

Avoidable Cancer

Tagesschau ran an article (3rd Feb. 26) on a report by the WHO that about 40% of cancer-cases are avoidable. They cite smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity and infection as being the biggest factors. With lack of exercise and air-pollution playing only minor roles.

I am sure these results are correct and it is certainly good to avoid dangers if you can (e.g. smoking). But it sounded strange for the report to be saying that air-pollution did not play a significant role.

Then I stumbled on another report (7th Feb. 26) by the BBC's James Gallagher where he himself had "played guinea-pig" by inhaling traffic fumes on a busy road. Then, in tests, scientists (from Queen Mary University in London) found tiny particles, embedded in his red blood-cells, being carried around his body.

The conclusion was that, alongside other issues such as respiratory- and heart- disease, these particles cause inflammation which can "wake up cancerous cells, which then develop into deadly tumours". With "around one in ten lung cancers thought to be caused by air pollution in the UK".

Indeed, the report also mentions that the WHO believes that "polluted air is leading to seven million deaths a year" while the Royal College of Physicians estimate that it causes thirty thousand deaths per year in the UK.

So the WHO seems to be contradicting itself: Is or isn't air-pollution a major cause of cancer (and other illnesses)?

Another anomaly also grabbed my attention: In the BBC report they mention that this particulate-pollution comes both from exhaust AND as microscopic dust from tyres and brakes. So surely it would make sense to clarify the proportions? If it turns out that a good part of pollution in our bodies comes from tyre-dust, then we need to drastically reconsider whether we want to go down the path of electric mobility on roads.

And, on the topic of avoidable illness, toxins (chemicals and microplastic) are a massive problem in our water!

Genocide

This week on German radio (WDR5) they were talking about Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and that, with temperatures significantly

below zero, people in cities are suffering extreme hardship which certainly includes illness and death.

This is of course tragic and brutish. But the presenters went further and coined the term "Genocide" for the Russian action.

The Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure are terrible and the suffering is horrific. But surely the Germans, who are so "touchy" about the term "Genocide" and go into histrionics when it is used to describe attacks on Palestinians, need to be very careful: Such "hyperbolic hypocrisy" massively undermines credibility.

And, with Ukraine, I feel that the Europeans are acting in a very immoral way: Yes, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was VERY wrong. But the Europeans, from their cosy locations in Brussels and Berlin, repeatedly goad the Ukrainians on (with weapons and money) to continue a struggle which the Europeans (experiencing no risk themselves) consider to be "righteous". This "armchair animosity" (accompanied by vitriolic rhetoric) significantly hinders potential resolution of the problem.

Ticket Inspector Murdered

On 2nd Feb 26 a ticket inspector from Ludwigshafen was killed by a ticketless passenger on a local train while doing his job. This is brutal and tragic!

Everyone is calling for more staff and more security but I do wonder whether the solution should be a different one.

Here in Germany on stations, platforms and on trains normal staff have all but disappeared with ticket machines and "apps" replacing people. Often the only humans you see are security staff and ticket inspectors with these people unable to give any practical help regarding your journey. Their priority is to catch "fare-dodgers".

So surely a far more elegant solution would be to make staff "allies" of the passengers rather than their "enemies". For example putting conductors on every train and giving them the ability to issue tickets and give travel information. Companies could maybe take a small surcharge for tickets issued on the train (e.g. 20% extra) but not a hefty fine.

Unfortunately things are going in exactly the opposite direction as previously staff on inter-city trains were able to issue tickets but that service has now been withdrawn.

Kiddie-Cargo Bikes

Another one of our neighbours recently bought a large electric cargo bike to transport their children around. This is supposed to replace car-use so in theory is a good idea. But, in urban locations, the distances being covered (to kindergarten or to the shops) could easily be walked. So what is the gain? Surely this is a waste of both energy and materials. e.g. Batteries which are heavy, highly toxic and flammable.

Then I look at the children being transported: Sitting passively, bundled up in a box on wheels. Sometimes with their faces glued to the screen of a smartphone. Or being told off or comforted by a parent who should be concentrating on the road. This cannot be a healthy thing!

And often I see small children learning to ride their own bikes with obvious joy and pride in their faces ... while a parent follows them on the road (or the pavement!) wobbling about (at those slow speeds) on an enormous electric monstrosity.

To me this seems like total madness.

Gas Reserves and Hydrogen

Ironically two reports appeared next to each other on Tagesschau (TV news) recently. One was a report that German gas reserves were low and the other that the German economics minister was in Saudi-Arabia to talk about getting “green hydrogen” from the desert.

Both serious topics!

But when I read through the article on gas reserves, it didn't seem so bad: The tanks are almost 33% full and we are almost at the end of winter. On top of this a minister said there was no cause for alarm and that LNG-terminals had excess capacity for further imports. So why the drama?

Next I read the report on “green hydrogen” which is supposed to be produced using “green energy” in Saudi Arabia to be shipped, as ammonia to Germany to be turned into hydrogen.

That all sounds quite complicated and dubious. Indeed, how many wind turbines and solar-collectors is Saudi Arabia going to put up, when they can fire up oil and gas generators to produce the electricity to make the hydrogen which will then be turned into ammonia, shipped to Germany and turned back into hydrogen. And, even if green energy is used, it seems that, when you tot up all those steps, you probably have a negative environmental balance anyway.

So, of course, if you are reporting significant expenditure in hydrogen, you need an accompanying report stating that we are “running out of gas”. Hence the “empty/non-empty gas reserves” report.

Then, a few days later, there were headlines showing Chancellor Merz (and an economic delegation) in Saudi Arabia (and other Gulf-states) hob-nobbing with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and others.

Chancellor Merz also mentioned “green hydrogen” but, with his visit to Qatar, it was clear that gas was the main topic.

So the obvious question to be asked here is whether these “green hydrogen” plans are anything more than a fig-leaf to disguise hefty fossil-fuel contracts?

Epstein

So, as the media-frenzy over people linked to Epstein continues, I repeatedly ask myself what the legal basis for all of this is?

Yes, if underage girls were abused then prosecutions should follow. And, indeed, if Peter Mandelson passed on classified information to Mr Epstein, that should also go to court.

But it seems to me that we urgently need to distinguish between “sleaze” and “illegality”. How old were these girls? Which country's laws are being applied? I have heard of one twenty-year-old woman being described as a “victim”, a case which I would put very firmly in the realm of “sleaze”.

Unfortunately it seems to me that the “jurisdiction” that we have chosen is that of “The Media” with people being judged (and potentially destroyed) “by association” ... with a massive use of hindsight!

To me that all seems like a Kangaroo-Court!

And it is doubly-worrying as, at the moment, the world has many more problems which we should be concentrating on: From catastrophic environmental and climate- damage through to multiple wars which are raging and which, if escalation occurs, could threaten the whole planet.

So let's get real and “drop the distractions”. If we don't do that, then we will live to regret it. Or maybe we won't live!