

Northern Ireland police clamp down on anti-genocide protesters opposing Hillary Clinton's Belfast visit, while far right treated with kid gloves

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On the evening of November 14, a pro-Palestine protest attended by up to 200 people was held outside Queens University, Belfast (QUB) in Northern Ireland to oppose the genocidal slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza and the appearance of US Democratic Party politician Hillary Clinton at the university.

Clinton was speaking at the Global Innovation Summit (GIS), a corporate and academic networking event held annually.

Frequent protests have been held in Belfast since Israel's assault on Gaza began over 14 months ago. Marches have been held in the City Centre, from Writers Square to the City Hall, and from QUB to the US consulate in the south of the city.

At the QUB protest, large numbers of tactical police were deployed as protesters chanted "shame", carried Palestinian flags and a cut-out of Clinton depicted with blood on her hands. Four people, three of whom were QUB students, were arrested after a brutal police operation. The arrests were reported to have taken place when the protesters attempted to, entirely peacefully, unfurl a Palestinian flag in the university grounds. Social media footage shows protesters being thrown to the ground by members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), dragged by their ankles and hit with batons. Despite this, three of those arrested, according to QUB Palestine Assembly, have been charged with resisting police, obstruction, assault and are due in court this week.

All three are members of QUB Palestine Assembly—an organisation consisting of QUB staff and students—who have demanded all charges be withdrawn. The assembly has also questioned police and press claims that police

were injured and criticised QUB itself for giving the impression that "violence emanated from the ranks of the protest, which is false and adds insult to injury." The assembly has submitted a Freedom of Information request regarding the supposed police injuries.

Clinton was quietly whisked away from the event.

Clinton has been chancellor of the university since 2020. Hailed by QUB President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Greer as an "internationally recognised public servant who has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to Northern Ireland", Clinton is one of the most hated politicians in the world.

Besides being First Lady during the two presidencies of her husband Bill—during which the US invaded Somalia and, with NATO, bombed Belgrade—Clinton, as secretary of state in the Obama administration, famously sneered at the murder of deposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, "We came, we saw, he died." Both Clintons are outspoken supporters of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. She is widely derided as "Killary".

Clinton's role at QUB is one facet of US imperialism's abiding interest in Ireland. Particularly with the Good Friday Agreement, US imperialism created, and seeks to maintain, the stability necessary for the huge investments in the Republic of Ireland made by its largest tech and pharmaceutical corporations. The US sees Ireland as a platform for tremendous levels of tax manipulation and transfers, as an English-speaking production and headquartering location in the European Union and as a vital military staging post en route to Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Clinton's chancellorship was opposed by QUB students and staff from the first.

Her inauguration at the University in 2021, delayed because of the pandemic, attracted anti-war protests and chants of “shame on Queens.” Earlier this year, 260 staff, students and alumni signed an open letter “to register profound concern regarding the continuing role of Hillary Clinton as our Chancellor”, pointing to QUB’s role in arms research for firms such as Thales and BAE Systems and calling for an immediate ceasefire by the Israel Defense Forces. The letter called for “an urgent review of the current Chancellor’s position, and the introduction of a more rigorous ethical investment policy in consultation with staff and student unions.”

Speaking at the November 14 event, Clinton, blathered about the 1998 Good Friday Agreement—which was signed under her husband’s tenure as president—as “the end of the conflict, a moving away from the past to look towards the future”, and how “Higher education has to be viewed as a public good that businesses, governments, and citizens understand”. As she did so, the US and UK governments continued to ensure that the entire surviving population of Gaza was without hospitals, without schools, without food, living in tents and ruins.

During the protest at QUB, the PSNI arrested four men in connection with “causing public order offences”. They charged three of them, aged 18, 20 and 21, who are due to appear at Belfast Magistrates Court this week. A PSNI statement said “the men were arrested on suspicion of numerous offences and charged with resisting police”. The 18-year-old was charged with obstructing police and the 21-year-old with obstructing police and assault. Later that day, protesters organised by Mothers Against Genocide Code Pink group gathered outside the Grosvenor Road police station in defence of those arrested and protesting heavy handed policing.

In a hypocritical statement in defence of their blood-drenched chancellor, QUB authorities put out a statement that while they respected the right to protest peacefully, it was “disappointed at the action of this small number of protestors and condemn their behaviour”. The statement continued, “Queens University has led the response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East through calling for a ceasefire, providing scholarships for Palestinian students and divestment policies and has responded positively to the concerns of our university population where appropriate.”

The PSNI’s attitude to anti-genocide protesters stands in sharp contrast to the indifference displayed to the anti-immigration fascist thugs who terrorised the streets of Belfast over several days in August this year.

The violence saw roads blocked, cars set on fire, and missiles, including petrol bombs, thrown at police that resulted in three officers being injured. In other parts of the city, including Donegall Road and University Street, immigrant-run businesses were attacked.

On August 5, in the Sandy Row area, a loyalist stronghold, migrant owned shops were targeted for a second time, as armoured PSNI Land Rovers were attacked with petrol bombs and bricks. In response, police fired two plastic bullets. A man in his 50s was repeatedly stamped on the head by a gang of fascist thugs—in what was a racially motivated attack—as members of the public attempted to shield him.

More violence occurred in the Shankill Road area on the same day when masked men rammed a hijacked car into an estate agent on false pretences that the agency was “renting homes to asylum seekers”. There were also reports of men kicking in doors in the Woodvale area, attacking immigrant-owned cars and homes. The same month, a petrol bomb was thrown at a mosque in the town of Newtownards.

Although there have been some arrests, police handled the far-right protests with kid gloves, as is evident in the case of Bashir, who owned a supermarket. According to *Belfast Live*, Bashir also represents and hosts refugees and asylum seekers.

Bashir’s business, in the south of Belfast, was destroyed by racist thugs. He said that PSNI stood by and allowed his business to be set on fire. “All of that happened and the police did nothing, I am telling you the truth.” He continued, “What kind of police are letting people burn everything down?”

Speaking to *Belfast Live* November 29, Bashir bemoaned “nothing but empty promises” from the politicians and local authorities. The only support Bashir has received has been from the general public, who have generously donated to an online appeal—raising £30,000—to help immigrant-owned businesses targeted by the far-right thugs.



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