

in previous investigations. The investigative firms making reports for insurance companies on insurance applicants have often felt free to sell the same information to noninsurance clients.

Within the Federal Government agencies have increasingly been developing systematic patterns for exchanging information. When a Federal agent makes a national agency check on a person, it customarily involves checking the files of at least eight Federal agencies.

The individual citizen who is concerned about the erosion of his privacy has up until now had some consolation in the knowledge that all these files about his life have been widely dispersed and often difficult to get at. Digging up a sizable file of any individual has been a time-consuming, expensive proposition.

This is changing with the advent of giant computers with their capacity for instant recall of a great variety of available information. The Federal Government has led the way in installing larger and more sophisticated computers. It has purchased many thousands of computers, including some of the world's largest, and the Civil Service Commission is now operating a training center which has taught 2,300 Federal employees how to get maximum usable information out of various computer systems. The Internal Revenue Service's massive investment in computers to store and assess information on taxpayers is well advertised. We can all be cheered by the promised increase in fairness and efficiency in tax collecting that presumably will result, but if we look forward into the future a decade, the prospect is disquieting. For each taxpayer there presumably can be developed in the electronic memory banks a "cum" or cumulative file covering up to 10 years of his life. Not only would a vast amount of information he has provided about himself and his family over the decade be subject to virtually instant retrieval, but also, theoretically, information about known associates during the period and people and organizations who have had business dealings with him. In short, there will be the capacity, at least, for an instant dredging of one's dimly remembered personal affairs of the past. Unless procedures are developed to prevent unreasonable harassment through this capacity, then the taxpayer of 1976 may well be in a poor mood to celebrate the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence.

Which brings us to the proposal to consolidate some of the major Federal filing systems into one vast central data bank "by using the new information technology now available." Consultants have urged this concept of centralizing data upon the Bureau of the Budget. A special task force has now been appointed to study the idea. At first this central storage center would pool information now in the files of 20 different Federal agencies. The agencies were not specified in the announcement creating the task force but the pooling reportedly will include records from the Internal Revenue Service, the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance, and the Federal Reserve Board, to mention just four. Presumably in future years more and more agencies—and more and more of their records—would enter the pool.

The announcement implies the Government is interested only in assembling statistics in more readily available form. But every one of us in this room is a statistic, especially if the statistic involving us has our social security number attached. One consultant to the Bureau of