

Successful meeting at Berlin's Humboldt University calls for the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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On May 28 around 30 students and workers gathered at Humboldt University in Berlin for a meeting organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) titled “Freedom for the socialist anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotiuk! Stop the war in Ukraine!”

Syrotiuk, now 27 years old, was arrested on April 25, 2024, by the Ukrainian secret service (SBU) for advocating the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian working classes against the war. The government accuses him of “high treason under martial law”—an offence for which he could face life imprisonment.

The meeting took place at a time when Bogdan's trial is at a critical turning point. Two expert reports have now exposed the core of the charge—that Bogdan spreads Russian propaganda—as baseless.

The international campaign for Bogdan's release is gaining increasing traction in Germany. As the WSWs reported, his case has garnered growing attention in recent weeks at universities and in working-class neighborhoods.

The case of Bogdan Syrotiuk

Katja Rippert, a leading member of the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP), opened the meeting with a detailed report on the case and its political significance. She explained that Bogdan, as a leading member of the Trotskyist youth organization Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, had from the outset taken an internationalist position on the war in Ukraine—opposing NATO and both the Zelensky and Russian regimes.

She showed the audience the speech, “For the Unity of the Russian and Ukrainian Working Class!,” which Bogdan delivered at the ICFI's online rally on May 1, 2023. Upon his arrest a year later, this speech, along with several other documents, was seized by the SBU as “evidence.”

As Rippert explained, the charges are based primarily on articles by Bogdan and statements by the *World Socialist Web Site*. At the heart of the case is the allegation that the WSWs is a “Russian propaganda and information agency.” At the same time, the prosecution states that the WSWs “addresses the most important

socio-political issues around the world from the standpoint of revolutionary resistance against the capitalist market economy, with the aim of establishing world socialism through a socialist revolution.”

Rippert made clear what this wording means: The indictment is not simply directed against a single young anti-war activist. It is directed against a conscious and determined representative of a political movement that, from the perspective of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and its backers in the US, Germany and NATO, poses a threat.

Although two expert reports have refuted the charges and the European Court of Human Rights has accepted the case, his detention has been repeatedly extended.

The dictatorial Zelensky regime is not only persecuting Bogdan but is suppressing the entire opposition in the country, Rippert emphasized. Virtually all opposition parties have been banned, elections suspended and freedom of the press and freedom of expression abolished. On the streets, masked gangs in minibuses track down men to force them to the front as cannon fodder. The term “busifikacija” has emerged in Ukraine to describe this practice, and in 2024 it even became the “Word of the Year” in Ukraine.

Numerous videos on social media show this violent forced recruitment:

Spontaneous resistance to the war is growing among the population, according to Rippert. In January, the Ukrainian defense minister officially admitted that around two million Ukrainians are evading conscription and 200,000 soldiers have deserted. “The claim spread in the media that all Ukrainians are waging a national, patriotic war of defense is a propaganda fairy tale,” Rippert concludes. “In fact, it is a class war.”

The Zelensky regime is also rehabilitating Ukrainian Nazi collaborators. Just a few days ago, the regime held a ceremonial reburial in Ukraine for Andriy Melnyk—a top leader of the fascist OUN, which collaborated with Hitler's Wehrmacht and carried out massacres of Jews and Poles. Zelensky hailed the war criminal Melnyk as a “Ukrainian hero.”

The persecution of the opposition is an international phenomenon, Rippert explained, addressing the attacks on democratic rights in the US, Germany and Russia. She concluded with a call to expand the campaign for the release of Bogdan

Syrotiuk and to support the building of revolutionary parties in Ukraine and Russia.

The war in Ukraine and the role of German imperialism

Peter Schwarz, Secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International and long-time editor-in-chief of the German-language WSWS, then analyzed the historical and geopolitical background of the war. He emphasized that the war cannot be explained by Putin's malice. "The mobilisation of whole armies can only be explained on the basis of huge social pressures and forces." The war in Ukraine is part of an unfolding Third World War, along with the genocide in Gaza, the war against Iran, and the encirclement of China.

Schwarz demonstrated how the NATO powers have systematically prepared for the war in Ukraine: firstly NATO's eastward expansion since 1990, which was pushed forward to Russia's borders despite explicit promises not to do so; then the 2014 Maidan coup, which was not a spontaneous democratic movement but rather a regime change operation financed by the US with five billion dollars, in which fascists such as the "Right Sector" and the Azov Battalion played a decisive role.

In the years that followed, NATO systematically armed the Ukrainian army during the civil war in eastern Ukraine. The Russian military intervention in 2022 was, according to Schwarz, "foreseeable and deliberate—and deliberately provoked by NATO." The warnings were ignored.

This opposition to NATO does not mean one is obliged to defend Russia: "Putin is a representative of the oligarchs who have plundered, stolen and destroyed social property. We are irreconcilable opponents of his regime and his war." But the question is not who fired the first shot, but in whose interests this war is being waged. "Kyiv and Berlin do not want peace—but rather the defeat of Russia, no matter what the cost."

Germany is playing a key role. Schwarz quoted the then-Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel (Free Democratic Party, FDP), who had already declared in 1993 that Germany was "predestined to reap the greatest benefit from the return of these states to Europe." With over 100 billion euros since the war began, Germany is now the most important European financier of the war in Ukraine. The German defense budget will rise from 32 billion euros in 2014 to 152 billion in 2029. "This is the largest military buildup since Hitler. Germany is moving in the same direction as it did in the First and Second World Wars."

Following the reports a lively discussion followed. One participant asked whether the WSWS analysis that the war had been provoked by NATO did not imply that Russian attacks on other European countries would have to be tolerated.

"You cannot answer the question of war by asking who fired the first shot," Schwarz replied. "In every war, it's always said: We are the defenders, the other side is the aggressor. Even Hitler said that." During World War I, too, it was claimed that "Russia is attacking us"—even though every history book shows that German

war plans against Russia had been in preparation for years. What matters, Schwarz said, is understanding the social driving forces behind the war.

Furthermore, Russia has not been able to defeat Ukraine in the last four years and will not attack Germany now, according to Schwarz. "But if Germany continues on this path, it will eventually lead to nuclear war—and that is what we want to prevent."

A student from the Post Soviet Left (PSL), an organization of left-wing migrants from various post-Soviet countries, expressed her gratitude during the discussion for the lecture and the ICFI's campaign in defense of Bogdan. She stated, "Many will quickly realize that the war is not in the people's interest, and at the end of the day, I believe the truth will prevail. History has shown this before."

Another participant in the discussion raised the question of whether the ICFI's revolutionary perspective was not at odds with the immediate political situation of the working class, which is disorganized. Peter Schwarz replied that it is precisely the growing threat of war, the collapse of democracy, and the intensified attacks on the working class that are creating the conditions for a socialist counter-movement. He pointed to the series of general strikes in Italy and the mass desertions in Ukraine as expressions of growing resistance. "The working class will not accept this without a fight."

At the end of the meeting, those present adopted a resolution calling for the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk and all other political prisoners in Ukraine, and demanding that the European Court of Human Rights expedite the review of his case. The resolution makes clear: Bogdan is not in prison for a criminal offence, but because he advocates for the international unity of the working class against the war.

In August, Mehring Verlag will publish the book *The War in Ukraine and the Struggle for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk*, which is already available for pre-order. It will feature, for the first time, Bogdan's own writings, statements by the International Committee of the Fourth International on Bogdan's case, and analyses of the war in Ukraine and the role of German imperialism.

The campaign for Bogdan's release must be expanded in the coming weeks and months. We call on everyone who wants to support Bogdan's freedom and the building of an anti-war movement to sign the petition at wsws.org/freebogdan and to join the IYSSE's struggle!

We also invite all interested individuals to attend the IYSSE's next meeting: "Science Instead of War Propaganda: How Can We Fight Conscription, War, and Cuts at our University?" Thursday, June 11, 2026, 6:30 p.m., Humboldt University of Berlin, Main Building, Unter den Linden 6, Room 1072.



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