

Cannes Film Festival promotes US-NATO war against Russia

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18 May 2022

The Cannes Film Festival is the latest cultural institution or event to disgracefully provide a public stage for Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to promote the US-NATO war against Russia.

Zelensky addressed the gala opening of the 75th film festival in Cannes on a huge screen via a video link from Kyiv. Drawing heavily on *The Great Dictator* (1940), Zelensky exploited the profoundly humanist message of Charlie Chaplin's film classic to claim that the Ukrainian army was striking a blow for cinema and the arts.

"If there is a dictator, if there is a war for freedom, once again, everything depends on our unity. Can cinema stay outside of this unity?" Zelensky intoned. Quoting directly from Chaplin's speech at the end of *The Great Dictator*, Zelensky continued: "In the end, hatred will disappear and dictators will die." The Ukrainian president's duplicitous speech was then given a standing ovation by the well-heeled audience of film celebrities, super-models, media figures and critics gathered at the festival's Grand Théâtre Lumière.

Zelensky's references to Chaplin's film are repugnant. In *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin bitterly satirized the fascist rulers of Germany and Italy at a time when Hollywood studios didn't dare make any such criticism. Chaplin played two roles in the film, the Nazi dictator (named Adenoid Hynkel in the film, but unmistakably Hitler) and an identical looking Jewish barber.

When the barber is mistaken for Hitler, the former gives an impassioned speech to a crowd in which he deploras "a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people" and calls upon his audience "to free the world—to do away with national barriers—to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance."

Zelensky, whose government's promotion of unfettered free market capitalism and extreme nationalism includes full support for the notorious fascist Azov battalion, and his US-NATO backers stand for everything that Chaplin

abhorred. In fact, what would a Chaplin make out of the self-satisfied rubbish about "poor, defenseless little Ukraine," armed to the hilt and financed by the biggest imperialist robbers on the planet?

The shameless promotion of the NATO war against Russia and its puppet Zelensky by the media and bourgeois governments across the globe is being accompanied by the cancelling and demonisation of Russian artists. Cannes festival officials banned any official delegations or reporters from Russia. The only Russian director allowed to feature at the festival was Kirill Serebrennikov, whose new film *Tchaikovsky's Wife*, was financed in part by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

This action alone makes a mockery of the festival's pretence to be the guardian of democratic rights, or art. How many of the greatest masterworks of world cinema have come from Russia? The festival adopted a course of action far closer to an authoritarian than a genuinely democratic approach to filmmaking. How many American movies have been banned by Cannes officials during the decades of criminal invasions or bombings of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and more, resulting in millions of deaths?

The extent to which Zelensky and his media team, with the overwhelming support of the global press and television, have been able to promote the NATO war against Russia is unprecedented.

Just a week ago, a massive media campaign swept the Ukrainian band, Kalush Orchestra, to victory in the European Song Contest held in Italy. Zelensky was quick to respond, thanking the band and declaring, "I am sure that the sound of victory in the battle with the enemy is not far off."

In defiance of the rules of the competition, which forbids political commentary, a member of the band was able to appeal on stage for international support for

Ukraine's war effort and its soldiers in the steelworks of Azovstal. The European Broadcasting Union, which organises the contest, declared it would take no action against the band for making such a statement.

On April 3, as part of a media and propaganda offensive, which has included appearances before the parliaments of various Western nations, Zelensky addressed the audience at the annual Grammy music awards in Las Vegas to express his hope that the Ukrainian people could soon "be free like the people on the Grammy stage."

In his comment on the occasion, David Walsh wrote on the WSWS that the reaction of the American media and its "effusion over Ukraine is one of the most mendacious in history. It lives up to what was once said about the 'patriotic press' on both sides during World War I, that 'hacks of all political shades' were putting out 'as many lies as has been seen since the creation of the world.'"

Later the same month, Zelensky, who entered the public domain as a little-known actor in a satirical Ukrainian television series, addressed the audience at the Venice Art Biennale, posing as a defender of "the power of art," which "can tell the world things that cannot be shared otherwise."

In addition to lining up with the US-NATO war drive, the Cannes festival has underlined its attitude by massively promoting the new Tom Cruise film *Top Gun Maverick*, a piece of pro-war, patriotic propaganda. The original *Top Gun* movie (1986) led to a massive increase in recruitment for the US Navy and the top brass in the Pentagon are clearly hoping that its follow-up will have the same effect.

According to the website Brands & Films, Paramount Pictures, the production company for *Top Gun Maverick*, was provided "a vast amount of access to Naval facilities and staff in the state of California, Nevada and Washington—including permission to fly aircraft, position cameras on and in F / A-18 Super Hornets and Navy helicopters, and protected access to a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier of the class Nimitz."

The website also notes: "Yet Pentagon funding hasn't come without any strings attached (it rarely does). In return for the DoD funding, creators of the film and Paramount Pictures had to promise to offer an exclusive screening of the top brass before the film was made public."

In the wake of the tidal wave of national chauvinism and war-lust surrounding the Cannes festival, it is worth recalling the circumstances under which the event was

founded.

In its statement announcing the exclusion of Russian participants, the festival hypocritically asserted that, "Faithful to its history, which began in 1939 in resistance to the Fascist and Nazi dictatorships, the Cannes Film Festival will always be at the service of artists and film professionals, whose voice is raised to denounce violence, repression and injustices, and to defend peace and freedom."

Indeed, the film festival in southern France was originally conceived in 1939 (one year before the premiere of *The Great Dictator*) as a counterweight to the Venice Film Festival, founded seven years earlier by the National Fascist Party to promote the political and cultural aims of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. In 1938, the Venice event handed out its top award to films from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, including Leni Riefenstahl's notorious *Olympia*, celebrating the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The fascist propaganda films won out over Jean Renoir's anti-war and anti-chauvinist *La Grande Illusion* (subsequently banned in Germany and Italy).

French film figures were outraged and pressured the government of Prime Minister Édouard Daladier to launch a festival in their country. The latter was nervous about offending Mussolini and reluctant to take such action.

In fact, sympathy for Mussolini and Hitler, unstated or otherwise, was rife in French ruling circles. The government that finally did approve the establishment of the Cannes festival had previously reinstated the six-day week to finance the war effort, banned the Communist Party over the Stalin-Hitler pact and would vote Marshal Pétain into power less than a year later.

The 1939 festival was scheduled to open September 1, the day that Germany invaded Poland, initiating World War II, and had to be cancelled. The tragic events associated with the Cannes festival's origins ought to serve as a warning about the implications of the filthy, anti-democratic Ukrainian-nationalist drivel the festival is currently serving up.



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