

Introducing ID cards

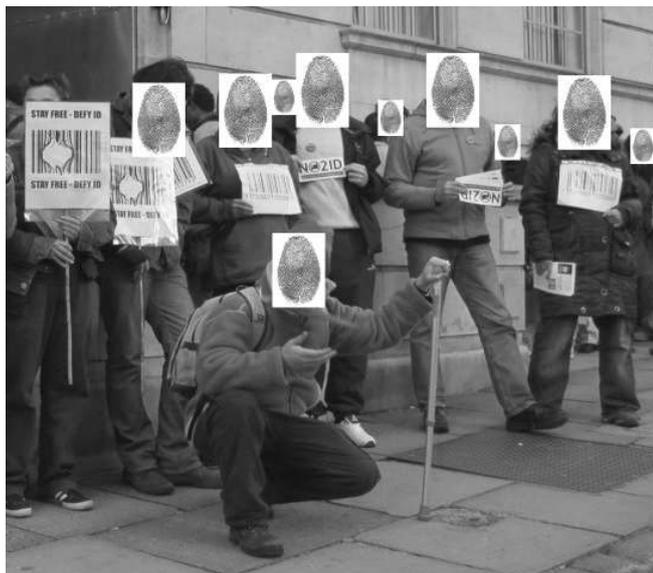
Widespread protest accompanied the introduction of identity cards for non-EU nationals in November. Sophie McKeand explains why.

At a time when the economy is crashing into a depression, with unemployment and homelessness dramatically on the increase, the UK Government remains hell-bent on spending billions of pounds tagging the population like dogs. The first phase of introducing the national identity card began on 25 November 2008. In a move reminiscent of pre-WWII Nazi Germany, the British government has ordered that all non-EU nationals living in the UK must now report to one of six new Border Agency centres across the country to be interrogated.

Overseas students and non-EU spouses of UK residents who apply for an extension of their stay in the UK must now report to have their biometric data harvested. Along with a photograph, name, nationality and immigration status, the cards also have a biometric chip containing a digital image and fingerprints.

There were a number of protests held on 25 November across the UK in defiance of such a blatantly racist move. The protests were attended by those who want freedom for all, not a select few, but that doesn't seem to have halted Jacqui Smith's determination to frogmarch the UK into a totalitarian state. In an article published on the Home Office website Jacqui Smith said: *ID cards will give employers a secure way of checking a migrant's right to work and study in the UK and help people prove they are who they say are.* Sounds fair, does it? No – victimising migrant workers and students in this manner simply attempts to put a 'respectable face' on racism and cannot be accepted. In addition, a recent report in the Observer points to the fact that *these ID cards cannot be read by any official body because the government has not issued a single scanner.* What's more, the Home Office has admitted that no government bodies, including police forces, have scanners - **and there are no plans to issue them!**

It could be concluded that this is, initially, a triumph for those of us that



Anonymous protesters in Liverpool object to the introduction of ID cards

oppose this fascist state tracking each individual as if we were a danger to ourselves and each other. No citizen in a free country should continually have to prove their identity. No government should be so audacious as to erode civil liberties with such blatant disregard for the rights of the individual. We should not have ID cards, or the scanners to read them.

However, reading between the lines, the lack of scanners takes on a more sinister tone. Although the ID card is the more visible face of the scheme, it is the National Identity Register (NIR) that sits behind the card that sets alarm bells ringing. This is the giant 'big brother' style database that will eventually hold any number of pieces of sensitive information on each and every member of the population.

If government bodies have no way of scanning these ID cards then they become no better than a piece of plastic with your photo on – like the driving licences that we already have. So what's the difference? The difference is that the government now holds a wealth of information about you – all in one place. You are responsible for its content. You will be fined if it is wrong. Your personal information could be accessed by any number of nosy civil servants for anything as trivial as a parking ticket.

Astonishingly, the government does not see the sheer hypocrisy of admitting that no scanners exist! If the cards are not fit for the purpose originally stated then why have them at all? The Home Office website states that the ID cards are the 'cornerstone' of the national identity scheme, and that *the cards will be linked to their owners by unique biometric information (for example, fingerprints).* This is needed to ensure that your card is really yours, and to protect you from identity theft. If nobody can scan the cards, then this crucial point made by the government is, in effect, defunct.

Whilst the population is routinely monitored, counted and checked, our sensitive, personal information is being increasingly shared between the public and private sector. There are currently fifty categories of facts that must be registered and the government reserves the right to add to this at any time. This centralisation of data will not prevent illegal immigration, will not prevent terrorism and will not prevent identity fraud. What it does is give those in positions of power too much power and too much information. There are very good historical reasons why Germany does not centralise its records. It would seem that the UK government thinks itself above learning such important lessons from history.

Deported from Caia Park

Genny Bove

A family seeking asylum in the UK, who had been living in Caia park for over two years, were forcibly removed from Britain just before Christmas in spite of efforts by supporters to prevent their deportation and amid fears that their lives would be in danger if they were returned to Algeria. .



Samia and Farid Boumerdassi

Samia Boumerdassi worked for the Algerian government as an environmental officer, but was forced to go into hiding after her efforts to tackle housing corruption resulted in threats being made on her life, including an incident where Samia was hospitalised after her car was forced off the road.

The family eventually escaped to Britain, where Samia, Farid and their three children sought leave to remain. The children were settled into local schools and Samia and Farid became active in their local community, helping out with several local groups.

The family members were seized by immigration officials in a dawn raid on their house in Caia Park mid-December, taken first to Yarl's Wood and then Tinsley House detention centres before being put on flights to Algiers. Samia and the children were deported ahead of Farid, due to a problem with his paperwork, but all have now been sent back to Algeria.

Efforts were made by friends and supporters to stay the deportation and local MP Ian Lucas had apparently been working on the case, although it has been suggested by some local activists that his government position of Assistant Whip might have limited his willingness to intervene in a robust and effective way on behalf of the Boumerdassi family. Campaigns to stop forced deportations challenge the unjust and inhumane immigration laws passed by successive governments. Ian Lucas might want to be seen by the local community to be supporting a popular family, but how

far is a Party Whip really going to go to challenge his bosses?

In any event, while MPs can sometimes be helpful in preventing deportations, it is absolutely clear that this cannot be relied upon. Experience has shown that active local campaigning can be very effective, and for that reason there have been moves to set up a local *No Borders* group to support families and individuals in similar situations in future.

No Borders is a network of groups struggling for the freedom of movement for all and an end to all migration controls, which calls for a radical movement against the system of control which divides us into citizens and non-citizens.

More information about *No Borders* at: northwalesnoborders.blogspot.com and noborders.org.uk

Court reports

from SchNEWS: www.schnews.org.uk

After two years of delays, postponements and legal nonsense, the verdict on the Lakenheath 8 case finally came through after a four day trial. After locking themselves to the munitions store of the US airbase at Lakenheath back in 2006, the eight were prosecuted for criminal damage and trespassing - under SOCPA section 128. As a maximum punishment the defendants had been looking at a year in the slammer and a £5000 fine. Yet on 17 December, in spite of being found guilty on both counts, they walked free on conditional discharges and were ordered to pay the rather more modest fee of £250 each in court costs.

In a case described by the senior crown prosecutor as *very complicated and unprecedented* the defence based their case on the idea that they were acting legally as they were stopping a war crime - the dropping of cluster bombs - from taking place. They claimed that their attempts to

alert the authorities had been ignored and so the only action left open to them was to physically prevent the bombs from being loaded onto the planes. The argument was rejected by the prosecution who said that possession of cluster bombs did not constitute a war crime. It did, however, lead to the admission from the USAF that cluster bombs were present at the base, a triumph of sorts after years of *we can neither confirm or deny* responses.

While defendant Mel Harrison stated the group's intention to continue to fight against the use of cluster bombs, Cdr Bob Mehal, spokesman for the US Department of Defence stated his group's intention to continue to use them saying *Use of cluster munitions can result in less collateral damage to civilians and civilian infrastructure than unitary weapons*. As the recorded casualties of cluster bombs are 98% civilian we can only assume the 'unitary weapons' he was referring to

were the type dropped on Hiroshima. For more, see:

www.easterncnduk.org

Meanwhile, over in West Yorkshire, veteran peace activist Sylvia Boyes was sentenced to three months in jail after refusing to undertake the 150 hours of 'community punishment' she was sentenced to for her part in an action this year at Fylingdales Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station in North Yorkshire. Alongside fellow activist Erica Wilson, Boyes cut through the base perimeter fence and liberally dispersed red paint, a reference to the bloodshed caused by US foreign policy and its ever eager friend, the British government.

For more, see:

www.tridentploughshares.org

Messages of solidarity and support can be sent to Sylvia Boyes at:

HMP/YOI NEW HALL, Dial Wood, Flockton, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF4 4XX.