NEWSANALYSIS

The Linux Voice view on what's going on in the world of Free Software.

Liberté, egalité, fraternité

Terrorism must not become an excuse to give up essential liberties.

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With the rest of the Linux Voice team, I am appalled and horrified by the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, which was perpetrated just as this issue was going to the printer. Settling scores with violence is the recourse of ignorant cowards – lower than animals. I am heartbroken for every person affected, and we extend our sympathy to the families, friends and fans of the people murdered.

This was without doubt intended as an act of terrorism. Some politicians seem to act as if "terrorism" means a terrible crime committed by someone who doesn't fit the speaker's own racial and religious profile. Just because something induces terror in some or many people, that doesn't make it terrorism. That diminishes the concept as well as grouping routine crime – for which society has millennia of experience and solutions – into the same bucket as a more subtle and serious phenomenon that preys on the meshed society.

Terrorism isn't just performing a terrifying act. It's provoking society's immune system into attacking itself, making its defence systems attack the values and people they are supposed to be defending. Terrorism is like an autoimmune disorder of democracy. You don't fight terrorism by attacking the virus; you fight it by strengthening the immune system. It is too easy to succumb to the virus. It seeks to provoke us into destroying ourselves, using the very freedoms we value as a weapon to provoke their extinction. I refuse to be terrorised and decline the opportunity to hate. I choose not to succumb to the terrorism disease and I invite you to join me in these choices.

As I write, certain voices are calling for blanket surveillance, for bans on discussion of some topics, for the blocking of certain websites, and more. These reactions are exactly the auto-immune response terrorism seeks to stimulate. Its architects do so because they have already dismissed the possibility (or the value) of democratic society and want the restrictions to go ever deeper as a tool both to damage capitalism and to radicalise more people. Ironically, banning speech that radicalises youth is likely to itself radicalise youth.

But even if the bans were not intrinsically self-defeating, we should still oppose them. To advocate a ban on anything on the internet is to put one's faith in magical thinking. The fabric of the meshed society – the internet, the worldwide web, peer-to-peer protocols, wireless networks – is all designed for resilience. It "treats obstructions as damage" and comes complete with the tools to route round it.

So any requirement for technical measures to impose a ban is a requirement to defeat the resilience of the meshed society itself. Encryption, VPNs and private communications must all be prevented or corrupted. Ultimately that requires general purpose computing devices be eliminated, replaced with devices that can't be modified by their owners. Richard Stallman calls this "treacherous computing"; Cory Doctorow warns us of the "coming war on general-purpose computing".

Beware straw men

As to surveillance: the murderers in France were known to the security services, who had been using existing laws to apply justified surveillance. There are circumstances where it's appropriate in a democratic society for accountable surveillance to be used to prevent crime. But there are limits. Gathering all metadata on all electronic connections is possible in a way the physical equivalents never were before. But is disproportionate democratically even if it is economically feasible.

In particular, it creates a capability for triangulation with other data from other contexts that makes Bentham's panopticon look trivial in comparison. The result is a society in which every form of speech can be cropped out of context and used to ensure conformity. The very existence of blanket surveillance chills democracy.

We should respond to this act of hate, which is as indefensible to anyone who embraces one of the world's religions as to those who reject them all, by ensuring we do not succumb to the self-destructive reactions perpetrators of terrorism want to provoke. That includes apparently reasonable demands for technical measures to prevent publication of hate speech, ban radicalising web sites and increase blanket surveillance. Behind the barbarism of terrorism, a brutal yet seductive subtlety of purpose lurks. We must not succumb.

> **"To advocate a ban on anything on the internet is to put one's faith in magical thinking."**

CATCHUP
Summarised: the biggest news stories from the last month

1 Canonical announces Snappy Ubuntu Core
Imagine a trimmed-down version of Ubuntu, geared towards deploying applications via Docker containers. Imagine that it supports transactional updates, so if something goes wrong when during the next round of updates, you can easily revert back to the previously working versions. Well, this is real, and it's called Snappy Ubuntu Core. Canonical certainly has its fingers in many pies at the moment, but this looks promising (see p40 for more). **www.ubuntu.com/cloud/tools/snappy**

2 Raspberry Pis head into space, running code written by kids
You can find Raspberry Pis virtually everywhere these days, and soon a couple of the dinky computers will be sent up to the International Space Station. Even better: they'll be running code to perform experiments written by schoolchildren in primary and secondary schools in the UK. Called Astro Pi, this project should be a fantastic way to get youngsters involved in programming. **www.raspberrypi.org/astro-pi**

3 HP announces EliteBook 850 running Linux
It's rather expensive (starting at $1,709) but it's available with SUSE Enterprise Linux 11. In any case, the more choice we Linux users have when buying hardware, the better. **http://tinyurl.com/kymfuc2**
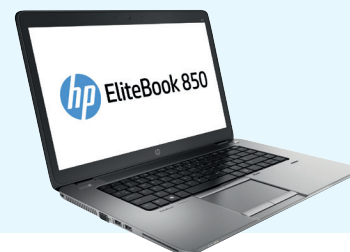
4 Devuan team publishes first progress report
Yes, the now-famous Debian fork that aims to provide "init freedom" (ie it doesn't use *Systemd*) has lasted longer than many expected. The Devuan team has even delivered its first progress report, which details development going into *Loginkitd* (a standalone alternative to logind, using *ConsoleKit2* as a back-end) and other software projects. According to the financial report, Devuan received €4,500 in donations up to December. **https://devuan.org/newsletter_22dec.html**

5 Red Hat adds speed boosts to Glibc
This might not sound like the most exciting news story in the world, but *Glibc* is a tremendously important piece of software, as it's the base C library that almost every piece of software on a GNU/Linux system links to. Now an engineer at Red Hat has worked on improving the performance of some of *Glibc*'s math routines, making some of the functions up to eight times faster than before. The report is heavy reading, but worth a look: **http://tinyurl.com/m8jrj7x**

6 Snowdrift.coop aims to help fund free software
Many FOSS projects are funded entirely by donations, but only receive occasional or one-off payments from users. A new website at **https://snowdrift.coop** wants to make FOSS projects more sustainable in the long run, by asking users to make monthly pledges to particular projects. And if you're a patron of *FooApp*, for example, making a monthly payment from your account on Snowdrift, you'll also pay a little extra whenever someone else becomes a patron too.

7 Crowdfunded laptop aims to respect your freedom
If you've ever tried to buy a laptop that works perfectly with Linux, you'll know it can be a chore. The Librem 15 is a crowdfunded high-end laptop starting from $1,899, and at the time of writing, the campaign had reached 71% of its goal. The machine will supposedly run on 100% Free Software – no binary blobs required. We'll try to get our hands on a unit for review in a future issue of the magazine. Check it out here: **www.crowdsupply.com/purism**

8 CoreOS team ditches Docker, creates Rocket
Software containers are all the rage at the moment. They let you run applications (typically on servers) in isolated environments with well-defined sets of libraries, so you can update them easily and they can't trample over other programs. Docker has been the big success story so far, but the CoreOS team has decided that Docker's scope has grown too large, and a replacement is needed: Rocket. It's a controversial move, but it's explained well here: **https://coreos.com/blog/rocket**