

Invoking "sedition" against Teabaggers: short-sighted, ahistorical, and suicidal

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The Nation joins a great tradition (Alien and Sedition Acts, Palmer Raids, Smith Act) by invoking "sedition" against Teabaggers.

It seems utterly suicidal for the Left to invoke "sedition," as Melissa Harris-Lacewell does in condemning Teabaggers in The Nation . What a proud tradition we would join by doing this: Alien and Sedition Acts, Palmer Raids, Smith Act. And what's up with Harris-Lacewell's adoration of The State, with its "monopoly on the legitimate [sic] use of violence, force and coercion"? Huh? Are we really happy with this utterly unqualified approval of such government action, and, as a result utterly unqualified prohibition of such things when used by non-governmental people? There goes the picket line, and anything else that they might deem to be "coercive."

All in all, this seems at best short-sighted, unbelievably ahistorical, and at worst suicidal. Nasty, even vile expression is a two-way street, and we should certainly retain the broadest right to express hostility to those who Harris-Lacewell enshrines as "agents of the state." (By the way, a recent court decision, which I certainly favor, said that we cannot be punished for giving the finger to a cop). Coming up next in The Nation: the uses of conspiracy law? No, wait a minute, it's already here: Harris-Lacewell writes of certain congressional representatives that "They joined as co-conspirators with the Tea Party protesters by arguing that this government has no monopoly on legitimacy."

Shall we re-try the Chicago Seven?