

IYSSE in Sri Lanka campaigns for public meeting demanding freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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There is growing support in Sri Lanka for the international campaign to secure the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old Trotskyist socialist imprisoned in Ukraine. Many workers and young people have registered to attend the October 13 online public meeting organised by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), titled “Free Bogdan Syrotiuk! Build an International Antiwar Movement Against World War!”

The meeting will be conducted in Sinhala and translated live into Tamil. Register here to attend on Zoom.

Bogdan is a leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), a Trotskyist organisation operating in Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union. On April 25, 2024, he was arrested by the fascistic Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on fabricated charges of “high treason under martial law.” After more than two years in detention, he was sentenced on August 10 to 15 years in prison for the “crime” of writing articles for the *World Socialist Web Site* calling on workers in Russia and Ukraine to unite and end the war.

Members and supporters of the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) have campaigned to free Bogdan at universities, workplaces and in public places. They have distributed hundreds of leaflets announcing the public meeting and copies of the article “Fascist Ukrainian court sentences Bogdan Syrotiuk, socialist opponent of war, to 15 years in prison.”

Reflecting workers’ support for this campaign, the Alton Estate Workers’ Action Committee unanimously passed a resolution on September 27 demanding the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk. It denounced his imprisonment as an attack on basic democratic rights and said: “The struggle for Bogdan’s release is connected to the mobilization of workers to stop the war. Only through such unity can the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people in Russia and Ukraine be stopped.”

Ashen, a 22-year-old working for Huawei in Colombo,

signed the petition to free Bogdan and expressed support for the IYSSE’s meeting, saying: “It is clear this young man was wrongfully punished because he bravely spoke against the war. Everyone should have equal rights to express their opinions, yet it is clear that this right, along with media freedom, has been totally suppressed in Ukraine.”

Mahesh Ekanayake, a schoolteacher in Polonnaruwa, said it was “essential” for workers to take part in the struggle to free Bogdan.

He said: “The same brutality directed against Comrade Bogdan because he opposed the criminal war is now being employed by ruling elites in capitalist countries against everyone who is increasingly speaking out against war and fascism. This repression is being carried out not only through imprisonment but also through measures such as the persecution of socialists, the blocking of websites, and the banning of Marxist books.”

Ekanayake said he agreed with the IYSSE that the war in Ukraine was an “imperialist war to redivide the world” and that the solution “is not to take the side of Russia or NATO, but to unite the entire world working class in a struggle against their own capitalist ruling classes and overthrow the capitalist system.”

Malinda Kumara, a young construction worker in Colombo, agreed that “world war has already begun, and it is growing the way cancer spreads through the body.”

He said it was clear that the aim of the IYSSE’s meeting was “not merely to free Comrade Bogdan, but to carry forward the program for which he fought. There is opposition to war throughout the world. A meeting like this can explain to workers and young people the connection between Bogdan’s imprisonment and the war, and the real danger of a nuclear war breaking out.

“The criminality of the war is demonstrated by what is happening in Ukraine. Young people are being forced into the war. Thousands of workers and young people have been subjected to torture and imprisonment because they

expressed opposition to the war.”

Kumara also expressed his opposition to Washington’s criminal war against Iran and to the genocide Israel is carrying out in Gaza with the backing of US imperialism.

V. Thuvisa, a student at the University of Jaffna, said Bogdan’s fight to unite Russian and Ukrainian workers was correct “because the working class in every country is a powerful force. They are doing everything in production and distribution. It is the workers and the poor who are most affected by this war.

“We lack sufficient knowledge and awareness regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. This is because there is inadequate public discussion about the war,” Thuvisa said.

She agreed with the WSWs’s analysis that war is the result of the contradiction between globalised production and the reactionary nation-state system. “I therefore agree that without the fight for socialism, there is no fight against war.”

Deneth, a student in the Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya, stated that Bogdan fought for “the international socialist program and to unite Ukrainian and Russian workers and youth. His arrest was wrong; he fought to stop the war. Fighting for his release means fighting to stop the war. I am joining the online meeting.”

He also said that war in the Middle East had driven up food and transport costs. “I cannot ask my family for more money. I am currently working while studying; I earn 2,500 rupees for a 12-hour shift. I work at a cardboard factory in Kelaniya, stopping only when exams approach. Academic activities have been disrupted.”

He said US imperialism was waging war to plunder natural resources across the Middle East and the globe, to reverse the dollar’s collapse and address the debt crisis, but this was fuelling opposition. “People in America are also opposed to war; nowhere do people want to see lives lost. The funds for war are raised by taxing workers and implementing austerity measures—it is a war against the working class.”

Deneth denounced Sri Lanka’s JVP/NPP government for refusing to “condemn the destruction of the Iranian ship in Sri Lankan waters; they are subservient to imperialism. This demonstrates that one cannot simply pressure imperialism by urging the leaders of one’s own country to act. The working class must unite globally. If workers halt the production and distribution of weapons, Trump would be left waging war with nothing but words.”

Asanka, a batik artist from Chilaw (North Western Province), said, “I oppose the war. Bogdan Syrotyuk must be freed. I will join the meeting.” He added that the batik industry had “collapsed with the arrival of large garment factories. I only get work from a single workshop. I agree with a socialist program to nationalise large factories and

food companies.”

M. Sanjeeva, a teacher at Prince of Wales College in Moratuwa, said he had registered for the Zoom meeting.

He said: “The world has entered a war driven by imperialist interests, and this is a moment in which humanity is facing the grave danger of it escalating into a Third World War. Comrade Bogdan Syrotyuk, who clearly recognised this situation, has been sentenced to 15 years of illegal imprisonment. I call upon all anti-imperialist and anti-war people to participate in this meeting to free Syrotyuk, who fought against predatory imperialist interests on behalf of humanity and for the well-being of the oppressed peoples of the world.”

A nurse from Peradeniya General Hospital told SEP campaigners that countries like Sri Lanka—which must import fuel, medicine, and chemical fertilizers—are disproportionately affected by war. “We cannot bear the rising cost of goods. The government claims there is no bitumen available for road construction due to the Iran war. A road near us was left half-finished, so we are constantly exposed to dust. The global conflict could escalate further, yet there is no discussion about this in hospitals, workplaces, or universities. We need to talk about this.”

She continued: “I used to think of myself as an individual, but this discussion made me realize that I am part of the working class and that the working class—which is suffering from this war—must unite. The working class needs to be made aware. Comrade Bogdan fought against the war and to unite workers and youth from Russia and Ukraine. He was arrested precisely for that reason.”

Speaking about the 2022 mass uprising, which brought down the government of President Gotabaya Rajapakse, the nurse remarked: “People rose up in 2022 only when they had hit rock bottom. That was at the beginning of the Ukraine war. Now, the Ukraine war and conflicts involving Iran in the Middle East have flared up. We could find ourselves in an even more extreme situation. People will rise up again. But, as you said, there needs to be prior preparation and an independent political program.”

Register for the October 13th Zoom meeting here.

Sign the petition at freebogdan.org.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact