

ments elsewhere on the Italian peninsula and in Spain. Military revolts triggered revolutions the previous year in Spain and Naples that raised the hopes and expectations of both moderates and democrats in Piedmont for political change in the Kingdom of Sardinia. By the beginning of 1821, conversations and discussions in the cafés, theaters, and private residences of Turin revolved around the question of reform and the relative merits of the moderate Neapolitan and more democratic Spanish constitutions, while increasingly frequent clandestine meetings of the various secret societies signaled the intention of the sectarians to seize the initiative. Political tensions in the city escalated dramatically in January when radical students occupied a number of buildings of the University of Turin and the government responded with force, injuring thirty protesters and arresting another sixty. During the same period, the young aristocratic officers began to negotiate with the heir to the throne and a generational contemporary of theirs, Charles Albert, the dynastic figure whom they hoped could guide the monarchy toward constitutional government and take the lead in a national war of independence against the Austrian Empire in northern Italy. At least initially, Charles Albert's contacts with the officers and his apparent willingness to play such a role encouraged them in their conspiratorial activities.

When democrat groups and elements of the army in the provinces launched a revolt in the second week of March, they forced the hand of the military conspirators in Turin. On March 10, 1821, a provisional government based in Alessandria proclaimed the democratic Spanish Constitution of 1812 and declared war on Austria, in the name of the "Kingdom of Italy". Two days later, an army insurrection took place in the capital city, with the rebellious troops echoing the demands of their provincial compatriots for the Spanish Constitution. In the wake of the insurrection, Charles Albert and Prospero Balbo urged the king to grant the demands of the military conspirators. A week later, the revolutionaries in Turin found their public voice with the launching of the *Sentinelina Subalpina*, a new newspaper that promoted the ideals of "constitutional liberty", "independence", and "national unity".

Victor Emanuel I, however, quickly dashed the hopes of the young aristocratic officers in the capital that they could reconcile dynastic loyalty with political reform, when he abdicated in favor of his brother, Charles Felix, rather than grant a constitution. For his part, Charles Albert failed to live up to the expectations of the liberal officers during his brief period as regent in Turin. While he did grant the Spanish Constitution, he did so only on the condition that Charles Felix approved the decision. More importantly, he refused to lead a war against Aus-