

Documentary photographers demand the immediate release of Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk

Richard Phillips
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The campaign by the *World Socialist Web Site* for the release of 25-year-old Bogdan Syrotiuk, jailed by the Zelensky regime for opposing NATO's war on Russia, is winning powerful support in Australia and internationally from workers, youth, artists, intellectuals and other defenders of democratic rights.

Syrotiuk—a socialist opponent of both the Zelensky and Putin regimes—was arrested on bogus charges of treason by the Security Service of Ukraine, the SBU, on April 25. He is a leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL), a Trotskyist organisation fighting to unite the Russian and Ukrainian working class on a socialist and internationalist antiwar program.

The statements published below are from documentary photographers Jack Picone and John Hulme, both currently working in Thailand, and Shantan Kumarasamy, a Sri Lankan based in the Netherlands.

Jack Picone is the recipient of several of photography's most prestigious international awards. This includes the Picture of the Year International award, which he has won three times, the UNESCO Humanity Photo award, the Mother Jones/IFDP Grant for Social Documentary Photography award and the World Press Photo award. His photographs have been finalists in Australia's annual Walkley Awards and the Amnesty International Media Awards.

Picone has covered wars and major social issues in Australia, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, including the 1994 Rwanda genocide. He is a co-founder of Australia's REPORTAGE photography festival, the founder of Reportage Workshops (a series of documentary photography workshops in Asia) and a member of the war photographers' collective SOUTH.

His work has been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum New York, Musée de l'Homme in Paris and Museum aan de Stroom in Amsterdam and is held in collections at the Australian War Memorial, the State Library of NSW and the National Portrait Gallery in Australia. Picone was an Artist-in-Residence Visiting Professor of Lingnan University in Hong Kong from 2012 to 2014 and has been a media studies lecturer at Mahidol

University in Bangkok, Thailand since 2017.

With alarming rapidity, we are approaching two months since a socialist opponent of the Ukraine-Russia war being waged by the Zelensky regime, NATO and the US, was arrested.

In a sinister Cold War Soviet Stalinist-era style swoop, Bogdan was arrested on April 25 and incarcerated by the Security Service of Ukraine, the SBU, in his hometown in Southern Ukraine. The 25-year-old Bogdan, who is in fragile and failing health, is now being held in the notorious Nikolaev prison.

What was his perceived crime? In fact, no crime has been committed. Bogdan has been unlawfully arrested and falsely accused of supporting Russia in its dirty war against Ukraine. These allegations are a delusional and fantastic fiction, and a polemic against reality. Bogdan is a humanist, a socialist, an anti-war activist, and a vigorous opponent of the capitalist Putin regime and its brutal invasion of Ukraine. Bogdan's anti-war passion and politics apply to Ukraine and internationally.

When the SBU handcuffed Syrotiuk in Pervomaisk, it not only stilled his physical freedom but violated his right to be a socialist and anti-war activist. While Ukraine has been under martial law since the Russian invasion, it still claims to be a democracy, but a true democracy doesn't carry out gross violations of human rights and shut down freedom of speech. Similarly, Ukraine has now banned one of the world's most credible and objective media organisations, the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Human rights, inclusive of freedom of speech, is a barometer for a functioning and healthy democracy. While it may be hard to list and precisely define all "human rights," Bogdan Syrotiuk's incarceration in a grim, life-threatening Ukrainian prison bluntly shows what happens to a person without human rights.

On a micro level, banning individuals for their constructive socio-political belief systems and peace activism in tandem with banning a media organisation like the WSWS on a macro

level conclusively confirms that democracy in Ukraine is corrupted, ethically compromised, and has lost its moral compass.

This is a fight for justice for Bogdan—his freedom and his life—and a fight for justice, liberty and life for people everywhere. It is a fight to recognise that when democracy is no longer recognisable as democracy, then capitalism and democracy are fundamentally compromised and corrupted. There is a system failure. The system has crashed. The system is nefarious. Democracy and capitalism are broken.

Humanists like Bogdan Syrotiuk and media organisations like the WSWS have a right to co-exist equally within and outside Ukraine; anything less is not freedom, not democracy. It is hypocrisy. It is fascism.

~ Jack Picone

John Hulme, a UK-born, Northern Thailand-based photographer, has spent decades documenting social issues in Europe, Thailand, Burma, India, Bangladesh and Japan, focusing in particular on the plight of so-called “illegal migrants” and other brutally exploited workers.

Hulme’s photographs have been published by the Independent on Sunday, the Financial Times and the Sydney Morning Herald and has been widely exhibited in the UK, the US and Thailand. His best-known photo-essays and exhibitions include “Burma’s Forgotten War” and “In Search of a Job—any Job” about Burmese migrant workers in Thailand.

I want to add my voice to all those demanding the immediate release of Comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk from Ukraine’s high-security prison where he has been held since April 25 on trumped up charges.

Bogdan’s call for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against war had begun to resonate within Ukraine, which is why he has been arrested, and why the Ukraine government has now banned the *World Socialist Web Site*.

There is growing opposition to this proxy war which has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of young men and maimed countless thousands more. The reactionary and crisis-ridden Ukrainian regime of Zelensky is fearful of this growing anti-war sentiment and is responding in the only way it knows—with brutal state repression and the abolition of whatever remains of basic democratic rights.

While the US, NATO and their international allies promote Zelensky and his government as defenders of democracy, the Ukrainian people are living under a de facto dictatorship.

Essential human rights have been dismantled, demonstrations banned, and left-wing dissenters arrested and imprisoned. Tens of thousands of men of military recruitment age are not prepared to die in this proxy war and have fled the country.

All this is occurring in a world where governments are turning toward fascistic forms of rule with state repression of student protests and encampments against the Gaza genocide and other anti-war opposition.

I urge workers, students and all young people to support the international campaign for the release of Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The spectre of a united global working class fighting for his release and the popularisation of his socialist and internationalist antiwar policies keeps the ruling elites awake—and rightly so. It is an inseparable part of the struggle against imperialist wars and the capitalist profit system.

~ John Hulme

Sri Lankan-born and Netherlands-based documentary photographer Shantan Kumarasamy sent the following statement.

Kumarasamy’s work includes photographic essays of Tamil plantation workers and their families in Sri Lanka, and images documenting the impact of Sri Lankan governments’ three-decade communalist war against the Tamils in the island’s northern provinces.

Bogdan Syrotiuk was arrested by the Ukrainian secret service on April 25th. Less than six weeks later, on June 3rd, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) was banned nationwide by the fascistic Zelensky regime. These draconian actions expose the true character of the US and NATO-led war in Ukraine and set a dangerous precedent for framing-up opponents of the war as “Russian agents.” This blatant assault on basic democratic rights and suppression of free speech must be opposed by all.

Bogdan steadfastly opposed the US and NATO’s war based on internationalist socialist principles. He bravely worked under extremely harsh circumstances in Ukraine to unite the Russian and Ukrainian workers against the corrupt regimes in Moscow, Kiev, as well as the complicit NATO allies.

I demand the immediate and unconditional release of Bogdan Syrotiuk and the dismissal of all false and fabricated charges against him!

Lift the ban on the WSWS!

~ Shantan Kumarasamy

The World Socialist Web Site appeals to all readers and supporters to get involved in the campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, stop the war in Ukraine, end the genocide in Gaza, and deepen the fight for world socialist revolution. Sign the petition below to demand Bogdan’s freedom and join the campaign to secure his release today!



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