

The Telegraph

Judge expresses sympathy with Fortnum & Mason protesters

A judge sentencing a group of anti-cuts protesters who stormed Fortnum & Mason appeared to condone their actions yesterday when he told them “history often vindicates those involved in such acts”.



Famous store was targeted by demonstrators Photo: GEOFF PUGH

By Martin Evans

5:58PM GMT 17 Nov 2011

Ten demonstrators who occupied the luxury department store on London's Piccadilly earlier this year were found guilty of aggravated trespass when they appeared before Westminster Magistrates' Court.

But in sentencing them all to conditional discharges, District Judge Michael Snow expressed some sympathy with their actions telling them they were all united by a “common sense of decency”.

Declining to award the famous store compensation, the judge told the group: “Civil disobedience has a long and entirely peaceful history in this country.

“History often vindicates those involved in such acts. I've read a series of glowing references on behalf of every one of you. You are united by a common sense of decency.”

Fortnum & Mason, which has an illustrious 300-year history and is often referred to as the Queen's grocer, was targeted by protestors on the day of a large TUC rally in March.

[Cuts protesters attack HSBC and storm Fortnum & Mason](#)

[Fortnum & Mason owner's £58m gift to charity](#)

[Dragged kicking and screaming: US protesters fight back](#)

[Cuts protesters attack Ritz Hotel](#)

Westminster Magistrates Court was told the store was targeted because the group believed its owners were guilty of tax avoidance.

After storming into the store, protesters, some of them wearing masks began chanting, beating drums and playing music.

Some even played volleyball across the displays leaving some staff and customers terrified and in tears.

Goods were stolen during the occupation while parts of the store were also vandalised causing £17,000 worth of damage.

As a result of the protest, the store was forced to close and suffered lost sales amounting to £54,581, the court heard.

District Judge Snow said: "Customers and staff reacted in different ways to the protest inside the store. Some continued as if the protests were not taking place. Others were terrified, frightened, confused, angry, intimidated and tearful."

But he told the protesters he believed their actions had been "ill-judged" rather than borne out of malice.

Those convicted were Euan Storrar, 24, of Dorking, Surrey; Sebastian Jones, 20, from Southampton; Daniel Lichman, 25, from north-west London; Oliver Pope, 20, from Southampton; Jake Colman, 22, from London; Adam Ramsay, 26, from Perthshire; Edward Bauer, 23, from Fleet, Hants; Grainne Gannon, 29, from north London; Oliver Rodker, 42, from Manchester and Peter Speller, 26, from Oxford.

All were given six month conditional discharges and ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

Coleman also received a £200 fine.

After the case the group, issued a defiant statement vowing to appeal against their convictions.

In a joint statement they said: Today, the 10 of us who were on trial have been found guilty of taking part in a protest – a protest that was dubbed 'sensible' by the senior police officer at the scene.

"We were standing up, or more accurately sitting down, against our Government making harsh cuts to public services."

But Alison Saunders, CPS London chief crown prosecutor, said they had been prosecuted because their actions had been unlawful.

She said: "On March 26, 2011, thousands of people protested peacefully and made their point without breaking the law.

"A very small minority decided to break the law and we must not allow them to undermine the right to lawful protest.

"These protesters chose to disrupt a legitimate business, which is not a peaceful protest and is a criminal offence."

The group were among more than 130 people originally charged in connection with the protest but charges were dropped against around 100.

Two further trials connected to the protest are expected to take place next March.

A spokesman for Fortnum & Mason refused to comment on the case.

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2011