

## Chapter VIII

### Crisis and Rebirth, 1864-1914

#### 1. *Hard Times in Turin.*

In September 1864, the people of Turin received the unexpected and devastating news that the city was about to lose both its ancient status as the home of a royal court and its recently acquired status as the capital of the new unified nation. That month the Italian government made public a secret agreement with Napoleon III of France. According to its terms, the French emperor promised to evacuate his troops from Rome within two years, on the condition that Italians transferred their national capital from Turin to Florence within six months. The "September Convention", which had been negotiated in secret with little or no consultation from parliament or the monarch, came as a bolt out of the blue to the city's residents. Although the Chamber of Deputies had voted in favor of Rome as the eventual capital of Italy in March 1861, most local people had assumed that the move would take place in some distant moment in the future.

Not surprisingly, such a dramatic break with the city's past and identity provoked an immediate reaction of outrage and disbelief from the populace. The municipal council, for its part, denounced the agreement, while the local newspapers whipped up popular resentment by attacking the decision to transfer the capital as a gross injustice and a betrayal of Piedmont. In truth, anti-Piedmontese sentiment among the other regional political groups over perceived Savoyard dominance of state administration and governmental affairs contributed both to the decision and to the way it was implemented. In anticipation of disorders, the authorities brought troops into Turin from outside Piedmont, dressed in full battle gear. When angry crowds poured into the principal squares, Piazza San Carlo and Piazza Castello, to protest the loss of the capital, soldiers responded with bayonet charges and volleys of rifle fire that quickly transformed the center of the city into a battlefield. The ensuing violence left in its wake a heavy toll of 50 dead and 130 wounded demonstrators.

The bloody clashes of September 21 and 22, 1864 marked the be-