

EU supports Orbán's dictatorial measures in Hungary

By Markus Salzmann
12 May 2020

At the end of March, the Hungarian government passed an Emergency Law giving Prime Minister Viktor Orbán extensive dictatorial powers. Although similar to Hitler's "Enabling Act," which consolidated the Nazi dictatorship in Germany in 1933, the law enjoys the support of the European Union.

The law allows Orbán to govern by decree for an unlimited period. He has the right to "suspend the application of certain laws by decree" and to "introduce other exceptional measures to guarantee the stability of life, health, personal and material security of citizens and the economy." Parliament is effectively suspended. The law does not place a time limit on the state of emergency; the government can extend it at will.

The Emergency Law is supposedly to enable a fight against the coronavirus pandemic, but from the very beginning, it was clear that this is only a flimsy pretext. As the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Közlöny* has pointed out, it mainly affects areas that have absolutely nothing to do with the fight against COVID-19.

In the judicial system, for example, the rights of defendants or convicted persons are drastically restricted. Civil and criminal proceedings can be postponed indefinitely by judges or prosecutors. The same applies to court applications by persons in custody. Actions for compensation may be dismissed as inadmissible without justification.

The rights to data protection and privacy, which in any case only exist on paper, have now also been formally abolished with the Emergency Law. The Minister for Innovation and Technology, that is, the government, now has the right to access all available personal data. Similarly, parts of the European data protection regulation have been repealed. The right to access or delete one's data has been removed, as has

the right to appeal against it. The decree also exempts government agencies from the obligation to provide information on the collection and processing of personal data.

The entire law is directed against the Hungarian working class. This can be seen from the fact that provisions of the labour law can be completely repealed. Some professional groups can now even be obliged to work 24 hours a day. This regulation marks the climax of the Orbán government's attacks on labour protection rights.

At the same time, EU subsidies can be paid out without requiring a risk analysis or on-site inspections. This benefits large companies, most of which are under government control or belong to people politically close to Orbán. Over 140 "system-critical" companies have been placed under military control with reference to the fight against the pandemic.

To enforce all this, even against resistance from the population, the army has been given police powers. Government critics are threatened with draconian punishments under the law. For example, the dissemination of so-called "false news" is punishable by up to five years in prison and violations of quarantine regulations by up to eight years.

The criminal offences are so vaguely formulated that any dissenting opinion or oppositional action can fall under them. "Viktor Orbán now rules as a dictator," commented Hungarian constitutional law expert Gábor Halmai. With the Emergency Law, Orbán's system had also lost its formal democratic nature.

While the Emergency Law, which was passed under the pretext of fighting the coronavirus, remains in force, the few protective measures for the population, initiated too late in any case, have largely been revoked. As in most other European countries, the

safety of the population is subordinated to the interests of the corporations—in Hungary, mainly Western car companies.

Since the beginning of the month, there have been hardly any restrictions, such as social distancing, outside the capital city of Budapest. Meanwhile, there are already plans to relax the regulations in Budapest as well, where the majority of confirmed coronavirus cases have been reported. According to official figures, there are 3,263 infected persons and 413 fatalities in Hungary. But these figures say very little. In hardly any other European country are so few people tested.

In addition, the government deliberately does not publish data. The mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karácsony, recently demanded this from the government. He complained that, above all, data on infections in hospitals remained under wraps, although it was sufficiently known that clinics and medical facilities are coronavirus hotspots. He also criticized the fact that people who are discharged from hospitals are not tested as a matter of principle.

The coronavirus crisis has also brought to light the scale of the social catastrophe in the country. Of the approximately ten million inhabitants, over one million live below the poverty line, a number that is now continuing to rise rapidly. Despite the loss of income due to the crisis, there is no additional state support being provided. The situation is particularly precarious for the approximately 300,000 Roma, who live in ghettos under sometimes inhumane conditions. After the easing of restrictions, they are exposed to even higher risks. “If the virus gets into the slums, it will be brutal,” Reuters quotes Krisztina Jasz of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

While opposition to Orbán is growing in the country, his establishment of a dictatorship is gaining support among Europe’s ruling classes. The EU Commission expressly declared that it would not take action against the emergency laws. According to a report in *Die Welt*, confirmed by Justice Commissioner Vera Jourova, there are “no concrete grounds indicating the violation of fundamental democratic rights” and therefore “no immediate countermeasures from Brussels are necessary.”

On top of this, the Hungarian government is receiving massive EU funding, not a single cent of which goes towards the expansion of ailing public

health facilities or benefits affected workers. Hungary receives €5.6 billion in emergency EU aid, which corresponds to 3.8 percent of the country’s gross domestic product. Italy, the country worst affected by the coronavirus in Europe, receives only €2.3 billion, or 0.1 percent of its GDP. The EU Parliament has expressly approved this.

Even the European Stability Initiative, a left-wing Berlin think tank, commented, “The EU is giving Victor Orbán almost four percent of its economic output while he rises to dictatorship. This severely damages the Union, which wants to be a democratic community of values.”

In fact, the EU is deliberately supporting Hungary’s path to dictatorship. Governments across Europe are preparing similar steps to implement their murderous “back to work” policies. While banks and corporations receive tens of billions of euros overnight, money is supposedly lacking for the simplest of safety measures for workers. This is incompatible with democratic rights. For this reason, the states of the EU are moving ever more openly in the direction of dictatorship and fascism.

Building on this, Orbán is openly revealing his fascist sentiments. Last week, Orbán used Facebook to wish Hungarian schoolchildren good luck for their upcoming exams. He posted a section of a globe on which the so-called Greater Hungary is clearly marked. Until 1920, this included parts of what is now Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Slovakia. Since then, fascist forces in the country have been demanding the re-establishment of Greater Hungary.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>