

Computer to Be Sensational Thief

THE next big, sensational robbery in this country might be committed by a computer. Perhaps it has been pulled off already and human beings aren't smart enough to find it out yet.

It's not that electronic data processors aren't basically honest but these machines are manipulated by people, who are about 95 per cent honest, if you don't count politicians. And computers are advancing, or at least moving, into every area of our lives.

What worries computer manufacturers and business men is that computers obey certain signals and any computer programmer who knows the secret pass words can make the machine do his bidding.

There are confidential systems for maintaining computer security, but not everybody trusts them. "We have to educate computers; not users," one manufacturer said. They're programming the machines to correct both their own mistakes and users' mistakes, but that just gives the machines another advantage over people.

People already are having battles with computers that have been fed erroneous data. Persons with good credit ratings and respectable repu-

tations have been confused with persons of similar names who won't pay their bills or who have criminal records.

An Oregon man has been receiving monthly checks from the government which he isn't supposed to get, and he can't get the check writing stopped. He's just holding the checks. Less fortunate are those who are supposed to receive checks but don't.

A big worry of company officials who trust their corporate records to a computer is that something might erase their entire businesses from magnetic tapes. So they invest in "back-up systems."

Computers are doing away with ledgers and account books, and as credit card systems grow, computers are making cash less essential and less used. Now the dollar needs a "back-up system." A vice president of a big New York bank was quoted thus: "The base form of asset is no longer necessarily a 400-ounce gold bar; now assets are often simply magnetic wiggles on a disk."

It is reported that 54 national agencies have more than 750 data banks containing extensive information on almost all adult citizens. Banks, stores and credit card com-

panies exchange information and the hazard of disastrous clerical errors is tremendous.

Fifty federal agencies have 858 separate data banks. For example, HEW has 61 data banks, with 402 million records. The Justice Department has 19 data banks with 139 million records. The Department of Transportation has 18 data banks with 6 million records, including files on Americans who have had their drivers license revoked.

Laws prohibit misuse of data bank information, but efforts are being made to tighten up security leaks about individuals.

Computers aren't human, but they're resembling humans more with every new invention. IBM is working on a new model that is to be able to understand and obey oral instructions, but even IBM, whose slogan is "THINK," admits that computers can't think.

Now MIT has built a computer that is programmed to speak in what is described as "a flat, unemotional voice." So we soon may have computers that can listen to instructions and then speak without thinking. It might be hard to tell that machine from some people!