

I *f you really
want to know the
truth, my salary
didn't even
amount to two
hundred lira a
month.*

Yet the rent of the flat where I lived was two hundred and eighty lira a month. Since everyone was in the same boat we didn't make any secret of it. In short, all of us working there used to take backhanders. Those in charge were just as aware of this as the rest of us. But whatever they did they couldn't put a stop to it. It was in the nature of the job. It was a job that lent itself to bribery and corruption. That's how it was, and that's how it will remain, as the saying goes. In the past they'd made one or two attempts to settle the matter. They'd made staffing changes from top to bottom of the department. But it

didn't work... It was like I said, the job lent itself to bribery and corruption.

To be more accurate, you couldn't really describe what we were doing as corruption. We didn't take a cent from the office cash and we didn't do anyone down. But all we had to do was to say to the contractors whose business we were dealing with,

"We haven't quite got it sorted out yet, sir..." And that was the only thing we ever did. Then the contractor would say,

"Well, you know best..."

And we were only saying what we knew to be true. All we did was to push a job forward or backward ten or fifteen days. Anyway, the contractor would get his money in the end. But if we wanted to we could have the documents ready ten days earlier or ten days later. You understand I hope, that as far as could be seen, there was no injustice to anyone. There was no harm done to the contractor or to anyone else. I'd been working there for almost two years. How the money got into our hands and into our pockets I just couldn't work out. And the other friends didn't know the answer either. We weren't cheating anyone of their rights. Yet since we weren't cheating anyone, how did it happen that we were absolutely swimming in money? Money was raining down around us. How can I make you understand what it was like? Imagine a room with the windows and the door open and suddenly a gust of wind catches the papers and lifts them all in the air, wafting them along in the stream of air from the window towards the door. Well, that's how it was in our office with money. It was there for the taking. Above all this money didn't belong to anyone. It wasn't the department's money, nor was it the contractor's. Our department was like a machine that kept on churning out money.

You understand, don't you? Or are you like me and don't understand a thing. This was money that apparently belonged to no-one. So it became ours. It wasn't as if we were cheating anyone, in fact by getting the job done quickly we were doing the contractors a good turn.

Furthermore, the way we went about the job and the

money we received were both perfectly open and above board. Because of this all the money taken was shared out equally among those working there in a brotherly way. If I say brotherly, don't misunderstand me. There would be some bigger shares for bigger brothers, and some smaller shares for smaller brothers. That is, everyone got a share proportional to his rank. Among ourselves a sort of partnership came into being. Since everyone got his share, there were no quarrels and no mutterings of discontent were heard outside the office. Our sharing out of the money was always honest, so there could be no unfairness. If one of us skived off or went to the match and didn't come to work one day, when he came the next day he'd find his share of the previous day's collections waiting for him. Even when you were on your annual holidays, your share was put on one side for you. For no apparent reason we kept on earning money. All was harmony and accord in our office with no place for unfairness, for the simple reason that no-one kept the money he received a secret, it was all dealt with out in the open, right down to the last cent.

Can you guess why? We had a list of tariffs that was clearer and more exact than the local authority's taxi tariffs! For jobs up to a hundred thousand lira we'd take one per cent. For a job worth two hundred thousand lira our share was three per cent. Then if we had the contractor's job done a few days earlier we'd raise the percentage accordingly. If we had the work ready twenty days earlier the percentage was doubled. Then again we'd adjust the percentage according to the sort of work the contractor wanted doing. If it was a transportation job the percentage would be higher, if it was a construction job the percentage would go up a good bit more, and if it was some sort of trading activity it would be raised or lowered according to the conditions of the moment. We had such a clear-cut list of tariffs that everyone from the boss down to the janitor would know exactly what percentage would be taken from any contractor.

Before I came to the department there'd been some fools who'd put the money in their pockets and not let their friends have a sniff of it. 'There's strength in unity' is a very true

saying. All the friends who were working there united against those who were taking money just for themselves, and got them kicked out. When this sort of thing had happened a few times, they finally put a stop to such unfairness in our department. None of us was going to do anything that might kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, and so we took care to distribute the money we got honestly.

In the job I had prior to this I was getting five hundred lira a month. I left a five hundred lira job and took this one at two hundred lira a month, and on top of that I paid four thousand lira to a friend to get me into this two hundred lira job. When someone once got into this place they'd never move from it. The friend who sold me his position had been obliged to move to Ankara. I promised him that I would give him his place back when he returned and four thousand lira. There were people willing to give twenty thousand lira for it, but he didn't trust anyone else to give him the place back when he returned, so he did me a good turn, and sold it me for four thousand.

After I took this job there were some big changes both in our house and lifestyle. First of all my wife and my children all began to put on weight, and became pictures of health. As for me... don't ask... the waist of my trousers became so tight I couldn't wear any of my suits. Anyone could tell at a glance what rapid changes had taken place in our lifestyle. My wife had never put on weight in all the twenty years I'd been married to her, but as soon as I started this job, she began to get fatter and was gaining weight at a steady rate of two kilos every twenty days. My poor wife was in the process of gaining all at once the weight she'd never gained in twenty years. Just as my trousers became tight, so the house became too small for us. We moved to a bigger house. My eldest daughter for whom I'd given up all hope of finding a husband, suddenly blossomed out, and got it into her head that she was going to enter a beauty contest. There were so many changes in our life I don't know which to tell you of, we even changed the party we voted for at the election. I leave you to imagine the rest.

Well, this was how things were when a new man,

named Haydar, was appointed to our department. With his arrival the whole business started to go to pieces. We didn't know who had had him assigned to our department. The boss gave him the transportation section. He was a puny fellow with a sulky expression. We'd all been like that once. Give him a month here and he'd be putting on weight and smiling like the rest of us, we said. But I don't know about getting fat, the man seemed to get steadily thinner. He'd creep around the place with long strides like a ghost.

The day after he started work, the boss asked us what share we were going to give him. After a long debate, since work wasn't going very well just then, we decided forty lira was a fair share.

Towards evening I approached him "Hello, Haydar," I said.

I put the money in an envelope on his desk.

"What's this?" he said

"Money." I said. "Your share of today's takings."

"What share?" he said. I smiled. When a man is sure he knows what's what, and that there's no chance of his putting his foot in it, he can give a superior smile. So I smiled.

He pushed the envelope away with the back of his hand.

"I don't want any share or such like." he said.

I picked up the envelope from the floor and took it with me.

"He's honest, this fool," said the boss, "He'll get us into hot water."

One of our colleagues replied, "He's not satisfied with the money."

We raised the money to a hundred lira. The next day another friend took his money to him. He explained how there'd been an injustice, and according to him, Haydar's position entitled him to the biggest share. Haydar drove him away.

This Haydar really put us on the spot. If we couldn't get him to take his share with the rest of us, he could expose us all. It seemed the fellow was going to deprive us of our livelihood. If we could just find the least little thing wrong

with the fellow, then we wouldn't have anything to worry about.

Because of Haydar's presence we couldn't take any money from any of the contractors for four or five days. If affairs went on like this, all our families would start to get thin again. If a man has never known what it is not to be thin, then it doesn't matter much. But it's awful to get thin again, when you've once had a taste of a better life, and known what it is to eat well. God forbid it should happen to anyone.

No matter what we did, or what schemes we tried, they didn't make a scrap of difference. Every morning he'd creep into work in his ghostly way, and every evening he'd leave the office as he came. He was a cold fish alright. He didn't make a friend of any of us.

A suspicion began to grow among us. Could it be that this fellow had been planted here purposely by those at the top so that he could listen and get to know what we were up to and report back to them.

If only we could get the fellow to take the money just once, we wouldn't need to worry.

The boss said, "Obviously he wants to take all the money himself, so what I'll do is I'll send one of the contractors to him and let him take all the money and then we'll see what happens."

That's what we did. The contractor had hardly been with him a minute when he returned looking disappointed.-

"What sort of a dishonest fellow is this!" he said. "No matter what I did I couldn't get him to take the money. When I put the money in his pocket, he was on the point of complaining about me. I've never known such an immoral fellow!"

From that day onwards we were all busy with plans, and Haydar was the subject of them all. This was the state of affairs when a man named Celil made his appearance on the scene.

"If you get me a job in this department, I'll get rid of Haydar for you," he said.

"You get rid of him and we'll get you a place alright," we

said.

"What percentage?"

We bargained. If he got rid of Haydar, we'd take him on as an office-boy at fifty lira a month. But he'd get a share of the takings equal to that of the boss.

One day the director came to the office with two guests. They ate lunch together and were drinking coffee. Haydar meanwhile was sitting on his own looking very sulky. All of a sudden Celil came in. He rushed up to Haydar and in a loud voice, "Well, well, my dear Haydar!"... and he hugged him in greeting.

Haydar was surprised.

"I don't know you," he said.

"Come, come, my friend," he said, "Come, come..."

"I'm sorry. I don't recognise you," he said.

All heads were turned towards them.

"Come on, now." said Celil, "You and me. We were together in that business in Ankara... Don't you remember? There was a deficit in your accounts... And didn't the lawyer get you off with one year in prison...?"

"No-o, you've mistaken me for someone else"

"Come, come... think a minute. After that, when you were a cashier in the bank... You disappeared with fifteen thousand lira... Come, come..."

Haydar was angry, "There's no 'Come, come' about it. I don't know you."

"I'll remind you. You got involved with a dancer once, didn't you? And then when you needed money for your wife... Didn't you embezzle? Come, come... think... has it come back to you now?... Come, come..."

"You've mistaken me for someone else."

"What do you mean, mistaken? Have a think about it... Come, come... And then when you were caught taking bribes, and your daughter..."

"What are you talking about?"

"What daughter?"

"Come, come... Come, come... Don't you know me now? - No- Come, come..Really, Haydar, how many times did I come

and visit you in prison? I took you grapes and cigarettes and I don't know what, didn't I? Come, come..."

"You are lying."

"Come, come... "

Haydar was so angry, he got up and went out.

No-one present believed Haydar had done these things, but even so they started talking to each other as if they did.

"Did you see that fellow, what a blackguard he is..." they said by way of explanation.

Two days later Haydar was dismissed from his job. The man couldn't get another job anywhere. We nicknamed Celil 'Come, come Celil'. Come, come, Celil is now our office boy on fifty lira a month. But he gets more money than the boss. And the lad deserves it. He got our business back on the rails again, thank God.