The appeal of Bogdan Syrotiuk exposes a political frame-up

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Lawyers for Ukrainian socialist and anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotiuk filed two separate appeals on September 9 against the 15-year prison sentence imposed on him on August 10 by the Pervomaisk City District Court in Ukraine's Mykolaiv region.

A 24-page submission prepared by one of his defense lawyers provides a devastating exposure of the verdict. It demonstrates that Bogdan was convicted for his political views, his writings and his editorial collaboration with the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The appeal calls the verdict "illegal and unfounded" and asks the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal to overturn it and close the proceedings, because the acts attributed to Bogdan do not constitute high treason under Part 2 of Article 111 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code.

Under Article 111, the prosecution had to establish intentional assistance to a foreign state or organization carrying out subversive activity against Ukraine and prove direct intent; that Bogdan knew such activity was taking place and consciously intended to assist it.

The prosecution proved none of this.

As the appeal states, the case was built "mainly on the content of the political and historical statements of Syrotiuk B.I., without proving the specific fact of his assistance to the aggressor state in carrying out subversive activities against Ukraine."

The defense points out that criticism of the Ukrainian government, NATO or the United States, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist views and criticism of nationalist historical figures do not constitute high treason.

The prosecution produced no evidence of contact between Bogdan and representatives of the Russian Federation, no coordination with Russian officials, no tasks or instructions from Russia, no transfer of information to Russian representatives, no assistance to occupation administrations or Russian military forces and no participation in organized subversive activity.

What the evidence actually establishes, the appeal states, is "writing texts, translating, collecting interview materials, and communicating with editors of a public international publication."

In other words: journalism and political activity.

To bridge this enormous evidentiary gap, the verdict treated the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International as a "foreign organization" supposedly engaged in subversive activity in the information sphere and Bogdan's articles and editorial work as assistance to that activity.

But here too, the appeal shows that the decisive elements were asserted, not proven. "The verdict does not establish subversive activity by the WSWS/ICFI within the meaning of Article 111, assistance by B.I. Syrotiuk to such activity, or the necessary direct intent," it states. "Instead of proving these constituent elements, the political characteristics of the publications and evidence of editorial cooperation substitute for their proof."

This is the core of the political frame-up.

The judgment relied heavily on an April 10, 2024 letter from Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, which characterized the WSWS as a communist outlet disseminating allegedly "pro-Russian narratives." The appeal points out that the letter is not a forensic expert opinion and does not establish Russian control, hostile purpose or subversive activity.

Even more damaging to the verdict is the prosecution's own forensic linguistic examination. The experts found in the examined publications no calls for the overthrow of the government, the liquidation of Ukrainian statehood, changes to Ukraine's borders, cooperation with or assistance to Russia, the transmission of information to the enemy or the carrying out of subversive activity.

Their general conclusion was unequivocal: "No signs of propaganda aimed at supporting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine were recorded in

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publications No. 1–14."

The full content of the six WSWS articles used to convict Bogdan likewise contradicts the prosecution's construction.

In "For the organization of an international movement of workers and young people against war!", the Russian invasion is described as "adventurist," and its "reactionary nature" is explicitly stressed. The article calls for an international struggle of the working class against both Western imperialism and the Putin regime.

Bogdan was not the author of another article cited, "US pledges to 'go on the offensive' against Russia." According to the verdict, his role was to translate the article from English into Ukrainian and transmit it for publication.

And in "For the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class!", the position could hardly be clearer. It states, "We … do not support this war, either in Ukraine or in Russia."

Other articles criticized the rehabilitation of the Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and the honoring of the Waffen-SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka. None advocated a Russian victory or assistance to Russian forces.

The appeal states directly: "The key flaw in the conviction is that it effectively replaces the concept of 'political position' with the concept of 'subversive activity.'"

It summarizes the logic of the verdict as a chain of unsupported assumptions: "critical political statement ? anti-Ukrainian view ? support for the position of the Russian Federation ? subversive activity ? treason." But, the defense stresses, "each subsequent link in this chain requires independent proof."

This is precisely what the trial court did not provide. It converted lawful political speech, journalism, translation, interviews and international political collaboration into supposed evidence of treason by attaching a criminal meaning to socialist opposition to the war.

The appeal also invokes Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Citing European Court of Human Rights case law, it argues that political speech—including views that "offend, shock or disturb" the state—is entitled to particularly strong protection. Instead of applying these principles, the trial court treated "departures from the official political narrative as evidence of subversion."

The defense asks the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal to overturn the August 10 verdict and close the criminal proceedings. Alternatively, it seeks Bogdan's acquittal because the prosecution failed to prove the elements of the alleged offense beyond reasonable doubt.

The appeal exposes the political character of Bogdan's prosecution. A socialist opponent of both the Russian invasion and the NATO-led war policy was transformed into a "traitor" because he opposed the nationalist and pro-war line of the Ukrainian state and fought for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers.

The WSWS fully supports the legal defense and the use of every available legal avenue to overturn this monstrous verdict. The appeal itself provides powerful additional material for exposing the frame-up and mobilizing opposition to Bogdan's persecution throughout the world.

But Bogdan's freedom cannot be left to the courts of the same state that arrested him, banned the WSWS weeks later and sentenced him to 15 years in prison for socialist and anti-war political activity.

The decisive force in securing his freedom is the international working class. The WSWS will intensify and expand the international campaign to free Bogdan Syrotiuk. We call on workers, young people, journalists, academics, artists and all defenders of democratic rights to take up this fight and bring it into workplaces, trade unions, schools and universities throughout the world.

We urge all readers to sign the petition at FreeBogdan.org and add a statement of support in their own words; to use the site's letter-writing tool to send a letter, in Ukrainian and in their own language, to the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal (inbox@mka.court.gov.ua), copying freebogdan@wsws.org, demanding that the verdict be overturned and Bogdan released immediately; to organize statements of support from their workplaces, unions and campuses; and to make as substantial a donation as possible to the campaign for his freedom.

Overturn the verdict! Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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