

Cologne Station Shut-down

Cologne Station is closing down for about ten days in order to install new points and switching systems. Unfortunately the software has an error so the shutdown will need to happen again next year.

Yes, Deutsche Bahn (German Railways) has problems and has recently got rid of one CEO. But I don't think it is a management issue and rather wish that, instead of wanting to be "cutting edge" with high-speed (and high-cost!) trains and "state-of-the-art" digitalisation, we would simply stay with systems which are not so "sexy" but are tried-and-trusted and can be maintained directly by railway staff ... the way it used to be.

The main disadvantage of high-speed trains (which no one ever talks about!) is the fact that, in order to achieve those speeds, you need to remove all points. This makes switching track impossible for long stretches. In the past there was a switching-points every four or five kilometres which made maintenance possible without closing the line.

Yes, better an affordable, working system than expensive, temperamental "Prestige Projects"!

Frank

This week a friend of mine died after many months struggling with depression. Frank was in his mid-fifties and had been in and out of the "secure ward" ever since lock-down, overwork and gaming (and other addictions) had wreaked havoc with his body ... and his mind.

I will miss our lunches together ... and my heart goes out to all those who are in similar situations.

Children's Rights

First outside my flat and then, later, in the pedestrian zone, I was stopped by charity workers hoping to "on board" me to donate to an organisation supporting "children's rights".

Children's rights are important but as I watch children here being carted around by their parents in various types of e-cargo-bike, I reflect on the disparity: Children around the world are disadvantaged by war, hunger, land-grabbing and by exploitative (export-oriented) manufacturing ... while we cart ours around in/on electric bikes ... or SUVs!

We know that our "developed" world has a big hand in creating the problems of the developing world (e.g. wars raging in order to secure access to minerals needed to make our smartphones) so, rather than

having charities which seek to put sticking plasters on the problem, I think that we should stop our rapacious involvement in poorer countries and, at home, get our children to "pedal their own bikes".

Tourism in Spain

This week we watched a documentary report on Aljazeera (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FUdOuI9jCU>) covering the problem of the housing shortage in Spain caused by flats being re-purposed for short-term letting to tourists.

The problem is serious and the reporting was good but the thing which bemused me is that the most obvious solution, an incremental tax on aviation fuel, to both limit "over-tourism" and also protect the climate, was never mentioned.

We have friends who regularly fly off on tickets costing less than 30 Euros, stay in ultra-cheap rental-flats and buy all their food at the supermarket. So as well as reining in those who profit from over-tourism, we also need to make sure that it is not our own "ultra-low-cost" holidaymakers who are making people in other countries homeless.

11th November: Fishing Nets

On 11th November each year Cologne celebrates a small "pre-carnival" (the opening of the season) and so, of course, facilities were put up for the revelers. This included portable toilets which, this year, were all plastered with pictures of fishing nets and a slogan stating that the toilets are partly made from those discarded plastic fishing nets.

All well and good but surely the true issue is not that toilets need to be made out of fishing nets but rather that masses of marine life are killed in these discarded nets ... which practically never rot away. The true emphasis should be that we should simply not be using plastic nets! Traditional nets (made of natural fibres) were rarely discarded (because they are expensive) and, if they were lost, they would simply rot away within a few months.

The fact that, today, a small number of nets might be recycled, might indeed soothe the public's conscience ... but is a dangerous distraction from the real issue.

Kretschmann

On 13th November WDR interviewed Winfried Kretschmann, a respected Green politician and president of the province "Baden Wurtemberg" on his new book, "The reason for Politics is Freedom". It

was interesting to hear what he had to say and indeed Mr Kretschmann should be applauded for his engagement and commitment to “good politics”.

However, whenever topics such as “politics” and “freedom” (and equality, justice, tolerance, democracy etc.) come up (as they frequently do!), I feel that there is now an enormous elephant in the room ...

How can we in the West purport to be on a higher philosophical and moral plane, when we have just spent two years watching thousands of Palestinians being slaughtered? Of course Hamas committed horrific crimes but the systematic, hi-tech killing of tens of thousands of innocent people (including children) is not excusable in any way.

Here I think we should be solving the problem rather than choosing sides, either Palestine or Israel. Both the one-sided reporting here in Germany and the clear, matter-of-fact presumption (by most of society) that the Israelis are “right” and the Palestinians are “guilty” has shaken my faith in humanity to the core.

This shows me that we in the West have completely lost the moral high-ground ... if we ever had it!

Fuel-cell

The German government plans to fund BMW with 273 Million Euro so they can put a fuel-cell X5 SUV into production (Tagesschau, 14th November 2025).

That made my jaw drop because, yes, it is good to investigate alternative energies. But surely, before we go full hog (and best NOT with an SUV), we should first try it out on a small scale? And how “green” is this technology really? Once you have built the (potentially explosive) infrastructure and expended energy both in building the vehicle and electrolysis water (to get the hydrogen), is it really “green” at all?

And we are told that hydrogen is urgently needed to power heavy industry. I wish someone would clarify all this: Is it green ... or not? And do we want it for industry ... or for SUVs?

Price- and Tax- Relief

The German government announced (Tagesschau, 13th Nov. 2025) that industry would be receiving a subsidised electricity price of (probably) five cents per KW/H. And that “ticket-tax” (on airline tickets) would be reduced. These measures are intended to make Germany economically more attractive.

Of course it is massively ironic (and wrong!) that these anti-climate decisions should take place during COP30.

Carbon Trading

The German TV-channel ARD screened a documentary, “Verschollen”, on how dirty the business of carbon-trading/carbon-offsets can be: The team were in Brazil where they exposed an enormous eucalyptus plantation project, which generated “carbon credits”. Indigenous peoples were forced from their lands and the wood produced was converted to charcoal and used for smelting iron ... which, in turn, was eligible for “carbon credits”.

Also shocking was that the sponsors, investors and regulators are shown to be either not-too-worried or actively involved in the “scam”.

And just to think that “Carbon-trading” is the central pillar for the EU’s (and other countries’) battle against climate change. This makes the mind boggle!

Bistroscopie

In their program Bistroscopie (15th Nov.) France Inter interviewed the economist Gabriel Zucman who proposes “Taxing the Rich”, especially the super-rich. While I think this is probably a good idea, the thing that was missing from the program was a proposal to tax and regulate the business-models that made those people billionaires.

This omission is, at the end of the day, also a reflection on us because ... how can we criticise super-rich online business owners (for example) when we are the ones eagerly buying their product ... while local shops and traders go bankrupt?

Film

I watched Mikhael Hers’ film “My Life with Amanda” (on www.arte.tv) which is partly a reflection on the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015. But another aspect caught my attention ...

In the film the 24-year-old brother of one of the victims of a (random) terrorist attack is forced to give up his happy-go-lucky lifestyle in order to look after his dead sister’s young daughter, Amanda.

He has doubts and worries but pulls through in a very non-spectacular and positive way, coming to terms with the cards life has dealt him (including his girlfriend also being injured) and embraces the new life.

I found this film so refreshing as the world seems to have fallen into a “default mode” where “men” are mostly represented as either “baddies” or at least slackers or disruptors. This film was not like that.