



## Berlin NEWSLETTER May 2022



### CATCH-UP PUBLIC HOLIDAYS?

The month of May began with that most **dispiriting** of German phenomena: a public holiday that falls on a weekend. International Workers' Day was on a Sunday this year, and unlike countries such as Belgium, Spain, and Ireland, where 'lost' public holidays are typically marked by a **catch-up** bank holiday Monday (and a welcome long weekend), Germany's public holidays come and go **depending** on the calendar.

Berlin's Labour Minister, Katja Kipping has now called for Germany – or at least Berlin – to fall in line with international best practice: "It's about giving back to employees something of what was taken away from them." Responding to the call, the Hubertus Heil, the Federal Labour Minister said the topic was "not currently top priority," though he did **admit** he found the debate "by no means **unappealing**." The Berlin-Brandenburg employers' organization **rejected** the idea as "absurd."

*Tell the class what you think of the idea.*

### GRÜNEWALD WORKHORSES



The newest employees of the State of Berlin are two southern German coldbloods named Bubi and Pauli. **Weighing** around eight hundred kilos together, Bubi and Pauli are workhorses, and trained specialists in forest labour. Officially registered as logging horses, Bubi and Pauli will **mainly** work in the Grönewald – the largest woodland in a city in which a fifth of the total **area** is covered by around twenty million trees – with designated daily working hours of eight am to two pm.

Most of the work in Berlin's forests is done by **harvesting** machines that are capable of felling, **stripping**, and **removing** trees en masse. Though highly efficient, the machines have a major disadvantage: They are **bulky** and extremely heavy. So the horses will operate in those parts of the forest where there are no pathways, or where there are particularly sensitive biotopes. Here they will be able to remove the felled trunks without **damaging** the **undergrowth**. "The horses aren't a replacement for the machines, but a **gentle** supplement," said Peter Harbauer, a forestry spokesman.

*Can you think of any other industries in which work animals would be useful?*

## TAXI DRIVERS

Berlin's taxi drivers are **feeling the pinch**. A number of different **threats** has hit the city's taxi business at the same time – including the corona pandemic, rising energy costs, and increased competition from new rivals such as Uber. Every day in Berlin there are one to two fewer cars **on average** in the taxi fleet. Two thousand drivers have handed in their licenses in the last two years alone. In the same **period** the number of rental cars in the city has risen by 2,400, with a total of 4,000 such vehicles now in the city. Not normally known for their talkativeness, the city's cabbies are now speaking out in the hope that the state can help **relieve** their **plight**.

“We need help. Otherwise we won't be around anymore,” said Leszej Nadolski, head of the Berlin Taxi Drivers' Guild, at the organization's annual press conference. Among a number of **measures**, Nadolski called for greater regulation of the ridesharing industry in particular. Although it is **supposed** to be forbidden for Uber cars to be hailed on the street, this was never monitored, Nadolski said. And while taxi drivers have to offer fixed prices, Uber drivers are allowed to vary their prices according to **demand**. Ridesharing companies were also allowed to **cherry pick** the areas they operate in, whereas taxi drivers had to **serve** the whole metropolitan area.

*Do you think the taxi industry needs to be supported? In what ways could this be done?*

## BIG BROTHER AWARDS

For twenty years, in its annual Big Brother Awards, the organization Digitalcourage has named and shamed the companies it finds **responsible** for the most flagrant violations of data protection. Heading the list this year is the German **Federal Criminal Office** (BKA). Other winners include the **Federal Printing Office**, the Swedish Klarna Bank, Lieferando and the Irish Data Protection Authority. The BKA won the award for the way in which it saves and uses personal data. Contrary to **statutory requirements**, these data are not adequately **tagged**, the awards committee said – which could result in millions of people being unjustly treated as dangerous persons or criminals.



“We want to rub salt in the wound and push forward the debate on data protection,” said the awards head, who goes under the pseudonym padeluun. Lieferando won the award for **forcing** its workers to download the app ‘Scoober’ which **monitors** their activity in minute detail. The Federal Printing Office was given its award for its increased use of blockchains in various projects. This, according to the jury, was “not only not very energy efficient, but also puts data protection at risk because in a blockchain nothing can be **erased**.”

*Who would you have given the award to? Say why.*

### 'PRE-LOVED' CLOTHING BOOM

The second-hand clothing **trade** is booming in Germany. Now increasingly known by the less **musty**-sounding name 'pre-loved', the sector still makes up a **mere** five percent of the total fashion market. But thirty-four percent of consumers now buy used clothing regularly; importantly, younger people are driving the market, which is growing **at pace**. Some estimate the international second-hand clothing market – which includes the popular luxury and vintage segments – to be worth thirty-four billion euros. Mainstream high-street fashion shops are now also getting involved.

The **shift** towards second-hand fashion comes **amid** a growing backlash against the so-called fast fashion industry. According to estimates by Greenpeace around a fifth of newly bought clothes are **hardly** ever worn. Large quantities are simply thrown away rather than reused. Fast fashion **took hold** between 2000 and 2014, a period in which clothing production doubled. Its rise has come at great environmental cost. Sixty to seventy percent of fast fashion items are made from non-biodegradable synthetic materials. Astonishingly, a Mckinsey study revealed that the international fashion industry in fact creates the same level of CO2 emissions **annually** as France, Germany, and the UK combined.

*Are you a fan of second-hand clothing? Describe the favourite item of clothing you own.*

### NO VAT FOR VEGAN FOODS?

Germany's Federal Environment Agency has called for the **removal** of VAT on plant-based foodstuffs. "A diet based more strongly on plants is good for the environment and is **healthy** as well," said the UBA president Dirk Messner. A VAT **exemption** would also make sense **in light of** rising prices for fruit and vegetables, he said. "Everyone should be able to afford a healthy diet, even those with low incomes," For Messner, the move would be a good **supplement** for the federal government's two-billion-euro **relief** package, which is intended to **combat** the country's cost-of-living crisis. "It would also take the pressure off those groups who haven't profited from the relief package, for example, **retirees** with low incomes."

The standard VAT rate in Germany is nineteen percent. A reduced rate of seven percent is used to **subsidize staple** foodstuffs such as milk, meat, fruit, and baked goods. Yet products and services like animal foods, flowers, and hotel stays are also taxed at the reduced rate. In April, a new EU VAT directive **came into force**. The directive sets a minimum rate of fifteen percent, but now also allows for a complete exemption for certain goods that cover basic needs.



*Do you think the VAT exemption would be a good idea? Give reasons for your answer.*

## ROAD RAGE

Berlin's red-green-red coalition government is set on a collision course with its federal red-green-yellow counterpart over the controversial **extension** of the A100 motorway around the city. The sixteenth construction stage of project, which extends the eastern part of the road, is **earmarked** for completion in the fourth quarter of 2024. The federal government is now keen to **accelerate** construction of the seventeenth section. But the costs for this 4.2-kilometre segment between Friedrichshain and Lichtenberg would **dwarf** the 700 million spent on section sixteen. Indeed, according to some experts, it may become the most expensive roadbuilding project in German history. For instance, since it is to be built in a **densely populated** urban area, it would involve enormous land costs and likely require a highly expensive **construction trench**.

Berlin's Senate doesn't want to see any of this happen, however. In the 2021 coalition agreement, the SPD, Greens, and the Left have already stated that they would not be **advancing** the project in the current legislative period, which ends in 2026. Financing the project is **proving** to be a major **headache**. While Berlin has money for roads, the local government argues that this is needed for **urgent** repairs to repairing existing roads and bridges, not for developing new routes. "We simply don't have the money for that," said Alexander Kaas Elias of the Greens. Kaas also pointed to the 2021 climate ruling of the **Federal Constitutional Court**, which obliges politics to **protect** the **conditions** of life for future generations. Berlin, he said, must find a way to quickly reduce CO2 emissions – particularly in the transport sector. The A100 extension was thus counterproductive: "A motorway can't make any kind of **contribution** to climate protection," he said.

Berlin's Left party has signaled that it will now resist the plans with greater vehemence. "We're **prepared** to escalate," said the transport spokesman Kristian Ronneburg, indicating that his parliamentary group were working on finding ways "to stop the FDP." For its part, the FDP – the party of the federal transport minister – has argued that the new motorway would relieve inner city **congestion**, close a **gap** in the transport network, and provide a better connection to the airport and commercial areas outside the city. Each of these goals may be **achievable** without extending the motorway, however.

This was the position taken by the SPD **deputy**, Stephan Machulik. "We stand by our **proposal** to let the people of Berlin decide on this. We need the federal support and financial resources for a **sensible** completion of the A104, the redesign of the A103 and for the rebuilding of the Rudolf-Wissel Brücke. These measures will make the **surrounding** neighbourhoods more livable and improve the free-flow of traffic."

*Do you think the motorway should be extended? Say why/why not.*

## Mini-Glossary

<b>accelerate</b>	beschleunigen
<b>achievable</b>	realisierbar
<b>admit</b>	zugeben
<b>advance</b>	vorantreiben^
<b>amid</b>	inmitten
<b>annually</b>	jährlich
<b>area</b>	Fläche
<b>at pace</b>	zügig
<b>bulky</b>	sperrig
<b>catch-up</b>	Nachhol-
<b>cherry pick</b>	nur die Rosinen herauspicken
<b>combat</b>	bekämpfen
<b>come into force</b>	in Kraft treten
<b>conditions</b>	Bedingungen
<b>congestion</b>	Verkehrsstau
<b>construction trench</b>	Baugrube
<b>contribution</b>	Beitrag
<b>damage</b>	beschädigen
<b>demand</b>	Nachfrage
<b>densely populated</b>	dicht bevölkert
<b>depending</b>	je nach
<b>deputy</b>	Abgeordneter
<b>dispiriting</b>	entmutigend
<b>dwarf</b>	klein erscheinen lassen
<b>earmark</b>	vorsehen
<b>erase</b>	löschen
<b>exemption</b>	Befreiung
<b>extension</b>	Erweiterung
<b>Federal Constitutional Court</b>	Bundesverfassungsgericht
<b>Federal Criminal Office</b>	Bundeskriminalamt
<b>Federal Printing Office</b>	Bundesdruckerei
<b>feel the pinch</b>	merken, dass das Geld knapp wird
<b>forge</b>	zwingen
<b>gap</b>	Lücke
<b>gentle</b>	schonend
<b>hardly</b>	kaum
<b>harvesting</b>	ernten

<b>headache</b>	hier: Problem
<b>healthy</b>	gesund
<b>in light of</b>	angesichts
<b>mainly</b>	hauptsächlich
<b>measures</b>	Maßnahmen
<b>mere</b>	bloß
<b>monitor</b>	überwachen
<b>musty</b>	muffig
<b>on average</b>	im Durchschnitt
<b>period</b>	Zeitraum
<b>plight</b>	Notlage
<b>prepared</b>	bereit sein
<b>proposal</b>	Vorschlag
<b>prove to be</b>	sich herausstellen
<b>reject</b>	ablehnen
<b>relief</b>	Hilfe
<b>relieve</b>	lindern, helfen
<b>removal</b>	Abschaffen
<b>remove</b>	wegnehmen
<b>responsible</b>	verantwortlich
<b>retiree</b>	Rentner
<b>sensible</b>	vernünftig
<b>serve</b>	bedienen
<b>shift</b>	Änderung
<b>staple</b>	Grund-
<b>statutory requirements</b>	gesetzliche Anforderungen
<b>strip</b>	hier: entasten
<b>subsidize</b>	subventionieren
<b>supplement</b>	Ergänzung
<b>supposed to, be</b>	sollen
<b>surrounding</b>	umliegend
<b>tag</b>	kennzeichnen
<b>take hold</b>	sich etablieren
<b>threat</b>	Bedrohung, Gefahr
<b>trade</b>	Handel
<b>unappealing</b>	unsympathisch
<b>undergrowth</b>	Unterholz
<b>weigh</b>	wiegen