

Submission for the Leveson Inquiry

Module 1

As requested from the Inquiry with the statement of truth:

01, February, 2012

I would like to draw your attention to the press coverage of the occupy movement since the 15th October and especially during the recent eviction court case brought by the City of London. This specifically relates to Module 1: Points 1, 4, 7 & 10 in particular.

Having been an occupier since early November on the St. Paul's site (OccupyLSX), as well as commencing a PHD study in Global Politics, it has come to my attention that a large proportion of the mainstream media have wilfully distorted the image and message of occupy. Examples include:

- Stories wholly based on hearsay, e.g. in The London Evening Standard, whose front page reported on intravenous drug use in the camp,
- The notable lack of coverage of the issues raised at OccupyLSX, such as social injustice, unsanctioned wars, unethical greed of elites, ecological destruction, genocide, inequitable neoliberal division of capital & resources and the current globalised system.

On Dec 19th, The City of London Corporation took Occupy LSX to the Royal Courts of Justice to obtain a ruling allowing them to evict the occupiers. The named occupier, Tammy Samede was represented by John Cooper QC. Daniel Ashman and George Barda were litigants in person.

The City of London claimed that Occupy LSX's tents block a public highway. Daniel Ashman, George Barda and John Cooper rejected the City's claims on many legal points that relate to the rights to protest, Article 11 of the European Human Rights Act: Freedom of Assembly and Association. The defendants asserted the over exaggerations of the claimed "nuisances" and the proportional universal benefit of occupy as a communal space to exercise the lawful right to protest.

Beyond this, Daniel Ashman also raised a further legal argument: this concerned "Lawful excuse", using the example set out by R v. Zelters et al. "The Ploughshares 4" [1996].

Daniel Ashman presented the court with the case that occupy is a new type of political agency, unprecedented due to its global nature. The case was made that political protests of the past have frequently failed. Marches have been ignored, petitions have had no effect and the balance of convenience has prevailed through corporate lobbying and within the limitation of the electoral system. He asserted that the physical semi-permanent nature of the camp, which is what the City of London was challenging, was intrinsic to Occupy LSX and therefore had lawfully excuse.

Within this case, Daniel Ashman accused The City of London Authority and the corporations that sponsor it of being complicit in genocide, amongst other destructive practices to both humans and the planet. This argument was set forward to justify OccupyLSX continuing at its present site to enable the dialogue that is on-going there to discuss an alternative future that is equitable, socially just and ecologically sustainable. There were bundles of submissions supporting these claims.

The judge's decision could have set a new legal precedent; however the press chose to ignore this turning point. Instead, outside the Royal Courts of Justice on the last day of the hearing, a journalist from the Daily Mail asked Tammy Samede, the named defendant for the whole camp, to comment on a trivial matter. This matter was mentioned in the court room, about when she reprimanded others for being rowdy and drinking too much on the camp. I asked the reporter – in light of all the serious issues that were being discussed in the courtroom, why he was asking that question. To paraphrase he said, "I work for this paper – it has this agenda – this is the story I have to write."

His reply suggested to me, that he was passively complicit within the newspaper's agenda and that whatever the actual events in the courtroom were; he felt that it was his duty to report about Occupy in a negative light.

This is an example of institutionalised bias.

The anti-fascist Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci asserted that elites in a society suppress a population and control them through engendering common sense, to behave with consent in the desired way. He suggested this is done through media, within education and through religious institutions.

The government, media and elites in Britain are interlinked:

- Corporations last year paid for lobbying of the British Government £2 billion, thus subverting the course of British Democracy.
- In Tony Blair's first election in 1997, he thanked The Sun for its "magnificent support" stating that it "really did make the difference".
- 23 out of the 29 members of the new cabinet are millionaires.

A further criticism of the press is that they over simplify and polarise, thus distorting the message of occupy. This patronises the reader and promotes ignorance about the movement. Two key examples of this are the media claiming that occupy “does not stand for anything” and that it is “anti-Capitalist.”

The reported line that occupy does not stand for anything was used frequently in the first few weeks of the protest. It has resonated widely with members of the public. The

press actively ignored the 5 initial statements issued by OccupyLSX that passed through the consensual process. What Occupy stands for is also shown by the solidarity we have shown with numerous marches on a wide range of issues, all the discussions at GA's, the comprehensive range of working groups and their foci and the three national conferences in London, Edinburgh and Sheffield. OccupyLSX has also initiated a dialogue with other Occupations in over 80 countries spanning over one thousand sites. In a press release, OccupyLSX rejected the G20 for being "undemocratic, unjust and unsustainable". There are also over 40 occupations in Britain.

If someone from the press genuinely did not grasp that occupy stands for something: maybe a job in the press is not for them. If a wide range of the press is presenting this message, it suggests a systematic or institutionalised problem.

Many newspapers have labelled occupy as "anti-capitalist." It may suit a proportion of the protest; however, it does not represent Occupy comprehensively. Anti-Capitalist sentiments are not reflected in any of the press release statements, or from the working groups statements that have gone through the General Assembly. An example of OccupyLSX position is on corporations, this shows that as a group we are not anti-capitalism, more accurately we could be defined as anti-injustice and against inequality or corporate greed. This is an excerpt from this statement:

'Globally, corporations deprive the public purse of hundreds of billions of pounds each year, leaving insufficient funds to provide people with fair living standards. We must

abolish tax havens and complex tax avoidance schemes, and ensure corporations pay tax that accurately reflects their real profits.

Corporate lobbying subverts our democracy. Last year corporations spent £2 billion influencing the British government. We believe exploitative corporate lobbying has no place in a democratic society. Legislation to ensure full and public transparency of all corporate lobbying activities must be put in place. This should be overseen by a credible and independent body, directly accountable to the people.

The existing system of corporate sanctions allows executives and board members to avoid individual responsibility for the consequences of their actions and inactions. Those directly involved in the decision-making process must be held personally liable for their role in the misdeeds of their corporations and duly charged for all criminal behaviour.' Personally, I am anti-neoliberal, anti-corruption, anti-inequality and pro-ecological and not anti-capitalist.

In the press the term "anti-capitalist" has negative connotations. These connotations have been engendered by the media and academia throughout the 20th Century affirming a myth that there are no alternatives to the current system, except communism, which failed in practice. The press are thus inadvertently suggesting that we as humans cannot improve on what has gone before. Therefore, this unfounded label, 'anti-capitalist', has an amazing power to distort the meaning of Occupy and discredit it to the public. By discrediting Occupy, this reinforces the system and acts to prolong the status quo in the interests of the elites.

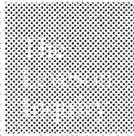
A further example of sensationalist journalism about occupy concerns claims made by papers including the London Evening Standard that intravenous drug use was rife at Occupy LSX. This headlining front page article was based on the City of London giving the camp sharps bins. This headline on the front of the Evening Standard is based on unsubstantiated evidence; however, its negative impact on OccupyLSX to the general public is immeasurable.

As a member of Occupy, although not a spokesperson for the movement, I believe Occupy has a vital role is to engender positive change. To engender this change to the political discourse it needs to highlight the numerous problems within the world, connected to social inequality, social injustice, the people who profit from others deaths and the ecological destruction caused by a number of elites. I believe the institutional bias in the press distorts the message of Occupy, and this is carried out by people who gain from the current situation continuing.

I hope the following letter is helpful with your inquiry. If you require further information I am more than to willing to assist with any follow up inquiries you may have with this submission – including opening all channels of communication with other occupiers.

Best wishes

Steve Rushton



Public Inquiry into
the actions of the police

Steps before publication

1. If you are happy for the Inquiry to publish your submission please add and sign the following statement of truth to the end of your submission/statement:

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

Date *07 February 2012*

Please be aware that by signing the statement of truth you are confirming that you agree that the contents of the submission/statement are true. Please take extra time to ensure that you are completely happy with your submission/statement before you sign it.

If you have provided a submission/statement in your private capacity you should state your full name in the submission/statement but should provide in a separate document personal details (e.g. address, contact address, mobile telephone number and e-mail address), which will not be published.

Please remove any personal details such as home address or telephone number before forwarding the final signed submission/statement.

If you have provided the submission/statement on behalf of an organisation, please state this clearly in the first line of the submission/statement.

2. Your signed submission/statement, in its entirety, should be returned to us by email.

3. Returning your signed submission/statement will confirm that you are content for the Inquiry to publish it on its website in the form you have provided. If this is not the case and you have any concerns or wish for certain sections to be withheld please make this clear in any response.

4. Your signed submission, once received, will initially be provided to those groups who have been designated as Core Participants to the Inquiry (a full list is available on our website: www.inquiry.org.uk).

5. If the Core Participants do not raise any matters your statement will then be referred to in open session and at that point it will be published, along with your name, on the Inquiry's website.

The Inquiry intends to begin publishing submissions/statements on the website shortly and would therefore be grateful for your response by return.