

“We will all help him together and make sure that the war ends”

Ukrainian refugees talk about the war and the fight for Bogdan Syrotiuk’s liberation

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Last week, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Ukrainian refugees in front of the “Ukraine Arrival Centre TXL” in Berlin Tegel. They discussed the campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, a socialist opponent of the war who was imprisoned by the Zelensky regime, and the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, which has now been going on for over two years.

Over 1 million refugees from Ukraine live in Germany, more than in any other country except Russia. In the arrival centre, the refugees, most of whom are working class, live in inhumane conditions that give the lie to NATO war propaganda about the supposed defence of “democracy” and “human rights” in Ukraine.

Most of the refugees are traumatised. Many women have come to Germany without their husbands, seeking to give their children a life without war, and are now struggling to survive here. Men over the age of 16 are no longer allowed to leave Ukraine due to the mobilisation for war.

The overwhelming majority of refugees want an end to the war above all else. Many supported the WSWs campaign to liberate Bogdan and the demand for the unification of Russian and Ukrainian workers.

Andrei* is 17 years old and comes from Zaporizhzhia in the south of Ukraine. He and his family are staying in a hotel in Tegel because they still have no housing. His mother works as a cleaner and his father as a delivery driver. Both are having a hard time, said Andrei, partly because they still don’t speak German.

The family came to Germany from Ukraine in 2023 to prevent him and his younger brother from being dragged into the conflict. In the meantime, even young people who are 16 or 17 years old are being forced into the war.

Many of his friends are still in Ukraine, said Andrei. They survive, “but the bombing is, of course, fierce.” According to Andrei, Ukrainians want the war to be over at last.

When the WSWs asked him about Bogdan’s arrest, Andrei said:

If a man is against the war, then of course I agree with him. I would also like to be involved. I don’t know how people who might see this now will react. But everyone agrees that we will help the person who is against the war. We will all help and support him together and make sure that the war ends.

While Andrei was influenced by the war propaganda of the Ukrainian government and NATO, he was impressed by the perspective that the workers of Ukraine and Russia can and must unite against the war. “Well,” he said, “that’s what I hope for, if the workers unite. If they unite, it will be good.”

Larissa* comes from Dnieper (Dnipro) in eastern Ukraine and worked there as a beautician. She has been in Berlin with her daughter for six months. She fled Ukraine to give her child a better life after her mother had already come here. She said:

It’s hard to be there with a small child in this situation. I don’t want to burden her psyche. I want her to grow up with a healthy mind. Besides, it wouldn’t do her any harm to get to know and see other perspectives.

Her husband is still in Ukraine. The situation there is now very difficult. She told the WSWs:

The electricity is constantly out. It’s hard for people to work in such an environment, in such a situation. Sirens are wailing every day, every day there is fighting on the Dnieper, in Zaporizhzhia, in Kharkiv. That’s the whole hot zone, something happens there every day.

Larissa reported that there are also a lot of refugees within Ukraine itself. “Not everyone can travel abroad, not everyone has the opportunity to leave. People come from neighbouring towns; they try to fend for themselves somehow.”

Larissa described in detail the terrible conditions under which refugees now have to live in the accommodation in Berlin:

The conditions are completely unhygienic, everyone is constantly sick, which means the children are constantly sick. You need medicine all the time. At mealtimes, everyone gets the same thing, with no attention paid to children, the elderly or the allergies of individuals.

My child has allergies, for example. I’ve already gone to the doctor, taken certificates with me, shown that I need at least something, at least a separate container so that I can clean myself and cook for the child. I have to pay a certain amount for food every month. But my child doesn’t eat there. So I have to shoulder extra expenses. I have to go shopping.

Most people have been living here for two years and the situation is

becoming increasingly desperate, Larissa said:

People like us live here, with children, whose children are learning German, who themselves are learning German in order to work in the future, looking for an apartment, collecting all the necessary documents—we sit and wait. There is a confusing queue.

Above all, she expressed her wish that the war would end. “We all live with the hope that the war will end one day,” she said. “Who wants war? Nobody does. Everyone wants peace.”

Larissa agreed that the war was first and foremost a war waged in the interests of the Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs, as well as the NATO powers. She said:

Unfortunately, this has always been the case throughout history. Even if you look at what the people at the top have for their own goals. There’s a lot we don’t even know.

When asked about Bogdan’s arrest and the state of “democracy” in Ukraine, she said:

To tell you something very clearly: people who have their own opinion are always somehow forced into a mold. They are somehow condemned; something happens to such people, unfortunately. Nobody takes our opinions into consideration. There is only one plan of action that everything follows. We are just victims of what happens.

Tatyana* is a seamstress from Kharkiv. She has been living in a refugee centre with her toddler for three months. Before that, she spent six months in the Tegel refugee camp, until a fire at the beginning of March, when she lost all her belongings.

“My child ran out of there with nothing,” she said, “just a pair of trousers, a pair of sports shorts, a sports shirt and a cap. That was all we had left. Our passports and documents were all burnt.”

She has since received new documents and new clothes from the job centre, but she is still unable to find an apartment. She said:

They just don’t allocate you any accommodation. They tell you that you’re in the queue. You ask which queue you’re in. They say the computer decides. You can look it up on the computer. But you can’t look anything up there. It’s some kind of system that decides everything.

She originally came to Berlin “because I have a small child to save. We are from a border town, we live very close to the border [to the territories claimed by Russia].”

She said that at the beginning of the war a Russian airplane dropped a bomb on a nearby kindergarten. “Our windows were blown out and the doors were all blown out. Fortunately, my mum and my husband were on the other side of the flat, otherwise they could have been blown up.”

She then fled with her child.

Tatyana reported that she used to work as a seamstress in Ukraine. Her husband, who is still in Ukraine, worked in a door factory before the war,

but now has to move from job to job. “Fortunately,” she said, he had not yet been called up.

She described in detail how the Zelensky regime forces Ukrainian men to go to war:

It’s terrible. They are simply abducted by force on the street. And why? Because there are people who consciously want to go to war, while others may not be ready. Besides, there’s already a lot of information about what it’s like on the front. There aren’t enough weapons. They have to buy everything themselves. Soldiers say that they need 200,000, 300,000 or 400,000 hryvnia [€4,600 to €9,200]. They have to buy everything themselves. Nobody has that kind of money here.

She agreed that there is no democracy in Ukraine:

That’s the way it is at the moment. Of course, everything used to be different, even if not one hundred percent, but now there is no democracy at all and nobody has any rights.

Men are simply picked up on the street. They are forced into cars and minibuses to fight. Workers from all professions are fighting, but the military police are on the streets intercepting people. Why is that? Shouldn’t everyone be fighting? ... And, of course, the rich are not fighting on the front line.

When the WSWs reporters asked her about the perspective of uniting the Ukrainian and Russian workers, for which Bogdan is fighting, and explained that the war is being waged in the interests of the Russian and Ukrainian oligarchy and the imperialist powers, but not in the interests of the workers of both countries, Tatyana replied:

There’s some truth in what you say, but it’s also the case that people in Russia are going to war even though they don’t have to. I understand that some of them are forced. But because they say they are our brothers. We woke up at 4:30 in the morning and they started bombing us. Why did they come to us to fight? I can’t understand this. They [the workers of both countries] were not enemies. But now it will take a long time for Ukraine to perhaps somehow get back on its feet, because so many children, husbands and sons have been killed. It’s hard to forget, to understand, to forgive.

At the end of the discussion, the WSWs reporters emphasised that the current war is ultimately a result of the destruction of the Soviet Union by Stalinism, and that the socialist traditions of the working class, which have a very long history in both Russia and Ukraine, must be revived. Opposition to the war also exists in the Russian working class, and the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, led by Bogdan Syrotyuk, has members in Ukraine, Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union who are fighting to unite the workers against the war.

Tatyana was very open to discussing this perspective further and thanked us warmly for the discussion.

At the end, when asked about the genocide in Gaza and the preparations for war against China, she emphasised:

Of course, I am against any war. Absolutely against any war.
And against any oligarchic president who favours a proxy war like
the one we have.

The discussions with the refugees make clear that opposition to the war and the Zelensky regime is rapidly growing in the Ukrainian working class, but that it lacks a socialist perspective. It is precisely for this reason that Bogdan Syrotiuk, who fights for this perspective, was arrested. This makes it all the more important to publicise the campaign for his liberation as widely as possible and to build a socialist anti-war movement in the working class.

Sign the petition to demand his release! Share the information about his case on all social media networks and discuss with friends and colleagues! Get in touch with us and join the fight for Bogdan's freedom! More information can be found at: wsws.org/freebogdan.

* Name changed by the editors.



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