

# THE RUSSIAN CONSTITUTION

## *On Paper, One Of The Most Liberal In The World*



members. The Council of Nationalities consists of about 238 representatives sent by the Supreme Councils of the various federated and autonomous Republics and the Soviets of the autonomous areas, ten members from each of the former and two from the latter. Either Chamber may initiate legislation.

The Supreme Council is elected for four years, and it nominates a "Praesidium," a sort of Cabinet of 37 members, who have extensive powers, such as that of convoking the Council, interrupting the laws, holding referendums,

equality of rights for all citizens, without distinction of nationality, race, or sex.

Liberty of conscience is guaranteed, the Church is separated from the State, and any citizen is free to practise religion or to employ anti-religious propaganda. There is guaranteed also freedom of speech, of the Press, of public meeting, and to ensure these rights the State "puts at the disposition of workers and of their organisations printing presses, stocks of paper, public buildings, streets, post, telegraph and

**T**HE outstanding difference between Russia and other totalitarian States is the fact that Russia has a liberal constitution—on paper, one of the most liberal in the world. Here is a summary of the chief clauses, based on a French translation of the original Russian.

"The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics," says the first article of the Russian Constitution, "is a socialist State of workers and of peasants." This Constitution was promulgated by the Soviet authorities a few years ago, and was shortly after ratified by the Congress of Soviets. The Russian Government at the time sent copies of the Constitution, with appropriate translations, to the other Governments of the world.

The Constitution has no reference to Communism by name. The Soviet Socialist Republics, which form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, were originally seven in number, consisting of the vast areas of European Russia, the Ukraine, White Russia, Transcaucasia, and three areas formerly Turkestan, now Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tadjikistan. Transcaucasia and old Russia were later given the status of Federated Republics.

### Political And Economic Basis

The Union of Soviet Republics is stated in Article 2 of the Constitution to have as its political foundation the representatives of the workers "who have become great and strong following the destruction of the power of capitalist owners."

The economic base of the Soviet Union is constituted by the socialist economic system and by socialistic ownership of the instruments and means of production, which is assured by the removal of the capitalist system, the suppression of the private ownership of the

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**ABOVE:**  
*Members of the  
Supreme Soviet  
Council in ses-  
sion*

●  
**RIGHT:**  
*The Kremlin,  
seat of govern-  
ment of the  
Soviet Union*  
●



means of production, and by the abolition of the exploitation of man by man (Article 4). The earth, waters, forests, mines, banks, agricultural instruments, all forms of transport, buildings, etc., are the property of the State.

### Some Private Property

Private property is allowed to a very limited extent, by Article 9. This allows "Small private economy of peasants and artisans, in articles of daily use, of personal use, and comfort in the home."

Article 12 says: "Work is an obligation upon each citizen, by virtue of the principle 'he who does not work does not eat.'" The principle of socialism is applied—to each according to his abilities, to each according to his need.

The supreme executive power in the State is the "Supreme Council." Legislative power is exercised exclusively by this Council. It has two Chambers, the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities. Members of the former Council are elected by universal suffrage of those aged 18 at least, with one member for each 300,000 inhabitants. This would give a House of about 575

and notably, while the Council is not sitting, of "declaring a state of war in case of aggression against the State." This Praesidium also ratifies treaties and appoints Ambassadors and Ministers abroad.

### Law And Justice

As regards law and justice, judges are elected by popular vote for a period of three years. The supreme legal tribunal is appointed by the Supreme Council. There are judges for the different Republics and other areas. Judicial hearings are to be in public, and the accused have the right to be defended.

By Article No. 118, the citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to work, to obtain guaranteed work with remuneration according to its quality and quantity. They also (No. 119) have the right to rest. This is guaranteed by a working day of seven hours for most workers, by the provision of holidays on full pay, and by many public amenities. Citizens also have the right to be educated. Women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life. Article 123 says it is unalterable law that there is

telephone offices, and other things necessary for the exercise of these rights."

Another right is that of the inviolability of the person—no citizen may be arrested except under legal sanction—and inviolability of the homes and the correspondence of citizens.

### Duties of the Citizen

The duties of the citizens are laid down to some extent. They must observe the laws, the discipline of work, and carry out their social duty, and must respect State property and uphold "this sacred and inviolable base of the Soviet regime, the source of the wealth and power of their native land, and of a cultural life for all workers."

General military service in the Red Army is "an honourable duty" laid on all citizens, and the defence of the country is a sacred duty. Any treason or any act tending to weaken the State's military power is the gravest of crimes.

Finally, by Article 143, the emblem of the Soviet Union is the sickle and hammer on a terrestrial globe, in the sun's rays, surrounded by swords, with the inscription "Proletarians of all countries, unite."

—L.D.R.