

NADER SEES PERIL IN COMPUTER USE

Fears a 'Nation of Slaves'
Without Public Controls

By LACEY FOSBURGH

Ralph Nader asserted yesterday that the United States would "become a nation of slaves" unless safeguards and human values were integrated "before it's too late" into what he called the unregulated and uncontrolled use of computers.

In a wide-ranging speech at the New York Hilton before the 25th annual convention of the 27,000-member Association of Computing Machinery, Mr. Nader described in pessimistic terms the ramifications of a growing computer technology that, he said, is now "exclusively in the domain of corporate and governmental control."

Because "the computer and the consumer should be the major concern of somebody in society," he urged his audience to begin to infuse "human considerations and values" into the use of computers.

Mr. Nader predicted that a "citizen backlash" against computers was inevitable if their use remained completely apart from public review.

Secret Data Assailed

People are being alienated, he charged by the way national data banks, owned by credit companies, banks, insurance companies, employment bureaus and others, are being used and shared. He called this massive accumulation of secret personal data on millions of people a "perilous threat to civil liberties."

Although he acknowledged that he personally did not intend to champion the rights of the consumer against the growing powers of the computer industry, he prescribed several steps to bring the industry under supervision. These included the following:

¶Creation of a regulatory agency at the Federal and state level to supervise all data bank operations.

¶Establishment of an "Information Bill of Rights" to protect an individual from the present "total invasion of privacy." The bill would grant an individ-

ual the right to see, challenge and correct all information kept on him in a data bank and allow him to know when, why, where and how this information was being used.

¶The holding of Congressional hearings to examine corporate and governmental abuses in the use of computers.

'Blackmail' Alleged

Data banks are a subtle kind of blackmail, Mr. Nader asserted, because their existence inhibits people and prevents them from "speaking out and blowing the whistle against the system."

"Invisible changes are taking place everywhere," he said during a press conference after his lengthy speech. "We feel them every minute of every day, and they are having cataclysmic overtones as to how we operate this society."

"This is leading to a significant kind of tyranny . . . The key democratic principle of a man's control over his life is being abused. And unless we do something about it, we're suddenly going to wake up and realize we're a nation of slaves."

Although Mr. Nader predicted that invasion of privacy would become "a major issue in some political quarters," he said that at present there was general "abyssmal ignorance" on the subject.

"The problem of doing something constructive in this area," he said, "is that there aren't enough people who care. The stakes are very high in terms of ignoring the whole question."