

Jesper Raundall Christensen visits the Occupy Movement at St. Paul

'TENT CITY', CENTRAL LONDON: Idealistic, "anti-capitalist" protesters certainly enjoy questionable nutrition from American burger chains I think to myself as I visit the occupiers in front of St. Paul's Cathedral in Central London. A certain amount of McDonald's wrapping paper on the ground tells me straight away that this site is not one of the left wing hippie collectives of my parents' youth. Nor will the obvious presence of shiny Apple products with their telltale white earphones spur any reminiscence of the 1960s or 1970s for those who were at the very forefront of a social revolution some forty years ago. But although the outward show of a protesters' camp and the dress code might have changed from back then (with a few noticeable exceptions) that same "feeling" or that contagious "energy" is certainly here.

Or rather it *was* here. So asserts Robin Smith with a friendly but serious tone of voice: "The first three to four weeks were truly something special. Everybody here believed that this would change everything, and that we were actually at the very forefront of economic and social progress on a global scale. Honestly I don't believe I slept for more than four hours most nights". Smith is showing me around the occupiers' campsite below the high-arching cathedral as I visit it for a second time. I will admit it looks a bit cleaner and a bit more organized this time around. The tents have even been raised some five inches off the ground by interim wooden constructions to keep them warm and dry, and there is now more or less a certain sense of permanence as one walks around the camp.

However, regardless of the tangible administrative and organizational advancements being made here, politically the movement is by no means what it started out as being claims my personal tour guide: "I feel that the movement started out wanting to expose and direct attention to the flaws and shortcomings of the economic system. That emphasis on diagnosing the problems worked really well and bound us all together. Now that various specific working groups have been established, and these have started looking not only at specifying and explaining the issues but also pointing directly to the tools and means to make the alterations the movement has changed course. All in all becoming much more directly political in a sense. For better and for worse".

Being himself very much convinced of the need for land reform on a British as well as on a global scale Robin also has some very specific ideas as to how the economic system can be improved for the better. However from the very beginning he was adamant that the occupiers should focus on pointing straightforwardly to the economic shortcomings of the present day rather than move towards promoting specific political change; something that would lead directly to a lot of disagreement within an already very diverse movement. "I even kept stating that I didn't want to be known simply as the guy promoting land value taxation to replace other more disruptive taxes such as income taxes, taxes on production and/or consumption. Again, that would be focusing on specific

solutions rather than pointing to the problems. But people were absolutely welcome to come up to me and ask about this stuff and I would happily spend the time explaining the economic issues and open up an honest dialog. And I think I made a significant impression on a lot of people in the months I spent living here full time". Robin points to his assortment of quite illustrative LVT-related charts and graphs designed to spur spontaneous interest and curiosity. The coloured charts, graphs and figures are tidily laid out in front of the entrance to the humble tent, which he called home for most of the late autumn of 2011. He and I decide to not take a peak inside the closed red tent since it is highly likely that a new inhabitant is now – for a lack of a better word – occupying it.

The make up of these inhabitants right here on the footsteps of the noble and mighty St. Paul's Cathedral has also changed noticeably from the first three to four weeks of the camp's existence. People with mental issues and/or addiction issues, the homeless, the unfortunate, in general people living on the genuine margins of society make up a significant percentage of the full time residents of the camp today. Unquestionably drawn to a genuine sense of inclusiveness, which without question would be considered a legitimate seal of honour for most of the occupiers and the camp organisers. But that very shield of honour appears to have a tangible flipside as well since the camp in the eyes of Robin has seen a noticeable decrease in the number of people occupying for political reasons as opposed to those living here for personal reasons.

We end our walk by entering what seems to be the largest facility on the site. It turns out to be the dining tent complete with kitchen, a coffee area as well as a general supplies section with items such as soap, cloths and shaving blades. Behind the counter furthest away from the entrance sits a youngish man with his feet resting on a low table in front of him. As I glance around the tent to get a first impression of the space he yells to me that I should be buying something. I suggest to him that it seems a bit ironic that an occupier would be so intent on making money as to shout for my attention. The man shrugs and mutters almost inaudibly that everybody needs to make some money somehow...

Ultimately: To get a general sense of what direction this highly publicized protesters' movement is maneuvering is not for this writer to speculate. In truth whether or not this very camp will even be here a year from now remains to be seen.

In the end perhaps these occupiers should take a thorough look at their name for some inspiration as to where it might be fruitful to focus their joint energy. Indeed the only thing any person can really "occupy" is once and for all: Land.

Editor: After our deadline the occupiers lost a legal battle put forth by the City of London and ultimately the occupiers at St. Paul's Cathedral was ordered to leave the premise.