

# Westland likely to cut 750 jobs as Heseltine pushes rescue

About 750 jobs could be lost at Westland, the helicopter manufacturer, in a package of redundancies to be announced today.

Sir John Cuckney, the Westland chairman, said last night the redundancies were because of a lack of orders.

Tass, the white-collar union, said it believed 750 jobs would go from plants in Yeovil, Weston-super-Mare, Milton Keynes and the Isle of Wight.

The redundancies, caused by a lack of orders for the rest of the decade before work begins on an Anglo-Italian helicopter, come as Westland is discussing a 30 per cent share takeover from a US manufacturer, Sikorsky.

Mr Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for Defence, is pushing a proposed European rescue package aimed at stopping the American company gaining a foothold in the European market.

Unions are angry that the redundancies coincide with a proposed rescue package.

Mr Chris Darke, Tass national organizer, said: "This is totally unnecessary. If the Government can intervene to set up a collaborative deal they should intervene to save these jobs. This is not a smokestack industry: It is a high-tech industry, supposedly the salvation of our manufacturing base."

● Defence ministers and officials, who were in Brussels last night for a routine Nato policy meeting, are to have further talks about a possible regrouping of European helicopter manufacturing companies as

part of an effort to save Westland (Rodney Cowton writes).

The subject was discussed in London on Friday at meetings between Mr Heseltine, and representatives of Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blöhm of West Germany, Agusta of Italy and Aérospatiale of France. This meeting was followed by another between the national armaments directors of the four countries.

Mr Heseltine is understood to have met Sir John Cuckney and handed him a document outlining government attitudes.

Yesterday Westland confirmed it had received the document from Mr Heseltine, but said: "It should be remembered that Westland is an independent private sector company while its European counterparts are state-owned."

It is clear that Westland is not enthusiastic about the possibility of being involved in a large European grouping of helicopter interests, and it emphasized that "we are far advanced in negotiations in pursuit of our publicly declared intention to seek strong international links which will include a European party".

● Fiat remains quiet about its possible intervention in the rescue of Westland which could provide the key to the problem (Peter Nichols writes from Rome).

Spokesmen at Fiat yesterday were neither confirming nor denying reports that they and Sikorsky together were seeking a 29.9 per cent holding in Westland.