

Lia German

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Riga

Latvia

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[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[Post-war](#)

[My siblings](#)

[Married life](#)

[Glossary](#)



My family background

My paternal great-grandfather, Meyer Kadishevich [1837–1920], was from Akniste [Ekabpils district], which, as it recently turned out, was part of Lithuania before 1921. They are now collecting data on Selia descendants [Selia – a cultural and historical district of Latvia] and as my great-grandfather was a native of Latvia, he was also one of the Selia people. There are more than one hundred Selia descendants left today, including spouses, and over 60 of them live in Israel, 14 in Latvia and eight in Great Britain. The surname Kadishevich survived, but no one of our Kadishevich kin lives in Riga nowadays. I have no idea of what my great-grandfather did for a living. My great-grandfather's daughter Riva, married Moshe Halperin, my grandfather, and they had five children. I don't know when my grandmother was born, nor when she died. I was never curious about things like that. My father, Ilya Galperin, was born in 1891.

My grandfather Moshe founded a weaving factory in Dvinsk in 1877. [Dvinsk, today Daugavpils, was a part of Vitebsk province then.] That's why after his death in 1930 we lived in Dvinsk. I know that he came from some a small town. I suppose that he is from Akniste, too, because my parents were Lithuanian citizens for some time; I learned about this when I received my citizenship. In an archive I found documents about their naturalization in 1925. My mother wasn't a Lithuanian citizen, but she became one automatically after her marriage.

According to family legend my grandfather came to Dvinsk on foot from some small Lithuanian village and built the first weaving machine with his own hands. He was a very talented person. His five children weren't like him. They all received higher education and couldn't do anything with their hands. They couldn't put their minds to anything. My grandfather probably lived somewhere near because he married Riva Kadishevich and they moved to Dvinsk. Their entire family lived in Dvinsk until 1915. In 1915 they were taken to Pavlovski Posad, near Moscow, with the factory. Jews were first evicted from Kurlandia and then from Dvinsk. [Editor's note: This move was connected to the tsarist government's concern about the possible loyalty of Jews to the advancing German troops during World War I.]

My grandfather died in 1930, and my grandmother stayed in Riga with her younger children, her younger sons and their wives, on 61 Lachplesha Street. It wasn't that she lived with her children, but rather that they lived with her! My grandmother was a very authoritative person. She survived the war; she was evacuated to Semipalatinsk with us. My father's younger brother took his wife, children and my grandmother there. He himself was at the front. My closest relatives survived.

My maternal grandparents came from Tuklum, Kurlandia. They were engaged in grain wholesale in Tuklum as well as in brewing. My mum's father, Leibe Gerson, a Tuklum native, died during some epidemic in 1919 and my grandmother Rebecca Gerson, nee Kramer, was left behind with eight children.

My mother Gerta Halpern, nee Gerson, was the eldest. She was born in Tuklum in 1899, studied in a German school and spoke good Latvian. In 1915, when Jews were evicted from Kurlandia, she found herself in Yaroslavl, Russia, and finished a Russian grammar school. It's interesting that she didn't know a single word of Russian before that. She was so good in Russian that during the war she worked as a typist in the town of Semipalatinsk, and after the war she was a typist at the Ministry of Dairy and Meat Industries. In the employment records she was filed as an economist in order to authorize the managers to pay her more because she was an expert typist.

My mother's recollections of Yaroslavl were very warm. After living in Tuklum, Yaroslavl seemed to be a capital to her. She often recalled Volkovsky theater and public performances by the poet Igor Severyanin, whom my mother was chasing barefoot in winter.

She never said a word about how my grandmother managed to make ends meet with her eight children. I don't know anything about their everyday life. Yaroslavl was a Russian town; there was no synagogue. The Gerson family kept all Jewish traditions at home though – on high holidays my grandmother cooked the traditional Jewish dishes.

In 1919, when they came home from Russia, my mother was about 20 years old, and the youngest kid was around eight. In Tuklum my grandmother lived in her own house and her brothers helped her. She had three or four brothers. They owned a brewery. They helped her a lot, but how long could they possibly support eight children? At first my grandmother gave birth to a child every year and two months, and then every two years. She used to say that children were a gift from heaven.

My mother went to Riga and got a job there. Her brothers, Moisei and Mendel, had left in the 1930s – Moisei for Brazil and Mendel for Palestine. They lived and died there. And Moisei took the others, my grandmother and the rest of the children, to Brazil with him. That's how they saved their souls. My mother corresponded with my grandmother. The children had only obtained secondary education in Latvia. Moisei studied at university, but didn't graduate for the lack of money.

Moisei started his life in Brazil by selling patties that his friend's wife baked. He was a very intelligent person, spoke twelve languages, I believe, and he worked as a journalist and translator. He had two daughters: one has already died, the other one lives in America. None of them succeeded in life! No one! It wasn't a family that would prosper.

Moisei married one of his sisters off to a rich man from Ukraine, a Jew, but she wasn't happy either. She was the only member of the family who was rich, and only due to the fact that she entered a Jewish family that had once owned a printing house in Ukraine, and also built a printing house in

Brazil.

The siblings all worked, earned their living somehow, weren't poor as a church mouse, but they weren't rich by any standard. Of my relatives nobody became a millionaire. Neither in Brazil, nor in Israel. Those who were millionaires here, remained millionaires there. I have a lot of relatives in Brazil. I'm not interested in them and they aren't interested in me. They are all young! Moisei once visited us, as well as Aunt Judith and her daughter, in the 1960s. Judith's daughter came to us a second time with her husband, a journalist. They were in Moscow and also came to see us. My grandmother was already dead by then. She died in 1967.

Uncle Mendel worked in a chocolate factory in Palestine all his life. He worked until his very last hour. He had two children. His son was a pilot – one of the first pilots in Israel in the 1950s – and his daughter was a PE teacher. Both had three or four kids. They have many grandchildren, too. They gave us a very warm welcome when we visited them. They regularly call us on holidays, but the young ones don't care about family ties.

My mother came to Riga, where some of her aunts and uncles had already settled, and got a job in my grandfather Moshe's office. After he returned from Pavlovski Posad he was the director of the representative office of the German company Hartmann in Riga and my mother worked as a typist for him.

Papa became a widower with two kids at that time. He was a very handsome young man and my mother married him. All her aunts were trying to talk her out of doing it. But she didn't listen to them. That's how Mum entered this Latgalian family, which spoke Yiddish and Russian. The result of this interlacing of Kurlandian and Latgalian roots was that they spoke German and Russian. My mother didn't know a word of Yiddish, she only spoke German. And everybody used to make fun of her.

Growing up

We were three children: my sister Edit, born in 1915, my brother Meyer, born in 1919, and I, born in December 1925.

My mother was my father's and my grandfather's bookkeeper, a typist and an interpreter. In the 1930s, under Ulmanis [1](#) rule when everyone was obliged to speak Latvian, my mother used to go to banks, to the authorities, etc. because my father didn't speak Latvian. [Editor's note: in that time one of the specifics of national politics was to establish Latvian as a state language]. My mother kept all the records. She acted as both a secretary and an interpreter because she was good in Latvian. She didn't do any housework; they had maids.

My mother sent me to the Jewish kindergarten at the 8th Riga Jewish school [see School #] [2](#) when I was four and a half. That school was an experimental school: maths exercises were given to each pupil individually, on separate sheets, according to their abilities. I only studied in that school for half a year before we moved to Dvinsk. That's how I became a pupil of a Jewish school – first in Riga and then in Daugavpils. All of my recollections of the 1930s are linked to Jewish schools. I was admitted to the Jewish school when I didn't know a single word of Yiddish. I only spoke Russian and German. By the way, I could read Russian and German from the age of three. I never mixed up words or letters. But first I was put into a German kindergarten, as was customary. I could only

stand it there for two or three days and then declared that I wasn't going there any more! And why? There was a room with tiers there and kids were supposed to walk in a circle in an orderly way. And at home our education was rather liberal: I was brought up without a governess. So, when I was walking past the piano in that room I touched the keys. I was immediately punished, evicted from the circle and sent up to the tiers to stand in the corner. I came home and said, 'I will not go there again'.

When we moved to Dvinsk, I entered a Jewish school and I began to study Latvian from the 2nd grade. My mum, who always listened to my opinion, agreed with the director of the 4th Dvinsk Jewish school V. Levemberg and he personally arranged an examination for me in all the subjects of the preparatory course. And as I passed that examination I was admitted as a first year pupil and was the youngest in class ever after. Until 1934 it was a Bund [3](#) school, with the Jewish social democratic spirit, with very interesting teachers who wouldn't be hired anywhere else. In 1934 the school was fully reorganized and all our teachers were sent to Liepaya. [Editor's note: After the coup of 15th May 1934, when Karlis Ulmanis came to power, several opposition party leaders spent some time in a special concentration camp in Liepaja, but on the whole the Ulmanis regime was very mild, in comparison not only to Mussolini's regime in Italy and Horthy's in Hungary, for example, but also to dictatorships in Latin America in the last decades.]

From that time on school became boring. Religion was introduced as a school subject. But we were brought up differently. We had a liberal atmosphere at home because Bund followers were social democrats. All our family adhered to these views. My sister was a left-winger, and my brother was an underground Komsomol [4](#) member.

After we had completed six years, we were able to enter the Latvian grammar school, that's how proficient we became in the Latvian language. I entered the Jewish grammar school, where they taught us Hebrew. In spite of the general opinion that Jews were very rich, some Jewish children in that grammar school were really poor. My mother always gave me an extra sandwich, otherwise I would have been robbed of my breakfast by hungry boys. The poor girls were hungry too, but they were shy. Some children came from orphanages. Only four out of 28 kids from my former class entered grammar school. It was the only grammar school and you had to pay for it. My interesting school period lasted for only one year, from 1940 to 1941, when the school became Soviet. Before that we would just come, serve our time, go home, do our homework; that was it.

Our school uniform evened out the differences between children from rich and poor families. Children from the orphanage also wore a uniform, but their uniform was different from ours. I had a woolen uniform and theirs was made of satin. My mother used to invite three or four girls to our home and they joined us for dinner. The poverty was terrible. My parents were able to pay, but they didn't always pay on time; they had some problems to do so, too. They had their own business; they weren't paid employees.

In Daugavpils we lived in a small wooden house near the factory with furnace heating and kerosene stoves but without any conveniences. We had four rooms.

My mother never sent me to any resorts or pioneer camps. There was one camp, but for poor children, in which my mother was a member of the parents' committee. We used to rent a summer cottage, but not every year. I would spend my vacations in Tuksum or at the seaside in Riga. We lived in Dvinsk for eleven years, but we only rented a summer cottage twice. We had our own

business, but business and money were two different things, especially in the 1930s. During the crisis in the 1930s, the family lost everything except for the factory in Dvinsk, managed by some relative, and Papa decided to go there immediately and save it! But he could hardly save anything. He was doing his best to support us and his mother. We didn't have anything superfluous. My parents never participated in any social activities, nor were they members of any party.

There was a library in our home. Papa and Mama used to take care of it. Papa left me a huge collection of books after the war, but the pre-war collection was completely lost. We had some books during our evacuation in Semipalatinsk as well, but they got lost on the way from evacuation. As soon as we arrived, my father started to collect books. He collected books on the history of Jews, the Jewish Encyclopedia; he had all the works by Simon Dubnow [5](#) and many works of fiction. He had good connections with antique shops and they sent him new books. Before the war my mother had German books and after the war she read both in Russian and German. The collection survived, but some books were borrowed by children.

I didn't go in for any sports in school. I took music and ballet lessons. But I had absolutely no ear for music. Of course, we didn't pay for the music lessons. A friend of my parents taught me. She used to say, 'I've never had a less talented and lazier student'. So I dropped music quite soon. I went in for ballet for about two years, but due to my lack of hearing I didn't succeed there either. I had a pair of skates, but I wasn't an expert skater either. People used to go to the skating-rink every day back then, including Saturday.

I've never been to the choral synagogue in Dvinsk. My parents wouldn't go there. We celebrated all holidays at home until my father's death. It was a tradition. Grandmother kept it and we were accustomed to it. We just had a family dinner, a gala dinner with traditional meals. On Pesach we always had matzah. Papa went to the synagogue twice a year - on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur. In the 1930s, in Dvinsk, he didn't go to the regular synagogue, but to his friends' home, who had a prayer-room in the house left to them by their parents. Ten people were to attend. Once he took me with him, that's why I remember.

But in Riga, after the war, when he was very old and didn't work, he didn't go to the synagogue on Saturdays, only on high holidays, when he kept the fast. He was a very educated man, he graduated from the Saint-Petersburg Institute of Psycho-Neurology, the faculty of law, along with the famous actor Solomon Mikhoels [6](#) from the Moscow Jewish Theater . But then the revolution [see Russian Revolution of 1917] [7](#) started and he didn't have time to defend his diploma.

During the war

We had to walk on foot when we were escaping from the Germans. We walked eleven days, from Daugavpils to Novosokolniki [Russia] - the first station that wasn't destroyed and where we could get on a train and head for Velikie Luki [Russia]. And from Velikie Luki we took another train. We crossed the whole of Latgalia on foot in eleven days. There were crowds of refugees! We reached the border but the Soviet frontier guards wouldn't let us pass, saying, 'You are deserters, the Germans are defeated, go back home and get to work'. But we didn't go back. We went to the closest village and rented a room from a countryman.

My father understood what was happening. When my mother and me were about to go to bed, a girl rushed inside, shouting, 'The Germans are here - save your lives!' We took to our heels. And by

the time we reached the border there where no guards there anymore, nor any border. Those who were clever enough had stayed there waiting and had passed the border. Later, when I was on business trips in that region, I passed all those stations that we had crossed by foot.

A train was leaving from Velikie Luki and going to Kemerovo. But my father fell ill with dysentery and was taken off the train at 'Yurga 1' station in Kemerovo. He was taken to the local hospital and my mother and me lived there in a hostel for two weeks. After that we went to Novosibirsk, and from there to Semipalatinsk. Papa had been to Semipalatinsk before. When the family factory was located in Pavlovski Posad [during World War I], they used to buy wool in Semipalatinsk. That made my father guess that the weaving industry must be developed in Semipalatinsk. So we went there and managed to settle very well within a day. My father worked there with a food supplies organization. He worked as a lawyer. My mother also got a job on the first day. Everything turned out like in a fairy-tale in Semipalatinsk.

When I turned 16, I finished a secondary school in Semipalatinsk. By the way, it was a Russian school, although I didn't study Russian a single day. Anyway, I finished school in 1942 with an honorary certificate. Gold medals weren't awarded during the war. I still have the certificate, only the gilded edging is gone. My first composition had a few mistakes, not stylistic ones but those to do with punctuation. Our class was composed of children from all over the Soviet Union. There were some friends from my previous school.

I finished school and entered Moscow Geological Research Institute [MGPI], which had been evacuated to Semipalatinsk. All my friends entered that institute. What faculty? Geophysical or geological, I can't remember exactly. When I completed my first year, the institute moved to Moscow, and I couldn't afford to go to Moscow. I had no one to support me in Moscow. That's why I stayed in Semipalatinsk, and the only other institute there was the Pedagogical Institute. So I entered the literature faculty, just for fun. After the Geological Research Institute it was some kind of sanatorium - very convenient, very interesting, lots of fun. The professors were also evacuees, and very good specialists. I finished my first year there and then came to Riga to continue my studies at the local philological faculty, majoring in the English language.

My mother came to Riga in October 1944, with the first train. She worked in Zagotzerno [organization dealing in grain supplies] in Semipalatinsk. She received a proposal to work in Moscow, in the Ministry of Dairy and Meat Industry. She sent an invitation to me at university and to my father's work place. We arrived in Riga on 31st December 1944.

Post-war

I graduated from university in 1949. But I had a problem with my diploma. I defended it in 1950. I wrote my thesis on the works of Upton Sinclair. [Sinclair, Upton (1878-1968): American writer of novels and non-fiction, with 80 books to his credit and best-known for his book *The Jungle*, which influenced President Roosevelt in passing the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.] But it turned out I had to produce another one. I didn't have a job in my field. I planned to stay at university. But they wouldn't accept me.

When assignments [see mandatory job assignment] [8](#) were given, they told me, 'There is no work for you here in Latvia! We'll pass you over to the Ministry of Education of the Soviet Union'. [In those years Jews were assigned to less attractive places in distant Russian provinces.]. I was very

scared, I thought it was very serious. And so I tried and became pregnant as soon as I possibly could. And I was pregnant when I defended my thesis for the second time. This time not on Sinclair but on Jack London. [London, Jack (real name John Griffith London) (1876-1916): American writer, best known for works such as *The Call of the Wild*, *The Sea Wolf* and *White Fang*.] Our dean's name was Yanis Niedre; he was a writer.

When I met my thesis supervisor, *Literaturnaya gazeta* published a long article entitled 'Upton Sinclair - careerist and betrayer'. I lived here, on 5 Gertrudinskaya Street, and my thesis supervisor on Blaumany Street. So we rushed to each other with copies of that article. And then we ran to Niedre. And this is what he told me, 'Why don't you redo your thesis in accordance with this article?' My work was called, 'The antifascist epopee of Upton Sinclair'. I was sitting in a library in Leningrad for weeks, studying these huge volumes in English, very interesting books. Only two of them were translated into Russian. And he says: 'Redo!' It was 1949! And I said, 'I can't. I might as well write on Chaucer'.

My mother had a job with the Ministry of Dairy and Meat Industry and Papa worked in many different places. My husband and me lived with them, we had no perspectives of getting our own apartment. Even when co-operative apartments were offered at work, we couldn't buy one because we had no right for another apartment - our parents and us had three rooms among the six of us.

I was under pressure for years. My sister, who was head of the planning department of the Lenta factory, helped me to get a job in the factory library. That was a few years after I graduated from university. That's when I really needed my diploma. From then on I worked as a translator my whole life. I translated technical texts. For the last 20 years I have been working in Latgiproprom, in the department of information. After Lenta I worked in the library of the Medical Preparations Factory. There I started with translations. I also worked for the Latvian Chamber of Commerce. But the real utilization of my knowledge of English, German, Latvian and Hebrew began only recently. It turned out that Yiddish is very much demanded. It appears I'm unique somehow. Everyone turns to me to ask for help with the reading of this and that foreign text here, in the House of Latvian Society of Jewish Culture. A few people can still understand or are studying Hebrew, but not Yiddish any more! I'm a dinosaur!

My siblings

My sister Edith finished a grammar school; first she studied in Riga and then in Dvinsk. Then she went to Riga to work in the Red Weaver factory, where she was an assistant to the foreman. She was 18 years old, and she fell in love with her boss, the foreman Konstantin Florianovich Yagolkovsky [1893-1981], a Russian of noble Polish origin. At the factory people would make bets, just like at the horse-races, how long this marriage could possibly last. They lived together for 35 years! Such a happy marriage one has hardly ever seen! Neither her children, nor her grandsons live as happily as they did.

They stayed here during the German occupation. He rescued her! They couldn't get out, they were at their workplace, and when they came running from work, the bridges were blown up. To leave Riga was impossible. My sister lived opposite the Botanical Garden, in a house in which there were about six apartments. And when, in the first days, some hooligans began to knock, the neighbor, asked whether Jews or communists lived there, answered, 'No!' And he didn't let them in. Actually this neighbor saved my sister's family.

Those were the first outbursts of Nazism. And then a law was adopted here, saying that non-Arian mothers of Arian children could live with the family; it was allowed by the authorities. My sister quit her job; she had to. Her husband worked in a dry-cleaners during the war doing very hard work, and she stayed home with the children. Yes, they did receive the summons to court, ostensibly they were getting divorced. No one of their acquaintances agreed, except for one. When they came to court, everyone started railing at this Latvian husband, saying that if he agreed to be divorced, he would 'kill' his wife. Upon which he went up to the judge and asked, 'Can I withdraw the application for divorce?' The judge answered; 'You must do so!' All these Jewish wives of Latvian and Russian husbands survived. But all of them were subjected to a castration operation – the tying up of uterus tubes. Those who had children were very pleased. When the Germans began to take people away, the Latvian colleagues hid them. When we returned to Riga, they lived in Zadvinye, near the Botanical Garden. Mum went there on foot. The son was in America, the daughter had died, and only the grandsons were still living there. But was she [Lia's sister] alive, my mother wondered? It turned out she was!

My brother Meyer was an underground Komsomol member, as I mentioned before, and on the first day of war he went to the Central Komsomol Committee and volunteered for the front. We received only one letter from Estonia, and then he disappeared. His name couldn't be found in any lists, not in the lists of the dead, nor in the files of his military unit. He must have sunk at the crossing to Kronstadt, or from Kronstadt around 1941. He got married before the war but had no children.

Married life

I got married in 1948, when I was still a student. My husband, Israel German, born in 1917, is from Rezekne. He finished the Jewish grammar school there. Teaching in the ordinary school was in Yiddish, and in the grammar school in Hebrew.

For several years in succession he tried to enter the medical faculty. To this day he knows Latvian perfectly. They wouldn't admit him due to his nationality. He didn't try another college. He was in the Latvian army, then he was automatically enlisted in the Soviet army. He was very musical and played the violin. And he was admitted to the orchestra of the Riga Infantry School. That's how he got to the front. He was a bandmaster. The cadets were sent to battle, and the orchestra remained in the rear. He was demobilized, then entered a musical school at the Leningrad Conservatory, and then became a student of the theoretical faculty of the conservatory. He came to Riga, where his sister lived with her small children, and they were very needy. He didn't return to Leningrad, but started to work to help her. Then we met.

We have been married for 54 years now. We were to celebrate our golden wedding not long ago, but he was sick at the time. My daughter-in-law booked a small table in a restaurant, but he had an acute seizure of gallstone disease and we didn't go to celebrate anywhere.

My daughter, Edith Dorfman, nee German, was born in 1950. She graduated from the chemical faculty of the Latvian University. She married a Leningradian, but she didn't live there for long. She returned to Riga and worked in a technical school, in a secondary school, and when the Jewish school opened, she started to work there. She has been living in Israel since 1992 and works as a teacher of chemistry.

My daughter often reproached me: she wanted to study at the philological faculty, and I kept telling her that I had a very bad experience. I did what I could to talk her out of it. I didn't teach her languages: if she had mastered English, she would have gone for philology.

My son Michael German was born in 1953 and graduated from the physics and mathematics faculty of the Latvian University. He is a system programmer and lives in Riga. He didn't even consider to pursue a humanitarian career like me. He had a choice between the conservatory or the physics and mathematics faculty. He wasn't patient enough. He finished a musical school, took private lessons with Professor Blumental. And when he passed the 10th year in school, we came to Blumental to consult him on what to do, that is which institute our son should apply to. He told us, 'Look, he can enter the conservatory today. But what for? In our business you must be a genius or you are a nobody! Would he want to spend his time teaching children, like I do? He is good at mathematics, what does he need the conservatory for?!' That's how his destiny was decided. Physics it was, the easiest way, the way of the least resistance.

My son isn't religious. My grandson Ilya, born in 1982, is a student at the physics and mathematics faculty, he works, and pursues his mother's and father's career - they are all programmers. All three work in the same firm. My daughter's son Henri has finished a Jewish school here, served two years in the Israeli Army, and now he works in Israel as a programmer, and studies at the economic faculty in the magistrates.

Glossary

1 Ulmanis, Karlis (1877-1942)

the most prominent politician in pre-World War II Latvia. Educated in Switzerland, Germany and the USA, Ulmanis was one of founders of Latvian People's Council (Tautas Padome), which proclaimed Latvia's independence on November 18, 1918. He then became the first prime minister of Latvia and held this post in several governments from 1918 to 1940. In 1934, Ulmanis dissolved the parliament and established an authoritarian government. He allowed President Alberts Kviesis to serve the rest of the term until 1936, after which Ulmanis proclaimed himself president, in addition to being prime minister. In his various terms of office he worked to resist internal dissension - instituting authoritarian rule in 1934 - and military threats from Russia. Soviet occupation forced his resignation in 1940, and he was arrested and deported to Russia, where he died. Ulmanis remains a controversial figure in Latvia. A sign of Ulmanis still being very popular in Latvia is that his grand-nephew Guntis Ulmanis was elected president in 1993.

2 School #

Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

3 Bund

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906

it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

4 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

5 Dubnow, Simon (1860-1941)

One of the great modern Jewish historians and thinkers. Born in Belarus, he was close to the circle of the Jewish enlightenment in Russia. His greatest achievement was his study of the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe and their spiritual and religious movements. His major work was the ten volume World History of the Jewish People. Dubnow settled in Berlin in 1922. When Hitler came to power he moved to Riga, where he was put into the ghetto in 1941 and shot by a Gestapo officer on 8 December the same year.

6 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

7 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

8 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.