Opposition mounts worldwide against 15-year sentence for Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

Andre Damon
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Opposition is growing around the world against the imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old socialist sentenced by a Ukrainian court to 15 years in prison for "high treason," for writing that Russian and Ukrainian workers should unite against the war and for opposing the official glorification of Nazi collaborators.

Workers, academics and public intellectuals on four continents have signed the petition demanding his freedom or sent letters of protest to the Pervomaisk City District Court, which handed down the verdict.

Over the past several days, hundreds of people throughout the world have signed the petition demanding his freedom, which has received more than 5,700 signatures since its publication.

The signers since the verdict come from the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Spain, France, Austria, Ireland, Finland, Turkey, Belgium, Sweden, Portugal, India, China, Taiwan, Poland, Norway, Denmark, South Korea, Romania, the Netherlands, Lithuania, the Philippines, Brazil, Croatia, Switzerland, Peru—and Ukraine itself.

The prosecution's case rested entirely on Bogdan's articles—which oppose both the Russian invasion and the US-NATO proxy war—and his messages with WSWS editors. The court ordered Bogdan's property seized and the literature of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, which he led, destroyed.

Bogdan has been imprisoned since April 25, 2024, when the Security Service of Ukraine arrested him and declared him a Russian agent, a claim the state never substantiated.

Mario Kessler, a historian of communism and senior fellow at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, sent a letter of protest Wednesday. "I, Professor Dr. Mario Kessler, historian in Berlin, hereby strongly protest the Pervomaisk court's conviction of Mr. Bogdan Syrotiuk," the letter begins. Further on, Kessler wrote:

> Must I remind you that Leon Trotsky, as People's Commissar for Defense, ensured the formation of the Red Army, which was able to curb the mass murder of Ukrainian Jews during the civil war? Must I also remind you that in 1939, Trotsky vehemently condemned the partition of Western Ukraine between Germany and the Soviet Union and advocated for an Ukraine independent of the Soviet Union—including Stalin's Soviet Union? How does this fit with the accusation that Mr. Syrotiuk, a self-proclaimed socialist and Trotskyist, is playing along with Putin's game?

Marta Havryshko, a Ukrainian historian of the Holocaust who teaches at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, circulated the WSWS's account of the verdict on X Wednesday morning under her own heading: "Political repressions in Ukraine under Zelensky." The post drew more than 10,000 views and 500 "likes" within hours.

Kerby Miller, emeritus professor at the University of Missouri and eminent historian on Irish emigration, wrote to the court:

> I fully support the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a courageous opponent of tyranny, regardless of its origins. The cruel, unjust, and excessive sentence, imposed on him by the Ukrainian court, makes a mockery of claims that Ukraine is struggling for "freedom" and "democracy." I urge you to pardon and liberate him immediately, if not on grounds of justice and compassion (his health is very poor), then to help convince Ukraine's potential supporters that your country is not, as often charged, merely a Nazified tool of US imperialism.

William Briggs, a political economist affiliated with Deakin University in Geelong, Australia and the author of *Classical Marxism in an Age of Capitalist Crisis*, wrote that he had followed the case since Bogdan's arrest and wished to add his

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voice “to the global protest against what was clearly a ‘show trial.’” He wrote:

> His “crime” is that he resolutely stands against the war. This has been twisted to mean that he was supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine. His was not a call for this or that country to prevail, but for a unity of the working people across national boundaries. His position was a principled Marxist position, and for that he is to be locked away for 15 years.

“It is hard to be accused of failing to recognise ‘democratic processes,’” Briggs added, “when they have been shut down.”

Bruce Allen, a paralegal in St. Catharines, Ontario, told the court: “The persecution of him is what could be expected in Putin’s Russia. It shows you are no better than Putin.”

On Thursday, Pungolo Rosso, the blog of Italy’s Revolutionary Internationalist Tendency, republished the WSWS statement in Italian, writing that despite “the profound differences we have with the Socialist Equality Party, it is our elementary duty as internationalists to express full solidarity and support for comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk.”

“As a retired Environmental Chemist and Sprinkler Mechanic from Melbourne, Australia, I demand the immediate dropping of all charges against Bogdan Syrotiuk by the fascist backed Zelenski regime,” wrote Steven Pollock on the petition Tuesday.

“An injury to one is an injury to all!” wrote Daniel Berkley of Canada on Wednesday.

“It is fascistic to imprison someone (for 15 years!!!) simply for exercising freedom of press,” wrote Yelena Baishanski from France on Wednesday night, adding that it was “unbelievably ironic he should have been sentenced for ‘comparisons to fascism.’”

Stephen Parsons from Denmark on Thursday morning, “The draconian sentence against Bogdan Syrotiuk is a direct attack on socialist internationalism and the struggle to unify the working class across borders in the fight against war. It bears comparison to the imprisonment of Rosa Luxemburg by the German authorities during the First World War. As with Luxemburg’s fate, it makes a farce of talk about the war as having anything to do with defending democracy.”

On Monday, the day of the verdict, John Woodford, former executive editor of *Michigan Today*, wrote on the petition: “We in the USA can regularly read about a Ukrainian in Russian custody but our news media reports virtually nothing about Syrotjuk and other Ukrainians who have been jailed, or worse, because they oppose and publicly denounce their country’s leaders...”

Workers, young people, professionals and retirees have written in English, German, Turkish, Portuguese, Spanish and other languages. A signer in Berne, Switzerland set out three demands: that the verdict be overturned and Bogdan released immediately, that the European Court of Human Rights expedite its review of his case, and that all political prisoners held by the Ukrainian state be freed. A signer in Porto wrote in Portuguese that if Bogdan cannot express his ideas publicly, “then the Ukrainian system is an oppressive and fascist system.” A Turkish-speaking signer in Germany wrote that the withholding of medical care from a gravely ill prisoner “is effectively transforming this sentence into a death sentence.”

An Australian signer demanded not only Bogdan’s release but the restoration of his property and compensation for the years of wrongful imprisonment. For some, the case has shaken confidence in everything they have been told: “It makes me wonder why,” wrote a signer in County Wicklow, Ireland. “It makes me feel we have not been told the full truth about this war in Ukraine.” A worker in Sri Lanka wrote, “The nature of the repression that the workers and oppressed people of Sri Lanka are now facing makes it clear that this is not a situation limited to Ukraine. This is the situation all over the world.”

The letters and signatures have accumulated against silence in the Western press. In the 27 months since Bogdan’s arrest, none of the following publications has devoted a single line to his case: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Times of London*, *The Economist*, the BBC, CNN, NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox News and Politico; and the wire services Agence France-Presse, the Associated Press and Reuters.

On the day of the sentencing, the *Washington Post* published two articles on the ruling of Russia’s Supreme Court barring the Yabloko party from September’s parliamentary elections; it has never published a word about Bogdan. David North, who chairs the WSWS International Editorial Board, wrote Tuesday to the *New York Times’* international editor, Philip Pan, asking the paper to report Bogdan’s case. No reply has come.

Bogdan’s defense has 30 days from the verdict to appeal. A complaint over his detention has been pending at the European Court of Human Rights since spring 2025.

The WSWS has called on workers, young people, journalists, scientists, artists and all defenders of democratic rights to distribute its statements on Bogdan’s case 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 WSWS at freebogdan@wsws.org.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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