

## A U.S. Congress Assessment Project Study

May 6, 1988

### AT THE (U.N.) MOVIES: MAKING AMERICA THE VILLAIN

Hot cold, day night; same struggle, same fight.

--anti-war chant parody

Nightfall in Hiroshima, Japan. Flowers float on the reflecting pool as the mourners softly weep: the annual Hiroshima memorial service for those who fell under the emperor's intransigence and America's atomic response. The scene is moving. The narrator builds his measured crescendo as he decries humanity's "awesome genius for death." Half a world away, eight jet engines spool up on a grounded U.S. bomber. The film's title menacingly explodes onto the screen: "Nuclear Countdown."

If the viewer has not picked up on the meaning yet, plenty of helpful visual cues follow. The message is unmistakable: the world teeters on the brink of nuclear war, and the United States is the chief culprit. A parade of mostly expired US. military hardware follows in formation: B-29, B-36, B-47, and B-52 bombers; F-104, F-106, and F-14 fighters; *Polaris* missiles and *Trident* submarines. An aging British *Vulcan* bomber makes an overflight. Then the scene fades to the premier peacemaker, the late Soviet Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev, railing against nuclear arms before an enthusiastic session of the Supreme Soviet.

**U.S. Periscope.** Viewers are told "there aren't any" peaceful applications of military technology. The film closes as a U.S. nuclear submarine's periscope pops out of the water and the narrator intones, "In a world calling for a New International Economic Order, isn't this a mad perversion of priorities?"

A mad perversion yes, mainly of reality. And the perversion is by the United Nations and its Department of Public Information. "Nuclear Countdown" is one of almost 150 films produced and/or distributed by the U.N. Heritage Foundation experts reviewed 46 of them. While some of these films treat such innocent topics as air traffic control, the

majority are attacks against the U.S. that misrepresent historical fact. Some, like "Nuclear Countdown," do it so blatantly as to be almost amusing, conjuring memories of the "scare films" shown in driver's education classes.

**Candidate for GAO Audit.** Yet, these films are not funny. U.S. taxpayers pay the biggest part of the annual \$12.2 million bill for these celluloid floggings as part of the 25 percent U.S. annual contribution to the U.N. budget. What is worse, huge audiences around the world and in the U.S., particularly schoolchildren, watch the U.N. films and presumably are influenced by them.

Before voting any more money to pay for the production and distribution of these films, Congress should direct the General Accounting Office to review all the U.N. films of 1986 and 1987. The GAO should devise a matrix of content, bias, and accuracy with which to assess the films. The findings of this GAO report should determine to what extent the U.S. continues to underwrite the films. Congress and the Reagan Administration, meanwhile, should consider alerting state boards of education to the apparent bias and distortion in the U.N. films that are being shown in U.S. classrooms.

Past evaluations have found that a systematic anti-Western, anti-free market bias pervades U.N. media products. The U.N. Department of Public Information (DPI), which has oversight responsibility for U.N. films, is at the core of the problem. As early as 1984, a Heritage Foundation study found: "[In the policy areas where] the U.N. has not been successful, DPI, through an unbalanced and often heavily biased interpretation of events, attempts to blame the failure on the Western industrial democracies."<sup>1</sup> Two years later, the General Accounting Office, an investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, analyzed 90 media pieces produced by DPI and came to a similar conclusion.<sup>2</sup> Even the U.N. library cannot escape manipulation. A 1986 Heritage study found that the U.N. Headquarters Library has become "a front for Soviet disinformation and covert operations." Making matters worse, the Library's index, crucial for information retrieval, is biased heavily against the U.S., Israel, and Western ideas.<sup>3</sup>

U.N. films are no different.

## WHY U.N. FILMS MATTER

In just three months in 1983, U.N. Information Centers distributed and screened 3,351 films to a total audience of 72,651,974 in developing and developed countries. In the same

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1 Roger A. Brooks, "The U.N. Department of Public Information: A House of Mirrors," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 332, February 23, 1984.

2 Thomas E.L. Dewey, "The GAO Renders Its Verdict: The U.N. Information Service Is Anti-American," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 515, June 9, 1986.

3 Mark Huber, "The United Nations Library: Putting Soviet Disinformation Into Circulation," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 487, February 18, 1986.

period, the Centers distributed and showed 705 films on the subject of disarmament to a total audience of 12,388,983; 200 films on apartheid to a total audience of 11,543,433; 123 films on Namibia to a total audience of 10,878,537; and films highlighting the importance of the socialist U.N. scheme called the New International Economic Order to a total audience of 14,449,058.<sup>4</sup>

A 1984 Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* reports that, "Some of these films treat their subjects in a balanced and unbiased manner and deal with subjects worthy of attention. Most of the films...however, obscure or ignore significant issues and problems facing developing countries. Material on economic development, for example, does not address the real challenges to creating wealth and prosperity in the developing world and ignores the economically most successful of the developing countries; material on disarmament ignores Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and the enormous threat that conventional arms pose to regional peace."<sup>5</sup>

**Blatantly Anti-American.** A painstakingly thorough study of U.N. films and other media in 1986 by the GAO found that they regularly contained blatantly anti-American propaganda. Concluded the GAO, "We found that a substantial number of the media items opposed U.S. interests because they took political positions unfavorable to U.S. interests and/or contained indications of bias against the United States."<sup>6</sup>

Of special concern, however, are the movies directed at children. The simplistic and misleading messages beamed at these young minds can foster loathing toward the U.S. and the West.

## "BEING YOUNG"

By far the worst of these films is a series of vignettes entitled "Being Young," made to commemorate International Youth Year, observed by the U.N. in 1985. The film tracks the sometimes squalid and often depressing lives of children in Peru, Northern Ireland, Japan, Rwanda, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. Poverty is the principal theme for the segments on the U.S., Peru, and Rwanda; discipline is the theme for Japan; yet for the depiction of the Soviet Union, the film makers chose excellence in athletic achievement.

A teenager in Peru races tour buses down the Andes for tips. Two young girls in Northern Ireland come to grips with that country's religious violence. Boys in Japan live in a Kodo commune, learning the disciplined life that comes with mastery of the big drums of that name.

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4 "Monitoring System for DPI Programme Implementation," United Nations Department of Public Information Memorandum from Lwanyantika Masha, Chief, Planning Programming and Evaluation Unit, to Yasushi Akashi, Chart I.

5 Brooks, *op. cit.*

6 General Accounting Office, "Analysis of Selected Media Products Shows Half Oppose Key U.S. Interests," Washington, D.C., 1986.

**Soviet Idyll versus the Bronx.** The "typical" Soviet youth is world class pole vault champion, Sergie Bubka. Viewers are treated to shots of Bubka and his young wife smartly attired in Western clothing, taking romantic strolls past tree-lined Soviet streets and holding hands beneath a statue of Lenin.

By sharp and distorted contrast, the "typical" American youth lives in one of the worst sections of the Bronx. He walks past endless trash heaps, graffiti-strewn walls, and the hulks of burned-out cars. Explains the narrator, "This is a 'poor' neighborhood in New York City. For a young person growing up here, life can either be a challenge to be met or an injustice to be suffered."

### "DOOMSDAY" MENTALITY

A large number of the films deal with the question of disarmament. The films' treatment of the issue is oversimplified, and they uniformly and grotesquely exaggerate the U.N.'s role in fostering nuclear accords and effecting their success. Some of the films cast the U.S. as the world's chief nuclear villain.

"The Doomsday Clock" (1987) is a children's cartoon that combines technically crude drawings with a truly ear-piercing sound track. Images reveal a wheat field giving way to coal which in turn becomes steel and then computers. The ingredients are poured into a large funnel and emerge as intercontinental ballistic missiles. The scene shifts to two figures sitting across the table from each other as a large clock ticks away in the background. As the clock winds down, the figures are transformed into enormous snarling animals with unnaturally long fingernails and teeth. The clock strikes midnight, the missiles launch (*fade to black*).

**Ignoring Reality.** In the second scene, a skeleton flies into the room and drags the figures over to the clock. The figures embrace. Beneath the U.N. seal, they sign a treaty. Outside the room, crowds cheer. The clock winds backwards, and everybody lives happily ever after.

The images and sounds are calculated to terrify and mislead. The message is unmistakable: economic and industrial development leads to Armageddon, there are only two nuclear powers, and only the U.N. can help. This, of course, ignores reality. Not only can (and does) economic development lead to prosperity, but it is the U.N.'s anti-market strategy that has led to poverty, famine, and disease. The "nuclear club," moreover, includes not just the U.S. and the USSR, but also Britain, France, India, and China. The U.N. not only has had little to do with the successful negotiation of nuclear accords, it has actually impeded their progress.

The message of "The Doomsday Clock" reappears in "Boom." This U.N. cartoon made by Czechoslovakian film maker Brestislav Pojar features a cave man living in peace and harmony until, one day, he discovers a stick. While fighting over a mouse with another cave man, he hits his rival over the head with the stick. Power of the stick in hand, he runs amok, taking whatever he wants: coats, dogs, women. With his illusions of grandeur, he is transformed into an armored knight. His weapons become more sophisticated: guns, cannons, heavily artillery, tanks. Foxholes are shelled. Whole cities are leveled. Missiles



are pointed at one another. The mouse, the initial instigator of the conflict, reappears and crawls into the launch computer, inadvertently triggering Armageddon and dueling mushroom clouds.

**"Made in the USA."** Another disarmament film is "In the Minds of Men" (1982). It assaults viewers' auditory senses with roaring jets, artillery fire, and explosions as children merrily skip to school. A somber narrator intones: "We and our children live with the ever-present threat of global-thermal nuclear war. Nuclear weapons and the possibility that they will be used have made the end of the human race a real danger." The voice of a little child asks, "Why do we have war?"

A series of erroneous generalizations follows, including the ultimate *non sequitur*, "War cannot bring peace." A kaleidoscope of carnage ensues, from the trenches of World War I to Dresden and Hiroshima to Indochina. Pictures of rotting, fly-covered corpses flash onto the screen, with more blood and gore than the midnight feature at a Texas drive-in. Here, again, the villain is America. The viewers see the normal progression of American male maturation into killing machines, from junior league boxing to M-16 rifle training. Pictures of dead children numbly meld with flights of American bombers. As children frolic in the water, a pair of U.S. A-10 *Thunderbolt* attack planes swoops down in formation. An American F-16 fighter flies up a river bed as the narrator proclaims, "Living in the shadow of nuclear war, whose horrors we can only imagine, we still have not learned."

"In The Minds of Men" closely follows what appears to be the U.N. script: piles of dead children and weapons that say "made in the USA."

## THE GLOBAL EXPLOITATION STORY

That the U.S. is portrayed as the world's chief war monger is not enough. According to U.N. films, the U.S. is also the planet's chief robber baron, enslaving millions through global economic exploitation.

Typical is "A New Bargain" by the National Film Board of Canada. It tugs at the hearts of its young viewers while blaming the U.S. and the West for the Third World's squalor. "Something is wrong," viewers are told. "The people of the Third World are still poor." The film explores the sad plight of Ghanaian cocoa farmers but curiously is silent about the incompetent and corrupt government-run state marketing board, which in large part is responsible for Ghana's rural poverty. The board paid Ghanaian farmers a paltry 25 percent of the price it received for reselling their cocoa on the world market. Nor does the film say anything about Ghana's official policies that embraced Soviet state agricultural schemes.<sup>7</sup> Rather, viewers are told, "Europeans exploited the wealth of Asia, Africa and the Americas."

**Food as a Deadly Weapon.** Later, "A New Bargain" charges that "Other countries profit from their control of critical food supplies. The United States is the world's largest grain

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<sup>7</sup> Melanie S. Tammen, "The Failure of State Agriculture in SubSaharan Africa" (Washington, D.C.: The Foundation for Africa's Future, 1988).

exporter. Food is also a weapon. It is one of the principal tools in the kit of American diplomacy." For this U.N. film, therefore, the massive U.S. food aid shipments have not been a program that for decades has been feeding the world's hungry, but "a weapon." Ignored, presumably deliberately, by this U.N. film is the fact that the U.S. has been the world's foremost supplier of food and other aid, from the post-World War II Marshall Plan to the recent and massive grain shipments to Ethiopia. Last year the United States spend a record \$19.2 billion on foreign aid.<sup>8</sup>

Such glaring errors of omission also color the U.N.'s economic film library. Illustrative is "The Big Village" (1979). Set in a primitive island fishing village, it portrays the world through a little boy's eyes. The vision builds from pathos to resentment. First and foremost, the boy tells the viewer, his people are not to blame for their plight. As an ox plows a field, he says, "Because we are poor, we can only afford the old ways."

**Manhattan Skyscrapers versus Hungry Children.** Pictures of peasants and fly-covered children dissolve into shots of American moon rockets and Manhattan skyscrapers. As nattily clad diners enjoy an al fresco cafe, the boy proclaims, "They eat well and look well, the rich of this world. But they have built on sand, for they have forgotten the green earth and the gentle wind. They have poisoned their rivers and seas in their search for wealth."

The world is compared to a "big village," a standard U.N. expression for its one-world outlook. As the scene switches to the U.N. General Assembly, the boy proclaims, "There are conclaves of the big village, too. A new age has dawned. Around the globe, the poor have been aroused." As the camera focuses on Third World delegates the boy warns, "Our people are a vast majority on this earth, but we do not rule it--yet. But things will change. It is best they change peacefully."

Picking up on this theme, "Your Ocean and Mine" celebrates the U.N. Law of the Sea Treaty, a cumbersome and widely criticized attempt to establish a global authority to rule and administer the world's seabeds and their resources. Viewers are told that the law "must go beyond the three-century old dictum of *mare librium*: freedom of the seas." The film opens as delegates labor over an accord while wintering, at U.N. expense, in Montego Bay, Jamaica during December 1982. Squirring and dazed fish are hauled aboard a factory trawler while the narrator informs, "Almost 99 percent of the world's fisheries now fall under jurisdiction of costal states, providing a long-needed opportunity for rational exploitation." The conclusion is clear: responsible fishing and sea mining cannot occur without an international seabed authority.

**Stacking the Deck Against the West.** "The Economics Game" (1978) uses mimes sitting around a card table. From the start, the deck is stacked against the West. Viewers are told, "The object of the economics game is to get rich" and that rich players make their own rules.

An economic boom creates pollution, but the rich player "doesn't care. The object of the game is to get rich." A poor player encounters misfortune. Naturally, she's blameless. "Oh,

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<sup>8</sup> United States Agency for International Development, FY 1987 Congressional Presentation.

oh, her crop is ruined by bugs. They don't have a cure for that. The ones with technology felt no need to do research on her pests."

Viewers are told, "This is a crazy game. It's true, everyone seems to be getting richer. But the poor ones are really not better off and the rich ones have gained a lot, but at the expense of everyone's environment and by using up everyone's resources. It's been like this for years and now some players have had enough. They don't want to play anymore unless the rules are changed and it would be hard for the others to play by themselves."

The solution offered by this U.N. film? "The old rules haven't worked, we've all agreed on that. That's why the member states of the United Nations have called for new rules, a New International Economic Order."

## **HISTORICAL FALLACIES**

"The Great Awakening" (1985) was made in celebration of the enormous "progress" achieved by formerly colonial African states. The film overflows with errors of omission, misrepresentation, and misleading optimism. Ignored is Africa's economic deterioration in the past quarter century. Instead, the film shows Britain's Prince Charles shaking hands with Zimbabwe's new leaders, as viewers are told, "the achievement of freedom and independence in scores of countries around the world reflects a story of courage, sacrifice, and dedication."

**Alaska in Red.** As the evils of colonialism are explained, a world map marks colonies in red. Including Alaska.

Great progress, viewers are told, has been made in decolonizing the world, but the job is not done. South Africa still occupies South West Africa (sometimes known as Namibia), says the film, and the British still rule Anguilla.

To be sure, Anguilla, the 60-square mile tropical island territory located five miles north of St. Maarten in the Caribbean Sea, with a population of 7,000 remains a British protectorate. The narrator assures viewers that the U.N. is on top of the situation, citing the dispatch of a 24-member "fact finding" delegation to personally inspect the island. No doubt U.N. delegations will visit the island frequently because, as viewers are told, "The U.N. keeps under constant review the status of countries like Anguilla until the people determine their final political status."

**Silence on Genocide.** "Footnotes To A War" (1980) tracks the exodus of Indochinese refugees without once explaining why they left. The culprit, according to the film, is neither Vietnamese military aggression nor the Khmer Rouge's genocide in Cambodia. Rather, viewers are led to believe that America's sluggish immigration procedures are to blame for the pathetic refugees in Thai camps. Canada and West Germany are praised for their refugee resettlement efforts; no mention is made of the 813,000 Indochinese refugees —

more than half of the 1.5 million who fled following the war — and millions of other refugees who find safe haven in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

### **AN EXERCISE IN SELF-PROMOTION**

Ultimately, U.N. films are advertisements for itself and its agenda. Usually, this is done subtly, by having the camera pan the General Assembly and mentioning items such as the "New International Economic Order." However, little is subtle and even less is true in the production, "The U.N. Is For You" (1984).

Once again, viewers see American military hardware as the chief conveyors of death, this time a B-29 attack on Dresden, as the narrator says, "Greediness and a lack of consideration lead to fights and quarrels. In countries they lead to war." There are no scenes of Nazi death camps or Hitler's blitzkrieg of helpless Poland. Only the U.S., it seems, has used the weapons of war. To the U.N. film distributors, apparently, only the U.S. is a threat to peace.

"The U.N.'s most important job," viewers are told, "is to stop wars and keep the peace." Its other main job is "to make things fairer on our planet" because "If the U.N. succeeds in making things fairer, then it will be easier to keep the peace because there won't be as many things to quarrel about." The U.N. accomplishes its mission by passing General Assembly resolutions. Countries that ignore these resolutions, and almost all do whenever it suits them, "can get pretty unpopular."

### **AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GLOBAL PUBLIC OPINION**

U.N. films are available in the U.S. from 30 commercial distributors as well as from the United Nations Information Centers. American public schools and political organizations make wide use of these resources. One of the commercial distributors, Barr Films, Inc., of Irwindale, California, over the past ten years has sold U.N. films to some 800 school districts, including those of Chicago, San Francisco, Orange County, California, and Hobbes, Minnesota.

Last month, the National Alliance of Third World Journalists convened its fifth national conference in Atlanta, including an "international film festival" concerned with "Visions of Struggle." U.N. films were featured at the conference.

U.N. films are a soapbox for those who prefer to blame their problems on the U.S. and those who believe in the forced redistribution of global resources and the supremacy of the state. These opinions long have been the mainstay of U.N. politics.

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<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Refugee Programs Monthly Report, U.S. Department of State, March 2, 1988.



**Suspending U.S. Funding.** The U.N., of course, is entitled to fund and distribute films. When the U.N. does so, however, it has a responsibility to ensure that the films are accurate and unbiased. When U.N. films portray the U.S., they should do so fairly and responsibly. Based on this sample of 46 U.N. films, there can be no doubt that U.N. films fail to do so. Until this situation changes, the U.S. should seriously reconsider whether it is wise to finance these products. As such, the Congress should suspend all U.S. funding for U.N. films and for the U.N. Department of Public Information until the General Accounting Office can analyze the films' content and certify that U.S. taxpayer funds are not underwriting anti-U.S. propaganda.

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