

CONFIDENTIAL

BILDERBERG GROUP

Meeting of the Steering Committee
London, January 10-12, 1958

Agenda: Discussion on:

I "Weaknesses of Western Society"

The present summary is complementary to the two papers by Dr. Mueller and Ambassador Quaroni, which were circulated among participants prior to the meeting. It will therefore be limited to additional observations and points specially emphasised in the course of the discussions.

It was generally agreed that it was dangerous to attempt generalisations about the weaknesses of society in the Western Community as a whole, since the weaknesses of American society were quite different from those of European society and inside Europe itself a clear distinction must be drawn between Britain and some of the northern countries and the rest. Indeed, each country had its own problems rooted in its national history and culture. Discussion therefore concentrated mainly on weaknesses which were most evident in the large states of the European continent.

In analysing the situation, speakers emphasised the crisis of confidence which seemed to be characteristic of the present situation. It had manifold aspects. There were countries where people doubted whether the existing system would permit, let alone initiate, the desired changes in the social structure. At the same time, the upper classes doubted if it was possible for changes to take place without bringing their own destruction. This affected foreign policy, since it made the ruling classes doubtful whether the social fabric would not collapse under the strain of the necessary sacrifices. Concern was therefore expressed that some of the Continental countries could not effectively mobilise all the strata of their populations to fight a hot, still less a cold, war.

Some speakers also maintained that in some countries the privileged groups showed lack of social responsibility which could easily be transferred to the domain of foreign affairs.

The idea of European unity had proved valuable in stimulating enthusiasm and attracting idealism among the younger generation which felt frustrated by the shortcomings of stagnant national communities. On the other hand, some participants felt that there was a danger that the idea of European unity might distract attention from the shortcomings of national societies and prove a form of escapism, rather than a means of meeting the real challenge.

Several speakers pointed out that the elimination of the more glaring weaknesses in some of the continental societies would not in itself suffice to provide the enthusiastic idealism which was required. Security, welfare and equality had not always contributed towards the development of generosity, purpose and self-sacrifice which were the main needs of the West at the present time.