

Sri Lanka: Railway workers and Katunayake Free Trade Zone workers back campaign to free Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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As part of the international campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka recently spoke with workers at the Katunayake Free Trade Zone (KFTZ) and Ratmalana Railway.

Bogdan, a 27-year-old Ukrainian Trotskyist and leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, was sentenced on August 10 to 15 years in prison on charges of “treason” for calling for unity between Ukrainian and Russian workers against the war.

The SEP/IYSSE campaigners distributed Sinhala-language copies of the WSWs article “Fascist Ukrainian court sentences Bogdan Syrotiuk, socialist opponent of war, to 15 years in prison,” and other literature. Their intervention drew significant support, with workers standing firmly behind the demand for Bogdan’s release and posing for photographs holding his picture.

The KFTZ is the country’s largest Export Processing Zone, employing over 30,000 workers. It is among several such zones, including Biyagama and Koggala, which make products for transnational corporations and global brands, such as Victoria’s Secret, Marks & Spencer, GAP, and H&M. Apparel workers are highly exploited, commonly earning around \$US107–137 per month (Rs. 35,000–45,000).

Lakmal, 34, works as a contract labourer for a manpower agency, with assignments in various apparel factories. His mother, who works in a Middle Eastern country, has told him about the ongoing war in that region; in the distance, she sometimes hears the Iranian attacks on American bases.

He said: “Ukraine is at war with Russia, Iran is being attacked, there are killings every day in Palestine, and tomorrow there could be a war between China and Taiwan. Who can say whether America will inflame it? There are military exercises taking place in Taiwan and the surrounding areas.”

He continued: “There is a possibility of war with nuclear weapons. If that happens, Russia and China can also use such weapons. The world has come to that point.”

If the wars go on, he said, “we will not even have food to eat. Ships or planes may not be able to operate. We cannot afford it now. The prices of everything are going up, but our salaries are not being increased. We cannot live like this.

“It was against this disastrous prospect that this young and courageous Ukrainian socialist took a stand. That is why I join my voice with many others around the world in demanding: Immediately release Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

Lakmal stressed the urgency of building an international anti-war and socialist movement among workers in America, Europe and around the world, saying that this task “cannot be delayed.”

A **female worker**, who requested anonymity for fear of retaliation by her employer, condemned the prison sentence against Bogdan and promised to sign the online petition for his freedom. She stated, “If the war continues, it will be a great disaster. War affects every country. Bogdan fought for the entire human race to stop the war. He must be released.”

The worker, who has worked in various garment factories for over 20 years, explained how the wars have affected the KFTZ. “There are fewer orders now.

There is no freedom to speak. The [monthly] salary is about 50,000 rupees. My husband also works in my factory. We don't even have a trade union inside the factory. If we ask for a salary increase, we are thrown out."

Dilushan, 50, a worker at a printing paper factory, said: "War is the authorization of state-sponsored killing. We must oppose war. Every human being has the right to live. From a human rights perspective, there is no right to deprive a person of their life.

"That is what this young man [Bogdan] is talking about. He is arguing for the right of every human being to live. He is speaking out for the people who are dying in the Russian-Ukrainian war. He is speaking out to prevent those who are going to die in the future from this war."

Dilushan added: "Such a person is rarely born in a country. He should be free, because he is a person who thinks about others and about the future. He must have the freedom to carry out his movement in that country. That is what democracy is. He cannot be allowed to be imprisoned on trumped-up charges."

He condemned the imperialist powers that use advanced technology for the destruction of human life rather than for the well-being of humanity. "When it comes to conducting wars through AI technology, the people who created these technologies hoped for the development of the world, but the imperialist powers use them for the opposite, because of their maniacal attitude. The atom was not discovered to make bombs. The man who discovered it did so for the development of the world."

Kumara, a young worker employed at a factory that supplies parts for the Smart Shirts company, said he knew little about the Zelensky regime's repressive measures. SEP members explained how Russian and Ukrainian soldiers are dying in the war, and how the imprisonment of Bogdan shows that freedom of expression has been suppressed.

Kumara responded: "You can't put a man in prison like that. It's wrong." He condemned military spending, saying, "People need to be fed. Resources must be spent on social welfare. We don't need any war."

Roshan, a worker at the Ratmalana Railway factory, denounced the imprisonment of Bogdan and said he would demand that the authorities free him

immediately. "This destructive war must be opposed. How come opposing war is a crime? The real criminals are the rulers who created the war. They must be punished," he emphasized.

After years of war, he said, the lies told to justify it are being exposed. "When these issues are becoming more and more obvious, and becoming an obstacle, the rulers attempt to gag the opponents of the war. There's no democratically elected government in Ukraine. Zelensky is clinging to power by force, using the war as justification."

Roshan denounced the Zelensky regime's glorification of Nazi collaborators in World War II, which Bogdan exposed. "They are enemies of the working class. I know that Hitler destroyed Marxist literature. Similarly, now they are destroying Bogdan Syrotiuk's Marxist documents. The international working class must rise against this."

Another railway worker at the factory, **Janaka**, said: "Bogdan Syrotiuk is a fighter who represented and defended the people of Ukraine, Russia and the world, not the global rulers. That is why the Zelensky regime imprisoned him for 15 years. I think world powers are behind this ruling. We workers must defend him.

"It is clear that this is a bogus case which has dragged on for two years since his detention in 2024. They could not find any evidence against him other than what he wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site*. This shows that this is a predetermined decision. They wanted to silence him for 15 years at least.

"This vehemently unjust verdict targeted not only Bogdan but also dealt a death blow to working people. Why am I saying so? Workers will have to shoulder all the burden of this spreading world war. Therefore, workers must oppose this internationally. I want to be part of that."



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