Johannes Stern on RT: Bogdan Syrotiuk convicted “for socialist thoughts”

Andre Damon
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Johannes Stern, editor-in-chief of the German-language edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, appeared live Friday on RT, the Russian state broadcaster, to discuss the campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, the 27-year-old Ukrainian Trotskyist sentenced to 15 years in prison for his articles opposing the war.

Stern, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei) in Germany, spoke from Berlin in a nine-minute live segment, under the broadcaster’s on-screen banner: “Ukrainian activist sentenced to 15 years for treason after opposing war on Russia.” The kicker above it read “Thought crime,” the phrase Stern used in the interview for what Bogdan was convicted of.

Stern used the opportunity to call for Bogdan’s freedom, an opportunity that not one of the leading news publications in the United States and Europe has offered.

Stern stated the WSWS’s opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine: “We, of course, oppose, as Bogdan did, the Russian invasion. But this was clearly provoked by NATO, and it’s a longstanding strategy to encircle Russia militarily.”

Stern told RT’s viewers that Bogdan

> is a socialist internationalist. He has opposed the Russian intervention. He opposes, of course, the NATO war, the imperialist war against Russia... He has put forward a socialist perspective, has called for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against the war. And that’s his crime. So it’s basically a thought crime. It’s a frame-up. It’s a political case.

“He’s convicted for socialist thoughts, for an internationalist position opposing the war,” Stern said.

The interview carried the case to an international television audience four days after the Pervomaisk City District Court in Ukraine’s Nikolaev region handed down the sentence. The leading Western newspapers, broadcasters and wire services—from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to the BBC, CNN, Reuters and the Associated Press—have not reported the verdict, or the case at any stage since his arrest in April 2024.

Monday’s verdict, handed down for “high treason ... under martial law,” stripped Bogdan of his property and his electronics, and ordered the socialist books and papers confiscated from him destroyed. The Security Service of Ukraine seized him on April 25, 2024, announcing that he worked for Moscow; he has been in custody ever since.

“There was no evidence produced,” Stern said.

The accusation that Bogdan spied for Russia or passed military secrets to Moscow, he told the interviewer, “is, of course, a lie.”

For more than a year Bogdan’s jailers have denied him the medical care he urgently needs. “Bogdan’s health was already bad when he was imprisoned... a 15-year prison sentence in Ukraine, given the horrific conditions in Ukrainian prisons... is really threatening his life,” Stern said.

Asked about the appeal his lawyers are preparing, Stern said the European Court of Human Rights has also taken up the case. The court accepted a complaint over Bogdan’s detention in the spring of 2025.

“But we have no illusions in the courts, given the character of the Ukrainian regime and the sentence which was just handed down on Bogdan,” Stern said. “It was a fascist court.”

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The main issue," Stern said, "is to build a powerful international defense campaign."

Stern also spoke about the state glorification of far-right forces in Ukraine, including Stepan Bandera, who led the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and whose forces joined the Nazi occupation in the mass killing of Jews and Poles.

> [Bogdan] has written extensively about the role of Bandera, the SS Division Galicia, the OUN, other Nazi collaborators in the Second World War, and has exposed the crimes of these forces against Jewish people, against the Ukrainian people, and, of course, as participants in the war of annihilation waged by Hitler against the Soviet Union, which killed at least 27 million people.

Stern said the rehabilitation of these "so-called national heroes" is the policy of the Zelensky government, and the courts are acting on its behalf.

Asked about the banning of the WSWS in Ukraine—Kiev blocked the site in June 2024, six weeks into Bogdan's imprisonment—Stern replied that the ban is one of many. "Basically all left parties are now banned in Ukraine," he said, and some 20,000 criminal cases have been opened "under the claim of treason."

Ukraine's Prosecutor General had opened 22,814 criminal investigations in conflict-related cases as of September 2025, 10,218 of them for "collaborationism," according to figures published by the United Nations Human Rights Office.

"Everyone who is opposing the rehabilitation of Nazi forces, who is opposing the NATO war against Russia, is seen as a criminal," Stern said.

Stern told the interviewer that the persecution of Bogdan exposes "the whole fraud that NATO is defending democracy":

> Here, I must say, I'm speaking from Berlin. There's really no coverage on this case, because it would, of course, explode the whole official propaganda narrative that the German government, the European Union, the NATO powers are waging a war for democracy and freedom.

Speaking of the German ruling class, Stern said: "They tried two times in the 20th century to conquer Russia and wage war for plunder in the East. And that's the third time."

The petition demanding Bogdan's freedom, posted at wsws.org/freebogdan, stood at 5,779 signatures on Friday. Since the verdict, signers in 33 countries—more than 300 people—have added their names, and historians, political economists and retired workers have written directly to the Pervomaisk court demanding that the conviction be thrown out.

Mehring Verlag, the German socialist publishing house, published a book on the case in July, edited by Stern. Translations into English and other languages are in preparation.

Stern closed the interview with a direct appeal:

> Bogdan's freedom depends on building the broadest possible international campaign. Please protest his conviction. Demand that the verdict be overturned, and that he be released immediately... Bogdan has committed no crime. He's a socialist. He's an opponent of war, who has been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for political convictions. And his life is in danger. And we appeal to everyone who defends democratic rights. Help us to win his freedom.

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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