

Student encampments protesting Gaza genocide spread across Britain, emergency protest at Downing Street

Our reporters
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Student encampments protesting the Gaza genocide are spreading across the UK, involving hundreds of students in total.

As of writing, 14 sites have been established, at the Universities of Warwick, Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford, Cambridge, Sheffield, Leeds, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, at Swansea and Newcastle University and at SOAS and UCL in London. At Goldsmiths University in London, students occupied a library building.

World Socialist Web Site reporters visited the encampment at SOAS and spoke with some of the students involved.

Haya explained, “SOAS is one of the most repressive and complicit universities,” challenging, “Why should part of the money we pay into our education be used to fund a genocide?”

“It’s really important to mobilise the working class, and to work together to put on a unified front. Not only to educate the masses but to dismantle that hierarchy, because we live in an unjust world, and it’s our duty to dismantle it.”

Foxglove said, “We’re in alliance with workers. It is something where we want to break down the barriers that exist, that are imposed by elite institutions that separate students from workers.”

The SOAS students are demanding the university “divest from companies complicit in Israel’s denial of Palestinian rights”; end its “banking and lending arrangement with Barclays”; “boycott Israeli academic institutions, which are deeply complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights”; “commit to supporting Palestinian education and the rebuilding of Gaza’s destroyed schools, hospitals and universities”;

“guarantee the rights of students and staff to express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle”; and “advocate for the UK government to implement an arms embargo on Israel and call for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire.”

At the University of Oxford, close to 400 faculty and staff members have signed an open letter declaring, “[W]e stand firmly in support of the members of the university community who have begun an encampment outside the Pitt Rivers Museum to demand that the university divest from Israel’s genocide in Gaza, as well as from Israel’s ongoing apartheid regime against Palestinians and its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.”

Student Ana told reporters, “It’s time for more than protests that happen every two weeks. It’s time for us to be here... in place until the university accepts our demands.”

At Cambridge University, nearly £10,000 has been crowdfunded in support of the encampment, with the funds pledged to be used to supply “prolonged, persistent, and effective” action, with any excess “donated to charities providing aid in Palestine.”

Three students at the University of Edinburgh have begun a hunger strike, with seven more saying they will join them. One of the students involved—who has lost 15 members of their extended family in the Israeli-authored genocide—explained, “What was already an urgent call for divestment has become so much more urgent all of a sudden, especially with the attack on Rafah right now.

“We feel a hunger strike is the only way to really show the gravity and the urgency that we students feel for divestment.”

At Goldsmiths University, students have forced the administration to agree to write to the government urging it to call for a ceasefire, fund a Palestinian scholarship and adopt a new ethical investment policy.

Although the encampments have not yet been violently assaulted by police as in the United States and other countries in Europe, the British government is making clear it is prepared to organise a crackdown.

The Zionist Union of Jewish Students (UJS) sought to create a pretext last week, claiming “these encampments create a hostile and toxic atmosphere on campus for Jewish students,” and citing a “continuous torrent of antisemitic hatred on campus.” These slanders are part of the Big Lie being perpetrated by the world’s imperialist governments equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

In fact, as a student at the University of Sheffield told the *Guardian*, “Some of the most committed campaigners for Palestinian liberation on our campus are Jewish students. We are a fundamentally anti-racist movement. The fight against antisemitism is part and parcel of the fight against racism.”

Clearly invoking the example of US college administrations which have commissioned police and fascist rampages on their campuses, the UJS concluded that it was “time that universities took their duty of care to Jewish students seriously.”

A spokesperson for Conservative government Prime Minister Rishi Sunak took up the call, stating “While we firmly believe in the power of rigorous free speech and debate, the right to that does not include the right to harass others or incite others to violence or terrorism.

“Obviously the police already have extensive public order powers to tackle disorder at protests and will continue to have our full support in doing so if needed.”

Tory leader of the House of Commons denounced anti-genocide protests as “disgusting” and demanded “an extremely strict response.”

On Tuesday, Sunak told his cabinet there has been an “unacceptable rise in antisemitism on our university campuses” and that he had invited university vice chancellors to a meeting at Downing Street on Thursday to discuss “the need for our universities to be safe for our Jewish students”.

Sunak explained, “We expect university leaders to take robust action in dealing with that kind of

behaviour and that will be the subject of the conversation in No 10 later this week to ensure a zero-tolerance approach to this sort of behaviour is adopted on all campuses.”

On Tuesday evening, several thousand people attended an emergency protest outside Downing Street against the planned assault on Rafah, called by the Stop the War Coalition, while other events were held in Manchester, Liverpool, Derby, Weymouth, Dorchester, Bridport, Hastings and Brighton.

WSWS reporters interviewed **Yuma** in London, who said, “I was horrified by what is going on in Rafah; I can't believe that the West is supporting the killing of innocents... I'm fed up of the West's hypocrisy”.



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