

Thames Valley police to start on £4.5m expansion of their computerised intelligence system, says Duncan Campbell

Leaky computer to store more records

THAMES VALLEY POLICE have received the go-ahead for the first £1 million of a £4.5 million plan which could increase 100-fold the capacity of their computerised intelligence system. It is already the biggest in any British force. Recently, a *New Statesman* investigation showed that personal information from Thames Valley's existing system was being illegally 'leaked' to commercial purchasers.

Approval to spend at least £1m on extra computer-power was given in September, at a secret meeting of the Thames Valley Police Authority. Discussion of the need for safeguards — there are already computerised files on 170,000 residents of the area — was ruled out by the chairman, a local magistrate. This was three weeks before the *NS* story which showed that items from computer files could be bought through Thames Valley policemen for as little as £4.

A four-volume Computer Feasibility Study presented to the Authority, and shown to the NS, outlines further expansion which would take expenditure to £4.5 million by 1986. (The Study is not secret, and councillors on the Authority have been legally advised that they may show it to the press.)

No evidence has been offered that Thames Valley's increasingly massive programme of computerised surveillance produces any anti-criminal benefit to compensate for its intrusion into citizens' privacy. In the Study, the police authority was effectively offered no option except to endorse the programme proposed, or go back to paper and pencil methods.

The Study's financial information, however, was worthless in terms of comparing options. Almost every comparison added recurrent, annual costs directly to capital costs.

THAMES VALLEY's present computer was set up in 1977 at the expense of the Home Office, which has conducted a 10-year experiment in computerising police-forces' local intelligence files. Local Intelligence Officers record and cross-reference information about everyone who comes into contact with the police, and in Thames Valley 37 of them work full-time entering this material into the computer. The files include details about victims of crimes, as well as rumours about individuals' friends, habits and personal characteristics.

Computerised facilities enable dossiers on people and their homes to multiply astonishingly fast. At present, about 120 new names and 120 new addresses go onto the computer every working day. There are no records of any being taken off. Ten per cent of the local population are on file, and by 1986

this will amount to some 286,000 people, or 15 per cent. This would be likely to include the majority of adult working-class males.

The police hope to buy their current computer from the Home Office at a knockdown price, and then buy new, more powerful equipment for installation during 1983. These recommendations were made and accepted long before the Home Office began working on the Evaluation Report which is supposed to test the anti-criminal usefulness of the system.

Thames Valley are tight-lipped about their computer, but other police sources have long been sceptical about the value of its advertised role. And even the

Michael Coren looks beneath a mushroom cloud

'Dangerous' right-wing sect cashes in on CND image

AN EXTREMIST religious cult is attempting to exploit the anti-nuclear movement to persuade people to read its highly right-wing political views. In an advert costing approximately £2,000 which appeared in the *Guardian* on 17 November, the magazine *Plain Truth* was advertised featuring a mushroom cloud with the words: '... but we CAN escape'.

According to the *Guardian* advertising department: 'We thought it was something to do with the CND movement, it looked OK.' In fact *Plain Truth* is the monthly publication of the Worldwide Church of God, described by the broadly based Christian group Deo Gloria Outreach, which monitors cults, as 'extremely dangerous' and playing on people's weaknesses and fears.

The views actually expressed in the magazine are certainly extreme. In the September 1981 issue the Chilean dictatorship was described as 'a bright spot in a world of increasing turmoil'. An article in May said: 'For years, United States officials have been busily engaged in explaining away the tactics of Cuba and other radical leftist movements undermining legitimate, often rightist, governments in the region. Now at last Washington under the new Reagan administration shows sign of opening its eyes. It is beholding the real dangers to Free World interests. ...'

Although justification of fascist regimes is not new, the manner of

Study suggests that although huge quantities of information are being put into the computer, very little is coming out. Only about 10 crimes a day are being checked on, compared to about 100 being entered.

The new computer will have 100, or possibly 160 times as much disc-storage capacity as the present model, and it is clear that soon after installation it will need to be doubled in power to cope with its hugely expanded memory. Soon after, according to the Study, Thames Valley will be asking for another computer network to be attached, so that other information and jobs may be fed in. Then, in 1988, they will need another, separate computer for 'command and control' of police units.

When the project was first announced, the *Police Review* wrote:

Much of the information is personal details (and) it may seem a trespass on the freedom of the individual. . . . There is a serious danger that once a person is in the system he may remain there until he reaches

the age of criminal ineffectiveness.

In 1978 the same paper disclosed that gossipy allegations about a man's supposed fancy for small boys had gone onto the computer. This year, officers from an outside force were called in when an Oxford man got the sack after his employer received information derived from police files. The man had been caught — though not prosecuted — while lovemaking in a marked car with a woman not his wife.

CAREFUL READING of the Study shows that the 'saving . . . on a return to manual systems' would be at least £150,000 a year, achieved by redeploying the 33 computer programmers and the 37 Local Intelligence Officers who are not building up the data-bank in preparation for the proposed new equipment. Before the experiment becomes a pattern for the country as a whole, there might be a case for some even more detailed cost-benefit investigations. □

...but we **CAN** escape!

Human Survival is at stake!

What's next?
Even small, unstable
nations now have
nuclear power.

FOR A YEAR'S ISSUES FREE SEND COUPON NOW.

PLAIN TRUTH

PLAIN TRUTH

From this week's *Guardian* advertisement

distribution of *Plain Truth* is. Over 100,000 copies are given out each month, many at busy newsagents. But a large number are placed on racks in some 25 London Transport underground stations as 'something to read on the way home'. London Transport were surprised to be informed of what the magazines actually contained but refused to take any action: 'Unless the magazines are pornographic, obscene or offensive to the majority of passengers we can do nothing.'

The Worldwide Church of God do not actually mention their name in *Plain Truth* until the small print but their beliefs are well known in the United States where they receive constant attacks from critics and ex-members. Their founder, Herbert Armstrong, is considered to be a messianic figure whose word is law. He has been accused of using the church's annual £50 million budget for his own personal use, indulging in trips around the

world and extravagant meals with his private entourage.

More worrying to everyone else is the strongly racist line which the church pursues. They consider the 'Saxon race' to be superior, they ban mixed marriages and support racial segregation.

Ambassador Press, the name used by the publishers of *Plain Truth*, were reluctant to answer any questions but did eventually make this statement: 'I do not know what this has got to do with you, it smacks of socialist Britain. What we do with our magazine is our business, we have private arrangements and that is all I am going to say.'

Deo Gloria Outreach is extremely worried at the progress of the organisation: 'The rate at which they are recruiting is frightening. People innocently pick up this glossy magazine and end up as members of something they do not understand: an attractive cover but very unattractive contents.' □