Historians, doctors and workers on five continents demand freedom for jailed Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

Andre Damon
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Opposition to the imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk continued to build over the weekend, six days after a Ukrainian court gave the 27-year-old socialist 15 years in prison for calling for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against the war.

The petition demanding his release passed 6,000 signatures. Nearly 500 people in more than 40 countries on five continents have added their names since the verdict, and letters have gone straight to the judges in Pervomaisk from historians, doctors, teachers and retired workers, each demanding that the sentence be thrown out.

Since Thursday the court has heard from a distinguished professor of history in Texas, a historian of Soviet agriculture in West Virginia, an anthropologist at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and a doctor writing from Sri Lanka. Letters came as well from a retired teacher in Australia, a reader who signed as a retired civil servant in Britain and others in France, Turkey and the United States.

Victoria Bynum, distinguished professor of history emerita at Texas State University and author of *The Free State of Jones*, wrote:

> As a historian and Distinguished Professor Emeritus, I am outraged to learn that Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for expressing his political views in historical critiques published by the World Socialist Web Site. I implore the Pervomaisk City District Court to reverse this sentence and grant Mr. Syrotiuk his due rights of free speech.

Mark B. Tauger, professor emeritus of history at West Virginia University and a historian of Soviet agriculture, wrote that Bogdan "did nothing wrong by expressing opposition to the insane Russian-Ukrainian war," and that sentencing him "is first of all a gross violation of his civil rights and human rights."

"As many previous people have commented, this action resembles Russia's suppression of opponents of the war, which makes me have second thoughts about supporting Ukraine in this conflict," Tauger wrote. "...Syrotiuk's views reflect those of many Ukrainians, and they should not be suppressed and he should not be imprisoned for expressing them."

Miha Kozorog, senior research associate at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and associate professor of anthropology at the University of Ljubljana, wrote:

> It is with concern and anger that I am following the erosion of democracy in Ukraine, and the verdict against Bogdan Syrotiuk—which I am monitoring through the Committee to Free Bogdan—is a major nail in the coffin of democracy and further proof to the world of what sort of country Ukraine is becoming. As a fellow human being, I implore you: overturn the verdict and set Bogdan free.

K.T. Dhammika, who wrote to the court on Saturday as a medical doctor at Kandy Hospital in Sri Lanka, said the order to destroy Bogdan's socialist books, leaflets and documents "reveals the political character of this verdict. These are the methods of fascism, not of a state that claims to be defending democracy." He added:

> As a physician, I regard the deliberate withholding of medical treatment from a prisoner as a grave violation of human rights and a direct threat to his life. A 15-year sentence under such conditions amounts to a death sentence.

Ukraine's security service arrested Bogdan on April 25, 2024, and has held him ever since—more than 27 months. For over a year the prison has withheld the treatment his condition requires.

No spying and no sabotage were shown at trial. What the state entered in evidence were his articles—which oppose Putin's invasion and the NATO powers arming Kiev alike, and call on the workers of both countries to unite against the war—and the messages Bogdan exchanged with the editors who printed them.

Adnan Çelik, writing from Turkey in both Ukrainian and English, pointed the court to its own repeated invocation of the

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“socially dangerous consequences” of Bogdan’s views and wrote: “This reveals that the prosecution against Bogdan is not related to the issue of support for Russia, which is a fabricated pretext.”

He asked the court to quash the sentence and free Bogdan, to have the European Court of Human Rights take up the case without delay and to release every political prisoner in Ukraine’s jails.

Tim Pearson wrote to the court: “The state’s experts examined 14 of Bogdan’s writings and included seven in the indictment. The court was then forced to drop one of the seven—an article on the military commissariats’ violent seizure of draft dodgers—after its own forensic commission could find nothing criminal in it. Therefore, Bogdan has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for writing six articles.”

Riley Ward, writing from Michigan, quoted Article 34 of Ukraine’s own constitution—”Everyone is guaranteed the right to freedom of thought and speech, and to the free expression of his or her views and beliefs”—and added: “To be clear, I do not support the Putin regime or its reactionary invasion. The war... needs to end, but only workers uniting across borders will bring this about.”

Frank Gaglioti, a retired teacher in Australia, wrote that “the prisons are full of Zelensky and his regimes opponents’ who are living under the most barbaric conditions. As Bogdan is very unwell, his sentence amounts to subjecting him to conditions of torture where he is being denied the most basic health care.”

The petition drew the signature Saturday of Grzegorz Rossoli?ski-Liebe, the Berlin historian whose 2014 biography, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist*, traces the wartime collaborator’s transformation into a Ukrainian national hero. The verdict counts “reinterpretation of national heroes and historical figures” among Bogdan’s offenses.

Jeremy Kuzmarov, managing editor of CovertAction Magazine, who reported Bogdan’s arrest in May 2024, signed Friday. Roger Waters, the co-founder of Pink Floyd, signed again on Saturday, writing “Free Bogdan.”

A signer from Russia wrote Sunday, in Russian: “Bogdan Syrotiuk said only what the majority of Ukrainians think. For that he got 15 years in prison. And this is called democracy in Ukraine?”

“Having a different opinion about things than your government is not treason,” wrote Cezar Turcanu of Romania on Sunday, one of 18 signatures from that country since the verdict.

Signatures since the verdict came in the largest numbers from the United States, Britain, Australia, Germany and Canada, then Romania, Italy, Sri Lanka, Ireland, New Zealand and France. Smaller numbers came from 30 other countries, among them Ukraine, Russia, China, India, Turkey, Brazil, Peru and the Philippines.

The German daily *Junge Welt* reported the sentence Saturday under the headline “Hochverrat unter Kriegsrecht”—”High treason under martial law.” On Sunday the Hungarian left-wing news site Pólus published an article headlined “Gondolatb?n Ukrajnában,” “Thought crime in Ukraine,” and the Russian-language independent site SVTV reported the case the same day.

The journalist Aaron Maté, who hosts *Pushback* on the Grayzone, wrote on X Saturday: “Both Russia and Ukraine have persecuted anti-war activists. Boris Kagarlitsky, one of Russia’s top leftist intellectuals, is serving a five-year sentence for criticizing the invasion of Ukraine. Kyiv’s crackdown on Ukrainian dissidents gets far less Western attention. Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk has just been sentenced to 15 years in prison for ‘high treason’ for writing six articles in @WSWS_Updates critical of the Zelensky government.”

As of Sunday, neither Reuters, the Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, CNN, the BBC, the Washington Post nor the New York Times had published a word on the case. Neither had Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists nor PEN International.

On RT Friday, the Russian state broadcaster’s international audience heard the case argued by Johannes Stern, who edits the *World Socialist Web Site’s* German edition. Bogdan, he said, had been “convicted for socialist thoughts, for an internationalist position opposing the war.”

Bogdan’s lawyers must file their appeal within 30 days of the August 10 ruling, and the European Court of Human Rights has had a complaint over his detention before it since the spring of 2025. Every letter to the court and every signature on the petition strengthens that appeal.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges its readers—in workplaces, on campuses, in newsrooms, laboratories and studios—to add their names at wsws.org/freebogdan, to circulate the petition.

Write to the Pervomaisk City District Court at inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua and the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal at inbox@mka.court.gov.ua, with a copy to freebogdan@wsws.org, demanding that the sentence be thrown out and Bogdan freed at once.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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