

# Abram Kopelovich

Abram Kopelovich

Riga

Latvia

Interviewer: Svetlana Kovalchuk

Date of interview: August 2002

[Growing up](#)

[During the War](#)

[Family background](#)

[My education](#)

[My family life](#)

[Alexander Germanovich Losev](#)

[Glossary](#)

## Growing up

My maternal grandfather, Zalman Beskin, died in 1938. I don't know when he was born, but he died in Vitebsk [1](#). I was three months old then. His wife, my grandmother Musya [Beskina], died in 1953 and she had been the head of the family since her husband died. Grandfather's brother Beskin, whose first name I forgot, was a merchant and lived in Kiev before the revolution [2](#). When his store was nationalized, about ten wagons were needed to take away all the goods from his shop. He had been a rich man and the Soviet authorities exiled him and his family to Yakutia [Northern Siberia] in 1924.

When I studied in Moscow, I saw Grandfather's nephew a couple of times, the son of this merchant. He was the deputy minister of trade of Yakutia! What his first name was, I, honestly, don't know. But the surname was Beskin! I think, that the Beskins live in Yakutia nowadays as well. My father Isaac Markovich Kopelovich [3](#), Jewish name Mordukh Idel Motl Kopelovich, was born in 1901 in Dvinsk [today Daugavpils in Latvia, 230 km east of Riga], and my mother Tsimlya Zalmanovna Beskina was also born in 1901, but in Vitebsk. They were a handsome couple. They got married in 1922 and had a chuppah. But he was a Trotskyist at that time. He was a Trotskyist until 1928, and when Trotsky [4](#) was defeated, expelled from the Communist Party [December, 1927] and exiled from Moscow, that was it. Later my father was Iosif Stalin's ideological follower. And my mother told him, 'Stop fiddling about with your Communist Party, I'm expecting another baby, who we are supposed to feed, by the way!' My brother earned something too by reselling things. He was born in 1924 and called Lev or Lyova. In 1928 my sister Sonya was born, Sofia.

My father's education was 'super-highest' - four classes. And Mum had completed eight classes - she wanted to study very much, but her father was very poor. Her uncle was very rich, but he wouldn't give the money for her education. I know only this fact: she wanted to study very much.

My father was a soldier in the Red Army [5](#) since 1919. There were four brothers, who had found themselves in Vitebsk [today Belarus] - Leib, or in the Russian way Lyova, then Khaikl, the eldest,



then brother Girsh [Grigoriy], Uncle Grisha, and my father Isaac - the youngest. Uncle Grisha was the one who loved to sing Jewish songs. Whenever I hear singing now, I think of him.

Later, the border was drawn between Russia and Latvia [6](#). The brothers served in the army at the time and then they found themselves wives. So, these four Red Army soldiers remained abroad, that is out of Latvia.

When Daddy fought in the Civil War [7](#) he was a rather experienced soldier, so he asked his commander to visit Moscow for one day, as he was serving nearby. The commander allowed him to. He arrived at his uncle's home, and his uncle shook out the contents of his rucksack and put in a crate of vodka instead. Father came to his unit, reported to the commander that Soldier Kopelovich had arrived and heard: 'Hey, why don't you take off your rucksack first!' - 'I can't, it's too heavy! Help me!' So they took off the sack and it was full of vodka! Father was not given a gram, but at once was promoted to the rank of sergeant major. And by the end of the war he was a sergeant major.

Here in Dvinsk, there were seven relatives left, all 'Zionists' and 'super Communists.' The first to be executed in Latvia in 1935 was my aunt Sofia Kopelovich; she was a Communist. But the most interesting things happened later. In 1937, people in the USSR were permitted to make telephone calls to Daugavpils [before 1920 Dvinsk], Latvia. They didn't correspond with each other by mail, it was impossible [8](#). So they decided to call. Father was busy at work, so he didn't call. In the morning they went to see their friends who did call - and they found out that all of them were arrested. Therefore the brothers refrained from calling. They decided that the following day they would go to the post office and call their mother. But the following day those who called were in prison. And my father Isaac was a Communist, a commander, so he couldn't compromise himself like that. There was no communication between Dvinsk and Vitebsk. It probably existed before 1928-1930, but later the Stalin regime was very strict [9](#) and arrested those who tried to get in touch with their relatives. I vaguely know my Dvinsk relatives.

Daddy was an odd-job man, a baker mostly. The Communist Party directed him to be a shop manager. And he kept this position until 1941.

## During the War

As soon as the war began [10](#) he was immediately sent to the front, but before he left he took all his relatives and put them all in a railway car and sent them to the Urals. As I was told - I was small then - we reached the Urals, and then headed for Dzhambul, in Kazakhstan. Mother's brother, Ierukhim Beskin, we called him Uncle Ira, was then working in Moscow as the director of a printing house, and we wrote to him and learnt who was where.

We arrived back in Vitebsk in 1944, and I started going to school. Father was still in the army, and we arrived right after Vitebsk had been liberated. The city was completely destroyed! They say Smolensk was destroyed, but in Vitebsk 95 percent of the buildings lay in ruins. I remember only the mess. I remember one bridge across which we were walking, there was a bridge to the brick plant that the Fascists wanted to blow up, and one soldier received the rank of Hero of the Soviet Union [11](#) for preventing that.

We were given a room in a barrack. And before Father returned in 1945, we lived there. Mum worked at the brick factory as an unskilled worker. We boys ran about, as I remember, played lapta [a ball game]. We were very good friends, I can hardly believe now that it is possible to live in such an amicable way. You ask if we lived poorly? That's not the right word! My grandmother used to give me 'a cake' in evacuation. And what this cake was? - a small slice of bread cut into tiny cubes. That was called a cake. Certainly, for the toilet - be it in winter or summer - you had to go outside. Before I left for Moscow to study, it was nothing for me to run to the toilet outside of the house barefoot in winter. No detrimental consequences whatsoever.

In 1945, my father was discharged from the army, returned home, and was given three German POWs, Fascists, to help him cut the wood and build two frameworks of houses and cement a deep cellar. Then the Germans were taken away, and he finished the work by himself.

After the war, he was just as strong an ideologist as before, but when I turned thirteen in 1951, he, the big Communist atheist, gathered ten Jews and carried out a bar mitzvah as if he was a fully ordained rabbi. Father retired at the age of 60 - in 1961. He still worked a little bit at different jobs. But at 69 years of age he died of cancer.

Father didn't want to return to Dvinsk after the war, because his mother and father had died there, and all our relatives had perished in the war. He told me that they were very religious.

## Family background

My brother Lyova finished eight classes of the Jewish school in Vitebsk, and then they closed the school. We all knew Yiddish well, wrote and spoke the language. In our home, we only spoke Yiddish with our grandmother. And with others we could speak Russian, sometimes inserting Belarusian words. With Daddy and Mum I spoke Russian. When they wanted to hide something from me, they spoke Yiddish. And when they realized that I understood everything, they started to mix Yiddish, Russian, and Belarusian words. But both they and I knew that wasn't working.

Uncle Ierukhim Beskin, my mother's brother, left with a large group of friends for Moscow in 1925-1926. This was a group of 20 men - all of them became porters in Moscow, having had not much of an education. And gradually, step by step, they made their way into the world. Some of them returned to Vitebsk, some were killed during the war.

Uncle Ira fell deeply in love with a beautiful woman. The parents of the two parties were against their marriage. Galina Evgrafovna came from an old noble Russian family. They loved each other and registered their union. Grandma used to joke, 'My son cannot eat pork, but he cannot resist cold boiled pork!' Which was her way of referring to her daughter-in-law. But then Galina became very close with my grandmother. They had two kids. They agreed that if there would be a boy - circumcision, if a girl - christening. There was a boy, and later there was a girl. The boy was duly circumcised, the girl christened. The boy's name was Leonid, we called him Lerik. He eventually graduated from a legal college in 1952, but he could not work: in his passport Leonid's nationality was Russian [12](#), but his surname - Beskin - was specifically Jewish. Leonid's nationality, which he got from his mother, didn't make his life easier.

Eventually, at the end of his life he became the manager of the singer Iosif Kobzon [people's actor of the USSR, officially recognized singer]. He was engaged in theatrical business, was a manager,

and came to Riga several times with various troupes. When Leonid Beskin died, Kobzon took on the funeral expenses. Leonid is buried at the non-Jewish Novodevichye cemetery, the most prestigious one in Moscow. It's right in the center of Moscow.

Galina and Uncle Ira are buried there, too. He was not a Communist; in fact, he became a rich man. His daughter Svetlana is in Damascus, they [she and her husband] received jobs at the conservatory there.

My eldest aunt is Anya Bessmertnova [nee Beskina]; her husband died under the wheels of a tram in Moscow. That's what I was told, but trams do not gain such speeds in Moscow to run over a man. He was a jeweler, so it's a dark and suspicious affair. They lived in Vitebsk and owned a big house there before the war.

Grandmother lived in Vitebsk with her younger daughter Tsilya Shagalova [nee Beskina (1900-1989)]. Granny was very religious. Father used to bake matzot, basically for her.

She cooked only kosher meals. She ate only dairy products. Uncle Ira used to say, 'Nobody has the right to help her. I am the only son - me!' Besides, after the war, he gave every one of his relatives 10,000 Rubles each to start building their own houses. And to his last day he supported his mum. Uncle Ira came to visit very often, together with his wife, sometimes in his own car. Aunt Galina Evgrafovna didn't like to offend anybody, so she visited all the relatives and ate everything she was given, although she knew that she would have to take purgatives later. She used to say, 'Well, why would I offend anybody?! But my diet, my fine figure!' They loved each other, those two.

I remember coming to see my grandmother and she would give me a Ruble: 'Go buy yourself some berries.' I went and I bought wild strawberries, which I could eat right in the market place, or, if it were other berries, I had to wash them first. Everyone loved her very much. At 89 she broke a leg while descending the porch. That was in 1952. And in Vitebsk there were very professional doctors then. The persecution of Jews had already begun and prominent experts from Moscow escaped to Vitebsk, and worked in the Medical Institute [13](#). They performed an operation, put her leg in plaster and said, 'With God's mercy she will be able to sit.' She sat, then she rose, then she walked on crutches and with a stick. After that, her case was described in many medical books, because it's a wonderful fact that she could get absolutely well at that age. When my cousin, who is now in Germany, studied there, she was told about this case by her professors. Then she said, 'It's my granny!' Grandmother died at the age of 89.

## My education

The school I went to was a kind of an elite school. Our Physics teacher was the first person to be awarded the Order of Lenin [14](#) in Belarus. Our Russian teacher was in the circle of Vladimir Mayakovsky [15](#). My friend, Nikolay Tishechkin, became a people's actor of Belarus. I wasn't the only Jew in our class. There were no national issues whatsoever. Everyone was a member of the Komsomol [16](#), or a pioneer [17](#). We visited factories and we had all sorts of interesting field trips. Our life was very nice.

I graduated from the Moscow Polygraphic Institute. I was admitted the first year when Jews were accepted, in 1955. The supervisor of our school treated Jews very well, and she told me, 'Don't you think, that you are not going to be admitted because you are a Jew!' She was Russian or Latvian, I

think.

I became a student of the mechanical faculty, specializing in mechanics and design of polygraphic machines. The food at our faculty was disgusting and because we were students of arts and humanitarian sciences, they fed us miserably. And suddenly, there came an announcement - that we were to go on strike! Nobody went to eat for two days. At that time the so-called Hungarian events [18](#) were happening. Instantly, all sorts of big shots descended on our school. And they immediately rectified the situation.

Sometimes we went skiing. Once we wandered into the residence of Khrushchev [19](#). They showed us to the exit rather quickly.

At school, every night we had dancing parties, especially on Saturdays. There was a separate campus, two kilometers from any residential area. I lived in a small room - there were only 18 of us living together - all nationalities. When you look at the picture of us, it is remarkable to see every ethnic type.

My uncle's wife, Galina Evgrafovna, personally taught me good manners and all the rules of decent behavior. She introduced me to Moscow's high society and taught me many things, including the right way to hold a spoon or a fork. You know, I was from a small town!

Uncle Ira was the director of a large printing house of the Moscow Theatrical Society. All posters, all tickets - were made there. As a student, I attended all the performances. Thanks to him, I saw a lot of theater plays. I went to the first Viennese ballet on ice, various festivals.

We graduated in 1960. After graduation, we had reunions every five years. On 5th May - the Publisher's Day. We continued meeting until Latvia became independent. Everybody used to come - even some foreigners, who studied with us. During these 30 years we were gathering every five years.

After graduation we had a 'free distribution' [20](#) - that means everybody was to look for a job independently. My brother Lyova worked here in Riga, and he was the head of a foundry shop. He had trouble with the Latvian language, which he didn't speak and needed to communicate with the workers in Russian.

I worked in the sixth printing house for half a year, that's where Sergey Eisenstein [21](#), the famous film-director, worked. They insisted on speaking only Latvian to me. So my brother sent me to the electric lamps factory, and asked his acquaintances there to hire me. It was a large production plant. So I went to the main engineer and he said, 'OK, start tomorrow.' I came the following day, though the first department - department of the KGB [22](#) - didn't want to accept me because I was a Jew and the factory was paramilitary. I began to work, and I worked there until my very retirement. I held all kinds of posts at the factory. I have achieved the rank of designer of the first category, there's nothing above it. I worked as deputy chief mechanic, the chief of design bureau, and my last assignment was the director of a shop.

## **My family life**

Where can you find a Jewish wife? In the regional Komsomol Committee! I was an educated Communist. I finished the University of Marxism-Leninism as a Komsomol member, then took a



philosophical training course. I was the secretary of the Komsomol organization of our workshop.

Once there was a session in the office of the third secretary of the Kirovsky district Komsomol Committee. I was the chief of the Komsomol lecturers' group, and my future wife also held some post. It was the time when various youth contests were fashionable. And there was one contest held right then at the factory 'Bolshevichk?'. And there comes my future wife, a young girl, and asks for two tickets. I didn't even now what kind of tickets they were. She bought two tickets and left, and I liked her.

And I told Valya, the member of the Komsomol Committee, 'Valya, I also need two tickets.' And she said, 'Abram, what, are you crazy? You never liked such performances.' - 'But I want to see one now.' 'Well, here you are.'

So I came there with my comrade. She came with a friend, too. And I invited her to dance although I wasn't an expert dancer. And she was a little bit offended because my friend was a real lady's man.

We didn't start dating for a long time. We saw each other about ten times, half a year. She was the first Jewish girl who I liked very much. And that's it. I didn't even know from the start that she was Jewish. And when I found that out, oy - she is Jewish! - OK, it's high time for me to get married! And I have never regretted it. We registered our marriage in 1965.

I was already a Communist, my wife was a Communist, so there was no chuppah, no Jewish wedding. Then it was impossible [23](#). Instantly, the authorities would have known about it. In 1966 our daughter was born. We couldn't afford a second child - she studied and we thought it would be too hard - nobody helped us financially. Debts, furniture on credit, apartment by installments - that was our life.

We lived in a rented apartment. It was possible to rent and then buy an apartment, so we wrote five applications to different co-operatives. Once I was in a collective farm [24](#) on an assignment. I came home on leave - and my wife wasn't there. And I was dressed in a felt jersey, just from the collective farm in the country. The neighbors told me she was at a party. I found her and she jumped up, delighted and happy. And I was standing there in dirty boots, you know, right from the village. And she exclaimed: 'I have paid for the apartment!' I said, 'No problem, honey, it's only 30 Rubles.' 'No, I mean the first installment for the apartment in the co- operative society! I had to borrow from this and that!'

And we received the apartment very fast. Then it was necessary to pay back the debts, and it turned out to be a prolonged procedure. It took us about 15 years to pay it all back. And we had to buy books too, and to settle our other bills. We began to travel a little when our daughter turned six. And then we started traveling more and more often. We never built or bought a summerhouse. However, we used summer residences provided by the state from time to time.

My wife's name is Anna [nee Maisel], she finished a Physics college here, and then worked at a prison school in Valmiera [a town 106 km north east of Riga]. Later she worked in another school as a teacher, and deputy director. She studied at post-graduate courses in Moscow. They didn't take her at university - as a Jewish person. But she found a job in the Institute of Improvement of Teachers' Qualifications. Later there was a vacancy of a scientific employee in the institute at the

Ministry of Education. Soon she became the chief of the department of labor training in the Institute of Pedagogy of the Ministry of Education. It was considered a prestigious post. Then she was invited to read lectures. Now my spouse is the Dean of the faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Latvian University.

When in 1991 the so-called freedom period began [25](#), my spouse Anna and Bregman Losev were the founders of Jewish schools. Anna created the first methodological instructions, first programs, and Losev analyzed the Jewish national questions. And they created the first Jewish school. Now, unfortunately, the schools have changed. Now the questions of money prevail, and then these questions were not so important. There was one goal: to create a Jewish school, so that Jewish children could learn about Jewish culture, Jewish life, and in general the basics of their national culture.

My daughter's name is Nelli, Muller after her marriage. She graduated from the university in the department of Physics, with an honors diploma. She was not offered a job in the university due to a simple reason - the position was meant for a relative of one of the bosses. And she entered the post-graduate courses in the Polytechnical Institute in Riga. When she was about to defend her thesis, Latvia became independent and all those changes started happening. And she left for America with her husband. She is a mathematician and works in a large travel company. And she carries out all mathematical processing for the company - absolutely all of it. She married a Jew, which is natural. It is a question of tradition and education. Both the Kopelovich and Muller families originated from Daugavpils. My daughter, granddaughter, and grandson are all Jewish, and the boy is circumcised.

I was a secular man. But, whenever I was on holiday with my wife, or I was traveling alone, I always found time for visiting a synagogue. Not because I was a believer, I just felt drawn to it. Besides, I liked to enter mosques and Christian churches.

But on 18-19th August, 1991, during the coup attempt against Gorbachev [26](#), we were on Baikal Lake [in Siberia], and we were very scared. There was no connection home to Riga, and besides they were showing all sorts of terrible stuff on TV, so we were very worried. It was in 1991, and we were in a place from where people can't be exiled any farther. It was funny! It was a Soviet tradition for television to show all sorts of cultural programs like the ballet 'Swan Lake,' Beethoven symphonies when some big Communist leaders died, like Brezhnev [27](#), Andropov, or Chernenko. And in these few days, we had too much culture and not enough news.

Up to the end of my life I will remember that I am a Jew. And I knew that I would marry only a Jewish girl. On Saturdays I started to attend synagogue. But of course, I don't observe all the subtleties of religion. First of all, it's a very long way to the synagogue if you go on foot. It's a great deal of walking. And you cannot ride on Saturdays. It's a serious infringement. And, secondly, my wife often comes late on Friday. If I'm at home, I light the candles. She sometimes works on Saturdays too, she cannot refuse. Well, how can one observe traditions in this situation? It is not allowed to put on the light, to do this, to do that. We cannot observe, even if we wanted to. The only thing we do, we don't eat bread at Pesach. When I worked, I didn't care what people said, I brought matzot and ate it. And my wife says it isn't very convenient, but still she abstains from eating bread. I keep the customs within reasonable limits - I would always put on a cap when I light the Friday night candles.

My sister didn't leave for Israel while Mum was alive. But when our mother died, my sister left. And then she died in Israel not long afterwards. We have a lot of relatives in Israel. The Zeltsers from Grodno [town in Belarus]: Sofia Zeltser, and her husband Alexander Zeltser. Their children are Musya, a doctor in Netanya, and Arkady, who is now working for a doctor's degree at the Jerusalem university. My brother Lyova left for Israel in 1992. My brother's son is now a doctor in Netanya.

My cousin Nina, Uncle Lyova's daughter, lives in Vitebsk. We regularly visit Vitebsk; our parents' graves are there. Two years ago we attended the festival 'Slavonic Fair' [an annual music festival called Slavyanskiy Bazar in Russian] there. I understand and speak Yiddish, too.

### Alexander Germanovich Losev

I need to say some words about my dear friend Alexander Germanovich Losev [1923 -1997], or as we called him, Sasha. I have a picture with him in it. I knew him since July 1961. I came to Riga after graduating from the institute in Moscow, and he was a friend of my brother Lev Kopelovich. Losev came to Riga after having completed training in the studio of Solomon Mikhoels [28](#) in Moscow. He and my brother were sent to Latvia by Mikhoels to create the Jewish theater right after the war. Unfortunately, it was not the time for founding theaters. Life was very hard.

My brother went to work in the foundry; Alexander Germanovich finished the pedagogical institute and started to teach at an evening school. Then he got married, lived on Dzirnavu Street in one room in a shared apartment [29](#). Financially he lived very poorly. He was always engaged in issues of literature. His hobby is the history of interrelation between Russian and Latvian languages, Rainis [real name: Janis Plieksans (1865-1929): poet, playwright, translator and politician, considered the most distinguished Latvian writer of all time], Pushkin [30](#) and so on.

He finished post-graduate courses by correspondence, obtaining the degree of a candidate of sciences [31](#) and worked in the Institute of Pedagogical Studies at the Ministry of Education. In the beginning he was just a scientific employee, but he finished in the rank of a scientific secretary. He wrote a lot of articles and books. He was always interested in Jewish issues, Jewish literature. At the same time he had many Russian and Latvian friends. He had been granted a three-room apartment, where in one of the rooms was his study, full of scientific materials, books, and magazines. He was very cheerful, and liked to tell Jewish jokes very much. It was a sheer pleasure to sit and talk to him. He felt very young and we loved him very much. We lived very near each other, he frequently came to see us and called on the telephone.

When he died, there was a big funeral ceremony. All the Jewish community came, as well as the Orthodox Christian community, that's how well loved he was. He died in 1997, and he is buried at the Jewish cemetery.

### Glossary:

#### **[1](#) Vitebsk**

Provincial town in the Russian Empire, near the Baltic Republics, with 66,000 inhabitants at the end of the 19th century; birthplace of Russian Jewish painter Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Today in Belarus.



## **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 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was Russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

## **4 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

## **5 Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- two years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- three

years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On the 22nd June 1941 Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was three years and in navy- fouryears. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to two years in ground troops and in the navy to three years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

## **6 Latvian independence**

The end of the 19th century was marked by a rise of the national consciousness and the start of national movement in Latvia, that was a part of the Russian Empire. It was particularly strong during the first Russian revolution in 1905-07. After the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917 the Latvian representatives conveyed their demand to grant Latvia the status of autonomy to the Russian Duma. During World War I, in late 1918 the major part of Latvia, including Riga, was taken by the German army. However, Germany, having lost the war, could not leave these lands in its ownership, while the winning countries were not willing to let these countries to be annexed to the Soviet Russia. The current international situation gave Latvia a chance to gain its own statehood. From 1917 Latvian nationalists secretly plot against the Germans. When Germany surrenders on November 11, they seize their chance and declare Latvia's independence at the National Theatre on November 18, 1918. Under the Treaty of Riga, Russia promises to respect Latvia's independence for all time. Latvia's independence is recognized by the international community on January 26, 1921, and nine months later Latvia is admitted into the League of Nations. The independence of Latvia was recognized de jure. The Latvian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

## **7 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.

## **8 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

## **9 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.

## **10 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **11 Hero of the Soviet Union**

Honorary title established on 16th April 1934 with the Gold Star medal instituted on 1st August 1939, by Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Awarded to both military and civilian personnel for personal or collective deeds of heroism rendered to the USSR or socialist society. [12](#) Item 5: This was the nationality/ethnicity line, which was included on all job application forms and in passports. Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

## **13 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.

#### **14 Order of Lenin**

Established in 1930, the Order of Lenin is the highest Soviet award. It was awarded for outstanding services in the revolutionary movement, labor activity, defense of the Homeland, and strengthening peace between peoples. It has been awarded over 400,000 times.

#### **15 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.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

#### **18 1956 in Hungary**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the

Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

### **19 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

### **20 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.

### **21 Eisenstein, Sergey Mikhailovich (1898 -1948)**

was a revolutionary Soviet film director and film theorist noted in particular for his silent films Strike, Battleship Potemkin and Oktober. His work vastly influenced early filmmakers owing to his innovative use of and writings about montage.

### **22 KGB**

Committee of State Security, took over from NKVD: People's Committee of Internal Affairs; which earlier used to be called the GPU, the state security agency.

### **23 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

### **24 Kolkhoz**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

### **25 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic**

On May, 4 1990 Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Republic has accepted the declaration in which was informed on desire to restore independence of Latvia, and the transition period to restoration of full independence has been declared. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held on march, 3 1991, over 90 percent of the participants voted for independence. On 21 August 1991 the parliament took a decision on complete restoration of the

prewar statehood of Latvia. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 24th August 1991. In September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations. Through the years of independence Latvia has implemented deep economic reforms, introduced its own currency (Lat) in 1993, completed privatization and restituted the property to its former owners. Economic growth constitutes 5-7% per year. Also, it's taken the course of escaping the influence of Russia and integration into European structures. In February 1993 Latvia introduced the visa procedure with Russia, and in 1995 the last units of the Russian army left the country. Since 2004 Latvia has been a member of NATO and the European Union.

## **26 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

## **27 Brezhnev, Leonid, Ilyich (1906-82) Soviet leader**

He joined the Communist Party in 1931 and rose steadily in its hierarchy, becoming a secretary of the party's central committee in 1952. In 1957, as protégé of Khrushchev, he became a member of the presidium (later politburo) of the central committee. He was chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, or titular head of state. Following Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, which Brezhnev helped to engineer, he was named first secretary of the Communist Party. Although sharing power with Kosygin, Brezhnev emerged as the chief figure in Soviet politics. In 1968, in support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine,' asserting that the USSR could intervene in the domestic affairs of any Soviet bloc nation if communist rule was threatened. While maintaining a tight rein in Eastern Europe, he favored closer relations with the Western powers, and he helped bring about a détente with the United States. In 1977 he assumed the presidency of the USSR. Under Gorbachev, Brezhnev's regime was criticized for its corruption and failed economic policies.

## **28 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.

## **29 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.

### **30 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)**

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

### **31 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees**

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about three years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.