

References

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Census 2011 – who will have access to the data?

With a subsidiary of major arms company, Lockheed Martin, being a lead contractor for the UK's 2011 census, Geoff Meaden asks if the data collected will really be secure.

In March 2011, Britain's once-a-decade national census will be carried out. The aim is to record a wide range of information on every person in every household in the United Kingdom, in order to help guide provision for local and national public services. To this end, the census is compulsory. A little-known fact about the census, however, is that the main contract, including data capture, was won by a subsidiary of US corporation, Lockheed Martin, which also helped with the 2001 census.¹ Lockheed Martin is the world's second largest weapons manufacturer² and makes Trident nuclear missiles for the USA and UK. It also holds a one-third share in the management contract for Britain's Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston, which is undergoing redevelopment as the government pushes towards replacing its nuclear weapons system. A recent growth area for Lockheed Martin has been 'intelligence and surveillance' and, as part of this work, the company has moved into data collection. Vice-President, Lorraine Martin is reported to have said, "We want to know what's going on anytime, any place on the planet".³

There are serious concerns that the data gathered by the census may fall under the US Patriot Act if a US-owned company is involved in its collection and, as

such, there would be a legal requirement for the company to make the information available to their government. Additionally, there is concern that the census information may be made more widely available in the USA, not only for law enforcement purposes, but also to private entities. We have no legal precedents as to whether, under the pretext of national security, this census information can be acquired by the US government. The UK Office of National Statistics claims that our data will be safe⁴ but the UK government has demonstrated on several occasions lax security arrangements in the management of digital data containing personal records.

The data gathered by the ten-yearly census is easily the most comprehensive data set in the UK, and it is used extensively for various socio-economic purposes. During the 2001 census 6% of households in the UK failed to comply with submitting their household information.⁵ This means that about three million people were 'unaccounted'. Given that there is significant distrust among people of British government connections to large corporations, having Lockheed Martin involved in gathering census information is hardly likely to encourage compliance. This will result in increasingly unreliable census data. One wonders how many US citizens would be happy for a British weapons manufacturer and surveillance company to collect their census data!

By contracting Lockheed Martin to do this work, what was a perfectly respectable and useful socio-

economic activity may now be perceived as part of the security world of intelligence and surveillance. There will be a range of ethical reasons why people may not wish to comply, from concerns about the security of their personal data to not wishing to boost the profits of a weapons manufacturer. So I hope that we in the science and technology communities will give support to people who do not wish to comply with the 2011 UK national census, and that we will campaign to get this contract terminated in the future.

Dr Geoff Meaden has recently retired as Principal Lecturer, Department of Geographical and Life Sciences, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent.

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