

Linux and Intel 386 processors will part ways

14 December 2012, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org)—Earlier this week Linus Torvalds took away support for 386 CPUs from the Linux kernel. He agreed with the position of Red Hat engineer and Linux kernel developer Ingo Molnar to drop support for Intel's old 386 microprocessors. For Linux users, the world is not coming to a halt. All it means is that the 386 DX33 chip will not be able to run in future versions of Linux, just in existing versions of the kernel. Intel 386-DX owners, for whatever hobbyist or other reasons, will not be able to enjoy the new Linux versions starting with 3.8. Molnár explained that the extra work involved in continuing support was greater than the returns in benefits.

"This tree removes ancient 386 CPU support and thus zaps quite a bit of complexity, which has plagued us with extra work whenever we wanted to change SMP primitives, for years," Molnar wrote in a message to Linux kernel creator Torvalds.

He spoke of the "nostalgic cost being that "your old original 386 DX33 system from early 1991 won't be able to boot modern Linux kernels anymore." Torvalds replied, I'm not sentimental. Good riddance."

[Intel](#)'s 32-bit 386 processor was first introduced in 1985 and production continued until 2007. In May 2006, Intel announced that 80386 production would stop at the end of September 2007. The Linux kernel was released in 1991 and was eventually ported to a number of computer [hardware platforms](#). The general reaction among technology bloggers is that Torvalds' decision to make the 386 processors history for Linux is not expected to bother most Linux users except for those who choose to still build on very old rigs.

As for Linux moving forward, Linux 3.7 was launched on December 10. Torvalds [wrote](#)

"It's been a somewhat drawn out release despite the 3.7 merge window having otherwise appeared pretty straightforward, and none of the rc's were all that big either. But we're done, and this means that the merge window will close on Christmas eve.

Or rather, I'll probably close it a couple of days early. For obvious reasons. It's the main commercial holiday of the year, after all."

Part of the news about this release is support for the ARM 64-bit architecture, with ARM support to boot into different systems using the same [kernel](#), which translates into portability across different hardware setups. There is also support for the Intel "supervisor mode access prevention" (SMAP) security feature. The release carries new drivers and fixes too.

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