

FROM NAVAL OFFICER TO CIVILIAN

The following editorial article is reproduced from 'Shipbuilding and Shipping Record' of October 9th, 1958, by kind permission of the Editor.

The number of engineer officers who have retired from the Royal Navy recently, and have subsequently joined companies engaged in the marine engineering or ancillary industries, has been considerable, and has given rise to much discussion among the civilians whose colleagues they have become. The run-down of the Navy is likely to increase rather than diminish the number of these new entrants to the industry, and some observations on the benefits and the problems arising from this situation may be made. The first consideration is that the marine engine building industry and the associated complex organization of sub-contractors have for many years had a marked shortage of well-trained technical personnel at the higher levels, and there would therefore appear to be plenty of room for qualified men. The training which engineer officers have received is sound, and their experience is valuable. There are some people, however, who feel that these officers are old-fashioned, and not too well versed in modern marine practice. This may well have been true some years ago, but this criticism lost its validity early in the last war, and the Navy, realising its own technical backwardness, has taken such energetic steps to remedy the position that much of its current thought and practice is on most advanced lines.

There seem, then, to be places to be filled and trained people to fill them, but there remain problems of assimilation; there are three parties involved, and thoughtfulness and discretion are called for on the part of all three if the operation is to be successful. From engineers already in the profession there is need for a realization that their jobs and their promotion are not really at stake, and that it is for their own long-term benefit and that of their industry that more trained personnel should enter it. Employers must appreciate the resentment that can be caused by ill-judged placing of ex-officers in certain positions, and must at all costs avoid even the appearance of favouring the man with a rank to the detriment of their own employees. Finally, the former officer himself has the most difficult task; he must become a civilian in thought as well as in fact. This is a considerable adjustment especially in the case of those who may have entered the Navy straight from school. It would certainly be helped by the disuse of the designation of rank, except in the few circumstances in which it is called for. This is a viewpoint which, fortunately, has gained increasing approbation among retiring officers and which should remove one of the major difficulties in the acceptance of the former officer as a real colleague in the circle to which he has transferred himself.

And, of course, the same reasoning applies to Naval officers from all the other specialist branches of the service. With a little effort and much goodwill by all parties, the entry of former Naval officers into the marine engineering and associated industries of this country should be of immense value.
