The present Constitution of the USSR was adopted on 8 October 1977 and remained in force virtually unchanged until 1988. An English translation was published in this journal and this translation was also included in other volumes published by the Documentation Office for East European Law.

A minor amendment was introduced in 1981, allowing the inclusion of other members of the USSR Council of Ministers, apart from the prime ministers and his (first) deputies, in the Presidium of the USSR Council of Ministers.

It was only in the wake of perestroika that major constitutional reforms were set in motion. Or to be more exact, the constitutional amendments of 1988 and subsequent years were themselves a major aspect of the political dimension of perestroika. The first wave arrived at the end of 1988, when new versions of chapters 12, 13 and 15 plus accompanying adjustments of other provisions were introduced. The two main lines of this reform were the general shift in emphasis from Party to state and the elaboration of a new system of agencies at the top

2. 4 Rev. Soc. Law 1978 No.1, 57-84.
of the state pyramid. The former found its expression in the attempt to improve the relevance of all state agencies, especially by injecting elements of pluralism in the way they are formed and function ('democratization'): chapters 12 and 13. The latter split the old Supreme Soviet into a Congress of People's Deputies and a derivative new-style Supreme Soviet and added the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet as an independent actor at the highest constitutional level.

_Demokratizatsiya_ of the state also affected the Party. The inflexibility of the Party apparat was weakened by prodding Party constituencies into action and subjecting _apparatchiki_ to a certain amount of grassroots pluralist pressure. In exchange, the principle of personal union of Party and state leadership, applied only at the very summit since Brezhnev, was extended to lower levels. The example for this, incidentally, was Ceausescu's Romania. In actual effect, the opportunity to assume local state leadership was only a sop, if not a poisoned chalice, to all Party leaders, because it made them, even in their Party functions, vulnerable to popular discontent. The Party leaders of Leningrad found this out to their chagrin.

The next amendment to the Constitution appeared one year later. In it the new Congress of People's Deputies asserted its powers vis-à-vis other high agencies of the state by inserting a number of textual alterations clarifying the supremacy of the Congress.

On the same day another package of alterations was introduced, some of which tended to grant more freedom to lower levels (republics, provinces) in the management of their internal structure and electoral affairs, while others reduced the impact of social organizations as special participants in the election process. The latter device, introduced by the 1988 reforms in an apparent effort to manipulate the outcome of the first elections for the Congress of People's Deputies, had been controversial from the start.

Three days later a new version of Article 125, devoted to the Committee for Constitutional Supervision of the USSR, was adopted.

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