informa

VIDEO
Datto's 2019
State of the MSP Report
Learn More

datto

Datto's Global State of the Channel
Ransomware Report

LEARN MORE

Channel Futures.

How to build a security operations center (SOC) on a budget
Learn more
AT&T Business

OPEN SOURCE

Richard Stallman Talks GNU, Linux, Terrorism and French Politics

Written by Christopher Tozzi April 18, 2016

What is Richard Stallman, the father of free software (if not open source) like in person? And what is he thinking now about Linux, terrorism and French politics? I gained some insight recently when the founder of the GNU operating system spoke near Paris.

What is Richard Stallman, the father of free software (if not open source) like in person? And what is he thinking now about Linux, terrorism and French politics? I gained some insight recently when the founder of the GNU operating system spoke near Paris.

I glimpsed Stallman for the first time in Boulder when he was a bearded the bus I was riding from Paris to the suburb of Choisy-le-Roi, where he gave a talk at a library last weekend to promote "free digital society." Out of breath and sporting khaki pants, a green polo and a worn Monopoly bag, he was immediately unmistakable.

Stallman says in his description of his "lifestyle" that he hates wasting time. He indeed wasted no time after boarding the bus before pulling out a laptop. He hacked for the duration of the hour-long ride to Choisy-le-Roi.

Upon exiting the bus Stallman appeared deeply agitated at the absence of the French host who was supposed to meet him at the station. A lesser hacker might have pulled out a cell phone and called the host, but Stallman does not use those. So, abandoning his original rendezvous plan, he set off into the town, where — after some fumbling encounters with locals who gave conflicting directions to the library — he eventually found the venue.

The library space was on the second floor of the building. The ground floor of the structure was empty. Stallman remarked that this seemed a horribly inefficient waste of space. He's a guy who likes efficiency.

Seeing no one to help him set up at the library, Stallman took to the podium to shout "Je cherche des organisateurs!" — "I'm looking for the organizers!" — about a dozen times, until a library staff member arrived. He then proceeded to remove his shoes and socks, walk around the library and set some cookies while the staff hurriedly set up a projector.

The audience that came out to see Stallman was surprisingly large and diverse. It included the geeks you'd expect — one guy in his twenties wearing a shirt with the GNU logo, another whose clothing declared "Monopoly is not a crime" — but also lots of people considerably older and younger, and at least one fussy baby. To my wife's satisfaction, she was certainly not the only female in the audience — although she may have been the only person dragged to the talk in exchange for stopping at the Jardin des Plantes's wallaby exhibit on the way.

The talk got underway about fifteen minutes late. Stallman, still barefoot and consuming copious amounts of cola, spoke in nearly perfect, sophisticated French for more than two hours. For me, the most memorable points from his presentation included the following:

- He interrupted the speaker who introduced him to remind him that he was "Dr. Dr. Dr. Dr. Dr. Dr. Stallman." Stallman never actually completed a doctoral degree, but he is one guy who takes his honorary doctorates seriously.
- He was quite blunt in his discussion of terrorism and its impact on France. "Terrorism causes few deaths" compared to tobacco and sugar, he observed. He noted that terrorism's disproportionate impact on French society and economy is a result of the French state's decision to scale its war-on-terrorising as he spoke). I thought that was bold, given that he was speaking in an audience which may well have included people personally affected by last year's terrorist attacks in Paris — which, incidentally, were the reason why Stallman was going the talk last weekend. It had originally been scheduled for November 15, 2015, two days after the Paris attacks, during which Stallman was in the city he said.
- He described the Linux kernel in 1991 as "proprietary software" ("un logiciel privatiser") because at that time it was not governed by the GPL license. That seemed a stretch to me: the original Linux license was informal and lacked legal sophistication, but it granted users the right to view the program as long as they did not try to make money off of it. And the source code was completely available.
- Similarly, he was respectfully critical of Linux Torvalds — to whom he referred consistently, with an air of distance, as "Monsieur Torvalds." He suggested that Torvalds's only interest in making code free was to speed development. That also seemed unfair to me; Torvalds no doubt likes open source largely because he thinks it's the best way to develop code, but there is no evidence that Torvalds does not also value the ideals of open source software.
- He said that the term "GNU/Linux" is better than "Linux" when referring to operating systems because the former assures the GNU developers due credit for their work in creating GNU software. It seems, then, that a significant part of the reason why Stallman is upset with efforts to write GNU out of the picture is that it means the project he founded misses out on the glory — which is different from being concerned primarily with the philosophical differences between the free and Linux projects.
- As far as Linux goes, Stallman compared everyone. Maybe that was just because he is better versed in the informal second person tense in French, but I thought it was interesting because I suspected he might want to do away with the formal version of "you" — which is a marker of hierarchy and social inequality — for the same reasons that the French revolutionaries dispensed with singular "vous" in the 1790s.
- I sensed that much of the content of Stallman's talk was canned, since he made the same specific points, using the same language and metaphors, that he has raised in other speeches and in his writings. (He gives these talks a lot, so it makes sense that he sticks to a script.) Still, I was impressed by how clearly and concisely he was able to present complex information, and relate it to local French issues. I suspect that the success of Stallman's success in promoting free software over the past three decades owes to his talents in speaking and writing very effectively.
- Stallman's talk consisted largely of a basic outline of free software principles. But he compellingly wove his points into discussion of other issues, including online privacy, Internet censorship, government surveillance and digital rights management, showing how the idea of publicly sharing code connects organically to political and social concerns that don't necessarily have anything directly to do with code itself. If the free software movement has a future now that open code has essentially become the default, it will be in bolstering support for the broader free culture movement.

If you've yet to see Stallman speak for yourself, you can find out when he's next coming to a venue près de chez vous.

Tags: Cloud Service Providers, Digital Service Providers, MSPs, VARs/SIs, Open Source

RELATED

Linux Foundation Partners with Open Source Group on Code Security Audits

Microsoft Releases Azure Sphere Secure Edge to Cloud IoT Solution

Igel Updates Partner Program with More in-Online Training, Replaces MDF

Ingram Micro's Promark Now Distributing Platform9's Kubernetes, OpenStack Services

17 comments

Lazza April 18, 2016 @ 8:45 pm — Reply

> with little apparent
> with little apparent sympathy for people who are victims of terrorism

Quite sick, but predictable. Stallman started an awesome movement with great ideals. Unfortunately nowadays it seems his only interest is to push the FSF agenda at any cost, including bad mouthing Linus, Mr Torvalds, many popular distros such as Debian and Ubuntu… Of course not caring about anything else.

This is a pity!

Anonymous April 18, 2016 @ 10:13 pm — Reply

> but there is no evidence
> "but there is no evidence that Torvalds does not also care about users' or programmers' freedom. "

I've been following news stories and blogs about Torvalds and Stallman for a couple decades now. I'm not prepared to direct you to any sources as (just this, but I would say – emphatically) – that there is abundant evidence out there that Torvalds does _not_ care about users' freedom on the same level that Stallman does. Torvalds has explicitly advocated for policies and positions which limit the users freedom.

Christopher Tozzi April 19, 2016 @ 7:07 am — Reply

> I think few people would
> I think few people would disagree that Torvalds and Stallman do not care about freedom "on the same level." Certainly Stallman cares more. But Torvalds's statements (e.g., Stallman "deserves a monument in his honor for giving birth to the GPL") suggest that freedom does matter significantly to him. So does the fact that he decided to license Linux under the GPL in 1992. If he did not care about freedom, he might have gone with a BSD-style license, which would have made at least as much sense in the early 1990s (when BSD had just become usable on its own) as the GPL.

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 2:08 am — Reply

Although he's technically
Although he's technically right about terrorism being extremely rare, it doesn't sound very politically correct when he says it. (non-PC things tend to upset people)

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 3:48 am — Reply

That he keeps saying
That he keeps saying "GNU/Linux" is crazy. Do a distribution with GNU software and can call it whatever you like. But linux is linux.

Anonymous July 10, 2016 @ 10:54 pm — Reply

> There are already
> There are already distributions with their own names. Your comment does not make any sense. Also one OS using the Linux kernel but not GNU is Android. It comes usually with locked root and has lots of malware.

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 8:41 am — Reply

THANK YOU! I'm so sick of
THANK YOU! I'm so sick of this whole GNU/Linus BS. GNU is a project governed by RMS. Linux is governed by Linus Torvalds. RMS says that Linux is no part of the FSF or GNU, so for him to keep saying that it should be called GNU/Linux is completely contradictory to what he says he believes.

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 1:27 pm — Reply

GNU/Linux: yes. Linux is only
GNU/Linux: yes. Linux is only the kernel. The rest is GNU. It is only fair to call it GNU/Linux. Thank you GNU; thank you Linus

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 7:20 pm — Reply

> I save some slides in 2011
> I save some slides in 2011 that estimated (in times of code) an 8% of GNU in Ubuntu. Most likely that percentage has been reduced in 5 years. It's not the rest by any means.
>
> Again, make a distribution with only GNU software and call it GNU/Linux. But modern OS are a lot more than that. It's only fair to not exclude all the other software. Debian Linux is not GNU/Linux.
>
> I have respect for Richard Stallman ideology and work, but when you hear him talking about Linux and Linus you can feel the resent.
>
> Christopher Tozzi April 19, 2016 @ 9:01 pm — Reply
>
> > I have seen the 8 percent
> > I have seen the 8 percent figure before, going back several years, but I have found not a reliable source for it. Not sure I buy it. Circa 1999 the figures for a complete distribution were: 3 percent code from Linus kernel, 30 percent from GNU and the rest from other projects (BSD stuff, etc.). (According to a March 1999 Wired article.) So far GNU to be only 8 percent now is a big departure.
> >
> > I can believe the kernel now accounts for a higher portion, though, since Linus has become much bigger since the 1990s. I am not sure that GNU programs have done the same.
> >
> > Obviously this is a hard thing to measure, anyway. Do you count total lines of code? Individual programs? Include libraries or not?
> >
> > And Stallman would no doubt point out that a lot of the crucial tools GNU provides are not necessarily in the distribution. For example GCC and GDB are not in Ubuntu by default but you certainly can't build Ubuntu without them. Going back to early days Stallman was emphatic about how Linux the kernel would never have existed if GNU didn't provide Torvalds the free tools he needed to program and compile it — which I think is very true, commercial assemblers, compilers etc. at the time were way beyond Torvalds's reach.
> >
> > Anonymous April 20, 2016 @ 10:16 am — Reply
>
> **"The rest is GNU".**
> **No, it**
> "The rest is GNU".
>
> No, it isn't. Although several important pieces of software belong to the GNU project, some others don't.
>
> Just because it is GPL or Free Software it doesn't come from the GNU project.
>
> Still, Stallman considers that GNU's packages are more relevant to the general system that (say) a desktop environment or a media player, which is the reason why he considers it should be called GNU/Linux.
>
> Anonymous August 18, 2016 @ 1:58 am — Reply
>
> > **Oh just shut up you**
> > Oh just shut up you nonsensical bumbling fool of today's interweb generation. Go play with your Samsung or Iphone recyclable toy and leave the technology wizards out of your narcissistic trolling schedule.

Anonymous April 19, 2016 @ 7:28 pm — Reply

" The rest is GNU." KDE is
" The rest is GNU" KDE is GNU! Really? How about mono (ok, that might as well just go), gcc used to be GNU but I suspect Red Hat (who have now owned it for decades) almost certainly haven't ever called it GNU. It might have started out as GNU/Linux, but that was a long time ago.

The only reason now to call anything GNU/Linux is to compare it against Android (which as far as I know is non-GNU/Linux).

Anonymous April 20, 2016 @ 11:34 am — Reply

Thanks FSF (RMS) thanks
Thanks FSF (RMS) thanks Linus. Thanks every one who has contributed.

Carney June 27, 2016 @ 2:01 pm — Reply

The problem with dismissing
The problem with dismissing terrorism as causing fewer deaths than smoking or sugar is that it ignores human psychology. By our nature humans see no bear risk more when it is imposed by others than when we choose it, more when it is concentrated in time and place than distributed, more when it is a result of malice rather than accident or indifference, more when it is unusual or unnatural than when it is ordinary or natural. The nature of terrorism is that it falls on the more frightening side of all these dynamics, and that is the very reason for its existence.

To go further, dismissing the reactions of others to terror is a form of boasting of your own superiority to them, or denigrating human beings for reacting like humans with emotions who experience more distress and suffering when a young family is killed by terror than when a hundred elderly people die in their 70s rather than their 80s because they used tobacco.

jackparker December 21, 2016 @ 7:20 am — Reply

Cosmetic breast augmentation
Cosmetic breast augmentation endoscopic approach is aesthetic breast augmentation endoscopic application of modern equipment magnified crisp structure chest cavity, making dissection padded breasts and put the bag inside an easy and accurate, less invasive.
olsafterhaloutsinkwhenperfectlaxthungshut.blogspot.com

Anonymous June 12, 2017 @ 12:33 pm — Reply

Stallman knows nothing about
Stallman knows nothing about France , French citizens or their history and should just shut up .

Leave a comment

GIF

Log in with your Channel Futures account

Alternatively, post a comment by completing the form below:

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name *

Email *

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Post Comment

Related Content

Microsoft Doubles Down with Iqel as Partners Get First Linux WVD Client

Cisco Adds New Software to Support Closed-Loop Operating Model, Accelerate Hybrid Applications

Accenture Teams with Google Cloud, McAfee Puts Spotlight on 'Shadow IT'

IBM Taps Partners for 'Store in The Cloud' to Target Retail Transformation

GALLERIES — View all

Image Gallery: Check Point Software CPX 360 Featuring Firsthive, Silver Peak, AT&T
January 31, 2020

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES — View all

Staying Relevant in Microsoft's Ever-Changing Partner Ecosystem
March 10, 2020

3 Things You Need to Know about the Current State of IoT
March 9, 2020

Beating Burnout: MSP Self-Care for Long Term Success
March 5, 2020

WEBINARS — View all

Why Security Orchestration, Automation and Response (SOAR) is Essential to MSP Success
March 25, 2020

Where is Managed Services Headed in 2020?
March 26, 2020

Securing the Future: The MSSP Opportunity in 2020 and Beyond
April 2, 2020

WHITE PAPERS — View all

FortiSOAR Empowers Security Operations to Accelerate Incident Response
March 4, 2020

HC3: The Simple, Scalable, Secure Hyperconvergence Solution for Modern Virtualization
March 3, 2020

HC3 Edge: Deploying Self-Managing Micro-Datacenters at the Edge
March 3, 2020

UPCOMING EVENTS — View all

Channel Partners Conference & Expo
March 9, 2020 - March 12, 2020

Channel Partners Evolution
September 29, 2020 - October 1, 2020

VIDEOS AND PODCASTS — View all

PASTCAST: Securing the Future: The MSSP Opportunity in 2020 and Beyond
March 4, 2020

GFS Insight Drives the Channel with Flow Management
March 3, 2020

Pin Ace a VSEtar!
January 28, 2020

TWITTER

@insightIDC reaches out to #channel #partnersecurity services @Azure dlvr.it/R8kgCv https://t.co/cCGGqqUQ1

@BlackBerry announces expanded North America channel program #cybersecurity dlvr.it/R8dxwv https://t.co/AAzAmvm8D

@IBMcloud, @CenturyLink extend partnership dlvr.it/R8dk7 https://t.co/BUbqyHUqd

@Sonicwall research reminds partners that contribute to increased #cyberattacks #modernworkplace twitter.com/i/web/status/1…

Adding #Kubernetes connections to #vSphere7 and #vCenterServer @VMware IT strategy dlvr.it/R8d2Ww https://t.co/YGFGl6ln7S

@CamerosOfficial brings easy application delivery to #MSPs dlvr.it/R8dqqm #Azure https://t.co/ubVDMcbVrq

This is what #5G has in store for channel partners - @CarolynDuffy @Geoingersoll @AdamKQ @Accenture… twitter.com/i/web/status/1…

#eSports, at the high school and college level, is a growing business opportunity for channel partners #esports… twitter.com/i/web/status/1…

Brought to you by informatech

Privacy | CCPA: "Do Not Sell My Data" | Cookie Policy | Terms

Copyright © 2020 Informa PLC. Informa PLC is registered in England and Wales with company number 8860726 whose registered and Head office is 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG.

Sign in to stay updated!
Sign up for our Channel Futures newsletters today.