

Students and youth in London demand freedom for socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

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Students and youth in London have spoken out against the persecution of the 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk. On August 10, the Pervomaisk City District Court sentenced Syrotiuk to 15 years in prison for “high treason... under martial law” for his opposition to the war in Ukraine and calls for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers.

Jennifer, a member of the recently established International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) society at Birkbeck University of London, said, “I think it’s absolutely ridiculous that they arrested him and convicted him on high treason for simply saying, ‘hey, wait a minute, we should look at this from another angle.’ He did not say Ukraine is in the wrong here, we should kowtow to Russia’s demands. He didn’t do anything of that sort.

“He simply said, ‘I think there may be other options here that may be worth exploring.’ And that was enough to call him a traitor. It’s similar to here in the UK, where people in balaclavas can shut down a port city [in a far-right protest] and have no arrests, but an 80-year-old woman holding a ‘stop genocide’ sign gets tried as a terrorist.”

Jennifer supported Bogdan’s call for the Russian and Ukrainian working class to unite against the war, “I think it’s the absolute right thing to do. Let’s face it, the Russian media tells what Putin wants, not what the people are thinking or feeling. So, I can’t imagine that every single Russian parent that has lost children on the front lines in this conflict is still supporting the cause.

“So, I think, as I’ve always said over the years, when it comes to workers, when it comes to the normal every day, the Uber driver, the guy that drives the boat that cleans the canal, the rubbish truck driver, we are all way more alike than we are different... It’s the right thing to do, to come together and say, ‘Hey look, we don’t want this war. You don’t want this war.’

“Are Russians and Ukrainians willing to stop and say, ‘Nope, we’re not going to do this anymore and we’re going to shut it down’? It’s a huge endeavour, but it’s the best way. Especially if you can get people from two countries, not just one-sided... if you can get both sides to just shut the machine off, that’s where we win.”

Jennifer called for everyone to rally behind Bogdan’s case, “Obviously I think he should be set free because he’s done nothing wrong. But when you look at it on a more practical level, obviously as much light as can be shone on his case to the greater public, the better his chances are. Because it’s obvious, in the court of law he’s not going to get a fair trial. So, it becomes incumbent to say now, how do we play the court of public opinion?”

Leila, a member of the Birkbeck IYSSE, linked the case to broader attacks on democratic rights. “Bogdan Syrotiuk was sentenced to 15 years not for any act of espionage, but for writing that Ukrainian and Russian workers should unite against a war neither set of workers chose or benefits from. No document, no witness, no evidence of spying has ever been produced, just a frame-up dressed up as treason under martial law.

“The parallels to what we see at home in the UK are hard to ignore. Just as Palestine Action activists are criminalised and stripped of basic rights for opposing occupation and genocide, a young socialist in Ukraine is locked away for challenging the official war narrative. Both regimes use emergency powers and national-security language to silence dissent, deny adequate medical care, and treat political opposition as an existential threat. When one system jails people for speaking truth to power, it weakens us all.

“Solidarity is not conditional on convenience. Standing with Bogdan means recognising that the logic which imprisons him for anti-war writing is the same logic that imprisons Palestinians for resisting their

oppressors. Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

Jacob spoke at the protest at the Old Bailey for SOAS University of London student Sarah Cotte, who is being tried in London this week under terrorism charges in an attempt to criminalise solidarity with the Palestinian people and to suppress fundamental democratic rights of speech and protest. **Jacob** expressed his solidarity with Bogdan, saying, “I’m with the SOAS 2 campaign, Fight Racism, Fight, Imperialism. We’re here to express our solidarity with Bogdan Syrotiuk.” He added, “Clearly all over the world, young people opposed to imperialism are being mopped up for principled communist positions. We need to come together to fight state repression globally and fight imperialist war and genocide.”

College student **Hector** said Putin and Zelensky are “both right-wing. The difference is one is being funded by Europe. I’m not really surprised [by Bogdan’s persecution], they do it with any political activists.”

The war in Ukraine was not over democracy, “It’s a fight of who gets more ownership of what, who gets more capital at the end of the day. That’s what I think. If NATO was actually useful, they’d help the Africans, they’d help the South Americans, they’d help the Asians that were suffering against French and Spanish and English imperialism.”

For those who speak out, “they kill people. That’s the Western way to silence somebody, it’s just killing them. If not, they’ll pay to assassinate them. If not, they’ll start a war. Like Sudan, Libya, Syria, multiple African countries and Middle Eastern.”

Hector was concerned about the drone strike on the prison holding Bogdan, which underscores the extremely dangerous conditions in which Bogdan remains imprisoned.

To fight for the freedom of Bogdan and an end to the war, “us being peaceful won’t solve anything. Us being quiet won’t solve anything. We need to speak out more. We need to socialise and... go against these huge companies!”

On the use of propaganda by the ruling elite to justify war, Hector said, “With the military they say ‘A true patriot goes to fight for their country’ but truly, that’s the least patriotic thing you can do, that’s the least Christian thing you can do. Because at the end of the day, you’re oppressing a whole country, killing multiple children, and you’re the reason why people

starve in the future.”

The WSWS urges every reader to go to FreeBogdan.org and act:

- Sign the petition, and add a statement of support in your own words.
- Write to the court, in your own language and in Ukrainian, using the letter-writing tool. If you have written before, send your letter again with the Ukrainian translation.
- Donate to the campaign.
- Post your support on social media, and share the campaign’s posts.
- Share the site widely with your contacts, in your workplace and in your neighbourhood.



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