

Life, Or a Way of Life?

by Theodore Dalrymple

One of the aims of terrorists is to alter the way of life of the country in which they live and kill: to sow fear, mistrust, and timidity. In this regard, they have just scored an important victory in France.

For hundreds of years (dating back to the twelfth century, in fact), the city of Lille has held an annual jumble-sale, or flea market. Last year, 2.5 million people attended, and 10,000 sellers participated, coming from a radius of 60 miles. This year, for the first time since the Second World War, Lille has cancelled the event because of security concerns.

The cancellation is striking because it does not reflect a lack of effort: five times as many policemen as usual were to have been deployed; concrete barriers were erected around the market-stall area to prevent the entry of booby-trapped vehicles; police marksmen were to have stood on many of the surrounding rooftops; helicopters were to have kept the whole area under constant surveillance. But in the end, the mayor of Lille, Martine Aubry, once a contender for the leadership of the Socialist Party that now governs France, reluctantly concluded that it was not enough, that security could not be guaranteed.

One can understand her decision. Who would want the ultimate responsibility for an event in which scores, or even hundreds, of people were slaughtered, as 85 were in Nice last month? A decision to go ahead would have been brave, but if it went wrong, it no doubt would have been condemned as foolhardy or worse. No amount of precaution could guarantee the safety of more than 2 million people from terrorist attack in a city the size of Lille. The tens of thousands of vehicles coming to the city could not all be checked carefully for explosives. The

last three terrorist attacks in France all used different methods: this in itself is enough to provoke anxiety as to what method terrorists will use next. Gas? Bacteria? And the government is already under fire for not having done all that it could have done to prevent the recent attack at the promenade des Anglais in Nice.

The cancellation of the flea market is a serious economic blow to Lille, of course, but it is far from the only event in France that has met this fate. In Paris, for example, a 12-day, open-air cinema festival has also been cancelled. The tourist industry has been badly affected: hotel receipts are down by 6 percent, and tourist arrivals by 10 percent. But as one Lille trader put it, "sometimes it takes two hours [during the jumble-sale in Lille] to go a hundred yards. Imagine the carnage if something happened." better lose money than human lives, a *Le Monde* headline proclaimed.

But the dichotomy between losing money and losing lives is, if not false exactly, less than the whole truth, or even the most important aspect of the truth. As the terrorists themselves are fond of implying, the real dichotomy is between losing lives and losing a way of life.

First published in