

Rapper Macklemore booted from tour for pro-Palestinian remarks, other bands drop out in solidarity

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In an act of contemporary McCarthyism, US rapper Macklemore has been dropped from a tour with British musician Ed Sheeran because of his onstage comments in support of the Palestinians and against the Gaza genocide. The comments enraged a group of Zionists and billionaires, who demanded that Macklemore be removed from the bill for the remainder of the tour, in a scandalous attack on freedom of speech and artistic expression.

In an act of cowardice, Sheeran acquiesced to this censorship. However, this capitulation to blacklisting rapidly backfired. Showing principle and backbone, Sheeran's other supporting acts, as well as his touring band, abruptly quit the tour in solidarity with Macklemore, putting the entire tour in question. This has a certain significance. The artists are clearly aware that public opinion has shifted, against Israel and its crimes, as part of a general radicalization.

Macklemore had been opening for Sheeran during the US leg of the latter's current tour. To his great credit, at a concert in New Jersey on September 4, Macklemore said:

A big part of the reason why I wanted to do this tour in the first place is so I could stand up in stadiums like this and say two words that are very near and dear to my heart: 'Free Palestine.' I said, 'Free Palestine!' I want those words to be loud and clear, so that people all the way in Gaza to the occupied West Bank know that we have not forgotten about them.

The rapper then launched into his song "Hind's Hall." Proceeds from that song go to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The crowd's reaction to Macklemore's comments was overwhelmingly positive, and Macklemore repeated his remarks during a concert the following night.

The Israeli-American Council immediately started a petition to demand that Macklemore be booted from the remaining dates of Sheeran's tour. "This was an Ed Sheeran concert—not a

political rally, not a protest and not an activist event," the organization wrote, as though freedom of speech were therefore precluded. The Council also accused Macklemore of using "a global concert platform to advance a one-sided political agenda."

The rapper's "one-sided" agenda included the following statement: "I believe that every human being walking on this earth deserves exactly the same freedom."

Singer Pink shared an Instagram post from StopAntisemitism, a notorious pro-Zionist outfit, that denounced Macklemore's comments. The post charged Macklemore with spreading "anti-Israel propaganda" and of accusing Israel of "a false 'genocide.'" It called for Macklemore to issue an apology and for ticketholders to be refunded.

Pink's sharing of this filthy post caused a backlash that cut the singer to the quick. In a lengthy, subjective and dishonest message, she acknowledged that she is Jewish and that the backlash had hurt her feelings. Pink also implied that she had been frightened by Macklemore's remarks. Perhaps the singer believes that the world should take greater note of her sensitivities than of the obliteration of Palestinian society.

Pink also tried to disclaim responsibility for her actions. "I have never asked for another artist to be silenced and I'm not asking now," she wrote. "I don't need anyone fired, and I don't need a refund." This is arrant nonsense. The silencing of Macklemore is precisely what Pink asked for by sharing the Instagram post.

In an Instagram post of his own, Macklemore announced that Sheeran had kicked him off of the tour. The two were scheduled to perform at Gillette Stadium, owned by billionaire Robert Kraft, later this month. In Macklemore's account, Kraft called Sheeran to say that the rapper would not be allowed to perform at Gillette Stadium. Kraft also organized other stadium owners and delivered an ultimatum to Sheeran: get rid of Macklemore, or you won't be allowed to perform at our venues.

If one were to draw a portrait of the typical American oligarch, it would look a lot like Kraft. He has an estimated net worth of \$11.1 billion, according to *Forbes*. Kraft is the chair

and CEO of the Kraft Group, which controls assets in real estate, packaging, sports and entertainment. He owns football's New England Patriots, among other professional teams.

Kraft's politics are correspondingly deplorable. Although he is a member of the Democratic Party, he has supported both capitalist parties. He has been a friend of President Donald Trump since the 1990s and donated to the aspiring dictator's 2016 presidential campaign and subsequent inauguration day celebrations. His wife, Dana Blumberg, is among the flunkies whom Trump named to the board of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Kraft is a staunch supporter of Israel and its crimes who has used his wealth to demand a crackdown on anti-genocide protests at Columbia University in New York. Moreover, he owns a Boeing 767 private jet that has been used at least three times to deport immigrants to Honduras!

In his notably objective and thoughtful statement about his firing, Macklemore stressed that he is not a victim. "The victims are the Palestinian people," he wrote, noting that more than 20,000 children have been killed in Gaza alone. "I want to make sure that as I tell this story, we don't lose sight of that."

Sheeran told Macklemore that people had been hurt by the words "free Palestine" and the display of the Palestinian flag. "I told him that if those words were more offensive than tens of thousands of Palestinian children being killed by Israel, then there was a fundamental disconnect between where those people stood and where I stood," Macklemore wrote.

Sheeran claims not to take sides, but "there is no neutral position between the oppressor and the oppressed," Macklemore wrote. "When one side has the bombs and bottomless financial and military support from America, refusing to take a side doesn't leave you in the middle." Sheeran's lily-livered protestation notwithstanding, the singer has most definitely taken a side. By allowing Macklemore to be dropped from the tour, he has solidarized himself with the supporters of genocide to protect his own career.

Macklemore noted that his statements raised hackles because he was "sharing a stage with one of the biggest artists in the world, in some of the biggest stadiums in America." The crowds showed "undeniable support for Palestinian liberation," and the two concerts could encourage other artists to speak out. "Maybe that's why this time it became so important to silence me," the rapper wrote.

Concluding his statement, Macklemore called his public opposition to the genocide a duty that deserves neither praise nor gratitude. "But if those words [i.e., "free Palestine"] cost me the stage, while turning the conversation back to Palestine, then it was the most successful tour I've ever been on."

In an attempt at damage control, Sheeran posted his own statement on Instagram. But the defensive, perhaps self-deluding, message only made Sheeran look worse. He gingerly referred to the "conflict" between Israel and "Palestine" and ludicrously emphasized his efforts to "build a bridge" between Macklemore and the supporters of genocide.

The singer took great pains to absolve himself of blame. "Macklemore coming off tour was the promoter's decision, it was not mine," he wrote. "I am not complicit." This is an insult to our intelligence. To justify his failure to stand up for Macklemore, Sheeran protested that he could not "abandon the touring crew and the other support acts and musicians who rely on me for work and to make a living."

But Sheeran's backing band and the other opening musicians pulled this argument out from under him. They announced their decisions in public statements that underscore the pathetic, self-interested character of Sheeran's actions.

"Artists must not be silenced when they speak up for the oppressed," Finneas, best known for his collaborations with his sister Billie Eilish, wrote on Instagram.

"Money doesn't give you the right to own the conversation," wrote Danish musician Lukas Graham. "Nobody's bank balance should decide who gets to speak or which suffering we're allowed to acknowledge."

"As Irish people, we know all too well about genocide, forced famine and violent occupation," wrote singer Aaron Rowe. "I cannot stand by and allow billionaires to use their position of power to silence the rightful voices of those who speak up against Israeli genocide and who highlight the savage murder of children. I would lose all respect for myself to carry on as normal."

Traditional Irish folk band Beoga, which also was on the tour, decried "the silencing of Macklemore by Zionist lobbies."

Great events put people to the test. Sheeran and Pink have shown themselves to be self-centered weaklings or worse. Macklemore and the musicians who supported him by leaving the tour have shown courage, solidarity with the oppressed and a sense of justice. The crowd showed its sympathies with Macklemore, and the rapper has gained even more support on social media. These developments lay bare the absurdity — and reactionary character — of the claim that musicians should steer clear of politics.



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