

Oppose the arrest of Boris Kagarlitsky!

Andrei Ritsky, Clara Weiss
1 August 2023

On Wednesday, July 26, Boris Kagarlitsky, the editor-in-chief of the Rabkor.ru website and well-known figure in the Russian and international pseudo-left, was arrested on charges of “justifying terrorism.” He is now in Syktyvkar in the Komi Republic, and faces up to seven years in prison.

The basis for the charges is an unidentified video in which Kagarlitsky commented on an attack by Ukraine on the Kerch Bridge, which connects the Crimean peninsula with the Russian mainland.

The Russian secret service FSB also conducted raids on the homes of three collaborators of Kagarlitsky at Rabkor.ru.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL) and the WSWs oppose his arrest from the principled standpoint of the defense of democratic rights and call for his release. However, in calling for his release, we do not extend any support to Kagarlitsky’s reactionary politics and we reject his designation as a “left-wing” critic of the Putin regime or the war in Ukraine.

Publications such as the liberal *Nation* magazine and *Jacobin*, the outlet of the Democratic Socialists of America, a faction within the Democratic Party, have published statements calling for his release, and describing Kagarlitsky as a “Marxist” and “socialist” and a left-wing opponent of the war in Ukraine.

In reality, Kagarlitsky’s politics have nothing to do with left-wing politics, let alone socialism or Marxism.

After having initially supported pro-Russian separatists in East Ukraine in the civil war that followed the 2014 US-backed coup in Kiev, since the eruption of the NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia in February 2022, his positions have aligned with those of NATO-backed forces within the Russian oligarchy.

The background to Kagarlitsky’s arrest is murky, and everything about his political record indicates that it is bound up with the intense factional infighting within the Russian ruling class and state apparatus. Just over a month ago, the mercenary leader and long-time Putin ally Evgeny Prigozhin launched a failed coup attempt with an explicit appeal to pro-NATO forces. Since then, the Kremlin has begun a purge of the Russian army leadership of supporters of Prigozhin, while giving Prigozhin himself and his Wagner mercenaries carte blanche.

On July 21, Igor Strelkov, a right-wing critic of Putin’s military policy and leading separatist leader from East Ukraine, was arrested. He is accused of encouraging extremism online based on allegations by a former Wagner employee, for which he faces up to five years in prison. He belongs to the part of the ultra-nationalist “pro-war opposition” that considers Putin’s actions insufficient to confront NATO imperialism. This faction of the ruling class and state apparatus explicitly states that it is ready to

use nuclear weapons and declare a general mobilization in Russia.

Kagarlitsky, by contrast, has spent the past two decades establishing himself as a “legal critic” of Putin’s regime with ties to almost every nationalist, Stalinist and pseudo-left tendency active in Russia. He is associated with both pro-Western pseudo-left circles and the largely pro-Putin Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).

His political biography began back in the late 1970s in the Soviet Union, when he became part of the “leftist” dissident movement. He was influenced by what were “fashionable” anti-Marxist currents of the “New Left” in the West at the time. Kagarlitsky and his supporters were united on a common platform of fighting for “reforms from above under pressure from below” and combined a mixture of Eurocommunism (a variant of Stalinism), social democracy and the petty-bourgeois radical “New Left.”

Based on this orientation, Kagarlitsky in the 1980s became the most prominent Russian representative of the Pabloites, a revisionist petty bourgeois tendency that broke away from the Fourth International in 1953, on the basis of an adaptation to the Stalinist bureaucracies and bourgeois nationalist forces. Like the Pabloites, Kagarlitsky supported the restoration of capitalism in the USSR under Mikhail Gorbachev’s “perestroika” policy, claiming that it represented a “self-reform” of the Soviet bureaucracy and a move toward socialism.

Kagarlitsky’s politics were always based on hostility toward Marxism and the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky against Stalinism in defense of the program of world socialist revolution. Even in the 1980s, as more and more documents were released showing the horrifying scale of the Great Terror of the 1930s, when generations of Marxists were murdered, he exhibited complete indifference to the worst crimes of Stalinism.

In a letter to a Soviet youth in 1990, David North, the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International, commented on Kagarlitsky’s best known work at the time, *Dialectics of Change*, which was published in English by the Pabloite-affiliated publishing house Verso. David North wrote,

Kagarlitsky’s *Dialectics of Change* abounds with the type of vulgar commonplaces that generally characterize the writings of petty-bourgeois politicians who possess neither historical perspective nor firm programmatic principles. Like all opportunists, Kagarlitsky claims to be “free from ideological preconceptions”—which means only that he is unaware of the theoretical underpinnings (i.e., pragmatism)

of his own thinking.

I do not condemn Kagarlitsky simply because he is not a Trotskyist and an adherent of the Fourth International. However, it is impossible to respect the political and intellectual integrity of a so-called “socialist” in the Soviet Union who simply dismisses Trotsky with a few phrases without even bothering to examine, let alone attempting to refute, the work of this monumental historical figure. What little Kagarlitsky has to say about Trotsky proceeds from an unpleasant mixture of ignorance and dishonesty. ...

It would be naive to believe that Kagarlitsky is simply unfamiliar with these works [by Trotsky]—though, in politics as in law, ignorance does not relieve the individual of responsibility for his actions. Rather, Kagarlitsky falsifies Trotsky because he is a petty-bourgeois reformist and opponent of Marxism. And for this very reason, he remains ideologically loyal to the basic political conceptions of Stalinism.

This orientation toward Stalinism and the bureaucracy would become the basis for Kagarlitsky’s future political activities during the restoration of capitalism and then the Yeltsin and Putin regimes. As the WSWWS has documented, Kagarlitsky functioned as an advisor to a section of first the bureaucracy, and then the oligarchy and state apparatus.

During perestroika, he and his associates from the Club for Social Initiatives (CSI) acted as advisors to the bureaucracy for the realization of capitalist restoration. The activities of the CSI consisted of targeting the “left wing” in the Stalinist bureaucracy, falsely claiming that it could express the genuine interests of the Soviet working class.

By the end of the 1980s, the CSI began to support Boris Yeltsin, the head of the most aggressively pro-restorationist faction of the bureaucracy, as a “people’s hero,” criticizing him only for his inconsistent presentation of the “program” and poor organization of the cadres. He explicitly insisted that the “radical reforms” should affect not only the sphere of distribution, “but also the sphere of production, management, and property.” In other words, he pushed for the full restoration of capitalism.

In the 1990s, Kagarlitsky worked as an expert for the pro-government “Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia” (FNPR), which directly emerged out of the Stalinist trade union apparatus. After that, he worked from 1994 to 2002 at the Institute of Comparative Political Science and Labor Movement Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

His ties to open Stalinists and nationalists are particularly damning. His publication Rabkor.ru has more than once become a platform for Stalinists and “left-wing” nationalists.

The most infamous case was the support granted by Rabkor.ru to the state-led persecution of historian Yuri Dmitriev. Dmitriev has done pioneering work in uncovering a major shooting site of the Stalinist Great Terror, the Sandarmokh forest, where thousands of workers from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and many old Bolsheviks and Left Oppositionists were killed. For this, he was imprisoned on bogus charges in a clear attempt by the Russian state to

suppress and intimidate all those seeking to reveal the truth about the crimes of Stalinism. Yet Rabkor.ru published an extensive Stalinist hack piece, backing the Kremlin’s persecution of Dmitriev and providing a neo-Stalinist justification for the terror.

Kagarlitsky’s entire political record marks him as a political enemy of the working class, and an accomplice of Stalinism and the Russian oligarchy.

Even after his arrest, sections of the Putin regime still consider Kagarlitsky useful. In a revealing comment, Sergei Markov, a political scientist and member of the ruling United Russia party, said that Kagarlitsky should not be arrested, but instead be brought into the Presidential Administration as a person with connections among pseudo-leftists around the world.

Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly stated that he “does not know” Kagarlitsky’s surname and noted, “We are in 2023, and the Russian Federation is in a state of armed conflict with a neighbor. I think there should be a certain attitude towards people who cause damage to us inside the country.”

The Russian president added that he will study the situation related to Kagarlitsky, which means the arrest situation may also change dramatically. Putin has already made a zigzag with PMC Wagner and Prigozhin’s mutiny when he changed his anger into mercy.

The far-right politician Alexander Dugin, whose daughter Daria was assassinated last summer, wrote an article for RIA-Novosti titled “Russia needs censorship and repression.”

In this article, Dugin called for the expansion and concretization of repression against enemies of Putin’s regime, especially against representatives of the NATO-backed “liberal” faction of the oligarchy. He called for this to be done on the basis of a new type of Russian national-chauvinism represented by a new “authentic sovereign worldview.” He also demanded that attention be paid to critics of the regime such as Kagarlitsky, but to act more gently.

In Kagarlitsky, the Kremlin is now targeting a figure that has been completely integrated into the Russian capitalist establishment for three decades. However, the principal aim of the crackdown on democratic rights will be the Russian working class and genuine socialist opponents of the war. The defense of Kagarlitsky’s democratic rights and call for his release are therefore a matter of principle.

From the standpoint of the working class, the defense of democratic rights is an integral part of the fight against war and capitalism. But to wage this fight, workers and youth must reject the type of opportunist and neo-Stalinist politics that Kagarlitsky represents. The working class must develop its political line and struggle in opposition to both Russian nationalism and Western imperialism. This requires the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Russia.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)