

The Bilderberg Conspiracy:
Inside the world's most powerful secret society
H. Paul Jeffers
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Colin Challen

I feel cheated. Once again, a publisher's desire for an eye-catching title has led to an anticlimax. Jeffers goes out of his way to provide a balanced judgement on the Bilderberg group⁸ of high-ranking businessmen, politicians and others who meet annually to hold secret discussions about how the world should be run. Certainly there's enough evidence in the operation of the Bilderberg group to satisfy credulous conspiracists – the secrecy, the high security, the guest lists – but there is no evidence to support the proposition that despite their obvious influence, the participants have sufficient power, jointly – which implies agreement between themselves

⁸ Named after the Dutch hotel where it first met in the 1950s.

– to carry out the plans sometimes ascribed to them; such as developing a world government for and on behalf of bankers. That we may have a world which is plainly in the grip of bankers and their aberrant market philosophy is not the same thing.

Few Bilderbergers (as attendees are called) have changed the world, despite their efforts. At one level you have people like environmentalist Jonathan Porritt, whose influence seems to have waned (perhaps the most important body that he once chaired, the UK government's Sustainable Development Commission has been wound up), and at another level you have some of the West's leading industrialists, bankers and government officials. But as we shall see, even they don't always share a common line. And regardless of which party is in power in Washington, their luminaries have flocked to Bilderberg meetings in equal numbers: so if there's a conspiracy going on here at all it is merely to continue to expand the set of loosely defined values which keep these folk in thrall – capitalism and capitalist democracy.

The Bilderberg Network would be a more apt title for a book charting the history of this glittering nexus and its detractors. The Bilderbergers are people who certainly know how to network. Gordon Brown attended in 1991. His boss at the time was John Smith, leader of the Labour Party and a member of the Bilderberg steering committee. Another attendee in 1991 was Bill Clinton. One can see the value to them of these people mixing with each other, many on the launch pad of their careers. One can imagine Clinton chatting to his British cousins, 'Jus' give me a call, y'all.' And out of such friendships, groupthink can safely develop along with the strengthening of tribal loyalties – or should we say ruling class tribal loyalties. There is, after all, a certain kind of tautological quality about Bilderberg: we are the Powerful Ones, therefore we are powerful. Keeping that power, along with its attendant privileges (and Jeffers does not skip over the luxury, the

exclusivity, etc. of the meetings) becomes important. One of Bilderberg's most egregious participants knew this: Conrad Black helped many fellow Bilderbergers maintain a lifestyle of luxury and exclusivity by creating his own *faux* Bilderberg set-ups, this time paid for by his companies. He recruited such luminaries as Henry Kissinger to advise his Hollinger press on global affairs. Presumably Kissinger had his staffers read Hollinger titles such as the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Jerusalem Post* to tell him what to tell Hollinger was going on in the world.

The proceedings of the Bilderberg group are never published, but Jeffers quotes from an 'official report' of the 1999 meeting.⁹ Here (p. 112) we learn the following:

'The meeting then turned to "redesigning the international financial architecture." There was "a general sense that the global capital markets had run a little ahead of their regulators." Nobody disputed the idea that recent crises in emerging markets should be blamed primarily on the countries concerned. But many people thought that the recent series of dramatic upsets also seemed to highlight failings within the international financial system. The regulators present insisted that these failings were now being addressed. But many of the other participants remained sceptical.'

Of the 'regulators' present at the 1999 meeting, the UK had Kenneth Clarke and Peter Mandelson,¹⁰ two people for whom hubris is no stranger. Clarke congratulated himself for setting the UK on a growth path in the 1990s, and Mandelson was part of the New Labour cabal that invented the 'no more boom and bust' myth – a myth based on New Labour's commitment to stick with Tory spending plans for two years after the 1997

⁹ Disappointingly, Jeffers' book contains no references, but his reference here to an 'official report' quotes directly from the minutes of the meeting which are available at <www.bilderberg.org/1999mins.htm>

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Bilderberg_participants#Prime_Ministers>

election to demonstrate their 'responsibility' and deference to City interests.

If there ever was such a thing as a Bilderberg 'conspiracy' perhaps it should be known as the conspiracy of the complacent. At that time a prolonged, global bull market and economic confidence was quite strong enough to see off regional difficulties such as the Asian crisis, or a sectoral flop like the bursting of the dot-com bubble. In such a market it is very difficult for anyone to make mistakes, least of all the regulators who are under even more pressure to 'leave well alone.' Perhaps the real dichotomy in the 1999 Bilderberg meeting was between those who would leave well alone and those who wanted a little private moral hazard protectionism against the market forces they were otherwise happy to encourage. Either way, it's a sloppy kind of conspiracy.

Perhaps one should regret the absence of a real Bilderberg conspiracy. Perhaps with a little more decisiveness from the great and the good, with clearly established goals for good or ill, there could be a New World Order, rather than a hotchpotch of partial solutions and wacky theories. The obvious dangers posed by a growing population with an exponential thirst for material wealth combined with climate change makes the global economic outlook dire. The start of 2011 was littered with reports from the UN about what we already know: food and energy price inflation is tied precisely to the destabilising effects of unmitigated population growth and climate change. So perhaps we should demand that if the Bilderberg meetings continue, a wider public should set the agenda. I'm not against meetings held under 'Chatham House' rules, where what is said can be reported publicly while keeping the speakers' identities secret. It is the agenda that matters. What offends is the idea that our fate can be kicked around in secret as if it were of no concern to outsiders. Free discussion on issues that affect us all should be possible without the need for secret clubs. And as we have seen, if people like Gordon Brown feel the need to get advice from the

likes of Senator Ted Kennedy on when to hold a general election in the UK, he can just pick up the phone.

Colin Challen writes at <www.colinchallen.net>