

Leon Lifshes On A May Day Demonstration



This photo was taken during the May Day demonstration in Bielsko in 1936.

When my brothers and I were 13 or 14, there were May Day demonstrations on the 1st of May worker holiday. Our house stood near the prison. We heard screams and it turned out it was the guards giving the inmates a beating. By that time, I had already joined the Red Scouts, a left-wing scouting organization. So we went to demonstrate in front of the prison, the whole group of Jewish and Polish youth. The Red Scouts were affiliated with the KZMP. It wasn't strictly a Jewish organization. I don't know why I went there. My father had no political views.

We lived in Chrzanow until 1932, and in 1932 our whole family moved to Bielsko. Henryk's brother worked in Bielsko, he was a commercial representative for the fruit product company Parol. We lived at 24 Rynek. The landlord was a German. We had a four-room apartment on the second floor, there was a bathroom, a kitchen, everything. I no longer went to school, I was already on my own. I had completed a textile college there.

In Bielsko, I was a member of the Communist Youth Union and, on its orders, an activist for the MOPR, which was a KPP affiliate. Before that, I was a member of the Jewish Worker Cultural and Educational Association. That was purely Jewish, and then, in Bielsko, I began my political activity in the communist party. Later I linked up with the left-wing movement. Being active on the communist party meant taking part in manifestations, in strikes, the whole political life.

We were divided into three-person cells that met secretly, and the police knew about them only if they had informers inside. There was a division into districts, neighborhoods, and then into cells. The party activity took place on three levels: the cell, the neighborhood, the factory. The cells usually met at the factories. At the time, I worked as a dyer at a textile plant, and that's where I conducted my activity as a communist.

My mother knew I was a communist but my father did not. She was very progressive. She only kept telling us, 'Alright, everything's fine, but just don't get yourself arrested.' We were all very involved, my sister, too.