ID CARDS

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South) (Lab): I do not have any problems with identity cards. I have several of them. I have a passport, a driving licence, a bank card, a credit card, a supermarket loyalty card, an NHS card and probably several others that I have forgotten about. None of these is perfect and secure and we all have our horror stories about what happens when they get stolen, go missing or get misused. But we continue to use them, for two reasons: one, because it is our choice to use them, and two, because there is an assumption that we have reasonably, or tolerably, secure firewalls between them. When I go on holiday, I present my passport but I am not asked to present the shopping list from my last visit to the supermarket. When I go to renew my driving licence, I am not asked whether my credit card can stand it. When I go to the bank, they do not ask when I last went to the doctor. The dangers in the Bill are that by putting all those information systems into one card, it creates something that is an invitation to criminals and hackers. It is a honeypot for crime. And we have yet to convince ourselves, let alone the public or even the experts, that we have the technology that would withstand that.

I will try to confine my speech to my worries about three things. A number of claims made in the Bill are unproven or just not true. In terms of the effects—in terms of tackling terrorism, crime or drug trafficking—I am very grateful to a retired scientist who took the trouble to undertake a European comparison of crime statistics on four parameters. He broke the EU 15 down into the eight that had voluntary ID cards, the four that had statutory compulsory ID cards and the three that had no ID cards. The figures are interesting. Over the past five years, the group that had the highest level of terrorist incidents and the highest rate of homicides were those that had compulsory cards. They also happened to have the greatest increases in drug trafficking and in crime. By contrast, those without cards had the lowest rate of terrorist incidents and the lowest rate of homicides, and had the most success against drug trafficking and in crime reduction.

What does that prove? Nothing. It does not make a case for or against ID cards; it just says that they are not relevant or central to tackling those challenges. In the countries that have ID cards, they have them because they are popular with their citizens. But by and large, they have their own firewalls in them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) said when she was moving her reasoned amendment, the key to this is that there is separation of data storage in those systems. We could have the same ID card system here, but it would require us to undertake a commitment that the responsibility and control was going to be placed in the hands of the citizen, not the hands of the state, and that is fundamentally at the heart of my objections to the Bill as currently drafted.

I worry about the scope for what people refer to as function creep. The best example of this that I came across was in the United States, where I understand that the Bush Administration wants to introduce radio frequency ID chips to the passports of all foreign nationals. It is a great idea

for the CIA; it will allow it to remotely monitor those who are there on lobbies and on demonstrations and who hold beliefs or convictions that the Administration disagrees with, and it is a reflection of the sort of paranoid society and Administration that one finds on the other side of the Atlantic. It is an American thing but not a UK thing.

I thought I had better check that with the Home Office, however. I got a reply today from the Minister, who pointed out that in the UK

"The International Civil Aviation Organisation initiated feasibility studies evaluating the acceptability and implementation options for biometrics and the storage of electronic data on passports including the use of radio frequency identification chips . . . The United Kingdom Passport Service . . . has played a significant role in the development of the options and subsequent standards. The UKPS has adopted these standards within the technical design of the biometric passport.

No final decisions have been taken yet on the chip technology for ID cards."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2005; Vol. 435, c. 1242W.]

That is the power of stop-and-search without the hassle of the stop. If we do that, we fundamentally declare war on our own citizens. With the presumptions of criminality and the right to spy, we move from the open society to the surveillance society in an insignificant, unrecognised sweep because none of these proposals has to come back to the House for primary legislation. That is why we must oppose the Bill.