

Occupy London camp cleared by police from St Paul's Cathedral

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Riot police moved in at midnight February 28 to clear the Occupy protest camp established outside St Paul's Cathedral last October.

Twenty arrests were made as a small group of protesters peacefully resisted. The majority packed away their equipment under threat of large-scale police repression.

The camp was established on October 15, 2011, after police prevented protesters from marching on the London Stock Exchange.

The police action, ordered by the City of London Corporation, was given the green light by the High Court. The eviction was allowed to proceed after the Court of Appeal refused Occupy London Stock Exchange (Occupy LSX) the right to appeal against the decision to the Supreme Court. As the operation was under way, police revealed that they also had the permission of St Paul's authority.

The "School of Ideas" situated in a disused building in Islington was cleared of protesters at the same time, and the demolition of the building has been brought forward. Protesters had already been evicted from another empty building in the City.

At midnight, five spotlights were turned on the protest encampment. At around 2 a.m., these were turned off briefly. When they came back on, four police officers stood on the balcony of the cathedral.

Demonstrators built a makeshift barricade of kitchen shelving. At around 3 a.m., police removed a dozen protesters involved in this action. A barricade of wooden pallets was also dismantled by police and bailiffs.

Other riot officers armed with shields advanced along the cathedral steps forcibly removing protesters, some of whom were praying. Jonathan Bartley, director of the Christian think tank Ekklesia, said he was kicked

repeatedly by police and dragged away from the cathedral.

Any remaining possessions were dumped into refuse trucks.

A fence has now been placed around St Paul's in order to prevent any efforts to reoccupy the site. The City of London Corporation is preparing what it describes as a "deep clean."

Since the Court of Appeal's decision, leaders of LSX had been slowly dismantling the camp and were liaising with authorities to conduct a peaceful exit. But the City of London Corporation clearly wanted a show of force to send a warning: Not only do they have the legal mechanism to remove similar protests, but they will do so with whatever level of violence required.

The police action follows on from the clearance of the "Democracy Camp" in Parliament Square on January 16, when 12 vans full of riot police were deployed against a dozen protesters, who resisted peacefully. The police were equipped and determined to meet any more vigorous resistance with large-scale violence.

As the site was being cleared, the authorities issued a statement that "High Court enforcement officers employed by the City of London Corporation are undertaking the removal with the police present to ensure public safety and maintain order."

An equally cynical statement was issued by the City of London Police, who said the repression of the protest was to "maintain order and facilitate lawful protest."

A spokesperson for Occupy LSX expressed shock at the St Paul's authority support for the police action, and asked if they had learned nothing in the last four months. Representatives of Occupy LSX had engaged in a spurious debate with leading figures from St Paul's aimed at promoting the idea of a more "ethical" capitalism.

The Church of England is a significant part of the power structure of the ruling elite in Britain and has supported all the measures taken by the City of London Corporation to remove the protest.

After the Appeals Court decision, the Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral said it hoped this would "lead to a peaceful dispersal of the camp outside St Paul's."

As images of riot police dispersing the camp were broadcast around the world, a spokesman tried to distance the church from the action it had condoned. He told the press, "In the past few months, we have all been made to re-examine important issues about social and economic justice and the role the cathedral can play.... We are fully committed to continuing to promote these issues through our worship, teaching and Institute."

The eviction shows the determination of the ruling class not to tolerate any challenge to their activities. Conservative mayor of London Boris Johnson told reporters he was glad that "finally the law has taken its course". His interest, he explained, is "the economic interest of the city and I want to make sure the businesses in that area can flourish."



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