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# Computer Weekly

Thursday, May 14, 1981 Number 757 25p

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## New faces at the top as Chappell and Wilson are axed

**CHRISTOPHER LAIDLAW**, 58, (right) new chairman of ICL, is the deputy chairman of BP who didn't make it to the top. According to industry sources, however, it was his age which blocked him.

A move to relieve the oil company chairman of his gruelling appointment at 60, rather than normal retirement age of 65, means that the much younger Peter Walters took the top slot.

This freed Laidlaw for the approach for the top ICL job. The initiative came almost certainly from Barclays Bank, the computer company's principal banker with whom Laidlaw held a directorship.

Laidlaw is a BP man through and through, having worked for the company for over 30 years. His background has been the crude oil and oil products supply side of BP and he became a managing director of the patent British Petroleum Company in 1972.

In his progress through BP he has shown himself to be a company political animal, well aware of the power centres at each level



**ROBERT 'ROBB' WILMOT** 36, (right), new managing director of ICL, was managing director of the UK subsidiary of Texas Instruments at 32, and appointed vice-president of TI Inc two years later, the only European to reach so senior a post.

Those who knew him at Texas Instruments say he was one of the company's most outstanding managers - which by the high standards of TI means he was very good indeed. He is also a thoroughbred salesman. "You've got to be a big go-getting salesman to get to the top of Texas," said one insider.

A graduate in electronic engineering from Nottingham University, he has presided over a massive growth in TI's UK operations in the four years he has been there. Prior to that he was, successively, manager of consumer integrated circuits in the UK, technical manager of the calculator business in TI's European headquarters in Nice, and divisional manager of professional calculator sales at the TI base in Lubbock, Texas.



### NEWS BRIEF

#### Micro thru at the NCC

**SPEARHEADING** amounted to a microcomputer invasion of the NCC in Chicago last week. Apple, Commodore and others were seen to be competing on an equal footing with the established names in the business. Local area networks, 5 1/4-inch Winchester drives, software productivity tools and advanced automation equipment generated considerable interest among 70,000 or so visitors. Full report pages 14/15.

#### News flash

A LEADING Italian news agency AGI, has ordered a large private viewdata system from Areg. The system will be based on a D VAX 11/750 processor and will provide 48 access ports, each which can support 10 or 12 terminals. The system will eventually be connected by a Gateway to the Italian public Prestel viewdata system.

## ICL may seek more govt aid

**Kevin Cahill**

**UNPRECEDENTED** cash outflow may force the new management team at ICL to approach the government for further funding in the near future.

The £60 million net cash drain dictated by ex-Chairman Philip Chappell for the company's current financial year is now likely to be reached by the time the half-year figures are due in a month's time.

Chappell and managing director Chris Wilson were replaced at an emergency board meeting last Friday by Christopher Laidlaw and Robert "Robb" Wilmot. John Linder, chief executive of the ICL Group, was appointed non-executive director, and Wilson remains a director.

The board was responding to the government's decision to pre-empt new management under the terms of its £200 million loan guarantee made in March.

The guarantee was needed to enable the company to borrow its £100 million of cash crisis during the middle of last year when high interest rates, high inflation and a halt to the growth in the economy.

Laidlaw and Wilmot told a press conference on Monday that ICL's cash base was out of line with its needs, and that further reductions could not be ruled out. The implications are that the

new team will be taking early steps to slim down the company's operations to pull it back into trading profit. ICL reported a trading loss in the three months to December 31, 1980, and warned that a similar loss was likely for the following quarter.

Laidlaw said he had a government brief to restore the company to profitability within two years. The government is being backed by three major shareholders - the

structure (IPA) as one of his early priorities.

IPA is the company's answer to IBM's system network architecture (SNA), which is a combined software and hardware product intended to connect up the elements of computer systems which are physically or geographically separate.

In what can only be seen as a direct criticism of the former board, Wilmot described the events of recent months as very damaging to ICL's customers and employees. But he believed most of the damage was recoverable.

Questioned about further management changes, Laidlaw stressed that the new team had only been at the company since the previous day, and that he was not expecting any proposals from Wilmot for two or three months.

Industry commentators feel a further shake-up will take place sometime after the half year results due in June. Changes are expected to reach down to divisional manager level - the level below the board.

One senior manager in ICL's international marketing division commented: "It has been difficult for those people who have been trying to get on with the job of sales. We are managing to maintain confidence but it has been difficult to hold international funding agencies like the UN."



Lyet

by **Kevin Cahill**

**IN A FORCEFUL** rebuff for what he described as "predatory propositions", new ICL chairman Christopher Laidlaw has terminated talks with Sperry Univac. His announcement on Monday came after a week of public statements of interest in the company from three US manufacturers and total silence from the government and ICL.

Comments from both Control Data and Burroughs that they would like to "help" ICL were topped last Friday by a statement from the chairman of Sperry Corp. J. Paul Lyet, that Sperry Univac was seeking a joint venture with ICL.

Despite promises to maintain product development and manufacture in the UK, Sperry's move was seen as a thinly veiled attempt to take over the ICL customer base. This has been valued at £2,000 million worldwide by Information Technology Minister Kenneth Baker.

The government has now pledged itself to continue to support ICL's research and development, and to purchase its equipment.

Speaking at an electronics conference this week, Baker did not rule out collaborative ventures with other manufacturers, and a government statement noted that the new management's intention is to pursue suitable ventures over time as part of its strategy.

But Laidlaw stressed that ICL intends to remain independent of

## Laidlaw sees off predatory Sperry

outside control. "ICL should be capable of surviving on its own," he said. He added that no significant proposal had ever been formally received by ICL from any other company, and that all discussions which might have led to links had been ended.

Users, employees and shareholders welcomed this statement of direction from the new chairman. A large Midlands user said that the blend of tough oil man and marketing whizz-kid was the right

combination to turn ICL around quickly.

A senior employee commented: "We have had a couple of years lack of drive, which has been missing since (former managing director Geoffrey) Cross left. Any drive there has been blunted by the sort of management that has been going on for the last few months."

He said that though directors

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- Post Office Superannuation Fund, Prudential Assurance and Legal & General Assurance.
- Commenting on measures he will take, Wilmot said his first priority was to get things back to "business as usual" and go on to develop a clear product strategy. He described ICL's current range as being in "good shape" but said he would be acting to "round-out" the product lines.
- He said the company had to be in mainframes to be successful in distributed processing, which he saw as one of the main markets of the future. He pinpointed ICL's information processing architecture

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# Computer Weekly

Thursday, May 14, 1981

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## NEWS BRIEF

### Lucas small business bid

IN a bid to enter the small business microcomputer market Lucas Logic, the expanding computer arm of the Lucas group, is negotiating a distributorship arrangement with the Californian company Findex. Findex manufactures a \$13,000 portable business machine with 256K of bubble memory and an integral 5 1/4-inch Winchester disc drive.

### Teletext Month

OCTOBER 1981 has been designated National Teletext Month by the Department of Industry, in an effort to boost sales of sets and usage of Ceefax and Oracle, the two broadcast information services. Free sets and adapters will be offered as prizes in two competitions.

### Fortronics deal

BURROUGHS is close to signing an agreement with Fortronics of Fife to market the F55 counter transaction terminal system on a worldwide basis, replacing ICL. ICL had been selling the Fortronics system in the UK to its own customer base, but that agreement apparently lapsed when arrangements for a worldwide franchise failed to materialise.

### Buyer for IMT

ROBERT Maxwell's Pergamon Press has ventured still further into the world of computers with the acquisition, for an undisclosed price, of St Albans based consultancy company Information Management Technique (IMT). Last June he bought up Infoline, and the end of February he paid £135,000 for Infotech.

## ICL picks Ethernet for network strategy

by Donald Kennett

ICL has chosen Ethernet as one of the main elements of its networking strategy and has ordered sample controller boards from Intel.

The boards will be used to help ICL develop its own range of products built around the VLSI implementations of Ethernet transceivers and controllers which are expected to appear around the end of next year from Intel and other semiconductor manufacturers.

ICL's business manager for networks, Gordon Peake, said: "Ethernet is only a carrier and it will fit in with our Information Processing Architecture. There will be more than one standard anyway - there is a UK product for a ring - and we will be able to accommodate others economically, but Ethernet II is still the front

runner. It has a high possibility of becoming a de facto world standard.

The decision by ICL to use Ethernet gives it a further stamp of approval as an international standard and also reflects a new mood within the UK company to cooperate with interfacing to other manufacturers' equipment.

"The plan isn't to use bought-in hardware, but the Ungermann-Bass system offers a very useful fall-back. We're trying to plan the timescales relative to the availability of low-cost technology," said Peake.

Although ICL is planning to develop its own network modules, the link between computers and peripherals and the network cable itself, ICL's Dataskil software house and bureau division is buying modules from Ungermann-Bass for its similar but separate

development work.

Peake stressed that ICL has been doing its own development work for the last 18 months at West Gorton research centre, based on Project Little, a 700 kilobit-per-second benchtop system with less than a dozen attachments, "just to understand the nature of these things".

He added that as an example System 10 has had a polled serial input-output bus for some time and this would continue to be used, complemented by Ethernet and other systems.

ICL has identified a need for three levels of capability in local networks. The System 10 bus would provide a low-cost means of multiplexing peripherals communicating at 200 kilobits-per-second via interfaces costing £50 to £100 per peripheral and controllers costing £500 to £1,000 per cluster.

## 850 bank staff strike over 10% pay rise

by Nicholas Enticknap

ABOUT 850 computer staff at five Midland Bank computer centres were taking part in a one-day strike on Monday. The action was called for after the bank had implemented a 10% pay rise without the agreement of the Banking Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU), which is asking for 14%.

Members of the rival Clearing Bank Union (CBU) have accepted the 10% offer in three other major clearing banks, but there are no CBU members in the Midland.

The strike started at 10.30pm, and because all BIFU members in all shifts were asked to support the action, it was scheduled to continue for 32 hours until early Wednesday morning.

Of the computer centres affected, two are in the City of London, one in North London, one in Bootle, Lancashire, and one at Pudsey, Yorkshire.

Further industrial action is likely to hit all the major clearing banks soon, following a ballot of BIFU members last week. The results will be made public today (Thursday), after an emergency meeting of the union's executive committee.

Two other computer centres are suffering industrial action as a result of pay disputes between BIFU and the employers. Staff at the Joint Credit Card Company's installation at Southend who have been offered an 8% rise in response to a claim of 20% are working to rule.

A work-to-rule is also in progress at the Bankers Automated Clearing Services (BACS) computer centre at Edgware, London, which is responsible for clearing all cheques drawn on the five major clearing banks.

● In an unrelated but significant move, the BIFU has formed a computer membership section. Terry Molloy has been named secretary of the section. The union has 9,000 members in computer centres of financial institutions, out of an estimated 15,000 in total.

## More govt installations halted

by Nicholas Enticknap

TWO more government computer installations ground to a halt as the Civil Service pay dispute entered its tenth week. As predicted the air conditioning at the DVLC computer centre in Swansea ran out of the liquid nitrogen needed to sustain it last week, and with maintenance engineers on strike the computers had to be shut down.

The centre's management tried to bring in new supplies of nitrogen to get the systems going again, but were stopped by the picket lines. The result is that 4,000 people at the centre now have no work.

The other site to shut down last week was the Department of Education and Science installation at Darlington, which handles payments made by the Department to local authorities. It is also used for calculating teachers' pensions. Nine operators have been called out on indefinite strike.

Strikes at other government installations are continuing as the unions press their claim for a 15% pay rise and the government stands firm on its 7% offer. At the VAT installation at Southend, 31 more operators were called out this week in addition to the 298 already on strike.

The escalation is in response to an attempt to circumvent the effects of the existing action, said a union spokesperson.



## Laidlaw sees System off Sperry overtures

● From front page

and senior managers had been briefed as new talks started, they had been told nothing they could not read in the newspapers.

City sources, who last week were resigned to the fact that any share bid from Sperry would almost certainly be blocked by the government, expressed open delight at the calibre of the people appointed.

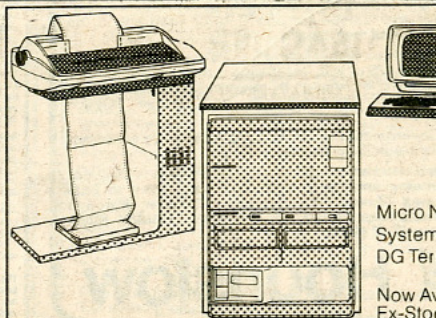
One broker indicated that he anticipated advising his clients that ICL would soon become a worthwhile investment again.

## System replacer due so

ICL has admitted off its first time that a replacer the System Ten is due.

The admission can put managing director at the ICL CUA co Eastbourne, in response to a questioner who referred to a report in the System Ten which revealed that the new system which he declined to detail, would be an upgrade and not a replacement.

The System Ten is the most successful small computers produced installed base of systems in the UK also.



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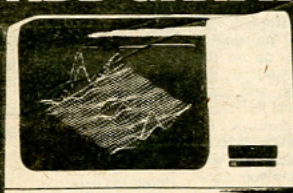
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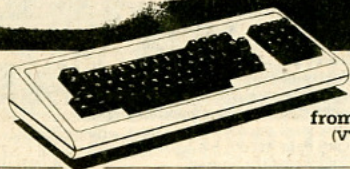
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Nicholas Enticknap reports from the CUA conference in Eastbourne on good relations with the parent

# Users appeal to Thatcher for reassurance on ICL

TELEGRAM was sent to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, last week from the ICL Computer Users' Association at Eastbourne, with an "urgent appeal" for reassurance about the company's future.

The telegram points out that the users have a large investment in the kit, and says "it would be a tragedy for users and the nation as a whole if we lose the rewards of investment".

It continues, "We also urge you to insist that any decision about the future will ensure that the company's long-term future is secured and for all".

The concern about the company's future was the dominant feature of the conference, attended by representatives of 100 major users. This was made clear in the question and answer session at the end of the traditional presentation to the delegates, in which nearly all the questions dealt with the possibility of a takeover, and the steps taken to deal with the present crisis.

In the absence of then-managing director Chris Wilson, who was

axed this week, deputy managing director Peter Ellis was the man in the firing line, and he won high marks for the candid way he dealt with the more probing questions.

The question that summarised the worry in every delegate's mind was put by Peter Bennett of Metal Box: how would users' investment be protected if ICL was taken over by a company like Univac, which would have no interest in continuing the ICL product line?

Ellis responded by admitting that ICL had recently been talking to a number of companies, but added that none of them had shown any inclination to buy up ICL.

These talks, he explained, were a regular feature of life in the 10 computer manufacturers which were next biggest to IBM.

All of these companies put together, he pointed out, would make an organisation that was not quite as big as IBM - a situation unparalleled in any other industry. As a result, talks had to take place between them to explore the possibilities of mutual co-operation, to

ensure that they remained competitive with IBM.

Ellis said that, in the final analysis, any decision about acquisition would be, as in any other public company, a matter for the shareholders. In his view, he added, an acquisition was "not likely".

However, he said nothing to rule out the possibility of a competitor acquiring a significant stake in ICL.

On a question about the government's £200 million guarantee, Ellis said that the sum sounded a very large one, but the money actually required to fund ICL's operations is "Not anything like that extent".

He said it was a matter of confidence - once the guarantee was there, the money was not needed, but if it had not been given the need might well have arisen.

Ellis was asked about ways in which users could press home their concern about the seriousness of the position. He replied that there were two ways, one of which, the telegram to the Prime Minister,

they had already spontaneously adopted. The other was to lobby their MPs.

A delegate suggested that it would be appropriate for users also to lobby their own managements, pointing out to them the costs involved in adapting their investment in ICL systems for use on another manufacturer's equipment.

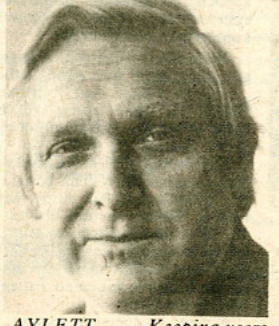
Ellis agreed in principle, but felt with a salesman's instinct that this was a negative approach; it would be better first to point out the benefits of continued investment in ICL and then spell out the cost of any alternative.

The ICL presentation as a whole was in marked contrast to last year, when the event was carefully packaged and stage managed by the company's public relations department, and no questions were allowed.

This year the atmosphere was altogether more relaxed, due in large part to the adroit chairmanship of Peter Aylett, head of ICL's UK division.



ELLIS . . . Winning high marks.



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## 'No plans to drop VME/K says Ellis

THERE are no plans to drop VME/K operating system, deputy managing director Peter Aylett told the conference.

He also said there was pressure from the computer users for additional facilities to lead to the growth of the system the size of VME. This was contrary to the initial objectives, he said, and shouldn't allow that to happen.

VME/K was originally developed as a "stripped down" system with minimal facilities aimed at experienced users. VME/B was to be a facilities system. But marketing conditions have since allocated small systems users (up to 100 and B to large systems users upwards). Pressure from users added facilities to K, and produced a smaller system VME/B known as VME/B-E.

The danger looming up for ICL will find itself with two operationally identical but technically distinct operating systems in the same range of machines.

## Govt and industry in £3m satellite project

David Craver

TELLITE and local area network links which will enable computer resources to be shared on between six sites in the UK are set up by early next year for a £3 million project funded jointly by government and industry.

The project, called Universe (Universities Expanded Ring and Satellite Experiment), was produced as a piece of research by the Science and Engineering Research Council (formerly the Science Research Council), to be undertaken at Cambridge and Loughborough Universities, University College London and SERC's Rutherford Appleton Laboratories.

It has now been taken up by British Telecom, Logica and Marconi which will all share the funding with SERC and which will use it for demonstrations to potential customers, as well as to experience of this type of networking.

Funding will also be shared by the Department of Industry,

where Under-Secretary Michael Marshall, who has special responsibility for space matters, welcomed the project as a collaboration between public and private sector enterprise which would demonstrate the new opportunities offered by information technology.

Universe will use the Cambridge Ring local area network developed at Cambridge University and now being marketed by several companies, including Logica.

The satellite links between Cambridge Rings will be based on the European Space Agency's OTS (Orbital Test Satellite) which is expected to last until 1984. Each site will have an earth station based on a three-metre dish antenna with a 14-gigaHertz transmitter and an 11-gigaHertz receiver.

Optical fibres will be used for the longer ring links, with twisted-pair copper wires for the shorter ones. Alternatives to the Cambridge Ring will also be tested, including the US-designed Ethernet coaxial-cable bus system.



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