

Alexander Bahar, other historians of fascism and Ukrainian nationalism, join call to free Bogdan Syrotiuk

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2 September 2026

The call by the *World Socialist Web Site* to oppose the August 10 sentencing of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years for “high treason” is finding a growing response among historians of fascism and Ukraine.

Among those denouncing the sentencing is the German scholar Alexander Bahar. Trained as a political scientist, Bahar co-wrote an important book on the 1933 Reichstag Fire, an event that served as the pretext for a major escalation of the Nazis’ escalating persecution of their political opponents, above all Communists. The book, co-authored with Wilfried Krugel, was published in 2001 in German, under the title *Der Reichstagbrand - Wie Geschichte gemacht wird* (*The Reichstag Fire - How History is Created*), by publishing house Edition q.

Bahar’s letter to the Ukrainian courts reads:

To the Pervomaisk City District Court
To the Mykolaiv Court of Appeals
Honorable Court,

It was with horror that I learned of the sentencing of the socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years in prison by a Ukrainian court. Bogdan Syrotiuk was essentially convicted because of six articles he wrote for the World Socialist Website, in which he called for solidarity between Ukrainian and Russian workers and youth against the war.

Fifteen years in prison for daring to exercise his right to freedom of expression—a right enshrined in the Ukrainian Constitution—to speak out against the bloodiest slaughter on

European soil since the end of World War II. Fifteen years in prison for calling on the working people of Ukraine and Russia to join forces in the struggle against this fratricidal war. Even in a country at war, this sentence lacks any sense of proportionality and casts a strange light on the democratic values and the rule of law that the Ukrainian state claims to uphold.

As a citizen of a country that made this war possible and continues to support it financially and militarily without restriction “as long as necessary,” I feel a special responsibility toward the people in Ukraine and Russia who are falling victim to this war.

Even though I do not share all of Bogdan Syrotiuk’s views, I have respect and admiration for his anti-militarist stance and his resolute opposition to the war. The war against Russia is not in the interest of the Ukrainian people. It is a proxy war instigated by powers that are not friends of the Ukrainian people, but rather use Ukraine and its population as tools to pursue their own hegemonic interests.

Those who speak out against this war are not doing Russia’s bidding; Bogdan Syrotiuk has condemned Russia’s military invasion just as he has condemned the Ukrainian actions that led to this war and serve to prolong it. On the contrary: He is acting in the interest of all humanity. With this in mind, I urge you: Overturn the verdict against Bogdan Syrotiuk and release him immediately and unconditionally!

Sincerely,

Dr. Alexander Bahar
Historian and Author
Heilbronn (Germany)

The case has struck a particular chord among historians of Ukrainian nationalism, many of whom have long been the subject of attacks by the Ukrainian right. Central in the ruling by the Pervomaisk District Court against Syrotiuk were two articles: One documenting the crimes of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists against the Jewish, Ukrainian and Polish peoples, and the other describing the glorification of the Nazi collaborators from the Waffen SS Galicia division on Ukrainian television. These articles, according to the court, constituted a “reinterpretation of national heroes and historical figures” and were cited as key evidence for his alleged high treason.

Several leading historians of the crimes of the Ukrainian nationalist movement have now signed the petition calling for his release or written to the Ukrainian court. These include Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, historian at the Free University in Berlin and author of an important biography of the Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera.

Last week, John-Paul Himka, professor emeritus at the University of Alberta in Canada, wrote a letter to the Ukrainian court, condemning Bogdan’s sentencing and the “official cult of Holocaust perpetrators and ethnic cleansers” in Ukraine. Himka has authored several of the most comprehensive historical studies of the crimes of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, most recently in the book, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA’s Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941-1944*, published by the German ibidem Verlag.

Since Himka’s statement, another leading authority on the history of Ukrainian nationalism, Per Anders Rudling, also signed the petition. Rudling is Associate Professor of History at the University of Lund in Sweden.

In his research, Rudling has examined the glorification of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in contemporary Ukraine, especially since the so-called “Orange Revolution” of 2004, which brought to power the Western-backed Viktor

Yushchenko. Much of this research was summarized in his most recent book *Tarnished Heroes: The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in the Memory Politics of Post-Soviet Ukraine*, which was published by the ibidem Verlag in Germany in 2024. He is also the author of the award-winning *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931*, published in 2014 by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Explaining why he signed the petition to the WSWS, Rudling stated, “This is an outrage, and I sign in solidarity and out of principle. Syrotiuk has done nothing wrong and should not be in jail.”

Other noted historians calling for Syrotiuk’s release include Professor Mario Kessler, senior researcher at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, and a leading authority on Jewish history and the history of the German workers’ movement; and Christian Gerlach, Professor of History at the University of Bern in Switzerland, and one of the foremost experts on the history of the Nazi war against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust.

The sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko from the Free University in Berlin and the Holocaust scholar Marta Havryshko, a Visiting Assistant Professor at Clark University, have expressed their opposition to the sentencing of Bogdan Syrotiuk on Twitter/X.

Bogdan’s defense lawyers will have to file for an appeal by September 9. We call on all readers to sign and circulate the petition calling for his release, and send letters to the Pervomaisk City District Court (inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua) and the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal (inbox@mka.court.gov.ua), copying freebogdan@wsws.org.

We also urge all supporters of democratic rights and opponents of war to make as substantial a donation as possible to support the campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact