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Occupy Wall Street's latest converts: the 1 percent?

A group of wealthy young Americans starts a social-media campaign in support of Occupy Wall Street. Its message: Tax us! But some analysts are skeptical.

By Daniel B. Wood, Staff writer, Gloria Goodale, Staff writer / November 2, 2011



In this Sept. 30 file photo, members of Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union enter Zuccotti Park in support of the Wall Street protesters in New York. For more than a month, protesters thronging city squares nationwide have aimed their anger at the richest 1 percent of Americans. Louis Lanzano/AP/File

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The Occupy Wall Street movement is trying to take a page out of Warren Buffett's playbook.

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For more than a month, protesters thronging city squares nationwide have aimed their anger at the richest 1 percent of Americans. Now, a group purporting to represent 1 percenters is telling protesters: We're with you.

Just as billionaire investor Mr. Buffett implored President Obama to raise his taxes, an organization of

wealthy young Americans called Resource Generation is hitting social media networks with the same message.

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"We believe that we have more than we need, while the 99 percent struggles to survive. This has to change. We believe in an equitable distribution of wealth," says a mission statement at the

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group's website.

On one hand, efforts like those of Resource Generation could help take the "class warfare" edge off the Occupy protests. Video testimonials on the website show earnest young Americans echoing Buffett's sentiments.

"I need government to help redistribute my wealth," says a man in a T-shirt. "Tax me! I am the 1 percent. I stand with the 99 percent."

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But because the testimonies are anonymous, some analysts are wary.

"Unless I see names and phone numbers and actual tax returns, I have to be more than a little skeptical," says Lara Brown, a political scientist at Villanova University in Pennsylvania and author of "Jockeying for the American Presidency." "Consider how many people post extravagant blogs anonymously but when asked to put their name on it, suddenly behave differently."

Moreover, a website does not a social movement make, adds Steven Schier, a political scientist at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn.

"This group does exist, but its resources beyond a Web presence have yet to be demonstrated," he says. "Those resources are essential if the group is to have a considerable and lasting presence in the national agenda."

"The tea party, for example, was able to call on thousands of activists for large public demonstrations," he continues. "This movement is going to have to demonstrate similar resources over many months for it to have an effect on the national agenda."

So far, Resource Generation has teamed up with Wealth for the Common Good – a network of business leaders that promotes fair taxation – and that represents a good start, says the group's cofounder.

The anonymity of the 1 percent website is based on the spirit of the Occupy websites, which include comments from supporters, says Chuck Collins, cofounder of Wealth for the Common Good.

"People don't disclose their tax returns – that is a frivolous objection, I'm sorry to say," says Mr. Collins. "We don't ask people to financially disclose as a requirement for speaking out – nor does any other advocacy group in America."

Some analysts see room for solidarity among the 1 percent and the 99 percent.

"The groundswell of people occupying public spaces and speaking out via online and mobile media is striking evidence that neither the 99 percent nor the 1 percent believe their government is working in the way it should," says Gordon Coonfield, a professor of communication at Villanova.

But he, too, admits that he is intrigued by the notion of rich Americans crying out to be taxed.

"I would want to talk to people who are putting out the message that they want to be taxed," says Professor Coonfield. "That's a man bites dog story if I've ever heard of one."

If true, it could have an impact on how the Occupy movement is perceived.

"When [Warren] Buffett came out and said he wants to be taxed more, people giggled and thought it might be some kind of ploy," says Barbara O'Connor, director emeritus of the Institute for Study of Politics and Media at California State University, Sacramento. "This is evidence that the idea has gone further than that and is starting to get some traction."



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