

# 23 to Study Computer 'Threat'

By LACEY FOSBURGH

A nationwide investigation into the growing use of computers and the "threat" that this poses to civil liberties was begun here yesterday by a group of scientists, lawyers, government officials, professors and businessmen.

Whether a nationwide network of computerized data banks may not significantly affect peoples' lives and endanger their privacy has been a subject of controversy for several years. This will be the first time, however, that the question of whether civil liberties can function at all amid such a proliferation of personal data will be scrutinized on such a wide scale.

The announcement of the study, which will be conducted over two and a half years by 23 persons representing different viewpoints, was made jointly here yesterday by the National Academy of Science and the Russell Sage Foundation. The academy will sponsor the project, and the foundation finance it with a \$149,500 grant.

## Professor to Head Study

Dr. Alan F. Westin, professor of public law and government at Columbia University, will direct the investigation.

"Our purpose is to make it eminently clear" to the Federal Government and the private sector, Dr. Westin said in an interview, that ethical curbs must be placed over the "currently unregulated and unsupervised" use of computerized data banks, or individual privacy and due process will become "virtually meaningless" in the electronic age.

The committee, which has no official power, hopes to investigate hundreds of public and private data banks, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information Center, police intelligence files, the Army Intelligence System, credit investigating corporations, hospitals, unions, churches, motor vehicle bureaus and universities.

Although the extent of a national information network falls "somewhat short of the specter of a 1984 surveillance system," Dr. Westin said, civil liberties safeguards must be established "during the next five years" or "it will just be too late."

At present, he asserted, there are no laws or court decisions in the country supporting the individual's right to see, contest, change or eliminate any of the information about him in a data bank. This information may include "facts, statistics, inaccuracies and rumors," Dr. Westin said, about virtually every phase of a person's life, his marital troubles,

## Will Examine Effect of Data Banks on Civil Liberties

jobs, school history, childhood, sex life and political activities.

### 'Access Is So Simple'

"Almost inevitably, transferring information from a manual file to a computer triggers a threat to civil liberties, to privacy, to a man's very humanity," Dr. Westin said, because access is so simple.

The effect is that it becomes harder and harder for people to escape from the mistakes of their past, or to move in search of a second chance, the Columbia professor added.

Robert M. Fano, the Ford professor of Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who is also chairman of the university's Committee on Privacy of Information, contended in a recent interview that no matter how many technical or legal safeguards were set up to restrict the use of computerized data, all computer banks were "eventually penetrable and unsafe."

Nevertheless, Dr. Westin said, two landmark bills have "a good chance" of being passed by Congress and the New York State Legislature. In general, both bills grant people the right to see and challenge information held by credit, licensing and employment agencies.

### House Hearings Due

Public hearings begin next Tuesday before the House Banking and Currency Committee on the "Fair Credit Reporting Act" which the Senate passed last November. In Albany, the Senate passed on March 4 the "Credit Data Reporting Act," which now faces action in the Assembly.

Other members of the 23-man investigatory group include:

Dr. Edgar S. Dunn Jr., economist and research associate with Re-

sources for the Future, Washington, D. C.

James Farmer, Assistant Secretary, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Representative Cornelius E. Gallagher, Democrat of New Jersey, chairman of the House subcommittee on Invasion of Privacy.

Nathan L. Jacobs, Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach, vice president of International Business Machines and former United States Attorney General and Under Secretary of State.

Dr. John H. Knowles, general director of the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston.

Dr. Arthur R. Miller, professor of law, University of Michigan.

Dr. George A. Miller, chairman of the department of psychology, Rockefeller University, New York City.

Judge Constance Baker Motley, United States District Court, New York City.

Ralph Nader, research lawyer, Washington, D. C.

Arthur Naftalin, professor, department of public affairs, University of Mississippi, and former Mayor of Minneapolis.

Roy Nutt, vice president of Computer Sciences Corporation, Los Angeles.

Representative Ogden R. Reid, Republican of Westchester.

Lee Reiser, vice president of personnel, Corn Products Company, New York City.

Dr. Richard Ruggles, professor, department of economics, Yale University.

William Spencer, executive vice president, First National City Bank, New York City.

Roderick O. Symmes, director of data systems development, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. Jacqueline B. Wexler, president of Hunter College.

Dr. Robert C. Wood, chairman of the political science department at M.I.T. and director of the Joint Center for Urban Studies, Harvard University and M.I.T.

Anthony G. Gettinger, professor of applied mathematics at Harvard and chairman of the computer science and engineering board at the National Academy of Science.

Dr. John R. Pierce, vice chairman of the computer sciences and engineering board at the National Academy of Science and executive director of the research communication sciences division of Bell Telephone Laboratories.