

## New Belarussian Law by Andrei Makhovsky, Reuters

Required Annotations	Student-Created Annotations	Summary / Questions / Reflection
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Comprehension	Find at least 3 previous stems	Comments
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MINSK — About 2,000 Belarussians staged one of the country’s largest protests in recent years on Friday to voice their opposition to a law that imposes a tax on those not in full-time employment.

Popularly known as the “law against social **parasites**” it requires those who work less than 6 months [183 days] per year to pay the government \$250 in compensation for lost taxes. The legislation came into effect in 2015 and has gone down badly with the Belarussian public at a time when many are struggling to make ends meet after more than two years of economic recession.

Protests of this size are rare in the former Soviet republic, run since 1994 by President Alexander Lukashenko, who has described himself as the “last dictator in Europe.”

“I’m not going to pay (the tax). It’s absurd, a return to the feudal system,” said Mikhail Gutuyev, who has been unemployed since losing his job as a sales agent. He and other protesters gathered in the main square in the capital Minsk and carried posters with slogans such as: “The president is the main parasite.”

Seeking to improve ties with the EU and lessen Belarus’s dependence on Russia, Lukashenko has over the past year heeded calls from the West to show greater **lenience** towards political opposition. A Reuters witness at the protest said the police presence was minimal and that there was no sign the authorities wanted to prevent the demonstration from taking place. ...

Belarus has been in recession since 2015 due to a slump in oil prices and **contagion** from an economic crisis in neighboring Russia, with which its economy is closely tied and where many Belarussians work in order to send money home.

In Belarus, those who are officially registered as unemployed are exempt from the law but those not registered, and also freelancers, housewives or husbands, and those working abroad all have to pay the annual tax to the government.

Those who officially register as unemployed must do community service for \$10 per month, so most people do not [register]. ...

According to the last tax inspection, 470,000 people should have paid the fee, but less than 10 percent have done so, generating just \$6 million in extra revenue for the government.

### Questions

1. If this new law came into effect in 2015, what are some reasons you can think of that the Belarussians waited until 2017 to protest it?
2. What are the causes of the recession?
3. What can you infer about the quality of the unemployment assistance offered by the Belarussian government from this article? What evidence from the article backs this inference?
4. How much money should have been raised by this new tax?
5. What can you infer about the political freedoms allowed in Belarus? Provide at least two pieces of evidence from the text to back this up.