

PROTECT WATERS. PROTECT LIFE

Hotter climate in some regions the ozone layer critically thin, deserts still spreading, rivers and oceans becoming more and more polluted: signs that the planet Earth, and life itself, are in danger...

Development models based on the profit motive alone are destroying our environment every day, unsettling fragile ecosystems, squandering natural resources.

Where the oceans are concerned, over-fishing by industrial fleets using devastatingly effective gear is jeopardising not only the future of fishworkers, but also the balance of marine ecology and consequently that of the land, too. It is easily forgotten that the oceans make up 70% of the Earth's surface and play an essential role in maintaining life on the planet.

In addition to over-fishing, which goes on in spite of the legislation governing exclusive economic zones (EEZ), there is the problem of pollution created by discharging various kinds of industrial and domestic wastes (toxic chemicals, radioactive matter, etc.) into the sea. The industrialised countries are at a loss as to how to get rid of about 300 million tons a year of potentially dangerous pollutants! It is only too tempting to look on the sea as a refuse dump and to negotiate the disposal of wastes With Third-World maritime nations in search of hard currency to pay off their huge debt burden.

As if this weren't enough, one could also mention the million and a half tons of crude oil spewed out each year by tankers on to the ocean's surface, radio-active contamination caused by nuclear tests and much else besides.

The development of super-intensive agriculture, involving excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides, has also led in recent years to the deterioration of rivers and in-shore waters, with consequent damage to the flora and fauna of many a continental shelf.

In some tropical regions, the development of aquaculture on a large scale - such as extensive shrimp culture for export - has meant the destruction of large areas of mangrove swamps which had hitherto been an essential factor in the ecology of sea-shore and the food security of local populations.

All such practices have serious consequences for marine environment and human life. The polluting effects of the growth of cities, of industry and of agriculture, are not confined to the exclusive economic zone of any one nation. They can cross oceans and spread from one country to another ... ending up sooner or later in the plate of each one of us by way of the food chain!

We live in an increasingly interdependent world. It is a matter of great urgency that we fight to protect the quality of the marine environment, as we should also do for any other part of the natural world. More and more fishworkers have shown their understanding of this by struggling to defend their common heritage and the very future of their profession. This was recently so in India where - in spite of repression by the police - a march by fishworkers brought together tens of thousands of people along both east and west coasts with an urgent appeal to the authorities: "Protect Waters, Protect Life!"

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