

The harsher conditions in the factories proved especially difficult for the newer elements of the industrial workforce, whose ranks doubled in size and whose composition underwent important changes after 1915. Despite draft exemptions for workers in strategic plants, the enormous demand for labor in the booming war industries attracted unprecedented numbers of women, teenagers, and the elderly as well as a large contingent of immigrants from other regions, Austrian prisoners of war, and colonial laborers recruited from Libya. None of these groups had had much prior exposure to the regimentation and pace of assembly line work, let alone under the conditions of wartime production. As a consequence, the unfamiliar and stressful work routine provoked mounting discomfort and discontent in the new labor force. Common hardships in the factories magnified the sense of isolation and shared grievances of workers who were already cut off from the rest of the population in their own neighborhoods on the periphery of the city. Here in these working class ghettos, immigrants, in particular, faced the terrible overcrowding, high rents, and inadequate services. These conditions made these neighborhoods a fertile recruiting ground for the extreme left of the Socialist party whose revolutionary pacifist propaganda found a sympathetic audience there.

Turin became the focal point of a more pervasive reaction on the Italian home front in 1917 against the hardships and suffering imposed by the war. Already in the spring of that year, soaring inflation and shortages of basic necessities sparked protests in a number of areas of northern Italy. Popular frustrations came to a head in Turin at the end of the summer, largely because of the municipal government's inability to solve acute problems of food provisioning. As a result, a growing population of workers found themselves having to wait in longer lines to pay higher prices for smaller rations of poorer quality food than their compatriots elsewhere in the country. These circumstances combined with simmering resentment over harsh working conditions, long hours, and iron discipline in the factories to ignite the explosive situation in the Piedmontese capital.

After a visit from Russian representatives sparked anti-war demonstrations in the middle of August, Turin erupted in violence in the last week of the month when another shortage of grain forced the city's bakeries to close temporarily. Massive public protests rapidly escalated into anti-war marches and a major insurrection as factories closed down and public transport halted. Despite efforts by moderate union leaders and socialist organizers to calm the situation, the crowds sacked stores, assaulted police stations, and erected barricades in working class neigh-