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# RAHN: If politics are taken too far . .

Richard W. Rahn

## COMMENTARY:

What should be the limits of acceptable protest in a democratic society? Virtually everyone opposes the actions of the far-left green activists who do such things as burn down wood frame houses under construction, or militants from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals who throw colored dye on women wearing fur coats.

Many on the political left, and even some in the mainstream media, complained about the peaceful protests of hundreds of thousands of Americans who held "tea parties" on tax day. Yet they lightly dismiss truly destructive actions by leftist advocacy groups, many of whom take Saul Alinsky's book, "Rules for Radicals," as their bible. Mr. Alinsky wrote, "In war [i.e., war for an ideal or goal], the end justifies the means"; thus almost any action is acceptable for one's cause.

The Capital Research Center (CRC) has just released a well- documented report on the activities of the little-known Neighborhood Assistance Corp. of America (NACA). It specializes in intimidating banks and their executives, even including spouses and children, as part of its political shakedown operations. Its founder, Bruce N even refers to himself as "a banking terrorist."

You may have wondered why so many bankers made loans and mortgages to people who clearly were unqualified. NACA has engaged in aggressive street protests and demonstrations including spreading information about the personal lives of bank executives and their fa



with the goal to pressure banks to lend more in poor neighborhoods.

One may agree or disagree with NACA's goals, but if its tactics had been used by free-market, limited-government organizations, one can imagine the outrage from the left and mainstream media. It is now clear that because NACA has had a number of successes in getting banks to lend to the unqualified, its activities have contributed to the financial crisis, yet it is not being held accountable.

According to CRC, "NACA typically extracts self-serving concessions from banks, forcing them to provide it with funds that it then uses to make mortgage loans to low-income borrowers. NACA rolls the fees it earns servicing these loans back into its campaign of bullying banks."

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is the most notorious of the radical, left-wing activists' groups. It has been charged with numerous voter fraud schemes (in 12 states), extensive tax evasion and racketeering, among other crimes. The Wall Street Journal reported that ACORN, while claiming to give voice to minorities and the poor, is really "a union-backed, multimillion-dollar outfit that uses intimidation and other tactics" to advance a "highly partisan agenda."

CRC reports that "ACORN even indoctrinates students in the taxpayer-supported schools. In New York City, it runs the ACORN High School for Social Justice. ... ACORN schools have transported students to the nation's capital to protest tax cuts." ACORN has a record of forcibly breaking up meetings, including even those of congressional committees. Its activists have harassed motorists and posted "Wanted" signs for corporate executives and yelled obscenities at their families. (Detailed documentation of the activities of NACA and ACORN may be found on the CRC Web site, [www.capitalresearch.org](http://www.capitalresearch.org).)

ACORN affiliates have received taxpayer-funded grants, which they have ultimately used to hire professional protesters to demand more government spending. In contrast, the left and its media allies had a hard time understanding and tried to avoid reporting how those who showed up for the tea parties were not professional, paid protesters but were Americans who were just fed up with Washington, including its double standards.

How would MSNBC and the New York Times react if free-market groups started hanging "Wanted" posters for Internal Revenue Service officials and employees who clearly serve as instruments for job destroying policies? Inflation is a tax that hits the poor particularly hard and

is caused by the Federal Reserve creating too much money and credit. What would happen if monetary-reform groups adopted Alinsky tactics and started picketing the homes of Federal Reserve members and harassing their spouses and children?

Many regulations issued by government regulators do not meet basic cost-benefit tests, thus costing Americans jobs and lowering real incomes. If limited-government groups began sit-ins in these regulatory agencies, many in the media would pillory them as destructive and irresponsible, unlike the adulation they give many sit-in protesters who demand more government regulation.

The right of peaceful protest is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Yet, unfortunately, too many in the media have a double standard, disparaging those whose peaceful protests are in favor of limiting government, while often praising those who engage in property destruction, the politics of personal destruction, harassment and even violence, while demanding more from taxpayers and special rights for favored groups. Such hypocrisy undermines both economic freedom and civil society.

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