

Zionists mount provocation against anti-genocide protest in Manchester, UK, as police arrest students in Oxford

Our reporters
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A group of around 25 Zionists mounted a provocation Saturday by temporarily stopping a march by hundreds of anti-genocide protesters in Manchester in northwest England. They did so under the protection of the police.

For seven months, protesters opposing Israel's decimation of Gaza, which has seen over 36,000 killed and 80,000 injured, have assembled in the city, the centre of the Greater Manchester county. The county, with a population of over 3 million, is home to many Muslims, including those with family in Gaza.

This week's protest gathered in St Peters Square to then march a few hundred metres down Oxford Street-Oxford Road to the large encampment set up by students in the University of Manchester campus. A march down one of Manchester's main arterial roads must be approved by Greater Manchester Police, and the necessary number of officers mobilised and traffic stopping measures put in place to ensure safety.

As protesters began arriving in St Peters Square, outside Central Library, a group of Zionists started to congregate across the tramlines, just tens of metres away from the much larger group of anti-war protesters. The Zionists waved Israeli flags, Union Jacks and at least one Iranian monarchist flag. Some came over to where the pro-Palestinian protestors were setting up the stage area and tables adjacent to Central Library and photographed and videoed them.

A speaker from the stage requested that the anti-genocide protesters stay at least two metres away from the line that they had set up in front of the Zionists.

At around 12:50 demonstrators began to assemble for the march, at which point the Zionists started to move away, with some positioning themselves on the left-hand side going down Oxford Street. As the

demonstration passed by, the Zionists chanted slogans including describing protesters as "fascists". This lasted for around 10 minutes.

Some Zionists then went ahead of the march and set up a line blocking Oxford Street. Instead of removing the Zionists, the police faced off against the protesters. When protesters requested they be allowed to proceed, police pushed them back. At one stage a police officer drew his baton. Meanwhile, a small group of officers formed a line some way in front of the Zionist roadblock (see second video below).

After 5-10 minutes, the Zionists dispersed, allowing the march to continue and meet up with the student encampment.

The provocation in Manchester took place the same day as police in Oxford raided a student occupation on the university campus at 8am. They arrested 17 students on suspicion of aggravated trespass, and some on suspicion of affray. All have been released on bail.

The students, organised in the Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) group, began their occupation of the vice chancellor's office last Thursday in Wellington Square. As with student encampments around the UK, now totalling 33, the protesters demanded the university divest from Israel and hung Palestinian flags outside the university administration building. An OA4P spokesperson said the protest was "a peaceful sit-in to demand that the university meet with us after two weeks of non-response". They demanded that the university administration meet with them "to negotiate immediately".

The police arrived after being called to the campus by management.

Students tried to stop police departing with their arrested colleagues, with hundreds blocking the exits to the building. Such was the determination of the students that it took the police over six hours to complete their operation, with a police van getting through the blockade and taking the arrested into custody.

The operation also targeted against protesters not occupying the admin building, with a statement from Thames Valley Police saying officers also dealt with protesters “in the immediate vicinity of Wellington Square”. It added that no arrests were made.

The fact that the Manchester march was temporarily stopped, with the police enabling this, is proof that the Zionists are being emboldened by the Conservative government and Labour opposition’s doubling down on support for Israel’s genocide. The nationwide protests in London, which have also witnessed Zionist provocations, have regularly been described by senior figures within government as “hate marches” organised by “left extremists”.

The provocation in Manchester and the repression of the Oxford occupation took place as Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced his National Service for 18-year-olds policy. This was backed by a frothing right-wing Tory media, with the *Telegraph* editorialising that it was necessary to inculcate “shared national values” under conditions in which “The anti-Israel hate marches have exposed the extent to which extremist views have already taken root.”

The WSWS spoke to protesters who attended the demonstration in Manchester on Saturday:



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