9 **Cairo, Athens, Salonica: strikebreaking and the anti-labour practices of employers and the state in the early twentieth-century cigarette industry**

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Strikebreaking often plays a central role in accounts of the violence that has been perpetrated in the struggles between labour and capital in history. It has been argued that violence was a popular and often successful strategy for employers in the United States prior to the federal labour legislation of the 1930s. As Joshua Rosenbloom notes, one of the most visible and contentious expressions of the increasing pressures of competition in late nineteenth-century American labour markets was the widespread use of strikebreakers. The factories seem to have had no trouble in finding “scabs” to do the work. The ability of employers to replace striking workers was one of the most potent weapons they had in their efforts to defeat the demands of organised labour for improvements to employment conditions.¹ Replacement workers were used in more than 40 per cent of late nineteenth-century strikes, and if strikebreaking was also used, then there was a great likelihood that the employer would defeat the strike. A variety of factors appear to have influenced the relative supply and hence cost of recruiting replacement workers, in particular the fact that the pool of potential replacement workers was larger in industries and occupations that did not require specialised skills.²

Strikers were very often exasperated by the thuggery and coercion used by entrepreneurs during the strikes that broke out in American factories in the late nineteenth century. A wide array of private and government forces were brought in to suppress the strikes. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, private detective agencies supplied guards who protected company property against strikers and would sometimes even assault them. During the early twentieth century, several firms appeared that supplied strikebreakers and guards at the request of companies, drawing on what amounted to private armies of thousands of men. The largest of these operated nationally. On many occasions the state itself intervened to break strikes. As with some of the strikebreaking firms, state militiamen deployed advanced weaponry against strikers and their sympathisers, including machine guns. Firms initiated “back to work” movements to destroy the strikers’ morale and used their considerable influence with the media to propagandise in the press and on the radio.³ Whatever the case may be, employers did not simply sit back and accept the strikes of the workers.

Instead, they staged a fightback against the unions, sometimes through lawsuits and legislation, sometimes with the use of violent thugs. As Matteo Milan has argued, “the American case is certainly a clear archetype in terms of the violent counter positions between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ . . . [with] images of brutal police forces employed in the services of private interests”. Yet, as he notes, the violence used against strikers was not only applied in the USA in the nineteenth century but in Europe as well.⁴ Recent studies have shown that in certain sectors of British industry – shipping, for example – there was a clear tendency “to employ violent, illegal and inherently subversive means to protect the management from both the opposition of trade unions and the increasing encroachment of the state into industrial matters”.⁵ In analysing the practices of violence during the strikes in Habsburg Austria from the 1890s until the outbreak of the First World War, Claire Morelon argues that violent confrontations between strikers, strikebreakers and the state forces that were protecting them frequently occurred. This is further evidence that industrial vigilantism and patterns of anti-labour violence occurred not only in the USA but in Europe as well at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶ These penetrating studies have undoubtedly broadened the research in the field of strikes and strikebreaking, illuminating the methods used by the state and employers in European countries to deal with them. Nevertheless, the structure of violence in the Pre-First World War period remains less explored, especially with regard to the public-private interplay in the policing of labour protests in other geographical contexts.

In this chapter I thus focus on the strikes that broke out at the beginning of the twentieth century in cigarette-making factories in three different urban and industrial environments in the South-East Mediterranean – Cairo, Athens and Salonica – which are located at the periphery of capitalist growth. What were the demands of the workers? What attitudes, practices and discourses did employers and the state adopt and express against the strikers? What were the factors involved in the strikes and how did they shape anti-labour ideologies, discourses and practices of employers and the state? What similarities and differences can be observed among the cases examined and how can they be interpreted? By utilizing a comparative approach, this chapter seeks to offer answers to those questions. Drawing on newspapers and archival records, the chapter will highlight the policies and strategies of the state and employers vis-à-vis the strikes that broke out in the cigarette-making industry in the early twentieth century.

The central question is how and for which reasons were the anti-labour ideologies, discourses and practices of employers and the state shaped. I argue that the mechanisms adopted to control the labour protests were not monolithic or inflexible and one-dimensional. Instead, they covered a wide range of possibilities, from violent suppression, to the adoption of consensual methods and paternalistic mechanisms which aimed to manipulate labour protests and weaken trade unionism. This chapter will first present a broad overview of the branch of cigarette making in three different countries of the South-East Mediterranean – the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Egypt – in the late nineteenth century, with an emphasis on the shape of the labour market and tax system and their consequences for

cigarette makers. This will be followed by an analysis of the case of Cairo and the protests by cigarette makers that broke out in that city at the dawn of the twentieth century. Our attention will then turn to Athens, finally to move north to Salonica, a city that was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1913.

Labour market

In the early 1880s, the Ottoman Empire established the Tobacco Régie (*Régie co-intéressée des Tabacs de l'Empire Ottoman*) with the participation of Ottoman and foreign banks. The Tobacco Régie had a monopoly over the tobacco market, exports and sales, and its purpose was to enable the Ottoman Empire to control tobacco revenues so as to service its external debt.⁷ Apart from Istanbul, in other urban areas of the empire too tobacco and cigarette production employed a great number of male and female workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Izmir, Samsun and Salonica, the monopoly tobacco factories employed around 1,400 women and men in total. In Salonica, industrial tobacco processing had previously been the main “industry” of the city, both in the final era of the Ottoman Empire and in the interwar period. The headquarters of Greek, Jewish, Armenian and American companies were located in Salonica, whose work involved preparing and exporting leaves and, in a very few cases, making cigarettes.⁸

The monopoly over the market meant that the tobacco sector came to be abandoned by several Greek capitalists, who sought a friendlier investment environment in the cigarette-making sector. This they found in the neighbouring country of Egypt. Cigarette makers, specialised male technicians who made cigarettes by hand, would also go to Egypt for work opportunities, since their craft was highly sought after. In Egypt, where the tax system did not impose a monopoly, cigarette production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was performed mainly by small and medium-sized businesses – some of which later grew into large tobacco industries – in which the specialised cigarette makers were men, who were highly sought after because of their craft. This enabled them to develop a strong trade union activity and in many cases disputes with their employers evolved into open conflicts.⁹

In Greece, there was no significant pre-industrial craft industry for the manufacture of tobacco products, whether cigar or cigarette making, as was the case elsewhere. The history of the handmade cigarette-making sector in the country, even though rather brief – dating from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-1930s – is linked to the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the period. Handmade cigarettes were the most popular tobacco product in the early twentieth century as they were smoked by the younger population and women, resulting in the constant expansion of the market. In Greece, tobacco processing – cutting and cigarette making for sale on the domestic market, in contrast to the processing sector, where selection and packaging were carried out – had become a state monopoly by the end of the nineteenth century. An 1883 law, passed after the introduction of a tax on tobacco by the government of Harilaos Trikoupi,

established 80 public tobacco factories in various towns throughout the country. As stipulated by law, tobacco-cutting could only take place in public tobacco factories and the tax paid on cut tobacco was to be paid within the factories.¹⁰ At the same time, cut tobacco processing would also take place in these facilities and be used to make tobacco products, such as cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco. As a result, small family businesses, those which channelled cut tobacco and cigarettes onto the domestic market, were forced to “acquire” their own space within public tobacco-cutting facilities.

After 1892, tobacco processing – cutting and cigarette making – stopped being an exclusive privilege of the state and the operation of private tobacco factories was permitted, albeit under the supervision of directors and officials from the public tobacco factories.¹¹ Handmade cigarettes had to be made in public tobacco factories but by male technicians – cigarette makers – chosen exclusively by the interested manufacturers. Thus, the state personnel would work in public tobacco factories that were subject to the state, but they were paid by the businessmen to whom they were attached.¹² The introduction of cigarette-making machines and the attempt to mechanise the sector in the early twentieth century provoked severe reactions on the part of the cigarette makers and led to open conflict between them and their employers.

Cairo

To understand the position taken by the Greek tobacco industrialists and the Egyptian government against the cigarette makers, we must also consider the international economic context in which the previously mentioned events took place just as much as the characteristics of those enterprises. The upturn in economic activity and the growth in international trade in the second half of the nineteenth century – after the great depression of the years 1873 to 1895 – brought international capital to the expanding Egyptian cigarette market: first, the British American Tobacco Company (TBA) and later the Eastern Tobacco Co, which took over Maspero Freres Limited, the sole British tobacco firm in Egypt, and gradually acquired Greek tobacco firms such as S.A. des Tabacs et Cigarettes Papatheologos and S. Mavridis Ltd.

As has already been mentioned, in May 1883 the Ottoman Monopoly over the tobacco trade was taken over by the newly founded company of the *Regie Co-interesse des Tabacs de l'Empire Ottoman*, which was to constitute the largest foreign investment in the empire. The monopolistic privileges of the Regies and its dominant presence put serious pressure on the existing tobacco firms, resulting in some of the companies being priced out of the market and they instead transferred to other parts of the world, such as the USA and Germany. The main place to which they relocated, however, was Egypt, specifically Cairo and Alexandria, where the invasion of the British army in 1882 changed the economic and business landscape of this Ottoman region. Many Greek tobacco dealers and craftsmen settled in Egypt, where they became involved in the tobacco trade and in cigarette making, establishing the first cigarette workshops and factories.¹³ The

Koutarellis Brothers cigarette company was established in Alexandria, Egypt, by Konstantinos, Dimitrios, and Alkiviadis Koutarellis in 1890.¹⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the company modernised its machines and buildings. In 1920, it built its own privately owned factory, installing a large number of state-of-the-art cigarette-making machines and special tobacco-cutting machines and increased the technical staff. The factory underwent a series of improvements from the 1920s onwards and by the eve of the Second World War, it covered an area of 5,000 square metres.¹⁵

When analysing the causes behind the choice of Egypt historian Christos Chatziiosif points to the shaping of an important and dynamic tobacco market, thanks to the presence of the British army of occupation, the European communities and the large number of travellers passing through on their way to and from the East. The addition of these consumers, who would at some point return to their homelands, created the conditions for significant exports of cigarettes to European countries.¹⁶ The formation of a free market without any restrictions, promising significant profits thanks to exports, attracted Greek tobacco industrialists as well as cigarette makers.¹⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, many Greeks would go to Egypt to learn the art of cigarette making and then return to their home regions to practice the art there. Manolis Karathanasis, one of the founders of the tobacco company of Samos mentioned earlier, went to Egypt – it is not known for how long – to “specialize” in handmade cigarette making.¹⁸ If we go by the advertisements placed in the Greek press by Greek tobacco companies, then Egyptian cigarettes, as well as the specialised cigarette makers who came from that country, were highly valued in the Greek market. For example, an advertisement of the I Proodos company, which belonged to the Karakitis Brothers and was established in Volos at the end of the nineteenth century, boasts that its handmade cigarettes are of the same quality as those from Cairo and Alexandria, having been prepared with the same method used by cigarette makers in Egypt.¹⁹

Greek-owned cigarette factories in Egypt were of various sizes and with unequal degrees of production mechanisation. Machines were used only in some early production phases, such as tobacco-cutting, while cigarette packing and rolling were done by hand until the end of the nineteenth century.²⁰ It was in this phase of production that Greek tobacco company owners had the greatest comparative advantage because, aside from importing Eastern tobacco, they were also able to import a cheap and specialised workforce composed of Greek cigarette makers.²¹ However, this advantage was not due solely to the use of specialised male cigarette makers but also to the use or, more correctly, exploitation of the broader workforce, including both women and children.

Cairo in around 1900, then, was home to an advanced handmade cigarette sector and numerous tobacco factories, strengthening the position of the cigarette makers. The Greek cigarette makers organised to vociferously demand higher wages and better working conditions through a series of strikes that took place from 1899 to 1902. More pertinently, their primary concern was to maintain the control of the labour process. Their employers at the tobacco company, however,

were more concerned to ensure this did not happen and sought to undermine the position of the skilled Greek cigarette makers by having them be accompanied or even gradually replaced by two other types of less-skilled local workers, the so-called “macaronists” and “sorters”.²²

The Greek cigarette makers of Egypt, along with their Italian and German colleagues, actively participated in these strike actions. The strikes were, however, violently suppressed by the tobacco company employers with the aid of the Egyptian police. Many Greek cigarette makers were arrested as “troublemakers” and the “more dangerous” ones were expelled from the country, as happened in Cairo in December 1901. A strike had broken out in the Greek tobacco factory owned by the Susas Bros company, with demands for wage rises and better working conditions. The Egyptian government did not remain neutral in this civil conflict that arose between the Greek entrepreneurs and the Greek cigarette makers. The cigarette makers accused the Egyptian government not only of using naked violence, arrests and expulsions, but also of protecting the Greek tobacco industrialists by providing them with native workers who would enter the factory escorted by the army.²³ The strike was characterised as a “revolt” by the factory owners. The Egyptian police violently pursued the strikers, injuring many of them and arresting 25 people. There are reports that many women and children were among the injured, a fact that demonstrates the presence of women and children in the workplace as well as their dynamic participation in the conflicts that arose in the tobacco factories.²⁴

The president of the Greek cigarette makers’ committee in Cairo criticised the position taken by the Greek consulate of Cairo and wrote a letter to the Greek prime minister accusing the consulate of collaborating with the Egyptian authorities over the expulsions and of not caring about the community of the Greek cigarette makers and their families. Some of those family members – women and children – were also employed in the tobacco factories, alongside a male member of their family, be it their husband, father or brother. The workforce in the tobacco factories, which was composed of Greeks, Armenians and Egyptians, is of particular interest as the employers of the Greek workers also came from their homeland of Greece. The foreign citizens of Egypt, the Greeks and the Armenians, were well-paid skilled cigarette makers, while the native population worked in subordinate posts in the factory, along with the women and the children discussed previously.

These foreign citizens of Egypt – the skilled cigarette makers – played a leading role in the growth of collective action in the tobacco industry. To confront the constantly expanding labour protests of the cigarette makers, the tobacco industrialists hired native workers as strikebreakers. During the riots, the Egyptian government strongly intervened, violently suppressing the protests and incriminating the Greek cigarette makers. By ensuring that the native workers could enter the factory, they aimed to protect the interests of the Greek tobacco industrialists. This meant that the skilled foreign workers who were employed alongside their family members were confronted with the native unskilled workforce. The confrontation thus went beyond the dichotomy of capital and labour and reverberated

throughout the labour force, thus bringing into the open other controversial issues within the labour force itself, in particular ethnicity and gender.

Athens

This “incident” was part of a series of labour mobilisations and struggles that took place in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. A leading role was played by Greek cigarette makers and those of other nationalities, as well as specialised male craftsmen and female workers. Maintaining the production process – alongside demands for higher wages and better working conditions – was the main issue of concern for the cigarette makers in Greece too. Although Greece lacked a significant craft industry in hand-rolled cigarettes, which would have enabled the cigarette makers to strengthen their negotiating power in the labour market, as had happened in Egypt, the presence of cigarette workers in Greece was not negligible. Nor were they deprived of militancy, as the protests and strikes that broke out in the cigarette industry in Greece in the early twentieth century attest.

It appears that the Greek cigarette makers who arrived in Greece from Egypt transferred not only their undeniable abilities in the craft of cigarette making, but also the “prowess” of protest and assertion. Having returned to Greece, they had no difficulty in being hired by the tobacco firms. On the contrary, they were in high demand, as they were guaranteed to produce the best cigarettes. This peaceful cooperation between employers and employees was, however, to be short-lived, since the contradictions between the demands of both sides soon came to the fore, even if the prime tobacco of the exquisite handmade cigarettes papered over their differences.

From as early as 1902, cigarette makers in Piraeus had been requesting a wage increase of 55 drachmas for every thousand cigarettes that they produced. Some tobacco sellers, mostly the smaller ones, accepted this compromise, as the cigarette makers presented it, but the largest adamantly refused to satisfy the cigarette makers’ request.²⁵ For them, the need to “get rid of” this specialised professional group of cigarette makers became an increasing “obsession”. They were to achieve their goal a few years later with the introduction of cigarette-making machines, of which it was said that “*they will get rid of any new demand from the cigarette makers*”.²⁶

The first attempt to mechanise cigarette making in Greece is attributed to a private entrepreneur, the tobacco factory owner K. Angelidis. The cigarette-making machine was used first in the State Tobacco Factory of Athens in 1885 and then in Piraeus, and it had a production capacity of about 50 kilos of cigarettes per day,²⁷ that is about 100,000 cigarettes for a ten-hour working day. The production capacity of a cigarette maker was 3,000 cigarettes per day. By the end of the following decade, the cigarette-making machines had become much more widespread. In 1909, new cigarette-making machine models were installed and operated in the public tobacco-cutting facilities of Athens, Piraeus and Pyrgos. By 1914, private entrepreneurs, such as K. Varkas in Athens, G. Pyrpasopoulos in Piraeus,

A. Karelias in Kalamata, V. Karavasilis in Pyrgos and N. Matsaggos in Volos had installed the first tobacco-cutting and cigarette-making machines.²⁸ Each cigarette-making machine appears to have “replaced” about 100 cigarette makers,²⁹ which led to a fierce reaction on the part of the cigarette makers themselves.

As specialised craftsmen employed in public and private tobacco-cutting facilities, the cigarette makers immediately understood that the beginning of the mechanisation of the production process would lead to their end. A professional end that threatened not only their identity as male specialised craftsmen but, first and foremost their survival, as it would push them to the margins of their industry. If for the tobacco traders the automation of cigarette making meant a shift from small craftsmanship – as it had been since the pre-industrial era – to the industrial and mass production of cigarettes, for the craftsmen cigarette makers it signified the end of their craft and their “proletarianization”, pushing them out of the “transitional zone”, where they could still be seen as “skilled, respectable craftsmen” positioned somewhere between the workers and the bourgeoisie.³⁰ Their concern as to what automation meant forced them into an open conflict with the tobacco merchants.

In May 1910, cigarette makers who worked for the tobacco merchant K. Varkas, whose factory was located in Athens, went on strike in protest at his decision to procure cigarette-making machines. The cigarette makers occupied the area outside the factory and remained there until late at night and their strike was to last for several days. The cigarette-making machines had to be transported into the tobacco factory with the help of the police, as there was a risk of reprisals from the strikers. Throughout the night, the factory was also guarded by policemen. At the peak of the strike, in late May, the cigarette makers occupied the factory and for two to three days it seemed as though the authorities had lost control of public order in Athens. The cigarette makers were described in the press as “more demanding”.

This description was indeed accurate as the demands of the strikers were now not only about the machinery but had extended to cover other issues related to the workplace and labour market control. In other words, in addition to attempting to prohibit the use of the machines, they also demanded the dismissal of the supervisor entrusted by the tobacco merchant Varkas, an end to replacement hiring (or the use of non-unionised workers) and the dismissal of those who had already been hired by Varkas. In addition to their demands for higher wages, fewer working hours and to maintain control of the labour process, there were also demands for control of the labour market. The collective control of the market was needed not only because the shortage of labour would lead to wage increases, but also because it was largely a prerequisite for the achievement of every collective demand. By protesting in this way, the cigarette makers were at risk of being replaced by their employers not only temporarily during a strike but also permanently. As regards their demand for collective control of the labour market, this should not be seen exclusively as the fruition of their collective struggles but in combination with their goal of maintaining their privileges as skilled craftsmen – both material and symbolic – in the workplace.

In late May, about 500 of the cigarette makers headed for the Customs Office of Piraeus, where the cigarette-making machines were being guarded, with the aim of destroying them. As a result, the first regiment and all the police force were put on guard. The strike continued until May 31 when, through the presence of overwhelming forces that aimed to put down the strike with either the threat or the use of violence, the state restored order. The machinery, which was stored in Varkas's property, had been protected.³¹ Almost a month later, most of the cigarette makers appear to have returned to work. The strike ringleaders, of whom there were 28 altogether, were indicted by the district attorney for damage to property: five were sent to the High Court and four to the Criminal Court.

The demands of the cigarette makers and their conflicts with the capitalist tobacco merchants were widely discussed in the Greek parliament in the 1910s. In 1911, in response to the events of May 1910, parliament debated the imminent submission of a bill on the use of cigarette-making machines. The opinions expressed during the debate on this bill reflect the ideas, mentalities, moral issues and social prejudices of the political world of the time as regards technological innovation, the analysis of which would require a separate study. Here we shall focus on two typical opposing opinions in order to trace the attitudes and the role of the state on this matter. The first opinion displays a modernising tendency and supports the need for and the inevitability of mechanisation, despite its social costs. This came in a speech by Nikolaos Vathris, a Member of Parliament for Corfu, who was also the proponent of the bill:

Regarding the requests of the opposing parties . . . of course, progress cannot be hindered even if means going to march on a road covered by dead bodies. . . . Steam destroyed sailing and deprived thousands of workers of work. So did railways, electricity and every progress that happens. Finally, the Commission deemed it necessary to tax the cigarette-making machines because they bring great profits to their owners, while, on the other hand, they deprived thousands of workers of work.

The second opinion, given by Dionysios Gklavas, the Member of Parliament from Achaia, shows how the introduction of technology was perceived by some politicians as a threat for both the health of the workers and also for public health: "I fully support the rightful demands of the cigarette makers. Due to the introduction of cigarette-making machines, a decline is being felt in this country and parliament must prevent the spread of this evil".³²

Even though it was not a central demand the cigarette makers' request for financial aid so that they could purchase the cigarette-making machine themselves reveals another dimension to these events. At the very least, it forces us to reflect upon and revisit the ways in which the workforce looked upon technological innovation. Machines were seen by the cigarette makers not merely as a threat, as the tool that would replace them, but as a means of production that had been appropriated by their employer. Recognizing the value of this means, they did not seek to destroy it but rather to appropriate it. If we also bear in mind the proposal

put forth by the cigarette makers' union a few years later, in May 1918, for the concession of an area within the public tobacco factory in which they could work independently,³³ then a more nuanced picture emerges, which shows the protective nature of the cigarette makers' demands towards their work during this period while also demonstrating their belief that the state – and its institutions – is the distributor of the social product.

Their behaviour and their actions – including the destruction of or threat to destroy the cigarette-making machines – should therefore be seen as something more than simply the behaviour of workers who are thinking “traditionally” within the context of a moral economy, as a result of their fear of new technology.³⁴ On the contrary, these specific practices are part of their negotiation strategies to gain work within the new economic and social order ushered in by the arrival of this new technology.

We can also view the proposal for the use of machines exclusively for pipe production for cigarettes within this context. As already mentioned, this specific task was carried out by male and female workers who were considered unspecialised. Specialised cigarette makers, aware that technological development would transform the production process and render old skills such as theirs, around which power relations in the place of production were structured, useless, demanded that they be able to determine the tasks in this area themselves. They therefore approached their employers in a pliant and conciliatory manner and claimed to be willing to accept the machines on the condition that they be used in an ancillary way during the production stage. This ancillary task was to be performed by “other” unspecialised “assistant” employees, thus highlighting the now common heterogeneity, contrasts, exclusions and hierarchies that could be found among employees at production sites.

To sum up, the active mobilisations of cigarette makers in the 1910s showed their fighting spirit, which was perhaps the result of two interconnected factors. First, the strong – initially – negotiating position that they had both against their employers and against the state, as they represented the few specialised craftsmen able to produce what was a very popular product. Second, the changes in work structure and organisation brought about by technological developments presupposed their own “end” – their professional “end” – and whatever this might entail on both a practical, material level and a symbolic one. Conflicts similar to the ones discussed earlier could also be observed in other cigarette factories in Greece during this period.

Salonica

Disputes between workers and employers in the cigarette-making industry over the organisation of labour, working conditions and control of the labour market broke out in the multinational post-Ottoman city of Salonica in the early twentieth century. In 1918, male and female workers in the cigarette factories went on strike, demanding a rise in wages and for workers to be hired only through the trade union. On 10 July, in a letter to the governor general of Salonica, the heads of the

city's cigarette factories notified the authorities of the goals and intentions of the cigarette makers' union. This letter "challenges" us to contemplate this incident, if only briefly, and underlines how often the "discourses" that surround an event are more interesting than the event itself.

In this letter, the managers of the tobacco factories notified the general commander of Salonica of the goals and practices of the cigarette makers' trade union, in their view. They presented the union leaders as the instigators of the strike, claiming that they aspired to moral profit and that they had enthralled the majority of the workers, particularly the more "naïve" and the youngest, who lack proper judgment.³⁵ In demanding that workers be recruited through the union, their aim – according to the managers of the cigarette factories – was to gain management power over the workers as well as over the ways and the methods in which the work was performed. This had resulted in a situation the aim of which was to "create workers who are undisciplined, disruptive, insolent, workers who deny all respect for their superiors and employers and every obligation to the assumed work". For this reason, the managers of the factories concluded that they would not only oppose the union demand to remove the strikebreakers, but they would fight to expel from all the tobacco factories of Salonica the few "troublemaker" workers who "were and will always be at the root of all arguments, the lack of discipline and, therefore, of unreasonable and inopportune strikes" and that "honest, hard-working and diligent workers" must instead be hired in their place.³⁶

The cigarette factory directors responded to the demand for wage increases by expressing an interest in male and female workers who are "naïve", as the directors called them, and who are tricked "by capitalistic, so to say, workers, i.e. those who receive high wages". For this reason they suggest that

increases should be applied not on a sliding scale but a progressive one based on wages . . . [it should] be progressively distributed in favour of those who receive low wages, who, in this case, are blatantly wronged by their colleagues.³⁷

It seems that while the strikers demanded that all wages be increased by the same rate, the employers' suggestion was that wages be increased progressively and in reverse proportion, i.e. a greater increase for low wages and a lower increase for high wages.

As can be observed, then, the target of the attacks made by the cigarette factory managers in Salonica was not all the workers in their facilities. The object of their ire was specifically the most unionised workers, particularly the union leaders who also happened to be the skilled male craftsmen, meaning that they were among the best paid but at the same time the least easy to control, in other words the "troublemakers". Not only, in the eyes of factory owners and managers, did they provoke "unreasonable" and "inopportune strikes" and cause material damage to their factories, these workers also constituted a threat to the maintenance of "order and morality" in the workplace as well as outside of it.³⁸

Conclusions

Maintaining total control of the labour process, higher wages and improvement of working conditions were the main demands of cigarette makers in those regions around the south-eastern Mediterranean Sea where handmade cigarettes were produced. Control over the organisation of labour – which is linked to technological and organisational changes – in the cigarette industry in those areas that were on the fringes of capitalist growth in Europe at the dawn of the twentieth century was the common factor – notwithstanding the fixed demand for wage rises – upon which labour protests were based.

In Egypt, the competition between the small Greek tobacco firms – which could even be considered family businesses – and the large multinational tobacco industry was particularly unequal. Unable to deal with the new circumstances created by technological and organisational developments in the tobacco industry in that period or to compete with the huge international tobacco firms, the Greek tobacco industrialists of Egypt sought to maintain control over the organisation of labour in their factories and to secure their profit rates through “traditional” means connected to the intensity of the labour performed, as well as through repressive and disciplinary measures against “disobedient” workers. Lastly, it could be said that the reason the Egyptian authorities imposed law and order was to secure the public peace and ensure the smooth running of the free market.

Protests and conflicts between cigarette makers and employers became widespread in Athens at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when certain tobacco industry owners decided to procure cigarette-making machines. The strikes became open conflicts and hand-to-hand fighting broke out between the strikers and the strikebreakers and state forces that were brought in to crush the strikes. The state, through the army and navy, acted as strong forces of suppression in an attempt to “restore” law and order. With the aim of maintaining the social order and public peace, the state initially approached the cigarette makers with an attempt to understand their position. So long as the social peace was not disturbed, either through their words or – more often – through their actions, the cigarette makers were accepted and treated sympathetically by the authorities. In this period, then, the state appears to have played an arbitrational, consensual and “paternal” role between the two opposing parties: the world of labour and the world of capital. Acknowledging this role, both parties turned to the state, asking it to help secure agreement for their demands. However, once the struggle of the cigarette makers escalated and became radicalised, the state started to behave towards them in a very different way.

The cigarette makers of Salonica were described – and identified – as “capitalistic classes of workers” by their employers, not only because they received higher wages, but also because they engaged in a fierce battle for control over labour organisation and to define responsibilities in the production area as well as for control over the labour market. Fully aware of this situation and the risks it posed for them the employers made an overt attempt to break up the workforce and consequently to weaken its capacity for collective action, as well as to “stimulate” the feelings and the “reflexes” of the state and society.

It could be argued that the attitudes, practices and mechanisms that were adopted to control the labour protests were not uniform but very diverse. Such practices and policies were often common to and similar in the cases discussed here, but they were adopted in specific periods and contexts, under particular economic, social and cultural conditions, the further study and research of which will allow us to grasp more clearly their commonalities and differences. In any case, it could be argued that for a deeper understanding of the “vehicles”, ways and mechanisms of the labour protests as well as of anti-labour practices and methods of suppression, the questions posed must go beyond the labour/capital binary and be enriched with other analytical tools, such as race, gender, the family and age.

Notes

- 1 Joshua Rosenbloom, “Strikebreaking and the Labour Market in the United States, 1881–1894,” *The Journal of Economic History* 58, no. 1 (1998): 183–205.
- 2 Joshua Rosenbloom, *Looking for Work, Searching for Workers: American Labor Markets During Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147–70.
- 3 On the emergence of anti-labour mercenaries, see Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- 4 Matteo Milan, “Introduction: Strikebreaking During Europe’s Belle Époque,” *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2019): 553–69.
- 5 Alessandro Saluppo, “Strikebreaking and Anti-Unionism on the Waterfront: The Shipping Federation, 1890–1914,” *European History Quarterly*, 49, no. 4 (2019): 570–96.
- 6 Claire Morelon, “Social Conflict, National Strife, or Political Battle? Violence and Strikebreaking in Late Habsburg Austria,” *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2019): 650–76.
- 7 Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, Volume Two: 1600–1914*, trans. Marina Dimitriadou (Athens, OH: Alexandria, 2011), 552.
- 8 Donald Quataert, “Labour History and the Ottoman Empire, c.1700–1922,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 60 (February 2001): 93–109; Touraj Attabaki and Bricket Gavin, “Ottoman and Republican Turkish Labour History,” *International Review of Social History* 54, Special Issue (2009).
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- 10 Law ARKST’ of 27 April/10 May 1883, “On the enforcement of duties on tobacco consumed”.
- 11 Ioannis Serraios, *Peri Isagogis Monopoliou en Elladi* (Athens: State Printing, 1934), 14.
- 12 Euaggelos Prontzas, “The Peasant, Tobacco, and the State. The Greek Tobacco Market (1887–1939),” *Ta Istorika*, no. 17 (1992): 275–300.
- 13 Relli Schechter, “Selling Luxury: The Rise of the Egyptian Cigarette and the Transformation of the Egyptian Tobacco Market, 1850–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 1 (February 2003): 51–75. On the Egyptian tobacco industry see

- also Relli Schechter, *Smoking, Culture and Economy in the Middle East: The Egyptian Tobacco Market 1850–2000* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile. Nationalism Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 49–57; Christos Chajiosif, *I Girea Selini. I biomixania stin elliniki ekonomia 1830–1940* (Athens, OH: Themelio, 1993), 366–68.
- 14 The Koutarellis brothers came from the Greek village of Drakeia Piliou. Their factory employed 2,000 people and daily production rose to 3,000 kilos of cigarettes. It was the only company that was able to compete with the Eastern Co. SAE, which gradually absorbed almost the whole of the Greek and Armenian tobacco industry of Egypt. Apostolos G. Konstantinidis, *I Piliorite en Egipto*, no. 1 (Alexandria: Silogos Zagoras, 1963), 60–61.
 - 15 Journal *Kapniki Epitheorisis* no. 102. pr.1955.
 - 16 Chajiosif, *I Girea Selini*, 336–67.
 - 17 Schechter, “Selling Luxury,” 51–75.
 - 18 See the “Karathanasis” Archive.
 - 19 *Empros News*, April 2, 1906.
 - 20 Chajiosif, *I Girea Selini*, 368.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 336–67; Alexander Kitroef, *The Greeks in Egypt, 1919–1937: Ethnicity and Class* (London: Ithaca Press, 1989), 96–111.
 - 22 Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 49–57.
 - 23 *Empros News*, December 27, 1901.
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 *Empros News*, January 10, 1902.
 - 26 *Empros News*, October 7, 1909.
 - 27 Serraios, *Peri Isagogis Monopoliou*, 19.
 - 28 Christina Agriantoni, *I Aparxes tis Exbiomixanisis stin Ellada ton 19o aiona* (Athens, OH: Historical Archives of the Commercial Bank of Greece, 1986), 197.
 - 29 Lois Labrianidis, “Industrial Location in Capitalist Societies: The Tobacco Industry in Greece, 1880–1980” (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1982), 123–24.
 - 30 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 127.
 - 31 The first trade unions were founded in Greece in the 1870s and were run by royal charter. They were obliged to submit an annual report of accountability to the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for overseeing them. The Revisory Parliament of 1911 saw the right to strike in a more favourable light, marking a shift from the period of “prohibition” to the period of “tolerance”. On the institutional framework of trade union freedoms and restrictions see Antonis Liakos, *Work and Politics in Interwar Greece* (Athens, OH: Historical Archives of the Commercial Bank of Greece, 1993), 157–77.
 - 32 *Empros News*, 18 March 191.
 - 33 *Rizospastis News*, May 26, 1918.
 - 34 Antonis Liakos has noted that striking cigarette makers turned against the machines, highlighting a predominant moral belief in the economy. In this way we can see how the working classes, whose influence reached as far as parliament, confronted rising capitalism: with a strong belief in the moral order which, in turn, determined their political attitudes towards the problem. Liakos, *Work and Politics in Interwar Greece*, 397–400.
 - 35 The arguments put forward by the employers are of course not new. Such tactics were used during the carpenters’ strike at the Pauling and Henfrey building contractors in Manchester in 1844. Engels writes that Pauling and Henfrey attempted to increase working hours to beyond sunset, lighting the workplace by gas. The workers went on strike as they believed that this would put downward pressure on their wages. The employers took the rebellious strikers and their ringleaders to court, accusing them

of “having intimidated the new workers into taking part in the strike”. According to the employers “it is about the rebellious, who spread confusion among the peaceful workers” (Engels 1975, 237–88). While Engels’s report may appear an anachronism, I would argue that the incident described has many points in common with our case. The literature on labour strikes is too large to be mentioned here. See for example Marcel Van Der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 137–208.

36 *Macedonia News*, July 11, 1918.

37 Ibid.

38 It is particularly interesting to note that the managers of the tobacco factories described the organised cigarette makers active in the trade union as “capitalistic classes of workers”. This recalls the conflict between entrepreneurs and the “labour aristocracy” that has been observed in Western Europe and the USA in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. See for example Jurgen Kocka, *White Collar Workers in America 1890–1940: A Social-Political History in International Perspective* (London: SAGE Publication, 1980), Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (New York: Basic Books, INC, 1964), Peter Armstrong, *White Collar Workers, Trade Unions and Class* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), John Coatsworth, Juan Cole, Michael P. Hanagan, Peter C. Perdue, Charles Tilly, and Louise Tilly, *Global Connections, Politics, Exchange, and Social Life in World History*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 229–39.