

Interview with Antifascist Fans of Lazio

Questions: Yavor Tarinski

[Η συνέντευξη στα ελληνικά ΕΔΩ]

When most people hear about SS Lazio they immediately think of neo-nazis and fascists. But then there is your group -Laziale e Antifascista (LAF). Tell us few words about your group and its activity?

The group was born to destroy the stereotype that all Lazio supporters are fascists. This stereotype is a powerful propaganda tool for Roman neo-fascist groups to indoctrinate younger boys with racist and fascist ideals. They use the curve of Lazio to promote their values, to do political proselytism and business. The values of S.S. Lazio, those demonstrated with facts in history, are the opposite. For a few hundred fascists, especially thanks to the mainstream media, there have been constructed this stereotype that discredits Lazio and continues to feed the ranks of fascists, not just at the stadium, but in society.

All activities we do are meant to destroy this stereotype, to make it clear that Laziale does not mean fascist in Rome, in Italy and around the world. The number of LAF membership, in various capacities and independently, is constantly increasing. In Italy there are a hundred, mostly in Rome but also scattered throughout the country, and another hundred around the world.



Posters of LAF in support of foreign Lazio players. On the left & middle: Ogenyi Onazi (Nigeria) / On the right: Miroslav Klose (Germany)

The club has been heavily stigmatized by far-right imagery. But was that always the case?

It is so since 1987 with the advent of the Irriducibili who have conquered the curve with the help of criminal organizations. Before them, Lazio's supporters were apolitical; there were right-wing groups, left-wing groups, mixed groups.

Lazio was founded upon egalitarian, solidarity and social values; if you studied the history of Lazio would understand that it is the opposite of a vision for a fascist life. Lazio was created in 1900 by nine Roman boys who decided to found a society of equals. This was decades before the birth of fascism. Now the misinformation makes people around the world believe that Lazio was the team of fascism when in reality Lazio was the only Roman team to oppose the attempts of the Fascist regime in 1927 to fuse all local teams into AS Roma. During World War II Jews and partisans have been hosted and hidden in the club's structures. The colors chosen were those of Greece to symbolize and honor the Olympic Spirit: sports practice as a means of unifying of peoples. They chose the

eagle as a coat of arms because it is a Roman symbol.

The largest fan group in the history of Lazio was the Eagles Supporters. They were a “mixed”, apolitical group. They dissolved when the Roman fascist parties and the criminal organizations decided to support the Irreducible to conquer the curve.

In the 70s in Rome there were the so called “Years of Lead” – a period of social and political turmoil in Italy that lasted from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, marked by a wave of both left-wing and right-wing political violence. In Stadio Olimpico there were fascist groups like the Viking, but also communist groups like Tupamaros and Commandos Aquile S.Basilio Talenti (C.A.S.T.). C.A.S.T., from the Roman districts San Basilio and Talenti, was actually the first group in Curva Nord. Others, like the anarchist Gruppo Rock existed until the early 90s. However no one had hegemony except of the Eagles who gathered many groups together.



Eagles Supporters

How is your group being accepted inside and outside the stadium?

People's feedback has been very positive, filled with enthusiasm. We have the support of many fans from Italy to South America who understand the value of the work we are doing. Anyone who believes in a world free from prejudice and discrimination should support us beyond the football faith.

Are there other antifascist and/or non-racist groups related to Lazio today?

Inside the stadium there is not a unitary group but many groups scattered in various sectors that to date do not expose their own banners. But in the city of Rome there are thousands of anti-fascist Laziali, and our goal is to help them unite and get organized.



Gruppo Rock was one of the anti-authoritarian subgroups of the Eagles Supporters

Do you have relations with antifascist supporters of other

teams from Italy and abroad?

We are not being an ultras group so we do not have “official” friendships with ultras groups, but we have many ultras friends from various teams. In Italy we have comrades from Genoa, Perugia, Juve, Empoli and Cosenza; in Europe there are St Pauli, Celtic and Marseille; while around the world we have friendships with Palmeiras, Gremio, Corinthians, CD FAS – Hinchada Del Rojo.

Recently the dominant far-right supporter groups of Lazio demanded women to stay away from the ‘sacred space’ of Curva Nord. Were there reactions against this sexist attitude?

They issued a sexist leaflet that asked to not bring women to the first 10 rows (supposedly reserved for the hardcore ultras), not in the whole Curva. The best answer was given by the thousands of women that support Lazio who, with their protests, forced the group to apologize.

Is your group or individual members collaborating with any political organizations and social movements?

We are more involved with social movements than with political parties. In Rome there are many antagonistic realities, and our initiative being a movement with autonomous and independent cells is present in many of them. There is no single thought in the LAF, nor a political ideology. There are anarchists, communists, socialists, liberals: each active in their own private life, people united by anti-fascism and passion for Lazio.



Photo of the left-wing Commandos Aquile S. Basilio Talenti (C.A.S.T.)

Can you give us a brief overview of the far-right influence in Italian football today?

The situation is alarming. Since the 70s the Italian neo-fascist parties have focused their recruitment efforts on the football stadiums. It is a political strategy that has been going on for the last 40 years. They indoctrinate young people who go to the stadium only to support their team with party-line, racist, intolerant values. Boys who do not have adequate cultural bases to defend themselves are being attracted by these values. In Italy today the ultras world has been almost totally hegemonized. Nowadays the fascists are more organized, because they are financed by neo-fascist parties that do business with organized crime.

What do you think is the potential of football for social change? Why there is such struggle for control over stadiums by both the left and the right?

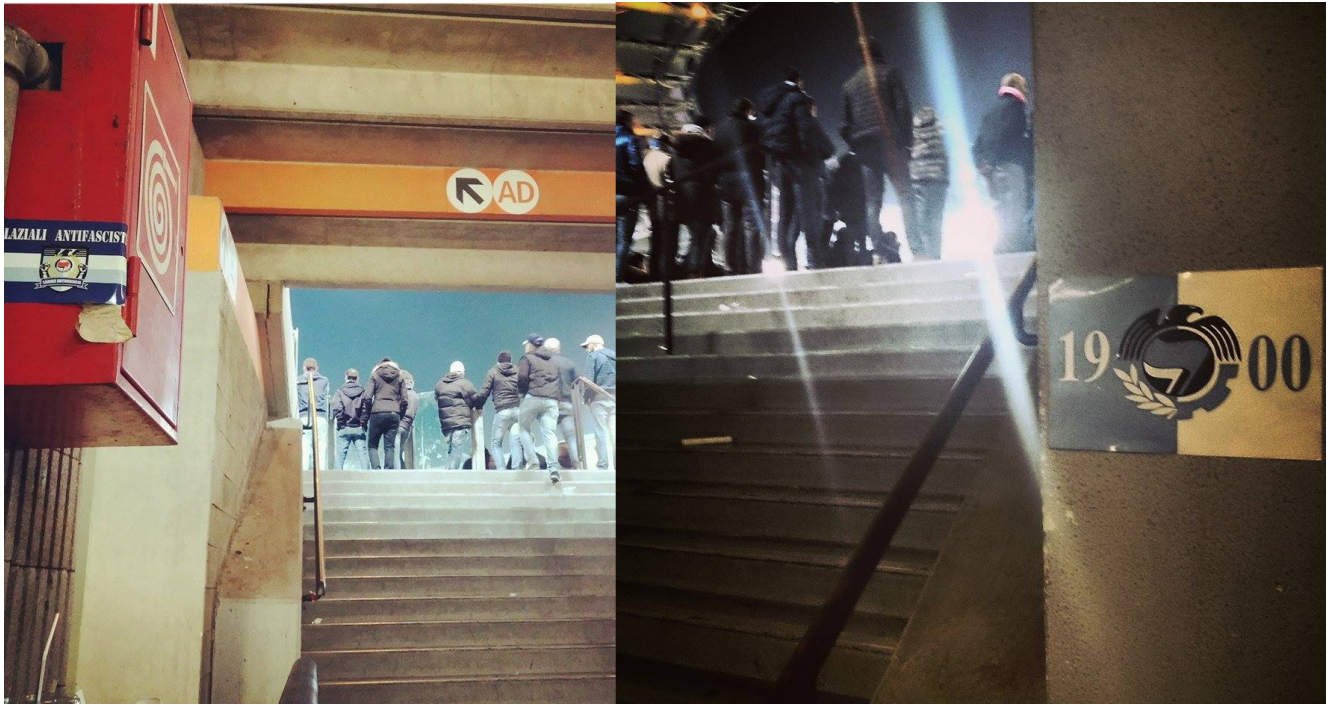
It can improve things, but unfortunately can also make them worse. The stadiums convey values. Nowadays we see a nationalist drift in the curves of many European countries. For years, fascist and neo-Nazi parties and movements have been striving to occupy these spaces, throwing up their propaganda and making political proselytism. They try to change the values that sport should seek – brotherhood, equality and respect are replaced with intolerance and nationalism– in order the youth to internalize their neo-fascist, racist, homophobic positions.

Concluding words?

The situation is so hard that we have to do what we do!



Flag of the far-right Irriducibili taken by LAF



LAF stickers inside Curva Nord



LAF scarves and t-shirts



The recent close relationship with West Ham United has provoked much resentment among the far-right supporters of S.S. Lazio, because of the multiethnic character of the English team's ultras (such as the infamous dark-skinned WHU ultras leader Cass Pennant-on the photo)

Cover photo: *Demonstration by members of LAF in front of the Coliseum in Rome (March 2016)*