

Riva Smerkovicene With Her Friends



This picture was taken in 1934 during my exile in Shimkayche, where I was sent for underground Communist activity. I, Riva Smerkovicene, am in the 1st row in the center wearing a white blouse, surrounded by my friends from the underground. Sitting to the right in a white shirt is Yakov Ratskevich. He was shot during one of the demonstrations. Masha Orlyanskaya is next to him. She was in occupation. She died in the 1980s. Itshak Smerkovicus is standing.

In spring 1933 arrests commenced: either somebody gave us away or our jaunts attracted too much attention. Our house was searched. Nothing was found at my place due to my neatness and discretion. I was arrested and taken to the police quarters, where I met a lot of my friends. It was my first arrest, so I got away with an administrative punishment. I was exiled without a trial. All of us were exiled to different places so as not to create conditions for us to continue our underground activity. I came to a small town. I was hired as a housekeeper by a family of Jewish pharmacists. I lived at their place, helped them with work about the house. In general, it was a pretty good place. Though, I wasn't allowed to leave the town and had to check in at the police station every week. Local citizens treated me with respect and I, of course, I didn't chuck away the chance to popularize the Soviet regime. I wrote home every week and got letters from my parents where I was asked to calm down and not to get involved in any dangerous matters.

In 1934 my exile was over and I came back to Kaunas. Straight upon my return, I became a member of the underground Communist Party and zealously started working. There was a boom of revolutionary movement in that period of time as Fascists came to power in Germany and we were aware what kind of dreadful prospects it could bring to us. Our hopes were with the Soviet Union. We knew something about arrests and repressions over there, but our sincere beliefs in the politics of the USSR and Stalin were so strong that we truly considered all those arrests to be fair. We continued our propaganda, taking any chance to stand up against Smetona's regime.