

Ukrainian Declaration of Independence (1918)

January 9th, 1918

People of Ukraine!

Through your efforts, your will, and your word, a Free Ukrainian People's Republic has been created on Ukrainian soil. The ancient dreams of your warrior ancestors for the freedom and rights of the working people have finally been achieved. But Ukraine's freedom has come at a difficult time. Four years of brutal war have weakened our country and its people, factories no longer produce goods, industry has stalled, the railroads are in chaos, and the currency continues to plummet in value; there is less bread and famine now looms. Mobs of bandits and thieves have spread across the countryside, especially during those times when soldiers deserted from the front, bringing death, disorder and ruin in their wake. Due to all this, elections to the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly could not be held on the date set by our previous Universal, and this assembly, which had been scheduled to convene today, could not meet to finalize the new temporary, supreme revolutionary authority in Ukraine that might institute order in our People's Republic and form a new independent government. Meanwhile, the Petrograd Government of the People's Commissars, in an attempt to bring the Free Ukrainian Republic back under its rule, has declared war against Ukraine and is sending its armies of Red Guards and Bolsheviks, who steal the bread from our peasants, without even sparing the grain set aside for seed, carrying it off to Russia and offering nothing in the way of compensation; they kill innocent people while spreading lawless, looting and disillusion wherever they go.

We, the Ukrainian Central Rada, have done everything possible to prevent the outbreak of this fratricidal war between neighbouring peoples, but the Petrograd Government has refused to match our efforts, and instead continues to wage a bloody struggle against the Ukrainian people and the Republic; more-

over, this same Petrograd Government of People's Commissars has even sought to delay the peace efforts and is now calling for a new war, which it characterizes as a secular holy war. Again, blood will flow, again the ill-fated working people will be forced to lay down their lives.

We, the Ukrainian Central Rada, elected by the congresses of peasants, workers, and soldiers of Ukraine, cannot agree to this and refuse to support further war, for the Ukrainian people want peace; and a democratic peace must come about promptly. Moreover, in order to ensure that neither the Russian nor any other government shall obstruct Ukraine's efforts at instituting this desired peace, to be able to bring order to our country, to create work, and to the strength the revolution and our freedom, we, the Ukrainian Central Rada, proclaim to all citizens of Ukraine:

From this day forth, the Ukrainian People's Republic stands as an independent, free and sovereign state of the Ukrainian People, subject to no one else.

We wish to live in harmony and friendship will our neighbouring countries: Russia, Poland, Austria, Rumania, Turkey, and others, but none of these may interfere in the life of the independent Ukrainian Republic, where power shall belong only to the people of Ukraine, in whose name, we, the Ukrainian Central Rada, representatives of the toiling peasants, workers, and soldiers and our executive arm, henceforth known as "the Council of People's Ministers", shall govern until the convocation of a new Ukrainian Constituent Assembly.

Firstly, we direct the government of our Republic, the Council of People's Ministers, to continue, on an independent basis, to pursue the peace negotiations that have already been initiated with the Central Powers, and to carry them through to conclusion – without regard for the interference by any other part of the former Russian Empire – and to establish peace, so that our country may begin its economic life in tranquillity and harmony.

As to the so-called Bolsheviks, and all other aggressors who would seek to destroy and bring ruin to our country, we direct the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic to take a firm and determined stand against them, and we call upon all citizens of our Republic to defend their welfare and liberty while not sacrificing their own lives. Our Ukrainian People's state must be cleared of the violent intruders sent by Petrograd, who trample upon the rights of the Ukrainian Republic.

This long and arduous war, launched by the bourgeois government, has left our people weary, destroyed our country, and ruined the economy. It must now be brought to an end. While the army is being demobilized, we order that some

be released from military service; after the ratification of the peace, the army is to be disbanded completely.

In the future, rather than maintaining a standing army, a people's militia will be established, so that our fighting forces may serve as defenders of the working people, and not as tools of the ruling elite.

Those districts destroyed by war and the chaotic process of demobilization are to be rebuilt with state aid and through the initiative of our national treasury. When our soldiers return home, new elections to the people's councils, district, county and city dumas will be called at a time yet to be announced, so that our soldiers may be granted a political voice. In the meantime, local administrations will be established and trusted to uphold the revolutionary and democratic principles of the people. The government should encourage cooperation between the various councils of peasants', workers', and soldiers' deputies, all of whom will be elected from among the local population.

On the matter of land, the commission elected at our last session has already devised new legislation concerning the transfer of land holdings, without compensation, to the working people, taking, as its base, our resolution on the abolition of property and the socialization of the land which was passed at the eighth session. In a few days the Central Rada will convene to scrutinize this legislation.

The Council of People's Ministers will use all means to ensure that the transfer of land from the land committees to the working people takes place before the beginning of spring tilling, without fail.

Forests, bodies of water, and all mineral resources – representing the wealth of the Ukrainian working people – are hereby placed under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

The war has also depleted our country's national manpower. Most of the factories, enterprises, and shops have been producing only that which was necessary for the war effort, and the nation has been left entirely without goods. Now that the war has come to an end, we direct the Council of People's Ministers to begin, without delay, the process of transferring all factories and manufacturing enterprises back to the peace-time production of goods most needed first and foremost by the toiling masses.

This same war has also seen a proliferation of hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers and invalidated veterans. In the independent People's Republic of Ukraine, no working man should suffer. The government will therefore work to increase the industrial output of the state, seek to develop all areas of the economy in which the unemployed may find work and to which they may

apply their strengths, and use all means at its disposal to ensure that those left maimed and of those who continue to suffer the effects of the war are provided for.

Under the old order, merchants and all sorts of middlemen gained vast wealth through their exploitation of the poor oppressed classes. Henceforth, the Ukrainian People's Republic takes into its hands the most important branches of national commerce, and all profits derived from these industries shall be used for the benefit of the people. Our state itself will supervise the management of both imported and exported goods to prevent the high prices, set by speculators, which bring only hardship to the poorest classes. To achieve this aim, we direct the government of the Republic to prepare, and present for approval, new legislation concerning the establishment of state monopolies in iron, leather, tobacco, and other products and merchandise on which the greatest profit has been drawn from the working classes for the benefit of the non-toilers.

Likewise, we order the institution of state control over all banks whose credits and loans to the non-working masses aided in the exploitation of the toiling classes. Henceforth, bank loans are to be granted primarily to support the working population and the economic development of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and not for use in speculation and various forms of exploitation previously practiced by the banks, or for profiteering.

Due to the ongoing political anarchy, widespread social anxiety, and a shortage of goods, discontent is growing among a certain segment of the population. Various dark forces are using this unrest and trying to lure unenlightened people back to the old system. These dark forces seek to roll back the people's newly won freedom under the restored yoke of Tsarist Russia. The Council of People's Ministers should therefore stand firmly against all counter-revolutionary forces. Anyone who calls for an uprising against the independent Ukrainian Republic, and a return to the old order, must be punished for treason against the state.

All democratic freedoms proclaimed by the Third Universal are reaffirmed by the Ukrainian People's Republic, with particular emphasis on the following: in the independent Ukrainian People's Republic all nations enjoy the right of national-personal autonomy, granted to them by the Law of January 9th.

Whatever matters enumerated in this Universal which we, the Central Rada, will not have time to accomplish, should be completed, rectified, and approved by the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly. We therefore call upon all citizens to fulfil their duty in the forthcoming elections with due diligence,

using all means to ensure the fastest tabulation of votes possible, in order that our Constituent Assembly – the highest governing authority in our land – may convene within a few weeks, to constitutionally enshrine freedom, harmony, and welfare as the founding principles of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic, for the benefit of the whole toiling people, now and in the future.

This, as our highest representative body, will determine the nature of our federative ties with the people's republics of the former Russian state.

Until that time, we call upon all citizens of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic to stand in vigilant defence of the freedom and rights won by our people and to protect their fate with all their might from all enemies of the peasants' and workers' independent Ukrainian Republic.

Original Source: Universal Ukrains'koї Tsentral'noї Rady (IV), adopted on 9 January 1918. Verkhovna Rada Ukrayny. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/no001300-18#Text> (Accessed on 05 February 2023).

Translated by Olena Palko and Samuel Foster.

