

Leading Ukrainian criminologist finds charges of “state treason” against Bogdan Syrotiuk baseless

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On December 4, a Ukrainian court in Pervomaisk reviewed the linguistic expertise commissioned by the defense lawyers of imprisoned Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk. Now 26 years old, Syrotiuk was arrested in April 2024 and charged with “state treason under martial law,” a crime which carries between 15 years and life in prison. Far from operating on behalf of the Putin regime, as the prosecution charges, Syrotiuk was the founder and leader of Trotskyist youth group the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, which has opposed the war in Ukraine by fighting for the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class.

The defense lawyers commissioned Yuri Borisovich Irkhin, one of Ukraine’s leading criminologists, to conduct a “linguistic examination” of the statements and articles that Bogdan wrote and published, and that have served as the principal foundation for his prosecution. Irkhin found that they provide no basis whatsoever for his prosecution as a “traitor” and a supporter of the Putin regime.

To understand the significance of this examination, it must be noted that in cases of alleged “state treason under martial law,” the prosecution heavily relies on what the Ukrainian state calls a “linguistic expertise” or “examination.” In an article for the *World Socialist Web Site*, Ukrainian socialist Maxim Goldarb, who was prosecuted under the same charges, explained how the enforcement of this law principally relies on this “expertise.” To prove its charges, the prosecution hires an “expert” who looks at written or other statements by the defendant to find evidence for “state treason” and work on behalf of the aggressor, that is, Russia. Invariably, the experts commissioned by the prosecution find in the words of the defendant what the prosecution wants to find. Staying true to this script, the “expert examination” of the prosecution found Bogdan guilty of having uttered statements that constitute state treason.

Yet the linguistic expertise commissioned by his defense lawyers completely refutes the prosecution’s case and that of its “linguistic expert.” The author, Irkhin, is one of the most prominent criminologists in Ukraine, author of over 150 scientific publications and former deputy head of the psychological service of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry. In his over 20-year long career, he has been involved in many high-profile cases and is regularly cited by newspapers and TV shows in Ukraine as an expert on linguistic forensics and other aspects of criminal law.

In his 65-page report, Irkhin examined more than a dozen publications by the *World Socialist Web Site*, which the indictment cited, denouncing the WSW as “a Russian propaganda and information agency.” Among them are several statements by the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, such as their November 2022 statement against the war, articles by Bogdan Syrotiuk on Ukrainian fascism, reports on the mood among Ukrainian youth, articles by the WSW on NATO’s role in the war, as well as an October 2023 lecture by David North on the Gaza genocide. Irkhin subjected all of these publications to a thorough semantic analysis,

highlighting terms expressing opposition to the invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime and the Putin regime itself.

His conclusion is unequivocal:

1. ... statements, phrases, sentences, or word combinations that contain public calls aimed at undermining the national security of Ukraine, its national interests, the elimination of Ukrainian statehood and the destruction of Ukrainian identity, and the conduct of subversive activities against Ukraine in the information sphere to the detriment of Ukraine’s information security, **are NOT contained** [in the articles and statements under examination].

2. ... **there are NO** statements, phrases, sentences, or word combinations that have signs of propaganda aimed at supporting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.” (Emphasis in the original)

Given the authority of Irkhin and the thoroughness of his analysis, even the Ukrainian court, which has so far routinely ruled in favor of the prosecution, despite its lack of evidence, could not ignore it. In light of the extreme contrast between the results of the examinations by the prosecution and the defense, the court was forced to rule on December 4 that a third expert will have to produce another expertise. This decision marks a significant set-back for the prosecution. However, while this is an important legal development in the campaign to free Bogdan, the significance of Irkhin’s examination goes well beyond its implications in the courtroom.

The trial against Bogdan was, from the beginning, constructed as a trial not just against him but the entire Trotskyist movement. The prosecution deliberately relied virtually exclusively on articles of the *World Socialist Web Site* to prove its case. But precisely this fact has now become its achilles heel. As a linguistic examination of these documents, Irkhin’s report is a powerful vindication not only of the fight to free Bogdan Syrotiuk but, more broadly, of the principled internationalist and Marxist stance taken by the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists and the International Committee of the Fourth International in opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The document, therefore, bears quoting at some length.

Analyzing a statement by the YGBL from November 2022 calling for the initiation of a global anti-war movement, Irkhin emphasized the repeated use of terms such as “Putin’s regime” and “Putin’s adventurist invasion of Ukraine,” concluding that the use of such phrases “clearly indicates the absence of any support or justification for the Russian

Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine and any other compliments regarding the war against Ukraine unleashed by Russia under Putin's leadership." Further, he wrote:

The objective content of this text represents the author's declaration of his sociopolitical position through the prism of the activities of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL) organization. The text expresses an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and Trotskyist position, condemning the policies of both the US and NATO, as well as Russia, led by the "Putin regime." In terms of its content, the text has a clearly anti-war message and expresses solidarity with the anti-war and revolutionary movement of the working class and youth....The text under examination verbalizes a position of opposition to war, with the key phrases **"against war"** and **"to create an international anti-war youth movement"** serving as anti-war markers and clearly expressing a position of rejection of war.

Irkhin reached the same basic conclusion with regard to all statements that expressed the position of the YGBL and the WWS on the war. Thus, after analyzing the speeches of Andrei Ritsky and Bogdan Syrotiuk to the 2023 International May Day Rally, Irkhin notes:

The speeches express the position of the Trotskyist movement, which condemns both the policies of the US and NATO and the actions of Putin's regime, viewing the war as a consequence of the global crisis of capitalism and imperialist rivalry. The text contains criticism of historical Ukrainian nationalism and the cult of the OUN-UPA, as well as condemnation of Putin's regime and the Russian oligarchy as heirs to Stalinism. Both speeches contain a call for the unification of the international working class on the basis of the anti-war movement and revolutionary internationalism. The text, in its objective content, reflects the author's anti-war subjective position as a whole, as well as a clear condemnation of the Russian invasion, which is called "adventurous" and "reactionary" in particular (see the statements **"This position is perfectly expressed in the adventurist step of invading Ukraine on February 24, 2022... this move increasingly shows its reactionary and limited nature"...** **"To say that bourgeois apologists like Putin are capable of bringing peace is to believe that it is possible to pluck a weed without touching its roots."** etc.).

At the same time, the statements clearly indicate the absence of any support for or justification of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as any complacency towards the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. In the statements **"We, the orthodox Trotskyists of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, do not support this war,"** **"The working class increasingly desires a speedy end to the war in Ukraine and expresses its antiwar stance, sympathizing with the situation of the Ukrainian workers,"** sympathy for Ukrainian workers is emphasized and the desire for the earliest possible end to the war is expressed." (All emphases in the original)

Strikingly, the prosecution chose to include no less than three statements issued by the YGBL in defense of meetings held by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) as part of an international anti-war meeting series in the spring of 2023. As a result, the statements

by the YGBL in support of the meetings in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Toronto, Canada and Bochum, Germany, were all subject to the linguistic examination. It should be recalled that especially the meetings in Canada and Germany were the subject of an aggressive state-backed campaign by Ukrainian nationalists seeking to prevent these anti-war meetings from happening.

Irkhin found that all the statements by the YGBL expressed a consistent Trotskyist opposition to the war and provided no evidence in support of the accusation of "state treason." Thus, with regard to the statement by the YGBL in support of the Bochum meeting, Irkhin writes,

The text condemns this decision (to ban the IYSSE at Bochum university) as a manifestation of an ultra-right campaign against democratic rights and accusations of a "pro-Russian narrative." The authors emphasize that the IYSSE is the successor to the international Trotskyist movement, which has always opposed Stalinism, Yeltsinism, and the Putin regime. The text criticizes Germany's imperialist policy, which the authors consider a manifestation of the revival of national chauvinism and military imperialism. The conclusion calls for the unification of youth and the working class in the international struggle against capitalism and for a socialist future. The text also clearly reflects the author's anti-war subjective position, mediated by such expressions as such as **"a meeting on the war in Ukraine and its likely catastrophic consequences,"** which sets the context for an anti-war discussion in which war is perceived as a tragedy of global proportions with potentially devastating consequences. The use of the phrase "catastrophic consequences" emphasizes the depth of the author's concern and creates an emotionally charged background typical of rhetoric aimed at condemning war. The phrase **"The main heir to the 1990s plunge into barbarism in the USSR is the current Putin regime, which has established its dominance"** reflects criticism of the current Russian government, which the author presents as a continuation of negative trends after the collapse of the USSR. The metaphor **"plunge into barbarism"** conveys the author's subjective view of moral decline, which reinforces the anti-war message by associating war with a dictatorial, inhumane regime." (All emphases in the original)

Irkhin also examined two major articles by Bogdan Syrotiuk about the history and contemporary glorification of the Ukrainian nationalists. With regard to Bogdan's article on "The crimes of the Banderovites against the Ukrainian people," Irkhin points out that the text does not even contain any reference to the current war. Instead, he concludes,

The text presented above, in terms of its objective content, is a piece of journalism in which the author expresses a sharply critical subjective assessment of the activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The author characterizes these figures as accomplices to Nazi crimes and accuses them of mass murders of civilians, Soviet soldiers, Jews, and Poles. The text also contains excerpts that the author cites as eyewitness accounts of violence attributed to "Banderovites" and condemns the current veneration of them as national heroes. The author also criticizes Stalinism, but distances himself from it from a Trotskyist standpoint, emphasizing that the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists cannot be justified by the anti-Stalinist struggle. In other words, objectively speaking, this text represents the author's personal subjective attitude toward the

historical events of the mid-20th century, in particular, condemning the crimes associated with the activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during World War II, interpreting them through the prism of Soviet ideology, as well as condemning the current attitude towards these events in Ukrainian public discourse.

The linguistic report marks a major development in the campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk. It will be an important tool before the European Court of Human Rights, which accepted his case earlier this year. Above all, however, it should be seen as a powerful vindication of the struggle for the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk and for the principles of Marxist internationalism that he was imprisoned for. We call on all readers to respond to this development by expanding their efforts for his freedom!

- Sign the petition demanding his immediate release!
- Donate to the campaign!
- Make this case as widely known as possible!



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