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## Computer Criminals

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### EDITORIAL

#### COMPUTER CRIMINALS

For decades there has been a conspicuous lag in the ability of law enforcement machinery to adjust itself to changing methods of crime and criminals. The statistics of crime grow much faster than the record of crime prevention, detection, and correction.

The versatile individual with propensities for dishonesty quickly takes advantage of new opportunities which arise in our age of affluence, but the record clearly reflects that the bureaucratic processes of criminal justice are difficult to move against such changes before they assume massive and disturbing proportions. Our legislative bodies particularly lack the alertness and mobility to perceive new crime threats and define measures and authority to suppress them, until long after they have taken firm roots and victimized large numbers of people.

Police circles have just recently started to deliberate extensively on the potentials for greater use of science and technology against crime and its causes.

But the criminal offender has long recognized, and taken advantage of, the vulnerabilities of advancing technology.

Increasingly, government and business are adopting computers for greater speed and efficiency. As would be expected, not all of the specially-trained computer programmers are honest. A need already appears to exist for special legislation and law enforcement skills to deal with the growing problem of "computer criminals."

For example, the following is reported by Bill Surface in his article "What Computers Cannot Do", which appeared in the *Saturday Review* of July 13, 1968:

"An even more disquieting aspect of the dependence on computers is that these machines are

printing less and less information onto sheets that can be audited by humans. In fact, computers are often sold as being so 'honest' that they eliminate the expense of auditors. While computers *are* as honest as cash registers, they do what skilled programmers tell them to do and, unfortunately, are controlled by individuals such as the quiet man formerly in charge of computer cards at a brokerage firm in New York. He went to the office on weekends and programmed the computers to gradually transfer \$250,000 from the corporation's account to accounts for him and his wife by showing that it had been used to purchase stock. Not only did the scheme go undetected for eight years, but the company's management was so impressed with the computer programmer that they promoted him to vice president before accidentally discovering the mythical account. Yet, after the programmer confessed, nobody could determine how he manipulated the computer to steal the \$250,000. He had to tell the auditors.

"Stock firms, banks, and wholesalers are repeatedly embezzled by two methods that computer operators find ridiculously simple: (1) have computers deduct a few, seemingly inconsequential cents in excess service charges, dividends, interest, or income taxes from thousands of customers' accounts and channel the total to themselves; (2) manipulate computers to systematically report portions of an inventory as normal 'breakage' or 'loss' and then divert the merchandise to accomplices. In both schemes, the embezzlers eventually remove the rigged cards, insert the genuine tape onto the computer, and conceal who did it and how (and sometimes if) the embezzlement transpired."

With the foregoing in mind, a news story which appeared in the *New York Times*, May 18, 1968, takes on special significance and raises interesting questions about the need for keener judgment in job-training programs for prisoners. According to the news report, on May 17th of

this year Sing Sing Prison at Ossining, New York, graduated twelve inmates from a computer programming course presented within the walls. Two of them were released on parole to take programming jobs.

Unquestionably, intelligent prison administration must prepare prisoners for maximum use of their aptitudes in legitimate, self-supporting work upon their release. But the useful goals of

criminal corrections can ultimately be defeated if those who have already evidenced propensity for crime are trained for jobs in which the temptations and opportunities for further crime exist to a substantial degree.

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