



JOIN THE LEAGUE FOR PROGRAMMING FREEDOM

Simson L. Garfinkel

A number of court cases are rapidly changing the world of computers faster than any hardware or software innovation ever has in the past. A pair of looming threats will likely put all but the largest software companies out of business and make computer programs much more expensive for users, unless we act now.

In June, Lotus Development Corporation won a major lawsuit against Paperback Software, a company selling a spreadsheet that used the same commands as *Lotus 1-2-3*.

Lotus immediately turned around and sued Borland Software, alleging that Borland's best-selling *Quattro-Pro* violated *1-2-3*'s copyright because *Quattro-Pro* could be customized by users to respond to the same keystroke sequences.

What's driving Lotus is economics. *1-2-3* costs \$495, while *Quattro-Pro* can be purchased for less than \$100. Lotus is trying to stamp out competing programs that make it easy for people to switch from *1-2-3* to something else. Without competition, Lotus has no incentive to improve its program or lower its price.

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The second threat is the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which has, for several years, issued patents for algorithms used by computer programs. Last year alone, it issued more than 700 such patents. Many computer programs are now suddenly in violation of patents that have been legitimately issued.

Patents are new to software, and many computer programmers don't understand their implications. Because of the added costs of patent searches, licensing, and legal battles, patents may increase the cost of creating a computer program by a factor of ten, or even a hundred. As they become more widespread, they're sure to shut out all but the largest companies.

What can we do?

The answer lies with Congress. The U.S. copyright law says nothing about a program's menus and "look and feel." The laws that govern the Patent Office say nothing about whether or not software should be patentable.

These protections were never enacted by Congress because they weren't needed. What's happened in the last five years is that large software companies have turned to the courts as a way of increasing their revenues. Look-and-feel copyright and software patents have been created by hyperactive legal departments, which have twisted copyright and patents to serve their company's bottom line, instead of the public good.

The League for Programming Freedom is an organization of people who oppose these new copyrights and patents. Some of the League's members are programmers who worry that their freedoms are rapidly being eroded by the legal system. Others are users and businessmen who believe that these new "software monopolies" will be the death of America's spirited software industry. Its president is Richard M. Stallman, who recently was awarded a MacArthur "genius grant" in recognition of his work in writing free software. League dues are \$42 a year for programmers, managers, and professionals; \$10.50 for students.

Recently, the League gained national attention when it picketed Lotus headquarters in Cambridge. On the legislative front, it's lobbying Congress to pass laws reversing the new monopolies that the courts have granted software publishers.

The League has written articles describing the copyright and patent issues in detail. For more information, you can write the League at One Kendall Square, #143, P. O. Box 9171, Cambridge, MA 02139; (617) 243-4091. ☐

Simson L. Garfinkel is a freelance writer based in Cambridge, Mass. Copyright 1990 by Simson L. Garfinkel.