

[LETTERS]



KNOWLEDGE VERSUS WISDOM

I read with interest the article “PEO gives thumbs up to new manufacturing initiative” *Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2012, p. 34). I sympathize with the arguments presented by the supporters of the Take Back Manufacturing campaign. However, I have come to the conclusion that this is yet another attempt to solve a problem that will be doomed to failure.

In 1980, I spoke at The Conference Board of Canada on the subject of skilled labour. In the

past 30 years, nothing has happened to alleviate the problem that we recognized then. If you were to invest your own money, would you spend it on investing in a manufacturing facility if you were not assured that you could hire the required skilled labour needed?

In the March/April 2010 issue, *Engineering Dimensions* reported on the half-life of engineering education. Despite the fact that the value of this academic education has decreased—and continues to do so—how else can we explain the situation, if we acquire more expensive “objects” with an ever shorter usable life, as we continue on our march toward a “knowledge society”? Note that nobody ever talks about a “wisdom society.”

A teacher of mine postulated half a century ago: for each

complex problem, there is a simple solution...which invariably is wrong.

It is the very fact that our effort to change into a “knowledge society” leads us further and further away from a “holistic consideration” of life, and towards a more fragmented knowledge that will prevent us from finding a solution that will truly serve society.

As valid as the observations are that the shifting of manufacturing to far-off countries has been detrimental to the opportunities for professional engineers, we need to recognize that if we only push our agenda without consideration of all other “undesirable situations” within our society, we are unlikely to make progress leading to a sustainable, sane society of which all sectors of society can benefit.

Dieter S. Leidel, P.Eng., Barrie, ON

CELEBRATING ENGINEERING HISTORY

As the current president of the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering, I found Peter DeVita’s article on the history of the beginnings of PEO (“A short history of PEO’s beginnings,” *Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2012, p. 26) timely and of interest, from another perspective. Not only is this a celebratory year for PEO on the occasion of its 90th anniversary, but also for the original Canadian Society of Civil Engineers/Engineering Institute of Canada (CSCE/EIC) and the current Canadian Society for Civil Engineering.

The CSCE/EIC is celebrating 125 years of existence and the current CSCE is celebrating 40 years since it was reorganized. The late 19th century was a period in our nation’s growth where engineers moved from a need to defend the lands to a need to build and unite. In 1887, Thomas Keefer, Walter Shanley, Sir Casimir Gzowski, Sir John Kennedy, Alan Macdougall and others who were involved in the building of the infrastructure for a new nation met to form an organization for the exchange of technical knowledge and expertise. These civil engineers were the leading railway and bridge engineers of the day. Thomas Keefer, who was the first president of the CSCE, and later a president of the American Society for Civil Engineers, also went on to establish pumping stations and a water system for the City of Hamilton.

The EIC and CSCE are celebrating our heritage this year on a number of occasions, with the highlight being events at the CSCE annual general meeting in Edmonton in June. The CSCE continues to be that learned society that Macdougall envisioned to provide for the exchange of technical knowledge through publications and conferences, with membership from coast to coast, as well as a directorate that represents all regions of the country and academe as well as practitioners.

Randy Pickle, P.Eng., FCSCE, FEC, Toronto, ON



SYMPTOMS OF A LARGER PROBLEM

Three articles in the January/February 2012 issue drew my attention. Two of them are Viewpoints (pp. 20 and 21) for and against a direct election of the president. The view that engineers of Ontario have a serious problem, which is attributable to the way in which the president is elected or who gets elected, is interesting.

The other article is on the history of PEO's beginnings (p. 26). It is remarkable that many of the concerns regarding the status of engineers in 1922 appear to be valid even now. In his visionary speech, as quoted in this article, F.H. Peters compares the "closely united organizations possessed by the lawyers and doctors" as a model for engineers to emulate. The profession has been self-regulated for so long now, and I see three features that may be symptoms of the problem: (1) There are so many engineers working as engineers, but without being a licensed member of PEO; (2) There are licensed engineers who do not work in the profession, but continue to retain the licence; and lastly (3) There is no single trade union that speaks for all engineers, regardless of their employer (perhaps Peters was wrong to say that "we must not become a trade union").

Addressing these three issues is fundamental to raising the status of the engineering profession, in my opinion. To what extent can any president, directly elected or otherwise, address these issues?

Sundar Damodaran, P.Eng., Mississauga, ON



KEPT IN THE DARK?

Peter Broad's article on the industrial exception ("Exception serves to cloud licensing situation in Ontario," *Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2012, p. 38), fills me with dismay and many questions.

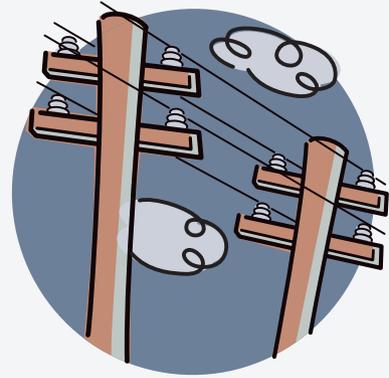
In fact, the perception of the industrial exception in Ontario goes far beyond "design and analysis of production machinery or equipment for use in the employer's facilities making products for the employer." Who are the 21 members of the RIETF? How were they chosen? As a member, this is the first I've heard of this task force.

What information is going to be given to PEO member employees regarding their roles and responsibility in the repealing of the industrial exception on the shop floor and when?

But the biggest question is: Can anyone take it seriously? "The task of deciding if an employee's duties require him or her to hold a licence rests with that employee." If you believe this is going to happen, I have several bridges to sell you. In my experience, managers of engineering and supervisors of engineers were often non-engineers. If not already, this needs to be on the RIETF's agenda.

Thanks for the article, but members appear to have been kept in the dark on this important issue.

Elio Comello, P.Eng., Camlachie, ON



ACT AFFECTS MANUFACTURING

Re: "PEO gives thumbs up to new manufacturing initiative" (*Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2012, p. 34)

Upon reading this dissertation, I am confused. The availability of inexpensive and secure power is one of the major factors in building and maintaining a manufacturing sector.

The smelter in Timmins has been shut down. Down the road in Rouyn-Noranda, with Quebec's attractive power costs, the smelter continues to operate. Exorbitant power costs in northern Ontario have contributed to the closure of many pulp and paper mills. And power costs are going much higher.

Where was the Toronto chapter of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers when Mr. McGuinty decided to go with the *Green Energy Act*? There must be hundreds of Toronto engineers who work directly or indirectly for the provincial government. Instead, Mr. McGuinty got his advice from politicians, David Suzuki and his cohorts. Even I am able to demonstrate the major effect that the *Green Energy Act* will have on power costs. Undoubtedly, people responsible for profitable industry have come to the same conclusion.

To address Mr. Southway's comments on the type of economy important to Canada, suffice it to say, it is and always has been a resource-based economy. I firmly agree that diversification to manufacturing would be extremely beneficial to Ontario and Canada. However, with legislation such as the *Green Energy Act*, there is little hope. R.J. Bradshaw, P.Eng., Meaford, ON

[LETTERS]

ELECTION OUTCOME

While I congratulate Annette Bergeron on her winning a decisive 45 per cent or so of the recent PEO vote, that figure represents, unfortunately, less than 7 per cent of the total potential electorate.

The introduction of electronic voting this time around was supposed to encourage a substantial increase in the number of PEO members actually voting, but that did not happen.

I hope President-elect Bergeron and the incoming council will spend a little time addressing why there appears to be such severe apathy in our elections—and maybe even trying to do something about this member disconnect.

James Dunsmuir, P.Eng., Brampton, ON



THOUGHTS ON OSPE

I am writing in response to the article by Robert A. Goodings and William D. Goodings regarding the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (*Engineering Dimensions*, March/April 2012, p. 30). I take exception to much of what they wrote.

First, my bias: I am not a member of OSPE. In my view, it is strictly a life insurance company, as just about every email and letter from OSPE is about selling me life insurance. Thank you, but I am covered.

The Goodings list several activities of the Political Action Network. Unless the purpose of these position papers is about hiring well-paid engineers to manage these issues, they are NOT advocacy.

The issues, such as safe water, green economy, and waste management and diversion, are worthy issues, but if the authors really want to involve themselves in these issues they should join the various committees of the CSA, IEEE, and other legislated bodies that decide these issues.

Advocacy is about selling others on the value and need for engineers, not giving engineering concepts and ideas away for others to implement without engineers.

So, the only value I see is the salary survey. But I have not seen one in years and, apparently, do not really miss it.

David Moffat, P.Eng., Toronto, ON

Letters to the editor are welcomed, but should be kept to no more than 500 words, and are subject to editing for length, clarity and style. Publication is at the editor's discretion; unsigned letters will not be published. The ideas expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions and policies of the association, nor does the association assume responsibility for the opinions expressed. All letters pertaining to a current PEO issue are also forwarded to the appropriate committee for information. Address letters to naxworthy@peo.on.ca.



PEO DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE

Re: "Thoughts on accessibility,"
Engineering Dimensions, March/April
2012 issue, page 46

I was in full agreement with the writer until she suggested that physical barriers were a reason for the under-representation of disabled people and women in the engineering profession. HUH?! Under the *Professional Engineers Act*, PEO is required to regulate the practice of professional engineering which, coincidentally, was thoroughly defined in the President's Message (p. 3). The predominant function is to license individuals and authorize companies that present credentials that meet an established standard of acceptance. I don't believe the process discriminates based on race, religion, gender, physical disability, age, hair style or any other imagined reason. And, to suggest that PEO is somehow responsible for who chooses to become an engineer is nonsense.

PEO should focus all resources on its mandate and be really good at that. Maybe then it could avoid situations like *PEO vs. Hubbert* and the organizational dysfunction, which damage the PEO brand and cause the government to question PEO competence. After witnessing the embarrassing debacle of the Mississauga town hall, which Mayor McCallion attended, I would conclude that government concern is fully justified.

David Gelder, P.Eng., Mississauga, ON