

## Our Alienated Rights

One hundred and ninety-four years ago the Founding Fathers asserted their independence with a ringing Declaration of man's "unalienable rights."

Today, as too often before, those rights are once more threatened. They are threatened not by some tyrannical foreign monarch, but by domestic governmental agencies whose actions and proposed actions against crime and dissent endanger constitutional guarantees designed to safeguard the rights of Americans to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Typical of these new dangers is the spreading web of Federal prying into the private lives of citizens. Utilizing modern computer technology, Federal police, security, military intelligence and other agencies are accumulating vast stores of data on the activities of hundreds of thousands of unsuspecting "suspect" Americans.

There is nothing wrong with the use of the computer to help make more efficient and effective the legitimate work of law-enforcement and other agencies. A modern society must use modern techniques to help enforce and administer its laws and to protect itself from those who would do violence to its leaders and institutions.

But a subcommittee headed by the highly respected Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, has unearthed alarming evidence that Federal agencies have been employing the new technology to amass data that has little or no direct relation to criminal or other activities of legitimate Federal concern. Particularly disturbing are persistent reports that the Army's Counterintelligence Analysis Division is disregarding orders to stop collecting information on peace and civil rights organizations. Furthermore, the subcommittee reports that restrictions on the dissemination of "intelligence" accumulated by some agencies is woefully inadequate.

Among the "persons of interest" on whom the Secret Service collects data are individuals who have merely threatened to "embarrass" a high Government official, who "insist upon personally contacting high Government officials for the purpose of redress of imaginary grievances, etc.," and who participate in anti-American or anti-United States Government demonstrations.

Senator Ervin, a conservative and a student of the Constitution, has observed: "I am a 'malcontent' on many issues. I have written the President and other high officials complaining of grievances that some may consider 'imaginary' and on occasion I may also have 'embarrassed' high Government officials."

Senator Ervin is obviously a "person of interest" by Secret Service definition and therefore grist for a Federal computer. Indeed, any American today who vociferously articulates unpopular or unorthodox views is in danger of being digested by a Federal computer, along with common criminals, and of being exposed to potential harassment and humiliation.

If Americans still cherish the Declaration of Independence and the rights we celebrate today, they will insist that their representatives in Congress support Senator Ervin's efforts to place strict legal limits on Federal collection and dissemination of information on the activities of private citizens.