

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INFACON



INFACON conjures up many things for many people. For the fortunate few who have been actively involved with this event since its inception, it brings back memories of far places, stimulating debates and above all, the people who have over the years contributed to the outstanding success of the Congress and who have added to the wealth of knowledge on all aspects of ferroalloys.

The International Ferroalloy Congress (INFACON) has been held every three years since 1974. INFACON X will be held in Cape Town in February 2004. Simple arithmetic shows that next year's Congress should in fact be INFACON XI. Thus, one Congress was skipped.

INFACON 74, as the name implies, was held in 1974, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The event was sponsored by the Ferro Alloy Producers' Association of South Africa (FAPA), the National Institute for Metallurgy (NIM - Mintek as it is known today) and the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (SAIMM). You will see some of the same sponsors involved in INFACON X. Dr. Robbie Robinson, renowned academic and past president of the SAIMM, was the Chairman of the Organising Committee. The editor was Dr. Helen Glen. Anyone fortunate enough to possess a copy of the proceedings of this first Congress will agree that from a literary and technical perspective, it is still the benchmark for subsequent events. A unique feature of INFACON 74 was the use of rapporteurs (my first duty) to ensure that the discussions following the presentations were recorded (in direct speech) as accurately as possible. This involved time-consuming correspondence (can you imagine life before e-mail?) to all parts of the world between the author and the person posing the question, with the rapporteurs acting as go-betweens. It is understandable that the much-awaited proceedings only saw the light in 1975. The names recorded in the proceedings as the members of all six committees read like the who's-who of the South African ferroalloy industry at the time: Dr. Peter Jochens, Mr. Harvey Reid, Mr. Piet Streicher, Prof David Howat, Mr. Sigurd Selmer-Olsen - to name but a few. The Congress was held in the new, very fashionable and upmarket Carlton Hotel in the CBD.

In the Foreword of the proceedings, Dr. Robinson provides an insight into the event. Three hundred and thirty six delegates from twenty two countries attended the Congress, which was opened by the Honourable P.G.J. Koornhof, Minister of Mines. Again, the opening address makes fascinating reading. During the Congress an *ad hoc* committee was convened as the first International Committee on the Organisation of Ferroalloys Congresses, with representation from the main ferroalloy associations of the world. The following decisions were recorded:

- The Congress would be continued at three-yearly intervals under the name of INFACON
- Every third Congress would be held in South Africa
- NIM (Mintek) would provide the permanent secretariat.

Six technical sessions were held, each preceded by a plenary address with a closing address by the session chairman. In all, thirty technical papers were presented. Prior to the closing address, a panel discussion on factors affecting the future of the ferrochromium industry provided stimulating debate in the form of a question-and-answer session. The hosting country for the next INFACON would be announced.

Eventually, word got round that the next INFACON would be held in Japan. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the event was cancelled – thus no INFACON 77. INFACON 80 was subsequently held in Lausanne, Switzerland from 12th to 16th October 1980. The event was organised by IFPEO, Institut des Producteurs de Ferro-Alliages d'Europe Occidentale. The Congress was officially opened by the President of IPFEO, Mr. R. Björklund, who was also President of the Organising Committee. The technical sessions were held in the Palais de Beaulieu. The Congress was well attended by 400 participants from 28 countries as well as 100 accompanying ladies. A total of four plenary addresses and 18 technical papers were presented. As with the first event, an international panel discussion (questions and answers) preceded the closing address. In his closing address, Dr. Louw Alberts, Chairman of the International Committee on Ferroalloys and President of NIM, presented an insight into the factors affecting growth in the industry and where growth was likely to take place. Twelve exhibitors had stands at the Congress. Attendees could choose from four post-event tours to Belgium/France (SADACEM/Compagnie Universelle d'Acetylene et d'Electro-Metallurgie), France (CUAEM), Finland (Outokumpu Oy) and Norway (Elkem Fiskaa plant).



INFACON 83 was held in Tokyo, Japan. As with the previous two Congresses, the event was well attended, particularly by local delegates. An impressive opening ceremony gave Westerners a glimpse of Oriental culture. Beautiful ice sculptures and the ceremonial opening of a barrel of sake were but a few of the many highlights. Delegates were each given a traditional square wooden cup from which to drink the sake. An evening of Kabuki theatre was included in the programme. Four plenary addresses presenting industry perspectives from Japan, Europe, the USA and South Africa were given. There were 19 technical papers, including a paper by Dr. Nic Barcza and Dr. Bruce Stewart of Mintek on the potential of plasma-arc technology for the production of ferroalloys – a forerunner of things to come. Unfortunately, no official proceedings of the Congress were issued, only preprints. There were 295 participants from 27 countries. At the end of the event it was announced that the next INFACON would be hosted by ABRAFE (Associação Brasileira dos Produtores de Ferro Ligas) and held in Rio de Janeiro – visions of samba and carnivals!

INFACON 86 took place during 31st August to 3rd September 1986. Again, well attended and well organised. Delegates were pleasantly surprised to receive a bound copy of the proceedings on registration. The Congress took place at the Inter-Continental Hotel in Rio, with the theme of examining the interrelationships in the international ferroalloy industry. At that time, the Brazilian ferroalloy industry was in an expansive phase with forecasts of strong growth on the back of immense mineral resources, a growing Brazilian economy, technological expertise, ample hydro-electric energy and the use of a renewable carbonaceous reductant, charcoal. A total of 503 delegates from 34 countries registered for the Congress. The Chairman of the Organising Committee, Mr. J. O. Nascimento greeted the delegates, and the opening address was given by Mr. Jose de Carvalho Filho. Thirty nine papers were presented by authors from 16 countries. The closing panel discussion again provided for stimulating and heated debate on controversial topics. The closing address was given by Dr. Aidan Edwards, Chairman of the International Committee on Ferroalloys. The venue for INFACON 89 was to be New Orleans in the USA. A number of post-congress tours rounded off the event. For the first time, photographs were taken during the Congress and some were published in a supplementary volume of the proceedings and subsequently mailed to delegates.

The 5th INFACON, INFACON '89 was hosted by the Ferroalloys Association of the United States from 23rd to 26th April 1989. The Chairman of the Organising Committee was John Oxaal. More than 600 delegates from 37 countries attended the Congress, which was opened by the Chairman of the Ferroalloys Association of the US, Donald H. Freas. The theme 'Technology Innovations for the 90's' was picked up by the 32 papers presented. The Fairmont Hotel provided the ideal venue for true Southern hospitality. The spouses' program was an equal success – 225 spouses attending the Congress social events. An unforgettable dinner cruise on the Mississippi on board the paddle steamer Natchez, complete with two Dixie bands, was included in the program. The Congress ended with a panel discussion by industry leaders from Brazil, Europe, Japan, South Africa and the USA. In his comments on the panel discussion, Dr. Aidan Edwards, Chairman of the International Committee on Ferroalloys, hinted at Cape Town being the venue for INFACON 6, scheduled for 1992. The Congress was closed by John Oxaal. The post-Congress tours were well attended, catering not only for technical visits, but including a cultural tour of Louisiana. A supplementary volume to the proceedings contains the names and affiliation of the delegates, opening and closing addresses, numerous photographs taken during the Congress and the panel discussion.

I can think of few places nicer than Cape Town in late summer, the venue for INFACON 6. The Congress was held at the Cape Sun Hotel from 8th to 11th March 1992. A novel feature was that the first International Chromium Steel and Alloys Congress was held in conjunction with the main event. As with INFACON 74, the Chairman of the Organising Committee was Dr. Robbie Robinson with Dr. Helen Glen the Editor – a successful combination. Congress organisers were Mintek, SAIMM and FAPA. The Technical Committees of the Ferroalloys and Chromium Steel and Alloys conferences were chaired by Dr. Nic Barcza and Prof. Riaan Dippenaar. Ten organisations sponsored the event. The Honourable F. W. de Klerk, State President of the Republic of South Africa, joined the delegates for the Congress lunch, an occurrence appreciated by all. It must be borne in mind that this was a time of rapid and tumultuous change in South Africa – Nelson Mandela having been released from prison just two years earlier, on 11th February 1990. For the first time, parallel sessions were held. Unfortunately, I do not have the statistics for the number of delegates. However, four plenary papers were read and six keynote addresses delivered by captains of industry and eminent scientists and engineers. For the Ferroalloys Congress, 42 papers were presented, and 35 papers for the Chromium Steel conference. The social programme proved to be as successful as for previous events, and



included an evening at the theatre, an evening at a wine farm, and of course the Congress banquet. Six post-Congress tours were offered to delegates. Hosts for the next INFACON: Norway, land of fjords and the midnight sun.

Appropriately, INFACON 7 took place in the university city of Trondheim in the northern part of Norway from 11th to 14th June 1995. The Organising Committee was chaired by Mr. Erik Solberg while the Technical Committee was chaired by Mr. Halvard Tveit. The Congress was organised by the Norwegian Ferroalloy Industry (FFF), Elkem, Finnfjord Smeltverk, Ila og Lilleby Smeltverker and Tinfos Jernverk in cooperation with Euroalliances. The 11 technical sessions were complemented by 10 plenary presentations. In all 60 technical papers were read. The Congress proved to be a great success, with delegates from 32 countries addressed by speakers from 17 countries. The theme for the concluding plenary session was 'Reflections on the future and on the role of the ferroalloy industry in the development of the regions of the world'. Prominent members of the international ferroalloy fraternity were invited to the panel. A range of interesting technical post-Congress tours offered attendees the opportunity i.a. to taste whale meat and see the sun above the horizon at midnight – a memorable sight!

Off to China for INFACON 8. The Kempinski Hotel in Beijing was the venue for the Congress during the period 7th to 10th June 1998. For many Westerners, including myself, it was their first visit to China. A truly memorable occasion, with post-Congress visits to the Great Wall and the terracotta warriors at Xian, to name but a few. The Congress was efficiently organised by the Chinese Society for Metals, with Mr. Bi Qun, Vice Minister, Ministry of Metallurgical Industry chairing the Congress Organising Committee. Delegates each received a hard-cover bound copy of the proceedings on registration. The technical programme consisted of nine plenary and keynote addresses. In addition, during the six technical sessions, 65 papers were presented. Mr. Dai Wei, Chairman of the Technical Programme and Editorial Committee, deserves special mention for his efforts to make such a resounding success of the event. The Congress banquet was held in the Great Hall of the People. This magnificent edifice, located on the Western side of Tian'anmen Square, was completed in just 10 months in 1959. With a floor area bigger than the Forbidden City, the main hall can seat 10 000 people while the banquet hall can accommodate 5 000 diners. Many senior government officials joined delegates for the dinner.

The Ninth INFACON, together with the Manganese 2001 Health Issues Symposium, was held in Quebec City, Canada during the period 3rd to 6th June 2001 at the Quebec City Convention Centre. The welcoming reception took place at the Chateau Frontenac, a historic landmark within the city walls. Delegates were informed that Quebec City is the most northerly walled city in the world. Dr. Dieter Ksinsik chaired the Organising Committee. The Congress was organised by The Ferroalloy Association and co-sponsored by the International Manganese Institute. In order to accommodate the numerous papers, parallel or 'breakout' sessions were necessary. The main Congress was organised into eight technical sessions, while the Manganese symposium had six sessions. Twelve plenary and 54 technical papers were delivered. The Manganese symposium boasted 30 papers. The theme of INFACON 9 was 'A Partnership with the Customer'. I recall that around 600 delegates attended the event – INFACON was still growing! Four post-Congress tours offered technical visits as far afield as Mexico. Social events included a romantic St Lawrence dinner cruise and an Old Quebec dine-around. A hard act to follow.

What can possibly still attract prospective delegates to future INFACONs? Two factors have continued to draw the crowds: technical excellence in the subject matter and choice of venue. The programme promises to be as exciting in terms of technical excellence and diversity as anything before it. The Congress theme is 'Transformation through Technology', appropriate for a country like South Africa where transformation in all spheres of life is a daily occurrence. Cape Town as a Congress venue will always be a popular choice. The newly constructed Cape Town Convention Centre boasts all the amenities of a state-of-the-art conference facility. February is *the* time of the year to be in Cape Town.

Willie Gericke

INFACON X Organising Committee and Vice Chairman, Technical Programme Committee