

Fascists enter parliament as COVID-19 devastates Romania

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Elections in Romania were held on November 6, as the COVID-19 pandemic that has now killed more than 15,000 people ravaged the country. The election was marked by an unprecedented abstention—only about 30 percent of the electorate turned up to vote—and by the emergence of the fascist Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) party, which took 9 percent of the vote.

How has a hitherto unknown political entity, founded last year and which as late as September polled less than 1 percent, managed to become essentially the third political force in the country, after the Liberal-Save Romania alliance and the ex-Stalinist Social Democratic Party?

The answer is found in the response of the international ruling class to a mortal crisis of capitalism, sharply intensified by the coronavirus pandemic. Fearing that its disastrous handling of the pandemic will trigger an outpouring of workers' struggles, the Romanian ruling elite is working to build a fascist movement that it hopes to use against the working class. All the main bourgeois parties, media and cultural figures are implicated in this filthy operation.

The chief responsibility lies with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the chief party to emerge from the Stalinist bureaucracy after it restored capitalism in Romania and across Eastern Europe in 1989. The PSD has provided both material and crucial political support for the rise of fascism.

During the pandemic, the National Liberal Party (PNL)-led government has followed the policy of the ruling class internationally—"herd immunity." After a belated, one-month lockdown, authorities essentially stopped efforts to contain the virus. The economy and schools reopened, with contact tracing all but

nonexistent.

The result has been a social catastrophe. Factories, schools and hospitals became epicenters of the disease, with mass casualties in care homes for the elderly and disabled. With a health care system already rotting on its feet, Romania has had one of the EU's highest death rates. The government has been widely accused by health experts of doctoring numbers to delay taking even minimal measures. Facing a mounting death toll and an imminent collapse of the hospitals, authorities closed schools and kindergartens one month after opening them.

Throughout the year, the PSD denounced every measure, however minimal, to contain the virus. This let the government justify its reactionary policies by citing the pressure of parliamentary opposition.

The PSD, heir to the Stalinist Communist Party, increasingly adopted the language and methods of the far-right networks deployed internationally to protest COVID restrictions. It is an open secret that this summer's demonstrations against the use of masks—attended by a motley crew of religious zealots and neo-Nazi groups—were held with the PSD bosses' blessing. Lower-level party officials supervised the events, which received saturation coverage in PSD-aligned media.

One of the more prominent groups at the anti-mask demos was the AUR, headed by 34-year-old George Simion. A lifelong provocateur, Simion comes from the milieu of far-right football thugs. He has spent much of his career agitating in the neighboring Romanian-speaking Republic of Moldova. He participated in a violent provocation with ethnic Hungarians in Romania, before launching a bid for the EU parliament candidacy in 2019, which although unsuccessful received wide media attention.

The backbone of the new party is made up of the religious fundamentalist elements, represented by party co-founder Claudiu Tarziu. Tarziu was a leader of the Coalition for Family, an umbrella organization of fascists of different religions, both Orthodox and Protestant. It gained notoriety as the main vehicle for a failed referendum in 2018 to change the definition of the family in the Romanian constitution and exclude gay couples from marriage. The referendum was organized by the then-PSD government, which also campaigned for it.

As a writer for various Orthodox rags, Tarziu's defining feature is his unashamed fascination with the fascist Romanian Iron Guard of the 1930s.

Another dubious and indicative figure around the party is Calin Georgescu. A career bureaucrat working for the UN and the Romanian government on environmental and "sustainable development" issues, he is associated with the Club of Rome, a Malthusian think tank. Repeatedly interviewing him, the Romanian press has given ample attention to his social Darwinist ramblings. He is the AUR's candidate for prime minister.

Another ominous element in the AUR's physiognomy is the presence of retired army generals. The most notorious is former Chief of Staff Mircea Chelaru. As an active duty general, he was involved on two occasions in erecting busts of the former fascist dictator Ion Antonescu, once in front of an army barracks and then in a church courtyard.

The AUR received wide attention in the media in the weeks prior to the election. Simion conducted friendly interviews on national television and with three of the best-known journalists in the country.

The rush to prepare the new political formation for election involved a concerted effort from the main bourgeois parties. An investigation by Galatimedia blog, quoted by G4 media, revealed that in one county, most AUR candidates were in PSD or PNL movements; in many cases, they were even PSD or PNL local elected officials.

Cosmin Gusa, a political spin doctor and media mogul employed by both major bourgeois parties, hailed the new formation after the election, praising its "unifying, patriotic message, street fighting against excesses to which Romania is subjected."

While a number of journalists and politicians have

expressed concern over the fascists' entry into parliament, all of them, including mainstream media and pseudo-left commentators, are characterized by a criminal degree of complacency. Appeals are made and assurances given that the major parties—the very same forces that created and nourished the AUR—would "isolate" the new party. Another argument is that the new formation is similar to many other "anti-establishment" parties that have sprung up in Romania in the last two decades.

The weeks following the election already have proven how fraudulent these claims are. The AUR has been given legitimacy and was invited by the president to official talks to form a new government. Simion has held high-level discussions with PSD leaders and the party has been given the leadership of four parliamentary committees.

The AUR is similar to far-right parties internationally, such as the AfD in Germany and the Vox party in Spain. It is a hand-crafted weapon of the ruling class, which is terrified of explosive social anger in the working class. Its references to the Iron Guard—one of the most murderous and demented organizations in history—must serve as an urgent warning to workers in Romania and internationally. There is no way to defeat the danger of fascist reaction save the independent mobilization of the working class internationally against capitalism and for socialism.



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