UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

On 12 March, 1917, a revolution broke out in Russia, as a result of which the Emperor Nicholas II abdicated. A Provisional Government under Prince George Lvov was set up by the Duma, which held office until 16 May, 1917, when it was reorganized. On 6 August, 1917, a new Cabinet under Alexander Kerensky was formed. This, too, was reorganized on 8 October, and maintained itself until 7 November, 1917, when the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet seized the government authority, and handed it over the next day to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed by the Union of the R.S.F.S.R., Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republic, by agreement between the Soviet Governments of the four republics, and the Treaty of Union was adopted by the first Soviet Congress of the U.S.S.R. on 30 December, 1922. The treaty, including the constitution of the Union, gave practical as well as theoretical equality to all the nationalities within the Union; it was adopted by the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. on 6 July, 1923, and finally ratified on 31 January, 1924. In May, 1925, the Uzbek and Turkmen Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and in December, 1929, the Tadzhik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, were declared Soviet Socialist Republics of the U.S.S.R. Later, the Transcaucasian Republic was split up into the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, each of which became constituent republics of the Union.

At the 8th Congress of the Soviets, on 5 December, 1936, a new constitution of the U.S.S.R. was adopted, known widely as the Stalin Constitution. At the same time the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic were proclaimed constituent republics of the U.S.S.R., which then consisted of eleven republics.

In September, 1939, the Soviet Government incorporated the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia—inhabited mainly by Ukrainians and Byelorussians. This territory ethnographically and economically was part of the Soviet Republics of Ukraine and Byelorussia when it was seized by Poland in 1920. Western Ukraine and Byelorussia were subsequently incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and into the
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic respectively. On 22 May, 1951, it was announced that some frontier sections of the Drogobyoh Region of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Lublin Voivodship of the Polish Republic have been exchanged (see p. 1298).

On 31 March, 1940, the territory ceded by Finland was joined to that of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Karelia to form the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic which was admitted into the Union as the 12th Soviet Republic.

On 2 August, 1940, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was constituted as the 13th Soviet Republic. It comprised the former Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Bessarabia (ceded by Rumania on 28 June, 1940), except for the districts of Khotin, Akerman and Ismail, which, together with Northern Bukovina, were incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. On 29 June, 1945, Ruthenia (Sub-Carpathian Russia) was by treaty with Czechoslovakia likewise embodied in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Soviet–Rumanian frontier thus constituted was confirmed by the peace treaty with Rumania, signed on 10 February, 1947.

On 3 Aug., 1940, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were incorporated in the Soviet Union as the 14th, 15th and 16th Soviet Republics.

After the defeat of Germany it was agreed by the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the U.S.S.R. (by the Potsdam declaration) that part of East Prussia should be embodied in the U.S.S.R. The area which includes the towns of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad in 1946), Tilsit (renamed Sovietsk) and Insterburg (renamed Chernyakhovsk), was joined to the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.

By the peace treaty with Finland, signed on 10 Feb., 1947, the province of Petsamo (Pechenga), previously ceded to Finland by the Soviet Union on 14 Oct., 1920, and 12 March, 1940, was returned to the Soviet Union.

In 1945, after the defeat of Japan, the southern half of Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands were, by agreement with the Allies, incorporated in the U.S.S.R.

The Soviet Union is a socialist state of workers and peasants, the political units of which are the Soviets or councils of workers by hand and brain. All central and local authority is vested in these Soviets.

The following is a brief outline of the principal provisions of the constitution of the U.S.S.R.:—The economic foundation of the U.S.S.R. is the socialist system of economy and the socialist ownership in the means of production and the abolition of the exploitation of man by man in accordance with the principle, 'He who does not work, neither shall he eat.' There are two forms of socialist property in the U.S.S.R.: (1) State property (property of the whole people); (2) Co-operative and collective farm (Kolkhoz) property (property of individual collective farms and property of co-operative associations). The land, mineral deposits, waters, forests, mills, factories, mines, railways, water and air transport, banks, means of communication, large state-organized agricultural enterprises such as state farms (Sovkhozy), machine and tractor stations and the like, as well as municipal enterprises and the principal dwelling-house properties in the cities and industrial localities, are state property, that is, the property of the whole people; but the land occupied by collective farmers is secured to them in perpetuity so long as they use it in accordance with the laws of the country. The members of the Kolkhozy also have small plots of land attached to their dwellings for their own use. Peasants unwilling to enter a Kolkhoz may retain their individual farms, but they are not allowed to exploit hired labour. The right of personal property of citizens in their income from work and in their savings, in their dwelling-houses and auxiliary household economy, their domestic furniture and utensils and objects of personal use