

“We will redouble our efforts to build a mass campaign for Bogdan’s release”

Thomas Scripps
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We are publishing the speech delivered by SEP Assistant National Secretary Thomas Scripps introducing the resolution “Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!” passed unanimously at the Seventh Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK).

It has now been more than half a year, seven months, since the Zelensky regime imprisoned our comrade, Bogdan Syrotiuk.

Bogdan was arrested on charges of “high treason under martial law,” which carries a sentence of at least 15 years to life in prison.

We have explained that the charges are spurious, and that what Bogdan really stands accused of is arguing for a socialist opposition to the war that has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of his fellow Ukrainians, and likely over 100,000 of his class brothers in Russia.

In fact, this has been very clearly spelled out by his persecutors, who state as justification for seizing him that Bogdan was “engaged in the preparation of publications commissioned by representatives of a Russian propaganda and information agency, the *World Socialist Web Site*.”

What do they mean by Russian propaganda and information? They explain that the WSWs “covers the main socio-political problems around the world from the position of revolutionary opposition to the capitalist market system, with the aim of establishing world socialism through socialist revolution.”

And shortly after arresting comrade Bogdan, the Zelensky regime banned the *World Socialist Web Site*: the second string to what was a planned combined strike against the ICFI’s presence and influence among the Ukrainian working class.

Bogdan’s petition for release from his pretrial detention in a maximum security prison has been denied and he remains uninformed of a date for a court hearing, or even an initial indictment.

The Ukrainian ruling class is acting out of immense fear of the social opposition that exists in a population that has now suffered more than two-and-a-half years of war, which it is dangerous to express openly but nonetheless finds reflection in reports of the rising number of desertions from the front lines, and the army recruitment crisis.

A month ago, *Foreign Policy* published the article “Conscription Is Breaking Ukraine: Ukraine is desperate for men on the front—but Ukrainians are increasingly desperate for a break,” which admitted: “After nearly three years of relentless assault, Ukrainians have grown weary of the daily deprivations and larger tragedy of a war they reckoned would end sooner, and yet has no end in sight. Many are unhappy about the call-up—and its intrusive methods—a consternation compounded by a recent tax change that docks incomes with a 5 percent military levy, up from 1.5 percent, for the provision of the armed forces.”

This has doubtless been aggravated by each new escalation of the war, each step closer to Armageddon and away from peace, and by the ever more ungarded discussion of the exchange of Ukrainian lives for the country’s mineral wealth. The latest news of course is that the United States is pushing for Ukraine’s 18-year-olds to be added to the pile, through the lowering of the age of conscription.

Bogdan is a target of the far-right dictatorship that daily descends to new levels of authoritarianism and cruelty in order to enforce the demands of the Ukrainian oligarchy, and above all the imperialist ruling class.

But of course, he’s much more than that. He stands not only for a general opposition to the war but a socialist programme to bring about its end.

In her extensive, excellent, report on this subject to the US SEP Congress, comrade Clara Weiss spells out the intense programme of political activity engaged in by Bogdan in the time leading up to his arrest and prompting it.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL) spoke at the IYSSE global webinar against the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine in December 2022. In January 2023, the *World Socialist Web Site* launched its Ukrainian edition. In March, the IYSSE began its international meeting series, “The war in Ukraine and how to stop it”, during which efforts were made to ban and disrupt our events. The YGBL issued powerful statements denouncing that censorship, in the name of the Russian and Ukrainian working class.

At our 2023 May Day rally, focussed on outlining an anti-war strategy for the working class and especially the Russian and Ukrainian working class, re-animating their shared revolutionary history, both comrades Andrei Ritsky (from Russia) and comrade Bogdan spoke, with Bogdan beginning his remarks:

The claim that all Ukrainians support this war is a brazen lie. The main prop for this war is not the proletariat and the Ukrainian population, whose situation is appalling. The main props for this war are the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and those they serve. We, the orthodox Trotskyists of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists, do not support this war, either in Ukraine or in Russia.

It was just three weeks later that the Ukrainian security services began their criminal proceedings against him and closely monitoring his activities. In the year between this and his eventual arrest, Bogdan and the YGBL helped to organise meetings of the centenary of the

Left Opposition and the death of Lenin. They issued incisive statements on the character of the Putin regime. Three days before his arrest, Bogdan completed his planned remarks to the May Day 2024 rally, which concluded:

We members of the Ukrainian branch of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists and the entire YGBL call for the unification of the Ukrainian and Russian proletariat with the proletariat in the imperialist countries to end this war!

We call for the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in all former Soviet republics!

And we call on the proletariat of the whole world to unite under the banner of its leader—the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Let the words of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels sound louder and stronger: “Proletarians of all countries, unite!”

As this record underscores, comrade Bogdan—and all of his comrades in the YGBL—have a particular significance even beyond that of socialist opponents of imperialist war. They represent the revival (among a group of quite astonishingly young, and astonishing, people) of the genuine traditions of international Marxism, the traditions of Trotskyism, within the former republics of the Soviet Union.

A victory wrenched, through persistent and principled struggle, from the disaster into which the Stalinist bureaucracy and its dissolution of the Soviet Union have plunged the working class of that region. I’ll leave it to the words of Bogdan and his comrades, in the final statement in which he had a hand in drafting, to describe that situation. They wrote:

The working class of the former Soviet Union confronts an existential threat. If the situation is left in the hands of the ruling oligarchy, the alternatives posed are between a direct conflict with NATO, which threatens the use of nuclear weapons, and a carve-up of the entire region through a series of civil wars and regime-change operations. Workers and youth across the former Soviet Union can only fight against the existential threat posed by the imperialist onslaught by returning to the path of 1917, i.e., the path of class struggle and socialist revolution.

To have young workers and students speaking this language in the former Soviet Union, working with the Trotskyist movement, is a huge stride for the international working class. And one which will lengthen.

Comrade Bogdan discovered and took his decision to contact the ICFI after happening across scans he found online of the *Bulletin of the Fourth International*, the journal that the ICFI published in Russian from 1989 to 1993. Today, through the WSWS and its broader influence, our potential reach is far wider.

Government intimidation and censorship is not something we take lightly. But we are not awed or demoralised; we wage a consistent fight against it in the confidence that our message will get through.

And that we will defend our comrades who are victimised for that work.

Clara’s report notes that our defence campaign has received endorsements from artists like Roger Waters and Ai Wei Wei; historians including Mario Kessler and Christian Gerlach; and several left tendencies in Russia, Latin America and Europe—though with many glaring, indefensible absences among those who are beneath contempt.

Since that report was delivered the party has also extracted a comment from US Green Party leader Jill Stein: which was more of a testament to the party’s determination than anything on Stein’s part but did raise the profile of Bogdan’s case.

As Clara says, “the campaign has no doubt received the strongest response in the working class, including in India, where Maruti Suzuki workers have given powerful interviews on Bogdan’s case. Rank-and-file committees in Australia, Sri Lanka, Germany, the UK and the US have released statements in support of Bogdan. We have also found an important response to the campaign among refugees from Ukraine and immigrant workers from Eastern Europe in Germany.”

Going forward from this Congress we will redouble our efforts to build on this foundation and build a mass campaign for Bogdan’s release. We will win the argument in the working class that Bogdan’s fate is tied up with the fate of their own democratic rights and their own lives: the fight against the new imperialist redivision of the world, in which workers are so many pieces on the chessboard to be traded and discarded.

The Ukrainian regime has imprisoned Bogdan, acting on the say so of its imperialist masters, to strike a blow against the ICFI. Because it wants to strike a blow against the revolutionary potential of the working class to bring down the warmongers, the oligarchs and the fascists.

Given that objective, they’ve picked the right tendency to go after. But precisely because of that: they’ve picked the wrong tendency to go after. The Trotskyist movement defends its history—and we’ve given an example of the energy with which we do so over the months since [Professor Aidan] Beatty’s hatchet job—and the Trotskyist movement defends it cadre with no less determination and persistence.

This resolution commits us to that effort, and I recommend it to Congress.



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