

level likely to be required for the kind of  $\TeX$  software support which will allow enhancements generated in the user community to be incorporated. To have to acquire such a competence just for  $\TeX$  might price  $\TeX$  beyond their reach; not to have it leaves the user with an increasingly provincial version of  $\TeX$ .

A second possibility suggested for " $\TeX$  Central" was to persuade some user to accept responsibility. Since the very concept of a widely shared language implies the merging of the interests of a diverse group of users, an undertaking to support such a language in any meaningful scope would mean a substantial commitment, almost certainly beyond the resources of, say, the AMS by itself. It is even unlikely that any single university computer science department could commit itself to such an undertaking. The more this alternative is considered, the more it appears that the most reasonable approach to the centralized support and standardization of  $\TeX$  is through the user community as a whole.

A third approach offered was creation of a separate (or TUG sub-) organization, composed only of production users, and for these together to support the central  $\TeX$  software support facility they need. But no active body of production users yet exists, and even if it did, that solution would be likely to provide for standardization of the language among commercial  $\TeX$  users (publishers) while tending to allow dialects to proliferate among educational users, where most authors of journal articles reside.  $\TeX$  as a language of communication between author and publisher would still be unrealizable.

A fourth suggestion was to freeze  $\TeX$  in its present form, and refuse to allow changes to destabilize it. Don Knuth will soon stop making alterations and improvements to  $\TeX$ . When he does, AMS could probably, as the holder of the  $\TeX$  logo copyright, maintain an essentially static "official"  $\TeX$  system, requiring use of only that system for computer-readable manuscript submissions to it. This would limit submissions to those from authors at installations willing to ignore all other versions of  $\TeX$ , no matter what advantages those versions might have acquired, or willing to maintain both our "fixed" version and whatever other evolving versions they chose. In such circumstances, fewer and fewer computer-readable manuscripts would appear (if any ever did), until the Society found itself using  $\TeX$  only for its own internal purposes, much as it now uses other computer typesetting systems. The Society would have gained whatever improvement in typesetting quality  $\TeX$  might represent over earlier

systems, but would have lost, with other scientific publishers, the chance to cut that large portion of its costs representing manuscript re-preparation.

A final suggestion would have a commercial firm take over  $\TeX$  as a software product acting as a vendor, charging a fee for initial distribution of the programs and an additional fee annually for software support. This idea would be good except that, since  $\TeX$  is in the public domain, it's not likely that any firm would offer to involve itself without some sort of endorsement, if not financial guarantee, from TUG. Such an arrangement might work, but only if TUG were willing to put itself on the line to ensure it. Pursuing this idea further might suggest the formation of a small, non-profit organization, under TUG and backed financially by it, to perform  $\TeX$  Central services.

I hope that the members of TUG, when the Steering Committee meets at Stanford in May, will see it in their interest to give real financial support to this effort. If TUG does not make the effort to convert  $\TeX$  to a production system, then it will probably not be converted (except for some specialized classes of users), and potential production users will not be convinced that  $\TeX$  represents a viable choice.  $\TeX$  will remain an educational tool, available in universities, and perhaps in places like AMS where it is used for its competence at certain kinds of typesetting, but it will not become the communications channel which we had hoped for.

It is important that you express your opinions on this subject, no matter what your point of view. Write to TUGboat; your letter will be part of a report to the Steering Committee in May. As many letters as possible will be published in the next issue, which will report on the May meetings.

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#### UPDATE ON PASCAL METAFONT Scott Kim

Work has just started on the Pascal implementation of METAFONT, which was originally written in SAIL. It is too early to estimate how long the translation will take—stay tuned to TUGboat for news as it develops. Those interested in keeping up with new developments in METAFONT, or knowing more about digital typeface design in general, are invited to correspond with Scott Kim at the Stanford Computer Science Department.