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ISP Data Retention seems to me to be a "very courageous" policy as Sir Humphrey might warmly advise Minister Hacker. As usual the essence of the advice eludes Hacker. If Brandis or Turnbull or Abbott were actually named "Hacker" would it still elude them? Probably.

The accumulation and storage of vast amounts of information by various companies or government agencies would seem to me to be a powerful magnet for hackers and internal malcontents for whom the penalties make the prospective adventure even more exciting. Brought up on computers, games and the web, penetrating these stores would be the best game of all. And the higher the risk, the better.

There is another category of people who would be undaunted by the penalties and that is the increasing number who don't leave their consciences at the company door and who seek personal fulfilment through means other than money. A large percentage of ordinary Australians see Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden as heroes, not villains, including many highly regarded members of society.

And who would be the targets? The Right Honourable Gentlemen mentioned above might be the juiciest but certainly anyone of their political or corporate associates would be enough to draw blood, in fact streams of it. Politicians are human beings, have human foibles and make mistakes like everyone else but they are targeted and publicly ridiculed by the press at every opportunity.

"Why Minister," Sir Humphrey would ask, "should you deposit a comprehensive record of your activities in the hands of someone else for mischievous people to trawl through looking for evidence of your foibles and mistakes? Haven't we, your humble servants, faithfully protected you by shredding every record before it could become dangerous? And now you are proposing to expose everything that you do, especially that which is beyond the visibility and advice of your humble servants. NO, Minister."

There are countless examples everyday of leaks of private information even from the most secure sources. Banks, ISPs, governments, corporations all have large, active security groups. They struggle to keep ahead but only just. They all have to cover a certain level of losses and unfortunate disclosures. These may be accidental or from whistleblowers or from hackers, but they happen and will continue to happen. The CIA and the Chinese are experts at hacking but so are many criminals and young hackers doing it just for the thrill.

But the greatest threats are from the insiders with knowledge and malice, and the insiders with knowledge and a conscience.

And you, Right Honourable Gentlemen, are the prime targets.

[Author's note: I can use the expression "Right Honourable Gentlemen" here without being sexist given the (almost) complete absence of women in the current Cabinet. Notwithstanding that I am sure that the one exception, Julie Bishop, would be well beyond attack and above blackmail.]

Keywords:

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