

Berlin film festival jury president Wim Wenders insists the role of artists is to “stay out of politics”

Stefan Steinberg**15 February 2026**

During the opening press conference at the 76th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), festival jury president and veteran German filmmaker Wim Wenders shamefully declared the role of film artists was to “stay out of politics.”

Wenders’ extraordinary comment came in response to a journalist who asked why the festival had failed to express any solidarity with Palestinians suffering from Israel’s genocidal onslaught in Gaza.

The exchange took place as follows. Initially, a member of the jury, Polish producer Ewa Puszczynska, speaking from the podium, declared that “cinema had the power to change the world.” Taking up this remark, a journalist from the political online interview show *Jung & Naiv* [Young & Naïve] noted the festival did not take place in a vacuum and recalled that “the Berlinale as an institution has famously shown solidarity with people in Iran and Ukraine, but never with Palestine, even today.”

He continued: “In light of the German government’s support of the genocide in Gaza and its role as the main funder of the Berlinale, do you as a member of the jury...?”

At this point the livestream of the press conference was cut off before the journalist could finish his question, which was, however, captured by others filming the event. He concluded his question like this: “Do you as a member of the jury support this selective treatment of human rights?”

In a statement, the festival press office declared the interruption, which included the question and the response by jury members, had occurred due to a technical fault. No one over the age of six is likely to believe that. A far more probable explanation is that a panicked editor pushed a button on hearing the words “the German government’s support of the genocide in Gaza.”

In the uncut version of the press conference subsequently broadcast, US-born Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle was the first to respond to the journalist’s question—by attempting to close down any discussion, asserting that those on the platform wanted only to talk about films.

Puszczynska (her productions include *The Zone of Interest*) replied next, describing the journalist’s question as “a little bit

unfair” and very complicated given that “there are many wars with genocides.”

The last and most damaging word was left to jury president and veteran German filmmaker Wim Wenders, who declared bluntly: “We have to stay out of politics because if we make movies that are dedicatedly political, we enter the field of politics; but we are the counterweight to politics.”

Wenders’ remark that artists are not obliged to take a position on a genocide which has now entered its third year is scandalous and must be firmly rebuffed.

Art is not a an empty formal exercise separated from social life and politics, nor is it merely a form of personal self-expression. What role does Wenders, now an “ecumenical Christian filmmaker,” attribute to art? According to critics, considering the “inner life,” exploring redemption, longing and the “presence of the unseen.”

In a 2018 interview, Wenders told the *Hollywood Reporter*:

“Every artist basically is the sum of his experiences. And spiritual experiences are very important. You can, of course, decide to live a life that is opposed to that. I was a radical student in 1968, and I turned away from my religious upbringing. I came back in a big way in the ’80s and found that I hadn’t really lost it. It was very much linked to the death of my father. Seeing him face death without fear, and actually with some anticipation and joy, was an incredible experience.”

Wenders has made valuable films in the past, but the conception he advanced in Berlin is both retrograde and utterly false. If art is to mean something important it cannot be indifferent to the upheavals of our day. What sort of art would it be that ignores the burning questions and convulsive events shaping and often devastating the lives of the planet’s population? Those events, as Trotsky observed, are prepared by people and made by people, and fall upon and change people. “Art, directly or indirectly, affects the lives of the people who make or experience the events. This refers to all art, to the grandest, as well as to the most intimate.”

Again, what would filmmakers who ignore mass murder in Gaza and the threat of dictatorship and world war truly have to say to anyone?

Wenders' positions do not come out of the blue. In 2000, we wrote, discussing some of his films:

Compared with other figures of the New Cinema movement, for example R. W. Fassbinder or Volker Schlöndorff, Wenders exhibits a tendency to pull back from difficult social and historical questions. Both Fassbinder (one of whose principal cinema influences was the German-American director Douglas Sirk) and Schlöndorff have tackled head-on issues emanating from the German past and fascism in particular....

In Wenders' own films the traces of the past remain either traces—political slogans daubed on a wall in the background—or assume an absurd form—such as the Nazi war movie being rehearsed in *Wings of Desire* (1987). This is not to insist that every German filmmaker has to devote all of his work to making films devoted to the German past, but Wenders evinces a reluctance to really come to grips with the roots of the problems displayed by the figures in his films, loneliness, despair, disorientation.

Unfortunately, Wenders was not alone in this sort of “anti-political” backlash, in reality, an accommodation to the official political and media barrage directed against opposition to the Gaza genocide and political and fascistic reaction generally. Actors Neil Patrick Harris and Michelle Yeoh offered similarly submissive comments in Berlin.

One appropriate response to Wenders and the others came from Indian author Arundhati Roy, who issued a statement explaining she now planned to turn down an invitation to attend the festival due to her disgust at the comments made by jury members.

Roy insisted angrily: “To hear them say that art should not be political is jaw-dropping. It is a way of shutting down a conversation about a crime against humanity even as it unfolds before us in real time—when artists, writers and film-makers should be doing everything in their power to stop it.”

Roy continued by noting that: “Although I have been profoundly disturbed by the positions taken by the German government and various German cultural institutions on Palestine, I have always received political solidarity when I have spoken to German audiences about my views on the genocide in Gaza.”

The opposition to the Israeli genocide, of course, is not confined to Germany. It has found expression in innumerable mass demonstrations, protests and strikes across the globe, including protests by significant numbers of prominent workers active in the film industry.

In May 2025 more than 350 prominent directors, writers and actors signed an open letter denouncing the “genocide ... taking

place in Gaza” and deplored the lack of action on the part of the film industry. Additional significant protests and demonstrations against the slaughter of civilians in Gaza took place at last year’s film festivals in Cannes and Venice.

The stance taken by Tuttle and Wenders reflects the political agenda of the German establishment, not the thinking of wide layers of the population.

The festival is quite prepared to express political solidarity with nations and campaigns when it dovetails with the requirements of the festival’s main financial sponsor, the German state.

The journalist from the website Jung & Naiv was quite correct in pointing to the “selective” nature of the festival’s expressions of solidarity.

In 2023 the festival posted a statement prominently on its homepage headlined “Solidarity with Ukraine and Iran.” According to the statement: “The Berlinale staunchly condemns Russia’s ongoing war of aggression, which violates international law, and expresses its solidarity with the people in Ukraine and all those who are campaigning against this war. The festival also stands with the courageous protesters in Iran as they defend themselves against a violent, undemocratic regime.”

The statement continued: “The film selection and various events—in part with cooperation partners—will focus on Iran and Ukraine.”

One year ago, the Berlinale management team led by Carlo Chatrian resigned in the wake of an all-party (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Green Party) campaign led by German Culture Minister Claudia Roth (Green Party). Roth and the rest denounced the festival jury as “antisemitic” for awarding a prize to the Israeli-Palestinian film *No Other Land*, which documents the crimes of the Israeli army and government against the Palestinian population in the West Bank.

Tuttle, Chatrian’s replacement, was then put through the wringer. Having declared she did not agree that *No Other Land* and statements made by its co-directors during the 2025 Berlinale awards ceremony were antisemitic, she was denounced by the pro-Israeli organisation “Values Initiative,” which called for state funding of the festival to be halted. Also in response, the Berlin Senate announced that it would halve its subsidies to the festival.

The pressure mounted on Tuttle by the German government and Israeli lobby explains, but does not excuse for a moment, her attempts to close down discussion on Israel’s war crimes in Gaza.



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