

REPORTS

Nalini reports on her recent tour of fisheries In France.

The region that James Smith and I visited in France was the Bigoudin area of Brittany. There lives a breed of fisherfolk who, as Henri Manis observes, are strong, warm-blooded characters with unsurpassed pride and a great sense of affection—qualities, which they share in common with their peers in India. Henri is a 'senior' priest and former dockworker at the fishing port. He's a lively man with a strong sense of humour who gets on well with people. He took us around with an air of great confidence, anxious less we miss anything important, eager that we make contact with people and sample delicious Breton sea-food.

We spent a whole day with Louis Leroux, the former president of the Guilvinec Fishermen's Committee, and an active unionist. He spent his entire working life on a 38' trawler, where he has now been succeeded by his son. These are the 'small fishermen', men who have inherited a long seafaring tradition and who make up a distinct community similar to fishing communities in India.

The fishing unit comprises the 'Patron' (owner-skipper) and five to eight workers. This number has fallen from the fifteen of 25 years ago in order to make operations commercially viable. Earnings are based on a share system: 50% goes to the boat and tackle, and 50% goes to the crew, after deductions for expenses.

Fishing activity has been regulated and the working day in this sector is restricted to eight hours. Catches include all types of fish, but mostly prawns. The marketing of fish is carried out much as it is in India, but in a better organized fashion. The fish is auctioned to licensed buyers of different size—some quite big, others small—who in turn wholesale it to the retailers who distribute it to the local markets. Most of the fish landed goes for local consumption.

Fishing Ports

The fishing ports in this sector are Loctudy, Lesconil. St. Guenole and Guilvinec. These small fishermen sell their catches through the marketing federation in auction style. If prices crash to the floor, the fish is withdrawn from the market and sold to the processing cooperative which is owned by the federation. This cooperative is equipped to deal with surplus stocks, to freeze them, to send them to distant markets in refrigerated trucks or to turn them into fish meal. Thanks to Minitel, the computerized telephone information service, sales prices on other markets can easily be determined and sound decisions taken. A service charge of 5% is levied,

Organizations

The fishworkers also have their own local Fishery Councils, made up of the four trade unions (CFDT, COT, CFTC and autonomous), which have both workers and 'patrons' as

members. The Fishery Councils also embrace the port authorities, fish vendors and processors. All ports have their committees, and contain around fifteen representatives of the fishermen, and fifteen for the vendors and port workers. The committees sprang up after the Second World War to protect the industry which was then under threat. As they are official their boards, the committees have commissioned a wide range of studies related to fishing and have set up regulations,

It was interesting to see how these organizations have taken stock of both economic problems and social issues, to the extent that they have even published an English-Spanish dictionary to enable fishermen to communicate by radio telephone with foreign fishing boats. I was quite surprised to hear Louis explain that despite this very organized approach and the fishermen's desire to work closely with 'research boffins', the latter's knowledge of the subject matter was extremely limited and of little benefit to the fishworkers. How very similar to the situation in India'

A European view

We were also able to visit Concarneau, the base for the large French industrial tuna fishing fleet, which operates in Mauritian waters, in the Indian Ocean and even as far as Indonesia. In the evening, we had a very lively discussion with the fishermen and their wives. I explained briefly the problems of the Indian fisherfolk, and how there were a number of clear similarities with the situation in France. Although some of our problems relating to rights of access to fishing waters, to credit facilities and to marketing—including the position of the Indian woman—struck them as some what 'feudal', a few of them were able to see parallels with their own past, but the vast majority had completely forgotten about their own history!

James and I then told them about the creation of the Collective and asked them what role they thought they might play in it. Although nothing very specific emerged, it was plain to see that there was a need for a common European forum where fishworkers and their supporters could meet, discuss problems and work out ways of solving them. This initiative could certainly help foster close cooperation between fisherfolk on a North-South axis, so vital for the protection of the oceans' ecosystems. James and his colleagues in the Maritime Working Group (*GroupeMer*) of the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD) in Paris hope to further this idea, and would warmly welcome approaches at the address below from any other Europeans interested in the venture.

Nalini

James SMITH/Simon KERZERHO
CCFD—4 rue Jean Lautier,
Paris 75001— FRANCE

Chile

After their 10th National Small Fishermen Conference in 1986, the fishermen of Chile set up their new organization — CONAPACH. At the beginning of 1988, they organized a massive educational programme in which scientists will work

closely with fishermen to better equip them to protect their industry and prove their skills (navigation, fish processing, etc). An initiative well worth following up!

Senegal

In October 1987, the International Collective organized various meetings with workers in the fisheries field.

A meeting of scientists from five West African countries was also held, on which we shall be publishing reports in the next issue of *Samudra Report*.

Upon his return from Senegal, a Breton fisherman who had visited his Senegalese colleagues gave the following statement to a French newspaper: "I have seen some extremely efficient Senegalese fishermen: what they lack is organization. If we had not protected and organized ourselves (30 years ago) today's small (Breton) fisherman would simply have ceased to exist."

Sri Lanka

(from our local correspondent)

The problem of trawlers has once again arisen. Last year, the Fisheries Ministry banned trawling; but instead of the promised law which was to have been introduced in Parliament, a Public Enquiry Commission has been set up—very likely under pressure from the trawler owners. Fishermen are now being 'invited' to testify to the Commission, and the majority are refusing to do so on the grounds that they have held legitimate title to fishing rights in their waters for generations, and not the Government.

Brazil

(from CPP, Recife)

The Brazilian State Fishing Development Board (SUDEPE) estimates that although 95% of the 600,000 people engaged in fishing are small fisherfolk (*pescadores artesanais*), their interests are totally ignored at State planning levels. Even nylon cord — the principal element in nets— is taxed as a luxury item, and the combined effects of pollution and industrial fishing have resulted in their becoming one of the poorest groups in the working class.

The rapid expansion of heavy industry, especially the development of programmes to produce 'alcohol fuel' from sugar cane has resulted in a burgeoning of chemical plants up and down the country. These distilleries, like the paper factories, pump vast quantities of effluent into the lakes, rivers and coastal waterways with scant regard for pollution control. Fish and shellfish have completely disappeared in a number of areas, or have become unfit for human consumption. Dozens of valleys and estuaries have become contaminated, and in Sao Luis to the north a major aluminium plant has not only exterminated all fish life, but ruined the ecology of an entire valley.

Brazilian fisherfolk are also faced with an off-shore fishing fleet geared exclusively to export which has been responsible for the exhaustion of fish stocks in a number of places. Even though small-scale fishworkers account for 50% of the country's total catch, in 1985 they only received 12% of available State aid, which favours exporters in order to help re-

pay foreign debt. As in many other areas of the world, it is estimated that the large shrimp boats throw away five out of every six tons of catch, landing only the prawns so prized for export.

And in the State of Maranhao, responsible for 40% of the total fish production of the nine northern states, the investment in export fisheries has resulted in sharply increased local fish prices, making it increasingly difficult for the poor to buy fish.

The same picture emerges as in Asia: the majority of poor fishworkers lack the most basic equipment and face numerous difficulties if they try to avail themselves of Government assistance.

NDLR - We will be covering this subject in greater detail in a future issue, together with a report from Mathany Saldanha from Goa who recently visited Brazilian fishworkers.

Philippines

Two Asian organizations have jointly launched an appeal in support of the 20,000 fishermen and their families working in Calancan Bay, on Marinduque Island in the Philippines—once famous for the quality of its fish and the beauty of its coral.

Since 1964, the mining company Canadian Marcopper, co-owned by ex-President Marcos and a Canadian firm, set up a plant on the island to mine copper. Since 1975, the plant has been processing nine million tons of concentrate a year, discharging waste at the rate of 750,000 cubic metres a month directly into the sea, blocking the Bay up to a distance of five kilometres from the shore. The fishermen fear that the last remaining portion of their fishing ground, the wide rock reef, will soon be covered by waste—and indeed, the 1983 Environmental Monitoring Report showed that waste had reached beyond the reef just outside the Bay, and that 38 square kilometres out of the Bay's total 50 had been encroached upon.

A 1981 decision by the National Commission for Pollution Control banning dumping in the sea was overruled by President Marcos, and, today, 20,000 fishermen are urging the Government to act. Two ecology action groups—Linked Tao-Kalikasan in the Philippines and Asia Pacific People's Environment Network (APPEN)—are appealing for help to save Calancan Bay and its fishermen.

To help the fishermen or to receive more details, write to:

APPEN NETWORK

*c/o Sahabat Alam Malaysia, APPEN Coordinator,
37, Lorong Birch, 10250 Penang, West Malaysia.*

or the campaign coordinator

*Sr Ma Alda Veasquez, Lingkod-Tao-Kalikasan,
PO Box 3153, Manila, PHILIPPINES*