

## Radicals and conservatives, 1839–1892

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The reform of 1830 gave Ticino a liberal constitution without giving it a stable way of changing governments. For sixty years its politics were dominated by two camps that regarded each other as enemies of the republic. On one side stood the liberals, later the radicals, anticlerical, centralizing and oriented towards the federal state. On the other stood the conservative and Catholic camp, attached to the Church, to communal autonomy and to the traditions of the valleys. Power changed hands by revolution in 1839, was defended by force in 1841, was reshaped by an armed *pronunciamento* in 1855 and was overturned by a coup in 1890. Each episode involved violence and many involved the Confederation. The settlement that finally ended this cycle, the introduction of proportional representation in 1891 and 1892, made Ticino the first canton to elect its parliament by proportional vote.

### 1 The revolution of December 1839

In the 1830s the liberals of 1830 split into moderates, led by Corrado Molo and Giovan Battista Riva, and radicals, among them Stefano Franscini and Giovan Battista Fogliardi. They quarrelled over religious questions, the treatment of Italian political refugees and the interpretation of the constitution.<sup>1</sup> In early December 1839 a brawl in a Lugano inn turned into an armed confrontation between townspeople and government troops. On 6 December about six hundred armed citizens of the districts of Lugano and Mendrisio marched on Locarno, then the seat of government, under the command of Colonel Giacomo Luvini-Perseghini. When they reached the town the next day, the moderate government collapsed. A provisional government was formed, and in elections held on 15 December the radicals won a large majority. The radical newspaper boasted that the revolution had not cost "una lacrima a una madre, un gemito a una sposa", a tear to a mother or a sigh to a wife.<sup>2</sup>

The DSS describes the events of 1839 as a coup d'état by the radical liberals against the conservatives, known in Ticino as the "revolution".<sup>3</sup> Its military leader, Luvini-Perseghini, was a lawyer and notary in Lugano who became mayor of the town from 1830 to 1862, sat in the Grand Council for thirty-two years and was elected to the National Council in 1848. He was a federal colonel and later commanded a division in the Sonderbund War of 1847, in which Ticino fought on the federal side and Luvini was defeated by the troops of Uri at Airolo.<sup>4</sup> His career shows how closely the professions of the law, local government, the army and federal politics were connected in the liberal elite of nineteenth-century Lugano.

## 2 Notes

1. Agliati, study of the revolution of 1839 and the counter-revolution of 1841, Scuola ticinese, no. 86, [https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista\\_scuola\\_ticinese/ST\\_n.86/ST\\_86\\_Agliati\\_rivoluzione\\_1839\\_tentativo\\_controrivoluzionario.pdf](https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.86/ST_86_Agliati_rivoluzione_1839_tentativo_controrivoluzionario.pdf), drawing on Francesco Bertoliatti, *La rivoluzione ticinese del 1839 nella politica interna e nella diplomazia* (Como 1939). ↩
2. Ibid., quoting *Il Repubblicano* of 6 December 1839. ↩
3. Koller, "Rigenerazione" (above). ↩
4. Pablo Crivelli, "Luvini-Perseghini, Giacomo", DSS, version of 23 July 2008, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/003518/2008-07-23/>. ↩

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