

ENCOUNTER OF FISHING CREWS OF THE SOUTHERN CONE OF LATIN AMERICA

Héctor-Luis Morales

The situation of Latin American fishing crews is critical in many aspects, due mainly to the tremendous pressure exercised by industrial fleets on resources. The fleets, as well, operating under flags of convenience, hire crew from third nations at very low wages, infringing the agreements established between labour organizations and national companies. On-board living and work conditions continue to be very arduous and work shifts are regularly more than eight hours.

Serious communications problems subsist among crew members, arising from the diversity of ethnic origin, language and cultural habits, at times causing accidents and serious conflicts.

Greenpeace is performing follow-up activities on the implementation of the Rio de Janeiro, Accords, specially Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, on Oceans and Marine Life. One activity is focused on distant water vessels in the Pacific, with a view to generating consensus among States, fishery agencies and citizen organizations with regard to the control of these fisheries, which have been subject to intense pressure. The vessels in question are based in U.S, Mexican, European or Japanese companies and process tropical tuna for the international market, satisfying demand in high income and high consumption countries. It is necessary to arrive at agreements which will make those fisheries a sustainable resource for the countries of the Pacific and for the fleets which depend on that resource.

Note was taken of the agreements between the European Communities and Argentina and other countries of Latin America, as well as the high rate of idle capacity in the European fleet, specially that of Spain. Panelists commented on the problems or advantages inherent in citizen participation, specially that of environmentalists and consumers, in decisions related to fishery regulation.

The company practice of unlimited resource extraction in order to obtain maximum return in the short run was also noted, with the exception of some companies with long term strategies, which seemingly involve the protection of resources. Fishing crews, for their part, are clearly in favour of depending resources, even though catch prohibitions may affect their income in the short term.

Eleuterio Yañez, Professor of the Catholic University of Valparaiso, prepared a summary of the issues dealt with on the Plenary Session:

- There is a common feeling, shared by scientists and workers, that is necessary to coordinate policy for the management of marine resources and present a more united front to the foreign fleets. Those concerns are not evident in policy decisions and it is necessary to generate decisions which will resolve those problems.
- With respect to the fishing industry, he is of the opinion that the common approach is wrong insofar as it is thought that the Fishing Law has solved all problems, while no one recognizes that increased extraction implies the exhaustion implies the exhaustion of resources. There is no law to promote the industry. Moreover, the industry has been oriented toward increased earnings which has not necessarily meant improved living conditions for fishery workers and fishermen.
- With regard to work conditions and employment protection, he is of the opinion that worker participation must be extended at all levels, by sending the best representatives to fishing councils at the national, zonal and regional levels. It is important that those representatives receive support so that they will transmit the concerns of those they represent with the best arguments possible. It is important to take advantage of the opportunities available under this government, which is more ours than was the dictatorship.
- Scientific research has addressed only biological issues, with little being done in the area of technological research and none at all in the economic and social areas. Projects will be presented for research into the work reality and the quality of life of fishing workers.
- Fishing cannot be analysed in isolation from transportation and port activities and must be undertaken with a view to the Pacific. In that same regard, it must be recognized that we have a "daddy" who protects that activity and that it is necessary to seek means of administration more in accordance with civilized customs.
- The basis for rational exploitation is the study of the biomass, which is a difficult undertaking.

Findings do not exist which could serve as the basis for establishing a figure for the permissible capture of mackerel, for example. It is irresponsible to affirm that there is a biomass of 24 million tons. Large ships are less efficient, while a mid-sized ship is often more efficient than a larger vessel. Extensive research is necessary in order to determine the proper size of the fleet. The Fishing Law has not stipulated the size and methods of prohibitions. The Public administration is unequipped to implement those dispositions. The number of vessels in the fleet was frozen in the North and the Eighth region, but was left open in the Fifth region for new fisheries. We need not concern ourselves with the 5 mile protection zone and artisan fishing because there are many zones vulnerable to perforations. The Fishing Law needs to be modified in many aspects.

Guillermo Risco, as President of the Organization which convoked the Encounter, addressed the assembly at the close of the event.

This Encounter has allowed us to appreciate our fishworker organizations. FETRINECH is a federation of a very few leaders but represents large and solid organizations. It involves strong and significant cross-industry labour unions.

Our basic concern has been to protect resources and employment. Even during the dictatorship, we struggled to protect resources and, in 1986, measures were implemented to that end. We representatives are proud of our organizations. We know that those protective measures go against the interests of our pocketbooks. We wish to work in the long term so as to preserve the source of our work. A large number of companies do not wish to protect resources and we have been

witnesses to the disappearance of numerous commercial species: prawn, whales, sawfish.

The environmental impact is massive, as can be observed in the garbage collected by many trawlers. A coordinated struggle to establish and monitor prohibitions must be undertaken by all countries. We workers are in favour of that struggle, as for example in Chile and Peru.

Serious efforts to undertake research into the state of marine resources and the living conditions of fishworkers are necessary. The finding of that research must be communicated and utilized by our organizations in the development of strategies and plans.

We must renew concern for the serious scourge of unemployment and premature ageing among fishworkers, resulting from over-exploitation on board. Peruvian fishermen live in subhuman conditions and their ships are true floating coffins. Environmental organizations should denounce those situations and should also defend the human species, and not only marine species such as seawolves, dolphins, seals and whales.

We need to support of scientists and technicians as we undertake a common task: **to humanize our work and promote the rights of fishing crews.**

A common element is our thirst for social justice. That we feel united and are not alone, that we will make progress with strength and unity. We must establish a commitment for permanent coordination. We must have an evaluation of the conclusions as soon as possible and make this process snowball until we are heard. ■