

# Ukraine declares national sovereignty

by Konstantin George

On July 16, the parliament of Ukraine, the largest non-Russian republic of the U.S.S.R. with 52 million inhabitants, adopted a declaration of sovereignty by a vote of 355-4. The declaration proclaimed the republic's goal of using its declared sovereignty to achieve future total independence: "Ukraine is striving to become in the future an independent national state."

The declaration of sovereignty echoed that adopted by the Russian parliament on June 12, announcing that "the laws of Ukraine in future have precedence over Union [Soviet] laws," that "all resources, industry, and agriculture are the property of the Ukrainian republic," and that Ukraine will conduct its own foreign and economic policy.

But the Ukrainian statement went far beyond that of the Russian Federation, proclaiming the "supremacy, independence, and individuality of the republic's power on its territory, and its independence and equality in external relations." It declared for Ukraine the "right to have its own armed forces, interior security troops, and state security bodies," stipulating that "Ukrainian citizens cannot be conscripted to serve outside the republic without the permission of the Ukrainian parliament." This means a call for the withdrawal of Soviet KGB and Interior Ministry forces, and the limitation on Ukrainians serving in the Soviet Army to a strictly voluntary basis. Left untouched in the declaration, for tactical political reasons, was the question of the Soviet Army and Air Force units, and the Black Sea Fleet, stationed on Ukrainian territory.

The statements contained in the declaration on economic policy were also landmarks. The parliament resolved that Ukraine would create its own national bank, not merely to issue a Ukrainian currency, but as a credit-extending institution to promote Ukrainian economic development. At least in principle, this measure is akin to Alexander Hamilton's creation of the National Bank of the United States, which became, in the early decades of American history, the credit-extending motor which transformed America into a world industrial and agricultural giant. Ukraine will also create its own foreign economic bank, to co-finance and arrange trade deals with Germany and other nations of Western Europe, to secure foreign investment and capital goods imports.

## Moscow's fall-back option

The near-unanimous vote for this declaration was all the more striking, in that only one-third of the parliament's depu-

ties are members of the Ukrainian national movement, Rukh, and allied pro-independence parties and organizations. The detested Communist Party still holds a two-thirds majority, yet its members of parliament voted *en bloc* along with Rukh and its allies to grant Ukraine a status of sovereignty falling just short of total independence. Why?

Had the Ukraine Communists not reversed their traditional stance against sovereignty, the rapid growth of a mass Ukrainian movement for total independence would have produced a political explosion in a very short time. Moscow would have been presented with its most heavily populated Captive Nation being totally out of control.

The crisis began to erupt on the weekend of July 7-8, during the Soviet Communist Party Congress in Moscow, when Rukh and its allies demanded an extraordinary session of the Ukrainian parliament to adopt a declaration of independence. Any move to stop a parliamentary session would have led to mass demonstrations. Confronted with this, Gorbachov adopted a new policy toward Ukraine, which could be summarized as: "Give them anything they want, short of leaving the Soviet Union, and short of putting on paper any timetable for full independence."

Ukrainian Communist deputies were hastily sent from Moscow to Kiev to attend the parliamentary session. The vote, technically, reflected a compromise between Rukh and the Communist Party, in that, in exchange for the declaration of sovereignty, no time frame was specified for total independence, and Ukraine will remain loosely affiliated to the Soviet Union's new mix of sovereign, confederated entities. In this sense, Ukraine's declaration went far beyond the June 12 declaration of the Russian Federation, but stopped just short of the Baltic states' demand for total independence.

Politically, however, the vote was a resounding victory for Rukh and Ukrainian patriots. They forced a very reluctant Communist apparatus to do something that that same party would have arrogantly rejected just two months ago. Moscow's extreme sensitivity to what is brewing in Ukraine was also reflected in Gorbachov's decision to appoint Ukraine's President Vladimir Ivashko, deputy general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. With that move, Ivashko was kicked upstairs, as he was forced to resign as Ukraine's President. Attesting to the high political volatility in Ukraine, no successor has been named.

It is only ten months since the Ukrainian national movement, Rukh, was founded in September 1989. In that short time, without a shot being fired, this nation has moved from being an outright colony to achieving the beginnings of a loosely confederated status within the empire. The intermediate victory achieved was something unthinkable for the majority of Ukrainians back in September. Confederated sovereignty is, of course, not the goal of true national independence. But that goal is no longer viewed as unattainable.