

Right wing wins large majority in Hungarian election

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The right-wing Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) won an absolute majority in parliamentary elections held in Hungary on Sunday. The party is hoping to gain a two-thirds majority in the second round of voting on April 25, which would allow it to make changes in the constitution.

The neo-fascist Party for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), which ran a racist election campaign directed against Roma and foreigners, obtained 17 percent of the vote, finishing just behind the Socialist Party (MSZP), which headed the outgoing government.

Fidesz, with 52.7 percent of the vote, commands 206 of the parliament's 386 mandates. The MSZP and its leading candidate, Attila Mesterhazy, received just 19 percent. This compares to 43 percent of the vote for the MSZP in parliamentary elections held four years ago.

As a result of Sunday's election, the MSZP has the same number of deputies in the new parliament as Jobbik.

The conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), which formed the first government after the restoration of the capitalist market, and the Federation of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) failed to gain enough votes to re-enter parliament and face the breakup of their organisations. Both parties were represented in the last parliament and held government posts.

Running fourth in Sunday's election was the ostensibly left organisation Politics Can be Different (LMP), which won 7.5 percent of the vote in its first showing.

The turnout of 61 percent was an all-time low. Twenty-three percent of the electorate voted Sunday for a party that had no previous representation in parliament.

A regional analysis of voting patterns indicates a highly divided country. In the impoverished eastern

half of the country, Jobbik emerged in second place behind Fidesz. In the west, Jobbik took third place behind the Socialists and fell to fourth place in the capital city of Budapest.

The swing to the right in Hungary is above all due to the policies of the MSZP. Kai-Olaf Lang, eastern Europe expert for the Foundation for Science and Politics, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the election was "a plebiscite against the Socialist government."

Since taking power in 2002, the MSZP government, led successively by prime ministers Peter Medgyessy, Ferenc Gyurcsany and most recently Gordon Banjai, carried out a series of major social attacks. The MSZP emerged as the successor organisation of the former Stalinist state party in Hungary, and its leadership is made up mainly of wealthy businessmen who made a fortune in the 1990s by selling off former state enterprises.

In the wake of the international financial crisis, Hungary was forced to appeal to the International Monetary Fund for funds in 2008, and Prime Minister Banjai implemented a new round of tax increases and wage and welfare cuts aimed at shifting the entire burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the general population.

The MSZP also attacked democratic rights and sought to make minorities in the country scapegoats for the crisis. Having banned the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary fascist group close to Jobbik, the MSZP set up its own civilian militias that, in a so-called war against crime, concentrated their activities against Roma and other minorities.

This played directly into the hands of the right wing. The leading candidate of Fidesz and incoming prime minister, Victor Orban, was so sure of victory that Fidesz did not even put out an election programme, and

Orban refused to participate in public debates.

Orban, who had posed as a pioneer of democracy against the Stalinist system in the early 1990s, previously headed a government, between 1998 and 2002. As prime minister, Orban implemented a series of major welfare cuts and privatisations. In response, the electorate voted him out of office in 2002, to be replaced by the Socialist Party candidate.

Since then, Fidesz has shifted further to the right. Today, leading members of the party openly express their sympathies for authoritarian types of government. Since Sunday's vote, Orban has made no comment on the large tally for Jobbik. Fidesz already cooperates with Jobbik in more than 160 municipalities and local councils, and it is expected that this cooperation will intensify under the new government.

Orban, who avoided any concrete pronouncements on his policies in the election campaign, will move quickly to continue the political course commenced by the preceding government. All establishment political observers are agreed that there is no alternative to radical "reform" policies.

The Austrian *Kurier* notes, "Economic reforms and the modernisation of the health and education system are inevitable. The conservatives know this as well. They will therefore have to carry forward measures which were initiated by transitional prime minister Gordon Banjai."

It is precisely this policy that has led to the increased influence of Jobbik. The party was set up in 2003 by disillusioned members of the extreme right-wing Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP), led by the anti-Semitic writer Istvan Csurka. Although the core of the party consists of just a few hundred right-wing extremists, it has been able to gain support, particularly in the rural areas in the east of the country, where unemployment, poverty and petty crime are rife.

The farmers in the region suffer under the diktats of the European agricultural policy, which has robbed them of a decent livelihood. What existed in terms of industry in the region has completely disappeared in the past few years, and youth unemployment is about three times as high as in Budapest. As a result, Jobbik was able to win a high level of support in the east from young people under 25.

Jobbik was able to profit from the complete absence in the Hungarian political spectrum of a party that

openly opposes the anti-social policies of MSZP and Fidesz. This enables Jobbik to combine open racism with social demagoguery.

The LMP does not represent a real alternative. Cobbled together by young intellectuals and prominent media and cultural figures, the party has close contact with the German, Austrian and Czech Green parties. As with the Czech Greens, the LMP will invariably shift to the right as the economic and political crisis deepens.

In 2005, the predecessor organisation of the LMP backed the free marketer Laszlo Solyom for the post of state president. Solyom won the office with the help of votes from Fidesz. He went on to throw his weight behind the social attacks carried out by the MSZP.



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