News of the Strictly Decimal Initiative

Year after year, the U.S. will lose millions of dollars to useless arithmetic, converting yards into miles and vice versa. The problem is serious enough to threaten the leading role of the U.S. economy. In the computer business, the same mistake is being repeated by defining 1 K of memory as 1024 rather than precisely 1000 words. As usual, the eggheads of computer science have pretty clever reasons, talking about powers of two and so on, but avoid finding a simple solution. Therefore, the President has decided to stop arithmetic fatalism and pessimism, and has launched a new movement, called the Strictly Decimal Initiative, aimed at introducing a revolutionary law in mathematics stating that $2^{10} = 1000$. After it was possible to prove that 2^{10} equals 1024, why should a great nation fail to go one step further?

The idea is obviously very attractive, and has been enthusiastically welcomed by many columnists. The idea makes sense, because every child can see that 2^{10} does contain a ten already, so it's logical to have a power of ten as the result. The Numeric Algorithms Tuning Organization, a thoroughly democratic club whose president is by definition a leading U.S. mathematician, immediately said that success of the initiative is only a question of effort. How else could free-world mathematics prove its superiority?

But there are critics, too. Some mathematicians do not even try to hide their sardonic laughter, and insist on the traditional solution. Their usual comment is that while the initiative will not achieve anything, it will certainly absorb some of the best mathematicians for years.

The Soviet Union has not yet reached a standard of computer science that would allow them to compete, but they have warned the U.S. administration that the Strictly Decimal Initiative would certainly threaten the process of mutual binary formula recognition.

European partners are not yet sure whether they should join the U.S. or start their own project, for instance a European programming language that avoids most of the disadvantages of others because it is entirely in French. A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Decimalization has made clear that European cooperation will be appreciated; for safety's sake, however, numbers exceeding 99 will not be passed to anybody outside the U.S.

Though Congress has trimmed the budget proposed by the President, more than peanuts is left. Most mathematicians who have won a contract now take a pragmatic view, trying to solve the problem by stepwise approximation. Some results, obtained on special new hardware, indicate that it should not be beyond our abilities to prove $2^{10} = 1023$. After that, everything else is only a matter of steady financial support.

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