

The sentencing of Bogdan Syrotiuk and the fraud of the “war for democracy” in Ukraine

WSWS Editorial Board
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On August 10, a court in the city of Pervomaisk in southern Ukraine sentenced Bogdan Syrotiuk—a 27-year-old socialist and leader of the Trotskyist Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists—to 15 years in prison for “high treason,” for calling for the international unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against war.

Bogdan has been convicted of a thought crime, in a ruling that blatantly violates international human rights law and the European Convention on Human Rights. The charge rested on the antiwar articles Bogdan published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and on his opposition to the Ukrainian government’s glorification of Nazi collaborators.

The very statements cited in the ruling make clear that he was an opponent of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and called on workers and young people in both Russia and Ukraine to oppose it. The verdict also cites his “comparisons with fascists and Nazis” and his “reinterpretation of national heroes and historical figures”—explicitly citing as evidence his denunciation of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose movement participated in the Holocaust.

The savage treatment of Bogdan and the kangaroo-court character of the proceedings explode the official narrative that has dominated the governments and media of the United States and Europe: that Ukraine is an embattled democracy, fighting to defend freedom against an unprovoked invasion. The prosecution of Bogdan exemplifies the real state of affairs in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian state has outlawed left-wing politics and suppressed all independent political and trade union activity. In March 2022, the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky suspended 11 opposition parties and merged the major national television channels’ news into a single state-run broadcast, and that June the courts banned the largest opposition party in parliament. Strikes are prohibited under martial law, and

wartime labor legislation has suspended collective agreements and stripped basic protections from the majority of the workforce. Elections have been suspended since Zelensky’s own term expired on May 20, 2024. He rules by decree.

All of this is systematically suppressed in the American and European media. In the interests of promoting the war, a fascistic government is palmed off as a paragon of democracy. Predictably, the sentencing of Bogdan Syrotiuk has not been reported in a single capitalist publication.

On the very day of the sentencing, however, the *New York Times*—among the most ferociously pro-war publications—carried an extensive report on the suppression of antiwar opposition in Russia. Russia’s Supreme Court, in a hearing convened one working day after the suit was filed, had struck the liberal bourgeois party Yabloko from the ballot for the September parliamentary elections, ruling on a lawsuit—nominally over copyright infringement—brought by the nationalist party Rodina. The report ran under the headline “Russian Court Bars Country’s Only Antiwar Party From Running for Parliament.”

The ruling, the *Times* wrote, was “the latest sign that the Kremlin will not tolerate any political forces that question its determination to continue fighting in Ukraine.” It noted that Yabloko’s deputy chairman, Maxim Kruglov, was sentenced in June to seven years in prison for a 2022 social media post about Russian atrocities outside Kiev, and that statements condemning the invasion “have landed hundreds of Russians in prison on criminal charges linked to war censorship laws.”

The Russian government is, without question, authoritarian, and the barring of Yabloko is an attack on democratic rights. But the repression the *Times* denounces in Russia does not remotely compare to that in Ukraine, about which it is silent. In Russia, a liberal party has been

struck from the ballot; in Ukraine, every left-wing party has been banned outright—and there is no ballot at all, because elections themselves have been abolished.

In response to the article and the media's silence on Bogdan's case, David North, chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board, wrote on Tuesday to Philip Pan, the *Times*' international editor, urging the newspaper to cover the case:

Ms. Vasilyeva's article treats the exclusion of Yabloko from an election as significant evidence of the Russian government's suppression of antiwar opposition. It also reports that Yabloko deputy chairman Maxim Kruglov was sentenced in June to seven years in prison over a 2022 social media post criticizing Russian war crimes.

Yet, as of this writing, I have seen no report in the *Times* that a Ukrainian socialist who opposes the war has now received a 15-year prison sentence—more than twice the sentence imposed on Kruglov.

There can be no credible basis for presenting Bogdan's socialist opposition to the war as support for Vladimir Putin. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International denounced the Russian invasion immediately after it began. On February 24, 2022, we stated explicitly that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine must be opposed by socialists and class-conscious workers."

... The issue I am raising with the *Times* does not depend upon agreement with our political analysis of the war. It concerns the consistent application of the principles of democratic rights and freedom of political expression. ... If the suppression of antiwar political activity in Russia warrants extensive reporting—and it certainly does—then the sentencing of a Ukrainian socialist to 15 years in prison for activities that include publishing antiwar articles warrants no less serious scrutiny.

"I urge the *Times*," North concluded, "to investigate Bogdan Syrotiuk's prosecution and sentencing and report the facts of his case to its readers."

As of this writing, the *Times* has not responded, and no report on Bogdan's case has appeared.

The *Times* is not alone in its silence. A search of the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the BBC, CNN, Reuters, the Associated Press and Agence France-Presse turns up no report on the verdict, the trial or the arrest. Not one major Western news outlet has reported the case.

Throughout more than four years of war, the American and European media have continuously suppressed information about political repression in Ukraine. The silence has a definite function. It protects the basic lie upon which public support for the war has been constructed: that this is a war for democracy, waged in defense of democratic rights.

The case of Bogdan Syrotiuk proves the opposite. That is why it has been suppressed—and why the suppression must be defeated. The wall of silence must be broken, and all workers, young people, artists and intellectuals must take a stand against this prosecution.

The verdict against Bogdan has not entered into legal force. His defense will appeal; under Ukrainian law the appeal must be filed within 30 days. The European Court of Human Rights had already accepted his case in the spring of 2025.

The fight for Bogdan's freedom enters its decisive stage—and it can be won. We call on workers, young people, journalists, scientists, artists and all defenders of democratic rights to expand the international campaign for his freedom—now, while the appeal is being prepared.

Distribute this statement and the previous statement, "Fascist Ukrainian court sentences Bogdan Syrotiuk, socialist opponent of war, to 15 years in prison," as broadly as possible—among co-workers, classmates and friends, and on social media.

Send statements demanding the overturning of the verdict and Bogdan's immediate release to the Pervomaisk City District Court at inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua, with copies to the *World Socialist Web Site* at freebogdan@wsws.org.



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