

University speakouts in Australia and New Zealand demand freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia and New Zealand held speakouts on university campuses between August 2 and August 4, demanding the immediate and unconditional release of imprisoned Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk.

Speakouts took place at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the University of Melbourne, the University of Newcastle, and Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) in New Zealand.

IYSSE speakers condemned the persecution of Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, who was sentenced last month to 15 years' imprisonment on frame-up treason charges.

The case contains no act of treason—no espionage, sabotage or collaboration with a military force. Bogdan was convicted for political articles published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, which opposed the US-NATO proxy war. That war was provoked by decades of NATO expansion—driven by US imperialism's drive for global hegemony—which deliberately instigated Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The speakers at each of the campuses covered a wide range of political issues surrounding the frame-up. Morgan Peach, IYYSE club president at the University of Melbourne, stressed that “Bogdan's sentencing reveals that Zelensky is presiding over a fascistic military regime, one that is rehabilitating Nazi collaborators as national heroes, ruling under martial law, refusing to hold elections, and rounding up young people off the streets to be cannon fodder for the war.”

An IYSSE member speaking at QUT said that “Bogdan's arrest and sentencing must be understood in

the context of a third world war—the opening shots of which have already been fired... The same governments that arm the Zelensky police state are waging war on every front. The frame-up of Bogdan Syrotiuk is one act in a global offensive against the working class and all opposition to war.”

At VUW, IYSSE speaker Tom Peters drew attention to the fact that “the attack on Bogdan and the criminalisation of socialist opposition in Ukraine is a warning to everyone” including young people and workers in New Zealand. Peters noted that the New Zealand ruling class suspended elections and imprisoned opponents of war during World War I and World War II, and that since a third world war is underway, the major parties today “will seek to suppress opposition in the same way as the Ukrainian government, unless they are stopped.”

At the University of Newcastle, IYSSE speakers urged students to become involved in the fight to secure Bogdan's freedom, because that struggle cannot be left in the hands of the fascistic Ukrainian courts. As one speaker noted: “The working class and youth around the world, including in Australia, must be mobilised to fight for Bogdan's freedom as the spearhead of a fight for democratic rights and against war everywhere.”

The speakouts drew a serious response from students, many of whom stopped to sign the petition demanding the immediate release of Bogdan. Several students also gave comments to IYSSE campaigners.

Bill, studying philosophy at VUW, said: “I think that Bogdan has definitely been wronged. He has just written his own truth, and the truth is not being accepted by Zelensky. After the Russian invasion, democracy has basically collapsed in Ukraine.”

On Bogdan's call for Russian and Ukrainian workers to unite against both governments, he said: "That's one of the more positive ways that they can go about ending this war. The war definitely has to end, and I think that both Putin and Zelensky are too stubborn to end it themselves."

John, a student at QUT, said he agreed with the democratic right to express political views without repercussion. "Free speech is all speech", he said, adding that while Ukraine had been invaded by Russia in 2022, the regime was "very corrupt, even before that."

When asked about Bogdan's and the IYSSE's perspective of uniting the working class against imperialist war and for socialism, John said "Capitalism is not working in America, so why would it work out here? Billionaires are only getting richer, we are getting poorer. The pay gap is rising, taxes are rising, everything is rising."

Josiah, a postgraduate student at VUW, said: "In a thriving democratic society, you should be able to have free speech. By jailing [Bogdan] it shows that they are actually not that into democracy if it's not their prescribed vision for what that democracy should look like. It's similar to opposition leaders being jailed in Russia."

On Bogdan's international socialist perspective, he said: "I think those ideas are dangerous to the US maintenance of its empire in Europe."

Atilla, at QUT, said "Bogdan has a right to express his thoughts. Even if the government disagrees with them they have no right to arrest him for it."

On the question of how the working class should respond to Bogdan's arrest and the broader clampdown of democratic rights, Atilla said that "workers have the ability to strike, to protest, to stop the machinery of war. If they walk out, the whole system stops. They can put real pressure on the whole system."

Izabel from VUW said she was "very distraught and angry" to learn about Bogdan's imprisonment and called on people to sign the petition. "He's done nothing wrong. Freedom of speech is a human right."

She said when she first heard about the war she had a one-sided view that it was "all Russia's fault, they're the bad guys." Since then, however, she had learned that Ukraine's government was "supporting Israel, they're supporting America." She agreed with

Bogdan's call for workers to unite against both the Putin regime and the Zelensky regime and its imperialist backers.

"I don't think the soldiers know what's going on," Izabel said. "Because I know that's what governments do, they try to hide the truth. They dehumanise the soldiers so they can go off and kill, because they're just numbers."

She denounced the New Zealand government's militarist foreign policies, including its refusal to condemn Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and the US war against Iran. "We [New Zealanders] do not support the attack on Iran, that is not okay. A lot of those killed were civilians and children in schools. But our government is saying that's okay."

Speaking about the connection between military spending and the growing social crisis, she said: "If we get New Zealand more involved [in the Ukraine war] then there's going to be more money spent on it and the soldiers won't even want to go in there and fight. This isn't our war. We've already lost a lot of mental health workers and nurses, they've gone to Australia because we're so short on money. The cost of food, petrol, everything has gone up and students are struggling, a lot of people are out of jobs."



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