Hungarian extreme right set up paramilitary "Guard"

Markus Salzmann
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The end of August witnessed the foundation in Hungary of an extreme-right-wing paramilitary "Hungarian Guard." The foundation of this force, which is supported by prominent political and social forces in the country, took place in a public ceremony. The establishment of such a neo-fascist paramilitary force must be seen as a serious warning to the Hungarian and the European working class.

Around 1,000 sympathisers and supporters gathered in front of the Budapest Castle, directly before the offices of the Hungarian president, Laszlo Solyom, to swear in the first 56 members of the guard (a number chosen to commemorate the 1956 uprising against Stalinism).

Among those taking part were not only representatives of various extreme right-wing and fascist groupings, but also the prominent conservative opposition party, Fidesz, as well as Catholic, Evangelical and Calvinist priests waving flags. Lajos Für, Defence Secretary of the first conservative government to take power under Prime Minister Jozsef Antall, following the collapse of the Hungarian Stalinist state in 1990, "swore in" the new recruits and presented them with their memorial documents.

Participants raised a red-white-red flag of the type used by Hungarian fascists during the Second World War, when the Horthy dictatorship was allied with Hitler Germany, and those sworn in to the Guard were dressed in the black uniforms favoured by the wartime Fascists. The day of the swearing-in ceremony had also been carefully chosen. On August 25, 1,100 years ago, the Hungarian army defeated Bavarian troops at the battle of Bratislava.

The Guard explained its aims in the run-up to its foundation. It wants to defend a "physically, intellectually and spiritually defenceless" Hungary. Its members are explicitly requested to learn how to handle weapons—an unmistakable threat to use force. Its aims include the "elimination" of the current so-called "social-liberal" government headed by Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany.

The head of the guard is the 29-year-old Gabor Vona, chairman of the ultra-right-wing party Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary). Jobbik emerged in 1999 from a student group, led by David Kovacs, a member for many years of another extreme-right organisation called the Life and Truth Party (MIEP). Former history student Vona had formerly worked closely with ex-Prime Minister and opposition leader Victor Orban, who has sought to win support for Fidesz from extreme-right circles through the creation of so-called "citizen defence districts."

Fidesz has been playing a thoroughly dubious role for some time. Outwardly, the party presents itself as liberal and democratic while at the same time cooperating closely with neo-fascist forces. When in power between 1998 and 2002, it was supported by the MIEP, and many Fidesz politicians still maintain contact to the MIEP, Jobbik and other ultra-right groups. The proposal to develop a "Fatherland Guard" within the army also came from the ranks of Fidesz.

Encouraged by the support from sections of the ruling elite, Hungary's extreme right has taken an increasingly aggressive course. Following violent clashes in front of the government buildings one year ago, approximately 10,000 persons demonstrated against the Gyurcsany government. The demonstration had been called by a total of 30 groups, most of which belonged to the spectrum of extreme-right-wing politics. Additional demonstrations by right-wingers are planned for September.

The protests against the government in September 2006 arose in response to the so-called "speech of lies" by Prime Minister Gyurcsany. The prime minister had given the disputed speech shortly after the parliamentary election of April 23, 2006, in order to rally his misnamed Socialist Party (MSZP) around an austerity programme that was adopted two weeks later. In his speech, Gyurcsany admitted that he had deliberately deceived the electorate and postponed economic measures in order to win the election.

Following the failure of any other organisation to give vent to public anger over Gyurcsany's speech and his anti-social policies, the extreme right was able to dominate the protest demonstration at that time.

A paramilitary group resembling the Hungarian Guard had already been established in Bulgaria some months ago. Bojan Rassate, former head of the racist Bulgarian People's Union, founded a "National Guard" with the aim of defending "helpless Bulgarians against gypsy gangs."

The guard organised a torchlight march for the notorious Bulgarian fascist Hristo Lukov and several parades in schoolyards and other public places. The Bulgarian guard is also responsible for a number of violent attacks on the country's Roma minority. In mid-August, several dozen skinheads with links to the guard launched an attack in the Roma quarter of Krasna Poljana in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. Some days before, around 30 right-wing extremists had attacked three young Roma, severely injuring

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one of them. The Roma minority then responded with spontaneous protests against the right-wingers, which also ended in violent clashes.

The reaction by political circles and media resembled that in Hungary. The governing socialists led by Sergej Stanischev, which head a grand coalition with the right-conservative party of the Tsar's son Simeon Saxecoburgotski, did not even condemn the attacks. Instead, they blamed the Roma. The deputy interior minister, Kamen Penkov, told the press that there were no skinheads in those suburbs of Sofia where the clashes took place. "Therefore," those behind the acts of violence must be "Roma gangs."

The extreme right is also represented in most other eastern European parliaments and in some countries is even involved in government. In Slovakia, for example, the Smer party led by Robert Fico, which calls itself social democratic, has formed a coalition with the neo-fascist Slovak National Party, and, until recently, two ultra-right-wing parties were coalition partners of the Kaczynski brothers in Poland.

The presence of these forces at a national level is also reflected in the European parliament. The entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the European Union meant that deputies from the extreme-right Bulgarian Ataka and the Great Romania Party also entered the parliament in Strasbourg and made it possible for the right-wing extremists to form their own parliamentary group. Europe's extreme right has assembled under the name "Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty" and includes such notorious neo-fascists as Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French National Front, Andreas Mölzer of the Austrian Liberals and Alessandra Mussolini, the granddaughter of the Italian dictator.

Possessing parliamentary group status, the deputies receive additional funding from the parliamentary budget and have the right to vote in the "Conference of Presidents," which lays down the parliament's agenda. In addition, they have increased powers to submit proposed legal amendments. The group is also entitled to interpreters, assistants and other personnel.

The Hungarian head of the government, Gyurcsany, his MSZP and its coalition partner the free market SZDSZ have described the newly created "Guard" as a "dishonour for Hungary." However, no one should be misled regarding their own political responsibility for the increasing influence of such extreme-right tendencies. The fact that fascist elements can spread their political programme today, largely undisturbed by official parties and institutions, and exercise their terror against minorities is primarily a result of the right-wing policies of the alleged socialists.

The cynicism of such former Stalinists who organised the restoration of capitalism and filled their own pockets in the process through smashing up social and welfare gains—while retaining the name "socialist"—has played into the hands of extreme-right demagogues. Growing poverty and a lack of perspective, fuelled by deliberate nationalist agitation on the part of the ruling elite, have created fertile soil for the growth of right-wing tendencies.

Gyurcsany's Socialists are exemplary in this respect. Seventeen years after the introduction of the free market, Hungary remains more remote than ever from any sort of prosperity and democracy. A narrow layer has been able to accumulate obscene amounts of wealth, while increasing numbers of the population confront ever more precarious living conditions.

Gyurcsany began his political career as a youth functionary in the Stalinist state party, and amassed a fortune in the course of the "wild" privatisations carried out in the 1990s. Today, he is on the list of the 100 richest Hungarians, and as head of the government is now feverishly implementing "reforms" in the interests of international finance. Many of Gyurcsany's cronies occupy senior party and government posts.

Figures such as Gyurcsany are to be found in many eastern European countries carrying out virtually identical policies. For example, both Stanischev in Bulgaria and Fico in Slovakia also began their careers in the Stalinist parties only to become glowing advocates of the free market economic system.

The Hungarian Socialists implemented reforms in the health and pension systems that led to precipitous rises in health insurance and the price of medicine. Pension levels are set to decline under the existing paltry level, while energy prices have risen by 30 percent during the past two years. Value-added tax on goods and services has been raised by 5 percent at a time when wages are either stagnating or actually falling.

The political opposition, on the other hand, largely consists of conservative, anticommunist forces, frequently led by former dissidents. Orban's party Fidesz first emerged at the end of the 1980s and came to prominence at the time of the collapse of Stalinism, attacking the Stalinist system from the right. At that time, Fidesz ranted against "communist totalitarianism" and demanded freedom and democracy. Today, it openly endorses totalitarian forms of government. Orban made this clear in the run-up to elections held in the spring of last year. "The Republic is merely a façade draped over the nation," he declared and indicated he could just as well contemplate other systems of government—for example, a dictatorship.

Such considerations are combined with the active stoking up of hatred against minorities and immigrants with Fidesz taking up demands—such as the demand for the return of Transylvania to Hungary—which have until now been the traditional preserve of ultra-right forces.

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