CrimethInc.
Democracy is Bankrupt

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to buy them; back-room deals will always be more appealing. The only way we can get leverage on the ones who hold power is by threatening to take that power away from them.

This has to mean more than shuffling back and forth between different parties. When we build our own grassroots momentum, developing the capability to make the changes we need directly, politicians are forced to hurry to keep up with us, scrambling to grant our demands before they lose legitimacy altogether. If we want to have leverage on the government, the most effective way for those of us who aren't millionaires or party bureaucrats to do that is to bypass the established channels and contest their authority. So the same principles that could take us beyond democracy—direct action, mutual aid, liberty and autonomy—are also the only ones that can help us wield any real power while it persists.

Beggars can't be choosers. When we only petition, we give up the power to determine what the choices are in the first place. Let's stop reacting to our rulers and set our own agenda.

What happened to all the optimism of the last election season, all that business about hope and change? For decades, we've pinned our hopes on one candidate after another, but now it seems like people are finally giving up on the whole charade. The only ones who still take it seriously are the protesters playing democracy in the street.

Why has democracy failed us? Is it the Electoral College, voting machines, gerrymandering—the sort of thing that could be remedied by electoral reform? That wouldn't explain why we're still disappointed with the results even when our favorite candidate gets in.

Is it corporate influence perverting politicians' agendas and controlling the media? Sure—but when power is distributed according to who rakes in the most profit, that can't help but affect politics. As long as private property exists, the rich will always have more leverage over our society, whether or not they can literally buy votes.

Is it just a matter of scale? Would the same procedures work if we only practiced them at town hall meetings and general assemblies? Anybody who has lived in a small town knows that while small-scale politics may be more personal, that doesn't keep them from being alienating. Likewise, letting an arbitrarily constituted general assembly determine what you can and can't do feels even more ridiculous than getting bullied by cops and tax collectors.

Maybe the problem has to do with democracy itself. Honestly, when has it fully delivered on its promises? In ancient Athens, when women and slaves were prohibited from participating? In the days of the Founding Fathers, some of whom also owned slaves? Today, when everyone supposedly has a say but self-determination feels further out of our hands than ever?

We keep blaming specific politicians and political parties, as if it were just a matter of personal failings. But any system that doesn't work unless the people using it are *perfect* is a bad system. What if some politicians really do mean well, but there's nothing they can

do? All the good intentions in the world won't help if the structure is broken.

So let's try another question:

Why do we talk about changing our rulers when we really want to change our lives?

The answer is obvious: because our rulers have more control over our lives than we do. But changing rulers isn't going to fix that. Is getting to choose the lesser of two evils really the best of all possible worlds?

Imagine if we could have complete control over our own lives. That's something that will never appear on a ballot. What kind of decisions *can* be made by voting—and what kind of structures does it take to impose them?

Think about what goes on in the Pentagon and the Kremlin and the offices of every town hall. Those day-to-day activities are the same under Democrats as under Republicans; they're not much different today than they were a hundred years ago. Whoever happens to be operating it, the machinery of the state imposes its own logic: administration, coercion, control. Politicians promise us the world, but their job is to keep it out of our hands—to *govern* it.

Our ancestors fought hard to overthrow the kings who ruled them. When they finally succeeded, they kept the structures the kings had established—the same ministries and courts and armies—imagining that these could be run for the common good. But whoever is on the other side of that apparatus—be it a king, a president, or an electorate—those on the receiving end of *governing* experience the same thing. The laws, administrators, and police of a democracy are just as impersonal and coercive as the laws, administrators, and police of a dictatorship. The problem is the institution of government itself, which keeps the governed at a distance from their own power.

As Oscar Wilde put it, democracy is "the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people." The essence of democracy is not just collective participation in decision-making, but also the apparatus to force decisions on everyone whether they voted for them or not. If we make our ideal a miniature version of this—"direct democracy"—it will never deliver the freedom we desire. We have to dream bigger, looking back to how our ancestors did things before they were ruled by kings, and around at all the parts of our lives that are still free from top-down political control.

Let's do away with representation; the gulf is always too wide between what we would do ourselves and what is done in our name. Let's do away with the idea that there can only be one legitimate decision-making body, one bottleneck through which all decisions must pass. Let's build new structures that promote autonomy and free association, making decisions by consensus where we choose to come together and retaining our independence otherwise. *Freedom* means nothing less.

Decentralizing power means that all of us can take our lives in our own hands and realize our potential as we see fit. When our social structures are voluntary, only the ones that are truly in everyone's best interest will persist. This might not be easy at first, but it beats pandering to the fear-mongering of those who benefit from control and hierarchy.

Wait, Let's Be Pragmatic Here!

All this sounds great in theory, but doesn't it leave us on the sidelines? Maybe democracy is rotten to its core, but it's the only game in town. How can we have any influence in our society if we refuse to participate?

Again, let's ask this question the other way around. What incentive do politicians have to grant us what we want if we only ask nicely? Corporations will always have more money with which