



A REVIEW OF IEM ORGANISATION A "ROYAL COMMISSION"?

By: Ir. Prof. Abang Abdullah bin Abang Ali, IEM President

After a stint with consulting engineers, Parunding Bakli and MINCO (now MINCONSULT) as a structural engineer, I sat for my PI and obtained my MIEM and PEng in the early 80's. I was later invited to serve in the IEM Council and gladly agreed in order to contribute to the profession and since then had some 20 years' experience observing how IEM works until appointed its President recently. Over the years I noticed its organisational structure remaining largely similar, the posts of the office bearers becoming less attractive to members at large with fewer nominations and the secretariat growing in size and becoming rather bulky. There were also past office bearers who haunt the corridors of power making it difficult for newly elected ones to innovate.

When elected President, I had a choice of just warning the seat which would be rather easy and enjoyable or embark on a process of change to improve the institution which is difficult and would risk offending some people as the effort of change would normally imply. There was also the joke by one Past President who lamented that it can take a few years each to be a council member, vice president and deputy president and by the time one is elected President, so many years have passed by and the poor guy would be too tired to do anything substantial.

I chose to offer to change the institution but leave it to the membership to decide whether they want the change. I started with suggestions on ways to reinvent the profession, rejuvenate the institution and revitalise the membership. I carried out an appeal for volunteers in the bulletin. I reached out to the general membership with thought-provoking President's Corner pieces such as the much debated dinosaur

piece. I spoke at major functions and dinners. I encouraged members to speak up to harvest their opinion and mine their ideas, even to the extent of having to endure sometimes quite crude as well as rude remarks from a few.

The open debate which all these actions have created is healthy for the institution. For once, more members have developed an interest in the institution. We have little problem with quorum at meetings now; we have more volunteers; we have more ideas thrown in; positive as well as negative ones. As a seasoned IEM member, I take all criticisms as alternative opinion which must be allowed to surface for the good of the institution. By allowing the few dissenting views, the owners can be identified and their views debated on. But of course there are limits to many things in life; personal attacks are certainly not welcome and are unbecoming of professionals like us, something that we teach students in courses like "Engineer and Society" in local universities. I do not respond to and normally just ignore these because no good will come to IEM if I do. There is a saying, *when your argument has little or no substance, abuse your opponent; one should not be dragged into this time-consuming firefighting situation.*

The Review Committee which comprises of mainly high powered, independent members under the able leadership of Y. Bhg. Dato' Ir. Hj. Keizul bin Abdullah, JPS DG has started work with its first meeting in June and is due to offer a first reading of its initial finding to the Council and its final recommendation soon. When this committee was first suggested, the term *Royal Commission* was used to imply extensive access to information, but then we have no authority

to give that title. It shall however call and interview selected members and staff. The President who is not a member of this independent review committee has given his first informal briefing.

As IEM grows in size over the years, it is expected that its organisational structure must either grow in tandem or that we should innovate in order to cater for the increased responsibility to remain dynamic. If this is not done, bottlenecks shall arise in a system unable to cope with the larger number and varied nature of activities. Many organisations have gone along this reinventing or reengineering path, and in the process relieving their elected office bearers who are part-time volunteers from mundane routine activities which can be more efficiently handled by full time senior staff. The office bearers can then concentrate on the more important responsibility of promoting the profession and institution, instead of being jammed up or paralyzed with routines. The system must allow for a lean but highly efficient, qualified and proactive staff. For example, we have now in place a relatively good Strategic Plan, Quality System (ISO), IT System and Library but effective implementation, monitoring and development is difficult with the current set-up.

It is my sincere hope that all these initiatives, despite being painful to some, shall lead to a stronger interest in the affairs of the institution amongst members and the election of new office bearers who can bring fresh ideas, creativity and dynamism into the institution. But if members wish to maintain status quo, I am also at your service, for that would be a lot easier on me. ■

Ir. Prof. Abang Abdullah bin Abang Ali
IEM President

IEM wishes all IEM Members & Readers
"Selamat Hari Merdeka"