Please fight Mosel madness

10 May 2009 by Jancis Robinson

***12 May** - See 'superb' (Sarah Washington) organic wine producer Rudolf Trossen's cartoon below.*

Your help is needed to fight a worrying threat to some of the world's finest Riesling vineyards in the Mosel valley in Germany. (I can't believe I spent a long weekend in Germany so recently and no-one mentioned it.) Work has apparently already begun on this *folie de grandeur*, Germany's largest bridge, which, it is feared, could wreck the eco-systems in such important wine villages and towns as Ürzig, Zeltingen, Wehlen, Graach and Bernkastel.

A four-lane, 160-metre-high bridge, as depicted in the artist's impression below, is being planned right through the finest Middle Mosel vineyards. Many winemakers are deeply worried about the likely effects of it. (*Nachher* means 'after'.) Please visit http://b50neu.de/html/projekt/projekt.html for details (German only, unfortunately). If you wish to add your voice to the campaign against this, please email the German Chancellor Angela Merkel via this link.

The main objections to this bridge are that it is likely to cause unpredictable changes to the microclimate and a massive increase in pollution (the main purpose of the bridge is to take heavy goods vehicles to and from the Benelux countries). To judge from the look of it, it also seems likely to threaten the tourism that is so important to this, one of the most beautiful wine areas in the world.

The bridge is 1.7 km - more than a mile - long. See http://b50neu.de/vornach.html for a series of pictures showing the area both before and after the bridge. Just roll the mouse over the arrows. Projected costs are already €270 million, and this cost must be borne by the region, not Germany as a whole.

I asked Berlin-based wine writer Stuart Pigott for his comments and this is his reply: 'Sadly the bridge is not just proposed, rather construction has just started. The project was originally planned during the 1960s as a so-called 'NATO-*Rennstrecke*' (a *Rennstrecke* is a racing track), the goal being to have a speedy link between the US air bases at Bitburg and Hahn in the case of nuclear war. The latter air base is now Frankfurt-Hahn airport. The new purpose of this fossil from the age of blind faith in technology and progress seems to be to help turn Hahn airport into a cargo hub (instead of the loss-making [Irish budget airline] Ryanair-hub owned by the state of Rheinland-Pfalz which it is now), with the bridge as a 'CARGO-*Rennstrecke*' to the Netherlands. I can't see how this will work, which makes this monstrosity a concrete white elephant. It is megalomania of the highest order, with Minister President Kurt Beck of Rheinland-Pfalz betting his political comeback on the success of this madness.

'To give you an idea of the bridge's scale. It is higher than Cologne cathedral and you could line all the Egyptian pyramids up beneath it in a row with plenty of space to spare. They reckon on €270 million costs and seven years' construction, but the geology is complex and possibly unstable, which realistically means more like 10 years' construction with unknown cost overruns. The bridge itself is bad, but the new road (B50neu) connected to it on the right bank of the Mosel is worse, since it will have a considerable influence upon the flow of water in and over the hillsides which are the top sites of Zeltingen, Wehlen, Graach and Bernkastel. I'm not the only one to have written about this, but the politicians are ignoring all criticism, simply not replying.

'Of the local campaigners, Sarah Washington in Ürzig is the most articulate and her stuff is all in English. Her email is: washsarah@gmail.com '

Visitors to this week's London International Wine Trade Fair may visit a display outlining the problems on the Pineapple Wine Services stand (R20). This will include invitations to wine lovers to express their concerns directly to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel in an attempt to get the political decisions reversed.