"There are realms—in a physical and in a psychological sense—in which an individual may . . . demand to be let alone."

Computer Privacy

We are statistically surrounded by computers.

The computers are inaccurate as well as impersonal — one insurance company found its files contained hundreds of thousands of errors, an average of one for every policy.

A third of Canadians believe computers threaten their personal privacy. But no one can say with certainty just how we can prevent these impersonal, inaccurate machines from undermining our well being.

Canada's Department of Communications and its Department of Justice have issued a 184-page report entitled *Privacy & Computers.* It is based on the work of a Task Force which interviewed experts, solicited briefs and sent questionnaires to 2516 Canadian organizations — financial institutions, insurance companies, public utilities, merchants, credit card companies, charities, private investigators and government agencies involved in health, education, taxation, law enforcement and regulation. Half of them (1268) replied.

The report notes that "information of all types has been used and is being used for planning, research and operations by government, business, universities and virtually all sectors of society."

It recognizes a basic dilemma: "There are great benefits to be derived . . . from computers (in) almost every activity from measuring the extent of pollution to administering a welfare program", but there is also realistic "concern about (their) potential use for invasions of personal privacy."

The Task Force posed several questions:

• Under what conditions should an individual have access to files containing information about him?

• What right should an individual have to delete, amend or add to such files?
• To what extent should personal data be protected against intrusion or accidental disclosure?
• What right should an individual have regarding dissemination of information that is in his files?
• Should he be informed about such dissemination and advised of all its uses?
• Should individuals be told about information stored in foreign databanks?

The first two accept databanks as legitimate but deny their right to be inaccurate. The survey showed that "there are more inaccuracies . . . than is generally realized. Seventy five percent of the respondents reported discovering mistakes." During the conversion of one American police agency's filing system, errors were found in nearly one-third of the individual folders.

The report notes that inaccuracy is caused by the slipshod way organizations gather data: "Those who actually collect information are often among the lowest-paid, least-trained members of their particular organization."

Three Canadian Provinces, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, give citizens the right to see information on themselves and to insist that their own views on the data be included in the bank. But people do not know of the existence of some databanks which carry information about them; nor do they know when or how often the files on them are updated or changed.

The problem of inaccuracy adds to the problem of dissemination. A single inaccuracy can be multiplied a thousandfold and live at least as long as the person whom it misrepresents. As the