

UK students set up Gaza protest encampments

Our reporters
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Students in the UK have taken action in solidarity with those in the US facing down fierce police repression and fascist violence to protest the imperialist-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Encampments have been established at Sheffield, Warwick, Newcastle, Leeds and Bristol Universities. Hundreds also took part in a student protest outside Cambridge University and a lunchtime protest was organised by staff and students at Bradford University.

At Sheffield, the Sheffield Campus Coalition for Palestine declared it had “begun a mass encampment in solidarity with the Palestinian people and in protest against allegations of their university’s complicity in Israeli apartheid and the ongoing bombardment of Gaza.”

A spokesperson explained, “The University has been found to have helped streamline and produce the very instruments of warfare Israel used in its ruthless and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza. It is for that reason that we students have come to charge the university with complicity in the genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Our demand is clear: divest now.

“We, as students of the University of Sheffield, will not sit idly by and watch our institution wreak havoc in Palestine and across the Global South. We will continue to take action on campus, regardless of reprisal or repression, without hesitation or fatigue. We will continue to hold the mirror to the faces of the University’s administration, until they raise their gaze and acknowledge their complicity and commit to dismantling their systemic evil. Until the University of Sheffield stands in active solidarity with Palestine, until Palestine itself is liberated from the violence of neo-colonialism, we will fight.”

A spokesperson for Sheffield Jews Against Israeli Apartheid (SJAIA) announced that the organisation “welcomes the May Day walk out by Sheffield University students in solidarity with Palestinian people. We support their actions and call on all students and staff to do so and resolve to hold their University to account for its complicity with the genocide perpetrated by Israel in Palestine.”

At a protest outside the university, *World Site* reporters spoke with Mohammed, who said, “The objective of these protests is to show the authorities—those in power—our voices do matter. I feel there is a huge gap between the higher ups and us, the working class. It is really important we continue to protest and rally, otherwise, if they stop, the higher ups will think they have won because they have silenced us. If we stop doing these protests over Gaza we will have lost our voice.

“It is a disgrace what has happened in America with the police on campus. Protesting is a basic part of human rights and freedom of speech. As far as I’m aware there has been no aggression or violence by students in America.

“Ultimately it feels the police action is because it does not fit their agenda, with America being an ally and supporter of Israel and the people supporting Palestine. What they don’t realise is that social media has revealed everything. People know the truth now and they will not be able to silence them, no matter how they try both here and in America.

“I saw a video from Germany, in Berlin, where very young protestors were being very violently attacked by the police. That is nothing short of a disgrace as well; it’s a basic violation of freedom of speech.

“It seems like at this moment the only way of being heard is by causing disruption. So if you are looking at the communities of international workers, by not going to work or striking, ultimately disrupting the economy, that is only way the government will say ‘OK we have an issue’.

“We’ve seen this with the rail strikes but still nothing’s been done. If you are connecting with the global working class that will create more pressure on the government. I think it’s important the working class is coming together internationally because at the moment it seems a bit like a broken record: we are doing all these protests and rallies to no avail. Unfortunately, that is the reality of the situation.”

Warwick Stands with Palestine explain, “On Wednesday evening, we set up camp on our Piazza after months of being ignored by our University. After countless demonstrations, sit ins, open letters and even a motion through our students

union, the University hasn't even engaged with us, let alone met our demands."

They call for the university "to divest from all companies complicit in Israel's occupation of Palestine and weapons manufacture"; "condemn Israel's bombardment of Gaza"; pledge to support the rebuilding of educational infrastructure in Gaza and also offer scholarships to Palestinian students"; and "protect Freedom of Speech for activists, students and staff who speak in support of the Palestinian people."

A fundraiser for the encampment has raised nearly £4,000.

Newcastle Apartheid Off Campus describe themselves as "a coalition of students and staff at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities who have joined together to join the global uprising for Palestine."

They demand: "Newcastle university must immediately disclose all investments, collaborations and partnerships with BDS target companies and defence/security sector firms" and "We demand divestment and cessation of academic, industrial, teaching or recruitment relationships with BDS targets and defence/security contractor firms".

The students describe themselves as "outraged our university has deepened its ties with Leonardo S.pA and Rafael Industries in spite of our vice chancellor admitting they supply arms to Israel."

Further demands include "the protection of students/staff to stand in solidarity with Palestine on campus. This includes abolishing the IHRA definition of antisemitism used to suppress voices against the Israeli genocide"; a "pledge to cut all relations with Israeli universities"; a "call for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza"; and "a commitment to forge links with universities in Palestine, including assisting in the reestablishment of destroyed universities in Gaza on their own conditions."

The Leeds Students Against Apartheid Coalition announced in setting up its encampment, according to reporting by the *Tab*, "Despite clear and repeated communication of our demands and our popular support from the student and staff bodies, the University Executive Group has failed to meaningfully respond and continues to hide behind equivocations, excuses, and silence.

"Its partnerships with arms companies and Israeli universities are especially dangerous in light of Israel's incessant bombing campaigns in Gaza and intensifying settler violence in occupied Palestine."

Referring to the police attacks on students protests in America, the group says, "Globally, we have seen an intense crackdown on Palestinian activism on university campuses. Hundreds of students and faculty members across America are being arrested for protesting their institutions' complicity in genocide, and the extreme and excessive

police violence against peaceful protestors should alarm all of us who value our inalienable democratic right to protest."

They continue, "As the prospect of an Israeli invasion of Rafah threatens to kill Palestinians on an unprecedented scale, it is more urgent than ever for us to end institutional support for the genocidal apartheid state.

"The university's complicity in the maintenance of the genocidal apartheid state of Israel is but a manifestation of the marketisation of education institutions, which prioritise profits over teaching quality, working conditions, and basic morals and ethics."

The students conclude, "Only through mass collective mobilisation and struggle can we as students and workers support the Palestinian people and liberate ourselves from systems of subjugation, oppression, and violence."

At the Bristol encampment, Bristol Students Occupy for Palestine, a student told *Epigram*, "Despite numerous meetings, open letters, walkouts and occupations the University of Bristol has thus far failed to take any action to divest from the arms industry. As students, as academics, as human beings we refuse to stand silent in a time of genocide. We demand divestment and demilitarisation – we demand arms off campus!"

They added: "Student protest will continue until our demands of divestment are met and until academic freedom and student safety are adequately protected on campus. The global movement of students for liberation and emancipation will not end until we see a free Palestine. None of us are free until all of us are free."

Outside the David Hockney Building of Bradford College, around 20 staff held a lunchtime walkout in opposition to the genocide in Gaza.



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