

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

“The verdict against Bogdan is an indictment of the Ukrainian regime”

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On September 6, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP-Germany), as part of its campaign for the Berlin state election, held a rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate under the slogan “Stop the Ukraine war! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!” At the centre of the rally was the fight for the release of the 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist and opponent of war Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison on August 10.

We publish below the speech by Katja Rippert, SGP candidate in the Berlin elections. The WWS has already published this detailed report on the rally, as well as a video of the entire event.

Fifteen years in prison in Ukraine—T

hat is the sentence against the young socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk because, in his articles, he advocated the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war.

In 15 years, Bogdan will be in his mid-40s. But the danger that he may never leave his cell alive is great. In the Ukrainian prison system, Bogdan faces death. He already had health problems when he was arrested, and he was then denied necessary dental treatment for more than two years.

The prisons are overcrowded, and medical care is virtually nonexistent. Just a few weeks ago, 162 prisoners in six Ukrainian detention facilities went on a one-day hunger strike against torture, forced labour for starvation wages, contaminated food and solitary confinement as an arbitrary punishment. Nine prisoners in Bogdan’s detention facility in Nikolaev also took part.

What kind of regime fears the words of this young man so much? Why does it want to suffocate his words at all costs, destroy his books and documents, and make him disappear into the depths of the prisons?

The verdict against Bogdan is at the same time an indictment of the Ukrainian regime itself. Let us look at some of the accusations listed in the judgment:

• “Non-recognition of the lawfully elected political leadership and the democratic processes of Ukraine”

• “Comparisons of Ukrainian citizens with fascists and Nazis from the period of the Second World War”;

• “Denigration of national heroes and historical figures”—by which this means, it should be noted, antisemitic Nazi collaborators;

• “Negative assessments of the Ukrainian armed forces.”

In his articles, Bogdan is said to have expressed views that allegedly serve pro-Russian propaganda, for example:

that people in Ukraine refuse to fight in the war;

• that mobilisation in Ukraine is carried out by coercion and in violation of human rights;

and “propaganda for communist ideology and the political current of ‘Trotskyism.’” The *World Socialist Web Site*, on which his articles appeared, is described as a “communist-oriented propaganda and information agency.”

These points prove neither high treason nor any other crime. Above all, they show one thing: Bogdan stated what is—and this truth is to be violently covered up and distorted. These points are directed not only against Bogdan but against masses of people in Ukraine who long for an end to the war and are confronted every day with a regime that is sacrificing their lives.

What “democratic processes” is the court talking about?

Already after the Maidan coup of 2014, a comprehensive attack on democratic rights began. At the same time, fascist forces triumphed. The Svoboda party was brought into the government. The Communist Party and communist symbols were banned. In 2022, 11 opposition parties were suspended. Since May 2024, elections have been suspended. President Zelensky rules by decree under martial law.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented house searches and criminal proceedings against critical journalists and activists. At the beginning of 2025, the SBU arrested young opponents of war in several cities who were charged because of their “Marxist and communist ideology.”

Strikes are banned, collective agreements suspended, the major television stations are merged into a single state programme, and the press has been brought into line. Even the *World Socialist Web Site* was banned in June 2024, a few weeks after Bogdan’s arrest. The Russian language has been driven out of schools, authorities and other institutions. This systematically discriminates against a large section of the population that speaks Russian.

Anyone who dares to question the government line can be persecuted. Just this June, a single mother was sentenced to five years in prison for harmless criticism of Zelensky. Tens of thousands of investigations are underway against alleged “traitors” and “collaborators.” The government has created an atmosphere of fear in order to silence opposition.

This is not a democracy but a dictatorship with a huge apparatus of repression.

The “national heroes and historical figures” whom the court

declares untouchable are none other than the fascists of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its military arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). They collaborated with Hitler's Wehrmacht, participated in the Nazis' war of annihilation and carried out numerous massacres of Jews, Poles and Ukrainians. Their leaders, above all, Stepan Bandera have been rehabilitated and honoured by the state for years.

Bogdan described their crimes in his articles in all their horrific detail. We have published them in the book *The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk*. They are images that do not let go of you—of people who were hanged, shot or hacked to pieces in the most bestial manner.

Monuments have been erected to these criminals, and streets and squares have been renamed after them. Conversely, the authorities have had hundreds of monuments torn down—to Lenin and other revolutionaries and to the millions of Soviet soldiers who defeated the Nazis.

Zelensky's dictatorship is placing itself ever more openly in the tradition of Ukrainian fascism and integrating far-right forces. The Azov Regiment, which was founded by a neo-Nazi, gathers numerous neo-Nazis in its ranks and bears SS symbols in its emblem, has been incorporated into the army. German neo-Nazis, too, make pilgrimages to Ukraine and fight there in the armed forces.

This year, the regime carried out the ceremonial reburial of the criminals of the fascist OUN Andriy Melnyk and Yevhen Konovalets. Zelensky honours them as "Ukrainian heroes" and is planning a separate "Pantheon of Outstanding Ukrainians" of other Nazi collaborators.

The Ukrainian Holocaust scholar Marta Havryshko summed up the twisted logic of the verdict against Bogdan very aptly: According to the court, it is not the glorification of Nazi collaborators or the toleration of SS symbols that provides ammunition for Russian propaganda. No, to criticise all this openly becomes treason.

Most recently, Zelensky even awarded the Order of Freedom to the American billionaire and fascist Elon Musk, the same Musk who described the AfD as the "last spark of hope" for Germany.

Day in and day out, the media claim that all Ukrainians are waging a national, patriotic defensive war. This is a propaganda fairy tale. There is no such thing as "Ukraine" or "the Ukrainians." 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 and serve the imperialist interests of NATO.

In the streets, uniformed and masked gangs of thugs drive from house to house in minibuses, tracking down men whom they want to send to the front as cannon fodder. There they are forced to fight against Russian workers who have been recruited just as brutally by the Putin government.

"*Busifikatsiya*"—That is what Ukrainians call this forced recruitment. Many are tortured and abused, often to death. Like Oleg Lysenko. He was forcibly recruited and later found at the side of the road with his skull smashed in.

In the campaign for this rally, we spoke with the 22-year-old Ukrainian worker Ilya, who fled to Berlin only recently.

He says the men are "simply abducted. Not even people with disabilities are spared. Every second person now walks around with prostheses. Some have lost their arms, others their legs. Ilya himself buried a classmate, who had volunteered. He was 19 years old. "Now all our friends are lying in the cemetery," he says.

He fundamentally rejects the entire war: "I believe this war should never have happened. We are completely against the Zelensky regime and against the Putin regime. We are for peace. We are for peace all over the world. We are young people. We want to develop ourselves, learn the language and work. War is not our profession."

More and more young people in Ukraine think like Ilya. Resistance among the population is growing. In several spontaneous protests, crowds have prevented recruitment, smashed and overturned vehicles of the TCC conscription authority and attacked the officials.

Another symptom of the growing opposition is mass desertion and refusal of military service. According to official figures, around 2 million Ukrainians are evading conscription, and at least 200,000 soldiers have deserted.

The mood has turned dramatically. Almost 70 percent now demand negotiations in polls in order to bring the war to a quick end.

The Zelensky regime is increasingly hated and is in a deep crisis. It is a parasitic oligarchy that has enriched itself from the state property after the Stalinists dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991. It rules with Mafia methods, just like the reactionary Putin regime in Russia.

These regimes fear nothing so much as the truth. They fear nothing so much as a political organisation that gives the growing resistance in their own population a conscious orientation and a socialist programme.

When the court in its verdict explicitly classifies communist ideology and Trotskyism as "high treason," every worker and young person should sit up and take notice. A spectre is haunting Zelensky's offices and the army command centres! A spectre well known to these gentlemen because in 1917 it took on flesh and blood in Ukraine as well, when the October Revolution swept away the tsarist regime.

From Nikolaev—the city where Bogdan is now imprisoned—it is only about two hours by car to the place where, more than 140 years ago, the revolutionary Leon Trotsky was born. It was Trotsky who built the Left Opposition and fought for an alternative to Stalinism. He defended the communist programme of world revolution against Stalin's reactionary nationalism.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, which Bogdan co-founded and led, stands in this tradition. It unites young Trotskyists in the former Soviet Union and joined the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement. It fights for the unification of Ukrainian and Russian workers against both the Zelensky and Putin regimes. It has shattered the myth of nationalism with which workers on both sides—and here as well—are clouded every day.

That is why Bogdan, the Young Guard and the WSWs are persecuted. We answer this shameful verdict with a counteroffensive. They want to criminalise Trotskyism? We fight with redoubled strength for Bogdan's Trotskyist perspective and for the unity of all workers—regardless of origin, around the globe! They want to fill the prisons with opponents of war? We conduct with redoubled strength an international campaign for the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk and all opponents of war worldwide!



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