

# **Greece: Repression and Resistance during the Pandemic**

Bad News Report

2020/05/15

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In coordination with the anarchist media collective RadioFragmata, we present the following report from Greece about the ongoing efforts of the Greek government, along with business owners, police, and fascists, to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to intensify repression—and the efforts of anarchists, migrants, prisoners, rebel workers, and others to fight back and open up spaces of freedom.

These updates are adapted from RadioFragmata’s monthly contribution to the “Bad News Report” podcast about the current situation in Greece. We hope to spread awareness about this situation and to bring more listeners to the podcast itself; we recommend the “Bad News” report and the Anarchist/Anti-Authoritarian Radio Network as a whole.

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## **April 2020**

In Greece, the state has taken advantage of the coronavirus outbreak to experiment with various methods of martial law and social control. The police are running around the streets as if it is a holiday for them—a reminder of the days under the junta, the dictatorship that ruled Greece in the 1960s.

Many of the measures have political implications for our movements and for social struggles in this region.

The refugee situation was already intensifying as a consequence of the Turkish state opportunistically sending desperate refugees to the Greek border. In the end, the refugees faced attacks on both the Turkish and the Greek sides. Many people overlooked this as a result of the virus—yet while they did not appear in the headlines, these attacks have drawn the praise of fascists, patriots, and others who want to see the passive genocide of refugees and immigrants.

The Greek state is trying to contain refugees in camps that are utterly unhygienic, in which there are already cases of COVID-19 and it is impossible for people to maintain a safe distance from each other. These are something between concentration camps and outright death zones. Additionally, new measures are going into place to create additional refugee camps on the mainland in order to isolate refugees; many have described these proposed camps as mass petri dishes of infection and death. Hiding behind its reputation as overwhelmed and underfunded, the Greek state has sent MAT (riot police) and various other state forces to islands and refugee camps to enforce a lockdown and contain refugees who are fighting for their survival in the face of the pandemic. Tests in some hotels that house refugees have found over 70% infection rates; the death toll in some refugee camps remains unknown.

The state has taken aggressive measures to repress refugee protests. In addition, the refugees detained on the islands have faced vigilante attacks; during the week of April 23, vigilantes attempted to murder refugees who were walking home on the island of Lesbos, the location of the Moria refugee camp, which holds over 10 times its originally intended capacity. This attack by local fascists or “patriots” has been part of a larger pattern of violence towards immigrants and refugees that also involves police forces.

The state also arrested an anarchist immigrant for posting calls to support those facing these unbearable conditions at the border. The authorities justified the arrest on the basis of online posts, demanding a 10-year sentence and claiming that the arrestee wanted to arm refugees so

they could defend themselves. They have cited no evidence in the case against him besides these posts advocating for general self-defense. This highlights a new level of repression in Greece, as the state implements new preemptive and draconian policies introduced under the far-right Mytsotakis administration.

On Thursday, April 9, 2020, an uprising broke out in the women's prisons of Eleonas-Thebes, triggered by the death of the arrestee Azizel Deniroglou. She may have been killed by coronavirus, seeing as she suffered from fever, shortness of breath, and a severe cough in the days before she passed away. Prisoners in Korydallos prison in Athens also demonstrated for self-preservation. Like other prisoners across the world, Greek prisoners are demanding early release or new safety and protection measures. Just like the refugees left to die, the way that prisoners are being treated shows that the state considers them expendable.

The anarchist prisoner support group Tameio is circulating a call for urgent solidarity and funds: A Solidarity Fund for Anarchist Prisoners and Persecuted Fighters. Since they got started in 2010, they have mostly drawn their funding from donations left in cash boxes at bars and restaurants, as well as fundraising parties; the lockdown measures have caused the group a serious shortfall in resources. In this regard, the lockdown has disrupted support for those who face repression, who face court fees and legal aid—and most of all, for the 24 political prisoners that the fund supports on a monthly basis. You can find more information about this situation here.

Anarchist teams, squatted social centers, and other groups involved in mutual aid and disaster relief that is independent of the state are making new efforts. Officially, “helping those in need” is one of the six acceptable justifications for leaving one's house during the lockdown. However, many of these groups and the spaces that host them have faced relentless police harassment and intimidation just for trying to coordinate food deliveries to those in need. On April 25, police carried out multiple arrests in Exarchia targeting those who were simply gathering food that would otherwise go to waste in order to distribute it to those struggling to get by.

Many mutual aid groups have continued operating regardless of the consequences. While the laws are blurry regarding what constitutes “helping people,” the police have been given permission to interpret this for themselves, and they maintain blatant double standards denying any efforts that specifically help immigrants or the excluded. Similarly, the anarchist group Rouvikinos received praise from the corporate media for bringing needed supplies to Athenian nursing facilities, while the gestures of support and solidarity they have made towards those in Roma camps have not elicited similar affirmations. It is dangerous to try to help people when the police consider this an affront to their authority and to the state, and this risk increases according to which people you are trying to help.

Despite the repression and intimidation of the goon police in the streets of Greece, the movement has carried out many solidarity actions with medical workers, prisoners, and refugees. It is a scary time, but it is inspiring that even under these circumstances, our movement remains visible thanks to a tremendous amount of mutual aid efforts, not to mention revolutionary graffiti, posters, and banners throughout the country.

The police have also used the pandemic as a justification to swarm Exarchia and terrorize its residents, especially immigrants and those entering or exiting squats. The lockdown measures are more visible in Exarchia than elsewhere. Police have been randomly stopping and searching people and ticketing them for fabricated violations in order to terrorize the neighborhood. The police units typically used to attack the anarchist movement, known as MAT and Delta, have set

up checkpoints and occupations across Exarchia, claiming that “the neighborhood as it was once known will never return.”

Night is especially scary; teams of Delta police can be seen riding around in motorcycle gangs, beating and arresting people at random, chiefly non-white immigrants. On top of this, gatherings of 30 to 50 cops can be seen at various checkpoints, flagrantly violating the social distancing protocol that is the justification for the lockdown in the first place. This sort of opportunism would be comical if it weren't so oppressive for the most vulnerable residents.

However, disdain for the police behavior is widespread, even among residents who were annoyed by Exarchia's squats and riots in the past. We are certain that when the lockdown measures are eased, resistance will return with a vengeance.

The state has done everything it can to blame the public if social distancing efforts fail. The state and corporate media have spread fabricated videos of people not respecting social distance in order to turn Greek society against itself. The state is using this pandemic to experiment with martial law, even enforcing prohibitions on swimming and fishing. Such measures serve to test what Greek people will put up with in order to refine plans for future authoritarian efforts to change this society, especially considering that the IMF now anticipates an even worse economic downturn than the recession of 2008.

All across the country, Greek police are ticketing homeless people for violating the lockdown as a consequence of lacking shelter, ticketing immigrants at a higher rate and targeting the most vulnerable on the pretext of enforcing safety measures. The Greek state has also evicted student housing throughout Athens, a step they likely hope will make it easier to privatize the university system in the future. They are also using the text message system via which residents request permission from the state to go outside to collect information about the general population.

In short, the Greek state that slashed funding for medical facilities and accelerated the privatization of health care is dealing with the pandemic by escalating state control and social manipulation. In early April, when doctors and other workers at the Evangelismos hospital in central Athens tried to stage a demonstration demanding more protective equipment, an army of police swarmed in to shut it down. In addition to ordering direct assaults on medical staff, the authorities have also told Greek medical workers that they are forbidden to speak publicly to the press about issues relating to the pandemic.

## **May 2020**

As of now, Greece is perceived to have avoided being hit hard by COVID-19. While the official death toll has remained quite low, some suspect that the state is reporting lower numbers in order to claim a political victory over the virus and keep Greece attractive to luxury tourism this summer. In any case, the state continues to take advantage of the situation to extend its apparatus, oppress marginalized and excluded groups, target youth, and reorganize Greek society to serve the new administration's political ends.

In contrast to recent years, a broader anarchist call circulated for people to participate in May Day demonstrations. In Greece, May Day had been largely appropriated by the [statist] left, despite its anarchist origins. Whether to spark new efforts or to demonstrate the political will of our movement, May Day 2020 saw a massive anarchist presence across Greece.

Around 800 anarchists gathered to march in the center of Athens in defiance of the lockdown. As usual, the police focused on this contingent while ignoring the mobilization organized by the communist party. This shows who the defenders of the state consider to be their enemies, who they consider to be a threat. In addition to this march, the autonomous labor union of delivery workers took to the streets in a motorbike demonstration. This followed an earlier demonstration by delivery workers demanding better pay and working conditions, especially in view of the increased demand for delivery during the pandemic. Other small gatherings and demonstrations took place across Athens and all around Greece on May Day, as well as banner drops and graffiti—asserting a meaning for May Day that is not coopted by the authoritarian left.

During the night following May Day, the anarchist group Rouvikinos attacked the headquarters of the customer service company Tele-Performance. This company is notorious for exploiting Greek people, seeing Greece as an opportunity to pay third world salaries within the European Union. This action focused attention on one of the predators that aims to profit on the economic deterioration that the coronavirus will wreak in Greece.

Taking advantage of the opportunity presented by economic desperation and the distraction created by the pandemic, the new government of Greece is attempting to eliminate many of the existing protections of Greece's beautiful wild areas. A new law they have proposed will eliminate several regulations preserving wild areas and clear the way for the destruction of the environment to accelerate. The new law will legalize various mining, construction, and development projects that were previously impossible. This will put the fate of Greece's vast wilderness at the mercy of private companies and industrial capitalism. On May 5, the day after the lockdown, a vigil took place in front of the parliament drawing attention to the ecological destruction that the law will cause; police brutally detained and removed 15 of the demonstrators.

While freedom of movement has been eased in Greece since May 4, many of the lockdown restrictions remain in effect specifically for bars, restaurants, and other "non-essential" businesses. Regardless, it is clear that the police will continue to target specific demographics and gatherings. First, police violently attacked youth who gathered to celebrate the lifting of the lockdown in Agia Pareskevi square. Police chased young people and fired tear gas at them simply for gathering outside after weeks of lockdown.

Soon after, on May 8, in the Kipseli neighborhood of Athens, police once again fired tear gas into a small square and attacked young people for drinking and hanging outside. This assault followed an anarchy-feminist "take back the night" demonstration against patriarchy, likely one of their motivations for attacking the square. When the police attempted to surround the square, people began chanting against them; in response, they shot tear gas at random into the center of the crowd. People dispersed in various directions, slowing police with some projectiles and pulling dumpsters into the street. Afterwards, Delta police began chasing whoever was trying to avoid the tear gas, beating and detaining people at random. In the end, they detained over 40 people, arresting five. Many people were beaten severely, including one person whose teeth were smashed and another who suffered broken bones after police dropped a motorbike on them.

Anger about this attack inspired a defiant gathering the next day, on May 9. Thousands returned to this square to show the police that COVID-19 will not strip our society of humanity. During the demonstration, people attacked banks, corporate franchises, and a police station; one cop was ambushed and saw his motorbike destroyed.

In addition to the misogynistic motivations for the repression of the demonstration of May 8, many believe that shopkeepers are encouraging police to disperse youth gatherings in squares.

Not wishing for people to enjoy free space, they want to make it clear that when “non-essential” businesses are able to open again, you will have to buy a drink in order to hang out in public. In response to the extreme efforts police are making to exert control over Exarchia, young people are looking for new places to gather freely; the police do not want such a tradition to prevail again, nor do they want anything resembling what Exarchia was—and will be again—to generalize throughout the city.

The anti-migrant campaign involving both the state and grassroots fascists continues to grow rapidly. Migrants are still holding small demonstrations demanding livable conditions inside refugee camps. Fascists both in and out of uniform continue to aggressively attack these demonstrations. The state has all but proclaimed that they don’t mind COVID-19 spreading in refugee camps as long as it doesn’t go beyond their walls. They are continuing to move refugees to the mainland in a process aimed at further isolating and concealing them, away from tourist destinations.

During the first week of May, however, local fascists responded to an attempt to move 57 refugees with extreme violence. The government was trying to move the refugees, many of whom were children, to a rented hotel in Pella, North Greece. Local fascists and so-called “patriots”—a euphemism for fascists who do not want their allegiances to be quite as obvious—attacked the buses conveying them. The attackers also set fire to the ground floor of the hotel intended to house them.

Afterwards, another attempt was made to house refugees to another hotel in Arnissa; this time, 250 fascists and other bigots set fires in the road to block the buses from entering the village. Fascist villagers also assaulted the hotel owner and attacked the hotel itself. Eventually, the refugees were taken to the region of Thessaloniki. It is known that these actions were part of a broader campaign by the openly fascist party Golden Dawn and other fascist groups to escalate violence against immigrants in ways that the state cannot do publicly. It is widely suspected that many of the participants were off-duty police officers.

The refugee situation is not improving, and the pandemic is complicating it even further. The state narrative is typically that the authorities understand the xenophobic and fascist responses of some Greek citizens, but they cannot fully support them due to the obligations of international law. This has set the stage for state oppression and grassroots violence to work side by side, if informally. In the second week of May, a Lidl chain store on the island of Samos began to segregate customers into lines of Greeks and non-Greeks for shopping. Immigrants were told to wait for Greek shoppers to finish before they entered the store. The situation for immigrants in Greece is already terrible and expected to get worse.

Prisons have also been targeting outspoken prisoners who have stood up for their livelihood during the pandemic.

Vasilis Dimakis is an anarchist serving 23 years for alleged bank robberies. He has been a courageous voice against the filthy conditions in Greek prisons. He began a hunger strike when the pandemic was first acknowledged in Greece, contributing to a broader public awareness of the repression and foul conditions that prisoners are facing during this epidemic. He has also been a passionate student behind bars, using the few educational opportunities available to him to pursue his studies while incarcerated. On May 9, he decided to expand his hunger strike to include a thirst strike in response to the authorities moving him to an isolation cell in the Korydallos prison to prevent him from continuing to inspire rage and resistance behind prison bars.

Pola Roupa, a prisoner from the group Revolutionary Struggle, has called for international solidarity. She too has continued to struggle against the opportunistic repression and violence inside Greek prisons. She too has been isolated, transferred, and targeted by prison staff on account of her consistent resistance and organizing behind prison walls. Other imprisoned members of Revolutionary Struggle have also been transferred and isolated in an attempt to suppress intensifying prison resistance in response to the looming pandemic. The group has made a call for international revolutionary solidarity.

Two members of Grup Yorum, a beloved Turkish-founded band that has a close relationship with movements in Greece, passed away in April following a long-term hunger strike: Helin Bolek passed away on April 3 and Ibrahim Gokceck on April 24. The Turkish state went so far as to steal Ibrahim's body during his funeral and to arrest many of those attending, including his own grieving father. Afterwards, an arson attack took place targeting a Turkish diplomat's car in Thessaloniki. The burning of the diplomat's car was an act of revenge, but it is nothing compared to the repression and trauma that the Turkish state continues to inflict.

With economic crisis looming ahead, insurrectionary anarchists have been carrying out expropriations in Thessaloniki. On May 7, a group went into a corporate supermarket and took baskets of food and other essentials without paying. Many of these items appeared afterwards in a major square of the city for all to take as needed. Such actions are likely to increase as Greece faces even harder economic times ahead. This is another element of an existing campaign of mutual aid projects that has continued to grow during the pandemic. Anarchist groups have delivered masks and other essentials to refugee camps for Turkish and Kurdish political refugees, Roma communities, and others excluded by the Greek state.

In early May, the Facebook page for RadioFragmata was shut down abruptly without reason. We expect nothing else from Facebook, but over 30,000 people followed the page, which served as a far-reaching platform spreading information about the struggle in Greece and abroad. We have organized a new page and continue to maintain a blog and twitter account. We assume Facebook took down our page in response to a request from the state, but Facebook has not given any justification for their action whatsoever.

Summer is upon us in Greece, but the dark skies still loom ahead. However, resistance and rage are very fertile here. While the situation is unprecedented, our movements are prepared.

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## **What Is RadioFragmata?**

RadioFragmata is an underground anarchist media collective based in Athens, Greece. Twitter: @radiofragmata

Our Facebook page, which had over 30,000 followers, was recently taken down without explanation by the site. Regardless of our contempt for Facebook, this was a big blow to our ability to reach a broader audience. We have started a new page here.



## **What Is the Bad News Report?**

“B(A)D NEWS—Angry voices from around the world is a monthly news program from the international network of anarchist and anti-authoritarian radios, consisting of short news segments from different parts of the world. As an international network of radio projects, we believe in the importance of international solidarity. And we also recognize the importance and the need to create and disseminate our own media and counter-information. We hope, with this effort, to reach out to other anarchist and anti-authoritarian projects, groups, and individuals, and to strengthen our connections and our struggles in sharing our stories.”

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