

Trotskyism on trial in Ukraine

Prosecution presents its case against Bogdan Syrotiuk

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To support the fight to free Bogdan Syrotiuk and to learn more about the case and the work of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, go to wsws.org/freebogdan.

After several postponements, since January the prosecution has presented its case against Bogdan Syrotiuk, a socialist political prisoner in Ukraine, in a court in Pervomaisk, southern Ukraine. Syrotiuk was arrested on April 25, 2024 by the fascist-infested Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) and is being charged under Article 111 with “high treason under martial law.” The arrest warrant for Bogdan charged that he was “engaged in the preparation of publications commissioned by representatives of a Russian propaganda and information agency, the *World Socialist Web Site*.”

The defense has rejected the charges, which carry a prison sentence of between 15 years and life in prison. Since his arrest, Syrotiuk, who is in poor health, has been held in a prison in Nikolaev.

The case is a political trial. The prosecution is basing its case on nine thick volumes of documentary material, the vast majority of which is comprised of political and theoretical pamphlets, including essays and statements by the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists opposing the invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime, and essays by David North, the chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site*, on the history of the Trotskyist movement.

In other words, Bogdan is charged not for any action committed or planned, but for his Trotskyist ideas, a “thoughtcrime.” The Ukrainian state’s case against Bogdan resembles nothing so much as a 21st century version of Nazi-style jurisprudence.

The prosecution is proceeding along the playbook devised by the Ukrainian state for its persecution of ideological and political critics. Immediately after the invasion by the Russian regime, the NATO-backed Zelensky government made major changes to Article 111 (high treason) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine to provide the pseudo-legal basis for the targeted persecution of opponents of the government. The Ukrainian socialist Maxim Goldarb explained in an article for the *World Socialist Web Site* in 2023:

The definition of the crime of “state treason” in Article 111 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine is very vague and abstractly written. This gives the repressive apparatus the opportunity to charge anyone under it whom the president or his team decide to pick out.

The criminal procedure allows for the arrest of a suspect without the right to bail or release. This is exactly what happened to Bogdan.

Since his arrest in April, Bogdan has been detained indefinitely. All of the defense’s requests for his release on the grounds that he poses no danger to society have been rejected. Most recently, on January 17, the court extended his pre-trial detention for another 60 days. In justifying its ruling to reject the appeals by the defense for Bogdan’s release, the court has routinely copied verbatim the SBU’s argumentation.

The “criminality” of Bogdan’s ideas and thinking are to be proven in court by “linguistic experts” summoned by the prosecution. This procedure too is commonplace in cases of alleged high treason. To again quote Maxim Goldarb:

... in order to give the appearance of at least some legitimacy to the ongoing complete lawlessness, the prosecution authorities (the SBU, the state office of investigation and the prosecutor’s office) have learned—attention!—to conduct “expert examinations” of a person’s words and statements, their comments and posts on social media. For this purpose, employees of the prosecution bodies take the words of any opponent of the current government—whether it is a post on social media, a speech on TV, or an article in a newspaper—and appoint and conduct a special forensic linguistic examination, where the expert linguist answers the following questions posed to him by the investigation:

1) Is there anything bad directed against Ukraine in these words?

2) Is there anything in them that indicates that the person indirectly or directly supports the enemy?

3) Is there a causal relationship between these words and any following consequences?

And so on and so forth. As you will understand, any words, position, statement can be called “bad,” simply because the forensic expert is operating based on highly relative and subjective evaluations and subjective perception. And the main question in such a case is to find the “right” expert, who will “correctly” evaluate the words of the victim of the regime and write the “necessary” expert report.

Where does this expert come from? How is this expert report written? And here it becomes particularly interesting for those who have not yet encountered the machinations of the current system of persecution of dissent in Ukraine. Part of the expert review can be carried out in state institutes of forensic expertise, where the expert will be given an order by the director of the institute, will fulfill it, and write what is necessary. Because in Ukraine now experts do not bear responsibility for anything, they can write anything they want.

In addition, there are also “appointed” experts whom the state system of persecution has helped to obtain the necessary license from the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, allowing them to conduct linguistic examinations. They are on the payroll of the state system of persecution and receive a very decent salary, for which they simply “clamp” the expertise needed by the system. If you want a bad expert report, they will write a bad one; if you want a good one, they will write a good one. Then the conclusions of this expert report are made the basis for bringing charges and for the initiation of the prosecution of a person: First, he is charged, then he is put on a wanted list; he is detained, arrested, imprisoned and so forth.

Precisely this kind of “linguistic expertise” was presented by the prosecution in court. Bogdan’s defense has demanded that the court reject the “examinations” of these “experts” because they have failed to provide evidence of the alleged crime committed.

The truth is that Bogdan has committed no crime whatsoever, least of all “state treason” and working on behalf of the Russian state. As a leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), which is in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, he has consistently fought for the unification of Russian and Ukrainian workers in opposition to a war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. His articles have provided unique accounts of the crimes of the Banderovite fascists against the Ukrainian people and

their glorification today by those who support the war.

The statements the YGBL and ICFI issued have condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine from the standpoint of socialist internationalism. They are the most powerful refutation of the charge of “collaboration” with the Russian state. In any nominally democratic legal procedure, these statements would form the basis for the *defense* of Bogdan against the charges. The fact that these and other statements by the ICFI and WSWs form the basis for the *prosecution* demonstrates that Bogdan is on trial because of his struggle for Trotskyism.

There can be little doubt that this case was discussed and designed not only by the SBU, but also its financiers and military backers in the US and other NATO countries, notably Germany. No less than the Ukrainian oligarchy, the ruling class in the imperialist centers views the emergence of growing opposition to the war and the turn by sections of workers and youth to Trotskyism as an existential threat to their class interests.

For that reason alone, Bogdan’s case deserves the utmost attention of class-conscious workers and youth internationally. But it is not the only reason. Bogdan’s case is the most conscious political expression of the broader criminalization of any opposition to war and free speech in Ukraine. As of March 2024—that is, before Bogdan’s arrest—there were some 55,000 political prisoners in Ukraine who were detained as “collaborators” by the SBU, according to the United Nations. This number must have increased significantly over the past year. Just two weeks ago, in late January, the SBU conducted major raids in several cities, arresting dozens of workers and youth who were reading Marxist literature and opposed the forced, violent mobilization of youth and men into the slaughter.

What happens in Ukraine today, if unopposed, will happen in the US or any country in Europe tomorrow. Therefore, we urge everyone to take up the fight for Bogdan’s freedom as the spearhead of the struggle to defend democratic rights and oppose imperialist war. Sign and circulate the petition to free Bogdan! Submit a statement opposing his persecution to the WSWs! Study his writings and the statements of the YGBL and the ICFI on the war in Ukraine!



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