

Authoritarian Populism and the Rural World
ERPI Inaugural Conference 2018

On March 17th and 18th, more than 250 scholars, activists, practitioners, and policymakers—representing more than 60 countries from diverse parts of the world—will gather at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague to share views and insights on the rise of authoritarian populism and its effects. This resurgence of exclusionary politics—particularly manifested in the countryside—is generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division.

The conference is hosted by the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI), a growing collective of scholars, researchers, and activists from a variety of universities, research institutions, and social movements. The collective is linked together by a commitment to understanding the emergence of authoritarian populism and identifying and promoting its grassroots alternatives.

Members of the ERPI collective explain that, "despite the deluge of commentary on the rise of populist politics, too often analyses resort to simplistic and sweeping generalisations about the rural dimensions."

The conference will feature scholars engaged in cutting edge analysis of the political dynamics that encourage new forms of authoritarian populism in diverse settings—especially in rural areas. Among them are Achin Vanaik (India), Becky Bond (U.S.), Burak Gurel (Turkey), Dzodzi Tsikata (Ghana), Eduardo Gudynas (Uruguay), Hilary Wainwright (UK), John Gaventa (U.S.), Karin Nansen (Uruguay), Khin Zaw Win (Myanmar), Natalia Mamonova (Russia), Raj Patel (UK), and Zack Exley (U.S.).

In India, for instance, writes Achin Vanaik, "the Sangh is fully committed to the project of establishing a Hindu state/nation as the 'true' embodiment of nationalism. The scale and depth of its implantation in the pores of civil society is unmatched". Vanaik adds that, "to defeat populist-nationalist forms of communal authoritarianism we have to fight against more than just communalism".

"To what extent are the world's autocrats—Trump, Duterte, Erdoğan, Modi, Orbán, Putin, among others—simply a mutually reinforcing collection of erratic rulers? Or are they taking shape as a global authoritarian populist axis? And finally, can movements in different countries learn from each other to resist the authoritarian wave?" asks Marc Edelman, Professor of Anthropology at the City University of New York.

Ruth Hall, a professor of land and agrarian studies at South Africa's University of the Western Cape reflects: "building a new politics and a new society means uncertainty, we need to embrace humility central to a radical politics, meaning that we don't always know the answers and must mistrust dogma and instruction from above".

To these ends, conference participants have contributed more than 70 [academic working papers](#), and its organisers have published a [series of popular articles](#).

Additionally, artists and musicians dedicated to social mobilisation and emancipatory rural politics from countries such as the Philippines, Spain, and the U.S., will participate in the conference.

During the meeting, several authors will launch their most recent books on topics that include agroecology, the role of organizers and activism, the political Left, agrarian social movements, rural extractivism, community resistance, and food sovereignty, among others.

Organising institutions include the [International Institute of Social Studies \(ISS\)](#), [Cornell University](#), [the City University of New York \(CUNY\)](#), [the Institute of Development Studies](#), [the ESRC STEPS Centre](#), [PLAAS](#), and [the Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#).

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