

Zero Emissions

This week I passed a sleek, powerful car plastered with large text stating that the car is powered by hydrogen and therefore has “zero emissions”. Very nice. Also many electric cars are marketed as having “zero emissions”.

Of course it is true that such vehicles do not have engines which emit toxic exhaust. That’s good.

But what about the total energy-cost of the vehicle? For example, the energy needed to charge the battery or produce the hydrogen; very heavy and potentially explosive tanks and batteries (for the fuel); the energy needed to construct the vehicle; the energy and toxic materials needed to make the battery; toxic microplastic abraded from the tyre-tread (during normal driving); etc.

So it certainly is massively over-simplistic to say “zero emissions” ... especially for over-sized and over-powered luxury. Much better would be to simply walk or hop on a bicycle: For that you don’t need to desperately explain to the world that you are traveling with “zero emissions”.

Sir Michael Moritz

Huw Thomas reported on a BBC interview with the Welsh billionaire investor Sir Michael Moritz where he expressed his feeling that antisemitism is on the rise in the UK and US ... so he will be applying for a German passport as an “insurance policy”.

He is probably right that Germany has a very positive view towards Jews (and Israel). Yes, children learn about the holocaust at school and everyone here would be horrified to be seen to express any anti-Jewish sentiment. So all good for Sir Michael.

But my view of German “non-antisemitism” is not that it is an out-of-the-goodness-of-their-hearts thing ... but rather that this is a “safe given” into which everyone can retreat. Here I mean that it is far easier to blindly support Israel (regardless!) than to get to grips with nuance and with concrete crimes carried out by the state of Israel.

Peace

As I was passing by Cologne cathedral, I caught sight on a demonstrator sporting a “PEACE” banner. That is certainly a good sentiment but one passer-by heckled (in German) that the demonstrator “should talk to Donald Trump”.

Indeed, yes, it would be good if someone could talk to Donald Trump about peace.

But alongside (or maybe ahead of) Donald Trump is the State of Israel which actually initiated the war with Iran. And Germany is a staunch, long-term supporter of Israel ... for many years supplying about one third of Israel’s weapons.

What a balancing act: Supporting Israel and criticising Trump ... when they are doing the same thing!

Omid Nouripour

On the ARD current-affairs chatshow “Caren Miosga” (1st March) the panel were discussing the war in Iran. The main preoccupation of one guest, Mr Nouripour (a very senior Green member of the Bundestag) seemed to be that the German government was not taking enough care of residents and tourists with German nationality who were stranded in the Gulf-region.

Indeed, I would not like to be stranded there but Mr Nouripour’s indignation seemed to me to be rather misplaced as the air-space was closed ... to everyone.

But the thing that struck me most was that this point distracted from “the main event” which is the fact that hundreds (maybe soon thousands) of people are dying (in several countries!), buildings and infrastructure are being destroyed and that the war is causing masses of greenhouse gasses to be emitted. Surely that should have been Mr Nouripour’s priority?

And, indeed, I have little sympathy for those who jet off to desert-countries to spend their time being pampered in air-conditioned luxury ... or flit onward to other exotic locations burning countless tonnes of kerosene. So is being stranded so bad?

Fukushima

11th March was the fifteenth anniversary of the catastrophic atomic melt-down in Fukushima. An event worth remembering and, indeed, recovery/repair is far from over with radioactive material now being released into the ocean.

So it was ironic that, at the same time, a flurry of politicians (including Macro, von der Leyen, Starmer and Söder) started campaigning for a return to nuclear power with the potential introduction of mini-reactors. Their motivation here was the energy that will be required to power artificial intelligence.

Here the thing that immediately occurs to me is that we have the analysis the “wrong way round”: Surely

we should not be asking ourselves where we will get the energy (needed for AI) from but rather ... if AI needs so much energy, then maybe we shouldn't be going in that direction at all.

Or at least we should charge those companies hefty fees or taxes for the energy that they use. That would make AI far more "selective" and would rule out flippant usage.

Iran War is "green" (?)

With the Israel/US vs. Iran war raging, I saw several headlines stating that the resulting increase in fuel prices could push Europe towards more "renewable energy". Indeed, yes, it probably will but this observation seems to be missing the point. So let's turn it around ...

If the world were not so addicted to oil, multiple conflicts (e.g. Iraq, Iran and others) and many festering injustices (e.g. Nigeria) probably would not have happened.

In my view the solution to this is not to desire "the-same-stuff-but-with-more-renewables" but rather to adjust our energy-hungry life-styles first. For example to take holidays which do not involve flying, cut freight-routes by creating local sources and, instead of relying on (ever-bigger) cars, walk, cycle or take public-transport.

And this assertion does not only apply to oil but also to other resources essential to the "electrified economy" (such as lithium, copper, coltan, etc.) but which are but carry their own costs. Both to the environment and in conflict and exploitation.

Made in Europe

As a reaction to supply-problems created by the war in Iran, the EU launched a campaign to promote "Made in Europe". Myself, as a person who supports *small-scale* (rather than *corporate*), I strongly agree with this.

But I feel that this is simply a "knee-jerk" reaction which further undermines Europe's credibility.

For example, over recent months, the EU Commission (and many others) have been aggressively pushing for the signing of the "Mercosur" Agreement ... which is the diametric opposite of "Made in Europe".

There are multiple other examples of Brussels resorting to massively illogical "cherry-picking" with a major one being that, after promoting industrial-scale farming for decades, the EU now wants to fine countries for having high levels of nitrate in the rivers.

Indeed, yes, health should be protected ... but we need to keep in mind where the problem came from in the first place.

Sahara Dust

Last week there were several reports of "Sahara dust" arriving (carried by the wind) and, yes, the sky did look hazy: It was as if there were a thin fog in the air.

So, if Sahara dust can be carried thousands of miles from Africa to Cologne, what is happening with various forms of pollution? For example we are told that microplastic is so prevalent that it is also present in the Arctic and on the top of mount Everest. So where does it come from?

Each year vehicles on German roads "emit" over one hundred thousand tonnes of microplastic dust abraded from the tread of cars and lorries. That dust lies on the surface of roads (until rain comes to wash it down the drain) so it is perfectly feasible that this dust, just like Sahara-dust, is carried on the wind to the remotest parts of the planet.

Something to investigate, I would say!

Pottery-Cafe and Ikigai

Another "pottery-café" has opened up near our flat. There are now a number of these and similar shops (sewing cafés, art-spaces, ceramic-painting-café, etc.) nearby. All very nice and certainly a creative distraction for the people who go there.

But alongside these new openings there are many local shops which have closed ... mostly because we can buy the items and the services which those shops provided much cheaper online.

So what do we have here? People look for fulfillment by doing creative things (excellent!) but we are closing down many businesses which "employed creativity" ... and replacing that with AI and with exploitatively produced "cheap-stuff" from abroad.

The Japanese have a saying called "Ikigai" which aims to identify the things required for a fulfilled life. The core idea is that you should find a job ... a.) which you are good at; b.) that you love; c.) making/ doing something that the world needs; and d.) that you can be paid for.

To me this sounds like a great proposition. But of this instead we strive for wealth and for leisure. Neither of which can provide fulfillment in life.

So the big irony here is that, for our leisure, we pay money to do things (in a pottery-café) which, previously, we could have done as a profession.