

MIPS to the People

Richard Larratt, M.A., P.Eng.

R.R. #1 Demorestville, Ont.

Canada, K0K 1W0

Abstract

Many writers suggest that computers enable the mega-state and "1984"-like isolate and over-power the individual. Such writers cite examples of citizen harassment by well-funded well-equipped bureaucracy. These fears were played to in a recent Revenue Taxation Film: "Excuse Me, There is a Computer Watching You". This writer presents the counter-point and counter-reaction.

MIPS aux gens!

Nombre d'auteurs suggèrent que les ordinateurs favorisent l'état tout puissant et, ainsi que le roman «1984» le décrit, lui permettent d'isoler et d'écraser l'individu. On parle ainsi du harcèlement du citoyen par la bureaucratie bien pourvue en fonds et matériel. Ces craintes ont été renforcées par un récent film de Revenu Canada: «Excusez-moi, un ordinateur vous demande». Cet auteur présente le contrepoint et les contre-réactions dans ce domaine.

Introduction

Perhaps because this is "1984" we are more aware this year, than any year after '48 of just how far computers have tipped power in the direction of the large organization ... be that organization one of state or corporation.

Other writers have noted that Orwell did not really mention computers "as such" in his book. Yet it does not take much imagination to see how willing and useful computers, in particular, the database sort we deal with everyday as research librarians, might be in providing an "evil" state with the necessary information stuff for "Orwellian" control.

Since the time and input of Einstein and Turing we have seen the world transformed by nuclear bombs and computers. I will place the bombs in the "space" as opposed to the "information" domain but even after twenty years in the computer and information business I am not that comfortable with this distinction between "space" and "information" ... yet who would not admit that the violence of Hiroshima was "spacial" whereas the assault on my privacy by computers is an assault of my information domain. For this writer's eye these words "limp"; I trust the reader "knowing what I mean".

In the Beginning

At the onset of the nuclear age, the U.S.A. by trial and persecution of it's scientists, see Oppenheimer, did what it could to delay the spread of nuclear weapons. When I was working on the war gaming computers inside the Defense Research Board more than twenty years ago, the Nuclear Club was still less than ten nations. How many is it today? Has the possession of Nuclear Weapons enabled the possessor to either stop or start a revolution or even to have it's own way. How about ten thousand AK-47's and the teenagers to carry them?

At the onset of the computer age, the few computers not in military use were either at universities or entombed in the tax department or a life insurance company. Throughout the sixties it remained so. Sure, computers became cheaper and found more and more application, but it was not until the advent of the personal computer that the possibility for the computer being an instrument of freedom not oppression became apparent.

Big Computers, Big Organizations

In part because this is "1984" and in part because large organizations have exceeded the boundaries of human decency in their mis-use of computers, average folks are increasingly aware of how computers are being used [mis-used] by large organizations in their pursuit of the individual, whether to sell, control or tax.

"Pardon me, there's a computer asking for you", is not a joke, it is the title of a [withdrawn] film Revenue Canada commissioned to frighten people. To the extent that fact and fear merge it might be taken as a sign of how things are proceeding in the bureacratic bowels of Ottawa.

Conversely

What about the converse? If the big guys can have their databases, their telecommunication grids, their LANS (local area networks) what is the chance/hope for the isolated individual. Ans. If over 40, if computer illiterate ... only political or luddite. If under 40, if computer literate ... this writer (43 but computer literate) says "out-compute/out-network them" much as the american revolutionaries "outgunned" the British in their war of independence (the old kentucky rifle versus the british musket story).

The article concludes by brief capitulation of the three options or reactions: political, luddite and "out-gunning".

Political

Freedom of Information. It is simply a national scandal, that the federal government has so well blocked information access in Canada (define "cabinet document") so bias affairs in favour of itself and it's fellow-traveller big business ... that on the occasion of a researcher in the P.M.O.'s looking for dirt on Mulroney ... researcher went to Washington: for Canadian information.

Since Canada makes no claim to being an "imperial" power, since there are no "national" security issues of more import than the fall of the Liberal Party, since that danger to the Nation is the greater of the evils, the other being that some laundry gets washed in the public eye let us proceed towards disclosure. Let's support those politicians that move in our cautious Canadian way to opening up the files. Having seen some of these SECRET things I'd think the greatest danger they pose is that some of population may die laughing.

Luddite

"Office Automation", "Factory of the Future" ... who other than a "Luddite" can oppose the changes these phrases encompass? That's right ... only a "Luddite" ... and they'll be no more successful than were the originals. If the Luddites win ... its GOSUB THIRD WORLD a place most Canadians go only with an Air Canada RETURN.

On the other hand, there is money and opportunity for a few with the will and wit to go against the stream. I have a hand-made leather case for my RADIO SHACK Model 100 (for the Luddites reading the article, that's a lap computer and I paid \$200 for the case and \$700 for the computer).

Out-compute; Out-network

I've run some big many-MIPS computers in my day and I'll opine that in the information wars now in their openings they're a lot like the nuclear bombs in the big-power arsenals i.e. at the "street" level "who cares" ... in Central America neither Russia or America can "use" those N. weapons ... everyday killing is done with American M-16's, Russian AK-47's, knives, clubs, et cetera.

It is important to note that most of the 3 million plus personal computers being sold this year in N.A. are going into big not small business.

Writer, Guru James Martin says it all if you care to pay the \$1000 or more for attendance at one of his seminars ... otherwise read his Information Manifesto and realize that what he is talking (big computers, big database systems) ... don't work: yet. Of course they have to and that's why corporate America keeps going to his Seminars. Come to mind. There's a better answer aborning in the new computer literacy.