Was the Milanese citizen who recounted the 1848 fights in Milan a revolutionary or a Patriot?

In 1848 all across Europe and in Milan, turmoil was widespread. In Milan there was extremely bloody unrest known today as the Five Days of Milan. The Milanese rose up in retaliation of the tyrannical rule of the Austrian Empire. The Austrian forces were lead by Josef Radetzky, a famed Austrian general. An unnamed citizen compiled his account of the events that occurred over the Five Days. This primary source was written from his perspective for the purpose of providing others with his accounts of the events. Looking into the detail of the account, its tone and content suggest it was directed towards Milanese citizens, with the hope of inspiring them.

The backdrop that was the setting of the Five Days of Milan was one of chaos. The precursors of the revolutions of 1848 began as far back as the July revolution in 1830 in France (Mason 51). The July revolution inspired many other small revolutions throughout Europe, but none like the scale of those in 1848 (Mason 52). The 1848 revolutions began in France as a result of, “A major economic recession and food shortages in 1846-47” (Mason 52). Revolts spread throughout the Empires of Europe; none were hit harder then the Hapsburg Monarchy of Austria (Mason 54). In Milan, Italian nationalist groups defeated the Austrian garrisons, forcing Radetzky to retreat (Mason 55). This source directly molds into the events of the Milanese
uprisings that occurred of the Five Days of Milan. While reading the source, it is easy to understand what the Milanese citizens had to go through on a day-by-day basis of the revolt.

The Milanese citizen who recounted the events of the Five Days of Milan is a clear patriot. With the formal demonstrations on the second day the author noted that they occurred, “In order to assert their own Italo-Lambard nationality” (Della Pertuta 5). The citizens of Milan wanted to be recognized by the Austrians as an autonomous nation. The author also notes that, “The tricolor flag was hoisted on the balcony” (Della Pertuta 5) which shows the citizens expressing their sense of Nationalism. It is evident that the author portrays his account of the Five Days, not as an ordinary uprising, but as a nationalistic effort.

The author also portrays the individual acts of the Milanese resistors in a seemingly patriotic manner. When discussing the efforts of some resistors he states, “Many a young Lombard was fighting furiously” (Della Pertuta 6). Clearly the author wants to portray the Milanese citizens as heroes who fought desperately to secure their own nation. The author associates himself with the Milanese resistors when discussing their capture of the Porta Tosa, an important strategic gate in Milan. The author states that, “Another important achievement carried out by our fine men,” (Della Pertuta 6) suggesting that he believes in the patriotic cause that the Milanese resistors fight for. The author also goes onto associate himself further with the patriots by stating, “We were still uncertain of victory” (Della Pertuta 7). This could possible mean that this Milanese citizen actually fought during the uprising, as his words would suggest. Additionally, the author describes the capture of several strategic positions as “memorable events”, clearly expressing his enthusiasm with the patriotic effort of his fellow citizens.

Just as the author describes the acts of the Milanese in a patriotic manner, he also begins to associate himself and his comrades as Italian. There are several moments within the accounts
of the last two days where the author describes the Milanese as “Italian”. This shows a sense of nationalism that was never felt before in Italy. The author paints a dramatic picture with his words when he states, “With hopes rising of victory in the hard struggle and of freeing our country from its hated oppressors, spontaneously all relies took to decorating the balconies of their houses with the attractive Italian flag” (Della Pertuta 8-9). What the author says is pivotal in determining his proud patriotic views of Italy. He references the country as “our country” and describes the flag as “Italian”. David Mason describes the groups that seized control in Italy, including Milan, was Italian Nationalists (Mason 55). Examining this primary source leads to a better understanding of Mason’s text as this primary source was written by someone who exhibited strong patriotic views of Italy. It almost seems that the Italians needed a common enemy in Austria in order to gain a strong sense of patriotism in the idea of a united Italy.

With the need to defeat a tyrannical enemy to gain a sense of patriotism, one can also say the author is somewhat of a revolutionary. On his account of the last day, he declares, “Thus ended happily this just and most fitting revolution of a just and virtuous people” (Della Pertuta 9). It seems that the author’s patriotic and nationalistic feeling is brought upon by the need for a revolution to unite Italy. Revolutions often have the same goal, out with the old and in with the new. In his case, it would be appropriate to call him a patriot who believes revolution will unite Italy. In the case of other revolutions of 1848, one thing that came out of most of them was a strong sense of Nationalism, especially in Italy.

With the widespread revolutions of 1848, the author of this primary source allows us to understand the atmosphere at the time. He writes a very detailed account from which it is easy to label him as a patriot who believes in a united Italy. Additionally, it is appropriate to view him as a believer in the necessity of a revolution to unite a people. He speaks as if he believes the need
for revolution gives people a strong sense of patriotism. The author that wrote this primary source to provide his account of the Five Days of Milan is very much a patriot, who believes in a united Italy.
Works Cited

Della Pertuta, Franco. *Milan during the Risorgimento. From Napoleonic times to the Five Days.*