

Belarus Wants to Criminalize Unemployment

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Taking an old-school approach to battle the woes of modern capitalism, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has endorsed a legislative ban on unemployment, Interfax reported Monday.

"You want to bring back [the phrase] 'social parasitism,' do it. That would be easier for the people to understand," Lukashenko was cited as saying at a governmental meeting on employment.

His comments were made during a discussion of the Belarussian police's proposal to punish people who "intentionally don't work," including by imposing forced labor.

"We need to make these people work using any means we know and can handle," the Belarussian strongman was cited as saying.

He set Jan. 1 as the deadline for introducing measures against "social parasitism" ("tuneyadstvo"), a Soviet-era legal concept.

Belarussian official statistics put the unemployment rate in the country of 9 million at below 1 percent. But independent experts estimate that the figure is about 10 percent of the total workforce.

This is not the first time Lukashenko has advocated radical employment regulations: In 2012, Belarus reportedly banned workers in the state-controlled timber industry from resigning without a senior manager's permission. Last May, Lukashenko called for similar restrictions in the agricultural sector, explicitly describing the ban on quitting a farmer's job as the reinstatement of "serfdom."

Social parasitism was a criminal offense in the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1991, based on the doctrine that in a socialist state, every able-bodied person has a duty to work and help build a utopian communist society.

The concept gained notoriety in 1964, when famous poet Josef Brodsky was convicted of social parasitism despite his argument that his job was writing poetry. Brodsky went on to receive the 1987 Nobel Prize in Literature.

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