

Second hunger strike in Ukrainian prisons in 5 weeks

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On September 11, hundreds of prisoners in Ukraine, the UK, Turkey, Russia, Austria, and other countries have joined a hunger strike protesting against torture and inhumane conditions in the Ukrainian prison system. According to the website anti-imperialism.by, 408 political prisoners from 18 different countries participated in the hunger strike, up from 362 prisoners who joined the August 5 hunger strike.

Both hunger strikes were organized by the Association for the Rights of Political Prisoners and Human Rights and the Platform for International Solidarity with Political Prisoners. The Association for the Rights of Political Prisoners and Human Rights was founded by the Kononovich brothers, the leaders of the Ukrainian Communist Youth movement which is affiliated with the Stalinist Communist Party of Ukraine. Since 2022, the Kononovich brothers have been subjected to violent persecution by the fascist-infested Ukrainian secret service (SBU). They are still placed under house arrest.

In Ukraine, 58 political prisoners joined the hunger strike, including at pre-trial detention centers in Lukyyanov and Lvov as well as in Nikolaev, where the 27-year old Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk has been held for over two years. On August 10, he was sentenced to 15 years for “high treason”, because he had called for the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class in opposition to the war.

The hunger strike focused, in particular, on the situation in the Vinnitsiya Penal Colony No. 86, where prisoners have reported severe torture, forced labor and other inhumane and degrading conditions. One of them, Alexander Mel’nik, who leaked his reports about conditions in the prison to the press and was one of the leaders of previous protests, has been held in solitary confinement for over two months. The strikers

demanded an immediate end to the torture and inhumane conditions at the facility, calling it a “concentration camp”, and demanded that Mel’nik be released from his solitary confinement.

According to a recent report by the Kremlin-linked website Ukraina.Ru, the Vinnitsiya Penal Colony No. 86 has become transformed into a center for political prisoners since December 2025. At least one prisoner, Andrei Gimgin, died in February in the prison because of what the report called “insufferable conditions of detention and the lack of provision of medical treatment”. The article described the conditions there as follows: “Prisoners are paid about 4 Euros a month for 12 hours of forced labor per day, producing barbed wire. When meeting with the warden of the Penal Colony, Dmitry Petrik, prisoners have to remove their headgear, bow, and address him as: “Sir.” They are brutally beaten for the slightest mistake. Even the death of a political prisoner entails no real legal consequences for the administration.”

In Kiev, the Kononovich brothers submitted letters of protest against torture in Ukrainian prisons to the US Embassy and the Delegation of the EU to Ukraine. In a statement, Mikhail Kononovich said, “More and more of the prisoners and those who are persecuted by the Ukrainian regime understand that struggle is the only path forward.” He added that, because of severe repression following the August 5 hunger strike at the Vinnitsiya Penal Colony No. 86, the majority of the strikes at the time did not support this hunger strike.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* expresses its full solidarity with the hunger strikes, demands an end to torture and inhumane conditions in Ukrainian prisons and calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners!

As the previous hunger strike and the persecution of

political opposition in Ukraine more broadly, the September 11 strike has been completely ignored by the Western media. There is nothing coincidental about this. There is a conspiracy of silence regarding the systematic and violent suppression of political dissent by the Zelensky regime which has been built up and funded by NATO to wage war against Russia. As this war continues to rage, with hundreds of thousands killed and many more maimed, more and more youth and workers are being imprisoned and silenced.

In June, Ukraina.Ru reported on a five-year prison sentence for a 42-year old single mother of a five-year old child, Natalia Kozachenko from Kiev. She was convicted for the “denial and justification of Russian aggression”. The basis for her sentencing were posts in which she sharply criticized the Zelensky regime and its well-known corruption, involving many of Zelensky’s closest allies and sums in the hundreds of millions of dollars. One of her social posts from 2025 read, “Over the years of a war he [Zelensky] never actually declared, your ‘sacred’ leader failed to ramp up arms production — the army survives on donations because he embezzled loan funds that even your grandchildren won’t be able to pay off....Does a concentration camp flying the yellow-and-blue flag really not bother you? Television is under state control, there is no opposition, bloggers who don’t support this madness are jailed, and journalists are sent to the grave. ...Waves of bot-generated noise are passed off as public support and ‘high-approval ratings’.”

In August this year, the well-known pop singer Olya Polyakova also raised the comparison of the country with a “concentration camp” in an interview that went viral. On social media, videos circulate on a daily basis, showing how men are being abducted on the streets to be sent off to the war. Meanwhile, the imperialist powers, with the EU and especially Germany taking the lead, continue to ramp up the war against Russia, edging ever closer to a direct military exchange between Russia and NATO.

This is the political context which makes it imperative for the Zelensky regime to suppress with ever greater ferocity any form of political opposition. The struggle to free Bogdan Syrotyuk and all other political prisoners is an essential part of the fight against the developing imperialist world war.



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