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Rethinking Crimethinc.

“Your politics are bourgeois as fuck”

W.

2006-09-04

There are two ways out of capitalism, revolution or death. Anybody who tells you otherwise is simply wrong. The US based sub-cultural cult “Crimethinc” (CWC) who mix anarchism with bohemian drop-out lifestyles and vague anti-civilisation sentiment would have you believe that capitalism is something from which you can merely remove yourself by quitting work, eating from bins and doing whatever “feels good”. They carry on the legacy of prize-idiot Abbie Hoffman, printing books and zines which fetishise scams, petty crime and useless activist/punk sub-cultural activity like food not bombs, squatting, etc. They are anarchists by name only with little relevance to the rest of the anarchist milieu and no class analysis, let’s venture into their secret underground “anarchy club”.

Crimethinc claims to not exist in a failed attempt at being both mysterious and poetic, we’ll have to start by stating that it does exist, it has a few addresses, a number of books in print and an online shop as well as a number of websites. It is a loose organization which represents a variety of political views a mish-mash of post-leftism, situationism, primitivism and all

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Retrieved on 10/10/2021 from
http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=3664

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those “introducing..” philosophy books you don’t tell people you read. Anyone can publish under the name or create content using their logo and each “agent” or group operates individually. There is no formal structure, membership or decision making process. One has to wonder whether it’s as decentralised as they claim to be, while the hundreds of kids who post on the forum have as much legitimate claim to call themselves part of crimethinc there are really only a vanguard of 20 people maybe less who have had the pleasure of being published under the CWC title and who run the entire show. Calling yourself a crimethincer allows you the illusion that you’re a part of something much grander though, when you’re a bored suburban teenager that’s very important and the well designed publications and impassioned prose in their texts makes for a very inspiring read. The problem is that once you analyse them critically you quickly realise they’re barely saying anything at all.

Many aspects of crimethinc reference the Situationist Internationale and a large chunk of their ideas are based around the Situationist concept “the transformation of everyday life”. The Situationists were heavily influenced by Marx and CWC are heavily influenced by American consumer culture it would seem. The call to transform everyday is a call to smash the current exploitative system, to participate in the class struggle, an ongoing historical conflict between the proletariat and the ruling class. Crimethinc substitute this class struggle with a teenage individualistic rebellion based on having fun now. Shoplifting, dumpster diving, quitting work are all put forward as revolutionary ways to live outside the system but amount to nothing more than a parasitic way of life which depends on capitalism without providing any real challenge. The arrogance of middle class kids (just like the hippies) supposing to change by world by roughing it as “poor” people for a few years is captured perfectly in the quote on the back cover of their book evasion.

The lack of any critical analysis and focus on spontaneity are serious shortcomings for crimethinc which lead me to believe they do not believe in revolution and are quite possibly happy to be the kids living on the “edge” of Capitalism, a system whose excess supports their drop-out lifestyles anyway. This would explain why crimethinc have no theory for revolution, how to build to overthrow this system and how to make sure that once we do we hold on to our gains, how to organise a post-revolutionary world so that we don’t repeat the failures of the CNT and other historical precedents. A spontaneous revolution leaves the working class no means to defend itself from reactionaries and state socialists. Crimethinc call for a revolution in everyday lifestyles and not life, they seek to define a subculture of individualists who care only about themselves and those immediately around them. A revolution of restless and spoiled middle class Americans that is contemptuous of workers and organised anarchists because in them they see the greatest threat to their bourgeois lifestyles.

The supposedly self-critical analysis in crimethinc’s 10 year report never touched on their failures as listed here. Perhaps this is something these kids will address now and hopefully other anarchists will add to the debate. I spent a few years uncritically spewing out empty crimethinc rhetoric and wasting time with their ineffective tactics and don’t wish to see another generation fooled. I would urge all comrades to seriously consider the easy solutions being peddled by CWC. The world can’t wait while serious revolutionaries are side-tracked by poor ideas and poorer tactics.

“Our demands most moderate are – We only want the earth!”

– James Connolly

or—oh my God now we're really fucking doing it!— giving out phony free tickets to the local cinema.9 It soon becomes clear that the real crime here is the way they plunder some of the finest and most invigorating ideas from the end of the 20th century, and render them dull and inchoate.” – Ramor Ryan

When thousands of french students recently occupied their universities and trashed their cities in opposition to the introduction of the CPE law one crimethincer had this to say about the organised students;

“When I looked at the situation in France, I often thought that they were not enough dumpster divers collectives!”

What purpose or relevance this person thinks a dumpster diving collective would have served to a mass radical movement beyond getting some old sandwiches which could be looted anyway is beyond me. When mass struggles emerge crimethincers are of course thin on the ground, mass struggle means working with squares and allowing workers to be part of their revolutionary subculture, which just wont do. The book “Anarchy in the age of dinosaurs” published under Crimethinc by the Furious George collective (who each deserve a bullet for crimes against anarchism) is short and poorly written arguing against the idea of mass organisation and for “chaos” and “butterfly wings”, apparently.

“Folk Anarchy is the name we have given to the arrow aimed at the heart of every dinosaur. We are replacing the mass movement with a scrappy multitude of mutineers, gypsies, sprawling shanties, thieves in the night and mad scientists”

“Poverty, unemployment, homelessness — if you're not having fun, you're not doing it right!”

Condescending, privileged, middle class crap. The only people who could think that poverty is in any way fun are wealthy kids playing at being poor for a few years, the daily reality of poverty, unemployment and homelessness for the average person is very serious and something anarchists should always organise against rather than mock.

The reality of the situation is that you can't boycott your way out of capitalism, dropping out of the system is never going to bring it down if anything you just re-enforce the system by recuperating people's alienation and desire for revolution by selling them a new lifestyle under the same system. Capitalism is a system of coercion and control, we don't work to support the system, we work because we need food and shelter and healthcare and the only way to get that under capitalism is with money. The only way we can get money is by selling our labour — the alternative is to rot, that's Capitalism. I don't want to feed my kids out of a dumpster or have to scam free healthcare if I get cancer, it's not appealing or practical. There's nothing revolutionary about using your white, middle-class, western privilege to remove yourself from the system at the expense of those who remain trapped in it. None of us are free until we all are.

This idolisation of the grifter and scam as a somehow revolutionary tactic has led their followers, and they are followers they certainly don't have much say in the running of the sites and the shop, the informal organisational structure “we're all crimethinc” enforces this, to be mostly bored teenage boys. A quick browse around crimethinc.net will show you this. The more worrying aspect is the “us against the world” mindset many of these youths have. Many view people who work regular jobs as an enemy complicit in the capitalist system, a system they don't fully understand and which crimethinc's literature

never fully explains. They have an embarrassingly liberal interpretation of capital and the struggle against it,

“By your ‘support the working class’ logic, I guess y’all should feel guilty every time ya boycott any megacrop like Wal-Mart — after all, they’ve got “working class” clerks workin’ there too” – DizzIE

In this quote from a row over a scam to rob tourists (or neo-colonialists as some bizarrely called them), a crimethinker shows up the dangerous lack of understanding of class struggle. Boycotts of multinationals, much like drop-out lifestyles, will do little to bring about the fall of Capitalism which is a social relationship based on wage labour. I do not wish to deny them their right to be drop-outs and live out of bins so long as they realise they will change nothing by living like this. An inflated sense of self importance has convinced them that their chosen path is righteous and all others are brainwashed by the system or are revolutionary beauraucrats.

One of crimethinc’s more recent publications “recipes for disaster:an anarchist cookbook”, is indicative of the massive problems with them. The book is a somewhat interesting list of pranks, scams and activist information. Proclaimed as the follow up to “Days of war, Nights of love” this book has many serious shortcomings. Recipes (little more than DIY guides) range from how to organise a black bloc to gynecology, Squatting, and “how to make a bicycle into a record player”. An eclectic mix of information, most of which is crap the rest of which is useless without political understanding. This is meant to be the practice where “days of war” was the theory but unfortunately DOW had no real theory beyond drop out and do what feels good. Organising a black bloc out of a handbook without any understanding of the social conditions which necessitate mass militant anarchist direct action is not just dangerous it’s counter-productive to our entire movement. The book shies

away from serious revolutionary information like how to organise a union in your workplace, how to organise at school, how to make contact and work with communities in struggle, how to break out of the activist ghetto, how to set up a social centre, how to provide prisoner support or how to support asylum seekers etc. All the activities amount to little more than activist busy-work, something to waste your time with while being a “drop-out”, ease your social conscience and not have to do any hard work or compromise yourself by working with people who are complicit in the system. The Antifascist Action guide is well meaning but pathetic, it amounts to a bunch of kids masking up and getting their rocks off by confronting the cops before running off again. This is a common element throughout, these things are listed because they are exciting and dangerous and make you “feel good”, not because they are effective forms of revolutionary organising.

Ramor Ryans review of Days of War.. is spot on and does not really need expanding on. DOW is massively plagiarised, full of inaccurate and offensive accounts of radical history and tends to define things in very basic terms like good and bad without any solid ideas backing up most of their claims.

“Text, ideas, and graphics are borrowed and pilfered from the Stoke-Newington fanzine Vague, British graphic artist Clifford Harper, French situationist Raoul Vaneigem and indeed, the whole of the Situationist pantheon. They sack the archives of radical sub-culture to compound a falsehood, the basic premise of this book, that it is an instrument for “total liberation.” In reality, CrimethInc’s vision seldom rises above that of a suburban kid rebelling against authority. Mired in the punk rock and crusty sub-culture, the practical application of all this revolutionary theory is apparently realized by forming a band, fucking in a park, going vegan