

0. CAVOUR and VICTOR EMMANUEL II - Story Preface

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This map depicts the fragmented Italian Peninsula where Austria controlled Lombardy and Venezia, two key areas of Northern Italy. It also depicts the locations controlled by Piedmont-Sardinia, where Victor Emmanuel II was King and Count Camillo Benso (also known as Cavour) was Prime Minister.

As Prime Minister of Sardinia, beginning in 1852, Count Camillo Benso (also commonly known as Cavour) had an ally in Victor Emmanuel II (the King of Sardinia who ruled jointly with the Sardinian Parliament).

Would individuals like Giuseppe Mazzini (who wanted an Italian Republic) be willing to accept a different type of political system (where a King ruled jointly with a Parliament)?

Choosing the right type of political system for Italy was an important issue, but unification-seeking political leaders had far more to overcome before they could select a suitable form of government. First they had to actually unify the peninsula.

A major obstacle standing in their way was ... Austria.

Austria—then a very powerful force in Northern Italy—controlled the areas of Lombardy and Venezia (where Venice, among other towns, is located). How could Victor Emmanuel and Cavour—and whatever military force they might be able to summon—end Austrian control of Lombardy?

The short answer is ... they couldn't. At least, not on their own.

Cavour and Victor Emmanuel II needed to become friends with other political powers who could help them wrest control of Lombardy from Austria.

To further the objective of Italian unification, Sardinia joined the Crimean War. Late to this endeavor, Sardinia supported France, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire who were allied against the Russian Empire.

Sardinia's late-entry, into the conflict, meant that it wouldn't contribute much to the Crimean war. On the other hand, Sardinia's willingness to help gained powerful friends for Victor Emmanuel II and Cavour.

Such friends might be useful in helping to push Austria out of Lombardy.

The strategy was not only well-conceived, it worked. The Sardinian King and his Prime Minister made an alliance with France.

In 1859, when France fought against Austria in the Franco-Austrian War, Austria was defeated at Magenta and Solferino. Italians, living in Piedmont, had helped to achieve that result.

By the end of that year, Austria no-longer controlled Lombardy. Instead, Lombardy was added to the holdings of Piedmont-Sardinia. This was a major step forward in the effort to unify northern Italy.

As people living in other northern Italian states were similarly voting to join Piedmont-Sardinia, Sardinia ceded Savoy and Nice to France.

Such are the deals which can be made between political allies.

The northern part of Italy was thus joining together, but what about southern Italy?

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Map Depicting Italy before Unification

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