



German
Historical
Institute
London

**Call for Papers
for an International Conference on**

The Global Knowledge of Economic Inequality. The Measurement of Income and Wealth Distribution since 1945

To be held at the German Historical Institute London, 15-17 November 2018

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Economic inequality has become one of the most contentious political topics of our time, and statistics on income and wealth disparities have come to play an increasingly important role in modern political culture, influencing public debates about distributional questions, societal self-descriptions and perceptions of other societies. Global knowledge on economic inequality and poverty evolved incrementally, with important spurts occurring in the 1960s/1970s and then again during the 1990s/2000s. The first initiatives towards an international standardisation of income and wealth statistics were launched by the UN and the OECD during the 1960s/70s, but made only slow progress. This contributed to delaying the debate about global inequality, which had long been confined to measures like GDP per capita, while comparisons in terms of personal income have only recently been possible since more data has become available. Both these debates and the underlying statistics have a history that is not yet fully understood.

Historians have recently begun to historicise the measurement of economic inequality as well as the changing public and academic interest in the subject since the post-war era. The German Historical Institute London will host an international conference to contribute to this growing field of research by bringing together historians and scholars from other disciplines working on the history of inequality knowledge. The conference will take a transnational perspective, but we also welcome comparative papers and case studies on individual countries that will help us to understand how global developments and entanglements are negotiated domestically. In particular, we invite contributions that address one of the following four broad themes:

- 1) **Context, theory, and production of knowledge:** the changing public and scholarly concern with inequality and poverty in varying political and socio-economic contexts since 1945; the evolution of income and wealth statistics as historical constructs including their underlying assumptions and theories; processes and techniques of

collecting information and producing knowledge; the interplay between official statistics, state bureaucracies, independent scholars, research institutes, NGOs and international organisations.

- 2) **Circulation, transformation and popularisation:** the circulation of inequality knowledge within societies and across the world (including circulation across disciplinary boundaries, the economisation of social sciences, and traces of inequality knowledge in arts and literature); publicity strategies of governments and official statistics; secrecy, non-circulation and non-knowledge; the role of the media in the transformation and popularisation of inequality knowledge; modalities of textual and visual representation of income and wealth statistics.
- 3) **Application, use and discourse:** the application of inequality knowledge in state bureaucracies and the political decision-making process; the use of inequality knowledge in public discourse and in political narratives such as the myth of the „income revolution“ in the United States or the „great transformation“ of society in the United Kingdom; the influence of statistical knowledge on societal self-descriptions and political languages and vice versa.
- 4) **The global inequality debate:** the emergence and shifting framing of the global inequality debate and its entanglements with domestic debates about inequality and poverty; the role of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations in the production and dissemination of knowledge about cross-country inequality; the causes and effects of the delayed global debate about personal income inequality.

We welcome submissions from scholars at all career stages. Please send an abstract of up to 500 words, accompanied by a short CV, to roemer@ghil.ac.uk by 28 February 2018. Economy travel and accommodation in London will be available for invited speakers.