

Barclays bank suspends sponsorship of music festivals after boycott over its ties to Israel's Gaza genocide

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After numerous bands withdrew in protest from the Download hard rock festival held annually at the Donington Park motorsport circuit in Leicestershire, England, Barclays bank announced last week it was suspending its sponsorship of the event.

The bank, the third largest in the UK, has been revealed as providing financial services to and holding shares in major defense firms delivering weapons to Israel during its genocidal attack on the population of Gaza.

Barclays has also suspended its relationship with the Latitude and Isle of Wight festivals.

More than 100 artists boycotted Brighton's Great Escape Festival in May over the event's links to Barclays.

Bands Boycott Barclays, which describes itself as "a group of musicians and music industry professionals who are using our cultural power to stand in solidarity with Palestine by boycotting all music festivals partnered with Barclays," spearheaded the campaign.

The exposure of Barclays operations led a number of bands to withdraw from Download. California hardcore band Scowl, for example, announced that "We will not be playing Download Fest this year due to Barclays Bank sponsorship of the event and Barclays connection to Israel and the genocide Israel is committing in Palestine. Free Palestine!"

Australian hardcore punk band Speed echoed the sentiment, revealing their decision not to perform "due to the recent news of Barclays Banks sponsorship of the event and their involvement in the war in Gaza."

Leeds-based Pest Control offered an explanation on Instagram, arguing, "We cannot sacrifice the principles held by this band and by the scene we come from and represent, just for personal gain." The hardcore band Zulu took a similar approach, pointing out on Instagram that Barclays is "actively committing genocide against

Palestine."

The BBC reported that "Mercury-nominated band Lankum, who are on the line-up for Suffolk's Latitude festival in July, were among the first to respond to the announcement [of Barclays' withdrawal]. 'We welcome the news,' they said on Instagram. 'Since the beginning of the campaign there has been great collective effort from a number of bands, artists and fans to get to this point. Standing together is the best foot forward.'"

Irish singer CMAT also pulled out of Latitude, reports the BBC, averring she would not allow her music,

"which I love so much, to get into bed with violence." [Comedy panel game show] *Taskmaster* star Joanne McNally cancelled her headline set in the festival's comedy tent. British comedian and writer Sophie Duker also confirmed she would be boycotting the event, saying on social media she was "committed to minimising my complicity in what I consider to be a pattern of abhorrent, unlawful violence."

In a May 2024 report, "Barclays: Arming Israel's Apartheid and Genocide," the Palestine Solidarity Campaign argues that

UK banks and financial institutions are facilitating and profiting from Israel's attacks against the Palestinian people by providing investment, loans and underwriting to companies supplying Israel with weapons and military technology.

Our previous research, released in July 2022, demonstrated that Barclays, one of the UK's largest high street banks, had shareholdings in, and/or provided loans and financial services to, at least nine companies known to be producing weapons and military technology sold to Israel and used in its militarised attacks on Palestinians.

The report goes on

Barclays now holds over \$2.5 billion/£2 billion in shares of eight of the nine companies whose weapons, components, and military technology have been used in Israel's unlawful violence against Palestinians. Barclays also provides over \$7.6 billion/£6.1 billion in loans and underwriting to seven of these companies.

Since our previous research, published in July 2022, Barclays has increased the value of its shareholdings in the companies identified by over 55%.

Those eight companies are BAE Systems, Boeing, Caterpillar, Elbit Systems, General Dynamics, QinetiQ, Raytheon and Rolls Royce.

Barclays signed a five-year sponsorship agreement with giant events promoter Live Nation in 2023, for festivals including Download, Latitude and the Isle of Wight.

A bank spokesperson told the BBC that the "protesters' agenda is to have Barclays debank defence companies which is a sector we remain committed to as an essential part of keeping this country and our allies safe."

The spokesperson complained about alleged intimidation of staff and vandalism of their branches. "The only thing that this small group of activists will achieve is to weaken essential support for cultural events enjoyed by millions," the bank told the BBC. "It is time that leaders across politics, business, academia and the arts stand united against this."

The BBC added:

Barclays has previously said it recognises "the profound human suffering" caused by the "complex and long-running conflict" in Gaza. However, it insisted it does not make its own

investments, but provides financial services to businesses "including those in the defence sector." That includes companies "that supply defence products to Nato and other allies including Ukraine." It added that "Barclays does not directly invest in these companies" and that "decisions on the implementation of arms embargoes to other nations" should be taken by governments.

Bands Boycott Barclays declared the suspension of the bank's ties with the Download festival a "victory." As musicians, the group went on, "we were horrified that our music festivals were partnered with Barclays, who are complicit in the genocide in Gaza through investment, loans and underwriting of arms companies supplying the Israeli military."

The outrage over the monumental war crimes in Gaza, which grow more horrific by the week, is entirely legitimate and the principled actions and comments of the various bands speak to views that are widely held. A general disgust has developed in regard to any association with the Israeli military and the Netanyahu regime, as well as its backers and enablers in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin.

However, the activities of Barclays are nothing out of the ordinary as far as such giant financial firms are concerned. This is how they all operate, and will continue to operate as long as capitalism exists. Barclays can suspend its sponsorship of music festivals, perhaps with a few grumbles, but the bank and Live Nation will go about their predatory activities, unharmed and unchanged.

To be surprised or indignant at the operations of banks and other major corporations, to shake one's fist at these firms, is an expression of political impotence, in the end. The anger and energy produced by the horrors in Gaza needs to be directed toward doing away with capitalism, the source of the genocide, and turning toward the working class as the only social force that can accomplish that historic task.



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