

Toronto International Film Festival to screen propaganda film for Israel's genocide in Gaza

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Acting as a cultural arm of Canada's imperialist ruling elite, the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) will be rolling out the red carpet Wednesday for the world premiere of a film about the events of October 7, 2023 that provides propaganda cover for Israel's genocide against the Gaza Palestinians.

The Road Between Us: The Ultimate Rescue, from director and producer Barry Avrich, is entirely silent about the Israeli state's decades of brutal oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people, and the violence and terror it has inflicted on the residents of Gaza and the West Bank over the past two years. The documentary film's lens is exclusively focused on the efforts of retired Israeli Major General Noam Tibon to rescue family members caught up in the October 7 Gaza Palestinian uprising against the Zionist regime, which for more than 15 years had subjected them to a brutal and ongoing economic blockade.

The film presents Tibon as an heroic figure. While Avrich emphatically—and laughably—claims the film is "non-political," the not-so-subtly inferred message is that Tibon personifies the "plight" and "courage" of the Israeli people.

The documentary centers on Tibon's obstacles in reaching his family, who had come under fire during the attack, when Palestinian fighters entered Kibbutz Nahal Oz, which lies less than one kilometer from the Gaza border. Tibon responded to a text from his son and, as the film's website breathlessly puts it,

With no time to spare, Noam and his wife, Gali, embarked on a ten-hour mission across a country under siege to save their family... Noam navigated ambushes, roadblocks, and a collapsing security system in a relentless race against time.

The film is described in the synopsis given by TIFF as "a profoundly human story about courage, family, and the power of love in the face of unimaginable terror."

This is foul Zionist propaganda. The constructed and entirely contrived narrative treats the events of October 7 entirely outside of history—as if they fell from the sky. Its narrative frame conforms to a "T" with that of the Israeli state and its western imperialist backers: the Hamas-led uprising was "unprovoked." Indeed, Avrich submitted his film to TIFF under the title "Out of Nowhere." It was the festival organizers, clearly in the interests of obscuring the film's pro-Zionist line, who persuaded him to rename it *The Road Between Us*.

Anyone who has followed the decades-long persecution of the Palestinians by the Israeli regime can only feel outraged by claims that Israel, which has been armed to the teeth by Washington and its allies, was a "country under siege" in October 2023. Since 2006, Israel had effectively maintained Gaza as an "open-air prison," repeatedly bombing and terrorizing its population, not to mention the systematic seizures of

Palestinian land and episodes of mass ethnic cleansing going back to the very formation of Israel in 1948.

Nor can there be any other legitimate response but hostility to complacent references to "courage" and "family" after almost two years of a non-stop genocidal onslaught by Israel, backed by the imperialist powers, on the Palestinians, whose families have been torn apart, massacred, starved and left destitute. The only "unimaginable terror" is that carried out by the IDF against Gaza's population.

The attempt by TIFF to wash the blood of the Palestinian people from the IDF by finding a "hero" among its senior ranks could not have served as a better piece of propaganda for the Netanyahu regime if they had paid for it themselves. To tout such a film as a legitimate artwork is as repugnant today as claiming that Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda efforts were a legitimate expression of life during the Third Reich.

There are many issues a serious documentary about October 7 could have taken up, including interrogating the conditions that caused hundreds of Palestinian fighters to embark effectively on a suicide mission, and the reasons for the alleged and thoroughly unconvincing state of "unpreparedness" of the Israeli military and intelligence.

The Zionist state and military boast about their technological capability and skill at every turn when it serves their ideological and political purposes. But world public opinion is supposed to believe they found themselves entirely blind-sided in October 2023.

Extensive evidence suggests that elements high up in the Zionist regime were aware of the Islamist Hamas' plans for October 7 well in advance, and chose to ensure that Israel's security forces stood down to create a pretext for a long-planned onslaught on Gaza to ethnically cleanse its population and seize the tiny enclave, to implement, in fact, the "Final Solution" of the Palestinian question. After the uprising began, the IDF invoked the so-called "Hannibal Directive," which allows the military to kill Israeli civilians rather than let them be taken hostage.

The decision to screen the film at TIFF, which has reserved the 1,800-capacity Roy Thompson Hall for Wednesday's premiere, has nothing to do with questions of artistic merit. On the contrary, the sordid process by which the film, initially excluded from one of the world's most important film festivals, became a—if not *the*—marquee event of TIFF 2025 underscores the central role that financial and Canadian imperialist foreign policy interests play in the festival management's decisions and those of the country's other major cultural institutions.

The phony furor over TIFF "censorship"

On August 12, media reports emerged that TIFF had reversed its decision to screen *The Road Between Us* at this year's festival, citing legal concerns that some of the footage recovered from captured GoPros

by Hamas fighters had not been cleared for use, as well as a “potential threat of significant disruption.”

These reports met with an immediate outcry of protest from the Zionist lobby in Canada, quickly joined and encouraged by the political elite and right-wing press.

On August 13, Toronto City councillors James Pasternak and Brad Bradford issued a joint statement on X, declaring, “TIFF should not be banning or censoring films and should respect the freedoms of the arts community,” and concluding that the decision to cancel was a “moral failure.”

The very next day, TIFF capitulated to this reactionary campaign, now less than 48 hours old, and announced it would ensure the film would be screened during what is the festival’s 50th edition. With *The Road Between Us*’s producers, explained TIFF CEO Cameron Bailey, “We have worked together to find a resolution to satisfy important safety, legal, and programming concerns.”

This quick retreat did next to nothing, however, to appease the film’s ruling class promoters, who in the name of denouncing TIFF censorship, lashed out at the supposed intolerance of anti-Gaza genocide protesters.

The *National Post* gave feature coverage to an op-ed penned by Sharren Haskel, who self-identifies as Israel’s “Canadian-born” deputy foreign minister. She voiced her outrage that TIFF sought “the ‘approval’ of terrorists,” who carry out “murders, rapes, and kidnappings,” and charged the festival with complicity “in silencing the truth.” She also slammed the Carney government for its empty announcement it would recognize a Palestinian state.

Canada, like the US and the other imperialist powers, is a key supporter of the Gaza genocide. Whether under Mark Carney or Justin Trudeau before him, the Liberal government has backed Israel’s genocidal campaign against Gaza and rampage across the Middle East to the hilt, shipping tens of millions of dollars in weaponry to Israel, while clamping down ruthlessly on anti-genocide protests at home.

Within Canada’s film industry the most prominent public statement of support for the screening of *The Road Between Us* came from Susan Reitman Michaels, sister of the late producer/director Ivan Reitman, whose family is a major benefactor of TIFF. The family donated land for the home of the festival, the TIFF Lightbox complex in downtown Toronto.

In an open letter Michaels wrote, “The irony is unbearable. My family’s gift of land to TIFF was intended as a memorial to my parents’ faith in freedom of expression, only to see that very principle eroded... What it looks like, and feels like, is the silencing of a Jewish voice at a time when Jewish voices are already being marginalized.” As intended, the letter elicited a thoroughly stage-managed “torrent of outrage,” with the festival reportedly receiving 60,000 emails objecting to the initial cancellation of the film.

The hypocrisy of Michaels and the other would-be warriors for “free speech” is staggering. None of them batted an eyelid, but on the contrary cheered on the political establishment when it systematically smeared and sought to intimidate hundreds of thousands of Canadians who participated in anti-genocide protests over the past two years. Anti-genocide activists calling for an end to Canadian imperialism’s supply of military equipment to Israel have faced arrest and harassment by the police, and in some cases the loss of their employment. The few voices who raised any criticism of the genocide within the political establishment, like former NDP member of the Ontario legislature Sarah Jama, were politically sidelined and silenced.

Moreover, the claim to be defending rights of “freedom of expression” on the one hand, while invoking the special rights of wealthy benefactors to influence programming decisions, reveals the class character of the objections.

In announcing the festival’s renewed commitment to screen *The Road*

Between Us, TIFF CEO Bailey issued a cowardly mea culpa. “I want to apologize,” he declared, “for any hurt, frustration, or disappointment that our communication about the film has caused, and for any mischaracterizations that have taken root. We’re working now—and we will be for a while—to clarify things and to repair relationships.”

Bailey offered his fawning and, frankly, disgusting reassurance:

I want to be clear: claims that the film was rejected due to censorship are unequivocally false. Both TIFF and the filmmakers have heard the pain and frustration expressed by the public and we want to address this together.

The “pain and frustration” were not expressed by “the public,” but by TIFF’s wealthy donors, the Zionist lobby, and powerful sections of the corporate and political elite—many of them the very same forces who last year demanded that TIFF cancel screenings of a documentary that humanized Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

It should be remembered that TIFF has a record of celebrating Zionism and Israel. In 2009, eight months after one of the Israeli military’s murderous assaults on Gaza, the film festival decided to honor Tel Aviv as the first city to be the subject of its new program, “City to City.” The decision provoked widespread outrage and protest.

Avrich, a Montreal-based filmmaker, has less than convincingly sought to talk his way out of any political intention behind his decision to make the film. Avrich told an interviewer for *Deadline*, “This film is not about politics, it’s about humanity, family and sacrifice.”

Avrich and the IDF Major General Tibon used a joint interview with the *Globe and Mail*, published September 6, as an opportunity to double down on this transparent falsification, presenting their film, in the postmodernist jargon so prominent in artistic and academic circles, as simply one “story” among others. In a remark that reveals at best his indifference towards and more likely support for the greatest crime of the 21st century so far, Avrich blandly told the *Globe* that he was just “a guy in Canada who is attracted to a great story... I didn’t see anything outside that story.” The same line was taken by Tibon, who adds in the same interview that “we didn’t say one word of politics.” Anyone who believes a word of this rubbish ...

When the *Globe* interviewer gave them the opportunity, to say something about the plight of the Palestinians and the ongoing genocide, both Avrich and Tibon pointedly refused to do so.

An artist unmoved by genocide and who, in the face of the systematic destruction of an entire people, “didn’t see anything outside” the fate of a senior officer in this machinery of mass murder and his immediate family, deserves only contempt. This is not a matter of artistic freedom. Rather, it reflects a tendency to revel in a kind of cold indifference to mass human suffering cultivated within a privileged layer of the middle class, whose expanding stock portfolios and bank balances are tied up with the eruption of imperialist wars over the past three-and-a-half decades, culminating in the Gaza genocide as part of a rapidly developing third world war.



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