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Arrested Gaza protester speaks to the WSWS about police crackdown

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with one of the 77 people arrested as part of the anti-democratic police crackdown on Saturday's national Gaza protest in London. They are referred to as "X" to allow them to speak more freely about events on the day.

Arriving early, X "got to Whitehall, on the corner by the Houses of Parliament, and there were already at least 100 police officers lined up, ready for action. I got to outside Downing Street and there was a big crowd of protesters just to the right of the Downing Street entrance. And there were barriers being put up around them.



Police among the assembling crowd near the stage area and Downing Street gates (left of photo), prior to the start of the rally

"I was talking to somebody and 10 minutes later, by the time I realised, we'd essentially been kettled [contained in an area] already in that little corner, except for a filter in and out, pretty much one by one. So already people were starting to get in quite a lot of distress, especially the older protesters, because they'd never been in that situation.

“And then later on that day, those barriers were dismantled, and then they’d be put up somewhere else. So, it felt like the police were completely controlling the situation. Wherever people went. From the top end of Whitehall, looking down, you could see that they were basically trying to separate groups.

“When the rally started, it seemed to be a bit more open, there seemed to be fewer barriers, but there were already arrests happening. There were the blue vest coppers everywhere, there were general police everywhere. There were police right at the top of Whitehall, already closing it off so you couldn’t get to Trafalgar [Square]. So we were contained. In all of the side streets were police vans at the end of them.”

Pointing out a change in how the protests had been policed, X said, “Since the summer of the general election [in 2024], the police presence has massively increased. They banned us from congregating on the green outside the House of Commons; that was from as soon as [Labour Leader Sir Keir] Starmer became Prime Minister. Since Starmer got into power the police have changed every single route.”

She added, “The Israeli counter-protest was literally on Whitehall, but just on a side street. On protests recently they’ve been placing them closer and closer to the pro-Palestinian marches. That’s become a theme since Starmer got into power. That was never the case before.”

X continued on Saturday’s events: “When the rally started, it was really cold. It was like two degrees. So a lot of people were struggling to be still. I was trying to keep warm by sort of moving about and walking between various groups and things like that. I started to move away from the rally around about the time, just after [Labour MP] Apsana Begum spoke, I think it was, just to see what else was going on.

“I walked up towards Trafalgar Square and there was a big group of pro-Palestinian protesters chanting in the line of police, line of police vans. There was lots of videoing of us, but that’s been another feature: so many undercover videoings, police infiltration, things like that going on.”

Soon afterwards, “Everybody was sort of forming into a kind of march look. And right at the very front were the Holocaust survivors or the relations of Holocaust survivors, which were basically people in their 80s, they were elderly people. And just as they started to move forward, the police formed a cordon, but it was quite a flimsy one, if you like.

“We were on the other side of that, because there was a gap, but they were filtering people one by one. Me and the other protesters, we were shouting to go through the gap, because we were worried about these elderly protesters. Because they just looked terrified. It was really

upsetting to see that, of all the things that happened that day. That was one of the worst things.

“I saw a woman who must have been in her 70s kind of get manhandled away from the police. She tried to get through and she was pushed back. I had to move away because I was starting to get really angry and a bit mouthy. Nothing dodgy but just saying this is completely unnecessary.

“Eventually, the police let them through. This was kind of halfway along Whitehall, so then the march was carried on. By which point I’d moved away because I was getting too upset. So I moved away from it.”

Later on, some protesters had got to Trafalgar Square. “I thought, maybe you can go through now; maybe they’re not going to arrest people. It’s really confusing. So I followed. I went up towards Trafalgar Square. I just walked through. I must have been about 10 metres behind, maybe a bit more, behind [Members of Parliament and rally speakers] Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell and that lot who had got through.

“It was really squished. It was quite worrying, a bit claustrophobic and everything. It was completely crammed. People were going up there, realising they couldn’t get anywhere, and then turning around and coming back. So they were trying to go against the march, and people were getting jostled.

“It was really turning into a crush, starting to feel quite dangerous. I realised I wasn’t going to get anywhere. They were telling people to sit down. I thought, we are sitting ducks here.

“I was told to move, and literally arrested 30 seconds later... And I think even if I had moved away and followed the policemen’s instructions to leave Trafalgar Square, I would also have been kettled anyway... A lot of people overheard them [the police] saying, ‘We’re just going to arrest everyone already.’”

X said she felt the situation had been “completely pre-orchestrated. They said, ‘Go through.’ I went through. There were no police stopping me going on to Trafalgar Square. I assumed, maybe they’re not arresting people, maybe they’ve allowed us to protest on Trafalgar Square, only to find out that it was all part of the trap.”

Spending 19 hours in a cell, X “had to ask seven times before I got my [legally allowed phone] call at twenty to 11 (10.40 p.m.),” by which time the person was asleep and she had to leave a voicemail. “I had to ask for toilet paper four times before I got any.

“When they put me in and I said, ‘Well, when can I have my calls like to my solicitor, my personal call?’ They were like, ‘We’re just about to do handover, so it’ll be about 45 minutes. It was constantly, ‘Yeah, in about half an hour.’ It was like that the whole time.”

“There’s been nothing in writing about what I’m charged with,” she continued. “There’s some confusion. These are things that have only been told to me verbally at the time of my arrest. I was released on bail. I’ve got to return for an interview in about a month’s time. And I’m banned from attending any protest within the M25 [Greater London ring road] until I’ve had my interview.”

Summing up the experience, X explained, “It was terrifying and humiliating, and it’s a massive spanner in the works for people like me who are renting, who are in precarious employment, or non-employment, or things like that. It’s a life-changer for us. And I think one of the upsetting things, for example: none of the media really mentioned the 77 people [arrested], they just talked about the chief stewards…”



One of the arrested protesters in London, January 18, 2025.

“There’s 70 plus people like myself who don’t have a lot of money, or political weight, or any of the gravitas, and are at risk of just being forgotten about… People are going to get evicted, people are going lose their jobs, when they don’t have very much already.”

X concluded, “Within an hour of being in the cell, I was more determined than I’ve ever been in my life to do it again.

“I was remembering all the time, it’s about Gaza, it’s about them. The reason I go to the London ones, rather than my local ones, is because they’re the ones that get on TV, and the most important thing is not forgetting about it, not letting it go under the radar.”

“We’re not stopping,” she added.

Our reporters