Government's Use of Surveillance Cameras

"Always under surveillance. You can't go far in Toronto without being seen on camera"[1]

Toronto police have installed surveillance cameras in areas of the city to deter and fight crime as part of a $2 million pilot project. There has been a surprising public acceptance of the cameras despite the privacy concerns associated with the technology. The Canadian public hasn't always accepted public surveillance cameras on their streets.

In June 2002, federal privacy commissioner George Radwanski began a lawsuit against the RCMP in British Columbia in an attempt to prevent the installation and operation of surveillance cameras in a Kelowna park [2]. Radwanski argued that the cameras infringed sections 2(d), 6, 7, and 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court dismissed the lawsuit because Radwanski, as privacy commissioner, did not have the requisite statutory authority. The court did not discuss whether the cameras constituted an infringement of the Charter. However, during that process former Supreme Court Justice Gerard La Forest "issued a legal opinion that general video surveillance for law enforcement purposes - recorded or not - likely infringes upon one's reasonable expectation of privacy . A Charter challenge on that basis could render public video surveillance illegal in Canada, according to a paper by the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC). That is, if anyone can be found to challenge it." [1]

Sources

[1] Francine Kopun, "Always under surveillance" The Toronto Star (5 May 2007).

[2] Canada (Privacy Commissioner) v. Canada (Attorney General), 2003 BCSC 862 (CanLII).

Further Reading

- "Universal Surveillance: The Long Lens of the Law" CBC News (9 February 2004).
- "Privacy watchdog sues RCMP over cameras on streets" CBC News (21 June 2002).
- "Privacy: The Big Picture." CBC News (20 June 2002).

Websites

- Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada
- Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic