

Occupy Bristol served eviction notice by church and council

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On January 13, Occupy Bristol, the largest tented demonstration outside London and part of the international movement against social inequality, was instructed by Judge Roderick Denyer at Bristol County Court to leave College Green, where they have been camping since October last year.

Occupy Bristol members and supporters staged a four-hour sit-in at the court in opposition to the hearing being scheduled to last just 15 minutes. They said that the decision to serve the eviction notice had been “pushed through” without recognising the right of Occupy Bristol to defend itself or introduce fresh evidence. The demonstrators argued that the case against them was “undefendable” due to the fact that the eviction papers had been served to an “unknown person”.

The legal action was brought by the Very Reverend David Hoyle, the dean of Bristol Cathedral, which owns the land, in conjunction with the City Council. They produced legal documents full of hearsay evidence from council and church officials regarding environmental damage, anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse at the camp.

The council and church accuse the occupiers of “trespass”, “actual or threatened anti-social behaviour” and “actual or threatened use of the property for unlawful purposes.” There were “considerable fears that the encampment would lead to disorder, violence and lawlessness,” they claimed.

The greatest concern cited was over the sanitary state of the area, but it was they who denied the occupiers access to toilet facilities and fresh drinking water.

After the hearing, Bristol City Council issued a statement saying, “Now the court has found in our favour, we appeal again to those in occupation now to respect the order of the court and leave College Green

under their own steam and avoid the use of bailiffs”.

Dean Hoyle told reporters, “Whilst we are committed to listening to the Occupy Movement, we believe it is now time that this stage in their protest came to an end so that a wider community can once again benefit from access to College Green”.

In his installation ceremony as dean in May 2010, Hoyle said that he wanted the cathedral to become known as a place that offered a “generous and radical future”.

Bristol City Council Liberal Democrat leader Barbara Janke declared, “After two-and-a-half months of occupation, the camp is less a symbol of widespread citizen concern about issues of social justice and more an environmental eyesore and anti-social nuisance.”

Green Party councillor Gus Hoyt made a revealing statement that “Not once was Full Council allowed to truly debate our new and closest neighbours. When discussions did happen, they were in private and consisted only of party leaders and officers.... The final decision to start the eviction process was taken in secret. We all learnt about it at the same time as everyone else did—from the general press release.”

A Facebook statement from Occupy Bristol says, “The sentiment of campers is that the best course of action is to try and resist the unlawful eviction of College Green. The peaceful lawful protesters who are the campers came together as Occupy Bristol to show solidarity with the global Occupy movement. We seek to highlight how global elites control us through economic, political, military, scientific and educational means that lead to a continuity of agenda for their interests. A cartel of people ensure that their global power is undisturbed. We wished to show how and why the elites do these things.”

Other members of Occupy Bristol have said they will

not contest the eviction notice and distanced themselves from the court protesters, saying, “We understand that some individuals chose to attend court to act as lay representatives for Persons Unknown. Our understanding is that the lay representatives were not given the opportunity to make a case to the court.”

They insisted, “We continue to have positive discussions with both the Council and Cathedral. We understand both have been working on statements that speak to the political issues Occupy Bristol have raised. We await these statements with interest”.

Media coordinator Tony Cripps told our reporters that there would now be a “phase two,” which “doesn’t necessarily mean we will be staying on College Green...we are trying to be quite gracious with the Dean.... Many of the global economic, sustainability and social justice issues espoused by some in the camp have always been of equal concern to the church.”



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