

Historic Rotterdam bridge to be cut up to make way for Bezos' mega-yacht

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As millions suffer and die in the COVID-19 pandemic, the De Hef (Koningshavenbrug) bridge in the Dutch city of Rotterdam is to be partially dismantled this summer to let Jeff Bezos' US\$485 million mega-yacht exit the harbour where it was built and sail into the open sea.

The De Hef bridge is considered the first of its kind in Western Europe. A historical landmark and symbol of Rotterdam's industrialisation in the 19th century, the bridge was heretofore protected by strict preservation laws.

It was originally built in 1878 as a swing bridge, connecting industrial rail traffic from the North to that of the South of the Netherlands. It was damaged by a German steamship that ran into it in 1918, and the bridge underwent reconstruction, replacing the swing with a lift bridge by 1927. Thirteen years later, during the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II and the "Rotterdam Blitz" bombing to crush resistance fighters, the bridge was heavily damaged. However, it was one of the first objects in Rotterdam to be restored after the war due to its strategic importance.

Bezos's giant yacht, named Y712, is 127 meters in length and has three decks and three 40-meter-high masts that are now being built at a shipyard in Alblasterdam, a port-city adjunct to Rotterdam. To go from an inland dock to the North Sea, this unprecedentedly large yacht must pass under De Hef. According to reports in the international press, the municipality of Rotterdam has given the green light to dismantle the centre portion of the bridge so the gigantic vessel can sail through.

News outlets in the Netherlands and internationally have reported on the vast popular discontent this has provoked internationally, with mounting anger to the naked servility of the entire economic and political

establishment bowing to the individual whims of a single multibillionaire.

On a Dutch Facebook group "*Eieren gooien naar superjacht Jeff Bezos*" (Throwing eggs at superyacht Jeff Bezos), the fast-growing group has gathered over 8,000 members in less than a week. The Facebook group is calling for an event on June 1 to throw rotten eggs at Bezos's yacht as it bypasses De Hef. The founder of the group, Pablo Strörmann, told *nltimes.nl*: "Normally it's the other way around. If your ship doesn't fit under a bridge, you make it smaller. But when you happen to be the richest person on Earth, you just ask a municipality to dismantle a monument."

Since the pandemic began, the criminally reckless policies of the entire Dutch ruling establishment, both the pseudo-left and the ultra-right, placed the profit interests of the capitalist class above the lives of millions of workers and youth. At least 4.4 million cases and 32,000 deaths of COVID-19 have been recorded in this country of just 17.5 million people. Now, when it comes to a pandemic profiteer like Bezos, who has nearly doubled his fortune during the pandemic, it is ready to tear apart major monuments on a whim.

The response of the Municipality of Rotterdam, Europe's largest seaport, shows that there is no limit to how far the Dutch authorities will go to satisfy the indulgences of the super-rich, which dominate official social and cultural life across Europe. This absurd social inequality, which has grown particularly in the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the product of the capitalist system and its massive intensification of the exploitation of the working class.

As 2022 began, the British charity Oxfam published an annual report, titled "Inequality kills," reporting that incomes of the bottom 99 percent of society plunged as

the wealth of the 10 wealthiest individuals doubled. Bezos comes in second at \$179 billion as the emperor of Amazon, where his global workforce toil in slave-like conditions, after Tesla's Elon Musk, with \$238 billion.

The Netherlands has minted more billionaires than ever before in its history. According to NOS.nl, there are now 45 Dutch billionaires. As the wealthy enrich themselves, the poorest sections of the population are falling into extreme poverty.

This stark contrast is visible in Rotterdam Zuid (south) itself, much of whose population belongs to the poorest 40 percent of the Dutch population, states Brian Doucet. Under successive governments led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Rotterdam demolished thousands of low-income housing units, driving out the poorest layers of workers, following the central government's policy of gentrifying the inner cities to make way for new luxury apartments. This exacerbated the housing crisis facing urban workers.

Whether it is baptised by the clinking of glasses of champagne, a hail of rotten eggs, or both, Bezos' yacht is already being hailed by the super-rich as the "vessel of all vessels." *Architectural Digest* quoted Fernando Nicholson who enthused: "The Y721 is going to totally change the world of yachting with its design and innovation."

This luxury yacht sales broker at the Camper & Nicholsons yachting company added: "It's a boat with the latest technology and bells and whistles that have never been seen ... This will be the standard for all superyachts to follow, but in years to come, when its features become more affordable. Right now, only someone with Bezos' wealth can swing the cost."

Together with this mega yacht, Bezos has reportedly also commissioned a "support yacht" that will have its own helipad. This new yacht is reportedly 75 meters long and can accommodate 45 additional crew members and guests. It is also expected to host a sailing meeting space and have vast storage for Bezos' endless water toys: diving and snorkelling gear, jet and water skis, waterslides, surfboards, and so on.

On the day of the christening of the vessel, Bezos, the second richest man in the world, may call the press "to thank a few people" with insincerity, as he did when he returned in July 2021 from his private space flight: "I want to thank every Amazon employee and every

Amazon customer because you guys paid for all this. So seriously, for every Amazon customer out there and every Amazon employee, thank you from the bottom of my heart very much. It's very appreciated."

This will however cut no ice with workers in the Netherlands or anywhere else in the world. The cutting up of the De Hef" bridge to satisfy the caprices of a mega-billionaire exposes the reality of a social order that is deeply diseased and historically condemned.



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