

Speech at the SGP rally “Stop the Ukraine War! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

“The case of Bogdan Syrotiuk shows: War abroad requires repression at home”

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On September 6, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) held a rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate under the slogan “Stop the Ukraine War! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!” The rally was part of the SGP’s campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives election.

At the center of the rally was the fight for the release of 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist and opponent of war Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison on August 10.

Below we publish the speech by Johannes Stern, editor-in-chief of the German-language World Socialist Web Site. The WWS has already published this detailed report on the rally as well as a video of the entire event.

For more information on the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk and to sign the petition demanding his freedom, visit freebogdan.org

Dear comrades, friends and participants in this rally,

We are standing here today in front of the Brandenburg Gate to unite two demands that are inseparably connected: “Stop the war in Ukraine!” and “Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

On August 10, 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist and opponent of war Bogdan Syrotiuk was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Fifteen years! For what? Not for espionage. Not for sabotage. Not for passing on military secrets. Not for any collaboration with the Russian government.

Bogdan was convicted for six political articles published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and for his correspondence with WWS editors. In these articles, he opposed the war. He condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the reactionary Putin regime. At the same time, he opposed NATO and the imperialist powers that are using Ukraine as the battlefield for their war against Russia.

Bogdan opposed Ukrainian nationalism and fascism and the state glorification of Stepan Bandera, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and other forces that collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War.

And above all, Bogdan called on Ukrainian and Russian workers not to slaughter one another, but to unite on the basis of an international socialist perspective against their oligarchs and governments.

That is his real crime. That is the position this verdict is intended to criminalize.

An independent expert assessment by a leading Ukrainian criminologist concluded that Bogdan’s writings contained no propaganda in support of the Putin government. In more than two years of imprisonment and court proceedings, the prosecution was unable to present any evidence that Bogdan was an agent of the Russian government.

Because there is no evidence. Bogdan is a Trotskyist and, as such, an opponent of the NATO imperialists, but also of the Putin regime. Yet the

court nevertheless convicted him of “high treason under martial law.”

It not only sentenced him to 15 years in prison and ordered the confiscation of his property. It also ordered the destruction of the program, brochures and leaflets of his socialist youth organization, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists.

We have to grasp the significance of this. A court orders socialist literature to be destroyed. It punishes a young man for political articles. It declares opposition to war and nationalism to be treason. This is not justice. This is political persecution.

And the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk destroys the entire propaganda with which this war has been justified for years. We are told: NATO is defending “freedom” and “democracy” in Ukraine. But what kind of democracy is this?

Since the beginning of the war, no national elections have taken place. All left-wing opposition parties have been banned. Critical media have been suppressed. The *World Socialist Web Site* was blocked in Ukraine just weeks after Bogdan’s arrest. Hundreds of thousands of young men are being forcibly mobilized and sent to the front. And a socialist receives 15 years in prison because he says that Russian and Ukrainian workers have no interest in killing one another.

That is the truth about the so-called war for democracy. And that is precisely why the major German media are silent about Bogdan’s case.

Just imagine what would happen if a Russian court sentenced a 27-year-old opponent of war to 15 years in prison for political articles. The case would be on every front page. There would be special broadcasts. Government spokesmen would issue statements. Chancellor Merz, Foreign Minister Waidephul and Defense Minister Pistorius would talk about human rights in order to beat the war drum against Russia even more loudly.

But Bogdan? Silence.

And why? The answer is clear. Because reporting on his case would immediately raise the question: What kind of regime is the German government actually financing and arming? And this question leads directly to the real character of the Ukraine war.

This war is not simply a conflict between Russia and Ukraine that Moscow started out of the blue. It is the outcome of a decades-long imperialist offensive following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. NATO was expanded ever further eastward.

In 2014, the United States and Germany supported the overthrow in Kyiv and relied in the process on extreme-right and fascist forces. Since then, Ukraine has been systematically armed and transformed into a military outpost against Russia.

Putin’s reactionary invasion in February 2022 then provided NATO

with the pretext to transform this conflict into an open proxy war against Russia. And by now, the development is moving ever further toward a direct war between NATO and Russia—between nuclear-armed powers.

In recent days, the German government has taken this escalation to a new level. It claims that Russia was responsible for a foiled drone attack at Leipzig Airport and has responded with new punitive measures against Russia. Foreign Minister Wadepuhl and Interior Minister Dobrindt did not present a single piece of publicly verifiable evidence for the alleged Russian responsibility. Nevertheless, Chancellor Merz threatened that Russia would “pay” for it.

Russian institutions are being closed, diplomatic and cultural relations are being further severed, and additional sanctions and military operations against Russian ships are being prepared.

It is significant that the German government announced its escalation precisely on September 1—the day Hitler unleashed the Second World War. The Nazis staged a fake attack on the Gleiwitz radio station to justify the Wehrmacht’s invasion of Poland.

Now the German government is once again resorting to the same methods as it prepares to cross the threshold from a proxy war to an open war against Russia. That is exactly what Dobrindt meant when he said: “We are not at war, but we are the daily target of hybrid warfare.”

Step by step, the German government is creating a situation in which every provocation, every miscalculation and every incident can trigger a direct military confrontation.

The dark historical continuity in which this stands must be stated with absolute clarity, especially here in the center of Berlin. For the third time in modern history, German imperialism is directing its war drive against Russia.

In the First World War, the German Empire sought to bring Eastern Europe and large parts of the then Russian Empire under its control. The second attempt was Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

On June 22, 1941, the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union. That war aimed at conquering vast territories, controlling raw materials, enslavement and extermination. It culminated in the Holocaust, and at least 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives.

Today German tanks and soldiers are once again stationed on Russia’s borders. In Lithuania, Germany is permanently deploying a heavy combat formation abroad for the first time since the Second World War. It is producing long-range weapons for Ukraine. It is rearming on a scale that only a few years ago would have been regarded as completely unthinkable. Conscription is being reintroduced in order to generate the necessary cannon fodder here as well.

The economy is increasingly being converted to war production. Jobs are being destroyed, social spending is being cut, schools and hospitals are decaying—and at the same time ever larger sums are flowing into tanks, missiles and ammunition. Rearmament and social cuts are two sides of the same policy.

The working class is supposed to pay for the war twice: first through falling wages, job cuts and destroyed social infrastructure—and ultimately with its life.

And that is precisely why Bogdan’s case is so significant. Because war abroad requires repression at home. The ruling classes know very well that the overwhelming majority of the population is not voluntarily prepared to sacrifice its living standards and send its children into a war against a nuclear power.

That is why the tendency toward authoritarianism, state repression and fascism is growing everywhere.

Bogdan shows us where this development leads, but his case shows something else as well. It shows the power of an international campaign. Since the verdict, protest letters from more than 30 countries have been sent to the Ukrainian courts. Historians, artists, academics, workers and students are demanding Bogdan’s release.

Workers are also beginning to make Bogdan’s defense their own cause. Just a few days ago, VW workers published a resolution demanding his release—at a time when they themselves are confronted with plant closures and tens of thousands of job losses, while billions are simultaneously being poured into rearmament.

The campaign is clearly beginning to put pressure on the Ukrainian authorities. The Court of Appeal in Mykolaiv responded to the influx of international protest letters by declaring that letters had to be written in Ukrainian. That is remarkable.

For months, the Ukrainian judiciary was able to persecute Bogdan virtually without international public scrutiny. Now the court is receiving so many protest letters that it feels compelled to respond.

And how does it respond? Not by addressing the arguments in any substantive way. Instead, it is trying to choke off the protest with a bureaucratic language requirement.

But this attempt will fail. The protests will continue, and we must fight to make them much larger. Because for Bogdan, this is a matter of life and death. He already had serious health problems when he was arrested. For a long time, he was denied necessary medical treatment. Under the catastrophic conditions of the Ukrainian prison system, a 15-year prison sentence can effectively amount to a death sentence.

That is why we say: Freedom for Bogdan! The verdict must be overturned!

Of course, we place no trust in the Ukrainian courts, the German government or any other imperialist government. Bogdan’s freedom will ultimately not be won through appeals to those who are waging this war. It must be won by the international working class. That is the decisive perspective.

Bogdan has never claimed that the alternative to NATO’s war is support for Putin. On the contrary. He opposes both camps from a socialist and internationalist standpoint.

He says to Russian workers: Your enemy is not the Ukrainian worker. Your enemies are the NATO imperialists, the Russian oligarchy and the Putin regime. And he says to Ukrainian workers: Your enemy is not the Russian worker. You have nothing to gain by dying for Zelensky, the Ukrainian oligarchs, NATO or German and American corporations.

We say here in Germany: Our enemy is not in Moscow. Workers in Germany have no interest in killing Russian workers. They have no interest in billions flowing into weapons while their factories are shut down and their wages and pensions are attacked. They have no interest in a third German war against Russia.

The allies of German workers are the workers in Russia, Ukraine and throughout the world. That is why the central task is to build an international socialist anti-war movement of the working class. Not appeals to the German government. Not the illusion that any capitalist great power can bring peace. But the independent mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system that produces war, nationalism and fascism.

That is also the significance of our campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives election. The Socialist Equality Party is standing in this election to oppose the all-party coalition for rearmament, war and social cuts with a socialist perspective.

We say: Socialism instead of war!

And this slogan is not simply an election slogan. It expresses the fundamental alternative we face. Either the capitalist crisis increasingly intensifies the tendency toward militarism, fascism and world war, or the international working class intervenes in developments and reorganizes society on a socialist basis.

That is why we call on you today: Sign the petition for Bogdan’s freedom! Distribute it! Write to the Court of Appeal—in German, English, Ukrainian or whatever language you choose! Speak about his case in your workplaces, schools and universities! Call on trade unions, works

councils, artists, academics and organizations to issue public statements!

Distribute the book *The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk*, which documents the political background to this show trial.

And above all: Connect the fight for Bogdan's freedom with the fight against war! Bogdan is in prison because he fights for the unity of the international working class.

Let us make sure that this perspective reaches millions! The answer to the persecution of a socialist must be the building of a powerful socialist movement. The answer to nationalism must be the international unity of the working class. The answer to rearmament must be the class struggle against the policy of war. And the answer to the danger of a third world war must be the fight for international socialism.

Stop the war in Ukraine!

Stop NATO's war escalation against Russia!

Against rearmament, nationalism and fascism!

For the unity of the Ukrainian, Russian, German and international working class!

Join us in building a powerful socialist anti-war movement!

Support the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party!

And above all:

Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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