

RALPH T. BROWER • IRON & STEEL SOCIETY



On Monday morning, February 27, at the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Iron and Steel Society (ISS), 1983 ISS president Howard N. Hubbard will pass the presidential gavel to Ralph T. Brower, past chairman of the Electric Furnace division and former director of the Iron and Steel Society. The new president is technical operations manager, Caterpillar Tractor Co., at the Mapleton, Illinois, plant. Ralph has been with Caterpillar since 1950, starting his career as foundry metallurgist and advancing to foundry manager and manufacturing manager before assuming his present position.

Ralph Brower brings considerable expertise to the Society both technically and administratively. At present he is the regional director for the State of Illinois of the Foundry Educational Foundation. He is also a former trustee of the Foundation. He has also served as both a director and chairman of the American Foundrymen's Society. Ralph is the author of several technical papers and has served as a guest instructor on multi-national corporations at Illinois Central College. He is a graduate of the Purdue University in metallurgical engineering.

In addition to his professional and vocational activities, Ralph has been quite active in community affairs. He has served terms as president of both his

local Chamber of Commerce and School Board and has worked in an official capacity in numerous civic, church and governmental organizations.

Consequently it is not easy to catch Ralph Brower long enough to find out more about the new ISS-AIME President, but we did, and the following conversation took place.

I&SM: With your experience in the various organizations you have worked with, how do you view the Iron and Steel Society?

BROWER: It's a strong organization. The strength of the Society is balance. The Society has a good publication program and good conferences. The Society's education program is good. All of these factors combine to make the Society strong.

I&SM: Could you be more specific?

BROWER: Dissemination of technical information is one of the primary goals of the Society. We are very strong in publications. From where I sit, ISS is at an advantage over other Societies because we have people on the staff who know the publications business. This helps keep costs in line while we provide this service to our membership.

We have good conference management too. We don't tend to blow them out of proportion. We do a good job of getting the right people to contribute to the conferences and get the information out to attract people to attend. I'm impressed with how much concern is given over the quality of papers.

I'm impressed with the Society's continuing education program. We are taking the education to the student. Our programs are planned for small groups. People benefit more in the smaller groups because they can talk about their problems. I think the continuing education program is a very vital part of the Society program.

You know what I think the best thing about the Society is, by comparison with other Societies? The caliber of the staff

and the way they respond to the members. They do a good job. They're concerned with what happens to the members.

I&SM: How has the Society helped you?

BROWER: I have certainly made some good friends and contacts. That's always helpful.

The Society has kept me more in touch with the academic world, by my association through the Society with the academic people. Other than through the society, most of my contacts with the universities have been through placement offices. You learn more and know more about the academic world if you have faculty contacts. If you're going to generate interest in an industry, you do it through a faculty member, not a university placement office. I hope that we always keep our emphasis on keeping academicians active in our Society. But you might better ask the question, what can the Society do for a young person?

I&SM: OK, so what can the Society do for a young person?

BROWER: It provides a real opportunity to broaden his perspectives. Not only as an individual in your own field, but overall. I came from the Electric Furnace Division – my interests when I joined the Society were in electric furnace operation and production. They had nothing to do with the rolling of steel, it was melting. But by being a part of the Society I was exposed to the broader picture of the industry.

This is a good aspect of the Society. We have four diverse divisions, and the Process Technology Division. The Process Technology Division kind of strings through all of the divisions and seems to keep them together. I think that's great. They appear to be a coordinating link.

I&SM: Changing the subject, with the constituent Societies in the process of separately incorporating, what do you see as the role of AIME?

BROWER: The reason for AIME perhaps is similar to the Process Technology



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Division of the Society. AIME's possible role is in linking the four constituent Societies, a coordinating role, perhaps a catalyst. We still have to seek the link between the engineer, industry, government, and business. None of them can exist without the other. If we isolate the technology fraternity from the business fraternity or from the government fraternity, none of them are going to get anywhere. Who introduces them to each other? AIME could do this. Maybe only as a coordinator, perhaps with government agencies.

There's another aspect to consider for AIME. We need to continue our relationship with the other Societies of AIME.

I&SM: Why?

BROWER: You might say cross-fertilization. Think about new technology. Where did it come from? It branched out from something else. Look at computers. When computers first came into use, we all looked at them with the view "What an accounting tool we have here! Balance sheets, performance reports, a great tool!" That's all we saw. But now you walk into an engineering department and watch engineers redesigning with a computer. The first computer did not consider the design of a machine.

I&SM: You're saying that the field of ferrous metallurgy can benefit from new technology in the mining and petroleum industries?

BROWER: Certainly.

I&SM: Speaking of computers, it brings us to the subject of High Tech Industry. The advocates of High Tech are predicting the demise of heavy industry. What's your opinion on this theory?

BROWER: If everybody just breaks windows – go back to ECON 101, if you don't produce wealth – where does the wealth come from?

I&SM: Obviously, you don't share the current pessimism of our industry.

BROWER: Look at the bounce-back

of the auto industry in this country. How did they bounce back so fast if they were so far off base to start with? They've bounced back in a year. How did they go from loss to profit in two years?

I&SM: You have an opinion?

BROWER: Productivity, applied technology and quality. How do you separate productivity and applied technology? Our engineers are working on increased productivity whether it comes through quality or quantity. Ultimately they're working for increased productivity.

Look at what Inland Steel is doing today – continuous annealing. Look at that development. Thirty years ago no one could envision annealing on the run. Then you put it in a furnace and hours later you got it out. Continuous casting is another example. Today the foreign companies have picked up on this technology faster. But I don't think it's going to stay that way.

I&SM: What do you see happening in our Society over the next few years?

BROWER: You know when you look at the Society, and this is true when you look at the industry too, maybe we're at the point where we're not going to get bigger. We're going to have to face this fact. So we have to work on quality. We may not see a lot of growth, so we should concentrate on the quality of the Society's services. If we are to maintain our membership over the next four years we're going to have to provide this quality to our members.

I&SM: Do you have any specific objectives for the ISS?

BROWER: Only that we continue to become more and more global. In all conferences, when we add up the score, we have ten or fifteen non-North American countries represented either as registrants or authors.

We're putting new mills together and we hire foreign engineering organizations as technical consultants. So if some of the new technology is foreign, the Society

must become more global to meet its objective of disseminating technical information.