

Resources for the Future, consultant to the Bureau of the Budget, concluded that it would be desirable to establish a national data service center which would direct the file storage and management of significant archival records in machine readable form for all participating agencies, and provide a central reference source and explicit facilitating services for all users of Federal statistics.

After the Dunn report was issued, a task force under the chairmanship of Carl Kaysen, of the Institute for Advanced Studies, was appointed to study the storage of and access to Government statistics. The task force studied the question over a period of a year, and then proposed the creation of a national data center which would be given the responsibility for assembling in a single facility all large-scale systematic bodies of demographic, economic, and social data generated by the present data-collection or administrative processes of the Federal Government.

It would be the function of the national data center to integrate the data in such a way as to preserve as much as possible of the original information content of the whole body of records, providing ready access to the information within the laws governing disclosure to all users in the Government and where appropriate to qualified users outside the Government on suitably compensatory terms. The task force emphasized the necessity of developing safeguards to preserve the right of the individual to privacy in relation to information he discloses to the Government either voluntarily or under legal compulsion.

During the period when the desirability of a national data center was under discussion, hearings were held by a special Subcommittee on the Invasion of Privacy of the House Committee on Government Operations. A number of witnesses testified that it was their belief that a national data center would be a serious threat to individual privacy. Much of the discussion centered about the question of building up dossiers containing improper, irrelevant, but harmful information which could be used to the disadvantage of individuals. The view was expressed that the establishment of a national data center would encourage the collection and preservation of such information.

It cannot be denied that in some respects there has been a significant erosion of privacy over the past 50 years. The introduction of the income tax perhaps represents one of the largest intrusions, since a person must reveal all of his sources of income to the Internal Revenue Service.

The social security system, also, has made the employment history of an individual a part of administrative records. Such records such as motor vehicle licenses, driver's licenses, medical care, and public assistance records have further reduced privacy. In the past the operations of certain congressional investigations and the knowledge of the existence of security files kept by various Government agencies have led to further uneasiness. It is therefore not remarkable that the average person views with some alarm an apparent plan to centralize all records.

This uneasiness reflects, however, more a fear of possible misuse of information than an objection to its existence. For example, few individuals would mind that the Social Security Administration has the administrative information it needs if they were confident that no one else would have access to it. The Census Bureau has long realized that they could not expect to get accurate information if those provid-