

You can beat the computer system

by Mike Walker

If you sign on to your computer account one day and find your data gone, perhaps some adventurous student has found a way in and had some fun at your expense.

Security problems have receded from the foreground since the 1977 arrest of two U of A students, Bruce Christensen and Michael McLaughlin, for the theft of telecommunications services from the U of A. But security is an ongoing problem for the U of A's computer system, according to Computing Services director Dale Bent.

A "handful" of users, both students and staff, tamper with the system every year, he says. This year, a number of students have been blacklisted by Computing Services for tampering with inner workings of the computer system.

Their adventurousness can shut the system down, erase valuable material in someone's else's account, or gain them access to other (often business) users' private information.

The computer has electronic "lock and key" mechanisms to prevent users from tampering with the MTS (Michigan Terminal System) operating system, which is the brain of the computer and controls all its activities.

But, although the U of A does not teach students how MTS works, some manage to figure it out on their own or with the help of friends.

"Any computer system is going to have technical flaws in it," Bent says. "There are people around the university who have

become very knowledgeable. Some of them use that knowledge to do things with the system that they aren't meant to do."

And someone tinkering with the system can probably get away with it for quite awhile, Bent says.

"We just don't have the staff — it's completely impractical to

monitor every user," Bent says. In addition, a clever user can disguise his actions, making it tough to trace him.

The university usually punishes the offenders it does catch, by taking away their computer accounts, or by prosecution under the U of A's Code of Student Behavior.

The U of A Associate vice-president finance Willard Allen says, though, that few computer offenders are brought before the disciplinary panel that enforces the Student Code.

"The first step, rather than taking a sledgehammer to them, is to take their account away," he says.

But students can borrow someone else's account and password (the key that allows the user access to the account) if they have willing accomplices. Or they can surreptitiously discover someone else's password, and use that account without the owner's knowledge.

A student taken before the disciplinary panel can face a number of charges, from disrupting work to using university property in an unauthorized manner. Punishments range from a simple reprimand through to a fine of up to \$200, to suspension or expulsion from the university.

Bent, though, is sure the problem is more one of education than criminality.

"There are nine to ten thousand users (faculty, staff and students)," he says. "Some of these people are going to be crazy, some of them are out and out criminals, and some are just misguided."

The last group is the largest of the three, he says.

"People don't understand in a lot of cases what the ramifications of their actions are... It's just the same as putting a tap into a telephone."

But that's what the Christensen - McLaughlin case rested on, and last year McLaughlin won an appeal at the Supreme Court of Canada, and had his earlier conviction on theft of telecommunications services overturned.

"The criminal code was not designed in the age of computers," Bent says, adding that neither Christensen nor McLaughlin denied their actions; their cases rest on a point of law. Bent says Criminal Code amendments are on the way by the fall.



photo Bill Ingles

"Kirk to Enterprise... Beam me up."

Everyone to blame for energy impasse

by Jim McElgunn

The Alberta government's claims to absolute ownership rights over natural resources are "excessive, unwarranted, and inconsistent with the province's membership in a federal system."

But, said political science professor Larry Pratt at a Canadian studies-sponsored forum Wednesday, the Canadian government's National Energy Program (NEP) is inefficient and discriminatory against Western oil and gas producers.

"The blame for the impasse in energy negotiations does not rest entirely on the shoulders of one party," said Pratt.

Yet most debate in Alberta has focussed on the federal energy policy, ignoring the faults in the Alberta government's position, said Pratt. He said Premier Lougheed is using the energy dispute to create a myth of a besieged Alberta nation.

"The recurring images (in Lougheed's recent speeches) are of an alien government - the 'Ottawa government' - threatening to strip off our topsoil, to invade our living rooms," said Pratt. "These are the trappings of a national myth in the making."

"Alberta is trying to buy its way into parallel institutions," said Pratt, "to replace province-building with nation-building." He said Lougheed's speeches now talk of Alberta's grievances, not Western Canada's.

Lougheed is using emotional appeals like this, said Pratt, to consolidate support for his view that Albertans, as natural resource owners, have the absolute right to decide how much of a share other Canadians should get of revenue from these resources. In this view, other Canadians have no legitimate legal claim to a share of resource revenues.

Pratt said this does not mean Alberta is unwilling to share; what Alberta wants is the power to decide how much and with whom.

Through this extreme position, Alberta "inflicted" upon itself the National Energy Program Pratt said. But what is seldom realized is that "the NEP is only a bargaining position, albeit a drastic one," said Pratt. "I think we're a few months from concessions."

The federal government, said Pratt, believes it must have more control over the nature and rate of development in the critical energy sector. It therefore prefers energy development in the federally-controlled Canada Lands (especially off Newfoundland and in the Beaufort Sea) to provincially-controlled development in Western Canada.

Another federal worry is that sharply-rising oil and gas prices have "created havoc with the equalization scheme," said Pratt. He said disagreements over revenue-sharing, not price levels, are the real source of conflict.

"Every time oil prices have jumped, the provincial revenue share has grown, so the federal government has reacted in a very inefficient way by holding down the price," he said.

Pratt said even under the NEP Alberta will pile up \$25 to \$30 billion in the Heritage Trust Fund by 1990; something must be done to correct this extreme revenue imbalance.

"I do accept the argument that there is a right on behalf of all Canadians to share in the benefits from all resources," said Pratt, including revenues from Ontario and Quebec hydroelectric power.

He proposed the federal government guarantee provincial rights to manage resources in return for the creation of a provincially-financed, federally-run resource revenue equalization program.

But why would Alberta participate in such a scheme? Pratt said it would provide firmer guarantees of resource ownership rights, and also reduce the problems from excessive migration into Alberta.

HAIRPORT

Hairstyling for Men and Women

3 Locations to Serve You

7230 Argyll Road
Regency Hotel
469-2056

10632 - 82 Avenue
West of Renford Inn
439-4140

50 Brentwood Blvd.
Brentwood Professional Building
Sherwood Park
464-7282

Where we're smilin' and stylin'