

Anarchists in Education

The Free Popular University in Egypt (1901)

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On the evening of Sunday, 26 May 1901, the Free Popular University (Università Popolare Libera) (henceforth UPL) was declared officially open at the Theatre Zizinia in Alexandria. Responding to a public invitation issued two weeks before, a large crowd from the Egyptian and resident foreign communities and including many notables, attended the inauguration in such numbers that the theatre was unable to contain them. Raoul Canivet, editor of the French language daily *La Réforme*, began proceedings by setting forth the principles of the UPL and the details of its teaching programme. After his words were translated into Arabic by Muhammad Kalza, correspondent for *al-Liwa'*, the nationalist newspaper, Dr Polis Modinos spoke in Greek praising the establishment of the university as evidence of 'the rise of a new dawn of cultural life in Alexandria' and assuring the audience that the support of the local Greek community would not be lacking since the reputation of the city itself rested on Greek culture. Finally, Dr Onofrio Abbate Pasha, court physician and prominent member of the modernizing intelligentsia, rose to address the crowd. In the course of a florid speech, he described the main aim of the UPL as being:

To improve the morals of individuals by strengthening active wills and good inclinations, to develop the inhibited power of moral truth and of conscience to be worthy of proclaiming true liberty, to cultivate intelligence by the exercise of mental faculties and to lead the spirit to the just so that it may be fairer and better in social and community relations today.

This combination of individual improvement and social benefit meant, Abbate declared, that the UPL would perform 'a work that will not only be useful [in itself] but will be dedicated with solemnity to a revival of moral activity of the various foreign and Egyptian communities'. He ended with a rallying call:

It concerns you now, good citizens, to come forward and continue along the marked way, so that by improving your own physical and moral conditions, you will know how to sow good seed among your families, you, in whom the spark of life is exuberant, will understand how to clear the minds of people of falsehood and error, of

superstition, of fatal prejudices of caste, race and nationality, as much as of base and dishonest acts or criminal Utopias.¹

The formalities over, the crowd dispersed and a small select group adjourned for a meal at a local Italian restaurant, Santi, where more speeches and champagne flowed to the success of the new enterprise.

The UPL was the most radical initiative in education in Egypt before the First World War and part of a broader pattern of anarchist activity that would play a significant role in the development of the labour movement, grassroots political activism and progressive thought in the early years of the twentieth century.² Founded on a platform of resolute independence, it aimed to break free from national and religious frames of reference by offering a programme of free, modern and accessible education for all, and particularly ordinary people. Although it drew intellectual and political inspiration from Europe, the UPL in Egypt had its own special character, formed from revolutionary intent and adapted to the reality of a diverse religious, ethnic and linguistic society. Its significance lies in the radical nature of its educational programme and in its challenge to mainstream historiography. Egyptian scholarship of the period between 1882 and 1914 has been dominated by the struggle between imperialist and nationalist forces that has focused on the impact of British occupation and the revival of the Egyptian national movement. In this interpretive framework, cross-cultural alliances and subaltern strategies of resistance have been accorded little recognition. The UPL, as a project dedicated to the improvement of the education and conditions of the working classes in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional framework, therefore represents one of the 'lost voices' that contested the dominant colonial-national discourse and serves as an important example of social mobilization and the transmission of ideas at a non-elite level.³

From the beginning of the nineteenth century Egypt was in the process of significant economic, technological and social transformation. An extensive series of reforms in military organization, education, industry and the system of land tenure was implemented during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali to consolidate the institutions and economic development of an emerging modern state. The policy was maintained under his successors, particularly Ismail, who built up the infrastructure of the country through the construction of railways, roads and the Suez Canal. However, this ambitious programme of modernization incurred the mounting indebtedness that facilitated economic control of the country by a diverse array of French, Belgian, British and other foreign commercial interests. With this came increasing European political influence that culminated in the occupation of the country by the British in 1882. In the following years the British hold on Egypt and its incorporation into the international economy proceeded apace. However, the

¹ The full text of Abbate's speech can be found in *La Réforme*, 28 May 1901, with an abbreviated report in *Le Phare Alexandrine* 28 May 1901. The UPL opening also received widespread coverage in the Arabic language press such as *al-Liwa'*, *al-Ahram* and *al-Basir*. Known in French as the *Université Populaire Libre*, the UPL apparently had no official Arabic name with *al-madrasa al-'umumiyya al-hurra*, *al-jam'iyya al-kulliyya al-hurra*, *al-kulliyya al-jami'a al-hurra* and *al-kulliyya al-hurra* all being used, the last being settled on by *al-Ahram*.

² Despite this, it has received only the briefest mention in the literature, see Jacques Berque, *Egypt, Imperialism & Revolution*. trans. Jean Stewart (New York & Washington: Praeger, 1972), p.241; and Rif 'at al-Sa'id, *Tarikh al-haraka al-shuyu'iyya al-misriyya 1900-1940* (Cairo: Shirkat al-amal, 1987), p.204.

³ The term 'lost voices' is taken from Zachary Lockman, 'Exploring the Field: Lost Voices and Emerging Practices in Egypt, 1882-1914', in Israel Gershoni et al. (eds.), *Histories of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp.137-53.

foreign presence in Egypt was not confined to the occupying authorities and the European haute bourgeoisie but included European workers, especially those from Greece and Italy, who even before 1882 had come seeking work and settled there in considerable numbers. In the period up to 1914 they would come to play a central role in the development of working class political radicalism and a militant labour movement.

The growing sophistication of this diverse local working class was evident in the formation of workers' associations. As early as 1862 a group of Italian workers had set up the Italian Workers Society (*Societa Operaia Italiana*) in Alexandria. This was followed by similar organizations in the same city: the Workers' Brotherhood (*I Adelphotis ton Ergaton*) formed in 1872 by workers from Corfu; the Greek Labour Society (*I Elliniki Ergatiki Etairia*) in 1881 and the Italian Artisans Brotherhood (*Fratellanza Artigiana Italiana*) two years later.⁴ The aims of these bodies were initially quite modest, being primarily dedicated to the welfare of their members by providing mutual assistance and acting as a forum for social activities, but their subsequent development testified to a growing awareness of the utility of workers' organization in a broader political sense.⁵ In fact, radical political currents had begun to emerge within the circles of workers, skilled craftsmen and artisans as early as the late 1860s when internationalists, strongly influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin, became active in Alexandria. Inspired by the events of the Paris Commune in 1871, the movement grew and joined the Internationale in 1876 with sections organized in Alexandria, Cairo, Ismailia and Port Said by the following year.⁶ During the 1880s and 1890s anarchists maintained a persistent if unspectacular presence in Egypt but their existence was most fully brought before the public eye in October 1898 when a number were arrested and tried on a series of sensational charges including conspiracy to assassinate the German Emperor Wilhelm II during his tour of the Near East.⁷

By the very end of the nineteenth century the advantages of workers' organizations and the cause of political radicalism came together with the emergence of a militant labour movement. The cigarette workers' strike in Cairo at the end of 1899 is generally regarded as marking the emergence of the first genuine labour unions and the beginning of a period of sustained industrial action.⁸ These unions would provide an important vehicle for the improvement of working conditions and the defence of the rights of both foreign and Egyptian workers.⁹ A vibrant labour

⁴ Yianis Kordatos, *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ergatikou Kinimatos* (Athens: Boukoumani, 1972), p.174; Evgenios Mikhailidhis, *Panorama* (Alexandria: Centre of Greek Studies, 1972), p.178.

⁵ It should be noted that the Italian Workers Society in Alexandria did take a political position in 1882 with their support for the 'Urabist cause, al-Sa'id, Tarikh al-haraka al-shuyu'iyya al-misriyya, p.203.

⁶ A history of the anarchist movement in Egypt has still to be written but for a useful survey based on Italian sources, see Leonardo Bettini, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo* (Florence: Editrice, 1976), Vol.2, pp.281-8.

⁷ They were later found innocent of the main charge but some were judged guilty of lesser charges. See ASMAE AIE no. 86 '1899 Processo in Alessandria d'Egitto contro diverti anarchici'.

⁸ For a good discussion of the labour movement in the period before the First World War, see Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile, Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), pp.48-82. There had been strikes before 1899, see, for example, John Chalcraft, 'The Coal Heavers of Port Sa'id: State-Making and Worker Protest, 1869-1914', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Vol.60, Oct. (2001), pp.110-24.

⁹ There is no detailed study of the relationship between foreign and Egyptian workers but for a preliminary treatment see the author's 'Foreign Workers in Egypt 1882-1914: Subaltern or Labour Elite?' Paper presented at the Fifth Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme 24-28 March 2004, organized by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

press would act as an important forum for the discussion of workers' issues and a conduit for the propagation of ideas on labour organization, strategy and politics.¹⁰ With these developments came a change in the character of the membership of the anarchist movement. While in its first decades in Egypt it had attracted mostly Italians, many of them political exiles, by 1900 increasing numbers of Greek, Jewish and other workers were becoming active.

The diverse and conflicting forces promoting the modernization of the state, particularly the increasing foreign influence and the rise of a working class made for a dynamic confluence of political, social, economic and cultural ideas in late nineteenth century Egypt. In this contest education served as an important arena for the reproduction of political, cultural and social values where religious tradition and secularism, the requirements of the modern state, and a kaleidoscope of cultural influences competed with one another. At this time the education system in Egypt was a highly diverse assemblage of traditional and modern, local and foreign, public and private schools. Muslim, Coptic and Jewish religious schools coexisted side by side with a series of specialized modern government schools founded to produce state officials and professionals qualified to administer the state. These establishments included the School of Medicine (est. 1827), a succession of military schools, and the School of Administration and Languages (est. 1868). There was also a wide range of elementary and secondary schools set up by local foreign communities and missionary organizations, as well as a miscellany of vocational and private schools. Through these educational institutions groups such as the Greek communities, the Jesuits, American missionaries, the Alliance Israélite Universelle and many others dedicated themselves to propagating a specific nationalist, religious or cultural programme usually under the legal protection of a foreign state.¹¹

Although a more specialized sector, higher education reflected many of these elements. Al-Azhar stood as the long-established institution of traditional Islamic learning. Modernizing institutions such as the Dar al-Ulum (est. 1872) and the Khedival Teachers' College (est. 1880) had been set up with the aim of producing state teachers for a more modern curriculum. While a modern (private) university would not be founded until 1908, learned societies such as the Institut d'Egypte (est. 1859) and the Khedival (later Royal) Geographical Society (est. 1875) served as centres of research and intellectual exchange. Infused with the new scientific ideas and fuelled by the thirst for exploration they were nevertheless characterized by a socially conservative milieu of predominantly foreign scholars generously patronized by the palace and broadly reflecting its political views.¹² However, the rise of labour as an organized social and political force of considerable potential prompted an increasing awareness on the part of the bourgeoisie of the need

¹⁰ Although an Internationalist newspaper of anarchist bent had appeared briefly in 1877, perhaps the first successful avowedly labour newspaper in Egypt was the Italian language *L'Operaio* ("The Worker") founded in 1889 (not to be confused with the anarchist paper of the same name, published 1902–3). The first decade of the twentieth century would see the appearance of a number of newspapers that sought to represent the voice of workers, Bettini, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*, pp.81–8.

¹¹ For a detailed development of nineteenth century education in Egypt until 1883 see J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1938). For a discussion of the Greek and Italian schools in Egypt, see respectively, Katerina Trimi-Kirou, 'Se poio skholio pas?' in Tasoula Mandala (ed.), *Ellinika Istorika Ekpedeftiria sto Mesogio* (Chios: Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 2002); and Marta Petricoli, 'Italian Schools in Egypt', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.24, No.2 (1997), pp.179–91.

¹² Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt* (London & New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), pp.45–50; Donald M. Reid, 'The Egyptian Geographical Society: from Foreign Laymen's Society to Indigenous Professional Association', *Poetics Today*, Vol.14, No.3 (1993), pp.539–72.

to accommodate, co-opt and acculturate the working classes by offering suitable educational opportunities. One response was the establishment of technical schools such as the Leonardo da Vinci, an evening school of applied industrial arts for boys set up in Cairo in 1891 which taught various types of draughtsmanship as well as Italian.¹³ The debate on how best to cater for the educational needs of the less privileged continued into the next decade when proposals were generally vocational in tone or had a distinct cultural emphasis.¹⁴

It was in this context that the announcement to establish a UPL in Alexandria appeared in the Egyptian press in May 1901. The UPL movement was the product of a series of developments in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe, especially in Italy and France, that sought to provide education for the popular classes in order to address the widespread social and political crisis of the period, the so-called 'social question'.¹⁵ In Italy the first UPL opened in Turin in 1900, offering courses and lectures on various technical, scientific and literary subjects. It was followed early the next year by the establishment of UPLs in Livorno, Venice, Bologna and Milan. In Egypt the UPL owed some inspiration, and certainly its name, to the Italian model, sharing some features such as the reliance on public subscription for funding and the use of voluntary teachers. However, it reflected its own specific environment in two important ways. First, it offered a curriculum designed for an ethnic and religious pluralist society presented in several languages. Second, the UPL in Egypt was conceived as a more radical institution in political terms than its Italian or French counterparts. The Italian UPL movement was led by progressive and legalitarian socialist intellectuals with close ties to the Italian Socialist Party and, in fact, was opposed by Italian anarchists who charged such institutions with destroying the revolutionary spirit of the workers.¹⁶ The French *universités populaires* promoted the cause of 'social education', that is, the acculturation of the working class to the values of capitalism.¹⁷ By contrast, in Egypt the UPL was founded by an anarchist nucleus that was more inspired by the ideas of the celebrated geographer and anarchist, Eliséé Reclus (1830–1905). A supporter of Bakunin, friend of Kropotkin and participant in the Paris Commune, Reclus had gone to Brussels in 1894 to take up a position at the recently established New University. From here in both his courses and writings he promoted the message that knowledge was the path to freedom for the people.¹⁸

¹³ First established by Italian workers, the school was later put under the direction of the Dante Alighieri Society, itself affiliated to the Italian embassy, Marta Petricoli, 'Italian Schools in Egypt', p.181.

¹⁴ See, for example, 'Technical Education in Egypt', Egyptian Gazette, 8 July 1902; and 'Wanted – An Institute', Egyptian Gazette, 19 July 1902. The latter proposed an institute that 'would naturally take the character of an English one' attracting English nationals and 'the large number of Egyptians and others who are anxious to avail themselves of their knowledge of English as a means of self-advancement.'

¹⁵ Maria Grazia Rosada, *Le Università Popolari* (Rome: Rinuti, 1975). For the phenomenon in France, see Lucien Mercier, *Les Universités populaires: 1899–1914, Education populaire et mouvement ouvrier au début du siècle* (Paris: Edn. ouvrières, 1986). Among earlier mid-nineteenth century attempts to provide education for workers were the Mechanics Institutes and the University Extension in Britain.

¹⁶ Rosada, *Le Università Popolari*, p.27.

¹⁷ Sanford Elwitt, 'Education and the Social Questions: The Universités Populaires in Late Nineteenth Century France', *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol.22, No.1 (1982), pp.55–72.

¹⁸ 'Università Popolare Libera', *La Tribuna Libera*, 20 Oct. 1901. The anarchists in Alexandria were in contact with Reclus, at this time living in Constantinople, who wished the UPL every success, ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare in Cairo', corresp. 8 June 1901. Reclus, in fact, was familiar with the East having travelled to Constantinople and Anatolia in the spring of 1883 and in the following year to Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria, Henriette Chardak, *Eliséé Reclus, une vie: l'homme qui aimait la terre* (Paris: Stock, 1997), pp.403–7.

Planning for the UPL in Alexandria was undertaken by local anarchists, among them Pietro Vasai, Francesco Cini, Pietro Curti-Garzoni, Giovanni Tesi, Roberto D'Angio and Joseph Rosenthal, but its chief planner and public face was Luigi Galleani. Galleani was an anarchist of considerable standing with a record of more than a decade of militancy in Italy.¹⁹ In March 1900 he had escaped from detention on the Italian island of Pantelleria and made his way to Egypt only to be apprehended on arrival in Alexandria by order of the Italian consul. The arrest provoked widespread protest in the local press and Galleani was soon released under the terms of a royal amnesty. Quick to plunge back into political work, Galleani presided over a series of private meetings early the following year at the Italian Masonic Lodge in Alexandria to discuss plans for the establishment of a UPL. Concerned about a possible negative reaction, he counselled early on that anarchist doctrines should not be promoted openly in the UPL programme but suggested that they would more effectively exercise their influence through the institution over time.²⁰ On 31 March Galleani and others spoke in the Eden Theatre at the first public meeting canvassing the establishment of a 'free popular university'. The occasion attracted a small audience of about 50 people, including police agents, and a provisional committee was elected with Galleani as president and a journalist, Roberto D'Angio, as secretary.²¹ Early in May the second General Assembly at the Alcazar Theatre attracted a larger crowd of about 150 people and the constitution was approved, the first regular committee of 20 members elected and the publication of circulars authorized. A call for monthly subscriptions resulted in 64 signatures.²²

As the chief force behind the UPL, anarchists were well represented on the committee. Pietro Vasai, Constantin Sajous and Giovanni Tesi had all been defendants in the anarchist trial of 1899 and Roberto D'Angio had strong anarchist credentials as a journalist and pamphleteer. Joseph Rosenthal was at the beginning of a long and celebrated career as a political radical and trade unionist.²³ Other committee members, L. Biagini, Dr R. Camerini and Augusto Hasda, were confirmed anarchists or maintained close relations with them.²⁴ However, the UPL project also attracted support from those with liberal and progressive credentials: Raoul Canivet was the editor of a progressive daily, *La Réforme*, and Polis Modinos, a young Greek doctor at the European Hospital, would soon earn himself notoriety as the hardline president of the cigarette workers'

¹⁹ Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism 1864–1892* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), pp.223–4, 238–9. Galleani would leave Egypt in November 1901 to take up a position in the United States as editor of the influential anarchist newspaper *La Cronaca Sovversiva*. From here he would become a revered leader and prominent advocate of the anarchist doctrine of 'propaganda of the deed'. In 1918 he was deported from the USA but he remained a powerful spokesman and a notable defender of Sacco and Vanzetti. Ugo Fedeli, Luigi Galleani, *Quarant'anni di lotte rivoluzionarie* (1891–1931) (Cesena: L'Antistato, 1956).

²⁰ ASMAE AIE no. 87 'Università popolare libera in Alessandria', corresp. 22 April 1901.

²¹ ASMAE AIE no. 84 'Luigi Galleani', corresp. 1 April 1901.

²² ASMAE PI no. 28 'Università popolare, II Assemblea generale', 12 May 1901. See also *Le Phare Alexandrine*, 13 May 1901. The members of the committee were S. Bellantuono, Salvino Bensilum, L.A. Biagini (alias of G. Pozzesi), Dr R. Camerini, Raoul G. Canivet, G. Cervetta, Roberto D'Angio, S. Fischer, Augusto Hasda, Dr Polis Modinos, Osman Effendi, Cav. Paneghini, Jacques Rolo, Joseph Rosenthal, Papadakis, Constantin Sajous, Stein, Enrico Terni, Giovanni Tesi, Tuni and Pietro Vasai.

²³ For D'Angio see Nunzio Dell'Erba, *Giornali e gruppi anarchici in Italia, 1892–1900* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1983), pp.180–1. Rosenthal (1867–1927?) would be one of the leading figures in the establishment of the Egyptian Socialist Party in the 1920s though his activities prior to this have been little discussed, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifa'at El-Sa'id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920–1988* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse UP, 1990), pp.13–14; al-Sa'id, *Tarikh al-haraka al-shuyu'iyya al-misriyya*, pp.182–91.

²⁴ Camerini had apparently attempted to introduce anarchist ideas into the Dante Alighieri Society in 1898, ASMAE PI. No. 28 'Egitto', corresp., 7 June 1901.

association during the strike in 1902.²⁵ The early UPL committees would contain members from almost all the significant communities in Alexandria. Italians were the most conspicuous group but Greek, German, French, Armenian and Egyptian were represented. The participation of members of the Jewish community was particularly noteworthy. This included not only Rosenthal and Camerini but members of prominent commercial families such as Albert Tilche, Jacques and Claude Rolo, Claude Aghion and Baron Felix de Menasce.²⁶ The Egyptian representation, namely the presence of Osman Effendi and Muhammad Ayyub Bey on the early committees is also significant since it indicates that at the beginning at least, the UPL was not simply an enterprise limited to resident foreigners. There was also considerable diversity in social class. Workers (Sajous, Vasai, Cervetta), small businessmen (Salvino Bellantuono, Hasda, Rosenthal) and various professionals – medical doctors (Camerini, Modinos), engineers (Rolo, Biagini), and journalists (Canivet, D'Angio) – all sat on the first UPL committees. Indeed, the role of such an establishment figure as Abbate Pasha, at the time both vice-president of the Institut d'Égypte and president of the Khedival Geographic Society, at the UPL opening, and the large number of respected professionals, particularly doctors, a distinguished lawyer, Mario Colucci (ancien *battonnier* of the Mixed Courts 1895–97), and prominent businessmen at the inaugural dinner was evidence of the widespread public support for the project.²⁷

The ideals of the UPL reflected the libertarian and internationalist orientation of its anarchist founders. At the opening Canivet had spoken of the first principle of the UPL as being respect for the individual since 'freedom of conscience is the true charter of the modern world'. The UPL constitution stated that it was to be characterized by 'fraternity and mutual tolerance', and be open to all with no restrictions on nationality, language, religion, gender, or political, literary or scientific opinions.²⁸ While acknowledging the inspiration of institutions in France and Italy Canivet emphasized the particular character of the UPL in Egypt:

In a country such as this where all nations have colonies, where all religions have believers, where all doctrines are able to assert themselves, a University must be open wide to representatives of all nationalities and of all ideas. Only one rule should prevail: it is benevolence to all people [and] the widest tolerance for ideas. On this point it is unnecessary to go on because tolerance has happily remained one of the virtues of Egypt. It is only right to declare that the followers of the Islam are not outdone by anyone on that score and it is with profound joy that the Committee welcomes their presence among us.

To ensure this principle of openness it was necessary for the UPL to be independent of any outside authority. This had been determinedly stressed at the original public meeting of the UPL

²⁵ Egyptian Gazette, 24 March 1902.

²⁶ On these families see Gudrun Kraemer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1989), pp.76–9. Despite the considerable scholarship on Jewish Egyptian life, the prominence of Jews in radical circles before 1914 has been overlooked. Jacob Landau's view that Jews had little to do with anarchism is clearly inaccurate, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York, NY: New York UP, 1969), p.115.

²⁷ Attending the dinner were Dr Abbate Pasha, Raoul G. Canivet, Dr H. Legrand, Dr P. Trehaki, engineer Emilio Diamanti, Dr Burlazzi bey, Dr de Semo, Dr Polis Modinos, Dr Carlo Flack, Dr Terni, Dr Camerini, Dr Latis, Dr Lakha, Dr Augusto Hasda, Francois Bourgeois, Muhammad Kalza, Mario Colucci, Mr Cattaoui, Mr Colorides, Edgard Squares, and Dr Bonan. Those with strong anarchist credentials were conspicuously absent.

²⁸ The original text of the UPL constitution can be found in ASMAE PI no. 28 'Egitto'.

and was enshrined in the constitution: 'It [i.e. the university] is constituted beyond the interference, competition or patronage of any authority; the unlimited freedom of the professorial chair and the seriousness of the studies finding in this form of independent concentration their best guarantee.'²⁹ This staunchly secularist, internationalist and anti-authoritarian (if Utopian) position stood in sharp contrast to the orientation of other educational institutions in Egypt which were under the formal control of the Egyptian or foreign governments, community bodies or religious authorities. Consistent with this position the UPL aimed to be financially autonomous and relied on the monthly subscriptions of members according to their ability to pay.

The UPL in Alexandria may have been open to all, but its specific educational mission was 'to promote the diffusion of scientific culture and literature among the popular classes' (art.1). Unlike the schools that taught manual and vocational skills to workers, the UPL sought nothing less than the intellectual emancipation of man based on the idea of the right of all to a modern education. In his inauguration speech, Abbate had spoken of the need to create an 'intelligent working class' (*intelligente classe operaia*). The curriculum was designed therefore with a strong emphasis on science and the latest advances in scientific knowledge. A series of lectures on natural history dealt with the classification of the animal kingdom and the theories of evolution. Courses on human anatomy and physiology, chemistry and applied electricity were offered. Nor were the humanities neglected. Classes on Greek, Italian and French literature featured from the first week and Italian, French, Arabic, German and English language courses as well as a special course for deaf-mutes were later added.³⁰ Other lectures dealt with a wide range of specialized subjects, among them criminal anthropology, medical law and suicide. The UPL programme also recognized the importance of issues that related directly to everyday life and provided courses on hygiene and first aid. Other talks addressed different legal and political issues concerning the worker such as 'Workmen's Organizations in Modern Law', and 'Strikes and the Labour Movement'. Arabophones heard 'Abduh Badran speaking on 'The Worker'. Although we have no details of how he tackled the subject, the subject itself suggests an increasing awareness of, if not a working class, then at least the particular conditions of a worker's life.³¹

Classes were held each day in the evenings (except Sunday) so workers could more easily attend, and the majority of them being conducted in Italian or French. Even Modinos, despite his words at the UPL opening, gave his first classes in Italian. Although we have no precise information regarding numbers, it seems likely that the majority of students were of European background. Nevertheless, the UPL did attract Egyptian and other Arabophone students. In the first year at least, regular classes were given in Arabic, dealing with the historical development of the Arabic language, the importance of scientific training and a series of French language classes designed specifically for Egyptians. In addition to the formal course and lecture programme, the UPL served as a cultural centre and a meeting place, providing a reading room and library, open in the evenings from five until nine, where visitors could read local and foreign newspapers and

²⁹ '...si costituisca all'infuori dell'ingerenza, del concorso, del patronato di ogni e qualsiasi autorità la libertaillimitata della cattedra e la severità degli studi trovando in questa forma d'indipendente raccoglimento la loro migliore garanzia' [art. 6].

³⁰ The weekly UPL programme was regularly publicized in the local Italian, French, English and probably Arabic language press.

³¹ For a discussion on the process of working class formation as a discursive process during this period, see Zachary Lockman, 'Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899–1914', *Poetics Today*, Vol.15, No.2 (1994), pp.157–90.

borrow books. From 1902 the UPL published its own journal, *Revue des Cours et Conférences*, which included material presented in the lectures.³² Musical and theatrical performances such as that given by the Severi–Garzes troupe at the Theatre Alhambra were also sponsored.³³

All UPL teachers were unpaid volunteers drawn in large part from the fields of education, law and medicine. Some drew directly on their professional expertise, such as Ernest Hobsbaum, the principal English master at the Israëlite Alliance schools, and Shaykh Muhammad Hilmi, Arabic professor at the American Mission School in Alexandria.³⁴ A lawyer, Michele Guarnotta, expounded on legal matters, Drs Latis and Flack lectured on anatomy and hygiene respectively, and a worker, G. Cervetta, spoke on electricity.³⁵ Others, such as Dr Giuseppe Botti on Italian letters and Mario Colucci on Molière, were amateur scholars or individuals savants who dealt with subjects in which they had a special expertise. The contribution of journalists and editors was also notable: Canivet of *La Réforme*, ‘Abduh Badran of the Alexandrian weekly, *al-Sabah*, Tawfiq ‘Azuz of the Cairene bimonthly review *al-Muftah*, and Muhammad Kalza of *al-Liwa*’, all taught at the UPL.³⁶

From the very beginning the UPL made a special appeal to women to take advantage of the educational opportunities it offered. Article 3 of the UPL constitution explicitly declared that women would have free access to courses, and regular press announcements expressly encouraged them to attend classes.³⁷ Women were both members and teachers at the UPL.³⁸ Although we do not know the number of women actually attending classes, reports suggest the UPL had some success in attracting a female audience. In the first weeks a number of lectures were given on issues concerning the role of women in society: ‘Woman and the Family’ (Miss Siesto), ‘Society and Women’ (Canivet) and ‘Woman’ (Miss Severi and Mr Garzes). In April 1903, Miss N. Sierra gave a lecture on feminism criticizing all religions and the law for their oppressive character.³⁹ In appealing to women and promoting the discussion of issues concerning them, the UPL was participating in a wider public debate about the social role of women that had been going on in Egypt since at least the 1890s with the appearance of the first women’s magazines and the writings of Qasim Amin. Education was a particular concern. The first state primary school for girls had opened in Egypt in 1873, but by the end of the century there was still only a very small number of schools catering for girls’ education and even fewer opportunities available for women.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the opportunity afforded to women by the UPL was particularly significant not only because it predated the women’s section of the Egyptian University (1910–12) but because it gave women access to the resources of the UPL reading room probably well before

³² L’Operaio 22 Nov. 1902. Ibrahim ‘Abduh, *Tatawwur al-sihafa al-misriyya, 1898–1981*, 4th edn. (Cairo: Sijl al-arab, 1982), p.358 mistakenly gives its title as Université Populaire Libre d’Alexandrie.

³³ ‘Université populaire libre’, *Le Réforme*, 18 Nov. 1901.

³⁴ *Egyptian Gazette*, 31 May 1901 (Hilmi); Hobsbaum was the uncle of the historian, Eric Hobsbawm.

³⁵ Guarnotta would later gain some notoriety in 1919 for alleged anti-British activities (FO 141/744).

³⁶ *La Réforme*, 20 Dec. 1901; *Il Corriere Egiziano*, c.20 Oct. 1901. In the 1890s Badran had been associated with *Lisan al-‘Arab*, a politically moderate daily in Alexandria, Tawfiq ‘Azuz with *al-Tiligrafia al-jadida*, a conservative Cairene daily, see Martin Hartmann, *The Arabic Press of Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1899), pp.26, 56, 59.

³⁷ ‘Young ladies’ however were excluded on at least one occasion when Modinos spoke on criminal anthropology, see *Tachydromos*, 9 Jan. 1902.

³⁸ No woman seems to have sat on the UPL committee in Alexandria, at least not in the first two years, although Madame Moial was a member of the provisional UPL committee in Cairo.

³⁹ This lecture was published by the UPL and later reviewed in *Lux!* 15 June 1903.

⁴⁰ Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics*, p.36, Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation, Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cairo: AUC Press, 1996), pp.8–10, 52–6.

they were allowed admittance to the Khedivial Library (later Dar al-Kutub), and the libraries of the Royal Geographical Society and the Egyptian University.⁴¹

The initial public reception to the UPL was very favourable with 300 students reported to have enrolled in the first few days.⁴² The local press also warmly welcomed its appearance. The Italian language *Corriere Egiziano* saw it as a triumph of the popular demand for an education 'for the new times, with the new awareness, with the new science' as well as a valuable means of promoting Italian language, history, literature and classical culture.⁴³ *L'Imparziale* stressed the cultural diversity that the UPL engendered: 'All the languages that sound in the mouth of the happy fellow drinkers of the waters of the Nile serve as a vehicle at lectures of different university teachers.'⁴⁴ More significantly there was considerable support for the UPL from important elements of the Egyptian national movement. This was evident not only in the presence of Muhammad Kalza at the inauguration but by the support given in the pages of the nationalist daily *al-Liwa'*. The newspaper dedicated extensive coverage to the UPL publishing a full translation of the constitution and complete text of Canivet's opening speech, noting that 'Monsieur Canivet welcomed the sons of this region generally and especially the Muslims who responded to the invitation, and he gave regard to their noble nature. We offer many thanks to him for this.'⁴⁵ It further praised the founders of the UPL,

There is no doubt that this feat of distinguished people is worth every person recognising... It is a new [source of] pride for the port of Alexandria ...[and] it is an achievement for the founders [who] encourage people to free themselves of ignorance and delusion. So may God bless them for their humanity. We earnestly hope that our Alexandrian brothers support this college and frequent its doors as students for the acquisition of its benefits because the welfare of the people is dependent on and is adorned by the triumph of education.⁴⁶

Such statements of support from the Italian and nationalist, as well as the anarchist press, expressed a broad consensus that access to education was an important means of improving society.⁴⁷ Even the hostile position taken by the Italian authorities could not privately deny that the UPL had attracted considerable popular support from 'Greeks, Arabs and French'. Indeed, it was because the UPL was 'not of exclusively Italian character' that the consulate felt unable to move against it.⁴⁸ This heterogeneous character was to prove a considerable advantage in legitimating the standing of the UPL even if it diluted, if not fatally hampered, its potential as a radical institution.

While the UPL in Alexandria was proving an initial success, a similar venture in Cairo was faring less well.⁴⁹ Again, Luigi Galleani was the principal public voice of the project. At the

⁴¹ See Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), p.85.

⁴² 'al-Kulliyya al-hurra' al-Ahram, 4 June 1901.

⁴³ 'L'Università popolare', *Il Corriere Egiziano*, 19 Oct. 1901.

⁴⁴ 'Università Popolare Libera', *L'Imparziale*, 17–18 Nov. 1901.

⁴⁵ *al-Liwa'*, 27 May 1901.

⁴⁶ *al-Liwa'*, 29 May 1901. *al-Basir* in Alexandria also provided positive coverage, 27 May 1901.

⁴⁷ The anarchist newspaper *La Tribuna Libera*, edited by Joseph Rosenthal, did not appear until October 1901 but regularly promoted the UPL during its short life.

⁴⁸ ASMAE PI no. 28 'Egitto', corresp. 7 June 1901, AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare libera in Alessandria', 30 Oct. 1902.

⁴⁹ For the following see ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare in Cairo'.

beginning of June 1901 soon after the opening of the UPL in Alexandria, he arrived in Cairo to bring together those who might back the establishment of a similar institution in the capital. He quickly succeeded in securing the support of Ugo Parrini, the leading anarchist in Cairo, and more importantly, because of its numbers, the backing of the cigarette workers' union that was still enjoying the triumph of its successful strike in February of the previous year. Again there was a positive response from the local press with *al-Ahram* calling upon Egyptian teachers and educated persons to offer their services:

It is hoped that some of the nationalist scholars and eastern professors will participate in this useful project and they will not let those from outside overtake us in our own land. We have enough of those who mumble words of nationalism and service to and fervour for the homeland [watan] in cafés, taverns [hanat] and the theatre... [but] nationalism is based on action and not words and service to the watan is about the sacrifice of the individual which is in itself in the interest of his watan ... these Europeans [who] have resolved to establish the free college in this capital will find ten or five or four or three or two or one of our professors who [will] offer to teach free of charge in their own time just as the European teachers do because the college of Alexandria was almost overcrowded with teachers and students of Europeans and a few local citizens.⁵⁰

Appealing to the same values of openness advocated in Alexandria, a public meeting was called for 9 June at the Teatro delle Varietà to establish a UPL in Cairo because 'too much of the scientific patrimony has remained the exclusive privilege of the few and... high, true and positive instruction has been forbidden to too many of the people'. The invitation was to all 'without distinction of religious creed, political belief, social condition, race, nationality or language'.⁵¹ While the meeting drew only a modest audience and limited financial support, planning continued and a provisional committee was constituted. Again it was a coalition of radical and progressive elements that included committed anarchists – Ugo Parrini, Luigi Losi, Luigi Brogi and Panos Macheiras, as well as liberals such as Nikolaos Karavias, editor of the leading Greek language daily, *Kairon*. As in Alexandria committee members were drawn from a wide spectrum of society – the Italian, Greek, Armenian, Egyptian, Jewish and other communities were represented and drawn from different social classes, businessmen, professionals, workers, and employees.⁵² The Nile Masonic Lodge also pledged its support.

In Alexandria, despite some progress it was clear that there was considerable and organized opposition to the UPL. *Il Corriere Egiziano* referred to a campaign of slander, suspicion, insinuation, ridicule and 'false stories' and accused one critic in Cairo of being 'an agent provocateur, one of those that earn their salary in the shadow of the Ministry of the Interior'.⁵³ Certainly the

⁵⁰ 'al-Kulliyya al-hurra', *al-Ahram* 4 June 1901.

⁵¹ Leaflet, 'Università Popolare Libera', Cairo, 6 June 1901.

⁵² The most complete list of committee members is as follows: Musa Roditi, Luigi Losi, Vittorio Brogi, Giovanni Brunello, Ugo Parrini, Nikolaos Karavias, G. Fasani, Paolo Pilogatti, Neumann, Salomone Gonderberich [Goldenberg?], Moise Benrubi, Panos Machairas, Dr and Madame Moial, Samuele Haudlich, Rodolfo Borgovic, Dr D'Andrea, Charles Tapié, Paolo Karakache and Roberto D'Angio. [Sempad?] Papazian, Antio, Elias Fayad, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ebiari and Cioni were proposed as members but it is unknown if they accepted, ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare in Cairo', *corresp.*, 20 June 1901.

⁵³ 'L'Università popolare', *Il Corriere Egiziano*, 19 Oct. 1901; 'Per l'Università popolare', *Il Corriere Egiziano*, 22 Oct. 1901.

Italian consular authorities were hostile to the enterprise. In the lead up to the official opening, they had sought to dissuade Abbate from giving the inaugural address but without success.⁵⁴ The consulate was particularly keen to strike a blow against the anarchists after their failure to secure full convictions in the trial of 1899. An opportunity soon came. On 5 June, Dr Curti-Garzoni read an anonymous letter in a chemistry class that seemed to praise the action of Gaetano Bresci, the assassin of the Italian king Umberto I, the previous year.⁵⁵ Within days the Italian authorities set the legal process in motion to charge Curti-Garzoni and Antonio Torchia-Cosentino, a member of the audience who had applauded, with the defence of a criminal act (*apologia di reato*).⁵⁶ In the bill of indictment, the consular court made clear that its target was not just the two defendants but more broadly the anarchist movement in Egypt. Branding the UPL in both Alexandria and Cairo as part of a continuing pattern of dangerous agitation over recent years, it pointed to the fact that several of its founders had been charged with anarchist crimes before the same court two years before and that the UPL library harboured anarchist publications. Some elements of the press were less than convinced, and the conduct of the trial and suspected motives of the Italian consul, Cesare Romano, provoked criticism even from the semi-official organ, *L'Imparziale*.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite the protests of UPL committee members Canivet, Rolo, Aghion and others, the charge was upheld and both defendants were fined and sentenced to prison terms.⁵⁸ For the Italian authorities, the verdict had its intended consequences, intimidating the radical promoters of the university and facilitating its takeover by a more moderate group. *Al-Ahram*, which up to that time had been very supportive of the UPL, was quick to follow the lead and now accused the UPL of being an institution that propagated 'poisoned ideology'.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, in Cairo the financial difficulties of the UPL committee were heightened by a concerted campaign of opposition that was earlier and better prepared than it had been in Alexandria. Claims were later made that a number of bank employees were threatened with dismissal if they supported the university and a potential lecturer received an anonymous letter warning him of its anarchist designs. It was also alleged that a member of the Royal Family was using his influence against the cause of the university. Charles Tapié, editor of the progressive *Le Petit Égyptien* and himself a member of the committee, laid the blame for the UPL failure in Cairo in large part on 'the authorities and other retrograde spirits' for intimidating supporters of the university by their prosecution of Curti-Garzoni.⁶⁰ By December the Cairo committee decided to abandon the project, returning to donors the funds raised or placing them into a trust.⁶¹

⁵⁴ ASMAE PI no. 28 'Egitto', corresp. 7 June 1901. Far from being dissuaded Abbate also offered to give lectures, Egyptian Gazette, 5 June 1901.

⁵⁵ For documentation of the following, see ASMAE PI. no.28 'Egitto'.

⁵⁶ Garzoni already had a well-established record of anarchist activity having been condemned in Italy for political activities in 1894 and being one of the defendants in the anarchist trial of 1899.

⁵⁷ 'Il processo di Alexandria', *L'Imparziale*, 11 July 1901.

⁵⁸ Garzoni received 100 days' imprisonment and a fine of 60 lira; Torchia, 3 months and a fine of 50 lira. The sentences were subsequently confirmed in the Court of Appeal in Ancona but Garzoni's sentence appears to have been set aside after his recantation, ASMAE AIE no. 84 'Garzonio (Curti-Garzoni) Dr Pietro', corresp., 12 May 1902.

⁵⁹ See *al-Ahram* 9–13 July 1901. I have been unable to establish the reaction of *al-Liwa'* to the prosecution but, at worst, it is unlikely to have been as hostile to the defendants as that of *al-Ahram*.

⁶⁰ *Le Petit Égyptien*, 8 Dec. 1901

⁶¹ They were later used in support of striking cigarette workers, ASMAE AIE no. 88 'Scioperi', corresp., 6 Jan. 1902.

Despite the successful prosecution of Curti-Garzoni and Torchia, the UPL in Alexandria seemed to be making reasonable progress on one level. In November 1901 it moved from its original location in Mahmud Pasha al-Falaki Street into the larger premises of the former Austrian consulate in Sidi al-Mitwalli Street, which had a teaching room with seating for 100 students as well as a chemistry and physics laboratory. Yet by early the next year support for the UPL was flagging. For the anarchists, the election of the new committee in the previous October had been a considerable setback. Rosenthal, Vasai and D'Angio had not been re-elected although Terni, Sajous and Camerini retained their positions. Disillusioned with the direction the UPL was taking under the new committee, anarchists began to withdraw their support. Matters were not helped by a disagreement over money between Vasai and Camerini and there were some doubts about Canivet's motives.⁶² There were also difficulties in attracting audiences. Despite the hopes expressed by Modinos at the opening, the UPL secretary was bewailing the general apathy of the Greek community towards the UPL, although few lectures had in fact been given in Greek.⁶³ There was also criticism that the courses offered were not on subjects of most benefit to the working classes. There were complaints that the UPL should teach 'practical matters about health, proper upbringing of children of the popular classes, the abstinence of workers from wine drinking and such things' and not the philological subjects currently taught 'which if the working and popular class understands, then they have no need to go to the Popular University'.⁶⁴ By April class and lecture attendances were reported to be low and even committee members were failing to show up at meetings. As one [Bellantuono] remarked, 'the ship is sailing in difficult waters'.⁶⁵

With new committee elections scheduled for May 1902, the anarchists wrestled with the problem of a UPL that had fallen into the hands of 'the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats' and been turned from 'an institution of education into a place for meetings and hobbies'. Initially it was decided that Vasai should put forward a 'labour list' to stand against the incumbent 'bourgeois' committee but a couple of days before the election, there was a change of tactics. Camerini and Parrini, the latter visiting from Cairo, convinced their comrades to boycott the elections, strengthen their hand by enrolling new members and then call for an extraordinary general assembly to unseat the committee. It was a strange tactic since the combined forces of anarchists and workers were already in a clear majority but the plan, nevertheless, went ahead. The new committee was elected on the basis of only 31 votes out of a membership of about 500 while the anarchists embarked on a subscription drive in order to launch a new challenge. This brought in at least 60 new members but support for the UPL was lukewarm among workers in Cairo since they were reluctant to enrol in an institution that they would be unable to attend. Nevertheless, a general assembly was convened on 28 June attended by about 120 people with a hard core of about 30 anarchists who took the sitting committee to task. In a stormy session Vasai spoke of the values of individual liberty and his intention to fight for the maintenance of the spirit on which the UPL had been founded. Typically the anarchists were divided among themselves. In

⁶² ASMAE AIE no. 87 'Università popolari libere in Egitto, corrisp. 14 April 1902. D'Angio, writing some years later, described the UPL committee as 'composed of men of much goodwill and very honest but weak' and blamed Canivet for taking control of the organization and turning it to his own purposes (see '4 anni in Egitto', *Il Libertario*, 10 Aug. 1905, 18 Aug. 1905).

⁶³ *Tachydromos*, 18 Dec. 1901

⁶⁴ *Tachydromos*, 14 June 1902.

⁶⁵ ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare libera in Alessandria', corrisp., 14 April 1902.

the course of the meeting Camerini became alienated from his comrades while maintaining his position on the committee. Ultimately, the radicals were unsuccessful in regaining control of the UPL and were left to bewail the fact that 'day by day it becomes a bourgeois institution'.⁶⁶ By the autumn of 1902, grandees such as Baron Felix de Menasce, Count Savorgnan, Marcel Poilay Bey, assistant to the French consul in the affairs of the colony and board member of the French Chamber of Commerce, and Eugenio Miele, chief accountant of the National Bank of Egypt, sat on the committee and there was no longer any Egyptian representation.

Subsequent developments showed how far the UPL had departed from the aims of its founders. The emphasis on workers' education gave way to a more conventional, vocational curriculum designed for the employees of banks, commercial houses and offices. In August 1902 a series of commercial courses organized by the Association de Secours Mutuels des Employés of Alexandria (est. 1880) was launched offering courses in stenography, accountancy, shorthand and economics. The arrangement brought an annual subsidy of 1000 francs from the Association in support. The Alliance Française similarly provided 300 francs per year to teach its French language course. In October, a number of UPL committee members were received at an Italian consulate which had been bitterly hostile to the UPL only twelve months before. Assuring the authorities that the politically subversive character of the UPL was now a thing of the past, they appealed for assistance from the Italian government to sponsor an Italian language course.⁶⁷ This was a far cry from the original idea of the UPL as a politically and financially independent institution providing education in science and the humanities for the working classes.

If the anarchists were now effectively excluded from the running of the UPL, they did not shrink from commenting publicly on its affairs. In the weekly *L'Operaio*, the editors, Pietro Vasai and Roberto D'Angio, took on the role of its conscience and published astringent remarks on the new direction it had taken: 'the UPL is reduced to a school of teaching of foreign languages and stenography, no more, no less'.⁶⁸ *L'Operaio* explained the declining interest of workers on the fact that most UPL professors 'have not known how to absolutely identify themselves with the popular spirit of the UPL'. The nature of the UPL required a different approach, it contended, since '[it] is an institution of higher education but it has nothing in common with official universities, in which a higher method corresponds exactly to a higher education. In UPLs there is an imbalance (*sproporzione*) between the subjects of instruction and the method.'⁶⁹ When the UPL committee proposed that a special committee made up of delegates nominated by workers' associations be set up to organize the education programme, *L'Operaio* disagreed with the idea stating that such a committee should be made up exclusively of professors and not workers since, 'teaching is a matter that concerns them and no other'. The paper then appealed to 'all true scholars of the city...conscious of the absolutely popular spirit of the institution' to volunteer their services.⁷⁰ *L'Operaio* also took it upon itself to comment on the performances of individual lecturers. It praised the accountancy course of de Beaupuis and complimented the 'practical and instructive

⁶⁶ ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare libera in Alessandria', corresp., 6 Feb., 14 April, 17 May, 19 May, 21 May, 5 June, 3 July 1902 (quote).

⁶⁷ The members were Mario Colucci, Raoul Canivet, and Drs Camerini and Latis, ASMAE AIE no. 87, 'Università popolare libera in Alessandria', 30 Oct. 1902.

⁶⁸ 'L'Università Popolare Libera e gli operai', *L'Operaio*, 19 July 1902

⁶⁹ 'L'Università Popolare Libera e gli operai', *L'Operaio*, 26 July 1902. This difficulty of providing the type of instruction suitable for workers was one shared by UPLs in Italy, Maria Grazia Rosada, 'Università popolari', pp.614-17 in Aldo Agosti et al. (ed.) *Enciclopedia della sinistra europea nel XX secolo* (Rome: Riuniti, 2000).

⁷⁰ *L'Operaio*, 26 July 1902.

method' of Guarnotta's sociology classes.⁷¹ However, it forcefully criticized Giuseppe Rampin for his lecture on the workers movement: 'Rampin has not read and does not read anything about what is written or said today on the strike and the workers movement.'⁷² Despite these fulminations, the newspaper continued to urge workers to attend UPL classes since 'workers are convinced that whoever knows less becomes more easily the prey of Capital'.⁷³

In July 1903 the establishment of the Academy of Music as part of the UPL was a further indication, if one was still needed, of the incorporation of the UPL into the bosom of bourgeois education. Offering free musical education for those that passed the necessary entrance examination, the academy was run by a committee of men and women drawn from Alexandrian high society, among them the vice president of the Municipality, Ambroise Rallis, as its honorary president, and its president, stockbroker, Victor Sinano. There was no Egyptian on the committee. The programme of study was drawn up by Professor Colella and the teaching carried out by a largely Italian staff armed with European diplomas. In announcing the establishment of the new academy, the *Egyptian Gazette* added, with ill-concealed satisfaction, that what once was in danger of being the 'Unpopular University' was now rapidly developing since 'all distasteful elements' had now been eliminated.⁷⁴

By 1904 the UPL had made steady if not spectacular progress as an educational institution but it had radically departed from the original aims of its founders. The courses now offered were much more vocational in nature, geared for the needs of the young white-collar employee class. More than a hundred students were attending classes in English, French, Italian, accountancy, commercial economy and shorthand. One of the most popular classes was English language, offered at elementary and superior levels, which attracted young Egyptian, Greek, Italian, French and Syrian clerks from various government departments and particularly the Railways.⁷⁵ However, science courses, especially applied mathematics and physics, were having considerable difficulty in attracting sufficient student interest. The main reasons for this, according to the annual report, were the indifference of youth and the effect of two powerful competitors, cafés and 'other public establishments'.⁷⁶ The UPL continued to serve as a venue for conferences. In 1903-4 alone it hosted 30 such events, organized by bodies such as the League against Tuberculosis, the First Aid Society, the Zeta Foundation, and the Society of Popular Balneotherapy, most of them in Italian, with some in French and occasionally English. The UPL operated until 1909 and probably beyond. While it could still be the venue for political talks – leading Italian anarchist Pietro Gori spoke there during his tour in March 1904 – it never regained its radical character but in effect was competing for the same clientele as institutions such as the Greek Commercial Academy.⁷⁷

Despite the failure of the UPL, anarchists in Egypt continued to propagate radical secularist and libertarian ideals in the years before the First World War even if they were much more modest in scope. In June 1902 an International Reading Room (Sala di Lettura Internazionale) was set up in Cairo where collections of radical literature, periodicals and newspapers were avail-

⁷¹ L'Operaio, 3 Jan. 1903; 1 Nov. 1902.

⁷² L'Operaio, 22 Nov. 1902. The editors also took the current UPL committee to task for failing to give due credit to the institution's founders. Rosenthal was still making this point ten years later, J.R., 'A propos des Secours d'Urgence', La Bourse Egyptienne 12 Jan. 1912.

⁷³ L'Operaio, 3 Jan. 1903

⁷⁴ Egyptian Gazette, 24 July 1903.

⁷⁵ 'Free Popular University', Egyptian Gazette, 20 July 1904.

⁷⁶ 'Université Populaire Libre d'Alexandrie', Egyptian Gazette, 26 July 1904.

⁷⁷ Egyptian Gazette, 14 Oct. 1909; the Greek Academy was established in 1907 (Phos 3 Oct. 1908).

able to readers. This was followed by a series of similar, often short-lived, ventures in Alexandria and Cairo throughout the decade.⁷⁸ Specific organizations were also formed to promote different elements of the anarchist platform – atheism, the interests of the working class, and a range of other progressive issues. Later there were calls for the establishment of a secular school inspired by the work of Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer.⁷⁹ Indeed, in the first half of 1911 an international association of secular education was set up even if it did not meet with unalloyed approval from the anarchist press.⁸⁰

Scholarly discussion of the transmission of new political and social ideas to Egypt has tended to focus on their promotion under the sponsorship of naked colonial power or through the agency of Egyptian intellectuals, often after studies or time abroad. The case of the UPL in Egypt offers a different vector and dynamic. Inspired by a European model but adapted to Egyptian circumstances, it serves as an important example of the introduction of radical ideas opposed to both imperialist and nationalist discourses through a subaltern channel. Sponsored by a small, dedicated group of anarchists allied with progressives, the UPL sought to promote revolutionary political aims through a radical education programme. In its use of education as a political medium it predated and very likely served as an important inspiration to the nationalist circles that established the Higher Schools Club (*Nadi al-madaris al-'ulya*) in 1905 and its later night schools.⁸¹ Further, as an institution that styled itself as a modern 'university', the UPL was in some sense a forerunner to the private Egyptian University set up in 1908 even if its founding principles and political inspiration were very different.

Initially the UPL was successful in attracting public support to the cause of education for the popular and working classes from a broad spectrum of society across different classes and communities. While its chief constituency was the working class, its platform emphasized openness to all and particularly sought to attract women and Egyptians. Its assertion of independence from any national, cultural or state interest spoke of a strong commitment to an internationalist discourse that sought to cut across class, religious and ethnic lines. It therefore stands as an important counter to the nationalist-imperialist polarity. In some senses a precursor to the socialist and communist movements of the 1920s and the revival in the 1940s, the UPL was a broader attempt to articulate a pluralist social discourse.⁸²

In political terms, the founders of the UPL fell far short of their objectives. Despite allies among liberal, progressive, and even some establishment intellectuals, the limited financial and political resources of the anarchist movement were incapable of sustaining such an ambitious enterprise and it soon bowed to the greater political and economic muscle of the bourgeoisie. The campaign of opposition waged against it in the courts by the Italian authorities and taken

⁷⁸ See, for example, ASMAE AIE no. 86, 'Circolo libertario anarchico in Cairo', corresp., 15 June 1902. In October 1907 a socialist, Brando Faccio, called for a Casa del Popolo to be established along the lines of the original UPL of 1901, ASMAE AIE no. 111, corresp. 15 Oct. 1907.

⁷⁹ The proposal was made by Rosenthal at the pro-Ferrer meeting on 4 Oct. 1909, ASMAE AIE no. 120 'Pro-Ferrer', corresp. 7 Oct. 1909.

⁸⁰ On the secular school, see Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, p.330, and *Libera Tribuna*, 18 March 1913 for criticism.

⁸¹ Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics*, p.82.

⁸² The UPL also recalls the People's University (*al-Jami'a al-sha'biyya*) set up in Cairo by the communist Iskra in the 1940s though it is unlikely that it was a direct influence, see Ismael and El-Sa'id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt*, p.46 and Anthony Gorman, 'Egypt's Forgotten Communists: the Postwar Greek Left', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol.20, No.1 (2002), p.9.

up in the press by *al-Ahram* and others proved overwhelming and showed that the claims of the UPL to institutional independence were illusory. Their strong belief in the liberating powers of education notwithstanding, anarchists were unable to provide or recruit sufficient expertise from those who were skilled in teaching workers and sympathetic to their broader goals. Finally, the failure of the radical vision of the UPL was also due to some of the problems inherent in the anarchist movement itself: its lack of a strong organizational structure, its conflicting political strategies, and the contradictory elements within its political agenda. By the end of 1902 the UPL was well on the way to being transformed into a sober bourgeois institution that provided solid vocational skills for respectable white collar workers.

I wish to thank Katerina Trimi and Donald Reid for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. The following abbreviations have been used: ASMAE (Archivio Storico Ministero del Affari Esteri); AIE (Ambasciata d'Italia in Egitto); PI (Polizia Internazionale). All translations are mine.

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