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Secret Service Files

To the Editor:

It has been reported that Secret Service computers file the names of persons who participate in "anti-U. S. Government demonstrations," who make statements about officials which are "irrational" or "embarrassing"—all of these categories defined by the Secret Service itself.

Such tactics are not simply "alien" to our form of government, as Senator Sam Ervin Jr. suggests (news story, June 28); they are surely destructive of the spirit upon which our form of government rests.

The "collective mind" of the Secret Service is understandably compulsive about security and efficiency. But it is precisely for this reason that it should not be allowed to pursue its own priorities and momentum to their logical extreme. In failing to understand the elementary psychological insight that the security of this Government rests as much on freedom from fear of spirited debate as it does upon efficiency and physical control of suspected people's movements, the security groups have warped the complex and fragile fabric of emotions which nurtures citizen trust and courage, and thereby strengthens democratic debate.

It behooves public figures of authority—and those who are not afraid of being listed in the growing security files—to reassert their control over that one-dimensional misunderstanding of security which is the Secret Service and similar agencies. We ought to support Senator Ervin and pressure our own representatives to continue to disclose and criticize the new security measures.

JAMES A. SLEEPER  
Longmeadow, Mass.  
June 29, 1970

(I was 23 yrs old)