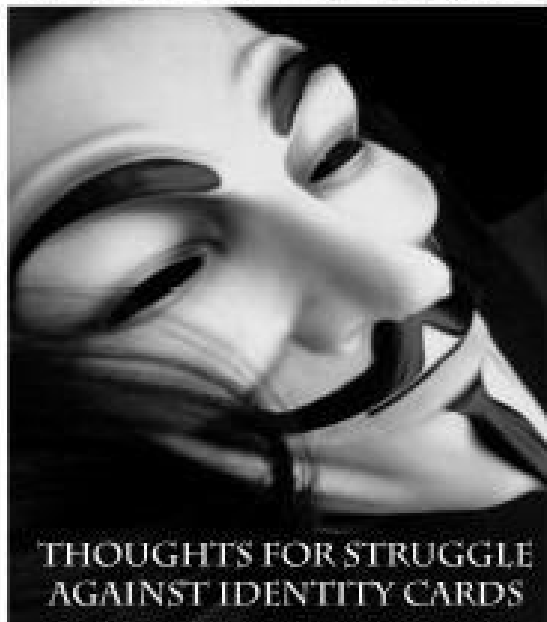


Defending Anonymity

Thoughts for struggle against identity cards

Anarchist Federation

Defending Anonymity



Anarchist Federation **Free/Donation**

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Introduction — a serious threat to freedom

The Labour Party is bringing in a national identity scheme to Britain. Anyone concerned about threats to our freedom from an increasingly authoritarian state should be worried by the Identity Cards Act 2006. This was passed with little change from what the government wanted, in spite of all the ‘write to your MP’ lobbying by No2ID and optimistic hopes of House of Lords amendments.

The British ID Cards Act is just one part of European and American efforts to impose electronic identity schemes across the western world. Around the same time, George Bush pushed one through the US Senate as an enhanced driving license known as RealID, tacked on to a military spending bill that was unlikely to get voted down in the middle of a war, and is demanding biometric passports for non-visa entry to the country. This side of the atlantic, European paranoia about borders is helping to drive EU-wide developments of passports, ID cards and databases.

In Britain, Labour is determined to get national ID in place for most of us within the next few years by creating a National Identity Register that you’ll be added to when you apply for or renew a passport. This is now planned for sometime between 2009–2012 depending how much the full roll-out is delayed for political and technical reasons. Identity and Passport Service offices (‘interrogation centres’) for in-person applications, vetting and biometric scanning have already opened in some parts of the country. Even if you don’t hold a passport, and 80% of us already do, only one more act of parliament is needed to force ID registration on everyone over 16 years old. Although ID may become an election issue against Labour, it must be remembered that the Conservative Party tried to introduce it in the 1990s before they lost the general election to Labour! Whoever wins, the ID Cards Act is there for any party to use.

Creeping compulsion

Having judged the strong opposition that already exists against having an actual *card*, the government announced in March 2008 that it won’t now make it compulsory except for airport & power station workers, people working on the London Olympics site, and others like doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers. That’s already a lot of people, but whatever, let’s not be fooled, because the real danger is not the carrying of a card, it’s the computerised identity *register* which we’ll all have to be on. Plus the state really does want us all to have a card, and actually hopes we’ll get one by choice! Young people applying for their first bank account will be encouraged to get an ID card for convenience when they apply for a bank account or student loan, and to prove their age in the pub. The rest of us are expected to follow later when we realise we can’t live without one. All of this shows us that the state is bent on imposing ID cards ‘by stealth’.

It’s worth noting that before the ID Cards Act was passed, state officials took advice from their industry partners that they would need to tread carefully and introduce an ID scheme step-by-step. This does seem to be happening via a mishmash of legislation and through national and

local government restructuring behind the scenes. For example, foreign nationals will be issued with ID cards in the guise of 'biometric visas' as soon as this year (2008), linked to the UK Borders Act 2007. Mandatory fingerprinting as well as facial biometrics is then to be introduced for all passport and travel documents within the EU, for children as well as adults.

The General Register Office (GRO) in England and Wales, which oversees the recording of births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths, became part of the Identity and Passport service in 1 April 2008. Various other plans, which may or may not be realised, include creating a 'co-ordinated online role of electors' (CORE) and encouraging residents to pay council tax through an internet scheme called Government Connect. All of these initiatives involve gathering local lists into national ones, ideal for building up the register. The government also intends to cobble together information from three existing sources instead of going ahead with the original idea for a brand new 'clean' database. The idea is that your personal ID record will be merged from data already held on different computer systems at the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Identity and Passport Service.

Moreover, the Children Act 2004 allows creation of separate databases for all children in England, that could easily turn into ID for everyone as this generation ages – one estimate is 50% of the population could be covered within 20 years! Pupils and parents are already protesting against fingerprinting (and even eye-scanning) that is being introduced to many schools for checking out library books, getting school dinners and signing attendance registers.

In Scotland, a national pensioner' cards has recently been issued which is actually a multi-purpose ID card disguised as a bus pass. Not only that, but in November 2007, we heard that post offices and travel agents are likely candidates for mass ID card applications and fingerprinting. So it's important to see this is not just about opposing one single Act of parliament and also that bureaucrats in Whitehall, local councils and private companies are already busy preparing the ground for compulsory ID.

Standing up and not being counted

Although ID is coming through in an incremental manner, the time to start fighting is now. The Poll Tax came in and was still defeated here from taking notice and learning from opposition to the initial trials in Scotland, and applying them to build a countrywide campaign. ID schemes have already been defeated in Australia, Canada, Korea, Taiwan and elsewhere. We would do well to look at how these examples of opposition worked before, since an international effort may well be needed. If it is to succeed, the campaign now needs to move beyond complaining what is bad about ID and prepare for concerted refusal and outright revolt.

Unfortunately the situation is not exactly like the Poll Tax of two decades years ago, when there was a clear benefit to individuals refusing to pay, because the government has strongly linked the scheme to national security as well as to the emotive threat of 'identity theft'. They hope they will convince many law-abiding citizens it will be a price worth paying. The high cost to individuals may well help convince a lot of people to fight the scheme, but to beat ID we really need to win the argument that the state cannot provide security or any bogus idea of respect, whether by ID cards, cameras or ASBOs. Society has been made rotten by the growing inequalities that are permitted by the system called capitalism that allows a small minority of people to own most of the resources and organise our lives.

ID is a class issue – the rich will ensure their anonymity by their limited need for the welfare state. Most recently we hear that children of ‘celebrities’ (which will undoubtedly include well-known politicians!) will be exempted from the Children Index – yet another clear message that ID will not affect everyone in the same way. As well as money, power and influence will give the upper classes anonymity from the state and the private companies who will run identity databases. We must preserve ours by downright refusal to accept ID, not because it’s too expensive and not because it won’t work, but simply because we won’t let the state invade every part of our lives. Out of struggle, as we have done before, we can strengthen our own idea of community that one day will overthrow the dominant systems of state and capitalism.

For anarchists, opposition to ID cards might feel so obvious that it’s beyond discussion, a ‘no brainer’. But the number of dodgy anti-ID arguments coming out have only served to confuse matters. This pamphlet aims to provide ideas and resources for those fighting ID from an anarchist position.

Common arguments against ID, and their limitations

ID cards will cost loads, even more than a passport, and hurt those of us who can least afford it

The ID database and card scheme will cost many billions of pounds. Much of this will end up lining the pockets of the private companies who will set up and run the computers and card-reading technology, and to pay the personnel involved in running the scheme. A figure of £300 per person has been determined by dividing the likely cost of the scheme by the population, and it is likely that a lot of this cost will be passed to individuals when we are asked to register for a card or make changes to our records – a kind of tax to pay for the fear and insecurity created by our scaremongering rulers. But it's important to remember the principle that we wouldn't want it even if it was free. Neither should the large fines scare us into registering. One of the strongest weapons against the Poll Tax was the campaign of mass non-registration by the public burning of forms or simply by ignoring council letters.

ID card and database technology won't work

There are huge technical problems with making ID work – no government has attempted a database scheme on the scale of the one proposed for ID in Britain. The story of public/private Information Technology projects has generally been one of massive delay and many additional years of expensive tinkering which have mostly benefitted only the companies that have the contracts. Home Office sponsored trials by Atos Origin showed unbelievably bad results for biometric registration and validation that would clearly discriminate against disabled, black and older people. A Dutch trial involving RFID passports showed that encrypted personal information could be read and the codes cracked in a very short time. These might seem like a good basis for opposing ID, but it's really not our problem. Let's not get drawn into arguing for a 'fair' or 'secure' system. We need to stand together and be clear we don't want any system, and try to use government incompetence to our advantage. Registration booths could become an important focus for direct action against the scheme, as could the companies involved.

ID cards won't solve crime or terrorism

The government has been sneaky to lump terrorism and organised crime in with any kind of credit card and welfare benefits fraud. But why should we care if a few of us are working the system when corporations and rich individuals continue to benefit from massive tax-avoidance and the government is spending millions on arms? A lot of us depend on 'petty' crime to overcome

poverty in our class-divided society. Organised crime and the terror threat are mainly diversions to scare us into believing we need the state to be secure when it's state-imposed social inequality, warmongering and religious bigotry that are the problems. Many of the people who threaten us most through fear of poverty or violence, whether they are fraudsters, terrorists, bosses or generals, are rich people who can buy anonymity and freedom of movement. So the bleatings of Liberty and others in the 'It won't work' brigade end up just adding to the confusion, because the very act of going on about crime or terrorism just propagates fear of each other. This is another form of 'divide and rule', keeping us down when we should be fostering solidarity amongst ourselves to fight oppression together. Anarchists refuse to be drawn into worrying about a state initiative from the state's own perspective.

ID cards will lead us into a police state

Well maybe, since the police will have access to the database and will have powers to demand to see ID cards, but even this sort of misses the point. The ID scheme is much more than information to help the police know who we are. If you're being denied healthcare or a driving license because you're not on the national register, is it not really enforcement that's the problem, it's the whole system. The real issue is the government's original idea of entitlement and its flipside – economic discrimination. The global capitalist economy relies on inequality so our governments are lying every time they say they don't want migrants working in Britain. They want cheap goods and labour from wherever they can get it and always have done, whether from the spoils of colonial rule, raw materials or sweatshop products feeding multinationals, from migration of workers with lower wage expectations, outsourcing of manufacturing and services to 'cheaper' countries, or by the driving down of wages in general.

Running this kind of capitalist system involves managing production and consumption for the mass of us. An electronic ID database will help to parcel up the majority of people in our 21st century society into economic units whose wages or welfare benefits, and the way these are spent, are tightly controlled. Plus, many workers are already being tagged and tracked in the workplace – a national ID could help extend this capability to all of us. All this is going on whilst the rich and higher-earning middle classes, especially those benefiting from the property boom or stock market income, can afford private healthcare and pensions along with the relative anonymity that goes with those privileges. That leaves those of us who depend on resources like state or low-paid occupational pensions and the NHS to have our entire life history put under detailed scrutiny from government bean-counters and private companies.

ID cards also take away our ability to create our own social and economic sphere. Labour (and some of the socialist Left who traditionally love social planning) hate the 'Grey Market' they can't track and tax, and so roll out the usual scare-stories of organised crime and terrorism. No surprise then that we are now seeing adverts telling us that buying cheap DVDs will buy guns for terrorists! They want us to feel guilty about everything from biodiesel, media piracy and cheap booze, while at the same time are promoting free-market policies for the rest of the world and helping companies make millions from the poverty of the majority of people on earth.

National ID on the cards

(from Organise! 64, Summer 2005)

The threat of introduction of a National Identity Card Scheme is still an ongoing UK government hot potato and almost an obsession for New Labour. But why? This article tries to wade through the mud of post-Sept 11th paranoia and to counter the fear-mongering coming not only through the electioneering twaddle of the political parties but even from anti-ID card campaigns like Liberty's. What we find is an ongoing and consistent commitment to enforced citizenship which appears to be the real meaning behind the rhetoric.

In the private sector, especially in retail, market research technology has provided the means to help companies 'understand their customers better' thanks to huge databases created from transactions using debit and credit cards and from store loyalty cards, enabling them to target their marketing campaigns and in-store product lines. Soon we'll have widespread use of Radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags that will help them track goods and clothes we are wearing inside and even outside of the store with much more sophistication than is currently possible with bar-codes, and even photograph us when we pick up products. For consumer goods then, Big Brother is surely here already (see separate article on RFID).

On the other hand, the public sector has struggled to keep up in 'understanding its citizens'. To push this forwards the Labour party has actively pursued the idea of e-Government and has attempted to create and computerise a number of systems such as the Inland Revenue and Criminal Records Bureau at great cost with varying degrees of success – the Passport Service and Child Support Agency systems being notable disasters in recent memory. But in spite of the setbacks and huge expense, Labour seems to have the will to see through a multi-billion pound National ID Card Scheme as a semi-public/semi-private initiative via the Whitehall and Industry Group (WIG) who have held events to attract a host of telecoms, security and other hi-tech companies, along with credit-checking agencies and information management consultants (see www.corporatewatch.org).

This is all happening while the supposed reasons for needing ID cards are being promoted by the government, and campaigns are up and running to oppose them. The picture is quite confusing with a host of arguments coming from both sides of the 'debate', and even within the same political parties. Lest we forget, Tories Michael Howard and Peter Lilley failed to introduce ID cards during the Major government. Now as opposition leader Howard is still in favour but Lilley has taken a more right-wing libertarian position. For anarchists, being against loss of personal freedoms could be seen as a given but, as we will see, some of the tactics of anti-ID card campaigning leave a lot to be desired, so it is perhaps worth a closer look.

Reading through the 'Fiction and Fact' mini-booklet response to ID cards from the civil liberties group Liberty you can just imagine their discussions with a social research consultant. What do the stupid Daily Mail reading public care about? Oh yes: Terrorism, Crime, Illegal Immigration, Benefit Cheats, security of their personal information, and having to pay for the Card, so let's organise our anti-ID campaign around the issues and tell them it won't work. Tell them how

terrorists, bank robbers, rapists and muggers won't be deterred, street crime is just as bad in countries that have cards, people smugglers will just forge them, 90% of benefit frauds involve the cheat's own identity. Some of these may be quite true, but talk about playing to people's fears and forgetting about any kind of social solidarity! When Blunkett or Clarke go on about organised crime, terrorists and failed asylum seekers, they are not interested in helping people understand their real agenda, but rather to market their plans using media-friendly sound-bites. By concentrating on this divisive catalogue of political issues (that drop so easily out of the focus-group kinds of methods which are popular for gauging support or otherwise for schemes that affect voting populations), Liberty's campaign misses the point about Labour's long term agenda which is all about social control.

So how can we really understand Labour's love of ID cards and work out how to oppose them effectively and not at the expense of unwarranted fearmongering? As pointed out by the altogether more sensible Defy-ID campaign (see www.defy-id.org.uk), Labour's ID card bill could rightly be called the 'National Identity Register Bill' since it is more about establishing a national ID database than issuing cards. The database, as currently intended, will contain not just your current name and address and 'biometric' fingerprint or iris scan, but will track and record any address (or name) changes and include your photo, National Insurance number, driving licence number, passport number, immigration number, and the number of 'any designated document not covered by the above'. The database would be open not only to the Immigration service and Police but to public and private sector organisations. These could be the tax office, employers, banks and credit organisations (including student loans), utility companies, libraries, dentists etc. Such a database could be set up quietly without further input from individuals and without even issuing cards. Blunkett had also spoken of linking the ID database to the forthcoming NHS one for electronic patient records. Furthermore, a database for all children under 18 (to include their school achievements, health visits, DSS and police records) was proposed last year for addition to the Children's Bill following the Lord Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié, which according to minister Margaret Hodge could 'also be used to support service planning and delivery' (see Direct Action, No.32).

According to the Regulatory Impact Assessment published alongside the current Bill, a 'terrorist' would need an ID card to 'stay in a hotel, rent accommodation, hire cars and generally carry out their activities'. As Defy-ID astutely brings to our attention, this implies we'd all need to have an ID card to do these things! This smacks most clearly of Labour's original idea of the entitlement card that Blunkett tried to get through in Feb 2002 on an anti-fraud ticket well before the terror scare really hit the UK, which gives a much clearer picture of the real purpose of a national database. Feasibility of entitlement cards was heavily criticised at the time (see FIPR response to the UK Entitlement Card consultation – foundation for information policy research: www.fipr.org/cards/entitlementresponse.html), but still fits well with Labour's social control agenda since they came to power which, with a good dose of religious work-ethic thrown in, has seen the imposition of workfare schemes through the New Deal and the more recent persecution of long-term unemployed on incapacity benefit. If retirement age goes up any further it looks like many more of us will be working until we drop dead. And Labour despises the black or grey economy they can't get taxes from, because everyone must be involved in building the Gross Domestic Product of UK, which is their real meaning of 'citizenship'. Blunkett's obsession with the idea of a card, continued by Clarke, clouds the fact that a database system would serve a very heavy state function with or without the actual carrying of one.

Bringing opposition to ID cards into the arena of social struggle requires solidarity and we can learn therefore, not just from the broad-based Australian experience of defeating an ID card scheme in 1987 (see 'On Campaigns of Opposition to ID Card Schemes', 01/01/1995, Simon Davies: www.privacyinternational.org/issues/idcard/campaigns.html) and other examples in New Zealand and the Philippines, but also from the Sans Papiers 'undocumented workers' movement in France that has helped show the way in a country that already has ID. Let's face it, we already have a sizeable section of the country that is excluded – the homeless, travellers, many poor 'pensioners' or younger people unable to work for any reason, as well as our exploited illegal workers and victimised asylum seekers. Many people are forced, whether they want to or not, to live in the black economy or resort to 'crime'. These are the groups that Labour don't want to exist, since it costs them money or denies them taxes, but they are an inevitable part of a capitalist society that values only work and profit.

Anarchists, who are not stuck in the mire of moralising about a loss of GDP that could in any case be recouped in days by stopping war on Iraq and other military spending, have always worked on and applauded tactics to elude national schemes, like encouraging the thousands of people who disappeared from the poll tax registers at the end of the 1980s. By not caring about the promises of liberal (or 'illiberal') democracy we have a headstart in keeping off the electoral role but more importantly we have been at the forefront of benefits claimants' action groups against Job Seekers' Allowance (see www.geocities.com/ncajsa/) and other community-based campaigns. At the hard end of campaigning like-minded activists have rescued asylum prisoners and seen off bailiffs. This is the kind of community model being used by the Defy-ID campaign, and one that should be supported. The solidarity gained in this level of grassroots activity can help build a sustainable fightback that appealing to individual self-interest on single issues will never achieve.

RFID – a new technology for ID cards

Radio-frequency identification tagging, or RFID, is a technology that started off in stock control, motorway tollgates, fancy key-fobs and pet ‘collars’. Now it’s on individual items in supermarkets for anti-theft and tracking shopping behaviours. Each tag includes an aerial and an electronic chip that sends out a code when it is excited by a transmitter in the shop. Both ASDA/Walmart and Tesco tried them out a while back on “smart shelves” displaying highly nickable Gillette razor blade packs, taking your photo when pick one up. Marks & Spencer is now tagging 3.5 million food trays, and Tesco is selling tagged DVDs in some stores and is massively expanding its RFID use. Tagged clothes (those paid for as well as nicked), another big product area for RFID, could potentially be tracked outside the shop although the cheaply made tags in common use are fairly large and not very durable. The real danger will come when these become small enough to remain as part of the clothing after sale. A proposed European Union “Intellectual Property Enforcement Directive” would actually forbid removal of embedded tags. Permanent tagging is being encouraged by the EU for limiting global movement of products, similar to regioning of DVDs, although this has been criticised by free-marketeters.

There may still be time to act. Gillette and the supermarkets suffered from bad press when they tried out RFID in razor packs, forcing a temporary withdrawal in some stores, and many privacy organisations are fighting RFID expansion. Various groups are supporting a worldwide boycott of Tesco to test the water in the latest fight against “spychips”. Minimum action is shopping less at Tesco. Other retailers, with an eye on their profits, are waiting to see what happens so it’s worth having a go, even if boycotting of one supermarket has its limits when they are all at it to some extent!

Not surprisingly, the state is interested in the level of control offered by RFID. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is testing “Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology” (US-VISIT) for tracking when and where people cross borders. RFID tagging is being installed in Ohio State’s prison system to track its 44,000 inmates, and some schools are already trying RFID-badges on students.

Other examples of RFID creep are embedded credit cards and mobile phones – these can of course be linked directly to your personal identity and location. There have also been a few (over-hyped) reports of under-the-skin tagging, such as staff in the Mexican Attorney General’s office and punters at a Spanish nightclub. If you are worried about ID-cards and other forms of control, it’s vital to keep a close eye on RFID developments.

More info on the web, in addition to numerous reports on Indymedia such as: ‘Cog in the Machine (tagging & tracking workers – which, and by who?)’ www.indymedia.org.uk

www.boycottTesco.com | www.notags.co.uk | www.rfidgazette.org

Interview with the French Anarchist Federation about their experience of ID cards

AF: You have had ID cards for many years. Should anarchists in Britain be concerned about attempts by the British State to introduce them?

Nicholas: Once the system is in place you cannot go back. The ID card is an object that identifies you. You have to have it with you at all times. It makes police control much easier. If you can't establish identity then they can take you to the police station without any other reason. Once they have the ID card in place then they can add other things- like biometric identification e.g. fingerprints. The base is the card and then they add things. The ID card is the beginning of a general file on everyone that regroups all other information they have to identify someone. They can have your whole life in this one file- your health, civil status etc.

AF: Won't a lot of people think that it won't affect them?

This type of measure is done supposedly for safety but it is not benign- it is a tool of oppression that can be used against militants, the socially weak and illegal immigrants. So of course anarchists and other political activists will be affected. But, it is an attack on general liberty, the basis of a whole system of surveillance. And, no one is sheltered from control by the police. There are abuses. For example, someone was just going home from work and was stopped by the police. He had forgotten his ID card and found himself at the police station for 12 hours. The ID card has become more and more dangerous because all the information is on computer. For the moment, we can say we are in a democracy and therefore only a few could be affected. The State could change and then the system is there to use against everyone.

AF: How will the ID cards link up with European-wide controls?

The Europolice can consult records in different countries and now they are also working together. They look at you, they don't like your face, they check. It is easier to stop people just to check identity. You are obliged to submit.

AF: Is it used as an entitlement card to obtain benefits?

No, in France you have other cards for that.

AF: What advice would you give to anarchists in Britain?

You have to argue that it is a danger for the liberty of everyone. Terrorism is a pretext. With a different government, then they can extend it to everyone. You also need to know exactly how the laws are to be enforced. For example, what happens if you don't have your card. Will there be fines, how long can you be held by the police etc.

Information from the German Anarchist Federation

ID cards actually came from Germany- a Prussian invention. It was designed to control the population, to check out who pays taxes, who needs to go to military service. They are now beginning to introduce new ID cards with a special chip. It is possible to check the ID card from a distance- so you could be just walking by and then could check your file. So on a demonstration they could use the information to check on who is there, who walks with whom etc.

Another aspect of the way that surveillance is increasing is the plan to introduce tolls for every car in Germany which would require each car to carry a GPS box. With this, not only could they check who had paid the toll but also check the movements of any car.

Panopticon Society

This article, edited from a leaflet produced in Manchester, is inspired by the Panopticon, a reference to Jeremy Bentham's prison architecture, having a central vantage point from which guards could watch each cell unobserved by the isolated prisoner, leading to self-regulating behaviour, as discussed in Michel Foucault's book 'Discipline and Punish'.

What have you got to hide?

The first important thing about ID cards is they want a register rather than a card. Bits of paper or plastic are to a great extent irrelevant. The old chestnut "if you're doing nothing wrong you've got nothing to hide" is being aired again by our government. They claim that the information to be recorded by the scheme (49 items in all) is only the basic necessary to prove your identity & to fight crime. But we are talking about 'knowledge power' here, the Panopticon that shines a light from which there is nowhere to hide.

One of the claims is that it will be used to stop terrorism, but ex-home secretary David Blunkett has already admitted: "I accept that it is important that we do not pretend that an entitlement card would be an overwhelming factor in combating international terrorism". In fact ID cards could even assist many of the things, like identity theft, that they are supposedly being introduced to prevent, so why do it?

Bearing in mind the expanding definition of crime is fast becoming 'what small minded petty middle class folk don't like' the scope for an ID scheme seems limitless. It appears to tie in nicely with the huge number of CCTV cameras in this country (the most in Europe if not the planet) and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), dispersal orders and the other new powers given to police and courts to penalise people without even the already dubious 'due process' of the law. Shopping centres are now being praised for banning young people in baseball caps & "hoodys". How low have things got when your clothes are the defining mark of criminality, striking fear even into the heart of mighty John Prescott?

They want to have your iris scan, fingerprint, photo, National Insurance number (NINO) and other numbers such as immigration number if you have one. If any detail changes you will be required to tell them & pay for the privilege of sorting out any mistakes, and bear in mind you may only find out something's not right when someone else accesses the data and says you can't have you benefits, or whatever. The state is proposing that your information will be available, not only to government officials, but also to others providing 'public service'. This would appear to include private companies like banks or credit checking agencies such as Experian. We hear that: "As part of this digital security infrastructure we envision that every constituent will have a highly secured, multi-purpose, government-provided electronic ID card that will serve not only for government purposes but also for online activities in the private sector-the electronic equivalent of today's ID cards, passports, driver's licenses and social security cards."

Of course this will all be presented in a way to make you think that this is actually a blessing, making life so much easier & convenient. Perhaps it will be, but who for?

Big business bonanza!

The ID scheme is being realised by a variety of information and communications technologies (ICT) companies including British Telecom and smaller 'card & card solutions' companies like Identix who work on fingerprint & facial recognition technology. In a lengthy submission to the Home Office, Atos Origin, one of the main companies involved, has argued that the Government should introduce an ID Card 'lite' and then migrate to a full biometric card and detailed population database when the card is already in use because: "the well understood sensitivity of the issue indicates the need to progress gradually rather than by 'big bang'. Because of the history and tradition of the British people, we believe that arriving at a universal entitlement multi-application smart card may be an iterative process stretching over a number of years".

The above statement is an example of the greedy cynicism inherent in this scheme. It is not just a case of the state deciding that we can't be trusted to live our lives without them imposing even more pointless rules & regulations. They are also intent on lining their chums' bulging pockets with our money. That's right, make society a semi-open prison and charge the inmates for the privilege — but at least we get to shop. With the advent of other monitoring technology it will no longer be necessary to go through your receipts to find out what you buy as among other things the clothes you wear will be readable using RFID. Admittedly the state might not be particularly bothered by what you wear unless it's a hoody or hijab, but the companies who are involved in developing surveillance systems want a little bit more than the millions they will rake in for their original tenders & the millions more they'll get when the job goes over budget. They will happily develop additional technology which can & will be sold to those interests who wish to target you for every penny they can get your hands on. People will, even more than at present, be regarded as economic units rather than autonomous individuals.

OK so why do we oppose ID?

1. Because it is wrong plain & simple.
2. It's a rip off. They really are taking the piss here. Charging us through the nose to get done over.
3. It will not work for any of the purposes they claim for a number of reasons including their lack of competence. As for the companies greed: it will work a bit, but always need a bit more money to fix it. Bit like smack really.
4. Government IT schemes always collapse into enquiries as to what went so spectacularly wrong. Over budget, the programmes don't work, the hardware doesn't work then they start to tinker round with them &/or the initial plan changes ½ way through (if that far on). Everyone a loser.
5. As was raised by a House of Commons committee, they will affect everyone but vulnerable social groups more. So if you are from an ethnic minority or homeless for example you will find yourself subjected to checks more often than those responsible for real offences, like bringing in this rubbish.

6. If it's not compulsory it will not be of any good really (also pointed out by a house Committee), though one thing for pushing it may be to go on the 'we can use finger prints to solve old crimes'. As we have no statute of limitations in this country & they got rid of double jeopardy it looks like when the police are feeling undervalued/funded they can fill the courts & jails with dubious cases.
7. Another issue people will have to face is how to live without our inflexible friends as we will apparently need them if we want to work or get benefits.
8. Loads of New offences including:
 - refusal to obey an order to register = £2500
 - failure to submit to fingerprinting and biometric scanning = £2500
 - failure to provide information demanded by the government = £2500
 - failure to attend an interview at a specified place and time = £2500
 - failure to notify authorities about a lost, stolen, damaged or defective card = up to 1yr in prison and/or a fine
 - failure to renew a card = £1000
 - failure to attend subsequent fingerprinting and biometric scanning when demanded = £1000
 - failure to provide subsequent information when demanded = £1000
 - failure to attend subsequent interview at specified place and time when demanded = £1000
 - failure to notify authorities of any change in personal circumstances (including change of address) = £1000
 - providing false information = up to 2 years and/or a fine

To add insult to injury, many of the offences set out in the Bill are civil penalties meaning it's unlikely you'll get legal aid to help your defence.

So what are we going to do?

So far there have been a few demos, mostly unreported by the mainstream media. After its re-election the government is set on bringing the legislation in as quickly as possible. Much of the foundation work has apparently been done & the propaganda machine has been revving up waiting for the green light. We cannot (did we ever) rely on backbenchers or the Lords to save our arses. This one like the Poll Tax affects everyone, more so as it also includes children, and it up to us all to fight it before or after the scheme comes in. This may mean having to set up support for those denied services due to a lack of cash, raising awareness of what is going on & of those companies complicit in the development of the scheme. We also have to challenge the variety of arguments being put forward by the government & supporters of the scheme on the grounds of public interest.

Clause 1(4) of the Bill defines it as being “in the interests of national security”, “for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime”, “for the purposes of the enforcement of immigration controls”, “for the purposes of the enforcement of prohibitions on unauthorised working or employment” and “for the purpose of securing the efficient and effective provision of public services.” Even if ID cards did address these issues, which they won’t, it will have to be argued that the effect on our freedom is not worth the claimed benefits. Some are attacks on our freedom anyway from the racism of immigration policy to the ‘so called prevention of crime’ measures which we have witnessed extending throughout the past couple of years. The Government & indeed the political culture have played along with the media a game of ‘who can scare the shit out of the public the most’. In attempting to outdo each other they have managed to convince many people that what they see is not real. While there are some unpleasant people in our communities doing things we’d all prefer them not to, it’s nowhere near as bad as the exaggerated horror stories that we are fed daily. This is how they have managed with barely a peep of dissent to the covering of the country in CCTV & imposing of new social controls such as ASBOs & dispersal orders. Manchester seems to be the capital of repressive practice, a willing laboratory for these new toys, happy to have more CCTV than anywhere else in the country (anecdotally I’ve heard the planet) & appears to deal out ASBOs like sweets, very often to children. If people are happy to accept these measures & the accompanying rhetoric, they will in the view of the government be prepared to accept the ID register & cards. Especially if those opposed can be presented as enemies of the people who support terrorism, criminality, dropping litter & anything else they heard that someone in a key marginal might have thought about getting upset about.

Now Labour have been elected again, albeit with a reduced majority & some backbenchers ready(ish) to challenge their leaders, we can look forward to an extension of the measures toward a stilted culture of fear alienation and the ‘comfort food’ of consumption. Already we are getting signals of this with the inaccurate & unfair stigmatizing of youth, immigrants & other sections of society. Their confusion of deference with respect, should worry us all. We need to address these issues before we no longer can. Remember what that German pastor said?¹

¹ Martin Niemöller “First they came for ...
And when they came for me,
there was no one left to speak out for me.”

Ways to fight ID

Like the Tories' poll tax, ID cards are Labour's own version of a 'tax on being alive'. We can scupper ID cards as soon as they try and force us to register, but only if we start preparing now. Once the scheme is in place it will be harder, although certainly not impossible, to beat it. We cannot allow the state to get away with becoming more authoritarian than it already is.

Get involved

One way to fight the national identity scheme is to get involved with a local anti-ID group (or set one up) and help get the message out by producing and distributing information against ID in community & social centres, libraries, health centres and door-to-door. There is still a lot to do to explain the basic facts of the scheme, as well as its likely effects, and to work out effective forms of direct action.

Get informed

ID will affect different groups in society in many different ways. We know that applications to the Student Loans Company will be linked to ID, probably so they can keep tabs on any address changes, and university students may even need to have an ID card to get a loan. Ex-Home Secretary Charles Clarke also wanted to gather ID information on other students and school leavers through the Connexions Card scheme for 13–19 years olds. There are likely be big changes in levels of police harassment for minority groups, and ID records could easily be used to control access to benefits or healthcare.

Get the inside information

Those in work can try and find out about any ID-related developments there. Anti-ID groups will be pleased to hear from any council workers or anyone else who can help the campaign find out when ID data collection starts to happen locally, especially in areas that may be chosen as a trial area for ID registration. A word of warning: local councils, who are likely to be involved with collecting additional personal data from the electoral role or council tax registers, are in general very authoritarian against anyone taking autonomous action. They also hate local people turning up in their cosy council houses to protest, especially when they would rather maintain the illusion that they are victims of a scheme instead of an integral part of it. Workers in companies implementing the scheme, like Experian, may know details about how their employer is planning to operate their part of it.

Get your passport

Personal information from passport applications will be used to build the National Identity Register. Some data collection has already started, taking face dimensions from passport photos. Later on, applicants will have to attend in person to get fingerprints or eyes scanned (69 Identity & Passport Service centres will be set-up around the country from October 2006 for in-person applications). So, for anyone who needs a new passport, it would be a good idea to get one now before the new systems are up and running properly, making sure the photo is not too clear so it is harder for the Passport Office to extract facial data. One Post Office service for the newer photo ID driving licence has your photo pre-checked so you can see what you can get away with (postage is also included which can work out cheaper than paying for this separately) – this may also be the case for passports. There must be lots of individual ways to confound the ID scheme and these can be shared in anti-ID groups, and even better, by telling friends and neighbours. This will help build a mass refusal campaign, because a scheme like this won't be prevented by small numbers of individuals helping themselves.

Get angry

Remember that local politicians of whatever colour cannot be trusted. Under the Tories, Labour council leaders enthusiastically issued poll tax demands and court orders, sent in the bailiffs and condemned local and national demonstrations as mindless riots. But as local people, we supported each other, we defied the courts and saw off bailiffs. We were angry and we fought back. Many of us disappeared off the registers for good. There may be a local MP against ID in some areas, but lobbying has been shown to be useless. We know that governments do not listen and that ID will be beaten on the streets or not at all.

Defy-ID and No Borders — better together!

This is the text of a leaflet produced by Nottingham Defy-ID in February 2007, group in which AF members are involved. It was also reproduced in the 'No Borders reader' distributed at the No Borders camp at Gatwick in September where a workshop was held on ID and Border control. The leaflet examines the link between the introduction of identity cards and databases resulting from the ID Cards Act of March 2006, and the British state's intention to introduce much stricter border controls through a new UK Borders Bill.

Defy-ID

Groups and individuals in the Defy-ID network have for the last few years been campaigning against the introduction of a national ID scheme, biometric upgrading of passports, and the surveillance society in general. At the same time, No Borders have been tirelessly protesting against maltreatment and incarceration of asylum seekers in detention centres and against repression by government (and privately run) immigration 'services'.

It's becoming clearer than ever that these campaigns should be working closely together...

Because ID has already been tested on asylum seekers and will also be used first on other 'foreigners'

The Home Office is now much more open about its intended use of a biometric ID database scheme to control Britain's borders. This is not completely new- we know that ID technologies have always been tried out first on asylum seekers. For example, the ARC 'smart card' that is carried by asylum seekers is used for their regular reporting and to obtain NASS payments from the post office. It is an ID card which goes hand-in-hand with their digital photos and fingerprints being stored by the Home Office. Asylum seekers are fingerprinted when they report to their reporting centre or police station. Non-European Union visitors will soon be made to have biometric visas, including those already in Britain. Plus, the European Commission has already put in place a plan to require children to be fingerprinted and photographed for passports from at least the age of 12 years old (EU member states can decide to make this even younger). What is perhaps less well known is this was trialed on asylum seekers in Britain. Children as young as five are known to have been fingerprinted at asylum centres in Croydon and Liverpool, for example. Plus we are starting to hear about police mobile fingerprinting units being used to further harass people in cars and on demonstrations. The plan for a new National Identity Register has also been dropped in favour of combining three existing databases to create a 'meta-database': (1) The Home Office asylum-seeker database (2) The Identity and Passport Service database, and (3) The Department of Work and Pensions 'National Insurance' database. Although the eventual plan is to extend ID cards and a meta-database to everyone in Britain, this change of policy makes it clear that asylum seekers and other 'foreigners' are first in line for more repression.

Because of the new “UK Border Bill”

The government seems to have put the powers given to it by last year’s Identity Card Act on the back-burner (at least for now), whilst biometric passport and visas are coming very soon. A new UK Border Bill introduced by Home Secretary John Reid on 25 January 2007 now aims to formally bring together border controls and compulsory ID. With relation to Biometric registration the Bill (amongst other things): “confers a power to make regulations to require those subject to immigration control to apply for a [...] “biometric immigration document”; and to require a biometric immigration document to be used for specified immigration purposes, in connection with specified immigration procedures, and in specified circumstances where a question arises about a person’s status in relation to nationality or immigration.”

Solidarity

Exposing the government plan to get a national ID scheme accepted

The single issue campaign No2ID has previously attempted to keep the right-wing on board by telling them they can be against a national ID scheme because it “won’t work to stop illegal immigration”. Countering this, the Defy-ID network has seen that the government’s ID system will work against immigrants. ID cards and databases will be used against ‘foreigners’ in general as a central part of the government’s plan, before they extend the scheme to everyone. The fact that ID cards and fingerprinting technology has been tested on asylum seekers shows that the state is prepared to impose ID on those people with the least voice to oppose it, before rolling it out to the whole population. Together, Defy-ID and No Borders could help get the message across that the government is trying to get its ID plans accepted by cynical scapegoating of immigrants and asylum-seekers. This would hopefully make for a stronger anti-ID campaign that is based on solidarity rather than fear.

Using the Social Centres network to widen collaboration of No Borders & DefyID

Those involved with No Borders (UK) and other refugee support groups already have a strong involvement in the emerging network of autonomous social centres in Britain. Many progressive anti-ID activists are also involved with social centres. This is true in Nottingham with activists using the Sumac Centre as a focus for Defy-ID campaigning, for example. As well as strengthening links between campaigns, social centres could also help keep an eye on the development of the Identity and Passport Service’s 69 new Authentication by Interview ‘interrogation’ centres for passport (and ID card) applications.

Get involved with Defy-ID

Defy-ID is a national campaign fighting ID, and there are many local groups who would love to hear from you.

“Defy-ID is not a national membership organisation, it is a network of groups from around the UK. Local groups form the basis for resistance to every stage of the introduction of ID cards and could involve all kinds of campaigning methods. The best way to get involved is to contact your nearest group. If there is not one in your area perhaps you should think of forming one. However, the idea is not necessarily that groups would be formed specifically to protest against the identity card scheme, but also that existing groups could join the Defy-ID network. Such a group might, for example, be a community group, anti-fascist, environmental, animal rights, tenants association or asylum seekers support group.”

You can find out more about Defy-ID on the web and find further ideas for action at: www.defy-id.org.uk or contact the Anarchist Federation and we'll attempt to put you in touch.

Local Defy-ID Groups

There many groups around Britain opposing ID. Some of the local groups the AF is involved with are in Liverpool, Manchester & Nottingham. *Haringey Against ID* is a good contact in London. For more Defy-ID groups see: www.defy-id.org.uk (although be aware that this list is quite old). See also www.no2id.net with No2ID local groups list. Now the bill has passed No2ID should be moving away from lobbying towards more grassroots activities.

Group activities might include:

- Bringing information along to share — so we can learn from each other what it's all about, and build up confidence to refuse
- Producing leaflets and posters, to help get the message out more widely
- Making badges, stickers and stencils, to show our opposition
- Speaking at local events
- Opposing trials, in areas where the scheme is being tested
- Action around new identity and passport registration offices

Rather than concentrate only on the negatives (we know it will be bad), it's a good idea to get across the message that schemes like these have been defeated before, and can be defeated again if we resist collectively, not just as individuals.

The Liverpool and Nottingham groups have their own web presence. Check these for regular meetings.

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Web: www.nottingham-defy-id.org.uk/
and www.veggies.org.uk (See Events Diary for meetings)

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
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Anarchist Federation
Defending Anonymity
Thoughts for struggle against identity cards
September 2005

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