

AN OPEN LETTER TO HOBBYISTS

February 3, 1976

By William Henry Gates III

King of Newbies, Protector of Cruft, Lord High Muckymuck of the Golden Lawsuit, Knight of Ni!, General All-Around Protection Fault, Quasher of Things Quashable, Supporter of Athletics...

To me, the most critical thing in the hobby market right now is the lack of good software courses, books and software itself.

You said it!

Without good software and an owner who understands programming, a hobby computer is wasted.

Any examples come to mind... ?

Will quality software be written for the hobby market?

Not by your lot, obviously.

Almost a year ago, Paul Allen and myself, expecting the hobby market to expand, hired Monte Davidoff and developed Altair BASIC. Though the initial work took only two months, the three of us have spent most of the last year documenting, improving and adding features to BASIC. Now we have 4K, 8K, EXTENDED, ROM and DISK BASIC. The value of the computer time we have used exceeds \$40,000.

And we want it back, dammit!

The feedback we have gotten from the hundreds of people who say they are using BASIC has all been positive. Two surprising things are apparent, however, 1) Most of these "users" never bought BASIC (less than 10% of all Altair owners have bought BASIC), and 2) The amount of royalties we have received from sales to hobbyists makes the time spent on Altair BASIC worth less than \$2 an hour.

About what your current offerings are worth, methinks.

Why is this?

Because we think you're a twit.

As the majority of hobbyists must be aware, >most of you steal your software.

How refreshing! And now you pre-steal our software for us! Now _that's_ convenience. Sure thing. Worth each and every blue-screen, you bet!

Hardware must be paid for, but software is something to share. Who cares if the people who worked on it get paid?

Is this fair? One thing you don't do by stealing software is get back at MITS for some problem you may have had. MITS doesn't make

money selling software. The royalty paid to us, the manual, the tape and the overhead make it a break-even operation. One thing you do do is prevent good software from being written. Who can afford to do professional work for nothing? What hobbyist can put 3-man years into programming, finding all bugs, documenting his product and distribute for free? The fact is, no one besides us has invested a lot of money in hobby software. We have written 6800 BASIC, and are writing 8080 APL and 6800 APL,

Haha! 8080 BASIC! 6800 BASIC! APL! It's mine! Mine! ALL MINE!!!

but there is very little incentive to make this software available to hobbyists. Most directly, the thing you do is theft.

And I'll get you for this! All of you! And your little dogs, too!

What about the guys who re-sell Altair BASIC, aren't they making money on hobby software? Yes, but those who have been reported to us may lose in the end. They are the ones who give hobbyists a bad name, and should be kicked out of any club meeting they show up at.

When I grow up I'll have a herd of lawyers to deal with these miscreants. And dungeons and torture machines to put them in. And the big guys who used to beat me up in elementary school and take my lunch money, I'll track them down too and make them write long documents on 386s running M\$-Nerd, with 14-in. monitors that flicker, and that someone has put big, greasy fingerprints on. You just see!

I would appreciate letters from any one who wants to pay up, Before I make you pay up! Mwahahahaha!

or has a suggestion or comment. Just write to me at 1180 Alvarado SE, #114, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87108.

Unmarked packages from small cabins in Montana excluded.

Nothing would please me more than being able to hire ten programmers and deluge the hobby market with good software.

...except hiring about a million code-monkeys to deluge it with tons upon tons of utter drek, that is.

Bill Gates
General Partner, Micro-Soft

...Upholder of the Rules of Snot-Wrestling, Keeper of the Seal of Simon the Fender-Polisher, Wearer of Pocket Protectors and Thick Glasses, etc., etc. etc.

Scary, no?