

Leading fighter for Julian Assange's freedom calls for mobilisation behind Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporter
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Maxine Walker was a prominent member of the Julian Assange Defence Committee based in London. A lifelong socialist, she played a leading role in the international campaign to free the imprisoned WikiLeaks founder, who was indicted under the Espionage Act in 2019 for exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Walker this week called on all those who fought for Assange's freedom to join the fight for Bogdan Syrotiuk's release from prison in Ukraine. Her statement is reproduced below.

The conviction and 15-year sentence of Bogdan Syrotiuk must be condemned by all socialists, anti-imperialists and those who fight the battle for truth and justice. We must fight for his release and mobilise support for him. He was convicted of High Treason for six articles he wrote for the *World Socialist Web Site* opposing the NATO-instigated war in Ukraine.

Bogdan's case provides a rare glimpse behind the impenetrable wall of silence and propaganda that NATO nations have built around Ukraine's corrupt, fascist regime. This regime was put in place by the US and other Western nations in the 2014 coup against the elected government of Ukraine. The NATO powers have celebrated Ukraine as a gallant democracy. When Russia, after years of failed negotiations and many NATO provocations, began its military operation in 2022, the anti-Russian narrative was hysterically ramped up, and billions have been poured in to arm and support Ukraine. Currently, the drone and missile attacks deep into Russia with arms supplied by Britain and other NATO powers represent a dangerous escalation.

Bogdan and his young co-thinkers took a principled and courageous stand, opposing NATO imperialism, the Zelensky puppet regime, and Putin's military

assault, counterposing to war and nationalism the class unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers.

In my experience, the narrative surrounding the Ukraine war is the most successful propaganda exercise mounted by Western states in living memory. For four years a ruinous, ferocious war has been fought in Europe with vast casualties which have barely been allowed to register with the wider populations of Europe. The history is barely known. The violent coup which overthrew the elected Ukrainian government in 2014 was brought about after a long period of CIA planning and its organisation of fascist forces and parties. The context was the planned encirclement of Russia up to its borders by heavily armed NATO states. Ukraine was a key state for NATO to acquire. With that in place, imperialism has endlessly armed Ukraine and waged an undeclared war on Russia.

While the Zionist genocide in Gaza broke the wall of silence and impunity and mobilised a large and varied movement of opposition, that is not the case for the Ukraine war. Yet the motives of the imperialist states are identical. They fight to force a redivision of the world to secure the future profits of the gangster financial oligarchy. Their enemies in this task are identified as Iran, Russia and China. They are taking their populations into a world war which threatens nuclear annihilation. None of the sons and daughters of the profit-hungry gangsters will fight in the existing and future armies. Dying or returning maimed and traumatised will be the job designated for the working class, as ever.

The much-vaunted "democracy" of Ukraine has not had an election since 2019; it has withdrawn from its obligations under Article 10 of the European convention on Human Rights covering freedom of expression; in 2019 it introduced a new national

holiday for fascist Stepan Bandera who had led an organisation whose members fought alongside the Nazis against the Soviet Red Army in the Second World War and were perpetrators of the Nazi Holocaust, massacring tens of thousands of Jews and Poles; in 2022 it banned 11 opposition parties including the largest party and leftist organisations, and stripped many trade unions of rights.

That is the kind of democracy favoured by the imperialists. The rulers of Western nations are now stepping up the attack on democratic rights against their own populations. We saw the warnings of what was to come when Julian Assange and WikiLeaks exposed US and other imperialist war crimes.

Assange was relentlessly hunted down, illegally surveilled in the Ecuadorian Embassy where he had earlier sought refuge, persecuted and finally imprisoned in the hellish Belmarsh prison. He faced extradition to the USA and a possible 175-year sentence. His health was almost broken. The media narrative relentlessly slandered and mocked him.

We campaigned for Assange on the streets and found that the working class had a very clear understanding of his case and the injustices he faced. We repeatedly heard the sentiment that “He’s been fitted up”. The campaign warned that Assange was the canary in the coal mine, and that those who seriously oppose and damage imperialist interests would face similar lawless treatment. Assange finally won his liberty by hard campaigning and excellent lawyers. But that warning of deepening repression has rapidly come true.

Last month, 66 percent of Ukrainians told Gallup pollsters the country should seek a negotiated peace. So far, this sentiment has been largely politically silenced by the illegalisation of opposition and fear of violent reprisals. As the war drags on, the voices of dissent will grow. Bogdan, as a rare and courageous socialist voice speaking out publicly, has borne the brunt of the regime’s insecurity and anger. He is a political prisoner, and a large campaign must be mobilised in his support. He has put his life on the line, and the goal must be his freedom. Nothing less will do.



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