# Pro-Palestine protest disrupts Cambridge graduations amid rising campus tensions



A pro-Palestine demonstrator caused significant disruption at Cambridge University during graduation ceremonies on May 23 by chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House. Dressed in a boiler suit smeared with red paint, he secured himself with a padlock and zip-tie, fervently chanting "Free Palestine" as his voice echoed through the area. Simultaneously, around a dozen supporters waved Palestine flags and donned face masks, further amplifying the protest's visibility outside ceremonies for Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges.

This protest reflects an alarming trend of escalating tensions at academic institutions, as the new Labour government demonstrates a lack of resolve in safeguarding civil liberties on campuses. Earlier in March, the university secured a High Court injunction that prohibited protests on specific parts of the campus until the end of July—a decision that has been condemned by activists and rights groups alike. Critics have branded this a flagrant attack on free speech, indicative of a broader trend under the current regime: a chilling clampdown on dissenting voices that dare to advocate for Palestinian rights.

The student-led group advocating for Palestinian causes has ramped up pressure for the university to divest from companies perceived to be complicit in the ongoing conflict. This movement gained momentum after King's College publicly announced it would cease investments in arms firms—a cowardly capitulation to student activism that showcases the failure of leadership to firmly stand against external pressures. Such actions are symptomatic of a broader academic climate influenced by narrow political agendas, undermining the integrity of higher education.

This protest is just one part of a larger wave of demonstrations across UK universities, revealing a coordinated effort that could potentially destabilize academic freedom. The previous government's failures to address these issues now cast a long shadow, as the current administration struggles to rein in the fallout from persistent student activism. The reluctance to confront such politically motivated disruptions is troubling, raising questions about the commitment of leadership to uphold civil rights amidst escalating tensions.

Moreover, the university’s attempts to impose a longer-term ban on protests—a five-year injunction initially sought—faced public outcry and legal challenges. Although the court issued a more limited injunction, the situation underscores the administration's fear of protests disrupting significant events like graduation ceremonies. The ruling, while a temporary victory for activists, illuminates a precarious balance between political dissent and institutional authority, emphasizing the urgent need for accountability from our leaders.

As these events unfold, the University of Cambridge continues to face scrutiny, yet the implications of these protests and the increasing restrictions on free speech resonate far beyond its walls. With social justice and political accountability at stake, the urgency for robust opposition to current policies becomes even clearer. The ongoing struggle at Cambridge not only highlights the contentious nature of university investment policies but also serves as a rallying call for a broader resistance against a complacent government unwilling to defend the rights of those fighting for justice.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724> - A pro-Palestine demonstrator disrupted graduation ceremonies at Cambridge University on May 23 by chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House. Wearing a boiler suit smeared with red paint, he secured himself using a padlock and zip-tie, chanting 'Free Palestine.' Approximately a dozen other demonstrators waved Palestine flags and wore face masks outside the ceremonies for Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges. In March, the university had been granted a High Court injunction to prevent pro-Palestine protests on parts of the campus until the end of July. King's College, part of Cambridge University, declared in May that it would cease investing in arms companies following public outcry. The student-led group 'Cambridge for Palestine' had urged the university to divest from companies 'complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.' The University of Cambridge has been approached for comment.
3. <https://www.icjpalestine.com/2025/03/03/high-court-rejects-bid-by-the-university-of-cambridge-for-a-long-term-injunction-on-palestine-protests/> - On February 27, 2025, the High Court of Justice rejected the University of Cambridge's bid for a long-term injunction aimed at banning Palestine-related protests at four university sites until 2030. The university's application followed a series of high-profile encampments and demonstrations led by Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) at Senate House Yard in May and November 2024. Despite the university's legal efforts to impose a sweeping five-year protest ban, the court issued a narrow, two-day injunction that restricted entry to Senate House and Senate House Yard, explicitly removing any references to Palestine or C4P, while preserving the right to protest in surrounding areas. The ruling was hailed as a victory for student activists, affirming their right to protest and challenging the university's attempts to suppress political expression on campus.
4. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests> - The University of Cambridge has been condemned by activists and rights groups for obtaining a High Court injunction that effectively bans pro-Palestinian protests on its campus until 26 July 2025. The ruling, issued by Mr. Justice Soole, was described as a 'chilling attack on free speech' by critics. The university had initially sought a more long-term injunction, requesting a five-year order to block protests related to the Israel-Palestine conflict on its grounds. However, last month a judge rejected this bid, citing its overreach. In a second attempt, Cambridge University returned to court in mid-March to seek a four-month order to prevent disruptions during key graduation events. The court's decision was grounded in the argument that there was a 'real and imminent risk' of recurring protests, which had already disrupted ceremonies in previous years.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities> - Students from the group Cambridge for Palestine, along with Oxford Action for Palestine, initiated encampments at their respective universities to protest against their institutions' investments in companies linked to Israeli actions in Gaza. The protesters set up camps with supplies, sleeping bags, and banners bearing slogans such as 'There are no universities left in Gaza' and 'Divest from genocide.' They demanded that their universities divest from all companies linked to Israeli genocide and occupation, help rebuild Gaza’s education system, end institutional relationships with Israeli universities, and protect the safety of students and staff involved in pro-Palestinian action. The encampments were part of a broader movement involving over 100 universities globally taking action for Palestine.
6. <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/> - On March 21, 2025, the High Court granted Cambridge University’s proposed injunction against any protests related to Palestine and Israel until the end of July 2025. The university had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to five months following interventions from the European Legal Support Center (ELSC), supported by Liberty and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to protest. Liberty intervened in the case, accusing the university of 'attempting to silence students and academics.' The court's judgment was criticized as setting a dangerous precedent that would severely restrict protest rights on campus.
7. <https://thetab.com/uk/cambridge/2024/06/19/cambridge-universitys-st-johns-may-ball-disrupted-by-pro-palestine-protest-177511> - On June 19, 2024, students representing the group Cambridge For Palestine disrupted the annual St John’s May Ball at Cambridge University. Protesters dressed in keffiyehs positioned themselves on top of St John’s New Court’s exterior walls, launching red, white, and green flares to represent the colors of the Palestinian flag. They also dropped a banner reading 'Cambridge: Divest from Genocide,' while attendees watched alongside members of the security team. Some members of the crowd were heard chanting 'Free free Palestine' and 'Palestine will be free, Palestine will live forever.' This disruption was part of a wider series of protest actions initiated following a Freedom of Information request concerning Trinity College’s investments in February. Smaller protests culminated in the establishment of the 'liberated zone' by Cambridge For Palestine on May 6. The protest group aimed to force Cambridge University to disclose its financial ties to organizations complicit in the conflict in Gaza, divest from such organizations, and reinvest in and protect at-risk Palestinian students.