Gary Tyler, former political prisoner in US, endorses campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk: “This young man should be free”

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Gary Tyler, the former political prisoner who spent nearly 42 years in Louisiana’s notorious Angola State Penitentiary for a murder he did not commit, has endorsed the international campaign demanding the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk. Bogdan is a 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist sentenced to 15 years in prison for calling for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against the war.

Tyler signed the petition for Syrotiuk’s release at a presentation and book-signing in Detroit Wednesday night for his 2025 autobiography, *Stitching Freedom: A True Story of Injustice, Defiance, and Hope in Angola Prison*. The event was sponsored by the Library Street Collective and Michigan Justice Fund and featured displays of the campaign for his freedom and his quilted artistic pieces.

In signing the petition for Bogdan Syrotiuk’s freedom, Tyler drew directly on his own experience of political persecution, and connected the imprisonment of the Ukrainian socialist to the crimes of American imperialism and the bipartisan character of the capitalist state.

Tyler said:

> The Ukrainian regime is reactionary and nothing like the way it is portrayed. This young man should be free. He is fighting for a just cause, and no one should be penalized or punished for doing what’s right. We need more people like him. When they get to the point where they punish someone because they are outspoken against an injustice, then something is gravely wrong with the system itself.
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> He’s against the war. He’s against people suffering in Ukraine and Russia. He is against those who are preying on them, and that is the fault of America imperialism and instigation by the European countries. They feel that they’re above everybody and can subject everyone to their wishes. You see what’s going on, and it’s just this horror.
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> There is a great deal of opposition, but it’s got to be harnessed in the right way. Trying to change the minds of the perpetrators is not going to change anything. You got to protest, but the Democrats are no different from the Republicans. They’re all about maintaining the status quo.

Bogdan Syrotiuk was arrested by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on April 25, 2024, in his hometown of Pervomaisk in southern Ukraine. In August 2026, a Ukrainian court sentenced him to 15 years in prison. Syrotiuk has committed no crime. His imprisonment is a political act, carried out by a regime that is a client of American and European imperialism, and it is directed against the entire working class.

Tyler’s endorsement is highly significant. As the *World Socialist Web Site’s* Lawrence Porter wrote in his review of *Stitching Freedom*, Tyler was a working-class youth from Destrehan, Louisiana, whose father was a maintenance worker and whose mother worked as a domestic. As a high school student in 1974, he was framed, convicted and sentenced to die in Louisiana’s electric chair at the age of 17, after a sham trial overseen by Judge Ruche Marino, reportedly a member

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of the White Citizens Council, the suit-and-tie wing of the Ku Klux Klan.

Tyler was held on death row for two years and spent nearly 42 years incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. His incarceration spanned the administrations of seven Louisiana governors and seven US presidents, from both the Democratic and Republican parties, none of whom granted him a pardon or meaningful assistance. As Porter noted, Tyler's book pointedly states: "When I went to prison, there were some three hundred thousand people locked up in US jails. Now there are over two million."

In 1976, the Workers League—the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party—and its youth organization, the Young Socialists, launched a national and international campaign to free Gary Tyler. The Trotskyist movement mobilized young people, workers, and trade unionists across the US and abroad, distributing tens of thousands of copies of the pamphlet *The Frame-Up of Gary Tyler* and collecting nearly 100,000 signatures on petitions demanding his release. In his remarks Wednesday night, Tyler paid tribute to the Workers League and Young Socialists and specifically referred to Tom Henehan who was assassinated in New York City on October 16, 1977 at a dance organized by the Young Socialists to demand Tyler's freedom.

The Workers League explained that Tyler's case signaled a broader turn to domestic repression by the ruling class and its two-party system in response to mounting social and economic crisis, and that the methods used against him would be directed against the entire working class—black and white, immigrant and native-born. On this basis, it called for the independent mobilization of workers and youth, and opposed all tendencies that tied the defense to the Democrats or reduced the struggle to a purely racial question.

Tyler was finally released in 2016, at the age of 57, only after a series of court rulings left the state of Louisiana with no other choice—and only after the state exacted its final "pound of flesh" by insisting that Tyler accept a guilty plea for manslaughter in exchange for his freedom. Tyler refused to confess, instead expressing his sorrow over the death of Timothy Weber and his sympathy for the Weber family.

Since his release, Tyler has become a mentor to homeless youth and a successful artist specializing in appliqué-patterned quilts and textiles, a technique he learned in prison. His work has been acquired by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History, the California African American Museum, and the Santa Monica Art Bank. He has spoken at institutions internationally in opposition to the injustices he witnessed in Angola, and in April 2025 he gave a statement to the WSWS calling for the release of imprisoned Palestinian graduate student Mahmoud Khalil.

Tyler's endorsement is a powerful addition to the international campaign for Syrotiuk's freedom, which has drawn support from workers, students, historians, doctors, journalists, and youth on five continents.

The WSWS urges all those who defend democratic rights to sign the petition and send letters to the court in Ukraine by visiting freebogdan.org.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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