

# A provocation that failed: On Alex Steiner's attempt to discredit the ICFI's defense of Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk

WSWS Editorial Board  
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On January 28, the blog site of Alex Steiner, permanent-revolution.org, posted an anonymous "Letter on political prisoner Bogdan Syrotiuk" that accused the International Committee of the Fourth International of having recklessly compromised the security of the Ukrainian Trotskyist, and, therefore, of being responsible for his arrest by the SBU, the state police of Ukraine.

The basis of the January 28 accusation was the false claim that the legal name of the arrested socialist is "Ostap Rerikh," which was the name used in articles on the activities of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL) posted on the *World Socialist Web Site*. The letter asserted that the name "Bogdan Syrotiuk" is an alias. In his comments introducing the anonymous letter, Steiner's collaborator Sam Tissot wrote:

Since his arrest, the World Socialist Web Site (which is run by the ICFI) has launched a campaign for his freedom. However, unbeknownst to members of the party and supporters of the campaign, the editorial board of the WSWS bears more responsibility for Ostap's arrest at the hands of the SBU than it has thus far cared to disclose.

The letter received claims that far from protecting a young socialist activist working under a fascist infested regime, the ICFI's leadership recklessly endangered him by publishing his legal name on the WSWS and allowed him to share their materials on the highly monitored VK social network. The letter further claims that this information has been deliberately hidden from the ICFI membership.

Three days after posting this denunciation of the International Committee, Steiner has posted "A Correction and an Apology." It states:

We have been informed that the letter we published on Jan 28 2025 from an anonymous source is factually incorrect and therefore we are removing the letter and our comments based on the letter. The letter claimed that Bogdan Syrotiuk was a pseudonym of the Ukrainian political prisoner and leader of the Young Guard of the Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL) and that Ostap Rerikh was his legal name. This claim was factually incorrect. On the basis of this mistaken information the letter writer went on to accuse the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) of using Bogdan's real name instead of his pseudonym in a series of articles reporting on the YGBL, thereby needlessly exposing Bogdan Syrotiuk's identity to the repressive arm of Ukrainian

intelligence forces. We, the editorial board of the Permanent Revolution website, apologize for publishing and commenting on this factually mistaken letter. It should not have happened.

We reject this apology, which is a dishonestly evasive explanation for Steiner's decision to post a denunciation based on a blatant lie. This decision was clearly intended to implicate the ICFI and WSWS in Bogdan's arrest and discredit its defense campaign. Prior to the posting of this article, Steiner's blog site had never reported, let alone denounced, the arrest of Bogdan Syrotiuk. But suddenly, on the eve of a significant legal proceeding scheduled for February 4, Steiner's blog site posted a mendacious denunciation.

Attempting to justify himself, Steiner asserts that he "did reach out to the chair of the World Socialist Web Site twice for a comment" on the anonymous letter's allegation. He claims that he "waited for 3 days for a response and, receiving none, we went ahead and published the letter." The WSWS has conducted a search of all its email addresses, as well as those of David North. No such letter was received.

Steiner further claims that the decision to publish the anonymous denunciation "was made in the belief that we had a responsibility to provide a warning about the dangers of not using a pseudonym when doing political work in a highly sensitive situation." This self-serving excuse combines hypocrisy and deceit. Steiner, in his numerous denunciations of the International Committee, has shown no scruples whatsoever about referring to North by his legal name and posting information that undermines his personal security.

However, the fundamental lie told by Steiner and his collaborator Tissot pertains to the origins of what they describe as an anonymous letter. In the introduction to the "letter" posted on January 28, Tissot wrote: "We have been able to establish the identity of the sender, however, we will not undermine their wish to remain anonymous."

In fact, the source of the misinformation was not an anonymous letter. The fabricated claim that the ICFI, the WSWS and David North were responsible for exposing "Ostap Rerikh," and that Bogdan Syrotiuk is a pseudonym, originally appeared in a series of tweets posted between December 30, 2024 and January 3, 2025 by an anti-communist provocateur using the handle *Alexander Goldman@bukvasevich*. He identified himself as "An anarchist and independent journalist specializing in covering revolutionary and radical activities in Eastern regions." The account with this handle first appeared on X on December 9, 2024. [For reasons we will explain, the account was suddenly shut down on February 3.].

Three weeks later, on December 30, 2024, "Alexander Goldman" began posting a series of diatribes against the ICFI, the WSWS and David North,

which were centered on the claim that they were responsible for Bogdan's arrest:

The ICFI made a critical mistake by exposing Ostap's identity, which led to negative consequences for him. To cover their responsibility for his arrest, they invented a pseudonym.

You would be shocked at what small Trotskyist cults are involved in, from sexual harassment of female members within their sections to defending sexual predators. Groups like the ICFI and RCI are cults. Their members don't even realize they are part of a cult.

Ostap Rerikh is his real name, while "Bogdan Syrotiuk" is a pseudonym created by the ICFI cult leadership after Ostap was arrested by the Ukrainian secret services.

The ICFI leadership is responsible for his arrest, as their contact with him put him in danger of being detained. Yet no one in ICFI has taken responsibility for it. I will be providing detailed commentary on Ostap's arrest in the coming days.

On January 3, 2025, Goldman posted an eight-part tweet that resumed his diatribe against the International Committee and David North.

Goldman opened with a personal attack on North and repeated his claims about the ICFI's responsibility for Bogdan's arrest. He then asserted: "The ICFI does not contribute to Ostap's legal fees or his lawyer's expenses, nor do they maintain any direct contact with him in prison."

Intending to discredit the ICFI with the implication that it has abandoned Bogdan to his fate, Goldman exposes his own role as a provocateur. First, how would Goldman have any information pertaining to the payment of Bogdan's legal fees or about contact between representatives of the ICFI and the prisoner? Access to Bogdan is tightly controlled by the Ukrainian state. If Goldman has any information about who may or may not have been in contact with Bogdan, it could only come from the prisoner's jailers. Moreover, Goldman's insinuation that Bogdan has been left without support is clearly intended to solicit from the ICFI and supporters a statement about alleged financial assistance that could be manipulated by the SBU in the interests of its case against Bogdan.

The claim made by Steiner and Tissot that the source of the false information they posted on January 28 was a "letter" from a source who wished to remain anonymous is an out and out lie. All the allegations endorsed and posted by Steiner and Tissot were based on the public tweets of "Alexander Goldman."

While "Alexander Goldman" is a pseudonym used by the provocateur, the libelous allegations were posted publicly on X. The statement of Tissot in his introduction—"We have been able to establish the identity of the sender, however, we will not undermine their wish to remain anonymous"—was a cynical subterfuge. Steiner invented the story of an anonymous letter to conceal from readers of permanent-revolution.org the fact that he was making use of fraudulent material, for which there existed no corroborating evidence, provided by an agent provocateur and anti-communist enemy of Marxism and Trotskyism.

Had Steiner and Tissot identified their informant, readers would have been able to examine the X account of "Alexander Goldman" (@bukvasevich). They would have been able to determine his political identity and the credibility of his allegations.

Here is a sample:

On December 30:

Perhaps the most ironic thing about Trotskyists is that they use Stalinist-style purges against their own members in their small, cult-like parties, which are designed to promote the egos of their wealthy, upper-middle-class leaders and secure donations from their supporters...

Stalinists and Trotskyists share much in common. Both are willing to kill any opponent of the "workers state," and in times of revolution, they will target and eliminate anarchists. This is evident from history. Marxists and Trotskyists are mortal enemies of anarchists.

On January 1:

As a far leftist who comes from an anarchist tradition and despises Marxism, I support Trump's pro-immigration stance [sic] but at the same time I understand why Trump and Musk push for mass immigration [sic].

On January 2:

Fascists, Nazis, Marxists, and Trotskyists—once they seize state power—will imprison and kill anarchists. History provides no reason to believe they would act otherwise. Anarchists would undoubtedly be among those targeted for elimination.

Was there an alternative to Stalin, as Trotskyists claim?

What amuses me most is the notion that all was well in Russia while, Lenin, Zinoviev, and Trotsky steered the state. In reality, the same ruthless processes of elimination began at the very inception of communist rule.

At its core, it is the communist ideology itself that sowed the seeds of these atrocities. The belief that the Communist Party is historically destined to lead the social revolution, coupled with the principle that the ends justify the means, unleashed a wave of destruction.

These ideas not only shaped the brutal policies of Lenin and Trotsky but also paved the way for Stalin and the horrors that followed Lenin's death.

Goldman also posted on January 2 a letter from the early 20th century anarchist Alexander Berkman to Emma Goldman:

Trotsky? Well, he shows he is an awful coward. Afraid of his precious life. But he did not have much consideration for the lives of others when he used to order wholesale executions, not to speak of the razed villages, and of Kronstadt, etc.

Would serve him right if some one shoots him. He is afraid to see reporters even. Might be a Russian among them, you know, whose father or brother had been killed by Trotsky. But he'll make money all right.

Goldman continued his anti-communist tirade on January 3. He posted a tweet promoting a book titled *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution*. "Dedicated to Aron and Fanya Baron and all the anarchists murdered by Bolshevik tyranny—and those who fought to save them."

Steiner knew that the allegations posted by his blog site would have no credibility if their source were known. Therefore, he concocted the cover story of the “letter” from a sender who wished to remain anonymous.

But there is no escaping the fact that Steiner placed his blog site at the service of a provocateur intent on assisting the Ukrainian police and sabotaging the defense campaign mounted by the ICFI. The text of the “letter” attempts to substantiate the fundamental lie upon which the state frame-up of Bogdan Syrotiuk is based: that the WSWS is a propaganda agency of the Russian state. It asserts: “In 2023, Russian state media played a crucial role in amplifying WSWS articles on Ukraine, which drew the attention of Ukrainian intelligence services.”

After the exposure of his fabricated claim of ICFI responsibility for Bogdan’s arrest, Goldman continued for several days his efforts to sabotage the defense campaign and assist the case of the Ukrainian state prosecution. In a tweet posted on February 3, Goldman wrote that Bogdan’s arrest “was facilitated by online communications with the Kremlin controlled ICFI, which enabled Ukrainian intelligence services to identify him.” But this was his last tweet.

Several hours later, Goldman posted a one sentence tweet: “I have made the decision to leave X.” With the collapse of his operation, this agent provocateur closed the account and has deleted all his tweets. Unfortunately for Goldman, the WSWS, anticipating this attempt to destroy evidence of his operation, had made screen shots of the incriminating material.

Steiner, having promoted Goldman’s lies and facilitated the latter’s attempt to sabotage the defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk, must come clean and provide a detailed explanation of how the article posted on January 28 came to be written. What, precisely, is the nature of his relationship with Alexander Goldman? When did this collaboration begin? What did Steiner know about the politics and background of this individual? Did Steiner know of previous identities employed by Goldman before he set up an X account in December 2024? Did Steiner work with Goldman in the drafting of the article posted on January 28?

There are passages in the “letter” posted on permanent-revolution.org that are entirely in line with Steiner’s previous denunciations of the ICFI, which he habitually refers to as a “cult.” The letter’s conclusion accuses the ICFI leadership of “opportunism,” which is not a criticism generally leveled by anarchists who are viscerally opposed to Marxism in all its forms. This raises a question: Did Steiner collaborate with Goldman in the drafting of the original set of tweets in late December and early January?

This very criticism is reiterated by Tissot in his summary remarks that follow the text of the “letter”: “The failure to adequately protect Ostap’s identity is a consequence of the opportunistic nature of the regime.”

While the history and nature of his relationship with the provocateur “Alexander Goldman” have not yet been clarified, what can be said with absolute certainty is that Steiner’s posting of Goldman’s lies was not the result of an unfortunate journalistic mishap. Steiner’s politics—and that of his associate Tissot—made them the perfect accomplices of Goldman’s provocation.

This is the not the first time that Steiner has offered his services for a provocation against the Trotskyist movement. He was recently the principal American source for Aidan Beatty’s biographical hatchet job on Trotskyist leader Gerry Healy and the ICFI. Steiner made available to Beatty, whose slanderous hack work received funding from pro-Zionist institutions, whatever personal information he had about David North’s family background. As North noted, “The FBI will appreciate Steiner’s services as an informer.”

Steiner himself is not a police agent. But his subjectivism and uncontrollable hatred of the ICFI make him useful to its enemies. They view permanent-revolution.org as a post office, which they can reliably use when they want to distribute anti-ICFI denunciations and misinformation. Goldman knew that Steiner would grab at the opportunity

to attack the ICFI.

Steiner’s blog site has been in existence for approximately 15 years. Its politics—on the rare occasion that it even comments on major world events—are characterized by the most vulgar impressionism, opportunism and a complete absence of Marxist and Trotskyist principles. The intervals between articles posted by Steiner on his own blog site are generally four to eight months.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not elicited a single comment. He has not written on or denounced the Gaza genocide. The only article about Ukraine under Steiner’s byline was posted nearly three years ago, and it consisted of a reactionary endorsement of the defense of Ukraine under the slogan of national self-determination.

The pervasive theme of Steiner’s blog site and the central purpose of its existence is hatred of the International Committee. In his efforts to disrupt the work of the ICFI, he is prepared to collaborate with anyone, no matter how reactionary their politics.

This hostility is rooted, in the final analysis, in Steiner’s petty-bourgeois politics and anti-Marxist theoretical conceptions. Like many student radicals of the 1960s, his theoretical conceptions and political outlook developed under the influence of the Frankfurt School, which Steiner mistakenly assumed to be a form of Marxism. When he joined the Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, in 1970, Steiner believed that Trotskyism could be somehow reconciled with Freudianism and the conceptions of Herbert Marcuse.

The unresolved issues of politics and philosophy interacted with an extreme and highly volatile subjectivism that is the most notable feature of Steiner’s troubled personality.

After a few short years of activity in the Trotskyist movement, Steiner abandoned revolutionary politics in 1978 at the age of 32. He left the Workers League and has lived the last 46 years of his life in the milieu of middle-class philistinism. Steiner was not entirely satisfied with his retreat from socialist politics. In the aftermath of the International Committee’s split with the Workers Revolutionary Party, Steiner reestablished contact with his former comrades in the Workers League. He professed support for the struggle it had conducted in defense of Trotskyism. Steiner was particularly effusive in his expressions of admiration for David North.

As late as 1999, Steiner, claiming agreement with the ICFI and Socialist Equality Party, reapplied for membership. But the ensuing discussion of his application made clear to the SEP that Steiner remained, notwithstanding his professions of loyalty to the ICFI, a middle-class radical, whose enduring commitment to the anti-Marxist conceptions of the Frankfurt School was incompatible with party membership.

This assessment was vindicated by Steiner’s rapid shift to the right in response to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in the Middle East. His susceptibility to demoralization, always a feature of Steiner’s personality, acquired, under the impact of the reactionary political environment, a malignant character.

Steiner justified his final break with revolutionary politics by proclaiming the failure of Trotskyism. Following in the footsteps of demoralized ex-Marxists who embraced anti-communism in the 1940s and 1950s, Trotskyism became for Steiner “the God that failed.” In the well-known manner of embittered renegades, he developed an implacable hatred of former comrades who remained active in revolutionary politics. Those who upheld socialist principles and rejected opportunist politics were now regularly denounced as “cultists.” Steiner views their unflinching dedication to the socialist cause as both a reminder and rebuke of his own renegacy. He cannot justify his politics and life decisions without hating his former comrades, especially David North.

Trotsky once wrote, “In politics, hatred plays the most abominable role.” Steiner’s political and moral descent into willing collaboration with an agent provocateur against the International Committee, even at the cost of undermining the defense of an imprisoned Ukrainian comrade, is a

vindication of Trotsky's warning.



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