

Hungary: Opposition to Prime Minister Orban Plans More Protests over 'Slave Law'

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Hungary: Left-wing opposition parties collaborate against right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in continuing protests against new "slavery law". The new **labor law** increases the maximum amount of overtime workers can be required to work from 5 hours per week to 8 hours per week. This is hoped to offset Hungary's growing labor shortage and gives employers three years instead of one to settle payments of accrued overtime. The law was passed along with legislation that gives greater government control over the court system. Critics say that Georg Soros is funding the protests. -GEG

Hungary's beleaguered political opposition has vowed to keep up the pressure on the country's far-right prime minister, Viktor Orbán, after a **week of protests** in which thousands came on to the streets of Budapest, and four MPs were roughed up by security guards after attempting to get their demands across on state television.

The protests were triggered by a **so-called "slave law"**, passed amid chaotic scenes in the Hungarian parliament last Wednesday, which allows employers to force employees to work overtime, and lets them delay payment for up to three years. It was passed together with legislation that provides for greater government control over the court system, the latest move by Orbán's Fidesz party to capture independent state institutions.

A number of different opposition parties are cooperating on a joint strategy to keep pressure on the government.

"We're closely cooperating on a daily basis, and are planning roadblocks and further demonstrations if the president signs this into law," said Tímea Szabó, of the

opposition LMP party. She also said the opposition would announce civil disobedience action, though she refused to specify what it had in mind.

On Monday evening, about 2,000 people braved subzero temperatures to protest outside the headquarters of Hungarian state television, shouting slogans about Orbán and demanding opposition MPs be let on air. About a dozen MPs spent 24 hours inside the television headquarters trying unsuccessfully to speak to viewers. After scuffles with security guards, one MP was led away in an ambulance.

The Hungarian government's response has been to banish almost all discussion of the protest from state-controlled media. When it has referenced the protests, it has put the blame on its usual target: the Hungarian-born financier and philanthropist George Soros, favoured bogeyman of the far right across the globe.

"Brace yourselves for a new kind of democracy, one born of a carefully managed revolution by remote control," wrote government spokesman Zoltán Kovács in a blogpost about the protests. "The revolution unfolds with protest leaders from a band of the usual suspects, many of them trained abroad and with close ties to Soros networks."

Kovács also pointed the finger at the international media, claiming they were overselling the protests, and at the "stomach-churning opportunism" of the liberal Belgian politician Guy Verhofstadt, who tweeted his support for the protests and **used the hashtag** #01G, which refers to a Hungarian meme insulting Orbán in vulgar language. Kovács described Verhofstadt as "one of Soros's henchmen in Brussels".

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