

# ISSMFE NEWS

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SOIL MECHANICS AND FOUNDATION ENGINEERING.

Vol. 11 No. 2

Apr.-June, 1984



## Letter from The President

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Throughout the world we have faced difficult times during the past three years. And, as you well know, when I took office at the Stockholm Conference 1981 to serve yourselves and our International Society as President, we had suffered a hard blow by the sudden and untimely loss of Kevin Nash. But we might well reflect that world conditions had probably been worse about 50 years ago, when the enthusiasms generated by a new art-science of service to all branches of civil engineering led to the organization of the first International Conference, Harvard 1936, as also of the brotherly worldwide community of geotechnicians, that is the recognized characteristic of ISSMFE-SIMSTF. It is under conditions of greater hardship and challenge that we grow more through zestful cooperation.

There are causes that rally all of us into a feeling of enthusiastic communion. For instance, when somebody like our present Secretary General does not spare efforts in guaranteeing the continuity of emission of the ISSMFE News, despite the sudden loss of its prior publisher, associated with Ground Engineering. Such instances of efforts beyond the calls of reason or duty are what identifies each and every one of our Society's members. And thereby it is now my privilege to

address some words directly to yourselves, the worldwide membership of ISSMFE. The potential for personal unstinted contributions is all there, it is up to us to foster the means of bringing it forth.

My first thought is of our respect for the past. It fortifies us to honour and emulate those who cradled and nurtured the specialization and the International Society to the point where we have been called to take over. Let it be unto us a source of stimulation but never of psychological atrophy: just think of how much was done with such modest starting means!

Let us also proudly boast our allegiance to the present, because that's where we build the future. And our interest is in the future, because, as glibed Mark Twain "I'm going to spend the rest of my life there". In the present we belong, with participation and intense involvement, but to the future we apply ourselves, with commitment and dedication.

I have made great efforts to conduct my Presidential mandate in consonance with some deep philosophical convictions. Firstly, that we are all equivalent in the only thing that matters, which is our enthusiasms as human beings and as fellow professionals; secondly, that just as in geotechnique there are no two cases exactly alike, we are each and everyone most fortunately different, individually and culturally different, and it is in cherishing our differences that we relish life. We congregate and confer, not to speak and hear in unison the oft-repeated, but to draw from the richness of multitudinous differences, of experiences, thoughts and intuitions.

Is there a need or a wish to introduce new practices? Is that a hint of not giving due credit to the past? How so, if the past only becomes so because of the inexorably perpetual change?

The keyword of our Society is International. If you permit me a slight personal digression, I may exult in the fact that lucky coincidences permitted me the great privilege of a very international life experience. Indeed it is no more than by obligations to my own past that I interpret my mandate as directed towards institutionalizing the steps of the ladder whereby from any Member Society throughout the world anybody dedicated to geotechnical engineering should seek to ascend to

the positions from which greater international contributions will be drawn. It is my insistent policy that we are a "federative" Society and that we should catalyse all initiatives to grow from bottom up, and concentrate the attention of the Society's Officers on coordination of such initiatives for maximized benefit: the activities should not be dictated from top down, but merely coordinated at the top.

The Society's past concentrated on the quadrennial episode of the International Conference and the bound volume of the List of Members. One recognizes that even the Vice-Presidencies and the Regional Conferences received left-handed recognition, although the latter have been imposing themselves as the most congenial and technically productive conference venues. It is my feeling and earnest endeavour that much more activity will have to be generated, stimulated, and conducted by the Regional Vice-Presidents.

Moreover, my vision is that our future work will have to develop very much more on a continual basis rather than aimed at conference episodes: and such continual participation will require, and depend on, vastly increased correspondence and casual "petit comité" meetings in subgroups of Technical Committees. Increasing activities at local and Regional levels do not preclude a fully international character, since for the benefit of the younger geotechnicians the international leaders should be invited as lecturers and debate-leaders. The greatest proportion of our junior geotechnicians, the leaders of tomorrow, are unable to reach the inner circles, remote, of limelight at International Conferences. They must be called to activity in Regional Technical Subcommittees, for which topics should be adopted from direct specific problems of constructive technical and economic interest: thence move up into activity in the fully international Technical Committees; and, thus, further participations and rises should derive from prior enthusiastic service and recognition.

For the enhancement of the work of the Technical Committees I have postulated that, to begin with, there must be the proposal of topic, and volunteering of conduct of the core of the work through a task force within the

proposing Member Society. Any Committee work is always based on the groundwork being done by a small group and the discussions, agreements (explicit or tacit) or dissensions, complements, etc... being supplied by the Committee members-at-large, orbiting around. There is also the crucial problem of financing early steps, promoting seminars etc. for operational revenues, and, finally, being able to collect some net returns from publications. It is well recognized that most of such technical publications offer sound economic feasibility. Net returns suggest recycling into a subsequent Technical Committee endeavour. Of special note is the fact that there should be some enthusiasms from the competition for technical and economic success, between Member Societies entrusted with different Technical Committee reports.

Three important points are emphasized:

(a) the appointment of Committee Members by the President, and of Regional Subcommittee Members by the Vice-Presidents (with grateful acceptance of recommendations, from Member Societies and whoever else), in the hope of having divergent views adequately represented within the Committee;

(b) the detailed register of effective participation of each committee member at each step;

(c) no emission of ISSMFE-sponsored publication without thorough subjection to discussions at technical sessions, and honest reproduction of the discussers' views. The basic fact is that we are more interested in honest questioning than in a presumed culmination of knowledge; and state-of-the-art views will only be distributed with paternity and date meticulously explicated.

Although much of the above seems repetitive, the disconcerting fact is that practices were not reflecting any zeal in gearing to such a reasonable reality, even if debated and approved. For instance, what sense could there be in

perfunctory approvals of Technical Committee reports by the Delegates assembled at an Executive Committee meeting? Such a meeting is clearly entrusted with approval of Administrative Committee reports, permanent or ad-hoc. Do any of you sign a mortgage or pay an insurance policy without even reading it? I make an earnest appeal that Delegates go through a dynamic reading of Minutes of the Executive Committee meetings, that embody our history. Surprising how much of interest one finds! For instance, how many know that at Sydney 1971 it was unanimously approved that as soon as a host Member Society has been chosen, it should consult all other Member Societies regarding topics of preference for the Conference? My own wish would be that instead of discussion sessions at conferences being handed over to ad hoc invited Panelists etc., in order to reach pointed and productive discussions we should greatly profit from turning over the conduct of the discussion session to the Technical Committee that has been working on the topic for the 4 years. Incidentally, those not included in the Committee (not everybody can be in the same football team, there must be some on one other side) will have had 4 years to whet their rapiers for the verbal fencing.

For the San Francisco 1985 conference we have achieved an experimental start. Of the 27 technical discussion sessions planned we were able to hand over 4 to the Technical Committees: one to the Constitutive Relationships Committee (conducted by the Japanese Member Society); one to the Centrifuge Testing Committee (U.K.); one to the Landslide Committee (Canada); and one to the Geotextile Committee (U.S.A.). The other 23 technical sessions will follow the earlier pattern, with panelists carefully selected to represent a good distribution. Which procedure will give more promise?

We request your urgent replies to the Brazilian Society's inquiry on topics for the 1989 Conference, so that if the experience proves promising and the

new President so wishes, the Technical Committees for the 1985-89 period might be formed somewhat attuned to such indicated interests.

In such endeavours on behalf of the future of our brotherly community, I have had to give a great effort to the task of drafting a Revision of Statutes. A respectably old and big Society should draw pride from distilling a set of Statutes essentially conceptual, rarely subjected to changes. The Executive Committee resolutions promote the frequent adjustments, are then distilled into Policies, and further distilled into By-Laws, before attempting to require amendment of Statutes.

One basic tenet is continuity, but with considered impatience. Another reflects my deep convictions of true internationalism: such is, for instance the proposal to make Information Exchange (between absolutely all Member Societies, through widened classification and retrieval services of papers, under the Information Advisory Committee), and so also the Research Cooperation Committee, statutory requirements of the Society.

I urge you to challenge us: to elect active officers; to submit topics of really crucial interest to yourselves, irrespective of any unwarranted shyness if the topic does not occur in recent papers on finite element analyses; to participate actively, even aggressively! The response to the call has not been as rapid as I would hope, in egoistic desire to reap some self-justifying fruits. There is some inertia in generating new habits, of on-the-spot response by letters, of exchanges of views candidly by correspondence. There is, of course, also the time for credibility and fruition of ideas and practices! And it is by the fruits that we shall know the trees.

Let us plant the tree, now; yesterday! With deepest thanks for all the support, and very best wishes to each and all,

Victor F. B. de Mello

## ISSMFE NEWS

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SOIL MECHANICS AND FOUNDATION ENGINEERING

Editorial and advertising enquiries to Dr R. H. G. Parry, ISSMFE Secretariat.

Published by the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering, University Engineering Department, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1PZ, U.K.

Not to be reproduced in part or in whole without permission.

Typeset and Printed by Piggott Printers (Cambridge) Ltd