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Belarus Resumes Dispersing Protests as Lukashenko Decries 'Gestapo' Opposition

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Workers' strikes at major state plants, which broke out last week following the harsh crackdown on protesters, gave a major boost to the opposition movement. **Euroradio / Telegram**

Belarusian authorities resumed breaking up protests and employees were denied entry into offices for joining the opposition in the second week of demonstrations against the country's disputed election, Belarusian media reported Wednesday.

Riot police dispersed a Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ) strike and a state-run media demonstration, according to the reports. Protesters were reportedly denied entry into offices, while the national theater building whose entire troupe threatened to resign was closed for "sanitation."

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The Belarus interior ministry said two people were detained at the MTZ strike.

Lukashenko compared the protesters outside factories to the Nazi secret police, the state-run news agency Belta reported Wednesday.

“The workers and managers pass through a corridor of an aggressive crowd before and after work, like the gestapo,” Lukashenko said during a national security council videoconference.

“You, the workers, are the bosses at the factory. We’ll deal with these demonstrators that meet you at the entrance,” he warned.

The latest dispersals put an end to several days of relative calm that followed the 7,000 detentions, hundreds of injuries and at least three deaths in the wake of the Aug. 9 polls.

Election officials said Lukashenko won 80% of the Aug. 9 vote, while opponents maintain that the election was rigged and his main challenger Svetlana Tikhanovskaya was the actual winner.

Workers’ strikes at major state plants, which broke out last week following the harsh crackdown on protesters, gave a major boost to the opposition movement. The opposition has called for a general strike from Monday after hundreds of workers at state-run factories laid down tools on Friday in a sign that Lukashenko’s traditional support base was turning against him.

Observers noted, however, that pressure from employers and a lack of clarity about the opposition’s next steps threaten to undermine the anti-Lukashenko movement.

BBC wrote that “there are signs suggesting that the momentum for factory strikes could be winding down,” citing a 20-to-80 share of MTZ workers who are on strike.

“Our ranks are thinning out due to unprecedented pressure,” Andrei Bokun, head of the striking committee at major state-owned potash producer Belaruskali, told Interfax.

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