

Hungarian government declares “state of crisis” over refugees

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The Hungarian government declared a state of crisis on March 9 and completely closed its borders to refugees on the so-called Balkan route. Following the example of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Macedonia, Hungary has announced that only people with valid passports and visas will now be permitted to enter the country.

Interior Minister Sandor Pinter declared at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday: “We are declaring a state of crisis for the entire country because of migration.” An additional 1,500 soldiers were mobilized and military and police took up positions along the border.

While the influx of refugees is a factor, the government is reacting primarily to growing social tensions and protests within the country. It is mobilizing additional soldiers, expanding the powers of the police and intelligence agencies, and clearing the way for the permanent implementation of emergency laws.

Government representatives announced plans to erect a fence along its border with Romania, although this does not lie on the so-called Balkan route. Nevertheless, they announced that provisions would be made to seal borders with south-eastern neighbours within ten days. Hungary had already built fences on its southern borders with Serbia and Croatia several months ago.

The right-wing Fidesz government has been planning to implement emergency laws for some time. It wants to combat “terrorism” with more than 30 separate measures. According to official propaganda, the danger of terrorism comes above all from refugees. The rights of assembly and of freedom of the press will be restricted, the border will be closed long-term and the freedom of the Hungarian population to travel placed

under tight restrictions. Telephone and Internet providers will be required to provide data to the state authorities and to shut off services on command.

Since Victor Orbán took over the government six years ago, freedom of the press has been curtailed repeatedly. Now the media will be required to publish government press releases and to censor “dangerous” material. Anything that the government deems unpleasant could be classified as “dangerous.”

The intelligence agencies, which are already working to a large extent without restraints and are dominated by ultra-right forces, will receive even greater powers. The military will also be deployed long-term inside the country. Strikes can be forbidden at any time. The government can impose these measures for up to 60 days before they are debated in parliament.

Orbán had already announced that the rights of refugees in Hungary would be further restricted. The space allotted to refugees in internment camps should, in the future, only be as large as that allotted to prison inmates, says the draft of the legislation.

In addition, aid money and integration measures will be slashed. The Helsinki Committee human rights group says that the actual aim of the measures consists in destroying the motivation of refugees who have been granted asylum to remain in Hungary. According to the draft legislation, the changes to the law will go into effect on April 1.

The implementation of a state of crisis and the planned emergency laws serve not only to repulse refugees, but are also aimed directly at the Hungarian population. The social gulf in the country and all over Europe is rapidly expanding and is leading to social protests.

Workers at the online department of the food retailer Tesco are planning a strike aimed at a wage increase.

The third-largest retail chain worldwide gets 80 percent of its online business, the fastest growing branch of the corporation, in Budapest, where wages are a mere pittance.

The management of Tesco in Hungary says that it is prepared to raise wages slightly in Budapest and Győr, but not in other cities and regions where, on account of high unemployment, employees have no possibility of finding another job.

In addition to strikes there are frequent protests against the deep cuts to education in Hungary. In February, more than 20,000 people attended a protest in the capital before parliament for better funding for schools and better pay for teachers. At the beginning of February, there were protests in eleven Hungarian cities. The largest was in Miskolc, in the destitute eastern part of the country. It was the largest protest outside Budapest since the end of the Stalinist regime in 1989.

The government has already made it clear that such protests will be suppressed by police in the future. According to the unions and opposition parties, striking teachers were sought out by police in their homes and questioned about the protests. This awakens memories of the dark chapter of Hungarian history in the 1930s and 40s, where the regime and state forces collaborated with the Nazis.

Orbán and his government announced that they would continue to implement severe austerity measures. According to Orbán, the new draft budget that the government will present at the end of April will call for a balanced budget in 2017.



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