

# Union seeks hours cut

Alexander Baron reports from a post-industrial battlefield

According to the MSF (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Trade Union), productivity in the engineering industry is 60% higher today than in 1981. This has been achieved by a dual process of rationalisation and new

as jobs become more and more specialised, workers require more training and qualifications.

As the MSF and other engineering unions are currently showing no signs of the Luddism with which the Trades Union movement is popularly believed to be infected, they believe they



automation - who gains?

technology. It is of course the latter which makes the former possible.

Not surprisingly the engineering unions are pressing for a bigger slice of the cake and a shorter working week on account of this. A recent meeting of over 400 delegates from all the unions involved unanimously endorsed both the claim and a strategy of industrial action in pursuit of it. The campaign begins in earnest on 23rd September.

Apart from increased productivity the other justification for the campaign is to keep up with the Joneses. And the Schmidts. Thousands of staff in the chemical, tobacco and steel industries already work a 35 hour week, while in West Germany the unions, having succeeded in reducing the working week to 37 hours are pressing a similar claim, as are Austrian and Italian workers.

According to one MSF source another benefit of the reduced working week would be to reduce the unemployment figures. When West Germany engineers had their hours cut to in 1985 over 100,000 new jobs were created.

This last statistic seems questionable, to say the least. In fact the prognosis for engineering and manufacturing industries in general is that the number of real jobs will continue to decline as new technology continues to be introduced. Paradoxically this can strengthen the unions' claim, for

deserve to be rewarded for their willingness to move with the times.

## More ghosts

New evidence for the phenomenon of ghost withdrawals from cash points is presented in the latest issue of Which? the Consumers' Association monthly magazine.

As reported in the last issue of Outlook, banks and building societies are adamant that it is impossible to beat the system and withdraw money from someone else's account. When customers lose money this way they are invariably told that someone must have gained access to their personal number or card or both.

Now a Which reader has forced Lloyd's to admit that they owe him the stolen money. It was withdrawn in the US and he does not even own a passport. They have reportedly agreed that he is the victim of a professional fraudster.

In a June meeting European Justice ministers discussed the problem under the auspices of the Council for Europe. They too concluded that current systems have security "weaknesses".

Ian Henshall