

SPRINGING FORWARD

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They have gone onto Daylight Savings Time especially early this year.

THEY who do all those things to inconvenience and irritate our lives. It begins today, March 11, 2007.

I have never quite gotten over the fact that an hour of the world can just be snatched away into the void and then redelivered to us in the Spring like a wayward postcard. Time always seems so solid and immutable, but these are two annual reminders that it is not. We humans, not Cronos or Yahweh, put the calendar in order and make the seasons clear. This phrase from the *I Ching* goes all the way back to the first sage-king of China, the Emperor Yao, who did this by sending out emissaries to the four directions to take astronomical sightings and make adjustments. We've simplified that somewhat. Or have we?

To listen to the news last night, you might well conclude that we have put the calendar into *dis*order and created a small chaos. A mini Y2K—that 1999 techno-bugbear that the year 2000 would throw our entire computer-driven society into a dark night of the silicon chip. The newscaster line—(they are always identical on every station as if the anchor people were using the same teleprompter to save money)—is that the date change was passed by congress to cut energy costs, equal to a hundred thousand barrels of oil, since people would have another hour of daylight in the evenings. THAT, it seems, was from an old study. ("Studies" being the modern counterparts of the ancient oracles.) More-recent-studies-show that those costs are simply applied to the mornings, when people get up in the dark, and it costs at least that much to sort out the computer confusion nationwide. Of course this presumes that no self-respecting persons could be expected to set their own clocks. This is surely too arcane and tricky a thing. We have serfs to do that: those little gnomes in the machines who carry bytes around on their backs as the old Mayan gods of time carried the hours.

I suspect that underneath this economic argument is a more visceral indignation that congress—*people*—should be fiddling with Time. When the words Daylight Savings Time Begins and Daylight Savings Time Ends appeared neatly printed on our calendars in April and October, we were able to see those events as inexorable as Mondays and Fridays. Congress didn't invent Mondays and

Fridays and it can't *un*-invent them or shift them around, although there might be a groundswell of support for the un-invention of Mondays in favor of an extra Saturday or two.

I lay awake in the early dark this morning trying to calculate if it was time to get up or not. What time should I go to bed tonight and what time was that *really*. Now that's ridiculous! Why should I be enslaved by a clock, which is now shown to be both unstable and unpredictable.

But it gets worse.

Once I decided to get up at the usual 6:30—*old* time—(and this, just because it's the hour I wake up, not because of some appointment) I made my coffee and then took on the Setting of the Clocks. First to the cell phone: I turned it on, half expecting the cyber miracle—that the clock would have reset itself. But it hadn't. The news chaps were right. Still, rather than take the 5 seconds to change the one digit myself, I called Verizon, listened to the menu (15 seconds right there) and sure enough, a recorded message said that all I had to do to adjust for Daylight Savings Time was turn the handset off and on again. (Presumably what I had in my hand was the handset.) But it didn't work. I tried another Verizon number. No go. Instead of 5 seconds, I spent several minutes trying to invoke this automatic labor-saving service. But the serfs in the machine were recalcitrant. They had obviously listened to the news last night and decided that they were all greatly put upon and should strike.

So I took the 5 seconds and set the clock myself. After coffee, I felt ready to take on the more manual timepieces. This is where it gets spooky. I went to the old non-digital oven clock in the kitchen. I knew it was exactly 7:30. But the clock said 5:00! The wrong time should have been 6:30. But this was the wrong wrong time. I mean aren't we the arbiters of time? Was this clock trying to out-think congress? Well it couldn't outfox me. I set it straight. "7:30 it is!"

When I returned to the bedroom, I picked up the little white tick-tock alarm clock that sits by the bed. It said 5:30. Now wait a minute... I look at that clock every day. I went to bed by that clock last night. How could it suddenly be one hour off in the wrong direction? Neither congress nor I had fiddled with it yet. The cyber-genies may have taken the day off but the old-fashioned clock gremlins were hard at work.

I turned the cell phone on to confirm the time and *it* now said 8:30. The cyber-serfs were back on the job, along side the old clock gremlins, and all of them, it seems, had taken time into their own hands. Relieved, I finished my coffee, forgot the time, and set out to enjoy what the newscasters promised would be a beautiful day.