

Stop the political frame-up of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk!

David North
17 May 2024

On April 25, 2024, Bogdan Syrotiuk, the 25-year-old leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (the YGBL), a socialist-Trotskyist organization active in Ukraine, Russia and throughout the former USSR, was arrested by the notorious state security service of the fascistic Zelensky regime, the SBU. Bogdan is being held in atrocious conditions in a high security prison in the city of Nikolaev (Mykolaiv), which is located in southern Ukraine.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement with which the YGBL is politically affiliated, has finally obtained the actual documents in which the SBU presents its charges against Bogdan Syrotiuk. These documents, which form the basis of his detention, make absolutely clear that Bogdan is the victim of a monstrous state frame-up. The allegations concocted by the SBU are a crude combination of lies, obvious fabrications, and political absurdities.

Moreover, the documents submitted by the SBU are directed not only against Bogdan. They are nothing less than a declaration of war against all left-wing and socialist opposition to the Zelensky regime and, specifically, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its public organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The central allegation leveled against Bogdan Syrotiuk is that he is guilty of high treason. The basis of this charge is that Bogdan has been for the past two years “engaged in the preparation of publications *commissioned by representatives of a Russian propaganda and information agency, the World Socialist Web Site*” [emphasis added.]

The *World Socialist Web Site* is denounced as an instrument of “an active information war against Ukraine” being waged by Russia, which

uses the so-called “left-wing” propagandists and their information platforms (websites, media and social platforms) to discredit the support of Ukraine by international partners, justify Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine, accusing Western countries of creating conditions under which Russia was forced to launch the so-called special military operation, fomenting wars in Ukraine by providing it with weapons, etc. As a result, they are used by Russia to systematically convey pro-Kremlin narratives to the population of Ukraine and Ukraine’s allied countries...

Since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the *World Socialist Web Site* “WSWS” has regularly published articles in various languages aimed at discrediting Ukraine and representatives of governments around the world for assisting Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor state.

The ICFI’s opposition to the US-NATO war in Ukraine is an essential element of its political program, deeply rooted in the socialist and internationalist principles of the Trotskyist movement. The attempt of the Ukrainian regime to portray this opposition as an instrument of Putin’s

propaganda network is as viciously mendacious as it is politically absurd. The intransigent opposition of the International Committee of the Fourth International to the Putin regime—which emerged as a consequence of the Stalinist bureaucracy’s final betrayal of socialism and the restoration of capitalism in the former USSR—is a fundamental political fact that is substantiated not only in written texts numbering in the hundreds, but also in the exhaustively documented activity of the Trotskyist movement spanning decades.

True to its fascist character, the Ukrainian regime is operating on the basis of the well-known precept of Hitler and his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels: “The bigger the lie, the more readily it will be believed.”

In this particular case, the Zelensky regime seems to believe that the scale of the SBU lies are of such a magnitude that they will simply overwhelm the thinking public. It thus expects that public opinion will accept that the Putin regime is directing the work of the WSWS, which the SBU indictment describes as

an online publication of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated sections in the Socialist Equality Parties around the world, which 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.

At no point does the SBU attempt to explain the contradiction that wrecks its case against Bogdan, i.e., that the political principles that he upholds as a socialist and internationalist opponent of wars waged by the capitalist ruling class are irreconcilably hostile to the policies of the Putin regime, including its invasion of Ukraine.

It attempts to evade the contradiction by simply lying. The indictment claims that Bogdan’s activities, “acting on the instructions of a representative of the *World Socialist Web Site*,” consisted of “supporting and justifying the conduct of the Russian aggressive war on the territory of Ukraine...”

Every word is a lie. The opposition of the ICFI, its affiliated organizations, and the WSWS to the Russian invasion, in line with its hostility to the Putin regime, is a political fact that is documented in hundreds of articles that have been posted since the first day of the invasion.

On February 24, 2022, the day of the Russian invasion, the ICFI posted a statement on the WSWS titled: “Oppose the Putin government’s invasion of Ukraine and US-NATO warmongering! For the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers!” It began:

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* denounce the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Despite the provocations and threats by the US and NATO powers, Russia's invasion of Ukraine must be opposed by socialists and class-conscious workers. The catastrophe that was set in motion by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 cannot be averted on the basis of Russian nationalism, a thoroughly reactionary ideology that serves the interests of the capitalist ruling class represented by Vladimir Putin.

What is required is not a return to the pre-1917 foreign policy of tsarism, but, rather, a revival, in Russia and throughout the world, of the socialist internationalism that inspired the October Revolution of 1917 and led to the creation of the Soviet Union as a workers state. The invasion of Ukraine, whatever the justifications given by the Putin regime, will serve only to divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class and, moreover, serve the interests of US and European imperialism.

In the two major statements that he has made during the past week, Putin has justified his actions by enumerating the provocations and crimes of the United States. There is, no question, much that is factually true in his denunciation of Washington's hypocrisy. But the viciously anti-communist and xenophobic ideology that he invokes and the interests that he claims to be defending are thoroughly reactionary and incapable of appealing to the broad mass of the working class in Russia, let alone in Ukraine and throughout the world. A substantial section of the working class in Russia and Ukraine will be repelled by the cynicism of Putin's glorification of the heroic struggle waged by the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany in World War II while denouncing the October Revolution and the existence of the USSR as a multi-national state.

The ICFI insisted that the socialist opposition to imperialism was incompatible with any form of national chauvinism, and, therefore, rejected all the justifications given by the Putin regime and its apologists for the invasion. Their invocation of "national defense" could not be accepted by socialists. The defeat of imperialism and its overthrow was possible only through the revolutionary struggle of the international working class. The ICFI statement cited the words of Trotsky: "Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle, is possible only for that party that has already declared irreconcilable war on the national state in time of peace."

The ICFI called "for an immediate end to the war," and explained: "In opposing the invasion of Ukraine, we denounce the policies of US/NATO imperialism, whose claims to be defending democracy and human rights are blood-drenched with hypocrisy."

This political declaration elaborated the principles and policy that have guided the work of the ICFI and WSWS since the war began.

On February 26, 2022 the International Committee held an international webinar, in which its opposition to the war was emphatically advanced. Among the speakers, in addition to myself, were Nick Beams, a longtime leader of the International Committee's Australian section, Johannes Stern, a leader of the ICFI in Germany, Thomas Scripps, a leading member of the ICFI's section in Britain, Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, and Evan Blake, another leading member of the SEP (US).

The ICFI has never wavered from the principled opposition to the policies of NATO and Russia that it advanced in the first days of the war.

The relationship between the ICFI and the comrades of the YGBL

coincided almost exactly with the outbreak of the war. They were attracted to the ICFI precisely because of its opposition to both the war and the national chauvinism of the Russian and Ukrainian regimes.

The SBU indictment charges that the *World Socialist Web Site* assigned to Bogdan "the task of preparing, writing, editing and publishing ... both on the WSWS website and other communist-oriented media, articles, publications, comments, etc. aimed at spreading pro-Russian narratives related to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, to which [Bogdan Syrotiuk] gave his voluntary consent."

In support of this claim, the SBU references a YGBL statement titled, "For the organization of an international movement of workers and young people against war!" It claims that this document, posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* on October 12, 2022, includes "fragments, statements, sentences and phrases... which contain justification of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, which began in 2014..."

The actual document clearly exposes this claim to be a lie. There is not a single sentence in the YGBL declaration that indicates support for the invasion of Ukraine. The SBU cites selectively from the document, including passages only from numbered paragraphs 4, 7, 8, 10 and 13. Paragraphs 4 through 8—the SBU interrupts the continuity of the YGBL's analysis by leaving out paragraphs 5 and 6—provide a concise Marxist explanation of the objective capitalist crisis and political aims that underlay the instigation of the war by the United States and its NATO allies. They state:

4. The new world order that the United States wants to establish looks like this very possible picture: Russia and China are to be subordinated to imperialism and divided, if that is necessary to maintain direct control over their natural, industrial-technological and human resources.

5. The European imperialist powers support the United States for their own place in the new redivision of the world. At the same time, European imperialism, while placed on rations by the United States, sees a way out of its economic and geopolitical predicament only in a redivision of the world in which it can regain its former greatness.

6. Japan, South Korea and Australia support the US only as much as it suits their interests in the struggle against China in the Pacific region. These countries will support the US as long as it allows them to compete with China. The process of dividing spheres of influence will revive the contradictions between the Pacific capitalist powers, which are as much in limbo as Europe.

7. The crisis of 2008 revived class struggles around the world. The Arab Spring of the early 2010s is vivid evidence of this revival. It forced US and European imperialism to take more decisive measures. In 2014, they supported a coup d'état in Ukraine. Through this coup, the US was able to create all the conditions to build a bridgehead in a future war against Russia.

8. The Covid-19 pandemic that erupted in 2020 exacerbated the contradictions of capitalism and was the trigger for a more rapid expansion of US imperialism in preparation for war against Russia and China. The US embarked on a more provocative path of abandoning the "one-China" policy, and increasing its support for Ukraine, as expressed in the NATO summit in August 2021, which supported Zelensky's "Crimean platform."

Significantly, the SBU leaves out paragraph 9 of the YGBL declaration, which presents a scathing indictment of the Putin regime. That paragraph reads:

The reactionary regime of Vladimir Putin emerged from the treacherous dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the restoration of capitalism. The policies of Putin, in the final analysis, are aimed at safeguarding the wealth of the post-Soviet oligarchy against the pressure of Western imperialism from above and, even more critically, against the movement of the Russian working class from below.

The SBU does cite paragraph 10, which continues the critique of the Putin regime, stating:

Within this geopolitical and social context, *Putin's adventurist invasion of Ukraine* on February 24 was the Russian oligarchy's response to NATO's relentless expansion to the east. The Putin regime's main objective was to achieve through the pressure of its "Special Operation" a new round of talks with the US-NATO, since the last round ended up crossing "red lines" on the part of the US-NATO, which caused Putin's invasion [emphasis added].

The characterization of Putin's invasion as "adventurist" is in no way compatible with what the SBU claims to be a "pro-Russian narrative." Obviously recognizing the fragility of its attempt to portray the YGBL statement as pro-Putin propaganda, the SBU decided against further citations from the document, leaving out the YGBL's development of its denunciation of Putin's policies in paragraphs 11 and 12, which assert:

11. The Russian bourgeoisie's desire for an "equal partnership" with the West was one of the most utopian delusions. This delusion, historically derived from Stalin's policy of "Popular Fronts" and then "peaceful coexistence," developed among the fledgling class of Russian capitalists in the 1990s.

12. The Putin regime has not gotten rid of this utopian delusion. Its whole policy has been to maneuver and seek compromise with the West, with whom the Russian oligarchy wanted to be "on equal footing." Except that Western imperialism, with its conquering ambitions for Russia, did not care about these conciliatory tones of Putin's regime.

The SBU also chose not to cite paragraph 17 of the YGBL statement, which declares:

The course of the war after Putin's invasion of Ukraine increasingly emphasizes the reactionary nature of this invasion. While claiming to be fighting for the independence of the Russian people from the threat of Western imperialism, Putin is in fact only defending the independence of the Russian oligarchy to exploit the Russian working class and the country's raw material wealth.

Paragraph 18, which is also left uncited, further demolishes the SBU's indictment of Bogdan, the YGBL and the WSWS as instruments of Russian propaganda. The paragraph asserts that

the Putin regime has no way out of the current crisis for Russian society. It will not have such a way out in the future. All of the

military and political activities of the Putin regime will only contribute to the escalation of Western imperialism and the deterioration of conditions for the Russian, Ukrainian and international working class.

The SBU also failed to cite paragraphs 19 and 20, which presciently warned of the catastrophe to which the war could lead.

19. The prospects for the present war, when thought within the framework of the capitalist system, are very bleak. First, this war will take on a long-term character and will not only be fought between Ukraine and Russia. It is the first step in inflaming the world situation to the point that the threat of a third world war is simply inevitable. All countries of the world will take part in the future war.

20. Secondly, the nature of the war will be determined by the policies of the ruling classes, which now stand on a blatantly anti-human position. The ruling classes are recklessly moving toward the use of nuclear weapons in the conflict, thereby creating the real possibility of a nuclear Armageddon. The specter of planetary destruction arises from the insane policies of imperialist and capitalist governments. The recklessness of the ruling capitalist elite compels young people to ask whether they will be allowed any future at all.

The SBU specifically cites this document as proof of Bogdan Syrotiuk's treasonable activity. But the text of this document conclusively refutes the charge that Bogdan and the YGBL are advancing a pro-Putin narrative.

Moreover, and most decisive, the Ukrainian regime does not present a scintilla of evidence to substantiate its absurd and lying claim that the *World Socialist Web Site* is a "Russian propaganda and information agency." With this filthy slander, the Zelensky regime betrays—notwithstanding the ongoing war with Russia—the lingering influence of Stalinism's rabid hatred of Trotskyism. As in Russia, the transfer of power in Ukraine from Stalinist bureaucrats to capitalist oligarchs has not required any change in the methodology of the political police. The same techniques of fabrication and slander, utilized by the Stalinist regime against Trotskyists in the era of the Moscow Trials and the terror of 1936-39, remain operative in Kiev.

Bogdan Syrotiuk stands accused of treason and faces the threat of a life-long prison term that is the equivalent of a death sentence. But the allegations against Bogdan are based entirely on articles and speeches he has posted on the *World Socialist Web Site*, in which he has declared his opposition, as a socialist internationalist, to the capitalist regimes of Zelensky and Putin and the ongoing war that has cost hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian lives.

The SBU indicts Bogdan for advancing in his speeches and writings posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* "which are accessible to everyone in the world, including citizens of Ukraine" information that exposes the reactionary character of the Ukrainian regime and the war.

The SBU declares that Bogdan's "criminal actions were stopped only with the intervention of a law enforcement agency." What a devastating self-exposure of the claims that the US-NATO proxy war is being waged to defend democracy in Ukraine.

The reality is that Ukraine is a fascistic dictatorship, which applies police methods to stop the expression of popular opposition to the policies that have brought untold suffering and death to the people.

The arrest of Bogdan Syrotiuk comes precisely at a point of mounting popular opposition to the Zelensky regime. On May 18, a new and vastly

unpopular mobilization law that will vastly expand the recruitment dragnet of the Ukrainian military goes into effect. Even the *New York Times* has expressed doubts about Zelensky's ability "to find new troops to relieve a weary, often demoralized force."

In an article posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* on April 30, Maxim Goldarb, a Ukrainian socialist who has been persecuted by the Zelensky regime, reported: "More and more Ukrainian men are desperately trying to flee the country, unwilling to die for someone else's selfish purposes."

He added:

It is not the rich minority, but the poor majority—the unemployed, workers, peasants, teachers, doctors, office workers—that will be sent into the bloody meat grinder. Now, with the adoption of the new law, the number of men deprived of basic human rights, who will be captured and hunted down like animals and sent to the front, will increase many times over.

The profits of those who benefit from this war will also increase many times over ... These huge profits will be divided up between the military-industrial complex, its lobbyists in the American and European establishment, and the Ukrainian oligarchic top brass.

Bogdan Syrotiuk's life is in danger. In the environment of terror that exists within Ukraine, he is deprived of all means to defend himself. Efforts to obtain competent legal representation have been undermined by government threats against defense lawyers. No less than five attorneys have declined to represent Bogdan because to do so would expose them to significant physical danger.

The significance of the fight to defend Bogdan and secure his freedom extends beyond Ukraine. His incarceration is yet another example of the growing international assault on democratic rights as imperialism escalates its military operations throughout the world. The political conspiracy to destroy Julian Assange set into motion a process that is replicated throughout the world.

Those who oppose and expose the crimes of the imperialist regimes are targeted for persecution by the state. The assault on basic democratic rights—first and foremost, freedom of thought and speech—is always justified on the basis of lies.

The opponents of Israel's genocidal war against Gazans are denounced as antisemites, even when the protesters are Jewish. In the denunciation of Bogdan Syrotiuk as an agent of Russia for opposing the proxy war in Ukraine, the same lying method is at work.

The real reason for the arrest and persecution of Bogdan Syrotiuk is that he is fighting for the unity of the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class against the ruling capitalist elites of all countries. As Comrade Andrei Ritsky of the Russian branch of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists explained so eloquently in a speech delivered at the May Day 2024 celebration held by the International Committee:

The only "crime" that Bogdan committed was his conviction that Ukraine can become truly free only through the independent struggle of the Ukrainian working class, acting together with the international working class against imperialism and war. He advanced a principled political position based on a Marxist understanding of the war, opposed to the fanatical worship of Ukrainian nationalism as well as the reactionary Russian nationalism of the Putin regime. Like our entire movement, he has fought for the unification of workers in Russia and Ukraine with the workers in the imperialist countries, to put an end to a fratricidal war that has claimed the lives of at least half a million

Ukrainians and tens of thousands of Russians.

He concluded his remarks with a declaration of the fundamental perspective that underlies the work of the Fourth International:

No bourgeois regime is capable of resolving the crisis other than through war and destruction, because any other way would be contrary to its fundamental capitalist interests. The contradictions of capitalism cannot be resolved within national borders and on the basis of a defense of private property. Only the international working class armed with the program of world socialist revolution will be able to put an end to the wars and resolve the fundamental crisis. To do so, however, it must fight for its unity with its brothers and sisters around the world.

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls for a global campaign to demand the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk from prison. The fight for Bogdan's freedom must be taken up by workers, students and all those who are committed to the defense of democratic rights and opposed to the escalation of imperialist wars that, unless stopped, threaten humanity with a nuclear catastrophe.

Join the fight to Free Bogdan. Circulate this statement as widely as possible on social media. Bring this case to the attention of co-workers, fellow students, and friends. To sign a petition demanding Bogdan's release, contribute funds toward the defense campaign, and become personally active in the fight for his freedom, go to wsws.org/freebogdan.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact