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Big Brother Computer Is Dismantled

Washington

The Justice Department has dismantled a computerized intelligence-gathering unit and locked up the files the unit collected on thousands of individuals in response to civil disorders in the late 1960s.

Attorney General Edward Levi has promised to give Congress advance notice if he ever considers it necessary to revive the operation, a prospect he called unlikely.

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The action was made public Thursday as the department and Senator John Tunney (Dem-Calif.) released an exchange of letters between them. An aide to Tunney said there were files on 22,000 Americans.

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark created the Interdivisional Information Unit (IDIU) in 1967 in an effort to pull together the intelligence reports compiled by the FBI and other federal investigators on civil disorders and the individuals involved in them.

The computer system run by the eight-man unit was sophisticated enough to produce, for instance, a file on all persons in Chicago who were thought to be members of the left wing Weatherman group, a Tunney aide said.

The Central Intelligence Agency received a copy of the unit's computerized files on 10,000 to 12,000 individuals in 1970 when the CIA was asked to increase foreign surveillance of domestic radicals on trips abroad. The CIA has said, however, that it never used the list and destroyed its copy in 1974.

In a letter to Tunney on February 20, Levi said the computerized system was deactivated last October 17.

"At that time, all computer programs, data files and system documentation were secured and rendered inaccessible for operational use," he wrote. Other records which were not programmed into the computer "were placed in locked files and they also have not been used operationally since that time," he continued.

Levi said he has instructed Assistant Attorney General Glen Pommerening "to arrange for the lawful disposition of these materials and to ensure that no future operational use of this data is made without my specific prior approval . . ."

Pommerening said in response to questions that the material "will be retained in a secure atmosphere" until the National Archives determines whether it should be preserved or destroyed.

Levi said he "can foresee no circumstances at this time under which the manual or automatic system would be reactivated."

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