



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Borotba: Workers should put an end to crisis in Belarus

written by Borotba

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Minsk: Rally in Lenin Square in defense of Belarusian government, Aug. 16.

Borotba (Struggle), a revolutionary Marxist organization banned by the U.S.-backed government of Ukraine, issued the following statement on Aug. 25. Borotba activists continue their work from exile, in the anti-fascist Donbass republics, and underground in Ukraine. Translated for Struggle-La Lucha by Greg Butterfield.

The political crisis in the Republic of Belarus has continued for two weeks. The reason was the latest presidential election, the official results of which (the victory of the incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko with 80 percent) categorically did not suit the opposition. Thousands of rallies were held throughout the country. In

the early days of the protest, the security forces responded with brutal force. Despite the fact that the protesters failed to achieve their goal — removing President Lukashenko from power — the confrontation continues.

Lukashenko's government

Belarus differs from other post-Soviet countries — Russia, Ukraine, Moldova — in that the permanent President Lukashenko, who came to power in 1994, did not permit mass privatization and destruction of social infrastructure. Most of the large enterprises remain state-owned. Agriculture enjoys state support and provides jobs for a significant part of the country's population.

The cost of economic and social stability was a severe suppression of opposition. However, thanks to these economic and social policies, Lukashenko's support has rarely dropped below 60 percent before.

In 2019-2020, the situation in Belarus worsened. The global recession has affected the economy of Belarus. Economic difficulties have intensified with the COVID-19 epidemic.

It should be noted that in recent years the Lukashenko regime has taken a number of anti-social measures: a tax on “parasites,” reform of labor laws, and some others. However, these decisions were less likely than in Ukraine or Russia to “rob” the majority of workers. The resources obtained from the reduction of the “social sphere” went to state needs, and not into the pockets of oligarchs and officials, as is the case in other post-Soviet countries.

It is also necessary to emphasize the smooth ideological turn of the Lukashenko regime in recent years: fearing absorption by Russia, nationalistic motives were increasingly woven into the state ideology, a policy of “Belarusianization” was pursued and the soft expulsion of the Russian language from the public sphere was

carried out.

Against this background, there was a serious deterioration in relations between Belarus and Russia, its main economic partner and political ally. In response to Russian demands for deeper integration and merger into a single state, Lukashenko used the rhetoric of national sovereignty and effectively blocked closer unification. In turn, Russia began to apply pressure by raising the price of energy.

The nature of the protests

The picture of the confrontation between the “people” and the “dictator” imposed by the imperialist media should not overshadow a political and class analysis. Sympathy for the victims of police brutality does not mean supporting their political agenda.

The leading force in the protests against the Lukashenko regime was the urban middle class, which has grown and strengthened during the years of relative economic prosperity. The middle class considered the framework of the paternalistic welfare state to be restrictive, seeing its ideal in the “free market” and “free enterprise.” Having no experience of neoliberal reforms that have destroyed the economies of Ukraine and Russia, a significant part of the Belarusian people sees the future of their country in market-driven “freedom.”

However, a neoliberal program of large-scale privatization, health cuts and freedom to lay off workers is unlikely to appeal to most workers. That is why the “reform” program, initially widely advertised by opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and her supporters, was later simply hidden. But it was too late.

The position of secession from the Union State [of Russia and Belarus, founded in 1996], as well as the dominance of nationalist bloggers and journalists in the Opposition Coordinating Council, alienated broad strata of the population from the protest movement.

At the symbolic level, the “white-red-white” nationalist flag, which was also used by Belarusian collaborators during World War II, dominates in the protests.

In the absence of prominent leaders, political émigrés controlled by the CIA’s Radio Liberty and the Polish government became the center of control of the protests. Thus, the widespread protest movement was utilized by liberal-nationalist politicians under the control of imperialism, which makes it possible to draw some parallels with the Euromaidan events in Ukraine.

In response to mass protests, Lukashenko began mobilizing his supporters. Although rallies in support of the president were less massive than opposition rallies, they did not have the character of paid extras, as was often the case with [deposed Ukrainian President] Yanukovych. Lukashenko was supported by older people who have a negative experience of the collapse of the USSR and appreciate the remnants of the welfare state preserved in Belarus.

The role of the working class

Unexpectedly for many, an important factor in Belarusian politics was the working class of large enterprises, which actually acted as a separate “party” to the conflict. It was for the allegiance of the working class that the main struggle between Lukashenko and the opposition unfolded.

Outraged by the police brutality of the early days of the protests, the working class began to lean towards the opposition. Demands to stop the beatings and to release those arrested found support from the workers. Sensing this, the opposition declared a national strike. However, by that time the harsh crackdown on the protesters had stopped, and most of those arrested were released. While sympathizing with those arrested, the working class was not at all ready to support the political agenda of the protest leaders — privatization, market reforms, nationalism — and the plan to rouse the workers for a nationwide strike actually

failed.

The opposition, in turn, deliberately focused on recruiting workers exclusively from state-owned enterprises into the ranks of the strikers in order to inflict maximum economic damage to the “Lukashenko regime.” At the same time, the leaders of workers’ protests associated with the opposition leadership voiced only political slogans; the social agenda was promoted exclusively by representatives of the left-wing organizations of the Republic of Belarus. Along with demands for the abolition of fixed-term labor contracts, leftist activists opposed the privatization of state-owned enterprises. These slogans naturally conflicted with the general trend of the liberal-nationalist agenda and were de facto banned from the main opposition media sources.

However, theses about the “rising labor movement” were actively broadcast outside the Republic and served as an excuse for supporting the white-red-white protests for many left-wing and democratic organizations outside Belarus. It can be stated that the real labor movement, thanks to skillful manipulation, served as a screen for the liberal-market movement led by leaders of the pro-Western opposition. Such examples are well known in history: for example, the protest of freight carriers in Chile against the Allende government in 1972-1973, and the protest of miners in 1991 in the USSR.

Borotba welcomes the attempts of the Belarusian left to organize an independent political movement of the working class. But the elimination of the welfare state and the implementation of market reforms cannot be an option for Belarus. On the contrary, the strengthening of the social character of the state and the introduction of truly socialist elements into public life can become a way out and an alternative to the lifelong rule of Alexander Lukashenko. And this development is impossible without a strong left movement and independent organizations of the working class.

Source: [Borotba.su](https://www.borotba.su)

