

Professor Mark Steinberg, leading scholar of Soviet and Russian history, submits letter in defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk

Mark Steinberg
4 September 2026

The World Socialist Web Site has received the following letter in defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk from Mark D. Steinberg, a leading scholar of Soviet and Russian history, Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, who previously taught at Harvard University and Yale University. A former editor of Slavic Review and director of Illinois's Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, Steinberg is the author or coauthor of The Fall of the Romanovs, Voices of Revolution, 1917, Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925, The Russian Revolution, 1905–1921, and the widely used textbook A History of Russia.

To the Pervomaisk City District Court:

Forgive me writing in English as my Ukrainian is still underdeveloped. Having read the verdict against Bogdan Syrotiuk, convicted of treason against Ukraine, I would like to express my dismay and disappointment at the court's action and at its legal and political logic. I write as a historian of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine and as an opponent of Putin's regime and the Russian war against Ukraine (such that I have been placed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a "stop-list" of scholars deemed "Russophobic" and banned from entry into the Russian Federation).

Sadly, the logic of your verdict, though perhaps technically allowable according to Article 111 of the Criminal Code (I am not a legal expert) is a mirror image of the political approach toward dissent by the Putin regime, which has branded Russian critics of the regime and the war as "foreign agents," as members of "undesirable organizations," or as treasonous, arresting and sentencing many to prison and forcing many others

to flee the country.

I am not affiliated with the *World Socialist Web Site* or the Socialist Equality Party, nor do I endorse all their positions. But I cannot be silent when a country where I have lived (as a researcher) and care greatly about treats a person's writings and opinions as sedition or treason. This has all the signs of a "thought crime" that does not call for violence. I strongly believe that ideas and opinions and communications of these, when they do not plan violence, has no place in a democratic society—not in the US (where we have our own threats for free thought and speech), not in Russia (which is no longer democratic), and not in Ukraine, which seeks to be a European country embracing European values and legal norms. What I have been able to learn about the case, mostly from the verdict itself – though it was a former student of mine who alerted me to the case – saddens me deeply.

Sincerely,

Mark Steinberg

Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois

Bogdan's defense lawyers are preparing 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