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## *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*

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The contemporary geopolitical situation is characterized by an apparent stability, which conceals the potential for profound change. It seems that even the most extreme positions—proclaiming conservative, right-wing and sometimes even fascist ideas—on the political scene are sometimes presented as catalysts for change, which, according to their supporters, do not pose a threat to individual freedom and the stability of the social order. These political movements, as Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe notes, have emerged because of the functioning of the so-called neoliberal system, which is currently dominant in most Western political systems. This system was established after the period of the so-called Keynesian welfare state, characteristic of the political and economic order shaped in Western countries after World War II. The collapse of faith in the welfare state model, which was supposed to ensure dynamic economic growth and reduce social inequalities, created space for the formation of a new order based on the conviction that decision-making should be transferred to experts and on the thesis that the existing system cannot be questioned and overcome. Neoliberalism was shaped, among other things, by the fuel crisis, increasing bureaucratization, and growing social dissatisfaction with the conditions of hired labour, which led to the objectification of an individual and prevented their self-fulfilment. The introduction of the neoliberal system led to a growing social polarization and the transfer of power to experts who did not represent the interests of specific groups but focused on maintaining their positions. As Chantal Mouffe notes, this gave rise to a state of post-democracy, in which citizens no longer believed that much in the agency of democratic institutions. This was manifested in low voter

turnout, the blurring of differences between parties' programmes, and the pursuit of so-called politics without opposing forces<sup>1</sup>, among other things. It was in this context that the importance of populist movements began to grow, which, thanks to their simplified narrative about the causes of the ongoing crisis, were able to effectively reach a wide audience while articulating the interests of marginalized social groups. Referring to this situation from the perspective of the so-called broad approach, proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, among others, we can see that the old system, based primarily on the logic of capital accumulation, is currently being transformed. Referring to the strategy presented by Chantal Mouffe, positive socio-political change can be best achieved through action based on the so-called “radical reformism” that accepts the principles of legitimacy but attempts to implement a different hegemonic formation.<sup>2</sup> This approach assumes conducting a hegemonic struggle within the democratic order, in which the aim is not to overthrow it, but to redefine the principles on which the political community is based. This method therefore consists not so much of supporting pro-social attitudes that favour pluralism, but of managing and transforming existing institutions so that they lead to the radicalization of democracy. This means striving to expand the democratic space by including excluded voices and enabling a real conflict of ideas within a pluralist political order. Actions which consist of entering the existing institutional frameworks and giving them a new dimension make it possible to leave the political binary located between neoliberal democracy and conservative populism attempting to return to a radical version of politics based on the sovereignty of nation states. This type of strategy assumes the creative use of existing mechanisms of power to build a more inclusive, pluralist democratic order that opposes both technocratic stagnation and reactionary nationalist tendencies. The process of change proposed by Chantal Mouffe does not involve unconditional acceptance of capitalism in its current form, but its transformation in such a way that it considers the pro-social potential and serves the interests of various social groups. An important goal of this approach is to introduce the logic of equality and solidarity into structures that have so far been based on exclusion, domination and the logic of profit while maintaining the framework of democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, London: Verso Books, 2018, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

pluralism. Diversity thus becomes a value that allows not only the emergence of new axiological content in the extensive dimension but also the intensification of existing social and political relations—by designating new fields of action and forms of engagement. In this context, the contemporary transition period, in which, on the one hand, extreme—xenophobic, racist and nationalist—attitudes are revealed and on the other, feminist movements and initiatives which fight for equal rights of national, sexual and religious minorities and the easing of the existing social polarization are being developed, is a time when the existing standards of social life organization, interpersonal relations and norms of behaviour are deeply uncertain and fragile. Attempts to transform negative attitudes using revolutionary methods of complete break with the existing system often turn out to be ineffective because contemporary consumerism demonstrates the ability to intercept even the most extreme gestures of opposition and include them in commercial circulation. As a result, their message becomes shallow and the original content is reduced to a superficial form, which leads to the process of reification.

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