

70th Berlin International Film Festival

## An interview with Vanessa Lapa, director of *Speer Goes to Hollywood*: “We have to take the danger of rewriting history very seriously.”

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The Belgian-born, Israeli-based director Vanessa Lapa showed her film *Speer Goes to Hollywood: The Unbelievable Second Career of the Good Nazi* at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival. The WSWS spoke to the director.

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WSWS: *Speer Goes to Hollywood* is directed against the portrayal of Albert Speer as the “good Nazi”—as he depicted himself. His book *Inside the Third Reich* is still being published in Germany by the Ullstein publishing house with a glowing introduction.

In your director’s note for the film’s premiere in Berlin, you write: “This film is about my personal awakening with regard to Speer’s role, as well as his attempts to lull the whole world into forgetfulness.” What exactly do you mean by that?

Vanessa Lapa: You shouldn’t take Albert Speer’s book from the shelf until a new foreword is published by a historian such as Magnus Brechtken. I regard Brechtken’s 2017 work, *Albert Speer: A German Career*, as definitive. This is my request to Ullstein.

In my opinion, there is no such thing as a “good Nazi,” but, like most people outside Germany, I knew very little about Speer. When I started to study the documents, including those from the Nuremberg trials, I came across many things I did not previously know.

I didn’t bother so much about whether Speer knew about this thing or the other. Of course, he was a liar. But, above all, I tried to find out what he actually did and deconstruct his own words. For example, his

exploitation of slave workers in the armaments industry, which took completely inhuman forms.

I knew of course who Krupp was and the role played by his factories in the war and for the Nazi Party, but I was not aware in detail of how closely Krupp was connected to Speer and how they treated the workforce. This is perhaps the most terrifying aspect of Speer’s role. If I have to say anything personally about Albert Speer, then it is that he was a man for whom human life had no value at all.

WSWS: The film deals with the extreme exploitation of forced labour in the arms industry. Do you see a connection between fascism and capitalism?

VL: I’m not a historian and I don’t know enough about it. But if I simplify your question—i.e., whether there is a relationship between politics and money, between power and money, personal and financial interests and fascist oppression—then my answer is very clear: Yes!

WSWS: In the discussion that took place after the film’s premiere in Berlin, you spoke about historical truth and the rewriting of history. Could you elaborate?

VL: I said that the dividing line between “history and his story” is very thin. In the film, I show how easy it is to distort history. If Speer’s film had actually been made in Hollywood, many would have accepted his version as fact.

We have to take the danger of historical revisionism very seriously.

WSWS: What do you think about the growth of the

far-right Alternative for Germany [AfD]? Its leader, Alexander Gauland, declared that the Holocaust was just a piece of “bird shit” in Germany’s successful history.

VL: Such statements are particularly dangerous because the surviving witnesses of the Holocaust are gradually dying out. The return of fascist tendencies is terrifying, not only here in Germany, but all over the world.

WSWS: Have you heard of Jörg Baberowski, a history professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin, who declared in the magazine *Der Spiegel* that “Hitler was not vicious”?

VL: Yes, I read an article about it. I don’t know enough about German politics and the academic world here and can only say that such declarations are very dangerous in Germany and also all over the world. Are there any journalists writing articles against his position?

WSWS: Apart from us, practically no one has commented on it; instead, students are being attacked by the media and the university administration. ...

VL: I can only repeat—this is extremely dangerous. People like Speer and today’s right-wing extremists are people who make a conscious decision in favour of fascism. Under certain political, geographical and economic conditions, the situation can change suddenly and lead to catastrophe.

WSWS: Your film shows scenes from Goethe’s *Faust* with Gustav Gründgens portraying Mephistopheles. Are you referring to the Faustian characteristics of German intellectuals who sell their souls to the devil rather than endanger their careers and wealth?

VL: Certainly, some people follow the AfD out of ignorance and lack of education. But there are also those who are educated and use their knowledge to distort the truth. The best example is Albert Speer himself, who was well-educated and liked to quote André Malraux and Voltaire in his conversations.

WSWS: What message would you like to convey to our readers?

VL: Be very careful, read between the lines, think twice before making any decision to go to war, remember what happened back then and study history.

What the Nazis did was not millions of years ago, and they were not animals or monsters, but rather people

who opted for a definite policy, fascism.

The most important thing is that we cannot remain silent. Elie Wiesel once said: Silence never helps the oppressed. It only helps the oppressor. I think that is extremely relevant today. With my film, I want to issue a call to take seriously and oppose the right-wing danger in every country.



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