

Hungary: What accounts for the success of the extreme right?

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The gains made in the recent European election by extremist and neo-fascist forces in Hungary and a number of other countries are a serious warning to the entire European working class. Twenty years after the introduction of the capitalist free market in Eastern Europe, fascism is once more raising its ugly head.

In Hungary, the neo-fascist Jobbik party won nearly 15 percent of the vote and three of Hungary's 22 seats in the European Parliament. In other Eastern European states, as well as in England and the Netherlands, ultra-right parties also increased their share of the vote. In Romania, the Great Romania Party (PRM) received 7 percent of the vote, and in neighboring Bulgaria, the extreme right-wing National Union Attack party won 12 percent and two seats in the European Parliament. In Slovakia, the equally right-wing Slovak National Party (SNS), which has participated in a government coalition with the Social Democrats since 2006, received just 5.5 percent—i.e. just over the five percent hurdle necessary for representation in the European parliament.

Jobbik's electoral success means that the party, up until now dependent on financial support from a number of rich backers, will be entitled to considerable sums in the form of European Union (EU) subsidies. In the European Parliament the party will be led by 42-year-old Krisztina Morvai. The party campaigned in the European election under the slogan "Hungary for Hungarians," blaming Jews and Roma for the country's advanced economic crisis and social decline.

Jobbik is the political arm of the "Hungarian Guard," a paramilitary organization, which openly agitates against and attacks Jews, Roma, gays and other minorities.

Supporters of Jobbik or similar outfits are suspected of responsibility for a wave of murders of Roma. In February a Roma man and his five-year-old son were shot dead in cold blood as they attempted to flee their burning

house, set on fire by arsonists. A 54-year-old pharmaceutical factory worker, also Roma, was shot on his doorstep in late April.

High on the list of suspects are individuals with police or military training, including perhaps veterans of the Balkan Wars or the French Foreign Legion.

Despite the gathering of DNA and other evidence, no one has been arrested for any of the crimes. This comes as no surprise since ten percent of the Hungarian police force are members of the "Ready to Act" union that has close links to Jobbik.

The Hungarian Guard was created in August 2007 by Jobbik leader Gábor Vona. Units of the group clad in black deploy in cities and communities on an almost daily basis claiming they are providing the public protection against "gypsy crime."

Jobbik and the Hungarian Guard have been systematically supported by the right-wing Citizen's Federation—Fidesz. During the numerous demonstrations against the country's "socialist" government, Fidesz used its extensive party apparatus to mobilize participants and then handed over the microphone at rallies to the neo-fascists. High-ranking functionaries of Fidesz and the church were present at the founding of the Hungarian Guard. Allegedly, there have already been informal discussions over a future government coalition between Fidesz and Jobbik following the next election.

These factors, however, fail to explain the electoral success of a party which consists of a few hundred officials and a layer of socially disoriented elements. The increased influence of the extreme right-wing must be examined in connection with the political changes which took place in 1989 and the historical role played by Hungarian Stalinism.

Today's social democratic Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which heads a minority government led by the independent politician Gordon Bajnai, suffered a

humiliating defeat in the European elections. Winning just 17 per cent of the vote, the MSZP won a third of the total obtained by Fidesz (56 percent). In some regions in the south and the east of the country the social democrats came in third behind Jobbik, which was able to obtain up to 22 percent of the vote.

The MSZP emerged at the beginning of the 1990s from the former Stalinist state party. Under its first chairman, Gyula Horn, who came to prominence for his role in the symbolic breaching of the “Iron Curtain” at the Hungarian-Austrian border, the party played a leading role in the privatization of large sectors of the country’s economy.

In the course of the so-called “wild privatizations” of the 1990s, former Stalinist cadres became the most virulent free market advocates. They used their old party connections to appropriate factories and then sold them off to Western investors, making a substantial fortune in the process. The current chairman of the MSZP, Ferenc Gyurcsany, is one of the country’s richest men and owes his fortune in large part to the plundering of the economy which took place at that time.

In 1994 the right-wing government was voted out of power and the MSZP governed in an alliance with the neo-liberal Free Democrats (SZDSZ). During this period tens of thousands lost their jobs as the government proceeded to restructure the Hungarian economy. Later the ex-Stalinist social democrats set about dismantling the country’s social net, demolishing the existing relatively good welfare system as part of a harsh austerity policy.

Due to its anti-social policies the MSZP was punished in the federal election of 1998 which resulted in a decisive victory for Fidesz. Fidesz, however, carried forward the policies commenced by the social democrats and the MSZP returned to power in 2002. Following a series of scandals and internal party conflicts, party leader and former intelligence service agent Peter Medgyessy stepped down and made way for the businessman, Ferenc Gyurcsany.

In preparation for membership of the European Union, Gyurcsany radically reorganized the state budget and the last remaining public enterprises were privatized. Upon entering the European Union, prices for food and energy exploded, while wages stagnated. It was only because Fidesz was so discredited that the MSZP was able once again to win the elections in 2006. Because of substantial conflicts with its neo-liberal allies, the party governs at present without a majority and is dependent on votes from the opposition parties.

The resignation of the hated Gyurcsany and his replacement by Bajnai ushered in a new round of attacks on the population. As the effects of the economic crisis spread, the government implemented wage cuts, tax increases and further cuts in social welfare systems in accordance with the demands made by the International Monetary Fund and the EU in Brussels. National bankruptcy was only avoided at the beginning of the year by international credits.

While the entire burden of the crisis has been transferred onto the population, the government in Budapest is doing everything it can to placate and satisfy business interests. The German energy group E.ON has just received an enormous compensation payment from the Hungarian government. A spokesperson for E.ON explained last week that the company and the Budapest regime had reached an agreement over a compensation payment of between 220 and 230 million euros to be paid by the end of 2010. The reason for the payment is the diminished value of the Hungarian *forint*, which led to losses on the part of the E.ON subsidiary in Hungary, Foldgaz Trade Zrt.

There is no organization in the Hungarian political spectrum that offers any alternative to such policies. The nominally left Hungarian Labor Party (Munkaspart) was founded at the beginning of the 1990s by Stalinist hardliners who felt left out when it came to sharing out the posts and pickings from privatization. The party has limited influence—predominantly at a local level.

It is under these conditions that Jobbik has been able to exploit the political vacuum with its fascist demagoguery. The struggle against this right-wing threat is inseparably bound up with the elaboration of a rational, socialist, internationalist solution to the devastating economic crisis and the political exposure of the Stalinist and ex-Stalinist forces.



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