

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

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### **Viral chants at Goldie draw rebukes; protest organizers say criticism detracts from ceasefire demand**

Goldie chant was part of an ongoing boycott that has drawn criticism, but protesters defend the long-standing practice.

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Protesters march in Philadelphia on Sunday, demanding a cease-fire in Gaza.

Elizabeth Robertson / Staff Photographer

A viral protest chant that targeted an Israeli-owned falafel shop in Center

City on Sunday has drawn criticism from President Joe Biden and Gov. Josh Shapiro, highlighted the challenges facing Jewish-owned restaurants, and added to an increasingly fraught political discourse around Israel during a time of war.

The incident occurred before 7 p.m. when demonstrators with the Philly Palestine Coalition briefly stopped outside Goldie on Sansom Street and chanted “Goldie, Goldie, you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide.”

Demonstrators did not enter the restaurant, which was open, and no vandalism occurred on the premises. But this brief stop in an otherwise calm three-hour protest drew admonition and accusations of antisemitism from Biden to Shapiro to U.S. Reps. Dwight Evans and Brendan Boyle.

It also earned reproach from elected officials who have been more openly supportive of the Palestinian cause. “I’m appalled at what happened at Goldie last night,” State Sen. Nikil Saval, who supports the cease-fire movement, posted Monday on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. “Targeting Jewish neighbors and businesses because of the actions of the Israeli government perpetuates violence when our efforts should be toward building a world of safety, solidarity, and inclusion for everyone.”

The Philly Palestine Coalition denied the allegations of antisemitism, defended the practice of boycotting businesses, and accused elected officials of ignoring the underlying demand of the protest: a cease-fire.

“We made a two-to-four-minute pit stop,” Natalie Abulhawa, a coalition organizer, said Monday. “We are marching to call for an end to a genocide to Palestinians. We’re calling on our reps to do something — to stand up for what’s happening.”

Goldie is one of several eateries in the CookNSolo restaurant group, co-owned by renowned Israeli-born chef Michael Solomonov. Protesters contend that Goldie was not targeted for simply being a Jewish business, as some elected officials alleged, but rather because CookNSolo fundraised over \$100,000 for the Friends of United Hatzalah, an Israeli nonprofit that describes itself as volunteer EMS organization. The organization provided emergency relief services to Israeli Defense Forces soldiers after the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks. Sunday’s demonstration included a near-identical chant

outside a local Starbucks, due to what the coalition described as the corporate coffee giant's support for Israel.

Solomonov declined to comment on Sunday's incident. But at an event panel at the Jewish Community Center in Cherry Hill on Nov. 11, moderated by The Inquirer's Michael Klein, he described an ongoing coalition-led boycott against his and other Israeli restaurants as misdirected anger at best and antisemitism at worst, while reiterating his sympathy for the Palestinian cause and his disapproval of Israel's actions at times.

"I understand how it would be demoralizing not having independence, not having a voice, not having a government that isn't corrupt," he said last month. "The representation for Palestinians is crappy and they deserve better. And I believe the Israeli government often time does things that I would not do at all ... and it can be quite damaging."

## **Boycott meets protest**

The Philly Palestine Coalition in October launched a boycott of Israeli restaurants that it accused of appropriating Palestinian cuisine as a "means of erasing Palestinian existence," echoing themes of the long-standing boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel.

The coalition named Solomonov's restaurants, but the list also included non-Israeli-owned businesses, like Essen Bakery, owned by South African Jewish chef Tova du Plessis, and Suraya, the Lebanese hot spot in Fishtown, as well as Huda, a Rittenhouse Square sandwich shop owned by Elkins Park native and self-described Zionist Yehuda Sichel — all of whom the coalition claimed were "complicit in some degree in Israel's system of occupation and apartheid," according to Instagram posts.

The boycott campaign has not hurt sales at Solomonov's restaurants, he told Klein during the panel, and little evidence has emerged suggesting it has burdened other boycotted businesses.

At the panel, Solomonov also responded to criticism that Israeli chefs have appropriated Palestinian cuisine and adopted Arab dishes as their own — a

perennial debate that often resurfaces alongside each new conflagration of war.

“I think if you’re trying to find reason or verbiage to invalidate Israel, or the right to Jews to have a homeland, ... you’ll literally use whatever you have, and an easy way to do that is to say that all the food is all stolen,” he said, adding that “without a question or a doubt, part of Israeli food is Palestinian influenced.”

Solomonov noted he has closed Zahav to promote events for Palestinian cookbook author Reem Kassis, though the two are not speaking now, according to the New York Times. He also said Zahav imports more Palestinian wines than any other establishment in the city, contracts with Palestinian vendors for olive oil and other ingredients, and credits Levantine influences on his menus.

## **Sympathy for Palestine, criticism of Israel**

Solomonov’s brother, a soldier with the Israel Defense Forces, was killed by snipers while on patrol near the Lebanon border on Yom Kippur in 2003. And throughout his years as a public culinary figure, he has not shied from speaking out on the political situation in his homeland. But he has also expressed support and sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

“I personally believe in the right of Palestinians to have their own state, and the right for self-determination, and I don’t deny those things,” he told the crowd of several hundred in Cherry Hill last month.

He said he understood why some people might choose to take out their anger at businesses and try to discredit Israeli cuisine, but “saying that Israeli food is stolen from Palestinians, is just another way of saying that the land is stolen, that they don’t have a right to be there.”

According to a Philly Palestine Coalition, Huda was “raising money for the Zionist State,” which owner Sichel considers an unfair characterization of his fundraiser for the southern Israeli town of Sderot, which was severely

affected by the October attacks. His business raised \$3,000 to pay for children's therapy there.

“They're allowed to think these things but what they cannot do, what they should not do, is go in front of a private business that is owned by a Jewish or Israeli person and accuse them of genocide,” he said about Sunday's protest chant.

## **‘It's a distraction’**

While it defended the boycott, the Philly Palestine Coalition emphasized that its primary focus is ending the Israeli military siege in Gaza that has killed more than 15,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Others felt the censorious response was overblown — and noted that hate-based threats against Palestinians and Muslims are also on the rise.

As Sunday's chant continued to generate outrage Monday, Ahmet Selim Tekelioglu, executive director of the Philadelphia chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said that recent attacks against Palestinians have not generated nearly so swift a condemnation, singling out the “inflammatory language” in Shapiro's response to the viral chant.

Tekelioglu accused Shapiro of libeling protesters and conflating criticism of Israel “as targeting a faith group.”

Shapiro “once again missed an opportunity to act as the governor of those who stand against right wing Israeli government's crimes,” he said.

Shapiro spokesperson Manuel Bonder reiterated the governor's comments from Sunday and said, “Governor Shapiro will continue working to bring people together and stand up against hatred in all forms in our Commonwealth — including antisemitism and Islamophobia.”

The Rev. Jay Bergen, pastor of the Germantown Mennonite Church, said the response to the stop at Goldie ignores the broad support in Pennsylvania for a cease-fire.

“It’s a distraction both from what Israel is doing in Gaza, and it’s a distraction from what I see as the much more broad and dangerous antisemitism across the state,” said Bergen.

**MM – Max Marvin** I cover breaking news, with an interest in government accountability, political hijinks and weird stories that could only happen in Philly.

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