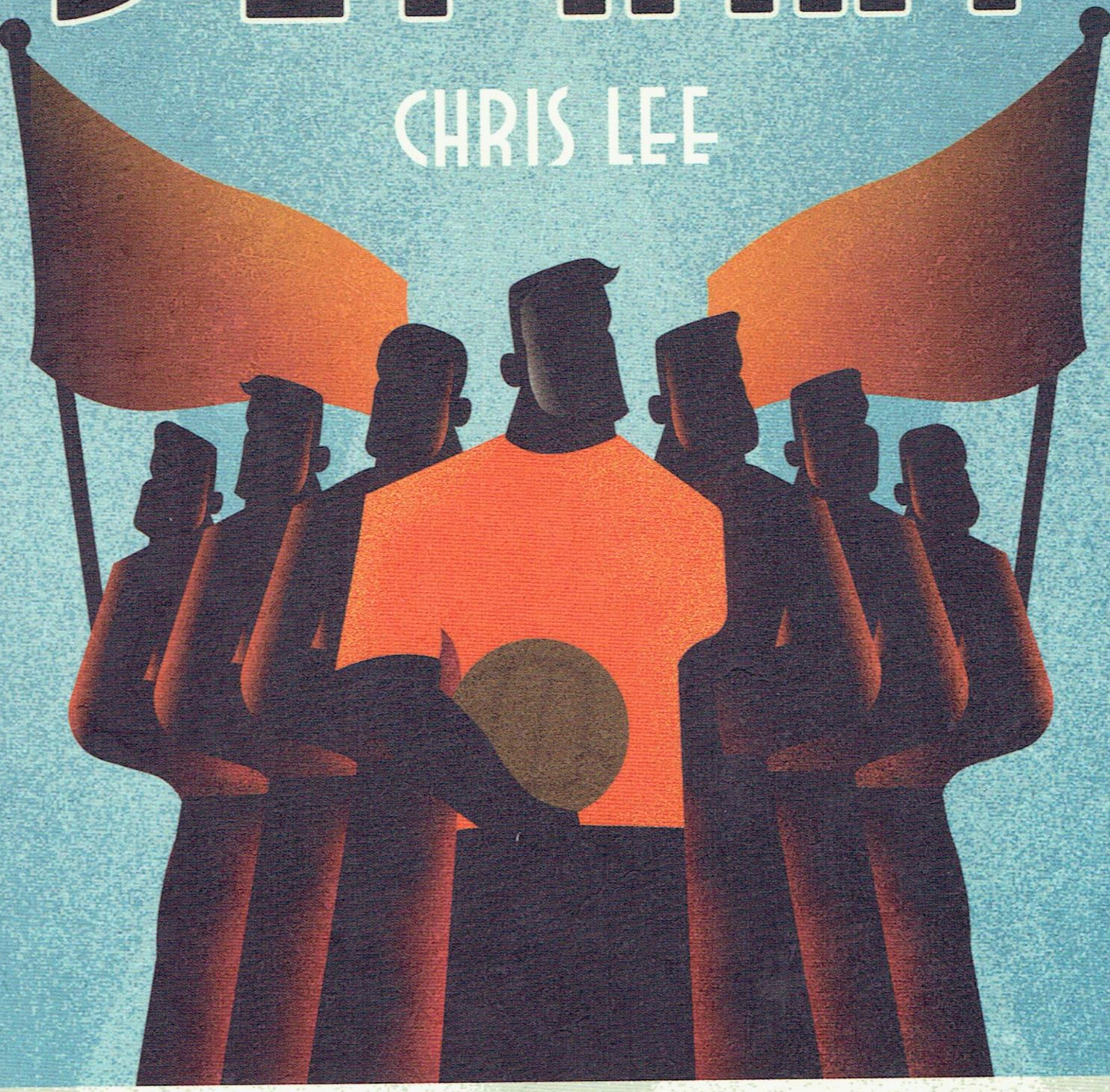
THE DEFIANT

CHRIS LEE



A HISTORY OF FOOTBALL AGAINST FASCISM

First published by Pitch Publishing, 2022

Pitch Publishing
9 Donnington Park,
85 Birdham Road,
Chichester,
West Sussex,
PO20 7AJ
www.pitchpublishing.co.uk
info@pitchpublishing.co.uk

© 2022, Chris Lee

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright.
Any oversight will be rectified in future editions at the
earliest opportunity by the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
sold or utilised in any form or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording or by any information storage and retrieval system,
without prior permission in writing from the Publisher.

A CIP catalogue record is available for this book
from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 80150 185 9

Typesetting and origination by Pitch Publishing

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

Kraków's Holy War and Polish football today

Michael Cole spent a year in Kraków as a visiting researcher. Although he attended home matches of both Wisła and Cracovia while there, he noticed a marked difference when walking around the city as derby day approached, he tells me. 'A lot of graffiti was appearing, some of which was very specific to football, but alongside that there was graffiti that struck me as quite clearly antisemitic. You'd see in huge letters *anti-Jude* – "*Jude*" being the German word for Jew – or sometimes just "*AJ*" on the wall along with a picture of the Star of David with a line drawn right through it,' Cole explains. 'I was pretty surprised by this, bearing in mind this history of Poland, the Jewish history, the proximity to Auschwitz. It just shocked me that this was happening.' Cole investigated this graffiti further, speaking to other researchers and historians, and was surprised to learn that these antisemitic messages were apparently an accepted part of the football culture in Kraków around derby day. 'It was accepted that Wisła fans would use the term *Jude* to insult Cracovia fans, and people didn't really notice it any more; it was so much a part of what was going on in the city,' Cole continues. 'It brought up all these negotiations again about what it means to be Polish, and how Polish identity is understood and defined, and it seems to be all the same kind of problems going back to the pre-war period.'

Cole explained that in the pre-war period, Polish Jews suffered discrimination as they did in many other countries in Europe. Wisła even banned 'non-Polish' players while Cracovia supported Jewish and foreign players, which gained the club a reputation as a 'Jewish club', and that has stuck to this day as a key part of the club's identity. One of the club's ultra groups calls itself the *Jude Gang* (Jewish gang), which Cole adds is part of the reason there is so much '*anti-Jude*' graffiti around the city. 'From my research, the idea of "the Jew" in Polish football is something of a bogeyman, so it takes on whatever particular meaning the fans of a club decide to give it,' Cole continues. 'So, for certain fans, when they use what on the face of it is antisemitic language, it's aimed at attacking Cracovia fans. It's a term that's used in other cities as a way of insulting rival fans, too. This idea of calling your opponents "Jews" as the worst insult you can use shows that there is definitely an underlying sense of antisemitism going on, otherwise why would it be considered such an insult?' I asked Cole whether there were comparisons with Tottenham Hotspur, whose fans 'reclaimed' its Jewish identity – so-called due to the high Jewish population traditionally associated with that part of north London – after receiving insults from some opposing fans in the 1970s. 'It's a similar idea to Tottenham or Ajax in Amsterdam. The justification is taking what was initially used as an insult against the club or its fans and trying to "re-own" this name,' he says.

Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Więcej (Never Again Association) is Poland's leading anti-racist organisation. It was founded in the 1990s as a response to rising Nazi skinhead violence in Polish cities, taking place in various settings, from the streets to rock concerts and football. The group monitors racism and discrimination of all forms in Poland and has worked with numerous bodies, including the Council of Europe, the European Union and Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE). The group worked with UEFA ahead of Euro 2012, hosted jointly by Poland and Ukraine, to implement the 'Respect Diversity' programme of awareness-raising activities. Never Again also organises football tournaments for inclusive and progressive football fan groups from Poland and other countries. Rafał Pankowski heads up Never Again's Monitoring Center. He tells me that the Nazi skinhead subculture was a relatively new phenomenon in Poland in the 1990s, which emerged around the same time that Nazi insignia started appearing at Polish football grounds.

'Polish football had been strong in the 1970s and '80s, but by the 1990s, it was very weak, both at the national team level and the club level,' Pankowski explains. 'Attendance figures dropped, and it became easier for a radical or extremist minority to dominate the culture and subculture around football. People just didn't bother going to football any more, so there were no longer 50,000 people at the game, there was maybe 1,000, and if you bring 200 skinheads to the stadium, you are more or less in control.' Pankowski is keen to emphasise that most Polish football fans are only interested in the football and not the politics of a vocal minority. Despite some fantastic new stadiums in Poland thanks to Euro 2012, many Polish football fans are put off going to the stadium because of a 'nasty subculture' they might witness at league matches, preferring instead to follow on television.

According to Pankowski, in recent years the far right in Poland has revisited the Polish nationalist ethos of the 1930s and much of its symbolism, along with other international symbols of white power, such as the Celtic cross. The radical Polish nationalism of the 1930s could be violent and antisemitic, both themes that have returned, Pankowski says. In addition, Pankowski informs me that images of Janusz Waluś, a Pole who is serving a life sentence in South Africa for the killing of South African Communist Party (SACP) secretary-general Chris Hani in 1993, have appeared at Polish football stadiums in recent years. Pankowski believes that the use of Waluś's image by the far right in Poland has more to do with his victim having been a black man rather than a communist.

Pankowski explains the paradox that, while Polish football is relatively diverse and multicultural on the pitch, on the terraces one can witness xenophobic and racist behaviour just metres from the field of play. 'I'm not saying that every football fan is a racist fascist, of course, but I'm afraid the far right is very strong and even if not everybody supports it, the far-right presence in the stadium is intimidating enough to make any opposition difficult,' Pankowski adds.

The far right in Poland uses football as a tool for mobilising support; for example, a young far-right candidate polled a tiny percentage of the national vote in a recent election yet was the first choice among football fans. The Polish far right galvanises for Poland's annual National Independence Day rally on 11 November, which has attracted the far right from across Europe.[13] 'Poland for the Polish' is a familiar cry. According to Pankowski, that doesn't just mean the exclusion of ethnic minorities, but also the LGBTQ+ community. 'There have been a lot of homophobic banners and statements in Polish stadiums in recent years, and – as in the 1990s – we've seen a lot of passivity from the football establishment towards it,' he adds. Given the weight of apparent indifference towards the vocal minority of the far right in Polish football, is there even space for progressive opposition, as in Germany with FC St Pauli, or Rayo Vallecano in Spain? 'No, that's very difficult, I don't think there is an equivalent at all yet, but over the years, we will try and try, and we will succeed at last,' Pankowski insists.

One example of a progressive club in Warsaw is AKS (Alternative Sport Club) Zły, which means 'bad' in Polish. The club is based in the Praga district of the capital and was founded in 2015 as an independent and inclusive society. Swearing is outlawed in the club's stadium to attract families, and the club is open, democratic and multicultural. With both women's and men's teams, AKS Zły also believes in gender equality at the club where 'football comes first'.[14] Makabi Warszawa was a Jewish football club that had been founded in 1915 and dissolved under Nazi occupation in 1939. Its original ground stood where Poland's national stadium stands today. The club was re-founded in 2014. A year later, the club played newly formed AKS Kraków in what is believed to be the first Polish-Jewish football match in Poland since the war.[15]

So what does the future look like for football in Poland? 'We're in a situation, not just in Eastern Europe but across the world, where we're seeing an increase in polarisation. And that does mean a higher support for the far right, but I think that we're seeing a positive response from people on the left,' Michael Cole concludes. 'In Poland, for example, where things like homophobia, antisemitism and other forms of racism are deemed acceptable in society because we have political leaders who use this kind of language, it's no surprise that we see this kind of behaviour in football stadiums and may continue to do so. But it's important to point out that clubs do quite a lot of good work in the community, and there is a big sense of community built around these clubs, so I think it's important to emphasise this and focus on the positive elements of what it means to be associated with a club while continuing to try to combat and deal with these big issues.'

Russia's difficult history

In August 1939, having failed to secure strategic agreements with Britain and France, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin sent his foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov to sign a non-aggression pact with his German counterpart Joachim von Ribbentrop. Nazi Germany invaded Poland from the west just days after the deal was struck, with the Soviets advancing into Poland from the east. And so it remained until June 1941 when Hitler, frustrated by his failure to secure a surrender from Britain, turned his mind eastwards to break the deadlock. He broke the non-aggression pact and invaded Soviet territory, gambling on a swift advance to Moscow within four months, named *Operation Barbarossa*. The Soviets were caught unaware but regrouped and resisted. The Great Patriotic War had begun. Initially, the