US sours on foreign graduates

Job prospects clouded by immigration bill

Washington

US high technology industries and scientific organizations are just waking up to a little-noted, devastating change in US immigration laws which, if enacted, could change the face of Silicon Valley and university engineering faculties. The proposed change would prohibit foreign students from taking jobs in the United States on graduation. Instead, they would have to go home for two years before they could apply to work in the United States.

Under present law, they may apply for a change in visa status without leaving the country, and often do so.

The new provision may well become law before Congress adjourns. Identically worded provisions are in both the House and Senate versions of the bill. Neither has yet emerged from committee, but the provisions are unlikely to change before Congress acts.

Nobody knows how many students would be affected partly because many are either in the country illegally or do not report their work status.

At Stanford, for example, 50 per cent of all students studying for a PhD degree are foreign. Nationally, in 1980, 20.4 per cent of all science and engineering graduate students were foreign. In engineering, one-third of all PhD recipients are not US citizens. Engineering is the most popular field for the 311,000 foreign students, graduate and undergraduate, estimated to be in the United States (see Table).

Civilian high technology companies have come to rely increasingly on newly qualified engineers and scientists who are not US citizens, says Pat Hubbard of the American Electronics Association, because the US defence build-up has caused defence industries to hive off many of the American graduates. William Cagney of the National Foreign Trade Council which represents 650 major companies adds: "When DuPont goes looking for a PhD in chemical engineering, it more often than not hires a foreigner; there simply aren't that many Americans to go around. These people are vital to US industry." Both trade groups are opposing the proposed change in the law, as is the Semiconductor Industry Association, representing many Silicon Valley firms.

The provision in question is Section 212 of a bill that changes the Immigration and Nationality Act, the umbrella law that governs US immigration policies. Reform of the act has long been a public issue in the

United States, where many thousands of Mexicans cross the southern border to work on ranches, illegally, and where the plight of the Cuban and Haitian refugees drew world attention to the problems of assimilating still more people from abroad. A blue-ribbon study was made by the Select Commission on Immigration, headed by Father Theodore Hesbergh of Notre Dame. The Reagan Administration proposed its own views of how to tighten US immigration laws, but the bill that has received the most support is that proposed by Romano L. Mazzoli (Democrat, Kentucky) in the House and Alan K. Simpson (Republican, Wyoming) in Senate. That part of the bill involving foreign students did not appear in Father Hesbergh's recommendations nor in the

Administration bill, and so went unnoticed until a few weeks ago.

At present, most foreign students in the United States have visas allowing them to stay as long as they are studying, but they are not allowed to work. On graduation, they may apply for permanent resident status — a step towards citizenship — if they have a job offer. They usually remain in the United States (working) until this change occurs. A minority of foreign students are in the United States on so-called J visas, having been sent by their government or on exchange programmes, and they must return home on completion of their studies. Under Section 212, all students would have the equivalent of J status.

A House staff member explained that far

Setback for Chevènement

The second constitutional airing of the prospective science and technology bill (*loi*), on which the French science boom depends, has led to a bloodbath. For the Senate, the conservative French upper house, last week voted amendments which amputate most of its effective clauses.

The law, in the tattered form approved by the Senate, will now go to the National Assembly (the lower house), probably in June. Although the government has the majority there, the law will have to go through a lengthy process in which clauses deleted by Senate are reintroduced as amendments, adding to an already packed parliamentary session.

The Senate is an indirectly elected body, a third of its members being appointed each year on the basis of regional (departmental) elections. Electors consist of mayors and other such dignitaries, and amount to some 500 from each department. The Senate remains firmly conservative despite last year's election of the socialist Mitterrand government, and so is a source of constant irritation. But this is the first time it has behaved quite as badly towards government legislation.

The government explanation is that the science and technology bill gave the opposition an excellent opportunity to put a major dent in the plans of a senior minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who is also the leader of the most left-wing element of the socialist party, the Ceres group. Ceres is of an intellectual and loosely Marxist tendency, and a favourite target of the conservatives. The fact that science and technology were involved in the Senate debacle is incidental.

Chevènement wished to devolve power to the regions, setting up regional councils for science and technology with their own budgets. The senators wished to "put off" that reform.

Chevènement wanted to open up

research institutions such as the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) to industry, by creating a new type of legal entity through which for example, CNRS could make profits in joint ventures. The senators would have none of it.

And, most of all, Chevènement wanted a law that would define future budgets: 17.8 per cent extra each year in real terms over the next three years. "Too imprecise" said the senators, who feel that such a broad commitment would give Chevènement too much power. In fact, the minister is now discovering that a commitment to a figure on paper — even in a parliamentary bill —

"L'ÉTAT, C'EST MA LOI"

is not a firm promise. Discussions are now going on at cabinet level for the 1983 budget, and Chevènement is having to fight as hard this year as he did last.

Chevènement was impatient with the Senate's reaction to his well-laid plans. He described the Senate majority as "reactionary" and "cut off from the people". But he now faces a long struggle against the conservatives and against those of his cabinet colleagues who resent his scientific imperialism. **Robert Walgate**