

Over 200 film workers protest participation of fascist AfD at Berlin film festival

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More than 200 film workers issued a protest last Friday against invitations extended to members of the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) for this year's opening ceremony of the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) on February 15. The largest number of signatories come from Germany and include actors, directors, producers, writers, programmers, journalists and students. The statement is also signed by film workers from the US, Britain and a number of other countries.

The declaration begins: "We, the undersigned, are outraged that invitations have been extended to politicians from the AfD (Alternative for Germany) to the opening ceremony of the 74th Berlin International Film Festival. We find this to be incompatible with the festival's commitment to being a place of 'empathy, awareness, and understanding,' a declaration shared at its annual press conference on January 19 and published on the festival homepage."

The open letter notes that in 2019 the Berlin Film Festival published a declaration entitled "We, the Many," signed by some of Germany's leading cultural figures. The 2019 Declaration began by addressing the historic crimes committed by the Nazis, and explained: "As creators of arts and culture in Germany we do not stand above things. Rather we have both feet firmly on the ground—the very ground upon which one of the worst state crimes against humanity was committed. This country has seen art vilified as degenerate and culture being abused for purpose of propaganda. Millions of people were murdered or driven into exile, amongst them many artists."

The Declaration, supported at the time by Berlin film festival director Dieter Kosslick and the entire festival management, noted that "right-wing populism stands in hostile opposition to the art of the many. Right-wing

groups and parties frequently disrupt events, aim to determine repertoires, polemicise against the freedom of art and above all are working on the re-nationalisation of culture [i.e., rooting it once again in the "nation"]. Their disrespectful reaction to people seeking refuge, to dedicated artists and dissidents, clearly shows how they plan to deal with our society should a shift of power in their favour become reality."

The Declaration continued by pledging to deny a "platform for racist-nationalist propaganda," and to reject all "illegitimate attempts made by right-wing nationalists to exploit art and cultural events for their own purposes."

The open letter issued last Friday argued that the "invitations [issued to the AfD] invalidate these statements and are yet another example of the hostile and hypocritical environment art and culture faces in Berlin and Germany." The letter concluded. "We refuse to normalize or allow right-wing politicians to participate in our spaces."

Following the publication of the letter, the festival management immediately went into damage control mode and issued a statement expressing its opposition to right-wing extremism. It refused, however, to withdraw the invitations to the widely despised far-right members of the AfD. The decision by the Berlin film festival to issue the invitations has subsequently been defended by the Minister of State for Culture, Claudia Roth (Green Party), and the Berlin Senate.

"For the opening of the Berlinale, which was also made possible with considerable federal funding, the members of the responsible cultural committee of the German Bundestag were also invited at our suggestion," said a spokesperson for Roth in a statement. This was in line with "democratic practice" and "the Federal Government's respect for parliament

and its elected representatives.”

The Berlinale management also defended the invitations to the AfD. In a joint interview with the *Tagesspiegel*, Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian explained that it was “a major dilemma.” Although they are “against right-wing extremism” and support “all demonstrations and initiatives against the right ... we respect it when the Minister of State for Culture and the Berlin Senate allocate their ticket quotas to democratically elected representatives, even if they are from the AfD.”

It remains the secret of the Berlinale management how the fight against right-wing extremism can be reconciled with invitations to members of the AfD.

Roth and the Berlin Senate are not acting out of respect for “democratically elected representatives,” they are deliberately trying to strengthen the fascists. In recent years, the government and all parties in the Bundestag have not only adopted large parts of the AfD’s programme, but have systematically integrated the party into their parliamentary work—including in the cultural field. The AfD has been represented in the Bundestag’s Committee on Culture and the Media for several years by MPs Marc Jongen and Martin Erwin Renner as full members.

The two members of the AfD invited to the festival’s opening ceremony, Kristin Brinker and Ronald Gläser, are notorious for their far-right rhetoric and convictions. At the start of this year, Brinker, who is the state and parliamentary group leader of the AfD in Berlin, confirmed she had attended a meeting of far-right extremists in the flat of the former Berlin finance senator Peter Kurth.

The guest list for the meeting last summer included the Austrian right-wing extremist Martin Sellner, the far-right publisher Götz Kubitschek and the AfD’s lead candidate for the European elections, Maximilian Krah. Sellner was one of the main speakers at the recent meeting of fascists in Potsdam that discussed a program for the deportation of millions of migrants, including those with German passports. The Potsdam meeting became the flashpoint for the demonstrations in recent weeks, with millions taking to the streets to express their revulsion for the AfD and its sponsors in the German political establishment.

Gläser, deputy leader of the Berlin AfD, was also in attendance at the meeting of fascists in Berlin in the

summer of 2023. In 2019, Gläser posted a message on WhatsApp expressing his support for the post of another AfD member who advocated the use of machine guns against left-wing anti-fascist protesters.

By inviting the fascists, the Berlinale is taking up its own dark traditions. In 2020 the public learned, nearly seventy years after the film festival’s launch in 1951, that its first director, Alfred Bauer, had been a convinced Nazi party member and belonged to its paramilitary wing, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, “Storm Detachment”). Bauer was relieved of military duties in 1942 due to health problems and then took up a leading position in the *Reichsfilmintendanz*, the “steering body of National Socialist film policy” established in 1942.

Following the outcry in 2020 over the involvement of Bauer in the early years of the festival, its management ordered an investigation, resulting in the December 2023 publication of the book *Kino im Zwielflicht: Alfred Bauer, der Nationalsozialismus und die Berlinale* [*Cinema in the twilight. Alfred Bauer, National Socialism and the Berlinale*], which deals in detail with Bauer’s fascist past.

Now, four years after the Declaration of 2019, two months after the publication of the book about Bauer and in the wake of weeks of massive public demonstrations throughout Germany opposing the AfD, the Berlin Senate and the Green Party-led Culture Ministry are effectively undermining the festival’s previous pledge to deny a “platform for racist-nationalist propaganda.”



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