

# FIXED IDEAS AND LETTER BOMBS

Formerly Feral Faun critiques FC's *Industrial Society & Its Future* as ideology

Unfortunately, the response of american anarchists to the 'unabomber' (hereafter, FC<sup>1</sup>) has mostly been one of knee-jerk disavowal verging on reactionary hysteria. It seems these anarchists fear for their good reputation by which they plan to convert the masses to anarchism. So there has not yet been an actual critical response from an anarchist perspective to FC's tract *Industrial Society & its Future*. Since FC claim to be anarchists (defining this in terms of favouring self-determination for individuals and small groups over the domination of large scale systems over our lives) and have involved themselves in doing something (whatever problems we have with their tactics), this non-response is absurd. *Industrial Society & Its Future* is an attempt to deal with some significant questions often ignored or dealt with by sloganeering in the anarchist press. FC's statement has many faults, often is shallow and inadequate to the challenge it is attempting to meet. This stems from a lack of thorough social analysis, reliance on concepts which seem to come from pop psychology and adherence to fixed ideas (a fixed idea is a thought or idea that dominates the thinker, causing her to channel all thinking and analysis through that one idea, eg. for the religious, god is a fixed idea, for the patriot, the country). FC correctly sees that the industrial technological system is a system of domination, but miss the fact that it is an integral part of a more complex social system which needs to be attacked in its totality. But let's examine FC's theses.

## LEFTISM: A NEUROTIC RESPONSE TO A PSYCHOTIC SOCIETY (FC'S THESES 1-32)

FC's tract strangely begins with several pages critical of leftism. Stranger still, this criticism relies completely on psychology (and that of a rather crude 'pop' form). FC use this as a basis, later on, for a more general description of the psychology of people under the industrial system.

FC see leftism as having a psychological basis in "feelings of inferiority" and "oversocialisation". Modern american leftism is certainly based in what Max Stirner called "ragamuffinism" and Nietzsche called "resentment". Some recent anarchist writings have referred to it as the "ideology of victimism". This ideology does seem to reflect and promote feelings of inferiority, but FC seems to be unfamiliar with these ideas and adopt instead a methodology reminiscent of pop psychology in their critique. Fortunately for FC, leftists are apparently so afraid of any sort of criticism, that they could only respond to FC's inadequate criticism with hysterical yammerings.

FC are correct in saying that most american leftists come from middle or upper-class backgrounds. But FC miss what may be the most significant aspects of this in terms of the psychology of leftism: namely, that many leftists believe that they are privileged, that they have an excess of social power, and they feel guilty about this. In a very christian, messianic manner, they "give themselves" to those who -- according to their ideology -- have received the short shrift from society. This guilt and secular christianist activism explain the leftist masochism, self-sacrifice and dogmatism quite well. Recognising the religiosity of leftism, we can see that it can be compassionate, morally based and hostile all at once -- just like christianity which compassionately and morally instituted pogroms,

inquisitions, wars and genocide against heretics and non-believers.

FC's attempts to interpret every aspect of the leftist's life in terms of a pop psychology inferiority complex severely weakens the argument. Leftists, like nearly everyone else in this society, lead very compartmentalised lives. I have known leftists who seem to "like" the blues or world beat music because they imagine such music is a way to get in touch with the feelings of black or third world people. Thus to the extent that leftism affects the art preferences of the leftist, it does not seem to be in the direction of embracing defeat or irrationalism, but of trying to get in touch with other cultures. This is absurd and merely reinforces the commodification of these cultures, but it does not, in itself, indicate inferiority feelings.

Certainly, leftists spend far too much time trying to prove the equality of oppressed groups and demanding that it be granted by the state, but this does not so much prove the inferiority feelings of leftists as their adherence to relying on authority. It is the leftist belief in a democratic social order -- which is to say, a structure of democratic authority -- which causes them to embrace victimistic ideology, an ideology which begs those in power to grant equality, rights, justice, etc. This practise of constantly begging for what one wants (particularly when those wants have been transformed into abstractions which one can never see accomplished) inevitably makes one feel weak and incapable -- and so inferior. Leftist activists promote this form of radicalism because it guarantees their role within the present social structures. When women, gays, blacks, etc., start taking their lives as their own as individuals, it brings them into conflict equally with leftist ideologues and with society, precisely because they are no longer begging and so no longer need the leftists to beg for them.

FC's concept of "oversocialisation" also proves to be inadequate because it

depends on psychology rather than an analysis of the social role of the leftist. Leftism is a form of liberal democratic / humanist politics -- that is, it is part of the political system to which the rise of capitalism and the industrial system gave birth. So it is no surprise that leftists subscribe to the "liberty, equality, fraternity" which are the shibboleths of such politics. But the totality of the social system is far more complex and irrational than FC think. The real values of this system, the ones for which it sacrifices all others, can be summed up rather simplistically as follows: (1) the expansion of capital; (2) efficiency in production; (3) increasing social control in the daily lives of individuals to guarantee the first two. Beyond these fundamentals, the social system is quite irrational and full of contradictions. Thus, the social structure is both anti-racist and racist as each of these tendencies may under different circumstances better serve the above-mentioned values (and, of course, aspects of earlier social structures do not disappear overnight). The same can be said about sexism / anti-sexism, violence / non-violence, war / peace, etc. Leftists are no more or less "oversocialized" than conservatives, moderates or most radicals. Leftists believe that the social system can be rationalised, that its contradictions can be removed without destroying the system as a whole. So they try to convince the authorities to abolish sexism, racism, violence, war -- without realising that, within this social system, these are a necessary part of the same mechanism of control of which anti-sexism, anti-racism, non-violence and peace are a part -- the one side needs the other, just as the right needs the left and vice versa.

I do not deny the neuroses of leftism as evidenced in its guilt, masochism and moral stridency. But if we want to make an intelligent attack on the social system -- as FC apparently does -- we need to develop analyses of society and the left's role therein that go far deeper than FC's pop psychology.

## FIXED IDEA #1: THE POWER PROCESS (FC'S THESES 33-98)

The first major fixed idea that dominates FC's thoughts is "the power process". This idea seems to form the basis of most of FC's analysis, and that's too bad because it's a flawed idea -- pop psychology reminiscent of 70's management strategies and self-help books. FC describes the power process: "Everyone needs to have goals whose attainment requires effort, and needs to succeed in attaining at least some of these goals". But do I need goals? No, I need or want specific things. Some effort is inherently involved in getting these things and, of course, I will be happier if I do get them and if I determine how I get them. But to transform this need for actual things into an abstract need for goals, effort and attainment which are simply words that can be used to describe how one gets what one needs, and then to

base an analysis of the present social system on this abstraction is absurd. I have goals, simply because I need or want specific things, but I do not need goals -- so I do not need a "power process".

The "power process" is a psychological model and, like all such models, springs from and is only useful within a specific social context. The 'oedipus complex' was a model developed in Victorian Europe which worked well for explaining much of the sexual psychology of Victorian Europe. Over time it has proved less and less useful and is now used only by die-hard Freudians. It has no applicability to ancient Romans, Hopi Indians, Mbuti pygmies, medieval English peasants, etc. The "power process", assuming it has any application outside of pop psychology, would also have to be understood in terms of a specific social context. FC's attempt to universalise it

which provided their basic needs is about one quarter of the amount of time spent by the average person in industrial society at work. In other words, primitive people got the things they wanted with less effort than most of us expend to get what we want. In fact, since there was no time schedule which they had to follow to perform these activities, so they could be done whenever one pleased (except in emergencies), it can be argued that primitive societies were societies of total 'leisure'. With the rise of agriculture and cities about 10,000 years ago, the new technological system doubled the amount of time that those who used it had to spend in meeting their basic needs and placed this activity on a strict seasonal time schedule -- this could be considered the origin of work. Industrial technology drastically increased both the amount of work time and the rigidity of scheduling necessary for work. So most

IF THE UNABOMBER PREVAILS AND WE RETURN TO WILD NATURE...



CAN I STILL HAVE MY CARPHONE?

leads to a sloppy understanding of history and anthropology.

FC's anthropology is about 30 years behind the times. FC seem to assume that primitive people needed to spend most of their time and energy satisfying biological needs. It has been pretty well established that even in harsh environments, the amount of time primitive people spent in activities

people in our society find themselves so exhausted by activities not of their own making that in what little leisure time they have they often choose to vegetate through passive entertainment. This problem is *alienation*. FC are not completely unaware of this -- in our society people do not satisfy their biological needs AUTONOMOUSLY, but by functioning as parts of an immense social machine."

Alienation is not merely a psychological problem. Often the most alienated people are the most adjusted to their alienation. Alienation is the reality of a social system in which our lives, our activities and our interactions are not our own to create as we choose, but have been made for us in such a way that we become the property of society. The ways of fulfilling our needs and wants become very convoluted and indirect, like a Rube Goldberg machine -- but it isn't comical. I want food, shelter, a few things to give me pleasure. So I travel -- by car or public transit (which have become another necessity) -- to a place where I spend eight hours -- not making my own food or shelter or playthings -- but maybe shuffling papers or welding parts to parts or serving food to strangers or sitting in front of a computer processing information that means nothing to me. I do not do these things because they give me any pleasure -- usually they are miserably tedious tasks. In themselves, these tasks serve no purpose for me. They serve no purpose of the boss or corporation for which I do these tasks and they serve the purposes of the social system -- in other words, they serve purposes alien to me. What I get for giving up so much of my life to serve an alien cause is *money*. So after work, I have to go out to the shops with the money I got from working to get food, clothing and pleasure items I want -- since it is as compulsory as a job, this shopping time should also be counted as work time -- and I must pay rent to a land-lord or mortgage to a bank for shelter. In fact, with the exception of a few who refuse, most people sacrifice most of their lives to buy survival and a few plastic trinkets. Here there is a goal, an effort of the most horrendous sort and the attainment of basic necessities -- but there is no life, not one that is my own. The technological system is an essential part of this alienation but not the totality. A complex social system incorporating work, technology, capital, authority, ideology (including religion) and so on, all of which are integrally intertwined, this is what turns our lives into mere resources for society. And it must be attacked in its *totality* by those of us who want to take back our lives.

FC's "power process" seems to me to have a meagre, pathetic view of the world as a constant struggle for survival. This may well indicate the meagre, stingy social context from which it springs -- for the present era certainly is that. But such meagreness will never get us out of this mess. That will take something strong and lively, something so certain of its abundance that it has no fear of squandering. Stirner speaks of such a thing calling it one's "own might", the might of which one makes one's life one's own, and so comes to have an excess of life -- and it is this, my life as my own, and not "the freedom to go through the power process", that I want.

FC's reliance on their fixed idea, the "power process", makes for very poor -- and, in my opinion, dangerous -- social analysis. I have already pointed out the fallacies this has caused in FC's understanding of primitive societies and the acquisition of necessities in industrial society. But FC take these fallacies further. We'll leave aside such minor absurdities as FC's attribution of a lack of interest in having children to a disruption of the "power process". The danger of FC's use of the "power process" as a basis for social analysis becomes evident when it is applied to science. For FC, science is essentially a surrogate activity. Scientists get involved in order to "go through the power process", and science is (emphases added):

obedient only to the psychological needs of the scientists and of the government officials and

corporation executives who provide the funds for research.

If only it were that simple, but science is not just a surrogate activity to help a few people meet their psychological needs. Science is an integral part of the social system under which we live, an ideological and practical tool for the maintenance and expansion of that social system. It is *this* goal to which science is blindly obedient, and for the social system, science is not a surrogate activity, but a necessary component for its survival. Whatever psychological fulfillment science may provide to its practitioners is simply, like the paycheck, part of the bribe necessary to make people willing to serve the needs of society in this way.

FC are obviously aware of the systemic

## Civilisation as a system of social relationships makes my life and my activities alien to me, so that they are not my own, but are molds into which I am to try to fit. I try to destroy the system for myself as a way of taking back my life.

nature of at least of industrial technology (even though they don't make the connection to the social system as a whole), yet they are so fixated on their pop psychology concept of the "power process" that they develop tunnel vision and interpret everything through this faulty idea. So they end up lacking a clear analysis of society. This fixation on the "power process" causes FC to describe things as universal problems which are only problems within this present social context because of the necessary contradictions of this society. Thus, "transsexuality among American Indian tribes" was no problem, because the tribes in which it occurred accepted it without censure. If FC were to study sexual anthropology, they would discover that many sexual practices which are considered perverted by our society are practiced by many primitive people without the stigma of perversion and so were no problem. Such activities become problematic in this society because sexuality is most useful to it when repressed and promoted at the same time -- transforming it into a hard-to-get commodity and into an identity. Thus, the problematic nature of sexuality stems not from a disruption of the "power process" as FC would have it, but from its commodification. Such separation of sexuality from life is rarely a problem in primitive cultures.

FC define "freedom" as "the opportunity to go through the power process..." The only freedom I consider to be worth pursuing is that my life be my own to determine, that my interactions be my own to create, that my self-enjoyment be central to how I live my life. FC may try to claim that this is what the "power process" is, but their own use of the term proves otherwise. It is a fixed idea through which to interpret the world and which one should sacrifice oneself. The desire for self-determination and self-enjoyment will move me to fight for myself and possibly even to sacrifice some things, but I will sacrifice them to myself and will never sacrifice myself. But adherence to a fixed idea (such as the "power process") moves one to fight for the CAUSE, to sacrifice oneself to the

CAUSE. As I will show, FC call for just such self-sacrifice, showing that the "power process" has nothing to do with making one's life one's own, but is a fixed idea to be served.

### FC'S DESCRIPTION OF INDUSTRIAL-TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY (FC'S THESES 99-160)

having laid the groundwork with the fixed idea of the "power process" FC now present their "analysis" (more a description) of industrial-technological society. FC introduce this part of their essay with five "principles of history". As with most radicals for whom "history" is a central concept, they refrain from defining it. I find the five principles to be useless abstractions. They are concerned with

destruction of civilisation. Rather I try to destroy this system *for myself* as a way of taking back my life. For FC, the destruction of [the industrial] system must be the revolutionaries' ONLY goal... no other goal can be allowed to compete with that one.

inadequate and unconvincing in many ways. And it leads FC to propose a revolutionary strategy that is self-sacrificial and, furthermore, absurd.

### FC'S FIXED IDEA #2: THE REVOLUTION AGAINST THE INDUSTRIAL-TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEM (FC'S THESES 161-232)

I oppose not only industrial technology, but technology and civilisation in their totality. So why do I call FC's "revolution against industrial technology" a fixed idea? Because my opposition to civilisation is based on a recognition that civilisation as a system of social relationships makes my life and my activities alien to me, so that they are not my own, but are molds into which I am to try to fit. I would never willingly sacrifice myself for the

vast social trends and express only the most banal generalities about these trends. The only positive thing I have to say on it is that they would lead anyone who desires individual self-determination to conclude that they must destroy society itself. But FC use these "principles" as dogmas by which they interpret industrial society. Nonetheless, this is the best section of FC's essay. Their descriptions of this society are often accurate, though their interpretations are frequently shallow and poorly thought out because of their dependence on fixed ideas and dogmas.

FC rightly recognise that the industrial-technological system is not compatible with self-determination, that it must, out of inherent necessity, regulate people's lives and that the level of regulation must increase as the system expands, but FC do not recognise that this is true of the system as an integrated whole -- including its political, cultural and ideological institutions. The whole is beyond reform and revolt against the totality is necessary -- which means that attacks against any part of the social system can be worthwhile as long as they are aimed at taking back one's life. In the same light, just as "good" and "bad" parts of technology cannot be separated, neither can "good" and "bad" parts of civilisation as a whole.

So I am to be second to the goal of destroying industrial technology, having a goal for which one is willing to sacrifice oneself changes the nature of the battle against the social system. FC's strategies, aside from being frequently absurd, are also strategies on an immense scale. One almost gets the impression that FC expect to convert a large number of people to their cause who will then be willing to participate in a unified revolution... Since FC make comparisons to the French and Russian revolutions, it seems that this is their model for revolution, sufficiently modified for use against industrial technology. But both of these revolutions actual moved in the opposite direction to that which FC calls for. Each created modern states which made transition to an industrial system easier. I would argue that a unified revolution of the sort for which FC call can most likely only lead to the creation of a unified system, not to the destruction of one. If the goal is individual self-determination, then the struggle must start from the individual who united only as one chooses with whom one fights.

Those who have a cause with which to fight rather than fighting for themselves want converts. So FC recommend a method of propagandising which involves inventing an ideology of "Wild Nature vs. Industrial technology". This manipulative strategy hardly seems conducive to promoting individual (or small group) autonomy. FC's strategy seems to promote a large group dynamic where a few would lead and most would follow. If this did not seem mostly like FC's fantasy, I would find this part of FC's ideas detestable. But FC are explicit: the destruction of the industrial system must be the top priority. For this, we should be willing to support dictatorships if that will

destabilise the industrial system, support agreements like NAFTA and GATT if they can make the system topheavy and so easier to push over, and have lots and lots of children because children of revolutionaries supposedly become revolutionaries (at least according to the genetic theories to which FC apparently subscribe). For FC, there is no social context in which these things arise and for which they occur -- capitalism, technology, the state, the family -- all are nothing for FC, only industrial technology and its destruction matter.

FC make an important point when they tell us that primitive people as individuals were actually much better able to take care of themselves than industrialised people who have allowed themselves to become dependent on an immense social system. The significance of this for me is that it means that, to a much greater extent than we can know, their lives were their own. But is it only industrial technology that ends this oneness? I have already pointed out that hunter-gatherers apparently pursued the activities necessary for survival without compulsion, except in emergency situations (eg. droughts, severe storms), doing them when they felt like it -- more for the joy of it than out of need. Individuals were constantly figuring ways of making these activities easier and more enjoyable, but these ways were not immense systems, but merely tools and methods that individuals could make and use for themselves. The rise of agriculture (not to be mistaken for small-scale gardening) was the introduction of a technological system. It created a compulsory seasonal schedule for the production of food. But agriculture did not rise in a vacuum. Archaeological evidence indicates that agriculture developed in conjunction with the rise of early cities. Cities may, in fact, have come first... There can be no doubt that a concept of exclusive (private or communal) property must have coincided with the development of agriculture. There is also evidence of a connection between religion and agriculture. The early cities already give evidence of structured hierarchies and a specialised warrior class which can rightly be called a state and its army. In other words, the technological system of agriculture arose as part of an integrated social system -- what we call civilisation. This system, in its totality and through all of its structures (technology, the state, economy, religion, the family, work, exclusive property...), took the lives of individuals from them and made these lives the property of society. John Zerzan has presented evidence in a number of his writings that this alienation began well before the rise of civilisation, but this system of social relationships called civilisation changed life qualitatively in ways that made alienation a central defining quality of life. The fatalism and religiosity that are so much a part of agricultural societies can be seen as an expression of this alienation. Peasants feel more as though things happen to them than that they do things. Industrial technology certainly made a further qualitative change in the nature of alienation. Though farmers are forced to comply with a time schedule rather than doing things in their own time, they still (in peasant cultures, not in agribusiness) are directly producing their food. In industrial society, the activities into which one is forced in order to earn survival are not even directly related to one's survival needs in any way. They have become complexly alien. But once again, the technology is only part of an entire complex, integrated social system, all of which acts together to guarantee that we can only gain our survival by giving up our lives to the reproduction of the social system. Those of us who want our lives back cannot limit ourselves to

FC's "only goal". We have much more to destroy than the industrial system -- we have the whole civilisation to bring down and will attack it on all fronts; the state and its protectors (cops, the military, bureaucrats...), economy (capitalism, work, property rights and so on), technology, religion, education, the family, ideology... And we won't do this as a cause, but selfishly, because we want our lives back. I want to determine my own life, create my own activities and interactions for my own enjoyment. So any "revolution" that demands that I sacrifice myself for its cause is as much my enemy as the social system which demands the same of me. Only a revolution which attacks society in a way that allows individuals to take back their lives interests me, and such a revolution would grow out of the revolts of individuals against their own alienation, not from a mass programme.

FC's hatred of the technological system has my sympathy and agreement. But I vehemently reject their adherence to fixed ideas, particularly their dependence on a psychological model, the "power process", as a means of analysing the technological system. I wonder if this psychological conception of the problem is why FC, who say that the destruction of the industrial system is "the ONLY goal", has chosen to blow up technicians, researchers and other human servants of the machine rather than large-scale industrial facilities which are more essential parts of the industrial system. Don't get me wrong, everyone who has been attacked by FC has been working actively toward drastically increasing social control and destruction of wild places. The few deaths are no loss to me -- in fact, I smile, thinking "One less technician to control my life". But killing off technicians one by one seems like an extremely slow way to destroy the industrial system.

I have many problems with FC's ideas. Their lack of a clear social analysis and their adherence to fixed ideas prevent them from making a coherent and convincing critique out of their often accurate descriptions of industrial society. Furthermore, FC's fixed ideas channel the whole into an authoritarian and very self-sacrificial conception of

revolution. Nonetheless, FC has been doing something to fight the present social system. One may question their tactics, but those who do so from an anarchist armchair or from the position of typical, ineffective and unsatisfying radical activism had best direct equally probing questions at themselves.

#### AFTERWORD: SOME THOUGHTS ON VIOLENCE

While there has been little response at all to FC's essay, the reactions to their violence has come from nearly all sides. Even Tad Kepley's mostly sympathetic article in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* #42 was tainted with moralisms regarding violence, in spite of Tad's claim to the contrary. Tad says:

The anti-authoritarian who makes use of violence ... must be aware of the contradictions in destroying to create, in using violence in the hopes of creating a world without violence.

There are no contradictions in destroying to create -- Every act of creation involves destruction. When one makes a meal, one directly or indirectly kills or mutilates other living things; making a shelter will involve destruction of one form of thing to make another. But it is Tad's second phrase that is more relevant to this question. There certainly would be contradictions in using violence if what one wanted was a world without violence, but FC never claims to want a world without violence. FC want a world without a huge global system that destroys the autonomy of individuals and small groups. I also do not want a world without violence. I want a world in which individuals can create their own lives and interactions in accordance with their desires -- and, in such a world, conflict and, therefore, violence is inevitable. It is the state's monopoly on violence that I oppose, and when individuals use violence against the state (or any other aspect of the system of social control) and its tools, they are breaking that monopoly.

Tad Kepley and the critics of violence are wrong. Taking a life is *not* the ultimate act of domination. Forcing someone -- or hundreds, thousands, millions, billions -- into dependency on

a social system that bleeds their lives away to reproduce itself and in exchange for survival (in the worst cases, not even that) and possibly also a

Domination consists of forcing people to give away their life energy while they are living. Certainly, dominators (or dominating institutions) sometimes kill

removal" of such a person takes nothing away from me that I would want to keep. Because I am selfish, I will never willingly sacrifice myself, but I will gladly sacrifice anything or anyone that interferes with my ability to create my own life and interactions as I choose. 'Human community' is an abstraction. Real interactions and associations are those experienced by individuals -- either as self-determined creations or as impositions -- not the mystical connections which spring from such abstractions as 'humanity' or 'species being'. My interactions with cops, high-tech researchers in social control, state bureaucrats, capitalists, religious leaders or any other authority figure, no matter how indirect the interaction, is one in which I am imposed upon, one aimed at making my life alien from me. Such an interaction can only impoverish me. The death of any such a figure of authority, therefore, does not impoverish me and may well enrich me. Indeed, it can add a little brightness to my life, knowing that I have successfully managed to attack, in however small a way, the structures of authority -- even if that involves killing someone who has willingly chosen to be a bully-boy for authority. Certainly, it makes more sense tactically to attack targets of more significance than any individual can ever be in maintaining authority -- but such attacks on property also get condemned by those in power as "mindless terrorism". And they are equally condemned by those who prefer to do nothing but continually beg the state to, please, abolish itself and, in the meantime, be nicer to poor, sweet, harmless little anarchists.

I am not meaning to be overly harsh to Tad. His article at least shows some sympathy for FC's hatred of the technological system and avoids the reactionary hysteria found in *Slingshot* and numerous other anarchist periodicals. But in his assessment of violence, Tad seems to be kissing a bit too much pacifist ass. Destruction of a global social system will involve violence, and that violence would not be ironic or contradictory with its goal, it would be the unconstrained expression of the passion that those who are taking their lives back feel against the system that keeps them alienated.

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## INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY AND ITS FUTURE



### The Unabomber's Manifesto

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few trinkets and glass heads -- that is the ultimate act of domination. The killer lays no claim to the life of the victim until they kill them, and even then they lay no claim to the life but only to the ending of that life.

to enforce their power, but as the cliché says "the living envy the dead".

FC's targets are precisely people who abuse, by their research or other work activities, to uphold and increase domination. The "absolute irrevocable