

HBO drops Serb actor Miloš Bikovi? from *The White Lotus*, capitulating to Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's anti-Russia campaign

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In a shameful act of capitulation to the eruption of anti-Russia hysteria, HBO has dropped actor Miloš Bikovi? from the acclaimed television series *The White Lotus* over allegations that the actor supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Ukraine Foreign Ministry launched a smear campaign on X/Twitter on January 24 calling on HBO to drop the actor following the announcement 12 days earlier of the casting for the third season of *The White Lotus*. The next season is slated to be set in Taiwan and released in 2025.

The Ministry stated, "Miloš Bikovi?, Serbian actor who has been supporting Russia since the start of the full-scale invasion, is now set to star in HBO's *The White Lotus* Season 3." Tagging HBO, it added, "is it all right for you to work with a person who supports genocide & violates international law?"

The post on X also included a video that smears Bikovi? by combining segments from *The White Lotus* with clips of the actor receiving an award for the Pushkin medal from Vladimir Putin in 2018, prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The 36-year-old Bikovi? is a Serbian-Russian actor known for his roles in *Serf*, *Serf 2*, *The Challenge* and other successful Russian and Serbian films that have won numerous awards. The actor was born in Belgrade in 1988 and lived through (and survived) the US-NATO imperialist bombing of Serbia. In 2021, he became a naturalized Russian citizen.

In a statement, Bikovi? denounced the smear campaign against him. He noted, "Today, a targeted campaign has been unleashed against me, seemingly as an external maneuver to influence decisions that can create a disturbing precedent shadowing the essence of

artistic freedom. The result of such a narrative is the triumph of absurdity and the defeat of art."

Bikovi?'s statement recounted his own background and opposition to war. "I grew up in a war-torn country," he said. "At the age of 11, I endured days and nights in shelters while my homeland and my hometown were bombed. And could never wish such devastation on anyone."

"There are more and more active conflicts in the entire world," he went on. "Each one is different. Each one is heartbreaking. I wish all of them to stop and principles of love to prevail."

He added, "I was honored to be chosen to be a part of *White Lotus*, a TV series that I hold in high regard and with colleagues whom I deeply respect. However, my participation is not possible due to reasons beyond the realm of art and I will not bow to any narrative that seeks to compromise my integrity.

"I would like to thank everyone who stood by me. I wish my colleagues great success in creating the next season.

"Regardless of everything, I strongly believe that art can heal. I believe it can help humanity unite. My beliefs and my dedication to art will remain unchanged."

There's no reason to doubt the sincerity of Bikovi?, who previously expressed similar sentiments when Russia invaded Ukraine. In an Instagram post on February 25, 2022, he wrote, "I know how terrible war is. We've been through a similar situation, but they can't be compared. Every conflict has its own circumstances. And the scary thing is that war and bloodshed from all sides reminds us of how far humanity is from global unity and love."

While *The White Lotus* was strongest when it satirized the wealthy, the shameful silence by the series creator Mike White on this attack on Bikovi? points to the highly censored and self-censored atmosphere in Hollywood currently—particularly among its more privileged layers who are afraid to say anything that might affect their careers.

For all the furor over Bikovi? and other Russian artists, not a single American or European artist has been condemned or even questioned for any of the innumerable US-backed criminal wars over the past 30 years. To put an equals sign between artists and the population at large, on the one hand, and the crimes and actions of their governments, on the other, is illegitimate.

Bikovi? has worked in Russia for more than a decade in film and has become one of the more popular performers in the country. He has expressed a strong sympathy for Russian culture and its people. For his filmmaking and cultural role, as noted, he was awarded the Pushkin medal in 2018. He has also worked with Oscar-winning directors like Nikita Mikhalkov, whom the EU sanctioned in 2022 following the outbreak of war.

As a result, the Ukrainian government has had a target on Bikovi?’s back for some time. In 2019, he was banned from the country for reasons of “national security,” claiming he had filmed shows in the Crimean peninsula. Crimea was annexed by Russia following the far-right US-backed coup in 2014.

The 2014 coup in Ukraine, orchestrated by the Obama administration and major European powers, mobilized fascists to topple the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich, ultimately leading to a bloody civil war within Ukraine.

The Trotskyist movement, including our supporters in Ukraine and Russia, condemns the Russian government’s invasion of Ukraine as a reactionary act. But the ultimate blame for the invasion rests with the decades-long US-NATO provocations against Russia to goad it into war and seek an imperialist carve-up of the vast country.

Despite all their humanitarian and “democratic” pretenses, the US and European powers are backing fascists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine. The country’s corrupt president Volodymyr Zelensky, representing the interests of the Ukrainian oligarchy, has also

assaulted democratic rights of workers and left-wing opposition within the country.

The US-NATO war drive against Russia in Ukraine has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths in both countries, with innocent civilians caught up in the imperialist-backed bloodbath.

Despite all the hypocritical anti-Russia hysteria—including attacks on Russian culture, artists, sportspeople and more by the US ruling class and its upper middle class toadies—the Biden regime in the US is widely despised for enabling the ongoing genocide in Gaza by Israel, along with expanding the wars throughout the Middle East, Ukraine and Eurasia.

The US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine is unpopular both in the US and around the world and every effort is being made to drum up war fever once again. The attacks on the democratic and cultural rights of artists like Bikovi? must be opposed and condemned.



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