

David Attenborough

As, on his hundredth birthday, praise for David Attenborough filled various media-channels, I shared this admiration. But the tragedy for me is that, although we fully accept the science of climate- and environmental breakdown, we repeatedly fail to heed the message of Mr Attenborough and others like him.

Empire

I watched Aljazeera's excellent documentary "Empires Untangled" and one remark in the episode on "The Portuguese Empire" struck a note with me. This was when Professor Jeremy Black of Exeter university mentioned (20:30 mins) that "Empire works best when it actually doesn't take with it the necessity for territorial control". Indeed, yes!

For me this one sentence describes perfectly our current "globalised" trading model: Why take on the task of managing the slaves in the cotton fields or the workers in the cotton mill, when you can get someone on the other side of the planet to do it for you?

So for me current (manipulated and unfair) "market-forces" are the new model for "Empire": Others (poor people somewhere) do the dirty-work, we (western consumers) get the cheap goods and corporations rake in the profits. This is colonialism by proxy.

E-Bike Batteries

A friend recently had her e-bike battery stolen and is now having trouble getting hold of a new one: They are expensive (700 Euros), difficult to get (availability) and, as models change, you might not be able to get the one you need.

So it occurs to me that, with all the subsidies, the deals and the hype, masses of people have gone out and bought e-bikes which are spending a lot of time in people's sheds and garages. Or standing in the rain. So, in a year or two's time, when the batteries are failing or the circuits corroded, the world will have a mass of electro-junk on its hands.

The question I ask myself here is why are we so lazy that we can't even pedal a normal bicycle?

House-building

People everywhere are criticising the lack of housing and so, during a recent visit to the UK, I noticed numerous house-building projects. Necessary, I suppose. But two points occurred to me ...

Many of the projects seem to be to build houses ... rather than flats! Which is surely wrong as flats would accommodate far more people (and services) far more efficiently. Often enabling people to do without cars.

Next there is the point that, in a decade or so, the "Baby-boomers" will be dying off so then there will be a glut of accommodation with the property being built now dropping massively in value.

Surely the answer should be to have a "square-metre tax" (incorporated into local taxation) so that people (e.g. retirees) occupying more space than they need are encouraged to down-size?

Debtageddon

I was listening to France Inter (radio) and, just in passing, they mentioned the EU's "Covid Debt", which still needs to be serviced. I had never heard about that, so how much is it?

Recently, the EU gave a green light to a loan of €90 billion to Ukraine ... on top of all the aid, loans and material which have already been given.

Next you have the fact that Germany (and many other states) have decided to significantly increase military spending. With Germany taking on new debt of €500 billion (the "Sondervermögen").

Then you have talk of possibly confiscating Russian assets which have been frozen (because of the war) to help fund the Ukrainian war-effort. This will certainly have consequences including that, if we confiscate Russian assets, when it comes to peace-talks, they will ask for those assets to be returned.

In my view this all adds up to "Debtageddon" where the nations of Europe will be trampled under the hooves of the monstrous debt which is being created.

We are already seeing some of the symptoms of this as countries discuss hard choices which need to be made regarding pensions and health-care provision.

Brexit

During a recent visit to Britain the topic of Brexit seemed to still be on people's lips with many relishing the possibility that the Starmer government will move towards closer ties. And maybe even rejoin the EU.

I admit that Brexit was a tragedy, a mess and a mistake: Britain should have stayed in Europe to fight for reform of some of the crazy rulings which come out of Brussels.

But times have moved on and with wars and crises swirling around us (including potential oil-shortages), maybe Brexit is not such a bad thing ...

Yes, people talk about changing the way we source goods in order to be more “resilient”. This points towards a desire for more local economies and fewer over-extended supply-chains and dependencies.

With this being the case “ever closer union” (the goal of the EU) does not seem to fit at all. Surely we would do better with far more local economies, aligned in a “federation” ... rather than a union!

Airborne Microplastic

On 4th May The Scientific American reported on research carried out at Fudan University in China where the findings tell us that airborne microplastic is accelerating the warming of the planet: When dark microplastic dust lands on light surfaces (e.g. snow), significantly more heat is absorbed.

The conclusion drawn by their expert, Steve Allen (of “Healthy Earth”) was that we should be “removing plastics from our lives”.

Indeed, yes, I can’t argue with that. But surely, if we are focusing on airborne microplastic, rather than concentrating simply on “packaging”, the thing that we need to be removing most is “tire-tread-dust”?

Vehicles (cars and trucks) in Germany alone generate over 100k tonnes of toxic microplastic per year, abraded directly from tire-tread and catapulted into the air.

It is a perfect storm but topics which impact our “motoring comfort” are swept under the carpet.

Robots sorting Rubbish

On 5th May BBC News ran an item on robots being used to sort rubbish. Very ingenious!

But surely all the effort and energy needed to develop and run those robots completely negates the advantages of recycling?

And, anyway, why not simply drastically reduce packaging? Up until the 1960s nothing much was packaged in plastic anyway.

For me the classic symbols of wastefulness and “kidding-ourselves” are “Bottle Banks”: The main energy-cost for making glass is not the raw material but rather the energy. So collecting glass is green-washing intended to delude consumers.

In my view packaging should only consist of materials which can either a.) be composed or b.) be

reused. Anything else should carry a hefty tax to discourage that action.

Deutsche Bahn

Tagesschau reported that Deutsche Bahn (German Railways) are now introducing “Last-minute tickets”.

That might be nice for the people who can bag a good deal but surely the whole point of public transport is not to offer “deals” but rather to offer a structured, affordable, reliable service in order that people don’t need to use private cars or air-travel?

For every “cheap deal” there is price to pay somewhere down the line: Either more expensive fares, worse service or compromised safety.

European Leaders in Armenia

BBC News reported on an EU summit (with Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa) being held in Armenia on 4th & 5th May.

In theory good ... but my heart sank ...

Surely a big factor in the conflict currently raging between Ukraine and Russia is that The West (NATO and the EU) pushed too far east too quickly. And now we are trying to project our influence into further locations (Armenia, Georgia and others) where we think we can “get a foothold”.

In my view this is highly provocative!

Fuel Discount

Germany has introduced a “Tankrabatt” to ease the costs for motorists. That’s nice for motorists.

But surely the goal should be to wean us off of fossil fuels (for the sake of both energy-security and the climate). So wouldn’t it be more logical to let those prices rise and encourage people to switch to “The Three Ps”: Pedestrian, Pedal or Public-transport.

The goal here would be to nudge both our society and our economy towards local and regional structures where people (and products) don’t need to travel so far. Instead simply walk to shops served by local producers.

That would be a winning formula, don’t you think?

Spring (Patio-) Cleaning

Spring is here but there is a definite lack of insects and song-birds. This is confirmed by mainstream nature-programmes. In my local garden-centre they are promoting 5 litre cans of patio-cleaner (“toxic to aquatic organisms” !!!) for 3.99 Euros. No wonder our insects are dying!