THE T&G HAS SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT ID CARDS. WE ARE ASKING MPS TO OPPOSE THIS BILL, IF UNAMENDED AT 2ND READING.

WHY DO WE OPPOSE THIS BILL AS IT CURRENTLY STANDS?

The T&G’s position is to oppose the ID cards bill. ID cards and an ID database will:

1. Be costly and impractical
2. Make it more difficult for everyone to access public services
3. Endanger public service workers
4. Be a disaster for race relations
5. Be ineffective in preventing illegal working (or benefit fraud, organised crime, id fraud, or terrorism).

We are asking MPs to raise the points in this briefing during the second reading debate. We would also draw MPs attention to a separate briefing issued by Liberty which outlines the civil liberties implications thoroughly. An Early Day Motion calling on the government to shelve plans for ID cards has been laid down and we also ask MPs to sign this EDM.

COST:

- The government won’t say how much this bill will cost, citing ‘commercial sensitivity’, and in effect, asking MPs to sign a blank cheque.
- Independent researchers at the LSE have put the true cost of running and implementing the scheme at £18bn.¹

- **The money involved could be much better spent** -

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<th>£18bn is the equivalent of:</th>
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<td>270,000 new council houses, ² or</td>
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<td>50% of all teachers, GPs <strong>and</strong> nurses - 275,000 teachers, 40,000 GPs <strong>and</strong> 198,000 nurses ³</td>
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¹ Observer, May 29th 2005
² The Tory £35bn cuts plan, Labour Party document April 2005
The cost is far more than the loss to the UK through fraudulent use of benefits and services or through ID fraud. Less than 1% of benefit fraud is due to identity falsification. Both the BMA and RCN have said there is no evidence of significant use of public services by those ‘not entitled’. The estimated £1.3bn cost of ID fraud has been widely discredited, with IT magazine the Register pointing out that most of this would not be addressed by ID cards.

A POTENTIAL ELECTORAL LIABILITY

- Government has said that the scheme will be self-financing, through a flat rate charge on individuals (with exemptions possible). Even at the latest estimate of £300 per person the scheme risks becoming Labour’s poll tax. Just as in Australia, public opinion will turn against ID cards when the full implications are known. A YouGov poll last year found up to 3 million people would refuse to carry an ID card.
- Only 7% of the population are prepared to pay more than £42 (the current cost of a passport) for a combined card/passport. Currently 2/3 of voters have ‘little or no idea’ how the scheme will work.

IMPractical

- This will be one of the largest IT projects the Government has embarked upon. A number of the companies behind previous expensive failures (Child Support Agency, DWP, Inland Revenue), such as EDS are likely to be rewarded with parts of the ID contract. As Patricia Hewitt said to a BBC Question Time audience in September 2003, "The principle, the civil liberties and the practicalities of great big IT projects and databases have a horrible habit of going wrong".
- Errors in the system could literally ruin people’s lives, as has already happened with the Home Office’s Criminal Records Database, which has an error rate of up to 10%.
- Many IT experts have pointed out that the system will not be secure from hacking the database or forging the cards.
- The pilots that have taken place have already shown a high failure rate particularly for certain groups including disabled people and ethnic minorities.

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4 ‘Health Tourism Plans Unveiled’, 30 December 2003, BBC news online
5 see for example www.theregister.co.uk/2005/05/25/id_bill_mk2_fraud_con/
6 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3728043.stm, May 2004
7 MORI poll conducted for Race Equality Impact Assessment
8 MORI for Detica IT consultancy, April 2004
9 quoted in Computing Magazine, 26/9/03
10 UK Identity Cards and Social Exclusion, Privacy International, 30/5/05. The report suggests up to 4 million disabled people will have significant difficulties with using a biometric card, and points out that the Race Impact Assessment failed to foresee problems for black people with the iris scanning technology (which were pointed out on their website in January 2003).
• The confusion over use of the cards – entitlement or security? - also makes it more likely they will fail – for example, Tim Conway of trade body Intellect (the largest IT industry body, heavily involved in the scheme) has said that any use of the entitlement card as proof of identity would ‘doom the system to failure’.12

• On coming into office, the Labour Government scrapped the benefit payment card introduced by its Conservative predecessor on the grounds that it was too difficult to computerise up to 20 million claimants. How then can it hope to run an ID card for 60 million citizens?

PROBLEMS FOR PUBLIC SERVICES AND PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS

People will eventually need the card to access public services. The history of the card (previously ‘entitlement card’) reveals one of its key aims. It will be much easier for this or any future government to exclude any group it chooses from accessing public services.

• Difficulties if the database is flawed or non operational - false refusals, long queues, and immense problems if they are lost,

• The focus on stopping use of public services by those ‘not entitled’ will inevitably lead to discrimination in public services – see (4), below.

• Making people use a card every time they access a public service will facilitate charges for services. In New Zealand, proposals for a similar ID card scheme were defeated when it emerged that the card would have facilitated a part-payment scheme for the health service.

• T&G members in public services, along with other public service workers will have to make decisions about access to services. In effect they will have to act as unofficial immigration police,

• T&G members working with vulnerable client groups (the homeless, mentally ill, elderly, and disabled) have expressed concern that their jobs will become harder, their clients more marginalised and excluded.

• All frontline workers will also be affected as private sector organisations can register as card users13. We have particular concerns regarding our members in ports and airports, and on public transport generally.

A DISASTER FOR RACE RELATIONS

• The experience in France and elsewhere is that ID cards create social unrest and increased racial tension and disaffection, as ‘foreign-looking’ people are targeted for ID checks.

11 Other confounding events included glasses, religious headcoverings, glaucoma, ‘heavy eye make-up’, ‘eyes not level’, (iris) baseball cap, hair (facial recognition), and ‘wart on finger’ and ‘muscle weakness’ (fingerprint) – UK Passport Service ‘Biometrics Enrolment Trial Report’
12 Quoted in Computing Magazine 3 July 2002
13 Clause 14 Subsection 5 enables an accreditation scheme to be set up allowing organisations to apply for approval to make ID card checks. David Blunkett gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select committee in May 2004 that this could include organisations such as video rental stores, for example
• ID cards are discriminatory in principle and in practice. The cards will be compulsory for foreign nationals (including up to 3 million commonwealth citizens in this country) straight away, and this group will have visually distinct cards.

• Many groups representing ethnic minorities have expressed strong opposition to this bill, as has the Law Society and many other individuals and organisations. The 1990 Trust said the ID scheme “will reinforce racial discrimination and particularly Islamophobia”. JCWI pointed to the “risk of creating a general culture of suspicion toward black and ethnic minority communities”. Keith Best, former head of the Immigration Advisory Service, said ID cards would be used in a discriminatory way and could herald a return “to the bad old days of the Sus laws.” The Metropolitan police, whilst favourable towards ID cards/databse in general, said “We have severe reservations that the scheme could add to tensions at a time when the police service is investing greatly in gaining confidence across all communities.”

WON’T TACKLE ILLEGAL WORKING, SERIOUS CRIME OR ID FRAUD

• The T&G’s experience (eg with the gangmasters issue) is that undocumented workers are employed by people who simply don’t care about checking people’s papers. ID cards and database won’t change this, particularly as the government has indicated that employers may have to pay to make online checks. Carefully focused measures aimed at exploitative employers would be much more effective.

• The TUC has raised concerns that employers may simply avoid employing black and ethnic minority people (despite anti-discrimination laws) to protect themselves, as employers will not have full biometric (fingerprint and retina scan) card readers.

• Serious criminals will be able to forge ID cards. Supposedly secure biometric cards were quickly forged by computer students in Japan. They may create a false sense of security that they are unforgeable and actually increase the market in identity theft. Also it will be impossible to create a clean, secure database as there are already false birth certificates in circulation.

• Countries with ID cards have just as high rates of crime as the UK.

• Since the tragic events in Spain in March 2004, a country with biometric ID cards, the government has stopped claiming as it did in November 2003 that ‘It is obvious that terrorist networks would target the countries that had made the least progress in developing the capacity to provide [ID] protection’.

We urge MPs to vote against this bill on the second reading and to sign EDM 263 opposing ID cards.

14 written evidence to Select Committee on Home Affairs July 2004
15 The same points were forcefully made by the Law Society in written evidence to the HASC in December 2003.
16 statement by David Blunkett to the Commons on 11th November 2003.