

Multics future dim despite Honeywell/Bull merger

By Rosemary Hamilton

The joint venture plans recently announced by Honeywell, Inc. ignited a spark of hope among its Multics community earlier this month as some users speculated that the joint venture might breathe new life into their discontinued operating system.

But a Honeywell official quickly doused such hopes by stating that the Multics strategy will not be altered at all.

"Obviously, there'll be some guys who'll want us to call the tooth fairy and bring back everything," said Eugene Manno, group vice-president of Honeywell's Information Systems group. "But the actions and direction we've taken will continue. I don't foresee any changes."

According to a top Compagnie des Machines Bull executive, the company is not yet sure what it will do with the Multics operating system, which Honeywell said it would not support beyond 1994. Francis Lorentz, president and chief operating officer, said in an interview last week that Bull probably has as many customers running Multics as does Honeywell.

"In many cases we will be able to sell customers add-ons to their mainframes and follow their needs in power until that date," Lorentz said. "It's unclear what we will do after that."

Nonetheless, one Midwest Multics user who requested anonymity said the Honeywell joint venture, which will merge Honeywell's Information System division with Bull and NEC Corp., leaves open a "possibility that the new company will take a second look at Multics."

"Maybe it's a one in a million shot," he continued. "But maybe we can get someone to take a look at it."

It was more than a year ago that Honeywell announced it would stop further Multics development, and since that time it has been working with users, many of whom remain irate despite the decision to incorporate Multics features into a new version of the operating system, HVS 6 Plus, which will be available sometime in 1988 and will run on the vendor's newest line of minicomputers.

Some members of the Multics community, a small but highly visible group of users that includes Ford Motor Co., said they hoped the new company would give Multics another chance, primarily because there is a substantial European Multics community — with a few dozen sites in France — that has bought systems through Bull.

Alain Buis, head of the French Multics user group, said he would "love to see them reconsider" the fate of Multics, "but it's not evident."

"Bull may stand up on its hind legs and support its Multics users in France, or they could be wimpy and say Honeywell in the U.S. knows what they're doing and go along with it," said Bruce Sanderson, a software specialist at Ford and a member of the Multics review committee of the Honeywell Large System User Association (HLSUA). "But I'd say there's less than a 50% chance," he added.

Multics users of HLSUA recently presented four major features to Honeywell that they said must be in-

corporated in the new operating system for migration to be possible. Those features include the Multics Relational Data Base Store and the virtual file functionality as well as the PL/I language and third-party software support.

Manno said Honeywell will officially respond to users in the next few months. The Bull-controlled joint venture will continue with the Multics migration plan, he added.

Amiel Kornel, Paris bureau chief for the CW Communications International News Service, contributed to this report.

Phone or write for your free 90 so you can compare FATS to y HARDWARE EVALUATOR or by SMF and EREP.