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Hungary

Hungary: pre-election situation and emergence of a new anticapitalist left

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Interview with Annajuli Rosenfeld (Solidarity Action Group), Péter Somogyi (Spark), and Zoltán Sidó and Ágnes Gagyí (Solidarity Economy Center). Annajuli Rosenfeld is one of the coordinators of Solidarity Action Group, also a member of Solidarity Economy Center and Women for Each Other Movement. Péter Somogyi is one of the coordinators of Solidarity Action Group, also a founding member and one of the chief executives of Szikra ("Spark") Movement. Ágnes Gagyí and Zoltán Sidó are members of the Solidarity Economy Center.

INPRECOR : While the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, and his party, FIDESZ, reigned supreme since 2010, they lost the capital, Budapest, five regional prefectures (Pécs, Miskolc, Eger, Tatabánya, Szombathely) and two towns of comital right (Érd, Dunaújváros) in the last municipal elections. And the polls show them the losers in the next legislative elections, which will take place in April 2022. How do you explain this turnaround? What is the opposition's strategy?

Péter Somogyi: FIDESZ won constitutional majority in 2010 amidst the deepening financialization crisis of 2008 which caused the downfall of the then incumbent socialist and liberal government and with it the collapse of the bipartisan structure of Hungarian political life, effectively putting an end to the liberal paradigm that defined the era after the regime change in 1989. While the left has lost its credibility and consistency due to the neoliberal policies it became associated with, FIDESZ have not increased its social base significantly. The field of the opposition became fragmented and contested. The new government restructured the electoral system in a way for it to favour the winner by means of compensation and therefore maintained the generally dual party system in Hungary with the difference of the "left" spectrum filled not with one large but more smaller parties. These are in a way forced to act in cooperation and form a common list by means of a primary that serve to maximise the chances of the "opposition" candidates. This method was tested first during the 2019 municipal election with considerable success. Still, it needs substantial capacity for mobilization on the part of opposition parties which is mostly based in metropolitan areas. Rural areas are more easily controlled by the government through the direct subordination of subsidies and workfare programmes.

Ágnes Gagyí: Oppositional successes in the 2019 local elections were mostly due to a cross-party alliance strategy that comprised the whole opposition (Fidesz did not have T of the vote in 2018; 49% of the votes translated into parliamentary supermajority due to the electoral system). Since local governments' power was extremely reduced earlier (mostly through the nationalization of local government debt, which later translated into economic dependence on the central government), oppositional local governance has meant less of a space for major policy changes, but rather a (however narrow) opportunity to build political outreach and administrative background for the 2022 oppositional campaign. Presently, polls do not signal a unilateral advantage for either Fidesz or the opposition. Fidesz has been stepping up measures that secure its influence even in case of losing supermajority, or even in case of an oppositional government. Most major issues have been linked to supermajority votes by changes of the constitution, while Fidesz-related domestic capitalist positions have been stabilized in various strategic branches, from banking to energy or the (by now privatized) higher education. The general oppositional strategy involves collaboration to reduce Fidesz' seats, as well as a strong competition between parties. Oppositional parties have been starved of state funds, social outreach and capitalist alliances since 2010; 2022 means for them a crucial opportunity for regeneration. In general, oppositional politics targets the politically literate middle class (since 2010, it has been only Fidesz that has systematically maintained a political penetration of workers and the poor); the campaign so far has been about partly collaborative, partly competitive communication towards this base.

INPRECOR : To try to prevent the opposition from presenting a united front against FIDESZ, the Orban government passed a law at the end of December 2020 (at midnight and during the holidays!) Under the new

rules, a party would be able to present a national list * only if it has candidates in at least 71 of the 106 electoral constituencies in the country, instead of the current 27. How does the opposition manage to avoid falling into the trap? [1]

The six opposition parties which have formed an electoral coalition (MSZP, Demokratikus Koalíció, Green, Párbeszéd, Momentum and Jobbik) published a document entitled "Guarantees for a change of era" which promises in particular "the drafting of a new Constitution (...) subject to referendum ", the return of "a balanced public audiovisual service "in place of" false and hate propaganda ", "to restore the independence of the judiciary ", the accession of Hungary to the European public prosecutor's office, the establishment of an electoral law "based on proportionality" or the election of the president by direct universal suffrage. They promised that a more detailed program should be worked out in the coming months, but for now there are no economic or social measures in their program, and nothing on ecology or the rights of women, LGBTI and ethnic minorities, even though Hungary has a large Roma minority. How do you interpret this lack?

Annajuli Rosenfeld : Among the opposition coalition. political parties interested in extending social rights or in representing ethnic minorities are in the minority. The balance of power between the opposition parties and the necessity to reach an agreement between them keeps any issue that could jeopardise coordination between them off the agenda for the time being. From the SAG perspective, this is interesting in that the access of the critical organisations behind them to the instruments of institutional politics is not yet so extensive that they have a significant lobbying power.

P.S.: Partially successful grass-root mobilization in municipal elections alone have not led to any breakthrough in these areas, because opposition-led municipalities have found themselves in opposition to the government and their room for manoeuvre is drastically limited by their lack of resources. A good example is the crisis of rented housing, where municipalities are often only able to utilize part of their rental housing stock at the expense of selling other parts of it. Current moves by the government are reinforcing a general trend of legislating state assets into the hands of loyal partners or building a conservative middle class by means of privatization making the economic influence of Orbán and his circles lasting way further than next year's election. What makes the situation interesting is how the coalition of opposition does not only need a one-time electoral victory but its actors have a common interest in reinventing forms of democratic participation, general mobilization and therefore contest regarding public policy. Of course in these times positions considering social policies are blurred since the parties are interested in the metapolitical issues of reestablishment of general constitutional rules, order, liberties, "checks and balances", and such.

Á.G.: Given the constitutional limitations and Fidesz' economic power that will be maintained even in the case of an electoral loss, the large part of these promises would be hard or even impossible to be carried out; they are rather to be interpreted as declarations of intent in a campaign context. In terms of social programmes, the oppositional parties are not to be expected to run a radical path: although poverty and anti-poor measures have been a topic of oppositional communication in opposition, according to both ideology and electoral target groups, oppositional parties represent various colours of the politics of embourgeoisement that has dominated Hungarian politics after the regime change. There is no oppositional party that would represent politics rooted in and influenced by an organized labor constituency, and would propose a broader conception of social reorganization for social or climate ends. The same dynamics have characterized Roma politics too (also a long-term characteristic of postsocialist politics). Messages by the independent candidate supported by Szikra have run counter to this general trend; without a larger electoral or party political base, this is an incipient step that at least has brought issues of labor and social reproduction into the vocabulary of the campaign.

INPRECOR : Since almost his election in 2010, Victor Orbán has made an anti-European discourse, while refraining from leaving the European Union (EU) and taking advantage of European funds to enrich himself and enrich the circle of his close friends. At the same time, he has enjoyed a certain indulgence from the

leaders of other EU countries, in particular Angela Merkel, and he is well known to be highly regarded by the bosses of the German automotive industry. How do you explain this apparent paradox?

Zoltán Sido: Orban's main goal has been to establish a political system that enables both external and internal capital accumulation. On the one hand, in capital intensive, export oriented industries (like manufacturing) this means granting a very profitable economic environment for multinational companies, e.g. by lowering the corporate tax to 9% (lowest in the EU), providing generous state funds to companies in exchange for "creating jobs", introducing anti-labour legislation, etc. This explains the favourable position towards Orban from representatives of Western capital. On the other hand, in less capital intensive and more domestic oriented sectors of the economy (namely the banking sector, media, tourism, the energy industry, agriculture, retail, etc.) there's been a push to build a national capitalist class. The latter strategy requires some level of autonomy from the EU of course - hence, the strengthening of economic ties with Russia and China, coupled with a strong anti-EU rhetoric at home. However, the diversification of capital imports doesn't mean a loosening relationship with Western capital: Hungary, as a semi-peripheral country is still extremely dependent on Western capital and technology. Collaboration with German automotive capitalist lobbies has been part of this relation - a story Direkt36's investigative journalists covered in detail in 2020.

INPRECOR : Hungary has recently experienced several social mobilizations, in particular the demonstration against the "slave law" in December 2018 and the strike in the AUDI factory in Győr in January 2019. What are the reasons of these mobilizations? How do you interpret this renewal of social mobilization and how the trade union landscape is changing in this context?

Z.S: Maintaining the level of capital accumulation after the 2008 crisis, and particularly to sustain the crisis management of both Western and local SME capital, meant that the FIDESZ government had to suppress workers' rights. As part of this, the government completely emptied out the institutions for tripartite social dialogue, custom-tailored the Labour Code to employers' needs, restricted the right to strike, etc. The "slave law" was part of this trend (fun fact: in the Austrian media the "slave law" was called the "BMW law", because according to anonymous sources, the German automaker company required this legal change in exchange for bringing a car manufacturing plant to the city of Debrecen). The decade-long anti-labour policies fostered resentment among workers and trade unions: the protests against the "slave law" and wage strikes popping up at various companies are clear signs of this. However, the Hungarian trade union movement is far from ready to fight back in an organised way. Union density is low and it's been decreasing over the years. In addition to this, unions are mostly present in the state sector and at big multinational firms, representing the less precarious part of the Hungarian working class. After the protests against the "slave law" several unions reported a slight upturn in membership, but most people joining a union today face a stark, disappointing reality: the vast majority of Hungarian unions today still maintain the union culture of the state socialist years - instead of rank and file organising, mass meetings and collective actions there's mostly lobbying towards employers and a partial redistribution of union fees in form of symbolic acts of welfare (gift cards for Christmas, etc.). In the past couple years there've been signs of more thorough organising efforts in various sectors, but still, the Hungarian trade union movement is still far from being a major political force.

P.S.: The series of protests triggered by the "slave law" was a formulating experience for many young leftists. It lasted for a few days, then oppositional parties "hijacked" them and reframed their agenda around the issues of freedom of the press and civil liberties. This confirmed the usual framework of ultra-leftists who generally abstain from electoral politics to work on "autonomous spaces" and incite the coming insurrection - but at the same time stimulated those who believe - with the words of Mark Fisher - that "the emphasis on direct action conceals a despair about the possibility of indirect action", and therefore only an effect of capitalist realism. The latter embarked on - though at times desperately - building political organizations that might have helped us during the weeks of the slave law protests. How these projects will establish links with the working class - through rank-and-file organizing or making alliances with unions - is a strategic question which still needs to be answered in the years to come.

INPRECOR : for the past two years, we have seen the emergence and rapid development of a new

anti-capitalist left. Can you describe this phenomenon and tell us what are and how are your organizations in this context, the " Solidarity Action Group ", the " Solidarity Economic Center "and Szikra (*Spark*)?

A.R.: As several sources point out (e.g. Solnit), crisis situations catalyse the emergence of mutual aid groups in society. The SAG, as a forum for coordination, was formed during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of facilitating coordination between green, feminist, and left-wing organisations. In the first phase, the work of framing the crisis needed to be done and avenues for practical assistance were experimented with. Now, joint thinking and institutionalisation has started among the participating organisations.

P.S.: Szikra started as a grassroots initiative with the aim of mobilizing leftist youth using the 2019 municipal elections as a possible point of entry where we can make our mark with relatively small effort. By carefully choosing a few candidates of the coalition of opposition to support we started to experiment with building alliances with stakeholders at the levels of both social movements and political institutions. All the candidates we worked for won and we used the experience and the momentum we built up to formulate our own organization with the aim of moving a bit forward in every possible corner, strengthening our position in the context of the fragile dynamics of the opposition. We have tripled our core membership in numbers during last year and on the road to offer more and more activities for them and possible fields to organize in. We are slowly diversifying our work and making a point of financial autonomy: we cover all our operating costs on the base of membership fees. We therefore aim to extend our base, use our campaigns - electoral or single-issue - to facilitate our growth and not the other way around.

Á.G.: The three organizations we represent in this discussion have been funded in the last few years; yet the process of collective learning and organizing experiments that these organizations are part of is longer. Like elsewhere in the region, the generation that grew up in the first decades after the regime change, has produced a new wave of left politics by the 2010's, which was obliged to rediscover and recreate a left understanding of the postsocialist situation after the silencing of left voices in the transition process. Similar initiatives, including initiatives for party politics, have happened earlier in Hungary, just like in other EE countries. What is probably new is the cumulative deepening and broadening of the conceptual and organizing capacity of the new left, which makes it possible to root broader political ideas in local social and political contexts. Among the present organizations (which are more numerous than the three we represent here), Solidarity Economy Center specializes in deep organizing, linking solidarity economy initiatives with union rank-and-file organizing.

INPRECOR : Do you plan to participate in any form in the opposition candidate selection process and what sets you apart from the six coalition parties?

Z.S. and Á.G.: The Solidarity Economy Center won't participate in the upcoming elections. Not because we think party politics is useless in general, but because our aim is to build the structural power that is crucial to articulate, popularise and execute an anticapitalist agenda. We see the lack of this kind of organized power, and the exclusive reliance on the institutions of bourgeois politics in the lack thereof, as a major limitation of left politics, something that the failure of Western "left populism" in recent years also highlighted. We do collaborate with political projects and local governments, but our main organizational focus is to enhance the type of rank-and-file level social organization and material basis that could serve as leverage for anticapitalist party politics in the future.

P.S.: We run one candidate for office next year by means of the primary. In this way we can focus our efforts in one constituency while still exacting pressure. We do not have illusions about the effects that we can create without a significant electoral base and infrastructure but have some arguments for trying. First, we don't believe that a structural force for leftist politics can be organised without actual leftist politics to be represented: organising can lose its sense of relevance without a link to superstructural institutions, questions and apparatuses of ideology and lawmaking.

Secondly, there are people we can reach only by using the nationwide platforms of parliamentary politics. Without building a wide and self-reliant movement we can only experiment with alternative economic forms and rank-and-file organising on a limited scale. These laboratory experiments can produce know-how but have serious epistemic limitations due to their small scale. Thirdly, abstaining from electoral struggles in a situation where the new constitutional order may be founded can cause anti-capitalist organizations and parties to become even more marginalized. Backing candidates without a mass party can be called "reformist" strategy - but that would be missing the point: in Hungary today there is no room for reform, we are at the verge of either a constitutional revolution or a social crisis.

INPRECOR : among the 29 organizations that make up the "Solidarity Action Group", Szikra is the largest numerically speaking and the only one that sees itself as the nucleus of a future political party, with an outline of programme and strategy. What are its main programmatic elements and what is its strategy? Does it think that a coalition victory in the next legislative elections would open a new political period, and if so, what will be its strategy in this new period?

P.S.: Talking about a nucleus of a political party might be misleading. We're at an early stage of organisational development where our decisions are made to enable progress both intellectually and in terms of resources. Szikra is more easily understood as an effect of the current contradictions of the Hungarian anti-capitalist scene. Long years of marginalisation and collaboration with the liberal establishment, with the uneven reception of the experiences of alterglobalisation movements, and repression from FIDESZ left the "new" left in segmented subcultural territories. Financing these without engaging in political struggles pits the agents against each other, keeping them dependent from international funds, niche market consumers, academic grants, and enforces informal hierarchies, consolidating preexistent class relations among members of these organizations. Those who grew up under the last 10 years of authoritarian right-wing government need to find their political home outside the reach of these relations without getting integrated in the remnants of the status quo ante establishment. Our programme, in fact, is to acquire the tactical space to manoeuvre enough to form a programme. Sectarian differences that both stem from and perpetuate political passivity are overcome by structured action for attainable goals - we call this "a political realist turn" - and the political culture of formal party discipline - at the same time we pay the necessary price of tactical operational capability in terms of strategic short sightedness and theoretical incoherence. These are typical of young political organizations and are managed through internal mechanisms of feedback and constant cooperation with other organizations.

On a long run we see the current bipartisan structure unable to effectively address ecological, anti-capitalist, feminist concerns - even forces them out of the political field of vision. Two answers present themselves to this dilemma: either building outside of this dual playing field - which can only work if we prepare for a political collapse - or using its dynamics to overcome it. The structural pressure that forces oppositional parties on the same coalition favours "third" positions: liberals and conservatives need to consent while none can represent the opposition as a whole. What the coalition of opposition will represent can only be a political vision of no particular party. As long as we have the leverage to use this platform to elevate the issues we find of strategic importance we are winning. The outcome of next year's election can not be seen beforehand and the country is looking forward to a long process of mobilization either way. Our general trajectory of movement building will not be altered on account of the composition of the parliament, electoral success only matters in terms of coverage and resources we can use to extend our horizon and organizational base. Future political parties are too far to consider in concrete terms, instead we look at our work as a necessary training exercise for those who need to be prepared when future anti-capitalist forces are to be built. By means of building a community around actual meaningful political work we acquire the experience otherwise unattainable. With the words of Trotsky, we can only learn to ride a horse by riding a horse.

INPRECOR : Another important organization in the "Solidarity Action Group" is the "Solidarity Economy Center". What is the role of this Center and what is the state of its thinking?

Z.S.: Briefly, the aim of the Solidarity Economy Center is to establish and strengthen initiatives that try to reorganise the most important areas of social reproduction (like work, housing, care, food and energy production, etc.) in a democratic and sustainable way, turning away from the exploitation of human and natural resources and developing an economic cycle that nurtures social and ecological systems. Our strategy consists of two large sets of activities. First, we build capacity to establish various forms of economic autonomy: housing cooperatives, energy and food coops, etc, and the broader institutional models that allow for the scaling up of such circuits. Second, we do union organising, currently in the sectors of care work and education. Our goal is to link up these two strategic areas: namely, to help the unions we work with to go beyond wage fights towards demanding autonomy over social reproduction. We strongly believe that this kind of reproductive autonomy from the market is absolutely necessary to enable an anticapitalist agenda.

INPRECOR : A common point of the 29 organizations of the "Solidarity Action Group" is to say they are anti-capitalist. What does this mean in the particular context of Hungary, a small country of 10 million inhabitants within Europe, where 80% of the economy is controlled by multinationals, especially the German automotive industry? What are the main anti-capitalist measures that you recommend?

A.R.: Not all of the SAG organisations would define themselves explicitly anti-capitalist, for some, e.g. conservationists, food sovereignty organisations within the movement do not have such a direct political profile, while others are explicitly engaged in scientific research. The aim of SAG is for the participating organisations to identify common ground in their own and each other's struggles and to work together to develop a common political agenda.

Á.G.: Anti-capitalism as a broad agenda involves the radical transformation of a secular global system, which presently encompasses each and every aspect of our daily survival. At the Solidarity Economy Center, we don't think of Hungary as an exception from the broad relations of capitalist crisis and transformation that link our lives to that of everyone else on the globe. We see the state as an important institutional enabler and field of struggle, but we do not believe that the deep embeddedness of social reproduction in Hungary within global capitalist flows can be radically altered by local state policies alone. Within this context, we think of our work as covering a specific aspect (that of deep organizing and institutional modelling for reproductive autonomy) within a larger collaboration with initiatives that cover other aspects of a common struggle, both locally and internationally. Within this framework, the mid-level tools we work on mostly involve tools of organization and policy that enable the broadening of organized reproductive power. We do think of this capacity as a condition of being able to enforce anti-capitalist state measures; yet instead of singling out and listing policies one by one (e.g. put the idea of strengthening the Forint next to a policy that strengthens workers' rights), our work focuses on the actual interrelations between the processes these policies target (e.g. how a cheap Forint is conditioned by Hungary's dependence on labor-intensive FDI), and finding out how building anti-capitalist capacity can be realized within those processes.

P.S.: At Szikra we are not in a position to recommend anti-capitalist measures outside the general outline of supporting workers ownership and management, the strengthening of workers rights and the restructuring of public funding along the line of participatory economic and solidarity principles. What we are working on is more like building a community and establishing channels by which we can enhance the usage of the movement's resources. Not being a think tank we would be over our head and utterly useless to form specific policies on every possible issue - we would even consider it dishonest and undemocratic. We prefer actual participation when it comes to policy-making and make policies on issues with regard we can ensure the participation of those affected. Typical of our policies is how we envision media funding structure, putting the decisions over the funding of outlets in the hands of those reading them, therefore proposing direct democratic control over public information. We do not think in terms of representing programmes during contests between elite factions: for us electoral strategy is not aimed at institutional power in itself but used as a pretext to reroute the energies of the anti-capitalist scene to form its own organizational structure.

INPRECOR : A permanent campaign topic for Viktor Orban and his party is the fight against migrants (which

is also largely fantasy, because migrants have no desire to come to Hungary but are looking for countries where they can find better paid work !). And as this subject seems to be running out of steam, in February 2020 they attacked the Roma community, which represents 8% of the Hungarian population, by challenging a decree of the supreme court which granted compensation to sixty young Roma victims of school discrimination. How do you react to this racist policy?

Á.G.: Fidesz' Roma policy is multifaceted: while anti-Roma sentiments are used as a potential electoral tool, meanwhile Fidesz' support among Roma is relatively high, due to the system of public work which has linked unemployment benefits to local governments' discretionary power, and thus created a direct political dependence. In its present efforts to secure its influence in case of an electoral loss, Fidesz has been stepping up the outsourcing of social policy to churches and church-related charities: this can be seen as another means through which they penetrate and control the poor, including poor Roma. Our stance on this matter focuses on the social levels of dependence that propel the use of the Roma issue as an extra political card up the sleeve of any party across the board since 1989.

INPRECOR : Viktor Orban and FIDESZ have another obsession: sending Hungarian women home to procreate, and rebuilding Christian families. They have not (yet) dared to legally attack the right to abortion, but support anti-abortion organizations and have not hesitated to divert EU funds to finance an anti-abortion poster campaign. They also attack LGBT rights head-on, de facto prohibiting adoption by same-sex couples and going so far as to enshrine the traditional notion of "gender" in the Constitution. Is there a feminist movement and an LGBT movement in Hungary and how are they mobilizing against these attacks?

A.R.: SAG's radical feminist organisation, Women for Each Other Movement, was represented at the anti-abortion protests and, due to the pandemic, we mostly expressed our solidarity or disapproval through online platforms, and social media. We also joined the E.A.S.T. - Essential Autonomous Struggles, an international organisation that works on essential labour and women's reproductive rights at transnational level, and organised knowledge-exchange events such as roundtables as part of their campaigns.

P.S.: As for LGBT movements, they peaked during the socialist-liberal era since the government could use them as features of its culturally progressive image. There were efforts to radicalize them without any possible positive outcome. LGBT struggles became associated with this strategy, which caused the movement to frame its agenda exclusively in terms of civil rights and access to marriage and middle class life in general. (Also it is a somewhat ill-conceived copy of western LGBT movements, and got co-opted by multinational corporations' PR strategies.) In rhetoric the government monopolizes middle class values and uses LGBT people as punching bags whenever liberal opposition needs to be provoked or the cohesion of the right-wing electoral base reinforced. They are entrapped in this party dynamics and in a short term unable to be integrated into any form of anti-capitalist political agenda.

A.G.: The anti-gender campaign and the campaign against womens' rights is part of an international conservative agenda that uses these issues to create a symbolic screen against which "normal" people can be pictured as beneficiaries of conservative politics. In Hungary, this tactic resembles most closely the government's anti-migrant and anti-homeless politics. Beyond a tactic of symbolic politics, both streams have caused practical harm to people, including forbidding gay couples to adopt children, and the government's reluctance to recognize and tackle the problem of domestic violence, which has become endemic during lockdowns. The government's stance on women's labour is made clear in statements like Viktor Orban's acknowledgement of womens' hard work to take care of their husbands after getting home from their jobs. Also a member of E.A.S.T, SEC has been working on women's issues from the perspective of care work, focusing on social workers who faced the challenges of the pandemic both at work and at home.

INPRECOR : do you have contacts with the anti-capitalist left in the rest of the world and what do you expect

from these contacts?

A.R.: In the EU context, Hungary's peripheral position in relation to core countries, especially Germany, is reflected in the strategic position of Hungarian anticapitalist organisations. European left-wing parties are interested in the development of peripheral countries as long as they see their left-wing parties as potential partners. They can serve these strategic goals by knowledge exchange and allocation of financial resources.

P.S.: With Szikra we have connections with European municipalist projects (e.g. Barcelona en Comú, Preston, Ne da(vi)mo Beograd), regional leftist parties (e.g. Mo~emo!, Razem, Levica Slovenija, Syriza) and movements (e.g. DIEM25) we aim to cultivate, mostly in the hope of exchanging ideas and experiences that may be relevant to us. It's a learning process. We have a diverse membership with ties to other movements and projects, contacts with anarchist networks or Trotskyist internationals, or even experiences with Bernie Sanders' campaign. We looked at European grass-root initiatives to find our initial inspiration and fashioned our organizational outlook after multi-tendential movements like DSA. Táncsics - Radical Left Party, one SAG member organization aimed to build ties with the European Left Party family. We expect political progress in the way of building coalitions between movements working in different fields that have strategic significance for anti-capitalist struggle (e.g. housing, reproductive rights, ecology, education, solidarity networks and unions). For this we need institutions to facilitate formally coordinated efforts and joint strategic thinking.

Á.G.: In our work at Solidarity Economy Center, we have been building on a longer process of communication of new left initiatives across the region, as well as on specific international contacts and examples that are relevant for our type of organizing. One type of these contacts include regular collaborations on concrete projects, like with the East European housing cooperative network MOBA, or strategic consultations, like for instance with European initiatives who also work on linking community energy to community finance, or with East European union-based rank-and-file organizing projects. Another type of contacts involves following and learning from others' examples, like in the case of Kerala's large cooperative network and union-cooperative collaborations, the Croatian cooperative network ZEF, or the Preston model and related policy plans for institutional scaling in Corbyn's program. We are members in international networks, but have not been part of international-level campaigns yet as our work so far focused on rooting solidarity economy ideas in local organizing capacity.

INPRECOR: Orban is promoting a project of construction of a huge Chinese university in the South of Budapest, and more generally is offering to China that Hungary becomes the entry to Europe of the new silk road, the huge ambition of the so-called Chinese communist party. What is your position regarding that?

Á.G.: The plan for the Budapest Fudan campus, and the related loan agreement, has been used by both Western and local oppositional communication as a perfect example case of the "democratic backslide" narrative, which sees Hungary as (re)turning to Eastern despotism after its postsocialist project for Western democracy. This is an ideological treatment that ignores a structural analysis of both postsocialist transition (which was anything but a process of democratization in the social sense), and of the present global transformation in which Hungary's capitalist elites of course navigate according to their own interests. In the latter respect, what is important to remember is that Hungary won't necessarily be the "entry to Europe" of the new silk road. The Budapest-Belgrade railway project is one of the first Chinese-funded infrastructure projects that are framed as part of the BRI within the EU. It is part of the infrastructure that is planned to link the port of Piraeus (in which a Chinese company gained majority ownership after the Greek crisis and its Troika treatment choked the Greek economy) to rich European markets. The promise of those markets has been recently enhanced by the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, the main European initiators (and beneficiaries) of which are French and German multinationals seeking entry to Chinese markets. Most of Hungary's economic interaction with China happens within the value chains of the German automotive industry. Fidesz has been making efforts to use Chinese investments as a way to differentiate external financing away from European and IMF loans, in order to maintain manoeuvre space for domestic economic policy. But what has happened so far remains below the levels of dependence from both EU financing and Western FDI.

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The opposition campaign has so far been happy to use the opportunity of the Fudan investment to amplify its own voice by joining Western new Cold War narratives. From our perspective, these immediate tactics boil down to aiding a murderous tendency for military conflict in the middle of a global hegemonic crisis. The alternative to (intransparent) Chinese loans is not a happy subordination to the Troika or the IMF, but an international solidarity that opposes both Eastern and Western aspects of capitalist exploitation.

P.S.: This became one of the most controversial topics recently, since it enabled the opposition coalition to play their card of cultural war and make it an issue of choosing between the values of either East or West. From their point of view it is too good to miss. The way we see in Szikra it is more of an issue of national sovereignty and transparency regarding state security - also a symbol of the ongoing housing crisis, since the Uni is supposed to be built in place of an accessible student housing facility. We're not against Fudan University per se. It is a typical example of how we can try to cause cleavages in the existing field of oppositional politics. FIDESZ claims to be "anticommunist" and allies with China, claiming China is not communist despite what the Chinese government thinks of itself. The opposition claims to be anticommunist, argues China and the FIDESZ are communist. We endorse communism in itself while being critical of China, FIDESZ and the opposition - nobody could understand this on the grounds of either the government's or the opposition's discourse while the public is still forced to make sense of it. What we miss is transparency with regard to state matters. It is obviously of public interest while still impossible. Revolutionary strategy in general is exactly this: demanding impossible but nevertheless necessary measures. We don't believe capitalism can be "reformed" - that is exactly why we need to demand it.

PS:

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[1] The parliamentary elections for the election of the unicameral Hungarian Parliament combine a first past the post system in the 106 constituencies with a proportional multi-member list system intended to fill, in a single national constituency, the 93 additional seats.