

Honeywell decision puts Groupe Bull in sticky situation

Multics phaseout plan irks European users

By Amiel Kornel
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PARIS (CWN) — Honeywell, Inc.'s decision to withdraw gradually support for its Multics operating system has raised the ire of European users and tainted its relationship with French computer maker Groupe Bull, which distributes Honeywell equipment throughout most of Europe.

"Honeywell's decision, and consequently Bull's, is unacceptable," according to Alain Buis, president of the French Multics users group. "We

feel a bit abandoned."

More than 35 Multics systems have been installed in France, Great Britain, West Germany and the Netherlands. France, with 26 Multics sites, is by far the largest European market.

Bull sells systems throughout most of Europe, while Honeywell retains marketing responsibility only in the UK and Italy. Once closely linked to Bull, Honeywell is now tied only by distribution and licensing agreements to the state-owned French computer giant.

Angry users are looking to Bull to come up with computing alternatives to Multics in the coming years. "Normally," Buis said, "Honeywell or Bull

should supply us with a migration solution offering the same functions as Multics."

The decision to phase out Multics has placed Bull in the cross fire between Honeywell and disappointed clients. A senior Bull official said that the company is entering into discussions with its clients to define solutions appropriate to each site.

But according to a French user who requested anonymity, client reaction to Bull's initial propositions has been tepid. Many clients doubt that current operating systems can offer Multics-like functions.

French users, certainly the largest Multics lobby in Europe, plan to petition Bull at the end of January to de-

fine a contractual agreement assuring sufficient technical support for the system into the 1990s.

Bull, replied the company official, is "ready anytime" to sign agreements with the users. Regardless of the outcome of those negotiations, European users, nearly unanimous in their acclaim of the system, will be sorry to see it go.

"The arrival of Multics was a breath of fresh air for computing research," said Georges Nissen, a manager at the Institut National de Recherche en Informatique et Automatique, "but now that air is becoming rarer."

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