



Computers are in the news a lot at the moment – and not necessarily for the best of reasons, depending on your view of society.

Many major technological inventions have their initial perception changed by circumstances. Individuals can also change their views as their personal circumstances change.

The printing press was feared because it made education for the masses easier and diluted the power of the educated to control society. It took a while and society had time to adapt to the new circumstances.

Machines were feared because they would replace workers who would then starve. It was an upheaval, but it turned out alright when it meant that goods could be manufactured at reduced cost, better quality and quickly available.

The development of computers was an undoubted good for the war effort in the 1940s. After the war they were useful for doing more sophisticated calculations at great speed and at reducing cost.

They have further developed to provide a variety of social benefits.

The development has been too rapid to allow society to adjust at a comfortable speed and that has caused problems in some areas.

The Internet and the World Wide Web enables quick and easy communication.

It also made possible the downloading of music files without paying any royalties. Some people believed it should be free and simply made them available on web sites. The same applied to books and films.

As technology cannot be un-invented, the relevant industries are working hard to recognise the new circumstances and devise a marketing system that will still encourage people to create and make a living from their efforts.

More recently the authorities have discovered that the speed of communication between activists is faster than their response times and that, as a result, demonstrations are harder to control. They will have to adopt new strategies to regain control and maintain public order.

People have used the Web to oppose and expose totalitarian regimes and been praised for it. Who would argue against an effort to improve human rights?

The position has made a dramatic change recently with the publication of confidential documents generated by officials of democratically elected governments.

We have now arrived at a point where unelected people take it upon themselves to decide what should or should not be in the public domain. (Will they decide to publish any confidential documents that criticise what they are doing? Will they publish the dull, boring communications?).

Everyone should recognise that there are some things that are better left unpublished for sound practical reasons..

The publishers might believe themselves to be acting for the greater good. It is fairly easy to appreciate the publication of the MPs expenses as it exposed some Members who were clearly taking advantage of the secrecy afforded them.

Publishing confidential communications between people who were properly performing their duties by expressing assessments and opinions is an altogether different matter – even if you find their opinions unpalatable. Surely one can only cry “Publish and be damned!” if you are the one who will bear the consequences.

What ever you think, don't blame the computers, they just make it possible. No Luddites, please.

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