

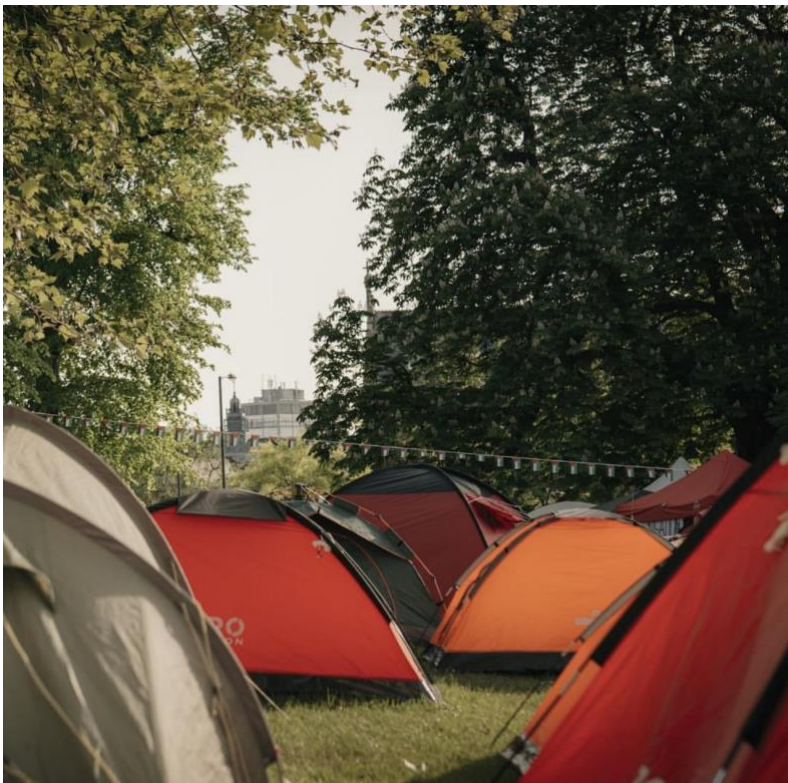
Palestinian Solidarity Encampments on Campuses: A Deeper Insight into Student Activism and Resistance

“I hope the movement avoids becoming insular and continues to speak out, leaving behind groundwork for future students.”

Since October 7th, there has been a rise in tension between staff and students concerning standing in solidarity for Palestine on campus. A large proportion of students feel that their ability to express themselves has been restricted, especially regarding showing support for Palestinians in Gaza.

Although the fear of being silenced and persecuted in universities is imminent, students have taken it upon themselves to test these boundaries to speak out against injustice. This began when students built encampments on their university campuses, where they collaborated and worked together to protest, including camping and taking turns to sleep and eat. They had specific demands they wanted their universities to follow up with; until then, they vowed not to leave.

A notable case that came to my attention was the University of Bristol (UoB). This university was one of the first in the United Kingdom (UK) to start an encampment after being inspired by American universities, such as Columbia University and Yale. Police officers responded to these protests with extreme violence, attacking students and staff. Videos of the chaos went viral on social media, sparking conversations about freedom of speech and expression on campuses.



university.

The demands by UoB were clear. They insisted on these six things:

- 1) the transparency and disclosure of all investments and partnerships, 2) demilitarise the university and divesting from all arms companies, 3) adhering to the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement by withdrawing all partnerships with Israeli universities, 4) supporting Palestinian liberation and reparations to the Palestinian people, 5) do not apply repercussions for involvement in the protest camp for any student or staff member and finally, 6) make the university a peoples

Photograph from: @Bristoloccupy4Palestine Instagram - Photograph of the encampment

I spoke with Sam, a UoB student who participated in the encampments, to gain greater insight into the student experience.

Interview with Sam

When asked what inspired the students of the University of Bristol, Sam explained how UoB students had been protesting for months before the encampments. Still, Sam clarified that UoB management was not listening to their student and staff body.

“University management would at every opportunity downplay our outrage, so we wanted to create a space of solidarity and protest, which the university could not hide from and dismiss.”



Photograph from: @Bristoloccupy4Palestine Instagram - Photograph of student activists protesting

Encampments for Palestine often held cultural events for fundraisers, helping the cause. UoB held a few of these events, which were celebrated on social media. “Community events stood out to me,” Sam said. “Going into the encampment, I’d failed to realise how much the Bristol community would rally behind and join us. Almost every day of the encampment, someone was kind enough to supply a meal for campers.”

“The fundraisers were also really special, with us being inundated with cakes at our first bake sale, so much so that we had to extend it across another day and with us raising around £500 by the end to be split between Medical Aid for Palestine and local Palestinians in need of support. I can’t express the extent of the love that could be felt across these events,” Sam said.

On social media, there has been unwavering support for the encampment. Still, there have also been fears that people with differing opinions will put those involved in danger through exposure and harassment.



“When people see firsthand through social media the reality of genocide, it becomes almost impossible to deny. There was little to no backlash as the number of people supporting Israel has dropped drastically.”

“We did notice that the encampments were smeared in some news coverage, but we found local coverage to be much less biased,” Sam Said

Photograph from:

@Bristoloccupy4Palestine Instagram - Photograph of the encampment

I asked Sam if he believes the encampments have been successful: “The student movement globally forced media attention onto the Palestinian liberation struggle, and encampments stood as a visual reminder to anyone who walked by.” Sam said.

“There are also recent reports that various arms companies will no longer attend university events for fear of student protests.

I wanted to know what Sam hopes for the future of Palestinian solidarity movements in the UK. He said, “I hope the movement avoids becoming insular and continues to speak out, leaving behind groundwork for future students.”

“I hope movements continue to fight and safeguard against racism, misogyny and other supremacist ideologies.” He continued.

“Finally, I hope the movement holds to movements in Palestine and allows itself to be led by the Palestinian struggle, committing itself to the same shared principles of Palestinian liberation. We need to recognise that a ceasefire is a first step, nothing more.” Sam said.

Written by Israa Elmousa

Sam requested that his full name be withheld to protect his privacy and out of concern for his safety if his involvement were made public.