

Sex-change engineer was sacked unfairly

AN engineer shocked his bosses when he decided to change sex and go to work dressed as a woman.

They feared that when Mr Ron Fowell turned up in his new guise as Miss Linda Hollingworth it would cause a strike among the 10,000 workforce.

So he was dismissed from his job at the GEC telecommunications plant in Coventry.

An industrial tribunal in Birmingham was told that the company felt it had no alternative but to sack him, but in a reserved decision released yesterday the tribunal ruled that the company acted unfairly.

Mr NATHAN MYERS, the tribunal chairman, said: "The company had no sufficient grounds for coming to the conclusion there was substantial reason for a dismissal.

"Even if they had a valid reason they did not act reasonably in the way they carried it out."

The tribunal was told that Mr Roy Kenwright, personnel manager, feared that the novelty of Mr Fowell's appearance might attract people from other departments and cause work to be affected.

The management was also embarrassed about which lavatory he should use.

It was claimed that two female employees said they would ban Mr Fowell from their toilets, and two supervisors were said to have objected to the sex change, one on religious and one on moral grounds.

But Mr Myers said that no employees had been called to give evidence

Mr Fowell joined the company in 1968, served a three-year apprenticeship before becoming a planning engineer and was thought to be a potential supervisor.

The tribunal adjourned its decision on what to do about Mr Fowell's dismissal.