

IYSSE meeting at Berlin's Humboldt University against the Ukraine war and the persecution of Bogdan Syrotiuk

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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On October 21, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Berlin's Humboldt University held its start-of-semester meeting. At the centre of the meeting was the case of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk. On August 10, a Ukrainian court sentenced him to 15 years in prison for "high treason under martial law." Katja Rippert and Peter Schwarz of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) presented the book *The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk* and explained why the persecution of the young Trotskyist is of great significance for every opponent of war.

Tamino, who leads the work of the IYSSE at the university, placed the case in the context of the growing youth protests in Europe. Hundreds of thousands are taking to the streets against social cuts, conscription and rearmament in France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Albania. Bogdan, he said, spoke "for millions of young workers and people around the world who have no future under capitalism." His release was therefore part of the fight against war and capitalism.

"Thought-crimes"

Katja Rippert, a member of the SGP national committee, explained how the verdict against Bogdan was based on so-called "thought crimes" (*Gesinnungsjustiz*). The court had ordered the destruction of his Marxist books, which had been confiscated, and cited as the only "evidence" against him his articles for the *World Socialist Web Site*, in which he called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war.

The prosecution's attempt to portray Bogdan as a Russian agent had failed. Bogdan and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) had condemned Putin's invasion from the very beginning, Rippert said. The court was now stating openly what this was really about: it accused Bogdan of spreading "propaganda for communist ideology and the political current of 'Trotskyism.'"

Rippert focused on two charges in the verdict. First, Bogdan had drawn "comparisons of Ukrainian citizens with fascists and Nazis." In reality, he had exposed the role of the far-right nationalists who openly wear Nazi symbols and stand in the tradition of Nazi collaborators. She showed an excerpt from a 2014 BBC report that made clear how the Right Sector and the S14 neo-Nazi group became a decisive force in the Maidan protests. In the video, S14 leader Yevhen Karas rails against "Russians, Jews and Poles." Today, he commands a drone regiment in the army and was honoured by Zelensky in December 2025 for his services in the Ukraine war. The far-right founder of Azov, Andriy Biletsky, received the title "Hero of Ukraine" in August.

She quoted Bogdan's May Day 2023 speech, which is printed in the book *The Ukraine War and the Fight for Socialism: The Case of Bogdan Syrotiuk* and which the court presented as evidence against him: "The claim that all Ukrainians support this war is a brazen lie. ... The main props for this war are the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and those they serve."

Another charge against Bogdan is "denigration of national heroes." This refers to fascist criminals such as Stepan Bandera and other leaders of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) and its military arm, the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), who collaborated with Hitler's Wehrmacht (Army) and carried

out massacres of Jews, Poles and communists. This year, the Zelensky regime had OUN leaders Andriy Melnyk and Yevhen Konovalets solemnly reburied.

Rippert showed historical footage of the Waffen-SS Galicia Division, which was recruited largely from the Melnyk wing of the OUN and set up under Nazi direction. The verdict also cites Bogdan's article on the glorification of this division in Ukraine as evidence against him.

Rippert warned that 15 years in prison could mean a death sentence for Bogdan. His prison is close to the front and was recently hit by a drone. Even though an appeal against the verdict had now been filed, she said, no illusions should be placed in the courts. "We can only win Bogdan's freedom if we fight against this war with the same courage and the same determination as Bogdan."

"This is not democracy, it is dictatorship"

As Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), explained in his contribution, the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk shows that this war is not about freedom and democracy. The Zelensky regime had banned almost all left-wing and opposition parties and blocked publications such as the WWS. "A government that arrests left-wing opponents and bans publications that criticise its policies is not democratic but dictatorial."

At the same time, the regime was glorifying Nazi collaborators. In Lviv there was a huge monument to Stepan Bandera. That was "as if one were to erect a big monument in Berlin to Goebbels or Himmler," Schwarz said.

He pointed to the silence in the German media about Bogdan's case. Apart from the left-wing dailies *nd* and *junge Welt*, no major German media outlet had even mentioned Bogdan's name. "If he were a right-wing Russian dissident, everyone would have pounced on it."

Schwarz warned against illusions in Germany: "Here, people still talk about a 'firewall' against cooperating with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), and a lot is made of it when they display their fascist views all too openly, but a government that is prepared to support Ukraine with €100 billion, where monuments are being erected to such figures [as Bandera], will not hesitate to

rehabilitate Hitler here, too."

He then turned to the roots of the war, which went back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The imperialist powers understood this as a signal for a redivision of the world. Wars followed, from Yugoslavia to Syria, as did the eastward expansion of NATO. In 2014, Washington, Berlin and Paris supported the right-wing putsch in Kiev, after which NATO systematically rebuilt the Ukrainian army. At the same time, Schwarz stressed that the Russian invasion had been thoroughly reactionary. He quoted the statement of the ICFI, which unequivocally condemns the invasion by the Putin regime because it divides Russian and Ukrainian workers.

A nuclear escalation was now looming, Schwarz said. At the beginning of October, Moscow had announced that it would also consider using nuclear weapons if the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad were isolated. NATO dismissed this as a bluff, which could prove to be a "catastrophic miscalculation," Schwarz explained.

Germany was now the driving force in the Ukraine war and had spent more than €100 billion. The claim by Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democratic Party, SPD) that Russia was preparing to conquer Europe was "absurd," Schwarz said. The economic output of the EU was nine times that of Russia. The real reason for the massive rearmament programme was the crisis of the German export model. Cheap Russian energy, the Chinese sales market and the American protective umbrella had all fallen away. "It is a war with which German imperialism is responding to its deep crisis, as in 1914 and 1939." This policy was inseparable from the attacks on wages, pensions and jobs, as the wholesale job cuts at Volkswagen showed.

The only progressive answer was the mobilisation of the international working class on the basis of a socialist programme. "Anyone who claims today that this development can be stopped by putting pressure on those in power is lying. A counter-movement pursuing a socialist perspective must be built."

Sign the petition demanding Bogdan's immediate release at [wsws.org/freebogdan](https://www.wsws.org/freebogdan).



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