

Hungary: Right-wing commemoration of 60th anniversary of workers' uprising

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Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising with a nationalist tirade against immigrants on Sunday. The prime minister spoke at the official celebrations in front of the parliament to several thousand supporters of his right-wing Fidesz Party.

Alongside a number of Hungarian and European politicians, Orban presented the revolution, which was bloodily suppressed by Soviet troops, as an anti-communist uprising in support of capitalism and the nation. In reality, it was a tragically failed attempt by the Hungarian working class to overthrow the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy and establish a socialist society.

The introduction of capitalism, which the Stalinist bureaucracy carried out 25 years ago, has proven to be a catastrophe for workers. Hungary is an impoverished country, socially polarised and governed by a right-wing regime that is increasingly adopting authoritarian forms of rule, managing only to hold onto power by stoking xenophobia and chauvinism.

Orban's speech was full of nationalist pathos. He spoke of the "Hungarians' fight for freedom" and linked the struggle of Christian Hungarians against the Ottoman Empire to the "invasion" of refugees over the past year. Certain passages of the speech recalled the fascist propaganda of the Miklós Horthy regime. "We have decided in favour of our own children instead of immigrants. We have chosen work instead of speculation and assistance. We are standing on our own feet instead of being debt slaves. We support defending borders instead of an open hand," Orban proclaimed.

Orban strongly attacked the European Union (EU), which Hungary has been a member of since 2004. He was opposed to a Europe "imprisoned by lethargy and illusions," while Hungary had taken "the road of the good" and confronted new challenges. He accused the

EU of being led by "deluded elites" who behaved like the Soviet Union had once done. "People who love freedom must protect Brussels from Sovietisation; from people who want to tell us how we should live in our countries," he stated. "There can be no free Europe without national states and the thousands of years of Christian wisdom."

Although Budapest maintains generally good relations with Moscow, the government incited anti-Russian sentiment. The Hungarian foreign ministry demanded a meeting with the Russian ambassador to complain about the portrayal of the 1956 uprising in a bad light by the Russian media. At the meeting, it would be made clear "that we will not accept anyone speaking in a denigrating manner about the revolution of 1956 and its heroes," a statement from the ministry declared.

A decade ago, the heads of 20 European States as well as high-ranking NATO and EU officials participated in the 50th anniversary celebrations, but the Hungarian government was largely isolated this time around. The sole foreign head of state at the central commemoration was Polish President Andrzej Duda. He promised Hungary Poland's support on the refugee issue. "You can count on Poland, we stand together in the most difficult times," he stated.

Orban also has high-ranking supporters in Germany. He received an invitation from Bavarian Minister President Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union) to speak to the Bavarian state parliament about the Hungarian uprising on October 17.

Orban described the opening of the border in 1989 (the Hungarian government opened its borders to refugees from East Germany who wanted to reach the West, thereby accelerating the breakup of the GDR) and the current closing of Hungary's borders as "two

sides of the same coin.” In both cases, the issue was “protecting freedom.” In 1989, Hungary had to open the borders to secure freedom; today, it had to close them to protect freedom. Closing borders to refugees was a “duty.”

On Tuesday, the Minister President of the German state of Saxony, Stanislaw Tillich (Christian Democratic Union), spoke in his capacity as president of the Bundesrat (upper house of Germany’s federal parliament) at a commemorative ceremony at the Hungarian parliament.

Although a massive police operation protected the official commemorations on Sunday in Budapest, there was a counter-demonstration. Several hundred supporters of the liberal opposition shouted “dictator, dictator,” and drowned out Orban with whistles. Some clashes broke out between government supporters and protesters.

The protest was called by the Együtt Party (Together), the product of a split from the Socialist Party (MSZP). The successor organisation to the Stalinist state party ruled Hungary from 1994 to 2010, with a break of four years, before breaking apart in the face of hostility to its anti-working class policies and corruption scandals.

Orban’s main goal with his right-wing agitation against immigrants and the EU’s refugee policy is to divert attention from the social tensions in his country. UNICEF confirmed last year that no other EU country has such a high rate of child poverty. One in three children in Hungary lives in conditions that pose a health risk, the UN child aid agency reported. Thirty-six percent of the Hungarian population is considered poor by EU standards, amounting to 3.5 million people.

Hungary is currently building a new fence on its border with Serbia to prevent refugees on the so-called Balkan route from crossing into the country. Hungarian media reported that different construction methods are being tested before the final building process commences. Last year, Hungary began installing 175 kilometres of barbed wired fencing on the borders with Croatia and Serbia.

Hungary leads the way among European states in rejecting refugees. On October 2, a referendum supported by Orban to anchor his policy in the constitution failed. Despite an unprecedented media campaign and large sums of money spent in support of

the campaign, the required quorum was not achieved.

Although the refugee referendum result was invalid, Orban still plans to change the constitution. For the necessary two-thirds parliamentary majority, Orban requires the support of the fascist Jobbik Party, which collaborates with Fidesz on other issues. This is an additional reason for his far-right rhetoric.

In exchange for supporting the constitutional amendment, Jobbik is demanding that no more entitlements to reside in Hungary, and therefore within the EU, be granted to foreigners purchasing Hungarian government bonds. The government initiated this practice four years ago. Anyone who invests in Hungarian government bonds can practically buy the right to reside. In this way, Hungary raised an estimated €1 billion. “We require neither poor nor rich terrorists,” stated Jobbik leader Gabor Vona after a meeting with Orban.



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