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## BOOK REVIEW: OUT OF THE WRECKAGE: A NEW POLITICS FOR AN AGE OF CRISIS

Tomáš Žipaj \*

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MONBIOT, G. 2020. Ako z toho von: Nová politika pre svet zmietaný krízami. [Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis]. Bratislava: Premedia, 2020. 174 p. ISBN 978-80-8159-908-8.

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**George Monbiot** is a British ecologist, political scientist and writer specializing in a variety of issues concentrated on political philosophy in relation to ecology, society and politics. He is also a co-founder of Rewilding Britain organization, which aim is to try to redefine a relationship between humans and nature. **Monbiot** is well known for his books such as *"Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain"*, *"Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding"* and *"The Age of Consent: a Manifesto for a New World Order"*.

In his book *"Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis"*, **Monbiot** focuses on how new knowledge of psychology, neuroscience and evolutionary biology makes it possible to see people and their characters in a completely different view - as exceptional altruists who can work together. In nine chapters, the author tries to show how we can build on these findings and create a whole new policy - a policy of belonging.

The first chapter begins with the author's message about the disintegration of the old order and the establishment of a new era. According to him it is necessary to seize the opportunity, if this does not happen there will be just another epoch of wasted chance. **Monbiot** draws attention to the fact that in today's world, facts and evidence are no longer essential; the narrative structure of the story is beginning to dominate, which brings chaos to the society. The

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narrative of a successful political story of change should be built on values and principles, such as democracy, understanding, belonging, empathy, justice and independence. Current narratives of political stories should be simple and comprehensible, covering the needs and aspirations of the widest possible range of the population. In the story of today's world, individualism prevails; the vision of a common goal getting lost, which causes the decline of faith in basic democratic norms and principles. The decline of democracy creates a suitable environment for populism, politics of anger; elites turn their anger on other nations. **Monbiot** sees the only solution in revitalizing communities, where democracy is revived through belonging and altruism, which would help build a proud society based on empathy, solidarity and belonging.

In the second chapter, **Monbiot** focuses on the emergence and persistence of the political ideology of neo-liberalism, as well as its influence on our decisions. Neo-liberalism was defined by **L. von Mises** and **F. Hayek**, the basis of their teaching was rivalry, where individuals have a desire to be more successful than other members of society. US Presidents **J. Carter** and **R. Regan** are also considered as pioneers of neo-liberalism; in the United Kingdom, neo-liberalism is associated with the "*Iron Lady*" **M. Thatcher**. Over the years, however, neo-liberalism has missed its basic starting points, as there has been an unequal distribution of wealth, tax cuts, rising rents, especially privatization. **Monbiot** illustrated the failure of neo-liberal theory on the person of **D. Trump**, who is not limited by morality, enjoys the benefits of privatized wealth and his steps led to the polarization of American society. The biggest problem is the fact that, despite the many shortcomings and failures of neo-liberalism, no alternative has been offered. According to **Monbiot** neo-liberalism can only be replaced by a completely new story, based on hope, transformation and renewal of human relations.

The third chapter describes a situation in which ideas and ambitions stagnate, as the only possible alternative to neo-liberalism is social democracy. **Monbiot** points to the phenomenon where, in the current globalization trends, it is very difficult to build on the original social democracy. The problem with the functioning of social democracy in the 21st century is the impossibility of averting the climate crisis, because economic growth linked to this direction is not compatible with climate protection. During the era of **B. Clinton** and **T. Blair**, the politics of "*triangulation*" came to fore. "*Triangulation*" consisted of priorities pursued by politicians, which were combined with the priorities of their opponents, thus creating a certain middle line between neo-liberalism and social democracy. **B.**

**Obama** was also unable to set a new direction, as during his two terms in the office, up to 95% of the increase of income in the USA was distributed only between 1% of the population. At the end of the chapter, **Monbiot** states that the current political parties do not make any new proposals that would contribute to a significant political turnaround; in today's world it is necessary to focus primarily on recruiting people who completely have lost faith in politics.

The fourth chapter characterizes the phenomenon that occurs in the current social life, namely alienation, which leads to apathy, non-involvement, what opens room for demagoguery and populism. The loss of trust in state institutions contributes to alienation, when more than half of the population does not trust the state apparatus. The setting up of the school system, where students are damned because they cannot solve a certain type of task, but does not look at their qualities in tasks where they excel, also contributes to greater alienation. The education system does not encourage students to think critically, which leads to attacks on scientific findings, expanding demagoguery, these only increases the level of alienation. The growth of alienation also brings a move to the virtual world, people are losing socially oriented values; contact with the physical world is becoming lower. People who have been alienated are the least likely to participate in political life - they do not follow political events; they do not participate in elections. The author refers to **H. Arendt's** statement that anti-politics should create a friendly environment for the spread of extremism and demagoguery. **Monbiot** fears a situation where no new political narrative will be offered, which in the most extreme case, may lead to the return of fascism.

The fifth chapter is devoted to solving the problem of alienation, which **Monbiot** sees in belonging. To overcome alienation, a revitalization of society is needed; society must be cohesive and involve as many communities as possible in decision-making processes. The process of creating effective communities may start with activities that are not time, energy or economically demanding, so that the widest possible range of people can be involved in community projects. Belonging can be achieved through a participatory culture, which will bring new challenges and opportunities. **Monbiot** sees participatory culture as a phenomenon that will help revitalize politics, create social belonging, and thus implement the vision of a better functioning world. A participatory culture can also help to improve relations between immigrants and indigenous people, because diversity is an element of resilience within the community. However, **Monbiot** adds that without national and transnational involvement, the direction of the

today's world will not change, but change must begin from the "bottom-up" direction- from the communities, from each and every one of us.

In the sixth chapter, **Monbiot** focuses on current economic models, but adds a new element to traditional ones such as the market and the state, namely commons. Commons are resources that the community jointly protects and manages; commons make the value to the community, while encouraging engagement and cooperation. The expansion of commons can meet with opposition from the state and corporations, as this would mean restoring wider rights to the communities. Based on several models, **Monbiot** proposed its own model, where even the state taxed only the goods of higher-income communities, such a tax would be invested in a common social fund, from which the population would be paid a universal basic income. **Monbiot** presents the measures proposed in this chapter as an opportunity to improve the distribution of wealth, which could strengthen the feeling of belonging.

In the seventh chapter, the concepts of economic formation are discussed, where the population is trying to achieve a more sustainable way of life; the author relies on the trend of sustainable growth. Although in this issue he refers to the analysis of **F. Hayek**, when the protection of natural resources is not more desirable than the protection of products created by human activity. However, when achieving sustainability, it is necessary to be aware of the limited nature of natural resources, which can only be achieved by stopping the separation from physical reality. To overcome the current situation, **Monbiot** proposes a gradual increase in taxes on non-renewable sources, followed by massive subsidies for renewable energy sources. Thus, politics should begin to focus on achieving the welfare of the population, not just on economic expansion. The solution could also be to introduce participatory budget management within communities, where citizens would have certain powers; citizens would not be just passive observers. Budgetary powers would have to be transferred from the central to the local level, but the principle of subsidiarity is very rarely applied in practice; however without subsidiarity a policy of belonging cannot be fully achieved.

The eighth chapter reveals the background to the functioning of the politics, where it is possible to observe a direct relationship between the amount of funding and the gain of influence. The result of this situation is the paradox "of a polluted environment"; the paradox manifests itself in all sectors e.g. banking, pharmacy and food. All these sectors are willing to finance the political sector, to avoid the pressure of a functioning democracy. **Monbiot** sees it as one of the solutions in creating constitutional assemblies, which would take place cyclically and whose

task would be to enrich democracy and correct systemic failures. Systemic change can only be achieved through effective participation, which must be based on a creative, vibrant and intelligent political culture. Another problem of the current political functioning considered by the author is the transfer of power from the national level to global forums, thus losing their power of electoral vote in representative democracies. **Monbiot** realizes that it is not possible to restore global power to nation states, but it needs to be democratized, whether through reform of the UN General Assembly, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The author sees the middle path between unilateralism and belonging in the existence of directly elected bodies subjected to the will of the people at all levels, from local to global forums.

The final part is focused on the possibilities of implementing the measures proposed in the previous chapters. Only a few proposed measures could be implemented immediately, most of them require a system change. To achieve that change, it is necessary to suppress rivalry and individualism; it is necessary to act according to the principles of reciprocity and altruism. Communities need to be built on a participatory culture; communities will manage their own common resources; communities can become a place to create new politics. Decision-making processes must be carried out within small political units, only then will power become a community function. Although some of the suggestions offered by the author may sound unrealistic, they can be implemented through a motivated network of volunteers, new strategies, new political techniques and the wisdom of the crowd. The renewed community will provide space for values such as empathy, connectedness and altruism, which will also mean a revival of civic life. According to **Monbiot** *"fundamental reorganization of democracy and the economy from below will allow us to regain control and overthrow the forces that frustrate our efforts for a better society"*.

The peer-reviewed book deals with a highly interesting topic that resonates within society. The book *"Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis"* offers a set of solutions to overcome the current political functioning of the world. Although some of the solutions may seem unrealistic, they can serve as a springboard to gradually change the way how system works. The book is suitable for all students of social and political sciences, as well as for the general professional public, which is interested in the possibility of solving the problems of the current political, economic and social crisis.