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**SOVIET
LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

by
DON BROWN

Editor of
"RUSSIA TODAY"



A Russia Today Publication



885

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and other Municipal Services

by Don Brown

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The Socialist basis of Soviet society makes needless the obstructive Party bickerings of our Council Chambers. A common aim is infused throughout soviet local and national government.

The soviets meet in the evenings, permitting attendance without loss of work and wages.

Soviet municipal officials may be elected to the soviet.

There is no plural voting in the Soviet Union—no business, property, or university votes.

The Soviet financial system compares well with our rating system. Rating often tends to accentuate the gulf between town and country, and to give advantage to a wealthy community.

A penny rate in Poplar (population 625,268) yields £2,606, whilst in Westminster (population 129,579) it yields £41,792—twenty times as much.

The absence of landlords, “land value” and “rateable value” makes Soviet town planning much easier. Slums can be cleared, bridges erected, parks planned, without concern for private profit. Moscow for instance, is planned in considerable detail, to expand to a population of 5,000,000. When Citizen 5,000,001 arrives he will have to re-pack his bag and settle elsewhere.

Some of the bad points in our system are legacies which grew out of the municipal needs of Tudor England, not yet adjusted to modern needs, whereas the Soviet system was recently fashioned to solve the problems of democratic government in a modern way.

There is much however that we could teach the Russians—not so much in the matter of organisation as in the technical sphere. Many of the achievements of British local government would win high praise from the Russians on the grounds of technical ingenuity and excellence of workmanship.

SOVIET LOCAL GOVERNMENT

NEW BEGINNINGS

TEN years ago, a group of architects and engineers struggled along the wave-battered shore of the Caspian Sea. The Apsheron Peninsula looked inhospitable, but one of the architects was saying “Here we will have a theatre, and there a cinema. On that raised land will stand an hotel, with plenty of sea view.”

This was the planned beginning of the Soviet city of Sumgait in Azerbaidjan. The plan provided for a rapid growth to 100,000 inhabitants, with all a modern city would require.

That was *one* method of bringing a barren piece of Soviet territory to life.

Then there was the newly created township of Igarka—above the Arctic Circle—the requisites for the construction of which set off from Archangel and Vladivostok in five ships with every requirement down to 2,000 razor blades. These Noah’s Arks containing all the requirements of a township set sail with their ingenious prefabrications in July, 1936—and Igarka, now well established on the Nordvyk oilfield, creates a fuel-base which doubles the cargo-capacity of ships on the northern sea route.

Few local governments start with such a clean sheet as this, even in the Soviet Union. But before the war 270 Soviet towns were being replanned, and now there is the tremendous task of repairing the ravages of war—being tackled in the fourth Five-Year Plan.

It is the local soviets which have to translate these schemes into achievement.

How does this local government work? How is it elected? Where does it find the money? Is it democratic?

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The word “Soviet” means “Council,” and was the name given to the councils of workers and peasants and soldiers, which first came into being during the 1905 Revolution. The name was given to similar Councils in 1917 and has remained ever since.

The local authorities of czarist times disintegrated in 1918. For some years following, local soviets in towns and villages assumed what powers they wished and administered their areas in their own way. Eventually the central government formed new divisions of local government—the oblast, krai, okrug, rayon, city and town soviets, and selosoviet (village soviet).

An oblast is an administrative district which contains no autonomous areas. An autonomous area peopled by a national minority is usually known as a krai—the largest units below the

22 Autonomous Republics. The 80 oblasts vary in size from the Moscow Oblast (2,000 villages and 42 towns) to the South Ossetian Republic (41 villages and one town).

A rayon is a large unit of villages, small cities and towns. There are 3,500 rayons in the U.S.S.R.

Between oblast and rayon is another unit—the okrug. Since 1930 they have been largely superseded by the rayon and only about 30 remain.

In addition there are 808 cities and towns, 942 town-hamlets and hamlets, and 70,000 villages, all electing their own soviets.

These bodies are responsible for man's activities over one-sixth of the earth's surface—an area a million square miles larger than the face of the full moon, and inhabited by nearly 200,000,000 people of 183 separate nationalities, speaking 150 different languages, and at different stages of cultural and economic development.

PECULIAR PROBLEMS.

The Soviet Government has been faced with many problems in its attempt to devise a system of democratic local government.

Imagine the difficulties in relation to the nomads. What system of voting, representation and taxation is possible for such Khirghiz "townships," which when the grazing gets thin, move their "town" of felt-and-wattle "yurtas" to new pastures?

What sort of soviet assembly will suit the Soviet Eskimos, whole "villages" of whom will be sealing amongst the ice-floes in their kayaks?

What of the voting rights of the Nentsi following their reindeer herds as the melting snows reveal more moss above the Arctic Circle?

Great encouragement has been given to these people to abandon their nomadic life so far as it was possible. Irrigation projects ensured grazing and food crops. Agricultural scientists produced hardy varieties of wheat and vegetables which would grow in the far north. Fish-canneries were established near the fishing grounds, and settled townships came into being around them. Nomadic fishermen have become members of fishing co-operatives, whilst the establishment of breeding-farms for sable and silver fox is bringing stability and settlement to the fur trappers.

In the kaleidoscope of nationalities represented in the Supreme Soviet, the Soviet of Nationalities, and local organs of government, can now be discerned the faces of Deputies elected by the Nentsi, the Evenki, and Khirghizians—from the farthest corners of the Soviet Union.

These people have quickly developed their local government, and the Soviet system holds sway in place of previous backwardness.

Where any form of local government already existed, the best features have been incorporated into the local Soviet system.

enable them to carry out their part of the plan—that is, their own plan as approved or modified by higher soviets in conformity with the District, Republic, and All-Union plans. The money comes to them both from local collections of taxes due, and grants from higher bodies.

In addition, a local authority often has a local income of its own. Moscow has a motor car tax, a collective farm will have ticket-money from its own cinema and so on. Then there is an almost universal "culture tax"—a local levy which must be expended on cultural needs—a playing field, theatre or club, etc.

Income from local sources is tending to increase, with less dependency upon grants from higher soviets. In 1935 less than one-third of local budgets was derived from local sources, and it had risen to nearly a half by 1940.

LOCAL LOANS

Town or country soviets may seek authority to raise a loan for some local venture—a waterworks or hospital, etc.

A town would get such a loan from a special department of the State Bank—Tsekombank—which grants short-term loans up to five years at 3 per cent. per annum, and long-term loans up to 40 years at 1 per cent. per annum for municipal developments.

Big enterprises like the Moscow Metro, the Lenin Library, or the Academy of Science are not looked upon as local government responsibilities but are paid for by the State.

A village wishing to borrow money may do so from another State Bank department—the Selhozbank—which specialises in long-term credits to agriculture. In 1944 this bank advanced over 265,000,000 roubles for rehabilitation work, and in 1945 has loaned 350,000,000 for the purchase of new cattle, and home and farm buildings.

HOW DOES IT COMPARE WITH OURS?

An adequate comparison is not possible here, but one or two points are worthy of notice.

We appear to have too many local bodies—many of them too small for their tasks. There are 62 County Councils, 83 County Borough Councils, 309 Borough Councils, 572 Urban Districts, 475 Rural Districts, 7,000 Parish Councils, and 4,100 Parish meetings for an area a hundred times smaller than the Soviet Union.

The squabbles amongst these bodies regarding their "rights" are not found in the Soviet Union, where no local activity is *ultra vires* if it does not conflict with the general interest.

In place of apathy in local government, the Soviet public participate to a wide degree and there is close contact between elector and elected.

War Tax was introduced in December, 1941, and applies to all between 19 and 60. It is a form of additional income tax and is collected monthly at source at the following rates: annual incomes up to 1,800 roubles pay 120 roubles per year, between 9,600 and 10,800 pay 1,020; above 24,000 pay 2,700 roubles per year—i.e., between 7 per cent. and 11 per cent. It applies to collective and peasant farmers, who pay from 150 to 500 roubles per year according to the farm's prosperity. Persons exempt from the war tax are Service men and their families, invalids, men over 60 and women over 55. Persons of military age but exempt from service pay a 50 per cent. higher tax.

Mass Loans initiated in 1928, designed, like our War Savings, to soak up surplus purchasing power, particularly for the war period, bring in about 10 billion roubles a year. They bear interest at about 4 per cent., tax free, may be borrowed upon up to 30 per cent. of their value, and are redeemable on demand in cases of dire need. They combine lottery features such as the option to take State Lottery tickets in lieu of interest as it falls due.

These loans are a source of a great deal of revenue for the local authorities. For instance, out of the 9,000,000,000 roubles collected in the 1940 Loan, 50 per cent., of all urban subscriptions went to the Union Republics who passed on 50 per cent. of it (25 per cent. of the whole) to the local soviets. Of the loan money collected in the villages, 90 per cent. of it was kept by them for their own use. Moscow retains 10 per cent. of State Loans collected in its area.

The Soviet Government has found no reluctance to invest in the several War Loans—a good sign of confidence—as will be seen from these figures. The 1942 Loan called for 10,000,000,000 roubles and was over-subscribed 125 per cent. in 10 days; the 1943 Loan of 12,000,000,000 was reached in one day, and in seven days had reached 20,000,000,000; the 1944 Loan of 25,000,000,000 roubles had reached 28,064,170,000 roubles in six days.

This was 10 per cent. of the entire Soviet budget for that year, and was subscribed to by 72,000,000 citizens.

Defence Fund. A unique feature of Soviet finance is the amount received in voluntary contributions—gifts—to the national exchequer, amounting to almost as much as the tax receipts. It was 20,000,000,000 in 1942 and has steadily increased. It may be some years before OUR Income Tax people are working overtime issuing receipts for voluntary contributions. Such gifts come from individuals, churches, collective farms, army units, etc.

Lotteries. State-sponsored lotteries for special needs—road-building for instance—are quite a popular feature in the Soviet Union and during the war have brought in 7,000,000,000 roubles.

LOCAL ADDITIONS

The foregoing are the main sources of State finances in the Soviet Union, and they reach the local authorities in such amounts as will

There is, therefore, considerable variation from place to place in the details of election and government.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Prior to the Stalin Constitution of 1936 Soviet citizens only chose their local (town or village) representatives, who in turn elected some of their number to the rayon soviet. Indirect election of this kind went on right up to the Supreme Soviet, but since 1936 there has been direct election to *all* soviets, guaranteed in Article 134 of the Stalin Constitution. This declares that the Deputies to all soviets “are elected by the electors on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage, by secret ballot.”

Elections to city, town, and village soviets take place every two years—and every four years to higher bodies.

Prior to 1936, elections had been “open”—by show of hands at relatively small gatherings, usually in the factories or other places of work.

Since 1936 the elections have been by secret ballot, and on a territorial basis as in Britain, in place of the industrial basis. Factory units still meet as a kind of discussion group, and are very active in stimulating election interest. They often nominate candidates and submit requests to be dealt with by the soviet.

The people previously excluded from the franchise (priests, etc.) now have the vote, two categories alone excepted. This broadening of the democratic basis of Soviet society is assured in Article 135 of the Constitution:—

“Elections of Deputies are universal: all citizens of the U.S.S.R. who have reached the age of 18, irrespective of race or nationality, religion, standard of education, social origin, property status, or past activities, have the right to vote in the election of Deputies and to be elected, with the exception of the insane and persons convicted by court of law to sentences including deprivation of electoral rights.”

All elections are governed by regulations aiming at the proper observance of democratic procedure. Candidates must be nominated thirty days prior to the election: the election must not be held on a work-day; the polling-booth must be open from six a.m. until midnight; the electors are not disenfranchised if unavoidably absent from home on voting-day for they may vote wherever they are on production of their identity-card, which is then stamped to show that they have voted.

This simple expedient could hardly be applied in our Party system of elections. We should have Parties organising charabanc trips of their voters from a hopeless constituency to sway the result in a “possible” one!

Elections are under the control of an Electoral Commission, an *ad hoc* body elected for the duration of the elections from the main body of the existing soviet. Each soviet has its own Electoral Commission. Moscow's has 25 members, who supervise the elections and see that they are carried out democratically.

WHO ARE THE CANDIDATES?

Some people have been under the misapprehension that there is only one candidate at Soviet elections—that he is always a member of the Communist Party—and that an almost compulsory vote results in his unanimous return.

If such were the case Soviet Democracy would indeed be a farce. The actual position is very different, although it is not always easy in this country to grasp the truth from the limited knowledge and unlimited misinformation which has been available.

Anyone 18 years of age and over may be a candidate if nominated by some group of people like a trade union branch, co-operative, Communist Party group, youth club, cultural organisation, a regiment or group of soldiers, or a factory. There are usually several nominated by different bodies for the same area.

Membership of the Communist Party is in no wise obligatory. In fact the Communist Party Central Committee has urged members to give equally loyal support to non-Party nominees who came forward as the people's choice. Quite a high percentage—usually about 35 per cent.—of those elected to the village, town, city, Republic and Supreme Soviets are not members of the Communist Party or the Young Communist League.

There are many election meetings for each electoral area, forming a number of "eliminating rounds" for the several candidates who may have been put forward.

For instance a candidate may be put forward by a local factory, another by housewives from a block of flats. There may also be a retiring member who seeks re-election. Often these candidates are present together on the same platform at pre-election meetings.

Pertinent (and often impertinent) questions are asked of the nominees for office regarding their past work, their qualifications, their reasons for standing, and so forth.

On the basis of the candidate's replies and the general impression created at such meetings, the chances of the candidate to go forward to the actual elections are either strengthened or weakened. One of the candidates may stand head and shoulders above the others in ability, and some of the nominating bodies may withdraw their candidates, transferring their support to the better man. This process of selection of the best candidates goes on until there is invariably only one candidate left—the one who has won the backing of the greatest number of individuals and public bodies in the preliminary meetings and discussions.

Bear in mind that these discussions are very earnest ones, with nothing barred—no law of libel or anything else prevents the electorate from probing the weaknesses of possible representatives.

The election proper—the actual polling day—is often a matter of putting an almost unanimous seal upon the public choice which has resulted from this examination of candidates.

the allocation. In this way economically backward or needy areas are brought into line with the more developed.

Under our rating system it is often evident that the richer areas get richer and the poor get poorer. But in the Soviet Union there are no rates as we understand them. There is no "rateable value" of land and property whereby people contribute to local expenditure largely in ratio to the size or quality of house they live in.

SOURCES OF INCOME

The bulk of the income of the U.S.S.R. is derived from State-owned industries and trade. Money which in a capitalist country would be private profit, often for luxury spending, becomes public money devoted to public amenities in the U.S.S.R.

Here is a brief outline of the main sources :—

The Turnover Tax accounts for the greater part of Soviet income, and is a variable tax levied at the point of production as a percentage of the cost of production. It fits in with the price-fixing policy of the Soviet Union and varies from one-half per cent. levied on coal to 83 per cent. on vodka.

Profits Tax levied on profits of State enterprises.

Insurance Premiums paid to the Government in respect of insurance cover for crops, buildings, employees, etc.

Agricultural Tax is paid by collective farms on their income. It has been increased from 4 per cent. to just over 9 per cent. since the war.

Machine and Tractor Stations. These stations are maintained by the State. The collective farms pay them in produce for the use of their machinery and personnel, and such income goes to the State.

Customs duties exist but they are few and small, counting for only a minor portion of Soviet income.

Income Tax. Personal income tax forms only a small part of the national budget (about a twentieth) and is levied on all incomes over 150 roubles per month. Following the Nazi invasion, income tax was doubled. At this rate, the tax upon an income of 500 roubles per month was 6 per cent. In addition there is a tax upon single persons, childless families and families with only one or two children, payable by men between 20 and 50 and women between 20 and 45.

Persons with no children pay an additional 6 per cent., with one child an additional one per cent., and with two children an additional half per cent. of their incomes. For collective farmers with such families the taxes are fixed at 150, 50, and 25 roubles respectively. Exempted from these taxes are Servicemen and their wives; people who have lost one or more children in the war; and women receiving grants as mothers of large families.

Inheritance Tax is steeply graded, getting as high as 90 per cent. on half a million roubles.

produce, etc., but in return they have many advantages—technical and scientific aid, mechanised equipment on loan, insurance against bad harvests, etc., assured to them by the Soviet State.

The work of local government is inextricably bound up with the ordinary work of the village, and it is difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. Both the farm and the local soviet are equally concerned in the success of each enterprise.

One of the strong points of local government, especially in the village, was stressed by Beatrice Webb in an interview:—

“Assurance of performance” she said, “is to be found rather in freedom of criticism unrestrained by law of libel. The importance of free and constant criticism has been as greatly undervalued as its existence has been underestimated. Failure, even on the part of a village soviet, is sure of investigation.”

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

Almost the first question people ask when confronted with a long list of successful soviet enterprises is “Where do they find all the money?”

Collecting the money and spending it is all part of the planned economy of the Soviet Union. Broadly speaking it works in the following way: Every government body from that of the smallest village to the Supreme Soviet makes out a “shopping list” of the things it requires in the forthcoming year, and an estimate of what they will cost, together with an estimate of its own output of wealth in goods and raw materials.

Each local government body passes on its list of requirements and estimated cost to the next highest authority, which goes through the list, approving or disapproving the submitted plans and estimates. It then adds its own requirements in goods, services and money to the list and passes it still higher. Thus village and town pass their plans to the District Soviets, the several “boroughs” of large cities pass theirs to the City Soviet, the Districts and cities pass them on to the various Union Republics, who submit their composite plans to the Supreme Soviet which adds its own requirements.

Here they get final approval. Everything is approved which is in the best interests of all and does not conflict with the annual and five-year plans of the State Planning Commission.

Then the process “goes into reverse”—and as the lists of requirements were piled up through the various organs of government to the top, so now authority to spend the allotted amounts passes down through the same bodies—right down to the village.

Not all the required money is passed down—but authority to collect taxes and retain a portion. For the Soviet Union has no special tax-gathering machinery other than the local authorities, who are entrusted with the gathering of all revenue due from their area to the Supreme, Republic and local budgets.

A certain percentage of this they retain for their own needs, often augmented by substantial grants or subsidies from higher bodies. The poorer the area and the greater its need, the greater

Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their *Soviet Communism* say of this process:—

“Candidates are nominated, discussed, and either successively eliminated or carried forward to the final vote. This is usually unanimous (or more strictly what in England is called *nem. con.*) a fact which has often led to the inference that there has been no real exercise of choice by the electorate. On the contrary, the procedure is one of elaborate preliminary sifting of the nominations by various, often many, successive votes at the previous meetings, by which the less popular candidates have been eliminated.”

To make sure that the elected Deputy IS representative, he is obliged to poll at least 51 per cent. of the total electorate (not of the votes cast only) and failing this, the election must be held again.

Although there is this provision in Soviet electoral law, it would seldom if ever appear to be necessary for polls approaching 100 per cent. are usually found.

Such elections are comparable to the way in which many democratic bodies—trade unions for instance—choose their executive committees. Candidates do not come forward on a “Party ticket” for they are all of one mind regarding the main objective, and are chosen on their ability to advance the well-being of the body to which they belong.

THE MANDATE

Candidates do not succeed on dubious promises to “keep down the rates” (as if that were a criterion of service) but on their willingness and ability to carry out the wishes of the people. The candidate has no “election address”—it’s the other way round, for the electors make known their requirements to the candidate. These requirements are legion, and come to the candidate in the form of “instructions” from factory or public meetings. All these instructions—collectively known as “the Mandate”—are tabulated, and granted priority according to urgency.

From the “instructions to candidates” in a recent Moscow Soviet election (and there were close on 100,000 such instructions!) we learn that 595 enterprises (400,000 electors) had asked for more retail stores; 80 organisations requested that goods traffic should operate at night to relieve congestion; and 49 requests had come in for better and cheaper laundry services.

Here are some of the items to be undertaken by the Moscow City Soviet as a result of popular demand: the development of individual allotments; the supply of radio and telephone to every house; swimming-pools for every district; reduced prices for cinemas and theatres; the delivery of goods to houses; diminution of traffic noise; the introduction of permits for motor-cycles.

Elected Deputies are not allowed to treat election promises lightly—they must strive to fulfil them. The sections and departments of the city government examine the items in the Mandate and estimate which are capable of fulfilment. Decisions on all the “instructions” must be given—as to whether the proposal is feasible, and if not, why not. At regular intervals the departments

publish a report of progress, and each Deputy is obliged to meet his constituents at a public meeting, usually once a quarter, to give an account of his stewardship.

RECALL

Deputies who cannot or will not carry out their obligations are subject to recall, and new members elected in their place. This recall can be effected by a two-thirds majority of the electorate, or by a majority decision of the committee or section of which the offender is a member. The committee must then justify its action to the electorate. Such a device keeps Deputies "on their toes" and is a cure for incompetence or bureaucracy.

Tremendous interest is shown in local elections. So much so that sceptical people in this country cannot believe that votes of nearly 100 per cent. can be arrived at without compulsion. Yet such results come, not from pressure and regimentation, but from the electoral procedure just described, together with a very real interest in the machinery of democratic government. There is none of the apathy which is such a deplorable feature of some of our elections. Such phrases as "What does it matter who gets in, they're all out for themselves" are no part of Soviet elections.

This high civic sense is illustrated by the figures for the local government elections of December, 1939, when 1,300,000 Deputies had to be chosen. One million five hundred election committees with a total membership of over 7,000,000 were formed, and interest among the electors resulted in a poll of 92,812,237 from an electorate of 93,547,797—99.21 per cent.!

This is made possible because polling-day is a holiday; polling goes on from 6 a.m. until midnight; and one may vote even though absent from home.

WHO RULES?

One of the problems of democracy is that of devising a system of government which, besides being the best "tool for the job" of getting things done, at the same time ensures that ultimate power rests with the people rather than with their representatives.

"All Power to the Soviets" was a revolutionary slogan of 1917 which became fact, and power is still in the hands of the people through their elected councils of people of their own kind.

Each soviet can be over-ruled by higher soviets (the town by the district and so on) yet each soviet elects an executive which is answerable to the whole soviet which is answerable to the people, who have power to elect and recall.

Elected bodies are liable to "interference" from above and below, but in actual practice there is remarkably little friction between local and central government and the public.

The outstanding feature of Soviet administration is the integration of all national and local government bodies. This is such that Soviet law never uses the term "local self-government," but the

The committee appoints brigade-leaders (leaders of working groups) and managers of dairy farms—for a period of not less than two years. It may also employ specialists from "outside" on a wage basis. Money expenditure must carry the signatures of the book-keeper and chairman. The chairman is responsible for the day-to-day progress of work on the farm, which is organised in such a way that everyone has something to do.

The main departments in most farms are—Land and agriculture; Cattle-breeding; Trade and delivery; Culture and education; Municipal; Finance; Communications; National defence; and Health.

The work of these departments is carried out by the appointed members of the administrative committee, together with the assistance of volunteer "activists" who attach themselves to those elected to responsibilities (as in the cities).

The land and agriculture department checks on the rotation of crops and the carrying out of the farm scientist's suggestions. It also supervises the contracts with the sugar-beet factory and the Machine and Tractor Station.

The cattle-breeding department inspects fodder and ensilage; educates the farmers regarding cattle; reports abuse of livestock to the courts; and utilises such developments as artificial insemination.

The trade and delivery department helps individual farmers to dispose of their surplus, and checks on the State grain collections.

The culture and education department has jurisdiction over schools, reading-rooms, clubs, wall-newspapers, etc., for both children and adults.

The municipal department deals with the water supply (repair of wells, etc.); fire protection; disinfection; and village improvements generally.

The finance department looks after expenses, and tax collections.

Communications covers posts and telegraphs and newspapers.

The roads department has general charge of the roads and bridges in its area. Main trunk roads are the responsibility of higher bodies.

The national defence department checks up on service in the forces, organises rifle clubs, encourages Red Cross training, etc.

The health department controls the village dispensary, and organises lectures on sanitation and hygiene.

In addition there is a "Revolutionary law" department which co-operates with the District Inspector of Militia (akin to our police force) in the detection of crime. It conducts educational campaigns against anti-social behaviour.

It will be seen therefore that the local government of the collective farms is entirely the affair of the members of each farm. They have certain obligations in the way of taxes, provision of

varies in size according to the district and main crop, from twelve to nearly a thousand families (average 82 families). The average size of a collective farm (kolhoz) is 1,300 acres, but they are much larger in the grain districts.

The land is given to the collective "for ever"—it may not be sold or rented, and each household has an additional plot of land varying from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{4}$ acres, a certain amount of farm stock, and a house.

Local government in such a community is vested in a general meeting of all the members, which elects a chairman, auditors, and a farm-committee or board of managers. Such a committee is in full control of the farm's finance. Co-operatives in the Soviet Union also have autonomous control of their own finances.

MODEL RULES FOR VILLAGES

A set of Model Rules drawn up by farm workers for the government of agricultural units was approved by higher government bodies in 1935 and they have formed the basis of farm community government since that date.

"The general management of the artel (farm co-operative or collective) shall be vested in the general meeting of the artel members, and, in the intervals between meetings, in an administration elected by the general meeting. This general meeting is the supreme organ of administration in the artel."

So say the Model Rules, and they lay down the duties of this general meeting as being—to elect a chairman and an administrative committee; to elect auditors for a period of four years (who must be approved by the District Executive Committee of the Soviets—the next highest body); to admit or expel members; to ratify production plans, building plans, and estimates of income and expenditure; to fix standards of work and rates of pay; and to ratify contracts for the hire of machinery from the Machine and Tractor Station.

One half of the total members forms a quorum for matters other than the election of chairman and committee, the admission or expulsion of members, or money matters, when not less than two-thirds of the membership are required to make decisions.

Elections, once by open vote—show of hands—have since 1936 been by secret ballot. Decisions in the general meeting are by show of hands by all over 18.

An administrative committee or presidium of five to nine members is elected, and they choose a vice-chairman from amongst themselves (usually the chairman's nominee) as assistant to the chairman.

They hold office for two years, and must meet at least once a fortnight.

An important person in the farm government is the book-keeper appointed by the administration from amongst the farm members or from outside. He is responsible in the first place to the auditors (who make four audits a year) and finally to the general meeting. The chairman and book-keeper are paid.

Constitution always refers to "local organs of State power." The classless nature of Soviet society makes possible this unanimity between the administrative and executive bodies at all stages, and the people who elect them.

HOW IT WORKS OUT

How does this work out in practice?

The Government of Moscow. Moscow is governed by the Moscow City Soviet (usually abbreviated to Mosssoviet). This is a body which is responsible for carrying out the orders and functions of the central authority—the Supreme Soviet—so far as they relate to Moscow, and at the same time has a great deal of local autonomy and initiative. It is far from being just a "branch office" of the Kremlin.

The full soviet numbers over 2,000 Deputies. The number fluctuates according to the population. Leningrad and Moscow now elect one deputy for every 3,000 voters.

Most Soviet towns are growing rapidly and their citizens aim to keep pace with this growth in their ratio of representation.

Here are some figures showing thirteen years of growth:

	Moscow	Leningrad	Baku	Gorky	Tbilisi
1936 ...	2,029,425	1,690,065	453,333	222,356	294,044
1939 ...	4,137,018	3,191,304	809,347	644,116	519,175

THE PLENUM

The whole body of Deputies—the plenum—is the supreme organ of legislature for Moscow. As Kaganovich points out:

"The soviet is a permanently functioning legislative organisation which controls and supervises not only the enterprises belonging to the city, but all other economic activity carried on within its territory."

This plenum meets every six or eight weeks in sessions which may last several days. Its usual hours are 5 p.m. until midnight to accommodate its members, who are all workers. The members of the soviet (with exceptions mentioned later) are unpaid for their civic duties, though they may be paid as employees of the soviet.

The plenum is not just a rubber stamp to approve the decisions of the presidium, but is a working body with considerable powers. Speeches seldom exceed ten minutes each—the plenum deciding how long each speaker shall be allotted. No prior rights of speech exist and the rank and file has equal opportunities with members of the presidium.

THIRTEEN BRIDGES

To take concrete instances—when the Moscow Soviet decided to make Hunters' Row one of the city's main thoroughfares, they dynamited the old property to make way for the new. No landlords shed tears either of sorrow because their rents were gone, or of joy because the compensation had made them rich for life. The same with Gorky Street, where some buildings were destroyed, and others moved back thirty feet, whilst the hospital was swung round through 90 degrees to get the sun.

When the Moscow and Volga Rivers were linked by canal, the river at Moscow rose over nine feet and made the existing bridges too low for navigation. To overcome this, thirteen new bridges were built simultaneously in one year and nine months. (When the new Waterloo Bridge was built over the Thames, more time than this was spent in the preliminary arguments between property owners, lawyers and tax-payers.

ISPOLKOM AND PRESIDIUM

From the plenum there is elected a kind of executive committee known as the Ispolkom. It meets only three or four times a year when any special business requires its attention. Its main function in Moscow is the selection of fifteen members from the plenum who will form the real municipal leadership. These fifteen are known as the presidium.

This presidium carries on the day-to-day work between meetings of the plenum. Of the fifteen, the chairman, three vice-chairmen, and the secretary are paid and they devote their whole time to the work.

The remainder of the presidium are usually paid officials of the soviet—heads or officials of municipal undertakings. There is in this a wide difference between the Russian and the British practice. The difference between the elected councillor and the paid professional official, so evident in our local government does not exist in a soviet. Many of the members of the soviets are at the same time paid employees of the government of which they form a part.

Russians think it more illogical that we should bar municipal employees from election to the Council but at the same time allow heads of private firms who may have business dealings with the municipality to become aldermen and councillors.

The supreme executive—the presidium—has full authority to carry out the policies of the plenum and to put its plans into effect. Such activity gives it a considerable amount of initiative. It is often the body which draws up detailed plans of the work, and meets almost continuously. Every few days there is a meeting of the fifteen, but the five paid members have informal contact between meetings.

The presidium has no sub-committees, but to facilitate the work each member takes charge of certain tasks, although the presidium remains collectively responsible. The head of a department—say gas or electricity—who wanted a question deciding, would go first to the presidium member who had made that department his special concern.

Whenever a particular question is being discussed by the presidium it is usual to invite the head of the service affected to attend and participate in the discussion.

Rents are payable monthly in arrears. They are calculated according to the type of house, the renter's salary, and the number of his dependants. By law, rent cannot exceed one-tenth of a household's income. It is more often between two and five per cent. The size of house or number of rooms allocated depends upon the size of one's family—the cubic capacity allotted varying from town to town according to the amount available.

Serving soldiers have a reduced rent of 80 kopeks per square yard per month (only living space is reckoned, not kitchens, bathrooms, etc.).

Certain categories have priority. People who work at home, artists, doctors, writers, holders of certain Awards, and people whose health requires it are allotted more space, whilst in the municipal re-housing schemes, people with rheumatism or tuberculosis must be the first to be removed from damp or basement dwellings, and the aged and infirm who have difficulty with stairs have priority for ground floor rooms.

TRANSPORT

The old droshky with its unhygienic upholstery and its even more unhygienic padded driver are now museum relics in Moscow. In their place have come buses, taxis, and tube trains.

In 1934 the Moscow municipality owned 364 buses and 33 trolley-buses and there were no tube trains. By 1940 these had grown to 1,300 buses, 580 trolley-buses, and 40 miles of the Metro-Moscow's Underground.

Leningrad Soviet cannot embark upon a Metro, being almost as interlaced with canals and rivers as Rotterdam, but it has wide modern streets which can accommodate bus and trolley-bus transport.

The foregoing account of some of the activities of the Moscow City Soviet could be duplicated in miniature for most other cities and towns in the Soviet Union, but the Soviet local government which does exhibit a measure of difference is that of the countryside—the administration of the village soviet, or selosoviet as it is called.

IN THE VILLAGES

There are various types of farms—a few individual farms, State farms, farms owned by a factory for the supply of produce to its dining-rooms, and collective farms.

The local government, whether it be of an individual village, or an aggregation of villages in a collective farm, is the village soviet (or Selosoviet). It is responsible for the management of the farm as well as the wider interests with which it is concerned as a local authority.

The 250,000 collective farms now account for 97 per cent. of the agricultural land, and their local government concerns the majority of the people of the Soviet Union.

A collective farm is an aggregation of several villages, and

WATER

One of the scarcest things in Moscow used to be a good drink of clean cold water. Lack of adequate supplies, reservoirs and filters, and the consequent fear of typhoid or other contamination led to the boiling of all drinking-water, making it very unpalatable. Less than half the people had a water supply at all in old Moscow. Some had springs whilst others had barrels of water delivered.

Water engineers estimated that Moscow would require 175,000,000 gallons a day by 1937. That was just about the total amount flowing through the city in the River Moscow. Such a population as was anticipated would empty the river and make shipping rather difficult.

Stalin pointed out the solution, by suggesting that they bring the River Volga to Moscow—and in 1937 this suggestion became a reality. The Moscow-Volga Canal brought an abundance of water and also increased Moscow's importance as a shipping centre, for it has now become the Port of Five Seas.

The Moscow-Volga Canal has brought an abundance of water to Moscow and by 1940 had increased to five times its previous supply. It also brought more electricity as the water surged through five hydro-electric stations.

Moscow now uses 250 million gallons of water per day or 55 gallons per head, whereas it used to be 12 gallons per head (before the war Berlin used 30 and London 48 gallons per head per day). Large reservoirs have been built 15 miles away capable of holding a year's supply and the waterworks now have a total possible output of 490,000,000 gallons per day.

HOUSING AND RENT

With cities and towns growing so rapidly, with more and more people wanting a better standard of housing, with all the war-time destruction, with "priorities" on labour and material in so many directions, the task of housing the people is a big one. Yet it is tackled in true Soviet fashion and the local government housing allocation and house building departments are two of the busiest.

Most Soviet dwellings belong to the State or the municipality, or a trade union or co-operative or some public body. Some are privately owned. One may get a five-year loan at 2 per cent. per annum with which to build one's own house, but one can never buy the land upon which it stands—all land belongs to the people and cannot be bought or sold. However, one can obtain a lease of 65 years for a brick building and of 50 years for a wooden one, and the right to occupy the site can be sold or transferred to another person.

Few buy their own houses for there is complete security of tenure without ownership, and the rents are very reasonable indeed. Rents are low because they are not charged to yield a profit but only to recover building and maintenance charges.

MOSCOW DISTRICT SOVIETS

Moscow itself has grown so large that it is now administered in a rather similar way to London. To make government less cumbersome there are now 24 Districts, each with its own local soviet, which are elected concurrently with Mossoviet on the same franchise.

These 24 Districts have between them 6,000 elected Deputies. Together with Mossoviet this means that the government of Moscow is the responsibility of over 8,000 elected representatives.

The plenum of each of the Moscow Districts (which resemble our Borough Councils) averages 250, with a presidium varying from seven to ten. In addition there are also two or three "substitute candidates." These are a feature of most soviets, and consist of likely people for soviet office who are getting a schooling in the business of administration by filling up gaps occasioned through illness, etc., among the elected Deputies. Such people are often the "runners-up" to the successful candidate at the elections.

As in Mossoviet, presidium members are usually engaged full-time as paid heads of District departments. They meet as a presidium once a week.

An interesting cross-section of the Moscow District Soviets is obtained from the last available figures of their composition. Of the 6,000 Deputies 2,040 were women, 3,502 were workmen, 1,486 were higher employees of the municipality, 236 were Red Army men, 184 were students, with 527 miscellaneous persons.

The under 25's numbered 876, whilst 3,340 were between 26 and 40, and 1,719 were over 40.

Detailed administration is largely in the hands of the District Soviets, which, like all soviets, are permitted to deal with all local needs provided such activity is in harmony with the work of higher authorities and with the tasks delegated to the Districts from Mossoviet.

They have about a dozen administrative departments—education, health, housing, etc., and are also responsible for control of the local trusts which cover such things as road construction, public feeding and local industries.

Ultimate financial control of the District's activities is vested in the Moscow City Soviet, yet Districts are free to undertake a great number of activities without seeking sanction from above. In the event of a District exceeding its budgetary allotment however, there would be an enquiry and maybe curtailment of its expenditure.

Problems requiring adjustment arising between the Districts and Mossoviet are dealt with by the presidium of Mossoviet, or failing this, the Mossoviet plenum, which is the focal point of all Moscow and district interests.

Sir E. D. Simon, in his *Moscow in the Making*, says :—

"The relations between the city soviet and the district soviets in Moscow seem to me admirable and could scarcely be improved. On the one hand, Mossoviet lays down the general principles of policy, and has full power to see that they are carried out ; on the other hand, the district soviets are not only entrusted with a large amount of administrative detail, but they are also encouraged and expected to exhibit a considerable degree of spontaneous initiative.

"At every point the districts are given an opportunity to state their case The pettifoggish jealousy, fruitless conflict, and sense of self-importance on the part of minor bodies which have done so much to frustrate the government of London have in Moscow been subordinated to the wider needs of the city as a whole."

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

There seems to be very little indeed which is NOT the concern of local government in the Soviet Union.

Departments. Mossoviet has thirteen departments (akin to our Gas Department, Rates Department, etc.) engaged in the administration of services. They deal with Public health ; Roads and river banks ; Education ; Finances ; Town planning ; Construction projects ; Veterinary needs ; Land ; City trading (stores, cafes, restaurants, price and quality inspection, location of shops) ; Housing allocation ; Social insurance ; Parks and green belt ; Below street-level work (sewers, cables, etc.).

Divisions. In addition there are nine management divisions, also administrative, chiefly concerned with the control and supervision of the activities of the many "outside" Trusts which carry out work all over the Soviet Union. The Divisions cover Local industry ; Telephones ; House management ; Construction ; Building inspection ; Transport ; Savings bank and credits ; Arts ; Entertainments ; Broadcasting ; Postal service and Newspapers.

The work of departments and divisions often merges, for although the soviet has its own direct labour available for most undertakings, there are occasions when bigger units are involved. In bridge-building for instance, the Bridge Trust with its special knowledge, equipment, and trained workers would be called in to do the work.

Trusts are bodies formed for specific tasks and often operate over a wide area—some are local and some are All-Union Trusts. They have their own budget, personnel and plan of work. When providing goods and services within the boundaries of a local soviet they do so in concert with the local authority.

Sections. Who instructs and controls the divisions and departments ? Ultimately they are answerable to the presidium of the soviet on behalf of the full soviet, but the day-to-day guidance and instruction comes to them from their opposite number in the soviet plenum. These "opposite numbers" are the sections or committees of the plenum.

Mossoviet is divided into 25 sections which are similar in a way to our municipal committees, although they have rather less power since the soviet presidium has executive control over the sections.

ELECTRICITY

Since 1936 the Moscow power system has been the biggest in Europe, with an output of over 4,000,000,000 kilowatt-hours. The old municipal power station is now dwarfed by the giant stations of Kashira, Shatura, and Stalinogorsk which now supply Moscow with a million kilowatt-hours more than was consumed by the whole of czarist Russia, and twice as much as is consumed by the whole of Denmark. A new hydro-electric station now being built on the Oka River near Kaluga (95 miles from Moscow) will soon supply Moscow with an additional 100,000 kilowatts.

The basic sources of Moscow's electric power is peat, low-grade coal, and water power. Many square miles of peat swamps are found around the city.

HEAT AND POWER STATIONS

A municipal development which has grown apace in the Soviet Union is that of providing heating and hot water direct—laid on to houses, factories, laundries, etc. Such a service is usually interconnected with the supply of electricity, for the Soviet Union is using the heat previously wasted as a by-product of electricity production. The ordinary condensing steam-electricity power station has a very low thermal efficiency and loses at least 70 per cent. of the heat generated. In 20 years of research Soviet scientists and engineers have given many Soviet towns and cities—Leningrad in particular—a heating and hot water service laid on at low cost. No individual boilers or stoves are necessary—just turn on tap or radiator and there is hot water or warmth as and when it is required !

GAS

The production and distribution of coal gas is not nearly so highly developed in the Soviet Union as it is in this country. Many houses in Moscow are without it and must rely upon oil or wood stoves.

But the Moscow Soviet is now engaged upon a spectacular project which will change all that. A pipe-line to rival our cross-channel "Pluto" is in course of construction to bring natural gas from the oilfields of Saratov to Moscow—a distance of 482 miles. It will cross 90 rivers and five lakes, 13 railway tracks and 14 roads. It is scheduled to be finished in December, 1945. Already 40 shafts have been drilled to 2,000 feet. One shaft alone supplies all the industrial and domestic requirements of the city of Saratov !

A special municipal body has come into being—Mossgastroi—which will handle the entire project from laying the pipeline and erecting the gasholders to installing the street mains and domestic fittings. As a result, Moscow will have five times more gas than it has at present.

Other cities are adopting the same idea—Lvov is already supplied, and Kiev is soon to follow.

bodies, and projects would not get beyond the suggestion stage before it was intimated that such activity would not be viewed favourably.

A Soviet municipality has therefore greater powers of initiation, in a much wider field, than its counterpart in England, but is not so autonomous in regard to any of its activities.

Some of the sections and departments parallel our own municipal committees, but there are others as yet outside the sphere of English local government.

Let us look at some of the Soviet services and see how they compare. The Public Feeding Section for instance, have we not our British Restaurants? We have, yet in many instances municipalities are seeking to destroy their own work in this direction because it is alleged to compete with private profit.

But the Public Feeding Section in Moscow continues to grow. To supply better and cheaper food to the people it is establishing more restaurants, increasing the vigilance of food inspectors, and establishing more municipal food production.

MOSCOW'S BREAD

"Robert Dunderhill and William Hayward, who are by appointment the common bakers of the town, do not supply a sufficiency of bread, to the great inconvenience of the inhabitants; they are therefore fined, the former fourpence, the latter sixpence." So say the Court Rolls of Arundel Castle for the year 1082 A.D.

"Longer bread queues in London. Housewives early morning search. Shortage persists."

So say headlines in our newspapers in 1945. Both feudalism and capitalism appear to have experienced difficulties. But Moscow's municipal bakeries have solved the problem. Moscow has 28 mechanised bakeries turning out 10 varieties of white and five varieties of rye bread, and 30 varieties of rolls—6,500 tons every 24 hours. And all turned out under such wholesome conditions that Mr. George Roberts, an official of our bakers' union said upon his return:—

"I certainly look forward to the day when such conditions and such workmanship will be found in the baking industry of this country too."

To take another instance, the Motor and Horse Traffic Section in Moscow is not just the hackney carriage committee—it has a fleet of municipal taxis, organises transport for school children, has a municipal furniture removal service, runs coach tours, provides holiday transport—and all without private profit, and run with great efficiency, or there are 5,000,000 people will know the reason why.

Then there are of course the services with which we are quite familiar—heat, light and power.

It may not be long before a bright Moscow schoolboy can recall that gas, coal, oil and electricity were methods of securing heat, light and power in the dark ages B.A.—"Before the Atom," and may recognise a piece of coal in a museum. But perhaps we can talk about Moscow's electricity without making this booklet too out of date.

There is a section for each of the following:—Building; Housing; Schools; Roads, bridges and river banks; Agriculture; Fuel; Finance; Defence; Anti-aircraft defence; Motor and horse traffic; Public health; Railway transport; Main drainage; Culture; Local trading; Tramways; Public feeding; Communal economy; Sewage, lighting, parks and green belt; Court, prosecution, police and fire; Local industry and Co-operatives; Homeless children; Communication; Metro (Moscow's underground railway); and the Elimination of Adult Illiteracy.

Each Deputy must belong to a section (unpaid) and may choose which he prefers, but is discouraged from joining more than one on the grounds that one will be enough if he is to do the job well. We have to remember that these Deputies are not moneyed gents taking up municipal affairs as a hobby in retirement, but workers who have limited time for their civic duties.

What are a Section's duties? It is required by law to concern itself with plans of work in its own particular branch, giving its conclusions to the plenum and presidium on the reports it receives from the department with which it is concerned. A section's job is to "inspect, inquire, advise and propose." It has no power to spend money or wield other executive power. Such things are the province of the Department concerned, which acts under the authority of the presidium.

The relations between a section and its Department are usually quite cordial. The presidium is disposed to encourage the sections to recommend, complain, demand, or advise. The presidium decides on all such things—yet final authority rests with the plenum in the event of any disagreement.

Sections vary from 40 to 600 members according to the popularity or otherwise of the subject dealt with. The full section meets for one or two evenings every month, and elects a small bureau or committee to carry on the day-to-day work. The usual number is six, of whom the chief official of the related department would be one. This committee elects a chairman, vice-chairman, and a paid secretary, and meets two or three times a week to prepare agendas and act as the stimulating force to the section.

ACTIVISTS

There is another category of people associated with Soviet local government—the "Activists." This is the name given to public-spirited men and women who voluntarily attach themselves to the various sections in order to assist the elected Deputies in their work.

Such activists may attend the meetings of the section to which they are attached and may join in the discussions, but, not being elected persons, have no vote.

It has always been the aim of the Soviet Government to encourage wider participation in the country's affairs. "Every



Discussing farm problems with one of the work brigades of a collective farm.

cook must learn to govern" was one of Lenin's axioms in the early days following the Revolution, and the widespread development of "activists" is a move towards increased civic responsibility among Soviet citizens.

For instance, the Public Health Section of Mossoviet numbers 600, but as many as 1,000 activists join them to assist with their tasks, and visit homes and hospitals, checking the fulfilment of decisions, bringing grievances to light, as well as contributing valuable suggestions in the discussions. At the same time, such activists are gaining valuable experience and they prove to be a fruitful recruiting ground for future electoral candidates.

"COUNCILS OF AID."

Another volunteer movement which has emerged in Soviet municipal life is the "Council for Aid in Restoration and Municipal Improvements," which had a spontaneous origin in Kiev. This new form of local initiative consists of men and women whose knowledge, experience and popularity can influence the speed of reconstruction.

Each member of the Council of Aid—many of them celebrities and professional people—has been allotted a street or area where they supervise and assist the repair of property, the planting of



The Plenum of the Moscow City Soviet in session. These Deputies were elected by more than 99 per cent. of the total constituents.

trees, and the organisation of transport. Volunteer teams of workers are tackling the damaged houses, whilst men, women and children have got together and planted 11,000 trees and 40,000 shrubs to beautify Kiev.

Every Kiev resident is being asked to contribute a minimum of fifteen hours per month in restoration work, which is regarded as a matter of considerable honour. Many exceed the requested 15 hours, for here is a task which is much more exhilarating than the often monotonous voluntary fire-watching of the war years.

The movement has spread to Moscow where volunteers have already planted one and a quarter million shrubs and trees, laid out 11,000,000 square feet of flower beds, and repaired damaged fences and roadways.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKS

There is nothing in Soviet law to say that anything is outside the scope of a local authority. At the same time there is no absolute autonomy—each soviet body can be over-ruled by the bodies higher up. Any unit of government may have its plans modified by a superior body, but in actual practice there is constant contact and exchange of information between the several