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Paper

FACTS ABOUT THE SOVIET UNION



Prepared For Schools

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THE LAND

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics covers one-sixth of the world. It is the largest continuous land mass—8,350,000 square miles in area. That is nearly three times as big as Australia, whose area is 2,975,000 square miles—not a small place!

The distance from Moscow to Vladivostock is further than from Cape York Peninsula to Melbourne. But the people who live in the Soviet Far East are quite near neighbours of ours. It takes only three weeks by ship to come from Vladivostock to Sydney. The development of air transport will reduce that considerably.

The frontiers of the U.S.S.R. extend from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and from India to the North Pole. When night falls on the Western frontiers, the sun is already rising in the East. There is eternal winter on its northernmost territories; down South it reaches into the sub-tropical zone.

From a poverty-ridden agricultural country, the Soviet Union has become in a generation one of the world's greatest producers of wealth. Its agriculture has been scientifically developed. Mechanisation and irrigation on a large scale, the combination of small farms into large collective farms and the establishment of State farms have resulted in a tremendous increase in production. In some cases this has been as much as 200 per cent. Tremendous amounts of flax, cotton, sugar beets and Kok-sagyz (rubber) are grown in the Soviet Union. It produces more wheat, rye, barley and oats than any other country in the world.

Its industries, planned and built in the last twenty years, are second only to those of the United States. Its mineral resources are abundant. Ten per cent. of the world's petroleum, 12 per cent. of the world's gold, 20 per cent. of the world's iron ore and 40 per cent. of the world's manganese ore come from the Soviet Union. It is fourth in the world for production of coal, and leads in the output of platinum. It ranks high for production of copper, zinc and lead.

THE PEOPLE

The last pre-war census counted 193,000,000 people living in the Soviet Union. But not all are "Russians." In fact little more than half of them are Russians, while the rest belong to more than fifty different nationalities and 125 small national groups. One hundred and fifty different languages and dialects are in use.

In Central Asia, in the far eastern and the far northern sections, many peoples were illiterate. Some had never had a written language of their own. They spoke tongues no one else understood. In many cases, they had no roads, no schools, no communications, no industry and only primitive agriculture. In 1897, only 24 per cent of the Russian people could read and write.

From 1917 all this was changed. The Soviet Constitution states: "Equality of rights of citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life is an infeasible law."

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The first thing that the Soviet Government did after the Revolution of 1917 was to teach the people to read and write. In twenty years, 40,000,000 adults were taught to read and write. They learned to write not only in Russian, but in their own languages—for some of which an alphabet had to be made. In the Soviet Union the different nationalities are encouraged to develop their own literature, songs, arts and handicrafts.

AN EXAMPLE

Before 1917, 99 per cent. of the six million Uzbeks could not read or write. Poverty-stricken growers of silk and cotton, they had to send all they produced to Russia, for the Tsar would not allow textile mills to be built in Uzbekistan. The women had veiled faces. When they married, they were traded off like cattle.

Today Uzbekistan's silk and cotton are spun and woven in its own huge mills. Because of modern methods of irrigation and machinery used on the collective cotton farms, Uzbekistan's cotton planters get the highest yield in the world. Education has made equal strides with industry. Instead of the 15 universities of pre-1917, there are 139. Just before the Second World War, there were 916,000 children attending Uzbek elementary schools.

The women of Uzbekistan no longer wear veils. As in all the republics of the Soviet Union, they play an equal part with men in their nation's life. Vice-president of the Republic is a woman. In the Soviet that governs Uzbekistan, over one hundred of the deputies are women. Many Uzbek women have become industrial executives, technicians and engineers.

Uzbekistan has still preserved its national culture, merging the old and the new in music and dancing. It has a notable ballet and opera companies, and an Uzbek woman, Tamara Khanum, has made the picturesque dances of her people famous throughout the U.S.S.R.

As with Uzbekistan, so with the other peoples of the Soviet Union. The ancient culture and handicrafts of Armenia, Georgia, Kirghizia, the Ukraine, and the other nations have been preserved and developed under the Soviet Government. The outcome of this respect for the nationalities was clearly seen in the recent war. There were no "discontented minorities" to divide the unity of the Soviet people in their fight against the Nazi invaders.

GOVERNMENT

In the Soviet Union, every man and woman from the age of 18, of whatever race, color or nationality, has the right to vote.

The structure of the Soviet Government in some respects resembles our Federal Government. It has two Houses, of which the Council of the Union has 569 members elected by universal and direct suffrage (like our House of Representatives) on the basis of one member for every 300,000 of the population. The Council of Nationalities has 574 members representing separate Republics and the 180 different nationalities of the Union. The Supreme Soviet consisting of these two Councils is elected for four years.



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THE 16 REPUBLICS OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| R.S.F.S.R. | AZERBAIJAN |
| UKRAINE | KAZAKHSTAN |
| BYELO RUSSIA | KIRGHIZIA |
| UZBEKISTAN | KARELO-FINN |
| TURKMENIA | MOLDAVIA |
| TAJIKISTAN | LITHUANIA |
| GEORGIA | LATVIA |
| ARMENIA | ESTONIA |

AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS IN THE UNION REPUBLICS

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Abkhazian | Kalmyk | Yakut |
| Abkhazian | Komi | Nakhichevan |
| Abkhazian | Mariisk | Abkhazian |
| Abkhazian | Mordvian | Abkhazian |
| Abkhazian | North Ossetian | Kara-Kalpak |
| Abkhazian | Udmurt | Crimean |

The Supreme Soviet has exclusive legislative power. Every Bill, before it becomes law, must be approved by a majority of both Houses.

The Supreme Soviet, sitting in joint session, elects the Presidium and the Council of People's Commissars (like our Cabinet in function).

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet is accountable to the Supreme Soviet and exercises supreme governmental authority between the sessions of the latter. It interprets existing laws and issues decrees; initiates legislation; appoints and dismisses the high command of the armies; ratifies treaties with other nations and appoints and recalls ambassadors for the Soviet Union.

The Council of People's Commissars is the highest executive and administrative body. It is responsible to the Supreme Soviet and to the Presidium. It is composed of the Ministers (called Commissars) of the various federal departments such as Defence, Foreign Affairs, Industry, Interior, Justice, Health, etc. It directs and co-ordinates the work of these departments, the execution of the State Budget and of the national economic programme.

Each of the 16 Union Republics has its own government on the pattern of the All-Union-Soviet. From 1922, defence and foreign affairs were the responsibility of the central government only, but since February 1, 1944, each of the 16 Union Republics has had its own Commissar of Foreign Affairs and of Defence. Each Republic is now able to make its own agreements with foreign countries, send its own ambassadors, and organise its own army, responsible, of course, to the Central Command of the Red Army of the U.S.S.R.

EDUCATION

Soviet Children receive public care and education from early childhood until they finish their high school or university studies. Nursery schools are provided for them until they are four; kindergartens from four to seven years old. After that, every child must go to the "seven-year schools," which are free, and much like our elementary schools.

After the "seven-year schools" students go to high schools for special training, and those qualified may go on to a university or an institute (for technical students). Good students pay no tuition fees. In fact, the government gives them enough to live on while they are studying.

The Soviet Union considers schools so important that classes were held even in cities under gunfire. Many school children from Western Russia were evacuated to the East, and universities and institutes from Leningrad and similar "front-line" cities carried on their work beyond the reach of the Nazis. In the State Budget of 1944, more was allotted towards the expenses of education than in the Budget of 1939, although the country was still deep in the war. In 1943 a special Academy was founded for educational research. New types of schools—Suvorov, Ushakov and Nakhimov schools—were founded in 1943 for war orphans, the sons of Red Army men and of guerrilla fighters.

The success of the Soviet education system is shown by the fact that not one recruit to the Red Army in recent years has been illiterate, and a considerable number have had a full secondary education.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT

These have become ever more popular in the Soviet Union. There are 89 major sports societies, and nearly 63,000 sports groups in them. Sport is organised round the "Prepared for Labor and Defence" badge, which is awarded for proficiency in cross-country running, ski-ing, swimming, rowing, shooting, track and field events, and gymnastics. Since it was instituted in 1934, more than 10,000,000 have won the badge. Parachute-jumping and bicycling are other very popular sports in the U.S.S.R.

Games of the nationalities have attracted many players. There are interesting forms of equestrian sports and wrestling from Central Asia, and exciting reindeer races from the North.

For the sports societies, fees are very low. Equipment and costumes are provided by the society.

There are individual and team championship tournaments in nearly every field of sport. Horse racing has a very big following—especially trotting. This year, the Moscow Derby attracted entrants from all over the Soviet Union.

The great annual Physical Culture Parade through Red Square in Moscow took place this year on August 12, in the presence of General Eisenhower. All the sports societies and national groups take part in this spectacular event.

CHILDREN IN THE WAR

"Years will pass. You will become adults. And then in the good hour of rest after big and peaceful work, you will remember with gladness that in the terrible days you did not sit about with folded hands, but in every way you could, you helped your country in its difficult and very important struggle against man-hating Fascism."

These are the words of the popular Soviet children's author, Arkady Gaidar, who wrote "Timur and His Comrades," and who was killed by the Nazis.

"Timur," of which a film was made, was such a best-seller in the Soviet Union that "Timur Brigades" were formed by boys and girls to help the families of soldiers. "Timurites" minded babies, dusted and swept, ran errands, and cleaned house when the mother was working and the father was in the services.

The other main Soviet youth organisation was formed years before the war—the Pioneers, who are divided into troops and brigades like our Scouts. To the boxing, gymnasium, sports and handicraft of the peace-time years, the Pioneers added military science during the war. In 1939, there were 15 million young people between 10 and 16 in the Pioneers. They have holiday camps and seaside homes, the most famous being Artek, a very beautiful place on the Crimean coast.

There were many children's activities during the war, for the Soviet authorities knew that besides helping their country, the children would suffer less from the shock of war if they were actively engaged in fighting it. So children helped to harvest crops, collected scrap, made gifts for the Red Army, visited the wounded in hospitals, trained as mechanics and radio-men. Many in the war areas acted as scouts, and even as guerrilla fighters.

MUSIC AND THEATRE

The Russian people have always loved music, and in the U.S.S.R. even during the war, there has been great activity in the composition of new music, and the performance of classical and modern symphonies, ballets, operas, cantatas and chamber music. The works of Tchaikowsky, Borodin and Glinka are very frequently performed. There are beautiful and elaborate performances of their operas and ballets in many cities.

Modern Soviet composers—notably Shostakovick, Prokofieff and Khatchaturian—have won high esteem beyond the U.S.S.R. as well as at home.

Soviet ballet is superbly performed and staged, in the tradition of Russian ballet known throughout the world. New inspiration for dancing has come from the folk dances and music of the many nationalities. Khatchaturian's ballets "Happiness" and "Gayeneh" are on Armenian themes.

Soviet children's theatres present plays and revues regularly for large audiences of young people. There are also many film-theatres, for which special children's films are made. Among the best-loved entertainments for children are puppet-shows. This year the Moscow Puppet Theatre performed Kipling's Jungle Book stories about Mowgli.

Shakespeare is a favorite with Russian actors and audiences. Recently, also, a Russian dramatisation of the "Pickwick Papers" had great success in Moscow.

AUSTRALIA AND THE U.S.S.R.

During the war the two countries have become allies and friends. In admiration for the war effort of the Soviet people, Australians sent food, medical supplies, and sheepskins. The two countries have exchanged ambassadors, and recently a new Soviet Minister, Mr. N. M. Lifanov, who is an expert in Far Eastern affairs, arrived in Canberra.

The entry of the U.S.S.R. into the Japanese war made us realise more clearly that the Soviet Union is a Pacific as well as a European country, and that its Maritime Provinces are not nearly as far from Australia as are European countries. Already it is clear that the two countries have a good deal to trade with: Australia has approached the U.S.S.R. for 100,000,000 super feet of the timber we need so much for home-building; and with the reorganisation of the Russian textile industry, there is an excellent opportunity for Australia to supply wool. Friendship and trade between the two countries have great possibilities in the peace.

* For further information and pictures about the U.S.S.R., enquire at Australia-Soviet House, 330 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, C.1.

