

What do #occupylondon want?

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I spoke [on the above issue at the Front Line club last night](#). And i stress, straight away, that I have no obvious right to do so: I have only attended a couple of times and spoken once, so I spoke as an observer of the phenomenon and for myself and no one else.

That said, I argued that what the whole #occupy movement is about is creating a space for dissent. Geography is a really important part of this: having a location where people can meet and talk over a period is vital That's because for thirty or more years neoliberalism has very deliberately crowded out all dissent, in economics and politics. So we have a hegemony of neoliberal thinking in economics whilst politicians are cowed into offering one agenda within the framework of the current political domain. These are themes I explore in depth in [The Courageous State](#).

The importance of #occupy in this context is that it creates a space; physical, social and virtual in which an alternative narrative can be developed, explored, tested and be accepted. This is vital. This narrative has to replace the failed mantra we have been fed for thirty years that greed is good, growth is essential, finance is power and that those who fall by the wayside should be left there since it's all their own fault. Vast numbers of people realise this is wrong, as of course it is. But as even debate last night showed, the simplistic mantras of the far left and right want to close this debate down and both using similar language. That's to say, they argue that by seeking a new narrative those occupying are wooly headed and wrong when both these discredited ideas can offer certainty, albeit that the certanty they provide is only in the minds of the true believers and bears no relationship to the life experience or needs of the people of this or any other country. But it's their narratives that demands certainty that the media have echoed to date.

That's indication of the bankruptcy of both the old left and the right, but it's not now going to put people off seeking the change that is needed, even though no one quite knows that that change might be, even if I have just written 332 pages speculating on it!

So #occupy is in a very real sense about telling a new story. And what's so shocking, as I pointed out, is the way they're doing it. They're located in exactly the right place to challenge the power base of the UK in the City of London (and only pedants argue they should be outside the Bank of England, not St Paul's: they're in the City, which is all that matters). The City is based on secrecy, and it promotes it through its tax haven activity in London and through its branches in Cayman, Jersey and so on. That secrecy is compounded by the form of company accounts, whose consolidated nature matched by the opacity of companies to their shareholders means we know nothing at all about what happens inside the world's major corporations. So tax haven and multinational corporations create a massive secrecy space, hidden from view where decision making is an unknown, unaccountable process. And then along comes #occupy and is so transparent it is shocking, revealing its inner working for all to see. And those used to the conventional logic that decisions are made and we are then told about them cannot fathom what is going on.

Precisely. The process is in itself revealing what is wrong with the City.

And have no doubt these methods can and do work. The Quakers have used them for 250 years and have yet to vote on anything - and have had massive social impact despite that.

Now I'll be honest: I do not think consensus decision making will become widespread. But that's not the point: the point right now is the challenge that it represents to the way of working of the City of London. This shocks it to the core, which is precisely what is so radical about #occupy. In the process of creating a new, complex, maybe messy (like life itself) narrative it is being open and honest about the fact that this involves honest doubt, uncertainty, evolution, error and change. That's like life. But it's not what neoliberals say life is. They say people are rational, all knowing, certain as to their preferences, and consistent over time. Unless they are all those things the neoliberal model of economics does not work, which is, of course exactly why it fails. The comparison is obvious: #occupy is honest, neoliberalism isn't.

And yes, these are all themes in the book, and I build within it a whole new economic theory based on the messiness of life. But that's just fortuitous coincidence. My point is that #occupy wants to build a new narrative, and that the process in which it is doing so is central to that aim. And that in itself makes it a pivotal action in understanding the changes our society is likely to go through over the years to come.

And I embrace it for that reason.