

Right wing expected to win election in Hungary this weekend

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Federal elections take place in Hungary this weekend for the sixth time since the full reintroduction of the capitalist free market in 1990. Opinion polls have repeatedly forecast a landslide victory for the largest opposition party, the right-wing conservative Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz). The neo fascist Party for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) may well take second place.

According to polls Fidesz might achieve a two-thirds majority for the first time by any party since 1990. Sure of victory, the chairman and leading candidate of the Young Democrats, Victor Orban, has rejected any participation in public discussions and arrogantly declared his intention to govern for a period of 15 to 20 years. Orban and his party did not even bother drawing up an election program.

In 2002 Orban was voted out of office after just four years in power. At that time commentators were skeptical about his political fortunes. However, in the course of the succeeding eight years, Orban's successors in the ex-Stalinist Socialist Party (MSPZ) made themselves so unpopular that the right wing can now hope to take power with a commanding majority.

In 1990 the Young Democrats posed as pioneers for democracy against the former totalitarian system. In the course of the 1990's, however, Fidesz increasingly adopted an aggressive Hungarian nationalist stance aimed at recouping those areas of land lost by Hungary in 1920 as a result of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in WWI.

In 1998 Orban became head of government and implemented a series of major welfare cuts and privatizations. In response the electorate voted him out of his post in 2002, to be replaced by a Socialist Party candidate.

Since then Fidesz has shifted further to the right. Orban adopted a policy of confrontation as leader of the opposition, aiming to block the government and discredit the parliament. As opposition leader he virtually ignored parliamentary sittings. He is alleged to admire the right wing Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the head of the authoritarian regime of Miklós Horthy that controlled Hungary from 1920

to 1944.

A number of high-ranking representatives of Fidesz have openly endorsed authoritarian conceptions of government. According to the organization's vice chairman, Istvan Mikola, government's central task is to contain "the unlimited urge for freedom on the part of the individual". Orban is even more explicit. "The republic is merely a garment bedecking the nation" he declared, and suggested that it was possible to contemplate very different systems of government, including dictatorship.

Fidesz has adopted positions that a few years ago were the reserve of fascist groupings, such as the demand for the return of Transylvania from Romania to Hungary. Mikola declared that a future Fidesz government would remain in power for at least twenty years if it awarded citizenship to Hungarians living abroad who, he claimed, would then repeatedly vote for the party out of gratitude. Fidesz representatives often refer to political opponents as gypsies or Jews.

Full responsibility for Orban's domination of Hungarian politics rests with the Socialist Party, the successor party to the former Stalinist ruling party. Under its first chairman Gyula Horn, who came to prominence through his role in symbolically breaking through the "iron curtain" at the Hungarian-Austrian border in 1990, the MSZP played a major role in opening up the country to the capitalist free market.

During the so-called "wild privatizations" of the 1990's the former Stalinist cadres transformed themselves into free market radicals. They used their old contacts to take over ownership of industries and sold them off to western investors. In so doing they were able to make large fortunes.

In 1994 the country's right-wing government was voted out to be replaced by a coalition of the Socialist Party and the Free Democrats (SZDSZ). During this period tens of thousands lost their jobs in the course of the restructuring of the Hungarian economy. The Socialists then began to make drastic cuts in the country's social welfare system.

In 2002 a series of scandals and internal party conflicts

brought down Socialist Party leader and former intelligence service agent Peter Medgyessy. The “socialists” then replaced Medgyessy with business magnate Ferenc Gyurcsany, Hungary's richest individual.

In preparation for membership of the European Union, Gyurcsany radically reorganized the state budget and the last remaining public enterprises were privatised. 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.

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 (IMF) and the EU in Brussels. National bankruptcy was only avoided at the beginning of the year by international credits.

Social conditions are dire. The education system ranks as one of the worst in Europe, according to statistics drawn up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Those growing up in poverty have virtually no opportunities for advancement. Seven percent of the population lives permanently in profound poverty, and a much larger percentage falls under the poverty line or is in danger of poverty. The average pension is just 230 euros per month.

Hungary's level of employment for all those between 15 and 65 years is among the lowest in Europe while labor costs average seven euros per hour, i.e. one quarter of the level in neighboring Austria. The life expectancy of the Hungarian population is eight years below the West European average. According to official estimates, the “informal” economy constitutes 20 to 30 percent of gross domestic product.

The situation for the country's Roma minority is even more dramatic. Their life expectancy is around ten years lower than the average in Hungary. In many regions 90 percent of Roma are unemployed.

These appalling social conditions have been exploited by the ultra right Jobbik, which is expected to poll at a level similar to the MSZP. The growth of the right-wing extremists must be seen in connection with the impoverishment that has taken place since 1989 and the treacherous role played by the ex-Stalinists.

The political scientist Zoltan Kizsely explained to *Deutschlandradio Kultur*: “Jobbik says simply: Twenty years for the last twenty years. Thus who were responsible in the last twenty years, no matter whether in opposition or in government, should receive twenty years detention or hard labor. Because people think: they have stolen to get rich

while we remained poor.”

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 of last year a Roma man and his four-year-old son were shot dead in cold blood as they attempted to flee their burning house, set on fire by arsonists. The police, 30 percent of whom are members of a trade union with links to Jobbik, has predictably failed to move against the organisation.

Jobbik and the Hungarian Guard have been systematically supported by the right-wing 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. Fidesz already works together with Jobbik in over 160 local councils and municipalities and this collaboration is expected to increase after the election.

Jobbik profits from the fact that the entire Hungarian political establishment supports the pro-capitalist austerity measures that have impoverished millions. It seeks to absorb and confuse opposition to these policies through social demagoguery and racist slogans.

The success of Orban's Fidesz and the neo-fascist Jobbik ultimately depend on the absence of an independent, socialist movement of workers. The deep revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian working class must be revived and joined up with the struggles of workers throughout Europe and the world. Workers and youth interested in this perspective should contact the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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