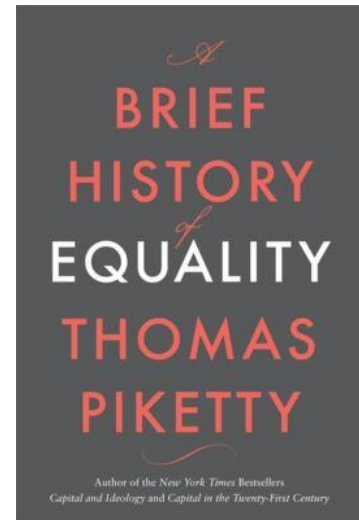


## **A Provocative Proposal for Global Democratic Socialism**

a review from Dick Burkhardt of

# **A Brief History of Equality**

By Thomas Piketty  
(2022)



The renowned Piketty brings a refreshing and populist view of inequality as a political choice that has varied widely time and space, a choice which has become far more global in nature today. There are “many different ways of organizing a property system or a border system, a social and political system, or a fiscal and educational system.” (p 9). The prime example of difference today is the “statist, authoritarian” system of China, with about 1/3 of all property in the public domain, including much of the financial system.

Will Western neoliberal globalization adapt to this Chinese challenge? Piketty’s answer for success is a more democratic globalization based on “transnational assemblies” with real budgetary power (unlike the European Parliament). Also with a global financial registry to eliminate tax havens, and with global taxes on billionaires and transnational corporations to enable poorer countries to modernize. He notes that financial flows today are from the poorer to the richer countries, like imperial tribute, when private profits and transfers are taken into account (this is what “neocolonialism” is all about, the subject of chapter 9).

Where Piketty fails is in not exploring the affects of limits-to-growth on inequality, especially our extreme dependence on rapidly depleting

fossil fuel energy, the extreme impacts of its waste products, and the corruption of the global economic system by those who profit, especially from oil. All this is being highlighted by today's Ukraine War, but visionary responses have been notably absent. A call for at least partial UN ownership of global oil resources would certainly be in order. This could be the basis for global dividends benefiting the "least among us" and could be viewed as a form of reparations for slavery and colonialism, the subject of chapter 4.

The biggest sign of hope for reducing inequality is that this has been the long term trend for the last couple of centuries. But it has always required struggle, popular movements, and crises. Today neonationalism is feeding off the failure of neoliberalism to reduce inequality within nations. Of course neonationalism, such as Trumpism, is itself destined to fail, especially to tackle escalating climate catastrophes and the like.

"The true alternative is democratic socialism, participatory and federalist, ecological and multicultural" (p 226). But this choice has yet to gather commanding momentum. Piketty wonders when new crises will force new thinking, despite deeply entrenched financial capitalism. His advice is "to propose to other countries a model of cooperative development based on universal value and on objective and verifiable social and environmental indicators" (p 244) – not GDP but the Genuine Progress Indicator and the like. However, when such initiatives are blocked, he asks willing countries to take the lead and get others on board later.

Yet Piketty's vision for democratic global governance remains undeveloped, despite decades of activism by others toward global democracy, such as proposals for a more equitable financial system managed by a global parliamentary assembly or a directly elected global peoples assembly.