



DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY: STATE OF THE ART REPORT

KENNY, J.J.P. (ed.) (1985) Pergamon Infotech Limited, Maidenhead, England, 245pp, £245.00

A book that purports to be a 'state of the art' report and costs £245 can be expected to be comprehensive and accurate, and to have some theoretical depth. Kenny, Chairman of the British Computer Society's Data Protection Committee, has edited a book that falls well short of these expectations.

The Report is in three parts: 'Invited Papers' by twelve European experts on various aspects of data protection and security, of 10 page average length; an 80 page 'Analysis' by Kenny which attempts to synthesize the contributions of the invitees; and a Bibliography comprising 51 items.

The invited papers cover the international legal regime of data protection (Bing; Gassman; Hondius), and the regulatory experience of Sweden (Freese), France (Fauvet) and - somewhat in anticipation - Britain (ICL and the Devon Council's preparations for data protection law).

On the security side there are papers on cryptography (Everett; Gordon) and personnel practices (Lindsay). Despite their brevity, some of the papers are useful: recent articles in English on the French and Swedish legislation are difficult to find. On the other hand, such brevity tends to reduce the surveys of international developments to platitudes and repetition.

Jon Bing presents the only theoretical analysis, the Norwegian approach of characterising data in terms of three types of interests: adequacy ('that all relevant data is available to a decision maker'), confidentiality ('that personal data should not be disseminated in wider circles than necessary'), and openness (subject access).

The European Convention and OECD Guidelines on data protection are subjected to an interesting analysis in these terms.

Such an approach does not appear to give adequate weight to the long-term political interests of individuals in limiting the amount of information organisations collect about them, irrespective of how it is presently used - although Bing does hint at such weaknesses. Otherwise, this political dimension gains scant consideration throughout the book.

The precis of Kenny's 'analysis' promises that 'the background to the development of the privacy lobby is outlined'.

The 'analysis' is a rather superficial 'cut and paste' from the preceding papers and others. Its half-page survey of Australian developments mentions the *Freedom of Information Act* 1982 as a 'rather weak Act of its type', but doesn't mention the substantial amendments to the Act in 1983 to strengthen it.

The 1983 *Privacy Report* of the Australian Law Reform Commission rates not a mention!

The 51 item Bibliography is too brief and selective to be of much use. For example, there is no mention of the works of James Rule, the American sociologist who has contributed some of the most important theoretical work on privacy.

Excellent printed and bound, in A4 format, it is the computing equivalent of a 'coffee table book': you would expect to find it in the reception areas of computer companies or consultants who wished to impress their clients.

The content is more suited to a paperback at one-tenth the price when it would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in data protection.

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