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# Our friend and comrade Mark Boytsun is gone.

Tuesday 14 March 2023, by [PILASH Denis](#) (Date first published: 13 March 2023).

**Our friend and comrade Marko Bojcun, a political economist, researcher of labour history, activist of leftist movements and solidarity with Ukraine, has passed away. It would not be an exaggeration to say that [Marko Bojcun](#) played a crucial role in keeping the fire of the Ukrainian left alive and in the emigrant and dissident circles that have reached our times in independent Ukraine.**

For the last 72 years of his life, he was seriously ill, but he continued to work and did not lose his optimism and will to do as much as possible. He revised and expanded his main book, based on his doctoral dissertation (“The Labour Movement and the National Question in Ukraine: 1880-1918”) several times - its 2021 edition can be downloaded in both Ukrainian (<https://rosalux.org.ua/images/bojcun-book-2021.pdf>) and English (“The Workers’ Movement and the National Question in Ukraine” on libgen). A collection of his articles “Towards a Political Economy of Ukraine: Selected Essays 1990-2015”.

But the most important thing for him was his active involvement in the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#), a network of British leftists and trade unions that would not have been possible without Mark. Since its inception, for almost a decade now, the campaign and Marko personally have been trying to do everything possible to ensure that the truth about events in Ukraine is known abroad and that our grassroots movements are supported, so that the struggle for their rights by Kryvyi Rih miners or Kurenivka trolleybus workers has been heard even in the British Parliament. It was especially important to counter the tones of stereotypes and misinformation that were eagerly spread by Stalinist and other conservative forces in the left-wing movement. So he regularly wrote and spoke, organised actions and online events. At the time of the full-scale invasion, he redoubled his efforts to educate the Western left about the dangers of Russian imperialism, Eastern European history and the present - and to rally support for the people of Ukraine.

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Marko was born in Australia, studied in Canada and later lived in Britain, but since the perestroika era he has been travelling to Ukraine on a regular basis. He belonged to a generation of diaspora youth whose political awakening took place in the wake of the 1968 radicalism and who, in contrast to the conservative nationalism of their immigrant parents, turned to radical socialism (in Mark’s case, the Trotskyism of the Fourth International and the Marxist humanism movement), becoming part of the global wave of the ‘New Left’.

Many of them became prominent representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia - John-Paul Khymska, Bohdan Kravchenko, Myroslav Shkandriy - but it seems that only Boytsun remained in left-wing activism to the end (there was, however, a member of the New Democratic Party, Halyna Freeland, the minister’s late mother). Mark’s first action was a rally against the shooting of protesters against

the Vietnam War at the University of Kent (interestingly, among the initiators of the anti-war movement in Kent was another future friend of Ukraine, Bill Artrell, who, after the Maidan, devoted the last years of his life to our nation, which tragically ended last year in a car accident).

Soon, he himself was founding the first public committees of solidarity with Ukrainian dissidents and organising a hunger strike by Ukrainian-Canadian students against the 1972 anti-dissident repressions in the Ukrainian SSR, after which Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau himself held talks with them and raised the issue of Ukrainian political prisoners at a meeting with his Soviet counterpart Kosygin. Marko recalled those times in detail (and wittily) in an interview for Spilnyi <https://commons.com.ua/uk/marko-bojcun-mi-perejshli-vid-nacionalizmu/>. The slogan of the journal *Diyalog*, which he co-founded and smuggled to Eastern Europe along with other banned (mostly anti-Stalinist Marxist) literature, “For Socialism and Democracy in an Independent Ukraine,” stayed with Boytsun until the end.

He pioneered the teaching and research in British universities of Ukrainian studies (which before him had been under the umbrella of Russian studies) in political science and history. As a Ukrainian-speaking expert, British television crews engaged him in filming documentaries in perestroika Ukraine, for example, about the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster or the People’s Movement and the first free elections. This gave him the opportunity to interview party leaders Kravchuk and Ivashko, but he was more interested in visiting dissidents, from the UGCC Archbishop Sterniuk, who was under house arrest, to some Lviv social democrats who introduced him to Chornovil, to hippie anarchists and striking miners.

In independent Ukraine, he was active both at the official level, advising on European policy, and at the grassroots level, analysing and criticising oligarchic capitalism and neoliberalism, supporting the labour movement and the young Ukrainian left, which was being reborn after being destroyed by Stalinist terror and demonised by wild capitalism. He contributed to the publication of some important books, such as the first Ukrainian edition of the so-called “national communists” by Vasyl Shakhrai and Serhiy Mazlakh, and a collection of works by Lev Trotsky (as perhaps the only well-known world politician who in the 1930s raised the demand for an independent Ukraine) on the Ukrainian question, to which he wrote a foreword and came to discuss (its immediate disruption by far-right inadequates greatly upset Mark and the historian Yuriy Shapoval, who were to conduct the discussion).

Marko will be remembered as he is in this photo, with a smile that radiates humanity and a willingness to act that he always maintained against all odds. For more than half a century, he defended the vision of a free, democratic and socialist Ukraine, which was taken up by new like-minded people in the twenty-first century. In a voice message he sent two months ago to the Social Movement activists, he expressed his hope to see the victory of the Ukrainian working people over the aggressor together and to “work for our common cause”. Thank you, Mark, for your work, which you did not stop until the end, and for the inspiration that your life’s journey has become. May you rest in peace.

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**Denis Pilash**

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