

## FOSDEM 2003 Brussels

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The third anniversary of FOSDEM, Europe's largest free and open source software developer conference [1], saw fans of free software getting together at the usual venue, the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Attendance figures of over 1000 were well up on the previous two years. **BY HEIKE JURZIK**

**H**ackers had arranged for an "Early Bird" meeting which took place before the official events started. About 60 FOSDEM attendees gathered in a cosy pub in the center of Brussels to talk shop, exchange community gossip and, of course, sample Belgium's culinary delights.

Free software is by no means just a modern trend. In his Keynote speech, Jon "Maddog" Hall, the President and Executive Director of Linux International, and a familiar figure to most attendees, gave an overview of the movement's early days, and explained how it tied in with UNIX development.

Maddog asked "Who owns Linux?", and went on to liken the software and support problem to the chicken and egg problem, asking what came first. He emphasized the importance of free software in various fields of application, and stated that "free" should automatically imply "freedom of choice". Maddog thanked everyone involved in authoring free software: "Free software is like a megaphone: I give so little, and I get back so much." The organizers took this

opportunity to reward Maddog for his dedication – with Belgian beer, of course.

Richard Stallman then went on to criticize the imminent introduction of software patents and gave an overview of the current scenario. After lunch, the event continued with various tutorials and talks. Jakub Steiner presented some new features in the GIMP developer version (1.3.x) [2] – the menu elements have been thoroughly revised, and screen positions are now stored between sessions.

In the GnomeMeeting [3] tutorial, Damien Sandras demonstrated a practical application of the software for video conferencing. Using two computers, webcams, microphones, and telephones, Damien turned the seminary room into a virtual conference room, showing various applications for the system in what was an extremely convincing presentation.

The first day at FOSDEM came to a climax with the presentation of the Free Software Awards [4]. The award did not go to a developer this time, but to Lawrence Lessig, Professor of Law at



Figure 1: Geeks from around the world

Stanford Law School, who was rewarded for his commitment to intellectual freedom. After a moving speech, Professor Lessig received standing ovations as the developer community showed their respect for his achievements. To round off the first day at FOSDEM the attendees all joined in with an enthusiastic rendering of Richard Stallman's "Free Software" song.

The second day of the conference was packed with talks and open sessions. These included talks on toolkits like GTK, wxWindows, and Tcl/Tk, but also featured security topics. Various educational projects were presented, such as DebianEdu [5], where a group of French teachers had selected elements suitable for classroom use from the well-known distribution. A new installer is claimed to have DebianEdu up and running a pre-configured desktop within 15 minutes.

FOSDEM 2003 was a successful event in every respect. The organizers, numerous volunteers, and a good showing of attendees made the Free and Open Source Developers' European Meeting a really rewarding experience. ■



Figure 2: A Packed FOSDEM audience listens to Stallman's gospel

## INFO

[1] <http://www.fosdem.org/index>

[2] <http://www.gimp.org/>

[3] <http://www.gnomemeeting.org/>

[4] <http://www.gnu.org/award/award.htm>

[5] <http://wiki.debian.net/DebianEdu>