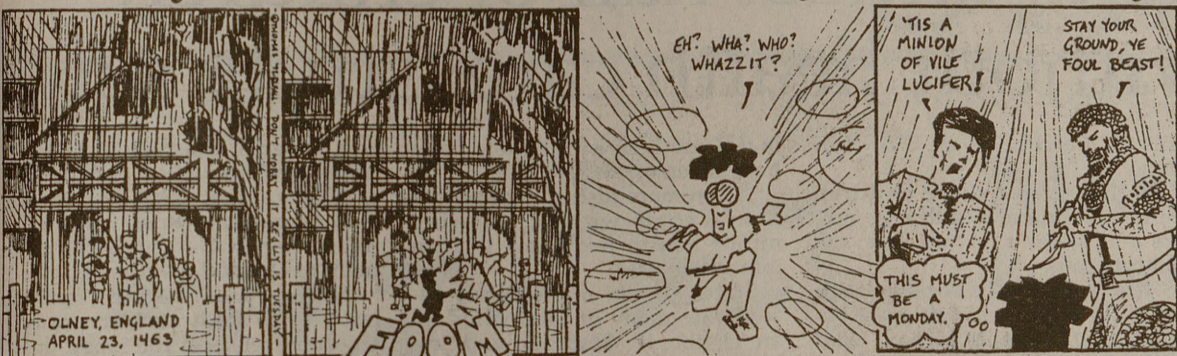


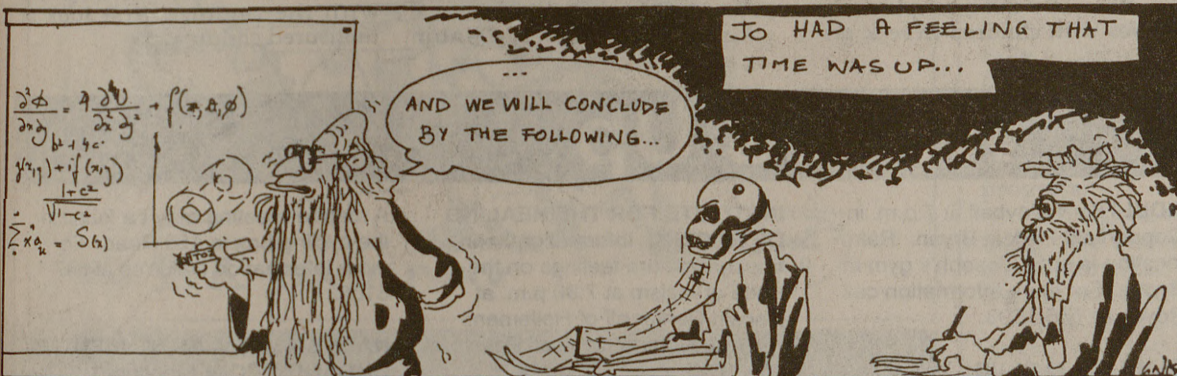
(the story so far...)

by thomas deeny



The Food Chain

by george



Kozy "k"

By Clay Welch



Wiretap laws forbid phone service

Commission votes against offering Caller ID for home use

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN— State wiretap laws don't allow residential customers to obtain a service that would let them know who is calling before they answer the telephone, the Public Utility Commission says.

The PUC voted 2-1 Tuesday against Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.'s proposal to offer Caller ID to residential customers. But the commission said certain businesses might be able to legally use the service if telephone companies get state permission to offer it.

Bob Digneo, spokesman for Southwestern Bell, said the company has not decided whether to revise and resubmit its application to the PUC. He said the company might appeal in court or ask the Legislature to change the wiretap law.

"There are customers all over the state that want the service. Thirty-six other states have the service. Anyone that's ever been interrupted by a call at home in the evening when they're trying to eat dinner can appreciate the value of Caller ID," Digneo said.

Caller ID opponents include The Texas Council on Family Violence and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. They were pleased with the ruling.

"It's a real potential problem for anyone who has an unlisted phone number — psychologists, social workers, child protective service workers. The unlisted number becomes useless," said Suzanne Donovan of the ACLU.

State law prohibits anyone outside law enforcement and some businesses from using a "trap-and-trace" device, which can display an incoming telephone number and other information.

The law precludes the Caller ID technology, which works through a display screen hooked to a receiving telephone. The service shows a caller's telephone number and the name of the person or company the phone is listed under.

"It appears that Caller ID has gotten sucked into some kind of a legal black hole," Digneo said.

The three commissioners were split in their ruling. Marta Greytok said the service is legal and Karl Rabago said it is not. Robert Gee said it's illegal for residential customers and legal for business customers.

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