**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
TWENTY-FIFTH INTERNATIONAL
MACHINE TOOL DESIGN AND RESEARCH
CONFERENCE**

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TWENTY-FIFTH INTERNATIONAL
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CONFERENCE**

*held in Birmingham
22nd-24th April 1985*

Edited by

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OPENING ADDRESS

Mr JOHN BUTCHER, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

It is a pleasure to make the opening address to this the 25th Conference on Machine Tool Design and Research, because it is an exciting time in the development of Manufacturing Technology. I am also glad that this Conference is based in Birmingham, the heartland of the Industrial Revolution.

This Revolution was based on coal, steel and steam. We now face the Information Technology explosion, fuelled by the Microelectronics Revolution. Microelectronics have improved traditional products and have made possible products which no-one could have imagined a few years ago outside the pages of science fiction.

Most relevant to you here today is the way that Information Technology is revolutionising manufacturing techniques. Machine tools have themselves been transformed beyond description over the last decade. This is only the start of a transformation of every facet of the way we produce and manage that production. Throughout the West Midlands firms are using CNC machine tools, computer aided design, robots, various forms of computer aided production management order scheduling, stock control etc.

This movement towards integration of manufacturing activities brings with it the possibility of flexibility and productivity in manufacturing unattainable with traditional factory organisation and management. They pose challenging, but unavoidable, choices for manufacturing management. If we respond positively to these challenges the opportunities are boundless.

This Government is in no way an uncritical believer in industrial intervention: the West Midlands can reasonably claim to have suffered from such intervention in the past. Too often in this country we have taken the simplistic line of thinking that any problem can be solved by throwing enough of the taxpayer's money at it. Neither however, are we narrowly opposed to any industrial role for Government. Where we have seen a clear need for Government action we have not hesitated to commit the necessary resources.

It is my Department's objective to promote Advanced Manufacturing Technology, or AMT for short, to increase manufacturing industry's efficiency. Our AMT promotion campaign is aimed at ensuring all UK manufacturing companies are aware of the potential of AMT and have a manufacturing strategy best suited to the needs of their particular business.

Manufacturers can visit selected companies who

will demonstrate their advanced technology application and outline advantages and pitfalls. Also a wide range of training facilities including seminars and video packages are available to help companies come to grips with this new technology. And companies are able to benefit from consultancy grants to assist them in planning an effective and appropriate manufacturing strategy.

All of these are practical straightforward aids to assist manufacturing companies in developing and implementing a manufacturing strategy best suited to their needs.

Also the Department can assist with industrial research and development. Funds are available to promote a significant advance for an industry or sector.

I believe we should continue to demonstrate the vast potential of AMT. It is this Government's aim to make the West Midlands a showcase for this new technology. Scotland has a Silicon Glen. The South of England has an M4 Corridor. Each has been successful in building a high tech specialism.

The West Midlands has succeeded in establishing the building blocks for the next, most exciting phase of the information technology revolution—the application of those techniques to the manufacturing production process itself.

"Mechatronics", the fusion of production engineering, electronic engineering, mechanical engineering skills on the shop floor, is the next phase of the IT revolution. The West Midlands' drive to become a European trailblazer in the supply and application of these systems will be boosted by the competition I am announcing today.

The Telford-to-Rugby "Mechatronics" axis now stands a chance of establishing a European lead in 21st century engineering systems. The users of these systems will be those manufacturers who through the application of brainpower and higher added value techniques will remain SUNSHINE INDUSTRIES. Therefore I am inviting engineering companies with operations in the West Midlands to compete for up to £5m in grants of up to 20% of the costs of installing Advanced Manufacturing Technology in the region. This will assist in establishing a series of demonstrations in a working environment in 5-10 companies along the Rugby-Telford axis.

The need to revitalise the West Midlands as the heartland of UK manufacturing industry is clearly understood by all involved in wealth

creation in the UK. Industry in the region can help itself regain international competitiveness as well as attach new market opportunities at home and abroad by adopting modern manufacturing techniques and management practices. The Department has been actively encouraging industry to take advantage of the benefits from available technology for some years through a range of initiatives including: Manufacturing Advisory Service; Small Engineering Firms Investment Scheme and the AMT programme.

A number of West Midlands companies have already benefitted from departmental assistance and we are aiming to expand the number considerably. Companies are invited to submit outline applications by the end of September 1985. Full details are available from DTI's Birmingham or London offices.

It is expected that competition will be fairly tough with only a few companies finally qualifying for a grant. Nevertheless I hope many companies will respond to the challenge. I see this competition as a chance for organisations to implement innovative ideas that bring something new to their sector of industry.

I am pleased to have been able to make this announcement at your Conference. I believe this initiative will lead to more companies appreciating the need to take up AMT so emphasising my central point of the need for companies to see their manufacturing strategy as a fundamental part of their corporate strategy.

Finally I wish this conference every success, and hope it will continue to prosper for (at least) the next twenty five years.