

CORRESPONDENCE

Can we Afford to Discard it?

SIR,

Even though it was not the main concern in my article, I thank Mr. Thomas for drawing attention to the fact that the reasons I gave for the R.N. selection of gas turbines rather than staying with steam are not entirely accurate. Having not had the opportunity of being privy to the deliberations that took place at that time, I can only refer to published articles and papers, etc. which give some of the background. In his article in the *J.N.E.* dated June 1975, Captain Melly listed some considerations which I assumed to be basically correct.

However, it appears to me that Mr. Thomas has missed the whole point of my article and I trust he is the only person to do so. The past is over and done with—we must think of today, or more important still—the Future! The reasons for a change that took place years ago are now unimportant and I certainly do not wish to appear to be wise after the event. That is all too easy and all I know is that I am glad that I did not have to make such a difficult and awe-inspiring decision as did Admiral Raper.

My point is that steam has improved over the past 15 years, and there is now little doubt that a modern steam propulsion system that is fully automated and fitted with electrical auxiliaries will more than satisfy Mr. Thomas's expectations as regards the work load and conditions that a present day engine room staff should encounter. Steam has changed since the 1960 vintage that he remembers so well. I can assure him that the 1981 vintage is very palatable and that during the next decade it will improve even more. This knowledge should not be thrown away and wasted, as has happened in the past to saturated steam.

Apart from creating a happy engine-room staff, steam can also satisfy others. Politicians like the indigenous manufacture it offers, Treasury officials appreciate the low first costs and the fact that it can burn low-grade cheap fuel, whilst Naval Architects are now back to the sensible position where they can change the power requirements at any time during the design stages knowing that steam, not being tailored to standard powers, can easily accommodate any revisions they may be forced to make.

Mr. Thomas asks 'Can we afford to reconsider steam?'. The answer is 'You must' or, to be precise, Navies that are not fully committed to gas must keep their options open, and reconsider the pros and cons of all systems in the light of present and future circumstances, together with appropriate and unbiased past experience.

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