

Russian Neo-Stalinists, Maoists oppose the campaign to free Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

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On April 25 of this year, Bogdan Syrotiuk, a Ukrainian socialist opponent of the war in Ukraine and of both the Zelensky Putin regimes, and leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), was arrested by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in his hometown of Pervomaysk, in the Nikolaev (Mikolayiv) region.

The International Committee of the Fourth International launched an international campaign in Bogdan's defense, demanding that Kiev immediately release him and end his political persecution. As part of this campaign, our organization, the YGBL, which is active both in Ukraine and Russia, as well as in other countries of the former USSR, has appealed to organizations in Russia that call themselves left and socialist to help publicize what is happening. The overwhelming majority of them refused to do so.

To their credit, the Telegram channel of Boris Kagarlitsky's "Rabkor" (whom the ICFI has openly defended against political persecution), as well as the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) and the Revolutionary Workers' Party (RRP) published statements in support of Bogdan on their social media pages. A handful of smaller organizations and public pages have agreed to help publicize the campaign. But most well-known organizations such as the Russian Labor Front (RTF), the Union of Marxists (SM), "Herald of the Storm" ("Vestnik Buri") Vasily Sadonin's "There is a path out" ("Vykhod Yest"), and many smaller groups and organizations decided to ignore us. A few smaller organizations and public communities decided to respond, but, for the most part, their response was negative.

Their response can be summarized as follows: They believe that it would be a mistake to disseminate information about Bogdan's persecution in Russia. They argue that by publicizing it in Russia we will allegedly only harm Bogdan by "planting evidence" (!!!) of Bogdan's connections with Russia. Thus, the outlet "Lenin Crew," which lays claim to being "orthodox Marxist" while seeking to "unite" Trotskyism and its mortal enemy, Stalinism, wrote, "We are very sorry for Bogdan's fate. But we think that communists from Russia must not engage in a public response, since this would be yet another bargaining chip for the prosecution, ... another piece of evidence linking him to Russia."

Our hapless "leftists" miss one important nuance here: Bogdan Syrotiuk is accused of working on behalf of the Russian state which invaded Ukraine. In claiming that a principled response to his arrest by Russian socialists would be "evidence linking him to Russia," they simply accept the equation of the Russian government with the

Russian working class, an equation that we, as all socialists, reject.

In our response to them, we explained that Bogdan, like the YGBL and the International Committee of the Fourth International as a whole, has been a principled opponent of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Russian regime in general. The real facts thus speak in Bogdan's defense and against the fraudulent charges of treason. Secondly, we insisted that only by openly pointing out Bogdan's real, internationalist position on the war issue will we be able to protect him because Bogdan is fighting for the unity of workers in Russia and Ukraine. By trying to silence these facts, we would deprive Bogdan of any argumentation in defense of his innocence. But the responses of these groups to this clarification was silence. Only one group explained, in a few short sentences, its refusal to reconsider its position.

Others refused to support the fight to free Bogdan outright: Some by declaring their de facto support for the Putin regime and its reactionary invasion of Ukraine, others by siding, on the contrary, with NATO and the Ukrainian government. The neo-Stalinist social chauvinists of the Russian Communist Workers' Party (RCKP) first echoed Lenin Crews' argument about not providing "evidence" for ties to Russia, but then continued with a cynical declaration of support for the Russian invasion:

... Well be consistent! Since your comrade was against the SMO [Special Military Operation] from the beginning, don't complain now! Alas, but it is quite logical that he got a full spoonful of it! Now he has a chance to find out on his own skin whose regime is more reactionary. Only the "reactionary" troops of the dreadful, terrible Putin will free him. We are, to put it mildly, not fans of Vladimir Vladimirovich, but your comrade's position is frankly stupid. Do not mechanically copy the tactics of the Bolsheviks of the early twentieth century! Think with your head! The Bolsheviks tied their tactics to specific conditions, which are absolutely not equal to today's conditions.

It is difficult to think of a more obnoxious example for social chauvinist rhetoric. We only cite it so that workers and young people in Russia and other parts of the world who read it will remember how social chauvinists behave when socialist opponents of war are persecuted in a country that has been invaded by their own

government. No doubt, many others, who chose to remain silent, share this position and fear that by speaking out publicly in favor of a Ukrainian anti-war socialist, their alliance with pro-Kremlin forces will be undermined.

The second response was from the Ural Maoist Union (SMU), until recently part of the well-known Russian Maoist Party (RMP), which also refused to defend Bogdan. The SMU's refusal to defend Bogdan Syrotiuk deserves to be quoted in full. They wrote,

We consider it unacceptable to interfere in the affairs of the working class of another state. We also believe that any help to your comrade from Russia would be harmful. This story is a matter of Ukrainian politics. Its coverage and defense of your comrade should [be] handled by Ukrainian politicians and Ukrainian media. We consider it unacceptable to help the Ukrainian security services with evidence of your comrade's connection with Russians. We consider it even more unacceptable to create reasons for Russian propaganda to demonize Ukraine, to declare it a concentration of atrocities and evils. The very last thing one would want is to aid Russian imperialism, and it is important for Ukrainian communists to defend their independence. Your comrade's story is unpleasant, no doubt, but it should be an exposure of the anti-people character of the Ukrainian regime from and for Ukrainians.

This response makes a mockery of the basic Marxist principle of internationalism, inscribed since the days of the *Communist Manifesto* (1847): "Workers' of the World Unite." Instead, the Maoists juxtapose to internationalism the principle: Workers of the world, "do not interfere with the affairs of the working class of another state." To put it bluntly, this is an ultra-nationalist, anti-socialist position which exposes the Maoists as an organization that has nothing to do with the defense of the interests of the working class.

Moreover, the Maoists, with this response, reveal themselves as allies of the Ukrainian government and NATO. Instead of helping an anti-war activist in Ukraine, they are isolating Bogdan, and seeking to block support for him in both Ukraine and Russia. The true reason for their refusal to support the campaign in his defense is their hostility toward the principles of international socialism, which Bogdan defends.

The reaction of the Russian Neo-Stalinists and Maoists, who still dominate what passes as "left" in Russia, is a violation of the most fundamental principles of the socialist movement. For over a century, the opposition of the socialist workers movement to war has been bound up with major defense campaigns, such as the one to free Thomas Mooney and Warren Billings, two US workers who were imprisoned for many years for their opposition to the US entry into World War I. These campaigns have always had an international character and were rooted in the basic democratic principle: An injury to one is an injury to all. There can be no defense of labor if democratic rights, especially those of opponents of the war, are completely compromised.

By refusing to take a stance in defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk, all these organizations that claim to be "left," "socialist" and "communist," have shown themselves to be bitterly hostile to the working class, democratic rights and the socialist struggle against war.

Their response must serve as an object lesson for workers and young people in Russia and internationally as to the character of these forces that have emerged out of the wreckage of Stalinism.

The YGBL will not be deterred from our struggle to free our comrade. We will redouble our efforts to free our comrade, by mobilizing support among workers and youth in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. His defense is intrinsically connected to the fight against war and the attack on democratic rights. From this standpoint, the development of the campaign in Russia is of particular importance.

Committed to the same tasks that Bogdan sets for himself, namely to achieve the unification of the Russian and Ukrainian working class for the struggle for socialism, we are convinced that this campaign will serve to raise the internationalist, socialist consciousness of the working class. The working class in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere must understand itself as a political subject that is capable of pursuing its political goals, in this case in defending the democratic rights of Bogdan. Secondly, we are convinced that the bonds of solidarity and friendship between the Russian and Ukrainian workers will be renewed when they see that there is socialist opposition to the war in both countries. Therefore, workers in Ukraine and Russia must know about Bogdan, a fighter for peace and socialism who was unjustly persecuted by the Kiev regime for his courageous stand, and together support his release.

We appeal to workers, youth and all those who consider themselves socialist and who are rightly outraged by this behavior of the Russian organizations that make up the "left movement": If you believe that an organization of the proletariat should not behave in this way; if you believe that it must show itself as a truly socialist organization at all times and in all things, and not compromise the principles that have guided the Marxist movement for more than 175 years and the Trotskyist movement, its successor, for more than 100 years; if you yourself are prepared to take up the struggle for these principles: Join the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists! Spread the word about what is happening now with our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk in Ukraine! Sign the petition for Bogdan's release! Fight for the union of the Russian and Ukrainian working class on the basis of the perspective of socialism, for peace between Russia and Ukraine!

Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!



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