



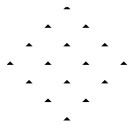
Uniwersał połaniecki - Tekst angielski

[A Universal Proclamation, prescribing complete freedom and the obligations for the country-folk.]
The RNN¹... has received from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the national armed forces a proclamation providing the conditions for the peasantry and their efficient care from the government, in the following form: Tadeusz Kościuszko², Supreme Commander of the National Armed Forces To the Commission for Order³ of all Lands and Districts Never were Poles in dread of the weapons of their enemies, so long as they were united among themselves and were able to use all their strength. Nor will it ever happen, I declare, that an army will conquer the Poles if the sly enemy – through perfidy, betrayal, and deceit – does not first destroy our will and our means of resistance. The entire course of Muscovite tyranny in Poland is proof of the degree to which this alien force has vexed our fate by variously using bribery, mendacious promises, unctuous pandering, inciting passions, inflaming one against another, blackening us to outsiders, everything, in a word, that devilish malice combined with the most perfidious cunning could conceive. In the many instances in which Poles have taken up arms against them, can this breed of brigands count a single true victory over us? But the fate of Polish courage has always been that the conquered enemy has replaced the yoke on our victorious necks at the moment we stopped to rest. How has such a turn of events for Poland come about? How is it that this nation has been groaning without the means to free itself? Alas, the cunning of Muscovite intrigue, more powerful than arms, has caused the Poles to be undone by the Poles themselves.

¹ Rada Najwyższa Narodowa, or Supreme National Council, was the central civil authority formed in the course of the Kościuszko Insurrection in 1794.

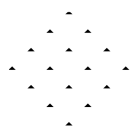
² Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817) was Commander-in-Chief (Naczelnik) of the armed forces struggling against Russia in the uprising named after him (the Kościuszko Insurrection). This Polish national hero was born to a middle-level nobility milieu. Thoroughly educated, including in Paris, he became famous for his contribution to the freedom of American colonies. After he returned to his homeland, he joined the war against Russia in defence of the Third-of-May Constitution. He eventually put himself at the head of the insurrection in 1794. After a series of successful struggles, the uprising was suppressed by Russian and Prussian troops; Kościuszko, wounded, was taken captive by the Russians. Released, he emigrated to the United States of America, and subsequently traveled to France and then to Switzerland, where he died.

³ The 'Commissions for Order' were civil-and-military local or regional administration bodies which operated in 1789–95 in the provinces (voivodeships), lands and districts (powiats), dealing with economic, military and administrative (that is, police) affairs.



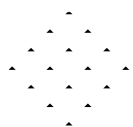
Moreover, the unfortunate Poles are divided by views regarding government and opinions about the law, upon which freedom and national organization must be based, and to innocent differences of opinion the criminal spirit of self-love and selfish prospects added mixed obstinacy, delay, and the tendency to comport with outsiders, ending in craven submission to them. The time has come, hastened by the scope of unhappiness and suffering. Yes, the time of Poland's ultimate fate, the epoch in which one goal, one undoubtable purpose, which permits no disagreement and which should unite hearts and minds and allow divided Poles to meet in a general alliance, excepting those who are known traitors or those timid and insecure citizens who follow their private motives. The current national uprising aims to return freedom, unity, and independence to Poland, and leave to freer times and the nation's will to determine under what sort of government it wishes to live. The existence of a diversity of opinions is suspended, the holy and obvious cause moves hearts strongly and conjoins together even those who were heretofore divided for sundry reasons.

Hence, the time, this very moment must be seized with the greatest zeal. The enemy exerts his entire energy to prevent us from using this occasion. He is using weapons, but these are the least dangerous force at his disposal. Against the host of frightened slaves we send the massed force of free citizens who, fighting for their own happiness, cannot fail to be victorious. That which has hitherto conquered us is the instrument of stealthily gnawing beasts, so now this loathsome Machiavellian product will be overcome by our vigilance, the ardor of worthy citizens, and the terrible sword of justice which reaches everywhere treason or perfidy harmful to the nation appears.



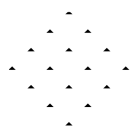
The fate of Poland depends on whether we crush the dual power of our enemies, that is: the force of their armies and of their intrigues. I must, hence, inform the nation that the Muscovites are seeking the means to enrage the country folk against us, citing the arbitrariness of the lords, their former misery, and, finally, promising a more prosperous future with Muscovite help. Speaking thus, they encourage and collaborate with the county folk in the joint plunder of the manors. These simple people, many times misled because of their distress, can and will fall into snares, and already we have seen that by seduction or force they have been put in enemy uniform. I must note with regret that the oft'times cruel treatment of the folk gives the Muscovite the opportunity to insult our entire Nation. Again and again I have received complaints from soldiers and recruits that their wives and children have not only failed to receive special attention, but that while their husbands and fathers serve the Commonwealth, they are subjected to the most onerous burdens. Such matters are certainly in many places without the knowledge and contrary to the will of the landowners, but in other places it must be the result of bad will or even the alien inspiration to quell entirely among the common people the fervor to defend the Fatherland.

But humanity, justice, and the good of the Fatherland show us easy and sure means by which we can avert the intrigues of domestic malice and of foreign intrigue. Let us declare that the peasants not only remain under the protection of the National Government, that an oppressed person has a ready refuge with the Commission for Order of his province, but that the oppressor, the persecutor of those defending the country will be punished as an enemy of and traitor to the Fatherland.



In this way, worthy of the justice of a glorious nation, being agreeable to the kind hearted, and only lightly burdening personal interests we will join the common people to the public cause and protect them from the enemy's snares. Hence I recommend to the Commissions for Order of the Province and the Lands of the entire country that the following arrangement is to be given to all landlords, property holders, and all their subordinate administrators: 1. Declare to the common people that according to the law they remain under the protection of the National Government.

2. That every peasant is personally free and that he is free to move where he wishes, provided he notifies the Commission for Order of his province as to where he goes, and provided he has paid all due debts as well as the national taxes. 3. That the common people have relief in their labor obligations so that someone who works five or six days weekly will have two days relief a week. Who works three or four days weekly will have one day relief a week, who works two will have one day. Who works one day a week, now need work one day in two weeks. Moreover, he who performs corvée for two, will be given relief for two. Who works singly will be given relief for single work. The leave system will last the duration of the insurrection, that is until the permanent legislative authorities make arrangements in this matter.

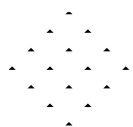


4. Local authorities shall endeavor that the farms of those who serve in the army of the Commonwealth not fall into decay and that the land, which is the source of our wealth, shall not lie fallow. Both the manors and the hamlets should attend to this matter.

5. From those who are called to the general levy [Polish, *pospolite ruszenie*], as long as they remain under arms, no corvée will be exacted. Rather, it will resume only with their return home. 6. The possession of land with obligations subject to the aforesaid relief shall not be taken away from the peasant by the lord, unless previously the lord has settled the matter before the local overseer and proved that the peasant has not fulfilled his obligations.

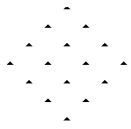
7. Should a sub-prefect, steward, or commissioner violate this regulation and burden the peasantry, he shall be taken before the Commission and given over to a criminal court.

8. If a landlord (and this I do not expect) orders or commits similar oppressions, he will be called to account as an opponent of the aims of the insurrection. 9. In return, the country folk, recognizing the justice and goodness of the government should eagerly perform the corvée which remains, be obedient to their authorities, attend to the farms, till and sow the soil well, and when the peasants receive a reduction in their burdens for the sake of the Fatherland and when the landlords gladly accept it thanks to their love for the Fatherland, the peasants should not refuse to be hired on by the manors for a fair wage to do needed work.



10. For ease in maintaining order to ensure that these instructions are carried out, the Commissions for Order will divide, as is possible in their organizations, provinces, or lands, or districts into supervisory divisions so that each division includes a farm population of one-thousand or, at the most twelve-hundred. They will designate these divisions according to the name of the chief village or town and thereby they will form a network in which easy communication will be possible. 11. In each division a supervisor will be designated, a capable and worthy person, who, in addition to taking on responsibilities within the Commissions for Order, will collect complaints from the people in his charge and from the manor in case the local population is disobedient or unruly. He will be responsible for settling arguments, and if the parties are not content, he will send them to the Commission for Order.

12. The benefaction of the government in easing the burdens of the common people should encourage them all the more to work, to farm, and to defend the Fatherland. Should there be those who would abuse the generosity and sense of justice of the government, would dissuade others from work, would rebel against the landlords, would refuse to defend the Fatherland, the Commissions for Order in the Counties and Districts will have to turn their diligent attention to this and immediately order the arrest of these rogues and give them over to criminal Court. To the same degree must the Commissions for Order watch over vagabonds who desert their homes and wander about the land. All these people are to be caught and sent to the security section existing in each Commission and, after being examined, if they are shown to be vagrants and idlers they should be employed in public work.



13. The Clergy, the most immediate teachers of the common people, should emphasize to them their obligations towards the Fatherland, which is really their mother. These clergy should enlighten the people that diligent work on their own land and that of the manor is as dear a sacrifice for the Fatherland as that performed by those who with armed force protect it from pillage and robbery against enemy soldiers: that in fulfilling his obligations to the manors, as abated by this manifesto, need do nothing more, and must only pay the debt to the landlords from whom he received the lands.

14. Clergy of both confessions shall announce this manifesto from the pulpits of the Catholic and Orthodox churches for the next four Sundays. Moreover, the Commissions for Order shall designate from their ranks (or from amongst the general citizenry dedicated to the good of the Fatherland) people who will visit gatherings in the villages and parishes and there read this manifesto aloud encouraging the people to demonstrate their gratitude for the great benefaction by sincere desire in the defense of the Commonwealth.

Done at the camp near Połaniec. May 7, 1794

Tadeusz Kościuszko

Translated © by M.B. Biskupski

Edited by Philip Earl Steele