

The Consumer Dictatorship

Near the end of last year a new scheme called ContactPoint was rushed through parliament with no fan-fare and not so much as a press release. With the huge mobilisation to reduce state information hoarding and tracking of its citizens through schemes such as the “e-Passports”, the ID card and the National Identity Register at large, the powers that be have staged a massive silent coup here: The new system will store the personal, location and medical details of every child (every citizen below 18) in England from next year. And not so much as a whisper preceded it.

The papers caught up a month too late; once the legislation had been passed safely the government chose to issue a press release. The fact that the press cannot produce a story in the absence of a press release, even one regarding new laws, would be an article in itself, more fittingly it would be an obituary regarding the death of journalism.

But when the opinion-smiths among the press did decide to comment, the only cost they seem concerned with was the financial one. The Daily Mail, Daily Star and London Metro sung on tune to warn “the taxpayer” that this would cost them £224million to build and have running costs of £41million. The shock head line was that council tax could even be hiked to cover the costs.

Of course they have a point; this is our money being spent on massive scales without any mind for public consultation. In addition to the ContactPoint costs we have heard ravings for months about how the surveillance-chipping of our passports will hike the costs from £51 to £66. The National Identity Register, the media gasps, will set us back £5.4billion. I'm not trying to make light of or dismiss our right to be angry about our money being spent on schemes we neither need nor want; but I do feel the bigger picture is being missed, or more likely ignored, by the media.

What bothers me is that no one actually seems concerned with the cost to our civil liberties in the least bit; it's as though we'd happily march into an Orwellian Nightmare of a society so long as we could do it on the cheap. As it is, the main grumble seems to be “You can say what you like about the totalitarian dictators of the past, but at least their prices were reasonable”.

At least with most of these aggressions against our liberty there is some sense of shame from the powers that be; sneaking legislation through in the dead of night, paying through the tax kitty, hoping no one will notice. But the brazenness of the ID card scheme is one that takes the breath away.

Possession of one of these plastic pocket-cages will be mandatory, yet on top of the scheme costing each and every tax payer £200 from the kitty, we will be asked to hand over £90 from our taxed income for the pleasure. The blind cheek of the consumer-dictatorship is unprecedented. Can you imagine the Nazi Storm Troopers rounding the Romany and the Jewish into their camps and then, just before they close the gate holding out their hand, coughing, and discreetly reminding their prisoners that “service isn't included”?