

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Pro-SDI documentary feeds pablum

"SDI: A Prospect for Peace" is the title of an expensive 30-minute television documentary produced by the American Defense Preparedness Association (ADPA) and previewed for the press and ADPA supporters here Oct. 26.

Ostensibly designed to overcome the bias of the major news media against the Strategic Defense Initiative, the film is supposed to present a thoroughly fair, pro-SDI argument "at last."

Its first broadcast is slated for Washington's ABC affiliate on Nov. 1—in the middle of Sunday afternoon when the majority of television viewers will be tuned into a football game.

Now, I regret folks wasting their time watching football. But I don't regret their missing this documentary. For all the \$250,000 worth of effort put into it, the film peddles a simplistic and painfully inadequate view of SDI.

The documentary talks down to the American public with a patronizing, "Golly, gee, wouldn't it be great if we could protect ourselves against the threat of nuclear missiles?" While the film acknowledges that the Soviets are aggressively developing their own SDI, it uses this information only to suggest to the viewer, "Doesn't this convince you that we, too, should at least be researching this effort, to find out if it will work or not?"

Everyone knows it will work. The film should have been more frank, laying out the facts with the same objective candor contained in the annual *Soviet Military Power* reports by the

Pentagon. It should have suggested to the viewer that there is something pretty ominous about the fact that the Soviets are working so feverishly on their own SDI while both lying about their effort and insisting that we stop ours.

The film never says that the Soviets are preparing an effective first-strike nuclear war-winning capability, and that the SDI is the only thing that can deter them. This might be more unsettling than the pablum dished out in the ADPA film. But given the downward budgetary direction of the SDI program, and the U.S. defense budget as a whole, a little shaking up is in order.

Another vital point overlooked in the film is the single most common argument of SDI opponents: "It is impossible for SDI to be 100% effective, and since even just one nuclear warhead getting through would kill millions, it is a waste of money."

Spending a few minutes answering that phony objection would have done more to advance the case for SDI than all the 15-second statements by the "experts" paraded across the screen by the ADPA. SDI does not need to be perfect to be "100% effective." The Soviets would launch a nuclear attack on the United States only if they were *certain* that they would win, that they could destroy enough on the U.S. side in a first strike that, given their own SDI defenses, a U.S. retaliatory strike would produce what the Kremlin views as "acceptable" losses.

On the other hand, if the Soviets are not certain of victory, they will never consider launching a first strike (unless they thought they were about to be attacked). Therefore, even if the SDI is only partially effective in the technical sense, it introduces a critical element of indeterminacy into Soviet military planning. That represents a *deterrent* that is "100% effective."

But the most glaring thing the film does not do, is to state clearly and simply that SDI is a program we should pursue no matter what the Soviet Union or anyone else is doing, for its revolutionary economic benefits, as well as its unique contribution to national security.

But apparently, the "Madison Avenue" approach of the outfit that made the film for the ADPA doesn't allow for any of this.

It also occurred to me, that maybe the ADPA was being very deliberate. Nobody could explain to me why, the night after screening their documentary, the ADPA's Washington chapter had a bash at which they gave an award to Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), the SDI's public enemy number-one!

Daring to cut middle income entitlements

Former Commerce Secretary Pete Peterson has called for the creation of a commission which would do the dirty work of cutting into Social Security, Medicare, pension funds, and other so-called "middle income entitlement programs."

Peterson made this proposal for "deep and abiding cuts" in the federal budget deficit Oct. 25 on CBS's "Face the Nation." The secret, he said, was finding a way that politicians could avoid taking the blame—since there are 39 million voters on Social Security.

House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-Ill.) told me the next day that Peterson's ideas are being given a lot of consideration. "The only time it could happen would be in the first 100 days of a new President's administration," Michel offered.

Like Peterson, he thought the important thing was that the "will of the people" not be a factor.