

GEORGE AND THE "DRAGON"

A wife reflects on the relentless march of technology

George is a mild man, a strange man, someone who is deep-thinking and lives in a world of his own. Quite literally. It is sometimes difficult to be married to George. He goes away for years on end, to do his own thing. But I love him and have been married to him for more than thirty years, so I'm used to his little ways.

But now I'm worried. George is coming home. For the past seven years he has been engaged in building his own little temple in far-off Ladakh - that's a remote country somewhere high in the Himalayas, near Tibet I think. George loves it there. He is at one with nature, and he believes it is truly wonderful to be amongst such remote people who have values and beliefs so very strange to us here.

George has spent so much time in remote places that he hasn't been able to take in what has been happening here, in this so-called civilised part of the developed world. It will all be a great shock to him and I am quite certain he won't like what he finds!

For example, George has no concept of how different things are now in relation to governing a country like ours. He is what is now called an "old" Democrat, and the "new order" doesn't like them. He values things like voting for our Member of Parliament and even meeting him at his local surgery from time to time. And although he used to scoff he did enjoy reading about what was happening in Parliament, even the childish slinging matches. But that doesn't happen any more. Today it seems as if Parliament is almost irrelevant. I don't think George will like the fact that his opinion doesn't count any more, and nor even does his vote!

Now it's Government by focus group, by the so-called "People's Panel" - faceless people who "mirror" the population. Their opinions are the ones that matter, not ours. George won't like that a bit. Nor will he like the fact that ordinary people, like us, even if some of them are deep thinking like George, don't count. The ones which are consulted, which do count, are the "professionals", the bright young academics with their smart degrees and their noses forever stuck into their latest research statistics. They have very little, if any, contact with the real world, and they haven't lived long enough to experience its ups and downs. George won't like that a bit. After all, George has spent all his life trying to understand this world we live in. He has spent years with primitive tribes in the Far East, in countries like Indonesia and New

Guinea, trying to understand their values and their cultures. He has spent years, too, in Africa, studying how our ancestors, the great apes, live, work, love and communicate. George cares about all these things, deeply, from our environment to our history, and achievements, as humankind.

But the thing which George will hate most is to see the results of the relentless march of technology. He will hate having his "eye identification" done before he can get his cash from the automatic cash machine on the high street. And I think he will explode when he has to go to the supermarket to get his "chip" fitted - that new little toy which we all must have fitted and which ensures he is programmed with all his history so that all he has to do is put his hand on a machine at the supermarket when he needs to consult a doctor or get a prescription; and when, if he is applying for a job, he has to do the same so that the interviewer can check his medical records and his employment records for that matter! Never mind the shock he will have when he recognises the fact that most of the people he passes when he walks down the street have had so much spare-parts surgery that they are now some 40% or more metal, nuts and bolts with bits and pieces added from other people and even animals - with perhaps less than 50% of the original human being left!

No, George won't like any of it - a bit.

But what can we all do about it? Not a lot it would seem. The rate of change is so fast, and the benevolent dictatorship under which we all now live is so skilful that the changes are made and it is only later, much later, that we recognise their significance. We are even now virtually "programmed" so that we are acutely aware that we must not offend in our speech. "Political Correctness" is all the rage - but no-one seems to have noticed yet that, in trying not to offend others, we have done away with that precious freedom of speech to protect which wars have been fought over the centuries.

And what if George, or I for that matter, speaks out? The best possible reaction would be if we are deemed as harmless cranks. But there are other, more sinister reactions which could result. After all, as I will tell George, today's "dragon" is huge and powerful. It is the corporate state in partnership with big business, on a global scale. And how can little, mild and gentle George fight it? I know he will want to - and I will give him what help I can. But I am fearful of the outcome.

After all, it has all happened before! But this Brave New World is so much more terrifying than the last one. George believes firmly in the strength of the human spirit and we have seen many hugely uplifting examples of that in the dark days of the Second World War George also believes in the mystical properties of the Eastern philosophies. I hope they will give him some comfort now. I just hope that George can teach me to find faith again, and to pray. 3

I will try to tell George that he is not alone, that there are millions of us, the "little people" who think as we do. We just have to reach out to find them - so that our joint voices can be heard. But how?

George will fight the dragon, of that I am quite certain. But how can he win?

That is the question to which I seek an answer.