

Closing the “Großmarkt”

Dreamy accounts of cute markets discovered by travel-reporters in remote corners of (for example) Perigord often appear in magazines and newspapers.

I count myself lucky that here in Cologne (which is not quite Perigord) we also have one of those markets: Every Saturday I can wander down, just 50 metres from my doorstep, and marvel at the flowers, the knick-knacks, the vegetables and the various delicatessen specialities from both our region and from further afield (photo). It is paradise. Really!

And surely these local economic structures should be central in our battle against climate-change, exploitation and the degradation of the environment?

But no, the city of Cologne has decided to close the wholesale market (Großmarkt) which supplies these traders and also small shops and restaurants in the region. This will certainly mean the death-knell for many of them and will leave the field wide open for “The Corporates”.

How can it be that governments (in Brussels, Berlin and in Cologne) repeatedly fail to protect such essential institutions? It must surely mean that they are in the pocket of big-business!

<https://www.express.de/koeln/koeln-scharfe-kritik-an-schliessung-des-grossmarkts-820127>

Bridges and Trucks

Last week I went cycling with a friend through the almost-post-industrial Ruhrgebiet where we passed at least three significant bridges across the Rhine which were being replaced: A monumental job, triggered probably by the collapse of the Morandi Bridge in Genoa in 2018.

On the replacement bridges I could see constant streams of 40-tonne trucks thundering over. So the question to be asked is whether our bridges really are “bad“ ... or whether they have simply been abused

Indeed, those bridges were built for small volumes of much smaller trucks so now it is no wonder that, our “masses of juggernauts” are shaking them to pieces.

Rebuilding is certainly necessary. But the real conclusions that should be for us a.) to put more freight on the rails and b.) to source the things that we need far more locally. If we don't do this then, in a few decades time, we will be rebuilding those bridges once again.

Postage

I wanted to send a book from Germany to a friend in England and found I had to pay just one cent short of seventeen euros: That was far in excess of the price of the book! The high cost was probably due to customs but even prices between EU countries looks hefty.

How can it be that online giants can dispatch their goods for next-to-nothing but individuals (and small companies) have to pay eye-watering prices? On top of this, those online corporations cherry-pick their taxation-obligations, minimise their wage-bill and maintain no local presence. While local-traders (who pay local taxes and rents) are closing down in droves.

This is a shameful situation so why not simply tax those deliveries (e.g. one Euro per parcel) so that the multinationals start to pay their share and local business at least has a fighting chance.

German Railways (DB)

Following the bad experiences of fans at the European Football Championships, a lot of attention has been focused on Deutsche Bahn (DB). Indeed, yes, DB has been in decline for many years now with the network hitting “breaking point” and key lines needing to be closed for maintenance. This, combined with several strikes and natural disasters have generated a loss of over Eur 1000 million in the first half of 2024.

Although management believes that the company will be in the black by the end of the year they are proposing to shed thirty thousand staff and switch to more digitalisation and automation. Cuts to services have also been proposed and, on top of this, ticket-prices continue to rise.

So what do we have here: Cuts in both staff and services? For a network that is essential in combating climate-change this is very WRONG.

My suggestion would be to drop swanky hi-tech, high-speed trains and instead concentrate on reliable, high-capacity, medium-tech, medium-speed trains ... which actually work and are affordable.

And, after the massive outage of world-wide IT systems last week, is it really advisable to sack staff and instead rely on digitalisation and automation?

<https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/deutsche-bahn-verlust-106.html>

https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/deutsche-bahn-fernverkehr-ostdeutschland-100.html?at_medium=mastodon&at_campaign=tagesschau.de

Letzte Generation (like Extinction Rebellion)

There was a recent spate of climate activists gluing themselves to runways so now politicians are discussing prison-sentences of up to five-years for those who disrupt in this way.

This may be correct but I find it bizarre that there have been absolutely no measures implemented by the government to try and placate/accommodate the demands of the protesters.

For example, across our cities, over-sized video-adverts tempt us to take cheap or long-haul flights or to buy flashy cars (electric or combustion). We could start by regulating this flippant advertising.

And why not increase taxation on (over-sized) cars, on trucks and on aviation? That would make good sense and would give those protesters less reason to stick themselves to roads and to runways!

<https://www.morgenpost.de/wirtschaft/article406872740/top-oekonomin-sieht-millionenschaeden-durch-klimakleber.html>

Plastic Alibi

Somehow I have got onto the mailing lists of several organisations which strive to reduce or eliminate plastic. That is certainly a good thing with them sending me invitations to join clean-up-squads on beaches and along rivers and giving me suggestions on how to reduce my usage of plastic. All good!

But the thing that repeatedly bemuses me is that the two biggest sources of microplastic (in the oceans) are in fact 1.) fluff from the washing of synthetic clothing (35%) and 2.) particles scuffed from the tread of tyres (28%) ... but these issues are only ever mentioned in passing with the topic then being “brushed aside” as if those sources of pollution did not exist.

My conclusion here is that we, as a society, have decided to only mention and to only tackle problems where the measures will not overly impact our convenience and our comfort.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/25/plastic-in-the-depths-how-pollution-took-over-our-oceans>

Money as a solution?

Back in April Chancellor Scholz and Annelene Baeböck took part in the “Petersberger Climate-dialogue” to prepare for COP29 UN climate talks, this time in Azerbaijan (a major oil-producer!). One conclusion that they came to was that tackling climate-change will cost A LOT of money and therefore private investment should also be drawn upon.

Here we need to mention a number of points ...

1.) During other crises (e.g. the financial crash of 2009 and Covid) the “money-gates” were opened and no expense was too much. So why is it a problem to find the money to tackle climate-change? Especially when we are opening up those same money-gates for re-militarisation. Somehow our priorities are wrong!

2.) Can we really trust “private money”: Surely private investors are primarily interested in cash returns so are they really a reliable source for a field which needs to be long-term coordination?

3.) And will “money” really stop climate-change? If we want the same levels of luxury and indulgence then we need masses of research and investment (and probably a miracle!). But do we really need all that? Surely it would be simpler to fly far less, to walk, cycle and take public transport and to source the products that we need mostly from local producers and manufacturers.

<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/scholz-investitionen-klimaschutz-100.html>

Christopher Street Day

This weekend it was CSD, the Gay Pride celebration and I happened to fall into conversation with one of the gay participants.

During our conversation he mentioned that the issue of gay rights had been hijacked and “weaponised” by the “big players” (corporations, media & politicians).

I could not help but to agree with him: Yes, it seems to me that it is often assumed that, if you are very vocally engaged in certain key issues, then you can “admonish yourself” from all other transgressions and, if anyone points out other problems you can pour scorn on them from your convenient ivory tower.

Joe Biden

At last Joe Biden has stepped down. But for me this whole thing drove a coach and horses through my faith in government: Mr Biden has been frail for years now so how can it be that the Democrats were unable to persuade him to not stand in the first place?

And now, rather than smoothing the path for Kamala Harris, he wants to concentrate on pushing through various bombastic projects to serve as his “legacy”.

This whole tragic farce fills my heart with sadness especially when we consider that wars are raging so incorrect decisions result in loss of life!