**Next Stop: 1984**

**Computers, Identification Cards and Immigration**

In periods of capitalist crisis and restructuring, such as the present, it becomes vitally important for the State to be able to identify and separate workers who are militant and increasingly uncontrollable from those who are malleable and can be controlled.[[1]](#footnote-1) The facility with which the State can undertake such political activity has been greatly augmented in recent years by the rapid growth of computers and microelectronics. Not only are traditional sources of data – such as drivers’ licenses, consumer credit card reports, insurance files, income tax returns, social security archives and FBI/CIA dossiers – being increasingly computerized, thus rendering access to them and their cross referencing easier, but new forms of data collection and control are being constantly developed.

In the area of immigration this has involved both the computer data banking of information on immigrants and applicants for passports and visas and the resultant easier sharing of those data among various State agencies. Most recently microelectronics research has been channeled by the State into the development of identification cards that can be verified electronically, used to gain rapid access to file material on the card carriers and cannot be counterfeited.

In the United States the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has been developing since at least 1974 a system of electronically coded, machine readable and unforgeable visas and identification cards for distribution to legally admitted foreigners.[[2]](#footnote-2) This system is designed not only to permit the easier tracking of legal immigrants but also to eliminate the forging of such cards for use by illegal immigrants. This ADIT system (Alien Documentation, Identification and Telecommunications) is designed to link machine readable cards to the Central Office Master Index records in Washington D.C. through specially designed terminals and telecommunications lines. The cards themselves, called Alien Registration Receipt Cards (I-551) are described by the INS in the following terms: they represent “a composite of aesthetic design, photographic precision, security checkpoints, computerized encryption coding and secure lamination techniques.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Aesthetic indeed! The initial production of these cards began in Washington D.C. but was shifted to a specifically constructed Immigration Card Facility in Arlington, Texas in 1978. It is encouraging to note that past INS efforts have not been very successful.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For some time now discussion has raged in policy circles about generalizing this practice to the entire population through a similar, technologically advanced national identification card – perhaps based on the social security card. So far such plans have been blocked by objections from both left and right about infringement of privacy and civil rights. The attractions of such a system to a State bent on the maximum accumulation of data and control over the working class is obvious. In recent years a series of books and congressional hearings have questioned the increasing amassing of personal data under the rubric of “infringement of the right to privacy”. Although this questioning was successful in blocking the creation in 1967 of a National Data Center to pool information on citizens, and in creating the Privacy Act of 1974, it has for the most part dealt with the accuracy and use of the data, i.e., efficiency considerations, rather than delving into the basic issues of whether the State should be allowed to gather such large quantities of data at all, and of the possible repressive uses to which it could be put – regardless of present intentions. This lack of basic interrogation of the process has persisted despite the Watergate revelations of how the Nixon administration used IRS files to harass political opponents and of how the FBI and other intelligence groups carried out COINTELPRO operations against domestic groups of political activists.[[5]](#footnote-5)

These COINTELPRO operations included the FBI’s “Border Coverage Program” in which it “infiltrated student groups, community organizations and political parties in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, planted heroin, cocaine and marijuana in the cars of Chicano leaders to ‘put them out of action for a while’ . . .” The FBI also has claimed credit for “promoting an anti-Echeverria demonstration” in order to “identify the most radical Mexican-Americans.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Clearly the more data the State puts into its computerized records the easier such identification and such repression will become.

The intention of the INS to use the new ADIT system to track individuals and to share its data with other agencies is clear. In a summary description of ADIT plans we find: “Data will also be accumulated for each document read and later analyzed for reporting of specific individual’s movement patterns . . . Longer range activities of ADIT will mean interaction with other automated systems of INS, Customs, State Department and likely Social Security, Labor and other agencies.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This kind of centralized government pooling is exactly the kind of move that Congress killed in 1967 with respect to American citizens. The new push by the executive branch of the State for this kind of “Big Brother” ability to monitor individuals’ “movement patterns” must not be seen as simply one more step in inevitable bureaucratic encroachment on privacy, but rather as a sign of the increasing inability of the State to control the working class, both in production and in reproduction.

In England microelectronics and computerization of record keeping and information processing has also been mobilized in recent years to facilitate State control of political dissidents. For example, in Cheltenham, the Government Communication Headquarters uses automatic tracking of wave bands, indexing and coding of the audio messages and selective recording to monitor international phone, telegraph and telex traffic. Domestic phone tapping is carried out through the Post Office using microelectronics to monitor over 1,000 lines at the same time “with the results going back to military and civil intelligence groups such as MI5 and the Special Branch.”

Among the other electronic surveillance programs in England is that at Scotland Yard where minicomputers are being employed to computerize the files of the Immigration unit and pool them with those of the Special Branch, the Drug Squad, the criminal intelligence unit and the CII. Although for the moment the other units have limited access to this system, the Special Branch can draw on the entire database. This system went on stream in May 1979 and is certainly being used to help control the increasingly stringent British immigration laws.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In France on December 25, 1979 the Minister of the Interior announced the creation of new computerized national identification cards and the opening of the first card production facility.[[9]](#footnote-9) As in the case of the American system, but employed for all citizens, these cards are electronically encoded, and include such data as name, signature, photograph, address, birth date, etc. The reasons for the creation of this system are also similar. Since the blockage of legal immigration in France (see the Moulier and Ewenzyck article in this issue) there has been a rapid rise in the numbers of illegal immigrants and widespread forgery of identification papers. As in the United States it is unlikely that the French State wants to actually curtain this movement of necessary labor, it rather seeks greater control and more elaborate means of intimidation against the immigrant population. In France where everyone is required to carry the cards, immigrants and citizens are to be differentiated by the color of the cards – a move ridiculed by some in France as being designed to help illiterate policemen sort out suspects! One way in which French security has gone beyond American methods is in the shipment of the cards to recipients. Whereas in the United States the cards are simply sent through the mails in plain envelops, the French are reportedly planning on sending theirs to distribution centers in packages that will blow up if tampered with! The French are apparently so proud of this new system of control that they have already tried to sell it to the Saudi Arabian government to help control their rising number of immigrant laborers as well as internal discontent. (French security forces were reportedly used as advisors by the Saudis in the retaking of the Mecca Mosque seized by dissidents.)

Opposition to these State projects have varied in each country. In the U.S. some have called for boycotting or even publically melting the immigration cards in a gesture reminiscent of the burning of draft cards during the War on Vietnam (See Flores’ article in this issue.) The generalization of the method to the citizenry as a whole is still being resisted at the Congressional level by groups such as the ACLU and the National Lawyers’ Guild. In France, the Collectif d’Information et d’Initiatives sur L’Informatique has called for boycotting the new cards.[[10]](#footnote-10) Others have discussed such methods as the appropriation of the identity of the dead or seeking complicity with workers producing the cards. The French and other Europeans have had a longer experience resisting such State controls than Americans because the practice of national identification papers goes back decades. That historical experience includes the period in which the Nazi occupation forces appropriated existing records for purposes of singling out Jews, communists and others for deportation and often execution. The experience of that period also includes the methods used to resist such repression: such as attacks by resistance fighters against population record offices and the precision bombing raids carried out by the RAF which destroyed 250,000 personal records at the *Kunstzaal Kleykamp* Art Gallery in the Hague in April 1944.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Finally, it seems likely that many, on both sides of the Atlantic, will begin to examine the long-standing experience of resistance in the Soviet Union and South Africa where governments have had systems of internal passports and pass books, respectively, aimed at controlling the residences, internal movement and employment of their citizens.

1. This is, of course, also true for all the institutions of capitalism, in the private sector as well as the State, from schools through private corporations. Schools isolate or expel uncontrollable students and employers try to identify and fire militant workers, whether citizens or immigrants. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “The Office of Planning and Evaluation,” *I & N Reporter*, 23(3), Winter 1974-75, pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. William M. Kemper, “The ICF and the Newest Resident Alien Card,” *INS Reporter*, Fall 1979, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The class dialectic of State efforts to improve ID security, workers figuring out how to overcome the improvements, and the State creation of even newer security methods, reminds one of much older dialectics, e.g., that of locks and lock-pickers and that of State mints and counterfeiters. See the General Accounting Office report critiquing INS efforts in using ID cards to control undocumented workers: GAO, *New Alien Identification System – Little help in Stopping Illegal Aliens*, Report by the Comptroller General, Washington D.C., May 30, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. COINTELPRO = acronym for counterintelligence program. For a discussion and review of these reports and hearings that does pose some of the basic questions see James Jule, et. al., *The Politics of Privacy*, New York: Mentor Books, 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Baird and E. McCaughan, *Beyond the Border: Mexico and the U.S. Today*, North American Congress on Latin America, New York, 1979, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. INS, “Alien Identification, Documentation and Telecommunication (ADIT)”, Washington D.C., September 20, 1980 (mimeo). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The above information from Conference of Socialist Economists Microelectronics Group, *Microelectronics: Capitalist Technology and the Working Class*, London: CSE Books, 1980, pp. 113-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. French information from X2000, “Danger! Carte d’Identité Informatisée,” *Gueule*, No. 1/22, November 1980, pp. 13-15 and X2000, “Liberté, Egalite, Identité”, *Gueule*, No. 2/6, December 1980, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Isabelle Kant, “Boycott,” Gueule, No. 2/6, December 1980, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. F. W. Mondius, *Emerging Data Protection in Europe*, New York: American Elsevier, 1975, p. 18 (fn). See also “de Havilland Mosquito operational history” entry in Wikipedia. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)