

Romanian Social Democrats join Grand Coalition government amid raging pandemic

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A new Grand Coalition cabinet was sworn in on November 25 in Romania.

Under the weight of a catastrophic COVID wave and a looming economic crisis, the previous government led by the National Liberal Party (PNL) disintegrated as their junior coalition partners, Save Romania Union (USR), left the coalition and a no confidence vote was passed against it. The Social Democratic Party (PSD), direct heir to the Stalinist Communist Party, joined the PNL in a Grand Coalition government.

The fourth COVID wave, according to local health experts like Octavian Jurma, had claimed by the beginning of November at least 18,000 lives and continues to take close to 2,000 lives each week. The overall death toll surpassed 57,000.

As the economic growth, paid for with a criminal policy of mass infection and death, benefited a handful of oligarchs, the liberalization of energy prices threatens to leave millions without basic utilities as winter months approach.

The two parties have signed an agreement that is set to last until the 2024 election, with a rotating premiership. The first prime minister, retired general Nicolae Ciucă from the Liberal Party, was sworn in on the 25th. The PSD will hold key posts such as Healthcare, Economy and Defense. Joining the Coalition will be the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, (UDMR) a right-wing party with close political ties to the Hungarian Orban government.

This new political set-up leaves the AUR, an avowed fascist party, as the main parliamentary opposition force in the country.

The Grand Coalition government formed in Bucharest marks a new and dangerous stage in the developing crisis of rule in Romania and Eastern

Europe. Thirty-two years after the restoration of capitalism in the region, and as the ruling elites double down on murderous mass infection policies, the norms of bourgeois democracy are being increasingly discarded.

The Grand Coalition will have sweeping powers. It will work to forcibly suppress working class opposition to its murderous pandemic policies. It will also join other right-wing regimes on the region, from the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine and Moldova, to act as a bulwark against refugees and intensify military provocations against Russia on the Eastern Front.

Like many similar social democratic parties and their pseudo-left appendages internationally, the Romanian Social Democrats have embraced the most right-wing positions on the coronavirus pandemic.

For the past two years, they have used every parliamentary and legal means to attack and thwart any measures taken by the former Liberal government to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic. This position has seen the Social Democrats openly embrace the most backward social forces and far-right conspiracy theories. Recently, they have attacked the transfer of hospital beds to COVID patients even at the peak of the fourth wave and have blocked legislation introducing the Digital COVID Pass.

Alexandru Rafila, who now holds the position of Health Minister for the PSD, said last year that teachers who were opposed to the dangerous reopening of schools were suffering of “cabin fever.” Rafila, who is a professor of microbiology at the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy, is also opposed to the introduction of the Digital COVID Pass. His stated priority will be to further “normalize” COVID, by moving the burden from the hospital system to outpatient care centers.

The education minister Câmpeanu, despised by millions of parents for his Malthusian ramblings, will keep his job, as children will be forced to attend unventilated and unsafe schools. Over 18 children have lost their lives since schools were reopened in September, as many as in the whole previous pandemic period.

The Coalition has created a new portfolio, a Family Ministry, modeled on existing institutions in Hungary and Poland. The post will be occupied by former PSD mayor of Bucharest Gabriela Firea. As mayor of the capital, Firea rose to prominence as one of the most strident opponents of COVID measures. She is one of the main leaders of the party and a devoted follower of the Orthodox church.

During Parliamentary hearings, the Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the fascist AUR deputy Tanas?, after praising the creation of the new Office, asked Firea about banning abortion. Along with issuing a perfunctory denial, the PSD minister had this to say: “I will fight so that all women have access to quality medical services, counseling, guidance so that, together with their families, with their close ones and with their priest they will take the best decision for their life.”

Romania currently allows abortion up to 14 gestation weeks without any qualification. In case of increased risk of fetal malformation, abortion is allowed up to 24 weeks, or at any time after that if the mother’s life is in danger. The new institution is a clear signal that the Grand Coalition will follow the direction set by the Orban and the Law and Justice governments (Hungary and Poland) in curtailing the most fundamental democratic rights.

The fascist AUR party will be the main political beneficiary of the Grand Coalition. The main parties have already integrated ultra-right policies in the governing program.

AUR is the product of attempts by sections of the Romanian ruling class to create a mass fascist party. Such attempts are now taking place throughout the world, as the pandemic is bringing social tension to a boil. However, such a movement does not currently exist.

The AUR’s anti-lockdown rallies draw dozens, at best hundreds, of individuals, drawn from the religious right and other deranged elements. Even their main

rallies, which involve considerable organizational effort, such as the anti-lockdown event on October 2, can draw no more than a couple thousand individuals.

Serious efforts are made however to promote and normalize the fascists by the ruling establishment. The most ardent allies in this effort are the corporatist trade unions, the Stalinist PSR (Socialist Party) as well as various pseudo-left groups and commentators.

In Eastern European countries, the legacy of nationalism and backwardness promoted by the Stalinists is responsible for the mistrust of science and directly linked to low vaccination rates and preventable deaths. Stalinist parties like the Romanian Socialist Party (PSR), linked to Die Linke in Germany, are now openly promoting the fascists. Gheorghita Zb?ganu, notable leader of the PSR, led a delegation at the October 2 AUR rally. Their placards were taken up by the media as proof of the heterogenous and “populist” nature of the event.

Pseudo-left outlets have likewise embraced the libertarian nostrums of the far right. Groups like the Association for the Emancipation of Workers (AEM), associated with the French Lambertistes (POI), and the Union of Militant Students (Sindicatul elevilor ?i studen?ilor Militan?i, SESM) work to provide a left cover to the maneuvers of the Social Democrats and Stalinists.

The lives and health of workers, as well as basic democratic rights, cannot be defended without an international socialist program. The emergence of the B.1.1.529 COVID variant (Omicron) speaks to the urgency of the situation and of the task of uniting the working class, independently of all factions of the bourgeoisie, on an international offensive to eradicate SARS-CoV-2.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* have called for a Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic to develop this program.



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