

## THE HUMANIZING POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY ----- ELLIOTT #2044

For two weeks in Mar/86, Loree and I had no hot bath: no hot water in the Marxist-Leninist Third-World country we were in, the only such country that's English-speaking: Guyana. But that's the least of our impressions, which we're conveying in this series of thinksheets, the first of which has to do with our 2nd experience in the country: our first was that our bags did not arrive with us (on BWIA), and our host, who'd been for 31 years director of the national airport, could do little about it: little countries are at the mercy even of little internationals, to say nothing of big ones. By the extreme pressure of a major Guyanese businessman, our bags arrived only two days late. (The most recent visitor to the Congregational Union of Guyana (our institutional host), Dr. David Dale, Moderator of the UK's URC (United Reformed Church, including the Congregational Churches), got his baggage four weeks late, long after he'd left the country!....Loree and I, too, were guests of the Congregational Union of Guyana, and esp. of its moderator ("Chairperson"), the Rev. Una Mathews (of whom much more later).)

This story reverses the usual notion--esp. among clergy--that technology is bad news for humanity, "machines are in the saddle and riding men." (In the middle of that last sentence, the phone rang, and a Manhattan friend told me of a wrist attachment helpful to the blind and the deaf, now being produced by a company he's named "Life Enhancement." Another instance of prohuman technology....but back to the one this thinksheet's about:)

We're aware that the computer is promoting honesty far faster than it's permitting dishonesty (by "hackers"). Eg, the IRS is electronically watching you ever more closely (though, maddeningly, it can't handle the "Explanations" the not-yet-updated forms continue to invite you to write). Again, technology for the disabled, the handicapped, has made astonishing leaps in the last decade--eg, wheelchair improvements (since that of FDR, which I saw in his Hyde Park bedroom) now pressure (through such organization's as ~~Harold~~ Wilke's "Healing Community") for architecture, and present-building modifications, "accessible" to the modern wheelchair.

My story begins with my noticing the bankteller's pad in the national airport, Georgetown, Guyana: it was unnumbered and poorly printed on a press I'd guess to be at least 40 years old. (No, I don't notice such things because of a Sherlock Holmes bent: it's that I love printing and have ever since "taking" it in school in 1930.) Now, you can't adapt such an old clunker to enumeration: pads can't be made with sheet-by-sheet successive numbers. So, unless each pad is numbered by hand, the accountant will not be able to require that the pad-user account for each sheet. This "blind" tempts the pad-user to dishonesty, as you are about to see.

The teller took my US\$200 Barclay's Travelercheques and gave me, at the posted exchange-rate, G\$823.24. Then he or a superior stole ½ of the US\$, as was ascertained later by a deacon who, having informed me that tellers are not to be trusted, had checked what was reported to the government (owner of the bank, of course) and thus discovered the "error." Someone had forged a new receipt and destroyed the bankcopy of the original. The sequel is even more enlightening:

The deacon asked me to obtain a photocopy of the original so he could expose the guilty party. In this dirt-poor country, such technology is rare and difficult to gain access to, esp. if you hit on holidays, which are frequent: Christian, Hindu, Muslim. When I reported my difficulty, he said "Don't bother. It's more important that I expose dishonesty higher up on the economic and political ladders. The people at the bottom, and the middleclass, know that the whole society is profoundly corrupt. Even the American Embassy is corrupt, selling visas. 'Everybody's doing it' is no excuse. But you can understand the little guy's view."