

S – This is Comrade Two, if you could elaborate a little bit about yourself. How old were you at the time of the encampment? How old are you now? And give a general political descriptor of yourself.

C2 – At the time of the encampment, I was a 21-year-old undergraduate student of philosophy in my third year, I am 22 now. No longer a student. I would consider myself a communist. That's quite a generic label but generally speaking I am not comfortable with one narrow tendency but I am primarily influenced by various heterodox tendencies which emerged following the '68 crises of institutional Marxism so namely autonomist Marxism, the ultra-left, various strands of Maoism and so-called Third-Worldism. I had a similar political orientation at the time but it was less critical or as well considered as it is now.

S – Great. I know this one will probably be redundant for you but when did you first go to the encampment? Tell me that long and lengthy story.

C2 – I was there right from the very beginning because I had helped to get the initiative started and organise it beforehand. I helped to set up the encampment.

S – Ok, love. That one was easy. What first drew you to the encampment as a moment, as a tactic and what was your first impression of the encampment when it was established?

C2 – I think what drew me to the encampment as a tactic, at the very least, was that I had seen the Gaza Solidarity encampments going up in the US and their subsequent brutalisation by the cops. More importantly even than that, I saw people fighting back, people setting up nigh on little communes, people escalating, taking over loads of buildings. I saw defiance, I saw resistance, I saw bravery and I found that deeply inspiring so I think I became increasingly agitated that we weren't doing anything similar. I had been trying to organise some direct actions on campus alongside some others in solidarity with the people of Palestine and thus far they had failed to amount to anything. So I sent a message to these

groups who we had been trying to organise occupation that were going nowhere with and it seems that the frustration I was feeling upon seeing this scenes of militancy and for other people more so repression coming out of the US and it seems that others were sharing that same feeling of frustration and so when I sent a message this quickly got some very positive responses. Very quickly two meetings were convened, that were very well attended as well compared to our previous meetings out of these various Palestine solidarity organising groups that existed on campus beforehand that we had been building slowly for a few months. So I suppose for me it was generally wanting to escalate disruption to british support for the genocide of Gaza in some way that I could and being incredibly inspired by the example set by the so-called student intifada elsewhere. In terms of my first impression of the encampment when it had been set up, it seemed like a shit-show. We had really rushed into it with very little preparation.

S - Exactly what the previous interviewee said, down to the phrasing.

C2 – I think what I heard about the Columbia encampment at Columbia university in New York, they had spent months trying to organise it. We had two meetings about a week or two beforehand. I think also after what I had seen happening in the US, I was frankly very nervous about what the cops might do, especially after some recent bad experiences with them in the Palestine solidarity movement in general especially at blockades and things like that. But I think I had forgotten that the British policing strategy is more based on pacification on the whole, trying to coax the majority into collaboration and isolating the more militant edge. But undeniably, I felt a lot of paranoia especially in the face of our deep, deep disorganisation. Nonetheless I was happy to see how many people were coming down in support and how much support it was getting initially. There were all sorts of people around there that I either didn't see very much or I'd never seen at all or the people I'd seen a little bit but not got the chance to work with but for whom I had a lot of respect and I think I was

overall in quite a positive mood about the whole thing because it seemed to me that it was serving as a very good base from which to escalate further and to try and deepen our intervention, deepen our organisation etc. But at the very beginning I didn't think it was in a good state but I suppose I was hopeful about where it might go.

S – Did you go into it expecting mass support or expecting the support that the encampment got, or rather that I saw it getting in its first few days?

C2 – I think I expected the support but I think I didn't expect how that would feel in some ways. I think logically I expected we were going to get support but that's a very different sense to just knowing that people will in some sense support you to the feeling of actually having all those people around you, helping you to build this thing. I think in some ways I hadn't really expected that almost, like I knew we were going to get passive support in some sense but I didn't expect so many people to be there so much near the beginning.

S - This is a little more benign but how did you spend the majority of your time at the encampment? Be as general or specific as you'd like.

C2 – I think for the most part, for the most part I was just in meetings all the time. Or chain-smoking. Sometimes both. I spent a lot of time just sat around in informal political conversations which I think were important overall. I definitely found it very refreshing to be in a situation where there are a lot of people around willing to talk about revolutionary political ideas, even if they weren't communists themselves, they were very willing to listen to my positions. They were very willing to take them seriously, to have their own ideas challenged. I found that very refreshing because it is not something you experience, normally you find a deep cynicism but when people break with the routines of everyday life, capitalist ideology loses much of its iron grip, naturally because we didn't have a cadre of conscious revolutionaries, it retrenches to be unable to encourage and elaborate that kind of break. I

think I spent a lot of time also on security and staying up into the wee hours, keeping watch, losing my mind slightly. What else? I don't know really. Putting up pallets, making signs, things like that. I think I probably didn't spend as much time as I should have on many of the more basic work necessary to keep the camp going. I was very laser-focused on escalation and political radicalism so I mostly spent my time on activities I thought would promote that but we still needed to maintain that base in some capacity in the beginning which I probably neglected somewhat.

S – At the beginning, in your opinion, was there more of an environment for ideological struggle? Or was that environment more open to ideological struggle?

C2 – Yes, I think in some ways, it was more open to it. It felt somehow less intense than the term ideological struggle makes it sound. What I really sensed was an openness and a willingness to hold fewer prejudices towards one another at the beginning. There were people with all sorts of politics willing to listen to each other, willing to take each other seriously. So I suppose it was an environment more open and conducive to ideological struggle at first because it had not yet got to the point where it felt like an uphill battle.

S – So how did you interact with the factionalism on the encampment? This is one of the... juicier ones we will call it.

C2 – I was the main instigator and leader. [Laughter]

S – [Laughter] I remember it very well. The smoking area putsch.

C2 – The Smoking Area Putsch, yeah. So, I very much encouraged and tried to organise factionalism on the encampment. I think factionalism is just a political necessity to be honest.

S – one divides into two, after all.

C2 – Well yeah exactly. In my opinion, one of Lenin's big mistakes was the ban on factions in the Communist Party. There was a lot of discontent among those of us more oriented towards militant escalation, this was there in place from the very beginning. In practice we had already formed a faction through various informal chats around the encampment, especially in the smoking area which is kinda funny. I don't know. Factions are always already there; the question is how you organisationally deal with them. So, I think I sensed that it was already there, I sensed that there was an increasing liberal hegemony over the encampment whereas I think early on, it felt like there was a greater degree of militancy, there was a less entrenched power structure. There were more radicals who were leading the way and making decisions that people were actually taking seriously. This seemed to be changing after a certain point and this was generating a lot of discontent. So, I kinda took it upon myself to encourage the development of this tendency as much as possible. This isn't to give myself too much credit because people only listen to someone insofar as they have an appetite for what they are promoting. So I think it would have happened. Whatever. I did take a very instigating role, we will put it that way. I think I regret that we were less open with it, I think people treated it in a clandestine way, like we were sort of trying to coup things. I think we kinda played into that. It seems that the politics of it got mixed up with some really petty frustrations and we traded in a lot of insults towards the politically (C2: I think I meant "liberally" here) inclined members of the encampment, we met in private, we were not particularly honest about the fact that we had formed an organisational group and I think this is what led to our delegitimization and downfall once people did find out that we had been organising in that way. I don't think that was inevitable. I think we, as much as there was always going to be a struggle there because there were some people there who wanted power over the encampment who were very liberal and wanted to forestall militant escalation and didn't want radical messaging, I think had we done things in a better way, we could have

politically connected with people outside the small group of people who had been venting discontent and frustrations to one another, because there were many people who I encountered in the encampment, who in their thinking were breaking with capitalist hegemony in some sense but for various reasons hadn't ended up in our group that had spontaneously formed. This meant that it became very hard to connect with them. Yeah. So I have no regrets about forming a faction or anything. I have no regrets about trying to get together to try and voice our dissent and to try and challenge the ruling liberal hegemony. Whatever happened, it's very likely that the liberals would have gotten their way because as a revolutionary until the final victory you're always going to be outnumbered, you're always going to be fighting uphill. Fundamentally, to be a revolutionary is to challenge common sense. So I don't necessarily think the course of the encampment as a whole would have gone differently but I wish we had been, I think we could have done a better job of using it as a vehicle for ideological struggle with a slightly longer view.

S – So it is my understanding that you met several people that you hadn't generally worked with before but have since gone on to work with a lot, what was your first impression of this group that we conspired with way back when?

C2 – That's quite hard to say. There were certain people I had already encountered over the course of the Palestine solidarity movement. So I already knew their political orientation pretty well. There were other people I had worked with before or I had seen around but I hadn't really talked to very much so I didn't really know about their politics, other than that they were involved with the encampment. I think the first sign that there was something interesting happening when I had been in touch with *Notes From Below* which is a journal inspired by the Italian workerist tradition and they'd said that they'd send us some free books and I think...

S – Wait, that was you?!

C2 – Yes, did you not realise?

S – Oh my God. Yeah, I didn't know. That was the first time I encountered *Notes From Below* and you're... I nearly said you're at fault but that would imply it was something bad. Wow, ok. I didn't know that.

C2 – Yeah, I'd been a big reader of theirs beforehand and when the encampment started, I saw on their Instagram that they posted something like 'hey are you running an encampment? Contact us' and I emailed them and got them to send us a load of free books and pamphlets. But I went and I brought this up to some people on the first or second day, I said does anybody here know notes from below and naturally no-one did, except for Sweet Mouse. I think later that day I was like I didn't know you were chill like that and we got chatting a bit more and I realised they were also into endnotes which we had read a lot of and were influenced by and I then knew that, I had met sweet mouse through Iphone and so then I kinda got an idea of the kind of politics circling around that group of friends was. After that, it is kinda difficult for me to say, a lot of the other first impressions are quite difficult to say, I find in a space like the encampment you see people around a lot and you kinda exchange words with them every now and then. So the relationships that formed happened quite naturally. So it is hard to pinpoint a moment when you first encountered someone and what your first impression was. In general, I would say, in terms of the group as a whole, I think I was generally very impressed by everyone's bravery and willingness to materially disrupt the British support for the genocide of Gaza. I think it was refreshing to feel that other people felt like we had to do more than just putting up a fucking peace camp because I felt like I had begun to lose my mind slightly. So I gained a lot of respect for a lot of people that way. It is

difficult for me to say, the whole thing was kinda a whirlwind. So it is difficult for me to pinpoint when I first got an impression of people.

S – Thoughts on the entirety of the peace camp rhetoric, very quickly before we continue? I know I have certain feelings about it. I am very interested to hear your analysis of that whole part of the situation.

C2 – Crock of shit basically, complete crock of shit. I do think its an example of... Post '68, I've heard there described as two trends in internationalism, one which was more dominant through the 1970s and one which from the 1980s onwards became more dominant on the left, those being anti-imperialist internationalism and so-called human rights internationalism and, of course, that human rights internationalism is still the dominant form that predominates on the left, though there are signs that this is starting to change in the direction of anti-imperialism. But this kind of rhetoric promoted by various NGOs and charities and general liberal institutions, I think was what diffused throughout the encampment and led to this pacifist rhetoric that we are a peace camp. Now, I think it's a load of bullshit because I and so many others on the encampment wholeheartedly support the armed struggle for Palestinian liberation. Peace without liberation is not peace at all, so I do not think that until the day of liberation we should trade in much discussion about peace because that seems to me that that implicitly delegitimises the violence of the oppressed. For me, it's important that we stand unconditionally with the Palestinian resistance, with the violence of the oppressed against their oppressors. So until the day that theres an end to the settler-colonial entity known as Israel, then I don't believe we should be talking about peace.

S - More on to the next three which are essentially your perspective and feeling on X day, feel free to be as critical or not critical as you'd like obviously I'd love for you to be very,

very critical. So if you could in however way you'd like describe your experience of King's Gate-gate which I believe was May the 8<sup>th</sup>.

C2 – That was a shit show and I know that's a word I've been using a lot. So, I believe the context for this was stalled negotiations with the university executive board. From the get go, I was aware that negotiations would just be a carrot on a stick dangled in front of us, this is the way with majority of university struggles, they pay attention to your demands until you start causing too much of a problem they can't ignore you and then they just stall you for ages like 'Oh negotiations! Negotiations! We will set up a committee' and it may seem like you're making some kind of progress, you don't make any progress because they just kinda draw it out and drag it out until it gets to the end of the academic year and then summer happens and everything goes away and they conveniently pretend like nothing's happened. Potentially they even make a pledge or two and don't really do anything about it. I kinda expected that negotiations were going to be kinda a scam from the get go but I guess in order to cause some trouble about the sham that negotiations were turning out to be, a few of us tried to get into King's Gate earlier in the day, just to cause a general ruckus. But security forced us out quite violently, they were trying to slam the doors on us and were trying to prevent the door getting slammed to get in but they were really pushing us out. I think a couple people got quite bruised from this and they got very, very incensed about this. As far as I am concerned, that's just the predictable consequence of our actions. The university aren't just going to let us in, they aren't just going to let us resist them, they are going to try and force us out. They bruised someone a bit, that's kinda the worst that happened, I know its not fun but I decided that I didn't mind that much because if that's what gets people to resist, then that's fine by me. However, I do think the blockade that followed, the blockade of king's gate, was frankly quite silly. It came out of just pure frustration that we had not made progress in negotiations and with experience with blockades at arms factories for example

and some people who maybe had some experience blocking road with groups like just stop oil etcetera, I think that meant that the blockade tactic had proliferated into the common sense of the activist left and so everyone just did what they knew how to do which was block things. Nonetheless I took part in it, on the megaphone for most of it, which was really quite tiring. I remember lots of people mocking the security guards who were there who had locked all the doors and everything. Up until that point they had been pretty okay around the encampment, I was trying to discourage people from doing this but they continued anyway. I think this was the start of tensions between the encampment and the security staff, which beforehand had been a relatively good relationship between the actual staff and the encampment, obviously people in the management of the security team were less fond of us. These tensions were probably inevitable but I think they were unnecessarily inflamed at times. I don't think the blockade of kings gate was a proud moment. I think at that moment it represented a deep isolation from the rest of the university such that we ended up causing a lot of trouble for random administrative staff. I know kings gate is where the higher management of the university is based but its not clear whether many of them were actually in that building. Its also just where the university administration takes places. Its also relatively far from the actual military and security infrastructure that does exist proximate to campus. So I led a breakaway with that thought in mind, because I took a break halfway through just having a cigarette because I was very tired and I was speaking to someone who knew a bit more about the location (C2: replace with 'local' pls) police, and he talked about how they were massively overstretching themselves to police this and I saw how the security guards were there holding it down and the idea occurred to me that we have completely overstretched the police and security team right now. Why don't we use this opportunity to do something, so I led a breakaway, just like a small group of us and we used this opportunity to go and disrupt one of the buildings more directly implicated in military RND (C2: plx replace

with 'R&D'). Security did eventually end up coming, though we were in a position where we were never going to be arrested because we had completely overstretched police capacity. So as much as it was just a small, fairly inconsequential disruption, I was still fairly proud to have taken the initiative to use that opening. I think in terms of the blockade, a blockade of an arms factory is not the same as a blockade of an administrative building for a university. A blockade of an arms factory is important and an unqualified good, obviously there's questions of strategy around it but I can't see anything bad about doing it. There are certain people who would suggest that 'oh but what about the arms workers', I think they can shut up. I think the blockade of the administrative building, the main issue I had with it was that the university management really exploited this misstep to generate a lot of ill will for us among university staff, especially many union members who were admin team who worked in the building or were security staff. This was probably the most noticeable example of a large trend, I think the obstruction of negotiations led people to cause any kind of disruption without regard for the balance of forces or tenuous alliances we were trying to maintain. But I will say that despite my criticism of this whole thing, this is an unavoidable consequence of people discovering their capacity to resist and becoming frustrated at their lack of progress. It is unavoidable. Especially without the intervention of a conscious revolutionary force. It will be messy, it will be unco-ordinated and it will be self-defeating at times. This is the case for all human endeavours, political struggle is not going to be any different.

S - Now onto the next big one: al-Shifa Hall Day, May 29<sup>th</sup>, Black Wednesday, our 9/11, whatever you want to call it, what were doing that day? What were you thinking? What's your general analysis and critique of what went on?

C2 - I actually had an assignment due the next day...

S - Oh God...

C2 – I think it might have even been one of the last ones so otherwise I would have joined the occupation but it meant that I wasn't in the occupation because I thought I need to get this assignment done for tomorrow, this occupation, I think, we had envisioned it would go on for a little while hopefully. But there was a protest that had been organised, like a rally, outside the hall where the occupation was taking place so I left the library where I was working on this essay to come show up at this protest. Both to show support and also I thought I would go there just to check that everything was going ok on the outside, as someone who was a bit more militant and security conscious. You know, check what security are doing, check what the police are doing, just make sure that everything is going ok and then I was gonna return to my assignment, get it done the next day and then go help out more with the occupation. That was my plan. Now as I was at this rally, I was going and checking up with people from the encampment, seeing what was going on and eventually I got enlisted to go in front of one of the doors, to prevent cops and security from blocking them and closing the occupiers in. We tried to do this, we failed to do this, despite a good fight. This is when things started to get a bit chaotic, cops were dragged people away, things were getting a bit violent here and there. I think someone fainted or someone got injured. I can't remember what, I just remembered that someone needed to get into an ambulance. At this point, the crowd had shifted to around the side of the building where we had been trying to block the doors, to prevent cops and security from blocking them instead and those of us who had been doing that had been dragged away. There was now this police line stopping this person from getting to the ambulance, so the crowd at this point had got quite large, had got very angry and was also quite confused. Lines of communication between the outside and the inside were all but non-existent which was a massive problem but I knew that our basic orientation was to open up physical lines between the crowd outside and the inside of the occupation. So my focus was on trying to permanently break the police lines that were surrounding the building. At this point many of us, were

trying to break the police lines and a few people had almost got dragged off by the cops so we were having to pull each other back and everything. It was really hot at this point it was really bad. The crowd migrated round to where the door to the courtyard is. After struggling for a while, we managed to break the police line and get the door open and I remember all of us rushed in. It was just this incredible feeling once we had done it. It felt like everything had opened up. In that moment of exhilaration I rushed into the building with a load of other people and I was trying to look to see if we could occupy more of it or if we could get a route open to see if we could get a way inside. The doors at this point had been locked, unbeknownst to myself. This didn't work, security were inside, the doors to the occupation hall were locked, I tried throwing around a few chairs but that didn't really result in anything. So we were pushed back into the courtyard, security had basically stopped us from getting inside. The cops had formed another two lines blocking us from the crowd on the other side, outside the courtyard. So we were split three ways between the occupation, those of us in the courtyard and those of us outside. We were kettled. We spent a long time there, someone was injured they had their leg just completely smashed in, we were getting rained on, we tried to break the kettle. We managed to break the line a couple of times on our side but there was a lack of coordination and communication between these three groups so we had no way of coordinating the pincer motion that we would have needed in order to break the kettle properly there. It was raining, it was cold, people were getting hit by batons. People were getting batoned in the neck and everything. I don't think anyone came out of that situation without some bruises. I think at this point things were getting a lot uglier for the crowd outside, I didn't know what was going on there, I was trapped on the inside. A few of us were trying to strategise, to know what to do. I started looking around, seeing if there was any way we could get into the building and set up a physical line between us and the occupiers. There was no hope, there was nothing we could do. The police had given us an offer to leave in an

orderly fashion so after conspiring with some people, we decided to take up their offer with the intention (that we didn't tell the cops) to cause some trouble once they'd let us out. I think the original plan that occurred to me was that we would go and occupy another building but that got changed to just generally causing trouble. Going and occupying another building probably wasn't a good idea but I remember leaving to cheers from the crowd and that felt quite good.

S - Cheers??

C2 – Yeah, everyone was cheering as we marched out. I can't really remember what happened after that but at some point we started to regroup and just started marching into the street. Suddenly it started feeling like everything was unpredictable. I didn't know really entirely what was going to happen, I think I had not been made aware of where we were as a group intending to head. I just knew we trying to do something, trying to cause some kind of trouble. Everything felt very unpredictable. We started running down Northumberland Street carrying Palestinian flags, grabbing random things we found on the street, people were picking up traffic cones and everything. People saw us in the street and were cheering at us. Me and Mary went and picked up a fence from a building site and we were running along with that and it was really heavy and it was bashing into my side as I was running through the centre of Newcastle with this massive group of us. I can't remember whether it was this point or later but there were police vans coming after us so we couldn't stop running...

S - Jesus, you nearly started a riot. Christ!

C2 – We made it down to Tyne Bridge and comrade goblins and I decided: right, let's block this properly so we tried to make a makeshift barricade out some materials we had brought and some materials we had found there but the general mood was inclined to sit down in the road and block it instead. I think this probably came from the history of tactics used by

environmentalist groups and the general tactic used in blockades. I think it was a bad move in my opinion. If you are just sitting down in the street in one of the central arteries of Tyneside, we are just asking to get arrested basically. Someone did get arrested that was comrade Le Rogue. Yes and I think because there was the sense that we were going to get arrested and there was a rumour that some of the occupiers were actually going to get arrested themselves. We decided we had to abandon the blockade of tyne bridge and we would all return to campus. I remember at this point police vans coming after us and really having to run back quickly and it was a bit scary at this point. By the time we got back to campus, the occupiers were ok. I think at this point it must have been nine or ten pm. I think that was the broad conclusion of the day. I remember chatting with some people at the encampment especially some medics that turned up. There were some comrades who I deeply, deeply appreciate who were just doing the basic work of trying to check if everyone was ok and doing the basic work of trying to hold things down, people who don't really turn up much, sort of unsung heroes of the movement. I was exhausted, I was shaken, I was bruised and I was utterly exhilarated all at once. We didn't manage to achieve what we wanted to at all, but so many people showed so much bravery and so much willingness to resist that day; and resistance and solidarity are very powerful feelings. They are not enough as shown by the fact that we obviously utterly failed that day. The occupation was defeated. We didn't manage to hold it down, we didn't even manage to hold down the blockade of tyne bridge. So many people got injured, there were I think four arrests, everything went wrong in some ways but I still remember that feeling of solidarity and defiance at the end of the day and just feeling alive from it. we need more than that if we want to realise a better world but in times of difficulty and defeat, it is those kind of feelings you hold on to. There would be a lot I could say to criticise the day. Again, the lack of preparation was a problem, the lack of preparation especially for the potential consequences from the repressive state. The lack of

communication and coordination was a large problem and as much as we had convened a large crowd out there. It had been done so under deceptive pretences, which meant that they were very confused as much as they were very angry, they were very confused. All these led to, or contributed to, the general shit show that it was. But I think none of us expected the response by the police and the university to be as bad as it was. So many occupations within British universities have gone on without much of a hitch. I did not expect a response like that where they brought riot police in. If anything that was the response I expected very early on in the encampment because I had seen so many images from the US but as the encampment had gone on, I had become accustomed to the sense that 'no, British police don't do this, they just try and pacify everyone with liberalism, they don't repress in this kind of way. So I suppose it is a scary reminder that police tactics can change, sometimes unpredictably but in some ways it's quite difficult for me to imply that we did much wrong. I think... I don't know. Yeah, it failed in some ways but aside from some of the obvious points, a lot of what went wrong was outside of our control. I think in terms of what I am unhappy with was that so much focus was on the police repression itself without much of a critical appraisal of 'ok what could we have done better?' or an appreciation of the fact that 'hey, we actually fought the fuck back'. This is part of why they had to bring so many cops down, this is part of why they got so scared. Because we actually put up a fight you know? If we hadn't have put up a fight like that, it wouldn't have escalated as much as it did. This is the consequence of us resisting. Yeah I think this is all I have to say about that.

S – Ok great, thank you. Two very disparate, elaborative questions now. I imagine you didn't go to Forth Banks afterwards? And were you aware of the various tear gas threats?

C2 – No I didn't go to Forth Banks afterwards, I had an assignment to do and I had spent all day protesting...

S – Adrenaline carried me to Forth Banks and nothing else, not gonna lie.

C2 – The tear gas threats, I think I only heard about this after the fact, to this day I think that still is something I have not heard any confirmation about, only rumours. I don't know what the nature of these threats were, I don't know if this is just a rumour that spread or if this was something the cops were actually starting to say. I have no idea.

S – Ok great, thank you. Moving on to describing your last experience of the encampment. I imagine this one will be a little more emotional, nostalgic, whatever, unless that is very much the opposite for you. Take it away, what was your last experience of the encampment, physically, emotionally or otherwise.

C2 – Oh that's interesting, I think its... Cos on here it says describe the experience of the end of the encampment which is a little different.

S – My apologies I switched that one up when I wrote them down in my little note book.

C2 – No, no that's okay, I was just going to say that because I wasn't there at the end of the encampment. No, I think I was with my family elsewhere at this point, and frankly I was glad when it ended because I think it should have done sooner. I can't isolate when my last moment physically at the encampment was but I think that there were two times that I remember signalling to me the end of the encampment while I was there. There was one which was on my graduation day and I remember the encampment was very much wanting to stay there in order to try and be a public presence to graduating student. I think there were only about three or four people there. I found it really weird being there in my graduation clothes, my family were up for the day and everything and going to chat with people at the encampment but more than anything I just remember how few people there were there at that point and how sad it was starting to look. Another time, I remember quite near the end of the encampment, I can't quite remember the exact dating of it. Truth be told this probably wasn't

the last time I was at the encampment. I remember when a comrade had been arrested very early in the morning and going and helping out in the evening there, I hadn't been spending much time on the encampment at this point and sitting there, late into the night, just in case cops came back to try and arrest someone, just feeling quite horrified, scared in some ways and just generally feeling the defeat and despair among a lot of people. I think I continued actually, every now and then, to turn up to the encampment after that, just to go to some meetings but the numbers of people turning up to them had really contracted. There were groups of people trying to talk about how we should continue it on over the summer but it was so clear that it wasn't working. I think I remember after that there were a lot of messages just trying to shame people into coming and helping out, when it was so obvious that the capacity and the political will just so obviously wasn't there. Then I remember coming back in summer after the encampment had ended and sitting and having a cigarette in the smoking area with Violetta and seeing the fences they had put up and just feeling very... just feeling very sad about the whole thing and about... yeah.

S - we had a very similar experience, I came up to visit a friend and the day I was supposed to get the train back home to my family's house, I went and sat there with this huge satchel bag stuffed full of my clothes and I sat there just looking at the fences and smoked. It was a very Paddington moment.

C2 – Paddington if he smoked.

S – Paddington if he was fucking cool. Ok... Very briefly as well, where do you think that political will went? What do you think caused those numbers and that interest in the encampment to diminish as sharply as it did?

C2 – I think it was... I think it was the two related factors of the window of political possibility closing and the repression of the encampment increasing. Alongside some

increasing conflicts in the left surrounding the encampment. The people running the encampment had become very entitled and managerial towards the rest of the movement and there had been a series of... there had been a lot of conflict that was the result of deep interpersonal disfunction and this overall led to the encampment to be especially isolated, to become a bit of a pariah within the local activist scene. I think that those kinds of conflicts, there was the will to navigate them a little bit when it still seemed like there were possibilities open, I think after the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, after the occupation had been attempted and failed, after the state had shown that the state will just repress the fuck out of it and they had began to arrest people. I think a lot of the will had began to dissipate around then. I think after the 29<sup>th</sup> of May a few of us the more militant faction did try some more clandestine direct action. I think there was a bit of that going on. I think at that point it was out of frustration at the evident closure of possibility that had happened. The possibility of a mass escalation happening from this had basically closed after the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, so the best we were left with was small groups trying to undertake direct action but at that point doing that kind of thing did not come with much of a passion for the encampment itself coming out of it. If anything the encampment proved to make that kind of thing more dangerous in a lot of ways as the people who were involved in that kind of thing had to basically make themselves avoid it, in case they got nabbed by the cops or anything. The police basically realised that the encampment was the place where all the militant people in the Palestine solidarity movement were a lot of the time so they could just sweep in and grab people. So yeah. To me that is what it seems like but it is difficult to say.

S - That was very good, thank you. So, moving onto our last two questions: what would you say was your defining experience or moment or feeling to do with or about the encampment?

C2 – So when I was to trying to write some notes for this question, I realised unfortunately I can't isolate one moment. I think I can identify a few interrelated feelings but I am sorry for

this being an improper way of asking but I am going to briefly try and summarise three moments that define to me the encampment and then explain a bit.

S – That’s perfect, if you can find a way to complicate the question, I’d love that!

C2 – Ohh, I forget you’re an English student sometimes.

S – [Laughter]

C2 – So the first moment was the very beginning of the encampment, like the very first day. The moment when we were walking up to this lawn carrying all this camping equipment with masks on and shit. You know it was early in the morning, not super early but earlier than any student... sane student would be on campus and we just walked up to this plot of grass and set it up. I remember walking up to do this and it felt very, very odd because breaking with capitalist routine is really very strange because you’re breaking with the forms of socialisation and norms in which you live the vast majority of your life, and have been living the vast majority of your life. It’s a kind of vertigo, you have no idea what is going to happen because what you are doing is not accounted for in normal bourgeois life, it’s a kind of leap into the unknown. It’s less the legality or illegality of it because this was only semi-illegal and there’s many forms of illegality that dovetail quite smoothly into the norms of everyday life. It is that leap into the unknown of you don’t really know what it is going to be. the second moment that stands out to me which was on the fifth night I believe where we sat around late into the night playing very unpolished, rough and ready versions of twentieth century revolutionary songs and as much as this seems like quite a small moment for would-be political revolutionists such as myself maybe not the most significant. I think to me it shows those moments of struggle in which you form very moving ethical relationships with the comrades you are struggling with. It was this rag-tag bunch of young people coming together and breaking with our atomisation in solidarity with the world’s poor, singing all

these songs from a long tradition of struggle that comes before us and is bequeathed to us. You feel kinda more than yourself, it's very moving. I think the third moment was the one I described earlier of running down to Tyne Bridge on al-Shifa Hall day as much as the blockade of the tyne bridge was not the most calculated move, grabbing a fence and running down with a comrade, police vans coming after us, sirens in the distance. It is that feeling of... simultaneous lightness and vertigo again, this sense that the blockages of possibility can in fact be broken. It is not that we managed to break any capitalist social relations that day but in those moments you remember that things could be otherwise, that things are not so intractable as they may seem and so I think those three moments summarise the main feelings that define the encampment for me, which I would define as solidarity, exhilaration, defiance, vertigo and the sense that another world *is* actually possible and afterwards there is the loss of those feelings which is very, very painful and it is that pain which has to drive you to deeper understanding.

S – Wow, that was excellent really. I don't think I could have asked for anything better really. You've very much synthesised exactly what I expected from this section and my defining experience of the encampment is also running down to Tyne Bridge after we'd gotten out of the hall and we are sprinting, and sweaty and really badly needing to pee and in black block because we were trapped in there for five hours. And it is three comrades I have since become very close friends with TB, Comrade Slo and Superhans, and we are sprinting down pilgrim street with a Palestine flag. You've captured the emotions of that scene in a way I don't think I have ever quite comprehended, so that was really good thank you.

C2 – No worries.

S – Lastly just to return it to you basically and where we more so started. Just generally what have you been involved with since the end of the encampment and how have you carried forward the lessons that you learnt there?

C2 – So before the encampment, I had been involved with the Marxist group RS21 and I stayed involved with them for a little bit and I was trying to set up a branch in the north east but I ended up leaving out of frustration eventually. I think after certain experiences that I have gone through it is very difficult to transition from that kind of very fast-paced exhilarating work to the really useful prosaic work of organising very dull meetings obviously because RS21, I think their politics are kinda good enough, better than most of the left but it's really very... a lot of the work is just organising public meetings, talking, a lot of it feels just like a talking shop sometimes, just very boring forms of activism so I got very frustrated. Those of us in the militant faction of the encampment who obviously remained together as co-conspirators for a long time, so I think I have focus within that group with running study groups within it, I know even as the encampment was going on I was getting people into the little reading group I had set up and was in fact where the Leonardo Off Campus group began from and trying to develop the spontaneous anti-imperialism that brought us together into collective, critical communist politic. I have been involved in trying to get our local anti-raids group restarted that's been really bad. Not as in the actual work of it itself, I will actually say that going and just talking to people, just ordinary people, out in the west end about the home office and immigration raids and spreading that information is actually as much as it is in some ways it is quite slow work that some people may consider boring, I actually kinda like it. I think I like breaking that isolation that some of us on the far-left can get stuck in with quite a radical message and that's what I find in anti-raids work, for example when you're going and saying to people: 'If immigration enforcement come, stop them!'. That's quite a radical message and so I quite like going and just chatting to ordinary

people and trying to bring them round. More people than you may expect get it, even if they wouldn't articulate it in the same terms that I may as a Marxist. They get it and when you make that connection with people it feels quite good, it is obviously not the same kind of connection you make with people in these moments of very intense struggle but it's some of the closest to a pale imitation of it that I have managed to find in a lot of ways. I think that's been the majority of my engagement really. I have been involved in a bit of anti-fascist stuff. I think if anything what I have found is a protracted difficulty to try and continue my political engagement in the aftermath of the encampment and find anything that approximates that intensity. But I have tried my best to keep studying, on a personal level, keep talking to people, keep studying with other people. Keeping up the work is, I think, important but it's a bit of an uphill battle when you are outside of these kinds of moments but you've got to do it.

S – Ok, great. Is there anything you would like to particularly close on?

C2 – Umm, great question. To return to both of those questions actually, sorry to the past two questions, I have written a quote down in my notepad here that I didn't read out, but I am just going to read out this quote from the much-maligned Left Communist Amadeo Bordiga:

'Marxism is not the doctrine for the understanding of revolutions but of counterrevolutions.

Everyone knows how to orient themselves at the moment of victory but few are those who know what to do when defeat arises, becomes complicated and persists'. I don't think I know still but we try and work it out don't we?

S – We will give it a go.