

WM. F. BUCKLEY JR.

Scoop!

On The Right

New York, Nov. 18—The people at ABC are on to one hell of a story. It is that nuclear war results in quite awful things. You know, like death, pestilence, hunger, pain, desolation, and skin blisters. That is the whole of the story in the documentary coming up next Sunday, and if you have ever doubted that nuclear war is awful, be sure to tune in. There is also a surprise ending: It tells you on the screen that probably nuclear war will be worse than as depicted by ABC. It remains only to be added that if nuclear war happens, its sponsors will be the kind of people responsible for this documentary.

The producers at ABC have gone to great pains to insist that it is not a "political" document. They are saying what the situation theatrically demands, but the sheer humbuggery of it is really too much. It is as if Nancy Reagan went into the polling booth a year from now and announced that she had not made up her mind whom to vote for. Why do they go through such motions of alleged impartiality?

BUT SUCH motions they have fastidiously gone through. In the version of the docudrama generally released for preview, one heard a sentence on the radio news. It said something like, "The crisis in U.S.-Soviet relations grew out of the U.S. insistence on deploying the cruise and Pershing missiles . . ." I say it "said" that because the lines have been eliminated. Look how we can be nonpolitical, Mal No hands!

Such wasted motion. At the very end of a long story on the controversy, published last Sunday in the *New York Times*, the whole show is simply given away by the writer of the script of *The Day After*, Mr. Edward Hume. I quote: "Although Mr. Stoddard [the principal producer of the drama] was determined to avoid any explicit political statements, Mr. Hume acknowledges that the film cannot entirely avoid a political interpretation: 'I would like to see people starting to question the value of defending this country with a nuclear arsenal. What troubles me is that there's no dialogue on the subject. I hope this film will wrench the dialogue back to the surface. To that extent, it is a political film.'"

It's all right there. The idea is to ques-

tion "the value of defending this country with a nuclear arsenal." That is a call to unilateralism in one syllable, assuming the word were as compressible as the analytical powers of the producers of *The Day After*. What it says is quite simply: It is wrong to own nuclear bombs. Because if we own them, the Soviets might want to blow them up, and to do so, they would aim nuclear bombs at us. It is not true that there has been no dialogue over unilateral surrender. But it has been, up until now, largely the property of Jane Fonda and others who reside in the fever swamps where junk thought grows.

Here is an idea for a follow-up on *The Day After*. ABC might call it *The Day After, II*. It should describe the life of citizens of Lawrence, Kansas, the day after we surrendered to the Soviet Union, which is exactly what we would do if it alone had atom bombs, which is exactly what Japan did when we alone had atom bombs. It might make instructive reading to have a look at James Michener's description of what the Nazis did the day after they took over Poland. The first thing would be the execution of anybody who was ever active in defense of free speech or, actually, active in behalf of any public policy. This would include the Jane Fonda-ABC set, and that is too bad, because death is much more pleasant than life in greater Gulag.

Do you want to see a movie as gruesome as *The Day After*? Go see *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. That is what happens to the tens of millions who



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"They're on to us, Boris! The CIA left us a Christmas card."

did not have a nuclear arsenal with which to say no to the Soviet beast.

If only these people would sit up and realize that it is precisely the existence of our nuclear arsenal that prevents such a situation as is depicted in the ABC drama. And remember this: A full-scale nuclear war would mean about one hundred million Americans dead. Those hundred million are going to die one of these days without nuclear anaesthetic, and they will in almost every case die more painfully. They should, then, live more joyously; which means they must have the courage to do two things: preserve their liberty, and keep the nuclear peace. Provisionally, these two things happen simultaneously, inseparably. □

THE DAY AFTER

New York, Nov. 21—The day after *The Day After* is most welcome. Two things, about which up until Sunday night there was only informed speculation, are now absolutely established. The first is that the movie itself was a profound bore, empty of engaging narrative and fatally marred by its lack of analytical rigor. The second is that whatever was on the mind of the impresarios over at ABC, the movie became a political operation.

On the first point, a little indulgence is in order for two reasons. The first is that the script originally ran for four hours. Reducing it to a little over two hours was in part an act of euthanasia, but no doubt caused turmoil in that the viewer was left with characters unaccounted for, and characters undeveloped. Viewed as a whole, it is hard to have an interesting two-hour picture about a stranger's death by cancer. You quickly get the idea that things are getting worse, that no relief is in sight, and that there is a general helplessness written into the situation.

This last point extends the metaphor, because *The Day After* is a protest against a situation over which the public has absolutely no control. In this sense it is exactly like contracting terminal cancer. What can we do about it? What can we do about the Soviet Union's mad race to pile weapon upon nuclear weapon in an arsenal already groaning with apocalyptic power? The answer to that question is we