

ENTHUSIASM FOR ID CARD IS WANING OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT

There are two key questions that identity card supporters should ask themselves. Firstly, is there any evidence to suggest that those countries that do have ID cards do not experience exactly the same problems as we are told identity cards will solve? Second, if the Government is planning to spend billions of pounds to make the United Kingdom safer, would you feel better about introducing a compulsory ID card, or spending the money on policing resources?

The card will have minimal impact on crime. Identity is rarely an issue in criminal cases. The police may well know who they think the offender is, the main challenge is obtaining evidence. This is rarely about identity. If we are to spend billions of pounds to fight crime surely it is better used on increased policing resources to help detect more of the 75 per cent of offences which never even end in an arrest.

Further, illegal immigration will hardly be affected. All those seeking asylum have been required to carry ID cards since 2000. Employers are required to inform the authorities if they suspect the immigration status of workers. Unfortunately they rarely do. The tragic events in Morecombe bay demonstrate not only that many people are being exploited but also that the immigration services would not have to look hard if they were minded to pick up significant numbers of illegal workers.

There are indications that enthusiasm for the governments ID card plans is waning both inside and outside parliament. Charles Clarke's acceptance that ID cards would not have stopped the London bombings was a welcome and honest admission. It appeared the public agreed as there was no noticeable increase in support for the proposals which recent polls show are now dropping below 50 per cent.

A further outbreak of Government honesty was evident when Tony McNulty, the minister in charge of the scheme admitted that they had "oversold" the benefits of the scheme at a meeting of the Labour Party's Fabian Society.

These developments make renewed opposition to the bill even more important as it returns to Parliament. The main opposition parties, who are opposed to the bill, must be encouraged to ensure all of their MPs vote against. Of particular importance will be the number of Labour backbenchers who can be persuaded to defy the Government. The number needed to vote against is nothing like that required in the days when the Government enjoyed a majority of over 150. However, it will still require a significant rebellion of about 40 or more MPs.

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Liberty will be working hard in the coming months to galvanise opposition to the bill. We believe there is a realistic chance that a continued concerted effort will frustrate the governments plans to compel all of us to have identity cards.

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