

## Being taken for a ride?

In the months leading up to September 2001, after years of plotting, a small team made final preparations. Then, the attack. The Home Office's grand scheme, Blunkett's vision: Entitlement Cards.

Ever since war-time ID cards were abolished in 1952, elements of the civil service had been trying to reinstate national registration – first introduced to Britain in 1915 to aid conscription. This time the intentions were disguised by talk of entitlement, but press and public refused to accept the “Entitlement Card” spin.

The Home Office introduced its Identity Cards Bill to Parliament. In fact, most of the bill was concerned with creating a vast surveillance database to record personal information about each of us; creating new offences; and providing new powers for the Secretary of State. The cards themselves barely got a mention; a mere pretext.

Civil liberties groups were horrified. A new campaign was formed – NO2ID – to stop ID cards and the database state. You have probably heard of us.

We are the ones warning that the Home Office wants to fingerprint you like a criminal and scan your irises;

— that you will be called to an interrogation and compulsory registration when you apply for a passport or other “designated document”;

— that after registration you will be liable for a fine of up to £1,000 every time you fail to notify the authorities of a change of circumstance;

— that everyone will be required to give details of all their residences, so the database will learn about everyone you ever live with;

— that every time your identity is checked, it will be logged in the register – recording which clinics you attend, with whom you bank, where and when you apply for credit;

— that you will have no control over who can access your file, containing all these data that Ministers routinely describe as “basic” personal information.

It is all there in the Identity Cards Act, which MPs finally put on the statute book in 2006.

Victims of domestic abuse seeking refuge won't be able to hide their addresses from the register; nor crime victims; nor witnesses in criminal cases; nor those just seeking a bit of privacy.

Here in Scotland, polls indicate that two thirds of people are opposed to the national ID scheme. Would you sign up for one of Blunkett's Entitlement Cards – an ID card linked to a vast intrusive database?

What would entice you not to resist, to give up your privacy without a fight? A free bus ride, perhaps?

To popular acclaim, the Scottish Executive introduced free nationwide bus travel for pensioners. All they had to do was return their old bus pass and sign up for a new Scottish Entitlement Card. Well, why not? What's the difference?

Once upon a time it was sufficient to show a pass to the driver while boarding a bus. It will soon be routine for pensioners and young Scots to swipe the Entitlement Card while the driver records the destination, as already happens in Shetland.

As a convenience measure, the Scottish Entitlement Card can also be used to access other services, such as libraries – where they do, of course, have to record which books are taken out.

The cards can also be used to access leisure services – where it is useful for a record to be kept of facility usage to help with resource allocation.

There will be a records of where you travel, what you read, what you do in your spare time. All these records will be tied together by the number on your Entitlement Card, the index to a “Citizens Account”. An account is being created for every person in Scotland. There are undoubtedly good reasons for recording all of these data, but do we really want databases to know so much about us? It was never previously necessary for the government to track the movements of pensioners. Who will have access to these data? What will they do with the information?

The Registrar General has recently acquired some new powers – from Section 57 of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006. There was a public consultation on many aspects of this bill, but Section 57 was inserted after that had concluded; without further consultation.

The General Register Office asked for Section 57 after discussing Citizens Accounts with officials from the UK Identity and Passport Service – the department responsible for implementing the UK National Identity Register; shortly after the Scottish Parliament voted to ensure that ID cards would not be required for access to devolved services. What powers does it give them?

The powers are simple. Section 57 sweeps away the long established rules of confidentiality and rule-of-law that protect privacy. It says that the Registrar General can record any information about you and share it with anyone, or words to that effect, all without Parliamentary oversight. It is a recipe for promiscuous use of your personal data by public bodies.

Citizens Accounts will form part of a de facto population register recording the details of our lives. A Scottish Identity Register.

There is a further danger. Notwithstanding Section 57, the Identity Cards Act gives the Secretary of State the power to appropriate data held by any public body to populate the National Identity Register. If there is a record of your journeys, reading preferences and leisure use, it can all find its way on to the National Identity Register.

NO2ID are not opposed to free bus travel or library cards, but these Citizens Accounts are being implemented without regard for basic data protection principles. The Scottish Government has a duty to protect our privacy. Until it does, I would not advise anyone to accept an Entitlement Card.

What price a free bus pass? To journey blindly towards a database state? Protect your privacy: say no to ID. [www.NO2ID.net](http://www.NO2ID.net).