

The Anarchist Library

Anti-Copyright



All traveler kids purged from CrimethInc. membership

Dispatch from the CrimethInc. Central Committee
for immediate release

CrimethInc.

July 22, 2002

Quitting your job was about having more time to do what needs doing, not just isolating yourself from the rest of humanity — wasn't it?

If one makes propaganda extolling what is revolutionary about shoplifting, one is not necessarily trying to get would-be revolutionaries to shoplift so they can be “more revolutionary” [obviously a stupid approach if there ever was one — although exploring the tactical benefits of shoplifting for a class of people looking to do less buying might make sense] — one might instead be trying to identify for shoplifters what is already insurrectionary in their actions, so they can broaden their analysis of their own lives.

Crimethought is not any ideology or value system or lifestyle, but rather a way of challenging all ideologies and value systems and lifestyles — and, for the advanced agent, a way of making all ideologies, value systems, and lifestyles challenging. It is not crimethought just to survive without a job by dumpstering, squatting, and hitchhiking; it is crimethought to realize that

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this lifestyle provides resources that can be used to revolutionize demonstration activism, or underground literature. It is not crimethought simply to distribute propaganda attacking the monotony and limited options of traditional employment; it is crimethought to create situations in which both workers and ex-workers benefit from each others' different experiences, and consequently discover new options and new adventures that were previously obscured.

The Stalinists, Surrealists, Situationists, and even Southern Baptists all had their bloody purges and internal dissensions, so why can't we, too? Having no membership should be no obstacle: we can still hold exclusions from time to time, just to be sure everyone remembers. These are festive occasions for us weathered politicos, analogous to the subtextual backbiting at the dinner parties of the bourgeoisie or the witch trials in the Salem, Massachusetts of old. But first, before we get into the fiery self-righteousness of the thing, some background.

It's been nearly a year now since I went through my entire proofing copy of the *Evasion* book in the dark back seat of a Greyhound traveling by night, with only my trendy activist headlamp for light. Even then, we knew already what the greatest drawback of publishing it in book form would be: all the general ideas in *Days of War, Nights of Love*, the inspirations and analyses and especially the rhetoric calculated to encourage revolt, would now be summed up in some minds by the specific formula spelled out by the stories in this new book. Even though *Evasion* is not a work of political theory, or a prescription of tactics, but clearly a personal account, a memoir — even though we've maintained from the beginning that there is no single strategy for insurgency, but that everyone must invent and reinvent their own — it was inevitable that we would be misunderstood by some, and we accepted that in publishing the book.

In publishing it, we wanted — to articulate this for the thousandth and last time — to introduce an account (one of many) of

of the past to see anew what the current context calls for. When we succeed in doing this, we can change the world, for it is inertia above all that keeps the wheels spinning as they do. If we cannot, we are done for — we will be more anachronists than anarchists, and our activism mere retroactivism.

And so now we turn away from the past, from all explanations and justifications and apologies, to face the future and the experiments we have in store for it. Doubtless, they will occasion comparable storms of controversy and misconception, if we are ambitious enough to keep pushing our own limits and hazarding schemes crazy enough to work. So, all would-be crimethinkers are hereby expelled from CrimethInc. — whoever can discover the strategies for the next offensive, set the terms for the next infectious revolts and heated debates and social upheavals, let them claim it for themselves! Expect our next book, or one of them, to be a liberation manual for middle-aged mothers, not another youth's chronicle of willful indigence. In the meantime, let's us traveler kids stop congratulating ourselves on how free we are and start using that word, *free*, as a verb, not an adjective.

work-free living to a wider readership, and thus challenge conventional notions about the sanctity of property and the misery of material poverty. With this cultural warfare, we hoped to do our part to expand the anticapitalist movement. Sharing particular scams, extolling the lifestyle of the scam artist, these were secondary goals at best. The 'zine had already been produced and distributed on as massive a scale as the infrastructure of our d.i.y. underground allowed, to the demographics who would be most likely to utilize its scams and emulate the author's life choices; we printed the book version to see if this narrative of refusal and adventure could sow other seeds outside its native environment. Some of the feedback we've received from beyond the existing activist and anarchist communities suggests that it has; but now it's time to shake off whatever success we've achieved, as one must always do to make space for new attempts.

And to speak, for the last time as well, of how our efforts, with this book and other projects, have been misunderstood. There is a certain kind of reader who, though you do your best to bring out the subtleties and ironies, will always focus on the most superficial, controversial terms in your works, and interpret your complex critiques as simple dismissals and endorsements ("paying=bad," "shoplifting=good" — or, far worse, "=anticapitalist"). Whether he professes to be your adversary or accomplice, it is best to avoid him altogether, for he will lower the level of dialogue on any issue to his own low denominator — and at that elevation, little of value can be discussed or achieved. Perhaps we can be blamed, in part, for creating some of these readers, by producing material that was too simplistic or too complex; perhaps this kind of reader is simply too rampant today to be altogether avoided by even the nimblest of propagandist's pens. One certainly can't say enough, though, that nothing in the world is one-dimensional.

So while this, too, has been said a million times, perhaps it will do some good to say it again in this context: the trav-

eler kid lifestyle is not in itself at all revolutionary. It may surprise some to hear this from us — that shows how little they've been listening all along. Shoplifting, hitchhiking, scamming, unemployment — separated from a program of life- and world-transformation, all these are merely alternative tools for survival, a survival which makes do with and ultimately accepts the status quo. Yes, it *is* better, however infinitesimally, to steal products than to give money to our executioners — but it's not enough! Three millennia of shoplifting now, and the exchange economy is still thriving. If it's life we're after, not mere survival, as the old dichotomy goes, we can't just sit tight now in our squats and punk houses, eating dumpstered bagels and selling our shoplifted wares on e-bay; we have to keep on risking everything to challenge the system that denies us the *rest* of the world, if for nothing else at least to continue challenging ourselves.

For the record, and to briskly repudiate every imbecile who has used "CrimethInc." as a synonym for scamming and freeloading, we've never been interested in being or being seen as partisans of any lifestyle; we've always insisted that being radical involves subverting all possible lifestyle choices, all traditional strategies and identities. Revolution occurs when some part of the social equation changes: when apolitical workers initiate a wildcat strike, when middle-aged mothers start to show up in the black bloc beside their sons and daughters, when vagabond dropouts integrate themselves into local struggles for affordable housing. The letters we receive from adult secretaries who have used CrimethInc. literature to inspire themselves to change their lives are infinitely more encouraging to me than the scores of teenagers reading *Harbinger* as they set out on the hitchhiking excursions young folks always have. Not that there is anything wrong with being a hitchhiking teenager — but to be a *dangerous* hitchhiking teenager, you must do something more than simply hitchhike,

and interpreting anticapitalist texts as glorifications of your hitchhiking doesn't count.

I hopped my very first train just a few weeks ago, after nearly eight straight years of unemployment and anticapitalist agitation. For most of that time, I was never much of a hitchhiking, train-hopping, scam-pulling traveler kid, and neither were most of the individuals I collaborated with — there are, believe it or not, a wide variety of other lifestyles that are equally conducive to such endeavors. The historical intersection of the latest wave of youth nomadism with the propaganda groups like ours have been spreading is, in some ways, unfortunate; it has had some good effects, but it has also made it easier for people to dismiss some radical ideas as the alibis of a new youth trend — or, worse, to believe that they are being radical simply by joining such a trend!

The creation of subcultural ghettos, the reinterpretation of subversive acts as promotions of some alternative lifestyle — these are processes by which opposition and subversion have been repeatedly neutralized over the past four decades, if not centuries. Yes, it is critical that we build new communities, with new cultural values and approaches, and that we not belittle these as "mere subcultures" when they do arise — for it is in these communities that we can develop and sustain a resistance, and create a context in which to lead free lives. It is also critical that we keep challenging these communities, that they do not become stagnant or self-satisfied: for as long as we are all under the great thumb, freedom is always for all or none.

CrimethInc., and for that matter (and far more important) crimethink, are not membership organizations, anyway. Subverting is not something you *are*, it's something you *do*, and must find new ways to do in every attempt. Let's not rest at expelling the traveler kids — hell, we're *all* expelled, time-tested CrimethInc. agents first and foremost! Even the most experienced of us insurrectionists must start from scratch every morning to foment insurrection, shaking off the inertia