

California academics and socialist groups in Russia, France and Turkey demand freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk

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More than two weeks since his sentencing and just 13 days before his appeal deadline, global support has continued to grow for Bogdan Syrotiuk, the young Ukrainian socialist imprisoned for opposing the war. Since Saturday, a group of some 200 California academics has written to the Ukrainian courts demanding his release, socialist organizations in Russia and Turkey have issued statements, and left-wing publications in Germany, France and Turkey have taken up his case, along with a Mexican Trotskyist group.

A court in the southern Ukrainian city of Pervomaisk sentenced Syrotiuk, who is 27, to 15 years in prison on August 10. It punished him for his socialist opposition to the war and his appeals to Ukrainian and Russian workers to refuse to kill each other, entering his published writing as evidence.

Over the past week 520 people in 57 countries—Russia, Kenya, Nigeria and El Salvador among them—have signed the English-language petition for his freedom, bringing the signers through that form since his conviction on August 10 to more than 1,400.

California Scholars for Academic Freedom, which describes itself on its website as “a group of some 200 academics who teach in 20 California institutions,” wrote to the Pervomaisk City District Court and the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal asking them to set the sentence aside.

The group formed in response to the attacks on academic freedom that followed September 11, 2001, many of them aimed at scholars of Arab, Muslim or Middle Eastern descent.

“The charge of ‘high treason under martial law’ is a political fabrication,” the scholars wrote. “He was

sentenced for a ‘thought crime.’ Please adhere to democratic principles and free Mr. Syrotiuk.”

The group, whose stated principle is that “violations of academic freedom anywhere are threats to academic freedom everywhere,” is co-chaired by Stephen Roddy, a professor of Asian studies at the University of San Francisco, and Sang Hea Kil, a professor of justice studies at San Jose State University. Its members include the historian Mark LeVine of the University of California, Irvine and the emeritus sociologist Howard Winant of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

A new statement has come from inside Russia, where opposition to the war is likewise prosecuted. The Communist Workers Party wrote on its Telegram channel August 24 that Bogdan “took communist and internationalist positions, criticized Russian imperialism, the Zelensky regime and Ukrainian nationalism” and “called for unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers” (translated from the Russian).

In Mexico, the Liga Comunista Internacionalista wrote Tuesday on its website that the war and repression “intensify on both sides of the front,” placing Bogdan’s sentencing alongside the Russian Supreme Court’s ruling, issued the same day, barring the anti-war Yabloko party from elections.

“His crime?” the site wrote. “Mere writings against the war, which for the court—without presenting, evidently, the slightest proof—make him a supposed ‘Russian agent’” (translated from the Spanish).

In Germany, Klasse Gegen Klasse, the paper of the Revolutionary Internationalist Organization, wrote Saturday that with “the conditions in Ukrainian prisons and the denial of medical care, this amounts to a near death sentence” (translated from the German).

In France, *Révolution Permanente* wrote that the case against Bogdan rests on articles in which he “denounced the forced mobilization of Ukrainian men, condemned the official rehabilitation of the antisemitic collaborator Stepan Bandera, and called for unity between the Ukrainian and Russian working classes, while opposing Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine” (translated from the French).

Its announcement to its 97,800 followers on X has been viewed more than 3,600 times. Both are papers of sections of the international tendency that publishes *La Izquierda Diario*.

In Turkey, the Socialist Party of Turkey declared Thursday: “Socialist thought is not a crime. Opposing war is not a crime. Let Bogdan Syrotiuk be freed!” (translated from the Turkish).

Muzir.org, a Turkish digital outlet that describes itself as practicing rights-based journalism, reported the case the same day on its website and Instagram account.

The Bolshevik Tendency, a Trotskyist group that broke from the international Spartacist tendency, wrote to both Ukrainian courts on August 24: “It is not a crime to criticize the government of Ukraine. It is not a crime to tell the truth about the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists of Stepan Bandera. It is not a crime to oppose the war of Ukraine/NATO against Russia.”

Individual letters continue to arrive alongside the organizational statements. More than a dozen reached the courts and the campaign in the four days through August 26, from writers who identify themselves as a public school teacher in Sri Lanka, a student in Switzerland, a conservation worker in Australia and a university worker in Piliyandala, Sri Lanka, among others.

“It is also a terrible irony,” wrote Jonathan Hall, “that the Court of a City named after International Labour Day (First of May-Pervomaisk) is persecuting a citizen for remaining faithful to the principles for which it is named.”

“As a young person in Europe,” wrote Lalitha Hettipathira, a student in Switzerland, “I am deeply disturbed that a 27-year-old can receive a 15-year prison sentence for expressing anti-war political opinions.”

Support continues to build among workers. In a Facebook group of Unite union members in Greater

Manchester, England, a member wrote that “our branch supported the petition demanding the release of Bogdan,” calling his sentence “an attack on working class anti-war internationalism.”

The statement Britain’s Stop the War Coalition issued Tuesday, which called on Prime Minister Andy Burnham to demand Bogdan’s release, has been viewed more than 5,300 times on X, and the coalition’s Facebook post has been shared more than 100 times.

The August 19 Instagram post by the British left-wing account Fight For A Future, which has some 780,000 followers, has reached 40,000 likes, and the August 20 post by MintPress News stands at more than 7,700.

Despite the growing support for Bogdan, the media blackout continues. Seventeen days after the sentencing, neither the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the BBC nor any mainstream US or European newspaper or wire service has printed a word on the case.

Workers, students and defenders of democratic rights should sign the petition and give to Bogdan’s legal and medical defense at wsws.org/freebogdan, and should carry his case into their workplaces, schools and unions. September 9 is the last day his appeal can be filed.



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