

Chapter IX

Turin between the Wars, 1915-1945

1. *Turin in the Age of War and Fascism.*

The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 quickly overshadowed partisan political and social conflicts in Turin and elsewhere on the rest of the Italian peninsula. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia at the end of July. Within a week, this local conflict mushroomed into a general European war as Germany, Russia, France, and England rushed to the aid of their respective allies. Italy took a more circuitous path into war. The outbreak of hostilities caught the Italian government of Antonio Salandra poised between two opposing alliance systems. A combination of diplomatic and domestic considerations led his government to declare Italy's neutrality in August 1914. In part, the government justified its decision, citing the army's lack of preparedness and Austria-Hungary's refusal to guarantee Italian territorial compensation. In the wake of the insurrections and riots in a number of Italian cities in June, Salandra also feared that military intervention might provoke renewed domestic disorders. The decision for neutrality suited the general drift of public opinion in Italy during the summer of 1914. Only a small group of nationalists and conservatives advocated belligerency in the first weeks of the war, either for reasons of national prestige or out of a sense of loyalty to the Triple Alliance.

This broad national consensus, however, began to disintegrate in the fall of 1914 with the halt of the German advance in the west and the beginning of an Austrian retreat in the east. A heterogeneous pro-war coalition of conservatives, nationalists, democrats, and dissident socialists emerged to advocate Italian intervention on the side of the Entente powers, England, France, and Russia. While this "interventionist" coalition represented only a small minority of the Italian public, their strategic influence in the media and other centers of power enabled them to seize the initiative from the less organized and politically fragmented neutralist majority. By the end of April, the Salandra gov-