

An international top secret world

IT WAS not the sort of response you expect from a high-powered pan-national organisation. But from the moment I rang the Bilderberg head office last May and was coldly informed, 'You already seem to know so much, Mr Coles', I knew this was no ordinary international think-tank.

Every year, a select few from Ireland's political and business elite are hand-picked to join their equals from the United States and Europe at Bilderberg meetings. Those who have received the sought-after invites over the past decade include Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, former taoiseach John Bruton, former European Parliament president Pat Cox and Justice Minister Michael McDowell.

Other Irish attendees have included former EU Commissioner Peter Sutherland – who has also been a member of the even more exclusive Bilderberg steering committee, AIB chairman Dermot Gleeson, multi-millionaire businessman Lochlan Quinn, and former Irish Times editor Conor Brady.

By those who attend, it is referred to only as a private meeting. No formal agendas are set and attendees are not permitted to discuss what happens. Secretive and persuasive, its members have been regarded as 'king-makers' for the past 50 years.

It is alleged by some to be little short of a secret world government. At the very least, it is the backdrop against which political policy is shaped worldwide. At worst, Bilderberg is the secret power behind everything from the formation of the EU to the ousting of Margaret Thatcher and the recent war in Iraq.

Recent research has suggested that every British prime minister for the past 50 years may have been a member and the group regularly vets US presidential candidates, including George W Bush and Bill Clinton. John Edwards, John Kerry's running mate, was also in attendance this year.

Later this month, Sky One launches a new series, *Conspiracies*. In each episode, it explores the facts and fictions behind disturbing conspiracy theories from 9/11 and secret world governments to hidden codes in the Bible.

And guess who features in episode three? Bilderberg.

Earlier this year, I had the chance to find out the truth behind a conspiracy theory for myself. My Bilderberg experience began when I was asked to take a week's work in Milan at the beginning of June.

Making the most of this opportunity, I decided to grab a few days holiday before my work began. While searching online for a hotel near Italy's northern lakes, I kept finding links to articles that claimed the meeting of a 'secret world government' was taking place in the same area.

In a few hours of investigation, I found myself armed with more information than I could comfortably digest on the Bilderberg group.

According to some, it is a fiction invented by students at MIT in the 1960s – but the wealth of well-researched evidence to the contrary is compelling.

The official history of the group begins soon after the end of World War II. At a time when feelings between Europe and the US were so volatile that European movers and shakers felt something had to be done, the Polish émigré Joseph Retinger set out with the help of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to bridge this emerging void in 1952.

Their aim was to galvanise both the Europeans and Americans



By Frank Coles

into finding common ground. With the assistance of the CIA, they arranged the first meeting in the Bilderberg Hotel, Holland, in May 1954, from where the meetings derive their name.

Each year, the four-day conference has been held in a different location; delegates must eat and drink together and the hotel – inevitably one of the world's finest five-star establishments – is closed off with strict security outside.

No reporters are allowed into the event as the meetings are designed to enhance privacy. According to the organisation's press release, 'this has no purpose other than to allow participants to speak their minds openly'.

Drawing on the abilities of the industrial, economic and political leaders of their day, Bernhard and Retinger created a meeting place for the powerful where the meetings 'go unannounced, their debates unreported, their decisions unknown'.

They had definite ideas of what the Bilderberg meetings should encourage, the ultimate aim being to unify Europe against the outside world with North America as a close ally.

In Bernhard's official biography, he idealised 'a United States of Europe in which borders are reduced to an absolute minimum and there is a common currency, a common financial policy, a common foreign policy, and a common policy of trade. The nations will give up so much of their sovereignty as is necessary to implement this'.

Remarks like this and leaks from within the conferences have given cause for one researcher to suggest that 'virtually all the European institutions we take for granted today were conceived, designed and brought into existence through the agency of the people involved in Bilderberg'.

The official history of the EU began more than 50 years ago. Echoing Bernhard's words, Pat Cox, while president of the European Parliament, made the following address during the May Day accession speeches that may hint at another beginning.

'Fifty years ago, a generation of European leaders, after a devastating war that divided our continent, saw all too clearly what was – but were prepared to dream of what could be. They had the courage of their European convictions. We are the beneficiaries of that legacy and of their foresight.'

'With the ceremony today, we give a new meaning, a new *raison d'être*



AIB chairman Dermot Gleeson was among the guests at the most recent Bilderberg meeting

Those who attend say it's a private meeting. Their critics say they are the real power that has shaped everything from the EU to the Iraq war

to and a new vindication of that vision,' Cox concluded.

There is a certain romantic idealism to the Bilderberg rationale that is undeniably appealing but, if any of the other reports are to be believed, it was also an organisation not to be toyed with and comprised of war criminals, racketeers, fraudsters and master manipulators of finance and industry who wouldn't hesitate to have me arrested if I turned up poking my nose into their private meeting.

Still uncertain, I dug further and found the number for the Bilderberg group's executive secretary in the Netherlands. I was greeted by an officious female voice, which became a cynical sneer when I enquired about Bilderberg. I asked her to confirm the details of this year's 50th anniversary of the meeting, especially where and when it was to be held. If her cold warning hadn't aroused such curiosity, my investigations may have run an entirely different course.

I arrived a day before the conference in the beautiful and tranquil town of Stresa, next to the magnificent Lake Maggiore in the mountains of northern Italy. A little on edge, I kept my intentions to myself until the landlady of my apartment opened the doors on to a balcony overlooking the Swiss

Alps and exclaimed in broken English: 'You have heard? Bush and Berlusconi may be coming here for big meeting this weekend?'

Perhaps the meeting wasn't so secret after all. I quickly reconnoitred the town and found the Hotel des Iles Borromée where the meeting was to be held.

I observed a few characters lurking outside, some in suits trying to look inconspicuous and others just sitting, watching who entered the hotel. Sauntering by and trying not to look suspicious. I headed home to prepare for the next day.

On arrival at the hotel the following morning, you could sense that something big was about to happen. Uniformed local carabinieri surrounded the hotel in typically laconic Italian style in their Armani-designed uniforms.

A quick scan of the area revealed three more levels of more discreet security and a surreptitious peek over a neighbouring wall revealed armed military police hiding in the grounds of the hotel, ready to move at a moment's notice.

I sat on a bench outside the hotel preparing my camera for what promised to be an intriguing day. When I next looked over my shoulder, I thought I recognised a familiar face. David Rockefeller was sitting on the patio eating a late breakfast no

more than 20 yards away. Rockefeller is one of the few who make up the core members of Bilderberg and its steering committee.

Over the next few hours, in exuberant Hollywood style, the delegates arrived in a series of convoys of dark, stealthily driven cars and anonymous helicopters.

For a private meeting, they were being very public and crowds of tourists were drawn to the noise, excitement and the small number of professional chancers like myself who had come to find out more.

OVER THE next few days, I was witness to the activities of the Bilderbergers and formed friendships with a small cadre of reporters who were also there to witness the event. Apart from the local journalists, however, it was surprising how few people were there to report on this curious amalgamation of suits, spooks and sunshine.

Spanish reporter Daniel Estulin commented: 'I was recently in Madrid for the launch of Rockefeller's autobiography and 97 journalists turned up to ask him about the colour of his socks when he was a boy. Now there are 130 of the most powerful people in the world dis-

think-tank... or a government?



Henry Kissinger, pictured above left with fellow Bilderberg grandees, stayed in this luxury hotel in Stresa, northern Italy, right, which was heavily guarded by local carabinieri, left, during the big pow-wow



Former EU commissioner Peter Sutherland, pictured at the hush-hush meeting at the start of June

cussing all of our futures and there's nobody here to ask questions.'

He's not the only journalist to express concerns about this. Veteran American reporter 'Big Jim' Tucker has been reporting on Bilderberg for 24 years and recounted some of his experiences to me in his gravelly southern burr. 'I've had warning shots fired at me, been forced to run away and this year been held by the police while reporting on the conference.'

Perhaps it is Jim's reports that provoke such strong reactions. As well as 'advance warning of Bill Clinton's ascendancy to the presidential throne after his introduction to Bilderberg in 1991', he also became aware that Margaret Thatcher's time in office was running out when he heard at the meeting she would be 'thrown out' for resisting the euro.

A year later, he happened to meet Thatcher at an event in Washington and, on hearing from Jim that the Bilderbergs may have ordered her departure, she humbly whispered: 'It is a tribute to be denounced by Bilderberg.'

Tucker asserts that in the US it is 'illegal for public officials to meet with private citizens to discuss policy', yet this is what happens every year and, 'when so many heads of state can be linked to Bilderberg',

it is surprising that more isn't known about their activities.

Former Irish Green MEP Patricia McKenna has tried four times to find out more about their activities by raising questions in the European Parliament. On each occasion, her questions have been 'conveniently shuffled down the agenda and never adequately addressed'.

'Bilderberg is a clandestine organisation operating from a situation of darkness,' she told me, 'and it represents a huge lack of democracy to have this organisation not open to public scrutiny. What are they trying to hide?'

Back in Stresa, on the second glorious morning, two of Ireland's prodigal sons made an appearance, Dermot Gleeson and Peter Sutherland, and I had to wonder what brought them there. Both have held the attorney-general's position and the chairmanship of AIB.

Sutherland moved on to Goldman Sachs and BP.

The reason for their attendance may only become apparent if we explore the observation of Bilderberg expert Mike Peters that the influence of the group 'is only discernible by a close scrutiny of the specific careers and connections of the individual participants'.

On one side of the Atlantic, we have the salubrious heir, David

Rockefeller, presiding over the JP Morgan International Council on which Henry Kissinger also sits.

He in turn sat on the board of Hollinger International with the disgraced Conrad Black and Pentagon war hawk Richard Perle, who is also linked to Kissinger via venture capital firm Trireme Partners. Perle was also one of the 25 signatories on the controversial Project For The New American Century document with Donald Rumsfeld.

Across the Atlantic, Rumsfeld sat on the board of Zurich-based ABB with Sutherland during 2000. Sutherland is also the European chairman of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission and used to hold Gleeson's post as chairman of AIB. Gleeson also sits on the international advisory board of the Independent News & Media group with Tory party heavyweight Kenneth Clarke and Peter Mandelson, the recently appointed European Commissioner.

All are Bilderberg members and this brief snapshot provides a glimpse at the intricate interweaving of the group in both business and government circles.

It is these connections that Bernhard hoped to encourage through the 'unwritten rule that anybody who has ever been to a Bilderberg conference should be

able to feel that he can, in a private capacity, call on any former member he has met'.

FOR THIS reason, Jim Tucker would like to see some changes made by the Bilderberg group. 'I would like to see every newspaper jump on their asses,' he tells me in his own inimitable style. McKenna elaborates: 'We need free media access. Public figures need to be held accountable.'

According to Tucker, Bilderbergers have tried to force a move towards a world government, establish NATO as a standing UN army and create a series of common currencies around the globe through the formation of the EU and soon the American Union and Pacific/Asian Union.

He recalled: 'When Ken Clarke spoke to me a few years ago, he told me that 'dollarization' would dominate the globe and our children would laugh at the petty currencies we have now.'

Three days into the meeting, I had heard varying theories on the group's purpose. They were either a genuinely altruistic group that merely required shelter from the prying eyes of the press or were an incredibly powerful assembly of

persuaders who could affect significant change on a world stage.

No one had labelled them a secret world government; they all agreed that Bilderberg's influence is more subtle than that and should be open to closer scrutiny and debate.

Retired British politician Denis Healey, a founding member, gave a typically ebullient response to the accusation that Bilderberg is a conspiracy: 'I've never heard such crap! That isn't a conspiracy - that is the world. It is the way things are done. And quite rightly so.'

My experiences in Stresa this year and the activities of many curious investigators before me, confirm that Bilderberg does indeed exist and maintains a level of secrecy and control that can only provoke more questions than its members will ever answer.

Jim Tucker remains resolute: 'When any group of men meet in secret to discuss the weakening of your national sovereignty, they are all guilty of a crime.'

● *Frank Coles is a freelance television writer, researcher and producer who has worked for the BBC, Channel Four, Channel Five, ITN and Discovery Channel. Sky One's documentary on Bilderberg will be broadcast on Thursday September 23 at 9pm.*