



Teabagging on the Commons: In lieu of an actual election, Tea Partiers Carolyn Lambert and Fereshteh Toosi have planned an experimental tea party on Friday, July 23, 5:30pm-7pm, at the **Hatch Shell on the Esplanade** (closest T station: Charles/MGH on the Red Line). Light refreshments will be served. For more information, visit www.teapartea.org and www.berwickinstitute.org

Third ParTea InsaniTea

by Sharon Steel

Carolyn Lambert and Fereshteh Toosi are not your typical third-party presidential candidates. Any given day on the campaign trail sees these two young women handing out sachets of tea rather than pamphlets and pins. Instead of power suits, they wear white wigs, three-cornered hats and traverse Boston in identical pairs of flimsy, black flip-flops. And let's not forget their smiles. In pictures, they are grinning – beaming even – effortlessly projecting the kind of image that implies they might actually follow through with their promises.

As Artists in Research (AIR) for the Berwick Institute in Roxbury, Lambert and Toosi have spent the summer operating as a collaborative team, focusing their efforts on the Tea Party – part fictional political party, part activism and part performance art. The original idea for the project, Lambert says, grew out of the concept of the Boston Tea Party itself, which she and Toosi considered to be an event emblematic of Boston's history, legend and lore. While in character, the Tea Partiers grasp white china tea cups, pull their wigs into ponytails and explore the city, hoping to engage in dialogue over the four platforms they support: MobilTea, SecuriTea, CommuniTea and just plain tea.

"I do like tea," says Lambert, speaking from the Tea Partiers headquarters. "In fact, I'm having some right now." The recent cof-

fee craze has created an overly agitated, nervous population, she says, adding: "In these times, our country needs to relax."

With a Starbucks on nearly every corner, it's no wonder Boston residents have a bit too much stress in their lives to kick back with a nice cuppa char. Problems concerning public transportation often round off the top of the list of grievances. The MBTA is planning on performing random bag searches during the Democratic National Convention (July 26-29), which, according to Toosi, may very well continue past the Convention as an ongoing security measure.

This does not please the Tea Partiers. Both women oppose the searches. "The whole claim of randomness is a fallacy. That's how racial profiling happens," Lambert says, adding that in response to protests, the MBTA stated it would simply search all passengers. She and Toosi spent the 4th of July passing out their sachets of SecuriTea (plain tea re-branded with their own labels) before the fireworks, inside the high-security Hatch Shell as well as the open areas along the Esplanade. The Tea Party also made appearances in Coolidge Corner and Faneuil Hall in the beginning of the summer, engaging people in conversations about the impending baggage and security inspections. As the DNC loomed closer, the duo protested alongside the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

When the ACLU gave away fliers filled with the logistics of the MBTA searches, the Tea Partiers circulated their SecuriTea.

Still, neither Tea Partier has the sense that they are attempting to change policy or legislation. "I feel what we are doing is solely in our role as artists. When I go out with my tea bags, I am there in solidarity with the ACLU and the National Lawyers Guild ... but it's more of a symbolic gesture, activism on a more poetic level," says Toosi.

Making the city of Boston more bicycle-friendly is another aspect of the MobilTea platform as well as an open call for designs for environmentally safe vehicles. The candidates held a workshop with Arts in Progress, a Boston-based non-profit organization that brings the arts to urban children, and invited a group of kids to draft a few models without the limitations of an expensive engineering education or a proper budget. One of the vehicles they liked best was powered by spit – a clean, self-renewable energy source, if not remarkably practical.

Though the artists will return to Pittsburgh, PA, at the end of July (Lambert is set to finish her graduate degree at Carnegie Mellon, where Toosi recently completed her MFA), they admit to wanting the Tea Party spirit to live on past this November. "If people would like to write us in on their ballots, we'd love that," Toosi says. "But it's up to them if they think it's a wise decision. There is a place for humor and understanding the ridiculousness of politics as just another institution we have created."