SINE IRA

TAXING THE RICH

How Global Elites Use Justice to Keep Power



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First English-language edition: Genoa, 2026

ISBN 979-12-82328-13-5
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Introduction

WHY NO ELITE PAYS OUT OF GUILT

In recent years, an expression that for decades belonged chiefly to the vocabulary of social movements and the left has become firmly established in mainstream politics: "tax the rich." It appears in electoral platforms, international campaigns, statements by economists, and even pronouncements by entrepreneurs and wealthy individuals. It is no longer merely a confrontational slogan. It has become one of the formulas through which Western democracies discuss inequality, responsibility, and the legitimacy of economic power.

Yet this convergence deserves scrutiny. Calls for higher taxes on great fortunes coexist with an intense concentration of wealth, increasingly mobile capital, and states struggling to govern transnational economic forces. The point is neither to deny that genuine redistributive policies exist nor to assume that every declaration of willingness to pay more tax conceals an ulterior motive. It is to understand what happens when tax justice also becomes a language of legitimation.

This brings us to the central question of the book: why do some of the wealthiest people say they want to be taxed more? How much of this comes from moral conviction, how much from a desire for stability, and how much from an awareness that a system perceived as excessively unfair eventually becomes politically fragile?

The argument advanced here is that, in many cases, a willingness to contribute more should not be understood solely as a sacrifice. It can also be a form of intelligent self-preservation: a price accepted to make the economic order more stable, restore legitimacy, forestall social crises, and maintain a privileged relationship with institutions. Paying more can thus mean surrendering some wealth without surrendering—and sometimes while strengthening—one's centrality and influence.

From this perspective, "tax the rich" is not necessarily a sham. It can raise revenue, correct imbalances, and finance public services. But it can also become a political ritual: a public demonstration that the system can correct itself without having to question its fundamental mechanisms. It is precisely this ambivalence that concerns the present book.

What follows is neither a tirade against wealth nor a defence of injustice. It is an essay on the relationship between taxation, legitimacy, and power in contemporary societies. It treats elites not as a conspiracy but as a structural position: that occupied by people with enough economic, technical, cultural, or institutional resources to shape decisions that also affect everyone else.

The decisive question, then, is not whether it is right or wrong to tax great fortunes more heavily. It is this: under what conditions does taxation genuinely constrain power, and under what conditions does it instead integrate that power more deeply into the architecture of the state and global governance?

This book focuses on that gap between economic redistribution and the distribution of power.

A Note on the Term "Elite"

Throughout this book I will often use the word "elite." It is a term heard everywhere, yet rarely given a clear meaning. For some, it simply denotes the very rich; for others, the political establishment; for still others, a kind of remote, closed, all-powerful caste. None of these images adequately captures what I mean. To avoid misunderstandings, I need to clarify the term at the outset, since the central argument of this book concerns elites: not as journalistic caricatures, but as a structure of contemporary power.

When I speak of elites, I do not mean "the super-rich" in a strictly economic sense, or merely the small minority who own extraordinary fortunes. Wealth is one aspect of an elite, not its definition. Some rich people have no influence at all, while some individuals who are not particularly wealthy exert systemic influence. Nor are elites synonymous with the political class: running a ministry does not necessarily entail exercising real power, and many of the most influential centres of decision-making today lie outside the state rather than within it.

By "elite," I mean the constellation of economic, technological, cultural, technical, financial, and sometimes political actors who occupy positions that allow them to shape the functioning of society on a sustained basis. They do not necessarily do so by issuing commands; more often they coordinate, stabilise, and translate complexity into manageable forms. Elites are not a group but a position: that of those who have access to the levers controlling information flows, technical standards, digital infrastructure, financial capital, and the public agenda. They need not meet in secret to exercise their power. Their power comes from operating within systems that already distribute influence asymmetrically.

The contemporary elite is not a closed caste; it is constantly renewed. Twenty-five-year-old technologists, influential academics, managers of global funds, algorithm designers, officials of supranational organisations, journalists capable of directing public debate: all can become part of it. What they share is neither income nor lifestyle but the capacity to turn resources—economic, technical, symbolic—into effective power. Such power is measured not by its sheer magnitude but by its continuity: an elite occupies that position when it can influence the course of events even while remaining out of sight.

What distinguishes an elite, then, is not wealth but function. It does not govern in the classical sense: it *coordinates*. It does not impose orders from above, but makes particular directions of development possible, probable, or inevitable. Even when it appears to be yielding something—for instance, when it declares that it wants to be taxed—it is performing its function: preventing crises of legitimacy that might destabilise the system as a whole. This is why understanding the phenomenon requires a precise definition. Without that initial clarity, we risk mistaking a systemic necessity

for moral intention, and a mechanism of stabilisation for an ethical gesture.

In these pages, therefore, "elite" should be understood neither as a moral judgement nor as an accusation. It is an analytical tool. It designates those who, by virtue of their position in networks of economic, technological, cultural, or institutional power, can steer collective decisions, set the limits of what is possible, absorb crises, and turn them into a new order.

THE RHETORIC

PART I

The Myth of "Tax Justice"



THE RHETORIC OF FAIRNESS

In almost every Western country, when the media speak of "tax justice," they do not convey the complexity of the issue. They tend to reduce it to a plot suited to a talk show or a three-minute television news report. The story is simple, repeated to exhaustion: on one side stands an "unfair" tax system that allows the rich, multinational corporations, and those clever enough to exploit loopholes to pay less than they should; on the other stands the community of "ordinary" citizens, shouldering an ever-heavier burden. The solution seems equally straightforward: make the rich pay, close the loopholes, crack down on tax havens, "put things in order." In this narrative, tax justice looks like a campaign of moral cleansing. Rather than understanding how the structures of economic power actually work, the aim is to tap into a widespread feeling—resentment at inequality—and turn it into a message fit