

Paris Accord

At the end of January, as expected, Donald Trump withdrew the USA from the Paris Climate Agreement. News reports were full of criticism of this move.

Indeed, it is certainly a strange thing to do. But even stranger is the fact that we (supposedly clear-thinking people) accept the truth about climate change but continue to guzzle fuel (cars, trucks, planes, etc.) as if there were no tomorrow.

And let's not forget that potential war with Iran, the attack on Venezuela and other conflicts are "oil-related". So if we (all of us) stepped back from our pampered lifestyles a little, that might help to take the pressure off and reduce the conflict. But of course we won't do that, will we?

Orcas in Antibes

ARD reported on a pair of Killer Whales (orcas) retained in a closed-down water-park in Antibes (France). They used to perform there but French law now bans that. Now activists are pushing hard for the animals' release. All rather a mess.

But, if we are concerned about animal-well-being then surely the place to start would be intensive meat production? Here animals spend their lives mostly in sheds until they are slaughtered in order to provide us with cheap meat. That all seems much worse.

In the past animals were an integral part of mixed farming: Grazing on fallow fields and "pooing out" natural fertilizer. How on earth did we manage to move from that to the intensive, chemical- and pharmaceutical-based systems that we now have?

Conspiracy

A repeated frustration of mine is that, with the Epstein files, most attention is aimed at the sexual excesses. But far more important is, I feel, the "peddling of influence" and the "exchanging of information" which went on.

I don't believe in hard-core conspiracy theories but, if this is not "the elite looking after each other", then what is it? This is certainly also a "conspiracy".

And the saddest thing to come out of the Epstein files is the quote from Steve Bannon saying that he intended to "take down the Pope [Francis]". I had great respect for the Pope's environmental and humanitarian engagement and was saddened that, for a long time, the focus was diverted onto whether or

not the Pope had investigated "sexual misconduct" enough. With the media energetically joining in!

It seemed to me like an aggressive "smear campaign" to silence a VERY good man. And now we know that it was indeed a smear campaign ... with people like Steve Bannon involved!

AI Impact in India

With the "AI Impact Summit" in India, reports seemed to be "talking up" the whole thing with it being taken for granted that we need AI for "progress" ... and for self-driving cars, etc.! The downsides (especially energy-consumption) were either not mentioned or glossed over.

It was mentioned that "AI Trainers" in India were able to find work. Indeed, yes, clicking images all day long to "train" AI! So, do we have a "Wizard of Oz" here? With, behind the AI-curtain, countless tens of thousands of "drones" engaged in mindless drudgery?

And it is all rather schizophrenic with us, on one side, praising AI and pushing for more "digitisation" (also in schools!) but now wanting social media bans for children? Don't get me wrong: I believe children should be on "digital detox" but the initiative in St Albans (England) where guidelines are given to parents, seems much better than technical measures (which will be bypassed) blocking this or that service.

Or is this all maybe a convenient "Trojan Horse" where mechanisms proclaimed to "defend children" are really systems to monitor everyone? Only time will tell.

Starlink and Putin

Several reports viewed the development that Starlink services had been withdrawn for the Russians as positive. And indeed, the Ukrainians seem to be making more advances on the battlefield.

But here we should pause for a moment and think that whole scenario through ...

Imagine that, yes, the tide does turn and the Ukrainians (with Western help) really do start to threaten Russia. Putin, whose whole reputation hangs on success in this war, would certainly "up the ante" with more troops, more strikes and more deaths.

And imagine if it went further than that and, as Putin started to lose the war, the military were to organise a coup? Then we would potentially have some deranged madman with his finger on the button in Moscow. That is us then "out of the frying pan into the fire"!

Munich Security Conference

There was a lot of coverage of the Munich Security Conference and I was shocked by the amount of sabre-rattling going on: It is as if the topic of “peace” is completely off the agenda.

Then there were some serious contractions with people saying both that the danger is imminent (Ursula von der Leyen: “Change or die”) while others saying that Russia is a spent force (Kaja Kallas: “Russia is not a superpower”). So which is it?

It seems to me that, as the arms producers see the dollar-signs flashing before them, the tail is starting to wag the dog (business interests are calling many of the shots). For example Phillip Inman wrote in The Guardian (23rd Feb 2026) about fortuitous “business tie-ups” (e.g. Quantum Frontline Industries) founding “joint ventures on defence, green energy and telecoms”. Excuse me: Green weapons? That is pushing it a bit! But I can imagine the PR: Inventing a drone that, with AI, can fly over fields “counting butterflies”. How sweet: So of course it’s OK for that drone to fly over battlefields killing people.

Rather than cranking up the aggression, we should be seeking solutions which, for me, should start with “repairing fences”: If the Russians know that they have the space they need (including access to the Black Sea) and don’t feel threatened (by NATO), then many of the triggers that caused the war fall away. Unfortunately we are going in exactly the opposite direction.

BSW

At the last general (Bundestag-) elections I voted for BSW, the party of Sahra Wagenknecht. I admire their mix of both left-wing and conservative values and their desire to “say it as it is”. And, most importantly, this was the only party pressing for peace both in Gaza and in Ukraine. Despite many attempts at defamation (by the media and by other parties), BSW was the only party I could logically vote for.

In order to get into the Bundestag a party needs to get over 5% of the vote. BSW got 4.981%, needing only 9529 more vote to reach 5%. Therefore BSW now has no representation in parliament.

A deviation of nine and a half thousand votes is well within the margin of error so BSW demanded a recount ... which has been repeatedly refused.

What astonishes me here is that Germany is constantly trumpeting its “democratic credentials” ... but refuses to allow this doubt to be clarified. I find

this incredibly “mean”, something which makes my disenfranchisement even more infuriating.

Department Stores

On 16th February WDR5 ran a retrospective on the Karstadt chain of department stores with the first one opening in 1881 in Wismar.

It was interesting to hear about the development of this institution and made me think of those that I knew and loved (Allders and Debenhams).

Here in Cologne they have managed to keep two main department stores open and I go and shop there whenever I can. But in other cities the buildings stand empty with the saddest example being Munich: Up until a few years ago, you could leave the the stations Hauptbahnhof, Karlsplatz or Marienplatz (above or below-ground) and land directly in a retail wonderland where you could buy pretty much anything you wanted or needed: From furniture and luxury goods right through to a needle-and-thread. My particular favourites were the food-halls!

Now the only branch remaining is at Marienplatz with the others closed down and empty.

There was a massive management scandal (with René Benko) which pushed many stores into bankruptcy. But the thing that got me about the WDR-report was that they put the decline of department stores down to falling demand due to online competition. Which, of course, makes this form of retail not viable.

The elephant in the room is the fact that the “playing field” is far from level: online corporations don’t have the same costs (rent, staff, insurance, heating, social costs, etc.) that physical retailers have. And online companies are also masters at avoiding tax. Which governments seem to tolerate!

No wonder physical retail is dying out.

Pesticides

Back on the topic of cancer, I listened to a radio discussion (WGN Chicago, 24th Feb) where they reported that statistics show that cancer levels are higher among farming communities. Apparently because of exposure to pesticides. They mentioned the work of Jay Feldman who has been campaigning for the group “Beyond Pesticides”.

With this being the case, residues of those toxins certainly find their way into the crops and subsequently also into our bodies.

But we choose to ignore that.