

Now it's credit cards

Computers threaten right to privacy

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The Right of Privacy will be lost in 1969. The Establishment has the power, the money and the organization. They are hitting simultaneously on many fronts.

The no-money society is being freely discussed in many conservative, solid engineering type journals. Machine Design carried an article a year ago in which they made free reference to the \$1-billion in credit-card debts carried on the books of national banks. The figures are now bigger than that. Do you think, Dear Reader, that you are going to have a chance against a billion dollar business?

Is it off the beam to tie the credit card to right-of-privacy? Credit Data Corporation in California has 70,000 members connected in its network via toll-free circuits. Their terminals, in turn, have access to records of the leading issuers of credit cards all over the United States. All very noble in purpose, since it minimizes "kiting" of credit cards.

There are two issues that are minor annoyances to the people promoting the no-money society. One is selecting the type of equipment needed. There are many kinds of equipment on the market and no sign of agreement between bankers, designers and equipment manufacturers. The other issue is the time element. When will the checkless—then the cashless—economy go into effect? "When", not "if" is the word; and you will note there is not a word of concern about what the public may think of the system.

One of the more advanced card types is the touch-tone card, manufactured by Pilgrim Plastics Corporation (Boston) and widely used by Bell System telephone computer networks and the Bank of Delaware in its retail credit card project in Wilmington. The clerk takes the customer's card, inserts it in a special telephone connected device and gets an audio "yes" or "no" from the bank's computer regarding the customer's credit standing. The transaction then

proceeds, with the clerk signaling the computer to bill the customer and credit the store and otherwise complete the paperwork.

All very businesslike so far, but bear in mind that at this particular moment the computer has within its memory the physical location of this particular citizen and can check a "wanted" list and report to the police just

as fast, and, at the same time, as it is reporting his credit rating to the store. If not actually wanted at this moment, it can store and print out a record of every purchase location at any time in the future.

Skip-trace agencies use credit checking to locate people. In at least one recent instance a BankAmericard was "credited" with making an arrest possible.

Your bank account carries your social security number, required for tax purposes (based on the assumption that you are automatically guilty until you prove yourself innocent by making your

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income tax out properly). Social security numbers are also used within banking circles to locate multiple accounts, in case you should be thinking of declaring bankruptcy.

Many local banks use their computers to offer a professional billing service to doctors. The doctor's assistant uses a touch-tone telephone connection to update the bank computer's record with a code for the treatment and the charge.

Some of these same banks offer a credit-check service. At your local grocer, the cashier punches the number of your card into a little keyboard next to the cash register. In a couple of seconds it answers back by lighting one of three lights, indicating "yes", "no" or "panic". How come a get-well card from the grocery manager?

Is this all shooting at shadows? Or is it 1984 in 1969? One of the big names backing the credit-card, no-money scheme is Bank of America. Their interest is understandable, since there would be a service charge. Would the income they get from this be tax free, since they are 51 per cent owned by The Society of Jesuits (Catholics)?

How big would you like your bogey-man to be? Think about the credit-card currency system and the existing direct connections between many of the larger banks and the IRS with their computing centers already existing. (Eighteen centers, as remember, each one large enough to handle the entire income tax program). Think about every citizen (that's you, too, baby) located every time he makes a purchase.

The 1970 census is coming along, with some 120 proposed questions concerning the number of household items such as dish washers, electric blenders,

plumbing, automobiles, the amount of property you own, your personal income and so on. Would this data (paid for by taxes) be available "on demand" to every manufacturer and credit agency that "demanded"? This will be settled in 1969.

Several recent court decisions have decided that records obtained using tax money cannot be kept from the public. The Federal government announced that records of psychiatric case histories will be computerized and made available "on demand".

Does this sound like a police state? Surely not. But then Liberty Lowdown no. 70 suggested that the CIA might be able to pump money into the political party of their choice.

And Life magazine (a politically lily-white publication) devoted an issue to the police rioting and the Chicago police "on the take," with some speculation that there is a connection between being "on the take" and the lack of discipline. Is this down-grading de-liberate?

Or the Justice Department and Attorney General Ramsey Clark's recent statement, "Of all violence, police violence in excess of authority is the most dangerous." Obvious solution—more authority?

The Warren Report implied the need for a Federal Police force and prompted J. Edgar Hoover to issue a rather remarkable warning to the American people against such a police force. Can there be any connection between this warning and the current moves to insert Patrick V. Murphy into the FBI where he can control the distribution of Federal money to local police departments in accordance with their compliance with the Federal training program?

Mr. Hoover is 74, serving long after the usual retirement age. President Nixon has already proclaimed that LBJ "speaks for" his planned administration. Will Patrick V. Murphy be advanced, during 1969, to a position where he will further insulate J. Edgar Hoover from the people?

The Committee on Information in the Behavioral Sciences of the National Research Council recently called for the establishment of a Federal Data Service Center without delay.

Rep. Cornelius E. Gallagher (D., N.J.), heads the House Special Subcommittee on the Invasion of Privacy, which is unanimously against the data bank idea. He puts the problem this way, "In order to create more benefits, governments think they need to know more about their people. The more the Government knows, the less the individual has left of himself which is his own. The more the Government accumulates data on the individual, the more the Government feels it needs to know."

During World War II there were many links between the National Research Council, Dr. Vannevar Bush, the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) and the Special Committee under Col. "Wild Bill" Donovan that developed the silent, flashless pistol and many other devices and schemes for the OSS, which later became the CIA.

Reach in your pocket right now, take out that credit card and look at it. Don't worry, it's still safe to use, probably. But each time you hand it to the store clerk, think back over the last few headlines from Washington. Sometime during 1969 you'll hear a barely audible snap as the last circuit is closed and that card becomes your leash.