Monitoring Americans by I.D. and Federal Database

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Two of the principal mechanisms by which the rulers of 20th century police states maintained their control over their people were the file and the internal passport. These governments kept a cumulative file (called the dangan in Communist China) on every individual's performance and attitudes from school years through adult employment. Citizens carried an internal passport or "papers" that had to be presented to the authorities for permission to travel within the country, to take up residence in another city, or to apply for a new job.

These two methods of personal surveillance -- efficient watchdogs that prevented any emergence of freedom -- required an army of bureaucrats fortified by a Gestapo, a Stasi or a KGB, plus the ability to commandeer an unlimited supply of paper and file folders. Technology has now made the task of building personal files on every citizen, and tracking our actions and movements, just as easy as logging onto the Internet.

Unknown to most Americans, coordinated plans are well underway to give the Federal Government the power to input personal information on all Americans onto a government database. The computer will record our school, business, medical, financial, and personal activities, and track our movements as we travel about the United States.

These plans were authorized by the so-called conservative Congress and are eagerly implemented and expanded by the Clinton Administration liberals. They plan to force all Americans to carry an I.D. card linked to a federal database, without which we will not be able to drive a car, get a job, board a plane, enter a hospital emergency room or school, have a bank account, cash a check, buy a gun, or have access to government benefits such as Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid.

Putting all that information on a government database means the end of privacy as we know it. Daily actions we all take for granted will henceforth be recorded, monitored, tracked, and contingent on showing The Card.

Legislative authority for these dramatic changes in what we endearingly call the American way of life was buried in two bills passed by Republicans and signed by Bill Clinton in 1996: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity

Reform Act (known as welfare reform).

The illegal immigration law prohibits the use of state driver's licenses after Oct. 1, 2000 unless they contain Social Security numbers as the unique numeric identifier "that can be read visually or by electronic means." (Section 656(b)) The act requires all driver's licenses to conform to regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation, which published its proposed regulations on June 17. (Federal Register, vol. 63, no. 116, pp. 33219-33225)

The illegal immigration law orders the Attorney General to conduct pilot programs in at least 5 states where the state driver's license includes a "machine-readable" Social Security number. (Section 403(c)) The law also orders the development of a Social Security card that "shall employ technologies that provide security features, such as magnetic stripes, holograms, and integrated circuits." (Section 657(a)) A "smart card" with these technologies can contain a digitized fingerprint, retina scan, voice print, DNA print, or other biometric identifier, and will leave an electronic trail every time it is used.

The law orders "consultation" with the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators. AAMVA, a pseudo-private, quasi-government organization, has long urged using driver's licenses, with Social Security numbers and digital fingerprinting, as a de facto national I.D. card that would enable the government to track everyone's movements throughout North America.

The welfare reform law requires that, in order to receive federal welfare funds, states must collect Social Security numbers from applicants for any professional license, occupational license, or "commercial driver's license." (Section 317) The Balanced Budget Act of 1997, in the guise of making "technical corrections" to welfare reform, deleted the word "commercial," thereby applying the requirement to all driver's license applicants, and even added "recreational" (hunting and fishing) licenses.

Another provision of welfare reform requires employers, since Oct. 1, 1997, to transmit the name, address, and Social Security number of every new worker to a Directory of New Hires. This is supposed to help track deadbeat dads, but the information is collected from all new workers (regardless of whether they are deadbeats or even dads) and maintained for 24 months.

The "instant background check" established by the 1993 Brady Act takes effect nationwide on Dec. 1. Under this system, prospective handgun buyers must be screened against a database of convicted criminals. But the new national I.D. card will make it easy to keep a database of gun buyers, too, which some states reportedly are doing already. Although the Brady Act forbids federal agencies from using the instant check system to register firearms, the FBI says it plans to keep records of prospective handgun

buyers for 18 months.

A few states have already quietly legislated acquiescence in the new federal requirements, but fingerprinting and smart cards have stirred an uproar in others. Most Americans have never been fingerprinted and look upon it as something that happens only to criminal suspects.

The New Jersey Legislature recently abandoned efforts to pass Governor Christine Whitman's high-tech driver's license called "Access New Jersey." It was designed to contain a computer chip with 100 electronic keys capable of storing large amounts of personal data. It would leave an electronic trail each time the card was used to cash a check, make a purchase, pay a toll, check out a book, get insurance authorization to see a doctor, or used for identification, all identified by Social Security number. These new federal laws effectively overturn the 1974 Privacy Act, which declared that "It shall be unlawful for any Federal, State or local government agency to deny to any individual any right, benefit, or privilege provided by law because of such individual's refusal to disclose his Social Security account number." On the pretext of catching illegal aliens, welfare cheats, deadbeat dads, and criminals, these laws will subject law-abiding Americans to the police-state apparatus of national I.D. cards linked to coordinated government databases.

If you don't want the Federal Government to convert driver's licenses into a national I.D. card that will allow Big Brother to build a computerized dossier on every American, rush your comments by August 3 to Docket Management, Room PL-401, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Nassif Building, 400 Seventh St., S.W. , Washington, D.C. 20590 marked Docket No. NHTSA-98-3945.