# **Social Credit score in Australia**

It is not news that the Australian government is relentless in its pursuit of those on social security payments. The robodebt program is evidence of that. But there are other concerning pointers to an active government agenda of social control.

One of these is the roll out of the Indue card. Trialled in Indigenous communities as a means of controlling spending — limiting it to the 'basics' — the card is being rolled out to other communities also. Ostensibly to stop spending on alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling, it also limits recipients' ability to pay for goods by cash and limits where recipients can spend.

A second is the control over activities by mothers receiving parenting payments through the 'Parents Next' program. The overwhelming majority of recipients are women, and there is a significant proportion of those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians.To continue to qualify for the payment, recipients must verify weekly that they have undertaken nominated activities with their children. Failure to do so without receiving an exemption results in losing their payment.

A third is the drug testing of social security recipients. Wrapped up as concern about addiction, the proposed program will place anyone testing positive on income management for two years. If they get a second positive result, they will be referred to a doctor for treatment options and will be required to undergo drug treatment as part of their job plan.

A fourth, and latest, pointer is the suggestion by Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton, that climate change protesters should have their welfare payments cut. He also suggested mandatory jail sentences for protesters and encouraged members of the public to take photos of protesters and to 'name and shame' them. Employment Minister Michaelia Cash has agreed reportedly saying: 'Protesting is not, and never will be, an exemption from a welfare recipient's mutual obligation to look for a job.'

All of these programs smack of benevolent paternalism that judge morality of social security recipients, and the message is clear. Drug use is personal failure; cigarettes, alcohol and gambling are weakness; single mothers are bad mothers; protesters are lazy and unproductive members of society. The solution? Government is everybody's long-suffering father, here to instruct a wayward public in proper civic behaviour by offering correctives to immoral behaviour.

The programs are also couched in terms of mutual obligation, namely that the recipient has a duty to government to receive its munificence. It is, in fact, the responsibility of government to provide for the people.

And even if one accepts some degree of accountability for payments, these programs beg the question of just how far government can reach into our lives to control how we live. If a person meets reporting requirements for Newstart, what right does government have to inquire further? So what if recipients spend their time volunteering, lying in bed, or engaging in peaceful protest? What possible value is there to anyone in interfering with the parenting decisions of parents receiving social security — on pain of losing payment?

If government is concerned for citizens' wellbeing, then it should properly resource services — drug and alcohol support, parenting support, subsidised childcare, financial counselling, education, and so on. Instead, it is generating a system of social credit: rewarding those who toe the line and punishing those whose 'score' falls below that of the 'good citizen'.

# **Social Credit score in Canada**

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: China’s Orwellian “social credit system” that records the social and financial behaviour of individuals and corporations across China, using a vast surveillance system, has expanded globally, and is now openly operational at the renowned Haidilao hot pot restaurant, in Western Canada.

Ryan Pan, a manager with Haidilao Hot Pot in Vancouver confirmed that over 60 surveillance cameras have been installed in the restaurant at the request of the Haidilao corporation, as part of the social credit system in China. He said that the Vancouver location has 30 tables with two cameras assigned to each table.

China’s CSCS operating within Canadian borders all boils down to the safety of workers, human rights, privacy of citizenry and national security, all of which is governed by legislation at a municipal, provincial, and federal level. The Canadian government is aware that China has implemented the CSCS and has even issued recommendations on how to conduct business inside China now that it has been implemented. But little to nothing has been done by elected officials to prevent China from implementing the CSCS inside Canada as a way to control foreign workers from China and Chinese owned businesses, or anyone for that matter, who is ethnic Chinese with personal or professional ties to China.

At a municipal (city) level, until recently, commercial security cameras used to be powered from a plug in the wall with a video cable going back to a personal video recorder (PVR). The City of Vancouver would normally require an electrical permit for this kind of set-up which would have, at the very least, alerted city officials in this case, given the large volume of cameras installed. However, the Haidilao cameras appear to be more modern cameras powered over Ethernet (POE). Meaning they are plugged into a network that can send video footage live back to China. They can be installed at any point without a permit. Quite simply, there is nothing stopping the Chinese government from insisting that all businesses in Canada who have ties to China either professionally or personally install a surveillance system as part of China’s social credit system.

British Columbia purports to have strict privacy laws with the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) governing how an organization can collect, use, or disclose information on individuals. When asked if the Office of the Privacy Commissioner was aware of CSCS sending private footage of temporary foreign workers and Canadian citizens back to China, Michelle Mitchell with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner in BC (unrelated to author), stressed that an important component of PIPA is consent and that an organization must have consent before collecting, using, or disclosing personal information, citing three types of consent under PIPA, which is express consent, implied consent, and opt-out consent.

Since many of the staff at the Haidilao restaurant are Chinese citizens and work under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in Canada, and are already listed in the Social Credit system in China as citizens of China, they aren’t likely to demand privacy under Canadian law. Even staff members who live in Canada permanently with “permanent resident status” face the same pressure to conform to China’s mandatory CSCS program, because China doesn’t consider individuals with permanent resident status in Canada unless they renounce their Chinese citizenship. “Consent” isn’t an option in totalitarian regimes.

A more insidious aspect to China’s CSCS is that it can be used to spy on Canadian citizens under the pretence of being a part of China’s social credit program. Canadian authorities may take the approach that CSCS has nothing to do with Canada and our laws. However, the Haidilao hot pot restaurant manager clearly stated that there were two reasons for the surveillance cameras, for both social credit and state security purposes. In all likelihood, next-generation data sources—such as information from facial recognition-driven video feeds, cell phone surveillance and e-com purchase history—are being collected from Canadians while they eat and it wouldn’t be the first time that the CCP has filmed Canadians inside Canada.

Over the past couple of years, an ever-expanding collection of surveillance cameras have been added to the Vancouver PRC Consulate, located in the prestigious Shaughnessy district of Vancouver, on the edge of a high traffic road that goes into the City. The surveillance camera has been installed on the edge of the property, one of which jettisons out into Canadian space, then retracts back. The street is a frequent place for pro-Hong Kong activists, Uyghurs protesting genocide, Iranians protesting the cooperation pact with China and members of Falun Gong protesting persecution. Canada is a multicultural country that has opened its doors to countless refugees fleeing persecution and promotes equality and the right to free speech as a core value. Yet Canada’s elected officials have done little if anything to ensure that the very people we have invited into Canada are promised a safe haven from the oppressive regimes they fled from in the first place.

The cameras used by the PRC consulate are the same cameras that the US banned the purchase and use of under the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) as a cyber security threat.

In 2019, Global Affairs, the department of the Government of Canada that manages Canada’s diplomatic and consular relations, also doesn’t appear to concerned that the Government of China is spying on Canadians with cameras installed on embassy grounds that jettison out into Canadian space, naively suggesting that addressing the matter is left to the Peoples Republic of China and the “honor” system of having a duty to adhere to Canadian laws.

“Diplomatic and consular representatives have a duty to respect local laws, and there is a similar expectation for the manner in which foreign missions operate. In Canada, there is an expectation that foreign missions comply with federal, provincial, and municipal laws and regulations, including those that governs the use of physical security equipment, such as cameras, fences, and lights.”

# **Social Credit score in the United States**

Some media outlets have compared the social credit system to credit scoring systems in the United States. According to Fast Company, "increasing number of societal "privileges" related to transportation, accommodations, communications, and the rates we pay for services (like insurance) are either controlled by technology companies or affected by how we use technology services. And Silicon Valley's rules for being allowed to use their services are getting stricter."

# **Social Credit score in United Kingdom**

In 2018, the New Economics Foundation compared the Chinese citizen score to other rating systems in the United Kingdom. These included using data from a citizen's credit score, phone usage, rent payment, and so on, to filter job applications, determine access to social services, determine advertisements served, etc.