

Review of the Monograph by O. Kudlai: "The Government of the Ukrainian People's Republic: Institutional Establishment and Main Activities (1917–1918)" - Scientific Editor: V. Verstiuk. National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, 2025. 580 p.

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In the difficult and tragic time of the struggle against the Russian Federation for the independence of Ukraine, a time of conflict deeply rooted in the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations, the study of the experience of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 takes on special significance: the course of political, socio-economic, and cultural events, as well as the practice and miscalculations of state-building during the revolutionary era.

The Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has published a monograph by Candidate of Historical Sciences Oleksandra Kudlai titled *The Government of the Ukrainian People's Republic: Institutional Formation, Key Areas of Activity (1917–1918)*, which is the result of many years of work on the development of issues concerning the formation of central executive bodies during the first period of the Ukrainian Revolution (1917–1921), specifically the era of the Ukrainian Central Rada (hereinafter referred to as the UCR).

The monograph introduces into scientific circulation a large amount of source data, primarily archival documents, which highlight the previously fragmentarily researched process of the formation of the first national ministries in the context of the revolutionary processes and shifts of 1917–1918. The author consistently outlines the main stages of formation, the definition of the key tasks, and the areas of work of the national government departments, the composition of which changed significantly during the period under study. The political events that took place in 1917–1918, both in the former imperial center of Petrograd and in Kyiv, which became the indisputable center of the Ukrainian national movement, are consistently covered. Special attention is paid to the policies of the Provisional Government towards Ukraine and the evolution of the attitude of Russian ruling circles in accordance with internal political changes in the country.

A separate chapter of the study is dedicated to the period from the issuance of the First Universal of the Central Rada in June 1917, which proclaimed the independent creation of the Ukrainian people's future, to the Third Universal in early November – the proclamation of the Ukrainian People's Republic. It was during this time frame that the General Secretariat was established – the executive body of the UCR, which became the prototype of the future Ukrainian government. The first months of its work were associated with reaching agreements with the Provisional Government, which resulted in Petrograd's recognition of the Secretariat as its governing body in Ukraine. However,

as the author proves, the boundaries of competence and the territory of governance were significantly narrowed, which became the main reason for the slowdown in the General Secretariat's activities in the autumn of 1917. Overall, seven general secretariats operated during this period, among which the secretariat of public education proved to be the most institutionalized. The departments of internal affairs, land, finance, and the General Controller were also being formed. Separately, the researcher highlights the secretariat of interethnic affairs, where administrations – later vice-secretariats for Jewish and Polish affairs – were formed under the assistant general secretaries. Since the position of the General Scribe was part of the Secretariat, its main functions are also indicated.

With the rise of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the General Secretariat became the Ukrainian government and, as declared in the documents of that time, maintained an autonomous connection with a democratic federative Russia that was yet to be created. Its composition was expanded, and governance spread to all Ukrainian provinces. O. Kudlai analyzes in detail the measures and efforts of the Ukrainian authorities regarding the restructuring of the former Russian Empire alongside other state formations that emerged on its territory during the first year of the revolution. A logical continuation of this policy was the work to prepare and conduct elections to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, as well as measures to preserve the front under the command of the Headquarters of the Russian Commander-in-Chief. However, the actions of the Russian Bolsheviks and the start of separate negotiations by the Council of People's Commissars with the countries of the Quadruple Alliance put an end to these plans.

The author notes that the conditions in which the Ukrainian government had to work at the end of 1917 were difficult – the foreign policy situation was changing very rapidly, the financial and economic crisis was deepening, and destructive phenomena were spreading. Accordingly, the composition and tasks of the General Secretariat also changed. By early 1918, 18 secretariats were already operating within it. On the basis of the interethnic secretariat, the foreign policy department—the General Secretariat for Foreign Affairs—began its activities; the vice-secretariats for Jewish, Polish, and Great Russian affairs separated into independent secretariats; and a maritime department was established.

The monograph notes that in these difficult conditions, the Ukrainian authorities attempted to take local



government bodies under their control. The subordination of the Free Cossacks to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs was intended to help restore order. The first steps were taken to create a national financial system, and the printing of state money began. In general, economic policy was based on taking control of large enterprises and maintaining state monopolies, while in the field of agrarian relations, it focused on the abolition of private land ownership and the subordination of land committees to the Secretariat of Land Affairs. A new land bill was being developed based on the Socialist-Revolutionary principle of socialization. The management of the transport system and postal-telegraph districts was taken over by the relevant departments. In social policy, the legislation of the Provisional Government was maintained, an 8-hour workday was introduced, and measures to combat unemployment were implemented. Work began on reforming the judicial system of Ukraine. In the context of Bolshevik aggression, a General Staff was formed, and a law on the people's army was developed and adopted; the port of Odesa became the main base of the national navy. The State Control of the UPR became the pan-Ukrainian auditing institution. In the sphere of national policy, a law on national-personal autonomy was adopted, which legally established the rights of the peoples living on the territory of the UPR. The educational department continued its work based on the principles of unified state educational programs, the development of national schools for all peoples of Ukraine, and the decentralization of educational management. Efforts to support national culture and heritage preservation work were united under a separate Department of Arts.

Thus, according to the researcher's conclusion, in the period from November 7, 1917 (the issuance of the Third Universal of the UCR) to January 11, 1918 (the day the UPR was proclaimed a sovereign and independent state), the General Secretariat functioned as an autonomous, plenipotentiary government. A process of institutionalization of the secretariats, the subordination of local bodies, and the creation of departmental bodies took place. However, due to internal political disputes, their leaders changed frequently.

The largest section of the publication is the fourth, which covers the time span from the Fourth Universal of the Central Rada to the Hetman coup on April 29, 1918. During this period, the General Secretariat, as the government of an independent state, was renamed the Council of People's Ministers, and the general secretariats were renamed ministries. The author provides a detailed analysis of external and internal events, changes in Ukraine's foreign policy—participation in negotiations with the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk, the signing and main content of the Peace Treaty, the course of the first Russo-Ukrainian war in the winter of 1917–1918, the evacuation of Ukrainian government bodies to Zhytomyr; and finally, the military presence of German and Austro-Hungarian troops on the territory of the UPR, which significantly influenced events in Ukraine and the measures taken by the Ukrainian authorities, particularly the Cabinet of Ministers, in the spring of 1918.

The researcher notes that after the liberation of Ukrainian territory with the military assistance of new allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary, the country found itself in extremely difficult socio-economic, financial, and military circumstances. The ministries had to work under conditions of deep crisis in all spheres of internal life. In its policy, the government was guided by the main provisions of the Third

and Fourth Universals regarding the implementation of democratic and socialist reforms and leading the country to the convening of the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly, which was to determine the future direction of the country's development. A significant factor in the country's internal political life during this period was the activity of the foreign military administration of Germany and Austria-Hungary on its territory, with the former playing a leading role.

During this time, a tripartite German-Austrian-Ukrainian commission operated, the result of which was the signing of a Trade Agreement intended to ensure Ukraine's fulfillment of its obligations regarding the supply of grain and food to Germany and Austria-Hungary. State bodies began to operate – the State Chamber of Trade and the State Grain Bureau. The agrarian policy proved to be extremely unsuccessful – the adopted land law further complicated and intensified relations between different segments of the population and called into question the success of the agrarian reform. Most importantly, this policy ultimately ruined relations between the UCR and its government and the foreign military administration in Ukraine. The work of the Ministry of Finance was uncoordinated with other sectors of the economy and, therefore, largely unsuccessful. Following a series of appeals from financial and industrial circles to the Ukrainian authorities with offers of assistance in overcoming the economic crisis, the heads of the relevant ministries agreed on the cooperation of their representatives in the Chamber of Trade and the Grain Bureau.

O. Kudlai notes that during this period, foreign policy was changed – a Peace Treaty was signed, and the Central Powers became allies of the UPR. With their military support, the UCR and the government were able to return to Kyiv and continue their activities. In the sphere of socio-economic relations, a number of legal acts were developed and adopted to regulate them at the legislative level. A Party Committee was created, and measures to overcome unemployment were implemented. In military affairs, systematic work on the formation of a regular Ukrainian army was initiated. The planned reform of the judicial and educational systems of Ukraine continued. The national policy of the Ukrainian authorities was successful – separate ministries for Jewish, Polish, and Great Russian affairs, the largest national communities in Ukraine, operated on the basis of the law on national-personal autonomy. The State Control received independent status, and the State Controller was removed from the Council of People's Ministers. The General Scribe position was abolished – part of its powers were transferred to the Central Rada, while the position of Manager of Affairs of the government was to be introduced instead.

The monograph notes that, on the one hand, the main efforts of the ministries were focused on developing and adopting laws, issuing circulars, orders, etc.; on the other hand, connection with local authorities was practically lost, which worsened management capabilities and weakened the levers of influence on the internal situation in the country. This ultimately led to the Hetman coup at the end of April 1918 and the removal of the Central Rada from power, supported by the German military administration.

Of importance, in our view, is the section in which the author of the monograph analyzes the biographies of the figures who held the positions of general secretaries and ministers. Due to a lack of evidence and biographical data, it is incomplete, but it provides a certain idea of the people—their education, experience, and party affiliation – who directly participated in state-building during the time of the

Central Rada. We also note that the publication has a well-organized and fairly large name index, which testifies to the author's attempt to introduce into scientific circulation as many names as possible of people involved in the work of central executive bodies in 1917–1918.

Thus, the monograph by O. Kudlai is characterized by meticulous work with a large number of documentary

sources to reconstruct the process of formation, the definition of tasks, and the activities of the central executive bodies of Ukraine. It will be useful to historians, teachers, and students of the humanities, as it reveals one of the key aspects of state-building during the UPR era, contributing to a deeper understanding of the events and phenomena of the first year of the Ukrainian Revolution.

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