

# Hungarian premier steps up nationalist rhetoric

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Hungarian premier Victor Orban is notorious for his right-wing nationalist rhetoric, but his pronouncements in the course of the past weeks go beyond past excesses.

In early October Orban delivered a tirade in which he firmly placed himself in the camp of the extreme right. He consecrated a monument to the mythical bird “Turul” in the southern Hungarian town of Opusztaszer. Orban described the “Turul” as a symbol of national identity and a “prototype” for Hungary, ranting: “The archetype belongs to our blood and our homeland.”

A cult of mythical creatures with grasping claws was a characteristic of the Arrow Cross regime, which established a fascist dictatorship in Hungary in the last months of World War II and murdered tens of thousands of Jews.

Orban not only embraced the symbols of the extreme right in Opusztaszer, but also much of their program, declaring: “This monument tells us that there is only one country, namely one capable of uniting all Hungarians on both sides of the Trianon border into a single community.”

The call for a revision of the 1921 Treaty of Trianon which defined the modern borders of Hungary has so far been a central demand of the neo-fascist Jobbik party. Jobbik calls for a Greater Hungary incorporating the Hungarian populated regions of neighbouring countries.

The nationalist tirades of Orban play into the hands of the extreme right. Last week, about a thousand right-wingers marched with torches through a Roma settlement in the east Hungarian city of Miskolc. Jobbik had called for the march and the participants were mainly uniformed members of the paramilitary Hungarian Guard.

Orban’s nationalist outburst comes in response to the decline of his Fidesz party and growing opposition to the austerity measures introduced by the Orban government in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Fidesz won an absolute majority in the federal election of 2010, but is currently polling at between 16 to 19 percent and is only slightly ahead of the opposition Socialists, which has 14 percent support. Jobbik has also lost half of its support since the 2010 elections and is now polling at just 7 percent. According to the survey conducted by Ipsos, 52 percent of Hungarians see no point in taking part in elections.

Fidesz recently lost two elections at a district and community level. In Sopron, a western Hungarian stronghold of Fidesz, the Socialist challenger won with 46 percent of the vote, and in Dunafoldvar, a town south of Budapest, the Fidesz office holder was toppled by an independent candidate supported by the Socialists.

The rapidly developing social crisis in the country has led to growing anger with the government. According to the Central Statistical Office in Budapest, the number of employees in the economic sector has declined for the ninth month in a row. In August alone, the decline was 2.4 percent compared to the same month last year. In the Hungarian private sector, job losses amounted to 45,500 in one year.

The official unemployment rate has fallen, but merely as a consequence of local employment programs that force the unemployed to work for a pittance. They are funded by the state budget, and the minimum wage was abolished to permit them to pay next to nothing. Welfare recipients, the long-term unemployed and early retirees are required to work 40 hours a week to supplement their measly social benefits by a maximum

of 70 euros per month. If they turn down any form of menial work, they are denied any assistance.

As a consequence, poverty in Hungary is spreading rapidly. In the course of one year the average disposable annual income has dropped from 5,036 euros to 4,884 euros. The number living in poverty according to the UN standards has risen to 1.5 million, or about 15 percent of the population. Another 30 percent are considered to be at “acute risk of poverty”.

A massive gulf has opened up between the wealthy neighbourhoods of the capital and the rest of the country. In the Budapest suburbs and areas of ??the capital, average income is 130 percent above the national average. The situation is especially precarious in the poverty-stricken provinces in the south and east of the country.

The rapid social decline is due to the austerity measures of the government implemented at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Government officials are currently negotiating with the IMF an extension of the country’s credit facility of 20 billion euros. Orban has made clear he will accept more IMF austerity demands to obtain the funds. Hungary is in the midst of a recession and all of the economic forecasts are very bleak.

That has not prevented Orban, however, from engaging in a phony domestic political campaign against the IMF and “debt slavery”. At the start of October the government began inserting ads into newspapers promising not to yield to the IMF’s demands.

Supporters of the government demonstrated on October 23, the anniversary of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, under the slogan “We are not debt slaves” and against the “dictates” of the EU and the IMF. The organizer of the so-called peace march was the pro-government newspaper editor and industrialist Gábor Széles. The Fidesz-led Budapest city council has recently spun off parts of the urban bus transport to private transport companies belonging to Széles.

According to the media, about 150,000 people took part in the pro-government demonstration. As was the case in previous rallies, Fidesz supporters from all over the country were brought to Budapest in buses. Some are also alleged to have received “allowances” for their participation.

Another 100,000 took part in a counter-demonstration

of the non-parliamentary opposition movements MILLA (“One Million for the Freedom of the Press”) and the trade union-oriented Szolidaritás movement. The main speaker at this rally was Gordon Bajnai, who headed a transitional government in 2009 and 2010. In his speech, Kajnai announced his return to politics.

Previously, Ferenc Gyurcsany, former prime minister and chairman of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), appealed for Bajnai to stand as the main candidate of the opposition in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

There could be no clearer signal that the current opposition to Orban offers no alternative. As head of a government consisting mainly of technocrats, Bajnai was the man who negotiated the first round of aid from the IMF on the basis of implementing a rigorous austerity package. Since being kicked out of office in 2010, Bajnai has assembled some of his former ministers in his reactionary institute “Homeland and Progress”.



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