

Hungary's new president lied about his father's Nazi past

Martin Nowak
31 March 2024

Tamás Sulyok took office as Hungary's president on March 5. His predecessor Katalin Novák resigned after two years in office due to scandalous pardonings of criminals. Both belong to the ultra-right Fidesz party of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has ruled the country since 2010.

Significantly, Novák was not obliged to resign due to the pardoning of 17 members of the far-right Hunnia movement, responsible for several attacks on the former social-democratic MSZP [Hungarian Socialist Party] government, as well as left-wing institutions. Rather, he was forced out as a result of the pardoning of Endre Kónya, who as deputy director of a boarding school in Bicske had been convicted of aiding and abetting the cover-up of child abuse. Novák pardoned him, like the other offenders, on the occasion of the Pope's visit last year, as the 444.hu website revealed.

After several weeks of protests by opposition parties, the far-right publicist Zsolt Bayer, a close confidant of Orbán, also turned against Novák. After the resignation of the president, the responsible justice minister, Judit Varga, likewise resigned and announced her withdrawal from politics.

Varga's ex-husband, the millionaire Péter Magyar, who himself had long profited from the Orbán system, placed himself at the helm of the ongoing protests. His intention is to use the new anti-corruption party "Talpra, Magyarok!" (Rise up, Hungary!) to challenge Fidesz and overcome the "division" in society.

That the leaders of the opposition camp would rather launch a scandal around the topic of "pardoning a paedophile" than address the pardoning of violent fascist criminals speaks volumes about the rotten character of the opposition. The latter ranges from the MSZP, which emerged from the former Hungarian Stalinist ruling party, to the Greens and the far-right Jobbik party.

Sulyok had been president of the Constitutional Court

since 2016 and was a reliable pillar of Orbán's authoritarian regime. Shortly before Sulyok took office, historian László Karsai revealed on hvg3600 that the new president lied about his father's Nazi past. Historians Krisztián Ungváry and Anna Gergely added to Karsai's account.

In an interview with the Hungarian-language Romanian newspaper *Krónika* in August 2023, Sulyok claimed that his father, László Sulyok, as a lawyer, had been sentenced to death *in absentia* by the Stalinist People's Court in 1946 and had therefore gone into hiding for 10 years.

In fact, Sulyok senior was chairman of the Hungarian National Socialist Party, an unconditionally pro-German split-off from the Arrow Cross Party, in the Fejér district. The Arrow Cross Party seized power in October 1944 with the help of the German army because the Horthy regime, which had been allied with Nazi Germany since 1941, was seeking a separate peace with the invading Soviet army. They continued the extermination of Hungarian Jews, which had only begun in May 1944, with particular brutality.

As the historians point out, Sulyok was neither put on trial nor sentenced to death *in absentia*. Instead, preliminary proceedings were initiated against him in May 1945, but these were discontinued in 1950.

The basis for the proceedings was, among other things, a newspaper article from June 17, 1944 in the regional newspaper *Fejérmegyei Napló*, in which Sulyok senior welcomed the new Arrow Cross regime and declared: "We see the establishment of party organizations as a means of developing a better future for Hungarians. Anyone who is free of Jewish blood, morally upright and of Hungarian National Socialist conviction is entitled to join us."

The case was dismissed *in absentia* because three acquaintances of the elder Sulyok claimed the article was actually written by the Cistercian priest and Arrow Cross

member, Rafael Marschall, who had already fled to the West. Despite the historical evidence, Sulyok junior insisted on his father's innocence and declared that the Hungarian Nazi Party member was a "socially sensitive, patriotic, philo-Semitic person"—an obvious and absurd falsification of history.

The historians also make it clear in their articles that antisemites and Nazis like Sulyok senior had little to fear in the Stalinist People's Republic of Hungary, which was founded in 1949, as long as they did not hold a political office. They refer to the antisemitic poet József Erdélyi, who was convicted but only spent a few days in prison and was able to publish again as early as 1954. The Stalinist bureaucracy also relied on antisemitic resentment and national chauvinism.

Beyond such historical questions, the brazen falsification of history by the current Hungarian head of state is also a symptom of the right-wing development of the entire ruling class in the European Union, including Hungary.

For years, the Fidesz government has glorified the authoritarian regime established by Miklós Horthy in 1920 after the violent suppression of the Soviet Republic under Béla Kun. In addition to the cult of Horthy himself, whom Orbán praised in 2017 as an "exceptional statesman," extreme right intellectuals are also glorified. The nationalist writer József Nyír? was elevated to the status of national poet in 2010 and his writings were declared compulsory reading in schools. Countless monuments have been erected to the war criminal Albert Wass.

This aggressive historical revisionism is not limited to Hungary. In Germany, the radical right-wing historian Jörg Baberowski received the support of politicians, the media and numerous professors in 2014 when he proclaimed in the German weekly *Der Spiegel* that "Hitler was not vicious." In 2018, French president Emmanuel Macron honored the Nazi collaborator and dictator Philippe Pétain as a "great soldier" whose tribute was "legitimate." In 2020, Spanish generals praised the Franco dictatorship, while threatening a coup and mass murders.

All the dams then broke in Ukraine, where the NATO-backed regime erected monuments to Nazi collaborators and mass murderers and named streets after them *en masse*. In 2023, the Canadian parliament celebrated the Ukrainian veteran of the Waffen SS Jaroslaw Hunka with a standing ovation. It is therefore hardly surprising that, with a few exceptions, the international press is keeping

the new Hungarian president's historical revisionism quiet.

Orbán's regime has been criticized repeatedly by its allies for maintaining economic and political relations with Russia. Nonetheless, Hungary has been fully integrated into NATO's plans for war against Russia. It voted for the arming of Ukraine and the admission of Finland and Sweden into NATO, and is increasingly developing into an important arms producer, especially for German industry.

The German giant Rheinmetall alone operates an entire network of arms factories, taking advantage of the low minimum wage, which was recently increased to 266,000 Hungarian forints (roughly €690 per month [US\$745]). Within the EU, it is only underbid by Romania and Bulgaria.

The new Lynx infantry fighting vehicle is already rolling off the production line at the Zalaegerszeg tank factory and the new Panther KF51 could follow. Hungary wants to integrate both into its own army. One of the largest ammunition and explosives factories is being expanded in Várpalota. In Kaposvár, the "Gidrán" wheeled vehicle is being built in a joint venture with the Hungarian armaments group HT Division, while Rheinmetall is developing the associated software in Budapest. And a few days ago, Rheinmetall announced the construction of a hybrid factory in Szeged that will manufacture products for civilian and military use.

Hungary's own armaments spending will increase by almost 29 percent this year to an unprecedented €4.63 billion, or 2.1 percent of gross domestic product. The "Zrínyi 2026" armament program is being accelerated and extended to 2030.

In their preparation for a third world war, the ruling classes everywhere are once again pursuing the crimes of the past. Around 900,000 Hungarians died in the Second World War, more than 6 percent of the population. Of the 825,000 Jews who lived in Hungary before the war began, some 565,000 died in the Holocaust.

Eighty years later, the Hungarian elites are not only falsifying history and rehabilitating the crimes of that time, but with their NATO allies are preparing incomparably greater ones.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact