

# Bits from the DPL

## State of the Debian address

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# Once upon a time

*Fellow Linuxers,*

*This is just to announce the imminent completion of a brand-new Linux release, which I'm calling the Debian Linux Release. [...]*

*— Ian Murdock, 16/08/1993  
comp.os.linux.development*

*[...] we were the first intentional community development project.*

*— Ian Murdock, 05/07/2011  
interview on [www.linux.com](http://www.linux.com)*

# 18 years later

- $\approx$  33'000 binary packages (amd64/sid/main)
- 12 releases
- $\approx$  900 **DDs** + 150 **DMs** + thousands **contributors**
- largest n. of **ports** among “mainstream” distros
- non-Linux ports — kFreeBSD, hurd (?), ...
- ...

Well done everybody!

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# One of a kind?

1993 — not many distros back then

18 years later — *lots* of other distros

openSUSE, Linux Mint, PCLinuxOS, Slackware, Gentoo Linux, CentOS, FreeBSD, Arch, Sabayon, Puppy, Lubuntu, MEPIS, Ultimate, NetBSD, Tiny Core, Zenwalk, CrunchBang, Dreamlinux, Vector, Kubuntu, Maemo, Red Hat, aptosid, Peppermint, PC-BSD, Chakra, Salix, ClearOS, KNOPPIX, Xubuntu, Super OS, BackTrack, gOS, TinyMe, Zentyal, EasyPeasy, Frugalware, Clonezilla, Pardus, Meego, OpenBSD, Quirky, PC/OS, Zorin, **Debian**, SystemRescue, Element, Unity, SliTaz, Macpup, wattOS, Scientific, Mythbuntu, Slax, DragonFLY, Elive, linux-gamers, 64 Studio, Ubuntu, mageia, Nexenta, Parisx, NuTyX, GhostBSD, Kongoni, moonOS, LFS, Lunar, Imagineos, Untangle, Fedora, Yellow Dog, aLinux, Yoper, IPFire, BlankOn, Mandriva, PureOS, FreeNAS, Moblin, Linpus, TurboLinux, blackPanther, ...

with many **differences**:

- technical choices
- release management
- release schedule
- target user
- community
- support
- packaging system
- user base
- look & feel
- ...

## How is Debian special?

# Debian's specials — quality

## “culture of technical excellence”

- **policy**, lintian, piuparts, archive rebuilds (FTBFS), etc.
- maintainers are **software experts**
- **no 2<sup>nd</sup> class packages**
- *“we release when it's ready”*

# Debian's specials — freedom

firm principles from the *Social Contract*

- 1 promoting the “culture of Free Software” since 1993
- 2 **free the bottom up**
  - ▶ in its software
  - ▶ in its infrastructure
  - ▶ open in its processes — *there is no cabal !*

community awareness

- users trust Debian not to betray software freedom
- **high bar for software freedom** advocates

# Debian's specials — independence

- volunteers
- no corporate/hierarchical structure
- no (single) company babysitting us
- living up on:
  - ▶ donations (money & hardware)
  - ▶ gift-economy

truly *remarkable* in today FOSS ecosystem

community awareness

people trust our choices not to be profit-driven



# Debian's specials — decision making

## 1 do-ocracy

*An individual Developer may make any technical or nontechnical decision with regard to their own work;*

— Debian Constitution, §3.3.1.1

## 2 democracy

*Each decision in the Project is made by one or more of the following:*

*1. The Developers, by way of General Resolution [...]*

— Debian Constitution, §2

that means:

- reputation follows work
- no benevolent dictator
- **no imposed decisions**

by who has money, infrastructure, people, ...

# Debian's specials — derivatives

Derivatives have changed the way distros are made:

- they focus on **customization** and need workforce “only” for that

Debian: **upstream for  $\approx 130$  active derivatives** — distrowatch.com

Linspire, Liurex, Mint, LiMux, Sidux, gnuLinEx, Grml, MEPIS, Xandros, Ubuntu, Univen-  
tion, Damn Small Linux, Collax, Euronode, Floppix, Gibraltar, Kanotix, Knoppix, PureOS,  
gNewSense, LMDE, 64 Studio, Elive, Freespire, Jolicloud, Kurumin, Maemo, Neopwn, Open-  
Zaurus, Parsix, Xebian, Hackable:1, aptosid, Ubuntu Studio, Mythbuntu, ArtistiX, Asturix,  
Goobuntu, LinuxMCE, nUbuntu, Peppermint, TurnKey Linux, Zenix, ...

anyone running a (transitive) derivative **depends on Debian** and on  
its well-being

*even if their distro hasn't told them*

# Debian's role

- quality
- freedom
- independence
- decision making
- derivatives

we play an **important role** in Free Software  
it's our responsibility to be up to the task; are we?

# “Lack of workforce” as a hindrance?

last year

“we lack manpower” as a major theme

we still and we will always do

but *we do attract contributors*

- DDs in April 2011: 911 — +25 wrt April 2010
- new DDs January–June 2011: 13
- DMs in July 2011: 149 — +30 wrt August 2010

don't cry for the “lack of workforce”  
put into better use what we have

# Quality as a hindrance?

better quality requires more time

- that's just the way it is
- but we are actually doing good!
  - ▶ etch — 22 months, lenny — 22 months, squeeze — 24 months
  - ▶  $\text{avg}(\text{sarge} \dots \text{squeeze}) = 25 \text{ months}$

where to

- a **dependable release process** → time-based freezes ✓
- a **collaborative release process**
  - ▶ releasing is a shared responsibility, not only release team's
  - ▶ do NMUs, welcome NMUs, love NMUs
- an additional quality/time trade-off for our users → cut/rolling

# Freedom as a hindrance?

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No.

( well, *maybe*, but it's not negotiable )

# Independence & do-ocracy as a hindrance?

do-ocratic governance has drawbacks

- **non-geeky tasks** might receive little attention (documentation, mentoring, management, marketing, accounting, legal-ish stuff, ...)
  - ... but leaving them unattended gets in the way of hacking
- besides: we compete with companies good at them

where to

- acknowledge the usefulness of (some) non-geeky tasks
- welcome contributors working on them ✓
- step-in and volunteer; it's rewarding



# Democracy as a hindrance?

*large changes are impossible in Debian, **someone will disagree** on debian-devel (AKA inertia) [ folklore ]*

- consensus  $\neq$  unanimity
- while we have both, **do-ocracy comes before democracy**  
do you want something to happen? just start *doing* it!

***Be bold. Honestly, what can't you undo?***

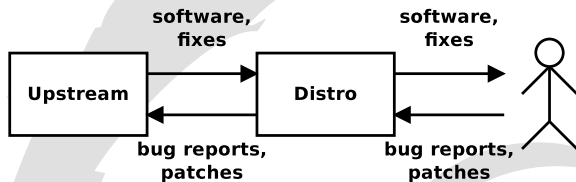
— Sam Hocevar, DebConf7

where to

- forking-enabling technologies
  - ▶ PPA (Personal Package Archives)
  - ▶ test-driven development
  - ▶ ...

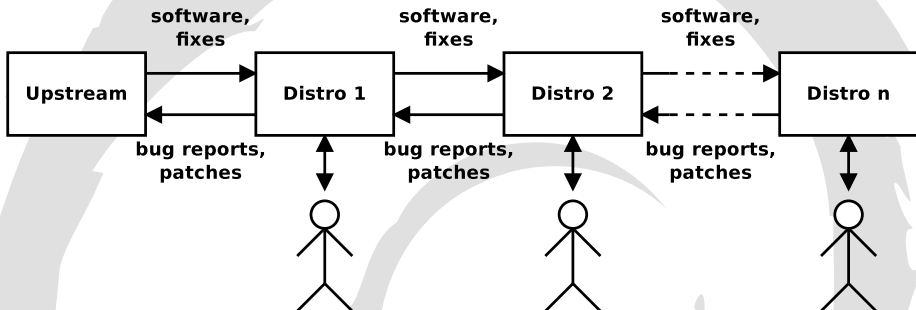
# Derivatives as a hindrance?

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- derivatives should be a blessing



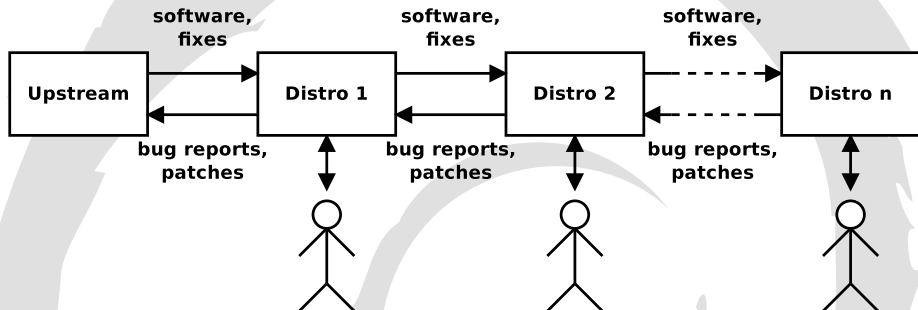
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where to

- encourage collaboration with derivatives ✓
- explain Debian to derivative *contributors*
- spread Debian's "give back" culture (Social Contract §2)

- greater role to play than being yet another distro
- if we FAIL, the Free Software community will suffer
- our own ways of doing things can strike back
- being bold and taking responsibility for collective tasks help

## Your thoughts?

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