

decade, Turin was the capital of the economically most modern state on the Italian peninsula, and as such it served as the model that other regional states attempted to emulate by lowering tariffs and pursuing foreign investment.

6. *Turin at the Forefront of the Italian Cause, 1850-1861.*

Despite these impressive achievements, the integration of Piedmont into the larger arena of national life in the 1850s took place less at the economic level, where inter-regional contacts still remained limited, than at the level of politics and culture. Turin served in these years as a national “think tank”, where solutions to the Italian jigsaw puzzle were proposed and debated. In the wake of the failed revolutions of 1848, the capital of the Savoyard monarchy became the haven for thousands of political refugees fleeing from the reaction sweeping the peninsula. Their presence in Turin made it an increasingly “Italian” city. Here the Statuto and a nascent parliamentary system guaranteed greater freedom of the press and expression of opinions than elsewhere. As a consequence, the years between 1850 and 1860 saw the flowering of political journalism and publishing in Turin. Writers, scholars, and political figures from other regions found not only hospitality and security in the Piedmontese capital, but also productive employment, collaborating on newspapers and journals, teaching at the university, and taking positions in the thriving publishing industry. One enthusiastic Neapolitan émigré went so far as to claim that Turin had become “the Mecca, the Jerusalem, the Holy City of the Italians”.

Of course, not all segments of the local population greeted the resulting arrival of twenty to thirty thousand aristocrats, intellectuals, politicians, and military men from all parts of the peninsula with undiluted enthusiasm. One pamphlet published in Turin in 1850 likened them to the “ten plagues of Egypt renewed in Piedmont in the nineteenth century”. More traditional elements of aristocratic society, in particular, saw their intimate little world of “family, legation, regiment, and court” threatened by the sudden influx of immigrants from other regions, whom they considered as little more than “an intrusion from Italy [...] into our house”. They displayed their displeasure not so much in any public pronouncement as in their social ostracism of the émigrés, their insistence on speaking their Piedmontese dialect rather than Italian, and their constant mockery of those nobles like Cavour and D’Azeglio, who had embraced the liberal-national cause.