# Glasgow Film Theatre rejects BDS endorsement amid trustee resignations and community backlash



The controversy surrounding the Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT) recently culminated in a contentious decision by its trustees to reject endorsing the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This decision was met with mixed reactions, especially from various community groups and stakeholders deeply invested in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian discourse. Caroline Turner, director of UK Lawyers for Israel, welcomed the trustees’ stance, asserting that the BDS movement represents a significant ideological challenge, as its founding principles include calls for the dismantling of the Jewish state. Her sentiments were echoed in a widely cited statement where she remarked on the past discomfort felt by Jewish patrons following GFT's prior boycott of Coca-Cola, which was linked to its position on Israel.

The BDS movement, launched in 2005 by a coalition of 170 Palestinian organisations, urges a non-violent campaign against Israeli goods, drawing parallels to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Its foundational goals include ending the occupation of Arab territories, ensuring rights for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and safeguarding the rights of Palestinian refugees. This framework has gained traction across various global movements, sparking heated debates and actions within cultural and artistic circles.

In a notable turn of events, GFT faced considerable internal dissent with three members of its trustee board resigning in protest over the cinema's governance and its apparent disregard for its unionised employees, particularly in light of the union’s call to boycott Coca-Cola. The Unite Hospitality union, representing 85% of the theatre's front-of-house and cleaning staff, initiated the boycott. As a result, Coca-Cola was removed from GFT's offerings, highlighting the intersection of labour advocacy, ethical consumerism, and broader geopolitical concerns.

Despite the GFT's rejection of BDS endorsement, some patrons expressed their dissatisfaction with the decision. Critics have voiced concerns that the theatre’s actions do not align with a genuine commitment to solidarity with Palestinian communities. Social media erupted with commentary, indicating a significant divide among GFT's audience. Ruth Gilbert, national campaigns chair for Living Rent, called the decision "pathetic and embarrassing,” suggesting that the theatre has underestimated its community’s commitment to Palestinian rights.

Moreover, campaign organisation Art Workers for Palestine Scotland has urged audiences and film-makers to mobilise pressure on GFT’s leadership to reconsider its recent decision. They argue that the theatre benefits from screening politically charged content, but this should not come at the expense of ethical engagement with pressing societal issues. The group maintains that genuine solidarity requires more than mere platitudes; it necessitates actionable commitment, which they believe GFT has failed to uphold.

Additionally, the theatre recently found itself embroiled in legal scrutiny when UK Lawyers for Israel lodged a formal complaint against it with Scotland's charity regulator, alleging that the boycott contradicted its charitable objectives. The complaint was ultimately dismissed, yet it underscored the tensions regarding charitable responsibilities and the cultural institution's operational ethos within a highly politicised climate.

As the GFT moves forward, they have committed to reviewing their ethical policies and practices and maintaining a platform for Palestinian artists, suggesting a nuanced approach to their programming and purchasing strategies. Turner from UK Lawyers for Israel noted that this pivot towards inclusive programming may extend to featuring Israeli films, which could serve as a bridge across the divided narratives currently influencing the cinema.

The unfolding situation at GFT exemplifies broader societal tensions related to cultural activism, ethical consumerism, and the roles cultural institutions must play in navigating complex political landscapes. As stakeholders continue to voice their opinions, the GFT stands at a crossroads, tasked with balancing its mission to educate and entertain while remaining sensitive to the diverse views of its patrons and community members.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25203732.pro-israel-lobby-lauds-glasgow-film-theatre-bds-vote/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/jewish-community-in-glasgow-fights-back-against-cinemas-coca-cola-boycott-q7mvcw5f)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25203732.pro-israel-lobby-lauds-glasgow-film-theatre-bds-vote/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/glasgow-cinema-caves-bds-pressure-coca-cola-q3lfjg21), [[4]](https://www.greatergovanhill.com/latest/glasgow-film-theatre-agrees-to-unite-hospitalitys-demands-to-drop-coca-cola)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/glasgow-cinema-caves-bds-pressure-coca-cola-q3lfjg21), [[5]](https://tfn.scot/news/charity-cinema-workers-celebrate-successful-boycott-in-solidarity-with-palestinians), [[6]](https://tfn.scot/news/gft-reported-to-charity-regulator-over-boycott-of-israeli-goods)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://tfn.scot/news/gft-reported-to-charity-regulator-over-boycott-of-israeli-goods), [[7]](https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/404909)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25203732.pro-israel-lobby-lauds-glasgow-film-theatre-bds-vote/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/404909)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25203732.pro-israel-lobby-lauds-glasgow-film-theatre-bds-vote/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.greatergovanhill.com/latest/glasgow-film-theatre-agrees-to-unite-hospitalitys-demands-to-drop-coca-cola)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25203732.pro-israel-lobby-lauds-glasgow-film-theatre-bds-vote/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/jewish-community-in-glasgow-fights-back-against-cinemas-coca-cola-boycott-q7mvcw5f> - The Jewish Chronicle reports on Glasgow's Jewish community opposing the Glasgow Film Theatre's (GFT) decision to stop selling Coca-Cola products. The move followed pressure from unionised staff advocating for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Jewish leaders argue that the boycott amounts to discrimination and express concerns over the theatre's stance on Israeli-related issues. The article highlights the community's efforts to challenge the boycott and the broader implications for cultural institutions in Scotland.
3. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/glasgow-cinema-caves-bds-pressure-coca-cola-q3lfjg21> - The Jewish Chronicle details how the Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT) succumbed to pressure from unionised staff and removed Coca-Cola products from its bar. The staff, affiliated with the Unite union, demanded the cinema adopt the BDS movement, leading to the cessation of Coca-Cola sales. The article discusses the implications of this decision and the ongoing debate over the theatre's position on the BDS movement and its charitable obligations.
4. <https://www.greatergovanhill.com/latest/glasgow-film-theatre-agrees-to-unite-hospitalitys-demands-to-drop-coca-cola> - Greater Govanhill reports on the Glasgow Film Theatre's agreement to remove Coca-Cola products from its bar following pressure from Unite Hospitality. The decision is part of a broader campaign advocating for the BDS movement. The article outlines the steps taken by the cinema, including the temporary removal of Coca-Cola during the Glasgow Film Festival and plans for a full review of their ethical policies and practices.
5. <https://tfn.scot/news/charity-cinema-workers-celebrate-successful-boycott-in-solidarity-with-palestinians> - Third Force News covers the successful boycott by Unite Hospitality members at the Glasgow Film Theatre, who removed Coca-Cola products in solidarity with Palestinians. The article highlights the workers' actions, the cinema's response, and the broader context of the BDS movement. It also touches upon the legal challenges faced by the cinema and the support from various community groups for the boycott.
6. <https://tfn.scot/news/gft-reported-to-charity-regulator-over-boycott-of-israeli-goods> - Third Force News reports on the complaint filed against the Glasgow Film Theatre with Scotland's charity regulator over its decision to boycott goods linked to Israel. The article details the legal proceedings, the cinema's response, and the broader implications for charitable organisations in Scotland. It also discusses the role of UK Lawyers for Israel in challenging the boycott and the regulator's dismissal of the complaint.
7. <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/404909> - Israel National News reports on the Glasgow Film Theatre's decision to stop serving Coca-Cola following protests from BDS-supporting employees. The article details the union's demands, the cinema's response, and the broader context of the BDS movement. It also discusses the implications of the boycott for the cinema and its patrons, highlighting the tensions between staff, management, and the community.