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Controlling Influences

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EXCERPT:

CIA CASE OFFICER: Directed by Saul Landau. Photographed by Haskell Wexler. Produced by Ralph Stavins for the Institute for Policy Studies. **CONTROLLING INTEREST: THE WORLD OF THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION.** Directed by Larry Adelman. Produced by California Newsreel; **BOTTLE BABIES.** A film by Peter Krieg, released by Tricontinental Films. All three at the Film Forum, October 12-15, 19-22.

The Film Forum reopens this week with a trio of political documentaries. California Newsreel's *Controlling Interest* is the central panel in this triptych, a bruising expose of multinational corporations that rakes a bit too much muck for its 45-minute length. Hopscotching the hemisphere, the film debunks the Brazilian "economic miracle," recapitulates the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic and the 1973 rape of Chile. All this is interspersed with scenes in a small Massachusetts city about to be deserted for the sunbelt by the corporation that has dominated its economy for a century. Although the filmmakers don't make nearly enough of a break with the conventions of "informational" filmmaking, they do have some good visual ideas—a parade of annual report covers whose artwork offers ample proof of corporate megalomania.

The not-so-secret stars of the film are the various corporation executives interviewed throughout. Their shameless fealty to the profit motive and casual barbarisms couldn't be bettered by wooden dummies dangled on

Karl-Marx's knee. Of Brazil—a military police-state with a 12-hour work day, child labor, and no unions—one appreciative American exec marvels that here "everyone from the guy who cleans the street to the men in high offices really work together." Another explains that factories are moving to "your Singapore and Mexicos" (with their \$20-a-month labor forces) because Americans are too bored to work in them. Finally, George Ball pops up to describe American foreign policy as a kind of cow-catcher on the juggernaut "geared to clear obstructions out of the way of American business."

The national character gets another working over in *CIA Case Officer*, Saul Landau's portrait of John Stockwell, a veteran of the Phoenix program in Vietnam and the spook who was "chosen to watch the Angolan ballgame, not from the 50-yard line but from the field itself." Stockwell is a cool customer whose reasons for quitting the agency seem complicated—inefficiency may have given him as many ulcers as did dirty tricks. Land-

au's oblique editing of the film's interviews, home movies, and newsreels, and Haskell Wexler's deep-focus photography make for a documentary-profile that's more stylish and ambiguous than most.

The West German *Bottle Babies*, the last film on the bill, is the ultimate heartcrusher. It graphically details the disastrous effect that Nestle's aggressively advertised powdered milk has had on the infant mortality rate in countries where boiled water is a luxury. In Kenya, where most of the film was shot, mothers use the formula without going through the elaborate sterilization procedure that it requires—it's the most affordable, if least practical, symbol of modernization.

Film Forum programmer Karen Cooper deserves credit for bringing these three films together. Each amplifies the others. The shift in perspective, from a study of an individual "imperial" agent through an overview of Western economic structure to a specific example of capitalism run amok in one corner of the Third World, has the sweep (though not the escape) of science-fiction.