

Scenario I

Six months after the end of the Viet-Nam War in mid-1973, it seemed fairly evident that the much hoped-for diverting of funds from military expenditures to domestic social problems was not going to materialize in any significant amount. Dissidents began to turn their energies to the inefficiencies and insensibilities of corporate practices and headlines were soon occupied with news of several coordinated, large scale explosions and communications disruptions in factories and corporate offices around the country. It did not take long for Neo-Luddites to coalesce around the goal of bringing the megamachine-society to a standstill.

Within urban areas the crime rate had reached an all time high in June of 1973 with the vast bulk of crime consisting of thefts of personal property and street mugging, much of it violent. There also was an exponential increase in the number of apparently senseless crimes: random shooting and knifing of people in all major American cities.

By 1974 blacks essentially had control of two major cities, and militants in at least one other large city and a half dozen smaller ones were in the process of trying to wrench control from bureaucrats and civil servants who lived outside their communities. Demands for immediate community control came not only from blacks and Spanish-speaking peoples, but from poor and middle-income ethnic white areas as well. Many reacted with violence at attempts by decision-makers to change the character of their areas. The chief concern of many politicians was the very real prospect of widespread social disorder occurring before and during the upcoming Bicentennial Celebration. Most people regardless of their race, income, or ethnicity felt such a crisis demanded immediate and drastic action.

So it was that in 1976 a President was elected on a "Security and Stability" platform and together with a sympathetic Congress instituted a number of swiftly implemented measures. The National Internal Security Administration was created and under the Urban Communications Act of 1977 the Department of Communications was added to the Cabinet. DOC was empowered and given funding to immediately establish a National Communications System, or NATCOM for short. Each megalopolitan complex was to see to the construction, by public or private means, of intra-urban cable networks to feed into NATCOM. The scheme developed by national communications planners was multifold.

First NATCOM was devised so as to enable government, military, and police operations to function swiftly and effectively in a widely dispersed pattern. Information about potentially dangerous people or groups was data-banked and made instantaneously available. Computers were utilized to collate personal information and activities and to predict by simulation the probability of a particular disruptive action. Thus those potential dissidents who could not be coopted or otherwise cooled out could be closely monitored. A proposal made back in 1971 for mobile transmitters implanted in the brains of habitual criminals was being implemented experimentally.

The personal crimes in urban areas that were not eliminated by local heroin distribution programs, NATCOM sought to minimize by installing miniature video cameras at strategic points on streets. One of the major reasons for the popularity of two-way cable television was its burglar protection service. It thus came to be that privacy from electronic surveillance ceased to become a major concern; after all, it was felt, no decent citizen had anything to hide.

Second, NATCOM could help satisfy public demands for greater localized control through the establishment of intracommunity cable systems within urban areas. By the end of the 70's almost all urban places over 2500 were fully wired. Planners maintained that by encouraging intense involvement in local cable systems a sense of control over local affairs and participation in local matters could be produced. (Behaviorial research by several prestigious institutions had shown that only a sense of participation was necessary to satisfy most people.) With attention so intensely focused on local developments, higher levels of government could thus be freed to pursue their activities unharrassed.

Third, NATCOM facilitated the formation of eight regional superagencies to control urban population distribution, housing, transportation, environmental resources, land use, and internal security. The formerly sticky issue of metropolitan government was skirted by instituting not a new level of government but rather technical service agencies empowered to set policy without the chaotic process of public involvement that had bogged down the implementation of so many plans in previous decades. Possible objections to such an arrangement were largely forestalled by the strategy of including into the agencies potential dissidents.

