

Variety

11/6/00

Nuclear Dynamite

(Docu -- Canada)

A Face to Face Media / National Film Board (Vancouver) production, in association with the CBC, with support from Telefilm Canada. Produced by Betsy Carson, Gary Marcuse, Selwyn Jacob. Executive producer (NFB) Graydon McCrea. Directed, written by Gary Marcuse.

With: Edward Teller, Barry Commoner, Ursula Franklin, Victor Mikhailov, Keith Lawton.

By KEN EISNER

Absorbing docu digs up declassified footage to explore a threat that ran quietly alongside the Cold War weapons race. The expertly assembled "Nuclear Dynamite" looks back on 30 years, now almost forgotten, in which the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed to find the most dramatic peacetime use of atomic explosions. Tube-bound effort will have outlets worldwide but deserves a shot at some theatrical playoff or at least a round on environmental/scientific circuits.

Although Project Plowshare honcho Edward Teller is clearly the villain of this piece -- since his hubris rained like fallout on the U.S. scientific community in postwar years -- it's a tribute to helmer Gary Marcuse's even-handed approach that the wizened old scientist agreed to appear here. The other talking heads include veteran anti-nuclear activists like Barry Commoner and Ursula Franklin, who suggest that the modern environmental movement was born of the ill-fated engineering program's radioactive follies. Lack of public oversight kept Soviets going for years after Washington gave up its plan to nuke a new Panama Canal, with Chernobyl the final capper, and Russian scientists offer a fascinating perspective, alongside newly unearthed propaganda films.

Camera (color, DigiBeta), Kirk Tougas; editor, Stuart DeJong; music, Henry Heilig and the Heilig Manoeuvre; narrator, David Suzuki. Reviewed at Vancouver Film Festival, Oct. 2, 2000. Running time: 72 min.