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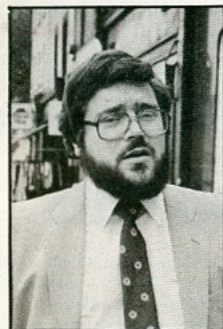
# computing

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## ICL's future



Uncertainty over the future of ICL means uncertainty and opportunity for the growing numbers of firms and individuals who sell wares and services aimed at ICL users. What ICL users like Chris Carter (above) are going to do when the dust of the traumatic changes at their manufacturer settles is a major feature of this week's Special Report on the ICL market-place (Pages 18 to 27) and leader on Page 17. News of the ICL Computer Users Association meeting on Page 5

## NCC in Chicago

Software advances in quality and productivity, international operating system developments, office networking, data flow protectionism — just some of the most important topics aired at the National Computing Conference recently. Richard Sharpe and Margaret Coffey contribute in-depth coverage of the industry's most influential event held this year in Chicago on Pages 8 to 10

## Tangerine push

Tangerine is planning a new offensive on the home computer market by renting machines through tv shops in the high street. The company claims to have two major television rental companies totally committed to the idea. Full story on this 'explosion around the tv set' on Page 6

## Videotex

Pressure is building up for Australia to pick the Canadian videotex system Telidon in preference to the UK's Prestel. Myer Emporium, the country's largest retail group, has put thumbs down for Prestel. But Australia still awaits permission to launch a

# ICL's team still faces debt crisis

By Steve Connor

The future for ICL remained in doubt this week despite the boardroom changes brought about as a result of Government pressure.

ICL users breathed a sigh of relief at the insistence from the new management that there is no chance of any other company taking an interest. But ICL still has to overcome its serious financial problems within a Government-imposed deadline of two years.

This is the time limit for the guarantee in March of bank loans up to £200 million. As a condition of the deal, the Government also imposed the right to be consulted over

boardroom changes and to nominate directors.

This is what appears to have happened this week.

Philip Chappell resigned as chairman on Sunday night following Cabinet meetings last week which discussed ICL's future. He is replaced by Christopher Laidlaw, deputy chairman of British Petroleum.

At the same time Dr Chris Wilson resigned as managing director, but he will remain an executive director. His old job will be filled by the dynamic 36-year-old managing director of Texas Instruments UK, Robb Wilmot.

Laidlaw has brought discussions with possible foreign

partners to an abrupt end.

He said this week: 'No formal proposal has been received but it has become apparent from these talks that an acceptable arrangement for ICL's shareholders, customers and employees is not readily available.'

'This is particularly true in relation to the retention of significant research and development and manufacturing facilities in the UK and also to the safeguarding of past and future customer investment in ICL products,' he added.

The moves came as a surprise to Sperry Univac and Control Data, both of which had been talking to ICL about



Robb Wilmot takes up his new role as managing director of ICL

possible joint ventures.

Wilmot remained guarded about the future of the ICL product range. However, he said it is important for the company to have a 'viable presence' in the distributed dp business.

There is a need for a powerful personal work station, he said. But ICL will remain in the mainframe arena as a crucial element in this strategy, he added.

•More details on the IC changes, Page 2.

## IBM agrees joint marketing project

IBM has signed a unique agreement with Floating Point Systems (FPS) to bring their marketing efforts closer together.

FPS, a US-based company built processors specifically to carry out high speed arithmetic operations.

The two largest FPS markets have been connecting to IBM and Digital Equipment machines.

John Harte, FPS's UK managing director, told *Computing*: 'The deal is only signed with IBM in the US as far as I know, but that is usually the way things like this are done. It may spill over to the UK later.'

'I think this is the first arrangement of this type that IBM has got involved in. It will mean that both sales forces can propose joint solutions to customers,' Harte added.

The move comes just a few weeks before deliveries of

megabytes of memory costing around £100,000.

Harte claims the 164 system is as powerful as FPS's older products. It is aimed at a very general market.

The only IBM offering in this market, the 3838, is, Harte estimated, as powerful as the 164 but costs much more.

## French dp faces big changes

From Michael Parrott in Paris

The French electronics and data processing (dp) industry faces a major shake-up following the election of Francois Mitterand to the presidency last weekend.

But the future of the Socialist Party's industrial programme depends on the results of the National Assembly elections expected at the end of June.

The party plans to nationalise

the four big French companies in the industry — Cii-Honeywell-Bull (CiiHB), CIT Alcatel, Matra and Thomson CSF.

Each would specialise in certain product areas, with CiiHB concentrating on dp, CIT Alcatel on telecommunications and telematics, Matra on space and missiles and Thomson CSF on military electronics.

The plan also provides for

the nationalisation of ITT remaining French telephone equipment company, CGC. Its LMT subsidiary was taken over under the defeated President Giscard d'Estaing's administration.

In the research field the party suggests that state centres should be set up in each technology.

It is by no means certain that Mitterand will be able to push this policy through, however.

## Ansi decision on Cobol delayed

By Jane Bird

Prospects of a new Cobol standard are receding still further with the reinstatement of two features which have only just been deleted.

The decision was taken by Ansi, the American National Standards Institute which met in Austin, Texas, to review comments on the specifications for Cobol.

committee's last meeting. Nested programs and database management were areas which people thought the current specification neglected.

Pierre l'Allier, a UK member of the International Standards Organisation (ISO) working with Ansi, told *Computing*: 'Nested programs together with the debug module, which was deleted last

out: 'This still does not mean that they will be included in the final standard.'

The re-introduction of nested programs should please a French member of the ISO Cobol Experts Group who wrote to tell the committee that without the nested programs 'there would be nothing worth moving to in the new standard'.

An Ansi member from

standard should be abandoned.

'He did not get a huge amount of support for his idea said l'Allier. 'But even if the motion had been carried the committee would have enough work to do in clarifying ambiguities in the existing Cobol standard.'

'It was not the Committee existence that was being challenged.



# Industry split over ICL top level purge

By Richard Sharpe

The UK computer industry was split this week in its reaction to the purge of ICL top management. One camp is expecting radical changes and the other is describing it as a 'cosmetic exercise'.

The radical changes include the possibility of a joint operation with Control Data at the big machine end and a new emphasis on integrating semiconductor components into new smaller systems.

Robb Wilmot's experience as a semiconductor designer at Texas Instruments was highlighted by several industry sources.

The new managing director was expected to grasp the nettle of whether a full line system vendor should take inhouse its own semiconductor manufacture and reap the types of rewards which Texas has done.

On the other hand sources within competitive mainframe vendors read the new appointments as a clear sign that ICL's path has not yet been chosen.

Christopher Laidlaw's statement, first made internally to ICL employees and then publicly on Monday, is offered as evidence by this camp that it

is 'business as usual' for ICL.

It was clear to both camps, however, that the appointments, which have been vetted by the Government, firmly block the way to any full scale takeover or merger.

The non-UK companies Burroughs, Control Data, NCR and Univac have all been mentioned in this context in the past 12 days.

Whatever their expectations, few senior figures in the UK industry were willing to talk openly about ICL because of possible competitive interests and their concern not to make the new top man-

agement position become impossible.

The managing director of one US company's UK subsidiary said he expected the new management to examine ICL's range product by product, 'hiving off' those that are not doing well, like the big machines, and dedicating resources to the medium and low end'.

Doug Eyeions, secretary general of the Computing Services Association, echoed this point and said he expected the new management to 'recognise that the company is overstretched'.

## Seeq files counter suit against Intel

Seeq, the company founded by a group of former employees, is mounting its own legal offensive in the battle between the two companies.

Seeq has filed a counter suit charging that Intel is trying unfairly to deny the new company entry to the market for non-

volatile memories.

Last January Intel filed a suit against Seeq, claiming that the ex-Intel employees who started the company would use Intel trade secrets to launch their new business.

In its counter suit Seeq accuses Intel of 'sham allegations' against Seeq and asks the court for an order to block any alleged efforts by Intel to prevent it from doing business.

The suit also charges that the employment contract signed by Seeq founders when they joined Intel was too restrictive.

## Texas, BP supply ICL men

ICL's new top management represents two opposing forces — the young, dynamic influence of 36-year-old Robert Wilmot steered by the experienced hand of 58-year-old Christopher Laidlaw.

Wilmot succeeds Dr Christopher Wilson as managing director and Laidlaw will take the helm as ICL chairman, the post vacated by Philip Chappell on Sunday night.

Wilmot is an interesting choice for ICL. Within 12 years of leaving Nottingham University, where he took honours in electrical engineering, he reached the top of Texas Instruments' UK subsidiary.

One of his major achievements at Texas was becoming technical director for calculators in Nice and later the division manager for professional calculators at the company's headquarters in Lubbock, Texas.

Laidlaw leaves British Petroleum as a deputy chairman. He first joined the company in 1948 and last month was tipped to become the chairman — but was succeeded by Peter Walters who at 50 years old is a

whizz kid by BP standards.

He said he was first approached for the ICL job before May 1 — when the BP changes were made — but was only given the firm offer last Sunday night.

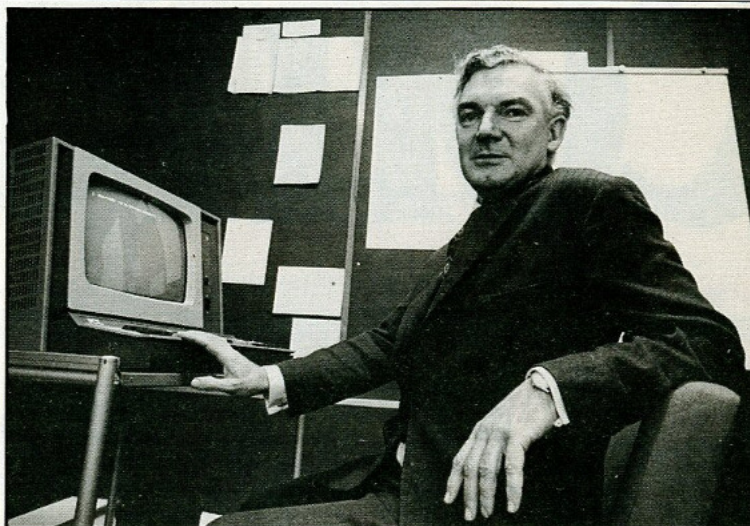
This followed a board meet-

ing where Chappell handed in his resignation. Wilson will remain on the ICL Board as an executive director.

The third new face in the ICL boardroom is John Gardiner, an economist who will be a non-executive director.



New chairman Christopher Laidlaw brings experience from BP



Peter Ellis, deputy managing director ICL, could not say when more redundancies are likely

## ICL hints at more job cuts

ICL is almost certain to make further cuts in its UK workforce in an attempt to return to the profitability it experienced two years ago.

The new chairman, Christopher Laidlaw, said this week: 'It would be foolish to give guarantees that no further redundancies will be made'. And he re-iterated his commit-

ment to restore profitability by further cost saving cuts.

He hopes to meet representatives of ICL's unions to try and get their co-operation in restoring the company's health.

However, any attempt to make further job cuts will be met with strong union opposition. And some union repre-

sentatives have made veiled threats that any redundancies could lead to a strike.

The greatest threat Government faces from industrial action by ICL employees is the possibility they will refuse to maintain crucial departments — already hit by the civil servants' strike.

It is evident that ICL's management was also considering further redundancies. At the ICL Computer Users Association convention last week, the deputy managing director, Peter Ellis, said redundancies are 'likely'.

'As inflation increases, we need to sell at least 25% more volume to maintain profitability, and we are not doing this,' he said. But neither Ellis — who stays on in his job — Laidlaw could say when the redundancies are likely to occur.

Last November, ICL made 2,500 people redundant. Most were from the manufacturing plant at Winsford in Cheshire which was closed down and sold to Control Data.

This was followed by talks between management and a joint trade union committee consisting of all the unions within ICL. These, however, broke down leaving union officials bitter and vowing not to repeat similar talks.

## Fujitsu tipped to build Intel chips

From Margaret Coffey in New York

Intel, the US semiconductor manufacturer, is looking out for a new second source for its 16-bit microprocessor, the 8086.

The Californian company is in the midst of discussions with Japan's Fujitsu which are believed to cover extensive technology exchanges on the 8086, associated processors and peripherals circuits.

Intel recently lost its chief second source when Mostek switched to Motorola's 68000 because it was not getting enough technical support from Intel (*Computing*, April 23).

A spokesman for Intel ad-

mitted that discussions with Fujitsu were under way, but would not comment on reports that Fujitsu was demanding wider transfer of technology than Mostek got.

But industry experts believe that Fujitsu wants the masks for the chips — something that Mostek did not receive — as well as logic and schematic diagrams, and some key process parameters for at least the seven circuits that Fujitsu is committed to produce.

Without detailed assistance from the company that originates the chip, second source manufacturers find it difficult, if not impossible, to 'reverse engineer' intricate circuits.

## Boardroom shuffle gives hope to ICL users

ICL's users hope that the company's boardroom shuffle will stop it from ending up in foreign hands which they see as the greatest disaster facing them.

At the ICL Computer Users Association convention in Eastbourne last week users made an appeal to the Government to 'ensure that the company's long-term future is secured once and for all'.

The mood at the convention was one of paranoia at the possibility of a US takeover and the problems it would involve for ICL users who have already

suffered from the transition from the 1900 product range to ICL's own 2900 range.

Following the boardroom changes, John Garratt, chairman of the System Ten users association, told *Computing*: 'My first reaction is that if this means that ICL remains a UK company and not fall into the hands of a foreign competitor, my association would be delighted.'

Answering questions from the floor of the convention, deputy managing director of ICL, Peter Ellis, admitted that a complete takeover of the

company was theoretically possible.

But he added the bid 'would have to take the consequences of what it would be a somewhat taxing job'. The recent talks between ICL and other computer companies have not resulted in any company showing a desire to buy the company and in any case the Government would have to be consulted, he said.

Ellis said that the key issue in any such talks is the investment users have in ICL.

'This is right on top of the list,' he said.



Steve Connor reports on the annual meeting of the ICL Computer Users Association in Eastbourne

# Dpm turnover is due to leadership

A study group in the US has concluded that the cause of the very high turnover rate of data processing managers (dpm) is different from four or eight years ago when the rate was just as high.

In 1980, it says, the 25-26% job displacement of dpm is a result of 'lack of leadership', whereas it was due to 'a failure to communicate' in 1976, and the job being 'too technical' in 1972.

The 1980s have seen a trend where senior managers are holding dpm's accountable for the use of computers in their organisation, said Dr Richard Nolan, from Nolan and Norton which conducted the 10 year survey of 20 US companies.

'In the early 1970s the drive

was for dp systems to carry out the administration of an organisation. But today the number one problem is productivity and computers are seen as the best way of increasing it.'

'And when senior managers look round their organisations to see this is being attended to they stop at the dpm', he explained. 'This results in tentacles being dropped from heights all over the organisation,' which he says is producing a lack of leadership.

What makes dp leadership so different, Nolan said, is a highly unusual growth in a dpm budget of about 30-40%, the change of skills associated with computers and the fact that dpm's never really know what end users are up to.



Richard Nolan, Nolan and Norton president, produced the survey

# 'Get schools in net plan,' says expert

Pressure is being placed on the Department of Education and Science to include schools in any plan to provide universities with a national computer network.

It is coming from Jim Brookes who has built up the computer network in the South West Universities Regional Computer Centre (Swurcc).

As a result of his development at Swurcc he is planning to establish a national computer network for educational establishments which allows computers of different makes to be linked using the British Telecoms (BT) packet switched service and other protocols.

The Swurcc was established by five universities in the

South West and was originally based on English Electric's System 4 computer. It now incorporates an ICL 2980 and computers from Honeywell, Control Data and General Electric.

Brookes is now in the fifth year of an eight year development plan and describes Swurcc's policy as one of 'positive and progressive innovation but always with a solid tinge of caution'.

His biggest problem has been a lack of standards. Swurcc ambitiously chose X25 protocol in 1976 before BT formally adopted it as a standard.

He has now tested how close BT, ICL and Honeywell have come to each other's idea of what X25 protocol actually incorporates as a standard. The result, he said, is satisfactory.

Swurcc is using a Control Data 1700 processor for packet switching, but this is planned to be replaced by 1982.

# ICL's field service is to be restructured

ICL is restructuring its field service operation to keep pace with new trends, in particular the spectacular growth of service revenue from software.

This is showing signs of outstripping both service revenue from hardware and hardware sales by the end of this decade, according to Alan Rousell, ICL's director of customer service.

'The most obvious influence on this is the growth in small machines which has a direct connection with the tendency for geographical

dispersion of computer systems,' he said.

This 'changing face of field service' has forced ICL to rethink its strategy. And it has resulted in the formation of Rousell's customer service division so that ICL can 'more than' keep pace with the changes', as he explained.

Traditional sealed service has been frustrated not only by the tendency for small machines and geographical dispersion, but by higher labour costs, mixing of equipment, higher user expectation and a number of other factors,

he told the meeting.

'Our response is the ambitious plan of customer service which aims to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness of field service by creating an integrated approach.'


At the hub of ICL's plans are 'centres of excellence'. These will be three types of field centres — software service desks, customer service desks, and regional service desks — each with specific, planned strategies on how to cope with the changing face of field service.

The software service desk

will include a remote 'telediagnosis' of customers' problems on ME29 and users with the operating systems Direct and Virtual Machine Environment (DME and VME).

The customer service desks are part of the 'total restructuring' for small systems servicing.

The retail service centres will have a two-fold brief. They will check the systems ready for plugging in before they are installed, as well as having mobile teams to call back and repair machines 'just like a tv repair man'.



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