

Bogdan spoke “for people throughout the world who oppose war”

Sri Lankan students and workers demand freedom for Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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Members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) intervened at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the University of Moratuwa, as well as among workers and working people in Colombo. They distributed Sinhala translations of the *World Socialist Web Site* article reporting on Bogdan Syrotiuk’s sentencing and other campaign material and collected signatures for the petition demanding his freedom.

Syrotiuk, 27, is a Ukrainian Trotskyist and leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists. He was arrested by Ukraine’s Security Service in April 2024. On August 10, the Pervomaik City District Court sentenced him to 15 years in prison for high treason under martial law for his opposition to the war and his calls for unity between Russian and Ukrainian workers. The court based its conviction on his political writings and correspondence with the WWS. His lawyers have appealed the sentence.

The campaign has attracted growing international support. More than 7,400 people have signed the online petition, while workers, students, academics, artists and political organisations in numerous countries have issued statements demanding Syrotiuk’s release.

In Sri Lanka, while major Colombo-based English-language newspapers remained silent despite requests to publish the news, at least two leading Tamil newspapers based in the northern city of Jaffna—*Uthayan* and *Thinnakural*—gave the sentencing prominent coverage.

In a letter to the Pervomaik City District Court, E. Priyantha, secretary of the Sri Lanka Health Workers Action Committee, demanded the immediate release of Comrade Bogdan. He pointed out that the Sri Lankan government, like Zelensky’s, is intensifying attacks on the working class and democratic rights. Referring to the Ukrainian court’s verdict, Priyantha said: “When a government seeks to control the courts, it is preparing to use the law as a weapon against its opponents. What is being done to Bogdan Syrotiuk in Ukraine is what every government that fears the working class seeks to do: silence the truth by force.”

Dharshika, a nursing officer at Kandy Hospital, also wrote to the Ukrainian court, demanding the immediate release of Comrade

Bogdan. Her letter states: “The conviction of a young man for his ideas is an act of political repression. The court’s order to destroy his socialist books, leaflets, and programmatic documents belongs to the methods of fascist regimes, not democratic ones.”

In conclusion, Dharshika wrote: “As a healthcare worker in Sri Lanka, I know the value of human life and the devastation that war inflicts on ordinary people. Bogdan Syrotiuk spoke for peace and for the unity of workers across borders. That is not treason—it is the voice of humanity.”

Sadhuni, a second-year student at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, spoke about the danger posed by the escalating conflicts between the major powers.

“If the developing world war continues, the whole world could be destroyed,” she said. “If the powerful countries involved in the war begin attacking each other with nuclear weapons, there is an immediate danger of the destruction of the world. This war must be stopped.”

“Bogdan Syrotiuk has opposed a world war that affects the whole world. He has spoken not only for himself, but for people throughout the world who oppose war. Therefore, protecting him is the responsibility of all of us.”

Sadhuni said that his arrest represented an attack on basic democratic rights.

“Arresting him for expressing his views is a violation of his basic democratic rights. It is an attack by the Ukrainian government on his right to express his political views.”

She signed the petition demanding his release and agreed to issue a statement in his defence.

Another student at the university explained that the social and economic crisis confronting young people could not be separated from the global crisis of capitalism.

“There is a major social and economic breakdown taking place throughout the world,” she said. “Young people in many countries have no employment opportunities. At the same time, we can see attacks on democratic rights. We experience this even within our university, where we do not have complete freedom.”

She said that the explanation given by SEP campaigners—that these problems are rooted in capitalism and its global crisis—had

shed “a new light” on the issues for her.

“I agree with the idea that war is a product of the global economic crisis. Many of the social problems we face today are connected with this economic crisis.” She signed the petition, explaining: “I am signing because I recognise his [Bogdan’s] democratic right to express his opposition to war and to stand up for that position.”

At the University of Moratuwa, Kasun, a third-year student in the Faculty of Fashion Design, condemned the sentence against Syrotiuk and agreed to sign the petition.

“The prices of oil are rising rapidly. This is directly connected with the world war. The price of food in restaurants has increased rapidly recently. Bus fares have increased. Boarding fees have increased. It is difficult to live on the money we have.”

He added: “The war is becoming more and more severe. If countries start fighting with nuclear weapons, the world could be completely destroyed in an instant.”

A young three-wheeler driver who spoke to the campaigners outside the University of Sri Jayewardenepura also expressed support for the campaign. “I appreciate the struggle you are carrying out. What Bogdan has done is oppose war. How can that be a crime of treason? Bogdan Syrotiuk should be freed.”

The driver, a former student at the University of Kelaniya, said: “The JVP used to shout against imperialism, but now it supports the American war programme. Because of this, I now realise more clearly the need to organise the working class internationally against war and imperialist attacks.”

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) leads the current National People’s Power (NPP) government.

A worker at the University of Moratuwa similarly agreed to support the petition. He said that Syrotiuk’s situation demonstrated the dangers facing those who oppose the war in Ukraine.

“The Ukrainian government is working together with US imperialism. America plays a major role behind this whole situation.”

He added that the war was not being conducted out of concern for human rights, but in pursuit of geopolitical power.

An employee of a newly privatised electricity distribution company said:

“I am against war. War causes enormous destruction. People lose the ability to live freely. I saw the war between Ukraine and Russia on television. Imprisoning someone because he opposed the war is wrong. People should have the right to hold political views and speak about them. I do not agree with taking that right away.”

“Can we organise workers and save this comrade? Can we put pressure on the Ukrainian government?” he asked.

SEP campaigners explained that the mobilisation of the international working class against war and political repression has a long history, including the international opposition to the US war in Vietnam. They pointed out that the political tradition of mobilising workers internationally has been systematically suppressed by trade union and pseudo-left organisations that subordinate workers to national governments and capitalist parties.

An employee of the National Lotteries Board also condemned Syrotiuk’s imprisonment. “We are against war. It is wrong to

imprison this comrade for opposing war. People should have the right to follow the political views they choose, and to write and read. That is a democratic right.”

He asked about Ukraine’s history as part of the Soviet Union. SEP campaigners explained that Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought against the Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country” and for an international socialist programme. The restoration of capitalism after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 ultimately produced the present capitalist states of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Russia.

A private-sector commercial worker who read Syrotiuk’s article said, “I am against war. It destroys human lives. It destroys the lives of young people. It is wrong to imprison someone for opposing war. People have the right to hold the political views they choose.”

He questioned whether several thousand signatures could exert sufficient pressure to secure Syrotiuk’s freedom. Campaigners explained that the issue was not simply the number of signatures but the social force of the international working class, which produces the wealth of society and possesses the potential power to stop production and oppose the policies of governments and ruling classes.

Hashini, a second-year sociology student at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura’s Faculty of Arts, opposed the suppression of the right to speak against war, emphasising that everyone must be free to express their views.

“He [Bogdan] spoke out against the war. Because of that, even his fundamental right to express his views has been suppressed. Everyone has the right to express their opinions,” she said. Opposing the US war against Iran, she condemned Washington’s efforts to expand its global influence through military power.

She also criticised the foreign policy of the JVP/NPP government amid growing global war tensions. “The government claims that it follows a neutral policy in war. However, the government’s actions show that it is supporting the United States. The government is purchasing American warplanes and entering into various agreements,” she said.



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