

Anthropologist John Comaroff joins protest against 15-year sentence of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk

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Retired Harvard anthropologist John Comaroff has submitted a letter protesting the imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk, the 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist whom a court sentenced to 15 years in prison for opposing the war between Ukraine and Russia, and telling workers and young people they have no cause to fight one another.

“I write in outraged protest against the unjust imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk for opposing the war in Ukraine,” Comaroff wrote in a statement sent to the campaign this week. “Taking an antiwar stance, and writing in support of it, is a fundamental right in any society that claims to guarantee the freedom of speech to its citizens.” The denial of that right to Bogdan, he wrote, “is a flagrant violation of which the world is taking note.”

Comaroff, born in Cape Town in 1945, taught at the University of Chicago from 1979 to 2012 and then at Harvard, where he held the Hugh K. Foster chair in African and African American Studies and Anthropology until his retirement in June 2024. With anthropologist Jean Comaroff, he wrote important works including the two-volume *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991, 1997), *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992), *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009) and *Theory from the South* (2011).

The campaign to demand the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk—the leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) who was arrested by the Zelensky regime in Ukraine in April 2024, charged with high treason under martial law, and convicted and sentenced by the court in Pervomaisk on August 10, 2026—has won widespread support internationally from workers, students, academics and defenders of democratic rights.

As of Tuesday evening, the online petition at FreeBogdan.org had gathered 7,984 signatures from more than 90 countries, nearly 2,000 of them added since the sentence and more than 400 since the site opened on September 6. The campaign has received more than 100

letters to the Ukrainian courts through the site’s letter-writing tool since the launch.

Seventy-three letters whose writers agreed to their publication are posted on the site; 42 of them, written since September 6, are from 10 countries on three continents.

On September 9, Bogdan’s lawyers filed two appeals with the Mykolaiv Court of Appeal in southern Ukraine that provided a devastating exposure of the verdict as an attack on freedom of speech of the press. The appeals called the verdict “illegal and unfounded” and asked the appeals court to overturn it, close the proceedings and set Bogdan free.

The evidence presented by the prosecution during the trial included six items published on the WSWS, five articles Bogdan wrote and one he translated, together with his interviews and other editorial work for the site. The content of these writings proves that the acts attributed to him—that he operated as a representative of the regime of Vladimir Putin—are patently false.

In fact, the prosecution failed to produce any 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.

Bogdan has already spent more than two years behind bars, most of it without the medical care he needs. In response to the campaign mounted by the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International for Bogdan’s freedom, the Court of Appeal announced at the start of September that it would accept correspondence only in Ukrainian.

As the WSWS reported on September 3, the campaign site’s letter-writing tool now adds a Ukrainian translation to every letter, so that each can be sent in Ukrainian as well as the language it was originally written in.

The campaign site publishes the letters being submitted,

showing writers' first names and last initials. Stephen C., writing from the US on September 12, addressed the courts through the 19th-century Ukrainian-born novelist Nikolai Gogol, whose *Dead Souls* follows a swindler who buys the names of dead serfs: "You have before you a living man, and yet you are asked to deal in dead souls."

Bogdan, he continued, "was sentenced to fifteen years for saying that the workers of Ukraine and the workers of Russia are not each other's enemies. A living man is being converted, before your eyes, into a name on a ledger, a file, a statistic. What will you do with this living man? Bogdan is not a ghost. He breathes. He needs medical care. He has a mother, comrades, a town."

Andrea R. wrote from Berlin on September 9, three days after the far-right Alternative for Germany won the state election in Saxony-Anhalt with 43.8 percent of the vote: "This is a dire warning about the rise of fascist forces in Germany. Ukraine lost a quarter of its population during Germany's war of annihilation. And yet Bogdan Syrotiuk was sentenced for protesting against the glorification of Nazi collaborators in the Ukraine. This is an attack on all those who oppose fascism and war, not only in your country but also here in Germany—and everywhere."

Ajitha G., a nurse in Britain's National Health Service, wrote September 8 that she was "appalled by the arrest of Bogdan Syrotiuk by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), his prolonged detention under extremely difficult conditions, his lack of access to necessary medical treatment, and now the high-treason verdict."

She added: "I have spoken and written to dozens of my colleagues—including nurses, doctors and other health professionals—about the persecution of Bogdan Syrotiuk. I intend to continue raising awareness among health workers and to support and intensify the campaign for his immediate and unconditional freedom in the coming period."

Kerem K. wrote from Australia on September 8: "The conviction of Bogdan Syrotiuk is more than the punishment of one young socialist. It sends an unmistakable and chilling message to every citizen of Ukraine: oppose the war, and the state may answer you with fifteen years in prison. A justice system that treats political dissent as a crime does not defend democracy; it hollows it out."

Wesley P. wrote from New Zealand the same day: "The horrifying absurdity of trying and imprisoning a socialist for asking Russians and Ukrainians to work together to stop the stupid, unjust war, would no doubt make Franz Kafka stop rolling in his grave and start taking notes." The verdict, he wrote, "ranks amongst the greatest European absurd literature, such as Franz Kafka's works and *The Good Soldier Schweik*, except for the incidental detail that it is not fiction."

Tilo W., a student in Germany, wrote September 10: "In a political climate that increases military spending and the integration of right-wing forces into the governments all over the world, Bogdan's sentencing is a very dangerous precedent to anybody who peacefully rejects the preparations of a third world war. His imprisonment is a violation to us all."

Zac H. wrote from Australia on September 7 to the workers of Ukraine directly: "The persecution of a socialist is clear evidence of the antidemocratic character and reactionary aims of the Ukrainian government. They are making you pay for a war you don't want and have no interest in. 100 years ago the Russian Tzar did the same thing in World War One. In response, your ancestors united with their Russian brothers and sisters to end capitalism and the war it produced."

The site's public signatures page recorded 38 new names on Tuesday, among them 17 from San Diego, six from Istanbul and two from Melbourne. Peter W. of Ottawa wrote on September 8: "He must be released from prison and rehabilitated immediately as he is in poor health." A signer in Bengaluru, India, had written the day before: "It is our duty to defend him and save his life."

Meanwhile, the carnage of the Ukraine-Russia war—which has killed a combined total of approximately 600,000 people from both countries—continues to deepen. A drone hit the Mykolaiv jail holding Bogdan Syrotiuk overnight on September 9-10. According to available information, Bogdan and the other prisoners were not hurt.

The appeal now sits before a court that has told Bogdan's supporters to address it only in Ukrainian. The WSWS calls on all workers, young people and defenders of democratic rights to send letters, in Ukrainian and in every other language, and sign the petition. FreeBogdan.org carries the petition, the letter tool and the defense fund.



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