

OPINION

What I've Learned Occupying Wall Street

Taking time for true democracy to work

BY LACY MACAULEY

I was standing on a street one evening near my home in Washington, D.C. — it seems like ages ago now — with a chatty friend who travels often to New York. He mentioned that a few New Yorkers were planning an "occupation" of Wall Street.



Not knowing what I was getting myself into, I said, "I'm there." A few days later, I boarded a bus, backpack and sleeping bag in tow. I was there when Occupy Wall Street began.

After some chilly nights in Liberty Plaza, I returned to Washington to help plan an occupation in my city. Others in Boston, San Francisco, Dallas, Atlanta, Denver, Portland, Seattle, and so many more cities have begun

their own occupations. Occupy DC started Oct. 1, and is still going strong.

Many people are asking why. While the occupation of city squares all over the nation is inspiring many people, others are (understandably) a bit perplexed.

But I think people understand more than they know. Something is very wrong with our country and our world. The rich got richer from our economic crisis, and the poor barely got the crumbs from their banquet table.

Now big corporations are asking for a new tax break, a tax holiday that they say will create jobs — while the last time Congress granted that tax break the main result was layoffs and downsizing. Corporations are sitting on over \$2 trillion in cash, but aren't hiring. Our environment is under assault. Natural disasters are laying waste to towns like Joplin, Missouri, and some lawmakers even held up relief efforts by threatening to trim education, health care, and other vital services to free up money for emergency aid.

We keep paying for wars, and people keep

dying in them. About 50 million Americans have no health insurance, and too many of them go bankrupt paying for health care. Agribusiness is destroying family farms. Poverty is rampant. Congress can't stop squabbling. Corporations have too much control. About 25 million of us are unemployed and underemployed and can't find jobs. Too many college graduates can't find jobs. Our children's future is uncertain.

So, many of us are fed up. We've brought our anger and hopes to our city squares. We're not leaving until we see real movement toward change. More people are arriving every day and joining us. In liberated squares, parks, and plazas all over the country, we're discussing challenges and talking about solutions. Every voice is equal, and all of us are expected to raise our voices, our ideas, our concerns. We're reaching consensus. We're figuring it out as we go.

All I can say is that true democracy takes time. At Occupy D.C., we meet daily to discuss why we're there. The unemployed, the foreclosed, and the sick-of-it-all are coming

together to discuss the world that we want to see and how to get there. We have big problems. We need big solutions. And those big solutions take time.

While on Wall Street and on McPherson Square on K Street in Washington, I've learned how to change my clothes in my sleeping bag. I've learned how to run a generator, which keeps us in electronic touch with the outside world. I've learned the best methods for hauling plastic bags of donated bread, pastries, and bagels nine city blocks. I've learned to appreciate tarps.

I've also learned that when we all raise our voices together and work in the spirit of true democracy, we can work toward real solutions and real changes to our world. We the people tend to agree on a lot more than we realize. It just takes coming together, talking things through, and not leaving until things change.

And that's what the occupations are doing: We're staying put, and taking the time for true democracy to work.

Lacy MacAuley is Media Relations Manager at the Institute for Policy Studies.

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and all walks of life

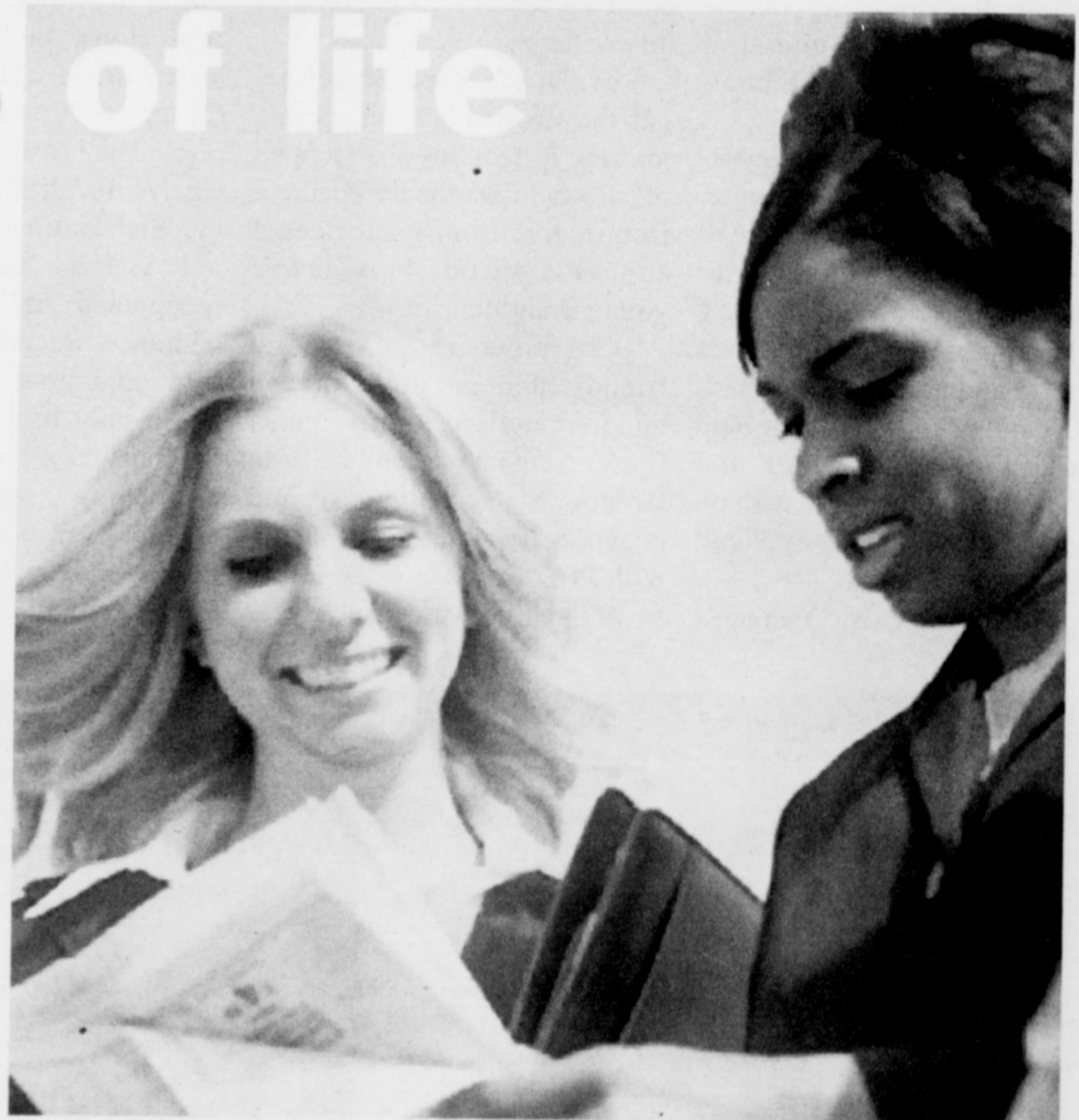
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