

CINEMA IN DEMOCRATIZING
GERMANY

Reconstructing national identity
after Hitler.



MASS CULTURE AND
COLD WAR POLITICS
THE BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL
OF THE 1950s

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It began in Berlin! And what is perhaps more crucial—one began in Berlin! From Garbo to Marlene Dietrich to Ingrid Bergman. From Ernst Lubitsch to Dieterle, actors, directors, composers, and technicians of film, a long list of brilliant names, every one a piece of international film history, and every one also a piece of Berlin!—*Der Tag*, 6 June 1951

State sponsorship of film as mass culture was renewed in earnest in the first years of the Bonn Republic. Beginning in the early 1950s, officials earmarked federal funds to subsidize an annual film festival in the western sectors of Berlin. Like the festivals in Mannheim and Oberhausen, the Berlin event exhibited an international array of products. But the similarity stopped there. This was no art festival, aimed at cultivating public appreciation for neglected film genres or experimental films. The majority of films shown in Berlin were commercial feature films readily accessible at one's local theater. Bonn officials were not at Berlin to encourage cultural diversity. Nor were they primarily interested in the festival as a means to bolster Berlin's ailing film industry, segregated both from the West German "mainland" and the international market. Their ambitions were overwhelmingly political.

Following the lead of American cultural officers, Bonn officials sculpted the Berlin festival as a cultural accompaniment to their pro-Western, anticommunist politics. Berlin became an important symbol of West Germany's democratic renewal. The festival was conceived as a way to revive the former capital's interwar reputation as an important European cultural center; and ultimately American and West German officials expected the image of a revitalized Berlin to serve as proof of Western economic superiority and cultural dynamism. Yet the Bonn government also fostered this image for national purposes, expecting a thriving "colony" in the East to lend a certain legitimacy to its claim to represent the best interests of all Germans—not just those residing in the West.



The opening of the fifth Berlin International Film Festival, 1955. (Courtesy of the Landesbildstelle, Berlin)

Over the course of the 1950s, various West German federal ministries played out their version of Cold War politics to an international audience, eager to score a public relations coup by enticing East Berliners to film performances that excluded the products of socialist countries. Thus, federal officials carefully cultivated their stage in the East with an eye toward promoting the sovereignty of their Germany, in a way that flaunted their new Western political orientation.

In June 1951, the city of Berlin held its first annual film festival. It was a modest affair with a small budget.¹ Guests attending from twenty countries were plagued by poor weather and inconvenient accommodations, which forced them to commute long distances to the festival film houses. This was postwar Berlin, a city devastated by Allied bombings and fierce street fighting during the last months of the war. Defeat, occupation, and the victors' failure to agree on a peace settlement had reduced Berlin's political prominence to that of the former capital city of a nonexistent German Reich and had augured the end of Berlin's international reputation as *Kulturstadt*. Postwar Berlin became an embattled island of cultural provincialism that attracted a good number of curious artists and filmmakers—such as Roberto Rossellini and Billy Wilder—in search

of authentic scenes of suffering, dislocation, and psychological trauma.² Few, however, were willing to subject themselves permanently to the strict rationing and volatile political atmosphere in order to spark a cultural renaissance.

Despite Berlin's obvious lack of appeal as a tourist destination in the early postwar period, the number of festival attendees grew from year to year. By the end of the decade, fifty-three countries were represented and Berlin had won recognition by the FIAPF as an "A" festival, an honor shared only by the older, renowned film festivals at Cannes and Venice.³ Berlin's initial success in luring international notables and attracting the interest of the press was based on the peculiarities of the festival. The distinct political and ideological agenda of its early years separated it from its more overtly commercial equivalents in France and Italy. These festivals, in contrast, had developed into media spectacles dominated by film stars and their clusters of paparazzi or the less visible dealings of businesspeople hawking their latest products or movie concepts.

The Berlin festival (or "Berlinale," as it became known) was enthusiastically promoted as the "Western cultural showcase in the East." Berlin was not merely a symbol but also a site where political and ideological differences acquired a palpable presence in the form of physical and linguistic barriers, protected military compounds and airfields, even the distinct national uniforms of foreign occupiers. The economic union of the Western zones, the Soviet blockade, and the ensuing airlift further dramatized the East-West split. Media coverage in the West firmly established Berlin as a necessary democratic outpost in a no-man's-land of Soviet-sponsored totalitarianism. Berlin became the epicenter of the Cold War topography. Its festival was no mere commercial or cultural event but a celebration of Western values.

But the Berlin festival should not be reduced to a propaganda event underwritten by the American occupation authorities. Local interests also determined the character and development of the festival. Hoteliers and restaurateurs, for example, looked to the festival to increase tourism and stimulate an economic revival. Local filmmakers and technicians sought to resurrect interest in and contracts for their products and expertise. Although these local interest groups tended to support the American agenda, they added concerns of their own that would alter the event in substantial ways over the course of the decade. The festival became, in fact, the focus for the aspirations of Berlin government officials and artists who wished to rejuvenate the cultural traditions—and reputation—of the city.

These interests found a ready proponent in Alfred Bauer, who organized the Berlin film festival from its beginning in 1951. Perhaps best known as the author of the *Spiel filme-Almanach (Feature Film Almanac)*, Bauer worked for UFA in the last years of the war and as film adviser to the British Military Government in Germany between 1945 and 1950. In his capacity as the fes-

tival's director, Bauer sought to place Berlin back on the cultural map of Europe by reviving its reputation as "Film metropole"—an important center for film production and distribution.⁴ His commitment to this agenda reached back to at least 1950, when he presented the Berlin Senate with a "seven-point petition" urging practical support to stimulate the city's film economy.⁵

Film industry members in Berlin considered it a matter of economic necessity and international prestige to revive the cultural heritage of Berlin as the "artistic home of German film."⁶ With the division of Germany, Berlin filmmakers in the Western sectors were cut off from the Soviet-controlled Babelsberg and Johannisthal studios and deprived of access to the surrounding "hinterland." They feared the loss of their patrimony and livelihood, particularly during the Soviet blockade of Berlin, when many of their members headed west to build or expand new production centers in Munich, Hamburg, Wiesbaden, and Düsseldorf. Film distributors shifted their headquarters to Munich, Berlin's long-standing cultural rival, where Bavarian officials boasted that their capital city had become the film center of the new democratic Germany.⁷ Lamenting the loss of their life's blood, the Berlin Film Workers' Union (Verband der Filmschaffenden) warned their mayor of the impending demise: "It is a fact that a film industry no longer exists in Berlin. . . . There are only a few production companies, steadily moving West in search of a distribution contract and federal credit for a film that they'd like to produce in Berlin. Or a production comes to Berlin to film, and takes its value away from Berlin with it. We no longer have a distribution company that supplies the whole country; Berlin is uninteresting since it represents only 8 percent of [a film's] possible financial yield. It is also unimportant as a premiere city."⁸ Local filmmakers argued that a resuscitated Berlin film industry would benefit both industry members and the Berlin economy. The American and West German governments also had a good deal to gain from the image of a thriving Western metropolis in the midst of the communist East. In fact, Berlin filmmakers would later maintain that the public image, or the "gaze of the world" as one American film officer called it, mattered more to the festival's official sponsors than the reality of a depressed industry, careening toward cultural provincialism.⁹

The first Berlin film festival was heavily endorsed by American officials and may well have been the brainchild of Oscar Martay, a film officer of the Information Services Branch of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany (HICOG), who is said to have received his inspiration while attending the Venice Biennial Film Festival. Martay worked closely with the Berlin senator of popular education, Professor Joachim Tiburtius, to secure the financial means to sponsor the festival.¹⁰ Tiburtius would remain an influential voice in the Berlin affair, presiding over the Planning Committee throughout the 1950s. For the first several years, the Berlin Senate was listed as the sole official sponsor of the

festival. Allied contributions were not publicly acknowledged, although American authorities contributed financially to the event and representatives of the three Western Allies sat on the organizing committee until 1954, when the West German federal government became an official cosponsor with the Senate.

From its beginnings, the festival was a carefully designed cultural event with broad political overtones. Western democracies were invited to exhibit their finest film products to insure that the festival would become a "magnificent series of great cinematic events."¹¹ The point was not to pummel viewers with pieces of overt political propaganda. Rather than explicitly reflect the interests of American foreign policy, film was to serve as a goodwill ambassador.¹² Audiences were appealed to as consumers, the single shared identity in capitalist mass society. The existence of a successful festival showing popularly acclaimed films was in itself a propaganda victory.

Martay and officials at the U.S. Information Services Branch insisted that the festival be organized as a discrete event exclusively devoted to film and vetoed the attempts of Berlin officials to graft the film festival onto a larger cultural Festival Week (*Festspielwoche*) being planned for September 1951 in conjunction with an industrial trade show. Film was to hold the spotlight. American authorities did not want the popular appeal of this medium to be buried in a larger program devoted to the elite arts and business deals. The showcase for democracy was to be based upon this most "democratic art."¹³ The initiators of the Berlin International Film Festival proceeded from the idea that the event should direct the attention of the world once again to the old film metropolis of Germany. Berlin, as the birthplace of German film, is better qualified than any other city to organize an International Film Week for Germany and mold it into a first-class cultural event. If film was to be built into the program as merely a part of a larger and multifaceted exhibition . . . the . . . main purpose . . . of placing Berlin and its film festival into the public view as the spiritual film center of Germany would be illusory [*sic*].¹⁴ Oscar Martay exploited the city's former reputation to sell the festival to the world, claiming the legacy of Lang and Murnau for West Berlin at a time when privately owned film companies there were competing for Berlin audiences with the state-owned, Soviet-sponsored film monopoly, DEFA.¹⁵ The festival was to foster the image of a revitalized, democratic Berlin and serve as a tribute to Western cultural vitality.

Timing was also a consideration, since organizers believed it essential that the festival enjoy the undivided attention of the press and film world. In order to keep other events from stealing the thunder from the Berlin film festival, American officials firmly encouraged that the event be held in June rather than in September, as some Berlin officials favored. Martay explained that they wanted to preempt the festivals planned by various other German cities for

later that summer. Moreover, Martay particularly wished to avoid scheduling the Berlin festival to follow the Venice Biennial, which was set for late summer. A September date, he argued, would allow Venice to take the "wind out of [Berlin's] sails."¹⁶

The most important consideration for Martay remained, however, political. American officials sought to use film in a "cultural offensive" designed to reach the populations to the East and counter the influence of officially sponsored popular events there.¹⁷ The keystone of his argument to move the festival dates to June was based on

the fact that shortly after the first press notice about our Berlin festival, the Eastern press announced an "International Youth Festival" for the summer of 1951 in East Berlin, which is heralded as a meeting of the International Association of Democratic Youth [Weltbundes der Demokratischen Jugend] and is to be run by the Free German Youth [Freie Deutsche Jugend]. I believe it . . . necessary, on the basis of this political consideration alone, to hold the Film Week without fail . . . in June. By doing so, the necessary counterweight would be created, as would—above all—an attraction for the East Berliners and the population of the East zone, and not least of all for the youth in the Eastern peoples' democracies.¹⁸

Martay's arguments were supported by the festival committee members. Alfred Bauer acknowledged their commitment to the political aims of the American officials of the Information Services Branch and emphasized that while the event would provide an international forum for film professionals, it was expected to work on a more popular and local level as well. It should be staged, he maintained, "for the wide circle of inhabitants in West and East Berlin . . . and should present a peaceful demonstration of the cultural offerings of the Western world."¹⁹

Throughout the 1950s, Bauer and the Berlin Senate sought to accentuate the uniqueness of their festival in comparison to the other major European film festivals at Cannes, Venice, and Locarno. Berlin was promoted as a popular affair, in contrast to the "opulence" and "glamour" that reigned at festivals to the South.²⁰ From the first year of the Berlin festival, a good deal of attention was devoted to attracting popular support and attendance. The organizing committee, with official American encouragement, arranged several "mass events" for the program, including a star parade, autograph sessions, and an evening film screening at the open-air Waldbühne. In addition, HICOG sponsored outdoor film screenings at Potsdamerplatz to lure an audience from the East for its cultural wares.²¹

By the second year of the festival, Senator Tiburtius and several members of the Berlin State Parliament (Abgeordnetenhaus) insisted that the organizing

committee redouble its efforts to win the support of the people of Berlin—both East and West. Festival film screenings were organized in Neukölln and Wedding, sectors of the city that abutted East Berlin. Border areas were plastered with posters advertising festival events, and East Germans were offered festival tickets for the eye-opening exchange rate of one Ostmark for one Westmark.²²

The organizing committee also discussed screening the German film, *Nachts auf den Straßen* (*Nights on the Road*, 1951), in the Waldbühne with a promise of a personal appearance by the film's star, Hans Albers. Berlin officials felt this would draw large numbers of spectators from the East and West since Albers—the beloved blond-haired, blue-eyed epitome of dynamic masculinity, the urbane John Wayne of German film in the 1930s—was a “concept” among both populations. Apparently they expected to cash in on nostalgia by appealing to a common cultural experience of the Nazi period to unite a divided population, even for just a few hours. The key element was not the film but the ever-marketable “schöner Hans,” whose dual appeal as heartthrob and man of action helped transform him into an icon of an indivisible German cultural nation.²³

The decision to broaden the popular appeal of the festival was not based purely on Cold War calculations, however. After the first year's festival, Berlin officials had come under fire from laborers and lower-income groups residing in the city's western sectors. If Berlin officials were going to sell their event as “the democratic festival,” they needed to consider the class implications of this project. Parliamentary representatives from the SPD and the Liberal Party argued that the “working population attaches particular value [to the demand], and it is important, that they be included in the festival atmosphere. Already it has been very strongly protested in these circles . . . that the first festival was altogether too closed off” from them.²⁴ Special additional screenings organized for the *Randtheatern*, or border theaters, were designed to address this situation. Neukölln and Wedding were predominantly working-class districts and had been hard hit by the economic dislocations of the war. West Berlin, with an overall population of 2.1 million, contained as many as 300,000 unemployed, and tens of thousands were living off social welfare insurance or pensions. By extending the festival program to the margins of Berlin, officials hoped to conciliate a disgruntled working-class population and, by subsidizing tickets to such exhibitions, tempt East Berliners to cross the border.²⁵

The project to broaden participation in the festival did not, however, receive the unanimous support of the organizing committee. Alfred Bauer, for example, noted that decentralized or multiple film screenings were highly unusual at international film festivals and pointed to the prohibitive costs involved. He also feared serious opposition from film producers, who would resent a second, uncompensated showing of their films in outlying areas of Berlin.



German heartthrob, Hans Albers, whose film stardom outlived the Weimar Republic and the Nazi regime. (Courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin)

Film industry members did indeed strenuously resist these steps to democratize the festival. The representative of the Film Distributors' Association objected to the exhibition of festival films to a public (in Wedding and Neukölln) that "was not so open to artistic films." His colleague from the German Film Theater Association concurred, adding that he rejected the screening of films anywhere but on the Kurfürstendamm, the main business boulevard in center city: "One must remain exclusive in international settings. . . . We are talking about a film festival, not a promotional show for wine at which samples are distributed; [this is,] rather, a distinguished cultural event. . . . In Berlin, the cinema provinces actually begin just behind the Kurfürstendamm. All artistically significant or great films (for example, . . . [De Sica's] *Bicycle Thieves* . . .) flop in the other theaters."²⁶ Industry representatives possessed a keen sense for the geographic parameters of the prestigious and had little appreciation for the possible political dividends to be gained from screenings in the Berlin "provinces." Their cultural and class biases, moreover, left them free to respond as businesspeople and fight the pernicious effects of democratic practices on their pocketbooks. Political considerations, however, won this round; industry representatives were unsuccessful in blocking the special screenings in the *Randtheatern*.²⁷

Despite official efforts to democratize the festival, the border screenings, open-air events at the Waldbühne and Olympic Stadium, and autograph sessions at the Zoo or RIAS Park remained marginal to the real hub activity, which from the second year on centered around the once world-renowned Kurfürstendamm or "Ku'damm," the fashionable avenue that in Berlin's heyday was a consumer's paradise and the heart of the city's cultural life.²⁸ Even with an increasing crush of curious fans over the decade, the Ku'damm remained an elite enclave for international notables from the entertainment and business world.

Berlin's film public were corralled behind barricades as the ersatz royalty were ushered past in grand style to closed festival openings and industry-sponsored film balls. Berliners experienced the festivities vicariously, through press reports and newsreels. They were treated, for example, to stunning décolleté shots of the immaculately coiffed trio, Yvonne De Carlo, Sophia Loren, and Gina Lollobrigida, as well as reports about the comings and goings of Gary Cooper, William Holden, Trevor Howard, Yves Montand, Dieter Borsche, Curd Jürgens, Hardy Krüger, Bob Hope, Jeanne Moreau, Liselotte Pulver, Horst Buchholz, and Hildegard Knef, among others. When film stars made personal appearances, the public encountered their fantasy objects only across the proscaenium or a cordon of police. Hans Albers enlisted the aid of twenty police escorts to push back his fans when he went to retrieve his car. Maria Schell received homage at her hotel window, tossing flowers to her adoring but anyo-

mous mass of admirers. And in a grand gesture of noblesse oblige, Jean Marais showered his public with neckties from his hotel fortress.²⁹

The festival was clearly an elite construction, fashioned to satisfy political, economic, and cultural agendas centered on Berlin. The publicity that film personalities attracted only served to further these agendas. Despite the amount of attention lavished on visiting luminaries and the predictable distance maintained between these cultural elites and the Berlin masses, however, organizers successfully marketed it as a democratic festival, both domestically and abroad. Admittedly, the festival was democratic to the extent that it served as a showcase for the cultural products of Western democracies. But by 1952, Tiburtius and parliamentary representatives were determined to convince Berliners and the world alike that it was "democratic" in another sense. These officials proudly claimed that it functioned according to democratic principles, that it was a festival by and for the people, a genuine *Volksfest*.

This claim was based upon what was certainly the most unique aspect of the Berlin festival, the public vote. Audiences at the screenings of competing films were provided with ballots on which they were to rate each film's quality. A certificate was awarded to the film in each category that received the greatest percentage of positive evaluations. In 1951 Disney's *Cinderella* won top honors. That first year, however, public acclaim was merely advisory. The official competition was decided by an appointed jury of German educators, critics, artists, and theater owners, which awarded gold, silver, and bronze bears—the symbol of Berlin—to the top three films in each category (dramatic feature; comedy; detective or adventure film; musical; and documentary). The following year, the jury was dropped, and until 1956, when juried prizes were also conferred, the public vote alone determined the awards.³⁰

The elimination of the official jury was not the result of an avid push for further democratization. It was, rather, a condition imposed by the FIAPF in return for its formal recognition of the festival. The FIAPF was an international organization of national film producer associations based in Paris and Rome. Members were committed to participating as associations in only those international film festivals that had received FIAPF approval.³¹ FIAPF approval of the Berlin festival was expected to insure the steady participation of member associations in the event on an annual basis. As importantly, it was expected to improve the quality of films submitted to the festival by national industries. Bauer strongly felt that the continued success of the festival was dependent on the endorsement of the FIAPF.³²

Securing the official recognition of the FIAPF for an international film festival was not an easy matter. This was particularly true in the early to mid-1950s, when the national film producer associations were confronted with a steadily increasing number of invitations to recently hatched festivals. One



Autograph hunters on the Ku'damm during the 1955 Berlin International Film Festival.
(Courtesy of the Landesbildstelle, Berlin)

German representative in the FIAPF complained that "since the war . . . a considerable festival fatigue has occurred" in industry circles. "Almost every country, and in some countries even various cities, have attempted to gain permission to sponsor an international film festival." After assessing the expense of participating in these festivals, and the often-limited benefits they could reap in return, national film producer associations proposed an annual "Olympics of Film." This plan was designed to eliminate the multitude of national and regional film festivals in favor of a single, massive, competitive event. It was, however, heartily criticized and ultimately vetoed by officials in Venice and Cannes, who sought to retain the cultural and economic benefits of their own festivals. The Venice Biennial, with its twenty-year history, and the annual postwar festival at Cannes had become well-financed institutions with year-round staffs, supported by state and tourist industry funds.³³ Local businesspeople, city and state officials, and native film industry members guarded their prerogatives jealously and ultimately succeeded in protecting their interests. In the early 1950s, Cannes and Venice alone received the highly coveted FIAPF recognition as "A" festivals, which authorized them to appoint an international jury to judge the films in competition and award prizes.³⁴

Berlin was able to win FIAPF designation as a "B" festival in 1952, which meant that it was an officially recognized festival without the right to constitute a jury or award prizes. FIAPF recognition of the Berlin festival was not won without a fight, however; FIAPF members needed to be persuaded to accept the "political grounds" for the festival.³⁵ Organizer Alfred Bauer realized that the appeal of the Berlin event and the reason it received the endorsement of the FIAPF were based precisely on the fact that it did not mimic the events at Cannes and Venice. Given the physical devastation of the war and its northern geographic location, the former German capital could not hope to compete with the enticements of luxury and sun that were so amply provided on the Riviera. In the early 1950s, Berlin had no obvious charms that would recommend it as a tourist location or playground for the wealthy.

Bauer and festival committee members resolved to stress the uniqueness of their festival in order to stimulate press interest and to set their event off from the "glitter" festivals that had come to dominate the international festival calendar. They promoted their event to the FIAPF, the film world, and the press as both a democratic and "serious"—or "working"—festival that integrated the public voice, as well as seminars and lectures by noted authorities, into a program of film screenings. This strategy was designed to provide a distinct identity for the festival, elicit international interest, and convince the FIAPF that recognition should be renewed annually. Bauer felt it essential to the success of the Berlin festival that it retain this "official" standing given the international festival glut of the 1950s.³⁶

Festival officials were confronted with a greater challenge when they attempted to win the cooperation of the German film industry. In the first year of the festival, the Association of German Film Producers declined to participate in an official capacity, despite the entreaties of festival organizers and the Berlin Senate. The association's spokesman, H. B. Baum, blamed its reluctance to participate on the German film producers' weakened position on the world market and their inability to compete with the national products of the United States, France, and Italy.

The rationale for the association's decision involved more than a realistic assessment of the artistic quality of German films. It represented an unveiled protest against the film policies of the American occupiers. The German Film Producers' Association had noted American officials' keen interest and involvement in the Berlin film festival. German producers recognized that the festival served the political and propagandistic goals of U.S. foreign policy, as well as the interests of Hollywood producers, who were already well entrenched in the postwar European market. In a letter declining participation in the festival, Baum explained that "due to the film policies of the Allies, German film production has been placed at a tragic disadvantage in relation to foreign productions." The policies that created this unhappy situation derived from American insistence on the decartelization of the German film industry, which entailed the breakup of the huge UFI film monopoly and prohibited German film firms from involvement in more than one branch of the industry. This situation led to a proliferation of small production firms that had a great deal of difficulty securing financial backing for their projects and amortizing their films since they lacked other areas of diversification that would yield profits. Industry members lobbied for a more rational (vertical) organization of the industry, which would allow them to compete against the Hollywood giants.³⁷

In addition to protesting the decartelization laws of the Western Allies and the subsequent effects on the position of German film in the international market, German film producers decried the massive influx of foreign films into their domestic market, which, they claimed, displaced their native products. Their most acerbic criticism was directed at Hollywood, which supplied twice as many films to German audiences in 1953 as did German producers.³⁸ In a letter explaining their decision to spurn the festival, Baum reiterated these concerns:

You are also acquainted with the special measures prejudicial to the film industry as a whole [such as] the flooding of the German market with foreign films and the discounted release of reprises, which have impeded the development of German film in its entirety.

These circumstances do not permit German film to compete successfully in an international show, such as that being planned in Berlin. On the con-

trary, such an exhibition . . . has a showcase effect and would work to the disadvantage of the German market.³⁹

Fritz Podehl, a leading industry voice and head of the FSK, the industry-sponsored censorship board, elaborated on the inability of German films to compete with their more polished Hollywood competitors at the Berlin festival: "It would of course be important to know if other countries aside from the Americans are participating. In this case it would be probable that German films would have to be compared with German, and foreign films with foreign, if one did not want to come to a humiliating outcome for German production. Although the latter has improved in the last few years, the means are not at [our] disposal to be able to compete adequately on either the technical or artistic level with foreign productions."⁴⁰ In negotiations with festival authorities, industry representatives dropped broad hints that their members would be inclined to participate in the festival if the Berlin Senate and federal government were able to sweeten the deal by providing financial support for the ailing industry in the form of entertainment tax breaks and increased direct subsidies. In addition, they sought assistance in their dealings with American officials over the breakup of the UFI monopoly, which native producers feared would be sold to the highest foreign bidder.⁴¹ Berlin officials denied that they had any influence over the UFI dismantling process; their hands were tied by decartelization laws imposed by the Allies. Federal officials were also apparently unable or unwilling to provide the types of incentives the film producers demanded.

Festival organizers, however, did try to placate the producers with a proposal to create a special program highlighting the best "30-40 German postwar feature films from 1946 to 1951" at the 1952 festival. The show would be targeted primarily at "foreign film buyers and journalists" attending the festival and would "belong to the official program . . . and serve the export of German film." Bauer was suggesting that the festival play a mediating role between the German commercial film industry and foreign buyers, functioning more overtly as a showcase and marketplace for the German film product. With this gesture, he hoped to prove to German film producers that the festival was not merely a vehicle for foreign products but could serve their financial interests as well.⁴²

Bauer appealed to the federal Ministry of Economics to subsidize the exhibition, but the request was refused. As a result, the special exhibition of German films was scrapped. The industry did, however, sponsor a small-scale film fair that featured its most marketable products.⁴³ The lack of official support frustrated industry members, however, and did little to alter their impression of the festival as a foreign-dominated event. Consequently, German industry participation remained low, both in terms of members' attendance at the festival and their willingness to submit film entries for the competition. This situation

did not change until the mid-1950s, when the industry recovered its confidence and a sizable part of the domestic market for family-style entertainment. By 1955, it became a minority sponsor of the event, along with the Berlin Senate and the West German federal government, thus allowing industry representatives a greater voice in planning.⁴⁴

The federal Ministry of the Interior did take steps to support and publicize the native film product within West Germany and Berlin. Beginning in 1951, the Ministry of the Interior annually designated a jury composed of "personalities from public, cultural, and intellectual life" to award a German "Oscar," the Bundesfilmpreis, to the best feature and documentary films of the production year. Industry representatives, federal officials, film critics, and educators sat on the jury that presented the award, initially during a separately scheduled "special program" at the Berlin film festival. Only after 1953 did it become an official part of the program.⁴⁵ The Bundesfilmpreis provided an official seal of approval to a handful of films at a time when the German film industry was struggling for a place on the international—and domestic—market. By including the ceremony in the festival's official program, federal and industry officials apparently sought to increase the visibility of their native product in the hopes of boosting export revenues. Annual awards did favor box-office hits with proven appeal among (at least) German audiences.⁴⁶

Industry revival was not, however, the primary aim of the film awards. The award ceremony at Berlin provided an irresistible opportunity to engage in ideological showmanship. Predictably, given Berlin's location at the geographical heart of the Cold War, the conservative politics of the reigning Christian Democratic government in Bonn influenced the selection process. As one film historian has pointed out, "The political bias of the awards was unmistakable; the Minister [of the Interior] regularly honoured films with a distinct anti-communist and pro-NATO slant, usually stories dealing with Germany's divided state from a Cold War perspective. When challenged on this, a Ministry spokesman tartly replied: 'these prizes are gifts. It is our right to choose to whom we want to present them.'"⁴⁷

Federal officials were even more heavy-handed in the only other area of their involvement at the Berlin festival: the special screenings sponsored by the federal Ministry of Greater German Matters (Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen). Far from being benign exhibitions, these politically tendentious shows revolved around themes such as those featured in *Film behind the Iron Curtain*, a documentary screened at the 1952 festival comprised of clips from feature and newsreel films produced in the Soviet Union and East Germany. In the following years, the ministry expanded the program by showing complete films from the "Soviet zone," which focused on such topics as daily life in East Germany and the effects of Soviet policies on East German art.⁴⁸ Al-

though these exhibitions were not included on the official program, their obvious propagandistic thrust underscored the political nature of the festival. The ministry's exhibitions served to remind visitors that the real competition was not among films of the Western world. The stakes were much higher, as the German ministry pointed out in a series that chronicled the "loss" of patriots in the East to Stalinism. This loss involved the spread of communist influence as well as national truncation and cultural emasculation.

The federal government's decision to commit more resources to the festival was made after the June 1953 uprising in East Berlin, which began just one day before that year's festival. Senator Tiburtius opened the 1953 festival with a "memorial to the victims of the demonstration for freedom." The next year, Bonn's contribution to the festival was substantially increased and the ministers of the interior and economics, as well as the vice chancellor, personally attended the festival in an unprecedented show of federal support.⁴⁹

Ironically, the festival was forced to abandon the most overtly political aspects of its program in 1955, the same year that the federal government was officially listed as cosponsor. In order to retain recognition from the FIAPF, Berlin was required to adhere to FIAPF rules that sought to guarantee the political neutrality of all FIAPF-approved film festivals. Festival authorities were therefore requested to renounce the screening of all politically tendentious films.⁵⁰ Beginning in 1955, the propaganda shows sponsored by the federal Ministry of Greater German Matters were suspended, as was the David O. Selznick Silberlorbeerpreis, which had been awarded annually by a jury of international journalists to the German-language film that "best served international understanding."⁵¹

The reduction of overt displays of Cold War propaganda at the festival belied the intense political jockeying that went on behind the scenes during preparations for the event. With federal sponsorship, the festival acquired status as "the official German film festival," and representatives of the Foreign and Interior ministries kept a sharp eye on proceedings, concerned that festival organizers do nothing to compromise West German interests. Bonn officials won permanent seats on the organizing committee, and any decisions regarding invitations to East Bloc countries or screenings of "sensitive" films had to be cleared through the appropriate ministries.⁵² As a result, committee meetings were often the sites of clashes between proponents of political considerations and those with predominantly cultural agendas.

Alfred Bauer had been committed from the beginning to organizing an impressive cultural event that would both attract the best international film products available and rejuvenate the city of Berlin as a cultural capital of Europe. The bestowal of the coveted "A" rating on the Berlinale by the FIAPF in 1956 indicated that Bauer was close to achieving his goals. Yet the "A" rating

also brought with it a change in the nature of the festival. Organizers were compelled to decide whether to retain the popular vote as the mechanism to decide winning films or to assign this function to an international jury. By 1957, the public vote was dropped. The committee opted for cultural prestige over homey democratic practice. Berlin thus entered the exclusive inner circle formerly monopolized by Cannes and Venice.

By the late 1950s, however, even this inner circle had been riddled by sharp press criticism over the uneven quality of films screened for competition. Film critics complained that too few quality films were being produced worldwide to justify the overbooked international festival calendar. Berlin organizers, therefore, could not afford to become complacent. Bauer insisted that they had to address the critical comments of the press if they wished to retain their good reputation.

Perhaps the most persistent criticism involved the charge of partisanship in extending invitations to the Berlin festival. Immediately following Berlin's promotion to an "A" rating in 1956, journalists began to compare the guest list to that of Cannes, which was open to films of all interested countries, even those in the East Bloc. Countries with which France had diplomatic relations received their invitations to Cannes through the French Foreign Ministry. All others, such as the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, were invited to the festival by the French film producers' association.

By 1957, German journalists increasingly demanded that the Berlin festival be opened up to all nations, despite differences in ideology and political systems. Will Wehling, a journalist and press agent of the Oberhausen film festival, maintained in *Die Welt*:

The era of the festival as a primarily cultural-political affair ("film showcase toward the East") of the early years is gone, now that it has achieved recognition as an A-festival. That does not however mean that it has an apolitical demeanor. But one doesn't need to stress that in relation to Berlin. Either an A-festival is organized with the possibility of participation by all countries, or, in the case of limited participation, Article 2 of the Berlin bylaws must be changed, which last year read: "The film festival intends to demonstrate to a broad public the development of film art, to bring together in Berlin the leading personalities of the film world for an exchange of views, and thus to contribute to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendship between peoples."⁵³

Wehling's concerns, like Bauer's, were primarily cultural in orientation. This is not surprising given Wehling's affiliation with the Oberhausen festival, which had a reputation for displaying interesting examples of film art drawn from various nations, East and West, regardless of their ideological content or the

reactions of Bonn.⁵⁴ His argument was based upon the desire to secure films of the best artistic quality for the festival. For Wehling and Bauer, the festival was primarily a cosmopolitan cultural event based upon the principles of international dialogue. It should be treated as a marketplace for the free exchange of ideas; geopolitics and ideology had no role there.⁵⁵

Federal officials saw it differently, however. Bauer's plans to promote the festival as an elite forum for cultural exchange coincided with what was identified as a Soviet cultural offensive. Western officials had detected a change in Soviet tactics since 1955, when the Soviet Union switched from a hard-line adherence to Stalinism to a competitive posture abroad. A U.S. Information Agency pamphlet, for example, accused the Soviet Union of feigning a "posture of peace" to sell communism to the "free world." By 1957, "communist films" were no longer being distributed on a noncommercial basis through diplomatic channels and front organizations but were circulating "through conventional commercial channels in almost every market in the world." The Soviets were beginning to compete on capitalist terms, but they had one clear advantage: "communist interests" could use costly promotional devices such as film festivals to gain a foothold in foreign markets. Moreover, they utilized a number of profit guarantees "of the type that would be totally impractical for industries operating under the free enterprise system," offering films to exhibitors at reduced rates and occasionally extending nonrepayable "loans" to theater owners to cover the costs of advertisement.⁵⁶

West German officials adamantly refused to offer the Soviets an entrée into their "free world" festival. Tension developed between this principle of political exclusion and the pressing need to secure good films. By 1956, the political and cultural standing of the Berlin festival appeared under attack by the East when the Karlovy Vary festival in Czechoslovakia received FIAPF recognition as an "A" festival, joining the exclusive ranks of Cannes, Venice, and Berlin. The federal Ministry of the Interior considered the Czechoslovakian festival a direct challenge and worried that Berlin would have to compete with the socialist festival for participants since rumors had been circulating in the press that Karlovy Vary would be scheduled in 1957 to coincide with the Berlin event.⁵⁷ Federal representatives on the organizing committee feared that developing countries currently participating in the Berlinale would be persuaded to shift their loyalties to the East, given the scathing reviews their national products were receiving from German critics. This was expected to result in a loss of prestige for the Berlinale but, more importantly, would serve to undermine Western claims regarding the superiority and benefits of political—and cultural—democracy.⁵⁸

The controversy that arose in 1956 over the question of Soviet participation continued over the course of the decade. The Foreign Office stood firm against

Soviet involvement through 1957. For the 1958 festival, Alfred Bauer and a representative from the Berlin Senate's Office of Popular Education argued that Soviet films had been screened at the festival in Oberhausen and requested that the Ministry of the Interior allow the Berlin Senate to consider the issue of Soviet participation and make recommendations to the Foreign Office. Bauer maintained that it would be less harmful to screen Soviet films within the context of the Berlinale "than to allow . . . the Karlsbad [Karlovy Vary] festival advertise against Berlin and the Western world due to the fact that a large section of international film production remains closed off from the Berlin film festival because of Soviet nonparticipation."⁵⁹

Federal officials continued to resist the demand to include the Soviets. They treated the Berlin festival as an "official" government event because of the sizable financial backing of Bonn but more importantly because it occurred in Berlin—the West German outpost in the East. For that reason, they demanded that festival invitations follow official etiquette and conform to federal government policy. Therefore, when federal officials "relented" and permitted Soviet Union participation in the festival, it had to be done on their terms; the invitation was tendered not by festival authorities but by the West German Foreign Office. The tactics of the ministry assured Soviet response in advance. The Soviets declined to participate since they did not recognize the West German federal government as possessing sovereignty over Berlin. The following year, a representative from the Ministry of the Interior assured the Berlin organizing committee that a number of Eastern European states would participate, but "only those with which we have diplomatic relations."⁶⁰

Thus, German officials were responding to more than the dictates of Cold War cultural policy in their efforts to control East Bloc participation. A subtext to the debate was the issue of West German sovereignty—including Bonn's claim as legitimate heir of the old German Reich. Bonn officials were not merely battling the cultural forces of communism in Berlin; they needed to prove the justice of their political claims on this cultural "front."

Ultimately, the festival became highly successful in attracting hordes of East German visitors through the use of such strategies as reduced ticket prices and increased star presence at border screenings.⁶¹ Yet, ironically, festival officials were less adept at keeping Western visitors from heading east. Members of the Berlin Senate and federal ministries chafed at reports of visiting notables crossing the border to tour state-run DEFA film studios in East Berlin. Their best suggestion for stemming the eastward tide was to "keep them busy" with a full festival program "so they wouldn't get bored!"⁶² Berlin officials zealously sought to root out the competing cultural influences of their compatriots in the East, prohibiting, for example, the screening of DEFA films in West Berlin cinemas for the duration of the festival.⁶³

The Berlin festival became as much a display of West German economic vitality as a Western cultural showcase. By the end of the decade, the Berlinale more closely resembled the high-profile, "glitter" fests at Cannes and Venice and offered a schedule packed with trade shows, receptions, and industry association meetings. West German film companies optimistically set up export offices as well, still hoping for an entrée to the world market. And the Berlin film industry certainly profited from the publicity. After a flurry of contracts for sound synchronization and dubbing, Berlin film workers were producing a steady one-third of West German output by the end of the decade.⁶⁴

Conceived as a cultural accompaniment to Cold War politics, the Berlinale became a tribute to Western capitalism, commercialism, and the popular allure of mass culture. Faced with a budget crunch in 1956, West German federal officials were shrewd enough to beef up the budget for international advertising and travel subsidies for movie stars attending the festival.⁶⁵ They understood that the manufactured images of these human commodities would insure popular interest for the event. The Berlin festival was an elite construction that peddled propaganda through spectacle. What was being sold was not merely an image of material abundance, leisure, individual fulfillment, and cultural superiority but a political system as well.