

ground clubs at Turin were conspiring to kill the king, seize the citadel, and open the gates to the French. In May 1794 the plot was uncovered: two ringleaders were executed, but many of the plotters escaped.

In the summer of 1794 a French army penetrated the Ligurian coast and occupied Genoa, threatening Piedmont with invasion from the south. To add to the government's difficulties, the harvest that year proved disappointing; grain prices continued their steady upward movement, and the city council of Turin was forced to import grain to feed the population, overloading the already heavy municipal debt. Another bitterly cold winter followed, and again the municipal authorities had to open the stalls at the gates to house the thousands of paupers crowding the streets. No relief was in sight. The cycle of bad harvests continued in 1795, and again the city council had to spend large sums to bring in supplies of grain to feed the poor and the unemployed. The terrible economic situation and the proximity of the French army fuelled the spread of revolutionary propaganda. Outmatched militarily, unsure of the loyalty of its subjects, internally divided, and bankrupted by the cost of the war, Victor Amadeus III's government was on the verge of collapse.

The final blow soon fell. In April 1796 the French army stationed in Liguria, now commanded by the young Napoleon Bonaparte, burst into southern Piedmont and routed the Savoyard forces. On April 28 Victor Amadeus was forced to sign an armistice, admitting French garrisons to his main fortresses and effectively turning what was left of his kingdom into a satellite of France. Bonaparte then marched on to conquer Lombardy from the Austrians. Early in 1797 he dictated a peace settlement by which the Austrian emperor abandoned Lombardy to him. He then established two sister-republics of revolutionary France in northern Italy, the Cisalpine Republic in Lombardy and the Ligurian Republic around Genoa. Piedmont was now hemmed in on all sides by French territory or French allies. Victor Amadeus III had died at Turin on October 22, 1796. In April 1797, following the French conquest and occupation of Lombardy, his successor, Charles Emanuel IV, was forced to sign a treaty of alliance with France. The Savoyard state had lost all freedom of action and now continued to exist only at the pleasure of the revolutionary government of France.

Life at Turin in this last year of the Old Regime was gloomy and oppressive. Grain prices remained very high, food was in short supply, unemployment reigned. Rebellion flared up in the surrounding countryside, as peasants demanded cheaper food, lower rents and better conditions from their lords. In the city, the beleaguered government had