Summary of basic ideas behind the Breaking the Frame gathering

1. Technology is extremely important

In modern western societies almost every activity of life involves technology, and technological infrastructure and capabilities are crucial to the functioning of society. Moreover, the direction of technological development has a major impact upon the overall development of society.

2. Technology is political and not 'neutral'

Because of its great importance, it is not surprising that those who develop and control technologies (corporations, the military and technocratic elites) use this power to shape technologies in ways that serve their interests and to reinforce the overall industrial capitalist system. Moreover, technology has its own philosophy and culture, which we call technocracy, and which has developed over the last 400 years (since the Scientific Revolution) – see point 5 below.

3. We need an adequate understanding of the politics of technology

For various reasons, not enough attention is given to political issues raised by technology. This means that radical politics lacks adequate understanding of the entire social system it is dealing with. As a result, issues raised by particular technologies are dealt with as accidental side effects of a fundamentally benign process of technology development. There are many single-issue campaigns dealing with those issues in a reactive way, that fail to properly address the causes of the problems that come from the culture of technocracy. We need a better understanding of how technocracy shapes technologies and the relation to corporate capitalism.

In focusing on technocracy and the way this shapes the underlying politics of technology, we are not trying to suggest that this is the only cause of problems, or to deny the significance of capitalism. Rather, we are trying to focus on an area which is not properly understood in radical politics, in order to create a better and more complete picture of what we are dealing with.

4. The need for adequate understanding of the politics of technology is particularly essential in the current environmental and economic crises

The current environmental crises (climate change, biodiversity collapse, resource shortages) are caused by our system of industrial capitalism that has operated for the last 200 years. We argue that they are due just as much to the technocratic philosophy of domination and control of nature (as expressed in industrialism) as to the capitalist imperatives towards maximising profits and economic growth. If we are to achieve a transition to a sustainable and economically just society, this will necessarily also involve entirely rethinking our approach to technology.

5. Technocracy is a system of power and a philosophy of order based on technological domination of nature

Technocracy, the cultural and philosophical system of modern technology, is based on the maxim of the philosopher Francis Bacon: knowledge is power. The aim of technocracy is to control nature, ostensibly for the benefit of everyone, and to create social order. It has a series of key concepts: eg. materialism/mechanistic understanding of nature, efficiency, uniformity, rationalisation, automatic control, etc. Technocracy tends to force nature to conform to these concepts, rather than respecting natural limits and working with the way that nature is structured. In technocracy, the smoothly functioning machine is the ideal, both technical and cultural, to be striven for. These concepts are central to the way that scientists and engineers develop technology and are expressed through technology. For example, the entire industrial system is an attempt to organise the world according to these concepts and all the elements of that system (individual machines, factory organisation, distribution of goods, the market) must conform to them. Another example is eugenics, the philosophy of social control and efficiency that developed in the early twentieth century, based on direct technological intervention in human birth and death. The aim of these efforts to rid society of 'undesirable' people was to increase order and efficiency, for example so that countries could complete with their rivals militarily.

We argue that the influence of technocratic ideas can be seen very clearly in the shaping and selection of modern technologies, and in ways that mean that problems arise inevitably, not accidentally. Moreover, the technocratic approach of treating all problems as technical issues to be best addressed through technological fixes is a crucial problem in our culture.

6. The aim of the Breaking the Frame gathering is to develop a deeper understanding of the politics of technology and to create a network of groups and individuals working on technology-related issues

Through comparing the insights and analysis of different campaigning movements, and deepening our understanding of technocracy, we aim to create a more adequate politics of technology. By creating a network based on this improved and more radical political understanding, we aim to strengthen existing campaigns and launch new campaigns. Amongst the principles of a new politics of technology are:

- Opposition to technologies that are 'hurtful to Commonality' (i.e. to the common good, including the environment) and to 'technofixes' for social problems
- Support for technologies that satisfy real human needs and empower the powerless e.g. some renewable energy technologies
- Technology should be developed under democratic control, rather than under the control of private interests and the military