

# Hungary: Which way forward after Orbán's electoral defeat?

Peter Schwarz  
13 April 2026

“Democracy has won” was the headline of German magazine *Die Zeit*'s comment on the Hungarian elections. Numerous other European media outlets and politicians reacted in a similar vein, describing the election victory of Peter Magyar's Tisza Party alternately as a “victory for democracy” and a “victory for Europe.” Yet this assessment has little to do with political reality.

Viktor Orbán, who described his own regime as an “illiberal democracy” and served as a role model for numerous authoritarian politicians—from Donald Trump to Marine Le Pen and Giorgia Meloni—did indeed suffer a heavy defeat after 16 years in power. With a record turnout of 78 percent, Orbán's Fidesz secured just 38.3 percent of the vote, while Tisza won 53.2 percent. As only one other party—the far-right Our Homeland—managed to enter the new parliament, Tisza will even hold the two-thirds majority of MPs required for constitutional amendments.

Yet for the working class—that is, the vast majority of the Hungarian population—the change of government in Budapest will make little difference. Election winner Magyar not only hails from Fidesz's inner circle of power, but during the campaign he also constantly appealed to disaffected members of Orbán's party and refrained from any criticism of its political line. He intends to stick to both their inhumane refugee policy and their discrimination against ethnic minorities and LGBTQ people; at least, he gave no indication to the contrary during the campaign. Magyar attempted to outdo Fidesz's nationalism by constantly waving a Hungarian flag at campaign rallies.

Magyar's sole campaign issue was the rampant nepotism and corruption that now pervades the country like a cancer and is covered up by a judiciary and media placed firmly under state control. While such allegations of corruption had previously bounced off Orbán, they are now having an effect due to the economic crisis. In terms of per capita consumption, Hungary now ranks last among the 27 EU member states. The population has been in decline for some time due to the bleak outlook for the future. During Orbán's time in office, it fell from 10 million to less than 9.5 million.

Under these circumstances, it was not only the urban population and young people who voted overwhelmingly for Tisza to get rid of Orbán. Tisza also managed to score points in Fidesz's traditional rural strongholds, which are favoured by the electoral system.

However, Magyar has no answer to the social crisis. On the contrary. His electoral success is only a “victory for Europe” if by “Europe” one does not mean the continent's population, but rather the conspiracy of great powers, corporations and banks that calls itself the European Union (EU). The EU is focusing all its energy on rearmament, escalating the war against Russia and passing on the costs to the working class through cuts to social services and redundancies.

Orbán was a thorn in the side of the Brussels authorities because he maintained relations with Russian President Putin and repeatedly stood in the way of the war in Ukraine. Most recently, he used his veto to block an EU loan of €90 billion to Ukraine—which had already been approved—and which Ukraine urgently needs to continue the war. The EU is confident that Magyar will approve this loan. That is why Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who is actually bound to remain neutral in national elections, enthusiastically welcomed Magyar's election victory. “Tonight, the heart of Europe beats stronger in Hungary,” she wrote on X.

In the final phase of the election campaign, Orbán focused on the unpopularity of the war in Ukraine among the Hungarian population and waged a campaign against Kiev. But this did not save him any more than the campaign support from Donald Trump, who publicly backed him and sent Vice President JD Vance to Budapest as a campaign aide. Vance's appearance in the midst of the war in Iran, which is also opposed by the population, is likely to have weakened Orbán rather than strengthened him.

Unlike Orbán, Magyar was backed by the EU. Since his election to the European Parliament two years ago, he has been a member of the conservative European People's Party (EPP) group, which also includes EU Commission President

von der Leyen and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. EPP leader Manfred Weber travelled to Budapest specifically in the summer of 2024 to recruit Tisza into the EPP. It is reasonable to assume that the EPP provided significant support for the small party's professional election campaign, which is entirely tailored to Magyar's persona. Unlike with Trump's intervention, however, the EPP is not particularly troubled by this.

Politically, the EPP is on the far right. Until 2021, Orbán's Fidesz was also a member of the EPP; later, it joined forces with France's Rassemblement National to form a new political group, Patriots for Europe. In Italy, EPP leader Weber supported Silvio Berlusconi's election campaign and, by extension, that of Giorgia Meloni.

Magyar himself comes from an established family of lawyers in Budapest. His wife, Judit Varga, served as Minister of Justice under Orbán from 2019 to 2023, while he himself held a lucrative post as head of the Student Loan Agency. In 2024, Magyar then published secret audio recordings of his wife, from whom he had recently separated. In them, she spoke of corruption and interference in the judiciary. With the publication, Magyar provoked a scandal that brought him national attention.

Just how far to the right Hungarian politics remains, even after Orbán's defeat, is shown by the fact that in the new parliament, even within the narrow spectrum of bourgeois politics, there is no longer a single party that describes itself as left-wing or centrist. The parliament will consist of Magyar's conservative Tisza, Orbán's authoritarian Fidesz and the fascist Our Homeland. The interests of the working class are not represented in even a completely distorted form.

This situation is untenable. The class struggle is bound to break out, encouraged also by workers' struggles across Europe and internationally. Workers and young people who voted for Magyar to get rid of Orbán will soon realise that nothing has been resolved. Magyar and the capitalist interests he defends have nothing to offer but more poverty, sharper exploitation and war.

Orbán evolved from a Stalinist student functionary to a liberal student leader, then a conservative, and finally an authoritarian ruler. His career was initially promoted by the US investor George Soros, whom he would later demonise. This evolution did not simply stem from Orbán's bad character, but from the logic of capitalism, which can now only assert itself globally through dictatorship and war. Magyar is also subject to this same logic.

To break out of this vicious circle, a socialist perspective is necessary, one that unites the international working class in the struggle against capitalism. It must be based on a clear understanding of history.

To this day, the defenders of capitalism invoke the crimes of Stalinism to justify their own crimes. They reinterpret the 1956 Hungarian uprising, which was brutally crushed by Soviet tanks, as an anti-communist, pro-capitalist revolt. In reality, it was a workers' uprising that sought to replace the dictatorship of the Stalinist bureaucracy with genuine workers' democracy. Capitalism was only introduced later—under Gorbachev and Yeltsin in the Soviet Union and Németh in Hungary—by the Stalinists themselves.

Orbán came to national prominence in 1989 when, during the reburial of Imre Nagy—who had been executed in 1958 following the Hungarian uprising—he spoke out in favour of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. At Magyar's victory celebration on Sunday evening, his supporters chanted "Russians out," a slogan from the 1956 uprising. Ursula von der Leyen also recalled the 1956 uprising when she congratulated Magyar on his election victory.

This distortion of history must be rejected. Stalinism did not embody socialism; it was its gravedigger. Under Stalin, a privileged bureaucracy seized the power that the Russian working class had won in October 1917. It was responsible for numerous defeats of the international working class and, during the Great Terror of the 1930s, murdered hundreds of thousands of devoted communists and revolutionaries, including Leon Trotsky, the leader of the Left Opposition and founder of the Fourth International.

After the Second World War, the Stalinist bureaucracy extended the inherently progressive property relations of the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe—without revolution and without workers' democracy. Where workers rose up against Stalinism—as in 1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Poland and Hungary, or 1968 in Czechoslovakia—they were crushed. When, in the 1980s, a mass movement against Stalinist rule developed once again, starting in Poland, the regime responded—as Trotsky had already predicted in the 1930s—by reintroducing capitalism. Orbán and Magyar are the reactionary beneficiaries of this social counterrevolution.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**