

Protestors mass outside Stratford Vue over 'blasphemous' Islamic film

I didn't imagine that London and Essex would escape the arrogance. From the [London Evening Standard](#) and the [Daily Mail](#). The Newham recorder doesn't seem to have noticed yet.

Protestors have massed outside a Vue cinema in east London in opposition to a film which they claim is "blasphemous". Crowds gathered at the cinema in Stratford on Wednesday in protest against the screening of 'The Lady of Heaven'.

The film was released over the Jubilee weekend but was pulled by Cineworld over fears for the safety of staff following protests in Bradford, Bolton, Birmingham and Sheffield. In one video on social media, demonstrators in east London can be heard chanting "take it down" and demanded to speak to the cinema manager.

A protester is also heard saying: "Those who are wondering what is wrong with this film, it is a blasphemous film and it has also insulted black people. How have they insulted the BAME community? They have shown portrayed black people as filthy criminals and this film will be shown in Vue cinema. We want this film to be taken down immediately. Vue cinema have ignored." *Black actors have been clamouring for parts in film and TV, even when historically the person they are playing was not black (Anne Boleyn most recently). They can't always only play the goodie.*

Vue is defiantly continuing to show the film, saying it 'takes seriously the responsibilities that come with providing a platform for a wide variety of content' and believes in showcasing films of interest to diverse communities'.

A spokesperson for Vue Cinemas previously said: "Vue takes

seriously the responsibilities that come with providing a platform for a wide variety of content and believes in showcasing films of interest to diverse communities across the UK.

However, Muslim demonstrators entered Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, east London on Wednesday evening – where they chanted ‘Take it down’ and demanded to speak with the cinema manager.



In the footage, a protestor is heard claiming Vue’s manager was ‘dismissive’ when he ‘spoke to him regarding the controversial film being screened at the cinema’. ‘We ask you all to go one-by-one or even two-by-two and say to this guy: “Are you aware of the content? I personally went to him and he was very dismissive and he had a very arrogant attitude. So I ask you all one-by-one – we will bombard him by going to him hourly.

Dame Sara Khan, CEO of Inspire, an independent non-governmental organisation working to counter extremism and gender inequality, has written in the [Telegraph](#) this morning. I’m not always in agreement with her, but this

morning I am

Religious mobs are a threat to British democracy (top comment: The phrase “religious mobs” implies that more than one religion is involved. But it’s only ever islam that causes problems.)

In a diverse democracy like Britain, which accommodates a variety of political and religious beliefs and practices, maintaining social cohesion will always be a challenge.

Such differences mean tensions are bound to emerge and our core democratic values will be tested. What matters is how our public institutions, parliamentarians and government respond to these disputes. Demonstrating leadership is critical.

No such leadership has been on show in regard to the [protests in recent days outside cinemas across the country](#), demanding that screenings of the film *The Lady of Heaven* be banned.

Last year a religious studies teacher in Batley, West Yorkshire, was accused of blasphemy and went into hiding with his children after religious protestors demonstrated outside his school and a Muslim charity released his name online. An independent investigation cleared him of wrongdoing, yet his life was changed forever while the perpetrators continued with life as normal.

Explicit attempts are being made to prevent films and plays from being shown. I have heard directly from people who believe this has created a climate of censorship and had a chilling impact on freedom of expression, including within religious communities. Rather than being defended, artistic freedom is curtailed.

It’s easy to criticise Cineworld for its limp response, but questions must be asked over what support it received from local and central government, MPs and even the police. *The police just want a quiet life.* Despite claims that the

protests were peaceful, video evidence appears to show a hate-speech mob made up of dozens of Muslim men chanting sectarian anti-Shia slurs through megaphones.

For years, MPs, local authorities and central government have failed to defend our democratic values with sufficient vigour. I have seen how religious mobs have been appeased, in the hope that protests disperse – a tactic that often works in the short term. But this represents a failure of leadership, and only galvanises fundamentalists, who now know that if they engage in such behaviour their unreasonable demands will be met. In the long run, as our democratic values are eroded, social cohesion in our country will be dangerously undermined.

I do not deny that these incidents are emotionally charged and can feel overwhelming, but we clearly need better support for our institutions and communities to help them stand firm against such divisive activity. This is why I am currently conducting a review and recently launched a call for evidence. I want to hear from local authorities and members of the public, and welcome submissions from them.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid also weighed in on the controversy on Wednesday and said the cancellations were ‘an incredibly dangerous road to go down’.

Speaking to TalkTV, he added: ‘I am very concerned about the growing cancel culture in this country. There’s people out there who think they have a right not to be offended and of course, no-one has that right. You might not like what someone’s got to say, but they have a right to say it.’ Mr Javid also highlighted that there is no blasphemy law in the UK, saying: ‘What we have in this country is freedom of speech and expression and that is a fundamental value.’ *But what will he **actually do** about it?*

The movie’s executive producer, Malik Shlibak, called the decision to pull it ‘unacceptable’ and accused the chain of

'bowing down to radical extremists'. Yesterday he revealed he had received messages from activists telling him 'I'm going to kill you' on Twitter.

But he said he wasn't scared by the threats, which included him being called an 'infidel', an offensive term relating to someone who is unfaithful to their own religion.

It comes as film fans who watched *The Lady of Heaven* in London called on cinemas that have pulled it to have a re-think.

NHS worker Toqeer Abbas, 47, who watched the film at Vue Cinema in Shepherd's Bush, south west London, said: 'I do not agree with the protests. I think it is sad people have called for it to be banned. Most of those people haven't watched it. It is sad that cinemas are not showing it as that allows for any other viewpoint to be restricted. There are certain people that we know that have been against it but this is a conservative view.'

'If you shut down dialogue you have nothing. You have a world of ignorance. This film creates a talking point. You don't have to believe it and if you don't you should do your own research.'

'We have heard the stories that were in the film but we have never seen it before. This is the first time we have had a movie showing these events in this way. We've never had anything like this before. This is the first time in 1400 years.'

'For me there was too much imagery. It was made too human. We will get in the car and have more conversations about it. It's a talking point and I think it has a positive message.'

A Muslim woman, who is originally from Lebanon who watched the film on her own, said: 'It was a nice movie. I liked it. It had a positive message. People who have been protesting have a different opinion. We don't need to do that. We are all

Muslim. I would not want to see it banned from the cinema.'

Vue, meanwhile, is still listed as showing the film in a number of its London branches tonight. *The afternoon showing at Stratford is in 50 minutes.*