

"The Orwellian nightmare would be brought very close indeed if Congress permits the proposed computer National Data Center to come into being. We already live with the fact that from birth to grave Federal agencies keep tabs on each of us, recording our individual puny existence, monitoring our incomes and claimed deductions, noting when we are employed or jobless, and—through the F.B.I. and similar agencies—keeping all too close watch on what we think or say, what we read and what organizations we belong to.

"If this situation is still somewhat tolerable, it is because each agency keeps separates files and it takes some considerable effort to find and bring together all that is known about a particular individual. What is now proposed is the amalgamation of these files, and the creation of a situation in which the push of a button would promptly dredge up all that is known about anyone.

"Understandably, this idea has brought vigorous protest, in which we join. Aside from the opportunities for blackmail and from the likelihood that the record of any single past transgression might damage one for life, this proposed device would approach the effective end of privacy. Those Government officials who insist that the all-knowing computer could be provided with safeguards against unauthorized access are no doubt of the same breed as their brethren who 'guaranteed' that last November's Northeast electric blackout could never occur. Even the Swiss banks have learned to their own and their clients' sorrow that the device of numbered accounts is inadequate to frustrate determined would-be blackmailers.

"Perhaps in the long run the fight to preserve privacy is a vain one. But, like the struggle to preserve life, it must be continued while any shred of privacy remains."

AUGUST 10, 1966.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR,
The New York Times,
New York, N.Y.

DEAR SIR: As a citizen and Congressman, and particularly because of my service as the ranking and only minority member of the Special Subcommittee on Invasion of Privacy of the House Government Operations Committee, I commend your August 9 editorial, "To Preserve Privacy."

Our Subcommittee, chaired by Congressman Cornelius Gallagher of New Jersey, just completed hearings on the Federal Government proposal to establish a National Data Center. The testimony removed any doubt as to the foundation of your "1984" fear.

However, I am not willing to resign myself to the fateful suggestion that "Perhaps in the long run the fight to preserve privacy is a vain one." Rather, I intend to continue, as your editorial also challenges Congress, with my struggle for its protection.

The problems posed by the National Data Center proposal are in carload lots. Like nuclear energy, there is nip and tuck competition to keep computers working for us, not against us.

There is undeniable value from the standpoints of economy and efficiency in allowing agencies to pool data. But, if it is to be done, must there not be ground rules and clear-cut standards?

Thus, I recommend the calling of a symposium of computer men, sociologists, educators, lawyers, and others to identify a correct course. These men and women should suggest safeguards: coding, surprise audits, inter-computer interrogation limits, interrogator identity, abnormal interrogation detection, illegal disclosure penalties, and many more. We also need to consider the individual's right to know the contents of any government dossier on him.

Computers can give us longer life, teach our students, design better transportation, provide our statesmen with facts and figures for sound decisions, capture criminals, diagnose disease, and add new dimensions to every element of society. But, making it possible means maintaining man as the master of the machine.

Advanced technology must not be paid from the accounts of individuality. For as Justice Brandeis said, we all are entitled "to be let alone."

Sincerely,

FRANK HORTON,
U.S. Congressman, 36th District of New York.