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## Hungarian rebels against the "Microsoft Tax"

Posted 10th January, 2008 at 15:08:06 by [mr.goose](#)  
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Seems that Microsoft corporate enslavement goes far beyond the English-speaking world. A long and complex legal battle is currently raging in the former *Eastern Bloc* state of Hungary. APEH (the Hungarian Tax Office) insists that all Hungarian businesses must submit their tax returns on-line. This is not a problem in itself. However, APEH also assumes *all* computer users run Microsoft Windows. This infuriates Hungarian businessman and software developer, Charles Barcza. He develops and runs blackPanther, one of the biggest Hungarian-language Linux distributions. Fortunately the revolutionary spirit is still alive and kicking in Hungary and **Charles is fighting back...**



Charles Barcza

Despite smiling for our photo, Charles is not a happy Hungarian at all because APEH's decision renders his blackPanther OS and all other non-Microsoft operating systems useless for submission of tax returns.

Hungarian business people have to download two Windows executable programs from APEH, run them on their Windows based PC's and then submit these back to APEH, duly completed, in Microsoft Windows of course. APEH's tax return files simply do not work on any other platform, not even using WINE or CrossoverLinux. So if you are a Macintosh or Linux user, then tough luck! You must buy Windows!

No one likes paying tax. But being forced to pay an additional "Microsoft tax" just in order to pay one's statutory tax seems fundamentally unjust. Moreover, what sensible business person would install an OS that cannot be used to complete one's compulsory tax returns? It is one of the worst examples of government-sponsored Microsoft *lock-in* one can imagine. However, Charles is not a man who gives up without a fight. He has hired the services of Dr. Csilla Radovics, one of Hungary's finest lawyers to advocate his case. If he wins, then it could have serious repercussions throughout the EU, including in the UK.

I caught up with Charles back in summer 2007 in Pécs, a pleasant Roman town about the size of Southampton, 200km south of the Hungarian capital, Budapest. In an interview, painstakingly translated by my Hungarian speaking partner, Charles explained that his blackPanther operating system has an estimated 120,000 downloads. Based heavily on Mandriva Linux, blackPanther has been written to suit the needs of the Hungarian home market.

Not to be confused with a version of Apple's OSX operating system, Charles chose the name Panther simply because he likes them. Of course I did wonder if he would like panthers as much if he ever came face to face with one! And Charles was quick to explain that blackPanther was also available in other languages, including English. The

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blackPanther operating system is now supplied as standard on a range of tough and reliable laptop PC's manufactured by Charles's company.



**A blackPanther laptop "down the pub" c/w a couple of Pécs-brewed Szalon beers**

He told me that having suffered forty years of communism, Hungary is becoming a vibrant trading nation once again. In fact, the right to trade was incorporated in the Hungarian Constitution after the revolution in 1989. APEH forcing business people to use Microsoft Windows was severely restricting his ability to trade and is therefore unconstitutional.

Moreover, there is a very fundamental human rights issue here. Why should a Hungarian national and EU citizen be forced to buy proprietary American software in order to communicate with his Government? There are many, many ways that a government can collect data on-line without forcing its citizens to buy expensive and unreliable foreign software

Several months have passed since our meeting. Charles has submitted a petition to the Constitutional Court and to the Ombudsman. He approached the Ombudsman because of a particularly bizarre data protection issue. Seems that if you do not wish to swell Microsoft's coffers any further, then APEH's answer is that business people should go to their local "Telehaz" - a sort of free, community-based internet café.

Laudable as the Telehaz movement is, who in their right minds is going to take all their business records to an internet café? The notion is utterly ridiculous. Not merely is it very inconvenient but it raises some serious privacy and confidentiality issues too. The case is slowly progressing through the Hungarian Courts.



**Hungarian authority with its finger on the button? Clearly not in Charles Barcza's case**

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-  [blackPanther Linux](http://www.blackpanther.hu)  
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-  [Mandriva Linux](http://www.mandriva.org)  
<http://www.mandriva.org>
-  [APEH](http://www.ap eh.hu/bevallasok/nyomtatvany)  
<http://www.ap eh.hu/bevallasok/nyomtatvany>
-  More about the Telehaz movement including pictures of where APEH thinks business people should fill in their tax returns  
<http://www.telehaz.hu>
-  GarfNet's Linux pages - penguin-powered and full of unixy goodness:  
<http://www.garfnet.org.uk/linux>

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### Re: Hungarian rebels against the "Microsoft Tax"

*On 10th January, 2008 at 21:35:01 **scarpent** says:*

Very interesting article -- thank you.

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