

Hungary: Rightist parties seek to topple government following election

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Hungary's prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany, has called a vote of confidence for October 6 in an attempt to face down demands for his removal from office by right-wing opposition parties.

The vote comes after devastating losses suffered by his Socialist Party-Alliance of Free Democrats coalition government in local council elections on Sunday. On a turnout of 53 percent, the ultra-conservative Fidesz won 18 of 19 county councils and the position of mayor in 15 of Hungary's 23 largest cities. The Socialist Party only narrowly retained power in the capital Budapest.

Fidesz has successfully exploited popular opposition to Gyurcsany's austerity measures, which are aimed at meeting the criteria for adoption of the euro. It has been organising daily protests since the leaking on September 17 of the prime minister's speech in May to a closed meeting of leading party officials. In his remarks, Gyurcsany admitted that his government had "lied in the morning and lied in the evening" about the scale of the economic cuts required. He then went on to pledge that the cuts would be implemented.

Just moments after the polls closed, in a surprise television address, President Lazlo Solyom called for the governing coalition to remove the prime minister. Gyurcsany's admission that he had lied "undermines confidence in democracy," he said, calling on parliament to choose a new prime minister so as to "restore the required social confidence" for the imposition of unpopular economic measures.

Hungary's budget deficit needs to be cut from its present 10.1 percent of gross domestic product—the highest in the European Union—to 3 percent, in order for the country to qualify for adoption of the euro. Measures proposed include massive cuts in the public sector as well as tuition fees for university students and charges for doctor's visits.

The confidence vote is a manoeuvre aimed at countering Solyom's demand and providing a stamp of legitimacy to the government. Gyurcsany calculates that he will win because the coalition parties still enjoy a majority in parliament, despite their recent plunge in popular support, holding 210 of parliament's 386 seats. Fidesz and the Christian Democrats have responded by refusing to participate in the vote and calling for a mass protest outside the parliament.

Up until now, the protests have been relatively small and dominated politically by far-right groups such as the Party for Hungarian Justice and Life (MIEP), "the Rightists" (Jobbik) and the "64 People's Committee." This proved to be politically embarrassing for Fidesz, which has tried to downplay its links with fascist elements.

It is entirely possible that Friday's demonstration will be larger than previous protests. But this would not make the political basis of Fidesz's opposition to the government any less reactionary.

Fidesz leader Viktor Orban presided over negotiations for Hungary's entry into the EU, but now makes a show of opposing the economic measures that are required. This is an attempt to divert popular hostility towards the multimillionaire premier along right-wing populist and nationalist channels.

The opposition parties are acutely aware of the dangers facing Hungary's ruling elite as a result of rising social discontent. In a revealing comment, Lajos Kosa, Fidesz vice president, told state television that parliament had become the rubber stamp for an elected dictatorship and that Hungarians might rebel.

"The budget will come and further austerity measures worth 1,000 billion forints (\$4.6 billion) will come too, and then in the spring all of us will be chased out [from parliament]—all of us, because a general uprising may

break out in the country.”

These fears have prompted Orban to call for an alternative method of imposing the cuts package. Fidesz’s main demand is for the creation of a “government of experts” that would have the necessary credibility and authority to do what it argues Gyurcsany cannot accomplish without discrediting the parliamentary set-up. His appointed “experts” would be able to implement “shock-therapy” measures without any democratic control.

Whatever attempts Fidesz might make to disown the far right, they will continue to feed off the nationalist sentiment that is being whipped up while Fidesz postures as the defender of the social interests of workers and peasants against foreign capital and its agents. The MIEP calls for resistance against globalisation and the financial diktats of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which it portrays as part of a Jewish conspiracy.

In countries throughout central and eastern Europe, right-wing neo-liberal and explicitly fascist formations have exploited both the legacy of Stalinist domination and the role played by former Stalinists and the so-called Socialist parties they set up since the restoration of capitalist market relations.

Gyurcsany is a typical example of a former Stalinist bureaucrat who used his position in the state apparatus to enrich himself. The former Young Communist secretary models himself politically on Prime Minister Tony Blair. Like Britain’s New Labour, his government imposes the demands of the international financial oligarchy that is impoverishing working people.

He calculates that he can remain in office because he is still the favoured representative of the European powers and the major global corporations. Spokesmen for such institutions as Goldman Sachs and Dresdner Bank insisted following the local elections that Gyurcsany’s retention of control of Budapest was sufficient for him to retain power.

He has promised his big-business backers that he will continue to defy popular opposition, stating that his “government cannot be pressurised via street politics. This parliamentary majority cannot be blackmailed....

“I hear those who say that we shouldn’t give up our programme, that we have to keep governing. I’m telling them that we won’t give up.”

However, the survival of the government is by no means assured. The danger is that, in the absence of any political tendency articulating the interests of Hungary’s working class, Gyurcsany’s downfall will result in a further shift to the right and a worsening social catastrophe.



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