

FBI files threaten privacy

One of the most serious consequences arrested persons face is the possibility their names will be placed in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's criminal files.

The FBI records contain the names of thousands of arrestees, but fail to say whether they were found innocent or guilty or were released without being charged with a crime.

Information on the 20 million persons in the FBI fingerprint file is available on request to 3,750 local police departments, 1,420 sheriff's offices and 390 federally insured banks, according to a recent article in The New Republic.

Once the FBI furnishes its data to local agencies, it disavows responsibility. The information ultimately can enter the hands of private businesses, insurance companies, reporters and other unauthorized persons.

The FBI reportedly has files on thousands of cases, and 1.2 billion personal records are stored in the other 850 federally operated data banks.

Computerization is making these records instantly available to a growing number of people, yet the FBI insists it has neither the resources nor the obligation to check out each arrest record it receives.

Although a statute requires the bureau to cancel the exchange privileges of local agencies that provide records to unauthorized users, the FBI has suspended the borrowing privileges of local police only six times since 1924.

A Senate subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Sam Ervin, is considering whether federal data banks should be limited to distributing only conviction records to non-law enforcement agencies and supplying acquittal records to the police only if they have rearrested the subject or if his first prosecution still is pending.

The committee proposes a bill which would require every data-gathering agency to keep its records up to date, mandate random audits of federal and state criminal files and grant every citizen the right to inspect his file and correct inaccuracies.

The proposed bill also would oblige any agency using an arrest record to verify the information's accuracy and completeness. Such verification would be automatic with computerized systems.

The proposed bill also would clamp down on "promiscuous dissemination" by holding the distributing agency responsible if its data reaches the wrong hands.

According to FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley, the subcommittee's proposals would seriously hamper law enforcement and would cause crime rates to soar even higher.

Kelley says the FBI files are being unjustly "cast in the role of the oppressor menacing individual liberties."

He contends that law enforcement needs such data banks "to preserve the individual's right to remain alive, keep his possessions intact and walk on a street without fear of harm."

But law enforcement also should seek to preserve the individual's right to privacy.

Enactment of the bill concerning federal data banks would help insure this privacy and would guard Americans against another "fear of harm"—the harm which comes when confidential information enters imprudent hands.

Jane Owens

Richard Righteous - "Is there another way?"

Who says American politics will always be corrupt?

Oh, sure, scandals have come and gone in this country, but with the trauma of Watergate, something tells me it's a whole new ballgame.

New scandals are uncovered almost daily (milk bribes, illegal gas price hikes, espionage in Chile) to keep new corruption in check. Tax statements and financial records are probed thoroughly before a man is approved for office.

By the year 2000, if trends continue, legal safeguards should exist to stop corruption before it even makes the ballot—at all levels of government.

Excuse, me, sir. I'd like to run for Lancaster County weed control agent."

"Weed control, huh? That's an important job, you know. You realize we have the right to investigate every last detail about your life, background and character?...Okay, name?"

"Richard Righteous."

"Are you sure that's your name, Mr. Righteous?...Has it always been your name?..."

A few more routine questions, and you're taken to a dimly-lit room to undergo several hours of thorough questioning:

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second thoughts

"Have you ever accepted any bubble gum, rides, money or other gifts or favors from a government official?...Where were you the day of the Watergate break-in?" And so on.

Having passed that, you're sent (or carried) to the records bureau to pick up your final application forms.

"Okay, Mr. Righteous. We'll just need a few things from you. Copies of your back income tax returns, your birth certificate and marriage license, your police record, college grade transcripts, military service record."

Frantically, you jot everything down.

"Also, a financial statement showing your total assets, liabilities, and final net worth."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, 31 character references and a 10,000-word essay on 'Why I want to run for office.' Now, if you'll just fill out forms one through 64, omitting sections E through J in form 37...and return them to this office by Friday, we'll begin the investigation to determine whether you're qualified for the job."

"I-I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I'll have to withdraw. I'm a working man, and I haven't got time to complete all of this. Isn't there any other way I could run for office?"

A quick glance around the room, and the clerk suddenly lowers his voice. "Well, yes. There is one way...Do you have about \$300?"

FEDERAL RESERVE
LOANS



to the editor

Dear Editor,
Please note the Friday, Sept. 13 Daily Nebraskan article, "Pizza replaces keg for 'Yell Like Hell'." paragraph seven.

Would you please refresh my memory on the law(s) pertaining to:

1. The tampering with and/or removal of United States mail from United States Post Office mail boxes by persons other than the addressed holder.

2. The laws pertaining to government censorship of any or all United States mail.

In addition, I would like to know where the University has its head, when we have to start saluting, whom we salute, how we salute—three, two or one finger(s), why the University is above the law and what are we going to do about it.

Ticked Off