

THE RISE OF HUNGARIAN POPULISM

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State Autocracy and
the Orbán Regime

BY

ATTILA ANTAL

*Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary
and Institute of Political History, Hungary*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2019

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83867-754-1 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83867-751-0 (E-ISBN)

ISBN: 978-1-83867-753-4 (Epub)



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CONTENTS

<i>Author's Biography</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
1. The Theory of Authoritarian Populism and Neoliberalism	1
1. The Framework of Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Neoliberalisation and Hegemony	3
2. Neoliberal Penal State in Liberal Democracies	9
3. Globalisation and Hybridisation	11
4. Authoritarian Populism in Eastern Europe	17
5. The Biopolitics of our Time	23
5.1. Michel Foucault: The Biopower of the Modern State	23
5.2. Giorgio Agamben's Biopolitics: The 'Production' of Homo Sacer and Permanent State of Exception	26
5.3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: The Biopolitics of Capitalism and the Populism	30
6. Constitutional Dictatorship	35

2.	The Origins of Authoritarian Populism in Hungary	43
7.	The Nationalist–Populist Historical–Theoretical Complex in Hungary	44
8.	The Horthy Regime as Historical and Semi-authoritarian Ancestor of Right-wing Authoritarian Populism	49
9.	Totalitarian Populism	53
9.1.	National Socialism and Populism	53
9.2.	Communist Populism	55
9.3.	The Biopolitical Character and Periods of the Rákosi and Kádár Regimes	57
9.4.	Goulash Communism and Populist Legitimacy	60
10.	The Foundation of Neoliberal Hegemony	64
11.	The Agony of Liberal Constitutionalism and its Inability Treating the ‘End of Patience’	67
3.	The Orbán Regime: Neoliberal and Authoritarian Populist Backlash	75
12.	The Particular Political Theories of the Orbán Regime	77
12.1.	A Renaissance of Carl Schmitt	78
12.2.	Leader Democracy	81
12.3.	From Political to Populist Constitutionalism	84
12.4.	National Identity and the Concept of ‘Juristocracy’	87
12.5.	The Creative Political Leader and His Court	89

13.	The Radical Left Theoretical Bases of Authoritarian Populism	93
14.	The Creation of a New Regime: Legalising the Autocracy	97
14.1.	Constitutionalising a Dictatorship	98
14.2.	Oligarchic Structures	109
15.	The Biopolitics of the Orbán Regime	113
15.1.	The Biopolitics of the Orbán Regime: The Refugee Crisis and the Hungarian Hate Campaign	116
15.2.	Populism as Civilisationism	121
16.	Orbán's Hungary as a Neoliberal Province	123
16.1.	Pseudo 'Freedom Fight'	124
16.2.	How the 'German Empire' Finances the Orbán's Regime	127
16.3.	The Exploitation of Workers	131
4.	Conclusion: A War Between Law and Politics	143
	<i>References</i>	145
	<i>Index</i>	163

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Attila Antal (1985) holds a Ph.D. in Political Science. He is a Senior Lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Law Institute of Political Science. He is a Coordinator at the Social Theory Research Group at the Institute of Political History. He is doing his contemporary research in the political theory of populism, social and critical theory, theory of democracy, green political thought, ecological Marxism, constitutionalism and political history.

PREFACE

By 2019 it seems to be proven that the political system in Hungary under Viktor Orbán significantly has moved into an autocratic direction. This book offers a deep historical and theoretical investigation on how this authoritarian populist regime has evolved. This new kind of autocracy cannot be understood without the thorough knowledge of Eastern Europe's twentieth century and the neoliberal agenda before and after the regime changes. There is a loophole in the literature on the historical and theoretical origins of right-wing authoritarian populism. This book indicates a wide range of debate on this, because without these historical-theoretical frameworks the Hungarian autocratic turn cannot be analysed from Western perspectives, which seemed to be inadequate to response such challenges raised by Eastern autocracies.

This book deals with the main factors behind Orbán regime: the past overwhelmed with authoritarian populism, the reformist anger of liberal democracy and the cooperation between neoliberal and state autocracy.

I propose here that Orbán's regime is a product of the troubled and unprocessed past of Hungary and moreover the uninhibited neoliberalism. In the context of contemporary literature on populism, it is underrepresented that populism is a historical phenomenon. The populism of our time is based on the Hungarian historical heritage: the interwar right-wing

nationalist populism, the Communist populism and the neoliberal anti-populism will be analysed here as the predecessors of the regime.

The next step towards contemporary authoritarian populism was the end of the 1980s and 1990s; at that time Hungary was the leading post-Communist country, which implemented the legal and economic frameworks of liberal democracy. This aimed a massive construction of legal instruments and a fully integrated economy into the neoliberal world order. The main cause behind this situation was the assumption that the basis of liberal democracy is the (neoliberal) capitalism itself. The ‘reformist anger’ has overloaded the society. This resulted the so-called politics of austerity, which was the main direction of international organisations (from International Monetary Fund and World Bank to the European Union, EU) in which Hungary and other Eastern European countries got involved, and its implementation caused several social catastrophes.

However, Orbán’s regime is not just a product of declining liberal democracy, given the fact it is financed by the EU’s neoliberal framework especially by the German automobile companies. Hungary has become a “good province” of the neoliberal empire. In this book, I argue that hegemony of authoritarian neoliberalism and right-wing populism are both based on Gramscian theory of hegemony. At the first sight, it seems to be embarrassing that on the one hand Orbán’s regime has been criticised by the EU bureaucracy, on the other it has been financed by EU and German industrial interests, but this reveals the deep tensions inside liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism. The Hungarian example is an anti-Greek story: while the Greek government unsuccessfully tried to get rid of neoliberal austerity, Orbán’s regime built up the autocracy in neoliberal framework. The cooperation of authoritarian neoliberalism and authoritarian statism/populism is not a new

phenomenon, but the Hungarian example is unprecedented because it is the first case when the authoritarian neoliberalism was able to unfold in the framework of the authoritarian state in the EU. The Orbán regime has abandoned not just the liberal rule of law, but all the social commitments of the welfare state in order to meet the expectations of neoliberal capitalism.

The significance of this book is the autocratic elements one can find in the Orbán regime does not only come from state autocracy created by the machine of political power, but also stems from the tyrannical nature of the regime maintained by neoliberal capitalism. The elements of Orbán's populist autocracy has been laid down in the burdened past of Hungary in the twentieth century and neoliberal autocracy also has pre-1989 roots. Neoliberal hegemony influenced Eastern European transitions and the political system being created afterward. There is a blurred collusion between authoritarian neoliberalism and populism.

It seems to me that from a Western perspective, the Orbán regime caused major confusion; it is because on the one hand the regime is seen as a determined dictatorship, on the other hand the various political theoretical pillars of the regime are unknown by the public. This multi-faced nature of the Orbán regime remained almost undiscovered in the literature and public debates. Although, the Hungarian autocracy has far not created under Orbán as a master plan. There was no such a plan to build autocracy in Hungary, but at the same time there was no direct theoretical and political intention to prevent the de-democratization either. It is to say that the process of moving towards an autocracy has been intensified. This means that the autocratic nature of the regime at the time of the 2010 elections was not determined. On the contrary, there were democratic scenarios inside Fidesz regarding governance. By now, the regime has become an autocratic populist

one and it relies on several authoritarian theoretical assumptions, which are described in detail in this volume. My main conclusion here is that the evolving autocracy in Hungary can be investigated on a higher level as a rebirth war between law-based theories and the emerging concept of *the Political*.