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Common Error No. 63 [1]

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63. "We need ID cards to help fight terrorism."

Terrorists constitute the one group which seems to have no difficulty in gaining access to forged and false identification. If ID cards were introduced in Britain, no competently equipped terrorist would be without one. Terrorists do not usually write the word "terrorist" as their occupation; they try to hide their purposes, and only surface as terrorists at the moment of their crime.

It is all very well to talk of higher technology to combat ID card forgery, but the technology of the forgers advances, too, and many terrorist groups have the resources to use it.

What ID cards are actually about is control. They enable authorities to know our movements, along with a great deal of other information. We have always been reluctant to grant gratuitous information to those in authority because we have so often seen it misused. Just as sophisticated phone-tap technology is now used by local authorities to search for people involved in fly-tipping, so we can expect the information on ID cards to make its way rapidly down the scale of offences and be used against individuals suspected of trivial misdemeanors.

We have learned to our cost that every level of government is careless with the information it stores on us. Even if authorities did not misuse the information themselves, it is quite likely that their slipshod controls would make it easy for those with criminal intent to do so. There have been incidents of highly sensitive information lost on mislaid disks, or stolen while inadequately protected. The very collection of so much information together would create risks of it falling into the wrong hands.

Government talks of combating terrorism, but the real purpose of ID cards is probably to control employment of illegal immigrants or to fight benefit frauds. There are better and less expensive ways of doing this than subjecting the whole citizenry to an ID card regime.

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