

Occupy Bristol, UK: Mounting threats to clear camp

Our reporter
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Threats to clear the Occupy Bristol camp are mounting from local authorities, MP's and officials of the church, which is the freeholder of the land where the occupation is taking place. Protesters have been occupying College Green, outside the local seat of government, for nearly two weeks.

As with the central London occupation, various pretexts are cited for the removal of the Bristol camp. These include potential disruption of Remembrance Day on November 13 and the laying of poppies at war memorials on the previous weekend, and because it is blocking a landing site for an air ambulance.

Barbara Janke, the Liberal Democrat leader of Bristol City Council, has announced her intention to “begin a dialogue” with the protesters. Assistant Chief Constable John Long said the police want to discover a “positive way forward.”

Bristol City Council Conservative Party group leader Peter Abraham was more forthright in his comments declaring, “It's disgusting we've lost College Green for the general public. I understood it was going to be for a couple of days, which was more than reasonable, and I spoke to the people down there on Sunday. But now it's almost looking like a permanent camp. I want College Green back.”

While attempting to posture as defenders of the democratic right to demonstrate, Janke stressed that the council and Bristol cathedral authorities “now have a difficult job in balancing this right against the wider rights of the public to continue to enjoy this green space without any risks to public health, damage to the environment, or loss to local businesses.”

Stephen Williams, a Liberal Democrat MP for Bristol West, while having the audacity to express his

admiration for the protestors, called for the council to “set a deadline for the protesters to move on, before Remembrance Sunday. Otherwise, the law will have to take its course—they are trespassing on land.”

Not to be outdone, local Labour Party Councilor Sean Beyon patronisingly said, “Occupy Bristol's not for me. I wouldn't exist long on vegan food, for a start, and I think camping should be opposed on a matter of principle. But if others, so fed up at the way things are going, want to shiver on College Green, then it is not for local government, or for the police, to stop them.” Beyon conveniently did not mention that it was his own party that permitted the banks to raid the national treasury of billions of pounds, and was responsible for record increases in inequality while in power.

On October 25, the *World Socialist Web Site* held a public meeting in the Occupy Bristol camp, addressed by SEP member Richard Duckworth who described how the Occupy Wall Street protests “have given voice to deep undercurrents of popular anger against the entire economic system...the myth of the superiority of 'free enterprise' has been discredited in the minds of tens of millions.”

Duckworth explained how the OWS movement “had struck a powerful chord among millions of people throughout the United States and internationally” but raised the critical question of what is the way forward for the movement. Duckworth said that calls for the movement to reject politics were an absurdity. In fact, the “no politics” demand is itself a “political demand,” he said, and warned the Occupy movement against the failure to address the critical political issues that are essential in a struggle against the capitalist “one percent”—which class should rule? If this was not done, he said, it would lead to the very real possibility that the Occupy movement “will be reduced to just another

protest movement that vents popular anger and opposition, but is harmlessly channeled back behind the parties and institutions of the political establishment.”

The meeting continued with lively discussions about scientific analysis, social housing crises, consumerism and Trotskyism versus Stalinism.

On October 28, Duckworth also spoke at an organised “Speakers Corner” adjacent to the Occupy Bristol camp and again opposed the “no politics” perspective, and warned that that political parties such as the Democrats in the US, New Anti Capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, along with their trade union bureaucracies are working “deliberately and consciously to block any independent political movement” of the working class.

Duckworth explained that thousands of people have been arrested and some of the camps broken up. Just last weekend, police attacked Occupy camps in Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Phoenix, Dallas, Orlando and Tampa, arresting more than 200 people in all. Australian riot police evicted the Occupy protests in Melbourne and Sydney and trashed their camps.

“The brutal reaction of governments to the demonstrations is an indication of the fear within the ruling class that they could spark a much broader popular movement. They are acutely worried that there will be a mass revolt of the working class under conditions where there seems no end to the economic crisis, and all governments offer is more austerity measures, mass unemployment and war.”

Duckworth concluded by demanding the “inalienable and non-negotiable” right of the working class to a job and a liveable income, high quality public education and health care, free of charge, housing and utilities, secure retirement, a healthy environment and access to culture and the expropriation of the banks and major corporations. The only way to secure these rights, organize and unify the unfolding struggles and direct them against the capitalist system is the building of a new political party—the Socialist Equality Party.



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