

Occupy Rome

October 15, 2011

I am in Rome for a one-week vacation. Yesterday I was traveling on the bus with a friend, just having finished a visit to the beautiful San Giovanni in Laterano church. We were on our way to another church, when I saw out the bus window a large group of people, an array of tents, and at the top of the steps of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni a speaker at the microphone. I knew there was an occupation going on in Rome, so I jumped off the bus and ran over. Sure enough, it was the occupation.

Luckily I had brought along a copy of *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, so I took it out of my purse, opened it up so the full front page was showing, and walked slowly up the steps. As people noticed the OWSJ they began to smile and applaud and cheer. When I got to the top, I was asked if I would like to speak to the rally. I happily agreed, and this is (from memory) what I said, holding up the paper all the while:

I am from New York City, and I bring you greetings from Occupy Wall Street. We are all part of a common international struggle against the horrible inequality and injustice that we see everywhere. I am thrilled to see you all gathered here, and I congratulate you on your rally!

I just heard some very welcome news from New York City. Mayor Bloomberg, working with the owners of the Zuccotti Park where people were staying, was threatening to forcefully evict the occupiers at 7am this morning, using the excuse of a sanitation emergency. The mayor said the evacuation would only be temporary, but everyone knew that this move was designed to end the occupation for once and for all. The occupation people sent out an alert, asking for people to come down and support them in defying the anticipated evacuation.

Well, by 6:15 am hundreds of supporters had come to Zuccotti, many bringing mops, brooms, and pails to help the occupiers clean the park. The situation was very tense—and then, just 40 minutes before the evacuation was to begin, the mayor backed down, and said that at least for now, the protest could go on. What a great victory!

It is an honor to be with you in these early days of your occupation. You've been here for three days so far. May you grow stronger with every passing day! All of us who are struggling for a better world without poverty, insecurity and injustice need one another, whatever country we are in.

There seemed to be a lot of journalists present, with many TV cameras. I hope our solidarity gets a lot of publicity here, and I have sent a report to the OWS people so they know how warmly solidarity from New York was received.

This afternoon I am off to the big Roman march, which is part of the international day of protest.