



Better community reduces crime, technology does not

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CCTV on the Cowley Road - Oxford Mail, honest broker?

As February came to a close the Oxford Mail once again published a story claiming victory in the battle to get CCTV on the Cowley Road. 'Sites chosen for CCTV system' by Fran Bardsley followed the standard Oxford Mail line: tell readers that the Police want/need the cameras, only interview people in favour, mention some crime for good measure, and say it's a done deal. In November NO-CCTV released a report that argued against surveillance cameras in East Oxford's Cowley Road. One of the areas focused upon in the report was media coverage. Our basic study of online local press coverage from May to November 2007 showed a considerable media bias in favour of CCTV. 96.4% of voices featured in the articles were in favour of the CCTV proposals. This contrasted with readers' comments where 62% were against. Local media are not honest brokers - CCTV is a visual medium that can supply images to newspapers desperate to sell copies. CCTV creates, enhances and sells stories. The media cannot be trusted to give a truthful or balanced account of CCTV. As we go to press still no decision has been ratified.



School backs down on CCTV in toilets

A school in Plymouth recently moved swiftly to defuse a row over CCTV cameras in children's toilets. Students returning to Lipson Community College after a half term break discovered that CCTV cameras had been installed in the toilets. Steve Baker, the college principal said that the cameras had been installed in error. He said they would be switched off immediately and removed as soon as possible.

Orwell rolls in his grave



CCTV camera notice in George Orwell Square, Barcelona

Spain is one of several European countries going through a so-called 'CCTV Revolution'. The past few years have seen a huge growth in the industry throughout the European Union, although no country rivals the United Kingdom in terms of the widespread use and acceptance of surveillance cameras.

Carlos Reyner, a spokesperson for the Barcelona Guardia Urbana admits to having heard the occasional protest against CCTV cameras in public spaces—or an ironic comment over the camera placed in Plaça George Orwell. Reyner said: "People have the subject of security cameras completely assimilated. Any complaints that have been made were done so on a philosophical basis and not by the residents or merchants in the area."

However, most Europeans are not willing to give up their right to privacy as quickly as the UK has.

The evidence clearly shows that CCTV is not an effective crime fighting tool, it is just a very expensive way of spying on law

abiding citizens. So why don't local authorities around the UK simply take down their cameras and spend the money on things that would actually improve people's lives? The answer to this might lie in part in the enormous profits to be made in the CCTV industry.

A recent report into the UK CCTV market produced by ARNCOS states that: "In the closed-circuit television (CCTV) market, the UK is one of the top most destinations in the world in terms of market development and maturity. The UK CCTV market contributed around 31.36% of the total electronic security market in 2005." This despite having only 1% of the world's population.

The report also points out that the UK CCTV market is set to grow yet further. The report says: "One of the major reasons for the growth of the UK CCTV market is expected to be the 2012 Olympic games, which will demand robust security". Notice that CCTV is offered as a robust security measure when no evidence exists to support this assertion.

Modern camera technology is a long way from Closed Circuit Television. RCON's document points out that "UK manufacturers and suppliers had remained on the forefront with many innovations. The market has continued to move in favour of digital technology and there is strong growth in the use of networked CCTV, particularly over IP networks". Whilst this is good news for fat cat security companies it is very bad news for the UK public. The Home Office's recently released National CCTV Strategy talks of a desire to create a network of cameras in the UK accessible from a central hub. We are moving from a grainy image recorded to VHS tape in your local newsagent to a nightmarish panopticon, where police and security services can pull up a crystal clear digital image of any street in the UK at any time.

The widespread support for surveillance cameras in the UK has been manufactured by the security industry, the media and an over-bearing state. Ordinary citizens need to wake up to this illiberal waste of money before it's too late.