

Preface to the book: “The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk”

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The volume “The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk” brings together for the first time the most important statements and articles on the case. The German edition will be published by Mehring Verlag in August 2026 and can be pre-ordered here. We are publishing here the preface by Johannes Stern, chief editor of the German edition of the WSWS and editor of the book.

On April 25, 2024, Bogdan Syrotiuk, a young Ukrainian socialist and leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, a Trotskyist youth organization in the former Soviet Union, was arrested by the Ukrainian secret service, the SBU. Since then, he has been held in prison in Nikolaev. He is accused of “high treason under martial law”—a crime punishable by 15 years to life imprisonment. In reality, Bogdan’s “crime” consists in the fact that he opposes the Ukraine war from the standpoint of socialist internationalism, opposes the capitalist regimes in Kiev and Moscow, and fights for the unity of the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class.

This book appears at a decisive moment. More than two years after Bogdan’s arrest, the legal frame-up constructed by the SBU has largely collapsed. Bogdan’s lawyers have systematically refuted the claim that he is a supporter of the Kremlin on the basis of his own writings. Late last year, they submitted an independent linguistic expert report by Yuri Borisovich Irkhin, one of Ukraine’s most renowned criminologists. His analysis shows that the accusations against Bogdan are entirely baseless.

The Ukrainian judiciary regularly relies on so-called “linguistic expert reports” in political proceedings. Selected experts are commissioned to examine the statements of defendants and deliver the desired conclusions. In Bogdan’s case, too, the prosecution initially submitted such a report. But Irkhin’s independent report convincingly refuted the claim that Bogdan had acted in the interests of the Putin regime. The court then ordered another expert report—but this, too, undermines the central accusations of the prosecution.

The European Court of Human Rights has now taken up the case. And yet Bogdan remains in prison. His pretrial detention is extended again and again, necessary medical treatment was denied to him for more than two years, and his health is seriously endangered.

The conclusion is inescapable: Bogdan is being persecuted not for any crime, but because of his political convictions. His trial is a political show trial. It is directed not only against a single young opponent of war. It is directed against the *World Socialist Web Site*, against the International Committee of the Fourth International and against all socialist opposition to war, imperialism and fascism.

The SBU’s indictment says this openly. It claims that Bogdan produced publications “on behalf of representatives of a Russian propaganda and information agency, the *World Socialist Web Site*.” At the same time, it describes the WSWS as a publication that “deals with the most important

socio-political problems throughout the world from the standpoint of revolutionary resistance to the capitalist market economy, with the aim of establishing world socialism through socialist revolution.” In this way, the Ukrainian regime declares not only Bogdan, but socialist internationalism itself, to be a crime.

The lie that Bogdan is an agent of the Kremlin is especially infamous. No other political tendency has so consistently exposed the reactionary character of the Putin regime as Trotskyism. The International Committee of the Fourth International condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 from the very first day. It explained that Putin’s war was not a progressive defence against the imperialist threat posed by NATO, but a reactionary response by the Russian oligarchy, which emerged out of the Stalinist destruction of the Soviet Union and the reintroduction of capitalism. The invasion does not serve to defend Russian or Ukrainian workers, but divides them and plays into the hands of the imperialist powers.

But opposition to the Russian invasion does not mean support for NATO. The Ukraine war is not a war for democracy and national self-determination. It is an imperialist war prepared over decades by the United States, NATO and the European powers. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States and its allies have pursued a policy of gradual military and geopolitical expansion eastward. The far-right coup in Kiev in 2014, backed by Washington and Berlin, the systematic arming of Ukraine and the country’s integration into NATO strategy against Russia were decisive stages on the road to war.

This is precisely why the defence of Bogdan is of such great significance. It exposes the propaganda that the war is being fought in defence of democracy. In Ukraine, elections have been suspended, opposition parties banned, freedom of the press massively restricted and socialist and other left-wing forces criminalized. Young men are abducted from the streets in buses and forced to the front. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian workers and young people have already been killed or maimed in a war that is not being fought in their interests, but in the interests of the NATO powers and the oligarchies on both sides of the front.

Bogdan’s arrest is inseparably bound up with this development. The stronger opposition to the war grows, and the more openly the character of the Zelensky regime as an instrument of NATO and the Ukrainian oligarchy is exposed, the more brutally the state cracks down on all opposition. Bogdan was arrested because his voice, his writings and the work of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists stand for a political perspective that attacks the war at its root by mobilizing the working class against all capitalist governments and for socialism.

This perspective is the red thread running through the present volume.

The first part, “The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk,” documents the most

important statements and reports by the International Committee of the Fourth International in defence of Bogdan. The May 2024 statement by David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWS and of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, which was published shortly after the indictment became known, tears apart the lies of the SBU and shows that the accusations are directed not only against Bogdan, but against the entire Trotskyist movement. Clara Weiss' report on the campaign to free Bogdan places the case in its historical and political context. It shows that the struggle for Bogdan's freedom stands in the long tradition of the socialist movement's defence of class-war prisoners. The statement by the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists on the first anniversary of Bogdan's arrest sums up the political content of the case and appeals to workers and youth in Ukraine, Russia and internationally to join the campaign.

The second part contains texts and speeches by Bogdan himself. They are the best refutation of the indictment. In its greetings to the 2022 May Day rally, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists openly declared its adherence to the International Committee of the Fourth International as the only international movement that defends the traditions of Lenin and Trotsky against Stalinism, nationalism and imperialism. In his essay on the crimes of the Bandera followers against the Ukrainian people, Bogdan defends historical truth against the state-sponsored rehabilitation of Ukrainian fascists and Nazi collaborators. His speech to the 2023 International May Day rally, which he delivered together with Andrei Ritsky, a Russian representative of the Young Guard, expresses the central slogan for which Bogdan is being persecuted: "For the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class!" In the speech he emphasizes: "We, the orthodox Trotskyists of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, do not support this war, either in Ukraine or in Russia." In his article on the tenth anniversary of the far-right coup in Kiev, he analyzes the events of 2014 as a decisive stage in the preparation of war and the revival of Ukrainian fascism.

The third part, "The War in Ukraine: A Socialist Perspective," places Bogdan's struggle in a broader historical and political context. It begins with the statement of the International Committee of February 24, 2022 against the Putin government's invasion and the war-mongering of the United States and NATO. The statement analyzes that the war ultimately has its roots in the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, and it sets out the principles that have guided the Trotskyist movement since the beginning of the war: irreconcilable opposition to the Putin regime and its reactionary invasion, an equally irreconcilable opposition to US and NATO imperialism, and the fight for the unity of the Russian, Ukrainian and international working class. The statement declares:

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... 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.

David North's lecture on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Left Opposition shows that today's conflicts in the former Soviet Union can be understood only on the basis of the history of the struggle waged by Trotsky against Stalinism and nationalism. The statement by the Young Guard on the danger of an imperialist carve-up of the former Soviet Union takes up this analysis and warns of the existential threat posed by the

escalation of NATO's war against Russia.

For German readers, this book has special significance. German imperialism plays a central role in the Ukraine war. Berlin is among the most important financiers, arms suppliers and active political supporters of the Kiev regime. The ruling class in Germany is using the war to justify the greatest rearmament since Hitler, to transform the Bundeswehr into a "war-ready" army and to align the whole of society for confrontation against Russia. At the same time, democratic rights are being attacked, opponents of war are being slandered and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, are being targeted by the Verfassungsschutz (Germany's domestic intelligence service).

The historical dimension is unmistakable. Eighty years after Germany's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, German imperialism is once again advancing eastward. In Ukraine, it relies on a regime that rehabilitates Nazi collaborators, destroys Red Army monuments and erases the memory of the common struggle of the Soviet peoples against Hitler's Germany. Bogdan's writings on the crimes of the Bandera followers and the glorification of the Waffen-SS Division Galicia are therefore not merely historical studies. They are a political warning. The falsification of history serves the preparation of new crimes.

The fight for Bogdan's freedom is therefore a central component of the struggle against imperialism, genocide and fascism. The attacks on democratic rights in Ukraine, the suppression of protests against the genocide in Gaza, the persecution of migrants and opponents of war in the United States and Europe, the build-up of police and intelligence agencies and the promotion of far-right forces are not separate developments. They arise from the same crisis of the capitalist system, which is once again driving the ruling classes toward war and dictatorship.

This book is therefore not a document for passive reading. It is a weapon in the political struggle. Every reader should study the case of Bogdan, but not stop there. Bogdan can be freed only through an international mass campaign that mobilizes workers, youth, students, artists and critical intellectuals. The petition for his release must be circulated. Meetings must be organized, resolutions adopted, and co-workers, classmates, fellow students, friends and family members informed. This book must circulate in workplaces, schools, universities and neighborhoods and become the starting point for political discussions on war, fascism and socialism.

Bogdan is in prison because he fights for a truth that the ruling classes fear: that workers in Ukraine and Russia are not enemies; that the war is not being fought in the interests of the working population; that the alternative to imperialist barbarism is not national chauvinism, but international socialist revolution.

His freedom will not be won through appeals to the governments that are waging and supporting this war. It can be won only through the conscious mobilization of the international working class. In this sense, the fight for Bogdan Syrotiuk is a test for all those who oppose war and dictatorship. It is a call to action.

Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!

Stop the Ukraine war!

For the unity of the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class!

Build the International Committee of the Fourth International!

Johannes Stern

Berlin, June 9, 2026

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