

Anti-Semitic outburst in the Hungarian parliament

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The latest anti-Semitic outburst by a leading member of the far-right party Jobbik was met with little serious opposition from the side of the governing Fidesz party and marks a further turn to the right in Hungarian politics. Faced with rising social protests against austerity, the government is increasingly relying on fascist forces.

During a debate at the end of November on the Israeli military offensive against the Gaza strip, deputy Jobbik chair Márton Gyöngyösi demanded, “A list should be drawn up of Jews living in Hungary” in order to check whether they “represented a security risk for Hungary”. Gyöngyösi demanded of State Secretary Zsolt Németh, “I think you should draw up such a list for Hungary”.

The Budapest historian Krisztián Ungváry commented on Gyöngyösi’s tirade, saying it amounted to “Nazism in parliament”. Jobbik was continuing the racist hatred of the Nazis and of Hungary’s fascist Arrow-Cross movement in the 1930s, Ungváry said.

A few days later, inspired by the parliamentary debate, some 100 neo-fascists from the Guards of the Carpathian Homeland demonstrated through Budapest. Outside the foreign ministry, the neo-fascists shouted “dirty Jews” and “send them all to Auschwitz”. At the end of the demonstration, Jobbik parliamentary deputy Balázs Lenhardt set fire to an Israeli flag.

Such actions are not uncommon for Jobbik. This openly fascist party, which received 17 percent of the vote in the 2010 elections, openly espouses its anti-Semitic and racist philosophy. Its paramilitary wing, the Hungarian Guard, persecutes and threatens Roma and other minorities.

Days of protests have followed the anti-Semitic outbursts. Several hundred spontaneously demonstrated outside parliament wearing the Star of David against the “fascist-isation” of the Hungarian parliament.

Gyöngyösi’s call for the drawing up of lists of Jews initially met with no criticism in government quarters. Németh replied only that this had nothing to do with the Gaza conflict. Despite its two-thirds majority in parliament, the government refused to implement any sanctions against Gyöngyösi.

Only when Gyöngyösi’s anti-Semitic outburst had led to the first protests did Fidesz feel compelled to participate in a demonstration against anti-Semitism on December 2.

The opposition social democrats and the liberal alliance “Together 2014” of former premier Gordon Bajnai organised a protest meeting in Budapest, which was supported by tens of thousands. When the Fidesz parliamentary leader Antal Rogán hypocritically criticised the latest anti-Semitic outbursts in the Hungarian parliament, he was met with boos and whistles, and shouts from numerous demonstrators of “You created Jobbik”.

The government party’s benign treatment of Jobbik is not accidental. Fidesz has increasingly adopted the nationalist policies of Jobbik over the last years. For example, works by anti-Semites and Nazis such as the writer Jozsef Nyirö have been incorporated into the school curriculum. László Kövér, the Fidesz parliamentary president, has already been declared “persona non grata” by the Israeli government for his defence of Nyirö. Kövér had called for the ashes of Nyirö, who originated in Transylvania, to be transferred back to Rumania, to create a site for pilgrimage by Hungarian Nazis.

The infamous nationalist rhetoric of government leader Victor Orban culminated last autumn with his notorious “blood and soil” speech. All over Hungary, statues have been erected of the pro-Hitler Reichsverweser (regent) Miklos Horthy, who ruled

between 1920 and 1944. Orban defended the emerging Horthy cult, saying he had not been a “dictator”, which won the undivided support of Jobbik.

While Fidesz has continued to court Jobbik, Orban’s government has used its two-thirds majority in parliament to establish authoritarian structures. Following the restriction of press freedoms in the media law, now universal suffrage is also to be curtailed. A new election law will introduce a registration procedure that will above all make voting more difficult for minorities and poorer layers of the population. Although there is already a compulsory domiciliary registration procedure, in future voters must undergo an additional complicated registration process at least two weeks before an election in order to be able to cast their ballot.

These new procedures will benefit Fidesz, which has the financial and organisational means to mobilise its core voters to register. In addition, there is a ban on political advertising on private radio and television stations, meaning that this can only be carried by the public broadcasters, which are controlled by Fidesz.

The establishment of right-wing and authoritarian structures above all serves to suppress protest against the government’s austerity measures. In recent years, with the support of the European Union and International Monetary Fund, Fidesz has implemented cuts in all areas. For example, there is presently massive resistance to the cuts in education.

For more than two weeks, thousands of school and higher education students have demonstrated against the cuts in education. They are demanding the withdrawal of the government’s “reforms”, which make access to those who do not have wealthy parents impossible. Fees have been introduced for most courses and the number of places reduced. Moreover, there have been wage and job cuts in the public sector, and working conditions for teachers have worsened dramatically.

While students have announced they will continue the protests, the government is cracking down. At the end of a meeting on Széchenyi Square in front of the Academy of Science, there were spontaneous demonstrations throughout the city centre. The police then blockaded several streets and put an end to the demonstration. At least three protesters were arrested, one of whom was a minor, and held at a police station

until the middle of the night. In the following days, the police presence was then significantly stepped up.

As well as student protests, there could be further strikes and demonstrations in the coming weeks. For example, a long strike is being prepared by workers at Budapest’s public transport company BKV. The management of BKV, who are close to the government, implemented cuts of €3.5 million this year alone at the cost of the workforce. The industrial action is also aimed against planned layoffs and the outsourcing of other parts of the company.



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