Focus

ety. Will these technologies help us alleviate our problems or aggravate them? Are there hidden

benefits and evils of the Information Society? And what will be the impacts on jobs, the environ-

ment, and the quality of knowledge itself? These questions were debated by a panel of experts at

magazine, and their differing perspectives are presented below.

Top 10 Reasons the Information Revolutionis Bad for Us

By Micheal Marien

There is no doubt at all that an information revolution is happening, but there is considerable doubt about whether the positive impacts outweigh the negative impacts, both now and in the future.

Here is my top-10 list of negatives; I'll start at the bottom and work up to the number-one problem.

- 10. The information revolution is had for equality, creating evergreater social gaps within and between nations.
- 4. It's bad for quality of life. It speeds the pace of life and makes time increasingly scarce.
- 8. It's bad for privacy. Interlinked databases have your name, your numbers, and much more about you.
- 7. It's bad for democracy so far, at least. Of course, there's the promise of enhanced citizen participation and electronic town meetings, but don't confuse the potential with the reality. Ironically, as a society becomes more complex, people are turned off of politics and turned on to an expanding variety of electronic entertainment.

6. It's bad for the environment. The sustainable society, which is something we need in the future, is being displaced by the glitzy Information Society. It is a distraction from the necessity of building a sustainable society.

5. It's bad for jobs. As new software becomes more widespread, we can expect more unemployment and under-employment.

4. It's bad for national security. We have the capacity to wage infowar, but we are also equally vulnerable to infowar and infoterrorism.

- 3. It is bad for law and order. Computer crime is a major cost for business and government, and much of it is not recorded.
- 2. It is bad for the future. Why? Quite possibly because infotech and infosociety have made the future unappealing and created a reaction against the future by those who, unconsciously or not, want to stop the world and get off.
- 1. The number-one negative is that having much more information is bad for our heads. It is bad because it produces infoglut, which may well be the greatest under-studied problem of our time.

Michael Marien is a contributing writer associated with the World Futurist Society and "The Futurist" publication. To comment on his article, he can be reached by e-mail at wfsinfo@wfs.org.

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INFORMATION is the Critical Resource of the Future

By Harlan Cleveland

NFORMATION expands as it is formation can, and increasingly efit the many, not only the few. does, replace land, labor, and capimation is shared, not exchanged; the consequence of the enormous

it gives rise to sharing transactions, not to exchange transactions.

The Fairness Revolution

The growing importance of information in creating wealth has turned out to be very good news for countries less endowed with geological riches and arable land. Japan, for example, with virtually no conventional fuels or useful minerals, with a short growing season and much farmland we would call marginal, was forced by physical poverty to bet on the only sure resource it had: the minds of its own people.

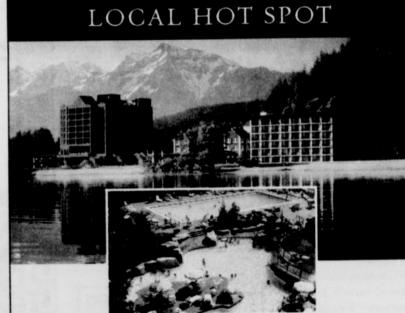
By contrast, in the countries whose people have been kept in ignorance, it hardly seems to matter which riches lie in the space they occupy. Most of their citizens betion society.

So in a rapidly changing inforused. Information is less hun mation environment there is going gry for other resources; the to be much less excuse for deprivhigher the tech, the less energy ing whole populations of the benand raw materials are needed. In- efits of development that could ben-

We're living at a very special tal. Information is readily trans- moment in humankind's long asportable. Information leaks. Inforcent toward civilized behavior. It is

advances of science and technology, sparked by information science and information technology, which have now made the human species, for the first time, the lead actor in its own evolution.

Harlan Cleveland is a contributing writer associated with the World Futurist Society and "The Futurist" publication. To comment on his article, he can be reached by e-mail at wfsinfo@wfs.org.



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