

ALLA CORRENTE
Count Camillo Benso di Cavour

Camillo Paolo Filippo Giulio Benso, Count of Cavour, of Isola Bella and of Leri (August 10, 1810 – June 6, 1861) was a leading figure in the movement toward Italian unification. He was the founder of the original Italian Liberal Party and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, a position he maintained (except for a six-month resignation) throughout the Second Italian War of Independence and Garibaldi's campaigns to unite Italy.

Cavour founded the political newspaper *Il Risorgimento* (the name given to the Italian Unification movement). After being elected to the Chamber of Deputies, he ultimately dominated it through a union of left-center and right-center politicians. He became Prime Minister in 1852, and successfully navigated Piedmont's way through the Crimean War, Second Italian War of Independence, and Garibaldi's expeditions, managing to make Piedmont diplomatically a new great power in Europe, controlling a nearly united Italy that was five times larger than it had been before he came to power.

The first apparently "liberal" moves of Pope Pius IX (elected in 1846 and at first seen as a liberal-minded Pope as well as somewhat in favor of Italian unification; however, these views ultimately proved to be false) and the political upheavals of 1848 in Europe spawned a new movement of Italian liberalism. These allowed Cavour to enter politics, no longer in fear of the police. He gave a speech in front of numerous journalists in favor of a constitution for Piedmont, which was eventually granted, thus making it a constitutional monarchy.

He never planned for the establishment of a united Italy, and his objective always was to expand Piedmont with the annexation of Lombardy and Venetia, rather than a unified Italy. After the Piedmontese army was destroyed by the Austrians at the Battle of Novara in March, 1849, he lost the following election. Defeat at Novara led to Charles Albert's abdication, leaving his son, Victor Emmanuel II, as king.

He became Prime Minister of Piedmont on November 4, 1852. He believed in free trade, public right of opinion, and secular rule, but was still an enemy of the republicans and revolutionaries inside Piedmont. He is criticized for a number of controversial methods he used while Prime Minister, but his career was considered a success by many because of the ultimate unification that came during it.

In early 1853, the Crimean War broke out, pitting Great Britain, France, and the Ottomans against Russia. Britain and France asked Piedmont to enter the war partially in order to encourage Austria to enter, which it would not do unless there was certainty that Piedmontese troops would not be available to fight in Italy. Cavour, who hoped that support for the allies would lead to their support for Piedmont's ambitions in Italy, agreed. As soon as the Chamber of Deputies agreed, he entered the war on France and Britain's side on January 10, 1855, too late really to distinguish themselves militarily, but its 18,000-man army earned Piedmont a place at the Peace Congress in Paris.

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In January 1858, the Italian nationalist Felice Orsini's attempt at murdering Napoleon III paradoxically opened up a new possibility for diplomacy between France and Piedmont. While in jail, Orsini wrote a published letter to the Emperor, ending with "Remember that, so long as Italy is not independent, the peace of Europe and Your Majesty is but an empty dream... Set my country free, and the blessings of twenty-five million people will follow you everywhere and forever." Orsini was still executed, but Napoleon III began to explore the possibility of joint operations with Piedmont against Austria. He and Cavour met in July 1858, and the two agreed that Piedmont would attempt to start a war with the Duchy of Modena, obliging Austria to enter, and France would come to aid Piedmont. Cavour also reluctantly agreed to cede Savoy (the seat of the Piedmontese royal family) and Nice to France if it helped in the war. A royal marriage was proposed and carried out between Princess Clotilde, daughter of Victor Emmanuel, and Prince Napoleon to seal the agreement, surprisingly made without Victor Emmanuel's consent.

However, Napoleon III quickly lost interest in war, and Britain, Prussia, and Russia proposed an international congress, with one point likely to be the disarmament of Piedmont. Piedmont was saved from this by Austria's sending an ultimatum on April 23, demanding that Piedmont disarm itself, thus casting Austria as aggressor. France immediately mobilized its army and slowly began to enter Italy, leaving Piedmont to defend itself for a short period.

Several battles managed to give the Franco-Piedmontese forces control over Lombardy and a victorious position, though the Austrians remained confident in defending their four fortresses in Verona, Legnano, Peschiera, and Mantua. These defenses, the horrors of the Battle of Solferino, the possibility of Prussian entry into the war, and the potential for an overly strong Piedmontese state convinced Napoleon III to sign a separate peace with Austria (Treaty of Villafranca) on July 11, 1859, ending the Second Italian War of Independence. Cavour was so infuriated with the terms of the treaty that he tendered his resignation to Victor Emmanuel, who was forced to accept the treaty since Piedmont was unable to fight Austria alone. Cavour, however, quickly regained confidence since several of the terms, such as the restoration to power of the rulers of Tuscany and Modena, would not actually be carried out. France would continue direct talks with Piedmont on the fate of the central Italian states, since all of them at the time were ruled by dictators supporting a merger with Piedmont, but unable to do so by the treaty that required them to restore their old governments.

Cavour had retired, but he closely monitored events during his short absence from power. He soon became impatient and actively entered politics again. Victor Emmanuel was reluctant to appoint him Prime Minister, due to their quarrel over the Treaty of Villafranca, but he did so on January 20, 1860.

Cavour immediately negotiated with Napoleon III, agreeing to cede Savoy and Nice in order to annex Tuscany and Emilia. Plebiscites in Tuscany and Emilia came out as huge majorities in

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favor of unification, though with a few abstentions supporting the old government. Garibaldi was furious at finding that his birthplace, Nice, had become a French city, but Cavour managed to convince most that uniting Italy would make up for these small territorial losses. The relationship between Cavour and Garibaldi had always been fractious: Cavour likened Garibaldi to “a savage” while Garibaldi memorably called Cavour “a low intriguer”. Notwithstanding these views, their actions completed the first stage of unification, and it would be Garibaldi’s turn to bring southern Italy into Piedmont’s control.

Garibaldi, still fuming at the loss of Nice to France, wished to recapture the city, but a popular insurrection in Palermo on April 4, 1860 diverted him from that cause. He requested a brigade from the Piedmontese army to take Sicily from the Bourbon Neapolitans who ruled it at the time, but Cavour refused. A band of volunteers instead was organized, known as I Mille, or the Thousand. This small group of redshirts landed at Marsala in Sicily on May 11, and eventually brought Sicily under Garibaldi’s control.

Cavour persuaded Victor Emmanuel II to write a letter to Garibaldi requesting that he not invade the mainland; the letter was indeed sent, but Victor Emmanuel secretly wished for Garibaldi to invade, and wrote another letter (apparently never sent) asking him to go ahead with invasion. Cavour realized annexation efforts were fruitless, and attempted to stir up a liberal revolution in Naples, but the populace was not receptive. Garibaldi invaded the mainland anyway, attempting to reach Naples quickly before Cavour found a way to stop him. On September 7, Garibaldi successfully entered Naples. Southern Italy and Sicily were now under his dictatorial power, and he also publicly demanded that Cavour be removed from his premiership, alienating him slightly from Victor Emmanuel II, who wanted Cavour to remain.

Garibaldi was not willing to stop at this point, however, and planned for an immediate invasion of the Papal States and Rome. Cavour knew that France would declare war if this happened, and he successfully stopped Garibaldi from attacking. Garibaldi had been weakened by the Battle of Volturno, so Cavour quickly invaded the Papal regions of Umbria and the Marche. This linked the territories owned by Piedmont with those taken by Garibaldi, and the king met Garibaldi halfway at Naples, where Garibaldi handed over power of southern Italy and Sicily, thus uniting Italy.

By proclamation of the Italian Parliament on March 17, 1861 the Kingdom of Italy was established. Victor Emmanuel II was recognized as the first king of Italia; Cavour became the first Prime Minister of Italy. He faced a daunting task of creating new national institutions and had to deal with the Church in Rome (he wanted it to be independent although forced to give up temporal power). Also, how to expel Austria from Venice? Before he could resolve these problems, he fell ill of malaria and died of a stroke on June 6, 1861.

-Dr. James J. Boitano
(Adapted from Wikipedia)