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francs next year) in many university computer departments, which are still desperately short of funds despite the government's declared commitment to boost microelectronics as one of the waves of the industrial future.

Meanwhile, Servan-Schreiber has firmly rejected criticisms of his running of the center. Replying to an article in

the newspaper *Le Matin*, which made public the complaints by foreign researchers, he pointed out that the center has had requests from researchers all over the world who want to come and work there and that many of its social projects are now coming to fruition. He added that Papert is said to have asked for a new contract as a scientific adviser.

"There has never been any question in

the minds of the founders of the center, that its efforts to diffuse computer technology for social uses and for developing the capabilities of individuals, should be separated from its role in stimulating the French electronics industry toward the production of personal computers—or from its role in helping the accelerated education of both adults and children," Servan-Schreiber said.

U.S. Softens Toxic Chemicals Accord

Paris. Despite considerable pressure from its industrial partners, the United States has successfully blocked efforts to persuade all western advanced nations to adopt a uniform system of premarket testing of potentially toxic chemicals.

One such system, known as Minimum Pre-marketing Data (MPD), has been under development by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris for several years. It has already been accepted by the 10 member countries of the European Economic Community as a common standard for their chemical industries, and the Carter Administration had previously indicated that it would propose its acceptance in the United States as well.

Last week, however, the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Anne Gorsuch, told a meeting of her counterparts from other OECD countries in Paris that the Reagan Administration was not prepared to accept the MPD system for U.S. chemical manufacturers. Instead, the United States will stick with the requirements of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which, some critics say, can be interpreted in a less rigorous manner than those which have been adopted in Europe.

The council of the OECD is expected to give its formal approval to an agreement, reached informally at the meeting, committing all member states to provide information on the toxic effects of new chemicals "in a meaningful form" before they are marketed. The council will suggest the MPD as one way in which this *can* be done; but it will not endorse MPD as the way it *should* be done, and will therefore permit other countries—notably the United States—to develop or maintain their own systems.

The Reagan Administration's reversal on MPD has been sharply criticized by environmentalists in the United States. They are also angered because a representative from the Natural Resources Defense Council, Jacob Scherr, was dropped from the U.S. delegation just 2 days before the meeting opened. An industry representative was also dropped, ostensibly for budgetary reasons, but Scherr says, "I am convinced the real reason is that they didn't want me on the delegation, and they removed the industry guy to make it look evenhanded."

After the meeting, those who had been involved in the negotiations with the United States put a brave face on the outcome. Chairman Blair Seabourn, Canada's deputy environment minister, described the result as a "breakthrough" which had "laid the ground very well for council action which has been pending for some time." Privately, however, there was the general feeling that the United States had successfully dug in its heels, with the result that the council

decision is likely to be weaker than many countries had hoped.

Minimum Pre-marketing Data was developed in response to a decision by the ministers of the OECD states that it would help international trade in chemicals—which currently account for about 10 percent of the total trade between OECD countries—if agreement could be reached on harmonizing standards for chemical regulations in each country. It sets out a list of data components that might be required before a chemical can be made available to the public, including chemical and physical characteristics, the results of repeated dose toxicity tests, acute toxicity tests, mutagenicity tests, degradation tests, and so on.

Members of the EEC have already agreed to use MPD as the basis on which they will meet the requirements of the so-called Sixth Amendment to the Community's rules on chemicals. Athanase Andreopoulos, director-general for the environment and consumer protection at the EEC commission, told last week's meeting that, following previous agreement by OECD members to accept the validity of tests carried out in other countries according to agreed laboratory procedures, international agreement on MPD was the "next essential step" toward a system that would adequately protect man and the environment while maintaining international trade in chemical products. The U.S. chemical industry, however, has argued that, given the current requirements of TSCA, those of the MPD would be unnecessary and would result in further testing costs. Reflecting this position, Gorsuch, in her opening statement, told her colleagues that the Reagan Administration was opposed to "inflexible, across-the-board, one-time notice requirements for all new chemicals." The United States, she said, was currently moving towards a more flexible system which would increase the testing burden on some chemicals and reduce it on others.

Symbolically, however, the EPA's firm stance on MPD indicated U.S. determination to oppose what it considers to be excessive regulation in the international arena—despite the different interpretation of some of its industrial allies—in the same way that it has done domestically. This was also reflected in the lack of any significant movement toward agreement on a common approach to the export of potentially hazardous chemicals to Third World countries, where the Reagan Administration has also taken a strong stand against new regulations.

By the end of the meeting, there seemed to be a resigned acceptance that the United States was not going to shift its position—and relief that at least a minimal form of accommodation had been reached.—**DAVID DICKSON**