

Australian democracy needs to learn the lessons from Hungary's House of Terror

By Maurice Newman, *The Australian*, 11 June 2018

Andrassy Avenue is a long, tree-lined boulevard in the heart of Budapest boasting high-end shopping and dining and grand neo-renaissance mansions, many of which are now embassies.

Amid such refinement and beauty one building, No. 60, is renowned not for its architecture but for the unspeakable cruelty of its former occupants.

Known today as the House of Terror, it was the headquarters of the Nazi-affiliated Arrow Cross fascists and, after World War II, the Soviet-aligned communists. Hungary's state security agency and the hated secret police, much feared for their brutal interrogations and murders, also were based there.

The House of Terror is now a museum. Hungarians hope it will play an important role in reminding the present generation of the past. Critics of the museum say its purpose is to tarnish the image of the present Socialist Party with its communist past and that the House of Terror is a "sleight of hand — equating fascism with communism". They maintain that the ideology of the communists was the complete opposite to the fascists. Yet, in reality, terror served them both extremely well, with one person from every third family seized, mistreated, crippled or executed during their collective reigns. The ultimate left may differentiate itself from the ultra-right, but if you are snatched from your bed in the dead of night by agents of a totalitarian state the subtlety may elude you.

Apologists argue that Hungary is a special case, a victim of two world wars and foreign intrusions. But it was Hungarians who reduced people to subjects, not foreigners. The system had no difficulty sourcing citizens who, in the name of ideology, were prepared to do what it took to oppress the freedom of others. The history may be Hungarian but the message is universal.

Fast forward a mere 60-odd years and a complacent West ignores the lessons of 60 Andrassy Avenue. Incredibly, even one of Hungary's most successful sons, George Soros, a multi-billionaire Jew who luckily escaped deportation and death, seems not to have learned any lessons from advocating the ideology that so terrorised and impoverished his birthplace.

Perhaps only Soros can explain this perversity, but according to *The Australian* columnist Jennifer Oriel: "Soros-affiliated organisations follow a well-worn political and rhetorical strategy, updated for the digital age. Like the socialists and communists of old, they attack liberal democracy by delegitimising the classically liberal values of individualism, free speech, logical argument and public reason."

Soros is powerful in European political circles, influencing elections, using human rights - networks to push open-border policies and providing financial support to climate change advocates.

For a Jew, he is surprisingly pro-Islam and at odds with today's Hungarian government which, on the grounds of "cultural incompatibility", opposes the EU's mass immigration policy. Hungary's recently re-elected Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, is targeted as "racist" for his stand. That said, restricted access to social security means fewer migrants and an unemployment rate of 3.9 per cent compared with 7.3 per cent for the EU overall.

Soros is a new breed of anti-Western elite. In Australia his Open Society Foundation funds the radical left GetUp!, which Oriel says is “engaged in an effective reframing of politics by -rebranding conservatives as the hard right while recasting the left as moderate or progressive. Many sections of the media have uncritically adopted GetUp!’s rhetoric.”

Accordingly, almost every idea, theory and view that fails to conform with today’s socialist orthodoxy is regarded by someone with access to a megaphone as hostile. Anything from gender to traditional holidays is politicised. If speaking the truth collides with ideology, an apology, if not harsher sanction, is demanded.

While older heads may resist indoctrination, eager young minds from kindergarten on are force-fed with a loathing of traditional values and Australian history.

New “unlearning” (brainwashing centres) are being established on university campuses intended to ensure that once students believe in nothing, they will fall for anything. In the quest for ideological purity, the Australian National University, among others, has rejected a fully funded Ramsay Centre for the study of Western civilisation “because it is not compatible with university autonomy”.

The Australian’s foreign editor, Greg Sheridan, observes: “Confucius centres funded by the Chinese government abound, our universities have taken money from Arab governments to sponsor Middle East studies and the various peace studies centres are comprehensively involved in advocacy. But a centre to study Western civilisation is beyond the pale.” Belatedly, a timid prime minister has sought an explanation. But what’s to explain?

Meanwhile, the Turnbull government works with the opposition to increase the size and reach of government while diminishing the role for markets. The popular media happily lend support, adopting the anti-capitalist cues organised labour and assorted green non-government organisations provide.

Collectivist concepts such as “social licence to operate” are accepted doctrine. Crony socialists and capitalists have become willing extensions of government policy seeking approbation from those who personally can benefit them or their activities. Patronage and privilege are surer ways to success. This has widened the wealth gap and progressively lessened faith in free market capitalism. Ordinary people see the deck as inexorably stacked against them. Public humiliation and fear of retribution have helped to silence protesters. If that fails, legal remedies are increasingly at hand.

Marx, Lenin and Gramsci would be pleased with this progress. The long march through the institutions is all but complete, with even the military and the judiciary captured.

Inevitably, linking Hungary’s past to contemporary Australia will be seen as a bridge too far. Yet Australia and other Western democracies are a long way down Andrassy Avenue. Repeated attempts to turn back have failed. While Hungarians have shown conclusively that supreme sacrifices made in the name of freedom are never futile, the longer we delay, the more brutal the journey and the greater the sacrifice.