

# Michigan's Computer Spy Network

"Private club" tackles intelligence

Fifth Estate Collective

1977

Recent articles in the *Michigan State News* and in *Penthouse Magazine* have exposed the existence of a nationwide "surveillance clearinghouse" which exchanges names and files collected by the intelligence units of over 200 member police agencies.

## Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit

This clearinghouse is the Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit (LEIU). It was created in 1956 in California as a voluntary "club" of police intelligence agencies in seven Western states. Over the years it has grown to include over 200 agencies-in Michigan its affiliates include the Department of the Attorney General, the Detroit, Flint and Warren Police Departments and the State Police.

Two features distinguish the LEIU. One is that over the years it became a kind of alternative to the FBI, in that the member agencies did not have to go through the FBI's red tape in order to pass names and information among themselves.

A second feature is that the LEIU sees itself as a "private club" of policemen. The meetings of LEIU have the character of professional association conventions, where police intelligence experts get to know each other and discuss their common problems.

Another aspect of this "private club" character is that the LEIU is not subject to the "freedom of information" laws. It cannot be forced to divulge its activity to the public.

## Interstate Organized Crime Index

One of the systems used by the LEIU is the Interstate Organized Crime Index (IOCI). This is a government information system. According to George O'Toole's *Penthouse* article, the IOCI is a "computerized file system developed and operated by the LEIU under a \$1.3 million grant from the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The IOCI system is an international network of computer terminals linked by telecommunication lines to a central computer run by the Michigan State Police in East Lansing, Michigan."

According to O'Toole, the LEEA cut off funds to the IOCI system last year.

Regarding the funds cut-off, O'Toole quotes the national chairman of LEIU: "The Justice Department put it on ice... They decided not to fund anything that uses the word intelligence until the hue and cry dies down. But they just recently called us up and said the pressure is off... So we may be back on again in a few months."

How do these computer systems work? A similar example of this type of information sorting-house is the "Hydra" computer system which was part of the CIA domestic surveillance program called "OPERATION CHAOS."

“As the material flowed into CHAOS from stations, domestic CIA components, and the FBI, it was analyzed, indexed, and filed. Every name of individuals and organizations was extracted and referenced in the central CHAOS computer system known as HYDRA. This system served as the reference index to all of the office’s holdings.

“If a report on one individual referred to others, their names would be indexed also. Any information which was received about an individual for whom CHAOS maintained a file went into his file: There was no winnowing of the material before its entry into the permanent record system of CHAOS.

“Once the information was indexed and filed, the HYDRA computer system permitted its prompt retrieval. By checking a name in HYDRA, one could find all the cables, memoranda or other documents referring to that individual, whether he was the subject of the material or merely mentioned in passing. It should be emphasized, however, that CHAOS did not maintain a separate file on every American name that was indexed in the computer.”

“In many instances the computer would refer a searcher to the file of another person, or some other CHAOS holdings in which the subject individual was mentioned, but there was not enough material to open a file. Thus, there were an estimated 300,000 Americans indexed in HYDRA, but only an estimated 7,500 Americans for whom actual files were maintained” (from *Supplementary Detailed Staff Report on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Vol. 3, p. 695).

## Who Gets Into the Files

Regarding the LEIU program, the key question is what kind of individuals get enrolled into the files and into the computers of IOCI. Are they interested only in the Mafia and other organized crime or do they also keep tabs on troublesome individuals not engaged in criminal activity—i.e., political dissidents?

The charter of the LEIU states that its purpose is the “gathering, recording, investigation, and exchange of confidential information not available through regular police channels on individuals and or organizations involved in, but not necessarily limited to,” organized crime.

Given the LEIU’s secret nature, it is impossible to answer this question one way or the other. Several of the member police agencies of the LEIU have been caught in the act of political surveillance, however. These include the police departments of Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, Baltimore, New York City, Cleveland, and of course, Detroit.

In the case of Detroit’s 100,000 political dossiers, how are we to know that, even if they are ordered destroyed, they have not already been entered in the information exchange process of LEIU and IOCI? If so, they could be retrieved.

Beyond the question of the 100,000 Detroit files themselves looms the larger issue of the actual and potential function of the police intelligence networks. What do they really do?

As O’Toole notes, “Perhaps it doesn’t spy on ordinary citizens and perhaps it directs its attention solely toward organized crime, but all that could change with a single meeting of the LEIU’s executive board. There is no statutory charter that defines the limits of the LEIU’s operations, and so it can be and do whatever its members decide it ought to be and do.”

from Police Spying in Michigan Newsletter



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Fifth Estate #281, March, 1977

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