

After three years in prison I went on a hunger strike for 30 days. I gained my freedom thanks to the strong endeavours of the Inter-Church and Amnesty International Committee. I travelled to Panama and thanks to the support of this government, I was designated a consultant for UNESCO for Latin America with the headquarters in Paris from 1978 to 1992.

During all this time in Paris, my "hobby" was to follow the steps of my ex-torturers through the police magazine in Paraguay, and especially to follow the tracks of *Plan Condor*.

DISCOVERY OF THE TERROR ARCHIVE

On 3 February 1989 a military coup d'état took place in Paraguay that overthrew Dictator Alfredo STROESSNER, after 35 years of iron governance. In June 1992 the new national constitution was approved. This one consecrated the legal entity of *habeas data*, a Latin phrase meaning "bring me the records."

On 11 September 1992, in Asunción, I made a *habeas data* demand to Judge Dr. José Agustín FERNANDEZ. It was done in order to find out the reasons for my detention and torture from 1974 to 1977. There was extensive media coverage of all my efforts in front of the legal power. I received a phone call telling me that my records were outside Asunción, of which I informed Judge FERNANDEZ.

He ordered the register from the "Productions" Office of the

National Police on 22 December 1992. It was thus that we found tons of documents which allowed us to know, among other things, how *Plan Condor* functioned.

This plan was promoted by the Chilean General Augusto PINOCHET in 1975 in order to eliminate any opposition to the military regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay).

Operation Condor allowed the action of foreign forces inside the countries of the Southern Cone, who imprisoned and eventually caused to disappear individuals from the other nations — i.e., the globalisation of state terrorism.

Suits were filed against PINOCHET (Chile), VIDELA (Argentina), FIGUEREDO (Brazil), BANZER (Bolivia), STROESSNER (Paraguay) and ALVAREZ (Uruguay) in Spain, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay. I appeared in the courts of these countries to present documents on *Plan Condor*, the criminal pact.

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Ekaterina KOLESNIKOVA

A Dictatorship in the Midst of Europe: The Case of Belarus

The recent development of the Republic of Belarus is distinguished by the striking difference between two periods in its post-communist history. At the beginning of the nineties, Belarus was one of the most promising young Eastern European democracies with stable political and economic ties to other countries. Nowadays Belarus is a politically and economically isolated country governed by the personalised dictatorship of its president, Alexander LUKASHENKO.

A NEW REPUBLIC

Belarus became an independent republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Having one of the most developed economic systems and the newest stock of production assets among all the Soviet republics, Belarus had the potential to become a highly developed European economy.

In 1994 the first democratic constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted, and soon the first democratic elections of the president were held according to this Constitution. In the early nineties there were two main political powers in the Republic.

On one hand, there was the ruling elite that had been formed mostly by the communist nomenclature with the prime minister at its head; on the other hand, the nationalistic opposition, the Belarus Popular Front, formed the second political power.

This nationalistic opposition was the one calling for the Republic's independent development and for breaking up the political and cultural ties with Russia. They also concentrated their efforts on forming a Belarusian cultural policy.

Contrary to other post-Communist republics, the Belarusian Parliament, which was formed during the Soviet era, was not re-elected until 1995, so the opposition Belarus Popular Front could not have access to power.

Besides, the strategy of extreme nationalism promoted by this Front was hardly acceptable in a country where the majority of the population had close relationships with Russia and where a great part of the Belarusian people either worked in Russia or had relatives there.

Additionally, despite the fact that in the early nineties Belarus was suffering from high rates of inflation and unemployment, neither of the two political groups proposed a consistent programme of economic reforms in the country.

AN UNEXPECTED PERSON

While these two political powers prepared their participation in the presidential elections, a member of the parliament, Alexander LUKASHENKO, entered the bid for the presidency rather unexpectedly.

He put the main focus of his presidential election campaign on the fight against corruption in the ruling circles (surrounding the prime minister) and also on anti-nationalistic policies (aimed at criticising the opposition, the Belarus Popular Front).

As it often happens in systems with a low level of political institutionalisation, almost any talented person "from the street" can enter politics and gain political power. Moreover, since the political parties in Belarus were young and had no experience participating in democratic elections, they had difficulties in becoming channels for recruiting a new political elite.

Alexander LUKASHENKO won the presidential elections in July 1994. LUKASHENKO's political opponents did not take seriously his election campaign, nor his extraordinary personality.

Coming from a village and offering very simple and clear ideas, he was accepted as the only fighter for plain people in the republic. Using populist slogans that reflected the hopes of the Belarusian majority, LUKASHENKO won the support of

the largest groups in the electorate — the pensioners, the army and the “working class.”

STEPS TOWARDS AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

Less than half a year after the presidential elections, Alexander LUKASHENKO’s authoritarian nature became clear. Although the 1994 constitution set up a separation of powers, he immediately set about trying to limit the role of parliament and the Constitutional Court in favour of the executive branch.

During the 1995 parliamentary elections, he publicly discouraged voters from participating because a turnout of less than fifty per cent would have given him grounds to disband the parliament and rule entirely by presidential decree.

Further, he openly challenged some rulings of the Constitutional Court, declaring their decrees unconstitutional, and he ordered the ministries and other governmental institutions to ignore them.

As the presidential reforms continued, the system of local authorities was changed and representatives to the local councils were thenceforth directly appointed by officials from the president. A basic procedure of democratic systems was thus abolished and another step towards establishing an authoritarian regime was made.

But even these efforts did not ensure LUKASHENKO the power he craved, and so ultimately more bold action was needed. Hence, he called two national referendums on a variety of issues, with the aim of bypassing parliament’s opposition to his agenda.

THE REFERENDUMS

The referendum in 1995 included a resolution to adopt Russian as the second official language and to replace the national symbols (state emblem and national flag) with new ones, which resembled the old Soviet insignias.

The November 1996 referendum went beyond symbolic issues to directly impact the governance of the country. Under the pretence of constitutional referendum, Belarus had a hidden coup d’etat, as a result of which the entire political power was concentrated in hands of one person in the country.

In it, a strong majority of votes cast were in favour of the president’s proposal for a radically amended constitution. This proposal was accepted, even though the referendum as such was clearly anti-constitutional.

The European Union (EU) and the United States (U.S.A.) severely criticised the conditions under which the referendum was held and have refused to recognise its legitimacy. Notably, the major exception to this criticism is Russia, whose parliament and government have affirmed its results.

Following this show of public approval, LUKASHENKO promptly dissolved the parliament and implemented a new one. This new parliament in turn adopted LUKASHENKO’s new non-democratic constitution, according to which the system of governance was changed completely. Under this new constitution the President became more significant than even the government; power was now fully concentrated in the President’s hands.

One of the most striking things is that the presidential term, after the adoption of the new constitution, was prolonged for an additional three and a half years, until 2001 — this in direct contradiction to an earlier ruling by the (old) parliament.

CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

The new constitution called for the creation of a two-chambered parliament, and after its adoption in 1996 deputies for the first convocation of parliament were appointed by presidential decree.

In general, the parliament has become largely inactive and is frequently bypassed by presidential decrees — as the constitution allows only for short parliamentary sessions, it becomes necessary for the president to issue decrees on

issues upon which parliament is unable to decide during the allotted time.

The decrees of the president have greater power than laws. In circumstances of “specific urgency and necessity,” the new constitution gives him the authority to make decrees even without a decision by parliament to delegate such powers to him.

The new constitution also alters the nature of the Constitutional Court, changing it from an independent body to one under the president’s control. Half of the twelve justices on the court are directly appointed by the president, and the other half are appointed by the Senate.

Immediately following this decision, five judges on the court resigned in protest; a sixth, who refused to resign, was prematurely dismissed by LUKASHENKO. The new Constitutional Court’s first act in office was to rule that his presidential decree enforcing the results of the referendum was entirely constitutional.

SUPPRESSION AND DISSENT

Between 1996 and 1999 numerous protest actions arose across the country and political opposition parties were formed at this time. All of those movements were severely suppressed by the authorities; most activists and leaders were either detained or unexpectedly disappeared.

It was confirmed later that they became victims of political murders. The number of political migrants leaving Belarus increased and many people from the opposition against the LUKASHENKO regime now live abroad. The pressure on the mass media forced a number of independent newspapers to close down, the most famous of which is *Svoboda* (“Liberty”).

Newspaper licences are cancelled, journalists are sentenced to forced labour being accused of slandering the president, and foreign journalists are expelled from the country. Freedom of the media is thus non-existent. Also TV and radio stations are completely in the palm of the state. For the few still-independent newspapers, it is very difficult to survive in the atmosphere of repression.

In 2001 Alexander LUKASHENKO won the second presidential elections, in which he received 75 per cent of the votes according to official sources, and his term of commission was extended until 2006.

Several aspects can help to explain this outcome: the highly atomistic society; the weak and separated opposition without a strong, unique leader; and the lack of independent sources of information. In addition, it is suspected that the real election results were falsified; foreign observers of the elections registered massive manipulations.

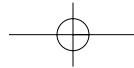
CHANGING ECONOMY

In early nineties and shortly after LUKASHENKO’s election, Belarus could be characterised as one of the economically weakest and poorest countries from the former Soviet Union. During this period the country had one of the highest annual rates of inflation (up to 600 percent in the mid-nineties) and unemployment (up to 15 percent, taking into account hidden unemployment) and a very low rate of economic growth (during some years, the indicator was negative).

The average monthly salary in Belarus barely reached 100 EUR until the end of the nineties. After the second presidential elections, however, the situation in the republic has changed considerably, so that currently among her neighbours Belarus is even considered a prosperous, rapidly developing country.

This opinion, unfortunately, is mostly based on the information from the official propagandist Belarusian mass-media and is a result of misunderstanding the real economic system in the republic.

The reason for the quick improvement of the aggregate economic indicators in Belarus — e.g. the deceleration of unemployment and inflation, the rise in salaries and pensions, and the increase in production and a building boom —



is a further consolidation of political power in the republic.

Coupled with the changed structure of production, the overwhelming share of state-owned enterprises and return to the Soviet-style methods of management and system of administrative punishment, LUKASHENKO's immeasurable presidential authority facilitates good economic results in the republic.

Still, all the economic decisions and programmes in the republic must be approved directly by the president. As a result of increased government interventions in the economy, the level of administrative corruption has increased in Belarus.

Additionally, while more and more foreign investment flows into its neighbour countries such as Ukraine and Russia, foreign investment is virtually non-existent in Belarus. Belarus has lost almost all her trade ties with other European countries and the only remaining partners are the countries from the former Soviet Union, Poland and Germany. Despite all the recent economic changes, Belarus still can be described as an economically and politically isolated country.

A THIRD TERM?

Currently, the possibility of a third presidential term is hardly discussed in Belarus. In September 2004 the president announced a new referendum to be held on October 17, where citizens were asked to remove the existing restriction in the constitution for more than two terms of presidential commission and, particularly, to allow Alexander LUKASHENKO to participate in the third presidential elections

in Belarus in 2006. The current Constitution does not allow the same person to be elected as president more than twice.

The aggressive agitating campaign in favour of LUKASHENKO, infringement of the election legislation, compulsion of citizens to participate in a terminated referendum (before the date of the referendum itself) and mass falsifications resulted in ninety percent turnout for the referendum and eighty-five percent approval of the amendment to the constitution, according to the Central Election Committee.

These numbers are doubtful and uncharacteristic for the atomistic and disjointed Belarusian populace, for whom the rate of attendance does not usually exceed fifty to sixty percent. Moreover, the referendum was held with numerous flagrant violations from the side of the state administration and local election committees.

It is clear that Alexander LUKASHENKO is going to evade the Constitution once again and to find for himself an opportunity to stay in power as long as possible "for the benefit of all Belarus people," according to his own words.

In general, this campaign showed that the opposition did not have the necessary potential to organise mass protests and meetings in order to express an alternative political opinion and to help change the authoritarian regime in the republic.

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Manuel QUINTERO

The Ecumenical Movement in Latin America and Its Relation to Europe

In the last decades of the XXth century and this early XXIst century, the ecumenical movement in Latin America was ample, with many forms which developed in answer to real issues and challenges, present both in its most immediate surroundings and in the whole oikoumene.

FIRST STAGE: WSCF

During the first stage, in the forties and fifties, the most significant expressions of ecumenism were the direct effect of the pioneering work of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in countries such as Argentina and Mexico; as well as the consequence of the YMCA presence in some of the most important cities on the continent; and of valuable efforts undertaken by Evangelical youth at the national and continental level: in 1941 the Latin American Fellowship of Evangelical Students (ULAJE) was founded.

Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (ISAL, Church and Society in Latin America) gathered young Christian intellectuals — among them the Catholic theologians Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, Segundo GALILEA, Juan Luis SEGUNDO, Lucio GERA, and the Protestant theologians Emilio CASTRO, Julio DE SANTA ANA, Rubem ALVES, José Míguez BONINO — for a critical reflection on the relationship between faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice.

Together with these progressive para-ecclesiastic ecumenical bodies, a series of dialogue and cooperation efforts took place involving Evangelical churches, which culminated in the constitution of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) in 1982.

CLAI basically summoned and included the so-called historical churches: Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed,

Presbyterian, Anglican, Waldensian and Congregational, with a small but valuable representation of Pentecostalism.

On the other hand, other churches related to the American missionary movement were also involved in missionary cooperation and theological dialogue under the auspices of the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL), which eventually developed the theology of *integral mission*.

At the end of the 1960s, specifically in 1969, the first meeting of CLADE (Latin American Conference of Evangelicals) took place in Bogotá. The FTL was organized as an evangelical response not only to the ISAL movement, but also as a response to the dominant North American evangelical conservatism that was reluctant to respond or to get involved in social questions.

Those expressions of a search for dialogue and cooperation between the Evangelical churches were marked by different ideologies. The most radical ecumenical movement, represented since the middle sixties by student (WSCF) and youth para-ecclesiastic organisations (the Latin American Ecumenical Youth Union, ULAJE), organisations of Christian education (Latin American Evangelical Committee of Christian Education, CELADEC), and of intellectuals (Church and Society in Latin America, ISAL), opened to Roman Catholic participation and pleaded for profound changes in social, political and economic structures.

COMPROMISE IN THE POLITICAL AREA

Militants of these organisations became involved in political processes led by leftist parties and organisations in their countries, and some of them paid with their lives for this compromise "until the last consequences."