

# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *What on earth happened at St. Paul's Cathedral recently, Neil?*

**Answer:** I really don't know. Despite being a prebendary, I only know what you do, from the papers and official statements.

I think that the Bishop of London got it right when he said in November that "hindsight is a wonderful thing!"

I visited the camp on Monday 17th October, before the difficulties began to mount into resignations. It felt very "alternative" in an amorphous lefty sort of way and some of the slogans were difficult to disagree with, especially those demanding a fairer deal for the world's poorest people.

The problem seemed obvious at the time. Here was a large group of people objecting, but nowhere was there available any coherent plan for what to do as a real alternative to our current way of doing things. It felt like a protest, not a political way forward. I found this both exhilarating and exasperating. Perhaps it was the fault of the media for not covering this more down-to-earth issue, but I am still not sure what the campers expected to happen immediately as a result of the protest.

The sign on the wall says Tahrir Square, EC4M, City of Westminster. This was a clear attempt to draw parallels between the removal of tyrants in places like Egypt and Libya. The suggestion is being made that the City bankers and those behind the scenes who control our politicians through donations and influence need to be ousted in the same way as Mubarak and Ghaddafi. So the protesters were in fact attempting to mobilise public opinion in that direction. They were very much an in-your-face protest and they badly needed the oxygen of publicity to get themselves noticed.

Goodness me, and didn't they get it?

Thanks to the confusion at St. Paul's, the whole thing became a super story for the world's media and heads started to roll in the Chapter House.

As you know, I like to write fiction, so let me try and piece together what, in my imagination, might have happened. "Chief Lefty Canon Chancellor Giles Fraser is genuinely moved by the spirit and ethos of the campers and he knows that in younger days, he would have been in a tent, not in a Chapter House. He makes welcoming and supportive noises, and the campers feel enamoured of him. They still do.

To his shock, he discovers that most of the Chapter don't agree with him and plan a forced eviction through the courts. So, feeling isolated and defeated, Giles resigns.

The Dean closes the Cathedral for the first time since the war, and immediately the headlines start to roll up, day after day. Ridicule is poured on the Cathedral for their reasons for closing. The Bishop of London tries to improve the situation, but gets dragged into the storm. Eventually, it dawns on everyone that having the police or bailiffs remove the campers forcibly will lead to horror stories all around the world about the cathedral promoting violence against defenceless protesters, and we are all reminded of the Arab Spring again. People say "shouldn't the church be supporting the protest?"

Eventually, the Dean also resigns as it was his decision to get rid of the protesters rather than accommodate them and share with them.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is now involving himself, with his usual quiet skill, and things start to improve."

My guess is that the protesters would have preferred a forced removal as this would have given them the best possible sort of publicity and aided their ambitions to get noticed and stay in the news for ever.

What happens next? Perhaps Giles Fraser can be tempted to return to the Chapter, but this time as the new Dean?

