

An exposure of “human rights” imperialism

## Burma’s Suu Kyi joins Hungary’s Orbán in promoting anti-Muslim chauvinism

12 June 2019

The meeting last week between Burmese government leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Hungary’s far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is a devastating indictment of the media propagandists for “human rights” imperialism who promoted Suu Kyi as “an icon of democracy.”

It was truly a meeting of minds in Budapest. In an official statement released by the Hungarian government after their talks, the two leaders agreed that immigrants were “one of the greatest challenges for both countries” and expressed their mutual concern over “continuously growing Muslim populations.”

Orbán is notorious for his vicious anti-immigrant policies and anti-Muslim xenophobia, as well as his glorification of Hungary’s fascist Horthy regime, which was allied with Nazi Germany during World War II. He has publicly endorsed the racist conspiracy theory of “The Great Replacement,” widely promoted in far-right and fascistic circles internationally, which contends that white Christian populations are being replaced by Muslims from the Middle East and Africa.

This experience provides an invaluable political lesson for workers and young people on the role of liberalism, which has always been closely aligned with the interests of US imperialism and its allies. Suu Kyi in Burma is just a particularly graphic example of the way in which “human rights” campaigns supported by the “liberal” media and non-government organisations are ramped up to justify military interventions, wars, regime-change operations and other diplomatic skulduggery.

Suu Kyi, who as state counsellor effectively heads the government of Burma (Myanmar), has presided over what UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described as the “ethnic cleansing” of Muslim

Rohingya from Burma’s Rakhine state. “When one-third of the Rohingya population had to flee the country, could you find a better word to describe it?” he asked in 2017.

To speak of a “continuously growing Muslim population” in Burma is to resort to the big lie. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees have poured over the border into Bangladesh to escape the Burmese military’s orgy of rape and murder, in which whole Rohingya villages were burned to the ground. Most of the more than 1.1 million refugees in Bangladesh struggle to survive in squalid camps lacking in even basic amenities such as clean water.

Suu Kyi is no helpless bystander to the Burmese army’s murderous operations, but has been the active defender of, and apologist for, its actions. She rejected the UN’s characterisation of the military’s rampage as “ethnic cleansing” and has taken no action against the army’s commander-in-chief or other generals despite UN investigators last year recommending their prosecution for crimes against humanity.

Moreover, Suu Kyi stands by the official discrimination against the Rohingya, who are denied basic citizenship rights and treated as illegal immigrants, even though many trace their roots in the country back centuries. She refuses to use the term “Rohingya,” as it would suggest, contrary to the Burmese Constitution, that they are a legitimate ethnic minority.

Suu Kyi’s cosy talks with Hungary’s right-wing autocrat barely raised a murmur of criticism in the international media. The last two years have evoked a collective tut-tutting and gnashing of teeth in liberal circles, with suggestions that Suu Kyi be stripped of her awards. However, no one has called her what she

is: a co-conspirator in mass murder who should stand in the dock with the Burmese generals.

The marketing of Suu Kyi as a defender of democratic rights was always a fraud. She has been cultivated as a US and Western political asset from the outset. Her opposition to the Burmese junta represented the interests of a section of the country's bourgeoisie that chafed at the military's domination of the economy and sought the lifting of sanctions to encourage desperately needed foreign investment. Her National League for Democracy (NLD), like the junta, was always mired in Burmese Buddhist supremacism and anti-Rohingya chauvinism.

Like all of its winners, Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for services rendered to imperialism. The Norwegian Nobel Committee hailed her "non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights" and "her unflagging efforts... to attain democracy, human rights and ethnic conciliation by peaceful means."

The Nobel Committee specifically noted her opposition to "all use of violence" in the midst of the huge protests and strikes by workers in 1988, which threatened not only the Burmese junta, but bourgeois rule as a whole. Suu Kyi played the central role in shutting down a mass movement that was assuming revolutionary proportions on the promise of an election in 1990 that the generals simply ignored.

For the next two decades, Suu Kyi was assiduously promoted by Washington and its allies as a martyr for democracy. In 2011, amid the mounting US confrontation with China, the Burmese junta signalled its willingness to reorient towards the US and to find a political role for Suu Kyi and her NLD.

Virtually overnight, US propaganda switched from branding Burma a "rogue state" to hailing it as "a developing democracy." The NLD victory in the sham 2016 elections, which left the military in charge of all the essential levers of power, was universally hailed as a great victory for democracy.

An editorial in the American newspaper of record, the *New York Times*, headlined "A Milestone for Myanmar's Democracy," declared: "Democracy may finally be taking hold in Myanmar." That the military effectively remained in charge did not bother the *Times*, which declared that "Myanmar's democratic evolution will depend on Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's

working with the military."

That is precisely what Suu Kyi has done. She and the NLD have provided the threadbare democratic trappings while the military has continued to determine basic policy. Her support for, and collaboration with, the military's barbaric ethnic cleansing operations have destroyed her value as a "democracy icon," while ensuring a warm reception from the far-right.

The ruling classes around the world are increasingly turning to far-right and fascistic forces amid a resurgence of working-class struggle internationally. A genuine fight for democratic rights in Burma or anywhere else can go forward only to the extent that it is linked with the mobilisation of the working class to fight for a socialist future for humanity.

Peter Symonds

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>