

More for All: Curbing Inequality in Our Digital Era

The Intellectual Project Behind *The Robin Hood Formula*

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Abstract

This paper presents the conceptual and economic framework underlying the novel *The Robin Hood Formula* (ISBN 9798267789301; originally published in French as *Plus Pour Tous*, ISBN 9782839946070). The work examines the structural drivers of wealth concentration under contemporary capitalism, critiques the limitations of redistributive fiscal policy, and proposes a data-driven algorithmic mechanism — the "Robin Hood Formula" — capable of recalibrating profit distribution across stakeholders. Drawing on principles of political economy and labour theory, the novel advances a systematic critique of capital-labour imbalances, arguing that transparency and computational tools may provide a novel lever for bottom-up economic reform.

Keywords: economic inequality, profit distribution, algorithmic governance, political economy, labour reform, capitalism, digital era

1. Introduction

Contemporary capitalism is marked by a deepening divergence between capital returns and wage growth, and between those who accumulate and those who are unable to create savings. Over the past four decades, one dollar invested in equity markets has grown approximately sixteen times faster than average wages, a disparity that challenges foundational assumptions regarding market self-regulation and the equitable distribution of productive surplus. While fiscal interventions — most notably progressive taxation of high incomes and wealth — remain the dominant policy response, they do not share wealth more equally and their political feasibility is increasingly constrained by the concentrated influence of ultra-high-net-worth individuals over democratic institutions.

The Robin Hood Formula intervenes in this debate through the medium of fiction, deploying narrative to render abstract economic mechanisms both accessible and emotionally compelling. The novel centres on Stanford mathematician Professor Eliza Rhodes, recruited to design an algorithmic formula capable of quantifying the fair

distribution of corporate profits across five claimant categories: labour, management, shareholders, the state, and lenders.

This paper situates the novel's intellectual contributions within existing debates in political economy, assesses the theoretical coherence of its proposed mechanism, and reflects on the strategic choice of fiction as a vehicle for economic critique.

2. The Structural Critique of Capitalism: Theoretical Background

Mainstream defences of existing income distributions under capitalism rest on two interrelated claims. First, that markets — including labour markets — allocate resources efficiently, producing equilibrium outcomes that reflect the marginal contributions of all participants. Second, that historical capitalism has demonstrably delivered broad-based prosperity, creating a non-bourgeois middle class and enabling mass access to goods and services previously confined to elites.

The novel's principal economist, retired French activist and near-Nobel laureate Jean-Paul Bourdin, directly engages with this apologist narrative:

"It's capitalism's classic excuse: you already have your share. However, when a few people today have the ability to amass tens and hundreds of billions, while at the other end of the ladder there's a crowd of billions of people who don't even make minimum wage — a minimum wage set by law because otherwise it would be even lower — you can't talk about shares and balance. You need to move the sliders and that means limiting the revenues from capital. Simply put there is no other way. This is still market logic, but we've got to set limits. No divine or physical law prevent it."

This position is theoretically consonant with neo-institutionalist accounts of market failure, and with post-Keynesian critiques of the wage-productivity gap. It also echoes recent empirical work (Piketty, 2013; Saez & Zucman, 2019) demonstrating the secular rise in the capital share of national income across advanced economies. The novel's contribution is to frame this as a problem of mechanism design rather than merely of political will.

3. The "Robin Hood Formula": Mechanism and Design Logic

The core intellectual innovation of the novel is its proposed algorithmic intervention. The "Robin Hood Formula" is presented not as a tax instrument — which would require state enforcement and legislative consensus — but as a transparency and benchmarking tool that operates through market pressure and information asymmetry reduction.

The formula operates on a company's EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation), described as a "standard, defined indicator that's published" and therefore universally accessible. Three operations define the recalculation:

1. A ceiling applied to dividends distributed to shareholders and interest paid to lenders.
2. A cap on the salary multiplier between the highest and lowest compensated employees within a firm.
3. The elimination of management bonuses and stock-options and account of accumulated cash reserves or undistributed profits.

The output of these three operations is a recalculated set of salary ranges that individual workers could, in principle, use to benchmark their own compensation against their contribution to firm-level value creation. As the character presenting the concept explains:

"What we want is a formula that will give us a result: the salary, or ranges of salaries, that people should be paid for any given job."

The mechanism relies on mass adoption rather than legislative mandate. The underlying theory of change is explicitly collective action-based: if employees across the economy simultaneously gain access to information revealing the gap between their current wages and their algorithmically-determined value-added, coordinated pressure from labor's numerical majority could produce wage adjustments without requiring either state intervention or revolutionary upheaval. The novel invokes the historical precedent of unionized households earning up to 20% more than non-union equivalents as an empirical anchor for this dynamic.

4. Information Asymmetry as a Lever for Reform

A notable feature of the formula's design logic is its treatment of corporate data as a public good currently monopolized by capital. The novel frames algorithmic redistribution as a form of informational reciprocity: corporations have historically extracted behavioral data from consumers and workers; the formula weaponizes their financial disclosures in return and is able to determine or extrapolate the profit structure of each one through geographical and sectoral analysis.

"They took all our data. We take back and process theirs. It's almost diabolical."

This framing draws on well-established arguments in information economics. Information asymmetry between employers and employees — particularly regarding firm profitability and the distribution of surplus — is a structural feature of labor markets that systematically disadvantages workers in wage negotiations. By making profitability metrics and fair wage benchmarks of all and every company universally accessible, the formula reduces this asymmetry, enabling what might be characterized as an informed collective bargaining equilibrium without formal union structures.

The scalability argument is explicit: with virtually all corporate financial data now available in digital form, the formula could, in principle, extrapolate salary benchmarks

for "every company in the world, listed or not." The systemic reach of such a tool would represent a qualitative departure from existing wage transparency initiatives, which remain fragmented and jurisdiction-specific.

5. The Political Economy of the Redistributive Constraint

A structuring premise of the novel is that conventional redistribution via progressive taxation is no longer achievable at the required scale, given the disproportionate influence of the ultra-wealthy over political systems. The formula is therefore conceived as a market-compatible reform that bypasses the legislative process entirely.

This premise raises substantive questions. If the formula's information diffusion requires platform infrastructure to reach scale, it will inevitably encounter resistance from the same capital interests that shape regulatory environments. The novel's antagonist, billionaire Eldon Miller, is explicitly motivated by the threat the formula poses to concentrated wealth, and pursues its suppression through institutional and extralegal means — a fictional rendering of what political scientists have documented as elite veto power over distributional reform.

Nonetheless, the novel's ultimate argument, voiced by Bourdin, is that consolidation of the middle class is both an economic and democratic imperative:

"My opinion doesn't matter. What does matter is the state of things: no one needs to be a billionaire, or a billionaire many times over, or even have many hundreds of millions. Trickle-down is a myth. By letting that happen, you're not building dreams, you're breaking down social bonds. [...] A lot of people are ready to accept that idea, but, since we don't know how to do it, it's still a pipe dream. But from now on it'll be possible."

This framing links economic redistribution to democratic resilience, an argument that finds support in empirical political science literature linking wealth concentration to democratic backsliding and institutional erosion.

6. Fiction as a Vehicle for Political Economy

The fiction and thriller format to advance an economic argument gives affordances unavailable to academic or policy writing: the embodiment of abstract mechanisms in concrete characters and stakes; the dramatization of structural conflicts as interpersonal confrontation; and the emotional engagement of a broad readership that would not ordinarily engage with economic treatises.

The novel addresses a readership explicitly framed as plural and politically heterogeneous: "thriller readers, political and inequality readers, anti-billionaires, free market reformers, democracy defenders." It addresses an existing conversation being — inequalities — one of the current most heated debates in society. This rhetorical breadth aims at bridging ideological camps and presents the formula not as a socialist

programme but as a reform operating within market logic, thereby broadening its potential coalition — and power.

This approach is not without precedent. Works from Upton Sinclair's industrial exposés to contemporary economic fiction have demonstrated the capacity of the novel form to shift public understanding of systemic issues. What distinguishes this work is its attempt to embed a technically specified mechanism — rather than a diffuse critique — within the narrative architecture.

7. Conclusion

The Robin Hood Formula represents an unusual intellectual exercise: the embedding of a formally specified economic reform proposal within a commercial thriller. Its theoretical contributions — an articulation of the capital-labor imbalance, a mechanism design response to redistributive political failure, and a theory of change based on information diffusion — are coherent and engage substantively with contemporary political economy.

The novel is propositional rather than technical: to establish the conceptual possibility of a data-driven, market-compatible redistribution mechanism, and thereby move the policy conversation from "this is desirable but impossible" to "possible — now let us design it."

In this sense, the novel's most significant contribution may be epistemological: it challenges the widespread assumption that fundamental redistribution requires either state coercion or revolutionary rupture, and invites economic researchers to take seriously the potential of transparency mechanisms and collective informational action as reform instruments.

Yet, beyond this analysis and above all, *The Robin Hood Formula* is a novel, a thriller which, against this backdrop, will entertain the reader with its adventure, twists and turns, and strong characters set in the isolated world of the ultra-rich, and in which relationships, seduction and deceit play, just as in real life, a key role.

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