

An updated, 2nd edition of the Horthy regime in Hungary¹

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Five theses

1. Between the two world wars in certain regions of Eastern Europe – each nation in a specific form - there were authoritarian regimes in existence. Since then historical experience has confirmed several times that the ordinary/normal way for capitalism to function in the region is authoritarian system. When in 1989 state socialism collapsed, liberal ideologists widely propagated with the slogans of liberalism and nationalism the idea that time had come to introduce and consolidate Western type democracies in Eastern Europe and they stated this process would help to achieve Western living standards in the region; what is more, people took the promise for granted! By now the age of illusions has come to an end. Soon after winning the general elections in 2010 with a two-thirds majority, Fidesz, a nationalist- populist party introduced a kind of authoritarian administration that in

¹ The interwar period dominated by Horthy's government is known in Hungarian as the *Horthy-kor* ("Horthy age") or *Horthy-rendszer* ("Horthy system"). In reality, Horthy's alliance with Germany was foolhardy, and a positive view of Horthy serves a revisionist historical agenda, pointing to Horthy's passage of various anti-Jewish laws -the earliest in Europe, in 1920- as a sign of his anti-Semitism and willing collaboration in the Holocaust.

many aspects is a reminiscent of the authoritarian regime between the two world wars, when Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary was an ally of Hitler's. By now the Hungarian liberal parties have ceased to be a political power, the "moderate left" has become peripheric while a radical, system-critical left only exists on the pages of the journal *Eszmélet*.

As a consequence of the system change in 1989 there was a radical break in the field of ownership and distribution, in the nature of the state and political power structure: capitalist private property, the restoration of capitalism, the re-integration of the country into the global market – all have resulted in a new social structure. In Hungary, as in other countries of the region, the (almost) unrestricted opening up of markets, liberalization of prices and the unbounded privatization took place in accordance with the neoliberal project. These changes led to the destruction of the lives of the former workers and peasants who lost their jobs and self-esteem (while those who were unemployed for a long time also lost their health, family and home).² Some sociologists estimate the number of those living below the poverty line in today's Hungary about four million.³ They constitute the new class of precariat that did not exist in the Kadar⁴ era (i.e. the socialist period). Most of the precariat come from uprooted peasants, former workers whose workplaces have been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of pensioners and Roma. Those on the top are recruited from a small group of new big businessmen and a thin layer of the new upper middle class closely connected to the former strata. Between the two extremes we can find a multitude of small entrepreneurs, those employed in public institutions – in general they are salaried workers. This social structure with signs of a process of castes returning shows deep relationship with social characteristics of the Horthy regime, and this way – let me repeat it – marks a radical break with the Kadar regime; constant threat of unemployment, everyday insecurity and social descent are destabilizing factors not only for the individuals but also for the social structure. If we want to understand the essence and character of the "authoritarian system of 2010" we should not miss a historical viewpoint.

2 Bartha Eszter: *Magányos harcosok: Munkások a rendszerváltás utáni Kelet-Németországban és Magyarországon* (Lonely fighters: Workers in postsocialist East Germany and Hungary). Budapest: L'Harmattan Publishers - ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék (Series: Eastern European Monographs, 2), 2011.; Uő.: *A munkások útja a szocializmusból a kapitalizmusba Kelet-Európában, 1968-1989*. (Workers on the Road from Socialism to Capitalism in East Germany and Hungary, 1968-1989). Budapest: L'Harmattan Publishers - ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék (Series: Eastern European Monographs, 1), 2009.

3 Ferge Zsuzsa számításait vö.: : *Népszabadság*, 2012. május 25., Ladányi János: *Leselejtettek. A kirekesztettek társadalom- és térszerkezeti elhelyezkedésének átalakulása Magyarországon a piacgazdasági átmenet időszakában*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2012.;

4 János Kádár (1912 – 1989) was a Hungarian communist leader and the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, presiding over the country from 1956 until his retirement in 1988. In Hungary and elsewhere, Kádár was generally known as one of the more moderate Eastern European Communist leaders.

Liberal criticism mainly focuses on certain characteristics of actions, populist attitude, the strong limitation of political rights and the growing role of the state in economic matters that are typical of the way the anticommunist Fidesz party (coquetting with the extreme right) makes policy; from all these symptoms liberal critics have drawn the conclusion that Fidesz is a party showing “Kadarian” and “communist” features. This opinion also reveals that in fighting with the left, liberals have not yet reconsidered their highly ideological uncritical commitment to capitalist system. It is this effort of theirs that effaces the Horthyist roots of today’s regime, the specific features in the 2nd edition, semi-peripheric form of capitalism. Liberals write about a “mafia state” but forget about its neoliberal background and basis, and also keep back the above mentioned historical specificities of Eastern Europe which open up their real importance in the context of (semi)periphery.

2. On the roots of the Horthyist “tradition”

The Horthyist tradition of the old gentry ruling class has come to the surface in many ways (among other old rubbish) and has always lived with us in many ways, though we know it very well that the imminent source of its legal “revival” that took place under the banner of democracy is: 1989. At the same time it cannot be denied that the politics in the 1950s of reckoning with the Horthy regime was soon followed by the politics of integrating significant groups of the old gentry and (even) the aristocracy into the system what was followed by their returning to certain stages of power and to cultural life as early as the 1960s. The integration of the old extreme right, a considerable group of arrow-cross thugs basically took place already in the Rakosi era (in the 1950s). It is not at all by chance that today’s liberal analysis accuses the state socialism for the recent revival of the arrow-cross tradition. The stratification of different periods makes separating systems even more difficult. The new system consists mainly of the debris of these fallen regimes, but their proportion in today’s Hungarian society is highly unequal. From a methodological point of view it is important to see that certain elements of the Kadar regime – above all its paternalistic-bureaucratic character – only lend colour to the neo-Horthyist restoration and help the authoritarian- dependent element in today’s regime while these similarly returning elements lack the specific social and cultural context of the socialist era.

Authocracy and the “tree” of misery with its extreme social inequalities take their roots in the Horthy regime, or rather in the age of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

3. International background and the new national bourgeoisie

On the other hand, international conditions in 2010 played a specifically important role in the formation of the new authoritarian regime. Both the EU and the USA have constantly and paternalistically criticized the Fidesz governments for

its antidemocratic political steps, its concentration of power, its open antisemitism and anti-Roma sentiments but in reality they have never attacked the legitimacy of the Orbán regime, since by squeezing taxpayers the government can maintain low budgetary deficit. True, at the birth of the new capitalist system (with the necessary inner contribution) there were Western “midwives” to assist the process of the so-called debt crisis treatment. It is also understood or rather a commonplace by now that the Eastern European (and also the Soviet) change of regime was inseparable from the so-termed neoliberal restructuring of the global capitalist system and from the new forms and challenges of the multinational capitalist power; while the “socialist world system” and above all the Soviet Union were unable to find the way to survival and they did not wish to work out a socialist alternative to the capitalist restoration. Since they had lost the economic and military competition against the West, the former “communist reformers” reached the conclusion that the solution for the state socialist crisis was an “integration” to the successful Western capitalism with the help of the Western core countries; the process was also called as “the reintegration into the world market”, “real convergence”, “catching up”, “democratization” etc. The result is well-known: the Orbán regime that is the product and “outlet” of this aborted project. The main aims of the state in the socialist period were just the opposite: the elimination of national bourgeoisie and the abolishment of private property, also, it was illegal to sell or buy state property. The new regime acts the other way round: the government nationalizes everything in favour of the new bourgeoisie (that the government itself has created from above), in order to be able to re-privatize factories, land and every other type of property. This freshly introduced bourgeoisie has flourished in the Fidesz era since it has got capital from public funds. This fact clearly shows the specially parasite character of the Hungarian national bourgeoisie. Under a nationalist banner and with the help of the upper layers of society, certain groups of the old-new power elites are trying to turn their privileges inheritable – this way out-facing both the foreign capital and the Hungarian society. As a result, they have restructured the system of distribution, that is they have deepened and widened the social-cultural inequalities of the society. After the internationally supported system change had taken place, the ongoing process of dog-fight for property can come to the restoration of a seemingly new authoritarian regime (and it happens not only in Hungary, but also in the other countries of the region: in the Ukraine, in Latvia, Bulgaria, Belarus or Romania). The political weakness and cultural deficiency of the new Hungarian ruling class have hindered it from stabilizing the new capitalist system and the problem remained unsolved even after Hungary joined the EU.

The new basic groups of the ruling class⁵ put all their hope in Orbán’s “Christian-

⁵ Basic cultural-ideological rift lies between the “ex-communists” (neophyte liberals, “Kadarist-managers etc) and the “Christian-national neo-Horthyists” (the offspring of the old Horthyist elite and “ex-communist” careerists joining them, and a part of the “ideology-free” new capitalists), the

national” government since it expresses/represents their values, financial interests, poor culture and their privileges in gaining budget resources. These layers of the new ruling class specifically fell back on government support because they did not know how to “treat” the constantly growing masses of impoverished workers and the unemployed and how to keep their reluctance in check. In other words: how can an impoverished society, huge unemployed masses, millions of humiliated and underprivileged employees be restrained and disciplined under the conditions of the returning economic crises? The former, social-liberal coalition had no idea about the answer, they only hesitated between the old “routine” neoliberal economic policy and propaganda based on the EU gobbledegook. That is why their political representation lost its social background so the coalition fell apart and got shrunk to a group of unimportant, “survival” politicians. Even the extreme right managed to gain strength during the 8 years of social-liberal governance. The succeeding newly developing “Christian-national” power that won more than 80% of the parliamentary seats in 2010 have managed to find the “solution” to the above mentioned problem. In Hungary and in some other Eastern European countries the people in power soon understood that introducing a new authoritarian regime was imperative. The new concentration of power in Hungary according to the historical “logics of necessity” has emptied out the parliamentary forms and parties. The new regime promises that it will bring about the working of undisturbed mechanisms to both the European leaders and the Hungarian public and in return they expect the European legitimation of the “system of national cooperation” – as they call their regime. By now, everyone who cannot fit in or does not want to fit in the framework of the regime are considered the enemies of the nation: communists, atheists, liberals, Jews, gypsies, foreigners or “patronizers” of all these...

4. The regime and the parties

The fate of the parties is determined as well⁶: in the 2nd edition of the Horthy regime “other parties” (communists in all party formations were banned by law and institutionally criminalized) are needed in order to revolve around the Sun - i.e. the “wise leader” and around his party, Fidesz - like small planets until they finally fall into the Solar system. In other words, though Fidesz party formally and legally could be displaced, in reality they want to secure “eternal” power for a segment of the ruling elite, for the Christian-national (the term comes also from the Horthy era) wing. According to this aim, the other parties that the power elites consider to be small and unimportant, are systematically crushed in material, political and moral sense with various means and tricks of power. The ruling elite even makes use of open oppression, bare lies, and operates with a system of all different kinds

latter are in strong competition with the multinational companies.

⁶ See Szigeti Péter: A magyar választási rendszer átalakítása. Political Capital – Social Development Institute 2013. október, <http://www.valasztasirendszer.hu/?cat=4>;

of institutions and committees that effectively produce the institutionalized world of fraud and falsified history by criminalizing the (state)socialist past – and they do it on a national scale. The ultimate political meaning of these actions is quite apparent: a complete closure of political alternatives in the left; for this they can get incessant help from the liberal right (in spite of its half-hearted, fruitless political opposition) with its enduring anticommunist propaganda. A necessary part and condition of these processes was a systematic hebetation of huge masses in society – neo-Horthyist restoration cannot be understood or explained in its depth if we forget about this factor. There was no serious social opposition against the return and subsistence of the Horthy cult. It is in light of this fact can the phenomenon be understood. The lack of social resistance partly derives from the experiences gained in the Kádár regime: with its bureaucratic nature “welfare state”, “caring state” – in spite of its progressive social achievements – hindered the majority of the population from rising above the paternalistic relations. Massive lack of autonomous individuals provides advantageous “human material” for the new, 2nd edition of the authoritarian regime. Like the Polish developments where political right and extreme right are represented above 80% in the parliament, the left is almost completely unorganizable since no system critical social (mass) movement could take root in Hungary. This is the ultimate cause of the political combination in the left being fragmented and the proliferation of secretarianism, narcissistic wannabe “leaders” and “messiahs” and the “immigration syndrom”. All elements of the working class are dispersed and impoverished in material-economic and also in intellectual-cultural-mental sense. True, the new social structure that had grown out of the regime change in 1989, is obliged to discredit the Kádár regime at all costs and falsify its history in order to manipulate and indoctrinate the young generation. Since the new regime, no matter how we judge the historical role of state socialism, has not been able to overcome the economic and social achievements of the old, Kadarist system within the last 25 years. It was in this ground that the stinking flower of neo-Horthyist restoration has shot up.

5. New class, new culture

Kitsch from the global market mingles with traditional national kitsch and creates the mainstream, decisive culture of the period. The phenomenon is only an offshot of the development when the 2nd edition of the Horthy regime came into being as the specific combination of two elements: the most updated global capital power and the most outdated reactionary social relations inherited from the period between the two world wars.

If the new capitalism cannot stabilize the Eastern European counties with the bourgeois-democratic institutions and measures applied in the West, then there must be serious social problems that I have mentioned above, but in order to clearly understand the ideological motives it is necessary to name these crucial problems more concretely. The reasons are numerous. I will only mention the most important

ones: massive pauperization, keeping salaries permanently low, maintaining a high rate of unemployment, sacrificing the lives of millions for the sake of new capitalism and the creation of a new ruling class from above. In other words, it is the basic, *in statu nascendi* characteristic of the regime to economically revitalize the weak national bourgeoisie tied to each other with cousinship and amenably serving the political power and the layer of great landowners. Conservative Fidesz power is going to accomplish the process. It is for this purpose that goods and assets, economic and political structures (allotment of tobacco and cigarette and pharmaceutical markets, distribution of land, parking companies or anything else, permanent nationalization and privatization etc) are monopolized and allotted on a party basis for the sake of individuals and groups politically chosen from above. This forms a relatively solid background for the new authoritarian regime that exists within the framework of the dirtiest cultural and ideological compulsivenesses (contempt for the poor, racist exclusion, cult of power and violence, homophobia, submission of women etc). Neo-Horthyist restoration naturally bears all the important marks of today's capitalist world, it is a strange "postmodern" creature that borrows its patterns and solutions from the neoconservative American governing: its criminalization of poverty, the principle of zero tolerance, the criminal politics of the three strikes, one tax rate for personal income tax, the moral cult of religion in parallel with the deployment of inequalities and absolute individualism.

The crisis of today's capitalism reveals its inherent contradictions in an extreme way. Above all, enforcement of (human) rights is controlled, there are irresolvable conflict in the the relations between the state and the society. Since governments all over the world give way to the policy of restrictions they are unable to guarantee basic rights against the market forces. These developments issue a challenge to social reproduction: Hungarian governments also made steps to protect the rights of the banks against the people, public sale of houses, apartments, cars and dislodgement happen every day. In order to set measures to labour rights, right to strike and the right to fair jobs the government introduces "counter-reforms". Similar heavily restricting trends can be experienced in the fields of welfare rights, rights for education, right for healthy drinking water or democratic rights – the consequences of the latter are very painful, since they contain the right for protest and the right for access publicity. Here ecological dimensions bear huge importance with special emphasis on making nature a business, the expropriation of common goods, the green economy as new hegemonic projects. Unlike in other countries, in Hungary protest movements and civil organizations do not question the right to private ownership and do not demand collective social-economic and human rights. In academic circles debates on rights are confined to the boundaries of liberal political philosophy. Political power has already completely absorbed the majority of the Hungarian intellectuals – with money, positions, privileges and threats. It is not by chance that we live in a period of intellectual hoax, a shocking decline of social scientific research and thinking.

Revolutionary Marxism 2017

In all the process we described above the churches are not simply partners but rather parts of the power. The Orban regime exceeds in this field the “achievements” of Lukashenko, the Belarus leader: with his government and parliament Orbán have transformed the official churches – above all the Calvinist and Catholic churches – into electioneering structures, a part of “Christian-national” political power. Churches are enlisted in the service of the Orban regime by giving them public finance as gifts and support; also, government ideologists have thought it necessary to re-define Christianity in order to extort respect from the society. They set the wealthy churches against the small ones and the churches are fighting with each other for the favour of the power. And the government wants to “consecrate” these processes by making religion and ethics obligatory subjects in schools as it was in the Horthy regime. True, Horthy, the regent did not want to manage it himself but left it to the churches. In Hungary today it is Viktor Orbán – who has no knowledge of whatever about Christianity - who bears “light”, brings brightness, labels European Christianity, gives lessons on Christian traditions, talks about revival and tells sin from “belief.”⁷

He has transformed education, schools into similarly important elements of the “suprasocial” political (party)power: teachers are forced to join “professional corporations.”⁸ The ideological binder of the new authoritarian regime is obviously nationalism and an officially defined neo-Horthyist Christianity that penetrates everyday life: in changing old street names and also principles and structure of the education and so on. The new constitution was also conceived in the so-called Christian national spirit, so in its preamble it excludes the majority of society who are not Christian, not religious or downright atheists. National populism goes as far as to make heroes of the Hungarian soldiers who actively took part in the Nazi genocide between 1941-1944 on the territory of the Soviet Union. Fascism, nazism are officially – also in the school textbooks – considered equivalent to “communism” and by doing so the complete history of socialism is criminalized for the sake of the regime’s exclusive ideological power. Intellectual life, culture in general are transformed into their image. A separate institutional state apparatus has been established for accomplishing this task, some of these are The House of Terror, Veritas Institute which was founded in order to find “the truth” in historical problems and intensify the neo-Horthyist restoration among the intellectuals.

All this ideological nonsense immerses in an anti-Western nationalist freedom fighter’s rethorics which can simultaneously exist with the precise execution and fulfilment of the Western financial rules – actually they serve as a screen for hiding the systems’s real intentions. Only few can understand the hypocritical and manipulative character of the regime since many can only hear what they wish to hear about the “exploitation of the Hungarian nation by the Western multitis”.

⁷ Jakab Attila: http://ideaintezet.blog.hu/2013/06/23/az_orban-rezsim_es_a_keresztenyseg.

⁸ Ágnes Huszár: *Templom és iskola*. Galamus, 19 December, 2013.

Fidesz party first built in its ranks the extreme right, fascism – with the agreement of the former socialist-liberal coalition – then in order to show itself presentable in Europe finally pushed the Jobbik (the party of the extreme right) out of their circles (as a kind of “militia”); while at the same time the Fidesz is trying to lure the neo-fascist voters to their ranks with an uncontrolled anticommunist campaign (after all, scapegoats are needed!). (It is not by chance that both the Horthy regime and today’s neo-horthyist regime are impregnated with fascism.) As a consequence – in the framework of a permanent “fight of culture” – ethnic, “racist” nationalism, kitch of the “Great-Hungary” type have pervaded society and at the same time, social problems have been pushed aside: the process signed the ideological victory of the authoritarian system like it did after 1919, in the Horthy era. The “new”, neo-Horthyist “culture” every day takes revenge on antifascist tradition; the hero of our time is no longer Marx, Engels, Lenin, György Lukács but the gendarme who killed Ságvári; the cultural model is Horthy, Teleki, Prohászka; the favourite writers of the regime are not Tibor Déry, Andor Endre Gelléri or Lajos Nagy but the fierce antisemitic Albert Wass, József Nyírő or Cecile Tormay.

And this way the most important historical mission of the regime change has been fulfilled on behalf of the ruling classes.

Translated by Katalin Baráth