

# Sophia Deribizova

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Russia

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*Sophia Deribizova is a beautiful woman with a bright happy expression and large light-blue eyes. Communicating with her was easy and enjoyable, because she answered all questions with pleasure and patiently recollected stories from her life.*

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## • My family background

My mother's ancestors came from Poland. I don't know from which town. Nobody has ever told me anything about the history of my family because they were afraid of revealing the fact that they were rich. When I asked my mother, 'Was our family rich?' she used to reply, 'You bet!' and avert her eyes, and she never talked much on the subject.

My maternal great-granddad, Barukh Vingelnikov, became a widower early and married again. I know little about his first wife, but his second wife, whose name I don't know either, was a difficult and selfish woman and mother used to purse her lips when talking about her.

Barukh Vingelnikov's second wife gave birth to two daughters, Bertha and Liya and they were of the same age as Sonya, my mother's mother, and they were friends, too. Barukh's wives were very beautiful. Otherwise great-granddad Barukh wouldn't have swallowed the bait [fallen in love] and married them. His two daughters were good-looking too, and each had been married twice.

Liya got married, her husband was a very good person, but then she met a doctor from a research expedition named Adolf, and he literally kidnapped her and took to Chara River with him, and they called their daughter, born in the 1930s, Chara. I don't know what happened to Adolf later, but I know that he was a doctor with some expedition and an enterprising and adventurous person.

Chara and I were coevals and very good friends, until she left for America in the 1980s. She died of cancer in Boston two weeks after she got there. She worked as a general practitioner all her life.



She used to say that she had dragged her second husband up from the 'bottom of life,' that is from a communal apartment [1](#) . Her daughter Mila lives in Boston now and it is through her that I know about their family.

Grandmother Sonya was brought from Poland to Nerchinsk so that she could be married off to Isay Goldberg, my grandfather. There was a lack of brides in Siberia and they were ordered from other locations, like furniture, through matchmakers and acquaintances.

Sonya was only sixteen then and she missed Poland and her family a lot, but later her father Barukh moved from Poland to Nerchinsk to join his daughter when she was already married. Sonya was a housewife all her life, and she brought up six kids: five girls, Sonya, Rakhil, Shifra, Liya and Debora, and one boy, Yakov.

Two books have been written about Nerchinsk. They describe the local schools, teachers, the luxurious library that ordered books from all over Russia and abroad, but after the Revolution of 1917 all those books were stolen. Now it's a very poor town, because the state was unable to find the money to build up the railway from Chita to Nerchinsk, and it is a miserable life without any means of communication.

Grandfather Isay's mother was called Shosya Goldberg. She was extremely active and restless to a very old age, visiting her kids' homes every morning. She spoke Yiddish.

The family was well to do. Isay Goldberg and his four brothers, Abram, Pinkhas, David and Levi, owned a manufactured goods shop with stationery, food stuffs, and household goods, and traded both whole sale and retail. I remember one occasion my mother told me about. A shop-assistant started to wrap a piece of material around himself and at the moment grandfather Isay came in, and of course that shop-assistant was fired right then. Each of the Goldberg brothers had their own house and servants.

My grandfather used to hire a coachman, a cook and a housemaid, and he had some horses and a cow. Grandfather Isay died of throat cancer before the Revolution, in 1910. He liked boiling water all his life and got sick. They treated him in Moscow, implanted a tube in his throat, but that kind of life couldn't last long.

The children of Sonya and Isay Goldberg were brought up to love nature and literature. Grandmother Sonya used to read a lot. I don't remember which books exactly. I know only that they had a big library at home. The children inherited her love of books. All their kids finished good schools as qualified teachers.

Yakov, Shifra and Debora were taught to play piano. Grandfather Isay, who played violin, and his daughter Shifra performed duets and managed even very complicated compositions. The children were taught music, but none of them ever mastered a foreign language. The Goldberg children used to gather on winter nights and play games, make music, cook pelmeni [Russian national dish with meat and flour] in big company.

That was a lot of fun! The family didn't follow religious rules strictly. They attended the prayer house on holidays and would certainly celebrate Jewish holidays at home - Rosh Hashanah, Purim, Pesach. Everyone in the house spoke Russian except for Grandmother Shosya.

In the summer the children were taken to their own cottage house in Shivanda resort near Nerchinsk. A nanny was hired for the children. For some time a Chinese guy served as a nanny [Nerchinsk is close to China] and the children liked him a lot. Poverty was a common thing in China at that time, and the Chinese who lived close to the border searched for ways to earn some extra money on Russian territory. That Chinese boy was very young, short and very agile and pliant - of course, children liked to play with him.

He helped around the house, in the vegetable garden and everywhere. At first his Russian was very poor, but he was rather talented and he managed to master Russian quite well and in quite a short time. He didn't have to teach the children, he just kept an eye on them when the adults were not at home. The Chinese lived in his own small room and dined at one table with the family. I was told that after some time he returned home where he had left his parents.

Everyone in Nerchinsk used the big library owned by a well-known Siberian businessman and gold-trader, Butin. Balls were organized in the public house built by Butin. [Editor's note: public houses in pre-revolutionary Russia accommodated a library, a lecture/theater hall, a Sunday school, a buffet and a book store.

The Bolsheviks made a good use of public houses to promote their revolutionary propaganda and organize mass meetings. After the Revolution of 1917 public houses were substituted by educational clubs and houses of culture].

At one of them Shifra was awarded a prize for the smallest foot (I think she was size 32). When she died I was unable to pass down her footwear to anyone, it was so small. [It is customary in Russia to distribute the clothes of those who died between relatives.] She often had trouble acquiring footwear, too.

They didn't experience any anti-Semitism. Even a priest from the local Orthodox Church visited Isay's house. Mama told me that they, the children, felt their 'peculiarity' only in religion lessons at school: they were released from such classes.

Sonya and Isay's children lived as a big happy family. The elder and only brother Yakov was born in 1892, grew up, and left for St Petersburg before the Revolution to study some craft. He didn't know exactly what particular craft he would choose.

He planned to make up his mind depending on what was available in St Petersburg, but his parents didn't think he would learn anything but horse riding, such a whimsical person he was. He had to grease the local policeman's palm every week so that he would pretend not to notice a Jew violating 'residential qualification.' [Jews were not allowed to settle in capitals - only in the Pale of Settlement [3](#).

Yakov would bring a 15 kopeck coin, and the policeman would click (smiling cunningly) that coin before his very eyes. Uncle was a hot-tempered and rather independent man to bear such a humiliation, and he went back to Nerchinsk before the Revolution, and he didn't do any work there. His parents were rich enough to help and support their children.

After the Revolution of 1917, Yakov returned to St Petersburg, completed book-keeping courses, worked as a book-keeper and stayed here for good. He had no children, although he was married twice. I met both of his wives, the first was Russian, they scolded and brushed each other down all

their lives, and finally she died.

They lived together for 30 years in St Petersburg. He had another wife when he was a very old man, I don't remember her name. They also lived miserably, had rows, and when they decided to get married in 1960, her granddaughter from her first marriage came to school and said that her grandmother was getting married, and the whole class rushed outside to look at such an old bride. She was Russian, as was his first wife. She died later, after Yakov's death in 1965.

Rakhil, the oldest of Mama's sisters, was the only one who knew Yiddish very well. Her grandmother Shosya and mother Sonya somehow spoke Yiddish only to Rakhil, of all the children, from a young age, so the rest of the children didn't know the language. Rakhil was the last to move to St Petersburg to her brother Yakov.

She married Genrikh Yoffe, who was a professor of mathematics at the Shipbuilding Institute. Originally, he proposed to my mother, but she refused to marry him. He was Jewish, but mother just didn't like him enough and didn't see him in the role of her future husband. During the blockade of Leningrad <sup>4</sup> Rakhil shared her ration with him [the blockade ration was 150 grams of bread per person per day] and she eventually died, and he spent one year in hospital after the war and died all the same - of dystrophy. They had no children.

The sisters Shifra and Liya married two brothers, Gdali and Levi Golumb, who were the sons of a Nerchinsk winery owner and both very unbalanced people. Liya didn't want to marry Levi, and he would come and make wild scenes. Her parents made her do so, but she didn't change her family name, and remained Goldberg.

Shifra married Gdali and changed her surname to Golumb. Both pairs had kids, but Shifra's girl died at the age of five, and Liya's boy starved to death at sixteen in the blockade of Leningrad, and Liya wore the expression of grief on her face ever after. Liya was a registrar, and a very well-read and competent person.

During World War II she was evacuated to the city of Kiselevsk, Kemerovo region. The local authorities entrusted her with the distribution of ration cards because they were positive that she would never steal anything. She was a lady of principles.

Both Golumb brothers fled to Charbin, China, in the 1920s to escape the Soviet regime; at the same time the winery had been looted in Nerchinsk, the whole town permeated with the smell of wine spirits. They fled - and nobody knew anything about them after that, though Liya was left with a son from Levi, named Gdali after Shifra's husband.

In the 1920s Shifra earned some extra money working as a pianist in silent picture cinemas. All the children had received a brilliant home education. I just recall one story about Shifra. She lived in a communal apartment, and going into the common kitchen was always a shock for her: the neighbors were either fighting or drinking hard.

There was one crazy married couple, and then the wife died and the husband decided to arrange a grand funeral repast. He treated his wife so badly, and he organized a mighty commemoration for the dead, as if it were a celebration of some kind! He invited Shifra, too. She was around 80 then. She was so disgusted that she left.

She couldn't physically stand the feast. She then came to our place without even calling first, and we were very surprised and worried about how she managed to reach us, a very old lady. Shifra was a book-keeper all her life and died in Leningrad in 1982.

Mother's younger sister Debora was embarrassed to be a Jew her entire life and called herself Vera instead of Debora. She went to Irkutsk and entered economics college. At the end of the first year she was expelled because she dared to dance foxtrot at a college party! Later she and her cousin, also expelled, had addressed the Minister of Culture Lunacharsky during his visit to Siberia.

They were rehabilitated and readmitted to the college on his order. But Debora packed her things and went to Leningrad to study to become a rate-fixer and worked all her life in this trade in various minor associations.

She played piano like a genius and had absolute pitch. During the blockade she met a married Leningradian, Veniamin Heisin. She used to call him Vitamin instead of Veniamin. His family was in evacuation then. He was Jewish and they lived in a common-law marriage for five years, from 1942 to 1947, and she gave birth to a daughter, Irina.

Even when his wife and children came back from evacuation, he continued visiting her and helped her a lot materially. Irina knew she had a father and didn't suspect he had another family. Debora died in Leningrad in 1993.

Malka is my mother. As a girl she was fond of taking care of animals, horses and cows. These skills helped her a lot later, when they were evacuated to a Siberian village during World War II. She was the only evacuee who could milk a cow and ride a horse. When she, like all her sisters, came to Leningrad, it was the day of Lenin's death in 1924. It was a cold day of January 22, the streets were crowded, everybody was worried and there was a sense of trouble in the air. It was later that she learnt - Lenin died!

In Leningrad she heard Mayakovsky [5](#) live and wouldn't miss an opportunity to attend meetings with poets and writers. She graduated from the Leningrad Training College for Grain Production and became an economist. Mother was proposed to by Genrikh Yoffe. He was very kind to me later when I was born, but mother rejected his proposal and he married Rakhil, mother's elder sister. I buried them all, mother's sisters, and her cousins as well.

In 1929 mother had already graduated from the Leningrad Training College for Grain Production and once she went to the party of her fellow countrymen from Siberia and met papa there. They married de facto in 1929. They didn't have a Jewish wedding ceremony.

They just started to live together and kept their joint household from 1929 - that means they actually became husband and wife in 1929. They didn't officially register their marriage until 1937, because back then single mothers were given cash benefits and as long as papa was ill they needed some extra income.

In 1939 they celebrated the 10th anniversary of their marriage and there were many guests invited. They were both atheists, and of course, this celebration was secular.

My father, Boris Deribizov, was born in 1900. He was Russian. He was from Warsaw [today Poland], but I always put down in all questionnaires that he was born in Ulan-Ude, for fear that personnel

managers might think that he was born abroad, had I written 'Poland,' so I used to insert 'Ulan-Ude,' as mother had taught me. But back then Poland was part of Russia. [Editor's note: Poland was partitioned between three powers in the 18th century and tsarist Russia got the largest part, which remained under Russian rule until 1920-21.]

His father and mother, my granddaddy and grandmother, Dmitry Deribizov and Praskovia Deribizova [1870s-1942], are from Tambov region. Grandfather Dmitry served on a railway station in Chita but he was often sent on assignments to other locations (in Chita, in Ulan-Ude and in Warsaw). Once, during one such trip, father got lost in Warsaw. He was 4 years old. They found him in the soldiers' barracks. Some soldiers had given him food and shelter.

Dmitry and Praskovia had six children. Praskovia never worked, the family was well off. All the children received a good education, but only my father managed to complete higher education - he graduated from the Leningrad Soviet Commerce Institute and became an economist. Praskovia was a genuine Russian woman, served as a churchwarden and was sent to Chita prison for that. After Poland, the entire family returned to Chita and grandfather Dmitry died there in 1930s.

Grandmother Praskovia came from Chita to St Petersburg right before the war with my married cousin, with whom we are friends now, and died in the outskirts of Leningrad in 1942 of starvation, and we only learnt about it after we came back from evacuation at the end of the war. She lost all her kids during her lifetime.

One of father's brothers, Nikolay, was arrested by the NKVD [6](#) in the 1930s and was executed in 1937 [during the Great Terror] [7](#), and father's troubles at work began. He was fired and accused of having helped the Whites [8](#) during the Civil War [9](#), whereas in reality he helped the Reds [10](#).

My grandmother had a secret address in Chita and the Reds didn't draft my father, but left him in town to provide communication with the partisans. After dismissal father managed to force his way into Prosecutor General Vyshinsky's reception, and he allowed father to live wherever he wanted and gave him the appropriate documents. Father's other brother was executed by the Whites during the Civil War.

His sister Lidia was exiled from Chita to Khabarovsk for printing someone else's letter in a newspaper, criticizing the management. She was a typist. She printed it, and had to serve several years in prison. She died there shortly afterwards, but she had a daughter who told me all this.

Father's sisters, Tatyana and Liubov left for Charbin in 1922, got married there, and we didn't hear anything from them after that. Grandmother Praskovia, who died in the Leningrad blockade, died with the firm belief that she had outlived all of her children. In fact, we have only learned of the fate of her daughters, my father's sisters, in 1993.

Tatyana emigrated to Australia in the 1950s and died there in 1962, and Liubov came back to Russia with Tatyana's children and died in the 1960s in Siberia. Her nephews were looking for our family then, but they hadn't found anybody.

We found each other later, in 1993, during an accidental meeting of former Charbin residents in Leningrad, where, through the photo I had brought, I met a former classmate of my cousin. He recognized them on my photo. Tatyana had married a Chinese, Vladimir Yao in Charbin, and their children look Chinese. She emigrated, her husband died in a Japanese prison, and the kids returned



to Siberia.

### • Growing up

I was born in Leningrad in 1930. We were living near the Griboyedova Canal then, at my mother's sisters' home. There was Liya with her son, Shifra, and mother brought her husband and me. Grandma Sonya and Rakhil were still living in Nerchinsk at that time, and they had sent us the baggage, furniture and clothes to help their relatives, but all those things were already confiscated at the railway station. Moreover, NKVD representatives had come to our apartment and wanted to seize our entire property from there, but father said that the belongings were his (and he's Russian), and only then did they leave us alone.

Papa worked very little, he was constantly sick, and mother worked and supported the entire family. Aunt Rakhil, when she came from Nerchinsk, looked after me. Liya and Shifra also worked, Liya as a registrar, and Shifra as a book-keeper, both in one enterprise - Lenvodokanal project [Leningrad Project Institute of Water Supplies].

We lived in one of two of Rakhil's rooms in a communal apartment. To get to our small room, we had to pass all the way through Rakhil's large room. Father was suffering bitterly from that kind of life. He died in March 1941, not long before the war began, of a heart attack.

We lived on the embankment of the Griboyedova Canal, in the vicinity of the Nikolskaya Orthodox Church and the synagogue. Being but small kids we used to run into both. I remember once in the synagogue an employee of the community asked me: 'And what is a Russian girl doing here?' I didn't understand what he meant. I had two white braids, but I never thought they were not allowed in a synagogue. I had a few friends among my classmates. Whether they were Jewish or not, I don't know. I was not interested in such questions then, at the age of ten.

### • During the war

By the outbreak of World War II, I had completed three years of a state school. My favorite subjects were mathematics and history. As a child in school and later, in the children's boarding school during the war, I did not encounter any manifestations of anti-Semitism, nor did I feel any segregation as a Jew.

Liya was in the Crimea on a Lenvodokanal business trip in June, 1941, and she was caught by war there, so when the children were evacuated from Leningrad, my mum only sent me, because Gdali, Liya's son didn't want to leave without his mother at any cost and he stayed to wait for her.

She made her way, and arrived on the last train in autumn 1941, and they met in Leningrad and the three of them - Shifra, Liya and Gdali - stayed in Leningrad throughout the blockade. Gdali died in 1942. Shifra and Liya were evacuated in 1942 with Lenvodokanal to Kiselevsk.

I was sent first to the Yaroslavl region, but then the front approached Yaroslavl, and we were taken to Tyumen region in Siberia, the village of Pyatkovo. I was 11 years old then. The state authorities ordered that children from boarding schools be sent away from the battle lines. In Leningrad Rakhil and mum saw me off, aunt Rakhil cried a lot, and mum was quiet. She was generally calm. Aunt Rakhil had a presentiment that we would never ever see each other again, and that was exactly

what happened.

The evacuation was a horror. A man whose children were evacuated to Old Russa told me, that the front line was almost there then! How was it possible to send children so close to the front? And then he took hold of two lorries, went to Old Russa to get his kid, and brought other children back to Leningrad and handed them over to their parents. Or, it was like this - trains with children were bombed. Older children managed to escape, fell on the ground, and the small ones perished. Brothers and sisters lost each other.

Mum came to Yaroslavl region to be with me and remained with me throughout the war. Later she worked as a tutor in the boarding school. I studied at school and missed nothing. We had very good teachers. German was taught by a German lady from Povolzhye.

### • Post-war

In August 1945 we returned to Leningrad with the boarding school, I was 15 years old, and I went to the 8th form. Then I learned about the Nuremberg trial from the papers. It made a great impression on me, just as the Doctors' Plot [11](#) in 1953, and even later, events in Czechoslovakia [the Prague Spring] [12](#). I felt compassion for people in trouble, and then, probably, understood, what anti-Semitism and genocide was all about, although it didn't touch me personally.

I finished school and entered the Hydrometeorological Institute in 1948. On the radio they talked about the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [13](#) day and night: that the Soviet people must be against cosmopolitans. I was a student at a technical institute, but for some lectures on history delivered by professor Mavrodin I used to join my friend in the Pedagogical Institute.

His lectures were the most interesting ones. But he was prohibited from reading them due to this campaign against cosmopolitans. Anti-Semitism had not touched me in any way, though I heard and knew about it, but my appearance or God rescued me. Wherever I went, in a train, and in casual conversations, people asked about my salary, whether I was married and what my nationality was. I would answer: 'I don't know, what it is', meaning my mixed origins, and it always turned out beneficial for me, therefore I did not feel any anti-Semitism.

In the winter and spring of 1953 I was still a student, and they dismissed our deputy dean as a result of general policies connected with the Doctors' Plot. He became an ordinary teacher. I told him: 'How will the meteorological faculty survive without you?' and he replied: 'And how will I live without the meteorological faculty?' Everybody remembered him, and I corresponded with him later. It was very sad.

I finished the institute in summer 1953, and I was assigned to go to Tashkent to teach hydrometeorology in a local technical school. It was interesting for me and I worked there for 4 years. In Tashkent I rented a corner room from an old and formerly rich Jewish lady: my salary was 90 rubles a month.

Sixty of which I gave her for meals, and fifteen for accommodation. The rest of the money was left to me by my landlady, as she used to say, 'For cinema and for banya'. [Banya is a public bath with public dressing rooms and showers or a type of Russian sauna.] We lived very cheerfully.



The team of the teachers of the technical school consisted of promiscuous and multi-national youth. The history teacher was a timid Jewish man, the deputy director was Latvian, a strong and bright personality. When he asked her in the teachers' common room - everybody gathered there, 'What mark would you give me, as a man, on a 5-grade scale?' She answered contemptuously: 'As a man?!' (Meaning he was too faint-hearted for a man).

Some Bukharian Jews lived in Tashkent then, and I made friends with the family of the city's head therapist, and her daughter (they were Bukharan Jews), and later I lived with them free-of-charge. [Bukharan Jews: The indigenous Jews of Uzbekistan, which speak their own Tajik-Jewish dialect, and which trace their roots back to 5th-century exiles from Persia.] She was a doctor, and her patients used to bring her gifts, but she was strictly ordered to take nothing. She was an ardent Komsomol [14](#) member.

In 1957 I returned to Leningrad to mum's communal apartment, a room she received for work in Zemmach [Research Institute of Excavation Mechanical Engineering]. I couldn't find work in Leningrad and lived for one year on mum's expense. Later I felt bad about it and then I had found a job in a weather forecast bureau.

I bought a cooperative one-room apartment in 1962. I was helped financially by all my numerous relatives and friends. I asked everybody to lend me 100 rubles, because the initial investment was 1,300. It was a lot of money, but later some of them remitted my debt and presented that money to me. Then I exchanged this one-room apartment and mum's room for a two-room apartment, in which I now live. I had proposals made to me, but I never married.

In 1969 I entered post-graduate courses by correspondence in Moscow. In 1970, after the emigration of my relatives - the family of Bertha Vingelminova-Krol - I began to correspond with them. My mum was very worried for me. The letters were delivered not to my home, but to the post-office box, so that the neighbors wouldn't know about my correspondence. Mum was afraid, for almost all her life she was scared that someone would find out about her rich Jewish past.

In 1980 I defended my candidate's thesis about the forecast of high waters on Volkhov River in the Leningrad region. I never bathed there. Our laborious data collecting system in hydrometeorology requires quite some time. I went on business trips many times through the institute where I worked, and studied by correspondence. Now I am the candidate of geographical sciences, I have written and published a few works on forecasting high waters and floods from snows.

In 1982 the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] did not allow me to go to a conference in Romania. The reason they gave was: 'She did not work in 1957, and it is quite possible that she, a daughter of a Jewish mother, was thinking of emigration to Israel'. They told the chief of our staff department in the district committee.

And this in the 1950s! Absurdity! One month later my colleagues and the staff department convinced me to try again and I submitted the documents one more time. I passed a rigid interview in the district committee - all questions about Israel - and the trip was permitted.

Now I am retired and I am a volunteer of Hesed. I am pleased to observe how the Jewish community prospers. I know that many people come here each day for lectures and meetings on Jewish culture, and I sometimes attend these lectures and observe Sabbath on Fridays in Hesed.

Here I have learned a lot of new things about Jewish traditions, that I didn't know before, for example, about wigs: that married Jewish women wear a wig. Mum and her sisters wore their own hair, and did not tell me anything about wigs. I have only learned it here.

- **Glossary:**

## **1 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **2 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.

## **3 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times.

The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

## **4 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

## **5 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)**

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

## **6 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **7 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor.

Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **8 Whites (White Army)**

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar.

Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

## **9 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke

out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti- communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti- Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides.

The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

## **10 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

## **11 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt.

As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **12 Prague Spring**

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

## **13 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc.

Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'.

They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **14 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.