📘 Misery of Cryptography

The answers to the questions the FOSS community asked at FOSDEM 2026

Introduction

Nobody gives you anything for free in life, and if they do, it's in exchange for something else.

I heard this phrase a hundred times. My father, a first-generation computer engineer, repeated it like someone leaving a key without saying which door it opens. Computers run in the family; I know perfectly well how a system works from the inside. I also know what it means to be active in a communist party, and with it, the conviction that the State was the only tool to guarantee social and ethical justice. For years, that was my trench. And from that trench, anything that smacked of decentralization, unregulated markets, or technologies that didn't pass through the State filter was automatically suspicious.

But this isn't about me. It's about you.

The FOSS community in 2026: questions without answers

Last January, the free and open source software community gathered in Brussels, as every year, for FOSDEM. In the hallways, in the talks, in the debates, the questions were always the same:

· "Free as in Burned Out: Who Really Pays for Open Source?"
· "The Geopolitics of Code: From Digital Sovereignty to Global Fragmentation"
· "Open Source & EU Policy" (the CRA, the regulation threatening to crush you)
· "Open Source Security in spite of AI"
· "Who Pays Your Bills? Sustainability, Community and Business: The Open Source Triangle"

Questions about why you're burning out, why your code is worth billions and you don't see a dime, why regulations ignore you, why artificial intelligence threatens you, why your communities can't sustain themselves.

These are questions you've been asking for years. But at FOSDEM 2026, they reached a critical density. Too many burned-out people. Too many projects on the brink of collapse. Too many companies making trillions from your work while you can do nothing about it.

The questions were on the table. What there weren't, were answers.

People went home with the same doubts, the same exhaustion, the same feeling that something isn't working but they don't know what. Corporations don't wait. States don't wait. War doesn't wait. While you debate, others move forward. While you burn out, others build

empires on your code. While the developers of ArduPilot say "I never imagined my code would kill people", the drones keep flying.

You can't wait another year. You can't go on like this another day.

This book is not about cryptography

The title might be misleading. Misery of Cryptography sounds like another essay on blockchain, another critique of speculation, another analysis of cryptocurrencies. It's not that.

Cryptography, blockchain, DAOs, tokens, zero-knowledge proofs… they're tools. Nothing more. This book is not about them. It's about you. About those who write code, who maintain the world's digital infrastructure, who burn out while others get rich. It's about the questions you asked at FOSDEM and the answers no one has given you.

Cryptography appears here because it's one of the tools that can help you. Not the only one, nor the most important. But one that, properly used, can solve some of your problems: verifying contributions without exposing identities, organizing without hierarchies, funding yourselves without relying on donations, collectively deciding the direction of your projects.

But if you're expecting a book that sells blockchain as the magic solution, close it now. It isn't. You've already solved coordination at scale in code; what you haven't solved is power. The solution is not technical. It's political. And politics is you, organizing.

The diagnosis (which you already know)

You've been seeing it for years:

· 60% of open source maintainers receive no financial compensation. 58% have considered quitting due to burnout.
· 90% of companies depend on open source software, but only 60% contribute actively. Of corporate investment in open source, barely 14% reaches maintainers.
· The value companies derive from open source is estimated at $8.8 trillion. Meanwhile, you burn out.
· Your code is used in wars, in mass surveillance, in systems that oppress people who, like you, only wanted to build useful tools. And you can do nothing because you are not organized.

The data isn't new. Neither are the complaints. What's new is that now, after FOSDEM 2026, the questions are clearly formulated. And what was missing were answers.

The answers this book tries to give

Not abstract answers. Not theory without practice. A framework, tools, and an action plan.

1. Why you burn out. Burnout isn't a personal failure. It's a structural consequence of a model that isolates and exploits you.
2. Why "goodism" doesn't work. Corporations don't pay out of love. History shows you only get what you can demand.
3. Why your code is political. Every line has consequences. What you write can end up in wars, in surveillance, in oppression. Neutrality is an illusion.
4. What tools exist to organize yourselves. DAOs, non-speculative governance tokens, privacy-preserving contribution proofs. Not to speculate, but to coordinate.
5. What happened to those who tried before. The history of the cypherpunk movement, the contrast between May (who got rich and died irrelevant) and Assange (who paid the price). Lessons to avoid repeating mistakes.
6. Why FOSS is burned out. The current crisis, seen through data, testimonies, and structural analysis.
7. What to do now. A concrete, step-by-step plan for a project, a community, a group of maintainers to start organizing.

And one more question, the one FOSDEM didn't ask but this book does:

"Who dies with my code?"

Because your code is critical infrastructure. And as such, it will be used. The only question is by whom and for what purpose. The creators of ArduPilot didn't want to kill people, but their software kills. The makers 3D-printing bombs in their workshops aren't evil, but they participate in a war without knowing it. If you don't organize, you'll end up the same way.

The thesis

My argument is simple: your refusal to organize politically has turned you into willing slaves of capital, with whom your respective governments are in cahoots.

Open source proved that collaboration works. Free software proved that knowledge can be common. What you haven't achieved is translating that technical efficiency into political power.

The goal is not to replace one centralized power with another. It's to end centralized power altogether, whether in the private or public sphere. Capital and the State are in collusion, and they are the ones who profit from your labor. You are not their accomplices; you are their raw material. But by refusing to organize, you make their job easier.

This book does not ask you to stop coding. It asks you to start coding with awareness. To understand that your work has value, that you can demand, that you can organize, that you can collectively decide the direction of what you build.

The tools exist. You already asked the questions at FOSDEM. Now it's just a matter of taking the step.

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