

Campaign to free Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk discussed on NZ M?ori radio

Our reporter
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On August 21, Tom Peters and John Braddock from the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand, spoke with Dean Hapeta (aka Te Kupu) on his radio show Te Kupu N? Te Kupu, on the M?ori station Te Upoko o te Ika Radio, about the global campaign to secure the immediate release of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The SEG members previously spoke with Hapeta just over two years ago, after Ukraine’s security police arrested and imprisoned Bogdan, the then-25-year-old leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL).

On August 10, 2026, Bogdan was sentenced by a fascist court in Ukraine to 15 years in prison for “high treason under martial law.”

Peters explained that Bogdan was accused of being a Russian agent and collaborator, but the prosecution “couldn’t produce any evidence that he had supported the Russian invasion, no evidence of sabotage or collaborating with the Russian military or anything like that.”

The YGBL leader was convicted and sentenced solely for writing articles and speeches published on the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), which was banned in Ukraine shortly after his arrest. He explicitly opposed both Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

Bogdan’s “crime” was that “he called on the working class in both countries to oppose the war, to unite against both of these capitalist oligarchic regimes, in Kyiv and in Moscow. That’s the only way that the war will be stopped,” Peters said.

The court’s sentencing decision stated that Bogdan’s statements included “non-recognition of Ukraine’s

legitimately elected political leadership and democratic processes,” “comparisons with fascists and Nazis,” “negative assessments of Ukraine’s Armed Forces” and “reinterpretation of national heroes and historical figures.”

Commenting on this, Peters said: “This whole case shows there is no democracy in Ukraine.” Volodymyr Zelensky’s presidential term expired in May 2024 and “elections have been suspended indefinitely, strikes have been completely banned under martial law, and the country has no freedom of speech. The major opposition party has been banned, as well as many others. All socialist and left-wing organisations have been banned.”

While Bogdan is accused of “reinterpreting” historical figures, Peters said, “actually it’s the Ukrainian regime that is rewriting history in order to glorify fascists and Nazi collaborators who joined the war of extermination against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust against the Jewish people.

“The Zelensky government has banned all symbols associated with communism; statues of Lenin have been torn down, and they’ve put up statues and renamed streets in honour of Nazi collaborators like the leader of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) Stepan Bandera, who welcomed with open arms the Nazi invasion.”

Hapeta noted that the media had tried to deny the presence of fascists in the Ukrainian establishment, but “people know, now: yes, there’s Nazis there. There’s no denying it now.”

Braddock added that there was growing opposition to the war among ordinary people, including in Ukraine, where “it is becoming increasingly difficult for the

regime to recruit cannon fodder for the war. They are now sending groups of thugs around to lift people off the streets to sling them into the army.” He referred to a report that a former Ukrainian Defence Minister has suggested expanding mandatory military service to women.

Similarly, “the working class across Europe increasingly recognises that they are on the front line of a possible nuclear conflagration” and that “participation in the war is being funded by massive cuts to social programs. So the whole attempt by the mainstream media and the imperialist politicians to maintain popularity for this war is collapsing.”

The developing mass opposition was connected with the draconian sentence given to Bogdan. Peters said, “This is an extremely unpopular regime, there is rising opposition, and their response to that is to intensify repression, and that’s what we’re seeing here.” Bogdan is being held in “atrocious conditions” which amount to torture; “he is being deprived of urgently needed dental treatment, so he is in continual pain.”

The verdict against Bogdan mentions the “socially dangerous consequences” of his political ideas. Peters explained that the danger, from the standpoint of the Ukrainian oligarchy and its imperialist backers, is that Bogdan “is telling Russian and Ukrainian workers that there is an alternative to slaughtering each other in the war, that they are not each other’s enemies.”

Asked about the roots of the war in Ukraine, Peters said it had to be understood as part of “the eruption of global war,” which included the attack on Venezuela, the war against Iran and the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. “All of economic life in the United States, across Europe, and increasingly around the world, is being subordinated [to war],” he said.

New Zealand’s ruling elite, as an ally of Washington, is pouring money into the military. Successive governments have integrated NZ into the build-up to war against China and provided training for Ukrainian conscripts to fight against Russia.

War, Peters said, is the outcome of “the profound crisis of American capitalism.” The US has more than \$40 trillion in public debt and an oligarchy whose wealth is based on unsustainable financial speculation, including the AI bubble. The solution of the ruling class is “to conquer and steal the resources of other countries.”

The origins of the Ukraine conflict, he explained, go back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The US and NATO imperialist powers responded by seeking to remove “all of the obstacles to imperialism’s total domination over Eastern Europe and the Middle East that were put up by the Russian Revolution and the anti-colonial uprisings” inspired by the revolution.

The SEG members stressed that the same historic crisis of capitalism that produced the war will drive workers into revolutionary struggles, in which the perspective of the Trotskyist movement can gain mass support.

Peters quoted from Bogdan’s speech delivered to the International Online May Day Rally in 2022, which expressed this revolutionary optimism: “In our world there is only one social and historical force capable of uniting humanity on an international basis, and that is the working class. It is the only social force that increases and strengthens with the development of capitalism. It is its product, and therefore has a real opportunity to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a new classless society based on the conscious planning of production, and a distribution of resources that meets the needs of society as a whole.”

Peters urged listeners to sign the petition demanding the immediate release of Bogdan, and to speak out and denounce the frame-up verdict.

“There is no legal basis at all for his imprisonment, but we have no illusions about the justice system in Ukraine,” he said. “What is going to secure his freedom and secure freedom for all political prisoners in Ukraine and elsewhere—[including] in Palestine/Israel—is mass opposition from working people. This should be seen as part of the movement to stop the Third World War that is already underway.”



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