

# The Bilderberg Group and the project of European unification

Mike Peters - "Mike Peters" <michaeljpeters@hotmail.com>

## *Introduction*

Despite their reputation for 'empiricism', British academics have tended to treat political power by means of abstract concepts rather than empirical information about the actions of determinate individuals and groups (e.g. Giddens, 1984, 1985; Scott, 1986). After a brief efflorescence of empirical studies of the so-called 'Establishment' in the early 1960s, sociologists in Britain became diverted from empirical investigation of power, as the study of national and international power-structures became conducted under the aegis of increasingly abstract theoretical categories derived from Marxism, and in particular by a wave of concepts based on Poulantzas's 'structuralist' critique of Miliband, and was followed by ever more esoteric discussions of the 'theory' of the state (e.g. Jessop, 1990), culminating in the hegemony of a post-Marxist version of Gramsci's conception of 'hegemony' - in which 'struggle' is posited without any identifiable human beings as its active protagonists, and with the stakes reduced to ideas rather than concrete interests.

This was in sharp contrast with the USA, where the impetus of C. Wright Mills's pioneering study of the network of interests involved in the Cold War (Mills, 1956) was continued by a flourishing group of scholars. There has been nothing in Britain of comparable scope or detail to the work conducted in the USA by G. W. Domhoff, Thomas Dye, Mark Mizruchi or Noam Chomsky, etc.

The present article is concerned with one specific facet of American power-structure research which, I believe, has important implications for the study of power in the UK. This is the subject of power-elite networks and forums, conceptualised as arenas for the conduct of intra-capitalist and inter-corporate strategic debates and long-range social planning, from which wider 'democratic' interference is carefully excluded.

The particular institution about which I will present information is the so-called 'Bilderberg Group', which is an interesting example of this kind of power-elite forum. It is one among a number of little-publicised institutions which have played an important role providing a means for debates and discussions to take place amongst different capitalist groups and different national governments over long-term planning issues and, especially, in co-ordinating strategic policy at an international level. Other such bodies on this trans-national scale include the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in the USA, with its UK sister organisation, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (otherwise known simply as Chatham House) and the Trilateral Commission (which itself grew out of Bilderberg meetings and has been essentially a more globalist version of the latter, since it incorporates Japanese representatives). Each of these bodies will be mentioned in what follows.

One of the 'functions' such institutions appear to serve is that of 'mediating' between the economic interests of private capital and the requirement of a general interest on the part of the capitalist class as a whole. I shall suggest that much of the theorising about the 'state' in the tradition of structural Marxism since the 1970s has confused this relation between capital and national governments, owing to the tendency to reify the abstraction called 'the state' and posit it as enjoying a virtual autonomy vis-à-vis capital; whereas the empirical evidence lends more support to the rather hastily dismissed (and often grotesquely caricatured) model called 'instrumentalism'.

To anticipate what will be said later, I believe that one of the key assumptions often made by structural Marxists, namely that the capitalist class is always divided into competing fractions which have no mechanisms for co-ordination other than the state, is not empirically sustainable. Part of this misconception, it could be said, derives from an over-literal understanding of the concept of the 'market' as constituting the only social relation amongst different fractions of capital. At least as far as the very large, and above all, the international (or as we would say in today's jargon, the 'global') corporations are concerned, this is definitely not the case: very sophisticated organs do exist whereby these capitalist interests can and do hammer out common lines of strategy. Bilderberg is one of these mechanisms.

## *The Context*

As the second world war drew to a close, the capitalist class in Western Europe was under severe threat from an upsurge of working class radicalism, the management of which required a strategy more sophisticated than conventional repression, and the first steps were taken, by political panes of both left and right, to develop

'corporatist' programmes based on a kind of national protectionism. By contrast, in the USA, the war had brought to dominance an internationally-oriented capitalist class who saw very clearly that their interests lay in a thorough 'liberalisation' (1) of the world market, abolition of tariffs etc.. Only the false wisdom of hindsight could make the eventual Atlantic Alliance system that emerged by 1950 seem preordained by 'objective' historical forces. Indeed, so used have we become to hearing phrases like 'American imperialism' and witnessing US interventions throughout the world that we can forget just how difficult it was for this internationally oriented fraction of the American capitalist class to impose its agenda upon the US state: the deep-rooted tendency of American political culture has always been what Europeans call 'Isolationist' and it took extensive political work to drag the Americans into these foreign entanglements. In this paper I will not be looking in any detail at how these interests influenced the US government during and after the Second World War, but rather at how they succeeded in effecting the integration of the Western European capitalist class into a new Atlantic alliance system

The period 1945-50 is highly complex and debate still rages over the origin and nature of the 'Cold War': for example over the degree to which the US was acting offensively or defensively against a (real or imagined) Soviet threat, as well as over the relation between the external or geopolitical aspect of the Cold War on the one hand and its domestic, ideological or 'class' aspect. And the recent work of Alan Milward, for example, has thrown into question many of the received assumptions about the causes and consequences of the 'supranational' institutions created in Europe in the aftermath of the war (Milward, 1984 and 1994; Anderson, 1996).

The beginnings of a clarification of these events were made with the pioneering analysis of Kees Van der Pijl, in conjunction with other Dutch Marxist scholars (Fennema, Overbeek etc.) ten years ago, together with the detailed empirical work of US power-researchers (e.g. the journal *Critical Sociology*). With the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent 'coming out' of veteran anti-Communists now prepared to open up some of their dubious accomplishments to outside scrutiny (Peter Coleman, Brian Crozier e.g.), more direct documentary evidence of the scope and intensity of covert US involvement in European politics in the post-war period is now available.

## ***The Marshall Plan and NATO***

The official version of the history of the creation of the Atlantic system reads like the 'lives and teachings of saints' (Milward, 1992). In these school textbook accounts, each of the pillars of the post-war world order has its great founding father, whose photographs invariably appear in magazine articles:

- \* the IMF and the World Bank are the work of Keynes
- \* European economic recovery is the work of General Marshall \* NATO is the work of Ernest Bevin, and
- \* the European Community is the work of Jean Monnet (with his faithful disciple Schuman)

These are not just myths; they are, in intelligence parlance, more like 'cover stories'.

The Marshall Plan is named after the speech on June 5 1947 by US Secretary of State Marshall, which invited European countries to join in a co-operative plan for economic reconstruction, with explicit requirements for trade liberalisation and increases in productivity. Over the next ten months there emerged the Foreign Assistance Act of 1948, which set up the Economic Co-operation Agency (ECA) to administer the European Recovery Programme (ERP) - the so-called 'Marshall Aid' - which gave \$13 billion in aid to 16 western European states. In four years, the ECA was superseded by the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) in 1951 which in turn was transformed into the Foreign Operations Agency (FOA) in 1954, later the International Co-operation Agency (ICA) in 1955 and finally the Agency for International Development (AID) in 1961 (Carew 1987 p. 6ff). It is generally recognised that this aid had a decidedly militaristic purpose, being essentially a prerequisite for the development of NATO. (2)

It is less generally acknowledged, however, that this unprecedented exercise of international generosity (dubbed by Churchill the 'most unsordid act in history') served direct economic purposes for the internationally oriented US corporations which promoted it. William Clayton, for example, the Under-secretary for Economic Affairs, whose tour of Europe and letters sent back to Washington played a key role in preparing the plan, and who pushed it through Congress, personally profited to the tune of \$700,000 a year; and his own company, Anderson, Clayton & Co. secured \$10 million of Marshall Plan orders up to the summer of 1949. (Schuman 1954

p. 240). General Motors similarly got \$5.5 million worth of orders between July 1950 and 1951 (14.7% of the total) and they Ford Motor Company got \$1 million (4.2% of the total).

## ***Roots in the Council on Foreign Relations***

The origins of the Marshall Plan are in fact to be found in the 'War and Peace Study Groups' instituted by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in 1939. (For the details see Shoup & Minter p. 117 ff). on December 6 1939 the Rockefeller Foundation granted the Council nearly \$50,000 to finance the first year of the project. Well over 120 influential individuals (academics and business leaders), at least 5 cabinet levels departments and 12 separate government agencies, bureaux or offices were involved in this. There were altogether 362 meetings and no less than 682 separate documents produced. I find it frankly astonishing that virtually none of the British academic scholarship on this period even acknowledges the existence of the CFR, let alone the War and Peace Study Groups. Evidence is surely required to show that they had no influence, if that is what scholars believe.

The plan which Marshall presented in his speech had already been outlined in the proposals of a CFR study group of 1946 headed by the lawyer Charles M. Spofford and David Rockefeller, entitled 'Reconstruction in Western Europe'; and the specific proposal for unifying the Western European coal and steel basin as a bulwark against the USSR was made by John Foster Dulles in January 1947.

To trace the origin of the movement for European unification, however, requires that we go back to May 8 1946 and an address given at Chatham House by a Pole named Joseph Retinger. In this talk he outlined a plan for a federal Europe in which the states would relinquish part of their sovereignty. At the time, Retinger was secretary general of the Independent League for European Co-operation (ILEC), run by the Belgian Prime Minister Paul van Zeeland. During the war Retinger worked closely with van Zeeland and other exile leaders who would become prominent in the Bilderberg network, (including Paul Rijkens, whom we will meet again shortly). (3) Out of these connections was born in 1942-3 the Benelux customs union, a kind of prototype of the Common Market.

The ideas adumbrated by Retinger were not new: there is a whole history of such projects for European unification and for even larger global schemes. One might just note here the assumption of the need for a 'great power' status as well as the almost taken-for-granted racism which informed Retinger's thinking:

*'The end of the period during which the white man spread his activities over the whole globe saw the Continent itself undergoing a process of internal disruption..... there are no big powers left in continental Europe..... [whose] inhabitants after all, represent the most valuable human element in the world.'* (Retinger 1946, p. 7)

Shortly after this speech, Retinger was invited by the US ambassador, Averell Harriman, to the USA to secure American support for ILEC.

*'I found in America a unanimous approval for our ideas among financiers, businessmen and politicians. Mr Leffingwell, senior partner in J. P. Morgan's [bank], Nelson and David Rockefeller, Alfred Sloan [chair of General Motors], Charles Hook, President of the American Rolling Mills Company, Sir William Wiseman, [British SIS and] partner in Kuhn Loeb [New York investment bank], George Franklin and especially my old friend Adolf Berle Jr [CFR], were all in favour, and Berle agreed to lead the American section [of ILEC]. John Foster Dulles also agreed to help. (Pomian 1972, p. 212)*

Thus was formed the European Movement (whose first congress at the Hague in 1948 is- the origin of the Council of Europe), which received substantial contributions from US government secret funds as well as private sources via the American Committee for a United Europe (ACUE). The names mentioned above are significant in the present context: Leffingwell preceded John McCloy and David Rockefeller as CFR chair, 1946-53, and had been a CFR director since 1927, while Franklin was executive director of the CFR 1953-7 and was later a Trilateral Commission Co-ordinator: also, incidentally an in-law of the Rockefellers.

US funding for the European Movement extended beyond 1952, most of it going to the European Youth Campaign, initiated by John McCloy, whose own career virtually personifies the Atlantic ruling class as a whole: a corporate lawyer of relatively humble origins, he became, through his contacts at Harvard, assistant Secretary of War 1941-45 and first President of the World Bank (IBRD), which he revamped to suit the interests of Wall Street;

and then US High Commissioner for Germany 1949-52 (where, among other things, he enabled Krupp to regain control of his steel companies, advising on the establishment of the Krupp-Stiftung, modelled on the Ford Foundation - he was connected to Adenauer through his German wife, whose sister married Lewis Douglas, J. P. Morgan financier and later US ambassador to Britain), after which he became a director of both the Chase Manhattan Bank and the Ford Foundation in 1953. He was also an active member of the Bilderberg Group, becoming chair of the Council on Foreign Relations itself.

As for ACUE, its chair was William Donovan (who ran OSS - forerunner of the CIA during the war) and its vice-chair was Allen Dulles (who was a leading figure in the CFR War and Peace Study Group during the early part of the war, and later the director of the CIA); and it was run in Europe by another CIA executive, Thomas W. Braden.

## ***The Bilderberg Group***

*'The Treaty of Rome f 1957], which brought the Common Market into being, was nurtured at Bilderberg meetings.'*  
(George McGhee, former US ambassador to West Germany)

'Bilderberg' takes its name from the hotel, belonging to Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, near Arnhem, where, in May 1954 the first meeting took place of what has ever since been called the Bilderberg Group. While the name persisted, its meetings are held at different locations. Prince Bernhard himself (who, incidentally, was actually German not Dutch) was chair until 1976 when he was forced to resign because of the Lockheed bribery scandal. The possible significance of this group may be gleaned from the status of its participants: the membership comprises those individuals who would, on most definitions, be regarded as members of the 'ruling class' in Western Europe and North America-In particular, the conferences brought together important figures in most of the largest international corporations with leading politicians and prominent intellectuals (in both academia and journalism).

Moreover, virtually all the European institutions we take for granted today, or treat as if they 'emerged' as a matter of course, from the ECSC, EEC and Euratom down to the present European Union, were conceived, designed and brought into existence through the agency of the people involved in Bilderberg.

## **Secrecy**

What Gill has referred to, with disarming brevity, as its 'almost completely secretive' character (Gill 1990, p. 129) is neither incidental nor superficial but integral to its functioning. It is essential that these discussions be kept out of the public sphere. The lengths to which the organisers go are quite astonishing. An entire hotel is taken over in advance (existing guests being moved out) and a whole caravanserai, including special catering staff and armed security guards, descend on the site several days in advance. I recommend the amusing account by Robert Eringer - to my knowledge the only journalistic investigation yet conducted (Eringer 1980). The maintenance of this secrecy has been remarkably effective. In 1967, Cecil King, then chair of the International Publishing Corporation (at the time the press group with the largest circulation in the UK) and chair of the Newspaper Proprietors Association, formally requested his fellow proprietors to see to it that 'on no account should any report or even speculation about the content of the conferences be printed' (quoted in Sklar 1980, p. 178).

On one of the few occasions when Bilderberg meetings were mentioned in a major British newspaper, the outcome was quite interesting. In the 'Lombard' column of the Financial Times, C. Gordon Tether wrote on May 6 1975: 'If the Bilderberg Group is not a conspiracy of some sort, it is conducted in such a way as to give a remarkably good imitation of one.' In a column written almost a year later, for the March 3 1976 edition, Tether wrote: 'The Bilderbergers have always insisted upon clothing their comings and goings in the closest secrecy. Until a few years back, this was carried to such lengths that their annual conclave went entirely unmarked in the world's press. In the more recent past, the veil has been raised to the extent of letting it be known that the meetings were taking place. But the total ban on the reporting of what went on has remained in force....Any conspiratologist who has the Bilderbergers in his sights will proceed to ask why it is that, if there is so little to hide, so much effort is devoted to hiding it.'

This column never appeared: it was censored by the Financial Times editor Mark Fisher (himself a member of the Trilateral Commission), and Tether was finally dismissed from the 'Lombard' column in August 1976.

## ***What goes on at Bilderberg?***

It is important at the outset to distinguish the active, on-going membership from the various people who are occasionally invited to attend. Many of those invited to come along, perhaps to report on matters pertaining to their expertise, have little idea there is a formally constituted group at all, let alone one with its own grand agenda. Hence the rather dismissive remarks by people like sixties media guru Marshall McLuhan, who attended a Bilderberg meeting in 1969 in Denmark, that he was 'nearly suffocated at the banality and irrelevance,' describing them as 'uniformly nineteenth century minds pretending to relate to the twentieth century'. Another of those who have attended, Christopher Price, then Labour MP for Lewisham West, found it 'all very fatuous.... icing on the cake with nothing to do with the cake.' (Eringer 1980, p. 26). Denis Healey, on the other hand, who was in from the beginning and later acted as British convenor, says that 'the most valuable [meetings] to me while I was in opposition were the Bilderberg Conferences'. (Healey 1990, p. 195)

Bilderberg from the beginning has been administered by a small core group, constituted since 1956 as a steering committee, consisting of a permanent chair, a US chair, European and North American secretaries and a treasurer. Invitations are 'only sent to important and generally respected people who through their special knowledge or experience, their personal contacts and their influence in national and international circles can further the aims set by Bilderberg.' (Retinger, cited in Sklar p. 168)

John Pomian, Retinger's secretary observed that:

*'...during the first 3 or 4 years the all-important selection of participants was a delicate and difficult task. This was particularly so as regards politicians. It was not easy to persuade the top office holders to come Retinger displayed great skill and an uncanny ability to pick out people who in a few years time were to accede to the highest offices in their respective countries today there are very few figures among governments on both sides of the Atlantic who have not attended at least one of these meetings.'* (Pomian, pp. 254-5)

The Bilderberg discussions are organised on the principle of reaching consensus rather than through formal resolutions and voting. Such is the influence and standing of the active members that, if consensus for action is arrived at, one might expect this to be carried out and the resulting decision to be implemented in the West as a whole. But the exact position of the group, and that of other such groups, is only discernible by a close scrutiny of the specific careers and connections of the individual participants. Here, one has to say that social theorists seem convinced of the irrelevance of this kind of information, which would be called 'protopographic' (i.e. data pertaining to concrete individuals, which companies they represent, their family connections etc.). This is somewhat contradictory, of course, because in their every-day roles, social theorists are just as interested in this kind of information as anyone else, and display a keen sense of its political relevance when it comes to conducting their own careers: but it has it nonetheless become almost a matter of principle to denounce use of this kind of data in social science itself. This tendency seems to come from a reification of the concept of 'roles' (as if these were real rather than constructs) and possibly from a functionalist assumption that social systems are subject to laws; with concrete human actors having no significance in shaping outcomes.

## ***Origins of Bilderberg***

The initiative for the first convocation came from Joseph Retinger, in conjunction with Paul Rijkens, President of Unilever. Retinger has already been introduced; and the significance of Unilever needs to be examined briefly. Unilever is one of the largest and most powerful multinational corporations in the world and one of the top European capitalist companies. In the 1950's the advisory directors of Unilever were as follows (and I'm drawing attention to the links with the Rotterdam Bank and Philips, the electrical firm):

- H.M. Hirschfield: also on the board of Philips and Rotterdam Bank and with the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs during the war, and after it Commissioner for the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands;
- K.P. Van der Mandel, also on the board of Rotterdam Bank;
- Paul Rijkens: also on the board of Rotterdam Bank;

- H.L. Wolterson: also chair of Philips and on the board of Heldring and Pearson (linked with the Rotterdam Bank);
- P S.F Otten: also President of Philips (and married to a member of the Philips family)

One of the unusual features of Unilever is its bi-national structure (Stokman et al, 1985): it is a jointly-owned AngloDutch company, with a 50/50 structure and a unitary board. This was a very useful device during the war, when operations could be shifted easily from the Netherlands to the UK. Philips had a similar arrangement under a Dutch law called the Corvo Law, whereby in an emergency it could divide itself into two parts, which it did when the Germans invaded: one with its HQ in Germany and the other American. Both these parts got large military contracts during the war, playing a role on both sides (Aaronovitch 1961, pp. 110-11). Unilever's financial advisers are the US investment bank Lazard Freres, which handles the private financial affairs of many of the world's wealthy families, including the Agnellis of Fiat. (See Koenig, 1990, Reich. 1983, Business Week June 18 1984).

Unilever's chief adviser on international affairs was David Mitrany, whose book, *A Working Peace System*, published in 1943, secured him this post. (He also worked for Chatham House). It was Mitrany who coined the term 'functionalism' to refer to the strategy of supra-national integration through a series of sectoral processes of internationalisation, designed to set in motion an autonomous logic, making inevitable further integration and ultimately making national states obsolete (Groom and Taylor p. 125 ff.). In the post-war period there were three basic models for European union: alongside the 'functionalists' (in this sense), were the 'inter-governmentalists' (e.g. Spaak) and the 'federalists' (e.g. Monnet himself). In the 1960s the functionalists used the slogan 'Atlantic Partnership' as the framework for the integration or synchronisation of US and European interests.

The immediate chain of events leading to the setting up of the first conference was as follows. Prince Bernhard set off for the USA in 1952 to visit his old friend Walter Bedell Smith, director of the newly-formed CIA. Smith put the organisation of the American end into the hands of Charles D. Jackson (special assistant for psychological warfare to the US President), who appointed John S. Coleman (president of the Burroughs Corporation. and a member of the Committee for a National Trade Policy), who in turn briefly became US chair of Bilderberg.

Charles Jackson was president of the Committee for a Free Europe (forerunner of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) whose extensive operations financing and organising anti-Communist social democratic political intellectuals has only recently been fully documented (see Coleman 1989); and ran the CIA-financed Radio Free Europe in Germany. Earlier he had been publisher of *Fortune* magazine and managing director of *Time/Life*, and during the war was deputy head of psychological warfare for Eisenhower. At the time of Bernhard's visit he was working with a committee of businessmen on both sides of the Atlantic which approved the European Payments Union.

It was thus a European initiative, and its aim was, in official bland language, to 'strengthen links' between Western Europe and the USA. A selected list of people to be invited to the first conference was drawn up by Retinger, with Prince Bernhard and Rijkens, from the European countries of NATO plus Sweden. The resulting group consisted of the Belgian and Italian prime ministers, Paul van Zeeland and Alcide de Gasperi (CDU), from France both the right wing prime minister Antoine Pinay and the Socialist leader Guy Mollet; diplomats like Pietro Quaroni of Italy and Panavotis Pipinelis of Greece; top German corporate lawyer Rudolf Miller and the industrialist Otto Wolff von Amerongen and the Danish foreign minister Ole Bjorn Kraft (publisher of Denmark's top daily newspaper); and from England came Denis Healey and Hugh Gaitskell from the Labour Party, Robert Boothby from the Conservative Party, Sir Oliver Franks from the British state, and Sir Colin Gubbins, who had headed the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during the war.

On the American side, the members of the first Bilderberg assembly included:

- George Ball, who was head of Lehman Brothers, a former high State Department official, where he was architect of the policy of Atlantic Partnership, and later member of the Trilateral Commission. Ball was closely associated with Jean Monnet, owing to his work as legal counsel for the ECSC and the French delegation to the Schuman Plan negotiations.
- David Rockefeller was the key American member of Bilderberg. Space only permits the briefest sketch of his direct economic and political involvements: head of the Chase Manhattan Bank, member of the Council on Foreign Relations, member of the Business Council, the US council of the International Chamber of Commerce, and, of course, the founder of the Trilateral Commission.

- Dean Rusk: US Secretary of State 1961-69, earlier President of the Rockefeller Foundation 1952-60, having succeeded John Foster Dulles, himself an earlier Secretary of State and - this is not at all a coincidence - a close personal friend of Jean Monnet whom he had first met at Versailles in 1918 as well as of Dean Acheson, Truman's Secretary of State and the true author of the Marshall Plan.

The final list was 67. Since then, the group enlarged somewhat, but the steering group remained the same size. (4)

After Retinger's death in 1960, the role of secretary was taken over by E. H. van der Beugel, who had headed the Dutch bureau for the Marshall Plan and later became president of KLM airlines and the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. After the resignation of Prince Bernhard, the role of chair was taken by British ex-prime minister Lord Home.

The status of the group and its meetings is ostensibly 'private'. Gill names it simply 'a private international relations council', but nothing could be more misleading than this name private, unless in its sense of 'secret'. When political leaders gather together with a view to arriving at consensus, in conjunction with leaders of industry and finance and press magnates and leading journalists, then this is not the same kind of thing as an assembly of ordinary private citizens. The vocabulary of pluralist political science ('lobbies', 'non-governmental organisations' etc.) systematically distorts the actual power relations at work in these different kinds of associations. It is even questionable whether Bilderberg meetings are really 'private' in the legal sense of non-governmental. Robert Eringer, for example, having received an official reply that 'government officials attend in a personal and not an official capacity', found that in fact officials had attended Bilderberg conferences at government expense and in their official capacity. The British Foreign Office responded to his queries by saying 'we can find no trace of the Bilderberg Group in any of our reference works on international organisations', while he later learnt that the Foreign Office had paid for British members to attend Bilderberg conferences.

Van der Pijl's assessment of the role of Bilderberg seems about as accurate as the available information would allow:

*'Rather than constituting an all-powerful secret Atlantic directorate, Bilderberg served, at best, as the environment for developing ideas in that direction, and secrecy was necessary for allowing the articulation of differences rather than for keeping clear-cut projects from public knowledge. In this sense Bilderberg functioned as the testing ground for new initiatives for Atlantic unity.'* (Van der Pijl p. 183)

But on occasions the group is known to have exerted real power. An (unnamed) German participant at the 1974 conference held six months after the Arab Israeli War at Edmond de Rothschild's hotel at Megeve in France, commented:

*'Half a dozen knowledgeable people had managed, in effect, to set the world's monetary system wolfing again [after OPEC's quadrupling of oil prices], and it was important to try to knit together our networks of personal contacts. We had to resist institutionalism, bureaucratic red-tape, and the creation of new procedures and committees. Official bodies should be put in the position of ratifying what had been jointly prepared in advance.'* (Sklar, p. 171)

## **The European 'Community'**

The Treaty of Rome signed on March 25 1957 created the 'common market' (the European Economic Community) and its roots were laid down in the ECSC (the European Coal and Steel Community) established on April 18 1951, based on the Schuman Plan of May 9 1950 (Vaughan 1976, Milward 1984). It is not implausible to suggest that the route from the one to the other in fact passed through the first five Bilderberg conferences, May 1954 at Oosterbeek (Netherlands), March 1955 at Barbizon (France), September the same year at Garmisch (Germany), May 1956 at Fredensborg (Denmark) and finally in February 1957 at St. Simon's Island (Georgia, USA); and that these secret meetings played a decisive role in overcoming the opposing, centrifugal tendencies symbolised by the collapse of the European Defence Community in 1954, the Hungarian revolution and its suppression and the fiasco of the Anglo-French adventure at Suez in 1956 - the last gasp of independent European imperialism.

Even more important the 'protectionism' implicit in the European unification project was successfully subordinated to the 'liberalising' hegemony of the Americans, through the close involvement of the key US

players at every stage. The evidence for this is entirely circumstantial, and this hypothesis must remain speculative, but I believe there is a prima facie case to launch an investigation. It should be clear from the details recounted earlier that not all the possible roads led to the Rome Treaty, and that there is far more to the politics of European 'integration' than the legislative enactments already known about.

## **Monnet's network**

Monnet himself, who mentions neither Retinger nor Bilderberg in his memoirs (Monnet 1978), cannot have been unaware of the activities of these crucial constituents of his programme. However much he may be portrayed in the hagiographies as a far-sighted idealist, Monnet was, first and foremost, an international financier, with an extensive network of connections on both sides of the Atlantic, occupying a particular place in the configuration of capitalist interests forming what Van der Pijl calls the Atlantic circuit of money capital (Van der Pijl 1984). He was, for example, a close friend of all the key figures in the US power structure; but, more importantly, his network centred around the New York investment banks Lazard Freres (run by Andre Meyer who was also on the board of Rockefeller's Chase International Bank), and Goldmann Sachs, which, after the war gravitated into the Rockefeller orbit. Monnet's right-hand man, Pierre Uri, was European director of Lehman Brothers; and Robert Marjolin, one of Monnet's assistants in the first modernisation plan, subsequently joined the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank. Uri and Marjolin were also active in Bilderberg.

When Monnet resigned from his position of 'High Authority' in the ECSC in 1955 to run his Action Committee for a United States of Europe (ACUSE), his secretary at ECSC, Max Kohnstamm who had earlier been private secretary to Queen Wilhelmina, (i.e. Prince Bernhard's mother-in-law), and then Dutch representative in the Schuman Plan negotiations, became the vice-president of ACUSE, which had extensive overlaps with Bilderberg. Kohnstamm, for example, later became a member of the Executive Committee of the Trilateral Commission, and Georges Berthoin, who was Monnet's private secretary at the ECSC 1951-55, took over Kohnstamm's place on the Trilateral Commission in 1975. Francois Duchene and Paul Delouvner, who both worked for ECSC in the fifties (and joined the Trilateral Commission in the 1970s), Guy Mollet and Antoine Pinay were in the Bilderberg network (5)

## **Europe since the fifties**

It would be simply too large and complex a matter to trace the twists and turns in the politics of European unification since the period from the fifties to the present. Too much water has flowed under the bridge, and it is doubtful that it is any longer even the same bridge, so many times has Europe' or the European idea' had to be periodically 'relaunched'. Instead of even attempting this in broad outline, I will draw attention very briefly to the role played by secretive and unaccountable organisations of members of the European economic and political elites.

One little-reported group, for example, which seems to wield immense influence is the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT). To my knowledge there have only been two or three reports of this group in the British press, and yet in articulating the demands and interests of the largest and most powerful European multinational corporations, it surely calls for close study. I suspect this is the same group as that mentioned in passing in Charles Grant's biography of Jacques Delors. Delors' arrival as European Commissioner in 1985, he says, could not have occurred at a more propitious moment: he had spent the autumn of 1984 searching for a 'Big Idea' to relaunch the EEC.

*'That autumn, in Brussels, Delors had met a group of officials and industrialists brought together by Max Kohnstamm, who had been Monnet's chief assistant. After Monnet's death in 1979, Kohnstamm had become one of the guardians of the sacred name of federalism. The Kohnstamm group advised Delors to make the internal market his priority and to lay down a timetable of eight years (the life of two Commissions) for its achievement..... At the same time Wisse Dekker, the chairman of Philips, made several speeches calling for the EEC to remove its internal barriers by 1990.'* (Grant 1994, p. 66)

If this is in fact referring to the same group as that known as the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), then we have an example of a continuity between the fifties and today. This ERT comprises the chairs/CEOs of the leading European multinational corporations and it is by no means a mere assembly of dignitaries. This is an extremely powerful body. According to research conducted by the ASEED collective, its



reports feed directly into the European Commission decision making process. One of its first reports, for example, entitled 'Missing Links', urged the immediate construction of a series of large-scale transport projects, including the Channel Tunnel. As well as Dekker of Philips, other leading figures in the ERT are Agnelli of Fiat, Gyllenhammer of Volvo, and Denys Henderson of ICI.

## ***Theoretical Excursus***

A persistent problem with theories of power over the last 20 years has been their lack of engagement with empirical evidence, compounded by the demonstrable empirical ignorance of theorists. It is as if every academic feels able to develop theories about power, and engage in debates it, without any requirement for relevant information, or at any rate with a tacit assumption that everyone at has such information.

One possible place to start an attempt to 'theorise' the role of Bilderberg and other international power-elite forums, might be to re-enter an old debate at the beginning of the present century: this is the debate between Lenin and Kautsky over imperialism.

Lenin's theory of imperialism sought to explain the first world war by reference to what he called inter-imperialist rivalries. While this theory has had an enormous influence during this century (it under-pins, for example, much contemporary discussion of the relations between 'the West' and the 'Developing World, in which it is assumed that power operates between geographically-defined regions, and that nation-states act at the behest of nationally-based capitalist classes), it is nevertheless demonstrably false in a number of crucial particulars. For example, one of the difficulties in Lenin's theory is reconciling it with the increasing interpenetration of national economies by trans-national capitalist blocs. To put this issue simply: wars take place between states, but inter-capitalist rivalries do not necessarily coincide with the territories between states, especially where international or trans-national corporations have developed. The material presented here, I would suggest, is of just this kind: it shows an inter-penetration of capitalist interests between the USA and Western Europe, and indicates a field of 'political struggle' within and between states, entirely outside that of the public sphere.

What is far less well-known today, however, is Kautsky's alternative conception which explicitly addressed this issue, and can be summed up by his notion of ultra-imperialism (Fennema, 1982). The simple hypothesis is that rival capitalist interests may, at least for a time, be able to coalesce into a relatively unified hegemonic bloc. Now this idea of a tendency towards stabilisation on a global scale may sound unrealistic today, but arguably this was what was achieved for fifty years, at least in the American-dominated half of the world, after 1945. It could even be said that the demise of the other half permits its universalization. Where are the 'inter-imperialist rivalries in the world today'?

## ***Silence of the Academics***

When first asked for a title for this paper, I briefly entertained the idea of using the above sub-heading, (paraphrasing a recent film-title), and I do believe it is important to ask why certain topics rather than others are deemed worthy of investigation. The material presented here is certainly 'dated' and therefore unfashionable, but similar information about the present could be investigated. It is surprising and somewhat depressing that such investigations no longer seem to be being carried out in universities today. (6) Academics often represent themselves somewhat flatteringly as 'critical' intellectuals, independent from or even determinedly opposed to the established systems of power in society, willing to face personal or professional risks in the pursuit of truth. Maybe they are more like lambs.

## ***Footnotes***

(1) The term 'liberal' signifies policies opposed to restrictions on international trade. The distinction between 'free trade' and 'protectionism' in international trade does not correspond exactly with the theoretical opposition of 'competition' and 'monopoly'. None of these concepts have straightforward empirical reference. The 1992 NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) for example, is in fact profoundly 'protectionist' in relation to such matters as intellectual property rights (software, patents for seeds, drugs etc.) with elaborate 'rules of origin' designed to keep out foreign competitors etc. see Dawkins 1993.

(2) If the Marshall Plan had military objectives (containment of Soviet influence) as much as economic ones (creation of markets for US industry), then NATO has a civilian, political and ideological role as much as a military one. NATO has been relatively neglected by students of 'supranational' organisations, and it is often presumed to be just a treaty rather than a quasigovernmental organisation in its own right. Its highest political body, the North Atlantic Council, covers foreign policy issues as well as strictly military questions, and the North Atlantic Assembly works to influence the parliamentary members of individual countries. It falls within the brief of NATO to conduct propaganda and defend states the 'infiltration of ideas'. Few citizens of NATO countries are aware of the whole apparatus to which membership commits them - e.g. Plans 10 G and 100-1 under which in 'emergency situations' special US units would be activated to suppress any movement 'threatening to US strategic interests'.

(3) It is extremely difficult to define the exact status of Retinger. One Polish war-time exile leader has been quoted as saying that Retinger was 'suspected of being in close touch not so much with British politics as with certain of its discrete institutions'. Presumably SIS. See Korbonski p. 20.

(4) Later American participants included Robert MacNamara, US Secretary of Defence under Kennedy and Johnson (earlier chair of the Ford Motor Company, and later President of the World Bank); and McGeorge Bundy, who worked on the Marshall Plan, was US National Security Adviser and later special foreign policy adviser to Kennedy and Johnson 1960-65, and became President of the Ford Foundation 1966-79. His brother, William Bundy, was with the CIA 1951-61 and later managed the CFR journal Foreign Affairs from 1979, after working at the Pentagon 1964-69. He married Dean Acheson's daughter. Finally, all three Directors of the CIA in this period were also members of Bilderberg: Allen Dulles (John Foster Dulles's brother), John McCone and Richard Helms. Needless to say, all these figures were also members of the CFR. For more details of participants see the essay by Thompson in Sklar ed. 1980, and Eringer 1980.

(5) Pinay, who was French Prime Minister in 1951, figures rather allusively in Brian Crozier's memoirs (Crozier, 1993 ch. XV) as the eminence grise of the controversial 'Pinay Cercle', an anti-communist intelligence outfit in the 1970s and 80s (Ramsay & Dorril 1986, p. 39 and Teacher 1989).

(6) It is ironic that while the initial research which discovered the existence of the Bilderberg network and explored its ramifications within the power structure of Atlantic capitalism came entirely from Marxist and left-inclined scholars in the USA, the whole subject has now been virtually taken over by the US far right as the centre piece of its own bizarre world-view. These writers of the far right (Anthony Sutton, Lyndon La Rouche, Spool and the Liberty Lobby etc.) have added virtually nothing to our understanding or knowledge of the phenomenon, and accordingly, are not referenced in the bibliography below. They have, however, contaminated the topic with their confusion. Since around the mid-1980s, the American Left has dropped the whole issue like a hot potato. For a singular exception see Brandt 1993, which is essentially a response to Bcrlet, 1992.

## ***Bibliography***

Aaronovitch, Sam *The Ruling Class*, Lawrence & Wishart 1961

Anderson, Perry 'Under the Sign of the Interim', *London Review of Books*, 4 January 1996

Ayala, Cesar J. 'Theories of Big Business in American Society' *Critical Sociology*, Vol.16 No. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1989

Beret, Chip *Right Woos Left*, Political Research Associates, October 1992

Brandt, Daniel 'Multiculturalism and the Ruling Elite', *NameBase Newslines*, October- December, 1993

*Businessweek*, June 18 1984

Carew, Anthony *Labour under the Marshall Plan* Manchester University Press, 1987

Chomsky, Noam *Necessary Illusions*, South End Press, 1989

Chomsky, Noam What Uncle Sam Really Wants, Odonian Press, 1993

Chomsky, Noam Secrets, Lies and Democracy, Odonian Press, 1994

Chomsky, Noam Powers and Prospects, South End Press, 1996 Coleman, Peter A Liberal Conspiracy, Macmillan 1989

Crozier, Brian Free Agent, Harper Collins, 1993

Cumings, Bruce 'Chinatown: Foreign Policy and Elite Realignment' in Ferguson, Thomas & Rogers, Joel (ads.) The Hidden Election, Random House, 1981

Hawkins. Kristin NAFTA: The New Rules of Corporate Conquest Open Magazine, 1993

Domhoff, G. William The Power Elite and the State, Aldine de Gruyter, 1990

Eringer, Robert The Global Manipulators, Pentacle Books, 1980

Fennema, Meindert International Networks of Banks and Industry Maninus Nijhoff, 1982

Fennema, Meindert & van der Pijl, Kecs 'International Bank Capital and the New Liberalism' in Mizruchi, Mark & Schwartz, Michael (eds.) Inter-corporate Relations, Cambridge University, 1987

Freitag, Peter J. 'The Cabinet and Big Business: A Study of Interlocks', Social Problems Vol. 23, 1975

Giddens, Anthony, The Constitution of Society, Polity Press, 1984

The Nation-State and Violence, Polity Press, 1985

Gill, Stephen American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission, Cambridge University Press, 1990

Grant, Charles Delors, Nicholas Brealey, 1994

Groom. A. J. R. & Taylor, Paul beds.) Frameworks for International Co-operation, Pinter, 1990

Hatch, Alden HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Harrap, 1972

Healey, Denis The Time of My life, Penguin, 1990

Isaacson, Walter and Thomas, Evan The Wise Men, Simon & Schuster, 1986

Jeffreys-Jones, Rhodri The CIA and American Democracy Yale University Press, 1989

Jessop, Bob State Theory, Polity Press, 1990

Koenig, Peter 'A prince among bankers who wears Lazard's triple crown' Independent on Sunday, 11 February 1990

Korbonski, Stefan Warsaw in Exile, Allen and Unwin, 1966

Milward, Alan The Reconstruction of Federal Europe, Methuen, 1981

The European Rescue of the Nation State, Routledge, 1992

Milward, Alan et al The Frontier of national Sovereignty, Routledge, 1994

Mills, C. Wright. The Power Elite, Oxford University Press, 1956

Mizruchi, Mark The American Corporate Network 1904-1971 Sage, 1982

Monnet, Jean *Memoirs Collins*, 1978

Pisani, Sally *The CIA and the Marshall Plan* University of, Edinburgh Press, 1992

Pomian, John (ed.) *Joseph Retinger: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise* Sussex University Press, 1972

Ramsay, Robin & Dorril, Stephen *Lobster* 11, April 1986

Ramsay, Robin & Dorril, Stephen 'The Pinay Circle' *Lobster* 17, 8 November 1988

Ramsay, Robin & Dorril Stephen 'In a Common Cause: the AntiCommunist Crusade in Britain 1945-60' *Lobster* 19, May 1990

Reich, Cary *Financier: the biography of Andre Meyer Quill*, 1983

Retinger, Joseph *The European Continent?* Hodge, 1946

Schuman, Frederick *The Commonwealth of Man* Robert Hale 1954

Shoup, Laurence H. & Minter, William *Imperial Brain Trust* Monthly Review Press, 1977

Sklar, Holly (ed.) *Trilateralism* South End Press, 1980

Stokman. Frans et al. (eds.) *Networks of Corporate Power* Polity Press, 1985

Teacher, David 'The Pinay Circle and Destabilisation in Europe' *Lobster* 18, October 1989

Tether, C. Gordon *The Banned Articles of C Gordon Tether* Hetheringstoke, 1976

Van der Pijl, Kees *The Mating of an Atlantic Ruling Class* Verso, 1984

Vaughan, Richard *Post-War Integration in Europe* Edward Arnold 1976