

frequent famines, while its trade suffered from the commercial decline that was then spreading across Europe. Meanwhile the fighting in Piedmont and northern Italy, in which Duke Charles Emanuel was deeply involved, aggravated the economic depression, and added significantly to the burden of taxation. This combination of a deteriorating economic climate and expanding military conflict exacerbated the already tense relations between Turin and its rulers, which reached their lowest point after the death of Duke Charles Emanuel in 1630. By then northern Italy had become a battleground in the Thirty Years War, which had started in 1618 as a religious conflict in the Habsburg empire, but rapidly widened into a struggle for European hegemony between France and Spain. Cardinal Richelieu, the chief minister to Louis XIII of France, decided to widen the war in northern Italy. In 1631 he forced the new duke of Savoy, Victor Amadeus I, to become his ally in a bid to conquer the duchy of Milan from Spain. In 1637, at the height of this conflict, Victor Amadeus died suddenly. He left the Savoyard state in the care of his widow, the French-born Duchess Marie-Christine, on behalf of his young sons Francis Hyacinth and Charles Emanuel. The new regent faced immediate challenges to her authority from a pro-Spanish faction at her court, headed by her late husband's brothers, Princes Thomas and Maurice, who considered her too subservient to French interests. They could count on wide support among Turin's civic elite, increasingly alienated by the government's fiscal demands, and piqued by the regent's refusal to reconfirm the city's privileges when she assumed power.

In June 1638 Richelieu compelled the regent to renew the alliance with France. The princes and the pro-Spanish faction at court saw this as a direct threat. The death of the young Duke Francis Hyacinth in October was the signal for overt hostilities. The princes obtained aid from the Spanish governor of Milan, and set out to conquer Piedmont from the regent. In July 1639 Prince Thomas occupied Turin without a fight, thanks to the support of the townspeople and the civic leaders. The French troops holding Turin for the regent were confined to the citadel and besieged there. But the military aid Thomas expected from the Spanish governor of Milan failed to materialize, and in May 1640 a French army began to besiege the city. A double siege now ensued: the French garrison in the citadel was still holding out against Thomas and his men, who were occupying the city itself, while they in their turn were besieged by the French forces dug in outside the city walls. In September Thomas was forced to surrender, and two months later Marie-Christine returned to Turin. To show her displeasure at the city's sup-