

The traditional scourges of hunger and cold accompanied the terror, death, and destruction of the air raids as ingredients of everyday life. The efforts of Fascist authorities to impose rationing and wage-price controls failed to stem rising prices or avoid shortages of rationed commodities. A flourishing black market emerged and the cost of living in the city more than doubled in the first three years of the war. Even when rations were available, they were woefully inadequate, since the government set a limit of only 819 calories per person or one-third of the daily requirement. By 1942, roughly 40% of the families in the city suffered from some form of malnutrition. Energy shortages compounded the misery of the urban population by limiting the availability of heating during Turin's harsh winters and by bringing public transportation to a virtual halt. Already in the winter of 1940-41, government decrees limited heating in private residences to a maximum temperature of 16 degrees centigrade, a figure that was steadily reduced in the years that followed. Not surprisingly, the combination of the air raids, hunger and cold led people to abandon the city in droves, so that Turin had lost nearly half its population by the beginning of July 1943.

In the face of mounting military defeats abroad and hardships at home, the Fascist dictatorship began to unravel. Mussolini's stubborn refusal to consider a separate peace with the Allies magnified popular discontent. Once again Turin's industrial workers took the lead in acting on this discontent in the spring of 1943. A wave of spontaneous strikes in the city and Milan in March, the first independent working-class demonstrations in nearly two decades, signaled not only the re-emergence of labor militancy and political activism, but also the regime's rapidly eroding authority. Developments in Turin aroused the alarm of the Duce's old allies in the monarchy, the Vatican, and business community and bolstered their determination to find a solution that would extract Italy from the war and forestall a revolutionary social crisis on the peninsula. Opposition to the isolated and depressed Mussolini also grew within the Fascist party itself as the summer of 1943 approached. The landing of Anglo-American forces in Sicily, the bombing of Rome, and the prospect of an Allied invasion of the mainland set in motion events that led to the fall of Fascist regime in July. Backed by a coalition of moderate Fascists and the military establishment, on July 25 the king, Victor Emanuel III, removed Mussolini as head of the government and replaced him with General Pietro Badoglio, former commander-in-chief of the Italian armed forces. After Mussolini's ouster and arrest, the Fascist regime seemed to disappear with barely a whimper.

The fall of dictatorship, however, did not bring much of a respite to