



VULGAR: Photographing one's restaurant meal is among the new and ubiquitous social irritants

Technology conditioning young to increasingly morally unregulated world

NEAR global gloom and despondency, not to mention weeping and gnashing of teeth last week, when Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and a slew of other time and energy-wasting websites failed and addicts everywhere went into meltdown. Had the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse galloped through the land, there couldn't have been greater consternation and panic.

My heart sinks when, at a meal out in company, everyone's mobile phone is placed next to their cutlery and, within minutes, one emits a shrill discordant ringtone. The query is voiced, "D'you mind if I take this?" – a purely rhetorical request. One of these days I'm going to say very pointedly, "YES, I DO!" Not that they'd heed me, so compulsively are they in thrall to the blasted thing they've already left their seat and are halfway to the door to swap inconsequentialities with the caller. Some don't even bother to leave the table, so the rest of us must remain silent. Like Pavlov's dogs conditioned to certain stimuli, others cannot resist the authoritative 'ping' of an incoming text message, but must respond immediately. And don't start me about the vulgarity of photographing one's restaurant meal. These are the new and ubiquitous social irritants.

I am an unapologetic, technophobic Luddite. I do carry a mobile phone, purely as a safety device in case I have a heart attack or a car crash. However, there's no point in ringing me because the instrument is irretrievably buried in the turgid depths of my overstuffed handbag and more than likely dead as mutton. Please don't wear out your index finger texting me either, because (a) I won't look at it nor (b) reply. There's a perfectly serviceable landline with an answering machine at home should your business be important

Anita
ROBINSON



or urgent. How anxious am I to scroll through an endless and stultifying series of photographs of other people's weddings, babies, pets or gardens? You may choose to browse upon unfounded rumour or puerile humour. I have not the remotest interest in conspiracy theories, bad jokes, dogs doing tricks or toddlers falling over, and I resent the assumption that I must be instantly accessible for Fear of Missing Out.

Like every good thing ever invented for the benefit of mankind, the unscrupulous, the subversive and the downright wicked seek to exploit it. Alarm bells ring when I see a primary school playground with half the pupils standing, heads bowed over mini-screens; a child's bedroom crammed with technology but no books; precocious little girls striking 'glamour'

Like every good thing ever invented for the benefit of mankind, the unscrupulous, the subversive and the downright wicked seek to exploit it

poses in photographs. Children are like blotting paper. They absorb what they see and hear and seek to emulate it. Handing them an instrument that, like Pandora's box, opens the floodgates to a dangerously attractive but morally unregulated world full of inappropriate knowledge they're not mature enough to cope with, is putting adult burdens on young shoulders that amounts to the theft and corruption of innocence. We're already reaping the tragic harvest of our liberal and over-indulgent parenting – sub-teens with body-image problems, premature sexualisation, self-harm, mental health worries, gender-identity issues and teen suicide. Was there ever a more vulnerable generation? Almost-unwittingly, we've colluded in the conditioning (or rather, 'grooming') of our own young. We've given in to the pester power of peer pressure, ("but everybody has this, does that, wears these") without considering age-appropriateness. In an increasingly dangerous moral climate, we leave them unlimited, unsupervised screentime and unmonitored friendships, then wonder why some go off the rails.

Maybe it's because we wore our own youth like a straitjacket in an era of unquestioning compliance, when we held authority and our elders in obedient respect and our nascent struggles against the system were promptly squashed. Every generation deplores the one that follows it. The spoilt, ungrateful, self-absorbed, disrespectful young are eternally going to hell in a handcart. Parenting today faces new challenges on top of the old. The generation gap yawns as widely as it ever did. As one wit put it, "It's hard to know exactly when one generation ends and the next one begins, but it's somewhere around nine o'clock at night."

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 12 1971

Alliance on Rise of IRA

THERE are two security problems in the North – the IRA and the clear threat of Protestant extremist who take the law into their own hands. This was stated last night by Mr Bob Cooper, joint chairman of the Alliance Party's political committee in Warrenpoint. 'Northern Ireland has now been adjudicated politically bankrupt. Reforms which should have started years ago have proved to be too little and too late. Threats have been used to force reforms and threats are being used to prevent them. The Government apparently bows to whatever threat appears most dangerous to its own position. This is not government by consent...

'Without immediate and far-reaching reform there will be no security. The Government should appreciate that it was its failure to give security to Catholic ghetto areas in 1969 which created the Provisional IRA. The Provos rose like a Phoenix from the ashes of Bombay Street. 'Security must be totally non-political. When you ask why so many Catholics in the urban ghettos put up with the IRA, the only answer you get is that the IRA is misguidedly seen as a security against armed attack and intimidation...'

Minister Warns of Bankruptcy

MR Roy Bradford, Stormont Minister of Development, has forecast that the North would be faced with economic bankruptcy in a matter of weeks if the present troubles did not end. Speaking on BBC, he said that if the extra troops being brought in did not get on top of the situation, the Government would have to think of going much further. When asked what he meant, he said it would mean putting more effort into the security precautions. Mr Bradford continued: 'There is a civil disobedience campaign organised with the express purpose of destroying our administrative structure and our society. These same rents and payments will be recovered through the courts.'

Orange Order Still Decides – CRA

SOUTH Derry Civil Rights Association in a statement said that, despite all the talk of reforms, the Orange Order still decided who worked where. The statement referred to recent appointments in the area all filled by Unionists.

(A native of Co Donegal, Bob Cooper had left the Young Unionists to join Alliance. Like Conn McCluskey, he saw Unionism's resistance to reforms and the subsequent violence of 1969 as having created PIRA. Frankly acknowledging the abject failure of internment, Roy Bradford hinted at even greater coercion. Significantly, at this moment, Faulkner was pressing General Tuzo for an all-out assault on the 'no-go' areas in Belfast and Derry – something the general rejected.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com