

deep

THE DUTCH SEAFARERS MISSIONS MAGAZINE

end



**MAKE
SEA ★
GREAT
AGAIN**



“MAKE THE SEA GREAT AGAIN”

This seemed to us a fitting theme for this new issue of DeepEnd. The sea, the shipping industry, and seafarers have had a difficult time lately. So it felt like the right moment to look for positive developments and explore reasons for hope.

Then current events overtook us: war in the Middle East. Ships have been hit by missiles, and many seafarers are stuck in the Persian Gulf. We hope that by the time this magazine is published, the situation will have improved.

Even so, we decided to keep our theme. From different perspectives we reflect on the future of the seafaring profession, the influence of ocean water on our lives, and the importance of trade union organisation. We also hear from a young seafarer, include the columns of Seafarer's Wife and Sea Beggar, and pay attention to maritime art.

In this issue we welcome a new member of the editorial team: Pier Jager. He works for Nautilus International in Rotterdam. It is nice to mention that his father and the father of the chief editor once sailed together many years ago. Pier has visited countless ships and in the coming issues he will share his maritime knowledge with us.

Enjoy your reading!

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FROM THE EDITORS



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ART ON BOARD

by Stefan Francke

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”

When you hear a certain high-ranking figure in the United States speaking in the news, you often hear words like: Great! Biggest ever! Highest number in history! and so on. It is clear who he believes should be in charge of the world. The idea behind “MAGA” seems to be this: becoming great by putting your own interests first and dominating others — if necessary, by force.

Then I read the words of Jesus: *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”* That is very different language. It is not about putting your own interests first or dominating others.

Of course, the words of Jesus are not easy to apply to international politics. But if we stay closer to home and look at life on board a ship, we can ask whether this idea might work there. A captain cannot simply start doing the work of an ordinary seaman, and the chief engineer cannot take over the duties of a greaser. There is a hierarchy on board, and it

is necessary. At the same time, a captain who isolates himself in his cabin, like someone in an ivory tower, is not very popular either. There is something called servant leadership. This means that a leadership position is not meant to serve the leader, but to support and guide those under their responsibility.

I think what Jesus is saying is that true greatness may be found in simple things. On board a ship, greatness rarely makes a lot of noise. It is not about who speaks the loudest, but about who does their job well. It is in the seaman who takes an extra watch without complaining, the officer who stays calm when systems fail, and the captain who listens before making a decision. At sea, everyone knows that in the end it comes down to reliability and looking out for one another. Without that, nothing works. Ships do not run on egos, but on cooperation.

Trust is vital on board. And sadly, that is exactly what seems to be breaking down at the global level. That is why many people

feel uncertain about the future.

Make Jesus Great Again! But Jesus does not need a campaign. What if greatness has less to do with winning and more to do with serving? What if influence begins with integrity? What if being “great” means being reliable, just, and humane? For those who work at sea, these are not just religious ideas; they are daily choices. How do you treat colleagues from other cultures? How do you stay professional under pressure? How do you keep your course when circumstances change? It is there, in ordinary work, that greatness takes shape. In a time of big words, it can be liberating to return to something simple: do your job well, take responsibility, and treat one another with respect.

In fact, the sea does not need to be made “great again.” It already is. Perhaps the same is true of what makes people truly great.

Amen. 



name Joris Hoogendijk
 job 2^e stuurman bij Nescos Shipping
 age .. jaar

SAILING THE REAL SEA STORIES

by Helene Perfors

“Honestly,” Joris begins, “I can understand why Dutch people don’t stay at sea for very long. And there are concerns — there are definitely downsides.” He himself is one of only three Dutch seafarers at Nescos Shipping, where he has been sailing since 2025. But for him one thing is certain: “I really love it.”

I know Joris from guest lectures at STC Group in Rotterdam and from LinkedIn. Now that he is not only a seafarer but also a volunteer at ISC The Bridge, I asked him to share his positive story about life at sea. Because Joris is clearly enthusiastic. He sails with Nescos Shipping on a service that operates under charter for Universal Africa Lines along the west coast of Africa. “I couldn’t have asked for a better job,” he says. “It’s one big adventure.”

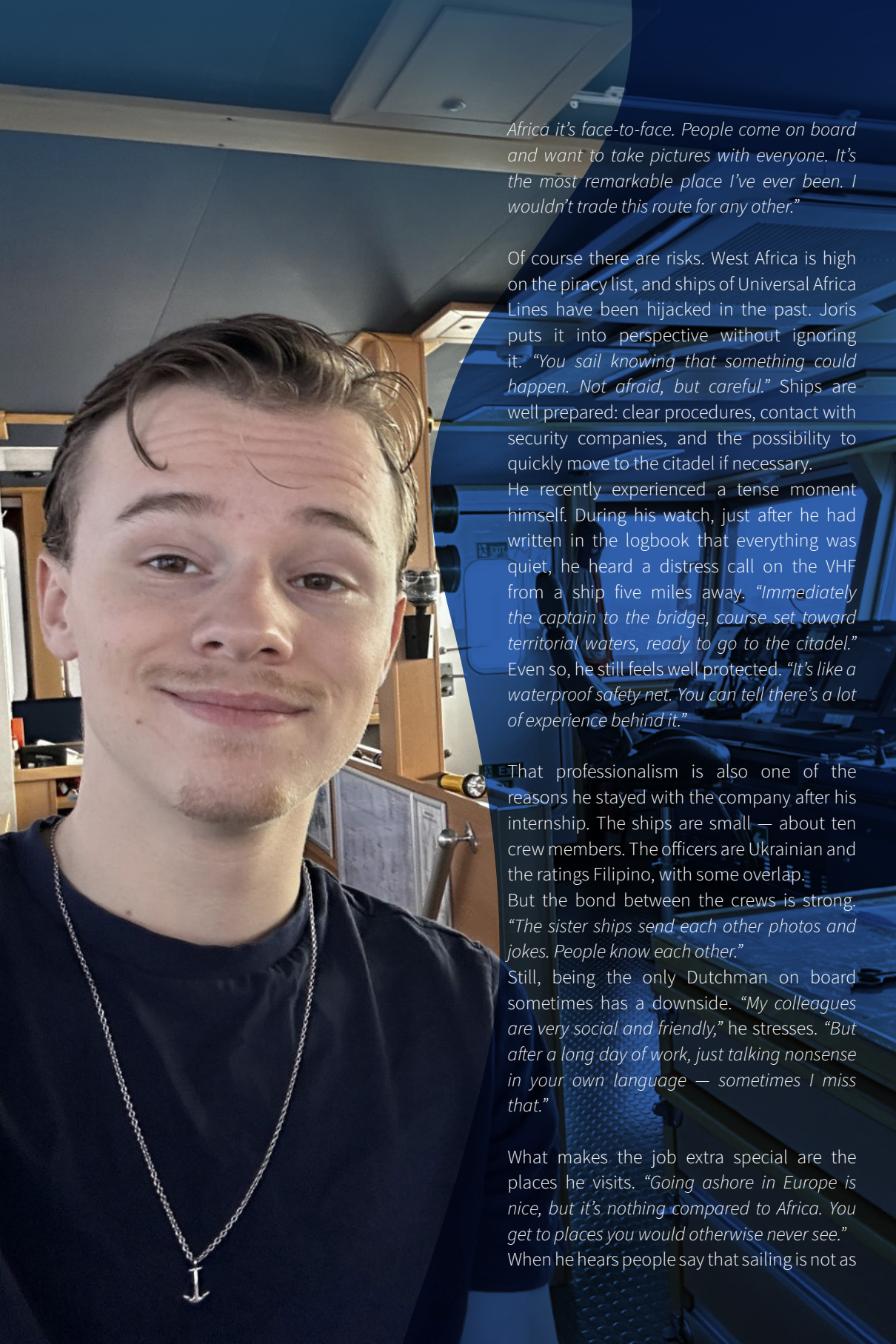
What makes it so special for him starts with the cargo. On many ships most of the loading work is already prepared ashore, but on his vessel things

are different. There is a lot of variation: heavy pieces, bulk cargo — basically every type of cargo you can imagine. That means the cargo plan constantly must be adjusted. “Your best friend in Africa is a ten-meter measuring tape,” he says with a laugh. “You’re standing on the quay — sometimes in the middle of a Nigerian village — measuring everything again. Will it fit? Is there space? Is the quay long enough?” For Joris this is exactly what he hoped for. “Sailing the real sea stories — that’s what I had in mind. For me it’s magical. A childhood dream.”

That does not mean he ignores reality. West Africa is not Europe. Poverty is widespread

and conditions can be tough. “The guys working in the port there get almost nothing,” he says. “No proper work clothing, very few safety measures. And you have to stay alert so things don’t get stolen.” At the same time, he tries to deal with it in a practical way. “You can get angry, but you can also show that you’ve noticed something and try to find a solution together. Those people are really poor.” On board they often give away water, and nothing that can still be useful is thrown away.

According to him, this human side is exactly what makes the region special. “In Western Europe you hardly see people on the terminals anymore. In



Africa it's face-to-face. People come on board and want to take pictures with everyone. It's the most remarkable place I've ever been. I wouldn't trade this route for any other."

Of course there are risks. West Africa is high on the piracy list, and ships of Universal Africa Lines have been hijacked in the past. Joris puts it into perspective without ignoring it. *"You sail knowing that something could happen. Not afraid, but careful."* Ships are well prepared: clear procedures, contact with security companies, and the possibility to quickly move to the citadel if necessary.

He recently experienced a tense moment himself. During his watch, just after he had written in the logbook that everything was quiet, he heard a distress call on the VHF from a ship five miles away. *"Immediately the captain to the bridge, course set toward territorial waters, ready to go to the citadel."* Even so, he still feels well protected. *"It's like a waterproof safety net. You can tell there's a lot of experience behind it."*

That professionalism is also one of the reasons he stayed with the company after his internship. The ships are small — about ten crew members. The officers are Ukrainian and the ratings Filipino, with some overlap.

But the bond between the crews is strong. *"The sister ships send each other photos and jokes. People know each other."*

Still, being the only Dutchman on board sometimes has a downside. *"My colleagues are very social and friendly,"* he stresses. *"But after a long day of work, just talking nonsense in your own language — sometimes I miss that."*

What makes the job extra special are the places he visits. *"Going ashore in Europe is nice, but it's nothing compared to Africa. You get to places you would otherwise never see."* When he hears people say that sailing is not as



“AFTER A LONG DAY OF WORK, JUST TALKING NONSENSE IN YOUR OWN LANGUAGE — SOMETIMES I MISS THAT.”

enjoyable as it used to be, he understands the feeling. Digitalization has changed a lot. *"The old craftsmanship has partly disappeared,"* he says. *"But a new one has taken its place."* He mentions the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS) as an example. *"If you only use it like a paper chart, then I understand people saying the craftsmanship is gone. But you can plan complete maneuvers with it. A whole new dimension has been added."*

Joris is now second officer on ships of about 130 meters. Small vessels, but able to go almost anywhere. The accommodation is simple and entertainment options are limited, although

he does have his own cabin. *"Sometimes we do karaoke,"* he says with a smile. *"The whole crew joins in."*

Moments like that make life on board enjoyable. *"A party occasionally is fine, but you need balance. You also work together and you still have to maintain some authority."*

For Joris the future seems clear for now: *"At the moment I really can't see myself doing anything else. It's simply the best job there is."*



by Hans Luesink

TITEL?

HOW GREAT IS THE OCEAN

In our maritime world, what counts first and foremost are the flows that move across the water: oil from the Persian Gulf, containers full of cheap goods from China to Europe, chemicals between the Gulf of America and Northwest Europe or Asia. Mostly bulk cargo, usually one way. The sea appears to us mainly as a passage — a wet trade route, nothing more.



Since the Industrial Revolution, we have relied on mechanical propulsion and slowly cut ourselves loose from the natural forces that once dictated life at sea. Powered by engines, we push straight into the fiercest storms, and our course line has become a straight track on a screen — often regardless of wind or current. High above the waterline, on the enclosed bridges of ocean giants, we hardly feel the power of the sea anymore.

So we have come to see the ocean as a tool, a route — much like asphalt is to a bus driver. Yet the ocean is infinitely more. Salt water is not merely the backdrop to our business, but a life source for humanity. And I don't just mean the fish we eat or the seaweed we harvest. The ocean is the driving force behind a habitable planet.

How so? Sunlight and CO₂ form the basis of photosynthesis. Carbon from CO₂ becomes the building block of living organisms, while oxygen keeps the air we breathe in balance. At the same time, sunlight warms the seawater. Small temperature differences affect salinity and therefore the density of the water. Under the influence of wind and the Coriolis force — caused by the Earth's rotation — a vast circular current develops. Water that flows away must be replaced. This global circulation acts as a conveyor of heat and energy and is often called the "Blue Machine."

Warm water flows from the equator toward the poles. Because warm water is lighter, it stays near the surface. In polar regions it cools, becomes heavier, sinks, and returns as a deep undercurrent. In simple terms, this movement

forms a global loop — an invisible river of energy carrying warmth to regions where the sun is weaker, giving Northwest Europe, for example, its mild climate.

But the environmental effects of more than two centuries of industrialization are throwing sand into this Blue Machine. The planet is warming, ice caps and glaciers are melting, and the white surfaces that once reflected sunlight are disappearing. Air pollution also affects how heat is radiated. Regions that normally would absorb energy from ocean currents are warming too and can take up less heat. The density differences in the water decrease — and with them the speed of the circulation.

The speed of these currents largely determines how heat is distributed across the Earth. Signs of a faltering Blue Machine include harsher winters and more extreme weather in Europe. Monsoon patterns may also shift, with major consequences for wet and dry regions around the equator.

Almost everyone has heard of El Niño and La Niña — Pacific Ocean phenomena that already have major impacts on surrounding countries. But a slowdown, let alone a shutdown, of the global Blue Machine that transports energy around the planet would be on an entirely different scale. A catastrophe — and that is putting it mildly.

Seafarers work at the very source of life on Earth. Changes there affect them directly, for example through stronger storms. But their loved ones ashore are just as affected as living conditions change. We as seafarers cannot turn the tide simply by steering a different course. Yet pausing to reflect on — and understand — the interaction between ocean and climate, between our workplace and the wider world, is a beginning. A mustard seed, perhaps, from which something great may grow.

Want to read more?
Helen Czerski: Blue Machine





CAN WE?

CAN WE?

MAKE SEAFARING GREAT AGAIN

Dear Stefan,

After the last online editorial meeting of DeepEnd, I closed my laptop and thought again about the theme for the next issue. In fact, it wasn't really a theme, but rather a wink to the slogan of a well-known—and not uncontroversial—president: Make ... great again. We, as editors, could fill in the dots with what we think could be improved, and how.

I planned to write something about "Make the Seafarer Great Again." It seemed an important subject to me, because the media all too often report worrying or negative stories about shipping. In the days after the meeting, the question kept running through my mind: how can we make this profession attractive and enjoyable again? The longer I thought about it, the more pessimistic I became about a quick solution. There simply isn't one.

Here is just a small selection of news from less than a year ago:

- * 10 March: Off the coast of Hull, the cargo ship Solong rams the anchored tanker Stena Immaculate amidships.
- * Early this year: In several sea areas—the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and around the Straits of Singapore and Malacca—pirates reappear after a period of relative calm and attack merchant vessels.
- * 29 September: The Minervagracht is attacked by Houthi fighters, resulting in a fatality. The crew of the Eternity C is only released after months of captivity by this group.
- * Late November: In the Black Sea several tankers and bulk carriers (Kairos, Virat, Midvolga 2) become targets of drone attacks.
- * Elsewhere: the Marine I drifts helplessly for days without food or drinking water before the crew is rescued.
- * Early December: The United States seizes the large oil tanker Skipper with little formality.

Could these events also influence other developments? Enrollment at maritime academies continues to decline, and in early February the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences even suspended—perhaps temporarily—the Maritime Officer program.

As if that were not enough, a major survey by the World Maritime University shows that no less than 51.9 percent of seafarers expect to leave the sector within five years.

The reasons are hardly surprising: heavy stress, workweeks averaging more than seventy hours, and for many not a single day off during their time on board. On top of that, many trainees—often Dutch students leaving home for the first time—find themselves in a completely foreign crew.

Dear Stefan, with such a (still incomplete) list of reports and figures, I must admit it is difficult for me to suggest a solution that would make the seafarer great again. Perhaps you have better ideas?

Looking forward to hearing from you,
Kees

I must go down to the seas again,
to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship
and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song
and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face,
and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again,
for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call
that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day
with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume,
and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again,
to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way
where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn
from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream
when the long trick's over.

© John Masefield, 1902

YES WE CAN!



YES WE CAN!

Dear Kees,

Thank you for your letter. It indeed sketches a very bleak picture of life at sea. I can hardly argue against it, because you are simply presenting the facts: a great deal of misery at sea. Especially as a European, one might well ask why anyone would still want to go there.

What is happening to crews on board is actually similar to what we have seen in shipbuilding for years: water flows to the lowest point. First Western Europeans were replaced by crews from cheaper countries, and now even they are being replaced by workers who are cheaper still. What this means for the overall quality of seafarers is easy to imagine.

Are there any bright spots left? I believe there are. Take the textile and shoe industry, for example: once large sectors in the Netherlands, later largely moved to low-wage countries. Yet some companies—often small family businesses—managed to survive by focusing on quality. Or think of the traditional family doctor—the village doctor who personally knew everyone. That model has also disappeared. Today many general practitioners work part-time and no longer want to be called out at all hours of the night. Yet with the system of GP emergency centers in the Netherlands we still maintain a high level of care.

The world is changing, and the seafaring profession is changing with it. The large Dutch shipping companies are unlikely to return, but a number of Dutch firms have managed to retain work in specialized sectors such as offshore operations, dredging, and support vessels. In these sectors there is a strong need for seafarers who can think independently and creatively. Often these are smaller (family) companies, where loyalty is strong and where there is still a willingness to employ at least some Dutch crew. Companies that do something extra for their people—such as a study fund or a celebration—also receive appreciation in return.

The old numbers of seafarers will probably never return, and it will also less often be a career for life. But in truth that was often the case in the past as well: many stopped sailing once they started a family. Moreover, young people today generally stay with one employer for a shorter time anyway.

Perhaps the role of maritime officer will increasingly become a profession for a certain period of life, somewhat like the short-term contracts in the armed forces. Experience may be lost at sea, but society benefits from the knowledge and work ethic that former seafarers bring into other sectors.

These are small bright spots. At the same time, the basic conditions remain crucial: a good salary that compensates for long periods away from home, a reasonable leave schedule, and decent living conditions on board. That last point does not even have to be complicated for shipping companies. Recently I was invited to bless a brand-new offshore vessel. The company had hired an interior designer for the accommodation. It immediately creates a different atmosphere than the familiar rubber floors and photos of ships on the wall. It doesn't change everything, but it certainly contributes to better living conditions on board. And perhaps AI could help reduce the ever-growing paperwork as well.

So no, Kees, I do not believe in a grand revival of the seafaring profession. But I do believe there is still a future. Even if it may sometimes feel like hoping against hope. Yes, you probably have to be a little crazy to venture into that jungle at sea. But then again—wasn't that always the case?

Best regards,
Stefan



MAKE THE UNION GREAT AGAIN!

**WORKERS MAKE
THE UNION STRONGER**

by Pier Jager

Many workers - including quite a few young people - think of a **trade union as something from the past**. Something for **older workers**, perhaps their own parents. Or even further back in time, when unions focused on improving harsh and unsafe working conditions, negotiating wages and employment terms, and establishing pension funds. **It was a time when many people had permanent jobs and worked for the same employer for many years.**

For years now, trade unions have seen their membership numbers decline. When you talk to non-unionized workers or former members, they often say they simply have no problems. And if a problem should arise, for example at work, they will just leave and find another employer. Or they rely on a privately arranged legal insurance policy.

Yet even in these “modern times” there are many reasons to join a union. Many workers—often recent graduates—have flexible or temporary contracts, either directly with a shipping company or through a maritime employment agency. This position means less job security, less bargaining power, and being more easily replaced. Some may also have student debts or high housing costs. As an individual you can be quite vulnerable. Being organized may therefore be more important than ever.

When workers organize collectively, they are much stronger. For example, a union negotiates

with shipowners about fair internship allowances for maritime students during their training periods on board. Later, as employees, collective agreements about wages and working conditions are negotiated between unions and employers. These agreements are laid down in a collective labor agreement (CLA) and apply not only to older workers but to everyone who falls under its scope. Organized workers can also turn to the union for support in labor and income-related issues or work-related situations on board. Examples include accidents at sea, illness, poor living conditions, bad food, or safety concerns.

An organization such as Nautilus International, the trade union for the maritime sector, represents everyone who works on a ship – all ages. Without organization, younger workers in particular risk remaining the “flexible shell” of the labor market.

What You Accept Today Shapes Your Future

The employment conditions you accept today determine what your career will look like later. If newcomers consistently accept low wages and insecure contracts, it will become the new standard. But if they join a union and participate in collective bargaining, the minimum standard can change.

Employers pay attention to the level of union membership. The larger the group of workers organized in a union, the more serious the voice of all employees - including young people - is heard and respected.

Trade unions do not only negotiate with employers. They also speak with governments, national politicians, maritime education institutions, and international organizations within Europe and beyond. Topics discussed include minimum wages, pension systems, the labor market in which you work, and worker wellbeing.

Solidarity Is Not an Old-Fashioned Word

What many people do not always realize is that, just like workers, employers are also organized

in associations. That is no coincidence—together you are stronger. That principle is called solidarity: standing together with your colleagues and with other workers in your sector.

If more young people organize themselves, they can no longer easily be played off against older workers, for example in discussions about pensions or wage increases. A larger and younger union helps prevent generational conflict and leads to fairer agreements for everyone.

Many young people see a union as something you join “when things go wrong.” But a union is more than legal support. It is a collective of people who together decide what work should look like. The labor market for tomorrow is shaped today by young people. If they organized themselves, they could help determine their own future.

A larger union is not a goal in itself. It is a means to gain more control over work, income, and security. And workers have much to gain from that.



Splashes

Tiny splashes of news featuring fresh headlines, eye-catching facts, and nautical oddities.

80 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE SAILING OBLIGATION



On 2 March 2026, it was 80 years since the Sailing Obligation (Vaarplicht) was lifted — the requirement for Dutch merchant navy crew to continue sailing under Allied command during the Second World War.

To mark this occasion, the Stichting Koopvaardijpersoneel 1940–1945 organised a commemorative concert on 2 March in the Nieuwe Kerk in Katwijk. In addition to many Dutch merchant navy and naval personnel, ambassadors and defence attachés from several former Allied countries were present,

including Australia, Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The concert was not only a moment of remembrance, but also one of recognition and appreciation for the resilience, perseverance and sacrifices of the seafarers who served under the Sailing Obligation. Attention was also given to today’s seafarers and to the continuing reality that civilian shipping can quickly become involved in conflicts — with all the consequences that entails.

Make Maritime Education Great Again!

The maritime sector in the Netherlands really needs to innovate. Everyone knows it, but in practice it's not that easy. That's why the government came up with a plan: by 2033, at least 30 climate-neutral ships must be built. No small task. To speed things up, €230 million in subsidies has been made available. And it's working — one modern ship after another is rolling off the production line. At the same time, however, there's a big problem: the sector is short of thousands of workers, including ship crews.

So a lot of well-trained young people are needed. Huge opportunities for Dutch maritime colleges. The maritime future is hot, happening, and full of challenges. But hardly any young people want to go to sea anymore.

"That'll change! Seven good years, seven bad years — it's always been like that in shipping," my husband shouts from the couch.

"The pay isn't always great, and anyway, who wants to sail on a ship with bad internet? It's obvious. Kids grew up online — a day without internet is a day wasted," he concludes.

Meanwhile, the schools are trying to turn the tide, but not always successfully. The nautical college in Amsterdam has basically pulled the plug. The others are each trying their own way to attract students. New strategies are cooked up, ads show off ultra-modern simulation centers, cooperation with the navy is launched, and at a reunion 650 former students are even asked — please, help us think of solutions.

I don't get why there's so little interest in maritime school. If there's one sector where you can see the world, work with cutting-edge technology, earn good money, and never be bored, it's shipping! The schools themselves have state-of-the-art simulators, and

for family members it's always great fun to step onto the bridge during an Open Day.

But spending an afternoon there as a parent also gives you a glimpse of the less glamorous side when you chat with students. One student said he learned nothing during his internship because the Romanian officer was afraid he might take his job afterward. Besides, there is not a single Dutch crew member on board — so what difference does it make which shipping company he interns with? Why is it so hard to find an internship placement in the first place? Why are accommodations so cramped that there's no room for trainees anymore?

Meanwhile, Dutch shipping companies complain bitterly about the shortage of seafarers. Together with a Dutch maritime college, they've been investing for years in maritime education in the Philippines, where young people are trained to work on Dutch ships.

I think that kind of investment would also be welcome in the Netherlands — and I even know

how. I read that most maritime colleges no longer have their own training vessel, and they really miss it. A ship can't be replaced by a simulator. You have to see it, feel it, smell it — experience it with all your senses. Sleep and eat on board with your mates, roll with the waves, get seasick, smell the engine oil, stand at the helm. You must experience sailing! Preferably early on in the training. And something that would reassure parents too: proper, committed supervision. That's why I think Dutch shipowners should jointly invest in a training vessel. It doesn't have to be new, and one would be enough for all the schools together. Which shipowner still has something suitable afloat?

Let's just hope the accommodations on those thirty new climate-neutral ships are nice and spacious. Then plenty of young students can sail on them. The youth are the future.

@strid

When names like Rembrandt van Rijn, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, or Willem van de Velde the Elder come up in conversation, I can usually picture at least one of their paintings—especially those of Van de Velde, with his beautifully detailed ships of the Dutch East India Company. Magnificent paintings! But Matthieu Ficheroux, Piet Bongers, and Albert Brenet? I had never heard of them—until I made a trip to the ss Rotterdam.



Artistic SHIPS

by Kees Wiersum

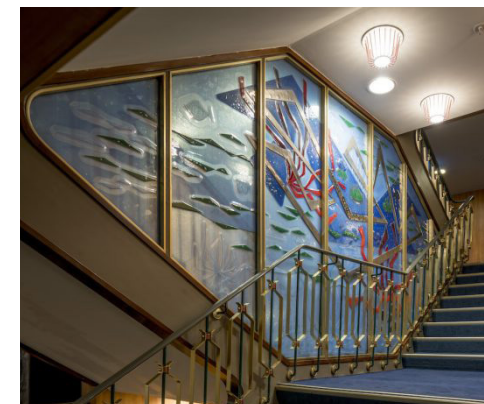


When we think about art, we usually think of paintings, drawings, sculptures, music, or theatre. And when we think about seafaring, we are more likely to imagine tough stories, wild seas, and distant ports.

In the art world, ships are actually depicted quite often: in harbor scenes, seascapes, or beach views, beautifully captured on canvas or paper. But among (former) seafarers, a ship is usually described in a very different way. Then the conversation is

about tonnage, types of cargo, the type of engine and its power, or the lifting capacity of heavy-lift cranes.

The interior of ships—and certainly what hangs on the bulkheads—is rarely discussed. That is not so strange: the “paintings” on board usually consist of the general arrangement plan, escape routes in case of fire, or instructions for safety equipment and machinery. Not exactly works of art by famous artists. And yet there are ships where art is everywhere. So





floors, and other artistic elements in the interior. Much of it still looks exactly as it did when the ship was launched in 1959.

It would go too far to describe all the artwork and interiors here. For those who want to know more about the architects and artists who contributed to the interior of the Rotterdam. For an overview scan the QR code.



On the ships I sailed on, I had to make do with a single picture of carefully arranged fruit. A picture hanging in—yes—the messroom. And oh yes, on the last ships built in Japan there was sometimes a small artwork from that country hanging in the captain’s cabin—sorry, the captain’s lounge.



much so that you may hardly notice it when you first step on board.

Until recently I had never set foot on the SS Rotterdam, the former flagship of the Holland America Line, which is now permanently moored at the Maashavenkade in Rotterdam. When I arrived at the outer pier by water taxi, I had no idea how strongly art would influence the atmosphere of this ship. As soon as you enter, the unsuspecting visitor is confronted with the style and artwork so characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s.



Because I knew almost nothing about it beforehand, I started reading about the creation of the Rotterdam after my visit. It turns out that not only welders, pipefitters, metalworkers, carpenters, and painters were involved in building the ship. Architects and artists also worked closely together to give the vessel the atmosphere that would make a voyage on the Rotterdam irresistible. Interior and naval architects collaborated with visual artists. The result can be seen everywhere on board: in wall and ceiling paintings, ceramics,



Splashes

SeaCare

Tiny splashes of news featuring fresh headlines, eye-catching facts, and nautical oddities.



Co-funded by the European Union



EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR MARITIME MENTAL SUPPORT LAUNCHED

Five Western European maritime welfare organizations have joined forces to create a new network that supports mental health at sea. With EU funding, SEA-CARE will train Maritime Crisis Responders and provide fast access to certified mental-health professionals during difficult situations on board.

Participants: Antwerp Seafarers’ Welfare (B), Deutsche Seemannsmission (D), Nederlandse Zeevarendencentrale and Stichting Pastoraat Werkers Overzee (NL), together with World Maritime University in Malmö (S)



MAKE *Mud* GREAT AGAIN

Everyone wants to make everything “great again”. That is positive in itself, but I often miss the nuance. As if history is made of mistakes we can correct with enough willpower.

My first tip for any global problem: zoom out, look back 100 years — very few people would truly want to return to that time. Things aren’t going that badly, and the past really wasn’t always better. At the same time, pretending everything is fine doesn’t match reality either; we live in a broken world.

Maybe we keep repeating the wrong story. We act as if everything is controllable, as if failure were some kind of bug instead of a fixed part of human existence. But life is not a marketing campaign. It’s a logbook full of loose ends, deviations, scratches, and chapters you’d rather skip.

As a true sea beggar working in the dredging industry, I googled the connotation of mud and beggar. Both are not very fancy. Mud is sticky, dirty matter. If someone says your name is mud, it means you have a bad reputation, you’re unpopular, or people are angry with you. And beggar, well....

Recently, old friends visited us. The meal was good, and of course we shared our achievements, our pride, and celebrated that. But we also had a deep conversation about the times in life when life is challenging—where we are, so to speak, stuck in the mud. Recognizing that in one another, and sharing in it, gives deeper meaning to our friendship.

Life is not always as “great” as social media makes us believe. Suffering is not evidence of failure, but of being human. Not everything that is broken can—or should—be repaired. Sometimes life doesn’t ask for solutions, but for presence: standing beside each other when it hurts, offering

compassion—or, as it is beautifully called in Dutch, *medelijden*: “co-suffering.”

I think we should stop trying to make everything great again. Progress does indeed come from people who refuse to accept a situation and work to improve it—please keep doing that. But that is different from saying everything is “makeable.” Perhaps the real task is smaller, yet braver: to acknowledge what is normal, to see what is broken, and not immediately look away. No gloss, no slogan—just honesty. That is enough.

At sea, you know better than anyone that storms are part of life. You sail with what you get, and you depend on each other. Life in a nutshell.

I attended a launching ceremony in Asia. While travelling in Thailand, an old monk explained the meaning of a chedi to me—a tower-shaped religious structure that from bottom to top symbolically connects earth, people, and heaven. At the base there is a lot of decoration made from shards of porcelain. Higher up, the structure becomes increasingly empty, symbolizing letting go and enlightenment. (Buddhism is less about forgiveness and more about insight.) That porcelain once travelled as ballast on Chinese trade ships — so even then they thought in circular terms. The monk shared a beautiful message when he spoke about the shards: what is broken can gain a higher meaning.

So, alright then:
make mud great again.



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“Dit is toch beter dan over politiek praten...”

