

Who Will Be the “Legendary” Jewish Socialist?

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## Introduction

“Who Will Be the ‘Legendary’ Jewish Socialist” takes you on the adventure of a lifetime, each player gets the chance to step into the shoes of a Jewish Socialist on the way to the Revolution! Explore Eastern Europe and meet comrades like Vladimir Medem and foes like Vladimir Kossovski. Along the path you’ll encounter paths that can give you a fast track to events such as the Revolution of 1905 where you and fellow Jewish Socialists garner enough support to elect representatives to the Duma or send you right back to the 1903 Russian Socialist Congress where you walk out after being ignored by gentile Russian Socialists. But be careful to avoid getting arrested at a worker’s strike, which could regress your game progress and lead to the loss of supporters!

The experience of Jewish Socialists in the Russian Empire speaks to many broader themes within Jewish history. Our hope is that in playing a game with such a specific focus, students will be able to engage with the material with greater depth. As a result they will be able to more successfully apply patterns from this topic to a broader study of Jewish history and Modern European history. In particular, players will grasp the recurrence varying “pathways” for Jewish survival, the internal and external conflict along each of those, and the balance of forming and asserting Jewish identity while working and existing in non-Jewish spaces.

With the rise of anti-Semitism in the late nineteenth century, seen in Russia with the pogroms and in Austro-Hungary with the rise of nationalism, Jews needed to find a way to survive, both as individuals and communities. The three trajectories that developed – immigration, Zionism, and socialism – were manifestations of much older ways of trying to ensure Jewish survival and balance external pressures to assimilate, oppression, and threats of violence. Jewish socialists faced many of the same challenges as their ancestors in having to

navigate asserting their Jewish identity while also engaging, to varying extents, with non-Jews.

Medem writes about motivations of Jews to join the socialist movement:

First, by his class feeling; by the consciousness of being a worker, exploited, [he feels] compelled to struggle for a better life jointly with his brothers; the second force, however, is his sense of Jewishness, the consciousness of being a Jew. Who is to say which of the two forces has the stronger impact?<sup>1</sup>

This is reminiscent of the maskilim, for example, who strove to embrace ideas of science and “progress,” while still maintaining their Jewish identity.

In 1897 the Jewish Socialist party known as the Bund, was spearheaded by Vladimir Medem. Medem was a secular Jewish theoretician that focused on the preservation of Yiddish culture as well as, procuring and protecting the rights of Jewish workers in Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> The Bund held a major role in Jewish politics during the time “Who Will Be the ‘Legendary’ Jewish Socialist” is set. They held a key role in the formation of the 1898 Russian Social Democrats Party. However the Bund’s aim to serve as the sole representative for the Jewish working class in Russia as well as their insistence to form an ethnically-based federal party led to tension at the 1903 Russian Social Democratic Congress, where the Bund walked out.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after that 1903 Congress, the Revolution of 1905 began. Despite facing continued state violence in the form of pogroms, which were instances of mass violence directed at Jews, they were able to establish themselves as major figures in the revolution. Jewish activists from different parties came together to form the Union for the Attainment of Full Rights for the Jewish People of Russia.<sup>4</sup> Eventually the organization joined the Union of Unions which worked to overturn the autocratic system in Russia. This provided Jews with a gateway to join the first

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist* (Ktav: Ktav Publishing House, 1979), 176.

<sup>2</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*.

<sup>3</sup> Ascher, Abraham. 2010. “Russian Revolution of 1905”. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian\\_Revolution\\_of\\_1905](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian_Revolution_of_1905) (accessed April 30, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Abraham. “Russian Revolution of 1905.” 2010.

Duma, a legislative branch newly established by Czar Nicholas II in his October Manifesto. The result of the revolution for Jews was government lifts of bans that restricted Jews. For example, more Jewish students were admitted to the universities of Saint Petersburg and Moscow, and more towns in southern Russia allowed for Jewish settlement.

The February Revolution of 1917 saw the fall of the tsarist government in Russia during the midst of World War I. The revolution also led to the dissolution of the suppressive governments structures, Jewish people were free of political restrictions. This meant that Jews could not only join existing institutions, but also form their own. Beginning in 1917, kehillahs, councils of Jewish self-governance began forming, a symbol of the newfound Jewish self-governance in Russia.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding these experiences helps students understand the ways in which power was used to exclude Jews and then on occasion, with conditions, to include them; the ways Jews navigated and adapted to that dynamic; and how Jewish identities formed in different locations and times. These questions are at the root of why we study history - they help us understand the current world and everyone's position in it. "Who Will Be the 'Legendary' Jewish Socialist" makes that history accessible and engaging. And, of course, as Vladimir Medem understood, who doesn't want to be legendary?

### **Game Design**

The game is modelled after Candy Land. Like Candy Land, our board will have a snake-like path, divided into individual game spaces. Along the path, there are several checkpoints that represent major historical events for Jewish socialists in the Russian Empire. The path of the game is chronological; as players move, they progress from the last decade of the

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<sup>5</sup> Gitelman, Zvi. 2010. "Russian Revolutions of 1917". YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian\\_Revolutions\\_of\\_1917](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian_Revolutions_of_1917) (accessed April 30, 2020).

nineteenth century to the February Revolution of 1917. The background of the game board will represent a map of the Pale of Settlement, the limited geographic area in which most Jews were sequestered by government mandate. Though the events of the game will not necessarily match up geographically with the locations on the board, we want to portray the spaces in which many in which many Jews lived and worked. As players experience the trajectory of a Russian Jewish socialist, they will encounter new ideas, comrades, and obstacles as they become more rooted in the world of Jewish socialism and the Bund. To represent this growth towards legendary Jewish socialist status, the game board will transition from a black and white scheme to colorized by the end.

This game is suited for a maximum of four players and is appropriate for people of all ages seeking to learn more about the experiences of Jews in the Russian empire. Each person will play as a Jewish socialist seeking to spread the socialist doctrine and organize effectively for the platform of the Bund as they become a part of this organization. There will be four colored game pieces (yellow, red, green, blue, and purple) to choose from. Each of these game pieces will be modelled after Vladimir Medem, famed Russian Jewish socialist and member of the Bund throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The figures will be depicted wearing clothing typical of Medem and other educated Jewish socialists like him: high collared shirts, suits, ties, and even a hat!<sup>6</sup>

To win the game, players must become the first person to advance through all of the spaces on the board and arrive at the February Revolution of 1917. To advance along the game's path, players will draw from two piles of cards: historical cards and life cards. For every turn, the player will draw a life card; these cards will make up a majority of players' movements

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<sup>6</sup> Roni Gechtman, "Medem, Vladimir Davidovich," *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, August 30, 2010, accessed April 29, 2020, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Medem\\_Vladimir\\_Davidovich](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Medem_Vladimir_Davidovich).

throughout the game. Historical cards, however, are specifically labelled and are only drawn when a player lands on a space on the board on which the title of a major historical event is listed. For a more extended list of sample life and historical cards, view the “Game Cards” document also included within this proposal.

The scenarios presented on life cards represent every-day occurrences in the lives of Jewish socialists. They will move the player forward or backwards a certain number of board spaces based on how the scenario would benefit or harm a Jewish socialist attempting to gain political power and organize for the Bund. For example, a player may draw the following life card: “Participate in a strike! Jewish socialists often used labor strikes to organize workers and advocate for better working conditions under the regime of the Russian tsar. Move forward 2 spaces.”<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, a player may draw a negative card, such as the following: “Spend a night in prison. Many Jewish socialists were arrested by the police for organizing strikes and challenging the tsarist regime. Move back 3 spaces.”<sup>8</sup> The amount of spaces the player moves towards or away from the end of the board depends on the extent to which the event would impact the path of an actual Jewish socialist trying to organize workers under the socialist party and advocate for their equitable treatment.

Historical spaces and cards carry greater consequences than life cards. Following the game’s start at the student socialist strike, the players will travel through and experience the rise of Nicholas II, the formation of the Bund, the first RSDLP Congress, the Kishinev pogroms, the Revolution of 1905, the October Manifesto, the second Congress of RSDWP (and eventual reunification in 1906), the second Duma, and World War I before reaching the end of the game, the February Revolution of 1917. At each of these historical checkpoints, there are two possible

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Blatman, “Bund,” *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, July 30, 2010, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund>.

<sup>8</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 191-195.

spaces, one red and one green, on which a player could land. Ending up on one of the historical spaces can either propel a player forward or backward five spaces depending on what the card instructs. For example if a player lands on one of these spaces at the formation of the Bund part of the game, the card could order, “You are chosen by the Bund’s circle leaders to be educated in Russian literature, the natural sciences, and political economy. The Bund educated select Jewish workers to elevate them and encourage them to lead the general Jewish population. Move forward 5 spaces.”<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the player could land on the other space and draw the card that commands, “You lose non-Jewish socialist friends after joining the Bund. The Bund’s establishment and methods alienated the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers Party during its early years, leading to attacks from leaders of the RSDWP such as Vladimir Kossovskii. Move backward 5 spaces.”<sup>10</sup> For a full list of the possible outcomes for each historical checkpoint, please refer to the “Game Cards” document.

There are also two special cases outside of the traditional life and historical card piles. In the life cards, there are several cards that will prompt players to switch places with another player of their choice. For example, a player may draw the following card: “Your colleague is arrested during a strike. You take their position in your local Bund organization, an important local center of leadership and activism for Jewish socialists. Switch places with someone in front of you.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, there will be a path representing exile, an experience of many Jewish socialists politically persecuted enacted by Russia’s imperial government. This experience had both positive and negative aspects for Jewish socialists: though it forced many to abandon their hometowns and live as fugitives, it also allowed them to share political ideas with

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<sup>9</sup> Blatman, “Bund.”

<sup>10</sup> Blatman, “Bund.”

<sup>11</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 164.

other Jewish socialists throughout Eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> Because of this, if players encounter this path from the bottom, they will ascend and benefit from this experience by gaining new comrades in their new location. If they encounter the exile path from the top, they will descend and experience the negative, isolating impact of exile. This path will be explained in the instructions of the game as well.

### **Instructions**

“Who Will Be the ‘Legendary’ Jewish Socialist” takes you on the adventure of a lifetime, each player gets the chance to step into the shoes of a Jewish Socialist on the way to the Revolution! Explore Eastern Europe and meet comrades like Vladimir Medem and foes like Vladimir Kossovskii. Along the path you’ll encounter paths that can give you a fast track to events such as the Revolution of 1905 where you and fellow Jewish Socialists garner enough support to elect representatives to the Duma or send you right back to the 1903 Russian Socialist Congress where you walk out after being ignored by gentile Russian Socialists. But be careful to avoid getting arrested, which could regress your game progress and lead to the loss of supporters!

1. Lay out the board and place all four characters at “start.” Decide which order you will play in. Each player will represent a Jewish Socialist, and your goal is to gain followers and establish yourself as a leader in the anti-imperial, socialist movement before the February Revolution of 1917, when the Russian tsar officially lost his power.
2. Each player takes turns drawing one “life card,” and following the instructions on the card. Watch out for cards that instruct players to switch spaces. These cards represent everyday occurrences in the lives of Russian Jewish Socialists.

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<sup>12</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 200.

3. If you land on a historical checkpoint (marked by a green or red spot on the board), find the corresponding card in the “historical cards” pile and follow the instructions on that card.
4. If you land on an exile path, take the path in the direction of the arrows. This could either boost you ahead (you meet comrades across Eastern Europe) or bring you way back down (exile can be very lonely). High risk, high reward!
5. In this way, each player will move along the board towards the Revolution. The first player to reach the February Revolution of 1917 is The “Legendary” Jewish Socialist!

### Sample List of Game Cards

#### Life Cards:

- Participate in a strike! Jewish socialists often used labor strikes to organize workers and advocate for better working conditions under the regime of the Russian tsar.<sup>13</sup> Move forward 2 spaces.
- Give a speech at a small conference. Local conferences allowed Jewish socialists to share their ideas with each other and create an ideologically coherent movement, usually working through the Bund.<sup>14</sup> Move forward 2 spaces.
- Convert a Zionist to your ideology. Zionists, who believed that Jews were a nation that needed an independent, sovereign state to obtain self-determination, were ideological opponents of Jewish socialists.<sup>15</sup> Move forward 3 spaces.
- Win over some workers from a local textile mill. Advocating for better working conditions was a major concern of Jewish socialists, especially members of the Bund, who wanted to unite laborers under the socialist party.<sup>16</sup> Move forward 2 spaces.
- Get better at Yiddish. Jewish socialists published literature in Yiddish in order to reach the Jewish workers, who were less educated and typically spoke Yiddish instead of imperial languages.<sup>17</sup> Move forward 1 space.

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist* (Ktav: Ktav Publishing House, 1979), 119-125.

<sup>14</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 274.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Blatman, "Bund," *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, July 30, 2010, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund>.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 49.

- Convince a friend to join a strike with you. Jewish socialists often used labor strikes to organize workers and advocate for better working conditions under the regime of the Russian tsar. Move forward 1 space.
- Your paper succeeds in reaching an audience of 10,000 people. Jewish socialists often used literary journals and newspapers to present and discuss intellectual theories and articulate their goals.<sup>18</sup> Move forward 3 spaces.
- Evade arrest. Jewish socialists like Vladimir Medem were often jailed for advocating against the tsarist regimes and for the equitable treatment of laborers.<sup>19</sup> Move forward 3 spaces.
- Get arrested. Jewish socialists like Vladimir Medem were often jailed for advocating against the tsarist regimes and for the equitable treatment of laborers. Move backward 3 spaces.
- A pogrom occurs near your home town. During pogroms, Jewish people were attacked as a religious minority. This was especially prevalent after the Revolution of 1905, when the Russian government equated Jews with revolution and attacked them accordingly.<sup>20</sup> Move backwards 3 spaces.
- The publication office of the newspaper that was going to publish your paper was raided. Jewish socialists often used literary journals and newspapers to present and discuss intellectual theories and articulate their goals. Move backwards 3 spaces.

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<sup>18</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 282.

<sup>19</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 119-125.

<sup>20</sup> John Klier, "Pogroms," *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, October 11, 2010, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pogroms>.

- You receive a letter from your mother. Despite feeling sympathetic to Zionism, an ideology viewed by many Jewish socialists as belonging to the corrupt bourgeoisie, she has come to see the value in the socialist party.<sup>21</sup> Move forward 2 spaces.
- Despite your pleading, a friend from University decides to believe in and fight for the Zionist cause of colonizing Palestine. Jewish socialists and Zionists were often considered intellectual opponents.<sup>22</sup> Move backwards 2 spaces.
- You attend a Bund congress in Moscow and give a speech that is not well-received. Through speeches at congresses, Bundists deliberated on their ideologies and came to agreements on important topics such as their affiliations with other social-democratic groups.<sup>23</sup> Move backwards 2 spaces.

Switch Places Cards:

- Your colleague is arrested during a strike. You take their position in your local Bund organization, an important local center of leadership and activism for Jewish socialists.<sup>24</sup> Switch places with someone in front of you.
- You are arrested for organizing a large strike at your University. While you are detained, one of your colleagues has to take your spot as a delegate to a congress of activists held in Warsaw.<sup>25</sup> Switch places with someone behind you.
- One of your comrades becomes ill and can no longer attend a strategic meeting with local industrial workers. You get to take their place and learn a lot about the needs of local

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<sup>21</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

<sup>22</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

<sup>23</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 260.

<sup>24</sup> Medem, *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, 277.

<sup>25</sup> Scott Ury, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

workers, a matter of the highest importance to Jewish socialists.<sup>26</sup> Switch places with someone in front of you.

Historical Cards:

- 1894 - Nicholas II becomes Tsar
  - You escape the Tsar's secret police. Jews were tracked down and expelled from major cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow during the first decade of the Tsar's reign.<sup>27</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - Your family and friends are expelled from Moscow because of the Tsar's policies. Expulsions heightened tensions for Jews in Russia and positioned them as scapegoats for the empire's problems.<sup>28</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1897 - The Formation of the Bund
  - You are chosen by the Bund's circle leaders to be educated in Russian literature, the natural sciences, and political economy. The Bund educated select Jewish workers to elevate them and encourage them to lead the general Jewish population.<sup>29</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - You lose non-Jewish friends after joining the Bund. The Bund's establishment and methods alienated the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers Party during its early years, leading to attacks from leaders of the RSDWP such as Vladimir Kossovskii.<sup>30</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1898 - RSDLP Congress

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<sup>26</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Davidson, "Russia and the Jews in the Nineteenth Century," in *Cultural Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson, "Russia and the Jews," 61.

<sup>29</sup> Blatman, "Bund," *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

<sup>30</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

- You are a key player in establishing the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. The Bund wanted to support proletariat unity across religious and ethnic backgrounds, succeeding by creating the RSDLP.<sup>31</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
- You are not chosen to be the Bund's representative on the Central Committee at the Congress. The three leaders on the committee were in charge of joining all the social-democratic groups into one party.<sup>32</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1903 - Kishinev Pogroms
  - You and your family escape the mob and get out of Kishinev to safety. Antisemitic pieces appeared in local news and invigorated Russian citizens of Kishinev to form a mob.<sup>33</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - Your house and business are destroyed in the Kishinev pogrom. The mob formed after antisemitic articles appeared in the local paper killed 49 people, maimed 586, and destroyed over 1,000 Jewish homes.<sup>34</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1905 - Revolution of 1905
  - You lead a *boevye otriady* and protect Bundists from an attack of the right-extremist mob. The Bund trained men to use guns and organized small militias in order to defend Jewish activists and citizens from mobs and pogroms.<sup>35</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Frankel, "Parties and Ideologies," The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, September 14, 2010, accessed May 3, 2020, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Parties\\_and\\_Ideologies](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Parties_and_Ideologies).

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 669.

<sup>33</sup> Wolf Moskovich, "Kishinev," The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, August 18, 2010, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kishinev>.

<sup>34</sup> Moskovich, "Kishinev."

<sup>35</sup> Abraham Ascher, "Russian Revolution of 1905," The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, November 22, 2010, accessed May 3, 2020, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian\\_Revolution\\_of\\_1905](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russian_Revolution_of_1905).

- You have to leave the city because anti-Jewish riots led by right-extremists. Jews were blamed for the outbreak of the revolution by many papers, inciting a wave of riots and pogroms across the Pale of Settlement.<sup>36</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1905 - October Manifesto
  - You participate in the general strike that forced the government to pass the October Manifesto. Initially, the October Manifesto was considered a major victory for democratic socialists because it promised civil liberties and the formation of an elected legislature called a дума.<sup>37</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - Your friends are injured in the massive wave of pogroms after the issuance of the October Manifesto. The political turmoil and uncertainty following the 1905 Revolution and October Manifesto provoked greater persecution of Russian Jews.<sup>38</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1903 - 1906 - The Second Congress of RSDWP and Reunification
  - Militants ask you to rejoin the RSDWP after your military success. Following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, members of the RSDWP sought out Bundists and asked them to return to the larger party.<sup>39</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - You walk out of the Congress with other members of the Bund. After attacks from Vladimir Lenin's section of the party, the Bund walked out after continually being accused of only caring about Jewish interests and outcomes.<sup>40</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1907 - The Second Duma

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<sup>36</sup> Ascher, "Russian Revolution of 1905."

<sup>37</sup> Ascher, "Russian Revolution of 1905."

<sup>38</sup> Ascher, "Russian Revolution of 1905."

<sup>39</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

<sup>40</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

- You are elected as a candidate for the second Duma, a legislative body. Jewish activists became representatives for their parties' interests during the legislative sessions of the Duma.<sup>41</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
- The Tsar dissolves the second Duma, an elected legislature, before any resolution can be made and your party fails to achieve its goals. The government refused to agree to the body's demands and denied suffrage to those opposed to the Tsar.<sup>42</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.
- 1914 - World War I
  - You help move the Bund's operations to Poland. During World War I, the Bund established an independent Polish Bund which became the party's new center because the German occupation allowed some political freedom for Bundists in Poland.<sup>43</sup> Move forward 5 spaces.
  - You have a falling out with your Bundist comrades in Russia. The German occupation of Poland during World War I disrupted communication lines between Bundists in Russia and Poland, leading to a division in the party.<sup>44</sup> Move backward 5 spaces.

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<sup>41</sup> Ascher, "Russian Revolution of 1905," The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.

<sup>42</sup> Frankel, "Parties and Ideologies," The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.

<sup>43</sup> Blatman, "Bund."

<sup>44</sup> Blatman. "Bund."

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