

The Fourth Universal of the Ukrainian Central Rada

The Fourth Universal was an edict issued by the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic on 22 January 1918. It called for elections and established laws respecting banking and land, which was to become social property. It also urged the people to resist the Bolshevik invasion. The most important item was the sentence proclaiming the independence of Ukraine. In its historical context the Fourth Universal had only a symbolic importance. Days after its proclamation, the Bolshevik forces occupied Kiev, and the Ukrainian government fled to the west. Yet the document retained its significance for the future.

To the People of Ukraine:

By your strength, will, and word there has arisen in the Ukrainian land a free People's Republic. An age-old dream of your forefathers, champions of the freedom and rights of the toiling masses, has been realized. But the freedom of Ukraine has been regained at a difficult time. Four years of destructive warfare have weakened our land and exhausted our people; plants have been closed and factories have ceased to produce; railways have been disrupted and money has lost its value; harvests have declined and the land is threatened with famine. The countryside has been infested with bands of robbers and thieves since the collapse of the front, and these marauding soldiers have caused bloodshed, confusion, and destruction in our land. Owing to these circumstances, the election to the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly as prescribed by the previous Universal could not be held; hence that Assembly, scheduled for today and expected to take over from us the supreme revolutionary authority in Ukraine, to

establish laws in the People's Republic, and to organize a new government, could not be convened. In the meantime, the Petrograd Government of People's Commissars has declared war on Ukraine in order to place under its control the free Ukrainian Republic. It has ordered into our land its troops – the Red Guards and the Bolsheviks – who are taking away grain from our peasants and dispatching it to Russia without having made payment; even the grain set aside for sowing has been confiscated thus. They are killing innocent people and spreading anarchy, lawlessness, and crime everywhere.

We, the Ukrainian Central Rada, have done all in our power to prevent the outbreak of this fratricidal war between the two neighbouring peoples, but the Petrograd Government has refused to consider our proposals and is continuing to wage a bloody war against our people and the Republic. Moreover, the same Petrograd Government of People's Commissars is beginning to dally with peace and is calling for a new war, which it terms holy. Blood will be shed again, and once more the hapless toiling people will have to lose their lives.

We, the Ukrainian Central Rada, elected at the congresses of the peasants, workers, and soldiers of Ukraine, cannot agree to this. We cannot support any wars, because the Ukrainian people desires peace; and democratic peace must be made as soon as possible. Therefore, in order that neither the Russian Government nor any other regime place any obstacles before Ukraine in her efforts to establish peace, and in order to stabilize the country, to promote creative labour, to strengthen the revolution, and to uphold our freedom, we, the Ukrainian Central Rada, announce the following to all the citizens of Ukraine:

Henceforth the Ukrainian People's Republic becomes an independent, free, and sovereign state of the Ukrainian people, subject to no one. We wish to live in peace and friendship with all the neighbouring states: Russia, Poland, Austria, Romania, Turkey, and others; but none of them has the right to interfere in the life of the independent Ukrainian Republic. The power in it shall belong only to the Ukrainian people, in whose name we, the Ukrainian Central Rada – the representatives of the toiling masses of the peasants, workers, and soldiers – will govern the country through our executive organ, which henceforth will be called the 'Council of People's Ministers.'

First of all we instruct the Government of our Republic, the Council of People's Ministers, to conduct from this day forth the previously initiated peace negotiations with the Central Powers, completely independently, and bring them to a conclusion regardless of obstacles or objections from

any other part of the former Russian Empire, and to achieve peace so that our land can develop its economy in harmony and tranquillity.

As for the so-called Bolsheviks and other invaders who are plundering and destroying our land, we instruct the Government of the Ukrainian People's Republic to launch a firm and determined struggle against them, and we appeal to all the citizens of our Republic to defend the welfare and freedom of our people, even at the cost of their lives. Our Ukrainian People's State must be cleared of the invaders sent from Petrograd, who trample on the rights of the Ukrainian Republic.

The long and difficult war launched by the bourgeois regime has wearied our people, devastated our land, and destroyed its economy. We must put an end to all this. As the army is being demobilized, we recommend that some men be released now; and following the acceptance of the peace treaties, the army should be completely dissolved. Further, instead of a standing army we envisage the establishment of a people's militia; our troops should be defenders of the toiling masses and not a tool of the ruling classes.

Localities destroyed by the war and demobilization shall be rebuilt with the assistance and at the expense of the state treasury. As soon as our soldiers return home, people's councils – in villages, districts, and municipalities – shall be elected again at the prescribed time, so that the soldiers too will have a voice in them. In the meantime, in order to establish an authority entitled to enjoy the general confidence, and one based on all the revolutionary-democratic classes of the people, the Government should invite the cooperation of the locally elected councils of workers', peasants', and soldiers' deputies.

In regard to the land question, a commission elected at our last session has already drafted a law on the transfer of land to the toiling masses without payment, basing this on the decision taken at our eighth session to abolish private property and to socialize land. This law shall be considered several days from now at a meeting of the entire Central Rada. The Council of People's Ministers shall take all the necessary measures to ensure the transfer of land to the farmers with the assistance of land committees before the spring sowing gets under way. Forests, streams, and natural resources of the land are the property of the Ukrainian toiling masses; they shall be administered by the Ukrainian People's Republic.

The war has also adversely affected the labouring forces of our country. Most of our plants, factories, and workshops were forced to produce the necessary war materiel, and the people were left without essential goods. Now the war is at an end. We are ordering the Council of People's Minis-

ters to take immediate steps to convert all plants and factories to peacetime production to supply the toiling masses with goods of prime necessity.

The war has also produced hundreds of thousands of unemployed and disabled. In the independent People's Republic of Ukraine there should not be a single workingman in need and distress. The Government of the Republic has been instructed to revitalize the industry of the state, to resume activities in all branches of the economy in order to provide work for the unemployed, and to take all measures necessary to protect and provide for the disabled and other victims of the war.

Under the old regime, the merchants and middlemen used to exploit the poor oppressed classes and reap huge profits therefrom. From now on the Ukrainian People's Republic shall administer the basic branches of trade and business, and all the profits from these activities shall revert to the people. Foreign trade, both imports and exports, shall also be placed under state control to forestall the possibility of the poor masses being forced to pay exorbitant prices to speculators. The Government of the Republic is accordingly instructed to draft appropriate laws on these matters, as well as to prepare legislation against monopoly in the production of iron, leather, tobacco, and other such products and goods, categories in which profits used to be unusually high – an arrangement that was especially unfair to the working classes and benefited those not engaged in productive labour.

We also order the establishment of the people's state control over all banks which used to contribute to the exploitation of the working classes by advancing loans and credits to the non-working elements. From now on, credit assistance from banks shall be provided above all to the toiling population, to promote the development of the national economy of the Ukrainian People's Republic and not for purposes of speculation or other exploitative banking practices.

Owing to anarchy, general unrest, and the shortage of goods, discontent among certain segments of the population has increased. This discontent is being exploited by various dark forces among the uninformed people for the purpose of restoring the old order. These dark forces are aiming at the return of all the free peoples under the united yoke of Tsarist Russia. The Council of People's Ministers should resolutely combat all the counterrevolutionary forces; anyone who advocates rebellion against the independent Ukrainian People's Republic and the restoration of the old order should be tried for high treason.

All democratic freedoms guaranteed in the Third Universal are hereby confirmed by the Ukrainian Central Rada. We further declare that in the

independent Ukrainian People's Republic all nations enjoy the right to national and personal autonomy as provided in the law of 22 January.

Obviously, it will not be possible for the Central Rada to realize all the programs of this Universal in a few weeks' time; these programs will be further developed and fully implemented by the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly. We therefore order all our citizens to carry out the election to this body most carefully and to make every effort to complete the tabulation of votes as soon as possible. This will make it possible for the Constituent Assembly – the supreme authority and ruler of our land – to convene within the next few weeks in order to uphold and confirm, through a constitution of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic, freedom, order, and well-being for all the toiling people, now and at all future times.

This supreme organ of ours shall also rule on the federative relationship with other people's republics of the former Russian state.

In the meantime, we appeal to all citizens of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic to uphold and guard unwaveringly the newly won liberty and the rights of our people and to use all possible means to defend their freedom against all enemies of the independent Ukrainian Republic of peasants and workers.

The Ukrainian Central Rada
Kiev, 22 January 1918

Translated by Oleh Fedyshyn