

Sleep tight!

Mister President, sleep tight!” With this sentence Boudewijn de Groot concluded his only protest song ever. In 1965 the Vietnam War is in full swing. The sarcasm of De Groot is still appropriate well over 50 years later. Now, it is about president – supervisory directors in our own country.

A couple of years ago we noticed how in front of the then supervisory boards of Refineria di Korsou N.V. and IUH N.V. hundreds of millions of public funds were squandered (your and my money). And once again the front pages are full of discoveries of fraud. Fraud at the workplace and fraud at the top. Last week the date for the criminal hearing against the former director of Girobank was finally set. Also fraud. And yes, all at the expense of public funds. But it is much more serious. The negotiations about the takeover of the Isla contract were suddenly broken off. There appears to be a connection. Our collective integrity is at stake. And it is really not just about public limited corporations. The private sector holds its own. In the past two years the largest airline in the Dutch Caribbean ended up in dire straits and is now as good as dead. Irresponsible management and insufficient supervision, that much appears to be clear. Meanwhile tens of millions of public funds have been pumped in to keep the comatose patient on life support.

The largest insurance corporation in the Dutch Caribbean must also be kept alive by pulling out all the stops. Grabbers at the top are a problem everywhere, that much also appears to be clear. But it affects all of us. These large corporations are crucial to the economy of our country, as is the refinery. If they threaten to topple then this has unpredictable and very considerable negative consequences for all of us. The negative impact goes well beyond Westpunt. In the big world around us we are to an increasing degree perceived as a little ethical country with an unreliable business community. That also costs a lot of money and missed opportunities. Were the supervisory directors at those corporations asleep? How were those supervisory directors selected? Friends? Acquaintances? Were they truly expert and independent? What does this follow from? Were they ever assessed on their performance in the interim? Or is, unfortunately, the same pattern visible: as a supervisory director mostly look at details that are absolutely unimportant and get involved in it very intensively but have blinkers on when it comes to things that truly matter. It is about time that supervisory directors give public account for their (inferior?) supervision. Go ahead and explain it in the annual report. This is already very common in other countries. This forces supervisory directors to seriously account for their responsibilities, not just in respect of the corporation but also in respect of our small and therefore very vulnerable society. The moral content of the corporation and its board fall, par excellence, under the responsibility of the supervisory board. If this is inadequate then as a supervisory director you did, by definition, fail seriously. And go talk about that and set the discussion about that contract that you know nothing about aside. Exactly the same applies to the trade union. It is fine to protest against the board if it makes mistakes

but also remember to scrutinize the in-house social responsibility and integrity. How ethical are people at the workplace? What is the trade union doing about that? We do not live on an island but in an adult world. This includes adult responsibilities. If you think these big pants fit then try them on sometimes. They are not pajama pants. So do not quietly doze off. Wake up every one!



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