

Bands pull out of Manchester's Radar Festival after event, under pressure from Live Nation-AMG and UK authorities, drops Bob Vylan

David Walsh
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Numerous bands have announced their refusal to participate in Manchester's Radar Festival after the event removed punk rap duo Bob Vylan from its lineup.

Among the bands are Hero in Error, The Scratch and ?ENN.

Bob Vylan, whose two members call themselves Bobby Vylan and Bobbie Vylan to protect their identities from what they see as Britain's surveillance state, came to international prominence June 28 by courageously denouncing the mass murder in Gaza at the Glastonbury Festival.

Frontman Bobby Vylan led thousands of young people in Glastonbury in chants of "Free, free Palestine" and "Death, death to the IDF [Israel Defense Forces]." The performance came a day after it was revealed in the media that Zionist troops, on top of every other crime, were deliberately murdering unarmed, starving Palestinians seeking food and aid in Gaza. The pro-Palestinian Irish punk band Kneecap played at the same event, also to tumultuous support.

The duo's words and actions, cheered by the vast crowd, has triggered an outpouring of hypocritical and lying hysteria from the British and other governments. The Trump administration revoked the group's visas, asserting that

Foreigners who glorify violence and hatred are not welcome visitors to our country.

This pronouncement coincided with the news that murderer-in-chief Benjamin Netanyahu was set to be welcomed in Washington by Donald Trump. As the WSWs noted,

In the America of 2025, chanting against a genocidal army gets you banished. Carrying out genocide on behalf of the US government gets you a red carpet.

The UK government has initiated a criminal investigation into Bob Vylan's performance.

Immense pressure was placed on the organizers of the Radar Festival to cancel Bob Vylan's set. One of the organizers, Catherine Jackson-Smith, told podcast interviewers that the festival did not want to cancel the group's headline performance.

Billboard reports

"It was categorically one of the most horrendous professional discussions I've ever had," she said. "I cannot express clearly enough that I wanted Bob Vylan to perform at our festival. But this was not our decision."

According to Jackson-Smith, Radar was caught between behind-the-scenes conversations involving the venue [Manchester's O2 Victoria Warehouse], its co-owners AMG and Live Nation, and local authorities. The decision to drop Bob Vylan was presented as an ultimatum: either cancel the band's appearance or risk losing the entire Saturday program.

"There was not an option for Bob Vylan to step on stage on Saturday; that became apparent at the beginning of the week," Jackson-Smith explained. "If we continued with Bob Vylan as our headliner, we wouldn't have the festival happening on Saturday."

Live Nation Entertainment is a huge multinational corporation, with \$23.2 billion in revenue in 2024, which describes itself as "the largest live entertainment company in the world," "the largest producer of live music concerts in the world" and "the world's leading live entertainment ticketing sales and marketing company." It owns a majority stake in AMG (Academy Music Group)

Explaining its decision not to play at the Radar Festival, Hero in Error commented

After speaking with Radar's organisers, it's clear they're facing the same pressures that many deplatformed artists are currently experiencing. They are good people, and it's evident they stand for progressive ideals. Both they and the artists being targeted are caught in a wider effort to deflect attention from the reality of what's happening. We respect the work Radar has done, but we believe that stepping back from this year's event is the right decision at this time.

Dublin heavy metal band Scratch similarly commented on social media:

We will not be performing at Radar Festival this weekend. The censorship and deplatforming of artists speaking out against the ongoing genocide in Gaza is greasy, dangerous and must be challenged.

To be clear, this decision is not a criticism of Radar Festival. We understand it was an incredibly difficult and complex situation. This is about showing solidarity with Bob Vylan and any artist who may face similar treatment in the future.

Shadowy government influence and wealthy lobbying groups should not be allowed dictate who is given a platform and what can be said on it.

This situation will only worsen unless we, as artists, support one another and take action.

Get Netanyahu to the ICJ.

Up Bob Vylan. Free Palestine.

Maltese punk and rock band ?ENN acknowledged a certain amount of soul searching "about what we should / shouldn't do." At first, the band considered showing up at the Radar Festival

to speak against the bullying, censorship, and strong-arming demonstrated towards the likes of both Bob Vylan and Radar. However, the messages and comments we've received tell a different story: one that has us fearful that, regardless of our intentions to act true to our values, whether we perform or not, this wouldn't be seen as 'good enough.'

As such, for our safety and sanity, we've made the final decision to pull out from performing at Radar this weekend. We are devastated to do so after the time,

money, and excitement we put towards this performance and can only apologise to anyone who was going to be there to see us. ... Be kind to one another, and let's continue to work together to shout for a free Palestine.

Other bands, including Massive Attack, Amyl and The Sniffers and Soft Play, adds *Billboard*, have "publicly supported Bob Vylan, urging the media to focus on 'what is happening daily to the people of Gaza' rather than silencing artists who speak out."

Reportedly, Radar Festival has not yet confirmed a replacement for Bob Vylan's headline slot.

Meanwhile, notes exclaim.ca,

Bob Vylan have celebrated their 2024 album, *Humble as the Sun*, returning to the UK charts amidst their rise to notoriety. (Generally, when you tell people not to listen to something, they tend not to listen to you!)

The band itself commented on social media:

Silence is not an option. We will be fine, the people of Palestine are hurting. Manchester, we will be back!

And

Ban Bob Vylan? The people said 'Nah'. We need artists that speak up. Our album 'Humble As The Sun' is back in the charts and, as an independent band releasing music on our own label, it shows the power of the people. You can't get dropped if you own the label. Thank you all!



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