

Depression and repression: Global capitalism, economic crisis and penal politics in interwar Greece

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journals.sagepub.com/home/euc**Leonidas K. Cheliotis** 

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the significant advances made over the last twenty years in terms of charting and explaining the ways in which state punishment is influenced by economic and political forces, little is still known about the penal effects of conditions of economic crisis and about the role the incumbent government's political orientation plays in this regard. Because the few available studies on these questions have been preoccupied with the Anglo-American sphere and only in the context of recent decades at that, even less is known either about the implications that different types or experiences of economic crisis carry for state punishment, or about the influence exerted in this respect by government political orientations other than those found in established democracies. Irrespective of geographical or temporal scope, moreover, the impact that different extranational factors and actors may have in terms of economic, political or directly penal matters domestically remains poorly understood. With a view to helping fill these gaps in the literature, this article explores the effects on state punishment that economic crisis and government political orientation had in interaction with one another in the context of interwar Greece. Attention is first paid to various ways in which global capitalism was decisive in creating within Greece an environment conducive to increased punitiveness on the part of the state. The focus is on the economic, social and political consequences of the Wall Street crash of 1929 and Britain's exit from the gold standard in 1931, as these were exacerbated by Greece's long-term exposure to predatory lending, speculative investing and external interference in her domestic affairs in the context of engaging international capital markets. The article then proceeds to discuss how the Liberal government of 1928–1932 sought to handle the situation, particularly the approach it took towards punishment.

Keywords

Economic crisis, global capitalism, interwar Greece, government political orientation, political economy of punishment

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, scholarship has made significant advances in charting and explaining the ways in which state punishment is influenced by economic and political forces. Most notably, we now understand a great deal more about the penal implications of different economic systems and political institutions (see e.g. De Giorgi, 2006; Lacey, 2008; Wacquant, 2009a). Further progress in this area, however, requires avoiding analytic tendencies that have to date been restrictive. Six such tendencies, interrelated with one another, stand out: first, what could be referred to as *penological reductionism*, in the sense that state punishment has been customarily conceptualised and operationalised solely in the form of conventional imprisonment (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2016, 2020; Hamilton, 2014; Newburn, 2020; Tonry, 2007); second, what may be termed *normalcy bias*, inasmuch as disproportionate attention has typically been paid to periods of relative economic or political stability (Cheliotis and Sozzo, 2016; Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2016, 2020); third, *ahistoricism*, to the extent that limited to no concern has usually been shown with the long-term historical trajectories of the variables at issue, be they the economy, politics or state punishment in itself (Gottschalk, 2006; Lacey and Soskice, 2021; Melossi and Pavarini, 2018; Reiner, 2021; Rock, 2005); fourth, *occidentalism*, in that the focus has been almost fixed on the Western world and, even more so, on Anglophone cases within it (Karstedt, 2013; Lappi-Seppälä and Tonry, 2011; Nelken, 2009); fifth, *statism*, insofar as analysis has mostly been restricted to the nation-state at the risk of leaving any local-level variations obscure (Barker, 2009; Lynch, 2010; Phelps, 2017); and sixth, *methodological nationalism*, given that developments inside nation-states have commonly been investigated without consideration of the international, transnational or global networks of which the states in question are part (Anderson, 2018; Jones and Newburn, 2007; Wacquant, 2009b; Xenakis and Ivanov, 2017).

Thus, knowledge is lacking about the effects that conditions of economic crisis have on state punishment, especially beyond conventional imprisonment, and what role the incumbent government's political orientation plays in this connection. Because the few available studies on these questions have been preoccupied with the Anglo-American sphere and only in the context of recent decades at that, even less is known either about the consequences that different types or experiences of economic crisis carry for state punishment, or about the influence exerted in this respect by government political orientations other than those found in established democracies (e.g. Left–Right, Labour–Conservative, Democratic–Republican). Similarly, reliance on state-centric perspectives has precluded insights into whether – and if so, how and why – the relationship between economic crisis, government ideology, and punishment plays out differently in different parts of a single nation. Irrespective of geographical or temporal scope, moreover, the impact that disparate extranational factors and actors may have in terms of economic, political or directly penal matters domestically is still poorly understood.

With a view to helping fill these gaps in the literature, this article explores the effects on state punishment that economic crisis and government political orientation have had in interaction with one another in the context of Greece. Prior relevant research on the Greek case has been concentrated on the contemporary period and mainly on the years during

which a coalition government led by the left-wing Syriza party was in power. The principal conclusions were that economic crisis can override a sitting party's progressive ideological orientation to induce malign penal outcomes, and that penally adverse economic pressures are likely to stem at least in good part from the international realm (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2020). This article looks back in time, centering on the interwar era and the timeframe between 1928 and 1932 more specifically. Concerning state punishment in itself, the analysis covers not only conventional imprisonment, but also violent modes of protest policing, as well as political imprisonment and exile. Whereas protest policing is addressed with reference primarily to extant scholarship, the other three forms of state punishment are probed through novel data derived from a range of archival sources, spanning official statistics, government reports and newspaper articles.

There are two main reasons why the period between 1928 and 1932 is suitable for present purposes. On one hand, it saw the Greek economy undergo a severe crisis whose main roots can be clearly traced abroad and to the global capitalist system in particular, both in terms of the exogenous shocks that either triggered or intensified the crisis and in terms of the circumstances that enhanced the Greek economy's vulnerability to them. Specifically, although Greece's economy was by no means alone in suffering a range of detrimental consequences as a result of the worldwide economic downturn that began in the late 1920s, the repercussions the country endured were especially acute due to the inordinate level of her external debt, itself in no small measure a reflection of the exceptionally exploitative approach taken by the international financial market towards borrowers from the global periphery. On the other hand, the span between 1928 and 1932 signified an important shift in government political orientation in Greece. This was the first time in nearly ten years, during which the country had been ruled by military coups, pro-royalist conservatives, splintered liberals or cross-party coalitions, that a largely united Liberal Party returned to power as a single-party government – and with a strong majority at that. Indeed, this was also the sole occasion in the interwar era that an elected government in Greece served out its full four-year parliamentary term. While the Liberal Party and its pro-royalist conservative counterparts alike opposed dictatorship insofar as they shared in common a commitment to constitutional rule under freely elected governments, the former adamantly rejected the latter's allegiance to constitutional monarchy. However, the differences between them ran deeper than that. Whereas the policies supported by pro-royalist conservatives were loosely guided by the aim of preserving tradition and promoting the vested interests of those most threatened by change, the Liberal Party had a comprehensive programme of modernisation of state, economy and society, whose parameters were set with a view to establishing and consolidating the hegemony of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie (Mavrogordatos, 1983). Crucially, part of this plan was the transformation of the Greek state from an entity that sought to sustain order chiefly through law enforcement, into one which would govern society mainly through welfare provision; that is, welfare services meant to mitigate social ills that were linked to extant economic arrangements (e.g. unemployment and poverty) and which might otherwise give rise to challenges to the economic and political status quo (Agriantoni, 2006). The years 1928–1932 thus allow for investigating in relatively sufficient length of time how a government's welfarist outlook interacted

with a grave economic crisis, whose origins primarily lay outside Greece's own borders, to influence penal policy.

Some elaboration is in order here as to whether it is apposite to classify the Liberal Party as having been oriented towards a welfare-based model of social regulation. It is true that the Liberals' previous tenures in office had not been devoid of repressive policies. At different junctures back in the 1910s, for instance, laws were passed by Liberal governments to introduce the punishment of internal exile for political dissidents, to impose controls on the right to strike action, and to allow for purging uncooperative civil servants (Edgar, 1980). Such developments, however, had mostly occurred in the context both of military involvement abroad (the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, the First World War between 1914 and 1918, and the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922) and the height of a civil war-like conflict (the so-called National Schism of 1910–1922) between supporters of the Liberals' founding leader Eleftherios Venizelos and those of King Constantine, itself largely linked to Greece's participation in the Great War (Clogg, 2013; Gallant, 2016). While – and, at least in part, because – economic conditions were unstable at the time, the Liberals also encouraged the unification of diverse pro-labour leftist groups into a political party (what was eventually named the Communist Party), and pioneered a bevy of welfarist measures: from the creation of a national health insurance system and the striking down of usury, to the passage of decrees that broke up large estates and distributed land to poor peasants, to the regulation of child and female labour, to the setting of basic standards for working conditions, to the legalisation of trade unions and the outlawing of joint trade associations (i.e. management-controlled workers' unions, which employees were obliged to join as a condition of their employment) (Agriantoni, 2006; Apostolakou, 1997; Gallant, 2016; Stefanidis, 2006). On the penal front itself, moreover, efforts were undertaken by Liberal governments during the 1910s to promote progressive reforms, ranging, among others, from the legislation of measures meant to reduce the use of imprisonment (e.g. suspended sentences and parole), to the passage of laws that enhanced prison oversight, to the development of detailed plans for the improvement of custodial conditions. These and other concrete facts that are elaborated elsewhere (Cheliotis, *in progress*) suggest that it is legitimate to treat the Liberal Party as having been welfarist in its political orientation when it was elected to government in 1928.

This article unfolds in two stages. It first explains the main ways in which global capitalism was decisive in creating within Greece an environment conducive to heightened state punitiveness. The focus in this regard is on the economic, social and political consequences of the Wall Street crash of 1929 and Britain's exit from the gold standard in 1931, as these were exacerbated by Greece's long-term exposure to predatory lending, speculative investing and external interference in her domestic affairs in the context of engaging international capital markets. The article then proceeds to discuss how the Liberal government of 1928–1932 sought to handle the situation, paying particular attention to the approach the government took towards punishment.

Shackled in debt: The economy and state punitiveness before 1928

The economic history of modern Greece – indeed, the history of modern Greece as a whole – is inextricably linked to repeated episodes of extensive borrowing

from abroad. Before even gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829, Greece began assuming heavy financial debts to Western lenders. In considerable part, Greece's very success in the War of Independence was achieved thanks to two hefty loans which the insurgent Greeks contracted in the City of London in the mid-1820s so as to fund their then ongoing military operations. Yet, in effect, the struggle for geographical and political liberation from the Turks set Greece on a path of accumulating ever-growing debt to other foreign actors. This was largely because of the exploitative nature of international lending in itself, combined with Greece's own economic peripherality, which not only led the country to foreign creditors in the first place but also served to raise her vulnerability to exploitation at their hands.

New loans to Greece typically came at excessively high nominal interest rates whose real value was further inflated due to speculative investing in Greek government bonds on international financial markets, as well as with vast fees and exorbitant commission expenses attached to them. As a result, net proceeds were at most sufficient to service previously accrued debts, which, in its turn, practically meant that Greece repeatedly needed to raise new external loans and accept creditors' demands for severe austerity measures if she were to stay afloat. Ultimately, with limited if any funds left to support economic development, the country was locked in a subordinate status both in terms of her ongoing and deepening financial dependence on foreign actors and in terms of the erosion her political sovereignty progressively suffered due to their meddling in her domestic affairs (Doxiadis, 2018; Pepelasis Minoglou, 1996; Reinhart and Trebesch, 2015; Toussaint, 2019; Wynne, 1951).

Greece contracted further heavy loans abroad in the aftermath of the First World War. However, these loans, albeit again extraordinarily expensive and agreed on strict conditions in terms of economic reforms, assumed much more of a 'productive' character, a development prompted by the arrival in the country of masses of Greek Orthodox refugees from Asia Minor in the early 1920s.¹ In particular, two large international loans were floated in 1924 and 1928, respectively, whose proceeds were meant largely to support the agricultural settlement of refugees and an array of modernisation initiatives. Success in these undertakings was deemed crucial to Greece's ongoing struggle for economic recovery, attainment of which was, in its turn, regarded as a necessary prerequisite of the country's political sovereignty. As the 1920s were drawing to a close, however, whatever economic progress had been achieved was limited in scope, due not least to the fact that external loan proceeds had all too often proved insufficient to support the projects for which they had been secured (Kontogiorgi, 2006; Mazower, 1991).

The socio-political environment thus produced was acutely volatile. Different administrations, including but not limited to dictatorial regimes, went down the path of repression in dealing with growing frustration among the public and the working classes in particular. In the first half of the 1920s, for example, it was ever more common for the gendarmes and the police to display unrestrained brutality towards the rising numbers of workers who engaged in protest actions against austerity and other policies that aggravated their hardship. Increasingly, the use of naked force against protestors came to be accompanied by the imposition of government stooges at the head of major workers' unions, thereby further undermining the organisational coherence and strength of the labour movement as a whole (Seferiades, 1998).

This period also saw a series of laws introduced to suppress those deemed to be political opponents. Most notably, in 1926, the short-lived dictatorial regime of General Pangalos enacted the measure of 'administrative expulsion' (i.e. internal exile ordered not by courts, but rather by local 'security committees') for persons suspected of acts against public order and state security (Alivizatos, 2011). Although no data exist as to the frequency of such provisions being applied in practice, their very establishment cannot but have added to the repressive climate of the day.

Albeit limited to irregular snapshots that also militate against ascertaining political ends, the available data on imprisonment suggest that its use was undergoing growth in the mid- to late 1920s. It should nevertheless be noted that this growth was only slight; in fact, imprisonment rates still stood at much lower levels than those recorded for the early and mid-1910s. In particular, the 1927 rate of imprisonment (including convicted and remand prisoners, as well as debtors) was 131 per 100,000 persons of imprisonable age (i.e. aged 10 and above), down by over half as compared to the corresponding rate for 1913 (294) and by 67.1% as compared to that for 1915 (399).²

It is clear, in any case, that persisting economic uncertainty at both the national and personal levels coincided with an intensification of state repression in the years before a largely united Liberal Party found itself in power under the premiership of Eleftherios Venizelos in 1928.³ With the economic situation about to worsen even further, the immediate question is whether Venizelos' government stuck to the welfarist outlook of the Liberal Party and charted a different penal course than its predecessors.

Three more loans and three shocks: The economy under the Liberals

Venizelos assumed office in August 1928, after the Liberals achieved a landslide victory in the national elections. While on the campaign trail, Venizelos had tried hard to woo the labouring masses. Although he declared his intention to curb communist activity (Stefanidis, 2006), he also openly expressed support for striking tobacco workers and pledged to introduce pro-labour policies if elected (Mazower, 1991). (Note here that Venizelos did not conflate communist activity with labour protest as such, a point to which I shall return later on.) Venizelos found willing ears among the working classes, albeit particularly among refugees (Mavrogordatos, 1983), who were by that point 'sufficiently numerous and compactly settled to act as arbiters of political life' (Clogg, 2013: 104).

Once in office, Venizelos promoted various far-reaching reforms in line with his vision of Greece's modernisation. A good number of these reforms were a matter of low-cost bureaucratic and institutional development. For instance, the Council of State was established as the supreme administrative court, which helped consolidate the rule of law, and the foundations were laid for the country's first and long-delayed nationwide Civil Code (Gallant, 2016; Stefanidis, 2006). At least some of the most ambitious reform projects Venizelos pursued, however, required major funding support that was secured on the international markets.

Thus, in the summer of 1930, for the purposes of promoting the overhaul of the country's education system and the building of new schools in particular, the Venizelos government signed a £1 million loan (at a real interest rate of 7.1%) with the Swedish company Krueger & Toll. More famously, Venizelos agreed two larger loans to support the ongoing infrastructural development programme – including drainage of lakes and construction of roads and bridges – which he had long considered essential to the agricultural and industrial development of the country. Although these latter loans came to be known as 'Public Works Loans', part of the first of them was also meant to help create the Agricultural Bank, whose primary function was to take over agricultural credit from the National Bank and, as such, supply low-interest loans to farmers (Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993; Stefanidis, 2006).

The nominal amount of the first 'Public Works Loan', which was issued in December 1928 exclusively by the London-based British bank Hambros, was £4 million (around £257 million in today's value). The nominal amount of the second 'Public Works Loan', issued in May 1931 by an international syndicate of banks headed by Hambros, was even higher, at £4.6 million (approximately £320 million in today's value). As usual, the real interest rate was high (at 7.1% for both loans), which meant that the net proceeds were substantially reduced. Moreover, the state revenues assigned as securities were excessive; in the case of the first loan, for example, their value stood at 25% of the nominal value of the loan and twenty times over the size of its annual service (Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993).

When all is said and done, the proceeds from the 'Public Works Loans' proved far from sufficient for the infrastructural development programme to be completed. More than that, although the loans in question were obtained with a view to undergirding Greece's economic development, their immediate effect was to add further strain on an already weak economy (Mazower, 1991; Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993). Due largely to the level of her external borrowing, Greece's public debt was on the rise, so much so that it had grown to 155% of GDP by 1931. Thus, the cost of servicing the country's debt continued to absorb around 10% of GDP (Christodoulakis, 2013). As a proportion of public spending, Greece's public debt service was uniquely high in the Balkan region and even almost stood on a par with the rates found in so-called 'developed' countries (Mazower, 1991).

As if this were not enough, Venizelos' latest tenure in office also saw three exogenous shocks befall the Greek economy, whether simultaneously or in close succession to one another. The first shock came in the form of extreme weather conditions between 1928 and 1930, as a result of which agricultural production was badly hampered: the entire cereal crop was destroyed in many areas around Greece, particularly in the North, and severe reductions were caused to harvest elsewhere in the country. Against this backdrop, there was inevitably pressure to expand the import of cereals to meet domestic demand, while the export of other agricultural products – itself the main means through which the country sought to cover its imports, as well as to maintain the exchange rate of its currency – was undermined (Kontogiorgi, 2006; Petmezas, 2000; Soldatos, 1993).

The second and yet more profound shock was felt across all sectors of the economy. It was, of course, the New York Stock Exchange crash in late October 1929 and the ensuing depression both within the United States and around the world. By dint of being feeble, small and open, the Greek economy was bound to experience particularly acute

reverberations in the immediate future. Demand for Greece's principal exports plummeted, as a consequence of which their prices also fell dramatically (Christodoulaki, 1999; Clogg, 2013; Kritikos, 2000; Pelt, 1998).

These developments implied a grave hit for the country's revenues in foreign trade at a time when the latter comprised over half of the total national income. The price collapse on the international agricultural market was especially harmful for Greek revenues in foreign trade, given that Greece's export structure was mainly based on agricultural products (Pelt, 1998; Stefanidis, 2006). Concurrently, there was a significant drop in imports, which, in its turn, brought about a reduction in customs revenues, themselves a large proportion of government revenues as a whole (Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993).

The decline in earnings from both exports and imports combined with a downward trend in the revenues from shipping, the tourist trade and emigrant remittances, as well as a contraction in the yields from overseas investments and the suspension of the inflow of foreign capital, to plunge Greece into a liquidity crisis (Pelt, 1998). Greece's budget surplus instantly went into a nosedive, decreasing by 64% (as measured in drachmas) within the space of a single financial year (Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993). As a corollary of all this, the real cost of the country's debt service grew by 45% between 1929 and 1931, making sustained repayment increasingly difficult (Christodoulakis, 2013; Mazower, 1991).

The third exogenous shock occurred in September 1931, when Britain became the first 'core' country to leave the gold exchange standard. The repercussions of Britain's move were especially rapid and serious for those participants in the standard who had, on one hand, pegged their national currency to the British pound, itself no longer convertible into gold and devalued by 20%; and, on the other hand, kept low reserves in gold (Eichengreen, 1992). Greece was just such a case. As the country held over a quarter of her foreign exchange reserves in pound sterling at the time when Britain went off gold, her reserve fell overnight below the statutory lower limit of 40% in circulation and sight deposits (Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993). Moreover, a few months earlier, in the summer of 1931, the Bank of Greece had sold its entire stock of gold to the Bank of England. Adding further to Greece's vulnerability was the inordinate level of the country's external debt, whose continued servicing required a steady outflow of increasingly scarce reserves (Christodoulakis, 2013).

As soon as the news broke of Britain's exit from the gold standard, panic selling ensued on the Athens Stock Exchange, forcing it to close, and a run began on the foreign exchange holdings of the Bank of Greece, causing it to lose \$3.6 million and announce restrictions on foreign exchange business within the space of a few days (Mazower, 1991). At first, Venizelos stubbornly sought to avoid retiring Greece from the gold standard, and rather tied the drachma to the US dollar. By January 1932, however, the country's financial situation was anything but improved. At this juncture, Greece's external debt was by far the highest among debtor countries around the world (Eichengreen and Portes, 1990), yet her foreign exchange reserve had fallen below 30% of the monetary circulation and sight deposits, and she was experiencing difficulty in securing the necessary foreign exchange to cover external debt obligations (Mazower, 1991; Pepelasis Minoglou, 1993; Wynne, 1951).

Unable to obtain another major foreign loan to tackle the situation, partly because international lending had in the meantime been tightened as a result of the 1929 crash, Venizelos was forced to take Greece off the gold standard in the spring of 1932, which inevitably caused the country to default on its debt payments (Wynne, 1951). Although Greece was certainly not the only debtor country to default during this period, her level of debt rendered her an exceptionally heavy defaulter by international comparison (Eichengreen and Portes, 1990).

Greece's declaration of default naturally marked the end of Venizelos' modernisation programme (Mazower, 1991; Reinhart and Trebesch, 2015). However, it also delivered a decisive, almost final blow to the Liberal Party's prospects for re-election. In the national election held in the autumn of 1932, the Liberals saw a devastating drop in their share of the vote as compared to the election of 1928. The result was a hung parliament, which was eventually resolved with the formation of a government by the pro-royalist conservative People's Party (Mavrogordatos, 1983). Electoral failure, however, was merely the culmination – and, indeed, only one expression – of public discontent with which Venizelos' Liberals had had to contend while in office from 1928 onwards.

At boiling point: The economic crisis from the bottom up

Unemployment already stood at high levels in Greece before the global economic crisis hit, with one-third of the potential labour force being jobless in 1929 (Soldatos, 1993). At that juncture and for the next three years, however, unemployment went into a rapid and sharp further rise. In the face of drastically reduced demand (whether in terms of exports or domestic consumption), large numbers of farmers were pushed into joblessness, just as more and more small enterprises were forced to downsize or shut down entirely (Kritikos, 2000; Mazower, 1991). Unsurprisingly, real income simultaneously underwent a steep drop – and from a very low base at that (Christodoulakis, 2013).

To make matters worse, deterioration in personal finances made staying afloat increasingly challenging, and more often than not outright impossible. The predicament was widespread in the agricultural sector, with swathes of refugees and native peasants having accumulated debts to local banks so as to satisfy pressing living needs (Mavrogordatos, 1983; Seferiades, 1999). In 1930, the approximate number of farmers with a short-term debt to the then nascent Agricultural Bank of Greece was as high as 286,000, while an estimated 58,000 farmers owed the Bank a secured debt (i.e. a debt backed by collaterals). By 1932, the overall total of farmers' debts (either to the National Bank, the Agricultural Bank, the Greek state or private banks) amounted to a colossal 8.5 billion drachmas (Vergopoulos, 1975). The situation was not dissimilar in industry. As big capital had been making vast profits, many owners of small units had been amassing heavy debts to banks to make ends meet (Kritikos, 2008).

Against this background, starvation also began to spread among the lower strata in various parts around the country, urban and rural alike (Mazower, 1991). All this combined with persistently wretched housing conditions and associated epidemics – especially in urban areas, and even more so for refugees, due not least to limited assistance from the Greek state (Kritikos, 2008; Mazower, 1991) – to intensify discontent among the masses. Working-class discontent grew even deeper after Greece left the gold

standard and defaulted on its external debt payments in 1932. This was because the protectionist policies and especially the import restrictions which the Venizelos government introduced in an effort to cut losses for the Greek economy, inevitably contracted commerce activity. This, in its turn, caused a further rise in unemployment at a time when three out of every four working-class families lived below the subsistence level (Stefanidis, 2006).

As one would expect, Venizelos and his Liberals had been losing ground with the working-class electorate all along. Incoming results whether from by-elections or from municipal and communal elections repeatedly revealed a decisive swing of the working-class vote to the Left and the Communist Party in particular, even if primarily by way of protest. Crucially, refugees also began switching their support to the Communist Party, partly as the latter started selecting rising numbers of them as local candidates (Mavrogordatos, 1983). What is more, workers' protest actions began gradually to grow in terms of their frequency, the number of participants and the array of sectors involved in them, as well as their assertiveness. Marches, rallies, strikes and riots spread – especially in cities though increasingly in the countryside, too – with protestors usually demanding debt freezes, cheaper credit and lower taxes. By 1932, labour mobilisations had risen to a level the country had not witnessed in the interwar era until then (Seferiades, 1998, 1999).

The remainder of this article looks at how Venizelos and his Liberal government sought to handle the situation.

Behind the 'Red scare': State coercion against labour protest

Upon assuming office in 1928, Venizelos endeavoured to promote welfare reform, especially, as mentioned earlier, on the front of education (Stefanidis, 2006). However, he also accorded concessions to at least certain demands the working classes conveyed in their spreading protests, particularly for debt relief. In 1930, for example, the Venizelos government introduced a five-year moratorium on agricultural debts owed to private individuals (Kontogiorgi, 2006). Such concessions, however, were neither sufficient to mollify the socio-economic anxieties and anger of the protesting masses (Mavrogordatos, 1983; Mazower, 1991), nor, in any case, did they comprise the government's main or even first response to the situation at hand. It was from very early on in its tenure – and before the Great Depression hit Greece, for that matter – that Venizelos' government turned to intimidation and repression as the principal means of seeking to curb labour unrest. So early, in fact, that the tough measures introduced were in effect mostly anticipatory in nature, even if they practically helped eventually to inflame the very issues they were intended to defeat (Mavrogordatos, 1983; Seferiades, 2005).

In 1928, mobilisations were sporadic, lacking in their organisation, and limited both in their geographical spread and in terms of the array of sectors involved in them (Seferiades, 1998). Nevertheless, against the background of rising economic hardship, Venizelos expected agitation and protest to grow before too long (Kritikos, 2020). For him, this was an opportune moment to try to finish off worker activism (Seferiades, 1998, 2005). The immediate question he and his government faced in this regard was two-pronged: first, how to justify repression at a time when protest itself was still both

relatively scarce and weak; and second, how to do so without appearing to target the working class in its entirety, an appearance that would risk serious electoral consequences for the Liberal Party.

To this end, Venizelos doubled down on the anti-communist rhetoric he had already adopted during the election campaign, albeit also twisting it in such a way as to subtly broaden its scope of controlling influence. Although communism in Greece was actually frail at that juncture – the Communist Party, for example, had very low membership and only attracted 1.4% of the vote in the national election of August 1928, as a result of which it had secured no seats in parliament (Mavrogordatos, 1983) – Venizelos fully embraced a discourse that exaggerated its spread in the country while at the same time portraying it as a threat not just to the polity but to the Greek nation itself.

This was because the deep roots of Greek communism purportedly lay in Moscow, where the Soviets were said to be engineering an international take-over. What is especially important for present purposes is that, in the context of that same discourse, Venizelos now replaced his earlier Manichean taxonomy of labour protest according to the ideological orientation of participants with one which divided up discontented labourers into good or bad citizens according to whether they participated in protest activity or not. All protest was henceforth tied to the ‘foreign’ danger of communist subversion, whereas acquiescence was accordingly hailed as a signifier of prudent patriotism. To this extent, a decisive clampdown on labour protest action was deemed of the utmost urgency (Apostolakou, 1997).

Its nationalist appeal notwithstanding, the anti-communist rhetoric Venizelos endorsed – including, ultimately, the call for domestic repression – was itself in good part influenced by foreign factors and actors. Now commonly known as the ‘Red scare’, the notion that the Soviet Union was seeking to incite political unrest around the world so as to overthrow national governments and install puppet communist regimes instead, was an invention that had already been sweeping the United States and Western Europe since 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. The British legation in Athens had meanwhile been putting pressure on successive Greek governments to adopt this line and accordingly display a ‘firm attitude’ towards communist activity in the country (Seferiades, 2005). Such perspectives were also represented and, at least informally, further cultivated among senior police officials in the context of the International Criminal Police Commission – effectively the political police fraternity in non-Soviet Europe from the early 1920s onwards (Fijnaut, 1997) – of which Greece had been an inaugural member.

Sure enough, within a few months after its instalment in office, Venizelos’ government brought to parliament a bill now widely known as the *Idionym* (i.e. *delictum sui generis*, or a law of its own kind), which lent the state far-reaching powers to crack down on any form of protest. In particular, the *Idionym* provided heavy punishment – a minimum term of six months in prison and internal exile for a period between one month and two years – for anyone who sought ‘the implementation of ideas whose manifest purpose [was] the violent overthrow of the established social order’, proselytised in favour of such ideas, or caused unrest or conflict during a strike or a lockout. The use of the press as a means of propagating subversive beliefs was determined to be a ‘particularly aggravating’ factor in judging the severity of that offence. Invoking reasons of public security,

the bill also banned 'communist assemblies' and gatherings of individuals who advocated 'communist' or 'similar' ideas, although it did not outlaw the Communist Party itself.

Venizelos proclaimed that the purpose of the Idionym was specifically to suppress communism as this had been formulated by the Bolsheviks and the Third International in Moscow. It was, in fact, the anti-communist intent explicitly attached to the bill, combined with the fact that much of it penalised convictions, which differentiated it from extant criminal legislation against subversion of the polity, hence the Idionym nomenclature (Kenna, 2001). As its unusually vague wording indicated, however, the bill practically afforded the government *carte blanche* to target the state's penal apparatus against any and all manifestations of political dissent (Gallant, 2016; Mazower, 1997; Seferiades, 2005).

Certainly, to the extent that the Idionym sought to penalise not just affronts against the state in themselves, but also actions deemed potentially preparatory in this regard, it bore the imprint of Greece's participation in the International Entente Against the Third International (*Entente internationale contre la IIIe Internationale*); a Geneva-based organisation with chapters in over twenty European countries at the time, whose remit was to co-ordinate anti-communist efforts internationally (Apostolakou, 1997; Ghikas, 2004). Other key dimensions of the Idionym, however, were modelled on laws already introduced elsewhere in Europe to tackle labour activism more generally, albeit often under the guise of specifically fighting communism. This was especially evident in the fact that the bill penalised not only allegedly subversive actions but kindred ideas as well, without at the same time banning the Communist Party as such. Indeed, the piece of foreign legislation that most inspired the Idionym was the (Anti-)Socialist Law (*Sozialistengesetz*) Bismarck had passed in Germany back in 1878, well before Communist parties became part of the political scene in Europe (Apostolakou, 1997; Ghikas, 2004; Seferiades, 2005).

News about the content of the proposed bill sparked a wave of outcry on the part of working-class and especially leftist organisations across the country. Strong objections were also raised by many leading public intellectuals in Greece and beyond. Most famously, a telegram of protest was sent to Venizelos by the international League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression, co-signed, among others, by Albert Einstein (*Rizospastis*, 26 July 1929). The Idionym did not go entirely unopposed in parliament, either. Indeed, as the Communist Party had failed to elect any MPs, the bulk of criticism against the bill came from the left wing of the Venizelist camp itself (Apostolakou, 1997). However, Venizelos was adamant in rebuffing critics and, thanks to votes from the vast majority of Liberal MPs as well as with support from the opposition, the bill was passed into law in July 1929 (Close, 1995).⁴

Venizelos, however, was also convinced that the Idionym could not be implemented with success unless the security apparatus of the state were substantially enhanced. Three key steps were taken to this end. First, a two-agency system of political surveillance was put in place: nearly all major cities were henceforth to be covered by the Cities' Police, which had their covert policing functions enhanced, while the gendarmerie was responsible for the rest of the country (Dagas, 1995; Mazower, 1997; Seferiades, 2005). Second, the process of criminal investigation was entrusted to the General Security Service within the Cities' Police, which was from this point onwards to include specialists in counter-

subversion and counter-espionage. And third, the number of police stations around the country was increased, as were the numbers of both police officers and gendarmes (Close, 1986, 1995; Samatas, 2014).

In this context, regardless of whether labour mobilisations were organised by communists or not, they became ever more likely to be met with violence by the coercive apparatus of the state. By 1931, nearly half of labour mobilisations were subjected to physical coercion by the police, the gendarmes or the army. Dynamic dispersals and arrests were particularly common, but clashes with the authorities increasingly also resulted in protestors getting injured and even killed (Seferiades, 1998, 2005). In a similar vein, albeit with a view to preventing labour protest from occurring in the first instance, there was an intensification of raids upon trade union buildings both by state forces and by fascist paramilitaries sanctioned by the Liberal government itself. In 1929 alone, according to *Rizospastis*, the Communist Party's newspaper, no fewer than 107 attacks were carried out on trade unions (*Rizospastis*, 26 March 1930). All in all, notwithstanding the growth that state surveillance of workers and their activities underwent at the time both in terms of capacity and operations, brute force remained the main means by which Venizelos' government sought to stifle the labour movement (Seferiades, 1998, 2005).

The application of the Idionym also escalated exponentially. Already by the end of 1929, based on data reported by *Rizospastis*, the new law had been invoked in 554 custodial sentences (whose average length was around 4.5 months) and 125 convictions of exile (for an average period of around 2 months) (*Rizospastis*, 26 March 1930). By the end of 1932, based on data reported by the Communist-supported charity Workers' Aid, the implementation of the Idionym had resulted in 2203 custodial sentences (whose average length was 10.5 months) and approximately 2000 exiles (of an average duration of around 4.5 months) (Mavrikos, 2004).

Notwithstanding differences in terms of the precise numbers they report, analysis of official data published by the National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) confirms the general picture as to the use of custodial sentences under the Idionym law over this period. In particular, according to NSSG data, a total of 1533 custodial sentences were passed between 1929 and 1932 for violations of the Idionym. Moreover, the number of custodial sentences imposed for such violations underwent year-on-year increases during this timeframe, rising by a spectacular 666% overall (from the low baseline of 71 to 544). Sentences were typically to be served in prison (only in one case was police detention ordered instead), and the custody terms set by courts were mostly up to a year, although longer sentences became increasingly regular with time. Of all those sentenced into custody for an Idionym violation between 1929 and 1932, 665 (or 43.3%) received a sentence of up to three months, 339 (or 22%) a sentence between three and six months, 340 (or 22%) a sentence between six and twelve months, and 188 (or 12.2%) a sentence of over a year.

Although the data available do not afford disaggregation of those sentenced into custody under the Idionym as such, it is nevertheless possible to glean revealing insights as to the scope of the Idionym's implementation if one disaggregates those who were given custodial sentences for offences 'against the security of the state', nearly all of which consisted in Idionym violations (at a 94.6% rate overall between 1929 and

1932). To start with, although by far most of those sentenced into custody for offences 'against the security of the state' had not previously been convicted of an offence in criminal court, the proportion of those who had been so almost doubled between 1929 and 1932, rising from 10% to 19.4%. Interestingly, within the latter category, the share of those who had been convicted specifically of an offence 'against the security of the state' decreased during the period under consideration, which indicates an expansion in the scope of the *Idionym*'s application.

Moreover, the great bulk of those sentenced into custody for offences 'against the security of the state' were either industrial workers (including artisans) or workers in agriculture or another unspecified sector. Together, these categories amounted to 1197, or three-quarters, of all 1610 individuals sentenced into custody for an offence 'against the security of the state' between 1929 and 1932. This was in effect proportionate to their combined share in the general working-age population of the country (at 73.4%, based on data from the 1928 census). Upon further disaggregation, however, it transpires that industrial workers were disproportionately likely to find themselves persecuted.

In particular, although industrial workers comprised 16.5% of the country's working-age population, they amounted to 47% of all persons sentenced into custody for an offence 'against the security of the state'. Workers in an unspecified sector were also over-represented but agricultural workers were under-represented. The former comprised 20% of all persons sentenced into custody for an offence 'against the security of the state' but 7.2% of the working-age population, whereas the latter constituted 7.2% of all those sentenced into custody for an offence 'against the security of the state' but 49.6% of the working-age population (see also Ghikas, 2004). The most likely explanation of these trends is that, by contrast with their counterparts in agriculture, workers in the industry and other sectors tended by dint of their professional status to be concentrated in urban areas, which is precisely where the coercive apparatus of the state had been most active in expanding and intensifying both its overt and covert operations against the labour movement.

Corroborating this claim is the fact that the overwhelming majority of offences 'against the security of the state' had been recorded either in large cities as such or, at least, in broader areas that included metropolitan centres. In particular, most offences had been recorded in the region of Athens and Boeotia (which alone accounted for 44.5% of all such offences between 1929 and 1932) or in Thessaloniki, Larissa, Lesvos or Kavala. However, what is also important to note here is, as Ghikas (2004) reports, that while these locales had large concentrations of workers, they did not necessarily display higher-than-average support for the Communist Party at the time. This further bolsters the argument that the *Idionym* was used to target workers as a whole, rather than just those among them who were (or were thought to be) communists.

Finally, although almost all of those sentenced into custody for an offence 'against the security of the state' were Orthodox Christians and had Greek citizenship, a significant portion of them – 417, or 25.9%, out of a total of 1610 between 1929 and 1932 – had been born in Turkey. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that around one in four workers targeted through the *Idionym* was a refugee from Asia Minor, a rate of representation which was disproportionately high relative to the estimated 17.7% share of such refugees in the general population of the country at the time. The reason why refugees found

themselves disproportionately targeted is likely to have been, at least in part, their increasing involvement in tobacco workers' unions, themselves the most compact, organised and militant segment of Greece's working class during the period at issue (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

Scaring everyone straight: The broader prison boom

Further analysis of official NSSG data reveals that, alongside the intensified imposition of custodial punishment for political dissidence, there was also a stark ascent in the use of imprisonment for other, apparently non-political reasons.

Between 1928 and 1932, the size of the country's prisoner population (including convicted and remand prisoners, as well as debtors) underwent notable year-on-year increases and a 39.2% overall rise as measured in end-of-year snapshots, from 6942 to 9666. Expressed as a per capita rate, 202 in every 100,000 persons of imprisonable age were in prison at the end of 1932, up by over a third as compared to the 1928 rate.⁵

Prisoner caseload data paint a similar picture.⁶ Between 1929 and 1932, the total annual caseload of prisoners rose by a stark 51.6% overall (from 46,196 to 70,051). This was because of a rise both in the caseload of convicted prisoners (by 46.2%, from 25,855 to 37,809) and, even more so, in the caseload of debtors (by 117.7%, from 10,845 to 23,619), while the caseload of remand prisoners underwent an overall drop (by 9.1%, from 9496 to 8623).

Indeed, by 1932, both the total caseload of prisoners and the respective caseloads of convicted prisoners and debtors had grown to be by far the highest in Greece's penal history up to that point (and ever since, for that matter). Expressed as a rate per 100,000 persons of imprisonable age, a staggering 1461 imprisonments (whether under conviction, on remand, or for debt) occurred in 1932. The per capita rate specifically for imprisonment under conviction was 788 per 100,000 persons of imprisonable age, while the rates for imprisonment for debt and remand imprisonment were 493 and 180, respectively.

Due to reasons of space, the remainder of this section will focus on imprisonment under conviction. Between 1929 and 1932, there was a 45.8% rise in the number of convicted prisoners admitted to prison (from 21,122 to 30,803), all of which was effectively the outcome of a 46.9% rise in the number of new admissions under sentences of up to five years (from 20,579 to 30,064). Throughout this period, the working classes consistently formed the overwhelming majority of convicted prisoners, with the proportion of workers in an unspecified sector being close to double their respective proportion among the country's working-age population.

Sentencing data show that the growth in the caseload of convicted prisoners was because of an upsurge specifically in the number of those sentenced to serve a custodial term of up to a year, which, based on NSSG's own measurements, increased from 830 to 1130 per 100,000 population between 1929 and 1932 (when the per capita rate of those sentenced to serve a sentence between one and five years remained effectively stagnant). But what explains the rise in the use of custodial sentences of up to a year in themselves?

The number of those receiving such sentences underwent a significant rise in relation to a variety of offence categories beyond the Idionym, including, for example, 'honour'

crimes, self-redress and unjustifiable acts of violence, and theft. In the absence of systematic data on the prevalence of crime as such, however, it is hard to ascertain the degree to which sentencing trends reflected developments in terms of criminal activity. A close look at annual-level data on the operations of the country's courts nevertheless suggests that the explanation is to be found in reforms to the workings of the criminal justice system and the politico-economic considerations that underpinned them.

Specifically, the data point to the role of one-membered misdemeanour tribunals; namely, tribunals where cases were heard by a single judge only. The Venizelos government legislated their establishment in February 1929 with the immediate aim of expediting the processing of a wide array of cases that would otherwise have to be dealt with by the extant (three-membered) misdemeanour courts. What is especially important for present purposes is that the jurisdiction of the new tribunals included various offences punishable with short custodial sentences: at first, offences that carried a sentence of up to six months, but as of 1931, also offences that carried a sentence of up to a year.

The total number of one-membered misdemeanour tribunals around the country underwent a rapid rise, reaching 221 by 1931 already, when the other (i.e. three-membered) misdemeanour courts just amounted to 50. Their caseload, moreover, was heavy from the very beginning, but it also grew dramatically within the space of merely four years. For example, the annual volume of cases received for processing rose by an astounding 228% between 1929 and 1932 (from 38,274 to 125,567). No doubt this was in good part because of the wide and, as of 1931, further expanded scope of cases over which jurisdiction was formally transferred to one-membered tribunals. The exponential rise in both the capacity and on-the-ground operations of the police at the time is bound to have made an additional contribution to the number of cases that reached the new tribunals.

One-membered tribunals proved particularly efficient by the then prevalent standards, reaching decisions on a vast number of cases annually, most of which within a few months. In 1932, for instance, one-membered tribunals issued decisions on 134,588 cases and in relation to 113,233 defendants, figures that far exceeded the combined totals recorded for Misdemeanours Courts, Assize Courts and Appeals Courts. Although proceedings in one-membered tribunals did not inevitably result in a conviction – roughly six out of every ten defendants would, in fact, be found innocent of the charges levied against them, a rate which may be taken to indicate the increasingly unrestrained and overzealous approach the police adopted at the time – they would still see vast and rising numbers of people sentenced every year to serve a term in custody (most often in prison, or otherwise in a police station). For example, one-membered tribunals meted out prison sentences for a total of 34,363 persons in 1932 alone, up by 45.7% as compared to the 23,580 people they sentenced to imprisonment two years earlier, in 1930. The great preponderance of those (95.7% of the total) were sentenced to a prison term of up to a month, although the absolute numbers of those sentenced to longer prison terms were not insignificant as such (e.g. in 1932, 1406 persons were sentenced to imprisonment for a period between one and six months).

To be sure, high numbers of people were sentenced to short-term imprisonment by other courts as well. Most notably, in 1932, three-membered Misdemeanours Courts sentenced 21,465 persons to prison terms of up to a year, while another 23,281 were

sentenced to similar terms by Magistrates' Courts. However, these figures represented a significant drop compared to the levels recorded for 1930 (down from 26,547 and 32,651, respectively) and were also way lower than the figures recorded for one-membered misdemeanour tribunals.⁷ Within four years, in other words, the newly established tribunals grew to be by far the most active judicial actor in terms of the numbers of people upon whom they imposed short-term custodial sentences.

Ultimately, as elaborated in detail elsewhere, the institution of one-membered misdemeanour tribunals was part of the Venizelos government's effort to strengthen the hold of the state over the working classes and the most deprived among them in particular. That is to say, in promoting the expanded imposition of short-term imprisonment for relatively minor criminal offences, the tribunals were intended to enhance a fear-based type of acceptance of state power among the poor as a whole, at the same time as forcing many of them to undergo direct disciplining in prison itself. Although the experience of imprisonment was generally meant to compel subjects to adopt an attitude of docile resignation to state authority, rising numbers of convicts were also placed onto work programmes – including, ironically, prison-building projects – that advanced a similarly submissive stance towards labour exploitation.

There was, it should be added, another aspect to the tribunals (and the broader court system within which they quickly emerged as a key component). In particular, the tribunals were structured and operated in such a way as to simultaneously push for the intensified use of conversion of the short custodial sentences they passed into stiff monetary penalties or fines. Thus, even while inflating prison populations, and not unlike imprisonment specifically for debtors, the tribunals were also meant to extract from the most disadvantaged fractions of the population financial resources that could help fill holes in the state budget under conditions of economic crisis (see further Cheliotis, in progress).

Conclusion

This article addresses a crucial topic that has curiously received limited consideration to date: how conditions of economic crisis and the political orientation of government interact to influence state punishment. In so doing, the article breaks with the bulk of prior pertinent scholarship – and, indeed, with the majority of works in the broader field of the political economy of punishment – in a number of ways. In addition to focusing on Greece, a little-studied case from the global periphery, the article takes a historical perspective and situates the analysis in the interwar years and the Great Depression in particular, a critical but equally under-studied juncture. Whether with reference to Greece's economy, politics or state punishment, moreover, heed is paid to international influences and, to the extent that the available data and space allow, instances of local variation. Finally, for the purposes of charting state punishment as such, use is made not just of the standard indicator of conventional imprisonment, but also of trends in political imprisonment and exile, as well as in violent policing of protest.

It is first shown that, as in years past, so too in the interwar era, the size of the external loans Greece contracted and the exploitative conditions international lenders attached to them posed a most severe hindrance to the country's economic recovery. Worse still, high and growing indebtedness also increased Greece's sensitivity to exogenous shocks. This

sensitivity came into sharp relief towards the end of the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s, when three such shocks occurred either simultaneously or in close proximity to one another: first, the repeated emergence of extreme weather conditions between 1928 and 1930, as a consequence of which Greece's agricultural production was badly diminished; second, the Wall Street crash of 1929, which caused the collapse of global commodity markets; and third, Britain's exit from the gold standard, which essentially intensified the effects of the 1929 crash. Each of these three shocks would have alone sufficed to cause harsh reverberations to the debt-ridden Greek economy. Cumulatively, their effect was bound to be tragic. Due, ironically, to the fact that Venizelos failed to secure yet another loan from abroad, Greece defaulted on her external debt in 1932.

As the article proceeds to demonstrate, the country's economic predicament translated into a range of devastating consequences for large segments of the population and the working classes in particular. Unemployment rose rapidly and real income fell precipitously at a time when many, especially farmers, had already accumulated deep debts to private lenders or the state so as to make ends meet. The consequent spread of starvation combined with stubbornly dismal housing conditions to exacerbate discontent among the masses, thereby increasing the appeal of resort to radicalism. Indeed, by the end of the 1920s, workers' protest actions had clearly become more frequent, more populous and more assertive.

Partly in an effort to anticipate labour unrest, and partly in reaction to its rise, the Venizelos government deployed the pretext of fighting the 'foreign' danger of communist subversion to promote legislative and institutional reforms – most notably, the *Idionym* law and the reorganisation and expansion of the security apparatus of the state – that allowed for the intensified use of intimidatory and repressive measures against mobilised workers, whether in terms of protest policing or in terms of political imprisonment and exile. Belligerent action against the labour movement was at its most pronounced in large cities, which also helps to explain the disproportionate representation of industrial workers among the targeted population.

Facilitated greatly by the introduction of one-membered misdemeanour tribunals, a steep rise also manifested itself in the volume of people serving short-term prison sentences for relatively minor criminal offences. Notwithstanding the crime control mission that was formally ascribed to it, such punishment was expanded by Venizelos' government in an effort to further tighten the grip of the state over the impoverished working classes in the sense of cowering them into submission to the established politico-economic order. At the same time – and here, too, the newly created tribunals were crucial – there was a push also to accelerate the use of conversion of short prison sentences into hefty monetary penalties or fines so as to raise proceeds that would then help to reduce state budget gaps.

All things considered, Venizelos' Liberal government did not only deviate from the Liberal Party's own vision of maintaining socio-political order through welfarist interventions, it also effectively reproduced and, in fact, redoubled the authoritarianism of earlier administrations, including dictatorial regimes. In so doing, moreover, it paved the way to even more repressive criminal justice and cognate policies that were adopted in subsequent years, most notably by the dictatorship of General Metaxas from 1936 onwards, and whose targets ended up including supporters of Venizelos

and the Liberal Party themselves (Close, 1986; Mazower, 1991; Samatas, 2014; Seferiades, 2005).

This article, therefore, lends broad support to two main findings from previous research on the relationship between economic crisis, the ideological orientation of government, and state punitiveness in the context of contemporary Greece: first, economic crisis can outweigh the welfarist outlook of an incumbent party to prompt malign penal effects; and second, the origins of penally adverse economic pressures are likely to lie at least in good part in the international sphere (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2020).

In the case of interwar Greece, the economic crisis the country faced from the late 1920s onwards, largely as a result of the Wall Street crash and Britain's departure from the gold standard, triggered or otherwise inflamed social disorder and concomitant political turmoil while concurrently hindering or altogether disallowing state responses other than repressive measures. Although administrations of an explicitly conservative political orientation would have likely resorted to repression anyway, the reigning Liberal Party's welfarist outlook was trumped by the crisis. Repression was further facilitated by foreign actors who furnished the Venizelos government with the ideological veil of anti-communism, legislative inspiration in the drafting of the Idionym law, and direct encouragement to crack down on labour activism. Arguably, however, the government's heightened susceptibility to such influences was itself linked to the unfolding crisis on the domestic economic front.

Granted, the Venizelos government sought to set the stage for, and to some degree also actively began, intensifying its use of state repression before the economy fell to crisis levels and while related social turbulence was not yet politically parlous as such. However, this should not obscure the poor and worsening condition in which the Greek economy already was when the Liberals took office in 1928, whence also their expectation that labour protest would soon grow. Nor should one miss the fact that repression increased further and, indeed, reached its apogee as the economic situation developed into a full-blown crisis and labour protest did spread from 1929 onwards.

The degree to which this article's conclusions hold beyond Greece is an open question. There appears to be broad correspondence with at least some prior studies of the specific relationship between deteriorating economic conditions and state punishment in the form of conventional imprisonment. To give a flavour of this, Hall et al.'s (1978) examination of Britain during the 1970s and Iturralde's (2008) work on Colombia from the 1980s onwards corroborate that grave economic instability coincides with an intensification in the use of imprisonment against common crime. Pertinent literature, however, is not without counterpoints. With regard to the US since the 2008 financial crisis, for instance, Aviram (2015) reports a positive link between economic downturn and official efforts to reduce resort to imprisonment, especially in connection with minor offences (see further Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2020). One way or another, the comparability of previously studied instances of critical decline in economic activity is a matter yet to attract sustained attention in relevant penological scholarship.

Similarly, little clarity can be gained from the limited evidence that exists on the impact of the Great Depression itself on imprisonment in countries other than Greece. Whereas, for example, Michalowski and Carlson (1999) find that the Depression only had a weak positive effect on imprisonment rates in the US (see also Jankovic, 1977),

Box (1987) reports a null effect in England and Wales, while Laffargue and Godefroy (1989) detect a definitive positive effect in France, as does Greenberg (1980) for Poland. It is possible that such variation might be explained, at least partly, with reference to cross-national differences in how the Depression manifested itself macro-economically or how it was experienced at ground level by lay citizens. Once again, however, these are issues that have yet to be addressed.

Things are no less unclear once conceptualisation of state punishment is extended beyond conventional imprisonment to encompass other state operations as well. This article's observation that both conventional and political imprisonment underwent growth in Greece when the Great Depression struck, represents a departure from Melossi's (2008) thesis that these two forms of carceral punishment tend to rise at discrete moments of a nation's economic life (the former when there is a downturn and the latter when there is prosperity). In any case, and notwithstanding the treatment usually accorded to it thus far, the scope of state punishment is much wider than its carceral manifestations.

Ultimately, the generalisability of this article's findings – including about the functions of penal repression, the mechanisms that translate economic pressures into penal effects, the impact of government political orientation, and the role of international forces intervening in the economic, political or penal realm of a nation-state – can only be ascertained through systematic comparative study of different forms of state punishment across diverse national contexts and various types and experiences of economic crisis.

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Notes

1. The massive influx of Greek Orthodox refugees occurred towards the end of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 and in its aftermath, when the defeated Greeks and the victorious Turks agreed to a forcible exchange of populations in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. By 1928, around 1.2 million Christian refugees had been moved to Greece, amounting to one-

- fifth of the country's total population (Pallis, 1929). Some 350,000 Muslims had meanwhile been uprooted from Greece (Hirschon, 2003).
2. The absolute figure for 1913 is for 1 December and was derived from the annual account of the Ministry of Justice for that year; the absolute figure for 1915 is for 1 October and was derived from the January 1915 issue of the journal *Politiki Epitheorisis*; and the absolute figure for 1928 is for 31 December and was derived from the 1929 report published by the National Statistical Service of Greece about imprisonment. For the purposes of calculating per capita rates, general population data were used from the Censuses of 1907 (to calculate the per capita rates for 1913 and 1915) and 1928 (to calculate the per capita rate for that same year).
 3. This was not Venizelos' first tenure in office; he had, in fact, served as a premier of the country for much of the 1910s.
 4. In 1931, the Venizelos government also revived the measure of 'administrative expulsion' as previously introduced in 1926 by the dictatorial regime of General Pangalos (Alivizatos, 2011). Although this development is not discussed here for reasons of space, it is worth noting that data on the use specifically of administrative expulsion are lacking.
 5. For the purposes of calculating per capita rates, general population data were derived from the Greek state's official statistical annual report (*Statistiki Epetiris*) for 1930.
 6. The term 'caseload' refers to the total number of cases of individuals held in custody during a given year (see further Cheliotis, 2011). Caseload data are not available for 1928.
 7. That the number of people sentenced to imprisonment by courts was notably higher than the number of convicted prisoners admitted to prison was due to trends in the use of sentence conversion (Cheliotis, in progress).

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