

Protesters at Cardiff and Edinburgh anti-genocide encampments speak out

Our reporters

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Student encampments against Israel's genocide in Gaza have spread to 25 universities in Britain. WSWs reporters spoke to protesters at the Edinburgh University and at an encampment set up this week at Cardiff University.

Salma, a Palestinian student studying law, said, "I'm here because I recognize that the onslaught and the brutality that my brothers and sisters have been facing in Palestine demands collective action.

"It awakens the collective conscious to stand up against injustice... I am ashamed of the way that this university that has taken so much in tuition fees, not just from myself but students at all different levels, whether it's undergrad, post-grad, masters, is using those to fund industries, so that they themselves enable the war by selling arms, by selling weaponry to the apartheid states in order to enact this brutality against my people.

Asked her thoughts on the encampments in the US and globally, she replied, "I found the student protests happening in the United States to be extremely inspiring. Whenever I saw these [social media] posts, not even just Muslims but members of the community from all different backgrounds, from all different ethnicities and all different lifestyles coming out, showing that truly what they did share was their humanity and their perspective on the need to stand up for the people and their suffering in Palestine, how they came together in such a collective and communal way through encampments."

Salma opposed how "the governments have been responding, the riot police for example, through these violent means and trying to break down their will and yet they still stand up and they still come back stronger than ever.

"We have seen this unfold in history before, for example, during the Vietnam War. Any time I have ever seen any collective student action and these calls for justice, I always thought to myself, I wish I could have the opportunity to participate in something like this. A chance to just cement my position on the right side of history and do what I can for my brothers and sisters in Palestine. So when I heard that Cardiff was hosting an encampment, immediately I thought I have to join in and do my part for the community."

Dan, one of the camp's organisers, said, "I'm here, as everyone here is, to call for disclosure of the accounts of the

university, as well as other universities within Cardiff, so that it's clear where our tuition fees are being spent.

"We're calling to the university to divest from war-mongering and Israeli-linked corporations. We're also calling for them to reinvest in Palestinian rebuilding, especially in terms of the complete lack of universities that Palestine now has. And we're also calling for them to support the safety of students and staff who are affected by the genocide in Palestine."

Edinburgh

The WSWs visited two encampments in Edinburgh, one at Edinburgh University, the other outside the Scottish parliament.

Around 35 students are camping in the Old College Quad of Edinburgh University. A number are on a rolling hunger strike protesting the genocide and demanding the university divest particularly from major suppliers to the Israeli war machine.

We spoke to **Bianca** and **Orlando**, media spokespeople for the University of Edinburgh Old College encampment.

Orlando explained, "This university has a long colonial legacy with regard to Palestine specifically. The longest serving chancellor of this university was Arthur Balfour, from 1891 to 1930. During that time, in 1917, he signed the Balfour Declaration, effectively giving away Palestinian lands of Zionist groups, giving away lands that were not his to give."

"For months we have been protesting the university's complicity, which not only covers its financial investments, but also its upholding of the IHRA [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] definition of antisemitism that inhibits any criticism of Israel due to its conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

"There has been an increased police presence around all of the demonstrations in support of Palestine over the past seven months."

2,000 people signed a Justice for Palestine Society call for divestment. Two buildings were occupied, while a motion passed by the Student Association was supported by 97 percent of those voting. 600 staff signed an open letter to the administration.

Bianca said that after months of pressure the university administration executive had finally agreed to having an agenda

point on their meeting this week on divestment.

Staff and students have demanded that the university sell its £2.8 million of direct investment in Google parent company Alphabet and £4.9 million held in Amazon for their secure cloud service provision to the Israeli government and military through Project Nimbus. Hundreds of Google workers have protested the project, with many sacked for taking a stand.

The protestors are also targeting Edinburgh University's use of Blackrock, the US based financial behemoth, to manage a £50.2 million portfolio, some £783,000 of which is described as "complicit in genocide". In all the university holds £709 million in direct and indirect endowment and investment assets.

On the hunger strikers, Orlando commented, "The university's complicity is something which has been re-inflicted in the most damaging ways to the student body time and time again. This hunger strike, I am not one of them so I can't speak on their behalf, has been a natural response to the situation. It serves as an extended form of solidarity with the people of Gaza, but if nothing else it should be telling of how the university has responded to students' demands."

Bianca said, "Now the clock is ticking in a way it wasn't before. It is a form of escalation that forces action on behalf of the administration in ways that the administration has been reluctant to take up in the past."

Several students are on hunger strike and several have undertaken hunger strikes before. Some are at home, taking only electrolytes and water.

Bianca said, "We have also had a very large influx of community support, both from staff at the university but also a large proportion of the broader Edinburgh city community of people donating food, blankets, stopping by for conversations, as well as demonstrations organised by civil society."

Orlando noted, "The university has neglected its Palestinian students and their wellbeing entirely, still refusing to make a comment on the genocide and refusing to reach out to Palestinian students and staff, noting that there are members of its community currently in Palestine.

"Shortly after October 7, Israeli students received contact from the University chaplaincy, to offer support. There has been nothing of the kind to Palestinians. There has been no recognition of a Palestinian presence on campus, nor any pro-Palestinian sentiment. In fact, the university has sought to demonise and infantilise any expression of a pro-Palestinian voice or demonstration."

Bianca said, "Increasingly as an individual I think the tide is changing. I think that can be seen in the global nature of the student movements and the broader movement for Palestinian resistance. I think the institutions that are backing the Israeli state ideologically and financially, like the University of Edinburgh, are coming under pressure to change that they have not come under before."

At the community encampment outside the Scottish parliament, protesters are demanding the Scottish government

divest its holdings in Israel.

Jay, a young woman living at the camp, said, "I have always been anti-war, anti-weapons. My entire family have been. The idea that, in Edinburgh and Glenrothes, these are the ones I know, there are companies that are funded by our government. They are providing fighter jets that are now bombing Gaza, bombing hospitals, killing children and I believe that should be stopped.

"The Scottish government will probably not be interested in such a stance, but if they can see the general public are of the same opinion... In this encampment, we have had so many of the public come up and ask us. A lot of them are not aware how much the Scottish government are providing to weapons manufacturers.

"We are a community protest. We have campaigns at 149 universities protesting for universities to divest from weapons manufacturers. We are in solidarity with them, we are so proud of everything they have done. Barcelona University in Catalonia have divested now because of student protests. We have protests in Amsterdam, they took over the city centre, we have the protests outside the Eurovision arena to show that we are not standing for this. I can go on Tiktok or X and see so many people standing in solidarity with me. I just feel connected, even though I have never met them. We are all fighting for the same thing."

Asked about the lack of any movement from any of the governments involved in the slaughter, and the lessons of the Iraq war, Jay commented, "I was quite young during the Iraq war [in 2003]. I remember how parents of children were very upset because kids my age had been murdered and they couldn't fathom that. The idea that they can ignore the protests, that many people, and still fund a genocide, a war, they can send weapons to Iraq, they can send weapons to Israel, but they are not going over there to see the after-effects."

Asked about the development of a global mass socialist anti-war movement, she said, "I think that's what we need! We need the working class to stand up and open their eyes. We have had so many people the past week say "We didn't even realise this was going on", because the media doesn't want you to know. The government doesn't want you to know because they know, when you learn, you are going to fight back. We need a global movement. We need everyone to wake up and see what is going on, and how can we fix this".



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