

The Controversy about Alain Resnais' Documentary *Night and Fog* (1956)

Abstract

This article from *Neues Deutschland*, the official daily newspaper of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), continued the East German tradition of associating West Germany with fascism and Nazism, seizing upon a controversy caused by the attempt by the West German embassy in France to have the French documentary *Night and Fog* withdrawn from the Cannes film festival. The film documented the horrors of the concentration camps and also showed the participation of the Vichy regime in Nazi crimes. Contrary to claims made in the article, the film was not withdrawn from the festival, however, it was shown out of competition. The film was directed by Alain Resnais, a French avant-garde filmmaker; he insisted on making the film with people who had been directly affected by the Holocaust, as he felt that he could not do justice to the event himself. He worked with Jean Cayrol, a French novelist and poet who spent three years in a concentration camp after participating in the French Resistance, who wrote the narration for the film, and Hanns Eisler, an Austrian composer who had gone into exile after his music was banned by the Nazi party, who composed the score. Eisler was a lifelong communist; he emigrated to the United States in 1938 but was blacklisted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and eventually deported in 1948—he returned to Austria, but later moved to East Berlin, and is most well-known for composing the national anthem of East Germany. The film was shown in East Germany during Leipzig Film Week in November 1956, but the state film company DEFA claimed that the West German version of the film had been mistranslated; they created their own translation that suited the communist ideals of East Germany better, thus the film was misused by the very people who were accusing West Germany of misusing and suppressing the film.

Source

Bonn Speaks for the Fascists

Following the intervention of the West German embassy in Paris, Alain Resnais' documentary *Night and Fog* has been withdrawn from the selection of French entries for the Cannes film festival. The film portrays the horrors of the concentration camps and impressively unmasks executioners like Bräutigam und Globke and their ilk who, despite their criminal past, hold leading positions in the federal government.

The decision by the French state secretary for industry not to show the film in Cannes has elicited strong protest from the French public.

Source of original German text: "Bonn spricht für die Faschisten," *Neues Deutschland*, no. 89, April 12, 1956, p. 4.

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