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### Fishermen and women for food sovereignty

(Translated by Arianna Bove)

#### From Kerala ...

The international fishworkers' movement started during the 1970s in Kerala, a state in southwestern India. The *Kerala Independent Fishworkers' Federation*, probably the largest trade union with no party affiliations in the region, was officially set up in 1979. Since 1957 the state of Kerala had been governed by a left wing coalition led by a left wing party that implemented development alongside a good welfare system. Both the poverty and the illiteracy that afflicted many Indian regions had been eradicated there. The population was 100% literate and this legacy was so strong that it influenced the non-left wing government that followed at the beginning of the new millennium.<sup>1</sup>

What brought the fishworkers to organise themselves? Similar to the peasants during the Green Revolution, the fishworkers witnessed and suffered the consequences of the false promises of industrial development in their sector – marked here mainly by the arrival of large trawlers that damaged the seafloor – and of the so-called blue Revolutions in fish farming that, whilst promising to increase food supply, in fact destroyed more resources than they produced. The same scenario seen in agriculture was unfolding here on the sea waves and in the blue fish farming tanks. Behind a supposed increase in productivity lied economic, social and environmental costs that deprived this claim of all meaning and revealed its negative impact, since it entailed the destruction of the supply of fish alimony, the ecosystem, and employment and life chances. Hence fishworkers started to organise themselves in order to counteract the technological leaps in the fishing industry with the protection of traditional and sustainable methods of fishing and farming, as well as to demand policies that valorise fishing crafts and guarantee rights and securities. Above all, the uniting of the fishworkers of Kerala and many other regions of India and worldwide around the common cause of a *food sovereignty* founded on the right of fishworkers' communities to access their fishing zones and water resources to manage them and practice their craft in an *organic relationship* with the protection of the

<sup>1</sup> On this issue, a fundamental reference is G. Madhusoodanan (2003) 'Il modello Kerala alla prova dell'ambientalismo', in *CNS Ecologia Politica*, n. 3/4 August-December 2003, Anno XIII, Volume 55-56. Currently, the government is once more left wing.

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ecosystem that had traditionally contained their source of labour and life, was caused by these communities' witnessing of the considerable destruction of resources, the expulsion of populations, the deep inequities and their impossibility to sustain themselves. The protection of labour implied *defending not only an anonymous employment opportunity, but also a way of life and a relationship with nature and human beings* that they had no desire to leave behind and from which they would not accept being expelled. As Thomas Kocherry, the historic leader of the fishworkers' movement, said, 'for us fishing is a way of life, not a mere source of income. The sea is our mother'.<sup>2</sup>

### Empty seas

*The first event* threatening the frugal life of the coastal communities of Kerala was the advent of *large mechanised trawl fishing*, introduced in the Indian Ocean during the 1960s. The local fishworkers involved in small-scale fishing, the main form of employment in coastal populations, immediately noticed the damaging impact in a decrease of their catch. Of the billion inhabitants of India, 60% live on the coast, the catch of local fishworkers constitutes around 30% of the whole national catch, amounting to three million tons a year; but they represent between 80% and 90% of the ten million fishworkers in the country and rely on the sea for their subsistence.<sup>3</sup> During the 1950s, the growth rate of the catch in South Asian seas prior to the implementation of new fishing technologies was 5% per year, whereas between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the rate dropped to 2%.<sup>4</sup>

Large-scale mechanised trawl fishing produces a large amount of waste in the world. Dead and dying fish are thrown back in the sea because they do not fall within the species selected by the market. This waste amounts to one third of the whole catch (circa 27 million tons). When it comes to crayfish or prawns, fished with special trawl-nets that work low on the seabed causing the devastation of the seafloor, the waste can reach 16 million tons a year and 15 tons for every ton of crayfish caught in some areas. It is remarkable that in the main areas of crayfish fishing in India, the yearly catch of this crustacean has gone from 45,477 tons in 1973 to 14,582 in 1979, and, more significantly, the crayfish exported is increasingly younger, which indicates overfishing, an overexploitation of the sea resources.<sup>5</sup>

At the global level, according to the FAO SOFIA report of 2002, around 47% of the main stock is fully exploited and thus without great chances of further expansion, 18% is over-exploited and keeps decreasing with no prospects of expansion, and 10% is almost exhausted. Thus only 25% is not subject to irrational modes of capture.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From the address to Oslo on 15 June 1999 on the occasion of the prize ceremony of the Sophia Foundation. The Italian translation is found in M. Dalla Costa, *Il movimento dei pescatori* (The fishworkers' movement), in M. Dalla Costa and Monica Chilesse, *Nostra madre oceano* (Our mother, the ocean), Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2005: 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> V. Shiva, *Vacche sacre mucche pazze*, Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2001: 48 (*Stolen Harvest*, South End Press, Cambridge MA, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> 'Situation mondiale des pêches et de l'aquaculture' (The world situation of fish and aquaculture), in *Rapporto SOFIA 2002: La situation mondiale des pêches et de l'aquaculture*. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y7300f/y7300f01.pdf>



As in agriculture, in the fishing sector the relationship between North and South shows us a construed abundance that is fictitious in the North, and causes ever-greater poverty in the South, where it takes away resources that are essential to food supply. According to Thomas Kocherry, 'Most governments, particularly of the North, are trying to prop up an unsustainable fishery. According to the FAO, every year governments worldwide pay US \$ 116 billion to catch just \$ 70 billion worth fish. Developed nations, which have over fished their own waters, have headed into the waters of the developing nations. The European Union (EU) has around 40% more vessels than necessary to catch fish on a sustainable basis. [...] Large industrial fleets have depleted all the oceans in the world. They have become a threat to the 100-million fishing people in the world. Further these have organic links with the coastal mono shrimp culture'.<sup>7</sup>

The global catch for the 'advancement' of fishing techniques and the possibility of working on and freezing fish on large industrial trawlers has increased from circa 20 million tons in the 1950s to 94.8 million tons in the year 2000 alone. The large size of catch and the features of this mode of fishing have created a situation where the exploitation of the fish assets has become greater than the reproductive capacity of the stock. In some cases, it simply annihilated it. The sea washing the coast of Terra Nova, place of cod fishing since the 1500s, has been emptied of the precious fish. Despite the Canadian government's ban in 1992, the situation remains unchanged; alongside the fish, 80,000 jobs also disappeared in the fishing industry for men and women.

Even the sector of 'technological improvement' that continues to develop especially thanks to government funding, contributes to raising the pressure on the sea. This funding is supposed to generate employment in poorer coastal regions and aid the development of fishing activities; however, it is mostly employed in the new technologies that increase *over fishing*. According to the World Bank, government aid amounts to a total of 20 billion dollars a year.<sup>8</sup>

European fleets are at home in the African seas with often devastating consequences for the local populations. In this respect, many agreements are currently in place between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Of note is the one stipulated by the EU and Mauritania on 1 August 2001 securing access to the sea for a financial compensation of Euros 430. After years of fishing, the local population has several fears.<sup>9</sup> As a result of years of European fishing, western Africa has lost half the stock of seafloor fish, including the finest species from a commercial point of view. In his address to the 2002 WWF international conference in Dakar, Senegal, Daniel Pauly, an authoritative voice in the research of the global exploitation of fish resources, said: 'Due to the unsustainable exploitation of fish resources carried out by foreign fleets, the *ecosystems of western Africa are as impoverished as the ones in the North Atlantic*, but the consequences for development and food safety are extremely serious, *much worse* than those that would occur in Europe or North America'.<sup>10</sup> The excessive fishing practiced by wealthy countries

<sup>7</sup> Speech of Thomas Kocherry on the occasion of the prize ceremony of the Sophie Foundation, 15 June 1999, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/apspeech.htm>

<sup>8</sup> M. Carbone, *Le milieu marin et le développement durable* (Marine environment and sustainable development), in 'Le Courrier ACP-UE', n. 193, Juillet-août 2002.

<sup>9</sup> *Accord de pêche UE-Mauritanie* (Fishing agreement between the EU and Mauritania), 'Le Courrier ACP-UE', n. 191, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.wwf.it/news2862002\\_4229.asp](http://www.wwf.it/news2862002_4229.asp)



impoverishes the Southern seas. Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), underlines that 'in many parts of the world *fish stock is suffering* since an *excessive number* of fishing boats with much state aid has been reducing the number of fish drastically. Some developing countries with good fish reserves have drawn agreements with foreign countries in the hope of increasing their income to pay their debts and stimulate economic growth. However, our research shows that unless rigorous safeguarding measures are put in place this could turn out to be a dangerous mistake'.<sup>11</sup> Clearly this is another case of a *spiral of extroverted development* in the name of debt repayment that is bound to create more debts with heavy immediate and future consequences for the population, starting from the reduction of levels of food self-sufficiency, whilst fish and money will go to developed countries. Along the coasts of many countries, *fish had been the safest and cheapest protein intake, compared to meat*. According to FAO research, fish, shellfish and crustaceans represent 29% of the animal proteins consumed in Asia, 19% in Africa and 8% in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> Over 200 million people in developing countries depend on this precious food for their survival.<sup>13</sup> However, as soon as it enters the global market, fish become fewer and dearer at the local level.

### Overflowing tanks

The other *great event* that induced fishworkers and coastal communities to organise in India and build connections with other countries in the global South and North was the advent of the so called first *Blue Revolution*, that is, industrial aquaculture, mainly of prawns. This mode of culture was established in many tropical countries, not only in India, and despite the fact that consumers are based mainly in developed countries, as a rule it is situated in developing countries because of the large impact it has on the environment. It is known as the 'eat and run' industry because the very devastation of the ecosystem it causes is such that it often has to depart from the very location it has exploited or leave it due to the spreading of epidemics that hits the culture, or due to the changing nature of market demand. Like the Green Revolution, the Blue Revolution presented itself with a humanitarian intent, this time coupled to an ecological motive, namely, to fight the scarcity of global supply of food by providing, with fish farming, proteins to poor populations and to reduce the pressure on the sea. The reasons given at the time were clearly false because the produce, an absolutely unnecessary food, was not destined to feed the poor but a well-off clientele in developed countries; the pressure on the sea was not going to be reduced, but increased, because the production of *fish food* required by the farming of prawns could only be increased by means of sea trawl fishing, which destroy more resources than those produced by fish farming. It is estimated that industrial fish farming generally needs to catch twice as much fish food than the one it produces, and for some species even more is required.<sup>14</sup> The production of three kg of salmon through farming takes 2.7 kg of fish food, which in

<sup>11</sup> Franco Carlini, *Ipocriti pescatori in acque altrui*, 'Il Manifesto', 3 February 2002.

<sup>12</sup> *Development and peace and the fisheries*, 1998, <http://www.dev.org/testA/issues/fisheries.htm>

<sup>13</sup> V. Shiva, *Vacche sacre mucche pazze*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> The economist Rosamond Naylor from Stanford University agrees in this respect with F. Ungaro, *Il rischio dell'agricoltura*, 23 October 2002, in [www.encl.it/it/magazine/boiler/boiler30/html/articoli/AasUngaro-Aquacoltura.asp](http://www.encl.it/it/magazine/boiler/boiler30/html/articoli/AasUngaro-Aquacoltura.asp)



turn takes 15 kg of fish to produce. This entails an enormous waste. It generally means four to six tons of fish food per hectare. But one also needs to take into account the fish destroyed through the devastation of the young fish and the eggs on the seabed, due to the use of trawlers to catch the fish needed for the production of fish feed.

*Around one third of the whole catch – 30 million tons – is destined to feed animals rather than humans, amongst which is the very fish that is farmed.*

But much more lies behind these hidden costs of industrial aquaculture. The installation usually consists of large tanks of two meters depth and one hectare of surface. The setting up entails the *destruction of forests of mangroves* that are characteristic of tropical coastal countries. The forests have extremely important functions: they protect the coast from soil erosion, hurricanes and other natural catastrophes, and constitute a precious nursery for species of fish that manage to face their early life in their quiet waters before venturing into the sea, thus contributing to the protection of a fish reserve for fishworkers. Prawns are farmed in a *combination of salt and fresh water* that needs to be continuously regulated, but the mechanical movements and growth of prawns cause the water to spill onto surrounding areas, resulting in the salinization also of the overexploited fresh water-bearing stratum. But *within the water* also flow antibiotics, prawns' faeces, and the large residue of fish food, 17% of which consists of biomass that is used by the prawns themselves, another total waste in this respect too. Detergents used for tank cleaning operations also overflow. The territory is compromised by its salinization and the chemical pollution thus making it impossible for agriculture to continue, and compromising sea fishing itself because the first strip is polluted and fish tend to migrate further into the sea thus increasing the distance that fishworkers need to travel for their labour. Moreover, there are also frequent fish plagues.

Many peoples are forced to *flee the salinized and polluted regions*, where even animals die, and to seek improbable rural re-settlements, given that the available farmable land is less and less. These cultures have been established in Ecuador, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Philippines, Honduras, Indonesia, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and India. There have been bloody struggles and fights against them and innumerable moments of protest. Assassinations linked to the prawn industry were reported in eleven countries. This industry attacked 7,000 km of coast in India, but those who fled because of it have had hardly any place to re-establish their economy. The alternatives are misery, degradation and hunger in the slums of the large cities.

The *employment* created by these farms is minimal when confronted with the employment it destroys. In Ecuador, for instance, *one hectare* of mangrove forest can produce enough food to sustain *ten families*, whilst the prawn farming industry of *110 hectares* only provides employment for *six people*.

It is often *women and children* who work in the farms, for eight to ten hours a day in *disastrous hygienic and health conditions*, which make them subject to frequent pathologies such as dysentery and skin disease. Cases of rape of the female workers have also been reported.



The *hours of domestic labour* also *increase* in the adjacent regions, as the distance to travel for burning wood and drinking water increases.<sup>15</sup>

The processing of the prawns in certain regions, such as the *Machar Colony* in the fisheries of Karachi in Pakistan, presents us with hellish scenarios. The processing of these crustaceans is based on intensive child exploitation. Crouching in long lines on wet and pungent floors, they peel prawns for twelve hours a day under the besetting watch of the supervisors. The pay is calculated on the number of baskets of fish filled. Those who manage to prepare 15 kg earn two dollars. Due to the position they have to work in and having to keep their hands under salt water in ice mixed with prawns, the children are bound to suffer from arthritis of the fingers and damages to the back.<sup>16</sup>

The World Bank has supported industrial aquaculture since the 1970s and today this is the *food sector with the highest growth*.<sup>17</sup> But the building of tanks and roads to transport the produce, and of *infrastructures* for its refrigeration, are mainly the *burden of the host country*, which in this way *gets further into debt whilst denying*, as we have already seen in agriculture, its support to local fishworkers, for instance, in terms of fuel, and the primary services for the population. In 1991, within the new neo-liberal framework imposed upon India, the government set up MPED (Marine Products Export Development Authority) to provide further support to aquaculture. In fact, the Authority has given technical assistance and significant aid to this sector in the country. During the same year, the government authorised fishing in the high seas.

### Frankenstein fish

A *second Revolution* would come to threaten the *blue world*: the *genetic modification of fish*. This was sometimes presented under the guise of humanitarian intents: as a way to avoid using antibiotics by genetically modifying the fish and thus increasing its resistance to diseases. At other times, the reason was more openly commercial. In particular, Atlantic salmon was targeted: to grow it faster (in twelve to eighteen months instead of the natural three years) and to make it more resistant to cold. However, the genetic engineering that promises an increase in the offer risks destroying it. Fish that grow faster can require more food, and more resistant fish can destroy wild species. Transgenic species from farms can spill over from the farming areas, as it often happens, and mix with other species with unpredictable outcomes on them and the ecosystem. In any case, when nature is forced on one side, it is weakened on another. The outcomes of the so-called Frankenstein effect were, for instance, the introduction of the opossum shrimp in several lakes North of the Flat Head Lake in Montana between 1968 and 1975, aimed to increase the Kakonee salmon food resources. As the shrimps devoured the whole zooplankton that constituted an important source of food

<sup>15</sup> For comprehensive information on this issue, see V. Shiva, *Vacche sacre mucche pazze*, p. 51ff; M. Dalla Costa and M. Chilesse, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 69; and M. Shanahan, *Appetite for destruction*, 22 March 2003, in [www.thecologist.org/archive-article.html?article=376&category=88](http://www.thecologist.org/archive-article.html?article=376&category=88).

<sup>16</sup> M. Dalla Costa and M. Chilesse, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> L. R. Brown, *Alleveremo più pesce che bestiame?*, in: [www.wwf.it/ambiente/earthpolicy/acquacoltura.asp](http://www.wwf.it/ambiente/earthpolicy/acquacoltura.asp).



for the salmon, the fishing of this fish fell. Before 1985 the annual catch of salmon was 100,000 units, by 1987 it had gone down to 600 units.<sup>18</sup>

### Another economy

The *alternative* sensible and effectively productive way to farm fish has existed for *500 years*. Since the 1500s, India employed traditional and sustainable systems of aquaculture that made it the first shrimp producer in the world. These systems had a modest impact on the environment and, where it was practical, joined and alternated with agriculture, forming integrated systems of aquaculture and farming. One of the best known is the *bheri* system, with *tanks of variable size*, employed in marshy and muddy areas such as west Bengal. If seasonal, fish is farmed between November and December, and rice during other months of the year. If perennial, when rice cannot be grown due to the high salt content of the soil, shrimps and fish are farmed throughout the year. In other regions close to estuaries, beaches and lakes such as Orissa, the *gheri* system is used. This consists of large ponds into which fish and shrimps are deposited by the tides coming in that also feed them, whilst a system of small bamboo fences keeps them there when the tide goes out. Thanks to a system of enclosures they are then captured with nets or by hand. Above all, this system is *alternated* with *wheat and rice* culture. When the wheat is cropped one part of the grain is left in the soil to constitute food for the fish. Another system is the *thappal*, involving a hand search for shrimps, oysters and other fish that are pushed towards the beach during the high tide. This search is often aided by the immersion in the water of a mat made of old herbs and balsam plants and intertwined with grains of rice, which attracts the fish. Once caught, the fish are put in salt-water containers. These images provide an idea of the *extreme simplicity* and *productivity* of the methods, as well as their *sustainability in all respects* using the *richness* offered by the sea. These methods had also catered for the life needs of the coastal populations for centuries.<sup>19</sup> However, that wealth has been, and continues to be, increasingly compromised by large industrial fishing and fish farming.

### Self organising

Confronted with the massive destruction of resources carried out by large mechanised fishing and industrial aquaculture, and the resulting impossibility of the populations sustaining themselves and their expulsion from these regions, the movement of fishworkers organised a series of struggles and grew with the aim of bringing together all of India's fishworkers. In 1982, there was a scission, yet the name and a very large section of union members stayed with Kocherry and *obtained*, from the government, *the suspension of trawl fishing along the coast of Kerala during the monsoon period of reproduction, from June to September*. Later this movement effectively reached the whole nation and took on the name of *National Fishworkers Forum*

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<sup>18</sup> V. Shiva, *Vacche sacre mucche pazze*, p. 60-61.

<sup>19</sup> V. Shiva, *Vacche sacre mucche pazze*, p. 58-60.



(NFF). It then proposed to set up a global network. Having organised meetings and built links with fishworkers in struggle in other parts of the world, such as Madagascar, Senegal, the Canadian provinces of New Scotland and Terra Nova – just to mention a few – and having launched four large strikes at the national level, beginning in 1991 and sustained by hard forms of struggle by the coastal communities, at the conference in New Delhi the *World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers* was established. But it was not until the 2000 Loctudy conference in a small village of Brittany in France that the forum reached a truly global level. The movement has given itself a *statute* and an *organisational structure*, and proposes to *constitute a local level of alternatives to capitalism* by employing modes of production and society that respond to the real problems of the local communities, facilitate decentralisation and autonomy, and are sustainable for the sea and the people who live by it. It has decided that on 21 November, the international day of fishing as chosen at the 1997 conference in New Delhi, a continental forum will commit to the organisation of demonstrations and strikes aimed at raising everyone's awareness of the issues brought forward by the fishworkers' movement. The following year, in *November 2001*, the movement declared a *global strike* involving the whole world of fishing opposing the depredation of seas. However, in Loctudy, another scission brought Kocherry to lead a new formation, the *World Forum of Fisher Peoples*, to which the Asian delegates and the majority of the African delegates adhered, whilst the rest of the movement, coordinated by François Poulin, kept the original name. The previous year, the fishworkers' movement had reached European countries with the Caravan of '99, and been a very important part of the Seattle protest. In 1999 it made various European citizens know about its *struggle against trawlers with giant nets in joint ventures* with foreign multinationals that threatened the life of fishworkers and ruined the fishing regions. It raised awareness on its struggle against the *large-scale fishing* that destroys biological biodiversity along the coast and in the high seas, and against the *industrial aquaculture* and its devastating impact, and the violence and *repression* the struggling population was being subject to. It declared its resolve to build local sustainable alternatives that responded to the needs of the coastal populations first and foremost. Like many other movements, it decided to not participate to the 2004 *World Social Forum of Mumbay* and instead to have a different presence, choosing to block the railway station and opt for other forms of struggle as a form of protest against the invasion of trawlers. It should be noted that in 1996, the fishworkers' movement, together with other sections of the Indian movements, had obtained a *Supreme Court ruling* that demanded the removal from the Indian coast of all aquaculture establishments by March 1997, with the exception of the traditional and improved ones, subject to regulation up to a distance of 500 meters from the sea and 1,000 meters near the lakes of Chilika and Pullicat, a wetland of international significance. The Court ruling was never respected by the government, which instead passed the *Aquaculture Authority Bill* to legitimise prawn farming in those areas and shifting the responsibility for the issue to the Ministry of Agriculture, whilst the demand was and still is to enact the *Marine fishing regulation act of 1978* that aimed at protecting three fundamental aspects of fishing: the life and economy of traditional fishworkers, the preservation of fish resources and respect for law and order in the sea.



As noted previously, the *large scale national strikes of the 1990s* had been *sustained* by hard fought struggles in coastal communities, realized through hunger strikes, sit-ins, marches, motorway, railway and airport blockages, the occupation of government buildings and of ports.<sup>20</sup> After these events, the *Murari Committee* was established, gathering the participation of 16 MPs, of all the government secretaries organically linked to the sector of sea and internal waters, and of three representatives of the interested parties. However, the 24 recommendations it issued – albeit very important and officially endorsed by the government – were never carried out. The struggles against the industrial establishments of aquaculture and large-scale fishing always met with strong repression.

The year 2004 signals another significant stage of the fishworkers' movement; the latter approaches the *ILO (International Labour Office)* to lay down together for the first time a set of regulations on *informal fishing labour*. Starting from ID documents and rights of repatriation and recruitment, from the need to have laws and regulations in place for onboard accommodation, from food to drinking water, and for ensuring medical provisions for emergencies and a safety kit in good state. They demanded providential security primarily in the form of a *pension* from the age of 60, and high insurance covers considering the risks involved. They also wanted regulations establishing a minimum age for labour onboard and a minimum amount of resting hours in relation to working hours, and underlined the need to ensure the education of youngsters by also proposing flexible working hours, given that postponing the years of labour onboard risks greater exposure to seasickness and loss of experience with the marine environment in the early years. They also demanded the establishment of a minimum income for those who receive pay, with particular emphasis on migrant and tribal labour.<sup>21</sup>

The document *Towards a Fisheries Policy in India*<sup>22</sup> put forward a series of other demands concerning the living conditions of the fishworkers, whilst wishing for the drafting of a fishing policy that accounts for the fundamental needs of the coastal populations and their organic relationship with marine resources. With respect to the states with a stake in fishing activities in particular, demands were made regarding the *living conditions of the village*, the dramatic need for space to build houses, ensuring the possibility of food (that

<sup>20</sup> Dalla Costa and M. Chilese, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 80. The text provides an overall outline and analysis of the fishworkers' movement's course.

<sup>21</sup> *International collective in support of fishworkers South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies*, 2-3 April 2004, in [www.wffp.org/indexcontent.asp?file1=ilo.html](http://www.wffp.org/indexcontent.asp?file1=ilo.html).

<sup>22</sup> *Towards a Fisheries Policy in India*, in [www.wffp.org/indexcontent.asp?file1=may0804.html](http://www.wffp.org/indexcontent.asp?file1=may0804.html). For a clearer picture of the framework of the parties interested in these demands, it is worth noting that according to the WFFP statute, the fishworkers who have the right to become active members of the Forum are all of the people who practice fishing directly and belong to the following categories in the different countries:

- People who fish to sustain themselves;
- Craft fishworkers;
- Autochthone populations that practice fishing;
- Coastal and continental traditional fishworkers;
- Autonomous fishworkers who practice small-scale fishing;
- Crew members.

Moreover, crew members belonging to groups other than the above who currently belong to the organisations identified in the sub clause a) of article 2, that is, organisation that share the objectives of article 1 of the Statute;

popular organisations rooted in the fishing community or that gather women engaged in the protection of fishery; fishworkers, whose activity involves the transformation, sale and transport of fish (with the exception of merchants).

For the whole list of the demands, see M. Dalla Costa and M. Chilese, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 97ff. The Statute is reported in full with appendixes in the same text.



had been highly prejudiced by industrial aquaculture and large-scale fishing), and the protection of fundamental services such as education, health, drinking water, and all of the infrastructures a village needs.

Other requests concerned *financial aid* for the *fuel* needed by the boats, and forms of insurance and credit that ensured more protection (in addition to the pension mentioned above). However, the very neo-liberal dictate negates the funding of small-scale fishing whilst encouraging the financing of large-scale fishing.

The need to *keep fighting* for a regulation of fishing starting from the enforcement of the Marine Fishing Regulation Act and to continue to oppose the marked tendency of the government to intensify the productive power of fishing was also reasserted.

### Women and the sea

The *role of women* in the fishing sector has long been *ignored and underestimated*. In fact, their labour, which concentrates on preparatory activities such as cutting fillets and selling fish, generates the income that in turn allows their husbands to pay a crew and go fishing, whilst also sustaining the costs of the family and the community.<sup>23</sup> Having seen their work compromised by the arrival of large-scale fishing, they organised themselves in cooperatives and employed saving and credit methods that allowed them to better confront the market activity. After all, cooperatives have been the form of organisation most strongly supported by the fishworkers' movement.

Their role in the struggle has been so fundamental that even in the organisational structures adopted by the international fishworkers' movement, at all levels, an absolute equality of representation of men and women was established.

In this global struggle of land and sea that sees the logic of profit destroy the logic of life, the voice and action of women alongside men is unquestionable. Unsurprisingly, in several documents marking the stages of the organisation of this movement, it was often asserted that thereafter no discrimination towards women was to be tolerated. The statute drafted in Loctudy, in *point 3 of article 1*, defining the *objectives* of the *World Forum of Fisher Peoples*, includes the aim to recognise, sustain and improve the role of women in the economic, political and cultural life of the fishing community. This commitment is fully in line with that adopted by the peasants' organisations.

The *Nyeleni conference* in Mali, February 2007, where networks of fishworkers participated together with those of peasants, farmers and other rural workers, was preceded by a *Women's Forum, a daylong debate between women*.

### Food sovereignty and life

Finally, the *international fishworkers' movement*, which we have analysed in its *Indian thread*, for the latter is the propelling engine of a coordination between fishworkers in the global South and North sharing similar

<sup>23</sup> In Canada, the United States, Japan and Norway, where the crisis forced fishermen to reduce their crew, the wives had to integrate it and work onboard (*Development and peace and the fisheries*, 1998, in [www.devpo.org/testA/issues/fisheries.htm](http://www.devpo.org/testA/issues/fisheries.htm)).



needs, represents *another crucial link* in the network defending *food sovereignty* on the premise that the sources of life, such as *the soil and the sea*, are common goods and have to be dealt with as such. It reclaims the right of access and management of those *communities that produce food*, the fishworkers in this case, and do so using methods that are sustainable in all respects, and thus also *renewable*. This primarily concerns the renewability of *marine resources, but not exclusively*. The notion of a fisherman's *craft* is inscribed in an *organic relationship* with the ecosystem to protect the versatility of its supply (environment, climate, culture, other goods present in the sea and coasts). As the peasant, according to the peasant-based conception of agriculture or responsible peasantry, is linked to the land not only as a source of production but also as a field to attend to and an ecosystem to preserve that is linked to the territory, so is the fisherman, in the idea of fishing carried forward by this movement, connected to the sea not only for the catch or fish farming, but as the overall resources that make a way of life possible, one that needs safeguarding. It is this *way of life* and of *life reproduction* that fisher people want to maintain and on which they built a *right to resistance*, in order to protect it against the policies of expulsion that neo-liberalism, together with industrial productivism, following a vision of the world as one large market for exports, promote more and more. As seen in agriculture, an acceptance of these policies would effectively entail that small fishworkers and coastal communities who live from fishing effectively put up with their expulsion; their extinction. For humanity as a whole, it would mean accepting a stronger dependency on money for the purchase of increasingly expensive fish produce when it comes from the sea, or of cheaper but farmed and increasingly polluted fish.

Against the *systematic war waged on subsistence economies and the criteria of sustainability* that they are bearers of, the international fishworkers' movement aims to *protect the modes of production* that for millennia allowed them to exist whilst protecting the *real supply of abundance* contained in natural resources and ecosystems.

Of equal importance are its aims to keep its *knowledge*. Interestingly, in Northern territories such as New Scotland, 150 fishworkers from the Bay of Fundy got together to self-organise their fishing. Rather than obtaining the allocation of individual fishing allowances from the federal government, they constituted the Fundy Fixed Gear Council to self-manage their overall quota,<sup>24</sup> thus recognising that when confronted with limited resources, a communitarian approach was the best solution for their proper administration. In the Philippines, the Agri-Aqua Association brings together agricultural and fish workers with the aim of rebuilding the mangrove forests, in the full awareness that without that ecosystem these economies and crafts cannot be resurrected.<sup>25</sup>

In every articulation of this discourse, the dimension of *solidarity, ethics, responsibility and sense of limit* emerges. Against the *unmeasured fishing that empties the sea* and denies the right to work and life to more

<sup>24</sup> *Development and peace and the fisheries*, 1998, in: [www.devop.org/testA/issues/fisheries.htm](http://www.devop.org/testA/issues/fisheries.htm).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, In Monterosso, in the region of Liguria in Italy, some still keep the craft of the nocturnal fishing of anchovies alive: *u pan du ma* 'the bread of the sea', as old local people call it. Thirty years ago, fishing was the main activity of the region. Today, however, only two boats equipped for night fishing still operate, coming back ashore at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. There are also difficulties in this region, and people are trying to obtain a trademark that recognises the quality of the anchovies and allows local salting, thus ensuring a future to the now exiguous fishermen's community (M. Chilese, *Né pesci né pescatori* (Neither fish nor fishermen), in M. Dalla Costa and M. Chilese, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 59). In Camogli, near Genoa, a fishermen's cooperative uses hand made nets in coconut fibre that are left in the sea at the end of the year to feed the fish, thus avoiding waste.



and more fishworkers, and against the *nonsensical financial games* that sustain it, this movement defends the meaningfulness and sense of limit of traditional fishing, that takes into account above all the needs of coastal communities, in a relationship of solidarity with all the fishworkers of the world, whose right to continue to work and live it aims to strengthen, and the same relationship of solidarity with the right to a food that is healthy and abundant for all communities in the world. The fishworkers of the World Forum of Fisher People in Loctudy endorsed their statute '[...]' stating that the Ocean is a source of life, and they will adamantly protect the inexhaustibility of fishing and marine resources for the people of today and the future generations [...].<sup>26</sup>

The movement carries forward its *action for food sovereignty* starting from the rebuilding of levels of *self-sufficiency* based on an organic relationship between crafts and resources in the ecosystem. It believes that food safety first derives from the *restoration* of these models of production and life. It *denies* that food safety resides in the availability of highly valuable currency sufficient to 'buy' food safety on international markets where small producers from the South have no deciding power over the price of exports and imports, and where we are increasingly forced to purchase polluted farmed fish. It *denies* that food safety can derive from the gracious concessions of aid, which has always been an instrument in the hands of stronger governments to influence weaker ones. It believes that food safety derives from food sovereignty. It *deliberates* that the sources and cycles of spontaneous life reproduction are not merchandisable and instead constitute the great common good from which to begin in order to re-establish economies that make it possible to have some *control* over one's own life conditions.

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<sup>26</sup> From the preface to the statute, in M. Dalla Costa and M. Chilese, *Nostra madre oceano*, p. 111.



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