

S – This is interview number 8, comrade 8. If you would like to elaborate a bit more about yourself, your age at the time of the encampment and your age now and give a general political descriptor.

C8 – Yes so at the encampment I was 18, I am now 20. Politically during the encampment, I was kinda... I am now an anarchist, I was kinda starting to discover anarchism but more leant to being a communist, just because of what I had read, I had read a lot of political theory and hadn't really been in super political circles so my politics was a lot more based on what I had read as opposed to the people around me or my own experiences.

S - Great, and when did you first go to the encampment then?

C8 – So I was there on the first day, helping to set up because I had been involved, not too heavily involved in the planning but I had been in some of the planning meetings, so I knew everything that was going on, so I was there on the first day, I think 7am, setting up tents in the cold.

S – Ok yeah, and what was that like?

C8 – It was quite weird to be honest, none of us had really done anything like that before I remember we all met up outside, what's it called, the junction – the fash pub. I don't know why that was our meeting point. Yeah so we all met up there, all with our tents and our supplies, just looking like we were going on a camping trip – very weird. We also had lost a huge chunk of people and just found them in a parking lot, it was just CIA with his car filled with Costco cookies and water, and yeah then we went to set up and, honestly, none of us knew what to expect. There were some people who were like 'the second we get there cops are just gonna attack us' and then some people were like 'oh we will be fine' and it ended up being really chill, like someone from estates came up to us and asked what we were doing and a few of us were just like 'We are camping!' and there honestly wasn't much question

after that. We did have some cops watching us from Northern Stage as it got later in the day but honestly, yeah, setting up was quite chill. It was just all of us trying to figure out how to build tents, the tents we had just bought or had had donated because we didn't really know how they worked. Yeah, yeah quite a calm start.

S – So what first drew you to the encampment and what was your first impression of it when it was established?

C8 – What first drew me to it? Well, I guess, as I said, I was involved in planning it. It just was something that aligned with me morally, obviously after October 7th and the genocide in Palestine and Gaza. I think all of us just felt so hopeless and like there was nothing I could do, and realising that our university had such a big hand in what was going on. Like one of the reasons I chose Newcastle, because it was between Newcastle and Edinburgh for me when I was picking unis and Edinburgh obviously had quite a lot of very big issues on campus with things like covering up sexual assault and things like that and that was one of the very big reasons I didn't choose them because they didn't align with me ethically and to come to Newcastle and after they talked all this talk about how they care so much about social justice and things and then to get here and realise that it was the complete opposite and then to see what was going on in Palestine and realise that my tuition fees that I had hoped were going somewhere good, were going towards that. It just felt like something I had to do, at least in some attempt to make the uni change. First impression? I don't know, it is quite hard for me to have a first impression because I was there, obviously, starting it. I don't know I think it was just quite... I obviously don't really know the word for it. It was just quite nice, honestly, seeing so many people come together caring about Palestine, not only just caring but wanting to do something and wanting to stand up and wanting to make some kind of change.

S – So how did you spend the majority of your time at the encampment, then? I have a kind of idea of this because one activity we were doing a lot of together, how would you describe what you were doing most of the time?

C8 – Pretty much all I would do was clean and smoke. Like it got to the point in the first couple of weeks where I had a little routine going, I would wake up at 9am as I lived really close to campus, I would go home, I would shower, I would go straight back and I would start cleaning and still there wouldn't be a lot of people up. But I would be cleaning up all the food and all the mess, probably would have smoked like three cigs at this point and then I would keep cleaning and then I would keep smoking and then there would be one of our really lengthy meetings at nine that would go on for two hours and we would not come to any conclusions, during which I would run off at any possible opportunity to chainsmoke in the corner and then I would do first night shift until like 4am and then I would go to sleep and wake up and do it all again. Pretty much just cleaning and smoking for the whole encampment.

S – Huge, god. So something that has emerged from previous interviews about the cleaning is that it seems to mostly have been women/femme presenting people who were doing a lot of the cleaning. What are your thoughts on what that says about the political culture of the encampment?

C8 – Yeah, I feel like misogyny was a very big issue and, at least for me, in my experience of it was mainly in the cleaning where like I remember I brought up one time in a meeting, and I often wouldn't speak in a meeting so I would just let the chaos wash over me, but I at one meeting I was like 'guys, we have to start cleaning, it is me and a couple of people who spend all day cleaning, there is mouldy food.' Like at the beginning we had the food tent, the little Tepee with all the food in and that was quite warm obviously because it was like May and I

would go in in the morning and it would just stink of rotting fruit and I would have to clean out all the fruit and so at this meeting I was like ‘guys, we need to get a grip and start cleaning’ and then after that meeting, a friend of mine overheard two guys in the smoking area making fun of me for bringing up cleaning and making fun of my political beliefs. So yeah I feel like there was a kind of weird culture where I think a lot of people forgot that we were living and forgot that... I don’t know, literally just forgot that they needed to clean up after themselves. People just kinda magically expected it to happen and the reason that it was magically happening was because of women, well mainly women, and yeah, I think that a lot of people kinda saw, at least the way I felt perceived, that I wasn’t as serious about politics or wasn’t as serious of an activist because I care about cleaning. But obviously for the encampment to have had any kind of longevity, for us to have survived in any way, it needed to be a clean space. Yeah, very misogynistic undertones to the cleanliness of it all.

S - Yeah, absolutely. So, the next three questions are about your perspective on a particular event, we will start with King’s Gate-gate which was May the 8th. What was your experience of that?

C8 – yeah so. I was actually talking about this the other day, I obviously started when we were protesting outside of the SU and then it just kinda organically escalated to us being outside of King’s Gate. I actually missed a couple hour chunk of it as I had tattoos booked for that day. I thought it was just gonna be a chill day so I was like ‘Oh, I will do the little rally outside the SU and then I will go get my tattoos’, and then suddenly we are outside King’s Gate and I was like ‘Guys, I have to leave’ and I just came back and everyone was still going and a friend of mine had just joined the encampment so I was like ‘where has she gone?’ because I had just abandoned her to go off and get my tattoos. So honestly, I didn’t have a huge experience of it because I missed out the middle bit, I was only there for the start and the end. But honestly, I thought it was just such an example, it was just a really effective

action, I thought. I thought the fact that it was so organic was really powerful and as well just in the fact that it was so organic, the fact that we managed to coordinate so well and kinda just all decide what we were doing and just do it and the fact that I could even run off and get two tattoos in Gateshead and then run back and it was still going, there was just such resilience from everyone and the fact that it did lead to meetings as well, it was such an effective action and it was so nice that it was such a random one.

S – Yeah, do you think it shifted the perception of the encampment in any way?

C8 – Yeah definitely, didn't the uni send out an email after, saying we had stopped students from going to their well-being appointments?

S – I think so.

C8 – I think so, or at least even if they didn't send an email that was the rhetoric around the day so I think for some people it definitely created a negative image of us, unfortunately but I think even in that it was quite good because the uni started taking us seriously because of it because it did lead to meeting and things like that and I think at least for me, it made me start taking us seriously. Obviously the encampment itself is an act of protest but that was our first time actually doing something and taking up even more space and taking even more action, so I feel like maybe there was some negatives from it, I very much was such a positive one because I think it did lead to us being taken more seriously.

S - Could you then describe your experience of al-Shifa Hall day? It's a big one.

C8 – Its *such* a big one. What a weird day!

S – Yep!

C8 – What a weird, dark day. I remember that day starting and we had had that three hour long meeting discussing it all the night before. I wake up and suddenly that's an awful idea

and suddenly none of it makes sense and then I think it was just [name of a comrade] threw together an idea and we were all just like, 'Right, ok!'. I remember it starting and I remember we actually had no clue what we were doing, we were just running. I had been in a comms meeting before and I had been writing press statements, and I was just sat there and I was like but what are we actually doing and none of us actually knew, we were just writing press statements, don't really know what's happening. Yeah. Kinda went to shit from the very start. We had buddies, my buddy got arrested, so ya know. Not great, not ideal. Yeah, I remember ran in, going around locking all the doors, some of the bike locks wouldn't lock that well, people were forgetting to wrap the locks around all that well so we just had random, people just squeezing through and we were like why're you here. I distinctly remember Saul in the spiral staircase in Armstrong picking up the bench to barricade the door and then like cops or security just immediately knocking it over and yeah at that point, I think that was the point where I kinda lost him and yeah, then we all just kinda got herded into al-Shifa hall. Yeah, we were kinda just in there for five hours. What a weird five hours. The brainrot in there was just so strange, the constant climbing of the organ or climbing of anything.

S - Well I wouldn't know anything about that!

C8 – Oh no! [laughter] the apple eating.

S – I don't remember that.

C8 – when we got food in there somehow and then David was just sat in the corner eating his apple, do you remember he had that like apple ranking thing going on?

S – No.

C8 - Him and Josie had a spreadsheet where they would rank apples, all they did was would eat apples and they had a little spreadsheet so as soon as we were in al-Shifa hall and had

food, there were apples in there, they just grabbed an apple, throws himself in the corner and just starts eating and gets on his phone and just does his little spreadsheet. He was rating it. Yeah, there was some piano playing, that I remember, I just remember going up and down the organ and seeing outside and losing my mind. It was so surreal as well, being up the organ and being able to see everyone else and being able to watch it. Being so removed from it was just so weird and the constant suspense, we obviously did barricade ourselves in there to some extent but then we quickly realised we had just been locked in and we just had to deal with that. Then there was the security guard on the little balcony filming us for ages, not a fun one and it was just so, it was just so weird, just not fun and the fire alarms as well.

S - the fire alarms going off.

C8 – Oh I forgot about the constant fire alarm. It was just the constant state of anticipation, just when are cops gonna just descend on the room? When is the next fire alarm gonna go off? How long are we gonna be in here for? Nowhere to pee, not much to eat apart from David's apples.

S – And Paul's protein bars that tasted like blood.

C8 – They were disgusting! There was the packet of bourbons though.

S – *My* Bourbons.

C8 – Aww they were your bourbons?

S – that made it to forth banks afterwards.

C8 – I support the bourbons.

S – So what would you say is your analysis of the success of that day? In terms of what we were doing on the inside and also, of course, what was going on outside.

C8 – Honestly, looking back, I think it was actually quite a huge success, I feel like after we all kinda beat ourselves up for it, we did not achieve the very, very loose plan, that did not happen. Even the fact that there was such a loose plan, very much so a failure, all the violence that the people outside faced and even us on the inside, but I felt like it was quite a success, I've heard that the uni thinks it was this incredibly well-organised, hugely amazing thing.

S - I wish.

C8 – How they think that, is wild, that is such a success that they think that. I think as well that, obviously I don't have amazing perspective because I was on the inside not on the outside, but just the sheer numbers on the outside were amazing, I have never seen anything like that in Newcastle, like before the encampment and since, never seen something like that. I think as well just seeing people constantly breaking the police lines and everything, it was just so amazing and the collective resistance was just so powerful and I think even on the inside, the fact that we did hold out for five hours, it is pretty cool. Obviously we were locked in there and we didn't want to be in there, but the fact we were holding out for five hours, like I said the uni sees it as us doing a five hour occupation, they don't see it as we got herded into a hall and locked in there. I feel like the failures are just glaringly obvious, there was no plan, we just kinda went for it but yeah, even in that. It was a weirdly successful day.

S - Great, so if you could describe your last experience with the encampment.

C8 – I don't remember what my last one was as I wasn't there until the very end as I had my fieldwork and then I moved out, I am trying to remember what my last one was. I think my last experience of the encampment was when I moved out. My mum came up to help me and obviously I had been at the encampment for like two months and I took my mum to the encampment, gave her a little tour. It was during a protest at Rafael so the place was really

empty so I just gave her a little tour of my tent and everything. I feel like my last notable experience of the encampment was probably the day Neighbour got arrested. As I had been on my fieldwork and I came back as soon as I heard he got arrested, that was the night that meme-gate kicked off as well. Dark, dark night. I had got back from my fieldwork, had just done a day of manual labour, I get back memegate happens, [a member of SDR] rocks up and starts screaming in my face, starts screaming about her 67, or however old he is, man at home crying, which was a weird one. Then I did like double nightshift as I couldn't make it back to my fieldwork and it was really quiet as after Neighbour being arrested and everyone being at arrestee support, then the drama of memegate, just nobody had it in them to stay there, so I ended up doing double nightshift, and even though it was June or July at this point, it was freezing. It was so cold, it had never been that cold before. I was just sat there shivering for the entire night. I am trying to remember who I did night shift with; I think first shift I did with Powys and Alaska which was a really rogue duo. Really weird, and then second, who did I do second with? I did it with Vogel and Makhno, was that it? I really don't remember much from any of it, I was so exhausted by that point, though I do remember on second shift I just kept half napping in my chair and every so often I would wake up and I would just see Vogel feeding the pigeon, you remember pigeon Mao? He just joined us for night shift and I would just, in and out of my nap I would see them just chasing him around and he was just there. Yeah that's, I think I did go to the encampment a couple more times after my fieldwork and before I moved but that's my last memorable one, just the pure chaos of night shift.

S – So, how did you interact with the factionalism on the encampment? Be as candid as you like, other people have been.

C8 – I felt like I was... I am trying to remember, what a dark time. I was quite in the factionalism because me and Saul are really close friends and were going into the encampment, very much was grouped in with him, in the rift. Yeah so, very much did

experience the factionalism, it was honestly quite a weird one from my perspective. I did, to some extent, understand the other side, I very much agreed, we weren't doing enough, we weren't taking enough action but yeah. I just found it so weird and it is something I continue to find so weird organising in leftist spaces now, the constant infighting and nit-picking over each other's behaviour and kinda policing each other's behaviour to such an extreme that it just becomes unproductive, like the factionalism took up so much of our time and so much of our energy as well and I think as well, at least for me, obviously I am very chill with everyone now, for a while I was just uncomfortable knowing the things that had been said about me, the things I had said to you before the things I had been made fun of for cleaning. Someone once said to me that I had clearly never read Marx beyond the manifesto, which is just so funny. Just the constant things like that, nit-picking each other's behaviour and policing how much theory someone had read without even talking to them about how much theory they had read. For me the factionalism as so much energy on something so minor and something that could have just been discussed. I think as well it shows how certain responsibilities fell to certain individuals, like I said I spent so much time cleaning but then because of that it wasn't like... I felt like the response to that should have been 'we should all clean more' not 'all she cares about is cleaning and she doesn't actually have any political opinions' and I think similarly to Saul, him being seen as a dictator instead of him taking over and controlling everything, it should have been 'oh, why aren't we doing more? Why has so much of the responsibility fallen onto him'. Yeah I think there was just a lot of nit-picking, we should just be nicer to each other.

S - So what did you see as the substance of our critiques? Just to go a little bit more into depth with that.

C8 – It was just so weird for me because I was so in it but so removed at the same time. I think the main thing I took away at the time was that lots of people on the encampment were

way too liberal and not taking enough action and then that was the main thing, at least for me, that I had heard. Definitely a lot of validity there. Then the other one was that Saul was a dictator and was controlling everything that we were doing.

S – Ok, great... Sorry I have mixed up the order of the questions because I just can't read apparently. So, what is your defining experience of the encampment? The one moment you think of and go, that's the encampment for me. What is that to you?

C8 – Not to steal your answer, but the answer has to be Tab Soup. I think anyone on the encampment who smoked or even if you didn't smoke, like you spent most of your time in that little corner just chain-smoking or watching other people chain-smoke if you didn't smoke and yeah. The little tab soup with all our little cig ends in the hole. I think as well, I found the smoking area of the encampment to be such a nice little spot, it was such a nice little place. Us smokers when do we get together except when its over a tab. Like we planned, so many schemes occurred in that little corner and I think as well, I mean so many people on the encampment smoked, pretty much everyone.

S - it wasn't a problem for me before I came to the encampment

C8 – I had nearly quit.

S – Me too! I had quit multiple times before that and was just about to again.

C8 – I was just about to again as I just had quit and I had just bought myself a pity pack and just chain-smoked it and then I was like 'I am gonna quit' and then the encampment started and I got so much worse, so much worse. But like it was just such a nice little community as we were all existing together anyway, we all lived together and ate together and everything but at least for me there were a lot of people I didn't interact with a lot. I was there all day every day but there were so many people who were also there all day everyday but I would barely see and the smoking area was so nice, I think especially with the factionalism like at

least for me, a lot of people on the other side I am such good friends with. I think it was such a kinda humanising space like I think especially for me with the factionalism because I was both really involved and really not involved it very much was just like a weird other side and a weird our side kinda thing and I think the smoking area was really nice just to diffuse all that and properly get to know people, especially with all the misconceptions going around for everyone, I know a lot of people thought of me as the silly little liberal who only thought about cleaning. I felt like actually getting to talk to people and know people, the smoking area was so nice for that, it was such a little community.

S - There's plants in the tab soup bowl now.

C8 - Really?

S - yeah there's just a bunch of... I don't wanna call them weeds but there are just little plants and they're back.

C - That's so cute.

S - So for our last question, what have you been doing since the encampment and how have you taken any lessons you've learned there forward with you? In the year and a half [at time of interview] it has been.

C - That's actually crazy.

S - it is kinda terrifying.

C8 - It is very terrifying. What have I been doing? Such a big question. Yeah, I have just kinda continuing to organise within Newcastle, very much remained a lot of Palestine related stuff, now just generally anti-fascist stuff. I have annoyingly fallen into the bureaucratic, activism track which I am clawing my way out of because it takes up too much of my time and I hate it. But yeah, I feel like the encampment was for me, because I have been involved

in activism since I was a young teenager and I have been involved in organising since then probably since I was 14 or 15, kinda when I started, but back home in my town in the south, organising very hard, very small-scale, very weird and when I got to Newcastle I immediately started getting involved in organising up here and the encampment really helped me forge those connections and kinda, I guess, find my footing as an organiser, knowing what I am good at, what I am passionate about and what I can do and what I want to do, yeah. I have just been kinda floating around since the encampment, just doing what I can when I can really.

S - Baller. Is there anything you'd like to finish on? A comrade finished on a quote from Amadeo Bordiga, a different finished with a quote from Sartre. So anything you'd like to leave it on?

C8 – Oh wow, I have a lot to follow then. I don't have a lot of quotes.

S – They're not good shoes, you don't wanna fill Bordiga or Sartre's shoes. [laughter]

C8 – Not the best shoes to fill. I have no quote, I don't know. When I look back on the encampment, obviously many, many failures, some successes, I think a lot of successes but not necessarily the successes we want but I think the main thing we take away from it is how important community is and how important it is to do stuff and do direct action, even if you don't necessarily think it is going to work out.