

The Bulging 'Snoop' Files On Citizens

N.Y. Times Service

Washington

The average person is the subject of ten to 20 dossiers of personal information about him in the files and computer data banks of government and private agencies, a Senate subcommittee was told yesterday.

Two lawyers and a social scientist testified that most Americans are only vaguely aware of the extent to which they are watched and that the controls over abuse of information gathering and dissemination are limited. One said that snooping is leading the Nation toward a "dossier dictatorship."

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem.-N.C.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, opened nine days of hearings on the dilemma of making computerized information systems serve society and the individual citizen rather than suppressing political liberties.

Ervin said that "these amazing machines and devices not only expand the memory of man a trillion-fold, they extend enormously his ability to retrieve instant-

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ly the information stored, integrate it with other information, and send it across country or around the world."

The senator hoisted an 11-pound, 1245-page, family Bible and then a two-inch strip of microfilm, both containing 773,746 words, to illustrate technical progress in the storage of information.

Professor Arthur R. Miller of the University of Michigan Law School, the first witness at the hearing, said that "Americans are scrutinized, measured, watched, counted, and interrogated by more government agencies, law enforcement officials, social scientists, and poll takers than at any time in our history."

ASSAULT

Miller, author of a book entitled "The Assault on Privacy," said that "probably in no nation on Earth is as much individualized information collected, recorded, and disseminated as in the United States."

He argued that "the information gathering and surveillance activities of the Federal government have expanded to such an extent that they are becoming a threat to several basic rights of every American—privacy, speech, assembly, association, and petition of government."

"Whether he knows it or not," Miller said, "each time a citizen files a tax return, applies for life insurance or credit card, seeks government benefits, or interviews

or a job, a dossier is opened under his name and an informational profile on him is sketched."

TRACKS

He said that everywhere a person goes, he leaves electronic tracks "that can tell a great deal about our activities, movements, habits, and association when collated and analyzed."

"The lack of concern over these data gathering activities probably reflects the fact that by and large they are well-intended efforts to achieve socially desirable objectives." He cited law enforcement agencies that combat organized crime or the Army mission to help quell civil disturbances.

But he contended that "there are no effective restraints on the national government's information activities, and no one has undertaken to insure that individuals are protected against the misuse of the burgeoning data banks."

FBI

Senator Roman L. Hruska (Rep.-Ne b.), disagreed. He argued that he knew of many legal restraints on the gathering and divulging of information and warned against impairing the activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies.

Miller, however, persisted and said that "it is simply unrealistic to assume that the managers or proprietors of computer systems—governmental or private—will take it upon themselves to protect the public against

misuse of the data in their custody.

"Information is being gathered, recorded, and disseminated with a let-George-do-it philosophy that is putting us on the pathway toward a dossier dictatorship."

CITED

Among the personal data collection efforts cited by Miller and other witnesses were the Department of Housing and Urban Development's adverse information file, the National Science Foundation's data bank on scientists, the Customs Bu-

reau's computerized suspects file, the Secret Service's dossiers on "undesireables," the Army's domestic intelligence operations, the FBI's National Crime Information Center, the New York State identification and intelligence system, the police department files on political activists in every major city, the Office of Education's migrant worker children data bank, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's file on loan applicants.

One said these were only the tip of the iceberg.