

Marseille riots. Fly in the counsellors, reiki therapists and human rights lawyers

by Theodore Dalrymple

I see from the St George's flags fluttering from the side-windows of cars that it is football-time again – yet again. Apparently it is to last several weeks, though probably not for England who are not usually very good and can be relied upon to put in a poor performance and exit at the early stages of any competition. Moreover, the English fans, tattooed and beer-bellied, have been rioting in Marseille: a city not much given to sentimentality when it comes to the treatment of the ill-behaved.

However, no doubt in twenty or thirty years' time a public inquiry, lasting several months if not years, could be mounted at public expense to the immense profit of lawyers, to prove that the fat and ugly sunburnt drunken English fans, suffering from terrible poverty and lacking in self-esteem, were provoked by the French police and were entirely free of any wrong-doing. Did not the French police have ample warning of what the English are like when they get drunk in a hot climate before a football match? Why were they not prepared for it so that instead they had to resort to utensils such as truncheons, tear gas and Alsatian dogs to quell the disturbances rather than prevented them by the mass deployment of counsellors, social workers, reiki therapists and the like? You have only to see the way they, the police, dressed to understand the provocation that the fans were under. Did they look friendly, did they look welcoming? The question answers itself. They had helmets, an open invitation to violence. You would never dare ask them the time, which is the only thing an English fan has ever required of the police.

There is only one solution, one thing that will take away the bitter taste of the whole episode: compensation. Some of them had to be carried away from the scene bleeding from their heads on which they had been struck! They even had to be taken, some of them, to hospital, facing the trauma of missing the match! Even the mere possibility of doing so was traumatic. Some might develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and not be able to work again. Their family life will be ruined. They will have only to turn on the television and see a football crowd to have terrible flashbacks. Some of them will resort to drink and possibly other drugs to dampen their emotions and counteract their depression. I call for an inquiry – in thirty years' time, when I shall no longer be a tax-payer.

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