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Let Me Light My Cigarette on Your Burning Blockade

Crimepensée Eyewitness Account of the Anti-G8
Demonstrations and Anarchy in the Alps

CrimethInc.

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it was everyone's duty to keep the camp clean, not a handful of unlucky volunteers! After maybe an hour, we left the assembly and dispersed into the camp. It was really amazing seeing anarchy in action. In one corner of the village an old man was building a small swimming pool for two little children out a mysterious giant pipe, some strings, and a plastic container...and just a few meters away some women was constructing a solar-heater to have a hot shower. There were so many things going on it was dazzling: constant debates and video showings, kids running free without parental supervision, friends gathering to peel vegetables and prepare food. Anarchy in fucking action, dude. The only problem we encountered was a couple of days later, when we had an assembly to decide what to do concerning the 150 arrested demonstrators in Lausanne. It was hard to find a consensus as we wanted to show authorities we were in solidarity with them but didn't want our camp to fall to the same fate as the camps that morning in Lausanne. There was actually no "right" choice, so people had a hard time figuring this out. Finally, the decision was that the people too tired to demonstrate again would stay in the village to prevent a police attack while others would assemble in front of the city hall in Annemasse to offer food and talk to the locals, showing the town people that these crazy anarchists were not just about smashing windows but about building a better world as well.

Sometimes, we're so stuck in this world of shit we find it hard to believe in anything. That makes communities like the VAAAG all the more powerful as we realize anarchy is not just a refusal of their system but a real convergence of creative and unique desires, an army of diehard dreamers bent on making those dreams reality and making reality our dreams.

While only forty kilometers away from here in the VAAAG the eight richest countries of the world were going to meet in order to figure out how to go on fucking everyone, we were there to show that something else was possible ... fuck, we showed anarchy fucking existed right here!

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in the best possible sense of the word— in one big field. The VAAAG was composed of tents offering a vast array of activities such as punk shows, debates, workshops on every imaginable issue, video-showings, legal advice, medical assistance, a nursery, an Indymedia Center, and more. The VAAAG itself was divided into “barrios”, each barrio being grouped around a communal kitchen. Every morning there was an assembly in each barrio to figure out what was going great and what should be improved. Two delegates of each barrio would meet at noon with other delegates to share everyone’s ideas and recommendations. If you didn’t feel at ease in your barrios you could switch barrios at any time. As we sat around a fire in front of which people were discussing, singing, and playing guitar, and we went to the first kitchen tent we found. The smell of awesome vegan food reminded us of our empty stomachs. One of the members of the barrio explained to us that the food was free, made by everyone for everyone, but that a contribution would be great to help paying for the camp fees. We gave a couple of euros and had a marvelous time eating tons of pasta and sauce around the fire. In the tradition of hobo elitism, we had no tent so we just fell asleep on our sleeping bags outside. The bright sun woke us up pretty early, and within minutes we were in the middle of the morning assembly. We were surrounded by a heterogeneous crowd of fifty people: young crusties, old ladies, middle-aged hippies....basically people of all kinds. The assembly figured out who would take care of the kitchen, the entrance, the camp security, and all other pressing matters for the day. The discussion was rolling from one person to another in a impressive and polite manner (Although in the assembly next to us, these old anarchists were all shouting at each other, which while sounding cool and passionate, probably got less done!). Someone came up with the idea of creating a team to clean up toilets and the camp in general. At this point an elderly man raised his voice for the first time, explaining that he thought we should avoid this kind of specialization as

their under-handed tactics live on camera! We felt horrible, but at the same time breathed yet another sigh of relief for following our trustworthy instincts. Yes, the G8 did manage to meet in Evian, but we definitely gave them a taste of the hell their political policies were inflicting on the rest of the world. As our group of anarchist conspirators and criminals drifted to sleep in this strange autonomous zone that had appeared from out of nowhere, we could not help but to realize that despite all their teargas, border-guards, water-cannons, over-priced train tickets, and secret meetings we had these presidents and premiers running scared. The amassed forces of the world's eight most powerful countries not only failed to stop us, but couldn't even catch us! And there's no sleep like the sleep of after a job—or insurrection—well-done.

Village for Human and Anarchist Experimentation

Although the main demonstration (Where you can smash corporations and burn capitalism down!) was on Sunday, we decided to leave on Thursday as we had heard of some “anarchist camp” taking place one week before the G8 summit. So the three of us left the dirty industrial town of R— and escaped to the green mountain retreat of the Alps. We were definitely a strange crew: a half-mad Belgian hobo (retired from a career as a punk rock star too!) and two other hardcore kids trying to be a bit more punk. Amazingly, all three of us together hitch-hiked the 700 km separating us from our upcoming battle in a day, and in the process had a really nice picnic with some old people we almost converted to anti-capitalism. We arrived at the VAAAG (The Alternative Anti-capitalist Anti-war Village) in the evening, where we were welcomed at the entrance by young men who explained us the way the village worked. The VAAAG consisted of around 1500 people living—

After hours of being herded into airports, terrorized by border guards, and adjusting my disguise as a harmless pony-tailed animation artist, I arrived at Annemasse. I felt like somewhere there should be trumpets, a glorious symphony announcing that against all odds this convicted criminal had made in past border-guards and hitch-hiked without knowing a word of French to a tiny little village in the Alps which served as our secret anarchist headquarters. As travel companions I was with an Italian philosopher and an Estonian film student (who we had picked up at the airport because “We looked interesting”) and in my pockets only a few pennies. Yet, within only one day we were going to take on the eight largest powers on the face of the earth.

I was a bit surprised when walking into the VAAAG that it appeared to be some sort of vaguely anarchist Woodstock. And a bad corporate one, with high-priced beer and no free food in sight. Clearly, something was wrong. I hurriedly borrowed the mobiles of strangers to call the crimepensée agent I had e-mailed only a few hours before he himself had begun his own wild hitch-hike to the VAAAG. Within a few hours of tramping about looking for him, it became clear—I wasn't even at the anarchist camp! I was at the camp of the Intergalactic, the camp of the social democrats, hippies, and Trotskyists. Of course there was going to be bad reggae and overpriced beer! Yet, on the other side of the mobile, I could hear the unmistakable sound of punk rock, and I could already smell the free food!

Despite it being pitch-black, I saw from the torch-lights of the VAAAG a tall man who was unmistakably sporting the infamous logo of the international conspiracy only known as the CrimethInc Ex-Workers Collective. I hurried over and introduced myself, and thanks to his perfect grasp of English within a few minutes we had a mad-cap plan of crossing the border to aid blockades at Lausanne, a smaller Swiss town that the G8 delegates were going to ride through early Sunday morning

in an attempt to avoid the roads near Geneva and Annemasse, towns already occupied by hordes of anarchists. Again another international border and a lack of Swiss Francs to pay for transport could be difficulties, but such things had never stopped us before. The forces of anarchy, separated by continents and border-guards, had just begun to gather their powers.

The Crimepensée agent informed me politely that he was going to sleep with a young woman, thus making my presence inside her tent a bit strange, but that I was welcome to sleep right outside. After having a few free cups of tea, I gathered my things to go to the bed. Luckily, a woman the age of my mother came up to me and in French informed me that autonomy included doing the dishes. I thanked her and started cleaning the tables.

At the next morning assembly at VAAAG, about two hundred rag-tag anarchists of over a dozen different nationalities decided it was time to leave France and go to Lausanne, consequences be damned! We marched like a small army straight to the border between France and Switzerland, where an emergency consensus meeting took place over whether or not we were going to show our papers to the border-guards. While at first it seemed to make sense, a young woman in our group revealed that she was already barred from entering Switzerland, so if we showed our papers she couldn't go through. Our group decided on solidarity, that none of us were going to show our papers—and if the guards wanted them, they would have to answer to all of us! I was a bit incredulous, having been involved in at least one failed border-opening before and ever being the pessimist, I asked them if they had ever blockaded a border before and if they even knew how to blockade a street. They just smiled and said they would worry about such things when they happened. Lacking their faith, the Crimepensée agent and myself marched towards the front of the group and prepared for the worst. The horde of anarchists behind us began chanting “No Borders, No Nations, Stop Deportations!”...and marched

over 150 people more or less at random, questioning them as regards property destruction. Hundreds of others being held hostage without the permission to leave the camp until they released their papers to the pigs. After relaying our escape on the Indymedia Radio, we decided it was time to take a well-deserved rest. According to all the news “from the front” on Indymedia, police repression was intensifying everywhere; and with most of the demonstrations coming to an end, we decided not to try our luck but to leave Switzerland as soon as possible.

We walked across all of Geneva under the bright sun, utterly exhausted yet still on alert since hundreds of cops were keeping anyone who looked like a protester under tight surveillance. After a really long walk we arrived at a station where a train was supposed to bring us back to Annemasse...but due to the fucking demonstrations it was closed! One of us noticed an Amnesty International van parked nearby so we decided to beg for them to bring us to the border. They were surprised to be interrupted from their note-taking, as Amnesty International were there to document political repression, but we managed to convince them that our affinity group was likely going to be another victim of repression itself for their files unless they got us across that border! While they at first drug their feet and told us to wait till nearly darkness, so that we should walk there instead; ten kilometers by foot with heavy backpacks after a day of riots, quick escapes, and sun burns: What a great idea, Amnesty!! Fortunately a young woman finished her work for the day and accepted to bring us back to the VAAAG in Annemasse. We thanked this kind stranger a million times, even though we all fell asleep in her car while she was still talking to us. As she dropped us off in Annemasse, people ran up to us and told us that just a few minutes ago the Indymedia Centre in Geneva was attacked by the under-cover police, who not only checked the papers of but violently beat many media activists, arresting twelve under the auspices of searching for the elusive “Black Bloc”. Luckily, by raiding a media center caught

van and thanked them a million times in a mixture of French and English. We were still anxious that the police would stop the van (As for the two of our crew fled into the graveyard—writing this four days later we still don't know if they're still hiding there!) but we couldn't help but smile as we the van sped past police lines without a problem. Not only did they help us escape the police blockades, the couple were actually going in the direction of Geneva: Wooo-hoo! Inside the car, the radio blathered on about “a degenerating riot of wild youth” in Lausanne, and we could barely help ourselves from bursting out in laughter, leaving our hosts perplexed. We started to talk with them about the G8 and even those “not-so-nice kids breaking things down”. We went to great pains to emphasize that all that was broken, burnt, wrecked, and plundered belonged to large multi-national corporations, and that if you take into account all the damage and killings caused by their neoliberalism our strike back was not only minute, but understandable. They seemed dubious, so we switched the subject and talked about how violent the police were (which was true on some level, but given our blockades and property destruction not particularly surprising, but it's always important to give pigs a bad name!). We were driving for maybe fifteen minutes when the old man told us he would then take a secret countryside road as the police were controlling the entry of all large towns. We thanked them again for going out of their way, and one of our company muttered, “Damn, it felt so good to be a gangster!” ... and even better to find local accomplices! The elderly couple shook our hands, leaving us at the train station of a small town ten minutes away from Geneva.

A few minutes later we arrive at the Geneva station (without paying for our train tickets!) and head towards the Indymedia Center at “L'Usine”, hoping to meet friends there and find out if there was any action still going on. Once inside L'Usine, free beers and orange juice in hand, we were told the camp in Lausanne had been attacked by the police and that they arrested

right past the dozen stunned Swiss border guards, who stared at us in disbelief. Our international gang reformed after its first victory, and came to the conclusion that now in Switzerland we had to get to Lausanne as quickly as possible before the authorities clamped down on our blatant disregard for international migration laws. We would ... take the tram!

Within minutes a tram pulled up next to the border, and two hundred anarchists filled in completely. I began wondering why we didn't do these types of seizures of public transportation more often. Everyone was smiling, clapping, and soon declared our solidarity to make sure we all paid our tram tickets—after we were dead. The seizures of public transportation continued unabated at the train station. Within minutes we had figured out what train was going to Lausanne, and using my body to keep the doors open, began piling in. A nervous conductor came up to the Crimepensée agent and explained that another train was leaving in ten minutes and would get us to Lausanne even quicker than this train. He smiled at her, thanking her for the advice, but informed her that we were sensibly taking the train that was leaving right now. All aboard the Anarchy Express!

Through the windows, the Alps and the perfect blue lake of Léman sped by us. Overflowing from the seats, our crew sat on our backpacks and chatted excitedly with the locals who had made the unfortunate decision to actually pay for the train to Lausanne. At Lausanne we were greeted at the train-station by a man—who could in another life pass for a mild-mannered barber—that announced in a few minutes we would have a bus headed towards the anarchist base of Camp Bourdonette. We arrived at a camp that was well-organized with hot-showers, melted Swiss chocolate bars, and a plethora of black and red flags. After claiming a bit of ground for Crimepensée, we decided to head to the squatted Camp Oulalala by the lake for a swim to cool-off after a long day of not paying for any form of public transportation whatsoever.

Where we greeted by a giant international anarchist beach party! I had never seen anything quite like this in my life: the amassed forces of the anti-globalization movement sunbathing, giving out heaps of free salad, throwing Frisbees nude in the lake, and generally having the time of their lives. After stripping off my clothes and jumping in the lake, I swam to what I can only describe as a rickety pirate raft built to single-handedly intercept the G8 delegates who, too terrified of the protesters to drive to Evian, were going to be boated across the lake. Complimenting the German crew on their flying the Jolly Roger, I climbed in and asked if they really intended to use this raft to intercept the G8 delegates and what they would do with them if they actually caught them. Although my German is notoriously poor, I believe they told me that they would make the heads of the eight largest powers in the world walk the plank.

As night set in, the discussion got more serious. Somehow having found myself in the camp of Germans and German-speaking Swiss, the camp starting a very serious discussion about how many roads in Lausanne we were going to block and how we were going to do it. While all the details were kept suitably mysterious, the organizers assured us that “We know how to block roads” and that “Supplies had been prepared”. After deciding to stick together, the Franco-Germanic Bloc sent a delegate down to the Pink and Silver Bloc (which liked dressing up in outrageous pink and silver outfits and dancing to the latest in anti-capitalist samba music). At the inter-group meeting, it was decided that the Samba band would lead the march into Lausanne, and a spokesman from “the Dark Grey Bloc” announced that “we embraced heterogeneity and dancing, and no-one was going to be forced to commit acts of violence they don’t approve of. ”. Hundreds of people clapped and cheered. It was going to be one of those days...tomorrow morning, that is. As I went to sleep, the last thing I remember hearing was the

ing through the smashed remains of their store. All’s well that ends well—or at least ends with the capitalists suffering at least as much as they make us suffer.

Back at Camp Bourdonette, the main crowd was being herded down the street by riot police, who in a move of unexpected chutzpah blocked the crowd off from returning to Camp Oulalala by the lake where the protesters had left their personal belongings. The crowd, confused, meandered up the hill to Bourdonette and the police followed, surrounding us in order not to allow anyone to exit. My mind racing, it became apparent that the cops were at best going to at least quarantine us in this camp, and at worse come inside the camp and beat the living daylights out of us. Thinking of School Diaz in Genoa, our affinity group hurriedly gathered their things and announced to other affinity groups that the time to leave was now or never. Almost everyone else decided it would be useful to wait to see what would happen, and perhaps retrieve their possessions from Camp Oulalala by the lake. We smiled, told everyone to meet us in Geneva, and made a mad-cap dash across the street to some woods, where the cops had yet to blockade. Manically rushing through underbrush, we ended up in the parking lot of a graveyard, and peering down the street, noticed that cops were already blocking off the exit, but the pigs didn’t see us.

Some of our erstwhile comrades panicked and fled into the graveyard, but our affinity group kept a level head by asking a polite old couple who were loading their van if they would be kind enough to save our freedom from the encroaching police. At first they seemed a bit surprised and maybe a little bit scared too...we told them the police was attacking the camp and that their ride was our only way out, our only way to avoid jail, emphasizing the drama with wild gesticulations and our eyes begging for help. Calmly, the old man stared at us with a look of peace and answered quietly: “Okay ... Let’s go quick then”. We hid our backpacks in the trunk, jumped in the suburban

and Silver joined the Black Bloc to fight back. While black-masked blockaders and pink fairies managed to fight back by erected barricades from barbed wire, burning cardboard, and an over-turned wagon—buying the crowd some needed breathing time—a tactical retreat was in order. Unfortunately, the retreat was anything but tactical, as a thoroughly mixed-up Black and Pink Bloc separated and went down two separate streets. This was a clear recipe for disaster, and within the hour the group our affinity group was with was surrounded by cops who were clearly going to close in within a few minutes. After a moment of quick thinking, our affinity group de-blocked (which means simply removing your black mask and replacing your monochrome outfit with suitably middle-class apparel such as a button-downed plaid shirt) and jumped a fence into a residential neighborhood. This neighborhood was peaceful, and as our affinity group crawled out of the well-manicured lawn, we surprised an older man who was quietly walking his dog from a running riot. Giving him a quick wink, we saw the other main split-off group. Re-blocking, we desperately tried to convince them that to rejoin the group that was surrounded by police just surrounded by police just down the street, but our pleas were ignored and following the usual and depressing herd instinct of crowds, the group just began marching down the nearest empty street. Obliging, the cops followed and as the crowd approached an open park, began openly pelting people with tear-gas canisters and attacking the crowd with truncheons. Seeing as the crowd had lost its earlier co-ordination and morale, things were only going to go downhill—a point proved as the crowd panicked again and started running across the park to escape the tear-gas. Jumping in the middle of yet another crowd of pink pixies in order to de-block, our affinity group decided to call it a day in Lausanne and walk back to camp to attempt to get whatever remained of the demonstration to Geneva. As we walked back to camp, we smiled as dumbfounded police and Shell employees began pick-

sound of a radio playing, “I am the antichrist, I am an anarchist, I know what I want and I know how to get it...”

Promptly at six o’clock in the morning the teeming masses of anarchy gathered outside their camp, with only a lone cop on a motorcycle cowardly perched in the distance. As everyone wiped their eyes, drank down some coffee, and checked their pockets for their vinegar and onions (to defend against the tear-gas attacks). Out of nowhere a ridiculously beaten-up green van appeared that resembled something that an anarchist Che Guevara would drive straight into the apocalypse. To my surprise it began blasting an eclectic and tasteful mix of everything from German street punk, techno, and hip-hop through speakers mounted on its roof. This tasteful choice in music got even my hips swaying in the morning sun, and some sections of the Black Bloc started dancing. The music was interrupted occasionally by news in both German and English: “The roads have already been blocked in Geneva!” Cheering broke loose, but we all realized we were running behind schedule. Where was the Pink and Silver Bloc when you needed them? Our mysterious radio host announced “The Pink and Silver have lost their Samba band...if anyone sees a Samba band, please tell them!” After a few more minutes of frustration, from the distance the unmistakable sound of Samba drums was heard. Triumphantly, we took over the highway and without a cop in sight began marching straight towards downtown Lausanne.

As regards preparation, this Black Bloc had definitely done their homework. Bottles of paint were distributed, blocks of wood gathered in carts, and huge tripods were carried. Indeed, the Bloc was ready for blockading. One Crimepensée agent was simply handed a pair of bolt-cutters with a wink! Ever apt at improvisation, anarchists began splitting off from the main march and seizing every available dumpster (including those chained to the ground!) for use as blockades. The Bloc, still on the outskirts of the city, began approaching when a Crimepensée Independent Revolutionary Cell noticed a Shell

petrol station in the distance. Hoping that everyone would get the message, he began yelling “Shell! Shell! To hell with Shell!” Within seconds, members of the Bloc started throwing stones and paint. The level of struggle was raised when yet another Crimepensée agent, bolt-cutters in hand, aimed straight at the window! Within a minute, some of the more enterprising members of the Bloc also rushed at the windows and began smashing them with their boots, iron bars, whatever was at hand. As the corner was turned, an Esso appeared, and the Bloc began reducing it to rubble as quickly as possible. The sound-van reminded everyone not to spend all their time destroying multi-nationals, but to remember that we were here to blockade roads. Inside the Esso, the Bloc triumphantly seized everything from cigarettes to flowers, destroying as much of the Shell station as they could in the process. A few of the more enterprising members of the Bloc even grabbed oil for lighting future blockades on fire. The process continued like clockwork, and a Select station around the corner was just asking for it.

As soon as we came to the first intersection to blockade, the Black Bloc acted in a way that can only be considered professional. Boards, crow-bars, and dumpsters were artfully assembled, and as an artist would be a finishing touch on their masterpiece, lit on fire. Several members of the Bloc stood back to admire their handiwork, lighting their cigarettes on the burning wreckage. Cars began backing up, and a few members of the Bloc waved, and one driver actually waved back! The entire main roundabout outside Lausanne was blocked! As the Black Bloc continued its march straight into town, it didn’t encounter any police resistance since the Pink and Silver Bloc kept the police line confused with their antics and music just a few hundred meters from where the Black Bloc was setting up the blockades. As one intersection was entered, the Black Bloc began skillfully disassembling entire construction sites, using every available and imaginable part of the construction equipment that could be possibly turned into a barricade. A

full-scale wooden fence appeared on one side of the intersection, another began to be filled with dumpsters and an iron bars. The Bloc in its excitement even began blockading even the side of the street they came from, but soon realized that they were blockading the escape route as well, and then dismantled the blockade as quickly as they put it up. Another overeager young member of the Bloc smashed the window to a small shop, claiming in defense that this shop primarily sold meat and so should be destroyed in the name of animal liberation. A quick debate on the merits of the action took place, and finally the group more or less decided that the negative reaction from locals outweighed the possible advantages. In the meantime, a Black Blocker with a megaphone reminded the crowd that lighting fires in residential neighborhoods might possibly burn down a residence, so “Cool the flames, but not the enthusiasm...we have all day!” The locals came out on their window still and street corners, to view the passing spectacle. Expecting probably nothing less than a horde of murderous barbarians as advertised by the police and the media, the locals were pleasantly surprised when the Black Bloc began throwing packs of cigarettes onto the balconies into the arms of surprised grandmothers, and giving brightly colored flowers to shocked store clerks. Never has rioting been so joyous!

Such hours of insurrection are not to last forever, and if they did perhaps we would forget their sweetness. Suddenly, from the distance tear-gas could be smelled wafting into the air. Screaming and running, a cross-dressing Italian in a full pink skirt and silver wings announced that the Pink and Silver Bloc was being attacked by the pigs and needed help!

As the Black Bloc moved forward, the Pink and Silver Bloc fell back even more, and despite the steady-stream of tear-gas canisters falling around the unmistakable view of a giant water cannon could be seen, ruthlessly spraying the Pink and Silver Bloc. It was pure cowardice on the part of the pigs to attack the Pink and Silver street party first...and together, the Pink