

SGP rally at Brandenburg Gate: Stop the war in Ukraine! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!

Our Reporters
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On Sunday afternoon, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) held a rally at Brandenburg Gate as part of its campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives election under the slogan, “Stop the war in Ukraine! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

In the heart of the capital’s political center, the rally delivered an important message against the increasingly dangerous escalation of the war against Russia and for the freedom of imprisoned Ukrainian socialist and opponent of war Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The rally took place against the backdrop of a dramatic escalation of the policy of war. The German government is driving forward the confrontation with Russia ever more aggressively, massively rearming Germany and increasingly placing society as a whole on a war footing. At the same time, democratic rights are being attacked and the costs of rearmament imposed on the working population.

At the center of the event was the case of 27-year-old Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was sentenced on August 10 by the Pervomaisk City District Court to 15 years in prison for “high treason under martial law.” The verdict was based on political articles he had written for the *World Socialist Web Site*, as well as his correspondence with WSWs editors.

The first speaker was Johannes Stern, editor-in-chief of the German-language WSWs. He explained that the demands “Stop the war in Ukraine!” and “Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!” are inseparably connected.

Bogdan, he said, had been convicted “not for espionage, not for sabotage, not for passing on military secrets.” His actual “crime” consisted of opposing the war from a socialist and internationalist standpoint.

Syrotiuk had condemned the Russian invasion and the Putin regime just as he had condemned the NATO powers “that are using Ukraine as the battlefield for their war against Russia.” He opposed Ukrainian nationalism and the state glorification of Stepan Bandera and other Nazi collaborators, and called on Ukrainian and Russian workers not to kill one another but to unite against their governments and oligarchs.

Stern pointed out that the prosecution had presented no evidence whatsoever that Bogdan was an agent of the Russian government. Nevertheless, the court sentenced him to 15 years in prison and even ordered the destruction of programs, brochures and leaflets produced by his socialist youth organization, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists.

“A court orders socialist literature to be destroyed,” Stern said.

“It punishes a young man for political articles. It declares opposition to war and nationalism to be treason. This is not the administration of justice. This is political persecution.”

Syrotiuk’s case, Stern said, “shatters all the propaganda that has been used for years to justify this war.” While NATO claims to be defending freedom and democracy in Ukraine, elections have been suspended, left-wing opposition parties banned and critical media suppressed. The WSWs itself was blocked in Ukraine just weeks after Bogdan’s arrest.

Stern also denounced the silence of the German media. If a Russian court sentenced a young opponent of war to 15 years in prison for political articles, it would be on every front page. There is silence about Bogdan because his case immediately raises the question: “What kind of regime is the German government actually financing and arming?”

He placed Bogdan’s persecution in the context of the escalation of the Ukraine war and the historical role of German imperialism. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO has expanded ever further eastward and, after 2014, systematically built up Ukraine as a military outpost against Russia. Putin’s reactionary invasion in February 2022 provided NATO with the pretext to transform the conflict into an open proxy war against Russia that is moving ever closer to a direct confrontation between nuclear-armed powers.

“For the third time in modern history, German imperialism is directing its war drive against Russia,” Stern declared, recalling the First World War and Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

The costs of this policy, he continued, are being imposed on the working class. “Rearmament and social cuts are two sides of the same policy,” Stern said. “The working class is to pay for the war twice: first through falling wages, job cuts and the destruction of social infrastructure—and ultimately with its life.”

The significance of Bogdan’s case therefore extends far beyond Ukraine: “War abroad requires repression at home.” At the same time, the case demonstrates “the power of an international campaign,” which must now be expanded on a massive scale.

The second speaker was historian and SGP candidate Katja Rippert. She examined in greater detail the political and social reality in Ukraine and showed, based on the verdict itself, that it is precisely Bogdan’s criticism of repression, forced mobilization and the glorification of fascist forces that is being criminalized.

Among other things, the court accuses him of the “non-

recognition of Ukraine's legitimately elected political leadership and democratic processes," "comparisons of Ukrainian citizens with fascists and Nazis," and the "denigration of national heroes and historical figures." His criticism of forced mobilization and, explicitly, "propaganda for communist ideology and the political current of Trotskyism" are also cited against him.

"These points prove neither high treason nor any criminal offense," Rippert explained. "Above all, they demonstrate one thing: Bogdan spoke the truth—and this truth is to be covered up and distorted by force."

She described the systematic destruction of democratic rights in Ukraine: opposition parties have been banned, elections suspended, the right to strike restricted and the media brought into line. Opponents of war and government critics are subjected to state persecution.

"This is not a democracy but a dictatorship with a vast apparatus of repression," she said.

Rippert spoke at length about the state rehabilitation of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and their leaders, who collaborated with the Nazis and participated in massacres of Jews, Poles and Ukrainians. Today, these forces are honored as national heroes. Bogdan documented these crimes in his articles and condemned their glorification by the state.

Rippert also rejected the claim that the Ukrainian population stands united behind the war. "There is no 'Ukraine' or 'the Ukrainians' as a single unified entity. In reality, it is a class war. Ukrainian workers are dying at the front and bearing the costs of the war, while the wealthy buy their way out and the oligarchs and politicians of the regime enrich themselves without restraint."

She reported on forced recruitment, desertion and growing draft resistance and quoted 22-year-old Ukrainian worker Ilia, with whom SGP members had spoken in the lead-up to the rally. He had recently fled to Berlin.

"We are completely against the Zelensky regime and against the Putin regime," he said. "We are for peace. We are young people. We want to move forward with our lives, learn the language and work. War is not our profession."

Rippert explained that it is precisely the growing opposition to war and forced mobilization that accounts for the Ukrainian regime's fear of a socialist perspective. If the court "explicitly classifies communist ideology and Trotskyism as high treason, every worker and young person should sit up and take notice."

"They want to criminalize Trotskyism?" she exclaimed in conclusion. "We will fight with redoubled strength for Bogdan's Trotskyist perspective and the unity of all workers—regardless of their origin, across the globe!"

The final speaker was Christoph Vandreier, the SGP's lead candidate in the Berlin House of Representatives election. He explained that the party is deliberately placing Bogdan's freedom at the center of its election campaign because "all the essential issues of the election campaign are crystallized in the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk."

"The attack on Bogdan's freedom is an attack on the freedom of us all," Vandreier said. If a young socialist in Ukraine could be sentenced to 15 years in prison for articles opposing the war, this

was also a warning for Germany. Here too, demonstrations are banned, opponents of war criminalized and the SGP defamed as "left-wing extremist" by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Bogdan's persecution also exposes the real character of the Ukraine war. "The Ukraine war is certainly not being waged in defense of peace and freedom," Vandreier said. It is about the same economic interests as 80 years ago.

While billions are poured into rearmament, jobs are being destroyed, social spending cut, conscription reintroduced and Bundeswehr officers sent into schools "to turn an entire generation once again into cannon fodder for the rich."

Vandreier also rejected the claim by the established parties that they represent a bulwark against the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The AfD "did not fall from the sky," he said but is "the sharpest expression of the rightward development of the entire political establishment."

"The only way to stop the AfD is through an international movement of workers against the root cause of war and fascism: capitalism," he declared.

He criticized the fact that, despite growing international support for Bogdan, not a single representative of the parties in the Bundestag has publicly spoken out for his freedom. Their silence is an expression of their support for militarism and war.

The decisive point, however, is that Bogdan himself is fighting for the perspective capable of stopping the war: "the unification of Russian and Ukrainian workers, of workers all over the world, against the warmongers."

To achieve this, a new socialist party of the working class must be built, independent of all capitalist parties and based on an internationalist program.

"This party," Vandreier declared, "is the Socialist Equality Party."

He called on those present to sign the petition for Bogdan's freedom, support the international campaign for his release and actively advance the SGP's Berlin election campaign.

"Turn the Berlin election into a rebellion against the policy of war," Vandreier concluded. "Vote SGP!"

The rally ended with repeated chants of "Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!"

The response on Pariser Platz underscored the growing opposition to war, rearmament and social cuts. The SGP is fighting to connect this opposition with the struggle for Bogdan's freedom and the building of an international socialist anti-war movement of the working class.



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