
SPECTATOR'S JOURNAL

AGENTS OF DECEPTION

by Rael Jean Isaac

The story has a happy ending. Soon South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV), the fourth largest producer of programs in the public television system, will be showing and making available to other PBS stations a brilliant film on Soviet disinformation, *Agents of Deception*. But the frustrations in finding a U.S. outlet encountered by Stornoway Productions, the small Canadian company that made the film, since it was completed in July 1985, constitute an indictment of American television and public television most especially.

Agents of Deception portrays "active measures" used by the Soviet International Department to influence public opinion in the West, including the creation of journals (the Greek tabloid *Ethnos*, reportedly created by the KGB in 1981, rapidly became the most widely read paper in the country); the buying of journalists (among them the man who became managing editor of Tokyo's largest conservative paper); the use of "agents of influence" (like Norway's Arne Trehold who insured that the Soviets were sitting on both sides of the table when his country negotiated a treaty on the disputed "gray zone" in the Barents Sea); and the manufacture of "front groups," of which the World Peace Council is the jewel in the crown, to channel peace sentiment into anti-American agitation.

Like the earlier *KGB Connections*, produced by the same team (finally shown in 1982 on New York City's Channel 11, that film never succeeded in surmounting the roadblocks to national distribution), *Agents of*

Deception is noteworthy not only for its extraordinary material, but for its innovative methods. The research that went into these films would support serious scholarly papers, and their impact derives from their meticulous accumulation of evidence. Television's gatekeepers, accustomed to documentaries where opposing talking heads provide "balance," are acutely uncomfortable with this technique, especially as applied to such unpleasant subjects as Soviet spying and disinformation. In the eighteen months he sought a U.S. outlet for the film (it was shown on CTV in Canada in May 1986), producer Kitson Vincent found that he repeatedly encountered the objection: "That film has such a strong point of view. We don't do point-of-view journalism like that." Vincent told me of his frustration: "I tell them I'm confused. How can it be called 'point of view' if in fact all the evidence is thoroughly documented and verified? If you say someone is doing something and this is how they do it and this is why they do it and here are the people who do it, how is that point-of-view journalism? There are twenty-two people testifying in *Agents of Deception*, from the little old lady who was a translator for the World Peace Council for twenty years right on to the top. I tell them if you have any problems

with our evidence go after it. But of course they don't."

While the earlier *KGB Connections*, which focused on Soviet spying, made extensive use of hidden cameras, it is interesting that in *Agents of Deception* these were not needed. The tools of Soviet disinformation were amazingly ready to speak for the camera, perhaps because vanity seems to be their overriding characteristic and the trait, one suspects, that first made them vulnerable to Soviet approaches. Both French journalist Pierre Charles Pathé and Danish journalist Arne Petersen, for example, who provide two of the most illuminating interviews in the film, preen themselves before the camera. They are not merely unrepentant; their air is self-congratulatory. Pathé, son of the creator of the Pathé newsreel, and editor of *Synthesis*, a news bulletin on French national security, who was caught passing documents to a KGB officer, dismisses the charges of disinformation as "completely silly." He admits the Soviets gave him the money to sustain his publication but declares loftily this had no impact on his publication. "It was independent, very independent." (Intelligence expert Roy Godson is interviewed, and points out that the themes of the publication

were denigration of the United States and support for the Soviet Union.)

Denmark's Arne Petersen, who took money from the KGB to pay for an ad in favor of a nuclear free zone which he induced 181 Danish artists and writers to sign, displays the same sense of superiority to the carping of lesser minds. "It's been charged that the people I knew from the Soviet embassy were from the KGB. Quite frankly I don't know. I know them as persons, as personal friends. They came here and brought along their wives and children." Asked if he might have been duped, Petersen replies: "I have an IQ of 161. I don't know how easy I am to dupe." A small self-satisfied smile comes to his lips. "I don't think so."

The Soviet Union's witting agents display a charming effrontery. Asked if the World Peace Council is a Soviet front, its long-time head Romesh Chandra replies easily: "It is not. It is by no means." Arkady Shevchenko, the former U.N. undersecretary general who defected to the U.S., describes how at the U.N. he would receive instructions from Moscow to make the arrangements for Chandra's visits. The camera returns to Chandra who declares that Shevchenko knows nothing about the WPC. "He has no knowledge of it. He has no reason to speak of it." The camera pans to a 1978 photo before the U.N. of a younger Shevchenko and beside him a smiling Romesh Chandra.

More surprising, for its candor, is the interview with Michael Meyerson, head of the U.S. Peace Council, the WPC's American affiliate. Meyerson, who is also a senior official of the U.S. Communist Party, shares the weakness for self-congratulation. He boasts that the Communist Party works within virtually every peace movement in the United States, and takes credit for a key role in organizing the huge 1982 peace demonstration in New York. "The U.S. Peace Council—I must confirm the FBI's intelligence—was instrumental in initiating June 12. We from the beginning helped to build it, supplied staff, and went all out to build it." Meyerson points out that the U.S. Peace Council includes among its members congressmen, members of state legislatures, and mayors. And sure enough, the film summons up Berkeley mayor

'That one showing led to Glen Cove, Long Island, achieving brief international fame. The town's mayor, Alan Parente, learned from the film that the Soviet Union used its Glen Cove estate for sophisticated electronic espionage against local defense industries. The City Council took the only measures in its power and revoked permits for Soviet citizens living on the estate to use the town's recreational facilities. This in turn led the State Department to order the town to cease meddling in foreign affairs and let Soviet diplomats back on the beaches. The town initially defied the State Department edict but eventually succumbed.

Rael Jean Isaac's most recent book (with Erich Isaac) is *The Coercive Utopians (Regnery Gateway)*.



and U.S. Peace Council co-chairman Gus Newport, who explains that Congressman Ron Dellums first got him involved and that New York Congressman Ted Weiss attended Peace Council conferences in Europe.

Why did people like Meyerson and Chandra, whom Shevchenko describes as "sleek as a snake," consent to be interviewed? Perhaps they (and others interviewed) have become so accustomed to the leftward slant of the media that they simply assumed a Canadian production company would portray them positively. Or perhaps they felt confident that whatever the motives of the film-makers, television's gatekeepers would make sure that no film critical of their statements reached a significant audience.

If so, they were close to the mark. The major networks, metro-media, the major cable outlets, all turned thumbs down. (ABC, the most open of the networks to independent producers, was divided but the naysayers triumphed.)

That left public television. Under fire for years for purveying a stream of left-wing documentaries, its officials might have been expected to leap at the chance to prove "even-handedness," especially since Barry Chase, PBS's vice president for programming, had told Accuracy in Media's Reed Irvine that PBS was eager to show competently produced material with a different perspective, if only it were available.

Midge Decter of the Committee for the Free World (which had disseminated the *KGB Connections* on college campuses) took the film to Jay Iselin, then president of WNET, the New York public television station that is the principal supplier of national programming for PBS. She reports that her reception could not have been more cordial. As she remembers it, Iselin told her: "People come in and talk to me and have an idea for a film and they don't even know where the financing is coming from and they take hours of my time. But here you have both a film and the money." (Decter had a foundation's commitment to provide the money for PBS to buy the film.)

But once WNET's public affairs staff had seen the film, Iselin's tone was different. He assured Midge Decter that the problem did not lie in the politics of the film, but its "incompetence." It was so hard-hitting and melodramatic. And what was that stuff about some World Conference or Council of Churches or whatever that group was—this claim it was a Communist front? There was no documentation on that. The film simply didn't meet today's high standard of journalism. Since Iselin resigned not long after this conversation, turning down

Agents of Deception may well have been his last major decision. It casts an ironic light on the final tribute bestowed by Bruce Christensen, president of PBS, on Iselin's performance: "Jay's contributions to American television are many, but what remains after the programs are over is the courage and the foresight to say 'yes' to the best and the untried, 'no' to the inferior and the commonplace."

Leslie Lenkowsky of the Institute for Educational Affairs then tried to step into the breach. Over lunch he told the news director of WETA, Washington D.C.'s public broadcasting station, of the film, and gave him a copy for the public affairs staff to view. Ten days later the film came back in the mail. There was not even a note enclosed.

Disappointed but scarcely surprised

that the station that gave us "The Africans" should have rejected *Agents of Deception*, Lenkowsky thought of Polly Kosko, director of program development at SCETV. The South Carolina station had produced a number of excellent programs on American drama and literature, and Lenkowsky suspected it would be open to a high quality public affairs program. It turns out he was right. □



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Dr. Buchanan is General Director of the Center for the Study of Public Choice and Harris University Professor at George Mason University. Among his other books are *The Limits of Liberty* and, with Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent*.

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THE HOOSIER PULSE



HOOPING IT UP

by Kent Owen

Time was when Indiana's favored pastimes ran to harness racing, horseshoe-pitching, squirrel-hunting, and fishing for bluegill and bass. But ever since 1893 when one of James Naismith's former students introduced the new game of basketball at the Lafayette YMCA, the Hoosiers have taken to it with gleeful zeal. What grand opera means to the Milanese and bull-fighting to the Cordobans, the sport of hoops and hardwood is to the people of Indiana: an athletic contest practiced as an art form and ritualized as a civic ceremony.

It does no good to suggest that in Indiana basketball is the extension of politics by other means, or that it is the moral equivalent of free-market economics. For all anybody knows, the game may scratch an itch deep down in the collective Hoosier unconscious. Or release sexual energies pent up by social strictures and religious repressions. Whatever its grander meanings, here and now or in the sweet by and by, basketball seizes Indiana from late November through March, keeping the Hoosiers warm, dry, and sentient when there are few good reasons for being out-of-doors.

With the metastasis of television over the last thirty years—satellite dishes pock the yards of farmsteads and house trailers—attendance at high school games has fallen off pretty badly. Still the school gym on Friday night comes as close to a thorough democracy as the pioneers could have envisioned. (They were all for egalitarian neighborliness and civility, a little leery of economic parity, and dead set against pluralism, largely for fear that the Papists might overrun the state and upset the balance among the Methodists, Baptists, Campbellites, and Presbyterians.) There in the town's biggest enclosure, at once overheated and drafty, redolent of salty popcorn, sweaty overalls, senior cords, starch and soap, dining with brasses and winds both peppy and flat, with young-

sters gabbling and old folks just visiting, the true spirit of Indiana bodies forth. Maybe such a life force coursed through medieval Florence or Georgian London; maybe Brueghel's burghers and peasant folk really did glow in exuberance on holidays. But nowadays the public spectacle of wholesomeness is rare indeed. Only in Indiana, perhaps.

It should stand to reason that with the Hoosiers' fondness for story-telling, somebody along the line would have turned the whole thing into a novel or, at least, a movie. Evidently not so, if the quality of a work has anything to do with its acceptance or staying power. Unlike baseball, which inspires fulsome homage, basketball has failed to stir the imagination of good writers to any lasting result. It may well be that the relentless pace of the game doesn't lend itself to the kinds of telling images that literature demands as emblems of experience. Then, too, the discipline the sport exacts of players may work against the colorful yet self-indulgent behavior that has given baseball and football so many memorable individualists. In basketball the play of the team as an intricately coordinated unit is almost always more important than any single star. The great shooter gets the acclaim, but they also serve who

only block, pass, rebound, screen, dribble, box-out, and set the picks. To dunk is spectacular, to assist honorable. Keeping a series of fast-moving actions fixed in the mind's eye is hard to accomplish. Ballet may be easier.

Even if basketball in Indiana has resisted portrayal, there are still a few brave persons bold enough to make the effort. Two young film makers, David Anspaugh of Decatur and Angelo Pizzo of Bloomington, have created a good-natured, semi-dry (about the taste of a white zinfandel) account of a rural school that, pulling at every bootstrap, wins the state championship. *Hoosiers* (what else could it be called?) reworks the history of the Milan Indians, who in 1954 fulfilled the dream of beating big city teams to win the tournament on a last-seconds jump shot by the thereby immortalized Bobby Plump. No story is so vital to the myth of Indiana basketball. It teaches us, as Emerson taught, that character, more than ability, is the *sine qua non*, and that hard work, discipline, intensity, tenacity, guts and grit and heart can win out in the end. It says we can be redeemed, even the most profligate and degenerate among us, through faith, hope, and a man-to-man

defense combined with clever outside shooting. It says we can take charge of our lives, no matter how dreary and pointless they may seem, to become the very best we can be because Coach, God, Indiana, and America—maybe in that order—wish it so.

You may think you've already read this in a *Saturday Evening Post* short story circa 1930. The kindly old principal (Sheb Wooley) who gives a second chance to a disgraced ex-college coach (Gene Hackman) who creates a winning team out of seven or so (the editor doesn't make that clear) hobbledehoy kids whose attitudes are on a par with their talents, and the winsome school marm (Barbara Hershey) who believes basketball can be the ruination of minds that have no loftier aspirations, and the town drunkard (Dennis Hopper), once a local hero as a hot-handed shooter, who struggles to reclaim his dignity and the respect of his own son, and a sorghum-and-molasses sampling of townspeople who hold fast to the team as their one proud proof of virtue: these are exactly the characters who might have made for sheer bathos. Or corrupting sentimentality. Or slick and snide grotesquerie. Or dull, plodding pseudo-Dreiserian naturalism.

To their credit, Pizzo as script-writer and Anspaugh as director got it right. The characters avoid the snares, and the actors make them sound, look, and feel like the genuine items to a fare-thee-well. The old gyms, school buildings, barber shop, farm houses, stores, town streets give off the worn-down surfaces of many Indiana places, and the people in and out of the crowds (almost all of whom are what they look like, aside from the early fifties get-ups) bear in their features and postures the distinctive marks of the Hoosiers as one of America's first hybrid peoples. They wear themselves oddly and off-handedly, fleshy here, stringy there, sags and wrinkles, women just short of pretty, men a mite out of focus. As for fashion, no one would ever guess that Halston, Bill Blass, Norman Norrell, Eleanor Lambert, and Mark Hampton



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