Rampaging through the Tokyo of Free Speech **[1]**

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On Thursday the 3rd of April, the newly appointed CEO of the Mozilla Corporation, Brandon Eich resigned—an event which got many people to sit up and take a worried notice. Eich resigned because of internal pressure from his employees because of his personal beliefs.

Mozilla makes open-source software: most notably the Firefox browser, but also other products such as the Thunderbird email client and the Bugzilla issue tracker. Its latest big push is Firefox OS, which Mozilla hopes will challenge the mobile OS behemoths of Apple (iOS), Google (Android) and Microsoft (Windows RT).

Brandon Eich helped found Mozilla. He is also a sort of a legend in his own right, as he invented JavaScript, which largely drives interactive websites across the Internet today, nearly 20 years ago.

When Eich was appointed CEO of Mozilla Corporation, a leaked IRS report [2] was revealed which indicated that he financially supported the "pro"-California Proposition 8 [3] campaign in 2008. California Proposition 8 was a bid to constitutionally ban same-sex marriage in the state of California. The proposition initially succeeded, gaining a majority support in a democratic fashion, but was overturned by a federal court.

I cannot say what Eich's motivation was to support Proposition 8. Of course same-sex marriage is opposed on religious grounds, but there are also good secular arguments against same-sex marriage (which I am not going to delve into now). That said, it cannot be assumed out-of-hand that Eich is some religious fanatic or a bigot—indeed, for all that we know, he could have reached the conclusions which he did after thinking long and hard about the various arguments.

However, Eich's action was not a popular one and does not resonant well with the liberal left. Therefore many of his employees felt uncomfortable with having him at the helm [4] and made their dissidence known. But the opposition to Eich's appointment was not just internal: an influential dating website asked their users to no longer use the Mozilla flagship product [5] because of Eich's appointment. In light of these events, many of Eich's board of directors resigned. In light of this hostile environment, Eich decided to step down.

What we are seeing here is a gross attack on freedom of speech and beliefs: things which are supposed to be protected in the United States of America. But it seems as if it is quickly turning into the land of the popular opinion. And this is a disturbing thing to see. Mozilla wrote a letter to GLAAD [6] (an LGBT rights advocacy group) to affirm their commitment to LGBT rights. GLAAD responded by ironically thanking Mozilla, saying

> Mozilla’s strong statement in favor of equality today reflects where corporate America is: inclusive, safe, and welcoming to all,

That is, inclusive, safe and welcoming for everyone who agrees with them.

But not all same-sex equality advocates were happy about what happened to Eich. Some prominent

homosexual activists are enraged [7] by what has happened: they feel that this is turning into a reverse witch hunt after they had fought for decades exactly to attain equality and tolerance. And let us not forget how important freedom of speech is to America: while doing a Nazi salute will get you thrown into jail in Germany and Austria, in the USA that action is protected as a form of freedom of expression. Similarly, holocaust denial will get you into deep trouble all across Europe, including liberal Belgium, but you have that prerogative in the USA, because you are allowed to speak your mind. Now, these are extreme examples and I am in no way equating them to what Eich did in making his donation. Rather, it would seem as if a legitimate movement such as the one in support of traditional marriage is now being hounded worse that neo-Nazis.

This is a situation which never should have happened. Not only should Eich's privacy in terms of his financial donations have been respected, but his beliefs should have been respected. Open source software should also not be used as a weapon: its makers should be agnostic over who their users are and what they believe and support. As proponents of free software have said [8]:

> To understand the concept [of free software], you should think of 'free' as in 'free speech,' not as in 'free beer'.

The fact that these things did not happen is shocking and anyone valuing freedom in the West should sit up and take notice of this situation.

I honestly do not know if boycotting Firefox [9] is an appropriate response to the events of last week. I also don't know how much it would offend the employees at Mozilla if they knew that I used their products to research articles for this blog and to liaise with my church.

Dr Glenn Andrew Peoples wrote a brilliant blog post [10] on what Mozilla's letter to GLAAD should have looked like. I eagerly await Mozilla's response to that article.

> Liberals claim to want to give hearing to other views, but then are shocked and offended to discover that there are other views.
>
> William F. Buckley

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