

ID cards will not stop the massive tax evasion achieved through cash transactions. Furthermore, the great tax rorts of the 1970s were stamped out eventually by determined judicial, legislative and investigative action without the benefit of an ID system. It seems to me excessive for the Government now to want to impose a compulsory card on millions of Australians who are not in the rip-off business and who want to go about their personal financial dealings without feeling that an omnipotent bureaucracy is placed to inspect every decision and dividend.

The proposed gains from reducing social welfare fraud would seem to be even less significant than the tax gains. Last week, the Minister for Social Welfare, Mr. Howe, told Parliament that net annual overpayments for social welfare were less than \$20 million, or less than one half of one per cent of a total welfare bill of almost \$15,000 million. Again it seems excessive that the Government should want every Australian compulsorily to carry a card.

The Government's report to the joint committee makes it clear that the ID card would be of little value in fighting organised crime. The report says Federal Police have indicated that "there are no real grounds for anticipating any impact on the level of organised crime generally".

The report adds: "The only relevant factor is that the ease with which organised crime has used the banking system in the past would be decreased by the proposed requirements in respect of certain banking transactions. Organised crime, particularly in the drug trafficking area, would be quick to identify possible methods of avoiding the inconvenience caused." Again, the case for compelling all Australians to possess IDs diminishes.

In its report, the Government reveals its sensitivity to criticism of the ID system on civil liberties grounds. ". . . without appropriate safeguards . . . some of this criticism would be well-founded," it says. There are two things to be said about these weasel words.

First, they carry the inbuilt assumption that it is OK to diminish individual rights so long as "appropriate safeguards" are provided. Rubbish. It is better not to touch the rights of individuals unless the social benefits are much more obvious than they are in the case for ID cards. A promise of safeguards does not overcome objections.

Second, the safety of safeguards is not always certain. The temptation will be greater for any government to get rid of troublesome safeguards than to get rid of an ID system which allows far greater control and inspection of the lives of individuals. That way real danger lies.—Geoffrey Barker, "The Age", 20/2/86.