

Election blow to Hungarian party

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Susan Vlets in Budapest

THE Hungarian opposition won two more seats in the second round of by-elections at the weekend in another setback for the Communist Party.

The result brings the opposition's total parliamentary representation to three and strengthens the hand of the reformers.

Voter turnout was low and the by-elections will have to be repeated for a third time in the southern town of Kiskunfelegyhaza because fewer than 50 per cent of the required minimum voted.

Mr Erno Raffay, the candidate for the opposition Hungarian Democratic Forum, won 62 per cent of the popular vote in Szeged, a city near the Yugoslav border. In Kecskemet, half-way between Budapest and Szeged, a Forum colleague, Mr Jozsef Debreceni, won nearly 70 per cent of the votes.

In both districts, the Communist candidate was in second place with about one-third as many votes.

The Hungarian weekly, Varnapi Hirek, reports that in Szeged the Communist candidate spent nearly £2,000 on his campaign. Voter turnout was highest there but Mr Raffay, who spent £300, was the winner.

In Kecskemet, even a personal visit and election rally by the party president, Mr Rezso Nyers, could not boost the fortunes of the Communist candi-

date. A poll published before the latest round of by-elections in the daily Magyar Nemzet said that 29 per cent of Hungarians would vote for the Communists in a national election and 12 per cent for the Forum.

By-election results indicate that the Forum, backed by other opposition groups, is the most successful at grassroots campaigning.

But in Kiskunfelegyhaza, even an appeal from a Forum member, Mr Gabor Roszik, the opposition candidate voted into parliament last month for the first time in more than 40 years, could not persuade enough people to vote.

Voting hours were extended and in the late afternoon a loud-speaker van was driven through the city reminding people of the election.

An opposition spokesman said publicity would be crucial for the national election due within the next year and that "we must fight for our space on television."

While the opposition's main task will be to create an image for itself, the Communists will be busy trying to change their image. Party renewal will be high on the Communists' agenda when they draft a new programme at their congress in October.

Magyar Nemzet has suggested that trust will be the key to election victory. A recent editorial stated that Hungarians staying away from the polls do not make up a silent majority but rather "a thinking majority".

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