

advantage: despite ten or more basic mother tongues, everybody can communicate. "A French island administered by the British" is what the Creoles call it, and it seems a justifiable definition.

And yet there is the amazing racial diversity: there are Hindus, Tamils, Telegus and Bengalis with shrines to Siva and mosques to Mohammed; Chinese Catholics and Chinese with Buddhist temples; Creoles of European, African and Indian descent; French and (rather disconsolate) Mauritians.

This suggests another economic possibility for the island, and one which vaster nations have come to rely on. There could be tourism. The Tamils walk on fire and climb ladders made of swords; the Muslims offer their Ghoon festival, the Chinese their Wolf dance; and Creoles swing in their erotic *sega* by the sea. To these attractions may be added that Mauritians of all races are unusually alert and welcoming.

There is also the appeal of an island—and a volcanic one at that. The climate is "subtropical maritime," warm throughout the year, and the only catch is the occasional descent of hurricanes (Carol, in 1960, swept in at 160 mph and destroyed 60 per cent of the sugar crop and 40,000 homes). The beaches are superb, with deep-sea fishing, and a coral reef is thrown in. The volcanic scenery is arresting, if rather eerie. The cities, all small, are charming—Port Louis, despite modern buildings, has the air of a provincial French town of the 1900s.

Who might come? The British, French and Australians run regular air services, so they are potential visitors. South Africans are being enticed, and Rhodesians too, whatever Harold Wilson may have to say. Indians too might come, and perhaps Americans.

Yet even if the dream of free-spending tourists were fulfilled, the economic troubles of the island seem, to the outsider, almost insoluble. Sugar is a fickle crop and demands large-scale production, which is at odds with the small holdings such as the Indians have on 30 per cent of the land, the remainder being company or state owned. For industry, Mauritius at present flies in from Europe and processes for re-export products needing a high labor content at low cost (for instance, watches); but such possibilities seem limited. As for population, unless the world movement of peoples becomes much freer (and of this there are as yet few signs), the situation seems really desperate.

Political tipsters name the Parti Travailleiste to win the critical pre-independence elections, despite the Parti Mauricien's aggressive agitation about the base. There may, of course, be a return to coalition. Presumably, the British will have to continue subsidizing the new nation and, because of the base, demands will no doubt be made on the Americans. Communism is gaining ground among younger Indians and Chinese, but is as yet an ineffective force.

Racialism in Mauritius is black-black and not the more usual white-black. Although there were riots a year ago and British troops had to be sent out, the probability is that the Creoles and Indians will come to terms, if only because there isn't the economic and even geographical elbowroom for the luxury of emotional racial attitudes.

A final reflection is that though one might think of Mauritius as being vaguely African, it is hardly so at all. The Creoles' ancestors left Africa 250 years ago, and the real mother countries are India and France, with Britain as a kind of foster mother. Now possibly America, once its troops are on Diégo Garcia, may find itself becoming a reluctant mother country too.

NATIONAL DATA CENTER

The Computer vs. the Bill of Rights

ANTHONY PRISENDORF

Mr. Prisedorf is a reporter on the New York Post.

The right of privacy is in trouble again. Tormented in the last few years by electronic eavesdropping devices, federal psychological tests and peepholes in post-office washrooms, it now faces an even more formidable adversary in the Bureau of the Budget's proposed National Data Center.

That an individual's private affairs should be of perennial concern to his fellow man is not surprising; the curiosity in human nature accounts for that. What is surprising is that the Constitution nowhere provides a clear-cut guarantee of the "right to be let alone," as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis described it in 1928. The reason for this deficiency is apparent, says Charles A. Reich, professor of constitutional law at Yale University: "The idea of privacy being invaded in the way it can be today never occurred to the people who wrote the Bill of Rights." Nonetheless, Justice Brandeis, in his far-reaching interpretation

of privacy, wrote: ". . . every unjustifiable intrusion by the Government upon the privacy of the individual, whatever the means employed, must be deemed a violation of the fourth amendment."

Opponents of the National Data Center would like to think that Justice Brandeis had the Budget Bureau's proposal in mind when he wrote his opinion. They seem convinced that the plan to use a central computer to pool statistical information now guarded by twenty federal agencies, including the Census Bureau, the Internal Revenue Service and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is nothing less than the premature materialization of the Orwellian nightmare, 1984. Perhaps this view was best expressed by Vance Packard last July when he was testifying before a House subcommittee on invasion of privacy. Speaking of Big Brother, he said: "My own hunch is that if he comes to the United States he may turn out to be not a greedy power seeker but rather a relentless bureaucrat obsessed with efficiency." Such an obsession, Packard warns, could lead to

the "ultimate of horrors, a humanity in chains of plastic tape."

The proposal for a statistical data center is the logical consequence of an efficiency study begun three years ago by the Budget Bureau in collaboration with the Social Science Research Council. Its report concluded that "the amount of overlapping and resource waste [in government agencies] is substantial." Accordingly, the bureau's Office of Statistical Standards proposed a data center "to improve the storage of and access to information for statistical users"—defined as the government, industry and the research community. In addition to the study, the Budget Bureau hired as a consultant Edgar S. Dunn, Jr., a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs. As he sees it, the fundamental purpose of such a data center would be to answer an "infinite" range of questions such as these: "What proportion of the residents of Appalachia possess incomes of less than \$3,000? What activities seem to figure prominently in the recent rapid growth of the Southeast, Florida, the Gulf Coast and the Boston-Washington corridor? What proportion of the registered voters turned out in a recent primary, and how were they divided between Republican and Democrat, urban and rural, white and nonwhite?"

Prompted by the "appalling" thought of government records neatly bundled together in one revealing file, with no assurance given that such dossiers "would always be used by benevolent people for benevolent purposes," Rep. Cornelius E. Gallagher, a New Jersey Democrat, convened his special subcommittee on invasion of privacy on July 26. The purpose of the hearings "to create a climate of concern" and to find answers to Representative Gallagher's challenging question posed at the start of the hearings: "Shall we create an elite who can narrow and dominate the 'corridors of power'? And who shall they be?"

The lead-off witness on behalf of the proposed National Data Center was Raymond T. Bowman, assistant director of the Office of Statistical Standards, and described by Representative Gallagher as the man "directly responsible" for the project. Bowman testified that the data center's objective is twofold: "We want to be sure that we are making effective use of new technological development because (1) we want to bring all available statistical information to bear on problems which confront the nation, and (2) we want to hold down the burden of statistical questionnaires." Bowman went on to suggest that the goal is by no means new. Government agencies, he said, continually try to find ways of using existing records for statistical purposes. To demonstrate this long-standing practice, he said that the use of federal income tax returns "as a source of statistical information," relieves 1 million small businessmen of "the burden of filling out census forms every five years." And this is done, Bowman asserted, "without compromising the confidentiality of a single return."

In an attempt to scotch the obvious misgivings of some subcommittee members, Bowman assured them early in the hearings that a data center "would not have an interest in building up dossiers on individuals because statistical interests do not center on individual cases." Nevertheless, he demurred when a subcommittee member suggested that the

identity of these statistics could be erased, thereby eliminating the threat to privacy without interfering with the operations of the data bank. "You would not be able to use this information meaningfully unless this kind of identification were maintained," Bowman said.

"To achieve the purpose we have in mind," explains his assistant, Paul Krueger, "we need to be able to collate the information obtained from different sources. As an example, we have tax returns which provide a considerable amount of information about the incomes of people. But they do not provide demographic information. We have census reports which provide all the demographic information. If you want to be able to relate incomes with demographic characteristics, there must be some sort of connecting link."

The importance the Budget Bureau attaches to personal identity is what principally concerns critics of the proposal. They fully suspect that today's statistical center may become tomorrow's intelligence center. Representative Gallagher did much to foster these suspicions in a June 14 speech on the floor of the House.

If the government does set up a central file or "dossier bank" of personal data on our citizens, there will be a huge store of information at hand to feed it. That list includes tax returns, census responses, social security data, military records, security files, fingerprints, mortgage guarantees, research involving individuals, and, if state and local governments are tied into the system, such things as school records, police files, driving violations, and property holdings. Confidentiality is now protected in many cases by the law. Centralization will create the need for a new set of safeguards. It might even be possible to pump credit reports and bank accounts into the computer. It should be apparent to anyone the great power that would exist behind the federal official who has the authority to push the button that would produce such a dossier instantly.

Representative Gallagher's misgivings were reinforced at the subcommittee hearings one month later by Paul Baran, an analyst for the RAND Corporation of Santa Monica, Calif. A member of several *ad hoc* committees for the Defense Department, as well as a consultant to the Institute for Defense Analyses and the Stanford Research Institute, Baran's credentials are impressive. Speaking as an individual and representing no special interest, Baran warned that should this machinery become available to the administrators of a government substantially different from the existing form, "it would make for an extremely efficient police state. While our computers and communications are fool-proof, they are not smart-proof," he said. "These systems are wide open to tampering by anyone sufficiently intelligent and motivated enough to take advantage of their weak spots."

It is precisely these weak spots that alarm opponents of the data bank. They acknowledge that technology has enriched human life, and that a federal data center will probably add to this enrichment. But, says Representative Gallagher, "just as democratic governments historically have secured the freedom of their citizens partly by controlling the fruits of scientific progress, so, too, must we now make sure that the government computers do not provide the means by which federal officials can intrude improperly into our lives." If safeguards are not built into

such a facility, he believes "it could lead to the creation of the computerized man . . . stripped of his individuality and privacy. His status would be measured by a computer. His life, his talent and his earning capacity are reduced to a tape with very few alternatives available."

This grisly warning may come too late. Ten years ago, there were fewer than 1,000 computers in the United States; ten years from now, it is estimated, there will be 100,000. Of the 30,000 computers in use today, half are in the service of the federal government. (Oddly enough, the forerunner of the computer was designed by a young engineer working for the Census Bureau near the turn of the century. Dismayed by the slow hand tabulations of the 1880 census, Herman Hollerith devised a "statistical piano" which assimilated census information fed into it on player piano type rolls.)

One danger inherent in an electronic memory system of the proportions envisioned by the Budget Bureau is the quality of information stored in it. "Unfortunately, the great bulk

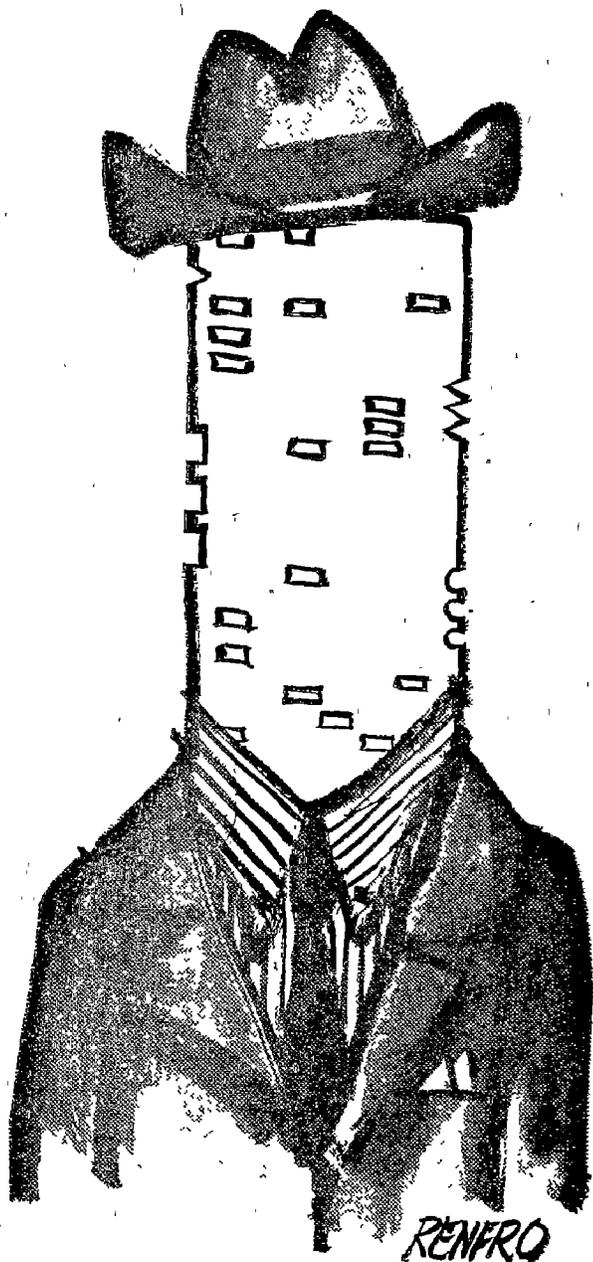
of information about an individual is not gathered as the result of inquiries by skilled government security investigators," says John deJ. Pemberton, Jr., executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. "Rather, it is often acquired by government employees of poor judgment, by private agencies, credit unions, insurance companies and businesses."

Pemberton's impeachment of these collection methods parallels an axiom of Professor Reich that "information gets less reliable the further away it is from the source." In testimony before the subcommittee he illustrated this point by citing a traditional practice at Yale. Each freshman is assigned an upper-class counselor who writes a personality report of his charge for the dean at the end of the year. "If this information gets into a file and stays there, it slowly changes from a reasonably accurate statement to something that could be a tremendous falsehood. The freshman may change. Perhaps he had a chip on his shoulder the first year, but after he got to, like the place he got to be one of the nicest guys around. So the information may no longer be true except as of the time it was made. Other people reading this may understand it in other ways." "The Christian notion of the possibility of redemption is incomprehensible to the computer," Packard observed at the hearings.

Addressing himself to the subcommittee's primary concern for safeguards, Bowman insisted that the centralization of statistical data in a computer memory bank would actually enhance the "confidentiality" of the information. Assembled under one roof, he argued, the material could be more closely guarded than it is now. This prompted one bemused Congressman to suggest that it would also make it easier for a federal employee to erase the disparaging dossier of a friend. Under the present decentralized system, the Congressman said, the friend "might exist in the Census Bureau and might not in the Internal Revenue Service. But he is going to totally not exist in a central data bank."

Under questioning Bowman conceded that a data bank of the type contemplated could endanger privacy, and recommended "very clear and specific regulations — legislation if this seems to be the desirable method." Asked who would have ultimate control of the data bank, Bowman replied: "Law." But sole reliance on legislative safeguards is not enough, cautioned RAND analyst Baran. He contends that "laws and laws alone have been pathetically ineffectual in stopping the growth of widespread electronic eavesdropping and wire tapping." In fact, so sophisticated have electronic snooping devices become that the security of the proposed National Data Center is threatened by them. Witnesses cited examples of "electronic radiation transmissions" from computers, and strongly urged that the walls of the data center be lead lined to prevent pirating.

Proponents, too, recognize these technological dangers, and disclosed at the hearings that they have devised elaborate safeguards that could be built into the computer. Budget Bureau consultant Dunn said that it can be programmed to identify "trick" inquiries — accidental or intentional. "You can teach the machine to say, 'This is a statistical inquiry but it is framed in such a way that the population or group you have defined contains only one individual —



less than the specific number of individuals." In addition, Dunn says, the computer can be "taught" to disguise records. If all individual identification were replaced by a special security code, no one could identify a person's record without that code.

As conceived, the proposed National Data Center would cost \$3 million to \$3.5 million and take between three and five years to stock with existing federal statistics, to be stored on 20,000 reels of magnetic tape. However, a less ambitious center could be stocked with a "respectable volume and variety" of data for \$260,000 in about a year. Although the National Data Center is still in the discussion stage, opponents report that there are rumors circulating in Washington that the Budget Bureau will request federal funds in next year's budget to establish the statistical center.

Centralizing government files would eliminate perhaps the best safeguard of personal privacy — bureaucracy. Compiling all that is recorded about an individual is now often a difficult and, consequently, a discouraging task. If the National Data Center were established, the mere push of a button would end all that.

Equally important, the statistical data center could set

a dangerous and irrevocable precedent. Its enemies warn that its existence would lead to pressures — within and outside the federal government — for the creation of a Personal Data Bank. It should be remembered that when Social Security was instituted, Americans were assured that their identification number would be kept secret. And when a provision was included in the Constitution for a national census every ten years, it was for the sole purpose of "enumeration." The 1960 census contained 165 questions, some of them dealing with subjects as personal as purchasing habits and incomes. What is more, there are pressures within the Census Bureau to include in the 1970 census prying questions about religious affiliation, education and ethnic origin.

To the suggestion that computers threaten to degrade mankind, John W. Macy, Jr., chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission, retorted in a magazine article recently: "Far from it! By removing the clerical decisions and the mass of paperwork details the computer may well free the mind of man for more worthy use."

Aristotle regarded machines with about the same degree of optimism. "When looms weave by themselves," he said, "man's slavery will end."

Perhaps.

LETTERS (continued from page 434)

subsidized by war debts, a fact that is nothing but an embarrassment to those who do research and to their hosts." This accusation is a product of your author's imagination. Of the 100 countries with which exchanges are conducted, war debts are a factor only in the case of Finland, the government of which has agreed to use its voluntary repayments of the World War I debts for this purpose. Elsewhere funds come entirely from the United States Government or by joint contributions from the two governments involved.

"One can hardly imagine Norman Mailer, Marshall McLuhan, Allen Ginsberg or William Faulkner as Fulbrights." Faulkner was a Fulbright, McLuhan is a Canadian and therefore not eligible, and neither Ginsberg nor Mailer is an academic personality.

"The stipends are too low." The amount of the grant is limited by the budget approved by Congress and is geared to comparable grants in the host country. British students on government grants receive just over £6 a week; those under the Fulbright Program just over £15 a week to compensate for additional expenses as foreigners. The accusation comes with particular poor grace from Mr. Kostelanetz, whose wife also held a Fulbright grant and who was somehow able to take a trip to Paris, also a driving tour of the United Kingdom, in the course of his stay.

"When a Negro student had considerable difficulty finding lodging for himself and his family, the commission refused to supplement his stipend or to acknowledge that James Crow lived in England." This is simply untrue. There were two Negro students in the year Kostelanetz spent in London, one in London and one in Cambridge. Neither made any request for additional funds for housing and both in their reports professed themselves satisfied with their quarters.

"Officials tend to be failed academics." The people with whom Kostelanetz chiefly came into contact at the commission were Cleanth Brooks, professor of English at Yale and D. P. Edgell, professor of the Human-

ities at San José College, both on leave of absence. I know intimately the executive secretaries of the commission in each of the European countries and many in other parts of the world. Not one of them is a 'failed academic.'

No doubt there were causes for Mr. Kostelanetz's unhappiness in London. But they were not those to which he referred in his article.

Oscar Handlin

new brand of virtue

London, England

DEAR SIRS: Outside the United States the view is widespread that your country is financially and militarily power drunk, and that moral considerations no longer weigh with you. Recently it was reported that at an official press conference Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense, stated that to believe that any American official is going to tell the truth is to be a fool, and a number of your recent editorials have exposed the nature of this lying. Without denying that this attitude is not confined to the United States, it is surely a new brand of virtue for a government to admit it is a liar. . . . This peculiar public confession destroys all confidence in any promise the U.S. Government may make. . . .

Are the people of the United States too preoccupied with their color problem or with the Dominican Republic or with Cuba to care that the almighty dollar and all it stands for now stinks in the nostrils of decent people? Do they or do they not know of the terrifying and barbaric atrocities that are being committed in their name in Vietnam? What sort of people have you become that you can remain silent and inactive while this is going on—financially and militarily power drunk so that moral considerations no longer weigh with you?

Hyman Levv, Professor Emeritus
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