

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER COMEDY PRODUCT...



SchNEWS

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GATES-CRASHER

AS SchNEWS GETS ROUND TO WIPING THE WINDOWS

“To try to own knowledge, to try to control whether people are allowed to use it, or to try to stop other people from sharing it, is sabotage.” - Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Movement.

This Saturday is **International Software Freedom Day**, so SchNEWS is donning cyberpunk mirror shades and jacking into the world of pony-tailed sandal-wearing geek warriors battling to keep information free from the grip of ruthless corporate monopolies, and creating an alternative world of free software based around Linux...

We are living in an age where fewer corporations own larger and larger chunks of the media – from Rupert Murdoch owning vast swathes of print, film and TV media, to others like Clear Channel, the Bush-funder whose stake in the US media includes a large slice of radio stations, concert venues, 39 TV stations, half a million billboards and more – and they'd like to do the same in the UK (See SchNEWS 541). Fortunately the internet has become a good outlet for independent media, albeit without the mega publicity budgets.

The world of computers is dominated by one belligerent monster – Microsoft (M\$) - who have steamrollered their way on to 93% of the world's PCs, and are worth an amount equal to the gross domestic product of Spain. They have built their empire using a combination of stamping on, or buying-out, competitors and making sure their patented technologies become defacto standards, pocketing billions from worldwide license fees. And they didn't get where they are today without political persuasion – in the form of big donations to both major US parties, as well as creating front lobby groups to influence policy - even setting up bogus grassroots groups and paying off newspaper columnists.

And in case you think Bill Gates, M\$ CEO, might be giving some of it back with his \$26 billion Foundation – consider this: while he's tossing \$100m into health initiatives in Africa over the next ten years, in the past three years M\$ has spent \$421m trying to eradicate its emerging rival, Linux. \$200,000 was used to set up the 'Grand Challenges in Global Health' initiative in Africa - its agenda exposed by the presence on the panel of Dr Florence Wambugu, a bio-tech expert from Monsanto. Being pro-GM, Gates spent \$25m on a research programme into

bio-tech for African agriculture. During his 2002 trip to India, Gates dropped a generous \$100m for AIDS research – yet spent \$400m on training people in government and education in using M\$ products, and putting M\$ Windows into Indian schools...

However M\$ don't always get their way and in April last year they lost a European Commission anti-trust ruling which said they had abused their dominance for commercial gain. It ordered them to release technical information so that third-party software could work properly on Windows servers, and hit them with \$586m in fines. More recently the new version of Windows – Vista – is delayed because the EU Competition Commission are saying it can't be sold in the EU as it breaks more anti-trust rules.

Free For All

But despite or because of all that, a software revolution has begun to bypass the monopolies. A whole new way of creating and distributing intellectual property and media, and protecting it from commercial exploitation, has emerged. The concept which underpins this is 'copyleft'. Put simply, if your work is copyleft, you still own it, but others can use it, distribute it, modify and improve it, and whatever results stays copyleft – kept in the public domain. Copyleft was first created as the legal back-bone of the Free Software Movement by founder Richard Stallman in 1984, who showed that it's better to let others use a program for free and allow them to contribute to it, and then make the improved version available to all as a commonly shared resource.

The participatory, anarchic and decentralised copyleft way of working has already given rise to several important success stories outside its initial use – such as the free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. It now has four million entries, all written and edited by readers who make changes which appear instantly on the site. A recent study found that Wikipedia is at least as accurate as any commercial encyclopaedia, while also much larger (and still rapidly expanding). Another example is Indymedia, the global independent news network which is also built on the postings of text, photos and video from readers using a system called 'open publishing'.

But how do they stop it all turning into a clearing house for nutty ranters?

Smash EDO Mass March

Saturday 16th Sept against EDO's Complicity in War Crimes in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. Meet at 12 noon at The Level See www.smashedo.org.uk

Wikipedia safeguards its content from sabotage by keeping all previous versions of an article, which can be restored, and has panels of experts monitoring and adjudicating in conflicts of opinion. Indymedia sites use editorial collectives to monitor postings and promote 'feature' articles. The free/open-source software movement also uses this way of working – smaller groups feeding into larger projects, which are refined by a myriad of extra contributors – to build up the operating system and key programs it needs to take on the mega software companies.

March Of The Penguins

“Under NO circumstances lose against Linux” said the 2003 email circulated to M\$ senior execs by the head of worldwide sales, who also talked of a special fund to offer bribe-like discounts or even free software to government bodies thinking about switching to Linux.

But despite M\$'s intimidation tactics and sweeteners, many organisations and individuals worldwide are switching over. Being free helps, but it's not just a matter of cost – it's also about security. Not only are Linux and Mac un-plagued by the viruses of the Windows world, but like Coca-Cola, M\$ keeps its software recipe secret and away from scrutiny. So it's no accident that countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China are now going Linux when the US company holds the keys to unknown hidden back doors into Windows with which they can do who knows what.

Despite M\$ putting \$750 million into promoting itself in China, that country is clearly moving towards Linux. In India, it is to become the standard in universities, as well as in several states including Madhya Pradesh, and schools across India, Chile, Brazil, China and the EU are changing over as well. As it stands M\$ is running a virtual extortion racket, taking money for nothing from every school, hospital and organisation across the world to pay for licenses to run the computers they depend on – but with a free alternative why should they? In Brazil, President Lula has publicly shunned M\$, with plans to switch the nation's IT infrastructure away from it – meaning \$120m a year less going into Gates's coffers. Linux could soon be on a third of Brazil's computers, with other Latin American countries set to follow.

continued overleaf...

Live and Let Linux

What is Linux then? It is an 'operating system' – like Windows or Mac – which comes with its own set of key applications – eg web browser, word processor etc. Many of these 'open source' programs are also available for Windows or Mac, and in fact are considered as good as, if not better than, MS products – eg Firefox and Open Office, which replace Internet Explorer and Office respectively. If you mostly use a computer for web surfing, writing, watching films and burning CDs, then you could safely turn your computer over to Linux.

One of the best things about Linux, apart from sticking two fingers up to another nasty corporation, and being virus and spyware free, is that you're downloading the software you want but don't have to muck around with cracks because it's all totally legal for a change. However as the programs are often being written by small teams with limited resources, some of the software is not as slick as the corporate products: Glitches can appear - but the whole process relies on people using these progs and reporting bugs and suggestions back to the development teams, so they can make it all more luddite-proof. So while Linux is not yet ready to compete as a high end multimedia platform - though it is improving rapidly - proof of its reliability is that over 70% of the internet is run using the 'open source' file server programme called 'Apache', mostly on Linux.

If you want to see Linux in action but don't want to delete Windows quite yet, it comes free for download and burning to CD, which when booted runs a working version of Linux and it's major applications. Or, you can make your PC 'dual boot' – that is both Windows and Linux are installed, giving you the choice at start-up. Even if you're stuck with Windows or Mac you could ditch MS Office and Internet Explorer and use Open Office and Firefox.

As SchNEWS's moves our raggle-taggle bunch of skip-bin PCs away from the 'dark side', this edition is being done using free open-source software running on Linux. The articles were written in Open Office, the issue layout done in Scribus, and website updated with NVU. Linux is a bit like Soya milk – it tastes funny at first but you soon prefer it and you know it's good for you.

* **Which Linux?** Because anyone can legally make and release their own 'distro' of Linux, many do: ranging from hacker communities to slick corporate versions (for more see <http://distrowatch.com>). SchNEWS recommends Ubuntu - free to download at www.ubuntu.com, which you burn to make a 'live CD', or if you don't have broadband we will post Ubuntu CDs free to the first 20 people who email in requests.

* **For an introduction to Linux** see www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/howtolinux.htm

* September 16th is **International Software Freedom Day** with events in over 100 countries. In London there will be a march from Regents Park at 12pm to Westminster University where there will be a range of talks, information sharing and free Ubuntu CDs to distribute. For more info see <http://gllug.org.uk>

IT'S ZIM UP NORTH

In August, the government ruled that asylum seekers from Zimbabwe would definitely not face any kind of persecution from that nice man Mr Mugabe, and therefore they can step up their forcible deportations of those that 'fail' their criteria. A coalition of protest groups has come together to call a mass demonstration in Leeds city centre on Saturday 16th. Assemble outside Leeds art gallery on the Headrow, Leeds LS1 3AD at 12pm. To join the weekly London vigil and for more about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, see www.zimvigil.co.uk

FLOOD OF INVESTORS

Just when we thought the story had gone cold, things are heating up in Turkey again. It's the return of the Ilisu Dam project, thought to have been defeated back in 2001, when UK company Balfour Beatty were forced to pull out and the consortium funding it he folly collapsed (See SchNEWS 331, 259).

Well, a new bunch of capitalists have decided that where Anglos fear to tread, they would be only too happy to seek the profits to be had from a project that would flood 300 sq km of Kurdish land, dislocate some 78,000 villagers, and impact upon people over the borders in Syria and Iraq (who, for some reason other, have a little too much on their hands right now to make too big a fuss about it). These sharp suited ad-venture heroes are VA Tech (from Austria), Alstom (Switzerland) and Züblin (Germany) and have applied for export credit guarantees from their respective governments. And even while all the decisions are yet to made, the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, signalled his intent of August 5th by laying a foundation stone for the dam, which as a bonus would flood large areas of unique sites of historical interest going right back to the beginnings of human history. For details of the revived campaign, see www.ilisu.org.uk

WAR ON TERRIER

After 5 days of evidence at Hastings Magistrates Court, 7 hunt sabs had their aggravated trespass case dismissed after a police attempt to 'fix' the case was exposed. A CPS civilian employee gave testimony to at least three "mistakes" or "oversights" in the evidence-disclosure process – where the prosecution has, by law, to hand over all relevant evidence - rules introduced after the exposure of stitch-ups with the Birmingham 6 and Bridgewater 3. There is no doubt in the minds of the defendants that these "oversights" were part of a concerted attempt by cops to coach witnesses and withhold evidence in order to gain a conviction at any cost.

The charges related to an incident on 21st Feb when 30 sabs attended the East Sussex and Romney Marsh foxhunt (who boast of their intentions to break the hunt ban). After the hunt was found hunting illegally there were confrontations - and one of the hunt was injured. The police smashed windows on a vehicle and nicked the 7 occupants, later charging them with violent disorder and GBH with intent. All were later released minus clothes, possessions and Landrover.

Charges were later dropped to aggravated trespass (disrupting a lawful activity on private land!) A 10-day trial with 36 prosecution witnesses started on 4th September. Despite attempts to put the defence off the scent with false leads, facts were unearthed by legal beagle Tim Walker showing the hunt had been illegally digging foxes out. Indeed the injured man, Tim Skinner, had a recently-killed fox on the front of his quad bike.

The CPS failed to supply evidence that would put the sabs in the clear, new evidence only being passed to the defence at the last moment after repeated requests. In the end, access to video interviews with key witnesses was only grudgingly acceded to. The cops' refusal to co-operate culminated in an 'abuse of process' hearing, where the Crown chose to offer no more evidence on the basis that it was impossible to be sure that the defendants would face a fair trial. The Judge threw the case out. Sabs are now rubbing their hands at the prospect of dragging the cops to court.

* To get involved see www.huntsabs.org.uk

Party & Protest

SEPT 21st - Time To Go Demonstration - Troops Out of Iraq, No Attack on Iran, No Trident Replacement, Get Blair Out, End Israeli Terror... Central Manchester - assemble 1pm Albert Square. * Brighton coach £10 return, call 07917 300419. * London coach from Shepherds Bush Road £15 waged, £6 unwaged, £3 u18s. Call 07984 405307 or email stwc_ham_sb@yahoo.co.uk

SOC IT TO EM

Activist/comedian **Mark Thomas** has been busy recently, successfully pissing off the upholders-of-the-law at Charing Cross police station by inundating them with paperwork the government deemed absolutely necessary for state security. Inspired by the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA) prohibiting 'unauthorised' protest around parliament (see SchNEWS 483) Thomas has urged people to partake in 'mass lone' demos, two of which have already successfully taken place. Each person applies in advance for permission to hold a single-person protest, just on the same day as everybody else. A range of causes has been protested from the obvious SOCPA, Iraq, Palestine etc to more imaginative ones like 'Ban crap laws' and 'Exile Robbie Williams'.

Next Friday the 22nd the third demo is taking place and Mark and the crew have thought up a way to double the dose of absurdity by holding - two consecutive demos that day. It should've proved a real paperwork ball-ache for the boys'n'girls in blue working today on the deadline for handing in protest applications. If you've missed out, don't worry as there'll be more demos to come. And if you still fancy a trip to express some dissent next week, why not grab yourself a blank sheet of paper and join the protesters as two creative souls did at the last one. www.markthomasinfo.com

* **Brian Haw** has been in court this week for breaching conditions imposed following his 5-year demonstration outside Parliament. After the embarrassing realisation that the SOCPA law written specifically to remove him did not legally include him, the court of appeal judged in May that Brian is not exempt after all. Conditions included limiting his demo to an area of 3 sq meters in total and reducing the number of people allowed to be present. Just to make sure Brian did as he was told, cops decided to forcibly remove most of his placards on the night of 23rd May (see SchNEWS 545). Brian and his lawyers had their day in court and on Tues 12th won their request for an adjournment in order to seek a judicial review of the ruling. The fight for the right to protest goes on! See www.parliament-square.org.uk

...and finally...

Fantasy worlds collided last month as World of Warcraft™ went head-to-head with War on Terror™. In one 'reality' the forces of good rally to thwart a Dark Lord dwelling in the Mountains of the East; in the other a bunch of geeks pretend to be druids in an Internet game. Beware, would-be warlocks: it's not yer magic sword you need to hang on to, its yer i-pod. Last month, one virtual Gandalf from Chicago (flying to meet a girl he'd met online, natch) downloaded more than his bowels into a plane toilet. Spotting a blockage cabin crew raised the alarm. Despite geekboy's explanation that it was a crap-smearred i-pod, not a bomb the plane made an emergency landing in Ottawa and passengers got the full 'terror procedures' monty from the bomb squad and secret service.

Quizzed on his quest, our hero explained that, far from being an ordinary passenger, he was in fact Valakar the Mighty (or something), leader of a Warrior Guild- getting him a full interrogation from some real spooks. When asked if he knew how to make a bomb, he proudly answered, Spock-like, "I have a degree in physics, and I'm not an idiot." Whoops. Several hours in a dungeon and a search of his computer hard-drive later, he finally got his i-pod back and the passengers were released.

Online orcs beware. Those who have spent too long immersed in a wierd virtual environment- like War on Terror World-exhibit detachment from reality, are quick to anger, not all that subtle and it's best not to approach them. OK?.

disclaimer

SchNEWS advises all readers - open sauce is tasty all over yer chips. Honest.

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