

said in the end that to repel the British from our land, we had to 'Bolshevize'. He got a standing ovation. Another speaker talked about fascism and Italy's occupation of Ethiopia and Libya. He talked about the revolution led by Omar Mukhtar, the oppression of the Libyan people, and how five of the revolution's leaders were thrown from an airplane into the sea. After that, I participated in distributing secret leaflets, using the wagon which distributed bread from the bakery.

During that time, I rarely visited my village. I went only once every two or three months, due to the restrictions imposed on traveling as a result of the growth of the revolt. I remember one time in the village, on a Sunday when all attended mass at the church, with the exception of the sick and a few absentees. All of a sudden, British soldiers led by an officer stormed the church, showing no respect. Other soldiers were surrounding the church. The officer just started looking, or rather surveying the congregation, and then pointed at me with his finger, indicating: «Follow me!» I was the only one in the church wearing western-style clothes; the others were traditionally dressed. He must have hoped I knew English. He asked, «What's going on here?» I answered: «This is a church, and people are praying.» «When will you finish?» he asked. «I don't know, the priest knows,» I replied. He told me to go in, ask the priest and return to tell him.

I went into the chapel with the eyes of the people following me in fear and questioning. Before the priest could answer me, the altar boy approached and whispered in my ear: «Tell them the services conclude after four hours.» When I repeated that to the officer, he just exploded in my face, shouting: «Damn liar! Beat it!» I went back to my place. We were very scared, knowing that a landmine had exploded under an armored military vehicle near the village. We were afraid that they would punish the whole village as had happened in other villages like Kafr Yasif.

Ten minutes passed, and our fears grew greater and greater. Then the soldiers came back, stormed the church, waving their rifles and ordering us out. They could not even wait for people to move on their own. Rather they applied their own method to speed things up, forcing men, women and children to evacuate the church,

pushing them with their rifle butts. A woman was pushed to the floor and she let out a loud scream. This made Alexander Khouri, the oldest person in the congregation, run towards the soldiers, waving his cane and shouting, «You bastards, Turkey never did what you are doing... We thought you came to rescue us from Turkey's tyranny, with two crosses on your flag, not one, but you are worse than Turkey...» Then he cursed the British cross, calling it a fake, and attacked the officer with his cane. The soldiers caught him, hit him and dragged him around, without any consideration for his age. The priest protested angrily, only to face the same treatment as Alexander.

There were many soldiers and it was useless to resist. They took us to the public square where all the villagers were gathered. The soldiers chose forty men and took them, as they claimed, to clear the road blocks set up by the revolutionaries on the main road. One week later, they were released.

World War II erupted and the British army confiscated all businesses including the bakery I was working in. Thus, I found myself jobless once again. A friend of mine from Al Boqia'h helped me get work as a carpenter in one of the British army camps, although I knew nothing about carpentry. I remember one time I was attempting to straighten some bent nails. A British officer saw me and asked in a mocking tone: «Are you a carpenter?» «No,» I confessed. He smiled and said, «Okay, you don't lie... I'll have someone teach you.» But before learning carpentry, I was fired. So I went back to my old job, baking, at a British army bakery in the bay of Haifa.

The war and war-related efforts created work for everybody. Since there were not enough workers in Palestine, a large number came from neighboring countries, looking for jobs. In the bakery I worked in, there were 84 workers, of whom 72 were Egyptians. There were Lebanese, Syrians and Armenians as well. The work was divided into two daily, 12-hour shifts. There was no break for eating, so we either had to eat while working, or finish our job as fast as possible, which was very tiring, to save a few minutes for eating. I remember a 'break' like that, at night with the lights dimmed. An Arab worker was going to the bathroom; unknowingly, he stepped on the foot of an Armenian worker who

was lying down, trying to relax during these few minutes. The Armenian was hurt and he cursed the worker in Turkish. To his surprise, the Arab worker replied with another Turkish curse. The Armenian, still surprised, asked, «Where did you learn Turkish?» The Arab, who was a Syrian, replied, «An Armenian came to our town, fleeing Turkey's massacres against the Armenian people. My father befriended him and learned from him how to process cheese.» Then the Armenian shouted, «How could you then curse your father's cheese-processing teacher?» The two embraced... and they were best friends from then on.

I did not like the job. It was not only tiring, but devastating: 12 hours a day non-stop, heat... and what was worse were the insults the workers had to suffer. Cursing was the lightest form of insult. Our supervisor was a British sergeant major in his fifties, red-faced, with constantly trembling lips. This trembling intensified when he was drunk. He used to arrive late at the bakery, not yet sober. He would call a worker to his office, beat him for no reason, and then fire him. Actually this was his way of blackmail. There was always a person who acted as 'mediator' between the 'fired' worker and the sergeant in return for a bribe. This mediator was usually one of the three foremen whom we considered even worse than the sergeant of the trembling lips, for they were Egyptians - Arab! They always carried leather whips and beat the Egyptian workers for the silliest of reasons.

The workers lived in constant fear of the sergeant and foremen. No one dared to protest, for the foreigners in particular realized that they were illegally living in the country. One phone call to the police could send them beyond Palestine's borders, where they would find only unemployment and misery. The Egyptians used to infiltrate into Palestine, hiding in cargo trains. The authorities overlooked this because of the need for workers and bribes, but the law did not protect these workers; rather it deported them. The sergeant knew all this; he knew that the workers, especially the Egyptians, desperately needed the work. He used this to his advantage. He thus increased the oppression and blackmail of the workers. Those who refused to accept his practices were reported to the police who in turn deported the workers. ●