

Turin's native son, Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, into political life after 1848, Piedmont acquired an exceptionally able leader, who distinguished himself both as a dynamic reformer at home and as the outstanding statesman on the peninsula in the 1850s. As a result, a new governing order took shape, capable of sustaining a strong executive while gradually eroding monarchical independence and assuring the political participation of large segments of the urban middle classes.

5. Political and Economic Modernization in Turin: 1849-1856.

The years after the revolutions of 1848 ushered in a new wave of reform initiatives in Turin that would have enduring consequences not only for the city and the Kingdom of Sardinia, but also for the political future of the Italian nation after 1861. From its inception, the Statuto introduced an important shift in the social composition of Piedmont's political class. The titled nobility assumed a much more modest presence within the new parliamentary institutions that arose in the course of 1848. The change was immediately evident in the elections of April, the first of the constitutional era. Few nobles chose to stand for the elections; those who did emerged triumphant in only 32 of 204 colleges represented in the Chamber of Deputies. A sharply reduced aristocratic political presence was no less striking at the local level. The elections of November 1848 in the city of Turin produced a new municipal council that included only 22 aristocrats among its 80 members, a far cry from the two-thirds majority of the decurions they had enjoyed only a year earlier. Men drawn from the ranks of the professional middle classes, commerce, and banking now moved in to take their places.

Despite their shrinking presence, aristocratic notables continued to dominate the political leadership of the city and state during the following decade. In fact, they headed two of the major parliamentary groups that developed after 1848. On the one hand, a majority of the titled deputies identified with the coalition of conservative royalists led by Count Ottavio Thaon di Revel that enjoyed close ties to the Catholic Church and the court and had a solid base of support in the diplomatic corps, the military hierarchy, and the countryside. On the other hand, aristocratic reformers like Camillo di Cavour and Massimo d'Azeglio, the brother of Roberto d'Azeglio, continued to furnish both the leadership and ideas for the moderate center-right group that controlled most of the governments in the ensuing decade.

Turin became the front line in a series of bitter skirmishes between