

Photographer, filmmaker and translator Eugene Ulman calls for the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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The campaign by the World Socialist Web Site for the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk and the dropping of all charges against the 27-year-old socialist and antiwar activist is winning significant support in Australia and internationally.

Syrotiuk—a socialist opponent of both the Zelensky and Putin regimes—was arrested on bogus charges of treason by the Security Service of Ukraine in April 2024. On August 10 this year, he was sentenced to 15 years’ jail. The court also stripped him of his property and ordered the destruction of all the books and pamphlets of his organisation, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists.

Workers, youth, artists, intellectuals and other defenders of democratic rights across the globe have signed the petition demanding Bogdan Syrotiuk’s freedom or sent letters of protest to the Pervomaisk City District Court, which handed down the verdict. Your support for this campaign is urgently required.

The statement below was sent to the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) by Eugene Ulman, a South African-based writer, photographer, documentary filmmaker and translator.

Ulman was born in the former Soviet Union but grew up in Australia, where he studied film and media at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and later at the University of California in Los Angeles.

In December 1989, Ulman was employed as a Russian interpreter and translator for Australia’s Special Investigations Unit (SIU) as part of its five-person mission to Moscow and Rovno in Ukraine to gather evidence to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals then living in Australia.

In 1998, Ulman was a translator for Russian

historian Vadim Rogovin at the Socialist Equality Party’s international summer school in Sydney.

As a filmmaker, Ulman has worked for the BBC, Al Jazeera, SBS and other channels. His writing has been published in the Sydney Morning Herald, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Tablet Magazine, Sufi Journal and BBC Online. His photographic work has appeared in numerous magazines and has been exhibited in Zimbabwe at ArtHarare in 2020, as well as in Right Turn Left, a current joint show with Rodney Badza. His first long-form documentary film, Positive Anomaly: Making History Johannesburg is currently in production.

As the tragically pointless Russia-Ukraine war drags on and on, with apparently no end in sight, destroying the lives of millions of people, we must condemn in the strongest possible terms the persecution of 27-year-old journalist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was sentenced on August 10, 2026, by a Ukrainian court to 15 years in prison on charges of treason, essentially for six articles he wrote in which he called for solidarity between Ukrainian and Russian workers and youth against the war.

There has been not one word in any of his writings that supports the Russian regime, Putin or the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, there have not even been any allegations made against him of espionage, sabotage or collaboration with the Russian military.

As a socialist, Syrotiuk has consistently rejected any kind of nationalist position. Many people have argued that, because Ukraine is the victim of an invasion, criticism or opposition to the Ukrainian government

should be deferred until after the war is over. However, anyone who genuinely values freedom and human rights must recognise this position as incoherent.

Of course, it shouldn't come as a surprise that a country at war would demand allegiance and loyalty from its citizens, but however much sympathy we have for the suffering of people in Ukraine, we cannot allow ourselves to ignore, excuse or minimise violations of their rights to freedom of expression and of the press.

Whatever one thinks of Syrotiuk's politics, imprisoning someone for 15 years for expressing political views is fundamentally incompatible with any meaningful conception of democratic rights.

This case should concern everyone who claims to oppose authoritarianism and defend freedom.

Opposition to a government, criticism of its historical narratives and advocacy for an alternative political position do not become "treason" simply because a country is at war. Ukraine's government cannot credibly invoke democracy as the justification for its struggle against Russia while imposing such a sentence on a young journalist for doing his job.

Syrotiuk's writing might make some people uncomfortable, but that is precisely the point. Rights are sometimes uncomfortable, and that is all the more reason to defend them. If opposition to the government, opposition to the war and solidarity with fellow human beings on the other side of a national border can be redefined as treason, then the meaning of democratic freedom becomes very narrow indeed.

If the Ukrainian government wants us to believe that it values democratic principles at all, this is a perfect opportunity for it to demonstrate that. The grotesquely disproportionate sentence should be overturned, and we must call for Syrotiuk's immediate and unconditional release.



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