

civil liberties, an end to censorship, and a more assertive “national” foreign policy. The same period also saw an increasingly public campaign against the titled aristocracy. Even respectable figures in the local establishment like Pier Alessandro Paravia began to speak of the “dislike that boils up in us bourgeois against the nobility”, a view echoed by foreign observers like the British ambassador who warned in November that a “class war... [is] not far off”. Anti-aristocratic sentiments took a variety of forms from graffiti, proclaiming “death to the nobles” to anonymous pamphlets that attacked the hereditary nobility and demanded their immediate elimination as “dangerous enemies of constitutional liberty” and sources of “civil discord”.

In an attempt to ease social tensions and curry the favor of middle-class public opinion, Charles Albert slid reluctantly in the direction of political reform in late 1847. Initially, he adopted a more pronounced anti-Austrian stance and dismissed a number of unpopular government ministers. When these steps failed to placate the opposition, the king followed the example of his fellow Italian rulers, Pius IX and Leopold II of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, by granting a range of reforms at the end of October that limited the powers of the police and censors, strengthened the Council of State, and introduced the principal of elected municipal councils at the local level. Such concessions, however, succeeded only in raising liberal and popular expectations for change and, above all, increased the pressure on Charles Albert to grant constitutional reform.

In the face of this increasingly assertive reform movement, the king received contradictory advice from his divided aristocratic advisors. Hardliners like Count Clemente Solaro della Margarita argued for a policy of royal intransigence even at the risk of a head-on collision with the opposition. Other conservatives like Marchese Vittorio Amedeo Sallier de La Tour and Count Carlo Beraudo di Pralormo accepted the need for the king to introduce a constitution, but advocated one that included a chamber of hereditary peers. The leading aristocratic moderates like Camillo Benso di Cavour, Cesare Alfieri, and Roberto d’Azeglio, dismissed the idea of an “aristocratic high chamber” as antiquated and no longer acceptable to middle-class opinion. They called instead for a document that guaranteed genuinely representative institutions as the only way to avoid violent insurrections, defuse demands for an “ultra-democratic constitution”, and insure a peaceful renewal of the country’s ruling classes.

This moderate position won the day in the Piedmontese capital after a separatist revolt erupted in Sicily in January 1848, followed by the