Australia: University of Melbourne meeting demands freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at Australia's University of Melbourne last week held its Annual General Meeting (AGM), titled "Free Bogdan Syrotiuk! Join the fight against World War III!"

In the lead up, the IYSSE distributed thousands of leaflets on the imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a Ukrainian socialist sentenced to 15 years in prison for opposing war. The meeting itself drew around 30 students, attending both in person and online, many of whom were joining their first IYSSE meeting.

Daniel, an IYSSE member, delivered a report on Bogdan's persecution and how young people can take up the fight to stop world war. He explained that Bogdan was convicted on August 10 by a fascistic Ukrainian court for "high treason." The only evidence provided were six articles for the *World Socialist Web Site* which opposed both sides of the NATO proxy war with Russia. Calling for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against their oligarchic regimes has been declared a "crime."

The war, Daniel explained, did not begin with Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and was not unprovoked. "For three decades," he said, "the United States and its European allies expanded the NATO military alliance across Eastern Europe and transformed Ukraine into an armed staging ground against Russia. Their aim is the military defeat and break-up of Russia to seize control of its vast natural resources, to dominate the Eurasian landmass, and to complete the encirclement of China."

Daniel emphasised that this conflict was inseparable from the broader eruption of imperialist barbarism, driven by the historic decline of US imperialism and its efforts to maintain global hegemony through militarism. He stressed that we are living in the opening stages of a third world war, with fronts in Ukraine, Iran, and preparations for a US-led assault on China.

"Australian imperialism is a direct participant," he said. "US forces now operate from 110 facilities on Australian soil. Military spending has risen from $48 billion to $60 billion, with a further $53 billion announced in April, while the anti-China AUKUS military pact will cost $368 billion. The working class is being made to pay. That is the significance of Labor's $38 billion cut to NDIS disability services."

He denounced the silence of pseudo-left organisations on Bogdan's imprisonment, including Socialist Alternative (SAlt), which has a presence at the University of Melbourne. Daniel's report outlined SAlt's sordid record of supporting US imperialist interventions, with leader Corey Oakley declaring amid the 2012 US regime-change war in Syria that the time for "knee-jerk anti-imperialism" was over.

SAlt has openly backed the flood of NATO arms to Ukraine on the fraudulent claim that Russia is "imperialist," a theoretical cover designed to justify support for Washington against Moscow. The assertion that Russia is an imperialist nation, equivalent to the US and Europe, has nothing whatsoever to do with the classical Marxist definition of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalist development and the dominance of finance capital.

Daniel made clear that SAlt's pro-imperialism was not the result of mistaken individuals but expressed their class orientation. Tendencies like SAlt, despite their use of socialist rhetoric, speak not for the independent interests of workers, but for privileged layers of the upper middle class whose careers in academia, the public sector and the trade union bureaucracies depend upon the preservation of capitalism.

In concluding, Daniel made an appeal to students that the fight to stop a nuclear world war "demands nothing less than the building of a revolutionary party to lead the one social force capable of ending capitalism before

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capitalism ends the world: the international working class, which is already beginning to move."

The report provoked several questions from the audience, including one student who asked for clarity on the IYSSE's assessment of the Putin regime. Members answered that Putin represents the Russian capitalist oligarchy which arose from the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the restoration of private property. As the youth wing of the world Trotskyist movement, the IYSSE is the implacable opponent of Putin from the left.

After the meeting, students indicated they would sign the Bogdan petition and begin attending regular IYSSE meetings.

Vicky, an international student from China, said: "We have a responsibility to support the release of Bogdan. What he has done cannot constitute a crime."

"The ruling class just wants to satisfy its own interests," she raised. "It may use war to gain more power or grab more money by constructing military weapons. Bogdan's case and the war in Ukraine are both weapons for the ruling class to gain their own interests.

"I think the Ukraine war and the Iran war are purposeful, and their aim is to attack China. The US has built a three-layer strategy to encircle China: alliances with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines; then Australia; then the Hawaiian Islands. If China and the US were to launch a war, every country would be exposed to it, the sacrifice would be enormous."

Jack was alarmed by Bogdan's case. "It's just such a blatant abuse of basic human rights and freedom of speech in general. And it's important to highlight that even in a country like Ukraine, which is widely presented as democratic, there is a fascistic government acting really repressively to their own citizens.

"It's important to fight against that because you can see similar things starting to happen here in Australia, the tightening of restrictions on free speech, laws here under the guise of condemning hate speech. There is this so-called royal commission into antisemitism, and the total crackdown on protesters opposing what's happening to Palestinians in Gaza, branding them all as perpetrators of hate speech. It's a complete lie. It feels like the government is slowly slipping the noose around our necks, and if they go so far then where does this end?

"In Bogdan's case, for him to just be standing against the agenda of NATO and the US, to use the people of Ukraine for an assault on Russia—to be jailed for that is pretty dark and should not be allowed to happen. The IYSSE stands quite strongly against both sides of the Ukraine war. I resonated with that quite a lot. That's what caught my attention for the club in the first place. You stand for the ordinary working-class people against a war that isn't in their interests."

Jack agreed with the IYSSE's assessment of Ukraine as one front of a global war: "All these wars happening all around the world at the moment, it does seem to be a recipe for a third world war. A big concern for me is how the Labor government is choosing to align Australia with the US, cozying up to the US war machine which is now led by Trump.

"The only way I think this will be resolved is a complete overhaul of the economic and legal systems in which society operates. No capitalist governments have an answer to this, not China or the US or Australia. It's going to take a more revolutionary approach, and that falls on everyday people to enact that. There has to be a shift in power from the elites into the hands of the workers.

"That's not a simple thing to do, the overthrow of capitalism, but what's the alternative? When you look at the falling conditions of everyday people, and the hyper-concentration of power in a small group of wealthy people, it has gotten to a point where the idea of trying to fix things within the system and try to abate capitalism, meet it halfway, this is not going to work.

"The IYSSE drew me because it very clearly and in a straightforward way explains the world situation. There are things today that are used to distract people from the major issues today, things like identity politics. Pointing out the real conditions and educating people is really important, teaching them to look past what's immediately in front of them and see behind it."

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