

# Open letter in support of Belarus anarchist revolutionaries

## What's happened?

On October 22 in Soligorsk (Belarus) administrative building of State committee of forensic examination was attacked and cars were set on fire at the parking lot of Soligorsk district prosecutor's office. On the night of October 28 the building of traffic police department of Mozyr district police department was set on fire. Soon a group of anarchists-revolutionaries: Igor Olinevich, Dmitry Dubovsky, Dmitry Rezanovich and Sergey Romanov were detained by a mobile group of Mozyr border detachment near the Ukrainian border in Zabozye village of Yelsky raion (Belarus). The detainees are currently held in a KGB remand prison in Minsk. They were charged under part 3 of article 289 of the Criminal Code (act of terrorism committed by an organized group).

## Anarchist Revolutionaries

Each of the detainees had been an opponent of the fascist state for many years and had regularly experienced its repressions.

**IharAlinevich** – an anarchist from Minsk, former political prisoner of the Belarus regime. In November 2010 he was captured by the special services in Moscow and in May 2011 was sentenced to 8 years in a reinforced regime colony under Art. 218.3 (intentional

# Uprising in Belarus from anarchist perspective

Society, Prisoners, Chronology, Events

Prameń

23 April 2021

**How can anarchists, antifascists and other anti-authoritarian sympathisers offer solidarity from abroad?**

You can make solidarity actions, e. g. in front of Belarusian embassies and consulates (or simply at the central square of your town). You can organise benefits and donate money e. g. to Anarchist Black Cross Belarus or to *Pramień*. You can help Belarusian refugees, several thousand people have left the country, including some anarchists and anti-fascists (sorry, no ready recipes, please search for information and contacts yourself e. g. through Belarusian anarchist web-sites). And, obviously, you can spread the word.

Some time ago three or four private cars of local police officers were burned down in a small provincial town of Drahichyn.

***Has there been attempts by opposition political parties or forces to take control over the movement and co-opt it for their own political objectives? If so, what has been the response from the protestors?***

Again, it is electoral protest. Most protesters want oppositional political parties or forces to take control of the country. The movement (or at least its largest part) wants to be co-opted.

**What opportunities do the current protests present for anarchists and anti-fascists in Belarus and what would it mean for them the fall of the current regime?**

The protest give anarchists a forum to speak and a space to practice ideas. In the last three years, almost all web-sites of Belarusian anarchist were declared ‘extremist’ by the Belarusian state, and all internet providers block them (it is possible to access these sites through proxy, VPN or Tor Browser). Almost all printed anarchist propaganda was declared “extremist” as soon as it was found and confiscated. It is punishable by law to share articles from anarchist web-sites or anarchist leaflets e. g. at one’s facebook page (big fines are applied). So it is hard to underestimate possibilities for propaganda which current protests have opened. However, one has to spread propaganda with caution. Some weeks ago, two anarchists had been detained in the centre of Minsk and subsequently were arrested for spreading leaflets.

The fall of current regime most probably will bring some liberalisation of the legislation. First, anarchists would like to delegalise expression of anarchist ideas (to abolish “anti-extremist” legislation). Second, there is whole range of social, environmental, legal changes which anarchists are anticipating and struggling for. A list of some of such changes was published by anarchist group *Pramień*: (this publication was followed by interesting discussion in Russian).

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cases, not anarchists, but feminists and human rights defenders were targeted by police.

In Hrodna and Baranavichy, anarchists were arrested when they formed anarchist blocks during demonstrations.

Three anarchists are under arrest and face criminal charges, two of them because already before the elections they were on the police list of 'especially dangerous' anarchists.

**In the recent uprising in USA, sectors within the very own protest movement played a role in quenching the insurrections by calling for peace, civility and reform. Is something similar happening in Belarus or are militant tactics widely supported?**

In Belarus, the whole protest started from the unfair elections. It was further propelled by extreme police violence in the early August. Protesters demand, inter alia, to hold "fair" elections and to punish police officers who killed and tortured. It is strange to assume that these same people who demand legality would call for an insurrection.

The protest is largely bourgeois (not totally, but largely), well-paid specialists and owners of small and medium-sized businesses march on the streets. They are demanding exactly peace, civility and reform. Why would they change their demands?

Militant tactics do not enjoy wide support, but militant slogans do. Protesters shout outward abuse at Lukashenka and his police, same slogans are repeated in graffiti, and the whole protest is very much carnivalesque (in all senses, including e. g. subversion of hierarchies).

Many people are ready to fight back the police to prevent arrests. This is not seen as violence. Most police officers are masked to hide their identity, and it became highly popular to demask them, to tear masks off.

Information is gathered and published on police officers who practiced violence, sometimes with their phone numbers and home addresses.

Tactics of protesters in Belarus is hardly influenced by other uprisings. Belarusians are very provincial, participants of the protests rarely have an idea that in Hong Kong anything happens at all, not to speak about Chile.

So far the protests are largely peaceful. But when police attacks protesters, sometimes protesters fight back and e. g. do not let to bust fellow protesters. In early August, there were several occasions of symbolic improvised barricades made from garbage bins and construction fences.

**What tactics of counter-insurgency are being used by the state to stop the protests? Are anarchist and antifascists being targeted in a particular way? How are they defending themselves?**

On 9–12 August police used everything: tear gas, flash-bang grenades, rubber, plastic and steel bullets, water cannons, armoured vehicles to break barricades, tortures (including beating some protesters to death). There are several people dead (some shot, some tortured to death), couple of dozen missing, several hundred were severely wounded by grenades and bullets and several thousand were tortured in police stations these days. From 13–14 August, police violence was reduced. Police continues to beat and detain people, but there is only one report of a murder which happened in the second half of August.

Since 14 August, couple of thousand protesters faced arrests or fines. There are more than 70 political prisoners who face criminal charges, several thousand more protesters face criminal charges (in the status of defendant or suspect), but are not under arrest. Many of them have left the country. The most widespread accusation is “organisation of mass disorder and/or participation in it”.

In Minsk, anarchists are rarely targeted in a particular way, due to our invisibility. Otherwise, we expect arrests. Some anarchists were arrested for their active participation in women marches or for their involvement in human rights organisations. But in these

## Dear Comrades,

Many months have passed since the beginning of the uprising in Belarus. The euphoria of August 2020 gradually turned into depression for some, but for many it became the basis for political organization against the dictatorship. And although the protests in the streets have so far disappeared and the dictator thinks he has won, daily resistance against the regime continues in Belarus. Neighborhood activists continue to hold one-off actions and organize themselves into small resistance cells. Telegram channels continue to push the revolutionary agenda.

Even though for the anarchists this repression is the most serious in all the years of the movement’s existence since its restoration in 1991, we continue to fight the regime and organize in the streets and neighborhoods!

For comrades from abroad, we have translated a number of texts that should help us understand what is happening in the country.

The brochure includes articles by various anarchist collectives on the background of the revolution and its development. On the pages you can also find interviews with various activists of the anarchist movement who took an active part in the protests and were repressed for it. We hope this selection will help you better understand the situation in the rebellious Belarus!

## Belarusian society builds muscles – comments on the protests 14 July

Thousands of Belarusians protested after the authorities prevented several politicians from fighting for presidency. Video and photo from the Internet shows dozens of cases in which protesters attack OMON and release their previously detained comrades. The “valiant” OMON riot police have not seen this attitude of the people for a long time. This can explain their bravery when they break into a crowd of protesters in a small group and are dumbfounded by the pressure. That’s how the cops were last seen in the 90s. Those who served then are now retired or working in offices. Cheeky young men from OMON, who live on the shoulders of the working population, have until recently felt powerful in the country.

A few days ago I read another news in support of the myth of a “peaceful” Belarusian, who is always reasonable and calm, and somewhere coward. This myth is spread not only by the authorities, in whose interests the culture of “peaceful” Belarusians, but also by their opponents. Amazingly, over the last 20 years the opposition has been fixated on peaceful protest, and the most radical method of fighting the dictatorship is still the legendary “Square”. Contrary to all expectations, the dictatorship survived both 2006 and 2010, and in 2015 everything went relatively peacefully under the tacit slogan “no war” (sic!).

As a result, when presidential campaign was announced late spring, people immediately lined to give their signature to all oppositional candidates, but not to Lukashenka. The authorities answered with repressions: several candidates and some of their supporters were jailed. This tactics only enraged even more people, and already in July there were protest rallies during which some protesters fought back riot police (I have to underline, protesters did not attack riot police). However, authorities allowed one oppositional candidate, Sviatlana Cikhanouskaja, to run in the elections. Cikhanouskaja substituted her jailed husband, Siarhiey Cikhanouski. Election campaign rallies of Cikhanouskaja gathered crowds of supporters, even in tiny and deeply provincial towns. The authorities started to be so afraid that they banned all Cikhanouskaja’s rallies in the last week before elections.

The election results were falsified, as it happens always since 1996, but there is general feeling that in reality Cikhanouskaja overwhelmingly won. Her campaign mobilised those people who usually do not participate in elections, and Lukashenka’s ratings are close to historic minimum (24% in Minsk in March-April 2020, with obvious later decline).

**What role are anarchists and anti-fascists taking in the protests? What are their main objectives when intervening in the protests? How are they seen by the rest of protestors? – What tactics are being used by protestors when confronting the state forces in Belarus? Have they been influenced by recent uprisings around the world, such as Hong Kong, Chile, Lebanon or Portland?**

Anarchists are on the streets, however, anarchists rarely mark themselves specifically as anarchists to avoid being busted (or worse). Therefore, the general public has little idea that anarchists are present. Anarchists come to demonstrations with banners and posters and spread leaflets to pursue anarchist agenda (e. g. anti-police, feminist, anti-nuclear).

There are almost no social guarantees for jobless people. Unemployment payments are as low as an equivalent to 10 euro per month, and conditions are applied (e. g. an obligation to perform public works couple of days per month), so most unemployed simply do not lose their time to fill papers in an unemployment office. Moreover, in 2017 Lukashenka tried to introduce something similar to general poll tax. Even unemployed had to pay a fixed minimal tax per year. Due to massive tide of protests, the presidential decree was rolled back. But this attempt was seen by the people as a serious breach of an unspoken social contract, and influenced current protests.

For a long time, political opposition was relatively unpopular, as some of its most vocal speakers are either economic liberals and advocate privatisation, or political conservatives who advocate e. g. ban of abortion (so far abortion is legal and free of charge in Belarus). At the same time, there are many currents within the opposition, including social democrats, left party (former communists) and greens who do not advocate neither privatisation, nor ban of abortion.

But this year the situation changed profoundly. During the first wave of coronavirus, authorities made many political mistakes and outraged citizens. First, they did not provide adequate information and in many times resorted to outward lies (e. g. statistics of deaths related to epidemics was falsified from the very start). Second, Lukashenka scorned and ridiculed ill and dead people, blaming them (not the policy of his government) in their illness. Such behaviour caused massive outrage even in-between former supporters of Lukashenka. Third, no social support was offered to people who lost their jobs or significant part of salaries. In Belarus, no services or industries were closed by governmental decree, but many industries suffered from the crisis anyway, e. g. tourism, transport, restaurants, export-oriented industries (as the demand declined). Fourth, many medics who had worked overtime under stressful and risky conditions, were not paid properly.

The absence of leaders on the streets can play a positive role in this situation. No more politicians are calling for peaceful protest and dialogue with the authorities. The landing of the candidates, profitable at first sight, turned out to be a mistake for Lukashenka – he has no partners for a dialogue, and it is not politicians who stand against him, but the self-organization of the people who cannot and do not plan a dialogue with “Batka” (nickname for Lukashenko, that means “father”).

Belarusian society, like any other society, is capable of changes only when it has confidence in its own forces. That is why authoritarian regimes try to destroy social connections within society and thus to prevent some radical transformations. In Belarus, this process continued throughout the whole existence of the dictatorship. A short pause after the Soviet Union managed to give enough energy for protests and revolts in the 90s, but then it went into decline. Large spontaneous post-election protests in 2010 were mainly against economic problems and led to the first retreat of the Belarusian dictatorship from its own plans in 2017. Let us leave behind the fact that the law on “social parasites” was signed, but the very fact of Lukashenka’s retreat deserves respect.

It is hard to say what served as the main catalyst for protests in the country today. Of course, the absolute failure of the authorities in the fight against the coronavirus and the economic problems of recent months (which will only grow) played their role. The political crisis with Russia has also had a negative impact on the stability of the regime.

In this regard, weakening the state’s position may become one of the catalysts for the formation of a social force. People are beginning to believe not only in their own strength, but also in the success of collective action, which is one of the key factors in radical transformation. Success in clashes with OMON shows that state is not defended by superheroes, who can break you in half at first desire. This state is defended by people like you and I, who have fear and the desire to preserve their own health. Each video and

photo of a man ripped out of the hands of the authorities is a symbol of the power of the Belarusian people in the struggle against Lukashenko's dictatorship.

dictatorship with more and more repressive legislation and less and less space for political movement. Nevertheless, at the start of his rule, Lukashenka enjoyed some support from portions of the population. His assumption of an office coincided with relative economic stability after stark economic crisis of the early 1990s (and some people tended to falsely attribute this relative stability to Lukashenka's rule).

Lukashenka in many ways continued to pursue the policy of his predecessor, prime minister Viachaslau Kebich (there was no presidential chair in Belarus before 1994). For instance, economic and political ties with Russia continued to be very strong. Another political bet of both Kebich and Lukashenka was to proceed with privatisation extremely slowly and cautiously. In contrast with neighbouring Russia, Poland and Lithuania, Belarus have not privatised many of its biggest industrial enterprises until now. It was made in order to reduce number of working places in industry slowly and hence to avoid social explosion. In case of fast privatisation, massive dismissals would be unavoidable. Social support for families with children continued to exist (especially with three, four and more children). Public health system is still free of charge for all Belarusian citizens (but not for citizens of other countries, even if they live in Belarus many years and pay all their taxes here).

But at the same time dismantling of social guarantees took place. For instance, in late 1990s short-term labour contracts (usually one year long) started to be introduced universally instead of previous system of contracts not limited in time. At the end of a contract year, an employer can dismiss an employee without a need to provide any justification. This measure was highly unpopular. But the regime managed to keep salaries rising, and the working population slowly accepted the new system. The short-term contracts are widely used not only to dismiss labour activist (e. g. unionists), but political activists (e. g. activist of political parties or social movements) as well.

## Interview with anarchist in Minsk about the Belarus protests

*The fight against the capitalist system and the authoritarian nation states driving the destruction of the planet must be an international one if it has any hope of succeeding. That's why we decided to reach out to anarchists in Belarus to learn about the current wave of protests confronting the regime of Lukashenka. We did it by contacting the Anarchist Black Cross Belarus, but this interview represents the opinion of a single anarchist in Minsk and doesn't reflect the position of any particular organisation or group.*

*From GAF we want to send our solidarity to everyone in Belarus fighting against state oppression. Specially to our anarchist and anti-fascists comrades, we hope all of you stay safe. We are encouraged by the acts of defiance we are seeing every day coming from Belarus and angered by the horrible violence of the state. We hope this interview spreads awareness of the situation in Belarus and inspires acts of solidarity all over the world.*

**What is the historical background that explains the opposition towards the current government? What circumstances precipitated the current wave of protests?**

Aliaksandr Lukashenka occupies the presidential chair since 1994. In 1996 he organised a kind of coup d'état (through a referendum with falsified results), and since then the country is a

## Bankruptcy of the Belarusian statehood

*In the last 3 months, the Belarusian government has shown its failure to solve serious urgent problems. And if the problem with economy is not new for the country, then Lukashenka's inability to overcome the coronavirus destroys the myth that without centralization the society will be plunged into chaos.*

Many Belarusians have long understood that the state is not the guarantor of their security. Back in the Soviet Union people discussed what was happening in the country only when the state wasn't listening. Belarusians dreamed of freedom while the state tried to teach us obedience.

Protection of the population from external and internal threats is the key argument for the existence of the state. Threats can be of different nature: depending on the state, you can be saved not only from a neighbor's invasion, but also from starvation death or illness.

Belarus State, being the heir to the Soviet Union, is trying to present itself as a social apparatus committed to creating a social system for the working population. Promises are transformed into conditionally free medicine, subsidized public transport and social programs for housing construction.

The state as an apparatus is in constant need to justify its existence. If there is an organization in society that imposes taxes, laws and whims on the population, it is the population that should receive something in return. The absence of sufficiently strong arguments for the existence of the state can lead to a revolution that

will try either to establish a “social” state or to destroy the state apparatus as a whole and choose a decentralized way of organizing society.

In this case, the Belarusian state is gradually losing its meaning. Belarusians can tolerate Lukashenka on their necks until he becomes so heavy that nobody wants to pull him. The protests in 2017 were against a certain law that should have made the lives of workers harder, but did not threaten their lives. The COVID-19 situation called into question the necessity of the state itself, which continues to let the population down in the fight against the virus.

Neighboring countries are doing much better with the coronavirus. This situation makes us doubt that the Republic of Belarus, which has been a dictatorship for almost the entire period of its existence, is able to somehow respond constructively to the problems of the population. Yes, we have already heard about the need to save the economy at the cost of the lives of physicians and workers, but few will accept such an argument. Economic failures in the country are directly related to Lukashenko and his government, which for many years has been trying to maintain its own power at any cost. Why then should Belarusians give their lives for the mistakes made by the country’s famous potato farmer and his friends?

The self-organization of tens of thousands of people inside the country shows that the Belarusian state copes worse with the crisis than people who are not professional managers on state salaries. If one reads social networks and telegram, one unwittingly asks why the Belarusian society needs the state in general, if we can spontaneously organize better than the whole vertical of power?

An additional nail in the coffin of the regime was a scandal with water in the western part of Minsk. Several hundred thousand people lost access to water in the midst of the coronavirus epidemic. What flowed from the tap in the Frunzenski district can only be used by the president and his children.

The local authorities initially denied the problem and once again tried to prove to us that the problem is in our heads and not in re-

- [https://t.me/nexta\\_live](https://t.me/nexta_live)
- <https://t.me/belteanews>
- <https://t.me/belamova>

that shapes the struggle here. Very often, people fail to understand the differences between political life here and in the West.

Last but not the least, you could organize mass protests in your own countries. We are all connected. What we need above all at any moment in time is the world struggle.

You can also support us through the Belarusian Anarchist Black Cross.

***Please list the websites and social media accounts that people should follow for reliable news of events in Belarus, especially from an anti-authoritarian perspective.***

**Pramen:** Websites to follow:

pramen.io – Anarchist Media Collective

abc-belarus.org – Anarchist Black Cross Belarus

Both include writing in English; other collectives write only in Russian in social networks. On these websites, you can find links to social network presence. We are doing our best to keep people updated!

As for private individuals, you can follow @bad\_immigrant on twitter or chaos.social mastodon instance. He is tweeting in English on the situation right now.

Follow the hashtag #belarus in your social networks. Plug russian texts into deepl and you should get readable results as well.

Donate to ABC-Belarus because already, over 5000 people have been detained and nobody knows how many more will be soon.

And let's hope that in couple of days Lukashenko will fall and there will be a huge party at which we will remember our dead and celebrate the living!

See you on the barricades, comrades!

**Anonymous:** Right now, there are also a lot of telegram channels where people post videos and photos in real time from the scene of everyday protests. These are not anarchist spaces, but they can help to offer a general picture of what's going on in the streets right now:

ality. And even after admitting the problem, the water tanks that were taken out into the street could not seriously affect the situation. Today, not everyone can pull 5 liters of canisters, and those who are under quarantine are isolated from the most basic resource. Residents of the city took the initiative and brought water to the homes and apartments of those who could not get to the nearest clean water tank. Thank you once again to the ordinary people of the country.

And don't tell us stories that the guilt lies on the shoulders of local officials, while the king simply did not know. Throughout his reign, Lukashenko created an apparatus that will always report on the green grass in the street at any time of year under the fear of repression. That's why the poisoning of minsk lies on the shoulders of the entire vertical.

In the coming elections, some believe that the Belarusian state needs liberal reforms. These very reforms will turn the country into the real cradle of European civilization, and we will finally get our "papizzot"<sup>1</sup>. The projects of other Eastern European states show that corruption and indifference of officials remain even after the change of one ruler to another. Scandals in Bulgaria, Poland and many other countries of former Eastern Block confirm a rather simple thesis – power corrupts even the most idealistic fighters. And the only solution that can rid people of greedy and corrupt officials is a world without the state and capitalism.

Today, Belarusians, like many people in other countries, will not be able to defeat the dictatorship of the state by choosing a new president. The destruction of the regime requires a social revolution that will restore the self-confidence of the working population. That is why not voting, but resistance and direct action can bring us freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> papizzot – is a promise from belarusian president that everybody will have salaries at least of 500 euro. This promise comes and goes every year and slowly turned into a meme.

## How did the Belarusians come to rebellion against the dictatorship

If you had asked people in Belarus how long the dictatorship of Lukashenko was left in early 2020, they would have looked at you like a fool. In a respected dictatorship, such questions are not asked, because you know what can happen. And in general, it so happens that the reign of the great leader is timeless. But the situation has changed so radically over the last 8 months that Belarusians took to the streets and for the first time in the new history of Belarus they fought back the police in at least 33 different cities of the country.

Today Belarusians have woken up in a new country. In it, people openly talk about hatred for the government and prepare for a violent confrontation with the police and state. They discuss online and live effective methods of struggle. Several factories went on strike the day after the elections.

And although the electoral commission reports about the victory of the dictator once again, objectively speaking, Lukashenko lost the election. He lost the election not to some certain candidate, but rather to the Belarusian people, who said that 26 years was enough.

How has Belarus turned from a stable dictatorship, where the most peaceful people live, into a protest center in Europe?

exact political identity as communists, anarchists, or liberals? Trying to define this huge crowd of hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered through humiliation, exploitation, and oppression for the last quarter of a century seems ridiculous to me. For me, there's one obvious fascist: Lukashenko.

*What can anarchists in other parts of the world do to support comrades in Belarus? Are there concrete structures to support those facing repression now? Are there pressure points that international solidarity could focus on?*

**Pramen:** Do solidarity actions. A lot of solidarity actions. Send us pictures of your solidarity actions. Support from outside inspires not only anarchist hearts but the hearts of everyone on the streets. People are seeing that they are not alone. After reading this text, just go paint a really simple banner, get your mates together, and take a picture. This will take couple of hours tops.

If you have more time and energy—be creative. Belarus is a capitalist state. There are a lot of embassies and other points that represent the Belarusian state. In 2010 in Russia, some daring anarchists occupied the Belarusian embassy. This can be one of the ideas on the table. Be creative—and through your creativity, we will know that you are honest in your solidarity!

And if you are tech savvy, start helping us out with problems with internet. In Belarus these days, people with money can access the internet way more easily than grassroots activists. Free VPN and other solutions are not working and we need a lot of help with this as lack of internet prevents a lot of organizational efforts.

**Anonymous:** Though hardly realistic, the best support would be to come and to support by directly participating in the protests. We need courageous and decisive people at our side. Another way is by sharing experience and ideas with our protesters—we need your imagination and creativity!

We also need informational support—many people don't know much about Belarus and the real situation here. The reality, mentality, and way of thinking are different in the post-Soviet context

tion to the modern state flag and in opposition to Lukashenko's Belarus, since Lukashenko was the one who ordered the creation of what is currently the official flag of Belarus.

I understand where the argument associating the flag with Nazis comes from. There was a very complicated situation during the occupation of Belarus by German fascists in the Second World War. Belarus was strongly oppressed by the Soviet government at that time, which was trying to destroy the Belarusian national identity. For example, in 1933, the Soviet government imposed a brutal and unjustified reform on the Belarusian language, in which the alphabet was changed from Latin (an alphabet very similar to the Polish language) into Cyrillic. A lot of people experienced repression. In these conditions, when the German army was approaching and the Soviet government evacuated in a panic, some people tried to create a so-called Belarusian Central Council. They were collaborationists, though their motives were not to support and welcome the German Nazis but to seize a chance to create a national sovereign entity. The council existed for less than two years. People who use the WRW flag today are often not even aware of these historical events. The WRW flag is a national flag that has been used throughout history during various times of oppression by many revolutionaries and has nothing to do with the German Nazis in the mind of Belarusian people.

I would draw a parallel with Kurdistan. There's the state flag of Syria and the Syrian regime—and there's the flag of Kurdistan. In the same way, we have the statist flag of Lukashenko—which has only been used during his presidency, so people avoid using it, especially in this struggle where everything is about deposing him—and the national and historical flag, which is white-red-white.

For sure, there are people in the demonstrations with a wide range of different political views. Most of them don't define themselves politically at all. When miners go on strike because they don't agree with the corrupt state government and the exploitation that their bosses are engaged in, do we try to determine their

## **Economic and political crisis**

Economically, Belarus is not an independent country. For many years, the Belarusian economic miracle has been able to survive only at the expense of cheap oil from Putin and direct money transfers from the Kremlin. Contrary to the fact that Lukashenko and Putin are not friends, this scheme worked relatively long while the Russian government was bathing in oil money.

With black gold prices falling, the Russian government was faced with the question of redistributing resources. Officials began to look at where the money invested was yielding some kind of result. Belarus did not give any special results. Contrary to all investments, Lukashenko extended his hold on power and hindered Belarus' integration into Russia – a process launched back in the 90s during Yeltsin.

The instability of Lukashenko over the past 10 years has shown that the Russian authorities cannot rely on him much. Turn to the West in 2015 added wood to the fire of discord between Moscow and Minsk. By early 2020, Lukashenko found himself in a very difficult situation. New oil and gas contracts have become much more difficult to conclude. The Belarusian authorities wanted at least some minimal concessions, but Russia was ready to give these concessions only when activating the project of the union state, with the joint currency and other points for the absorption of Belarus by Russia.

Political difficulties with Russia traditionally lead to economic problems in the country. During the last 5 years Lukashenko tried to neutralize this dependence by working with the West, but Western grants and loans cannot pull the Belarusian economy alone. In early 2020, the Belarusian ruble started to fall heavily against other currencies. Over the past 20 years, Belarusians have managed to survive several waves of such a fall, the largest being in 2011. The fall of the Belarusian ruble means for many Belarusians, including

the fall in their real earnings. In addition, problems with the payment of salaries at state enterprises began to arise.

## Fighting coronavirus with tractors

Lukashenko explained that it is due to economic problems that that Belarus can't afford any quarantine measures against the coronavirus. If at the beginning of the epidemic the dictator was still shouting that the Belarusians would be able to avoid getting infected by work in the field and visiting the sauna, a month later he had to admit the real reasons for the lack of quarantine.

The coronavirus proved to be one of the most serious challenges for the Belarusian dictatorship, which it failed. Instead of typical populism and care for their people the authorities left the population on self-sufficiency.

Medical care in Belarus is nominally free of charge, but many services have to be paid for, as there is not enough money from the budget for drugs and medical equipment. It was impossible to test for coronavirus in many cases. Many could not afford to stay home and go to work. It is difficult to assess the real scale of the Coronavirus epidemic in Belarus. The state is the only institution that has real figures, and these figures are kept secret. In addition, many cases of coronavirus were labelled as pneumonia, including fatal.

In order to maintain medical care, small businesses and a large number of ordinary people have, in fact, engaged in decentralized support of medical staff. Some restaurants and bars prepared food for the medical staff from the donations made by city dwellers. As in other countries, grass-roots initiatives produced protective masks. Taxi drivers transported medical personnel without payment.

A few months later, many people had the feeling that the state had abandoned them. But, on the other hand, there was a sense of

sion to Russia acknowledging the new situation in Belarus without intervening.

***Is there anything you would like to say to self-proclaimed “anti-imperialists” in the West who support Lukashenko?***

**Pramen:** Well... there could be a long answer. For example, we could explain that Lukashenko is part of the imperialist Russian project in this region. He is supported by Moscow for his loyalty to the Kremlin—and there is nothing “anti-imperialist” in a president who is in power by the will of the empire that holds power in the region. I believe the sort of critics you are describing also love the social benefits that the state allegedly offers in Belarus. However, if you do your research, you will discover that Lukashenko is actually the one who has been destroying social programs in this country for years while preventing people from engaging in any sort of self-organization. We could go on explaining things for hours and hours.

But you know what? Authoritarian leftists don't hear arguments. They are believers. They believe in their “truth” the same way some people believe in a religion. No matter how many good points you can bring, they will maintain their original position.

So we can shift to the short answer: “Go fuck yourself.” But you can still read more constructive things on our website ☒

**Anonymous:** If Lukashenko had the chance, he would build his own empire. If you could understand his speeches, you would realize that he suffers from delusions of grandeur—or “suffers” is probably the wrong word, because he enjoys them. There's nothing anti-imperialist in this political figure in any possible way.

***We have seen some “anti-imperialists” alleging that the movement in Belarus is comprised of fascists. There are allegations that the flag many demonstrators are waving is associated with the Nazi occupation of Belarus, for example.***

**Anonymous:** The first documented usage of the white-red-white (WRW) flag goes back to the fourteenth century. It's used nowadays as a symbol of Belarusian self-determination in opposi-

*strategy here? What would be the implications for Russia and elsewhere in the region if protesters force Lukashenko out of power?*

**Pramen:** It is not clear what is happening in Putin's head. It might be that he is just waiting for Lukashenko to weaken in order to strike a deal that would reduce Belarus to some kind of vassal state. At the same time, Putin is really disappointed with what is happening in Ukraine and Syria—the plans of his political analysts are not working out as he expected. At the end of the day, nothing prevents him from marching the Russian army into Belarus and proclaiming that it is part of Russia.

Putin has been playing with Lukashenko for a long time with the goal of integrating Belarus back into the Russian state. This never worked out, so it might be that there is a political decision not to support Lukashenko, to try to navigate the events in a clever way. Right now, if Putin supports Lukashenko with everything he has and Lukashenko still loses, Belarusian society will turn completely against Moscow. So for Putin, it might be a good tactic to maintain distance until things are clearer.

**Anonymous:** Putin was one of the first to congratulate Lukashenko on his victory and to affirm the results of the elections. In his message, he called for them to strengthen the collaboration between the two countries. Lukashenko's position is very weak at the moment. With the brutality he used during the elections, he lost any support and diplomatic leverage with the European Union. Now he needs the support of his big eastern brother. This is a very favorable situation for Russia. Without further expense, Russia can spread its influence over Belarus. It seems possible that Putin will do everything possible to keep Lukashenko in power including sending military forces to put down the protests.

At the same time, if the protests force Lukashenko out of power, there are too many factors to take into considerations to make any forecasts. The scenario varies from military intervention and inva-

solidarity, the certainty that neighbors, friends and even strangers from the Internet would not leave you in trouble. This feeling has restored to Belarusians the importance of the public as opposed to the state. Solidarity has become not just a word, but a direct practice.

And if in many countries, which were under the impact of coronavirus, with the fall of the number of infected, solidarity began to fall, in Belarus the structures of solidarity continued to work in other spheres as well. For example, in June, half of Minsk lost access to clean water. And while officials insisted that there was no problem with water, residents of the districts with water were organizing and delivering water to the neediest parts of the city.

Thus, one of the most important results of the coronavirus (the epidemic did not end in the country) was the growing awareness of the collective strength and the results that can be achieved through joint actions.

## **Elections during the virus**

It was a mistake for Lukashenko to decide to announce the elections in the midst of the coronavirus: in early May, they announced that the elections would be held in August. The moment of maximum dissatisfaction with the authorities was chosen. Thanks to this, the election campaigns of his opponents literally began to gain a huge amount of support from the very first days. One of the presidential candidates, blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky, began holding rallies with an open microphone at the place of collecting signatures. This format attracted a huge number of people across the country, who were given a platform to express their discontent. A few weeks later, Tikhanovsky himself and many other major opposition politicians were detained and charged in far-fetched criminal cases.

Instead of extinguishing the protest and dissatisfaction with the authorities, the repression provoked even more organization around another candidate – banker of Belgazprombank (daughter of Gazprom) Viktor Babariko. Unlike other candidates, Babariko was not engaged in political struggle and for many he looked like a “moderate” candidate who called for fair elections and did not plan illegal demonstrations across the country. Contrary to this, Babariko’s popularity was also growing among the more moderate part of the population.

As a result, the authorities decided to arrest Babariko and his inner circle on corruption charges. This step provoked another wave of discontent, the final stage of which was the announcement that the two largest opposition candidates would not be registered in the race for presidency. This decision resulted in major protests across the country with the first clashes with the police in Minsk: the demonstrators repulsed the detainees and saw that the OMON was absolutely unprepared for a violent confrontation with the people.

The clashes with riot police in July this year were a turning point for many in society. The dictatorship, which for 26 years had been built in part on its indestructibility through the support of the security forces, was suddenly extremely fragile. Videos of the confused OMON riot police quickly spread over the Internet and showed that one doesn’t have to train for 3 years in camps in Russia or the EU to fight the police.

Lukashenko did not deny registration to only one serious opponent, Sergei Tikhanovsky’s wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. Tikhanovskaya originally planned to run for president in order to give her husband and other opponents of the regime a voice. But after the majority of politicians were arrested, she remained the only candidate around whom voters could unite.

Tikhanovskaya is not a politician and is not trying to become one. The main requirement of her entire election campaign is new elections. She openly says that she has no plans and does not want

**Pramen:** We hope only for one scenario—that Lukashenko is done. Depending on the level of violence, he could be killed, or people might just shave his mustache off. Or he might flee—this happened to most of his friends from East Block who were overthrown. This is the scenario that we are all fighting for.

There is another scenario: Lukashenko stays. In that case, there will be massive repression after the protests subside. Hundreds of people will be prosecuted and sentenced to many years in prison. The list of political prisoners will grow very quickly. Anarchists will be on it for sure.

Repression will destroy any political life in the country. Anything that can pose a threat to the government will be destroyed. It’s not clear if the anarchist movement will survive this repression, as most of the groups are actually completely in it.

The collapse of the movement will send Belarusian society into decline. Many people will flee the country for sure. In the absence of political and social pressure, the economic crisis will drop people’s income and create more challenges for the working population.

But we don’t want to think about the worst-case scenario, because we are fighting for the best-case scenario—and we all know that there is no way back.

***How will the departure of Tikhanovskaya affect the movement?***

**Anonymous:** People are mostly struggling for themselves, for their freedom and life. Some people still regard her as a president in exile. Some never really cared. What everyone cares most about at the moment is the fate of those who are imprisoned and the responsibility for carrying on the struggle for those who sacrificed their life or health. So everything depends on the spirit of people, I believe—on whether they are ready to keep the struggle going despite all the violence and cruelty they are experiencing now.

***We have seen that Russia has not wholeheartedly supported Lukashenko in this situation. How do you see Putin’s***

anarchists have managed to influence the protests by bringing new approaches and techniques.

***We have heard that, at least according to a reporter from Belsat TV, anarchists played an important role in the August 9 protests in Minsk. Is this true?***

**Pramen:** Anarchists are playing quite an important role in this protests. We see organized affinity groups building barricades, trying to get bigger groups of people to move around the city and fight the police where it is necessary.

But even that is overshadowed by the creativity that the population is showing on the streets. What we call affinity groups in anarchist movement is something that exists naturally in society—friends go together to the protest and quite often they talk about what they should do beforehand. So you can see a lot of young people not affiliated with any political currents on the barricades fighting the cops.

As for the strategy... The main goal is very simple—to bring down the dictator. By participating in the protests, to spread the ideas of horizontal organizing and decentralization. Even during the clashes, people are still spreading the leaflets to protesters at the back of the crowd. There is a belief that if people manage to bring down Lukashenko without politicians and big leaders, that will deal a powerful blow to authoritarian tendencies in the country. It will also give a huge boost to self-organization and solidarity in this society.

Everybody understands that this revolution is not going to be a libertarian one. We are not going to be able to bring the state down. However, as anarchists, we can try to push our ideas as hard as possible to come out on the other side with more momentum towards freedom.<sup>2</sup>

***What are the different scenarios for how this showdown between Lukashenko and the protesters could turn out?***

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<sup>2</sup> platform.twitter.com

to stay in power. After the victory in Lukashenko, she planned to announce new fair elections, which should have changed the country.

Such a simple demand has united many political groups. Activists from the staffs of the imprisoned politicians got involved in her election headquarters. Tikhanovskaya's very election campaign relied heavily on the self-organization of the population in various parts of the country. Meetings with the candidate were officially registered in many places in the country where the candidate herself had not visited. Instead, there was a stage for speeches and an open microphone. Again, the microphone was rarely picked up by career politicians who feared reprisals, but rather by the working population and small businesses. In some cities, anarchists also spoke on stage.

Tikhanovskaya's popularity soared in just a few weeks. In July, she managed to gather one of the largest rallies in the history of the country – 50,000 people in Minsk. In other cities, she gathered from several hundred to 8,000 people. For a long time the authorities did not take any measures and allowed people to gather. Perhaps the role was played by the sexism of Lukashenko, who never held women for serious opponents of the authorities. The top of Tikhanovskaya's team were women. Tikhanovskaya also came on stage with two coordinators of her campaign.

Just a few days before the election, the authorities suddenly came to their senses. Instead of banning the gatherings, the decision was to play fools – all the venues declared open for rallies began to hold government events or repairs. The ban on assembly has provoked the next wave of discontent, but in active stages of protest has not turned out, as there were only a few days left before elections.

At the same time, during the last week the Belarusian police started actively detaining bloggers. Such tactics are not new and have been used by the authorities for many years – before any

protests there are constant detentions of journalists and bloggers, who can cover these protests online.

## Terrorist organization “Anarchists”

Before we proceed directly to election day, I would like to make a short introduction to the anarchist movement in Belarus.

Anarchists have reappeared in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early nineties, some groups made a significant contribution to the formation of the workers’ and environmental movement. Anarchists played one of the key roles in extending the moratorium on the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in 1999 (in 2009 anarchists and environmentalists lost the fight).

During the entire period of the dictatorship, anarchists have been involved in major political events, be it new re-elections, the movement against the construction of the nuclear power plant or protests against the laws on parasites. And in most cases, the population perceived the anarchist agenda very positively. Perhaps, somewhere they did not fully understand but accepted it.

Starting from 2013–2014, anarchists have become almost the only political force still engaged in street agitation. Most opposition parties have stopped fighting actively against the dictatorship after Maidan 2014 in fear of Russian occupation. Today, some opposition politicians still stand on the position “better Lukashenko than Putin. Part of the opposition was drowned in repression. It was much easier to do so, as repression against the leaders could have stopped the movement.

Due to their activism, anarchists are constantly attracting the attention of law enforcement agencies. Some activists are now in prison for symbolic actions, others are on the run. There are initiatives to help the poor and an anti-capitalist freemarket. Repression against anarchists rarely produces the desired result. They are writ-

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that there are calls for direct democracy on some major media platforms. At least some people in Belarus do understand that Lukashenko is a dictator, but dictatorship is a complicated machine. If we just pass this machine into the hands of another president, the scenario may simply repeat itself.

**Anonymous:** The political life of Belarus has been devastated by the years of authoritarian power. The existing parties only exist for the sake of existing—people hardly know them and don’t trust them.

Hence the classic joke: if you ever feel useless, just remember that there’s a Prime Minister in Belarus. Political parties don’t play any role here. Regular political models of decision-making don’t work.

Probably one of the things that united people and helped them to create a powerful movement is the almost apolitical character of this struggle during the elections. People saw something different than usual buffoonery. Tikhonovskaya, the main rival of Lukashenko in this election, appeared from nowhere as a housewife who took over running after her imprisoned husband and whose only political program was to organize fair elections half a year after she becomes president. After 26 years of surviving in a “social state,” people don’t believe in socialism. After the long Soviet history and continuing pro-communist rhetoric on the TV and in daily life, people are skeptical about communism. What people want is to put an end to the years of oppression—both ideological and economic, but economic first of all. They are not politically engaged at all. There are some political actors in the background of these events, but they are nearly invisible.

Unfortunately, we can say almost the same thing about anarchists—due to the small number of anarchists and the focus on the inside of the movement, anarchists can’t really take over and lead this protest. Though by no means do I want to underestimate the anarchist contribution—despite small numbers,

- You learn how to keep your flat clean, so that nothing in it can be used against you.
- You teach and learn security culture—both physical and virtual.
- You get to know your comrades in difficult situations and this creates bonds stronger than steel.<sup>1</sup>

*What is the composition of the movement around the August elections in Belarus? What are the political aspirations of the participants? What is the balance of power between them?*

**Pramen:** This election round is a shitshow. Many opposition politicians actually opposed the main plan for the protests. They were calling on people to stay at home and wait for a better time to rise. Many from the older generations were instructed to stay at home and not follow any provocations.

On the other side, the vacuum that was created by this political decision filled up with bloggers, smaller groups, and Telegram channels. Consequently, agency shifted from political parties to the people. This summer, the movement against Lukashenko became so massive that anarchists represented just a tiny part of all the things that were going on.

And what was going on was not connected with clear political demands. There were no political or economic platforms built around the elections calling for privatization or nationalization or anything else of the sort. Instead, people were organizing against the dictatorship—to bring it down. It is this simple. And this simple push drew a lot of people to it. Today frustration with Lukashenko is greater than ever. Currently, no political groups, organizations, or parties have been able to ride to popularity on this protest.

So for now, the popular uprising against Lukashenko can still go in any direction depending on who is present on the streets.

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<sup>1</sup> platform.twitter.com

ten about by the opposition media and thus attract new attention and energy to the movement again.

Today, the popularity of anarchists in certain youth circles is quite high due to the fact that apart from anarchists there are no political movements left.

## Re-election

Even before the beginning of the election campaign many people expected major protests in Belarus precisely because of the economic crisis and the coronavirus. It was logical for many to concentrate their protest efforts on election day and the following days. For instance, large media platforms in social networks and groups in telegram called for protests on election day several weeks before the elections.

Both protesters and authorities were preparing for these elections. There were pictures of military and police equipment on the Internet. Lukashenko attended training of riot police to disperse the protests. It was clear that the authorities would not try to bring down the degree of discontent, but rather to press the population by force.

It's not surprising that in the evening of August 9<sup>th</sup> thousands of people came out all over the country. Only according to the reports of the authorities themselves, the demonstrations took place simultaneously in 33 cities of the country. More than 50,000 people took part in those protests. The largest demonstrations were held in Brest, Baranavichy and Minsk. Several thousand people went out in the other regional centers.

To resist the demonstrators in Minsk, internal troops and police from all over the country were collected. The day before the election, transport columns were moving from the regions to Minsk. On election day, the city was cordoned off. Buses without license plates drove around the city and randomly detained pedestrians

or journalists. Internet access was turned off or severely restricted throughout the country.

By evening, the situation had changed radically. Crowds of people started going out into the streets and moving towards the center. The same situation was observed in smaller cities of the country. Towards evening, the first clashes with OMON began, as the people tried to free the detainees. The riot police themselves ran around the city at first, wearing T-shirts and batons with no special uniforms. The attacks on OMON quickly made it clear that the situation on that day would not be normal, with people being pulled out of the crowd and simply detained.

Just an hour after the first clashes, the center of Minsk began to resemble a combat zone. Czech noise grenades, Canadian water cannons, Belarusian MAZs – all worked to disperse the protesters. For the first time in the country's history, people began to erect barricades, as well as directly clash with law enforcement agencies. A huge number of people were released from the hands of law enforcement officers at night in various parts of the country.

Solidarity during the protests again showed the incredible power of collective opposition to the dictatorship. The crowds paralyzed any action by OMON and the military, contrary to all preparations. The lack of the Internet only played a negative factor for the regime – people went out to the streets to find out what was going on.

For two hours in the center of Minsk and other cities people were fighting against the Belarusian authorities. They fought with great energy, which they had been saving for so many years. The successful confrontation shows once again the fragility of the Belarusian dictatorship.

The movement itself today is not the traditional political parties that lead the Belarusians to a bright future. Protests are organized through media platforms and have no clear leaders. Groups of people gather in the streets and decide on the way to go. The lack of a clear plan may hinder the effectiveness of the protest, but the lack of clear leaders makes it impossible to suppress easily.

lectives went completely underground. Nobody is allowed to know who is part of our collective, for example. The same rule exists in other groups. We organize certain common actions together—the protests right now, for example—but everybody is participating on the streets as individuals or affinity groups, not in an organizational structure. This makes inter-group cooperation complicated, but it protects us from ending up in a situation in which a snitch in one group knows the infrastructure of the whole movement.

Anarchist street actions have a time limit—the maximum amount of time we have before the police come is usually around 10–15 minutes.

Working underground makes it difficult to integrate new people into the movement. That's why some of the groups function as entrance points for the anarchists—for example, everybody can attend a punk concert and, through that, get to know the ways to enter the organized anarchist movement one step at a time.

However, it is also important to mention that certain people came out of the underground to function as public figures. They give interviews, talk to the media, and make youtube videos on different topics. They do experience troubles with the police from time to time, but it seems that there are certain things you can still express. Calling for revolution might be problematic, but calling for direct democracy and decentralization of power seems to be fine.

The longstanding existence of the Anarchist Black Cross in Belarus underscored an important point: you can rely on your comrades not only when you are doing direct actions or participating in protests, but also when you end up behind bars. This is an important psychological factor that makes the movement strong.

Of course, those who join the anarchists are aware of the possibility of repression from the first day. So they are not just your average students who decided to get involved in politics when they happen to have enough time. Participants are aware that they can go to prison even for small things. And you organize your life accordingly:

tions on the streets. Apart from these organized groups, there are several widely known blogs that support the anarchist movement. In addition, a small group of activists organized a printing cooperative that has existed for three years now.

There has been a lot of disappointment since 2017. At that time, expectations were high as momentum against Lukashenko was growing. But then the uprising was smashed and everybody went to normality. A lot of people who served time in jail came out broken; for many anarchists, normality wasn't possible, as raids, detention, and psychological pressure continued. Some active people had to leave the country due to problems with the state apparatus.

However, despite the disappointment and these hard blows, anarchists continued organizing. The movement is not massive at all—around the country, there might be more or less 100 organized anarchists. Add a couple hundred more people who are sympathizers and that's it—out of a country of 10 million people. However, the events of 2017 also struck a blow to organized liberal and nationalist groups; they were not strong before it and afterwards, most opposition parties ceased all street activity. Since 2017, anarchists are most probably the only active force still agitating on the streets.

In our collective, we were doing media and agitation work. Some other groups were organizing public events with an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian direction.

It is also important to mention that in terms of class, the Belarusian anarchist movement doesn't include many students. It is mostly composed of different parts of the working class.

*How have anarchists continued organizing in Belarus despite repression? Do you have any advice for anarchists in other parts of the world who have not experienced the same sort of repression yet—but may experience it in the coming years?*

**Pramen:** Anarchists in Belarus have used a lot of interesting tactics over the last few years. First of all, most of the radical col-

The repression last night was brutal. There were so many victims. In rage, riot police threw noise grenades right at people. At least once a police truck rammed a crowd in the center of Minsk and killed one man. According to human rights defenders, at least three people were killed by the regime that night. The first blood was spilled, but people do not plan to stop. The plan is to take to the streets every day at 19:00 before the fall of the dictatorship.

There are calls in the telegram for direct democracy in the country on major channels. And although some fear that such calls exist due to misunderstanding of the concept, Belarus has rebelled and many demand the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the era of direct democracy.

# „We will not forget, we will not forgive“

*Written at the spot of death of one of protestors in Minsk.*

Today the first protester who was killed by the cops on Monday has been named by authorities. Alexander Taraikovsky was 34 years old. He was on his way home, said his wife but never arrived there or called again. Cops didn't inform the family so the dead got known to them after two days. Our thoughts are with the family and friends.

## Protest in more than 50 cities all around Belarus

Already at nine in the morning protesters started to form chains of solidarity or were marching through the cities. Like yesterday this protests are mostly organized by women. Today in more than 50 cities and towns protest took place. There is an interactive map now, where protests and strikes and other information are available. In general you could see that more and more people from different parts of the society are joining the protest. Families, older people, a lot of young people, as there are holidays and they don't have to go to school.

In Zhodino 3000 people were gathering, talking to the mayor and demanding the release of the prisoner. Zhodino has one of the biggest prison colony complex in Belarus.

future of the uprising in Belarus is yet unwritten—it could be suppressed, it could be coopted by neoliberal democrats or nationalists, or it could become a reference point for grassroots revolt. What happens next will be determined on the world stage, as struggles like this play out across six continents. We call for everyone who is concerned about the future of humanity to deepen international ties of solidarity, exchange tactics and resources, and understand these struggles in a global context.

For an update from the protest actions on August 11, read this. There is a call for solidarity actions worldwide on August 14 to support the uprising.

We interviewed members of the Belarusian anarchist publishing collective Pramen and, to ensure that we obtained a well-rounded perspective, we also sought answers from another longtime Belarusian anarchist, who spoke on condition of anonymity. In the following discussion, they explore the background of the current crisis, describe how to organize under a repressive dictatorship, and reflect on the potential outcomes of the uprising.

## Interview

***Give us a brief overview of the history of the contemporary anarchist movement in Belarus.***

**Pramen:** As some of you might have heard, the anarchist movement was destroyed in the Soviet Union. The rebirth of the movement took place at the end of the Soviet era. In the 1990s, anarchists played important roles in certain grassroots movements around ecology, labor struggles, and other issues. Since then, anarchists have organized in Belarus with various ups and downs. There are at least five organized anarchist collectives—the Anarchist Black Cross, Pramen, Food Not Bombs, Volnaya Dumka library, and the Really Free Market initiative. All of them handle different tasks within the movement—from anti-repression work to organizing ac-

Authoritarian leftists have looked for the machinations of Western state actors in these events, seeking—like other conspiracy theorists—to explain them as the malevolent workings of a single all-powerful shadowy entity like the CIA. Yet the uprising in Belarus is not particularly convenient for any of the geopolitical players involved. Although it gives Putin an opportunity to press Lukashenko for more concessions, it could also destabilize Russia. It interrupts attempts from the United States to gain more leverage in the region by establishing a more amicable relationship with Lukashenko. In a time when state violence, economic crisis, and a catastrophic pandemic have discredited governments worldwide, it threatens to set a precedent for mass revolt that could spread. Many commentators have noted that the events in Belarus could serve as a template for what might happen in the United States if the 2020 elections are contested.

Everywhere around the world, state structures are failing people and provoking rebellious social movements. Which political currents become influential in these movements will determine what is possible in the next generation of struggles. If there are not powerful anarchist currents involved—or if we immediately write off entire movements on account of the participation of some reactionary elements—we will make it inevitable that more of the disenfranchised and desperate will be drawn into ersatz movements organized by nationalists, neoliberals, and other authoritarians, with disastrous consequences. In the Gilets Jaunes movement in France, it was very important that anarchists got involved and fought to marginalize fascist and nationalist elements in it that were attempting to popularize their template for resistance against Macron's centrist government. Likewise, we should channel resources and solidarity to the anarchist elements in the struggle in Belarus.

Not all revolutionary activity is positive. When fascists gained the upper hand in the Ukrainian revolution, it was important to understand how this took place and to identify that the victory of the revolution did not represent a step towards liberation. But the

## **National strike is growing**

More and more people are joining the strike. Today 28 different factories and hospitals were completely or partially on strike in. Even workers from big state enterprises like Belas or Asot joined. Also Railroad workers and a lot of medical staff participated in the strike.

## **Repression**

Riot cops raided today to enterprise providing Taxis, Yandex and Uber in Minsk. After that they started smashing Yandex Cars. Taxi driver and their cars were already targeted in the night, because they provided transport to protesters.

## **The more people get out of prison the more stories of torture are told**

Most of the people still don't know where are their relatives and friends.

But more and more people got released today from Minsk pre-trial prison Okrestin. Starting at 22:30 even groups of people came out. Families, friends and volunteers were holding protest rallies the whole day waiting for the people.

People went through hell: 50 people in 4 person cell, torture, beatings, threat of rape, no water nor food, people were forced to sing the national anthem and got beaten... More and more people are giving testimonies about their experiences and posting pictures of their injuries. Yesterday night people recorded torture noises from the prison. Many of the detainees released from the detention facility on Okrestin are taken straight to hospital.

People wanna collect all the incidents and start a tribunal against the torturer and murderer of the regime.

## **Crimethinc: Belarus. Anarchists in the Uprising against the Dictatorship**

*Starting on the night of Sunday, August 9, in response to an election widely deemed to be rigged, a massive protest movement has broken out in Belarus against Aleksandr Lukashenko, the strongman who has ruled the country for over a quarter of a century. Police have arrested thousands of people, firing live rounds and murdering demonstrators. From Sunday to Tuesday, Lukashenko's government apparently shut down the internet and landline telephones in hopes of dampening the protests, while claiming that the blackout was the work of forces outside Belarus. Belarusian opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanouskaya was detained and apparently forced to read a script declaring that Lukashenko had won the election and urging people to "obey the law" and stay away from street protests before fleeing to Lithuania. Despite this, the protests continue. In a context in which the state has cracked down on every form of political opposition, anarchists are among the only organized groups still capable of participating in street demonstrations. To understand the events that are unfolding, we interviewed multiple anarchists from Belarus.*

This is not the first time we have had cause to correspond with Belarusian anarchists. In 2017, anarchists in Belarus participated at the forefront of a wave of protest against a law forcing the unemployed to pay a special additional tax to the government. Although some describe Belarus as the last socialist holdout of the Soviet era, the ruling class there is engaged in the same process

of accumulating wealth and suppressing dissent that we see in the United States, the European Union, China, and elsewhere. We don't see the protest movement in Belarus as a reaction to a "backward" regime that can be resolved simply by introducing democracy, but rather as yet another flashpoint alongside Portland and Belgrade in a worldwide struggle against the consequences of capitalism and authoritarianism.

Of necessity, the new wave of protest in Belarus is decentralized and largely leaderless, adhering to anarchist tactics if not principles. We fear that even in a best-case scenario, this current horizontality does not guarantee a positive outcome. Largely horizontal resistance movements have repeatedly been coopted and channeled into reinventing the same authoritarian state structures—including the movements that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union three decades ago. From our perspective, the most important thing that can take place in tumultuous moments like this is for people to develop a more thoroughgoing analysis of the structures of power and what it will take to bring about real liberation.

To understand the specific developments that have brought this crisis to a head in Belarus, we recommend this article by Pramen, the anarchist collective we interviewed. It is also important to read their analysis of why a more credible electoral democracy is inadequate to address the problems people face in Belarus:

"We should not forget that anarchists are against not only this presidential election, but against any president in general. The Belarusian people have long known that power corrupts everyone. Lukashenko may be replaced by an opposition politician, who will keep power in the country and continue repression against his own population. We must rise up not to get a new president, but to live without presidents. Decentralization of power should be a key factor in the transition from dictatorship to a free society."

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Anti-Copyright



Prameń  
Uprising in Belarus from anarchist perspective  
Society, Prisoners, Chronology, Events  
23 April 2021

Retrieved on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [abc-belarus.org](http://abc-belarus.org)  
Brochure compiled by the Anarchic group “Prameń”, a social-revolutionary anarchist group and information resource. We consider events happening in the world not in the light of hunting for cheap sensations, but from the standpoint of the class war. Contact Prameń at the website [pramen.io](http://pramen.io) or on Telegram <https://t.me/pramenby>. The revolution begins with you!

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

destruction of property) and Art. 339.2 (hooliganism by a group of persons). He was pardoned by presidential decree on 22 August 2015. In prison he wrote a book “Going to Magadan”, which was translated into several languages. In 2013, the book was awarded by Belarus PEN Centre with the Frantishk Alekhnovich Award for the best work written in prison. In 2016 Igor was awarded the Victor Ivashkevich Prize. After his release, Igor lived abroad and participated in the anarchist movement.

**Dzmitry Dubouvski** – an anarchist from Soligorsk. In 2010, he was put on the wanted list in connection with the “case of Belarus anarchists. In November of the same year, Dubovsky managed to escape in Moscow when the FSB tried to detain him and Igor. For 10 years, Dima was hiding in Russia and Ukraine, published diaries of his travels and participated in the anarchist movement.

**Dzmitry Rezanovich** is an anarchist from Gomel. He was detained on March 16, 2014 after crossing the Ukrainian-Russian border in Kursk. He had his brother’s documents with him. He was detained on suspicion of committing sabotage on Russian territory. The FSB failed to find sufficient evidence for this version and opened a criminal case under Article 332 part 1 of the Russian Criminal Code (crossing the state border of the Russian Federation without valid documents for the right to enter the Russian Federation). He was kept in a deportation center in Kursk region. On July 3 the court ordered to deport Dmitry from Russia and also sentenced him to pay a fine in the amount of 15,000 roubles. On 25 July Dmitry was deported to Belarus. He remained an active participant in the anarchist movement.

**Siarhei Ramanau** is an anarchist from Gomel. In 2013 he Romanov was sentenced to two years in prison with a suspended sentence for keeping 14 grams of gunpowder at home. (Article 295.2 of the Criminal Code). In 2014 he was sentenced to 6 years in prison, after complaints they reduced the sentence to five years. (Art. 295.3 of the Criminal Code). He was released in July 2019 and was sentenced to preventive surveillance restrictions, such as a ban to leave

the city and change his place of residence, a ban to visit bars, restaurants, stores and other places where they sell alcohol, a ban to leave the place of residence between 22:00 and 6:00 without a valid reason, the obligation to visit the inspection once a week.

All the four are mature individuals with strong moral principles and well-established views. Each of them is a convinced anarchist, each of them is an idea-oriented and worthy person. Each of them is a fighter for a new, free Belarus, where there is no place for brutality of police and paramilitary units and other law enforcement agencies, where there is no place for violation of freedom in all its manifestations.

## Why do we support them?

All accusations made by the state against the anarchist rebels are absurd, cynical and false. The arrested anarchists do not hide the fact that they were engaged in car arson, property damage, sabotage. All this is a direct action, **which in no way resulted in injuries or death**. They did not intend to cause that. As anarchist revolutionaries, who chose the path of guerrilla struggle, the group wanted to support the rebellious Belarusian people and contribute to the cause of popular resistance. The weapons are a sign that the guys consciously embarked on a decisive and risky struggle against state terror. We believe that the possession of firearms is the right of free people, not of the brutal law enforcement officers. Today, it is Belarus state based on military and police violence, built, paid for and managed by a mad dictator, which is a terrorist structure. It is the state structures that rape girls, beat up pensioners, shoot unarmed people, torture detainees in vans and detention centers, break into apartments, smash cars and break down bicycles, smash cafes and stores. Anarchists do not do anything like that. Anarchism is self-organization, mutual help, and solidarity. **Anarchism is not just the desire to be free. It is a struggle against any op-**

**pression, a struggle for freedom.** Yes, they had weapons with them. But it was not used against people. Yes, they set fire to buildings and cars, but these very objects are the backbone of the regime and that is why were chosen as targets. There were no casualties. Yes, they are rebels and revolutionaries. But every people have the right to rebel, especially in a country where no democratic mechanism works, where there is no justice at all, and every peaceful protest is met with state violence. Within a few months in Belarus, about seventeen thousand people were detained and about 1000 criminal cases have been opened. More than 100 political prisoners are behind bars. Even in response to the most peaceful form of protest – a strike – the authorities throw workers behind bars.

The ban on strikes, layoffs, repressions, and failure of Belarus authorities to fulfill their promises led to the fact that Soligorsk – the city of miners and workers – was chosen by anarchists for direct action. **The actions were aimed at supporting workers and expressing their solidarity with their demands.**

We call on the anarchists to hold back criticism based on excerpts and scraps from the interrogations of the comrades, deliberately published by the law enforcement agencies. Time will put everything in its place, and we declare with full responsibility that new facts about the group of Belarus revolutionary anarchists will become public.

We express our full support to the imprisoned anarchists and all Belarus people who have rebelled against the dictatorship and police violence and call for struggle for immediate release of **IharAlinevich, Dzmitry Dubouski, Dzmitry Rezanovich, Siarhei Ramanau**, as well as all political prisoners in Belarus. We call on all people who are not indifferent to spread information, organize actions of solidarity and resistance, any kind of pressure on all structures of Lukashenko's regime, both in Belarus and abroad. Remember that the best support is to continue the struggle to which the arrested comrades devoted their lives.

*Friends and comrades-in-arms*  
*Anarchist collective "Pramen"*  
*Mikola Dziadok, anarchist blogger*  
*"Effect Monro" Collective*  
*Anarchist Black Cross Belarus*  
*"Black Wave" Collective*  
*Autonomous Action*  
*Federacja Anarchistyczna Śląsk*  
*Lukáš Borl, anarchist and blogger*  
*"Volnaya Dumka" library*  
*"Boec anarchist" collective*  
*Project "Antijob"*  
*Anarchist black cross / Czech*  
*161 Crew Poland*  
*Publishing cooperative «Напильник»*  
*Collective "Make (A) Great Again"*  
*Abc Greece*  
*Anarchistyczny Czarny Krzyż Galicja (s. Kraków)*  
*325 Collective*  
*Газета "Атак"*  
*"The Chronicle of Resistance"*  
*Anarquía*  
*Agência de Notícias Anarquistas-ANA (Brasil)*  
*Publishing cooperative «Радикальная теория и практика»*  
*Volná komunita VAP*  
*Anarchistyczny Czarny Krzyż Warszawa*  
*Letter open for signature*

## Prisoners list

To see the lists of all political prisoners, their addresses for letters and information on them — see these resources:

[abc-belarus.org](http://abc-belarus.org)

[prisoners.spring96.org](http://prisoners.spring96.org)

[www.dissidentby.com](http://www.dissidentby.com)

Mediazona. Belarus ([https://t.me/mediazona\\_by](https://t.me/mediazona_by))

Radio Svaboda — Belarus (<https://t.me/radiosvaboda>)

**Ihar Alinevich: On the Way to Magadan**  
**Ihar Alinevich: Auf dem Weg nach Magadan**  
**Mikola Dziadok: The Colours of the Parallel World**

Dedok Nikolay Aleksandrovich  
ul. Volodarskogo, 2, SIZO-1  
220030 Minsk  
Belarus

## **Critical review of protests in Belarus in last 2 month**

Over the past 2 months we have gone through almost the entire book of possible tactics of non-violent resistance. Unfortunately, so far only Sunday protests have been able to strengthen on a permanent basis. The majority of other protest forms are now under control.

### **Working movement**

In the first week the workers showed their political strength in the country. Images of Lukashenko's humiliation at a meeting with workers in Minsk flew around the world. But the repression did not take long. Cops were sent to the entrances of factories and neither the support groups nor the workers were allowed to gather. Ideological work began to be carried out at the enterprises, i.e. workers were intimidated by layoffs and other problems. To reinforce their threats, many enterprises fired or detained the most active workers. Some of them had to go abroad.

At present, all calls to workers have little to do with reality. Most are intimidated and there is no political force that can give them serious support. The loud statements from politicians in telegrams and on the Internet have no impact without campaigning in the workers' groups. It is worth noting that there is now a small stream of workers who join independent trade unions. However, with such intensity it will take several years to form a more or less serious force in the form of workers of large enterprises.

Office workers, public transport workers and other sectors of the economy have not yet expressed any signs of self-organization within the labor movement.

## Protests in the regions

In recent months, protests outside the capital have played an important role in creating pressure on the regime. The Grodno protest briefly secured the retreat of the local authorities from the general agenda and allowed meetings to take place in the main square, while the local channel planned to provide a slot for the protesters. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Brest for many weeks. Thousands of protesters gathered even in small towns.

Today, the regime managed to take almost all cities under its control. While Minsk continued to make a peaceful protest, repressions in other cities were gaining momentum. As a result of repressions and a relative lack of solidarity, the regime managed to suppress the movement in Brest, Grodno and other major pockets of resistance.

## Drivers and the Armenian scenario

From the very beginning of the protests, drivers have been actively involved in the fight against the regime. The drivers channel<sup>97</sup> managed to unite large groups of protesters ready to help block the roads or take protesters out of hot spots. During talks about de-escalation of the conflict after the first week of protests, the drivers tried to become one of the key groups to organize a peaceful revolution under Armenia's scenario – blocking the country for economic damage. If in Armenia this form of protest quickly became the main one, then in Belarus the intensity of road blockades never reached any critical point.

## Buy books to support Belarusian anarchists

On October 22, 2020 the building of State Committee of Forensic Examination was attacked and cars were set on fire at the parking of prosecutor's office in the town of Soligorsk. On the night of October 28, the building of traffic police department of Mozyr district was set on fire. Soon anarchists **Ihar Alinevich, Dzmitry Dubovsky, Dzmitry Rezanovich and Sergey Romanov** were detained near the Belarusian-Ukrainian border.

The activists are accused of terrorist activity and illegal trafficking in weapons and explosives. At present, everyone is in the KGB jail in Minsk.

Anarchist and blogger **Mikalai Dziadok** was detained late in the evening of November 11 in a safe house near Minsk. After his arrest Dziadok was tortured for several hours and forced to give passwords to the encrypted equipment. The investigation believes that Dziadok repeatedly called for illegal actions on his Internet pages, including participation in protests and resistance to the cops. Dziadok himself was forced to go underground even before the revolution because of the threat of political persecution.

It's not the first time these comrades are in jail. Mikalai Dziadok and Ihar Alinevich were convicted in 2011 for a series of direct actions and each wrote a book about their prison experience. The books were translated into several languages. You can buy a copy and Black Mosquito Mailorder and all the proceeds will go to support these the authors.

Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus – participation in mass riot.

From 12 to 17 November Nikita Yemialianau spent five days in the punishment cell for “violation of uniform”.

Zenevich Vladislav, anti-fascist from Minsk, was detained on 30 November under Art 342.1 and arrested for 2 months. Earlier Vlad was detained at the march on 1 November, badly beaten, and the next day was fined 300 euro. His apartment was also searched.

On 13 December the anarchist Gleb V. was detained during a protest action in Minsk and sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest.

On December 16, anarchist Nikita Emelianau was again thrown into solitary confinement.

At the end of December it became known that the life of Mikola Dziadok was in danger, his lawyer could not get to him for more than 10 days. Now Mikola is fine, although there were tense moments in the cell.

*Not all repressions are listed in the text, but only those we were informed about and allowed to publish. If you have any additions or corrections to the text, email [belarus\\_abc@riseup.net](mailto:belarus_abc@riseup.net).*

Blocking of roads by pedestrians and cars at the moment has no serious impact on the regime. Moreover, this tactic is mainly present in the capital, while there are not even small groups ready to stop the traffic outside of it.

And although the drivers have taken on the role of organizers of the revolution in one of the last statements, there are many factors that will prevent them from doing so. Today in the country, even blocking the roads is regarded by many as a provocation or violent resistance. Such rhetoric is the result of rapid de-escalation of the conflict in the first days and the forcing of peaceful marches as the main form of overthrowing the dictatorship.

## **Women’s marches**

Most of the protest women’s marches created a platform for demonstrations on working days. Because of open sexism of the authorities, as well as unwillingness to create a conflict picture, women’s protests were held for a long time without unnecessary problems with the rioters.

The situation changed a few weeks ago from the OMON attack on Saturday’s protests. Marches were quickly suppressed due to lack of preparedness of many people for intensive repression and direct conflict with the regime.

Today, the marches are trying to restore, but at the moment, with increasing repression and attempts to crush the last pockets of resistance in Minsk, it seems unlikely that women’s marches will be able to rise from the ashes and become a political force in the protest movement again.

## **Anarchists, anti-fascists and soccer fans**

In Belarusian society in recent months, thanks to the media and the regime itself, a legend has been formed about knights in black

clothing who can burn cops at one glance. Karaev himself is afraid of these legendary protesters.

However, for real overall success, we need our fellow protesters to perceive us as legitimate participants in the general protest campaign and to hear our proposals on fighting tactics.

## Self-defense groups

More than a month has passed since the call to form self-defense groups on major telegram channels. During this time, a chat room and a telegram channel have been created for people interested in this topic. Once again, however, the intensity of the process has quickly dried up. During this month, only a few such groups were formed as part of neighborhood initiatives.

The purpose of such groups was to protect the demonstrators from the regime's infantry violence during major demonstrations. In addition, there were calls to assemble self-defense groups to protect the neighborhoods from cop raids.

In fact, there are no self-defense groups today that are ready to fight back the regime's violence in an organized format. Inside the crowd, there are various organized and spontaneous groups of people who fight back against cops in one situation or another, but the number of such groups is able to fight back against repressions in a situational rather than systematic way. On Sunday marches, it is never clear how the crowd will behave when cops appear, but mostly people have to take in account that everybody will run away even when they see small groups of punishers.

## MIA/KGB

In the first days after the election, the cops made a huge number of mistakes. All theory and abstract preparation proved to be inef-

house of one of the police officers was sprayed with graffiti. The searches were carried out by Brest police department.<sup>22</sup>

On 11 November the anarchist Mikalai Dziadok was detained. He is charged with gross violation of public order (Art 342) through the administration of Mikola and Pramen channels. The video after the detention shows that tear gas or pepper spray were used against him, and already in the office of the Main Department of Internal Affairs, his jaw was not moving properly. Later Dziadok reported torture and violence used to gain access to his computer.

On November 14, the guys detained on October 30 in a falafel shop were supposed to be released. However, six out of eight detainees were given additional charges, allegedly for participation in the October 25 march, and were given another 10–15 days in jail. Vladislav Moshchuk went on hunger-strike to protest against the repeated detentions.

On 15 November anti-fascist and musician Dima Masal was detained in Grodna. He may be known to many people by the punk bands Contra La Contra and Bagna.

On 15 November the anarchists Yauhen Rubashko and Mikhail Traulko were detained in Minsk. Mikhail was released from the police station, but Yauhen was given 15 days in jail under Article 23.34. Later Mikhail was sentenced to 15 days more.

On 17 November Kirill P., anti-fascist and MTZ fan received 13 days in jail for an action in defense of the Square of Changes on 15 November.<sup>23</sup>

On November 22, anarchist Artyom Solovey was detained during a march against fascism in Minsk. He was sentenced to 25 days of arrest.

On November 26<sup>th</sup> the antifascist Denis Zhuk, resident of Brest, was detained in the framework of the criminal case on mass riots in August. Denis was charged under part 2 of article 293 of the

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<sup>22</sup> [https://t.me/belarus\\_abc/386](https://t.me/belarus_abc/386)

<sup>23</sup> [https://t.me/belarus\\_abc/401](https://t.me/belarus_abc/401)

On 29 October anarchist Varvara Grinyuk was detained in Grodna for a solitary picket in front of university and sentenced to a fine. The art and design student of the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno was expelled on 14 October 2020 for absences. On the day of her expulsion she went in for surgery, for which she had been preparing for more than a month.

On the night of October 29–30, anarchists Dzmitry Dubovski, Ihar Alinevich, Sergey Romanov and Dzmitry Rezanovich were detained while attempting to cross the Belarusian border. They were found with firearms, ammunition, grenades and gas canisters. All were charged under Article 289.2 (terrorism) and Article 295 (illegal arms trafficking) of the Criminal Code.

Now they are all kept in the KGB detention center in Minsk. They are charged with attacks on regime facilities in Salihorsk and Mozyr.

On 30 October eight people who came to celebrate the release of Aliaksandr Bialow were detained. During the detention the pigs used pepper spray cans. The guys were beaten. They were accused of organizing a mass event in front of the falafel shop – according to the cops they shouted slogans “Zhyve Belarus”, “Go away, “Tribunal” while waiting for the falafel. All received 15 days in jail.

On November 1, three anti-fascists were detained near the Neman department store in Grodna, later they were released.

On November 8, anarchist Denis Moroz was detained in Be-laaziorsk. He was sentenced to 15 days in jail. Later his mother, who was also present at the protest, was also sentenced.<sup>21</sup>

On November 11 in Beryoza at least 4 searches were conducted in the apartments and homes of anti-fascists and former football fans of the city. At least two guys were raided. Everyone was shown search warrants for firearms and explosives. It all started after a

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<sup>21</sup> [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

fective in a real street situation. The mistakes led to an increase in protest sentiment and strengthened the fight against the regime.

Two months later we see that strategists made their conclusions. Instead of attempt to crush all the movement in one night, step-by-step repressions began, which gradually destroying the protest movement. For struggle against demonstrators the whole spectrum of repressions is used. Starting from demoralization of small towns with paid pro-Lukashenko rallies and finishing with unhurried initiation of criminal cases. So far, the number of criminal cases on mass riots and other articles has exceeded 500 nationwide. We know of 200+ cases in Brest and the same number in Minsk.

The regime realized that there was nowhere to be too quick. It managed to suppress the protests in large cities outside the capital by means of step-by-step slow repressions. And if for Minsk the detention of several hundred people on the outskirts of the march did not play a major role in the dynamics of Sunday protests, then in the regions the gradual increase in pressure was able to crush not only the protests themselves, but also the morale of the protesters.

## Neighborhoods/districts

After many protesters were pushed out of the city’s central squares, the protests moved to the neighborhoods. Small groups of neighbors meet on a permanent basis and organize cultural and political events. Many are organized through telegram from local district channels.

Over the past month, initiatives in the neighborhoods have been able to organize an important cultural program in the form of concerts, tea parties and performances. In some places, the political agenda is the main one. But in most cases, cultural events take much more attention and effort.

Administrators of some district channels delete the politics in general, while other chat rooms do not tolerate any radical discussions. Self-organization materials are subject to censorship.

In small towns, the organization of neighborhood initiatives has already faced problems with cops. For example, police has come to one of the meetings in Baranovichi and several people have been taken away. The lack of mass participation in small cities makes it very difficult to create new infrastructure.

And although we see that the dynamics are developing positively and the level of self-organization is increasing day by day, neighborhood structures lack the initiative to develop into a critical mass. And if this critical mass cannot be reached before the police begins to travel through the districts and detain the activists, the assemblies movement awaits the fate of other protest initiatives, which are relatively quickly dying out under the regime's intense repression.

## What next?

Obviously, it makes no sense to push the protest as it is. Many people like to compare protest with a marathon. If we continue in the direction of this comparison, then we run the marathon barefoot on the hot coals, and our opponent is quietly walking on the asphalt road. The Belarusian regime today has much more resources than the protesters. Repression continues to effectively knock out active protesters.

The radicalization of the protest itself will come sooner or later. There are no doubts about it. It will most likely come not from the appeals of anarchists or other radical groups. But it will come because of violence on the part of cops against the people. According to our estimates, such radicalization may happen too late – many activists with experience will already be repressed or will leave, but it will not be possible to mobilize enough new people.

On 14 October searches were conducted in Baranavichy in the homes of Yauhen Zhurawski and Pavel Pipko.<sup>20</sup>

On October 15, Anna and Inna Begal were detained in Brest. They were charged under Article 293.2 – participation in mass riots on August 10 in Brest. They were detained at 7 a.m. and searched in the evening after interrogation, during which the cops searched for the clothes in which they could have participated in the protests. Three days later they were released on their own on bail.

On October 16 anarchist Alexander Belov was detained at work and arrested for 15 days for participation in August 23 march.

On 20 October the antifascist and musician Igor Bancer was detained, he was charged under article 339.1 for a performance in front of a cop car.

On October 21 in the afternoon the anarchist Valeria Hotina was detained in the center of Minsk and sentenced to 15 days for participation in the August 23 march.

On 23 October the anti-fascist Andrei Marach was again detained at work in Brest. On 26 October he was tried, the case was sent back for revision, and the activist was released home to await a new summons. As a result the case was stopped.

On 23 October anarchists Alena Dubovik, Mikhail Traulko, Yauhen Rubashko, Ilya Senko and Daria M. were detained on their way back from a rehearsal. Later they were sentenced to terms of 12 to 15 days. Ilya fell ill with covid in the detention center.

Anti-Fascist Mikhail Palownikov was detained in Minsk on 27 October and sentenced to a fine on 28 October.

On 29 October at 10 a.m. police officers in civilian clothes came to the house of anarchist Uladzimir Chaika and took him to the police station of Baranavichy. There he was questioned about who conducted “sabotage” on the local railroad and was offered to work for police. In two hours he was released. Earlier he served 8 days in jail after his detention on August 9.

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<sup>20</sup> spring96.org

On 2 October the anarchist Andrei Chepyuk was detained. After he was detained his apartment was searched as part of the mass riot case.<sup>19</sup>

On October 3, Sviatoslav Baranovich, who served 3 years in prison for trying to prevent the detention of anarchists at the demonstration on March 15, 2017, was released. He spent the last six months in the isolation ward.

Since 4 October, another Brest anti-fascist Roman Kokhovich has been in the detention center. He was visited in the detention center by officers of the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and was charged with four episodes. At least two of his trials have already taken place. He received 15 days in jail twice. He was tried under 23.34 part 3, as he had already been detained under it this year on August 9, together with Andrei Marach, and they were both arrested.

On 6 October the police detained Maryna Dubina and sentenced her to 13 days.

On 9 October anti-fascists from Brest Raman Kokhovich was given 15 days and Lesha Chyvikov 200 euro fine.

On 12 October Masha Shakuro from the group “Boston Tea Party” and RC “Grazhdanochka” was detained and given 10 days of arrest under Article 23.34.

After someone broke a window in the building of Baranovich prosecutor’s office in the evening of October 12, the state started a new attack on local activists.

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, six searches were conducted in the homes of anarchists and punks, previously convicted for participation in protests. They confiscated computers, phones, flash drives and other media. Some people were taken for interrogation, including with the use of polygraph. [https://t.me/belarus\\_abc/310](https://t.me/belarus_abc/310)

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<sup>19</sup> spring96.org

We can try to push the regime to make mistakes in various forms. At the same time, it is quite possible that these mistakes and radicalization will not be necessary – for example, the consolidation of the regime will be lost and Lukashenko will be given to the people’s hands. Pushing people to make mistakes does not only mean throwing stones at the regime. Any form of active resistance puts the cops and the authorities in a position of decision-making.

Tikhanovskaya’s ultimatum does not have any political power at the moment. That is why such ultimatums are ridiculous for Lukashenko and his regime. But today we can stand shoulder to shoulder and increase pressure on Lukashenko to make the ultimatum not some video from Lithuania, but really an ultimatum of the Belarusian people. It is important to prepare for 25–26, but even more important today to increase presence in the streets and show that despite the repression the Belarusian people can resist the dictatorship!

## Interview with anarchist Vlad M. after 30 days of arrest

*We contacted our comrade, the anarchist Vlad M. after 30 days he spend in prison and talked about the detention and interesting people who you can meet at the administrative arrest. We didn't forget to ask him about his hunger strike, as well as the situation with the coronavirus in prison.*

**Pramen: Vlad, hello and welcome back! How are you?!**

Vlad M: Hi! Thank you. I'm fine more or less, in any case it could be much worse.

**Pramen: Now, many principles of anarchist organization are used by ordinary people to fight the regime. How does this make Belarusian society anarchist and how important is decentralization in the current protests?**

Vlad: Well, these principles do not yet make Belarusian society anarchist even close, but undoubtedly this movement is in the right direction and I like it. Yes, now the protest is decentralized and it has no leader. There is no such person who can be imprisoned and the protest will be immediately deflated. Previously, everything was different: the authorities were preventively detaining for example Statkevich or Severinets, people went out without knowing what to do, and that was the end of it. Today, everything is different and repression of this nature no longer works. Every protester is a leader, and for the protests to stop, the authorities will have to put everyone away, which is impossible. I think thanks to this very moment, the protests have been going on for 4 months now.

On 8 September, anarchist Artem Solovyuk was sentenced to 8 days in jail. He was detained after the Unity March.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, Aliaksandr Kozlyanka was tried in Brest. He was fined 100 euro allegedly for disobedience to a police officer.

On 11 September, 3 people from the Economic Crimes Department came to the office of the anarchist cooperative "Listovka". They conducted an "inspection" without a protocol on camera. They demanded to show illegal eaflets, but they did not look at the finished products. One of the pigs said: "Think with your head, you have a complaint that you have a mountain of banned leaflets here".

On 13 September several anarchists were detained during protests in Minsk. They were walking in the crowd with a banner "Ⓐ Tomorrow must not be like today Ⓐ" and handed out leaflets. The detainees were later released, one of the girls was fined.

On 15 September in Grodna anarchist and anti-fascist Igor Bancer was detained for a performance in front of the courthouse and released a few hours later.

On September 17, anarchist Dmitri Polienko was detained –<sup>18</sup> he received 5 days of arrest. The operation was handled by "activists" of GUBOPiK.

On September 29 it became known that an amnesty was applied to activist Dmitri Polienko – he was released from serving 14.5 months of home detention.

On 1 October Pavel Pipko from Baranavichy was arrested for alleged participation in the rally on 23 September. He was sentenced to 12 days.

On 2 October two members of the printing cooperative "Listovka" were detained in Minsk. Yauhen Dyatkouski was detained in the morning right in the office, and Konstantin Nesterovich was detained closer to lunch. The two of them were given 15 days in jail.

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<sup>18</sup> abc-belarus.org

August 21, Brest. After almost all administrative prisoners were released, 28 people remained in the detention center. Among them were anti-fascists Roman K. and Andrei Marach. After detention Roman was sentenced to 15 days of arrest, and Andrei – 12.<sup>15</sup>

On August 22, anarchists and anti-fascists were detained after a demonstration in Grodna. The young people were taken in an unmarked minibus. Administrative reports were drawn up for them. The detainees: Igor Bancer, Maximilian Krivets, Artur Kurshakov, Aliaksei Pauk. Banzer got 10 days, the rest – 7 days.<sup>16</sup>

On August 22, after 7 p.m., two young men, Pavel Toroshchin and Yauhen Borodzko, were detained near Victory Square by accomplices of the dictatorial power from the Central Department of Internal Affairs. They were handing out leaflets with anarchist content. Pavel Toroshchin was given 3 days, while Yauhen Barodka – 5 days.

On August 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> in Baranavichy several participants of the protest action were detained and taken to the police department. All detainees had reports drawn up for participation in an unsanctioned event, some of them were told the date and time of the hearing. The police tried to talk to them and find out who had invited them to the rally, whether they were paid money and offered their cooperation. After the conversation everyone was released, but later they received fines from 10 to 50 euros.

## Autumn

On 1 September three anarchists were detained in Minsk: Sergey Nevdakh, Ilya Senko and Sergey Sasunkevich. According to the comrades, Ilya was severely beaten by the cops. They were all given 15 days in jail. His story can be read here.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>16</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>17</sup> spring96.org

**Pramen: Many liberals are already burying Lukashenko and believe that no matter what happens today, Lukashenko will stop being president anyway. What do you think about it?**

Vlad: Lukashenko will stop being president anyway, it's indisputable. Today's protest has somewhat reduced in scale, but there are reasonable explanations for this, from the cold in the street to the covid epidemic. It would be naive to expect that the number of protesters would increase with the cold weather, and a large number of people fell ill at the same time. Very soon economic problems will be added here, and then everybody will come out on the streets, including those who have cold weather today.

**Pramen: In the last few months you have been under administrative arrest for 45 days. You have never received these punishment right after the march – the arrests were carried out by punitive officers from GUBOPiKa. What do you think is the reason for such a high interest in you and other activists of the anarchist movement?**

Vlad: The interest in the anarchist movement for GUBOPiKa is due to the fact that the anarchists remained essentially the only organized group on the streets. No party, movement or organization today goes out to protest in an organized way, because at one time they were defeated and their leaders were repressed. Belarusians participating in protests either go out on their own or in small groups of friends or colleagues. There is also the option of people coming out in yards and districts, but these are still unfamiliar people who do not have a certain level of trust among themselves and who may behave quite differently in certain situations. It is much more difficult to divide and detain a group that is close to each other, so the more such groups are on the streets, the harder it will be for the pigs to strangle the protest. For them, the ideal option is the complete absence of such groups, so in my opinion, that's why the anarchists are given such close attention.

**Pramen: Can you tell us a little about the last time the detention took place? How were you found?**

Vlad: We met a friend of ours, who was detained right at his workplace and sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest. Several people approached the detention center itself, while others were waiting for them in a cafe. About an hour after we all gathered for coffee and snacks, more than a dozen aggressive masked individuals broke into the facility. They threw for a second some kind of near-identification, in which it was simply impossible to see anything, and offered to follow them. Obviously, those who met their comrade near the detention facility were followed by an outside surveillance, which led them to our common meeting place.

**Pramen: Was force applied to you during the detention? To other anarchists?**

Vlad: This time no physical force was applied to me personally, only my hands were forced behind my back and handcuffs were put on (which were then replaced by plastic ties). Nevertheless, a comrade, who was re-arrested for another 15 days, was beaten and gassed on the territory of the police station. For these actions, the staff of the GUBOPIK specifically took him to the service car so that their actions would not get on camera.

**Pramen: After the first 15 days, you were held back. We heard that the Minsk GUBOPIK officers had personally come to Baranovichi. Really? And if so, why such attention to your group of detainees?**

Vlad: Yes, I had a GUBOPIK employee present at the court, who had to come to the court in person to testify against us. Apparently, in the pre-trial detention center in Baranovichi for technical reasons there is no possibility to organize the so-called courts by video communication, so the so-called judges have to go from the court building to the territory of the pre-trial detention center, and the pig, as we can see, was not even more lucky – he had to go on a business trip to testify against the anarchists. It is worth noting that the words of this cop were the only “evidence” of our

6.40 a.m. the policemen themselves picked him up from the house and brought him to the police department, where they drew up two reports, one for failure to appear on summons and the other for violation of Article 23.4 (resistance to a policeman). On 8 August he was sentenced to five days of administrative arrest.

On August 8, around 1 p. m., riot police raided the apartment where Mikola Dziadok and his partner lived. The anarchist himself was not in the apartment. They took two computers and a phone. The search was conducted as part of a criminal case for Facebook posts.

On August 9, six anarchists were detained in Baranovichi. They were given 7 to 15 days of arrest, later one more person was detained on August 10 and released with a fine.

Anarchist Pavel Sadovsky disappeared in Minsk on August 10, as we found out later – he was taken from his work by the cops. It turned out that he was sentenced to 3 days in jail and fined.

On August 12, Alexander Frantskevich<sup>14</sup> and Akihiro Gajewski-Khanada were detained in Minsk. They were accused of organizing mass riots and were placed in pre-trial detention. At the end of August it became known that the activists were beaten and tortured while in KGB custody.

On August 12, Ivan Krasovski was detained; later it turned out that he was badly beaten, he was hospitalized for a long time and moved in a wheelchair. On September 24 he was detained again and taken to the detention center on charges of rioting.

On 13 August comrades from Grodno got in touch and reported that during the last days at least 8 members of the antifascist movement had been detained.

Another trial over the anarchist Sergey Romanov was held in Gomel. He was given another 10 days in jail.

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<sup>14</sup> *ABC-Belarus provides critical support to Frantskevich for his repeated attempts to influence other members of the anarchist movement in Belarus and Ukraine through violence, as well as for deceiving his comrades, including on collective financial issues.*

third activist's house, a minibus was parked in the yard, and calls were received on the phone from the local police department to come and sign the unknown explanations. On August 8, anarchists Vladislav Abazovik and Mikita Selivonik received 15 and 10 days of arrest, respectively.

It was also reported that the police came to the place of residence of anti-fascist Vadzim Boiko, who was released in April.

In Brest near evening Alexander and Dzmitry Kozliańko were detained. The police called them in plain clothes and took away the brothers without explaining anything to their mother. Later, Dzmitry was released, but Alexander was not. He was sentenced to 5 days in jail for allegedly obstructing the elections as a public observer. Sasha was not released on time, but was kept for two more days without trial and only released on August 14. After his release he was summoned to court on August 28<sup>th</sup>, where he had to "ratify" the additional day he had served. When he went to court on the summons, it turned out that the court had not received the case.<sup>12</sup>

Dmitri Kozlyanka filed a complaint with the Investigative Committee with a request to institute criminal proceedings for assault on a police officer. They also tried to plant drugs on him, but unsuccessfully.<sup>13</sup> Only in early December it became known that the criminal case against Dima was refused.

We have also received information about the increased interest in the whereabouts of several activists from Baranavichy.

The cops in Gomel called the parents of anarchist Sergei Romanov and tried to summon all three of them for a conversation, but they refused to talk to them without a summons. At 10.15 p.m. on August 6, a subpoena was delivered to Ramanov personally by one of the officers. He was notified by summons at 7:00 a.m. on August 7 for proceedings in an administrative case. On 7 August at

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<sup>12</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>13</sup> abc-belarus.org

"offenses". That is, without his presence, it would have been difficult to condemn us, although I would not have been surprised if his words had just been read off the paper, and the petition to question the witness would have been denied...

**Pramen: Who was sitting in the cell with you? What were you talking about with your neighbors?**

Vlad: Out of 30 days I spent the first 5 in Minsk on Okrestin, and the remaining 25 – in the detention center-6 in Baranovichi. There, as I understand it, all 100% of administrative detainees are political, so in any cell you can count on good company. People are a cross-section of the whole society, representatives of different ages (from 18 to 60) and different professions (from bricklayer to CEO, from doctor to engineer, from miner to IT). Conversations, of course, are first of all about protests and politics: who was detained, who was tried, who was beaten, disputes about the date when the regime finally collapses, about the effectiveness of sanctions, the adequacy of the Coordinating Council, and so on. Due to information isolation, the detainees coming later than the others have to tell about the news they have read in the last days before the detention while the others were already sitting here. I remember especially how members of the Belaruskali striking committee gave a lecture on potash mining and production, with drawings and blueprints, everything as it should be.

**Pramen: Coronavirus is raging in Belarus' prison system now. Can you tell us a little bit about your detention conditions? Were there any patients in your cell? How did the administration treat them?**

Vlad: During the second part of my stay in the detention center in Baranovichi, a real epidemic broke out. At first we found out that in the neighboring cell the boy had a fever and bed regime (right in the cell, among healthy cellmates). In 3–4 days we moved to another building, and as a result, our cells were combined. This guy felt normal already, but he completely lost his sense of smell. A few more days later, having moved to a new cell, the guys asked us

about our well-being and told us that they had already gotten over it all. And also about the fact that a few recently released people wrote to them in a letter that they were doing covid tests, which all were positive. After 2 days I got a sore throat and fever and after a while I also lost the sense of smell (which has not yet recovered). Administration's attitude to this situation – the order to wear masks when the cell door opens, go to shower and walk (once or twice a week instead of daily) only with a mask. This is the end of all activities to combat covid. The maximum temperature of the paramedic's non-contact thermometer, which he recorded in my presence, was 36.8. In most cases, the readings do not even reach 36.0.

**Pramen: After being re-arrested, you went on a hunger strike. Can you explain a little why you decided to take such a radical step? How did the jailers and your neighbors feel about it in the detention center itself?**

Vlad: Being in detention, when you are constantly detained, you are tried in a closed regime with a lot of procedural violations, when a pig testifies looking you in the eye, and the judge easily makes a decision without absolutely no evidence against you, it is difficult to do nothing. I found myself in a situation where GUBOPIK had full control over my life, so I have only one tool left in my arsenal to influence it. Therefore, as soon as the judge finished reading the sentence, I immediately declared that I was on hunger strike in protest against the unfair verdict of the court and in connection with political persecution. Thus, it gave me back the feeling that I could influence my life and death to some extent even while in detention. The jailers responded to this first with complete disregard, and then with petty packets like sending a parcel that came back to me to the addressee or refusing to accept letters for sending. Once there were also threats of forced feeding. The neighbors treated me with respect and support, for which I am very grateful to them. They constantly watched my physical condi-

On May 7, anarchist Nikita Emelianov was sent to a cell-type prison for a month for violating the regime, and on May 29, Nikita was transferred to a prison regime in Mogilev prison.<sup>8</sup>

## Summer

At the beginning of July anarchist Dmitriy Polienko was prosecuted for insulting a policeman. The case was later re-qualified as an administrative one. Earlier he was sentenced to 15 days in jail under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code (calling for the organization or holding of an unsanctioned event) for posting a photo with a pot: banging pots at certain times is a form of solidarity with political prisoners. Polienko was taken from the courtroom under escort, his house was searched.<sup>9</sup>

On July 27, he was detained at the police department, where he went for regular check-ups ordered by the rules of home detention, and was sent to serve another 15 days.<sup>10</sup>

Also in early July political prisoner Nikita Emelianov continued to be pressured in prison: several times he was placed in the solitary confinement cell. Classical violations – violation of uniforms (when it was hot), dust on the bars.

On July 25, an anarchist activist Dmitriy Polienko was released after 15 days of arrest. Earlier it was reported that the activist was given two more 15-day sentences, and that in total he would have to serve 45 days of arrest and be released no earlier than August 23.

On August 6 preventive detentions of anarchists began –<sup>11</sup> anarchist activists Nikita Selivonik and Vladislav Abazovik were detained at work. Men in civilian clothes were present outside the

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<sup>8</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>9</sup> telegra.ph

<sup>10</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>11</sup> abc-belarus.org

On February 23, 2020, anarchist Sergei Romanau received his third preventive supervision violation for being in a cafe that sells alcohol. As a reminder, Romanov was released in July 2019, the court ordered him to impose preventive supervision restrictions, such as a ban on leaving town and changing his residence, a ban on visiting bars, restaurants, stores and other places where alcohol is sold in glasses, a ban on leaving his residence between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. without a good reason, a duty to report to the police station once a week. Sergei was sure that he would soon be charged under Article 421 of the Criminal Code (Failure to comply with the requirements of preventive supervision), for which he could be arrested or sent to a colony for up to a year. Then they didn't start the case,<sup>4</sup> but did start it on June 1, detaining the anarchist on his way out of the house.<sup>5</sup>

## Spring

Anarchist and blogger Mikola Dziadok was detained on March 19. A report under Article 17.1 of the Administrative Code was drawn up with regard to the anarchist, allegedly for the tag "The cops are scum" on the wall of the dormitory, which had appeared on February 3. The result – Mikola is free and the case materials were returned to the police department. Dziadok could not physically make the tags in Minsk, as on February 3 he was crossing the border at Terespol-Brest.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of May Vadzim Boiko, a member of the anti-fascist movement, sentenced to 4 years in prison in the famous "anti-fascist case", was released.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>5</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>6</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>7</sup> abc-belarus.org

tion, even the neighboring cell asked me every morning how I was feeling.

**Pramen: How was the hunger strike for 15 days and what can you advise your friends and colleagues who are thinking of taking the same measures?**

Vlad: Not exactly 15 days, but only 12 days, because I declared a hunger strike only in court, 3 days after my "second" detention. I would like to advise others to take such a decision, at least in a balanced way, and not just on emotions, because the test is more difficult than it seems at first sight. After refusing to eat, being in prison becomes much more difficult: the feeling of hunger and malaise do not allow you to concentrate on things that are great help to pass the time (reading, for example). Because of this time lasts much longer, an order of magnitude longer. Also do not expect any instant results from it, these results are likely to be absent at all or hidden from you. If you decide to go on hunger strike, it is worth talking about it as much as possible: a statement at the court, the transfer of information to freedom, a written statement to the head of the pre-trial detention facility about your hunger strike, to remind about it during each check, before each meal and in general in any convenient case. On the other hand, it is a great opportunity to test yourself for firmness and willpower, but it is worth considering that this test can not be passed and thus demoralize yourself.

**Pramen: Have you received any letters or cards during the 30 days of detention? How did the news reach your "home"?**

Vlad: Yes, I got letters from some comrades, but at the moment I know that at least a few letters/cards did not reach me. This is from the fact that the guys themselves were wondering if their messages came. It is impossible to calculate the total percentage of missed letters/postcards. All news were learned more from people who were detained later. I heard about all the important events that happened during my arrest while being there. Though, of course, these news came to me with some delay.

**Pramen: All the prisoners are charged per day. Did you get a discount for the days of hunger strike?**

Vlad: An hour before the end of my arrest I was taken to a room, something like a captress, showed a document on payment, where the full cost of “services” was specified and asked if I would sign it despite the refusal to eat. The guard who showed me the document did not know how events would develop if I refused to sign it, but it was obvious that this would be an obstacle to my timely release. I decided to put my signature under the document and an hour later was already free. But even now I don’t know if I did it right or not. In any case, I have not made the payment yet.

**Pramen: How do you feel now? Did you have any problems after 24 hours?**

Vlad: As of today (the third day after my release) I feel much better, although I still have a long way to go to full recovery. Every day the strength increases, but I’m still on a hard diet. The process of getting out of hunger strike is no less complicated and in terms of time it corresponds to the duration of the hunger strike. Many vital organs have switched to another mode during this period of time and now they need time to smoothly return to normal mode. In addition to all this, the sense of smell has not yet returned.

**Pramen: And finally – what would you like to say or wish your comrades on the streets?**

Vlad: I would like to say that we are on the right track and we are doing everything right. Repression against us is another proof of this. We must not give up or give up, everyone must continue doing what they do.

## Overview of repressions against anarchists and anti-fascists in Belarus in 2020

### Winter

Winter started with the termination of criminal prosecution against anarchist G.A.<sup>1</sup> under article 341 of the Criminal Code (desecration of buildings and damage to property), who had been previously suspected of drawing a tag against the European Games, which were held in Belarus from June 21 to 30 2019).

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, in Savetski district court the sentence in the case of Ivan Komar and Mikita Yemelianau, who were accused of throwing paint bulbs at Minsk court and an attack with a Molotov cocktail on SIZO-1 in Minsk, was pronounced.

Both were given the same sentence of seven years in prison. However, during the revision of the case the sentences were reduced: Nikita Yemelyanov – to 4 years in jail, Ivan Komar – to 3.5 years in jail.<sup>2</sup>

On February 21 the blogger Andrey Voynich was fined 450 euro for the extremist slogan in the house<sup>3</sup> caught on the video. Voynich believes his prosecution was caused by the fact that he is an activist of “European Belarus,” as the tag was there for years and no one was interested in it.

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<sup>1</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>2</sup> abc-belarus.org

<sup>3</sup> (abc-belarus.org)

Russia which uses its neighbouring country as a military foothold.

However, in the same way as we oppose Russian militarism in Belarus, we also oppose the militarism of Atlantic (NATO) forces in the Baltic Republic, together with all the armies and all the wars that are made by states against the people. Likewise, we do not buy the current rhetoric of Western ‘freedom’, nor of a possible mediation role of the European Union. The only role that the EU has is to manage the interests of European capitalism and therefore, as internationalists, we are opposed to this institution.

Instead, we call for international solidarity between all workers and oppressed people and for all social movements which are committed, in the East and in the West, to syndicalism and workers rights, to the right of housing, to feminist and LGBTQ mobilisations, to the defence of land and environments against speculators, to people’s solidarity and mutual aid, to the occupation of spaces, to the production of alternative cultures, and to the defence of civil society all freedoms against exploitation and authoritarianism – to quote only some of our preferred axes of social intervention.

Only the direct participation of people in struggles from below can make a difference and produce a movement that go beyond the substitution of an old government with a new one, more or less corrupt, more or less authoritarian. Among all other challenges that humanity is facing, the current pandemic has confirmed that state and capitalism do not work when it comes to the need for solidarity. It is the entire society that must change towards equality and freedom, and anarchism is more than ever the option that we put forward to achieve this.

The Commission of Relations of the INTERNATIONAL OF ANARCHIST FEDERATIONS (IAF/IFA)

## Interview “Update on the situation in Belarus” from November 20<sup>th</sup> by A-Radio Berlin

*A-Radio: So, once again we are talking with Maria from Minsk in Belarus. We had a talk at the end of August about the uprising in Belarus. So now, first of all thanks for taking the time to talk to us and yeah, we wanted to reach out again to get an update on the current situation in Belarus, so maybe you can start giving us a bit of an overview, what’s the current situation.*

Swix: So it’s been, I think, almost three months now since we didn’t talk about it. And I think I will probably just enumerate the most visible developments and the most visible changes in the attitude from both the protestors and the state, the attitude of the state towards it. So, first of all it should be mentioned that the protests are still in, so-to-say, their peaceful manner. So people still adhere to protesting every Sunday, and if, in the first month of protest almost no one has been detained at the protests, later, more and more people started to be detained right after the protest or even during the week for example. So the police changed the tactics and they started to create the atmosphere of fear. So before people were afraid to be detained after the protest, when they were leaving, but it was still fine, because you know what you should expect, right? But then they decided to create the intimidation campaign, and what they started doing is that the identified people, I think they

were using a lot of surveillance techniques or video cameras, so they were actually not detaining people at the protest they were recording them videotaping, or using pictures from the news media, and then they were identifying people and coming to get them with three people, three police officers, and that were people in plain clothes, so people were detained right in their workplace, or at the door of the apartment they were living in. So they were trying to create an atmosphere that every person will get detained, now or later, and they will come for everyone. And I think actually it worked, a little bit, because a lot of people started feeling very unsafe, because they were afraid to, especially those who were detained and then arrested, for administrative offences, they were later afraid to leave the house because they were afraid that the cops would come for them, so I think they would probably detain maybe a few hundreds of people like that, and then people would spread the news that it happened to them, so the relatives would start to be afraid, and so on and so on. So I think it worked to some extent, and it prevented some people from joining the protests.

Another tactic was that they started attacking the admins of local chats, so like I said before, in the previous recording, a lot of activity is organised and coordinated on Telegram, and people are organised in chats, and of course there are admins who are, just for, looking what happens in the chat, and sometimes it's at the same time the active people in the neighbourhood, but sometimes it's not, sometimes it's just the people who created the chat in the first place and they're just following the news. But recently there have been a wave of arrests of people who they identify as admins, and again they are creating again the atmosphere of, they know everything, they will come for everyone, and basically what they're doing is they're now hijacking local neighbourhood chats, especially before the mass protests, so they try to prevent people from coordinating and agreeing where they will start protesting and where they will gather and so on. In general I would say that many people, from the very beginning, they saw the protests as a form

## **Belarus: against capitalism and dictatorship, for internationalist solidarity**

The Commission of Relations of the International of Anarchist Federations (CRIFA) expresses its support and internationalist solidarity with the struggles of people in Belarus against Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorship, a mass movement that is participated in by our anarchist comrades there. The situation in Belarus concerns the autocratic dictatorship that has lasted for 26 years, the current economic, health and public services crises. A wave of protests have filled the squares of the country to request the dictator's withdrawal. As anarchists, we are not impassioned by the debate on whether the last presidential elections were fair or not. It is simply clear that the people in Belarus are saying 'enough is enough': they do no longer want a government which is starving, beating and oppressing them.

We stand in solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners and demand their immediate release. We also demand the reinstatement of all workers who have lost their jobs for participating in strikes or protests, and urge an immediate end to the repression. We denounce the violence and abuses of the political policies that are in place, and the regime's military or paramilitary forces, who are arbitrarily detaining, beating and torturing its political opponents. We demand the fall of an authoritarian power which is a sad remainder of the totalitarianism of the former Soviet Union, one which still serves as a weapon for the military strategy of Putin's

the authorities are inviting people to participate in a dialogue, in order to create a kind of collective view on how the country could be working. But of course everybody in their minds are boycotting it, and Lukashenko is now using some of the political prisoners that he released specifically for this campaign. So these people started supporting Lukashenko and pretending that they are democratic figures and that they are involved in dialogue with Lukashenko, and they started talking about the constitutional reform, and also releasing of political prisoners, but that could be a play again, so we never know what's going to happen. So it looks like, yeah like I said, whenever people stop the attack, or they stop protesting, the regime is going to swallow everything. And I think at the moment, everybody, like both sides understand that it's either them or the other side, and this is why this conflict is becoming more emotional and actually kind of more personal, because for a lot of cops it's now becoming more personal. They want Lukashenko to stay in power, because they know that if he goes away that they're going to be all persecuted. And of course cops then take this very seriously and very personally. So, let's see what happens, for the moment it's not over!

*A-Radio: It's a good point you mention how, like the instruments of repression are invested in keeping the regime going. In any case, thanks so much, and yeah, lots of solidarity and energy to all of you and your comrades, and hope we can stay in touch and get new updates, and, thanks.*

Swix: Ok, thank you.

of – when I say protests I mean the mass rallies on Sundays, when they would get hundreds of thousands of people. So many people were seeing it as a way of therapy. So basically you come there, you see that there is a lot of people, you're happy to be together, you're happy to show your dissatisfaction, but no more. People were not really going to demand anything, and people were actually avoiding confrontation with the police, so whenever they see the police they would turn instead of trying to provoke the police, or to try to get through the chain of the police. And I think it was so successful because the first protests, the first protests, the first rallies, were actually not smashed, not dispersed by the police, and this is why many people considered it as a way of collective therapy, and as soon as it became more stressful, rather than happy, for them, a lot of people stopped going, and I think we can see now a decrease in the participation in the rally. Still a lot of people are going but the police tactics are now, it's to prevent people from gathering in one spot by all means. And I think it's been two Sundays in a row where people got really demoralised and demotivated, because they couldn't get together, and there were a lot of people detained, and only last week it was another experiment that they decided to make not a centralised rally but rather tens of decentralised rallies starting from the neighbourhoods. And I think it was a very nice experiment and people liked it, because instead of trying to be and meet together in one spot in the centre of the city, a lot of people would gather in their neighbourhoods and then they would go together in one river, in one flow of people, and just march in their neighbourhood, or march towards the central part of their quarter for example. And it happened in the whole of Minsk, so the cops, yeah, they didn't know how to react, and it was I think for the first time when people started, they were trying to not run away when they see the cops, and this was actually something that broke the mentality of the cops, because suddenly people stopped running away from them, and people are standing and instead they are defending those who are getting detained. So I think everybody liked

last Sunday, and probably this Sunday it's going to be the same tactics, that people are going to start in their neighbourhoods, and march, trying to disperse the attention of cops and prevent them from being in one spot, very powerful. But I expect that cops are also taking this week to plan accordingly, and most probably they will also try to make some change in their tactics, again to prevent some people from gathering this time in their neighbourhoods. Let's see what happens.

Another problem that shook the society a few weeks ago, I think on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. There was an announcement of the death of one protestor, and it happened in a way that recently the authorities started to support the creation of specific groups of people who would, with the assistance of police, come to the neighbourhoods and destroy the protestors' symbols or intervene with their meetings, and so on. So that's like, people who reside in Minsk, but are supporters of the regime, and they are supported by the police in doing whatever they want. So, including attacking people physically, attacking their neighbours physically, and that was exactly what happened. So there was something happening in one neighbourhood, and people, they saw a few people, who were destroying something in the yard, and one person, he left the house and he went to see what was happening, and tried to prevent them from doing it, and there was a fight, and during this fight they detained him, and gave this guy to the police, and later this guy died, the next day he died, because he received some injuries that are incompatible with life. And of course all these people were masked, and we don't know who were the cops who hit him so hard that he couldn't survive, and basically this guy died just because he went out to see what's happening in the yard. He died not even from a rubber bullet or from anything, so it was done by people who support the regime. And I think that was a big wave of remorse and anger from the people, and at the same time it was very sad, a lot of people realised that they can be killed even in the yard, and no one's going to take care of it, no one's going to be punished.

because there's still a need for safe housing, for some places where people could hide, or that people could skip work or study to be still active in the movement. So it all needs money, and basically people are very welcome to donate.

*A-Radio: Ok, thanks. The crowdfunding campaign you just mentioned is at Firefund. We will include all the links to the ABC and to Firefund. Are there other types of solidarity you can think of that you would like to see for example in Germany or the world?*

Swix: Well I think in general there is a lot of people who potentially need to stay away from the country for some time or maybe forever, because of the repression, or because they just can't stay emotionally, or they cannot really survive four months of active protesting, so this is when sometimes people need safe housing, somewhere else in Europe for example. Or they would need maybe some help with getting asylum or something like that, but unfortunately this can not be published, but in general if you have such possibilities or you're interested in helping, probably it could also be contacted with ABC Belarus, and maybe there is some support that you could provide.

*A-Radio: Ok, thanks a lot. Is there any other topic that you would like to touch on that I haven't asked?*

Swix: Well, not really. I would just say that it is changing, the situation is changing every day. Sometimes you feel like you are over, and sometimes you feel like the darkest times are coming. The next day there is a nice thing that someone is doing and people are getting motivated again, and it's actually not clear what's going to happen. It could be the same thing as what happened in Egypt or in Venezuela, where the president just doesn't step out, even with the population not having electricity or basic supplies. And it looks like this situation or this context could be possible for Belarus as well. At the same time, clearly, politically, we can see that they are trying, they are struggling for the attention, for the media image to still kind of fuel their legitimacy. And for the moment they are creating like, basically like a dialogue space inside the country, like

the news, and then they call somebody who is on the march, to inform about what happens.

*A-Radio: I see. So since Monday we are in a week of solidarity with anarchists and anti-fascists in Belarus. Can you say anything about this?*

Swix: So basically, I think in the last month there have been a big wave of repression against anarchists, and there have been a few groups of people detained. So there were four people who were kind of labelled Belarussian partisans, because they were detained in a forest, and they are now accused of possessing guns and setting fire to some of the police or prosecutor's office buildings in the regions, and these people are detained, and yeah, it's been almost a month since they have been in prison, and they are now accused of terrorism. Another person, like a locally popular blogger, he has been detained ten days ago, and today there was an article describing the way he was tortured, because they wanted to get access to his computer. So, basically he is facing another charge of organising mass riots or something like this. And more and more people are getting arrested for shorter time, like administrative offences, and some people are not even getting released, like people spend fifteen days in jail and then they file another report on them claiming that they participated in this or that action. And some people spend about a month or more under arrest. And also because a lot of people are now ill, or sick with Covid, it is also something that prevents people from participating, including anarchists. So I would say that's it's becoming, just like for the whole society, for anarchists it's becoming more and more difficult to stay strong, to stay massive and numerous, and this is why there is a call for the week of solidarity, and people could make some events or protests in support of anarchists and anti-fascists in Belarus, or they could possibly send some money for the ABC. There is also another separate call that I think is going to finish soon, in three days from today. It's a campaign of crowdfunding for some activist stuff for anarchists in Belarus, to support their participation in the protest,

But at the same time this moment was also a moment when people realised that they can't support the regime anymore, or they cannot participate anymore in what's happening, even if they worked somewhere. A lot of workers at the moment are organising strikes, and when I say a lot, I don't mean that they are organising strikes in a collective action. It's happening more in an individual action, but, every day there is like 3-5 people who are announcing strikes individually, wherever they are working, and they are all demanding Lukashenko to go, for the political prisoners, and to stop the violence in the country, and also to find out those who produced the violence. And I don't know if it's really something that is really influencing the state, most probably it's just an individual action from people who cannot anymore be part of it, but at the same time it's also nice that people started doing it, instead of just silently being dismissed. First they are announcing these strikes. And on some factories there are quite some people who have announced it. Including the railroad workers, some of the biggest factories as well. Another group that is protesting a lot at the moment are the medical workers. Because they were the first ones that started talking about violence, and who started publishing information about real injuries that people had, and the fact that the cops were threatening them for disclosing this information, or for helping the protestors that were detained. And they were also the ones that disclosed the information about the guy that was killed, the one that I was talking about. So at the moment one doctor is actually detained in the KGB prison, for disclosing medical information that is supposed to be secret. And basically a lot of medical workers, and now also, because they cannot call a strike, they are trying to make some solidarity actions, everyday there is some picture about what's happening in some hospitals. And also with the new wave of Covid these people are also under attack, because they need to work very long hours, and they started also to question the numbers that the authorities revealed to the public. Because of course like the other time the authorities claimed that it's under control, and it's not so

crazy as in other countries for example. But they leaked some of the real numbers, and it ended up that the pandemic is here as well. So I think, yeah..

*A-Radio: So this is numbers of cases, of Covid cases?*

Swix: Yeah, numbers of cases or numbers of deaths. Or like the information about what is happening inside the Covid hospitals, and so on.

*A-Radio: Ok. Thanks a lot for this condensed information. Last time at the beginning of the uprising you mentioned the importance of the protest also being spread out and not just being in the Minsk, like it's been in the years before. How is the situation in like the rural areas now? Did the protests die down there because of the reasons that you mentioned, or is there still some, also protests going on outside of Minsk?*

Swix: Unfortunately it's almost died out, because the repression in the smaller cities is harsher. Probably I talked about it before, that there is not so many people as in Minsk, they are not so much concentrated, and the local cops could easily identify the people who are active. So at the moment, there's hardly any city that has a Sunday rally, I mean the provincial cities, so basically many people probably even come to Minsk to protest, but there's always some information about a small solidarity protest happening here and there, or like a picture of people waving a flag or something like this. So people are there, but they are afraid to show their activities openly. And I think, basically it's a little bit of controversy, that they are hoping that Minsk is going to change the situation and Minsk is always, I mean Minsk residents are always saying that, hey, we need regional areas to take away some of the cops. The cops are now concentrated in Minsk because the regions are not protesting. And basically there is always a call for the regions to also rise up, if they can, but it looks like it's not really happening. And in general I would say that at the moment the protest is fuelled by the neighbourhood movement, and in the regions the neighbourhood movement is probably not so widespread, it didn't

have enough time to form, properly, and now it's really easy for the cops to smash it, unlike in Minsk, where they tried to smash the neighbourhoods and they are arresting a lot of musicians who come to support the neighbourhood concerts, or people who provide lectures, like everyone who is to some extent helpful, they got repressed.

*A-Radio: You mentioned this change in tactics, with having more decentralised marches. You also mentioned the repression in the digital, organisational, realm with Telegram admins being repressed. Is there any change in this realm too with use of technology now that Telegram admins got detained, do you think there is any change there already that you can see?*

Swix: I'm not sure, I think everybody still sticks to Telegram because it's combining the reading of news, exchanging information, and chats. So basically if you go to another messenger, you will still need Telegram to see what's happening, because everybody is exchanging there. So, for the moment it's only information about how to protect your privacy on Telegram as much as you can. How to protect the admins' security and safety and so on. There's been a few new apps that developed that are now being tested. One of them is for monitoring the positions of cops and the positions of crowds on the marches, and basically it works both with the internet, but whenever you don't have internet they can send you some tokens via sms or via bluetooth, so basically people could download the tokens and see exactly what's happening. But, from what I heard, it's a little bit not helpful so much when cops are moving very fast, of course they can not produce so many tokens, so basically it's only helpful to see, for example, the blockades, or where the crowds are situated, and so on. So people are using some of the tactics but at the moment, it's basically, people still use the phone connection, because this is not switched off. Because every rally the mobile internet is switched off, but the mobile connection is not. So this is how, probably, there is someone always in the house, using the stable internet, like the landline, and they look at