

THE IMPENDING PROBLEM

So much for the pleasant past. Consider the following argument: A multiplicity of large, remote-access computer systems, if interconnected, can pose the danger of loss of the individual's right to privacy—as we know it today.

The composite information data base may be so large and so easily accessible that it would permit unscrupulous individuals to use this information for unlawful means.

Modern organized crime should be expected to have the financial resources and access to the skills necessary to acquire and misuse the information in some of the systems now being considered.

We are concerned not only with the creation of simple "automated blackmail machines" using this information, but with the added implication of new powerful "inferential relational retrieval" techniques now being developed. Such techniques, when fully refined, could determine relationships of any person, organization, event, et cetera, to any other person, organization, or event.

Human beings, by their day-to-day need to make decisions using totally inadequate evidence, are prone to jump to conclusions when presented with very thin chains of inferred relationships. For example, merely plastering a man's name on billboards will markedly change the outcome of an election, if the other candidate's name is not equally displayed.

The use of private detectives to unearth defaming information on political candidates and their associates has become an increasingly prevalent feature of elections and is expected to increase in the future.

The cost per unit of dirt mined by unautomated human garbage collectors can be cut by orders of magnitude once they obtain access to a set of wide-access information systems now being developed. It is the sophisticated form of chain-relation blackmail that may be of the most social concern. The development of geographically widespread access systems uses communications lines to connect the users into the computer. There is a widespread belief—but perhaps not by this committee—that somehow the communications network used will possess a God-given privacy, but "it ain't necessarily so * * *."

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIONS UPON COMPUTERS

Using telephone lines modified to handle digital data, we are able to build an increasing number of geographically distributed time-shared computer systems. Many individual users are connected to a common computer base. Examples of such systems include airline reservation and credit checking systems for civilians and fancy display "command and control" systems for the military.

Simple recordkeeping, a mark of a highly developed economy, has been a prime area of development of these large computer file/communications systems. The development passes through several stages. First, much of the routine clerical work is transferred to a single large computer with few humans nearby allowed to interrogate the system. As time moves on, the number of people who are allowed to directly interrogate the system increases. Next, the geographical distance between the users and the machine increases. And eventually sepa-