

# Introduction

February 9, 2016

Inequality has become a defining issue of our time, with political commentators of all stripes discussing its causes, effects, and possible solutions. Thomas Piketty's 2013 work, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, set off a chain reaction of books, journal articles, conferences, and debates focusing on questions of inequality. We intend to push this critique further.

As socialists, we believe that inequality is caused by, and integral to the maintenance of, the capitalist system and its most recent manifestation, the neoliberal globalized economy. *New Politics* presents here a symposium that seeks to reclaim the debate, showing where analyses of inequality are lacking and then presenting an alternative, socialist view.

The symposium opens with a conversation with Saskia Sassen, whose new work *Expulsions* seeks to uncover and articulate the systemic logic that drives the development of the current stage of global capitalism. At the heart of our conversation is a discussion of how the development of capitalism in the twenty-first century finds its roots in the decay of the forms of production that characterized capitalism in the Global North during the twentieth century. The new logics of capital accumulation not only continue to create unequal societies, but also intensify the discarding of people that are deemed unnecessary while expanding the expropriation of the resources it requires.

Michael Thompson's piece, "The Rise of the Servant Society," provides a theoretical background to our symposium. In it, he argues that growing economic inequality gives rise to particular and unique forms of power and domination, both social and psychological. The birth of a new economy based on service creates with it a form of precarious labor that is socialized into obedience. This critique then forms the basis for a call to action.

The next two contributions, written by members of the Hampton Institute (a new "think-tank for the working-class"), reveal mechanisms by which capitalism enforces domination and inequality. We are pleased to be furthering our collaboration with the Hampton Institute, a group forged in the memory of Antonio Gramsci and Fred Hampton. The first of these articles, by Colin Jenkins and Cherise Charleswell, illuminates the role of debt in producing a form of twenty-first century serfdom. The next, by Sean Posey, analyzes the growing problem of the unaffordability, and racial re-segregation, of housing while also analyzing the ways in which that inequality is both economic and spatial.

Two of our book reviews are also part of the symposium. *New Politics* board member Riad Azar reviews sociologist Robert Putnam's latest work, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Azar pushes Putnam's analysis to focus on the ways in which the richest 0.01 percent have been reshaping the economy to their benefit. And London-based activist Tom Peters reviews Lisa Mckenzie's *Getting By*, an ethnography of a UK public housing project in an age of austerity. Both reviews reveal how social reproduction structures class formation and resistance to it.

We hope this symposium helps to clarify the problem of inequality and suggest how it might be challenged.

Riad Azar and Saulo Colón

## Footnotes