

An ID Card for Every Citizen?

THE IDEA OF FURNISHING every American citizen a national identity card has been interjected for public consideration by Frances G. Knight, the redoubtable director of the U. S. Passport Office. She is convinced, she told U. S. News & World Report, that national registration will eventually come to this country at the demand of citizens "who are sick and tired of supporting non-taxpaying criminals and illegal aliens."

At first blush this seems hard-line talk, and Miss Knight concedes it is controversial and "loaded with political dynamite." Yet her experience in 20 years of handling the distribution of U.S. passports, which are themselves a form of identification card with which millions of Americans have become familiar in this age of jet travel, has persuaded her of the need for the universal ID. It would be to the advantage of the honest citizen, she says, and a protection against blackmail, financial loss through fraud and other criminal acts.

THERE WAS A TIME in this country when the mere mention of a governmentally-issued identity card would have caused an uproar, and even now many people would accept the idea most reluctantly. Still, it's a fact of common experience that we all are asked to establish our identification now and then, and usually this is done by showing one's driver's license — that carries a personal description, signature, fingerprints and photograph, in short a state-issued ID card.

If, by or before 1984, we are to have a national ID, as Miss Knight predicts, it might have the good result, besides discouraging crooks, frauds, tax dodgers and such, of thinning out the superfluity of cards that fatten the ordinary citizen's wallet. One card that would combine the identifications needed for social security, for charge accounts and for the national registration Miss Knight has in mind might prove tolerable for its convenience.