

CrimethInc. Shareholder Report

An Incomplete Report on and Critical Analysis of the Past Decade of Activity

CrimethInc.

April 1, 2006

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Today, April Fool's Day, 2006, we announce the third printing of our free anarchist primer, *Fighting For Our Lives*, which is once again available from us in bulk throughout North America. This printing of 150,000 brings the total print run of this pamphlet to 500,000 copies, the target we set for this project three and a half years ago.

A half million copies of a paper is a lot in some circles, but in our eyes, this is the very least we can do to help keep the anarchist alternative accessible. We would like to see a similar level of activity from all other anarchist groups, whether that takes the form of outreach, artistic expression, community infrastructure, labor organizing, mass mobilizations, sabotage, or other means of struggle. We challenge our colleagues not to stop at calling for a world without hierarchies, but to do what it takes to live and act outside them today—to perform the miracles it's going to take to get us all *out of here*.

A Mediocre Record

In that spirit, to inspire or outrage others into action of their own, this seems as good a time as any to review the activity that has taken place over the past decade under the CrimethInc. moniker. This accounting will necessarily be incomplete; it only covers the most obvious and quantifiable activities we could discern from the vantage point of this particular CWC nucleus, the CrimethInc. Far East distribution hub. All the same, it may help to establish the scope of what has been accomplished and of what yet remains to be done.

During this time, to our knowledge, CrimethInc. operatives have produced, distributed, and/or organized:

Free Material

- 500,000 copies of the free pamphlet *Fighting For Our Lives*
- 5 issues of the free paper *Harbinger* at up to 100,000 copies each
- at least 6 other free newspapers at up to 35,000 copies each
- at least 3 newsprint booklets at up to 40,000 copies each
- at least 4 23"x15" double-sided offset printed posters at up to 75,000 copies each
- at least 6 11"x17" printed posters at 5000 copies each
- at least 10,000 photocopies each of the 'zine versions of *Off the Map* and *Evasion*
- countless copies of innumerable other 'zines and posters, almost every one of them produced for free at the expense of corporate franchises
- an unknown number of cassettes and burned CDs and DVDs
- at least 500,000 stickers designed for anti-corporate vandalism

Commodities

- at least 10 books totaling over 100,000 copies, ranging from a children's book to a tactical direct action manual
- 2 issues of the journal *Rolling Thunder* at 3000 copies each
- the final 7 issues of the magazine *Inside Front* , each with an accompanying CD or vinyl record, at 3000 copies each
- at least 30 CD or vinyl music releases at up to 5000 copies each for bands from three continents; some of these bands have toured those continents extensively, distributing literature in the process and sometimes offering workshops
- at least 1 videocassette and 1 two-disc DVD (the latter compiling several films previously released individually) at 1500 and 2000 copies, respectively

Outreach and Engagement

- at least 12 multimedia tours, in which over 75 people have participated
- 4 national convergences, the most recent of which attracted approximately 200 participants (and at least 1 FBI infiltrator, whom we count neither as a participant nor as a human being)
- an unknown number of festivals, speaking engagements, gatherings, presentations, workshops, guerrilla "book signings," and other events
- involvement in several nationwide campaigns, including the protests against the Iraq war and the FTAA agreements, as well as the "Don't Just Vote, Get Active" campaign that culminated during the 2004 elections; ELF actions have also been claimed by CrimethInc. splinter groups, though no other CrimethInc. operatives have had knowledge of or involvement in these actions

Accessibility

- at least 10 websites, the most widely used of which has received at least 2 million unique visitors; of the 25 posters, pamphlets, and papers currently available on it, the most frequently accessed has been downloaded over 150,000 times
- corporate coverage from the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* to *Newsweek* , despite a policy of non-cooperation with the capitalist media (granted, this coverage has dealt with the supposed threats CrimethInc. poses to civil society as often as it has focused on specific projects)
- contributions to countless other independent media projects; in the punk underground, for example, this has included pull-out sections in *Slug and Lettuce* and *Profane Existence* and a column that has appeared regularly in *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* for 6 years

- CrimethInc. material has appeared in at least 12 languages, either as new material or in translation; *Harbinger* alone has appeared in German-, Portuguese-, and Spanish-language versions, each in a print run of thousands and the last of those being a collaboration between groups spread across three continents
- CrimethInc. material has been stocked by well over 150 US libraries and used, ironically enough, in countless high school and college courses

This is what you call mass production; some of these figures really put the “Inc.” in CrimethInc. An economist might say that by distributing our wares free of charge or for the production costs alone and operating with a highly motivated staff that works entirely without pay, we are breaking new ground in free market competition. Ironically, we oppose mass production, economists, markets, and competition—but we’re not interested in simply keeping our hands clean.

Nor are we interested in personal gain. To this day, no participant in any of these projects has received a dime for his or her efforts¹. Everything that can possibly be distributed for free is, and all proceeds from sales go immediately into further projects. All our projects are either funded by their own sales, the sales of other projects, criminal activity, or donations². This is a stark contrast to radical publishers who must give away much of the press runs of magazines they hoped to sell, not to mention miserly communist splinter groups that sell even their outreach material.

We do almost all our own distribution, working out of a few main hubs and a scattering of other nerve centers; this enables us to make sure that our material is always available through independent channels before we use corporate and institutional means to get it to those who might not otherwise see it³. We produce everything without barcodes, regarding them as a noxious concession to the corporate market⁴.

The limited accounting above, of course, leaves out the best endeavors, the unique and irreproducible ones. I recall a letter from a young person in a small town in the Midwest, reporting on the activities of the local CrimethInc. cell over the preceding months: these included distributing free pirated CDRs of Rage Against the Machine and Ani DiFranco to middle school students and pushing over a bike cop (and getting away with it!). Likewise, the “workshop” at the Youth Liberation conference in Florida at the end of 2000 that ended in the participants dancing naked around a fire in the rain, while remembered by many as a high water mark of excitement and transformation, remains invisible to history.

These are just the projects that have taken place under the CrimethInc. moniker, not to speak of all the other activities of those who have sometimes participated in these. Everything de-

¹ That Reagan Butcher, whose poetry first appeared in the CrimethInc. Letters series while he was in prison, has received \$253 in royalties (as documented in his poem “My Publishers”)—hardly enough to ease the difficult transition from incarceration to wage slavery, we fear—identifies him as a fellow traveler who contributes to projects without actually acting as part of the collective. This should be clear anyway, as he writes under his own name.

² Rumors that CrimethInc. is financed by trust funds or foreign governments are malicious fabrications.

³ For the record, Wal-Mart has CrimethInc. books on their website not because they stock them but because they list as “available” all books they can order through corporate distributors. After initially balking at working with such distributors, we eventually had to compromise so that libraries that do not work with independent distributors could obtain our books.

⁴ Approximately 5% of our books have been sold with removable barcode stickers on them, required by large book distributors who would otherwise charge us 25¢ per copy to put them on themselves.

scribed here has been achieved in collaboration with countless other groups and individuals—to be precise, it is all the result of the collaboration of various groups and individuals, sometimes under the CrimethInc. name and sometimes not. Some have accused CrimethInc. of being elitist or alienating, but it is precisely the radically participatory and decentralized aspects of the CrimethInc. experiment that have enabled it to be this far-reaching.

This is not to say there is no room for improvement—far from it! But this record should satisfactorily refute the charges of certain ideologues that informal networks and autonomous cells are incapable of sustained, effective activity. Whatever anyone might say against decentralization and voluntary association, they work for us. Likewise, our work over the past decade attests to the tremendous power individuals can discover in themselves and their communities when they extract even a part of their lives from the machinery of capitalism to invest in the liberation struggle. You can accuse us ex-workers of many things, but idleness is not one of them.

Abject Failure

All this productivity and activity, of course, indicates only one thing: the cataclysmic defeat of the CrimethInc. project thus far. We set out to raze Western civilization to the ground, and stocked its libraries instead. We began as iconoclasts, and became icons. Our first forays into the media were calculated to cast doubt upon themselves as well as all other media (hence the misattributed quotes, recontextualized images, and vicious sarcasm); our more recent mass-produced tracts unironically adopt a tone of earnest proselytizing, as if the ideas and skills thus conveyed could somehow outweigh the negative effects of mass production and mediated communication themselves. Starting out free of ideological commitments, we eventually settled into anarchism because it seemed the most free of dogma, only to become a mainstay of that milieu with all the usual responsibilities of good citizenship. Our quixotic assault on history has become a part of history—and now here we are making it easier on the biographers with a retrospective!

We have achieved moments of liberation in which we leave behind the world of hierarchy and powerlessness and despair; these cannot be discounted. But thus far, when the dust has cleared after each such departure, the old order has reestablished itself—and we have accrued more inertia, slowly becoming a part of the world we wish to destroy. Today, an internet search for “CrimethInc.” turns up more results than “crimethink”: like so many other organs of resistance, we run the risk of supplanting the original object of our struggle.

Of course, this is not necessarily for the worst. Destroying CrimethInc. will be no more difficult than destroying the capitalist system that gave rise to it. The CrimethInc. vehicle—a memberless underground, a front group for those opposed to front groups but in need of anonymity—was created to be abandoned, and none of us is foolish enough to conflate this fabrication with the unique and amazing human beings we all are in real life. Unfortunately, as capitalism, hierarchy, and miserablist indifference still hold sway across the world, all no less noxious than CrimethInc. itself, we are not ready to set fire to our Frankenstein’s monster just yet. The perfect murder-suicide, to extend the metaphor as far as our reluctant pacifist hearts permit, will require long and careful planning.

Besides, every numbskull announces that “[fill in the blank] isn’t like the old days!” as soon as he learns to talk. Black Star North, an obscure and short-lived splinter group that otherwise would probably never be mentioned again, once issued a demand that CrimethInc. disband—an

appeal akin to calling on Food Not Bombs to quit serving, as if it was just a matter of beseeching the board of directors to call the whole thing off. That was at the beginning of 2001, when we had accomplished so little of what lay before us! However disillusioned we are with our own efforts, we are even more disillusioned with disillusionment and capitulation—strategies which, sad to tell, have been tested over and over in radical circles, always with the same effects. No, we are not done yet—we have hardly completed the first phase of this experiment, and distributing 500,000 papers is hardly comparable to the full-scale revolutions in which we hope to participate.

Going Through the Motions

Resistance as a whole is an ebb and flow of movements that replenishes itself from the undifferentiated masses⁵ through the same processes by which CrimethInc. has been assimilated into today's anarchist milieu. All who have thus far constituted the CrimethInc. experiment emerged from this uncommitted mass; we have made our ways to resistance individually or in small groups, developing certain skills (and failing to develop others) in this process, eventually finding one another and establishing common cause and reference points as part of a broader social current.

Unfortunately, just as the masses from which we appeared are characterized by inertia, circles of resistance suffer from inertia of their own. This symmetry does a lot to explain the persistence of the status quo: as long as a society is divided cleanly into opposing camps, each rigid and predictable, it remains essentially static.

When contradictions deepen between the lives people lead and the lives they desire and believe to be possible, the resulting tremors dislodge new dissidents from the ranks of the complacent; transforming themselves, they wash into the camps of resistance in waves. The fundamental goal of most CrimethInc. projects, accordingly, has not been to fortify one camp, but to deepen the widespread contradictions that give rise to social instability. One might argue that it is not resistance movements themselves that make social change so much as it is contagious examples of transformation; working from this proposition, one might further hypothesize that those actually in the midst of transformation have more to offer to the project of revolution than partisans of revolution who have not changed in thirty years. The former may not have thought through all their politics and tactics yet, but their inconsistency and awkwardness are balanced out by flexibility, momentum, and optimism, not to mention the relationships they retain from their former lives. Once their new identities as radicals have crystallized, the roles they play in social upheavals are likely to be less and less dynamic: they can still fight, of course, perhaps with increasing expertise, but only from a fixed position⁶.

Hence the antagonism towards the established radical milieu that characterized early CrimethInc. projects: it was the bravado of rebels savoring weightless freedom while they still possessed it, knowing they were doomed to be isolated and immobilized within that milieu even-

⁵ For the purposes of this analysis, the only common quality that unites this mass is the fact that none of its constituents consider themselves to be revolutionaries. This is precisely the formless, infinite mass that certain organizers so ardently wish to win over to the revolution; by definition, this is impossible, for whenever an individual or group joins the resistance they step forward out of it. No wonder whenever one of those organizers looks around a meeting, he fails to see The People he believes to be the proper object of his efforts.

⁶ Earth First! is one of many radical institutions that began as unique, if problematic, manifestations of discontent only to be slowly absorbed into a more homogeneous culture of resistance.

tually. For good or ill, that phase is over now. CrimethInc. is a known quantity. The original vague inclinations towards liberation have solidified into a concrete program, and in the process much that was muddled or just plain juvenile has been dispensed with—but from this point on, CrimethInc. must do without all advantages save those of perseverance and pervasiveness, or else somehow defy the chains of causality to wrest free from history and repeat the process of development all over again.

This is one of our hard-won lessons: in order that resistance remain diverse and organic, upstart dissidents should preserve as long as possible all that is autonomous and anomalous about their revolts. Whenever a new dissident individual, group, or tendency appears, established radicals rush to engage them in dialogue; in the course of this dialogue, however contentious it may be, the reference points of the neophytes shift slowly towards those of the old guard and away from those of the rest of the population. Those who desire to resist quarantine in the existing radical milieu should be sure that the bulk of their dialogue takes place with others who do not yet have rigid political commitments.

Above all, it is necessary to pick the right enemies. One's enemies determine one's actions more decisively than any other factor, and there are always petulant radicals ready to incapacitate others by locking them in irrelevant debates. Those who wish to keep their hands free for the struggles that really matter must learn when to protect themselves by refusing to defend themselves, just as they must learn to benefit from criticism even when it is not intended constructively. CrimethInc. exists to engage capitalism in a fight to the death, not to battle it out with other radical splinter groups in a war of attrition.

We have learned to keep the radical community behind us, as it were, to draw ideas and inspiration from it while facing outward to the rest of the world. Experience has shown that little constructive criticism can be expected from ideologues with fixed agendas—their critiques of CrimethInc. material, which almost always bypass content to focus on reputation, show that they literally *cannot read*—but it is still of paramount importance to learn from and coordinate with others, and to collaborate whenever possible. Even the most entrenched can create unpredictable situations by joining forces with unlikely allies.

Low Points

Among other things, CrimethInc. has been an experiment in structure. In adapting the decentralized, radically participatory approach of Food Not Bombs and the Earth Liberation Front to the project of propaganda outreach, we have attempted to put whatever notoriety we win for ourselves at the disposal of all. The objections of traditionalists that this approach could not provide enough *control* over who acts as CrimethInc. have not been borne out by reality: neither fascists nor communists nor liberals have attempted to hijack the CrimethInc. bullet mid-trajectory⁷.

On the contrary, while thousands have associated themselves with the CrimethInc. banner, comparatively few have taken ownership of it to the point of carrying on long-term activity beneath it. To some extent, we are victims of the success of a few well-known CrimethInc. nuclei, whose efforts have raised the bar so high as to obscure the efforts of other CrimethInc. cells and the possibility of more such efforts. While our decentralized structure and emphasis on anony-

⁷ Perhaps those who are still concerned about this issue should suspend their notions about intellectual property long enough to publish something as CrimethInc. themselves, to show us the error of our ways!

mous participation have served to protect participants from the various hazards of celebrity, they have not sufficed to collectivize CrimethInc. entirely. This should not come as a surprise: it is not an insignia that enables people to do things, but access to resources, experience to draw upon, and above all the feeling that one is entitled to act. Until the more established CrimethInc. cells are able to do more to extend these resources to others, it will be optimistic to expect anything different.

So, like most other revolutionaries to date, we have failed to decentralize power within our own ranks as well as within society at large. Fortunately, unlike the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution, we hardly have a monopoly on power—most of the power in this society is still in the hands of capitalists and, less obviously, the dutiful citizens who serve them. Our strategy is not to seize that power ourselves in naive hope of redistributing it, but to share tactics by which others can seize it for themselves. Whatever we're doing wrong, others can do better.

And now (drum roll, please), the single greatest shortcoming of all our efforts thus far. No, it hasn't been our contention that those who can should experiment with confrontational unemployment as a means to focus on revolutionary struggle—seriously, would it have been better if we'd spent all these years working *for* the man? Nor has it been our failure to address the needs of “the” working class: those who desire a monopoly on the political organizing of working people would hardly waste so much bile on us if our efforts were of no interest to their target audience.

Far worse: all too often, we've failed to follow up our outreach efforts with concrete opportunities for people to connect to one another. Of the scores of people who have traveled to various CrimethInc. addresses hoping to join a standing army of revolutionaries, of the thousands who have written letters to those addresses beseeching the recipients to direct them to radical communities in which to take control of their lives, few have received more than words of encouragement for their pains; our resources were stretched thin enough as it was just collating stolen photocopies. Nobody can save anyone the trouble of developing initiative and experience for herself or himself; but people develop their abilities in communities, and more often than not we have failed to bring people together so this could take place. Whenever we have been able to do so, the results have been explosive; this makes all these missed opportunities all the more tragic.

We have counted on anarchist communities at large to be available to those who are inspired by our projects, but all too often this has not been the case. The focus on lifestyle as an end in itself among passive consumers of CrimethInc. literature, which has maddened its authors as well as their critics, has probably stemmed from this dearth of other points of departure. This is the great failure of the past ten years, the one that has perhaps made the difference between agitation and insurrection. Simply publishing and agitating is not enough; those of us who are already active need to put more energy into fostering networks and keeping them accessible to new participants. This must be an even higher priority than propaganda and outreach if the latter are to be of any use—that is to say, if the efforts of the next ten years are to produce different results than those of the past ten.

The Anti-Climax

Over the past decade, CrimethInc. has at some points been literally one person alone, abandoned by all, desperately struggling to crack the code for collective liberation before starving to death—and at other times, a crack team of seasoned comrades maintaining long-term projects, a crowd of hundreds suddenly erupting into the street, a vibrant international network of thousands. If anything, we have learned the value of dreaming big, of patiently maintaining our spirits through difficult periods and going all out when the time is right.

We still have some tricks up our sleeve—perhaps we’ve lost the element of surprise, but we never thought we’d live to see the opportunities we have now. Even so, we won’t be the ones to win this struggle. The weapons we’re fighting with cannot win it. 500,000 unique anarchist projects could pose a real threat; the fact that we have to make 500,000 identical copies of a single one is an admission of defeat, albeit an optimistic one. The only real value CrimethInc. can have is as a challenge to provoke others into more ambitious revolutionary action. This is our plea to you, if you care one whit for liberation, whether or not you’ve ever been fond of any of our projects: put everything we’ve done to shame. Don’t waste your breath criticizing our efforts—there’s work to be done. Demonstrate approaches that work better than the ones we’ve employed, and we’ll gladly take them up.

Perhaps it is necessary to put all this in plainer language for those who are still reading as spectators and critics rather than comrades-in-arms. So if you please, dear friends:

PULL OUT THE STOPS! FILL YOUR SPINE WITH GUNPOWDER! LIGHT A
MATCH IN YOUR BRAIN!

OUTDO US! OUTDO US! OUTDO US!

Some of you have labored hard, as have we—but perhaps it would be better to trade all our calluses for dynamite. We may yet have the chance.

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