

Slovenia: After far-right defeat in elections, radical left faces new challenges

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Slovenia's April 24 parliamentary elections saw the defeat of far-right Prime Minister Janez Janša — an ally of Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán and former United States President Donald Trump — and a surprise victory for Robert Golob's Freedom Movement, which was set up less than a year ago by green and liberal forces.

To discuss the significance of the election result and what it might mean for the left in the country, *Green Left's* **Federico Fuentes** spoke with **Miha Kordiš** from the radical left party, Levica, who was re-elected to the National Assembly.

While a lot has been written about other new left forces in Europe, much less is known about Levica in Slovenia. Could you tell us a bit about Levica's history and politics?

Levica is a new left socialist — not to be confused with social democratic — party. Our name literally translates into English as “The Left”.

The party emerged from the anti-austerity mobilisations against the right-wing government that was in power back in 2012–13. It began as a coalition of several existing parties and a new formation, Initiative for Democratic Socialism. The latter was the result of a decade or more of organising and intellectual work by student activists.

This coalition first entered parliament in 2014, after winning 7% of the vote, and went on to form a unified party.

Since entering parliament, we have had some success, even while being in opposition. We have managed to get a new minimum wage law passed, raising the wages of the lowest paid workers by several hundred euros.

We have also successfully blocked the purchase of military vehicles, raised the rate of the guaranteed pensions and social support, ensured the provision of free warm school meals for poorer children and banned fracking.

We have also helped rehabilitate the concept of socialism in Slovenia.

How would you characterise Freedom Movement and what is your assessment of the overall election result?

Stranka Gibanje Svoboda — the Freedom Movement party — is a typical liberal, centrist party. The election result was a landslide for them: they won 41 out of 90 seats in parliament in a context where turnout skyrocketed to reach record numbers.

Clearly, voters were completely and utterly fed up with the corruption, incompetence and authoritarianism of the far-right government led by Slovenska Demokratska Stranka (the Slovenian Democratic Party).

What impact did Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine have on the elections? What is Levica's position on the war and Slovene support for Ukraine?

Despite the outgoing far-right government trying really hard to use the conflict in Ukraine for domestic purposes — both in terms of electoral gains and to justify spending on military hardware — this failed to gain any real traction. The impact of the war on our election was thus negligible.

Levica stridently opposes any kind of military aid to Ukraine, as it would only serve to prolong the conflict. Despicable as Putin's invasion is, it did not fall out of the sky. NATO is neck deep in terms of its involvement in the situation. Indeed it was NATO's drive towards the east and its strategy of encircling Russia that destabilised the region in the first place.

Instead of working towards a ceasefire and quick resolution to the conflict, Washington is using Ukraine to bleed Russia as much as it can, at the expense of the working class — in Ukraine, Europe and Russia. Hence, its preference for military aid and sanctions over diplomacy.

While you were successful in getting re-elected, Levica's vote and number of parliamentary seats went down in these elections. How do you assess the reasons for the decline in votes?

I believe there were two reasons for this:

The first one is the political situation in general. With a soft form of coup d'état in motion, the electoral turnout was huge, as was the campaign to get people to vote. The question many people were answering with their vote was "who's got the best chance to oust current Prime Minister Janez Janša" and not much else.

As a new party that was rising in the polls, Gibanje Svoboda was able to capture the majority of the anti-Janša votes, at the expense of other parties. Two other liberal opposition parties did not pass the 4% threshold required to enter parliament, while the social democrats Socialni Demokrati and Levica saw a significant drop in their number of seats.

So for the first time in the country's history, there are only five parties represented in the national assembly: Gibanje Svoboda, Levica, Socialni Demokrati, the far-right Slovenska Demokratska Stranka and their puppet christian democratic party, Nova Slovenija.

The second reason is Levica's gradual shift from the socialist left towards the centre. Two years of the pandemic and the impact of the former far-right government have noticeably sped up this process, as Levica sought to enter into an alliance with liberal opposition parties.

In and of itself, this was a correct decision, as the primary goal was to defeat the far-right government. However, in those two years, talks began regarding an alternative post-election government, and Levica started to look and sound more and more like the liberal parties.

What happened was completely predictable — and avoidable. Levica failed to present to the people our own unique social analysis and program. The focus was solely on undermining the far right with what was basically a liberal critique, instead of some form of program based "anti-fascism is socialism" strategy.

But all the public was left with was a different name and a face, rather than a different politics. The

end result was that, on one hand, our softer electoral supporters turned to the name and face that had the best chance to replace Janša, while others just chose to abstain from voting.

Given that the Freedom Movement has to find coalition partners to form a government, has Levica taken a position regarding entering government? What does Levica see as the main challenges going forward under a Freedom Movement government?

Despite Gibanje Svoboda having enough seats to form government with Socialni Demokrati, Levica is negotiating to participate in the government as a coalition partner. We are hoping to take steps towards the demilitarisation of the country, the strengthening of public healthcare, ending the housing crisis, building a rapid response to climate change and increasing both social security and working class wages.

But as you might guess, the other coalition partners are not exactly thrilled with the very basic and modest progressive tax-and-spend reforms we are championing for the next four years.

We are also very concerned about the possibility of public healthcare being further degraded due to privatisation, as this seems to be the de facto policy of Gibanje Svoboda.

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