

A Note from the Editor

This work is based on a dialogue that took place among three socially and politically committed individuals in the winter of October 1999, seemingly light-years ahead of the morally, ideologically and humanistically horrendous events of the recent past, which manifested themselves as eruptions of violence that cared little for lives, let alone national boundaries—whether these be of Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, the US...

Conversations is being published at just such a time, in the wake of killing and suffering. It is important to locate it in this historic context, where the sounds of gunfire and laser-guided artillery drown the natural tendency of humans to seek one another in that most primeval of urges—the need to reach out and communicate. Or, simply, converse. Even at an epochal period when the terms of discourse and engagement seem to have been permanently mutated.

Though focused on the specific milieu of fisheries, *Conversations* deals with themes that are timeless—power, discipline, intervention, organization, motivation, will, identity. Part oral history, part polemic, part ideology, part philosophy, the dialogue takes on the nature of a freewheeling disquisition in search of understanding. It is this spirit of open-minded and open-ended discourse that we hope *Conversations* will invoke in the reader, who must remember that these discussions took place at a time when the world was a slightly more peaceful place and when different cultures were not boxed into antagonistic stances.

Michel Foucault, the French philosopher of power, said, “In our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments.” While not wishing to sound grandiloquent, we at ICSF hope that *Conversations* will be such a transforming document.

In Memoriam

Michael Francis Belliveau

31.7.1942 — 26.1.2002

Indeed, it is with a strange feeling of incredulousness that we dedicate this book to one of its creators.

We do so with pained hearts and with near disbelief, as it is difficult to accept that Mike Belliveau, but for whom this work would not have seen the light of day, has left us so suddenly—even before this book was published.

Yet, at the same time, we can console ourselves with the satisfaction that we have, in some measure, been able to capture within these pages the essence of Mike's lifelong search to

understand the processes that lead to social inequality, in this case, with specific reference to fishworkers.

I first met Mike in 1986. His participation that year at the founding meeting of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) in Trivandrum, India, had been recommended by a Canadian friend of mine, Gaetane Gascon, who, in the mid-1960s, had worked in the Marianad fishing village, just outside Trivandrum, where I too had lived and worked in the first decade of my involvement with fisheries. Gaetane had subsequently met Mike through her work in Development and Peace (D&P), one of Canada's leading international development agencies.

Although ICSF, as an international NGO, has always had a pronounced Southern bias, Mike's commitment to the inshore fishery and his sensitivity to development issues were so evident that, despite belonging to the geographic North, he was immediately requested to become a member of the first Animation Team (AT) of ICSF. He accepted only reluctantly—as I did too—wondering whether he would be able to do justice to the task. Our close interactions at AT meetings and during discussions on various issues, in those first three years, created a long-lasting bond, which helped us examine our involvement in fisheries with a rare degree of simultaneous objectivity and subjectivity.

Having myself been professionally trained in organization methodology, and having spent almost a decade in mass mobilization work among Indian fishworkers, I found in Mike a trade union leader with a difference. He seemed to ideally, and simultaneously, blend aspects of both a professional trade organization campaigner and a political trade unionist. My own experience in India, on the other hand, was that these aspects run parallel to, and quite apart from, each other. Although Mike and I constantly discussed these issues and wildly dreamt of throwing the debate open through the pages of ICSF's

SAMUDRA Report, that never happened—for lack of time.

It was only years later, in October 1999, that, along with Aliou Sall of Senegal, we got the opportunity to sit together for nine days to share our experiences more comprehensively. Our conversations took place at the little Treasure Guest House in Accra, Ghana. ICSF's AT had planned to meet there that year in order to familiarize ourselves with the work David Eli (*Co-ordinator of the NGO Technical Services for Community Development, TESCO, Accra, Ghana and an Associate Member of ICSF – Ed*) was involved in as a member of ICSF. Mike, Aliou and I decided to meet there two weeks earlier in order to record our discussions for possible future publication. Though we were all equally keen on putting something down on paper, we were also interested in just talking, getting things off our chests and inviting feedback from friends we trusted. All of us had been through difficult times in our work, which raised several questions in our minds, and we really needed to work through them. Though we wanted to get together in conversation, none of us had had the time to think through what we intended to do, nor the manner in which to do it.

All we knew was that we had asked David to book accommodation for us from a particular day onwards. I went to Accra via Dakar—it is still convenient to travel to West Africa through Europe than directly from India—and picked up Aliou. That was important because I knew that Aliou is not an easy person to pin down! I arrived at Accra with Aliou, only to hear that Mike was held up in Canada due to discussions on the native people's issue, and so would be a few days late. The delay ultimately turned out to be four days, and that meant we would get only nine full working days for our discussions.

As Aliou and I had other work to complete in any case, we went ahead with our plans. After Mike arrived and briefed us on recent events in the fisheries of the Maritimes, we decided to get a good night's rest, before starting work the next morning.

When we did commence in the morning, we started talking with no fixed agenda or plan. We talked from 10 a.m to 8 p.m., with a brief break to eat. Being out in the garden meant there were no smoking breaks either, and Mike puffed away while continuing to speak.

When we decided to call it a day and go for a break, Mike said, “Hey! But how will we get this book done? I do have a tape recorder but I wonder whether those little cassettes are available here, as I have only one.” We burst out laughing, with Aliou adding, “This time Our Barbarian is so high-tech that we will not find his technology here!” We often called Mike “Our Barbarian” as the poor guy had to suffer all kinds of experiences accommodating to Third World lifestyles. He ended up signing his letters to us that way too! As a ‘dutiful, responsible’ woman, I told Aliou and Our Barbarian, “OK, you guys go and have fun, but get a good night’s sleep. Maybe the night will bring good counsel about how we should proceed. Let’s be ready to start work tomorrow morning at ten.”

While they were out, I went up to the computer and tried to reconstruct the conversation of the day from memory, recalling each one of us speaking. None of us had taken any notes, and one precious day had already gone by. In the morning, I reread the notes, edited them—and then realized that the whole thing sounded like a great conversation. Why not just record our conversation, I thought, so that it remains spontaneous and relevant to our own needs? I was agog with excitement at this feasible proposition. When the guys awoke, they were not looking very bright because the night had obviously been too short, fatigue had built up, and no bright ideas had surfaced. Mike said to me, “You look pepped up. What have you got up your sleeve?”

I read my notes out to them, and asked, “How does it sound? Why don’t we just call it ‘A Conversation?’” They were both quite amazed. “It sounds great. I didn’t see you take any

notes. How did you recall it all? It's a great idea, but does it mean you are going to do that kind of job every day? How much sleep did you get last night?" each of them asked alternately. "Well, if you think that's fine, then let's just proceed. I'll take care of the writing," I replied.

And that's exactly how this book got on its way. We just talked non-stop for eight continuous days. When we got into very personal details, we would say, "This is off the record." Those pauses also gave my hand a rest! I took handwritten notes, and succeeded in keying in almost all of a day's conversation into the computer every night, trying to be as verbatim as possible. We had to stop abruptly when the other members of the AT arrived—or our conversation would have gone on for at least another two days.

It was only through these conversations that I began to understand Mike's lifelong search for, and commitment to, working class issues. I could only respect and admire the objectivity and integrity with which he worked through issues, struggling to find answers.

That was also the first time that I got to understand Aliou's thought processes. While working closely with him on programmes in Senegal, I had always realized that Aliou's rationale was different from mine. Though we had become close friends, I often could not understand his logic. Always aware that each culture had its own way of interpreting reality, I was content to let Aliou do things the way he thought fit, even when I did not understand his actions. But the 'dive' into Aliou's imagination that occurred during our conversations indicated how profoundly different we actually were. And, by implication, I realized how much deeper and more complex the social reality we were trying to deal with, is.

As our conversations had been such a great learning experience for us, I suggested that three other activists in the

fisheries sector should have a similar chance. I asked Mike to spare time for this. Of course, he was reluctant, realizing that such a process could take place only among people who trusted one another. And, of course, there was the vexing question: “Who would do all the writing?”

Although this book should have been published more than a year ago, it was Mike’s individual contribution that took the longest time to write. Mike could not find the time and space to complete it by the initial deadline. I managed to get three days with him in Canada in mid-2000, when I engaged him in the same Treasure Guest House method. But he finally completed the essay on his own, reworking it to leave behind a very precious document of, and for, the Maritime Fishermen’s Union (MFU).

For nearly ten days, we—Mike, Aliou and I—talked, we argued, we probed, we disagreed. Yet, the final outcome of our conversations was no mere rambling. At least, Aliou and I think so. And I’m sure Mike would’ve agreed with us.

But the ultimate worth of this book must be decided by you, the reader. For us, the authors, the process of producing it has been of immense value. Though printed and bound, this work is by no means complete in any way, but is probably just an instrument for greater reflection and dialogue. That is what Mike would have wanted too, I’m sure, although I know we have lost his great wisdom in carrying this triologue ahead.

And in that loss, I grieve—as do hundreds of Mike’s friends around the world.

Conversations is dedicated to you, Mike.

Nalini Nayak

March 2002

Preface

This book is the collaborative outcome of three individuals who have worked to build organizations of fishermen and fishworkers since the late 1960s. The three of us—Aliou Sall from Senegal, Michael Belliveau from Canada and Nalini Nayak from India—live in different continents and so our fisheries are situated in varying contexts.

Aliou Sall is a native of Hann, Senegal, and has been associated with the formation and development of the Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisans du Sénégal (CNPS) since its birth in 1988.

Michael Belliveau is the Executive Secretary of the MFU, based in the Maritime Provinces, on the east coast of Canada, where it has organized inshore fishermen.

Nalini Nayak comes from Bangalore, India, and has worked her adult life in the fishery of Kerala, a State in the south of India. She played a support role in the emergence of the Kerala

Swatantara Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF, the Kerala Independent Fishworkers' Federation) and, later, in the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF).

Of the three of us, only Aliou grew up in a fishing community. Nalini has been involved in community work among fishers for nearly two decades since 1967, working full time at it until 1980 and continuing thereafter on a voluntary basis. Mike started to organize inshore fishermen in Cape Breton in 1981.

Nalini had met Aliou in Senegal when he was doing his field work in fisheries as part of his university studies. She invited him to India to learn from the experience of the KSMTF. The three met in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, in 1986 as participants at the founding meeting of ICSF. Since then, ICSF has been instrumental in bringing them together on several occasions and in several different fishing areas of the world, like Cebu in the Philippines, Accra on the Gulf of Guinea, Thailand, Senegal and, of course, south India. Aliou and Mike have crossed the Atlantic back and forth several times, as members of their respective organizations, exploring each other's fisheries and institutions. Nalini has also collaborated with Aliou on several West African initiatives. She visited the MFU and the Maritimes only in mid-2000.

Given this background, our lives, naturally, are lived quite differently and our practical day-to-day work varies greatly. While we cannot claim to have had a common project, we have had much to say to one another over the past 15 years.

We owe a great debt to ICSF, not only because it has provided material support for this publication but also because it has afforded us unique opportunities to meet many of the inshore or artisanal fishworkers in their own settings.

The text that follows is divided into two sections. The first is a conversation amongst the three of us, a spontaneous triologue that went on for more than a week, which we recorded.

The second part of the text is a more detailed documentation of the organizations we work with. It differs editorially in the way each contribution has been written. Michael and Aliou have chosen to reflect more on what is going on within their organizations, being in no way obligated to the organizations by way of mandate or tasks. Nalini, on the other hand, has written a brief historical overview, together with her reflections.

We hope the conversation that follows will give the reader a feel for the questions that have arisen through our involvement in the inshore and artisanal fisheries sector. Needless to say, the three of us are the ones who have benefited the most from this exercise, as there could have been no better way to reflect on our individual and shared experiences.

Aliou Sall • Michael Belliveau • Nalini Nayak

June 2000

Introduction

Three Continents, Three Fisheries

The regions that the authors live in lie in three different continents, and have significantly large fisheries:

- Atlantic Canada, which once boasted one of the world's richest fishing grounds, until the collapse of the cod fishery;
- Senegal, in West Africa, where fishing is central to the economy and where resources, especially of pelagic species, are large and productive; and
- India, which has a diverse multispecies tropical fishery, and provides a source of livelihood to around 10 million people.

The discussions below focus on the inshore fishery, where the coastal communities display important differences in the way they access the resources. In order to be able to appreciate the conversation that follows, the reader needs to know the contexts in which the fishworker organizations that the authors work with, function.

Canada and the Maritime Fishermen's Union

The MFU was created in 1977, with the aim of organizing the inshore fishermen in the Maritime Provinces or the Maritimes, as they are called. The three Maritimes have borders on the Gulf of St Lawrence; two of them also have coasts on the Scotian Shelf, which extends 200 miles into the Atlantic and is washed by the Gulf Stream near its outer edges. The MFU can claim a wide base among inshore fishermen in the Maritimes, but it has never worked in Newfoundland, famous for its Grand Banks and historically huge cod stocks. (Newfoundland fishermen organized earlier under the banner of the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union, affiliated to the national Canadian Autoworkers Union.) The Maritimes and Newfoundland have approximately the same number of independent owner-operator fishermen.

Unlike the Newfoundland union, the MFU chose to organize only inshore fishermen, not members of the crew on industrial vessels or workers in fish processing plants. In the Maritimes, the inshore fishery is usually understood to include fishermen who operate in vessels under 45 ft (13.7 m) in length, which mainly return to port the same day. There are approximately 8,000 inshore operators in the Maritimes. While the MFU can claim membership both in the Gulf and the Scotian Shelf, it has tended to be far more successful in the Acadian regions of New Brunswick, where it started.

The Maritimes' inshore fishery relies on several groundfish, pelagic and crustacean species, but it is the ubiquitous *Homarus americanus* (lobster) that the inshore fishery is most dependent on. The lobster fishery employs traps and is regulated by season, number of traps and limited-entry licensing, and not by quotas. The herring fishery is executed almost exclusively in the inshore with gill-nets, and the groundfish are pursued with a number of different gear. Both these species are managed by restrictions on mobility and gear, as well as by quotas. A typical inshore fishing operation would involve a crew of three, including the captain. The Gulf of St Lawrence region freezes over in the winter, restricting the time fishermen can be out on the water; but, overall, the boats are at sea between 75 to 100 days a year. All fishermen rely on wharves to land their catches and to moor their vessels.

There are more than 300 coastal villages or communities in the Maritimes that would be regarded as fishing areas. In many of these communities can also be found some aspect of fish processing or packing. Unlike in Newfoundland, most fishing communities here are within an hour's drive of a large town or a small city. Nevertheless, opportunities to work in the winter season are not many; fishermen have been categorized alongside other workers in Canada who are temporarily out of work, allowing them to claim unemployment insurance benefits during the winter.

As a group, Canadian fishermen are getting older in relation to the rest of the workforce. Generally, they have less formal schooling than the average Canadian. Standards of living, naturally, vary within the fishery, but most inshore captains would enjoy approximately the same living standards as other full-time workers elsewhere in Canadian society.

Senegal and the Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaux du Sénégal

The CNPS is a fishworker organization of national character. It includes the fishermen of the '*grand*' and '*petite*' coasts of Senegal, with the exception of Casamance. In Senegal, fishing is not an ethnic-based activity, although, in some cases, specific ethnic groups may practise a specialized kind of fishery.

Fisheries is an important sector in the economy of Senegal, and, after independence, the Senegalese government has tried to have a great stake in the fisheries sector. Senegalese women have a major role in the inshore fishery, as the fish they process artisanally finds an important place in the diet of the nation. The existence of polygamy forces the women to strive for their own sources of income; the role they play in post-harvest activities is also important in maintaining social structures.

Of the Senegalese population, 92 per cent is Muslim, and, although fishermen may belong to different Islamic tendencies, they are, for the most part, religious and bound by social custom. The national literacy rate is around 33 per cent, and most of the fishing community speak Wolof, the single most important language.

The inshore fishery is dominated by *pirogues* and a variety of gear like hooks-and-line, gill- and drift-nets and, more recently, ring-seines. (*A pirogue is a canoe powered by a small outboard motor, and ranging from 3 to 25 m in length. Pirogues use a variety of gear, including lines, gill-nets, beach seines, cast nets and traps – Ed*) Approximately 90 per cent of the vessels are motorized and, since the last two years, have been equipped with large insulated boxes, to provide for the increasing duration of fishing voyages.

To date, Senegal has imposed neither a licensing nor quota system in the fishery, although there is legislation that demarcates the inshore fishing zone to 12 nautical miles from the shore.

Senegal has had a tradition of signing fisheries access agreements with the European Union (EU) under the Lomé Accord.

India and the National Fishworkers Forum

In India, the NFF was created in 1979. It is a trade union made up of member federations from the nine coastal States of India, each of which has its own government and jurisdiction over its marine waters up to 12 nautical miles from the shoreline. The waters beyond that range fall under the jurisdiction of the central government.

Fishing in India is a caste-determined activity, and, in some areas, the fishing castes are considered more backward than others. Being backward and at the edge of the land mass, these communities have been pushed out of the mental and physical radars of the country's successive planners.

The Indian artisanal fishery is extremely diverse both in craft design and in gear usage. In the upper parts of the west and east coasts, an extended continental shelf calls for larger craft. In the south, the shelf narrows and so the craft get smaller, especially towards the tip of the peninsula, where the *kattamaram* used to be the common craft. (*The kattamaram is a traditional fishing craft found in south India, built of three logs of lightweight albyzzia lashed together with coir rope – Ed*) Today, around 80 per cent of the craft in the north and about 60 per cent in the south are mechanized. The northern craft have increasingly been developed into trawl boats although, for the most part, they are still controlled by traditional fishermen.

In many coastal Indian States, women play an important part in the fisheries, traditionally being involved in the marketing and processing of fish. The complementary division of labour between men who fish and women who market and distribute the fish has made these coastal communities very vibrant and self-contained. As fishing requires traditional skills, the male

children often drop out of school early in order to set out to sea. Female children, once old enough, are burdened with household responsibilities, as both mother and father have long working days outside the home. This pattern is changing in areas where the fishery has got modernized, and, as such, we can say that fishing communities are always under transition. Around 60 per cent of fishworkers in the northern coastal parts of the country are literate; the figure decreases as one comes southwards, where the literacy rate is around 40 per cent.

Eight of the nine coastal States of India have some form of legislation or regulation relating to their marine waters, but all of them have different norms for determining what constitutes the artisanal fishery. In no State are the norms strictly observed, as the fisheries are not rigorously regulated. The only clear-cut resource management measure is a closed season for trawling—varying from one to three months—that is observed in most States.

No two States share a language and, although fish forms a major part of the diet in many coastal States, in some States like Gujarat some of the coastal population do not even eat fish.

CONVERSATIONS

A Triologue on Organization, Power and Intervention in Fisheries

On Intervention and Being an Intervener

Mike: Maybe we should start with the concept of the ‘intervener’ since you, Nalini, seemed less than enthused with the term when I started using it earlier today.

Nalini: Why do you use the term ‘intervener’? Can—and do—individuals intervene in social processes?

Mike: No, I do not mean individuals as such that intervene—but organizations like the MFU do intervene in social processes. How do you see your role anyway in all the years that you have been involved in fisheries?

Nalini: In India, we use the term ‘social activist’. People who are conscious of social contradictions take a stand on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, and get involved in processes and organizations that try to counter the forces of marginalization.

Mike: I have a problem with the concept and role of activism. The concept of intervention is interesting because it refers to the actual move to recover power in a situation that is outside the supporter. An intervention, at least in theory, allows the people you are intervening with to test out their ideas and actions on the supporter group in a context that is friendly.

I’d like to go back to a process I was involved with in the 1970s, through a person called Gerald Belkin, a filmmaker who spent time in Tanzania and made a series of documentaries on how people lived and thought. I thought those were powerful communications of the life of the people in Africa. The filmmaking team came to realize that they were not a neutral phenomenon in the villages where they were filming and that the local people they filmed were using the opportunity to draw attention to existing problems in the area like, for instance, hidden problems with the chief or with an aid worker. The film group realized they were making an intervention. They were a kind of mirror. Paulo Freire (*Brazilian adult educator, born 1921, died 1997, whose most famous work is Pedagogy of the Oppressed – Ed*) too used the concept of mirror images that captured a problematic. Social relations were problematized.

In Belkin’s case, the crew was very conscious of not becoming a part of the village because, while they

integrated with the local situation—learning the language, etc—they were conscious that they were independent of the situation and were autonomous, and, therefore, were not taking sides. This posed a challenge in articulating their own ideas. Unlike Freire’s methodology, which seemed to be more ideologically charged, Belkin documented a situation on video; in this way, he captured what people thought and the logic that lay behind particular themes or issues.

Belkin attributed his conceptual tools to a group called ‘Desgenettes’, whose founder, psychoanalyst Gerald Mendel, developed a theory of social power and how a group might go about recovering its rightful share of power. Mendel believed that groups tended to project on social situations their own psycho-familial schemas...But we won’t go into that now.

Freire also used the term ‘intervention’. Unlike the Desgenettes approach, the approach of INODEP (*Institut Oecuménique au service du Développement des peuples or the Ecumenical Institute for the Development of People, a Paris-based organization that uses the social analysis methodology derived from the work of Paulo Freire – Ed*) would be to identify key informants in a situation, develop a social analysis from what they communicated, and feed it back into the community, provoking the community to reflect on, and identify, the contradictions that occurred in the process of change.

When I started working in the MFU, there seemed to be pressure on me from the fishermen to be like them, a sort of implied questioning that since I was from the ‘outside’, what was I doing trying to organize fishermen. The tendency is to want to get familial and

that was a way for me to get involved, to get to know deeper the people one was working with. But, as I had some tools from Belkin, I made a conscious effort not to give ground, to remember that I was not a fisherman and that that was not my role. I tried not to get subsumed. My job was not to 'accompany' the fishermen but, in a sense, to challenge them in their secure atmosphere. 'Accompanying' a group is different from 'supporting' it. What does one contribute just by 'accompanying' a process? In relating to me, the people have to find some meaning.

In fact, in the MFU, people have remarked on the 'rare' relations between its staff and its members. I think we have established a way of working where we neither dominate with our own ideas nor simply leave the ideas of the fishermen unchallenged. Despite the fact that we are salaried, we have tried to shape the staff as interveners. We developed this approach over time. In fact, in the mid-1970s, I had Belkin organize a workshop for us in Moncton. He came along with a Swedish person called Bertil Malmstrom.

I got together about 20 people and, after the workshop, we created a working group that would get initiated into the methodologies of the group Desgenettes. We got together regularly for about two years, practising the methodology. We had a series of sessions with the students of the School of Social Work, who were facing some problems with the administration. We would record their discussions and then reflect on them, analyze them as a group and give them feedback, on which they could make the decisions they wanted. In the long run, although our group got dissolved, what we learnt in the process actually shaped us.

When I met you people in India, in 1986, what impressed me was the care you took in writing up your work in a way that the group Desgenettes did. You were conscious about what you were doing as a team, analyzing and documenting your work in a popular manner for others to read, but also, in the process, learning. Danilo Dolci in Italy did something similar, I think. (*Danilo Dolci, 1924-1997, often called the Gandhi of Sicily, used peaceful protests and hunger strikes to work with the poor and unfortunate in Sicily during the time of Mussolini's rule, inspired by the work of Don Zeno, a Catholic priest – Ed*) He too worked as a social animator and documented his observations in his book *No Man is an Island*. So, in a way, I think social animation predates Freire and has different expressions but all in the genre of 'making an intervention', which allows for people to bounce their ideas off one another and sort them out better as a group.

As time moved on, I got convinced that intense technical workshops for people to get conscientized are really not very effective. People get conscientized through the broader process of organization. When I got to the MFU, I found it a reasonably stable organization, where people could test their ideas and carry them through. That methodology kept us from getting burnt out because, although you get more and more involved as time goes on, you can always distance yourself from your actions and think objectively.

Nalini: I too followed some of the debates of that time. That was in the early 1970s, when a Marxist debate was still going on about the pros and cons of Lenin's theory of organization. (*As a young Russian émigré recently returned from Siberian exile and living in Geneva, Switzerland, Vladimir*

Illich Lenin wrote the long vigorous polemic What is to be Done in 1902, in which he sketched out a new vision of a Marxist revolutionary party to counter the Russian 'economists' view that the Social Democratic party in Russia should focus on legal activities aimed at improving the economic well-being of the working class. "The whole art of politics lies in finding and gripping as strong as we can the link that is least likely to be torn out of our hands, the one that is most important at the given moment, the one that guarantees the possessor of a link the possession of the whole chain," wrote Lenin – Ed) There was disillusionment with the Left because of its failure in organizing the working class and, as a result, there was a spate of writings on social movements. There were also analyses of what made up the psyche of fascism. This had an impact on us in India too.

But people's praxis is influenced by their social consciousness and, in this way, every human being is a social actor, and the term 'intervention' cannot be used to identify some individuals. From what I understand you saying, the 'intervener' is outside the process and not a part of it and, hence, is not influenced by the process. But look at us. Haven't we been influenced by our involvement in the movements too? Haven't we grown, changed and developed an evolving perspective because of our closeness to the movement, and, in this closeness, haven't we also been able to contribute our own ideas to the process?

Aliou: I prefer the term 'supporter'. I acknowledge that the supporters have been key in bringing dynamism into the fishworkers' movement. In my case, I must say that the role of a supporter *vis-à-vis* the movement can sometimes be ambiguous. While I respect the autonomy of the movement, the fact that I come from Hann and from a fishing family that held a respectable

position in the village makes me organically linked to the community and the movement.

Nalini: Well, Aliou, by saying that, you introduce us to another dimension of our reflection, namely, where do we come from? Why do we do what we do? Mike, all that you have shared about the evolution of your methodological approach does impress me. You mentioned Paulo Freire. How come you were interested in what he did? At what point of your life was that?

Despite having interacted with you all these years, I did not imagine you had this kind of a past! Yet, I always felt on a similar wavelength when we discussed organizational strategies, and now I am not surprised why. I knew you earlier played hockey and worked in Michelin Tire...But what led you to the MFU?

Mike: I heard of Paulo Freire when I attended a lecture by Ivan Illich, who explained how Freire had used literacy as a means of conscientization. *(Born in Vienna in 1926, Ivan Illich founded centres for cross-cultural studies, first in Puerto Rico, then in Cuernavaca, Mexico. During the 1970s, his Centro Intercultural de Documentación became an internationally respected focus for intellectual discussion. Illich's radical anarchist views can be found in his most famous works: Deschooling Society, Tools for Conviviality, Energy and Equity and Medical Nemesis – Ed)* Subsequently, I read Freire's books and was fascinated by the way he developed a methodology that used words and concepts and reflected on their social meanings. That was at a time when I was interested in international development issues. I had been working with the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. I had looked at what Julius Nyerere was

attempting in Tanzania through his *ujamma* programme; all the obstacles he faced had to do with issues of international development and aid. (*Julius K. Nyerere, the founding father of Tanzania, guided what had been the British Trust Territory of Tanganyika into sovereignty in 1961. He was the youngest of Africa's triumphant nationalists, a group that included Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast. His ujamma movement involved a shift from traditional lands into paternalistically planned villages in what, according to The New York Times, became Africa's largest and most debated example of social engineering – Ed*)

Nalini: Oh, I am glad you talk about the *ujamma* experiment. Last year, when we organized a workshop on social analysis in Ghana for African activists, I was surprised to discover that none of them had heard about the *ujamma* experiment. I referred to the *ujamma* experiment because we were talking about indigenous approaches to development, like the *gram swaraj* movement that Mahatma Gandhi began in India. (*Gram swaraj, or village self-rule, was a pivotal concept in Gandhi's thinking, where every village would be "independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary," according to Gandhi, writing in 1942 – Ed*)

Mike: It was after that that I got into the Belkin approach. But why are you so surprised that I was interested in Freire?

Nalini: Just because I had never dreamt that you would have gone through such a conscious methodological approach. I know very few trade union or organizational people who use any particular methodological approach in their organizational work. But, now that you say it, I understand you better and

that is probably why, very early on, I felt I could discuss organizational strategies with you. Do you remember we had wanted to engage in a written dialogue on this subject years ago?

Mike: Yes, I remember, and we have only got down to it now. But how and when did you folks in India get to know Freire? Was he also the source of inspiration for you in India?

Nalini: Well, that was in the early 1970s. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was discussed in the 'Free University' that radical elements in the student movement organized. We were not so much taken up by the details of Freire's methodology as by his analysis of poverty. We ourselves were studying the impact of colonialism on the history of our nation, and the complex and unjust Indian social system that discriminated between people. Freire spoke about the 'culture of silence' and how the process of conscientization gave people the possibility to break out of this culture, and helped them to fight discrimination.

Then, in 1971, Francois Houtart conducted a workshop in India on social analysis, where he developed tools of analysis. (*A Belgian priest and proponent of liberation theology, Francois Houtart is director of the Belgium-based Tricontinental Centre – Ed*) What was really appealing was the fact that he used Marxist tools, but integrated symbolic social representations, like religion and people's world-views, into the analysis. That approach was later developed in the Indian context by Duarte Barretto at the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore, and, still later, it was extended to embrace feminist and ecological perspectives by the feminist movement, with women

like Gabrielle Dietrich and Chhaya Datar making significant contributions. (*Gabrielle Dietrich work with the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, and, since 1975, has been on the faculty of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, India. She recently co-authored, with Nalini Nayak, Transition or Transformation? A Study of the Mobilization, Organization and Emergence of Consciousness Among the Fishworkers of Kerala, India. Chhaya Datar is Head of the Women's Studies Unit at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai India—Ed*)

Interestingly, Francois Houtart had also worked in Brazil where the initial conscientization work of Freire coincided with the post-Second Vatican Council liberation theology movement. It was at that time that concepts like “Church as the people of God” and “the Church of the Poor” stimulated students to venture out of the secure confines of family and acquaint themselves with the problems of the oppressed people, if they meant to take their Christianity seriously. Our student movement was radicalized then, and was also influenced by radical students from Kerala where, for the first time in history, a communist government had been democratically elected to power in 1957.

So, as students, some of us got exposed to rural India through work camps. Then, inspired by the Bishop of Trivandrum and a group of committed women social workers, I went to a fishing village in Kerala, called Marianad, where I lived for two years. That is a story in itself. Subsequently, I went back to university, did my masters degree in community organization, and came back to the same fishing village. I have been in the field of fisheries and coastal communities ever since.

Mike: It's interesting to gather that similar thought processes have influenced us. What about you, Sall, what were the influences on your life?

Aliou: I do not think we are what we are because of certain people, like Freire or Marx, influencing our thought processes. I feel that there is something in the human disposition itself and in the play of social events on our lives that makes us do what we do. I think it was my local situation between 1975 and 1979 that made me react to certain things that were happening in my society.

As I lived in Hann, the closest fishing area to the city of Dakar, we were the first to encounter the impact of urbanization. Hann became the first site for the installation of fish processing plants. It started with a huge tuna plant that started pouring hot and polluted water into the bay. Then others came along, a huge Japanese plant and then Sardine Afrique. These companies began to occupy our land too. That enraged us and we made a lot of trouble for them. We physically confronted them when they occupied the processing grounds of the women. We also began to understand how they were able to buy up some of our local leaders, who then began to intervene on their behalf, saying they would create more jobs, and so on.

That was when I was about 19 years old. The prevailing situation stimulated us youth to get together and, in the process, some more senior, shall I say Left-oriented, rebels joined us.

Hann never took easily to the coming of foreigners into its midst. In fact, I recall an incident, which happened when I was about seven years old, when my

grandmother made captive six French soldiers who were caught helping themselves to coconuts in our fields. Yes, Hann was then surrounded by fields, and many of the fishermen also farmed, as they were traditionally inland fishermen-cum-farmers who had migrated to the coast. It was my father's uncle who had led this settlement of migrants in Hann, and he was a great fighter. That spirit probably transpired to us.

As a group of youth, we organized the other young people into doing things together and having discussions. We also ran a tuition programme for children so that they could pursue their school studies better. Ours was the first generation that reached university. Yes, I was very interested in school and studies, and that was why I was probably one of the few of my time who did not go to sea, as all my peers did. I was fascinated by learning at school and it was probably because I was away from the practice of fishing that I developed a deeper consciousness about it, which helped me see more objectively what was really happening in the sector.

Mike: You make me think here about my colleague in the MFU. He is a bit of what you'd call an 'organic' type. I would not take any major decisions without first sounding it out on him. He was with us at the start of the union and is still there. He came from the first generation of the Acadian people who went to the University of Moncton. University education commenced in the Acadian region only in the 1960s. This colleague came from a fishing family, and knew great poverty and hardship, but went to university to study social sciences.

Five years after the university was inaugurated, the debate on the language and status of the Acadian people began. It was part of the movement for identity and valorizing the Acadian people's work of farming, logging and fishing. They were up in arms against the Anglophones, who controlled the fishery as well. They went back to their people as volunteers and started the mobilizations that grew into the MFU.

Nalini: This reminds me of people like Eugene Culas and A J Vijayan too—Eugene, who knew poverty and initiated the formation of the fishery co-operative in Marianad, and Vijayan, the son of a major fish merchant, who got exposed to the thinking of the student movement in the early 1970s and went on to mobilize the first trade union in fisheries in India. (*Eugene Culas and A J Vijayan have been active in the fishworkers' movement in India – Ed*) But, Aliou, what made you leave your country and go to Europe to study?

Aliou: In the late 1970s, the university in Senegal was in a crisis and the Department of Sociology and Demography was closed. That was also partly due to the happenings in Europe in 1968. The social science faculties were considered the origins of social revolt and so it was felt better to close them down. That was the reason I went to Europe. But it was extremely difficult because my father didn't have money. Yet, I can say that in the nine years that I was in Europe, I did all kinds of work to get money not only for my studies but to go home every two years. You know, the children of ministers and other influential people monopolized Francophone scholarships, while those like me had to struggle.

While in France, and especially in Toulouse, I worked with the immigrants, and that was a real education for me. There, too, I was involved in adult education for the immigrants who had to learn how to integrate themselves into the French system. In fact, I even wrote my *lycée* (a French public secondary school that prepares students for the university – Ed) thesis on the problems of the migrants. For this, I was influenced by the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (French anthropologist and sociologist who worked extensively in Algeria before becoming Professor of Sociology at the College de France—Ed), who wrote *Le echeque Scholai*, as well as by other books that critiqued the educational system, including those by Illich, who you mentioned earlier. I applied that analysis to my understanding of the experience of the migrants amidst the constraints and compulsions of the French system of education, which was very elitist and racist too.

You must also know that there were many other Senegalese students in France. There were some Burkinabes too. Only the sons of the rich got the Francophone scholarships, but there were lots of others who were political rebels, and they organized the Society of Senegal in France. I didn't really join them and tried to keep my distance as I found them too dogmatic. I think I was more influenced by the writings of Africans like Cheer Antio Diouf, Theophil Obenga of Congo, Bau Bau Amme of Niger and Kserbo.

I chose to study sociology instead of demography, which was the main attraction for other Africans because they held out a scope of better job prospects. But my interest was to get better tools to understand society. So, I finally moved to the university at Geneva,

where I was attracted by Professor Rolf Steppacher, who was sort of marginalized in the university because he spoke about ecodevelopment. His approach, and the issues he raised, rang a bell for me, as I looked back at Hann.

Mike: It is strange that we are repeatedly going back to the 1960s era. Why were the social science faculties so dynamic in those times and so mediocre now?

Nalini: I think in the 1960s sociology was just coming into its own as an academic discipline. The people who were entering university were people who came more from 'real life situations' like your colleague, and Eugene, who I mentioned earlier. Their education was motivated by the questions that arose from the pain of being discriminated against. This made them reflect on the social contradictions of their times, and academia helped develop tools to understand society as it existed. The social sciences were developing a critique of society.

Today, many of the social science faculties do not seem to develop in the student a critical analysis of society. As large numbers of students in our countries are those who have no 'real life' experience, the thrust of education is more academic and career-oriented. This has to do with the way that society at large is developing. Life is becoming more of a rat race, and society is no longer based on harmony and sustainable growth. People, and the students of the 1960s, in particular, hoped for a change, but they were not supported, and the dominant class continued to call the shots. From then on, the questioning spirit in universities only further deteriorated.

Aliou: Also, I feel that social sciences have fallen into the trap of what is called 'specialization'. In the process, it has lost the ability to analyze holistically and get inside actual social dynamics.

Nalini: Specialization is an approach encouraged by modern science. It leads to the dysfunctioning of society, of the environment and even of the human body, which are all complex dynamic realities. The approach, which dichotomizes dynamic reality, is the base of the modern 'development' paradigm. We can see, for instance, how 'scientific' management of the ocean resources has led to the collapse of our fisheries.

Mike: Before we get into that discussion, I still want to know what makes the 'non-organic' individuals get involved. Like you and I, Nalini, we come from more urban backgrounds. Your father was a bureaucrat, wasn't he? I personally had no political consciousness when I was 19, the way Aliou seems to have had. Rather, I can say I developed a different perspective due to what I call an existential crisis when I was around 20 years old.

I completed undergraduate studies in philosophy, literature and psychology and started teaching in high school until about 1966. I was getting frustrated with the formal schooling process because the students were more preoccupied by identity and relations than by Shakespeare. I thought I could make more of a contribution by getting deeper into psychology to understand the students better.

Instead, I ended up travelling. I went to Europe and, in order to earn money to keep on travelling, I played hockey. We were in Czechoslovakia in 1967 and we

saw what was happening there. Remember, it was only a few months later that the whole Czech society broke out in revolt against the Soviet bloc system. That was the first time I got interested in anything political. Then I went to the Middle East and spent three months travelling there. It was the time when Nasser had ordered the United Nations (UN) troops out of the Sinai, and we were asked by the Israeli police to leave. So, we went to Cyprus, Turkey and Greece, where also there had been a recent coup.

We toyed with the idea of going to India, but fathomed it would be too hot and so we went to Russia instead. At that time, not many visitors went to Russia and, to my surprise, I was amazed to see a fairly normal society, in the sense that people had their lives and pleasures and laughs, even if they were under a communist regime, which had been portrayed in Canadian minds as the darkest of eventualities. I came back from my travels and decided that I would not pursue my studies in psychology but would go back to university and study political science instead.

On Organizational Work

Mike: Most organizations, once formed, cannot conceive of a time when they will have to wind up. To the extent that they become ideas, they take on an eternal sense, which doesn't give people a feeling that things can be changed. In 1986, I was on the verge of quitting the MFU, where I had been for five years already, but meeting all you folks working in the fishery gave me new motivation. A few months after that, Gilles Theriault left the MFU. He was one of the founders of the MFU, and a charismatic one, at that.

I took over and realized I couldn't 'replace' him, but the attitude that I took was to allow for the possibility of what I call 'the will of Allah'—there are too many things beyond our control. I think that was the perfect attitude to have at that time because the first decade in the life of the MFU was so charged. It was a time when people who were ideologically driven gave of their time to build the organization, even without any pay. Finally, in some areas, it became so difficult that people had to leave. When I joined the MFU, it was like being self-employed.

Nalini: The movements of the informal sector have a real struggle to survive because of limited possibilities of access to funds, more so if they are political movements. In India, movements are always suspect if they have any links with the outside world, as they are not supposed to receive foreign funds. Aliou, I am really a bit surprised to see how the CNPS makes applications for funding abroad. I have not been able to understand why CREDETIP (*Centre de Recherches pour le Développement des Technologies Intermédiaires de Pêche or the Research Centre for Development of Intermediate Technology in Fishing, Dakar, Senegal – Ed*) as a support organization, has not been more discreet in exposing the CNPS to funding sources so that some amount of self-reliance is built up.

Aliou: That is indeed a complex issue, and you must know the complexities of our Senegalese society if you want to understand it. In fact, I have reflected on this in my part of the text later on, where we document the organizations we work with. But right now, I would like to say that we made a conscious choice right from the beginning that CREDETIP, besides doing some 'support' activity for the CNPS, would not get involved

in direct fundraising for the organization. This has been to our advantage as CREDETIP now cannot be criticized for existing at the cost of, or because of, CNPS. But I can see that it has had some negative effect on some of the leaders of the CNPS as they have become dependent and have not taken the question of self-reliance seriously. In some cases, they have made grave mistakes too, as in the case of Kayar and the insulated vans to transport fish. Nevertheless, we have tried to discuss with the locals at each phase and explain to them our disagreements.

Mike: I think I want to say something on this too because of the way we have grown in relation to financial stability. The MFU was conceived around 1975. In its early phase, organizational inputs were given by supporters. At that time there existed in New Brunswick what were called 'Rural Development Centres', which were funded by the provincial government. Those centres attracted old-style rural workers and some young Acadians just out of university, who wanted to bring along their people, from the farming, wood logging and fishing sectors, which were the poorest. These centres allowed for a lot of freedom for different initiatives in the north of the Province.

In particular, there was a core group that was influenced by the Frenchman, Louis Rousseau, who did his military service as a 'co-operant' in the Acadian region of New Brunswick. You, I think, would call him a social thinker. That group did several innovative things with the money from the social centres. There were people working full-time to form a union to organize under one umbrella all people of the Maritimes, not just the Acadians. They got the

endorsement of the Canadian Labour Congress. Though they were considered to be radicals, they did get endorsed as the official organization for the inshore fishermen of the Maritime Provinces. Newfoundland fishermen had already been organized under the International United Food Fish and Allied Workers Union and had been formally organized into a trade union by 1974. Their union included all the workforce, plant workers, crew on the fishing boats, the offshore fleet and the fishermen in the coastal fishery.

Initially, the MFU had support money from the Development Centres, but that source dried up in 1976. When it was officially launched in 1977, it was getting funds from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—Oxfam Canada, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation—and a small grant from the Canadian Postal Workers and the British Columbia's Fishermen's United Food, Fish and Allied Workers Union, the Provincial Federation of Labour, as well as from the Canadian Labour Congress.

It also raised some funds from the co-protection projects. Let me explain: There used to be big poaching going on in the lobster fishery. The MFU was keen to eliminate it and it wanted more help from the enforcement officers. By creating this co-protection programme, the fishermen directly helped identify infractions, and worked closely with the officers to apprehend poachers. The co-protection programme was financed by the federal government, and the MFU was able to use it not only to pursue the poaching problem but also to help with the general finances.

Then there were funds from Canada's generous unemployment programme. You could work for 10

weeks and then survive for the rest of the year on unemployment funds. Those funds were absolutely essential in supporting the organizers of the MFU.

When the MFU was formed in 1977, the same year that Canada declared its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), there were lots of expectations. Canada extended its quota management programme to all its fleets. Other organizations were emerging at the time as well. The Minister for Fisheries then was an Acadian, Romeo LeBlanc. He came up with a plan to get all the upcoming organizations together on one platform. He asked them to form a federation, saying that if they did so, he would give it an allocation of squid, which meant big money at the time as the Japanese were buying squid at sea.

The quota was worth a million Canadian dollars. That was key. But the idealism of the MFU and its view of itself as a trade union representing only the coastal fishery kept it away from the new federation that was created, the Eastern Fishermen's Federation (EFF), which comprised all the other sectors—the herring seiners, the crab boats, the specialized midshore draggers and the co-operative federation. By deliberately staying out of the federation, the MFU forfeited access to a valuable source of money. But within three years, many of these groups dropped out of the federation because of internal conflicts, I guess, and the EFF was left with a good base of funds from an amalgamation of small-boat associations of the inshore. They began to take positions on questions of the inshore fisheries that were different from those of the MFU. For example, they considered a fisherman a businessman, who, therefore, had no need for unions,

while the MFU regarded a fisherman as a worker. In this way, the EFF became the main antagonist of the MFU and got all the money.

I started work in the MFU in November 1981 in Nova Scotia, which was the area boasting the biggest landed value of fish catch. It was an Anglophone area. By that time, the MFU had gone through four years of militant fights and was exhausted. So, in 1981, there was nobody working for MFU in Nova Scotia, as there was no money to pay anyone. I agreed to take up the job for one year, sharing my time with the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour.

The union thought that its precarious situation in Nova Scotia would improve within the year, with new provincial legislation that would allow for collective bargaining of inshore fishermen. The legislation never materialized and by 1982, the MFU was virtually bankrupt. We were almost self-employed, hunting for funds, as dues to the union were voluntary and only a fifth of the members paid them. Thus, seven years after its birth, the MFU wasn't self-financing. To our advantage, we could still use unemployment insurance, but I personally was averse to that for various reasons.

Around 1984, Gilles—the magician, as he was often called for the way he managed to keep the organization going—came back with a surprise. He located some friendly people within the bureaucracy in Ottawa who understood the merits of the inshore fishery being organized. These were people who probably felt unhappy about the way the squid deal had got appropriated by the EFF to the disadvantage of the MFU. Gilles came back with Can\$300,000, which was

significant in those days and allowed us to pay back all our debts. That gave us a break and then, by 1985-86, when we had won trade union-type legislation in the Province of New Brunswick (but not in the neighbouring Province of Nova Scotia), we thought our problems were over.

In 1987, Gilles left the MFU, believing the union was in good shape. But that was not the case. The legislation recognizing the MFU as negotiator in collective agreements with buyers, which would include a dues check-off, didn't work. The fact is that the MFU had no real bargaining power because the all-important lobster fishery was too short-lived and the fishermen could not afford to give a strike call. We were in bad shape, both financially and organizationally. We couldn't even raise Can\$10,000 as a bank loan to keep going. I recall having serious discussions with my co-worker at that time, trying to assess the real strength of the MFU. Did it have any real social force?

In 1988, there was a change in politics in New Brunswick. The Conservative Party was defeated and the Liberal Party that came in brought in many Acadians. These, in fact, were peers of the MFU's Acadian organizers. Having greater access to them, we pursued them to create a different kind of legislation and we got what might be called the 'Rand Formula'. It stated that if a union succeeded in getting recognition as the majority union representing the workers of a plant, then, in any plant, even in those with no members of the union, all workers would have to pay dues to the union. With this new legislation,

although we had no bargaining power, we only had to demonstrate that the majority of the fishermen in defined areas had chosen the MFU to be their representative. Then, all fishermen in that region had to pay us dues.

That happened in 1991 and it took us two years to get the legislation properly implemented because some fishermen and buyers who wouldn't do the check-off, were against us. There were also legal battles. Although there has never been a total compliance with the new law, we can claim to have had at least 90 per cent success. The legislation is applicable only in New Brunswick and so the MFU is strongest here. The legislation has helped us solve some of our financial problems. All our workers are now on full-time salaries but, in the process, the former spirited style of the MFU has got domesticated. I say this because, initially, the MFU fought provincialism, as we looked at the fishery in a more federal way, but now we have acquired stability under a provincial law. Subsequently, in 1995, we won an allocation for snow crab, which was managed collectively by the MFU. Through this allocation, we were able to build a significant fund for health insurance and contingencies.

I think since then we have become more of a professional organization. I have never thought of the MFU as a movement, but in its origins it was really a part of a movement of inshore fishermen in the Maritime Provinces of Canada. But you could not call it a professional organization, either. In the 1970s, the MFU took a purist approach regarding funding, and we were a bit of a basket case, generally hobbling along all through the 1980s. The main focus of the activists

was to get the fishermen organized under one umbrella and they really skinned themselves doing that, working with very little money and means. Then, despite the legislation, in 1987, we had the failure of not being able to negotiate with the buyers, although the whole decade of struggle was aimed at getting the new Act through. That meant there was no way of deducting dues and making the organization self-reliant.

The only way I think we could transcend that failure was by taking a different view of the organization and what it stood for. As we had no mandate to boycott the buyers, we had to give up the possibility of bargaining. As such, we took on the character of an association, rather than a union. From then on, we had a completely different history—a new lease of life, if you like, as it was widely felt by then that the union would die.

By the mid-1990s, we were quite established, but we were no longer seized with trying to organize all inshore fishermen. In 1994, while at the ICSF Conference in Cebu in the Philippines (*In June 1994, ICSF organized a conference at Cebu, the Philippines, to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters, since called the 1984 Rome Conference – Ed*), it began dawning on me that we were becoming a professional organization, rather than the ‘fighting’ organization we had earlier been. While the organization didn’t grow, it stabilized, especially in the Acadian regions. Ironically, the MFU became financially strong during the period of the collapse of the Canadian cod fishery. You have to remember that our base is still only in the inshore fishery of the Maritime Provinces and this fishery was never cod-dependent, as in Newfoundland.

In fact, our most important fishery was lobster, whose stocks continued to expand. (*Sue Calhoun, in A Word to Say, notes that the first lobster cannery was established on the Miramichi River in the mid-1840s, and by the turn of the last century, there were over 200 in New Brunswick – Ed*)

In the Maritimes, various expressions of militancy continue to grow. But what I find interesting is that, in the 1990s, most of them took place outside our organization. The fights have taken different forms and most of them have been started not by the poor and oppressed, as it were, but by some of the most privileged pockets of fishermen who were in the inshore and midshore fisheries. Their actual interests were very narrow. But they adopted a kind of rightwing populism. The MFU has come into the picture in a big way only on a couple of issues outside New Brunswick and now specifically on the issue of ‘native fishing rights’.

Nalini: What you have told us, Mike, leaves me with several important questions. I hope we will have the time to discuss all of them, at least to clarify the questions, even if we do not have the answers. Let me voice them as they come to me.

You seem to look at the inshore fishery as a closed shop. What has it to do with our concept of ‘a way of life’? Do you feel the task is over? Has the union achieved what the organizers set out to do two decades ago?

The fishermen still depend on social security from the State. But, today, with changing global equations, the concept of the welfare State is itself being challenged. So what will happen to your fishermen if welfare is increasingly withdrawn?

What development choices are we making in the process? Do we just succumb to market forces and lose control of our destiny? Or, now that fishworkers from around the world have got together and see themselves as one group dependent on water resources, should we ponder on what development options will guide them in arriving at some common vision of the fishery?

What will the role of supporters be, now that the World Forum of Fish Harverters and Fish Workers (WFF) has been created? (*On 21 November 1997, men and women fishworkers from 33 countries met at New Delhi, India to create WFF — Ed*) Will we continue to bring to the Forum a global vision, as we did through the last decade, thereby challenging it to go beyond mere micro-realities? Or will we be expected only to offer the WFF the services that they ask of us?

Aliou: I would like to start with the last question about the supporters because I have always seen great value in supporters contributing to the thinking process of the fishworkers' movement. More than ever now, I think we have to be there because the situation at the global level will get more and more critical. Various forces may try to use the World Forum, and we have to continue to help it steer clear of such manipulations.

Mike: This has to do with the position we have to take as supporters or interveners. If we don't engage the World Forum in debate, it will not end up being responsible to the base. Only if there are supporters will it have some important historic contribution to make to global fisheries development and the coastal communities. The easiest thing for any fishworker organization to

do is to fire its staff or marginalize its supporters. And if that is not resisted, these organizations will only dig their own graves. But that does not mean that we are not indispensable as individuals. A social grouping becomes regressive and infantile in its thinking when it starts to believe that it is self-contained.

Aliou: Well, I am not sure the WFF will be able to build itself in such a way as to permit room for ‘intervention’. It is already creating its structure and once that is formalized, it will be off on its own, sort of. At the global level, I think it is so preoccupied with ‘who should be in and who should be out’, in terms of the fisheries sector, that it hasn’t had the time or the foresight to think of creating some alternative kind of organization. For that, it should have engaged in a discussion with ICSF but it didn’t, despite the fact that we had two occasions of exchange with its Chairperson, first at the ICSF General Body meeting and then at the India group meeting.

But whatever it is, what would we have to say on this basic demand of the WFF, ‘to protect coastal communities’? Mike, you keep repeating that we should not idealize artisanal communities.

Nalini: Do we tend to idealize the artisanal fishing community?

Mike: Let me try and explain it this way. In some areas of the Maritimes, there is a long history of anti-unionism. Building a union was like going against religion, almost. The union ideology was more related to the industrial proletariat; the fishermen considered themselves their own masters—self-employed, as we would say now. Actually, as a social class, they are ambiguous. There

are some among them who aspire to climb up the ladder to become 'big' fishermen, and others who may have to drop out when they can't make it any longer. So we can never consider them a homogeneous group, and that creates problems in the organizational process. But they want a union because of what it represents in terms of power, discipline and organization.

Aliou: In Senegal, the fishermen who created CNPS didn't have any such class understanding. They only wanted to have an organization to defend their rights *vis-à-vis* the government and, in their minds, such an organization is a 'syndicate'.

Mike: Can primary producers appropriate a form of organization that originated in the industrial model? They have tendencies to be owners and workers at the same time. Therefore, it will be normal if they mix association-type work with classical union work—making demands on the State, etc.

Nalini: Yes, it has to do with the fact that access to common property is obstructed when the State asserts its rights over the commons. So, while the 'property' question is key, I can also agree with you about the ambiguous nature of this sector. I can see this as one of the main reasons why we in the NFF have not seriously been able to advance the discussion on self-management or community management. This will happen only when we realize that we ourselves precipitate the crisis in the inshore.

Mike: I'm glad we are talking about the question of 'property'. In fact, I am not convinced that the MFU model, as it exists in the context of the Maritime Provinces, is sustainable outside New Brunswick. We are as if in a

shell. When the MFU started 20 years ago, its ambition was to organize all the inshore fishermen under one umbrella. Now, as I look back, I can see we have not been able to live up to our stated objectives in organizing the fishermen of the Maritimes. Therefore, either our model has to be questioned or the fishery has significantly changed during this period. This will be the case with the World Forum too.

In our case, in the creation phase, the people who started MFU saw themselves as an exploited group and they thought that was the case throughout the Maritimes and, therefore, felt the need to organize under one organization. Then, there was the fear that the fishery was growing towards greater monopolization and centralization. These people turned out to be dead wrong. In fact, in the inshore fishery, there has always been competition among buyers.

So, the simplistically stated ideas that formed the initial ideology of the MFU may have only corresponded to reality in the 1970s, but not for all time. Nobody predicted the inshore fishery would stabilize around lobster. So, what happened between 1970 and 1990, within the context of the Maritimes fishery, was the extension of regulation, differentiation of licences, further limits on licensed catch and the developing of quotas into a highly elaborate management system. The only people in 1970 who were on quotas were the offshore draggers and seiners. But, by 1983, virtually all the inshore was on some kind of quota, except for lobster. The lobster had a different kind of management regime, based on effort controls.

Nalini: What led to this development in the inshore? Why did the property regime develop within the sector?

Mike: I think it started when Canada made its claims on the EEZ to establish its property rights. If Canada didn't impose quotas on its fleets, the foreign fleets could come in and fish. So I do not know what came first exactly. I think it was the owners of the herring fleet who first introduced the quotas, wanting to establish a more orderly marketing system, and not really for resource reasons.

Nalini: So what you are actually saying is that as the capacity of the fleet increased, as in the case of the herring fleet, it was necessary to ensure catches to sustain the viability of the fleet, and hence the insistence on property rights.

Mike: You are right. Capacity had to do with it, although it was never accepted. The cod fish companies would generally get their quotas around January. In 1981, when they got their quotas, they were not satisfied, and so they went on strike and refused to fish. This was because the quota wasn't a viable one, considering the number of boats and their total capacity. At that time, it was the famous Fisheries Minister, Romeo LeBlanc, who promoted enterprise allocations—something like the individual transferable quota (ITQ) system. (*Individual Transferable Quota is an individual fishing quota that can be transferred – Ed*) Actually, this was a system worked out by the enterprises themselves. Even before that, the herring seiners in southwest Nova Scotia had formed a co-operative, around 1976, and they managed the quota as a kind of enterprise allocation. John Kearney has documented this in his study on the

herring-seiners in the Bay of Fundy during that period. (The Transformation of the Bay of Fundy Herring Fisheries 1976-1978: An Experiment in Fishermen-Government Co-Management, *John F. Kearney in Atlantic Fisheries and Coastal Communities: Fisheries Decision-Making Case Studies, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1987 — Ed*)

By 1983, we were seriously implicated in a full-blown quota management system, if you like. This was in the groundfish sector, of which cod comprised about 70 per cent of the catch. It is clear that the offshore trawlers were the dominant players, and the quota system was really a corporate model, with the government as the regulating agency.

The large offshore fleet reached an agreement that they would 'manage' the resources under the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) regime. (*TAC is the total catch permitted to be caught from a stock in a given period, typically one year — Ed*) The companies had no scientists and so they got the government to build up a large scientific enterprise that would do the stock assessments and set the TACs. Inshore fishermen were not impressed with quotas, especially in the seasonal fixed-gear fisheries.

The fishermen in southwest Nova Scotia, who had their own association of groundfish fishermen at that time, were dead against quotas. I remember them aggressively saying at meetings that they did not agree with the quota system at all. They had a long tradition of fishing all over the continental shelf and saw the quota approach as foolish. They also fished alongside their American counterparts on Georges Banks and the Americans would have nothing to do with quotas. It was the companies that bought into the quota

system, embraced it and legitimized it. Of all countries, I think it was Canada and its government that bought into the quota system most seriously, committing itself to an extremely elaborate system. I recall government officials priding themselves about their management system, claiming that it led to stability and surplus value, when even the United States had no such system in place.

I remember sitting in at a meeting in 1987 as part of the inshore-offshore review process. The Government of Canada was doing the review, which we, of course, thought was a sham because it had plans all worked out, regarding the split in quotas. Fifty per cent of the groundfish resources belonged to the offshore fleet and the rest of the thousands of fishermen had the remaining 50 per cent.

We had always challenged this unequal division because it left the offshore sector with ample quotas for their capacity but it meant that the whole capacity problem was passed on to the inshore. This was a bit like turning reality on its head, since one of the reasons organizations even got going was to fight against the growing capacity of the offshore, which was taking everybody's fish. We couldn't believe that the government was saying there was no overcapacity problem in the offshore, only in the inshore. I remember blasting forward at one of the meetings: "What you are doing here is passing the capacity problem on to the inshore. By dichotomizing the capacity problem, you are protecting the large industrial fleet. It is like a system of apartheid. You corner the best property for the few companies and

then you blame the rest for being the capacity problem.”

They all looked back blankly at me, said nothing and just went on. For the MFU, the real dynamic in the 1980s was the growing emergence of the midshore specialist fleet. This was created as an alliance between bigger fishermen, the companies and the provincial governments, building larger and more specialized craft worth Can\$1-2 million, almost as big a capacity as the offshore trawlers. But the rules of the inshore only applied to them. Much of the rhetoric of the fishermen was still targeted at the offshore. In a sense, the midshore fleet escaped being targeted for attack because the government still designated it as inshore. By 1987-88, at least 10 per cent of the inshore fleet were large-capacity midshore vessels, which had 70 per cent of the quota. Area by area, this sector progressively went into the ITQ system. Now, not only did the offshore companies have 50 per cent of the property but the midshore fleet was also claiming 70 per cent of the inshore as property.

Up until that point, the offshore fleet felt a threat from the midshore fleet because it had the capacity to catch all the cod in Atlantic Canada. The Canadian government lost control of the capacity issue and, at the same time, the associations lost their initial image of the fishermen being a deprived group, especially the groundfish midshore fishers and the crabbers. A lot of the rightwing populist ideology that you see in the fishery came from these new, elite, midshore types. They have done a lot of damage to the MFU, in Nova Scotia, particularly. The WFF should beware of the differentiation within what is still officially called the

inshore in places like Canada, but which actually contains these elite groups of specialist enterprises.

Nalini: Will this be the group that will gain entry into, and control, the WFF? I can just see them making use of demands like “protect the rights of the coastal community” and “ownership of resources for traditional fisher people”.

Mike: I think that will be an inherent danger. The capital-to-labour ratio is ten times less in the inshore than in the midshore and, therefore, what you have invested in your fishing becomes a dominant factor in your thinking.

Nalini: This is similar in Senegal or India. Once the old social controls break down in the community, you begin to think individually. So these two issues are really linked—the property question grows out of the capacity issue.

Aliou: I think there are also certain market factors that have to do with the property issue. In Senegal, the fish plants had their own fishing fleet in the past, but still depended on artisanal fishers because of market factors. Certain markets like Japan and, more so, Italy do not accept fish that is not caught within 48 hours. Since industrial technology cannot guarantee fresh fish, the traders had to engage the artisanal boats and take the catch from them.

Mike: In Canada, normally, fish plants cannot own licences in the inshore fishery. This sector is owner-operated, which keeps the companies away. If the companies do succeed in destroying this policy, within a few years, they will change the system completely, leading towards greater centralization in all the important

inshore lobster fisheries and using the quota system as a way to eliminate the base of the inshore fishery as we know it now.

Aliou. This makes me reflect on the new Maritime Fisheries Code in Senegal. The government wants to license the fishermen.

Nalini: Could licensing be a way of recognizing the fishermen as workers?

Aliou: No, it is the first step in declaring property rights. It is a means to control access.

Nalini: What is the alternative in situations like ours?

Aliou: Let me explain the reaction of the CNPS to the Maritime Fisheries Code. Fishermen initially did not refuse the suggestion regarding the need for licences. Their argument was that if the government gives them licences to fish, it has to guarantee the existence of the resource because the licence is to fish. But the fishermen saw through the game in this and the role of the new investors in the fishery. There are many non-fishermen, even foreigners and some non-resident Senegalese, who see the fishery as an interesting area for investments. It is this group that is introducing new equipment, the 45-hp outboard motor, and the global positioning system (GPS). It is this category of people who will accept the licence regime and then it will be imposed on the *pirogues* too.

The attempt to privatize resources has not yet succeeded because we are wary of it and take inspiration from community-based resource management, which is a collective system of

management and control. In Kayar, the fishermen managed to control the price of what was brought into the market as a high-value species. They did not go in for short-term large catches, even when the CFA franc was devalued and their inputs were costing much more. (*CFA is the Communauté Financière Africaine or the African Financial Community. The CFA franc, the currency of 14 African nations, was linked to the euro in a fixed exchange rate of 1 euro to 655.957 CFA francs on 1 January 1999 – Ed*)

Mike: So, what you are implying is that there was a problem with the market, which led them to this regulation and not a resource question.

Aliou: The open-access system poses a problem. Without controls, the more able fishermen want to grow and progress. They invest in bigger craft and gear and, in the process, the organization of work on the craft changes too. The percentage of earnings that goes to the owner gets larger and that to the workers gets smaller. Therefore, the question arises: how does the community control this greed and, at the same time, help the fishermen to retain their common-access rights? Limiting what is landed is the only way.

Mike: The main problem with open access is the resource. Is it in their minds to regulate their fishery at all? What would motivate fishermen to limit their open access? Do they feel there is a limit to the resource? In Kayar, they were motivated more to control the price than the resource.

Aliou: Yes, but although it was an economic motive in the beginning, I think that motive got 'biologised' later. But I do not want to be simplistic or to oversimplify it. Why did this regime succeed in Kayar and not in

Yoff, where it was simultaneously adopted? One reason may be the tradition of social control in Kayar, which is related to the second factor that most of the fishermen are also landowners and have a concept of private ownership. This can influence their understanding of the fishery, contributing to an understanding of territory. Then, the people of Kayar are more a settled community and do not have the feeling of being migrant, as the Yoff people do. Well, even if it is merely an economically motivated decision, we have to learn from it because, as a community, they succeeded where the government could not.

Mike: The more I hear you talk about land and Kayar, it makes me think differently on the matter. The fishing grounds in Kayar are much more contained and identifiable, isn't that right? Therefore, the concept of control becomes more easily acceptable and hence they succeed where the Yoff people do not in a more open fishery.

Aliou: Something becomes a resource only when it is exploited. It is exploited only when there is a need, a market. This makes me look at species like octopus and squid. Let me tell you the story of octopus. It's a crazy story. This year there was so much octopus all over our coasts that octopus was selling for 50 CFA francs a kg. Originally, it was a specialized fishery in Joal. So, from a situation of being rare, octopus became abundant. The fishermen of Joal had their own way of maintaining the octopus prices, but this year everything went haywire.

Mike: So what does CNPS do as an organization? How does it respond to this situation so that its members can get the best benefit from these catches? We in Canada

used to do 'over-the-side' sales, where we would contract a freezer trawler to come in and freeze the catch for us, especially of herring and mackerel, when there was not enough of a market for the surplus.

Aliou: No, CNPS did not do anything and I do not know which is a better stand, because marketing is such a risky job for an association. Moreover, the fishermen do not consider octopus as a stable stock. It can come and go. Fishermen saw it as a means of making some good money, which they would then invest in their regular gear.

Mike: I understand what you are saying. This is like our squid catches in 1979. There was so much abundance and there were different ways of taking advantage of it. Squid, to this day, remains part of the lore in the MFU. Only the Japanese freezer trawlers could handle it. So the Minister of Fisheries at that time thought, like your fishermen, that the squid abundance was only a passing phenomenon, and so he allowed the fishermen to catch and sell the squid to the Japanese on the sea. There are always situations of glut landings in fisheries. In the herring fishery, we were already encouraging over-the-side sales. This was when the Russian fleet was deployed in our waters. Our inshore boats caught herring and the Russians just bought it off us, especially from 1978 to 1987. The Newfoundland people did this even with cod.

Aliou: That was possible under certain conditions and that too out at sea. I think the area of the market is specific. The market is an institution with its own rules that are well controlled by fishmongers and the fish plants, which have a common agreement. Therefore, if ever a fishermen's organization wants to go in for

organization of fish sales, it has to go through this network and cannot sell directly.

Mike: Here you touch upon something very important. All fishermen's organizations dream of selling their own fish as a way of increasing earnings of the fishermen and making some money for the organization too. Market interventions can be done by the fishermen themselves but not through organizations like the MFU or the CNPS.

Nalini: The MFU and CNPS cannot do this as they consider themselves organizations with some political positions. The dynamics of an economic organization are different. An economic organization can be controlled by fishermen and can get them better bargains. This is what is done through the co-operatives we organized in Kerala and what the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) demonstrates today. (*SIFFS was formed in 1980 as a non-governmental apex organization of village- and district-level fish marketing societies of small-scale artisanal fishworkers of south India – Ed*) But they are distinctly different from the local union. And there too, the co-operatives only control the right of first sale by controlling the auctions; they do not go into the actual marketing of the catches.

Aliou: Well, this is what the fishermen at Joal did too. They did not displace the small buyers, but they collected all the products and negotiated with the traders to settle on the price.

Mike: Well, I am still interested in how the CNPS might address this issue of the large octopus landings and whether there is a way that both the CNPS and the

fishermen can gain by this short-lived show of so much octopus.

Aliou: The large landings of octopus have not really impressed the fishermen because, I think, they see it more as a symptom of a looming problem rather than a gift from nature.

Mike: I can agree with you there because it reminds me of the dogfish phenomenon in Canada, where the dogfish seemed to appear when the other groundfish had become depleted. But I want to get at the collective consciousness of the fishermen of the CNPS. What do they think they can or cannot do as an organization? Our fishermen would have made life miserable for me in the MFU if this had happened in Canada and we did nothing about it. What are the expectations of the fishermen of the CNPS?

Aliou: I think it is a combination of factors. First, the octopus fishery was traditionally based in Joal, where the total number of fishermen is small. Second, the fishermen are not impressed by the symbolic representation that the phenomenon will not last. Two or three months before the glut, CNPS was involved in an official discussion on the subject. Officials were trying to work out a regulation and decided to have a biological closure for octopus but nothing has yet been finalized.

Mike: Well, maybe that explains it then, and it sure makes a big difference how you look at the issue. When we had our over-the-side sales, I had the support of the government and most of the fishing industry. The government would allow foreign vessels limited access to underutilized species in exchange for buying in

some of these glut fisheries from inshore vessels that tied up with the freezer trawlers to transit their catch. Of course, all this has disappeared, especially after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. In any case, you cannot imagine such a programme without good collaboration from the government.

I would like to come back to the context of what I call a kind of populism in the Maritimes. Its origins are not completely clear, but in the fishery it seems to originate in parts of the inshore and midshore sectors, which held specialist licences and were made up of privileged fishermen. Their interests are very narrow but they managed to wrap themselves in ideologies that attracted a *mélange* of inshore fishermen who are disaffected for a lot of reasons, some having to do with these very same midshore interests.

Nalini: This happens, I think, when a small group with a particular vested interest takes advantage of some growing contradictions and uses a populist slogan to appropriate the base. I think we have a similar situation in Kerala at present. There is going to be a new Fisheries Act that will recognize the rights of ownership of fishing equipment only for bona fide fishermen, sometimes interpreted as the fishing community. In this context, the caste organizations came together to create a platform to struggle for their rights. The KSMTF or the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation, which is a class-based organization, joined this platform. It has been the only legitimate body making this demand for a long time. So now in the name of 'caste', all in the community

will stake a claim to ownership and I feel they are using the base of the KSMTF, which, knowingly or not, has fallen into a trap.

Aliou: In Senegal, there is another factor that encourages the new investors to emerge as a force within the inshore fishery and that is the way the macro-policies impact on us. For instance, the Fisheries Code now talks about ‘economic operators’. This term is gradually replacing others like ‘artisanal fishermen’. This change is linked to the global context, where everything is seen as an ‘economic interest’, regardless of who it represents. This is the easiest way to privatize. This is how all the freezing plants, etc. that came for the development of the artisanal fishery fell into private hands.

The new form of civil society leads to the promotion of private initiatives, profitable projects, and so on. Today, ‘ownership’ is what makes you a fisherman and not the fact that you go fishing. The government prefers to relate to the new brand of entrants because they function with a modern business logic, unlike the artisanal fishermen and their informal base. The guy from Fenagie Peche who went to France to make an attempt to join the WFF is also one such person who owns a *pirogue*. (*Fenagie Pêche or the Fédération Nationale des Groupements d’Intérêt Economique de Pêche is Senegal’s fisheries federation – Ed*)

Mike: You see a similar phenomenon in the Canadian context, even though the person who holds the licence has to fish. But there are lots of exceptions. As the ITQs developed in the midshore, the fishermen sold their quotas to small enterprises, which get other fishermen

to fish. So what actually developed was a fishing enterprise.

We see this particularly in the groundfish sector in southwest Nova Scotia. In that large fishing area, half the inshore groundfish fishery is under the ITQ system and the other more numerous small-boat fishermen are working within a kind of community quota management system. This is a conscious experiment as an alternative to ITQs, but many say it is simply setting up the sector for the full-blown ITQ system. This southwest area is real fish country and most of it had remained in the hands of fishermen, with lots of small buyers and processors. But, gradually, quotas are being consolidated by a few buyers.

Nalini: Are you saying that the monopolization or centralism that was feared would take place in the fishery 20 years ago is actually taking place now?

Mike: No, I don't think you can say that because the larger base is in the lobster fishery, and these tendencies are not seen there yet. Certainly, in the groundfish sector, there is enterprise taking over and even if it is not in the nature of monopoly, it is certainly corporate. I can tell you of one guy, for instance, who is supposed to be a business agent for the specialist vessels. He only has to talk to two or three plant owners who have a number of ITQs, and he speaks for the entire fishery. It is this guy who is calling the shots in management discussions these days in the Nova Scotia area.

You know, after the moratorium on cod was put into effect throughout the Atlantic region, most of the midshore fleet that had been such an emergent force in the 1980s went bankrupt and, under normal

business norms, would have disappeared. But because they continued to hold their quotas as quasi-property rights, they still had a claim on the future fishery. It has been amazing how they have been kept in business by provincial governments who covered their mortgages to the federal government, who gave them various forms of grants and support, and transferred to them lucrative allocations from other fisheries like the snow crab fishery and shrimp. These allocations directly affected what might have been available to the inshore fishermen.

Nalini: Does that mean they had great political clout too?

Mike: Their political clout is mainly through the provincial governments, who have been sponsoring them since the beginning. And, you know, if you talk about the present reality in the Maritime provinces, it is the inshore fleet that is by far the most productive, employing thousands of fishermen and plant workers. In some ways, this is driving the governments and planners crazy because, in their vision, the midshore was supposed to be the future of the fishery and the inshore was scheduled for elimination.

The quota systems have, in reality, proved to be a complete bust. So, even though the inshore fishery in the Maritimes has turned out to be the largest and most productive in the country, we still find the general direction of government policy being shaped by the various corporatist midshore sectors, even the bankrupt ones. It is for this reason that I keep on insisting that the inshore fishery has to be valorized. What I see, though, is that there are growing factors and forces that, right now, tend to rip it apart.

Aliou: I think this is the most serious problem, that the inshore people are not sufficiently conscious of their actual power. In Senegal, the fish plants are actually doing their best to reach out to the artisanal fishers and make alliances with the CNPS. They understand how fragile a proposition it is to bank on the industrial sector. Even the government can one day just withdraw their licences, and the industrial fishers will be finished. But the inshore defies control. So the CNPS must take this fact into serious consideration and build further on it.

What strikes me is that in Senegal, the CNPS has not only to contend with the State, which, realizing its inability to control the organization, is now using the parallel power of religion to divide the CNPS. This is a more fearful situation because, as you know, our fishermen may defy anybody, but when it comes to religious leaders, they will bow their heads.

Mike: Well, that is the most important question facing all of us—the question of control. The latest decision in the Supreme Court of Canada recognizing the rights of the native people has triggered a consciousness in the MFU and all inshore fishermen. It is a very brief moment in history, but all realize the importance of an organization like the MFU. It is amazing the way people called from all over and offered financial support for the legal battle. All kinds of people—former members who had deserted the MFU, some who had taken stands against us, enemies if you like—called to say this is the time they have to help their Acadian brothers, and so on. Even the Fish Packers Association called and offered to help. So this is a moment in time but it will make history depending on

the next step, that is, how the government will use it to address, and accommodate in a rational way, the new rights given by the Supreme Court order, which recognizes the old native treaty rights to fish.

I have a suspicion that all those who want to break up the inshore fishery will use this occasion to intervene with suggestions on how the natives should be accommodated. Here we have a situation of a fishery that was scheduled to be scrapped by several attempts, but is surviving and is the only sector that is most productive. But it has no real consciousness, as we were saying, of being a powerful sector, as rightwing populism and various reactionary forces have deformed the normal process of negotiation that would actually have taken place between the regulatory authority and the fishermen, now represented by the MFU.

You have this whole other group of fishermen who are taken by hysteria, using all their energies on non-issues or actions that are symbolic, and which never advance the real interests of the sector. They tend to be strengthened by people in the sector who are the most privileged. They are a kind of a mirror of a political trend in our country, represented by the Reform Party, whose tenets are anti-big government, pro-total privatization, and don't recognize the founding people of this country or any differentiation by group. This populist phenomenon, with all these rightwing trappings, is what translates into 'fishermen's rights'.

When you talk about 'fishermen's rights' in the Indian context, Nalini, it is a progressive slogan but for us

today, it is a cover for rightwing ideology. That's the difference in an organization like the MFU. We believe there are very few creative ways of accommodating the newly established rights of the Mi'kmaq native peoples, without weakening the base of the inshore fishery.

But the question remains as to whether the inshore fleet will develop conscious solidarity to be able to recover its rightful power *vis-à-vis* forces that want to integrate this fleet into a corporate system of property rights.

Aliou: I feel the powerlessness, or lack of consciousness in the fishers' actual power, has to do with the fact that they do not have access to correct data about their role in the economy. If they had facts about their contribution to foreign exchange earnings, about the number of people the sector feeds, the number of people it employs and absorbs from other dying sectors, they will valorize their fishery more.

Mike: Is it possible to organize the broad base of inshore fishermen in terms of the real recovery of power? Aliou, you are asking how come the CNPS is not able to recover the social power that fishermen are generating in Senegal. This power is generated by the work activity of fishing, but in the fishery, maybe more than in most sectors, the power that is generated by the fishermen is captured by virtually everyone other than the fishermen themselves—these could be the governments, the merchants, the staff, the supporters, etc.

That is my simplistic analytical framework. There are other ways in which power is used up or dissipated.

I am referring here to the kind of populism I was talking about, because I think that both the energy and power of the fishermen are used up in actions that are infantile and regressive.

Nalini: Is it being used up or is somebody using it or exploiting it?

Mike: We always like to think about external factors. We should look squarely at the internal forces—the fishermen themselves, the associations they create, the actions they take, etc.

Aliou: It is so important to talk here about some social actors who are part of the process itself and use this power for their individual interests. This leads us to the question of organization, how organizations structure themselves and how they function within, how the leaders in the movement are generated and how they can be bought up by others in an effort to strengthen their positions.

But I would first like to come back to the reference that you made, Mike, regarding those people who appropriate the power that is generated. In Senegal, I get frustrated to see that decades of our hard work can be appropriated in one stroke, as, for instance, when the Fisheries Minister refers to the fact that he belongs to the same ethnic group as the fishermen and then goes on to neutralize everything that the movement has gained.

Mike: It is an enormously frustrating problem for organizations.

Aliou: Further, earlier on, the fishermen created great myths for themselves. They believed that if they got a minister

from their own community, he would be sympathetic to their cause, and so they kept striving to have a minister from the community. But the actual danger arose when there was a minister from the community, who is more able to destroy the CNPS and negate what it stands for.

Nalini: We have experienced this kind of frustration right from the start in Kerala because the KSMTF has been independent. All the struggles in fisheries have been fought or led by the KSMTF, which makes very specific demands on the government. Finally, when the government decides to negotiate, all the political party unions are also present and whether or not they know anything about the issue, they give their opinions and have a say in the final decision. Initially, we thought that this would force the other unions to take up these issues too, but then we realized gradually that their positions depend on their status in the government—being in the opposition or not—and they were only using the occasion to get as much political leverage as possible.

Mike: So how do you advance this power that makes a difference to their lives?

Aliou: In our context, where the ‘politique du clientelism’ (*the politics of cronyism – Ed*) plays a big role, the National Congress is a way to prevent the appropriation of our powers by others. The fact is the minister sees hundreds of people flocking to the Congress and so many taking the mike to speak in the name of the CNPS and in this way owning the organization. That makes a tremendous impact. Moreover, if you look at it from the point of view of the informal sector—a

sector that is considered dispersed and, therefore, of no consequence—the organizational force that the Congress displays dispels all earlier misconceptions about this sector.

Nalini: In India, mere numbers at congresses are not enough to impress anybody. All political parties pull huge crowds. The real impact is made when you can draw large numbers into sustained struggles and this reveals the mobilization ability of the organization, which gives weight to the cause.

Mike: Yes, so tell us a little more about the NFF, and the sector in the inshore constituency that it represents and which is the leading force in the fishing industry today.

Nalini: The thrust of the NFF is certainly the artisanal fishery. When it was created two decades ago, there was enough data to prove the major contribution that the sector made to the economy, towards export earnings and, in our context, in terms of creating employment and food security. The NFF has always maintained that this is the only sector that is viable and can exploit the resource in a sustainable manner.

But the fisheries scenario has changed dramatically subsequently. The highly skilled artisanal sector has got motorized, massive ‘development’ in gear has taken place, and the fishermen have increasingly entered the midshore. While catch per unit effort has dropped substantially, the value of fish has gone up. This has helped the successful fishermen break even. In this development, the motorized sector has had a clear advantage over the non-motorized sector.

While this was initially the base of the union, as it entered into the struggle against the deep-sea vessels, the hub of the NFF moved from the south to the northern parts of the west and east coasts of India. There, the artisanal fishery was of a different nature, with much larger craft using gill-nets, bag-nets and the like. The individual fishing operations were much larger than in the south. When this section got mechanized, they shifted to the trawl gear, and so, though they are from the traditional fishing community and are actual fishermen themselves, they form the small trawl sector that the NFF was virtually against in the earlier stages. Now, they have become allies in the struggle against the bigger enemy in the deep sea.

My understanding is that although the NFF has consistently fought for aquarian reform based on the strengths of the inshore fishery, within the base itself, it has failed to check the growing disruptive technologies in the artisanal fishery. The problem is so overwhelming because of the numbers involved and the fact that government priorities are so skewed. Traditional social control mechanisms have also broken down as the State grew to be the regulator of the fishery.

On the other hand, the NFF through the Kanyakumari March to “Protect Waters, Protect Life” grew increasingly into a broadbased social movement. *(In 1989 the NFF organized the Kanyakumari March along the entire coastline of India on the theme ‘Protect Waters, Protect Life’, to create greater awareness of environmental problems and to forge greater unity among the fishworkers – Ed)*

The march started simultaneously from West Bengal on the east coast and from Gujarat in the west and proceeded towards Kanyakumari, the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula. I feel that, over time, the NFF has made more allies with social movements that have lost their space in the area of primary production and are, therefore, struggling for the broader and basic issue of 'right to life and livelihood'. This, I think, has dissipated the energies that should have gone into the creation of a solid conscious base among inshore fishermen, and, although it may still be able to mobilize them on specific issues, there is no real intensive debate in the organization on hardcore fishing issues.

Mike: My contention here is that movements or people in movements sometimes escape into politics. An 'escape' into politics, as distinct from political-level functioning, is an escape or disassociation with a specific base. I would say that, under severe conditions of poverty, you would be more vulnerable to such phenomena.

Nalini: At this point, I must add that there are parallel organizations like SIFFS that have a very specific base and whose concerns have been to provide support to the artisanal fishery. But, again, these would not play the role of a fishermen's organization that fights for the rights of the artisanal fishery. So I do recognize the dilemma of two organizations that run parallel to, and do not necessarily complement, each other. The union, on the one hand, gains political power because it has legitimate demands and is able to mobilize people but has no local base in the actual fishery. On the other hand, an organization like SIFFS that has a

solid base among active fishermen, functions like an association of its members, assisting them with credit and technology but without entering the larger political debate. I do not make this critique as an outsider as I have been closely associated with both these organizations.

Aliou: I would like to know here whether it is the organization or a small group of leaders who give the direction to the movement. Who are the people who symbolize the movement? I tend to think it is people who are not fishermen who symbolize the movement in the case of the NFF. Why I say this is because I want to look at the role of leaders in a movement. Is it possible that these leaders can have expectations that are not the concerns of the fishworkers?

Nalini: Your question is very pertinent because there are a number of non-fishing people giving leadership to these organizations. In this context, I should tell you about another development in the union. I am talking now about the union in Kerala, where there have been leaders and supporters who do not hail from the fishing community. As I told you earlier, when the NFF got into the struggle against the deep-sea vessels, this struggle was fought in alliance with the small-trawler sector. A section that we were always fighting now became allies in the struggle and some of the boatowners had a sympathetic position towards the artisanal fishers.

But look at what happened on World Fisheries Day 1998, the first time it was celebrated in India. The Kerala union called it World Fishworker Day and had a week's celebrations. For these celebrations, they

formed an organizing committee on which there was also a representative of the boatowners' association. On the day of the convention, this boatowner made a speech. He emphasized that they too were fishermen, coming from the same community. In a way, he was staking their claim over the pending Fisheries Bill that the government was soon to discuss on declaring only fishermen as owners of fishing craft and gear.

What was happening was that the boatowners were taking their chance to neutralize the actual differences among the fishers. The union got carried away by the fact that it could create a joint forum and get the boatowners to collaborate on its demands. The local union leaders did not realize that they were falling into what appeared to some of us to be a trap. A few months later, the union joined an alliance called 'Joint Committee for the Demands of the Fishworkers Community'. In Malayalam, the local language in Kerala, this name confuses the connotations of both caste and class, and is a melange. That was actually a committee on which all the caste organizations came together to work for a series of demands, both social and economic. They were able to get the KSMTF, which is the largest organization working on the actual fisheries demands of the fishworkers, to go along with them.

Interestingly, these decisions were made by leaders from the fishing community. When some of us did raise questions, I realized that there was no possibility for debate. Gradually, the union leaders began to isolate those of us supporters who had been with the movement from its inception, on the pretext that we are not from the fishing community.

- Mike:** What gives these communal groups their energy? What is their material base?
- Nalini:** Those who use the community or caste card do not really have any material base in the fishery. They are the educated ones who have other political interests. You must understand this in the context of identity politics as it develops in our country. In fact, these people talk about the fact that the act of fishing has kept this community out of the mainstream of the nation. Now that the fishery gets less and less lucrative, why should the union struggle to keep the fishermen in the fishery? Getting into the mainstream will give other economic opportunities to the community and why are those people from outside the community building up a case to 'valorize' this occupation? Is it to keep the fisherfolk in perpetual subjugation? So, with such questions, they are able to whip up some emotion that creates a solidarity within the caste, and, in the future, this position may take them away from the real issue.
- Mike:** What you are saying is similar to what we are facing today. I only think that we may be able to weather the storm because we have such firm roots with our members in an experienced organization.
- Aliou:** This makes me think about some other aspects too. It may not always be the leaders of the movement who 'escape into politics', but they may be used by other people who have some frustrated ambitions and hide them under masks that give them respectability.
- Mike:** Maybe the NFF should make more attempts to move back from being a social movement with lots of ideological positions and get back to being a fishworkers' organization.

I think the need of the day is the existence of real fishers associations working on hardcore fisheries issues as they arise. That is why I am a bit sceptical about the way the World Forum seems to see itself. It should not be an ideological organization, a structured organization, as such. For a few more years, it should have been a kind of associational platform working out hardcore issues and then deciding what specific issues should be on an international agenda.

Nalini: Yes, I too am of the opinion that the broader slogans may just carry them away. They do not seem to have started on solid ground. At the start, they should have been a small group of organizations that could trust and rely on one another, and having the time to work out their specific fisheries issues. It should have been opened up gradually, once a core group of associations that trusted and felt comfortable with one another had already been built up. Once there was a good grasp of the international scenario, the allies should have taken the lead in creating the World Forum. In this way, there would have been a hard core that had clear objectives and could call the shots.

Well, let's get back to the supporter issue. Mike, you were saying that I should further explore the role of being a supporter...

Mike: Well, that is because I wonder how the ICSF supporters in India look at what is happening in the NFF and your role in it, now that this question of 'outsiders' is being raised by your local union.

Nalini: We haven't addressed the question seriously as a group. We do exchange some ideas at times, but, as a group,

we have not felt the need to take a serious stand and communicate it to the organizations.

Mike: There is no question that the NFF can mobilize large numbers of people and hence demonstrate that they represent the artisanal fishworkers. On the other hand, it appears that there are no actual members who get together to discuss hardcore fishing issues and who are the base of the movement. How do they build up a sense of belonging to the union and a sense of having a stake in it? For how long can the NFF repeat such demonstrations of mass support? For the majority of the fishermen, the struggle may be over as the initial demands are met.

Aliou: Sometimes, I wonder whether it was better to just leave the informal sector as it was, unorganized, when it was difficult for the vested interests to appropriate it. Institutionalizing a movement exposes it to such dangers.

Mike: This goes back to the theme of making an intervention: an intervention is an initiative that apparently comes from the outside of a group or class of people. I would like to read a book on 'spontaneous' organizations of fishermen. To what extent were they really autonomous? Fishermen easily organize at the local level on particular issues, so what you are saying, Aliou, is, if they do organize anyway, why should we get involved in giving an organizational impetus? Well, Nalini, you often mention writers like Susan George, who made major contributions in breaking down myths about aid and development. (*Susan George, Associate Director of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, and Vice-President of the Association for Taxation of Financial Transaction to Aid Citizens,*

is the author of 10 books, including How the Other Half Dies and The Debt Boomerang — Ed) These contributions are ways of supporting change and organization, too.

Let me go back to Canada for a minute. When the group we formed with Belkin was doing its work, it was with people in community development, social action and international development, and NGOs. The people with whom we would make our interventions were supporters. What challenged us at that time was realizing how unformulated and unreflective the relation between the supporter and ‘supported’ was, and how much psychological garbage was involved in this relation—psychological baggage that was carried into the relationship.

Even at the international level, we were asking questions about the interface of the Western world supporters in Third World issues. What struck me was the potential in these kinds of relations for false consciousness. Supporters feel they are doing something great, possibly building misleading assessments of their real situation. I would like to read some astute book on, for example, how the whole supportive thing worked out in relation to the Sandinistas (*members of the leftwing Nicaraguan political party, the Sandinist National Liberation Front or FSLN. The group, named after Augusto Cesar Sandino, a former insurgent leader, was formed in 1962 to oppose the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle — Ed)*

Can I give you an example of how I learnt the hard way? In 1968, I was bothered by the Biafra issue, but as it was far away, I could not make the connection that I could do something about it. (*Biafra was a secessionist*

state of West Africa that existed from 30 May 1967 to 15 January 1970 and comprised, roughly, the east-central, southeastern, and rivers States of the Federation of Nigeria, dominated by the Igbo people. Fighting between Nigeria and Biafra broke out in July 1967 and Biafra surrendered on 15 January 1970. During its existence Biafra was recognized by only five nations, although other countries gave moral or material support — Ed) When I discussed it with my professor, she suggested we organize a discussion on it. I was surprised to realize that there were a fair number of people around Toronto who had worked in Nigeria through CUSO and were also perturbed by this problem. (*CUSO or the Canadian University Service Overseas came into being as an independent non-profit agency in 1961, in Montreal — Ed)* Subsequently, in 1969, we decided to go to Ottawa and occupy the office of the Minister of External Affairs and we refused to budge till he promised that Canada would help the struggling people. We were dragged out of the office and arrested. This was my first political action.

Well, to make a long story short, what shocked me was when the dream collapsed in Biafra and the leaders of the movement escaped, leaving the poor Biafrans high and dry and in an absolute state of famine. On the other hand, heaps of aid were poured in and even a month before the collapse, we were being told that the Biafrans were winning the war. Maybe the Igbos did believe they were winning because of the hype built up by the supporters. This was my first lesson about the great complexities in support relationships.

Aliou: In cases like this, I think it is the supporter who will be frustrated and not the supported because there was no demand for support. The supporters build up the

demand. So it is important to see how the need or demand is created.

Mike: This is why I say it is an ambiguous relationship. You cannot be literal about it but it is an important question for the supporters to think about. For instance, when my MFU colleague came back from Montreal to work with the MFU, I am sure his fishermen friends didn't actually ask him to do so, but were surely happy to have him back.

Aliou: I don't remember being ever asked by fishermen to come and help them. The problem arises when, as supporters, we think we are indispensable. We must help ourselves to better manage our expectations. In order to do this, we must look at the origins and see how the relationship arose. I am in a situation of wondering how fishworker organizations can be sustained in a context of the political powers wanting to appropriate them. On the other hand, it is sure that we, as supporters, contribute to the thematic development in the organization and in its strategies.

Mike: What you are suggesting is that there could be moments when the fishermen say they do not want us or make it clear that they don't in other ways. It is an ambiguous situation that is difficult to deal with as an individual. So if we are conscious of doing interventionist kind of work, we have to react collectively.

We have a right to claim our work in an organization. We are not wage labour. If we have developed reasonably productive activities in an organization, why should we be the ones to leave? Maybe it is the individuals who find our presence uncomfortable that should be the ones to leave.

This is a theme we should look at under ‘forms of organization in the fishing sector’, because we are constantly faced with, for instance, some fishermen saying, “We don’t need any staff. We can do the job ourselves.” That attitude springs from what I call an associational model; it is localized. It cannot grow broader without supporters and staff. It is normal that the fishworkers need to engage intermediaries if they want to intervene at broader levels than their immediate local ones.

I think when fishermen get together as ‘fishermen’s rights’ groups or the kind of ‘caste’ group that you talk about, Nalini, we can predict that they do not want any non-fisherman around. In a way, it is reclaiming the space they feel they have lost in the organization as the issues get wider and they feel the staff or the supporters are taking over, and getting all the exposure. This grows into a kind of ‘fundamentalism’, as I call it in the metaphorical sense. This feeling can lead to fishermen even saying that they can run their own fishery and that the government should quit. When this attitude spreads because it is whipped up by some people, it is very dangerous and can just wipe out an organization in one stroke.

I have experiences of that kind in Nova Scotia, when we were subjected to the populist wave. One of our former presidents got drawn into this phenomenon partly through his woman companion who was doing some part-time work for us in Nova Scotia, mainly churning up the fishermen to actions of all sorts. She was the activist type, telling them they should fight for all kinds of issues, but without any analysis or idea of how such things could be done.

While her actions led to splits in the union, the president wanted to make big changes in the MFU. He started focusing on the constitution and she functioned like his lawyer. She knew nothing about the organization, whereas he had been one of the founding members and knew all about it and had been part of the initial creation process. He came to the 1992 convention, upset its entire plan and, in his position as president, asked to focus on the constitution. He came up with some marginal proposals for change. One was proposing that the Executive Secretary should not have the power to hire and fire the staff. He wanted his woman to become a full-timer. When he did not get his proposal passed, as the majority of the fishermen were not impressed by what he did, he said he was pulling out as president and within weeks after that, he left the union and was a major factor in breaking up the local. Going back to the letter of the constitution, making use of some of its marginal clauses to achieve another objective, is a characteristic of what I call 'fundamentalism'.

Nalini: Before we go on much further, we have to talk about women's participation in our organizations.

Aliou: Hey, Mike, have you any women in Canada or not?

Nalini: It actually seems as if there were none, eh, Aliou!! Well, Mike, when I read the history about the MFU in that book written by Sue Calhoun (*A Word to Say: The Story of the Maritime Fishermen's Union* by Sue Calhoun was reviewed in SAMUDRA Report No. 10 & 11, December 1994 – Ed), do you recall I asked you where the women in fisheries were? You said there were lots of women involved in the initial stages of the formation of the

MFU, but when it got structured, women were just left out.

Aliou: Yes, I too have wondered. Because when I was there last year for the celebration of World Fisheries Day, I was really impressed by the participation of women and particularly by the leadership of women like Lucie. *(A mother of five, Lucie Breau has been fishing for close to a decade in New Brunswick. She is a member of the Comité des femmes côtières du Nouveau-Brunswick – Ed)*

Mike: I will have to go a bit into the past to think more deeply about this myself. When I started with the MFU in 1981, I had had some exposure in the national farmer's union, which had membership by family and where the women were involved and around all the time. They were present in everything. When I got to the MFU, the absence of women was a striking contrast.

I recall that they talked about women in demonstrations in the earlier days but by 1981, the MFU was a totally male-centred type of organization. There were many supporters who spoke about including women, but nothing materialized. There were traditions in the farm sector that we didn't have. For instance, women travelled around for meetings with men more freely in the farm sector than women did in the fishing sector. If I may say so, it was kind of taboo, even.

I have always said, moreover, that the MFU was not really a movement in the sense of the fishing communities being mobilized for some national objectives. Earlier on, it set itself up like a trade organization and as 95 per cent of the people involved in the trade were men, it seemed logical that the MFU

would be an organization of men only. The division of labour was far clearer in the fishery. Women were in the fish plants and they had no immediate relations with the fishermen; you cannot discount that.

But let's look at one recent period in our history, starting around 1993-94, when the Government of Canada began implementing changes in the unemployment insurance (UI) for seasonal workers. There were spontaneous revolts, mainly in the province of New Brunswick because these changes would have immediate effect on the number of weeks of seasonal work. Who took up the battle? Not the MFU, although they had always joined any battle that would touch UI. These new reforms weren't going to touch the fishermen. So who took up the cause of the women who were going to lose their food stamps? It was the Canadian Labour Congress and some industrial trade unions. There were former distant supporters who were disappointed with the position of the MFU.

What seems to have taken place at the time is the emergence of some women's organization to which the MFU made small contributions, but the action was outside the MFU, although it related to fisheries. It showed again how different the MFU was in practice from its idealistic origins. We take pains to have women delegations come to our annual conventions but, otherwise, there is little done.

Interestingly, where women have come out again to get involved in the preoccupation of the MFU is around the native rights issue. On the other hand, they are also coming out in Southwest Nova Scotia, where the populist types are running the show.

Nalini: When the UI issues hit the women, did the fishermen in the MFU not discuss it seriously? Many of their wives must have been affected and they must have had former experience of working on such an issue...

Mike: UI was a special programme established in the 1970s. It has always been attacked by the corporate lobby and it was always an issue for the MFU to defend. So, when it was clear that they were going to make reforms in the UI, the fishermen's organizations joined issue from the start and we were part of a study of the fishery where UI reforms were being addressed. We made recommendations based on it and built up a strategy for negotiation. For the seasonal workers, it was a spontaneous upheaval. Our attitude was a bit different. We wondered how to stick our heads into it when it was not an issue for our members anyway and when we had enough on our hands.

This reveals that the MFU isn't able to pick up on such social issues. It is only able to respond to things that relate to its members. We had to concentrate on issues that we could properly take on; joining larger social movements can happen at certain times, under specific conditions.

Nalini: Well, that is because the women aren't members of the organization. What prevents the MFU from giving membership to the wives of the fishermen?

Mike: We have never had an expressed demand from any significant number of women. Why would you invite more issues if they do not come to you?

Nalini: You mean there wouldn't be any other reasons, technical reasons, to refuse if they asked?

Mike: Well, at the level of the constitution, it would have to be debated, but I would not assume that it would get defeated. But you would have to wonder why women would be interested anyway.

This raises another historical feature of the MFU. When we started, we were affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress for the first seven or eight years of our existence. We never formally withdrew, but we just let it go and, interestingly, it is related to this question of women.

The seasonal workers movement was in no way confined to the fisheries. The woman who was emerging as a leader there was a seasonal worker in the national park, which was based in an area where our fishermen worked. There were all kinds of seasonal jobs that women had and this brought the movement about. Some of them who were in fish plants were members of the industrial unions and their cause was championed by the unions. As we were functionally not a part of the trade union movement anymore, we didn't get involved.

I know this is not a satisfactory answer, but it is just to tell you where we are. I would go one step further and say that women are still silent contributors to the fishing enterprise, in the homes, managing the books, etc. But even this situation is changed in the case of the younger generation, who tend to have their own independent work.

As distinct from Newfoundland, most of our fishing areas are not far from places where women can find other non-fishery related work. So even in the nucleus

of the family, the woman is no longer a 'traditional wife', as she works herself and, in many instances, doesn't even know what is happening in the fisheries.

Aliou: I realize, listening to you, that, compared to Senegal and India, women's direct involvement in fisheries, processing, marketing and credit, makes a big difference. The other fact is that women were already organized in the fish plants and when the MFU started, the need was to organize the fishermen in the inshore.

But what I want to come back to is what you said about the silent contributors. For those who have a consciousness on gender discrimination, they are able to capture how women contribute, even as they remain 'silent contributors'. In France, for instance, I think women have a greater stake in remaining in the informal sector because of the taxation system.

In the Senegalese case, if you analyze the reason why women are involved in the organization, it is because they are more exposed to a number of issues. So they make a great contribution through their participation. But I would like to go deeper into this issue of 'silent contribution'. Isn't it a more subtle way of contributing to the total fishing earnings rather than if one were to make money from another job?

Mike: I may not be the best person to give you an answer. Certainly, to have the UI you have to have some kind of recognized work. As silent contributors, the women are not considered to have work.

Nalini: Have they not asked for their silent contribution to be valorized?

Mike: Well, looking back at the farming union, one should ask, why aren't the women around more in the fishery? I would have to assume that the fishermen were more conservative about roles, the family, etc. and more dominant, unlike in farming, where women seem independent. I'm really not confident to speak on this, as I have never explored this area enough since it has never come up as a substantial issue in the MFU. I do not want to just use concepts to be politically correct.

Nalini: Well, this takes me back to a number of things in my work on these issues. The first is how the private and public spheres get dichotomized—work outside the family has value, but inside, it hasn't. The family is in the private sphere. So the women who are in the fish plants do not realize that they are there because their work in the inshore fishery has been subsumed and gradually appropriated by the industry, that they have lost their rightful place in the fishery.

Yet, Mike, I want to go back to our workshop in Senegal, when we were trying to arrive at an analysis of women in fisheries. I was surprised how close we felt to the Canadian women; we seemed to be on the same wavelength. Barbara Neis even spoke about an artisanal way of life and the resilience of the artisanal fishery because of the major contribution of women. (*Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, Memorial University, St John's, Newfoundland, Barbara L Neis is co-author of Their Lives and Times, which examines the cultural, social and historical presence of women in Newfoundland and Labrador – Ed*)

Mike: I told you that the Newfoundland fishery, in terms of the inshore sector, is so remote from urban centres

that there are no options for work other than the fishery. That's a simplistic answer. But what I want to say is that there have been several women who have done various investigations on women's silent contributions in the fishery, but nothing substantial has come out in terms of demands that a fishermen's organization can take up. Our organization, like the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union, is completely preoccupied with fisheries issues and resource management issues. But despite the involvement of women in the Newfoundland fisheries, when we go to meetings, there are no women in the Newfoundland delegations either. We do have a few women members who are fishers, though!

Nalini: We have seen that women get marginalized in fish-related activities, as the fishery modernizes. We have discussed how the resource and capacity issues are related. If the fishery has to be sustained, capacity has to be controlled and fishing effort has to be managed. Now, we are up against more serious situations when the wonderful welfare State begins to collapse. When the State gradually withdraws, as usual, women are the first to be hit; tomorrow it will be the men. Don't you also see that protecting the spaces of women in the fishery is a way to control excessive modernization, to control investments in fisheries, which, at the same time, will make the fishery more viable and, therefore, more sustainable?

This is what led us to talk about an 'artisanal way of life' and what made some of you men laugh when we said, "With no women in fisheries, there'll be no fish in the sea!"

Mike: Your question is certainly not lost on people in the MFU who think of larger issues that we face. Since 1988, we have been always saying that we should connect with the communities, and what better way than by involving the women. But we have never found a way to do it.

In the Maritimes, we have seen several mass protests and demonstrations in the fishery, and all kinds of women participated on the wharves, in Halifax, etc. All this was outside of any organization, certainly outside the MFU. So you cannot say that rural women have not been responding to the withdrawal of the State and its welfare system. But it hasn't happened in our organization because, I think, we have become so specialized in one aspect of the fishery.

Nalini: Well, Mike, if wanting to link up with the communities was a serious concern, have you not felt the need to initiate a discussion with the women even in the last five years when Chantal, Maureen and women like Lucie have taken so much interest in getting women together? (*Chantal Abord-Hugon, Co-ordinator of Development Education, OXFAM-Canada/Project Acadie and an Associate Member of ICSF, has been involved in community development with women in coastal communities in the Maritimes. Maureen Larkin, a former nun, and the only woman to have worked with the MFU on and off through the 1980s, is now with the Cooper Institute, Prince Edward Island – Ed*) This was also seriously discussed in the ICSF, which undertook such a serious Women in Fisheries programme. Weren't there some insights that you could start off with and initiate a discussion with the more active members of the MFU?

Moreover, when you talk about this business of specialization, it makes me go back to the discussion we had about the 'specialization' approach of modern science, which fails to see the dynamics of the social process and, therefore, the need to have a more holistic vision and approach.

Mike: Look, Nalini, during the 1990s, when I talked about most of the public manifestations in the fishery, those had to do with the UI reforms too. But in 1996, when large numbers of people again took to the streets, they were hitting at the crab allocations. In fact, the inshore fishermen were portrayed as the villains because we had been allocated crab quotas. The women were part of the riots orchestrated by the big crab interests. They were even part of the mobs coming to attack our fishermen, even physically. This may highlight one of the reasons why women are not a big consideration in the MFU.

You see, the crab licence holders in the enterprises had established such a strong position because of the wealth they had been able to generate from the crab fishery. They also controlled most of the fish plants in the region and were able to generate a belief among the workers in the plants that they were losing work because of the quotas to the inshore fishermen and, therefore, their jobs were being threatened. Hence, the reaction of the women and the antagonistic relation with our fishermen, who had to even take protection those days.

Nalini: So, the women workers were actually used by the fish plant owners against the inshore fishers. This is not the first time this is happening. I remember in South

Africa a few years ago, when they were formulating their fisheries policy, the industrial houses used the fact that they were providing 20,000 jobs to women in the plants, to support their claims that their quotas should be increased and that the 'subsistence' fishers should be marginalized. They cleverly referred to the artisanal fishers as 'subsistence fishers' to deprive them of fishing rights.

Well, I can see here that the women who give leadership in such cases do not really have a deep analysis of the fishery and, hence, fall into these traps and this is indeed a great pity.

Mike: We have never appreciated the role played by the trade unions that had some representation in the crab plants. As people from the outside, we could say that since then, women have formed plant workers' associations, and what they talk about is becoming professional plant workers.

I must tell you that the main issue of the association is the fund that they established—what they call a solidarity fund—with contributions from the crab licence holders and the provincial and federal governments, which provided a certain amount of money to extend the work of the crab plant workers so that they could increase the number of working days and then be entitled to the UI.

Central to the deal was to cut out the MFU fishermen from the crab fishery. We were furious that the provincial government would use this as a way to cut us out of the crab quota. But we challenged them and, I think, we were far more progressive in our position in respect to the plant workers. We said that if they

were genuinely interested in the workers, they should organize them legitimately and give them full workers' rights and not treat them as casual workers. This business of a fund was like extending some form of charity to them. We were the only ones making such a progressive demand because this link between the government and the plant owners is directly linked to the cutback in the UI programme since 1996.

The other aspect is related to the provincial government's own cutbacks. This takes me back again to the UI protests spearheaded by the New Brunswick women. They were the most militant in the country because they were the most directly affected. It was around 1994-95, when the woman leader I referred to earlier—the one who was a seasonal worker in the National Park—became a kind of celebrity. She decided to run for office as an MP and in the 1996 elections, she affiliated herself to the only really progressive party in the country, the New Democratic Party (NDP) that had never gained more than 8-10 per cent of the vote in the Acadian area. She won the election and it was a kind of electoral revolution. Another trade unionist, who was a leader in the plant protests, also won, defeating one of the key cabinet ministers in the government.

Just a month ago, in October 1999, when the MFU was in the heart of the native rights issue crisis, this woman announced that she was changing parties, and she joined the conservative party.

Nalini: Wow, politics makes strange bedfellows and, unfortunately, women fall into the trap too. So why did she do this?

Mike: Well, I cannot say for sure but what I would assume is that she found the NDP was going nowhere nationally and, to assure herself of a place in the next election, she felt she could do more for her people from within the conservative party. But what worries me is to think of the trade union people who supported her and put all their energies behind her. What must they be feeling now? This may even highlight why the MFU took a bit of a distance in the UI battle.

I myself am a little sensitive to people who are rabid with their leftist ideas and look at me and my colleague as business agents or hacks. But in our type of organization, if it has to make some contribution, we have to be careful about what we can and cannot take on, rather than, I say again, just be politically correct. But if we are not directly involved in some of these struggles, you cannot say we are not in solidarity. By trying to keep close to our members' issues and by trying to win struggles within our limited contexts, we might be able to hold on to a progressive organization and resist the ways of populism that have curious outcomes like this woman who is now affiliated to the conservative party.

Nalini: Mike, you make a serious point when you talk about nitty-gritty questions in the fishery. I too believe that we women can make a point only when we relate to the nitty-gritty questions of the production process. For this, we require in-depth work and an analysis of the development of the forms of organization of the work process. That is what we have tried to do in our 'feminist analysis in fisheries' in the ICSF Women in Fisheries programme.

My position was critiqued because this analysis grew out of our Indian experience, where the industrial fishery is not so developed, a criticism that I accepted. At that point, I wasn't really able to capture issues like the ones you are bringing up now, which would give me a real insight into what is happening in the modern fishery. In order to develop a perspective of a sustainable fishery, to understand these issues and then evolve strategies for action, it would be necessary to have long discussions like this among women and men from many corners of the world.

Mike: Well, I have offered to go to the women's meetings and discuss things with them, but they haven't picked up on the offer.

Aliou: As supporters, we need to invest more to understand in what waters we are swimming. We cannot contain a wave in our arms, it is said. I am trying to learn how to be more realistic. If we want to persevere in our work, we have to be realistic and keep our cool. This has helped me to be satisfied with less outcome and to get less depressed by what I encounter. So when you tell me that the wisdom of various people in your organization Mike, sometimes helps to function like a break, I am very impressed, because we need such breaks in our complex contexts, so that we make proper sense of what is actually happening before plunging into action. The fisheries situation has its own contradictions and this makes women's interests conflict with those of the inshore fishery in the immediate context. But it is important to know whether the MFU sees a way out to convince its members to change and focus on the real issues.

Mike: My judgement is that we make no contribution to the world by just getting agitated by what is going on around us. We have to find the right point at which to strike.

Aliou: But I would like to insist that the participation of women in the process of social movement and organization, and their capacity to participate, depends on the role they actually play in the fishery. I say this because, as supporters, we also have to have realistic expectations. That helps us put things in perspective too. There are other factors that impact on women's participation and these differ from region to region.

When I think about India, it is a strong movement of women not only because of the role played by women in fisheries but also because of the general social condition of women, which doesn't have to do with fisheries directly. So when we assess the women's involvement and the degree of politicization, we have to take into consideration the social contexts too. We cannot generalize.

On Assessing Some of the Gains of Organization

Mike: Sall, you have children. Have you noticed the kinds of toys that interest them when they are around three to five years old? I remember a comic strip in North America that used to have a character called Linus, who always dragged along a blanket. Linus' blanket was a topic of conversation. (*Linus, who sucks his thumb and carries a security blanket, is the ever-philosophizing character in Charles Schuz's classic comic strip, Peanuts – Ed*) The child psychologist Winnecott wrote that children sometimes use 'transitional objects', holding on to something in

the past that gives them a sense of security as they tread on new ground. (*Paediatrician-turned-child-psychoanalyst Donald Winnecott is author of Playing and Reality – Ed*) These transitional objects usually are ill-defined, but the child is strongly attached to them.

When we got into more socio-psychoanalytical work, this concept came up about ‘transitional organizations’. When a particular institutional class is moving on into another phase, the organization can be considered like a ‘transitional organization’, not a regular trade union, which is clearly defined. In some sense, we can look at our organizations as transitional organizations, especially the MFU and the CNPS.

Each organization has all sorts of meanings for those who adhered to it in the early days. Fishermen themselves are facing a transition period and the organization is a place where they can work out their ideas. You could say that it is a phase in which the actual consciousness within is very ambiguous. I could see us in the MFU going through a long transitional phase, when fishermen were playing out their ideas in the organization. The organization provided the forum for the fishermen to work things out. Our annual conventions were occasions where fisherman after fisherman would speak out into the microphone; sometimes it was the first time one had spoken in public. These were the exciting parts of the conventions, when people took the stage to articulate and display their ideas. At that time, they were not asking the organization to deliver a lot of bread and butter. But that’s not so now. The MFU is very

streamlined and its members expect results. I think the CNPS is not a simple local association, nor a trade union; it is transitional, in that it is not clearly defined, but the fishermen clearly need it and they know they want to be there in it.

Aliou: My first comment is that I appreciate your effort to help us reflect using certain psychological concepts like the ‘transitional object’. In fact, I did not know this side of you earlier—your interest in psychology! Well, as the child grows s/he is still herself. But in the organization, there are such forceful dynamics that it may happen that the transition is not always provoked by any common agreement. There is no straight line and we must understand the external influences that impact on the transition.

Mike: You’re right. Using the concept of a transitional organization implies that it is organic and that it will gradually mature, which is not necessarily the case. One of the keys of the analogy is that the kid, at one point, drops the transitional object. So with an organization, fishermen probably leave the phase that I am calling transitional and demand more business-like results from their organization.

It is just a concept, this idea of an organization being a ‘transitional object’, but it helps me sort out the MFU’s past and present, and I feel that the CNPS could, in some ways, be looked at as being in a transitional phase.

When a child is an infant, in Winnecott’s theory, the child’s consciousness is undifferentiated. S/he sees no difference between the mother and herself. For the

organization, when you think of the CNPS and the hundreds of fishermen who come to a Congress, their consciousness is very undifferentiated and the demands are kind of wide. But what impresses me about the CNPS is that in the movement of many such interests, the Congresses are a manifestation of their strength. But this will not last forever. How do you look at future developments? When do we look at what we achieve in the long run?

Even if the MFU disappears tomorrow, it would still have achieved something as an organization for the fishermen. I think our fishermen used the organization to work and to learn about the new management systems that came into the fishery in the 1970s, and, gradually, they themselves were implicated into the new systems and into having a say about them. In the short lifespan of the MFU, many, many fishermen developed quite a sophisticated understanding of the new management systems and, in a sense, became integrated into the modern fishery. This was certainly not what the leaders had in mind when they started.

Aliou: If you see how people mobilize during a Congress, it is crazy. There is massive input by the fishermen that cannot be calculated. This is in the form of support they offer, to host the participants, feed them, etc. It is tremendous. It is, in fact, very symbolic in the history of the Senegalese fishery that such unity of purpose can be displayed. I am still convinced that the social recognition of the fishermen, the simple fact that they make such a show of numbers and gather at the sight of the word ‘congress’, is extremely important. This itself is a phenomenon—just to see the way the

fishermen get onto the dais, how the senior ones are honoured and they come all dressed up as real chiefs, and sit on the same stage as the minister. I think this has given the fishermen a tremendous social status. They have begun to experience that they have power.

You know, because of this sense of power, a mere decision taken among themselves is like a decision *vis-à-vis* the State. They do not need to make a big manifestation of demand or broadcast their decision. There is no need because the State power is actually so weak and is just waiting to see what the fishermen are saying. In fact, when the government decided to close the octopus fishery, it was goaded on by the participation of the fishermen. This is what convinces me that the fishermen are powerful, but they are not really conscious of their power.

Mike: You are saying this confidence has come from the fact that they are organized and have their Congresses, etc. Would it have been any different if they weren't organized?

Aliou: I feel that even if we are a very small country, the fact that fishermen can meet from across the country, and build up relationships in the process, is very important. Earlier, if people considered you stupid, they would say "You are a fisherman." Today, this has changed. Often, newspapers carry big headlines: '*les pecheurs dit non*', '*le CNPS block l'accord entre Senegal et the Union European*'. None of this happened because of any huge manifestation or raising of demands.

Mike: Have you never had a mass demonstration?

Aliou: No. Why? Even the whole administration and the secret agents come to the Congress. It's crazy, you know. A big part of the planning is the seating arrangement on the dais and who will sit on the dais. Earlier, the fisheries officials—some young, recently trained graduates—would come to fishermen's meetings condescendingly. They would arrive when they liked, cigarettes in hand and go straight up to the dais, as if they were born to chair meetings. But we have taught them now that they have to learn to be invited. So now they do not go straight to the dais but sit among the audience and listen and learn. They also have to accept that there may be meetings of fishermen where they shouldn't expect to be invited.

I remember the Congress in 1993 when the Fisheries Minister called the day before to ask whether he was expected at the Congress. A couple of weeks earlier, he had called saying that there were 2 million CFA francs for CNPS. Our committee had gone and got it from him and he had tried to ask for details about the Congress and he was told vaguely that he would be informed later. But the fishermen didn't inform him, as they had no intention of inviting him, since they wanted the Minister of Agriculture, instead.

This leads me to talk about the question of 'autonomy' *vis-à-vis* the State and how the CNPS has arrived at demonstrating its autonomy. It is this fact, that they cannot be controlled, that impacts more on the government than a big demonstration.

Earlier, the presence of some foreign friends at our Congresses played an important role. The Minister felt obliged to impress them too. But this may not be necessary in the future.

It is not that there is no history of struggle in Senegal in different sectors, but in the fisheries, fishermen haven't adopted this form. I think that in the minds of their interlocutors, they are considered a counter-power, and these are the impressive gains of the organization. The question of the CNPS linking up to the broader social movements is always a risky proposition. Will we lose our soul?

Nalini: From what both of you are saying, you seem to express that your organizations have achieved the ultimate, and that they are, therefore, stable. But tomorrow, if there is a collapse in the lobster fishery, Mike, the MFU will be threatened and if social security is withdrawn, even more so. Nothing remains static and these are the lessons we learn from history too.

You talk about your State being so weak, Aliou. Well, the trend in the world today is to weaken State power so that the financial interests will call the shots. If the Multilateral Investment Agreement (MIA) gets through in the World Trade Organization (WTO) debate, we will no longer have the protection of the State before these giants, and the State will lose its role of arbitrator too. Don't you think it is imperative that your organizations take seriously the need to create alliances?

Aliou: I am not questioning the need to build alliances, but it is important to determine with whom and how exactly. We must not also underestimate the risks in this process. In Senegal, when CNPS maintains its autonomy, it does not mean that it does not relate to other social sections. But this is not structured or institutionalized.

I am referring here to the way the CNPS related to the general population during the time of the last fisheries agreement. This was more than a structural alliance. I am convinced that the organization can still have its power without linking to other organizations because there are other means of strengthening fishworker organizations. For example, in our context, the fishing communities are dynamic social realities. You can see and touch them, and they are centres of economic activity. So, I think, to build a community-based organizational approach can be an interesting alternative. This will also enable us to integrate the wider issues into this form of organization because the organization need not be limited to the resource questions, but can take up things like the impact of tourism, sanitation, etc.

Nalini: So this brings us to the ‘Will of Allah’.

Mike: Maybe there are other sectors of society that are as fascinating, but I think, to this day, the oceans are a kind of last frontier – little understood. Even to this day, though we have large scientific enterprises, they are often surprised by large annual catches of fish, apparently coming out of nowhere. We have heard no end of visionaries and planners predicting that the inshore fishery would collapse, but nobody paid much attention to the lowly lobster.

When you look at the terrible results we had in the cod fishery, you really have to consider whether the Canadian management model, backed by its big science enterprises and companies, was not just a giant hubris. Our cod collapse was a catastrophe of biblical proportions, as one of our leaders called it. Even Aliou

was kind of smug, feeling a bit like many of our own inshore fishermen that “it served them right”, those high-and-mighties, who thought they could manage the oceans with their science and management models.

At the moment of the moratorium, inshore fishermen all through Atlantic Canada saw it also as a conjuncture in which, ironically, they could regain some of their status. The sad story that follows is to see how the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada (DFO), the fisheries management authority, appears to have recovered its hegemony over the fishery. You would think there would have been a huge institutional change.

Aliou: I want to clarify what leads me to use the ‘community’ approach. First, because of the way our fishing community is structured. They represent an important part of the population, where there is so much immigration from other sectors. Second, all fish landing areas have fishing communities and, because of this, anything they do has an impact as they are a live and important presence in the economy.

Third, going through the people in the community makes it easier from the point of view of transparency, as everybody knows what is going on

Mike: Aliou has just put his finger on a significant difference between Canada, India and Senegal. Just establishing clearly that the CNPS is active and productive in these fishing communities is enough food for thought because of the role fish plays in that economy. What Aliou is saying is that if you get a good political organization in the fishery, you are almost at the centre of power in Senegal.

In the Canadian context, we could say a similar thing only in the Atlantic region in case of the cod, which is actually losing political power in the country now. We are only highlighting the differences in our contexts.

Aliou: ‘Alliance’ develops a kind of psychosis in me because of the risks and dangers it confronts an organization with, especially in the context of the CNPS, where all the other unions are linked to political parties who have electoral ambitions. I am always surprised at the way the fishermen themselves make a distinction about relating to some individuals who are linked to political parties, and remaining independent as an organization themselves. Never have I heard it being raised that the CNPS must support one party or the other. We will lose our identity as a counter-power once the party you side with gets into power.

Nalini: An alliance does not imply that you lose your identity, although it does have tremendous risks of weakening you. But, I feel, Aliou, you are not looking far enough as a supporter, as you are gripped by this psychosis regarding alliances. In your situation in West Africa, as your country shares a resource with so many other little neighbouring countries that are all making their own decisions about the resources and signing agreements with the Northern world, don’t you think you have to build some cross-border alliances? Similarly, from you, Mike, I would like to know how you see the alliance that is being built up through the creation of the WFF?

Mike: I think you are stretching it a bit, but I’d like to first hear what Aliou says.

Aliou: Nalini, don't you know that we are preoccupied with this question particularly through the West African programme? But you see how this programme got derailed too, by people wanting it to be just an aid project. As the fishermen have a long tradition of migration between these countries and as we share some resources that are the same, of course, we have to see how they can be also managed to the advantage of all.

But the CNPS is a unique kind of organization in West Africa and it is not because of the fact that we think alliances are important that we should rush into them, especially when other countries do not have any organizations like the CNPS. All the organizations that I know are either government-sponsored or have been hijacked by the government, except probably in Guinea-Bissau, where it is a women's organization. In Mauritania, there is a federation, but it is created by the government and the chief of the federation is an army colonel. That is the base of our fears, although we have not given up.

But to tell you that the CNPS is serious about alliances, I must say that there is one fisherman elected in the CNPS who is responsible to help create links with other fishermen in West Africa. In this context, I want to add that even the ICSF contacts in other African countries are with such organizations that are linked to the State and we have to be very careful about that, especially if the ICSF moves without a deeper awareness about these processes.

Then you may ask why can't the CNPS exploit more the fact that there is so much migration in fisheries, to

create alliances? But the situation of the migrants is also changing today. Earlier, even if it were the Senegalese fishermen who had helped build the fisheries of the neighboring countries, there are tendencies to disassociate with this trend now. The Senegalese now have to get licences to fish in these countries and what they fish there has to be landed there. In Mauritania, particularly, they are so racist and are growing violent and there are lots of border problems. That is why for the World Fisheries Day Celebrations in November 1998, the theme of the conference was 'Resource Conservation, Migration and Security at Sea'.

You see, fish has no real meaning in the culture of Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau. It is only an investment business. These countries have developed a nationalist ideology regarding fisheries as it earns them money. The only fishery they had earlier in the inshore was the octopus fishery and that too fished in a very unskilled way, with pots from fibreglass boats, as taught by the Japanese, and not with hooks, as our fishermen do.

Mike: Aliou makes me think of another aspect that we experience in Canada within our fishery. It is a very difficult process to make alliances with organizations that you do not consider to be at the same 'level' as yourselves. You find some of those organizations are just empty shells. Even with formalized organizations, it is one thing to have a symbolic alliance with them, but when it comes to carrying out effective action, you discover they can't deliver. So these are very problematic areas.

The little social power that can be attributed to your organization can be eaten up by coalition exercises. Even in a more formalized council structure like we have in Canada, we are asked to sit at the same table with several other organizations that are either business-like organizations or shell-type ones. And so you end up having very little possibility of making any real political action.

The Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (CCPFH) is only a tool that helps us to share information with some people we wouldn't otherwise have met because of financial constraints. So when you get to a 'World Forum', you can imagine the potential for used-up energies, mystifications, neutralizations — whatever you like to call it. We have only a handful of organizations that recognize one another as engaged in somewhat the same work, with similar perspectives on the fishery. Quite frankly, I don't think we should look at the WFF like that.

Nalini: So will the MFU join the WFF?

Mike: Do you actually believe that the MFU has the opportunity to join the WFF?

Nalini: Why do you say that?

Mike: In Canada, there are at least three large, sound fishermen's organizations, none of which has joined the WFF. Anybody who wants to grasp the complexities and ambiguities of the WFF only has to look at our CCPFH.

Aliou: Coming back to the WFF, I think we have to distinguish between kinds of actions because nothing can replace actions at the base itself, or in our own countries.

I really do not see how any action of the WFF can impact effectively on our governments. Let me relate this to what happened in France in the last few months, when farmers pressured their government to react to the WTO regulations. Farmers went on a rampage to demand that this be stopped.

Nalini: Now that you refer to that, it brings me back to this question of alliances. Actually, I think this present action in France also has to do with what the Indian farmers association did some years ago, an action that was carried to Europe as the 'International Caravan' through the network called People's Global Action. You probably recall that reference was made to this People's Global Action last year at our ICSF Animation Team meeting. Diegues asked Sebastian whether he was there and Sebastian said he didn't know anything about it. (*Antonio Carlos Sant'ana Diegues, a Member of ICSF, is with Núcleo de Apolo à Pesquisa sobre Populações Humanas e Áreas Úmidas Brasileiras or NUPAUB, the Centre for Research on Human Population and Wetlands in Brazil. Sebastian Mathew is Executive Secretary of ICSF – Ed*) I had cynically remarked that the ICSF is not inclined to such political actions!

Well, this year, People's Global Action organized this International Caravan where 500 farmers from India, together with 20 fishworkers from organizations in the South, spent almost a month in Europe. They interacted with various groups in Europe, telling them about their struggles against new happenings in the sector because of the new WTO regulations. These Indian farmers were part of the group that burnt down the research station of the giant US seed multinational, Cargill, which was manipulating the Indian seed

industry, not only by appropriating the intellectual property rights of the Indian farmer but also by creating a regime of centralization. Subsequently, the farmers' organization also attacked Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in India, including its posh outlet in Bangalore, my hometown. Then the legal battle of the multinationals started, asserting their individual property rights in the context of the new economic and legal order. This stirred up a whole wave in India of groups getting together to fight this domination by the WTO and led to the demand that India get out of the WTO.

Well, after these interactions, the Caravan participated in a huge chain when the G8 countries met in Bonn, where the Northern people demanded that the debts of the Third World be written off as we enter the third millennium.

All these groups will be there in Seattle, where the WTO is meeting, so that they can lobby their governments and demonstrate the hundreds of voices that want an alternative.

Mike: You are getting into hot waters there, Sall!

Aliou: No. This only confirms how important it is for organizations to put priority on building up local organizations because if the French farmers, for instance, were not organized, they would not have been able to pick up these ripples and react the way they did. It is not only an international issue that makes such things possible.

Nalini: I think what you are saying is important. We have to make a difference between what is today called lobbying, and organizing for change. I know that

lobbying is another cliché that pulls money these days and lots of 'activists' find this a very challenging and also paying job. There are all kinds of training programmes in advocacy, which is becoming another profession.

While I do believe that lobbying is an important supportive task, I have always been sceptical of the way it has developed. Things have to be 'sold' the way people in the echelons of power like to hear or see them. So the issues have to go in the wrappings of modern development concepts. This defeats the purpose altogether. Such strategies do not relate to a solid base and can have all the trappings of the negative side of organizing that we have reflected on.

Mike: In a way, our discussion on alliances triggers off ideas that have gone on in the history of any political movement. So there is no categorical position to be taken here. We have to have alliances. But what you seem to be pointing out in Senegal is that the conditions aren't really there to formalize alliances, and, at the global level too, we have to ask whether the conditions are really there to create meaningful alliances. We know intellectually that globalization is in full operation today. We know we need alliances on a world scale but we have to be serious in assessing whether the conditions exist for it. This still remains to be answered.

Nalini: Well, I have questions to both of you. Aliou, if the international alliance has no real effect and can't really deliver, then why are you bothered about Fenagie Peche seeking membership in the WFF? And to you, Mike: You sit on the board of CCPFH and you have been

instrumental in inviting the Southern fishermen to interact with the Council; and you saw the seeds being sown for this alliance. With all your experience, why haven't you been a more active player in determining the course of the WFF? If you are so bothered about energies being dissipated and if you are also concerned about the 'power' of the inshore fishermen being appropriated by others, what is your role, as a member, even, of ICSEF, in this happening?

Aliou: I think, when you address me, you do not raise the question correctly regarding the participation of Fenagie Peche in the WFF. Nalini, how can CNPS, which does not want to relate to Fenagie Peche in Senegal because it identifies with the government position, relate to Fenagie Peche at the international level? All this relates to what I have said earlier about CNPS playing the role of a counter-power in the Senegalese context. Moreover, I didn't say that the WFF has no role at all to play, but in political action and lobbying, it may be more effective as a communication channel between organizations than by getting into political action itself.

Mike: I think I have to clarify that I—or we—have all kinds of different thoughts about the WFF, but we certainly haven't concluded that the initiative should not be launched. But you asked a more direct question: Why was I walking away from having a say in how the forum gets shaped? The question is right on the mark. I have to ask myself why.

I guess my main answer to this would be that I have limited energies and time and that there is more than enough to do in the MFU, as it is. The other is the

question of whether this will weaken or strengthen the basic fishermen's organization. Up to now, our experience in the Council has been extremely ambiguous. It is hard for our members to see value in our participation in the Council.

Nalini: If the leadership in the Council is taken up by one of the three or four organizations in which you have more confidence, because they are genuinely good fishermen's organizations, would you think differently about it?

Mike: I am going to give you a long-winded answer. We already know that the origins of most of our organizations are quite ambiguous—a mixture of various forms of associational models, etc. The Council in Canada is even more vague in its origins, even misty, if you like. Moreover, nobody can forget that the Council is already recognized as a sector council under the country's Human Resource Development Ministry. Every other sector council is a corporate-type model of labour and management coming together to see how the sector can be improved.

The Council was able to get recognition without this management side by arguing that, in the fishery, the fishermen are both managers and workers at the same time. Now the real business of the Council is supposed to be the professionalization of fishermen, and it gets hundreds of thousands of dollars from the ministry each year to promote this professionalism. There are three or four good, union-type organizations that decided to participate in the Council for two reasons. The Newfoundland union wanted to develop a

professionalization programme, which, when you come down to it, is a form of licensing that we introduced in the Gulf of St Lawrence 20 years ago. So this organization generally stuck with the Council because it was an opportunity to meet at the national level, which we couldn't probably do on our own.

The question I am asking after five years is: Has the amount of energy we put in been worth it, just to have the opportunity to meet others? I think the only reason I would acquiesce to the Council being the official-type member of the WFF is because the Council has the infrastructure and money to not only help out in Canada's participation in the WFF but also to help the WFF financially too.

You cannot imagine the actual amount of money that the Council commands. There is something about it that is somewhat corrupting too. They also have consultants, who are really good people, but who get caught in these ambiguities. When you get into Canadian government-type monies, you are as good as gone.

Aliou: In a way, I see you have been trapped. I am sure you would not have minded if the WFF was created, but in a very informal way. We were all there in Quebec when the idea was mooted and we were not against it. But the turn it took into trying to establish itself at its very first meeting in New Delhi took us all by surprise, and I think this is very frightening.

Mike: Well, let's come back to the gains of organization, which we had started discussing. We found, for instance, in the early days, when the MFU went to a

wharf to collect dues from members, they would invariably ask, “What is the MFU doing these days anyway?” When you try to explain all the things you are doing and mention some results too, the fishermen would say, “Oh, that would have happened anyway.”

This kind of reaction shows that they do not attribute the gains to the organizational efforts of the MFU, while the MFU, on the other hand, cannot demonstrate that it alone won the day, or was responsible for those gains. Even in the case of one of the biggest victories of the MFU—getting the crab resource—as time progressed, you heard fishermen saying, “It was the minister who got that.” When we look at the gains our organization has made, they are not clearly defined. Even if they are experienced by the fishermen, they are not clearly understood.

Nalini: Well, what you are saying is that collective memory is very short and this is a general phenomenon in many ways. But in our case in India, while the fishworkers are conscious that lots of the gains are a result of their struggles, the successes accrue elsewhere. For instance, the major demand of the fishermen in Kerala has been the closed season for trawlers during the monsoon. After a decade, the union had only succeeded in getting a 45-day closure.

But there have been numerous other things they have demanded and got. In fact, the Fishermen’s Welfare Corporation was established to handle these demands like insurances for accidents at sea, compensations for death at sea or loss of equipment, housing grants, educational grants, buses for women vendors to go to market, etc. Now the Government of Kerala boasts

that it is way above all the other Indian States in providing welfare to the fishworkers, as if it were its own progressive policies that made this possible. The fishworkers were in constant struggle, demanding these things, which were easier to grant than the major demand of a closed season.

Mike: I think people remember only direct cause-and-effect. In 1982, the second years of the quotas in Canada, a few hundred of us actually occupied the building of the minister and demanded an increase in quota. Within a couple of hours, we came up with an agreement that gave our fishermen 2,000 extra tonnes of cod. Only those things in which they are fully involved, do the fishermen remember. But when you talk about fisheries management, there is a whole range of things. Virtually every struggle within the fishery has to do with how the management programme is implemented.

For us, it is the ambivalence that actually poses the problem. The fishermen know they have to have a regulatory authority, but, in practice, they see scientists taking non-objective positions, and government taking sides. So they are ambivalent. You need to have an honest and impartial system. Since 1977, many of the unions' struggles have been in relation to the management of the fish and those gains have been ambiguous too. On the other hand, during the same period, the lobster fishery expanded, both in terms of value and resource availability. So, did the MFU create this?

Aliou: I have two comments. One, some gains are more qualitative and difficult to assess. For example, in 1994,

the union and the core of all those in the industrial sector came together for the first time in a meeting organized in Joal. That was a very important occasion for the fishermen. It was the first time they heard the industrial people say that the government should create a compensation fund for the artisanal fishermen to take care of the victims of accidents at sea. And they were saying that they, the industrial group, would be interested in contributing to the fund. The fishermen were surprised to hear a Lebanese plant owner stating that 60 per cent of the industrial fish plant raw material came from the artisanal fishery. I remember what an impact that statement made on the fishermen.

That was an occasion when the industrial group came to ally with the CNPS against the fisheries agreements. What I consider a gain, though, is the fact that the industry recognized the power of the artisanal fishery and, as a trade-off, was willing to contribute towards the security of the artisanal fishermen.

Subsequently, when the fishermen participated in negotiations at various levels with the government, they also had access to documents that would be stamped “confidential”. You can imagine what this meant in the hands of the fishermen.

Mike: These are certainly gains, but only momentarily in what I would call ‘conjunctural’ moments. I recall in the earlier days how proud we were to be on every committee that was set up for the management of the fishery. Given our militant positions, that was a big deal for the fishermen. It was the way we were engaged in the negotiation process that mattered. It did not necessarily bring in the bread, but it took us to the

way in which the fishery was managed, using scientists, money, power, etc., and for the fishermen to be there was important.

Aliou: Now we can look at who profits from these gains. Senegal has what is called the Consultative Advisory Board in Fisheries, in which CNPS has two representatives. Two CNPS persons are also officially in the Socioeconomic Council, which gives direction to the planners. This is surely an achievement.

Mike: These are examples of getting into new grounds, where you can either win or lose. I know people who say that the MFU is collaborating with the government, and that is looked at negatively.

Aliou: Yes, lots of things can be misconstrued. In our case, when the government offered us a share of the money from the EU fisheries access agreements, CNPS refused it. This rejection was used against us, and it was said that we were just being political, when Fenagie Peche and the fishmongers' association wanted the money.

Mike: The whole objective of organizing is to get into a position of negotiation. You have no pretence of assuming the power of the State.

Nalini: This makes me think differently. When we are asked to be on consultative committees, most of them are not mandatory. It is a way for the government to pick our brains and then to use what we say to fit into their paradigm. This does not mean that we have not been able to make any impact on policy, but we can never claim it as an achievement of the NFF alone.

Aliou: In our case, participation itself is important because recognition is the main thing. Let me go back to the

legislation that brought the 6-12 mile coastal zone regulation. When this zone was enlarged, because of fishers' demands, it was not made public. The government wanted to make it appear as if the new measure was coming from the government and not from the demand of the fishermen. There are other instances like this. When we demanded a reduction in taxes and a change in identity cards, one fine day we discovered that these regulations no longer existed. The government had made these decisions on its own. So it is actually difficult to assess the gains of organization.

As supporters, we have to be conscious of the fact that the fishermen have their own way of assessing their gains. This makes me think of the Chinese painkiller oil, Mike. If the pain in your leg disappeared when you applied the oil, it would be interesting to know if it was the oil that really helped you or whether there was an internal process in your body that healed you.

This brings me to what I call the myth of gains. From 1992, CNPS started participating in discussions on the fisheries agreements. In 1994, it did so for the second time. It was interesting to hear fishermen from Joal and Hann say that it was because of CNPS and its actions that the condition of the resource had improved. In 1994, they said the resource was in good health and that there were no more boats coming into the artisanal zone.

At that point, I did not interfere with what was being said. It was not the figures that mattered, it was the belief that this had come about as a result of what

they had done. The actual fact was that the Spanish had realized there was less fish in the Senegalese waters and they were no more willing to pay so much for the access agreement. An official document from Pescanova proposed why they should go to other waters. (*Pescanova, S.A. is a large company based in Pontevedra, Spain, primarily engaged in the processing, distribution and marketing of fish products, mainly finfish, for human and animal consumption. In fiscal 2000, Pescanova reported sales of US\$628 million – Ed*) But letting the fishermen live with their myth of self-won gains actually gave them more strength.

Mike: One of the central myths in the MFU is that it drove out the herring seiners from the Gulf of St Lawrence around 1980. Actually, my sense is that the herring seiners were big in the Gulf in the 1960s and, by the 1980s, the resources were so overfished that the MFU was victorious only because the seiners had defeated themselves; but this is a commanding myth in the MFU.

The other thing that occurs to me now is that, around the elections every four years, the party that usually stays in power does so because the economy is doing well. This is objectively independent of any government action. Recessions and the growth of the economy are caused by so many micro-factors. But I thought what we want to say is that the organization plays a watchdog role. You can lie dormant in a public way, but still have a huge impact on the political landscape.

Nalini: At this point, I would like to reflect on the negative aspects of gains—how they can give you a sense of being bigger than you are in reality. I tend to look in this way at the last struggle of the NFF against the

deep-sea trawlers. The NFF has been recognized as a national union with an extensive base. But does the NFF really have the clout and organizational infrastructure to change things at the base?

I ask this because there were several initiatives we could take at the base to introduce local management strategies, but the NFF has not been able to do anything of the kind. Many suggestions and some attempts have been made, especially in trying to diversify the trawl fishery, but nothing of significance has really happened. Mass mobilization for larger policy demands has been the thrust of the NFF and, in this, significant gains have been made. This has to be seen in the context of India, where social processes involve a large number of people. While the mobilization of large numbers is significant in mass struggles, large numbers of people at the base make local organizational strategies extremely difficult.

Aliou: As for myself, I have not talked about gains being always positive. I mentioned what I felt just to help you to be sensitive to how people in my context assess things, mainly the intangible things. When symbolism plays such an important role, it is important for you supporters to understand how we look at things that are palpable gains, like the coastal zone being extended from six to 12 miles. There is also something symbolic in this because when the fishermen were discussing this demand, they were already aware of the fact that they were targeting the resource beyond the coastal six-mile zone. And in demanding access rights, they were staking their claim to do so. The 12-mile limit was only to legitimize what was already happening.

So I start distinguishing between visible and invisible gains. Even in the visible, you have an element of symbolism. This is mainly because of, again, the situation of recognition and whether the government is trying to take more and more of the credit, which is increasingly becoming an issue in CNPS.

Mike: I will make a comment on recognition. It is related a bit to the question of gains. My sense is that the fishermen in the MFU forgave the organization for what it did not accomplish in the earlier years because then it was more of an idea, an aspiration, a hope, but, gradually, the demand to deliver bread and butter has grown. My own sense is that you may be facing this right now, when I hear you speak about Fenagie Peche and that it is getting more of the material gains like money, etc., while CNPS isn't. But let us go back to Nalini's comment about NFF riding on what she calls the bubble. Over time, the big gain of the struggle against deep-sea trawlers will be lost, while the NFF too is losing sight of the nitty-gritty issues.

Nalini: You have to understand this in the context of the fact that it was a tremendous mobilization effort, which was sustained for close to three years. Subsequently, there were other issues like the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, which, again, called for large-scale mobilization to get fishworkers' rights recognized. Again, this was a broad-based issue.

So when I speak about a bubble that can burst, I feel that the energies spent on these larger mobilizations attract large groups of the dispossessed in the coastal communities, while the actual fishermen continue to

comb the seas in a desperate effort to survive. With no simultaneously effective organization at the base, the movement has not been able to check the destructive fishing that has entered the artisanal fishery. Undoing this will be a Herculean task.

Mike: From what you say, Nalini, there is probably a huge history behind those events. Most people who are involved in the fishery tend to be unidimensional. Everybody can understand what devastation big trawler fleets can cause to the resource, but what I can't understand is the power of this unidimensional David-vs-Goliath image to carry on within a militant organization, even when their daily lives are determined by other factors.

I can recall our minister going around in 1995-96, making it appear that the presence of foreign trawlers in our waters was the main issue, and he got support from fishermen everywhere. The only foreign trawlers in Canadian waters then were near Greenland, and some Cuban trawlers fishing Canadian hake that the Canadians themselves did not want. So there was no objective threat, but it was still a rallying cry and mystified the real problem facing the fishermen, which, in our case, was the emergence of the huge midshore fleet. I feel you are implying the same thing, while touching on a similar phenomenon in the Indian context.

Aliou: I think we have a similar problem in Senegal because we have the French style of administration, very complex and hierarchical, with many sections and subsections. But management of the fishery is under the tutelage of the Minister of Fisheries, who relies

on different institutions to assist with specific contributions. You have the research centre, CRODT (*Centre De Recherches Océanographiques Dakar-Thiaroye, the Oceanographic Research Centre Dakar-Thiaroye – Ed*) which is supposed to make the assessment of stocks and is the only one of its kind in the West African region. Then there is that huge impressive scientific boat, *Nouis Sauget*, for sophisticated marine surveys. Orstom overseas became the Institut de recherche pour le développement. (*Orstom was the Institut français de la recherche scientifique pour le développement en co-operation, a scientific research institute supervised by both the French Ministry of Research and the Ministry of Co-operation, set up to contribute to the sustainable development of southern countries. The Institut de recherche pour le développement or IRD is a French public science and technology research institute under the joint authority of the French ministries in charge of research and overseas development – Ed*)

It is very complicated, the continued influence and probably domination of the French. Look at the major contributions of these institutions. They all concentrate on tuna, which serves the interests of the industrial fleet. These very posh and well-equipped institutions give a sense of false prestige to the Senegalese scientists too. Though the research centre's main mission is to provide the government with data, based on which it can make policies, the actual research has been oriented towards the interests of foreign companies. You can guess how the priority of studies is linked to the interests of the West.

Mike: Would you describe it as a neocolonial institution?

Aliou: That has been the main reason why fishermen have denounced it—the foreign interest. But I think the

fishermen were forced to this conclusion mainly because of the lack of interaction between the government and the fishermen. Nor is there any transparency. So much information is secret. In 1987, when ICSF was organizing a meeting with West African scientists in Dakar, I sent a letter to the Director of CRODT, but he refused to come and address us to share the work being done by his institution. He didn't feel free or confident to do that.

Besides, there is the Directorate of Fisheries. This is again a complex institution. In the same building is situated the Senegalese Surveillance Project, supported by Canada, and also the Senegalese Coast Guard. For three or four years, Senegal has been profiting from the West African Development Programme, called Lux Development, centred in Gambia, with massive aid from Luxemburg. This is supposedly to improve surveillance of the fisheries subregion among six countries. So all the responsibilities are diversified and very complicated.

Nalini: My goodness, this is very unlike the Indian government that is so conscious about security issues and so suspicious of any foreigner getting involved in any scientific work on the coast! I remember the trouble we had when SIFFS was in the process of constructing the artificial reefs with the help of a technical person from Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), England. *(ITDG, founded in 1966 by E F Schumacher, is now an international group of development organizations with charitable status. Its head office is in the UK, with regional and country offices in the three continents of Africa, Asia and South America – Ed)* We first had to ask permission if he could dive and use an underwater camera and this was possible

only when the government research institute was made a partner in the study.

But coming back to the fact that you say, and seem surprised, that all research is funded by, or serves the interest of, the industry. Let's face it, this has been a growing trend in all sectors over the last two decades. The funds for research available to public institutions 'gradually' dried up. Research grants came from industry, initially with no strings attached, but later industry began to dictate the areas of study too. So the researchers had to fall in line with the research priorities of the institution. Now some of the research labs are directly controlled and funded by the industry.

Let me tell you about one case in India. There is a prestigious institution in Bangalore called the Indian Institute of Science. Recently, we heard that the multinational food giant Monsanto had invested money in the biotechnology laboratory in this institute. So despite the fact that there is a large farmers' movement around Bangalore protesting the entry of multinationals into Indian agriculture and against the 'terminator' gene technology, the Indian Institute of Science goes ahead with such an alliance.

Aliou: I still cannot see this kind of thing happening in the university in Senegal. When the octopus moratorium was being decided, we saw how the industrial fleet pressed for the closure. When I heard from the fishermen, I did not believe the fishery had been closed. So when we went to CRODT to enquire about the grounds on which such a closure was made, nobody there could answer us. Obviously, the closure was not stimulated by scientists but by the industry, which wanted to keep a control on prices.

About the money for research, I know that IFREMER (*Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer or the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea, at Issy-les-Moulineaux, near Paris — Ed*) gets a lot of private money and I think even Orstom does. But even if Orstom gets such money, I do not think that private interest in research is increasing and that the public interest is decreasing. In France, the relation between research and the private sector is visible, but the way the State of France operates and behaves, is not the way our government behaves and operates. France is maintaining CRODT to control information related to the Third World.

Nalini: You seem to be looking at it from a narrow perspective. You do not see the role of finance capital in the world today. As I said earlier, it is this force that is pushing for the MIA at the WTO. If this happens, the power or sovereignty of States will be totally undermined. The way has been prepared for this by the creation of the WTO, which now plays a leading role in international relations, even minimizing the role of UN institutions. On the whole, the role of the UN institutions is being relativized. Even NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) today decides to start a war with no reference to the UN. So we should be aware of these international dynamics and global equations that are changing the face of our world and the rules of the world order.

Aliou: Yes, of course, we can see the impact of the global market on our economy and on the fishery. But the whole WTO thing that you talk about still evades me. You see how the US tries to displace France in its relation with West Africa in the much-publicized visit

of US President Bill Clinton. So there is a power play going on between the Western nations themselves, which, I feel, is shrouded by things like the WTO, etc. I would take some time to come to such conclusions as you seem to be making, Nalini.

Mike: You get me thinking, anyway. You have to be careful when you arrive at the fact that the State is losing its power under the globalization phenomenon. We shouldn't lose our nerve. There is every reason to believe that there are other political forces coming into play and, maybe, for the moment, France's historical preoccupation with its colonies and the question of preserving its culture is one of those forces. I'd like to get back to the fishery where we are trying to understand how the management authority works in the three different countries that we represent.

I'll come back to the fact that companies are paying for most of the scientific work. In our country, the scientific work is mostly managed by the government. It is still a publicly managed business, but the fleets are paying for the scientific research work appropriate to their fishery. Last year, we challenged the findings of the scientists in the snow crab fishery and we threatened to hire an independent investigator. We haven't yet done it, but we did write a strong letter to a minister, making some claims. Clearly, the minister and the scientists at the national level were sensitive to the things we wrote about. The fact that there are still such people in the public domain allows us to have some leverage still. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the public domain will not make a comeback.

Nalini: Well, Mike, if I didn't feel like you too, I would not be here! I feel strongly that these things are reversible because things backfire at so many levels. But what I am trying to make both of you more conscious of is that there are major changes taking place at the macro-level that are going to completely alter the international playing field, and we have to beware of them.

Simultaneously, there are a number of so-called philanthropic industrialists who are creating foundations that are looking into humanitarian ways of managing the upcoming crisis and contradictions. When various peoples' movements cried halt to certain unsustainable developments, they felt that science and modern technology would find answers to all the questions. It didn't take long to realize that this would not happen. Now they appropriate the logic of the movements and try to integrate it into the capitalist logic in order to give them greater legitimacy.

Have you heard about the World Humanist Action Trust (WHAT)? This body of extremely eminent persons, mainly from the Northern world, was set up by two big industrial giants. The trust has set up two or three international commissions to develop perspective documents on various global issues related mainly to the use of natural resources. Industry has the money to pick the best brains of the world and then decide to do what they like with all the information they get.

I recently read a wonderful book by Marshall Berman entitled *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity by Marshall Berman, Penguin USA, 1988 – Ed). The title is a sentence

taken from the *Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels make a critique of capitalism while, at the same time, upholding the freedom, creativity and democratic values and energy released by the bourgeois revolution. Marx was thus a great admirer of modernity. While he sees the tremendous potential unleashed by the bourgeois capitalist revolution, he also sees imminent in it its destructive forces. Capitalism's growth requires that it destroys what it creates. The question we have to ask ourselves today, therefore, is to what extent modernity is sustainable.

Mike: Financial capital is clearly mythical and divorces itself from production capital. It takes on a life of its own and, I think, is getting to a point where money becomes almost fictitious. But when it reaches a point that will make people react, you will get a massive cultural revolution—in a popular or fundamentalist sense. All through this week, we have been searching, in our conversation, how to understand this growing populism and fundamentalism. The informal sectors that are beginning to agitate must surely include culture, religion, identities, etc. Nobody knows what attitude to take in this context. We all have to really watch ourselves.

Aliou: I would like to come back to the management authority. I said that there are poor relations amongst all these institutions that are involved in the authority. Even through routine data collection, many new concepts are being introduced, which is a way to appropriate people's knowledge. I am referring to something that is called participatory research, an approach adopted by some research organizations.

By utilizing such an approach, the management authority has been greatly enriched, but it has given nothing back to the people who actually gave the information in the first place, greatly reducing the transactional costs of the research.

When the fishermen give information, they exercise a sense of caution. They do not give out all the information. This paucity becomes visible when the management programmes are put in place. The fishermen then get to see how little the scientists actually know. They can even be said to be lying because they do not have a total understanding of the issue. The fishermen thus form a negative image about scientific work. But on occasions that please them, they participate fully, and then things can be mutually beneficial.

I will end by saying a word about the negotiation process. The participation of fishermen enables the management authority to apply for more funds in the name of a better management system and support for the artisanal sector. The existence of the artisanal sector is used to strengthen the management authority. In this case, the informal sector actually empowers the management authority.

Mike: But it is true that the fishermen have always been indispensable for research. There is a need to negotiate, though. What happened in Canada was that scientists became the chief scapegoats for the downfall of the cod fishery. But they blasted back, saying, "We work with models and if you give us bad information, how can we develop a model?" It is true that the fishermen do not give all the information; that's one feature of the business.

But now you hear a lot of talk about ‘traditional knowledge’. Scientists are now talking about the value of traditional knowledge. This is another potential trap. At least, for fishermen, it is terrain where they should tread cautiously. Why should scientists have the information just for the asking, anyway? Information remains an unnegotiated area. If the traditional knowledge of fishermen is invaluable, why should they give it away unconditionally?

Nalini: There are two aspects to what you are saying, Aliou. One is the importance given today to ‘people’s knowledge’. As social scientists realize that post-industrial society has not been able to provide the quality of life that it had promised, there are some schools of thought that profess the need to restudy traditional and customary practices. Some of the scientists are genuine in this search. There are others who jump on to the bandwagon, if you like, and do it because it is the fashionable mode. We should beware of these types.

But the other side of the coin is related to the question of intellectual property rights. This is another area that is being debated worldwide today. People’s traditional knowledge is being hijacked by the so-called scientific community, which then establishes rights over it and makes it a tradable commodity. Again, it is the victory of the richest and most powerful in the world, who then call the shots. New international treaties are being made to govern the rules of the game, and this is an inherent part of the new world order.

Aliou: You must be relative in saying that there are no stated demands on the terms of negotiation. I think two

periods have to be distinguished. Earlier, we had scientists go to the fishermen to do research, to collect data on catches, etc. This was a kind of regular, unbiased process, with no conventions. But, today, things are changing and we have to be careful about who appropriates the knowledge of the fishermen, and what role we, as supporters, play in encouraging this process.

We have been saying here that the inshore has to be valorized and this can be done only if the fishermen are able to retain for themselves the power they have as inshore fishermen. In Senegal, part of CNPS' involvement in research has been provoked by the urge to get more information and access to the research done. CNPS was influenced by many events and it claims a right to have, and to play, a role in the public institutions too.

I want to come back to the business of indigenous knowledge. It has been referred to in the conference statements of ICSF too. But, I think, we have to be cautious. Would merely making statements mean there are gains for the fishworker organizations? Traditional knowledge has empowered the management authority, and the researchers who use such concepts have won recognition. Today, as researchers try to be more integrated, they use terms that are supposed to be politically correct, as you say, Mike. Now you notice the whole thing in the United Nations Convention on Environment and Development (UNCED) Agenda 21 too. (*Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the UN system, governments*

and major groups in every area in which humans impact on the environment. Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the Statement of Principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests were adopted by more than 178 governments at UNCED, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3 to 14 June 1992 – Ed)

Nalini: I think Agenda 21 sought to defend the property rights of communities because the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was going to be negotiated. (*One of the key agreements adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where world leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for ‘sustainable development’, was the CBD. The CBD establishes three main goals: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources — Ed)* If only government representatives had their way, they would nullify numerous such rights. Agenda 21 was a lobbying tool or exercise that highlighted the areas for action in order to demand more justice from these new agreements.

Mike: The business of science and information clearly requires as much strategy and political consciousness as in any other domain. I was struck by what you were saying. The fishermen demand that their knowledge be taken into account, but it is not a negotiated demand, in the sense that in making the demand, they cannot be certain that their knowledge will be used in a management system that will benefit them. So it is problematic, the sharing of information with the scientists. On the other hand, if you withhold information and do not co-operate, what is your alternative? Is it to reject the use of science in managing the fishery altogether?

- Nalini:** You come to a very important point here, Mike. You ask whether we should refuse modern science, refuse modernity. I do not know whether I will go all the way and say we have to reject it, but we certainly have to question it and we have to accept that modern science has tremendous limitations. We, therefore, need to exercise much more caution, take more time and even probably blend several knowledge systems to find the best solutions. This requires an open mind and great humility and should certainly not be considered in commercial terms.
- Aliou:** But we have to come back to the fishermen. Why don't they reject collaboration with scientists? Mike, you seem to say that the fishermen don't succeed in having control over how their information is used. This makes me come back to the management authority. Though I would like to question the participatory approach, from the fishermen's point of view, it is some sort of achievement to be shoulder to shoulder with the scientists, sharing coffee and a simple meal, perhaps, and being together with them in the village setting.
- Mike:** Well, it's a big issue, that of the fishermen and their knowledge and their relation to the scientists, more so because it is never a negotiated relationship, since the scientists are not accountable to the fishermen. I know what you mean when the fishermen feel 'valorized' and flattered by associating with scientists. In our own fishery, we find a tremendous amount of spontaneous interest shown by the fishermen when scientists come to their field. That clearly demonstrates the fishermen's knowledge about the resource and their desire to improve their knowledge. It's always a

problematic area when the scientists try to fit all this into a model and the fishermen are left with the model, while the scientists have the last word.

But what I wanted to know was when you have a conscious process where fishermen refuse to collaborate with the scientists, what next? If they took a political stand to withhold information, where do they go from there? In our context, when we see this happen, it is not done with any sophisticated understanding. It generally gets displayed as mere fundamentalism, hostility to knowledge, hostility to planning, and so on. It is a problem area, especially when political work has to be done by the fishermen's organization.

Nalini: When talking about scientists, I think there is a marked difference, in general, between the scientists in India and in Canada. From what I have seen in your part of the world, I get the feeling that they are more hands-on people and that their training involves direct interaction or work in their areas of specialization. Their approach is both practical and theoretical. I think it is different in my country, where the technical people are the less hands-on type, and to be a scientist or engineer is a prestigious thing and requires that you do not dirty your hands. I would be surprised if many of our marine biologists have ever swum in the sea! Such scientists rarely think they have anything to learn from the 'simple' fishermen; their training makes them distant from the people and their issues.

Aliou: To place what you say in the Senegalese context, even participating in this limited way is already political. In our country, even if scientists come from the fishing

village—today many village people are educated—as scientists, they belong to another class and are not expected to dirty their hands. Unlike European and Canadian scientists, Senegalese scientists are automatically linked to, and dependent on, political power. In your country, Mike, they can remain independent of the political power. We will never see such a situation in Senegal. Also, former friends became distant once the CNPS became political itself. It is in this political context that we come back to the question of ‘recognition’ and the fact that CNPS thinks it is a big success to hold discussions with researchers and scientists.

Mike: You have to assume that it is true that in Canada scientists are more informal and more implicated in the fishery, but it is not that they are independent because they too are employed by government. What I was driving at earlier was that the fishermen clearly do search for knowledge about their fishery. They certainly have their own intuitive knowledge, which is not really explored, and that’s why you see this fantastic energy in their interaction with scientists. But this has nothing to do with the appropriation of knowledge and how the people’s science is being used.

Aliou: I think the fishermen have to relate constructively too. But, in Senegal, they are satisfied with the minimum because of the difficult political context. They now have to keep something for themselves, to hide something, because it is a question of status. The scientists, on the other hand, need to show that there is a difference between them and the fishermen. Thus,

they will resort to symbolic gestures, like bringing their laptops along to a meeting, even if they don't use them. I will say that in Africa, we can stop with the recipe of models. It is '*des demarche participative est plus un problem de comportement que un question du model, des nouveau model*' (The participative approach is more a behavioural problem than an issue of the model, the new model)'.

Mike: I am trying to get at another point and that is the potential of being anti-intellectual. We see that phenomenon among fishermen. It is the easiest thing in the world to mobilize fishermen against scientists. And then, what do you achieve? How do you manage the fishery? Do you not use science at all? Maybe you shouldn't!

Aliou: I am sure if you ask the majority of Senegalese fishermen, they will say, "No need for science; it is useless."

Mike: Well, even in Canada, they would say the same.

Aliou: I think you have a kind of complex situation, a constellation of factors like the stars. I think populism, even if it can lead to anti-intellectualism, is, at the same time, influenced by other factors in society, for example, religious fatalism and the failure of fisheries management plans. We cannot rely on the so-called scientific people, as there is a complex interaction among several factors.

Mike: I get stuck with this term populism all the time. There are all kinds of populism that needn't always take a negative form. I was talking about a particular trend, where you can indulge in mobilizing fishermen to be

anti-scientist, but you have nothing else to offer. Once you do this, you have to ask yourself whether you can actually have a management system in the fishery.

These are areas of such misunderstanding, precarious areas for fishworkers' organizations to be in. You can see that my own tendency is to want to see a lot of the fishery 'descientized', if you wish. After all, the project in Canada that was called scientific management of the fishery has been such a spectacular failure. How can we want to proceed with such a system?

I am myself in a dilemma. I'll give you an example from our lobster fishery. We get a kick in saying that of all the funds that go into fisheries management, the lobster fishery gets the least, and yet it is the country's biggest fishery in terms of value. So now the scientists are paying more attention to lobster and that is making me nervous. I have no confidence that they are going to make any productive contribution.

On the other hand, we all want to have a better scientific understanding of the resource. I think that is natural, but I wonder whether the trade-off in having more science is worth it at all. Here is a fishery that has emerged as the best fishery, with the least amount of science, and now science comes in and makes us nervous. Science is not independent of the management system, and management systems are not independent of the dominant powers in the country.

Aliou: Your concern can be valuable because you have nothing else to propose if you reject the existing

system. This means that the fishermen must have an appreciation of science. In Senegal, science has been considered useless. In that situation, by withdrawing, you have nothing to lose. So although our fishermen may have collaborated with scientists in some instances, it is not really difficult to withdraw. A lot of data about the collapse of the fishery came from outside sources, not from the scientists. This led to the Germans concluding that Senegal was, in fact, getting more money than it should for resources that didn't actually exist.

Nalini: I think, Mike, when you raise your question about the relevance of present-day science, you are actually seeking an alternative. I think the elements of your present system of managing the lobster fishery should form the basis of the alternative model of management.

Mike: Precisely. We are now seriously looking at this. The lobster fishery is the backbone of the Maritimes, and it has a management system that has worked much more dialectically with the managing authority, without scientists. That gives us a hint on how this experience can be extended into broader management areas. In Canada, we use the conceptual distinction of 'input controls' and 'output controls'. You can control a fishery in many more ways than just by quotas. Quotas are a system of 'output controls'. Our lobster fishery is controlled by 'input controls' or effort control. Those who have thought it through, do not think it is crazy to question the quota system. We can now picture how to build in effort controls even for groundfish that

migrates. Another element is the fact that lobster itself is sedentary and widely dispersed and so is easier to manage.

On the Will of Allah

Mike: We could probably start this discussion on ‘the will of Allah’ from an unusual angle. We have never mentioned even once that fishers are a different breed of people. I have always been struck by the fact that fishers are hunters and their anthropology is different. In our context, in Canada, they are in transition because things have changed. Their implements have changed and have become more sophisticated, with fishfinders, GPS, etc. But the culture of fishing that we used to be in touch with, can still be experienced.

But what do I know about the anthropology of fishing? Except that holding on to this tradition in today’s system is holding on to an anarchist system, compared to the rest of society. We have referred to the apparent fatalism in fishing culture, mainly arising from an inability to handle things like storms at sea, and so on. I think, in a simplistic way, any organization that wants to survive in the fishing culture can’t ignore this distinct aspect of fishing being a hunting type of culture. Any organization that forgets that aspect of fishing culture will not succeed. We must learn to leave a lot of room in our thinking for ironies, for occurrences that take place unexpectedly, and even for reversals. That’s what I mean when I say you have to leave room for ‘the will of Allah’.

But then we have all these other conditions for gains and victories. Such things are never consciously

determined by fishermen's organizations. My experience is that the actual scope for conscious action, rational acts of planning, and so on, are very few, and you are constantly waiting for conditions to develop. I'm surprised that when I sit with fishermen friends, we are always making predictions, trying to read the lines of the future in order to know where to go next. This brings us back to where we started in our long conversation—how and when we can make effective interventions in the fishery.

You have to wait for the right events and conditions to emerge before you do. The main work of an organizer in the MFU is to keep in touch with the base and build up a reading of the situation. Gilles Theriault—whose job I took over at the MFU – was a voluntarist and that zeal of voluntarism would drive the staff and keep everybody going. But it was not a generalized phenomenon. So you would find really burnt-out and frustrated people in situations that were not winnable, where the conditions permitted no action at all.

Nalini: What you seem to be referring to is that the objective conditions have to be ripe for anything to happen, the 'historical conjuncture', as I think it is called, but not the 'will of Allah'.

Aliou: Yes, what you have been mentioning sounds very objective and palpable for me. Some people have a monolithic and very structured way of looking at organizations—everything has to be in place and organized, meetings have to be regular, reports have to be presented, and so on. But I am glad you look at organizations differently. In Senegal, people need not

meet on any regular basis to keep an organization going. This kind of logic is not understood by those who are not close to reality. In my mind, fishermen take action only when they realize they have to. It is more related to *le justess* (correctness). It is somewhere between what is illogical, on the one hand, and thinking that is rational, on the other, somewhere in the middle. When you talked about 'the will of Allah', I was thinking about events that are not controllable in the life of the fishermen, which makes them fatalistic. I thought you were referring to that aspect, but I now appreciate how you have tried to develop a different consciousness.

Mike: I would like to clarify that I am using it in context. All it means is that there are so many vast areas beyond our control that you cannot change anything just by an act of will. That's why I associate it with dialectics. Everybody in this business of social action is prone to magical or omnipotent thinking, even fantasy thinking, if you like. These tendencies will always be related to a kind of voluntarism and the belief that you can actually do all this stuff, that, for example, you can change the nature of the State by an act of will or through sheer determination. But perhaps we should find a concept other than 'the will of Allah' because that may touch upon some people's sensitivities.

Nalini: Now that you have clarified what you said, I think I understand what you are trying to communicate. Initially, I too didn't expect to hear 'the will of Allah', although, as you say, being able to read events and feel the pulse is absolutely necessary to determine when and how an organization should grow and act.

I have a very different personal experience. My initial years in fisheries were spent in a Christian fishing community, Marianad, where people were very religious and the Church was the main force or power. I went there with my own values and understanding of poverty and, as I told you earlier, all that dramatically changed after I got deeper into the actual economics of the fishing community.

What I want to say here is that I was repeatedly struck by the way the people led their lives and took everything as it came, so to say. When they went out to sea, they never knew whether they would come back with anything. If they did, sometimes it would be just enough for themselves. If there was a surplus, it would be shared with neighbours; the children of the neighbours would just come over and sit to eat. Nothing needed to be said; it was taken for granted. This was based on the belief that “what is given is from God”, and that “God will take care of us”, and that “God knows what is best for us”.

Having been brought up as a Christian myself, I found these people lived more genuinely by what was written in the scriptures than I, who lived more by the logic that “god helps those who help themselves”. I realized that this factor of religion in their lives also meant that solidarity and sharing mattered so much in the community, and that this communitarian dimension was so necessary in sustaining the fishery.

Later, when we were faced with diminishing catches, we thought we had to try to understand better the need for resource management. I remember we organized what we called a ‘fish-bowl’ discussion. We had a group

of scientists discuss among themselves questions about the resource, in their own jargon, while the fishworkers observed.

In that process, one statistical biologist explained that the method of sampling is very representative of reality. He gave an analogy: if you want to see whether the rice in a pot is cooked, you take out a single grain and feel it; if that particular grain is cooked, you presume all the rice is cooked.

When the fishermen were given a chance to respond, they were quite adamant that fish stocks could not be assessed this way. Fish stocks were dynamic and such assessments were illogical. The scientist explained that models had been developed using a number of variables and factors that took into account the dynamic situation. But this did not seem to convince the fishermen, who couldn't fathom how a model could understand the sea! For a long time, they refused any discussion on 'management', saying that resource stocking is a cyclical phenomenon. Some also came up with fatalistic arguments.

I remember how the fishermen would get upset with me when I talked about fishing being a hunting activity, when I introduced some of them to the 'feminist analysis' of the fishery. I tried to explain it in contrast to agriculture, which was such a conscious act and which required a period of waiting for results. They did not want to associate their work with the act of hunting because they felt they were not as 'violent' as hunters, and that they used time and skill to trace and catch their fish. Moreover, the overriding belief was that the fish is 'God-given'.

I felt it was a well-integrated system, where people's beliefs and production systems resulted in social relations that they developed among themselves. Well, now, when things have changed dramatically in the fishery, both this consciousness and the sense of community and solidarity have also drastically changed. Today, the fishermen are led more by very individualistic goals. I wonder whether this kind of individualism in their work will obstruct the communitarian social process that may be required in what is today called 'community-based resource management'.

Aliou: Mike, when you talk about the 'will of God', I can understand that where religion plays an important role. What you say is applicable in Senegal. When people gather even for an official meeting, they have to first pray. God is always present and, at the same time, this deep religiosity also makes them accept other religions and they are thus tolerant. This is important because we can see how the fishermen are able to link the need to build their organizations with the fatalism that animates them.

There are so many accidents at sea, when people die, but it is considered a great thing for the fishermen, that they have been taken by God, and it is all the will of God. It is almost like a blessing. That's why, Nalini, Abay Fall, General Secretary of CNPS, did not mention the devastation by the cyclone. I have been thinking about that. You were so amazed that the fishermen did nothing when so many were killed at sea and so much equipment destroyed. Actually, Fall had not even mentioned to me all that had happened. He was telling

you only because you were asking, and he seemed to get worked up by your questions and your concern. But I'm sure he kept quiet with me because it was not something to report. The wind and the water have a great importance in people's lives and beliefs; floods are considered a punishment from God, a time to repent and change your lives. It is amazing that, during a flood, we can sometimes hear on the radio requests to people to go back to God and to repent.

Mike, you also make a link about fishermen who are in transition. I think there is need for revitalization. There are cases when fishermen lose the habit of being hunters and become more of technicians, using fishfinders and GPS, and so on. But technology actually makes fishermen greater hunters. In our case, the fishermen saw massive openings with the coming of outboard motors, when the resources in the inshore were becoming scarce. As with the ring-seines, there is a tendency to chase the fish, so the fishermen have to go farther out into the sea.

The idea about where the traditional fishing grounds are is also changing. That sense of property regarding certain fishing grounds is also disappearing in the language that the fishermen use. Now they have to go in search of fish. The fishermen put out to sea with two tanks of fuel.

Mike: You make me conscious of how easy it is to be simplistic in our comments. It is not so much to do with technology. I haven't had much contact with trawler captains. And, for a brief moment, you can't say that that man, the trawler captain, is not a

fisherman, even though he is operating a huge vessel. I am sure he too has so many of these characteristics we have been talking about.

But, Aliou, to digress a bit, you made me think of something. You said ‘the will of God’ and not ‘will of Allah’!

Nalini: I noticed that too and it rang a bell.

Mike: Aliou, you used ‘the will of God’ because that has no emotional connotation for you, just as using ‘the will of Allah’ has few emotional connotations for us Christians. If I said ‘the will of God’ in my context, people would think I was nuts. But both of you talked about the concept in a religious way, which is very different from the way I used it.

Nalini, you described Christianity in the communitarian spirit of your village. You were also aware that you were coming there with different values, but the way you concluded your analysis seemed to me rather weak. You seemed to be lamenting that the old solidarity has been broken, and that there is no longer any base for community management. There are a billion different ways to look at community management. In Nova Scotia, for instance, it means a particular group of fishermen sharing a quota.

Nalini: That’s not how we conceive of community in our country. For you, it is a closed shop—this many fishermen have access to ‘x’ quantity of fish.

Aliou: In the lobster case, is it community-based management? I am not sure. Yours is a system of community-based access rights.

- Mike:** I never use the word community-based management, except in one case where it is used to refer to a specific experiment and all that meant there was that a group of fishermen got a quota that they managed amongst themselves. Community quota is a misnomer, according to me.
- Nalini:** Then why all the big noise about community-based management systems?
- Mike:** Yeah, watch out for it. In theory, it would mean that instead of your management authority being national, you would have a locally-based management system.
- Aliou:** I realize, as we proceed, that we have to question this concept. We have to always consider the local context of the fishery. In Senegal, if we talk about community-based management, we should use the concept of territory because we are in a multispecies fishery and in a context where migration is highly developed. Since we do not have any system of management now and as we do not know the dynamics of the resource, isn't it dangerous to speak in terms of a community quota now?
- Mike:** Coming back to you, Nalini, we have to explore the concept of solidarity. Could you explain it a bit further?
- Nalini:** Basically, Mike, looking at the fishery like a closed shell—sharing what exists amongst those who fish today—is inconceivable in our context. The fishery offers a source of food to so many people in different ways. Earlier, the idea that fish was a gift from God made you share some fish if you caught more than enough; and you knew that if you didn't get any tomorrow, you could always get some from those who had.

So many people in the community—the old, the sick, the disabled—have an unstated right to the fish when it is landed. I remember Joseph, the ‘poor’ leprosy patient in Marianad village. One day I saw that some extension was being made to his house and I wondered how he managed to do that. The women told me, “Oh, you should see how much fish he takes on the beach.” When Joseph died, there was the usual big feast that takes place a few days after the funeral. Without ‘earning’ a penny all his life, Joseph had put aside money for this event, so that he could be buried with due honour.

Aliou: Let me tell you that the same thing happens in Senegal too. For instance, if in a poor fishing season a fisherman from St Louis has to come to Dakar for a meeting, he may borrow some money to pay for his transport. Before he returns home, he will make a trip to Hann, where there are a number of migrant fishermen from St Louis, and he will go to the beach at landing time. He can be sure to get his money back and maybe even a little extra from a fisherman who lands a good catch.

Nalini: Yes, in times of solidarity the surplus gets distributed. But these relationships have broken down now. So if a management system comes in and access is further restricted, where will all these people go? There is no social security programme of the State to fall back on.

Aliou: If the community’s solidarity gets dislocated, that may be related to other factors too. I think we have to identify the constraints that lead the fishermen to these positions. Perhaps sharing takes place in other ways. For instance, take the introduction of the outboard

motors in Senegal. It did lead to some changes and dislocation in family relationships, because the right that the family members earlier had to the revenue was restricted.

But what you say, Nalini, may give the impression that the fishermen are getting very individualistic. If you put it like that, vested interests will capitalize on it and press for greater privatization. I have never seen a fisherman becoming a capitalist.

Nalini: I am not saying that the fishermen will become capitalists. I do understand all the pressures they face, even for those whose operations manage to break even. But the mentality that seems to creep in under this pressure is the 'survival of the fittest' attitude. In the process, lots of people are left by the wayside. So, while the fishery may appear to be 'developing', there are lots of people who are dispossessed. This is more visible in some areas than in others. The other factor is that in some areas, the sector that processes bycatch, which goes into fishmeal, absorbs labour from the outside. People who are dispossessed from agriculture come to work for a pittance to sort and dry the bycatch.

Mike: What you are saying is that the community solidarity spirit, built into the sharing system, is breaking down. You are asking, what could now be the basis of solidarity? You can go further and ask whether fishermen can be organized at all, under these conditions.

You are talking about a community crisis generated by the combined dynamic of diminishing resources and the transformation in operations of the fishing vessels.

Under these conditions of a huge community crisis, what you mentioned earlier occurs—communalism grows in the community. Could you also say that this is part of the community crisis? And that the phenomenon of an ‘escape into politics’ takes place? I am not at all surprised that this happens under such circumstances because the conditions to organize sound real bad.

One of the biggest protests that we have had in recent years has been in Southwest Nova Scotia by fishermen in the Shelburn country area. The issue involved a combination of factors, mainly the introduction of groundfish quotas. This was being done on the basis of history; so if your history in the fishery was minor, you got a smaller share of the quota. Relatively poor people were thus being disenfranchised. So in what was otherwise a rich fishery, protests began. And where do those people who are disenfranchised go?

Nalini: So what will you do in a community of community-based management? What do you call community-based management?

Mike: That is what I am asking you because I don’t know. I am trying to learn from your experience. I have heard people talk about it theoretically and I do not know how one goes about it in reality.

Aliou: I would like to say a word about this community crisis that we are talking about. The transformation of ownership does have a negative impact on solidarity in the community. I recall that in the early 1990s, the Senegalese government released a sum of money to contain some social revolts from the university. This money enabled some university people to invest in

the fishery. These people came in with new ways of managing the enterprise by changing the sharing system. That led to heaps of problems. Other dependents, like the wives of fishermen, for instance, were left out.

In our context, solidarity is reciprocal. There was a reaction as the fishermen are exposed to risks, and since fishing is unpredictable, the idea of reciprocity is very deep among the people. The system of reciprocity is destroyed if the basis to share is destroyed. So I understand what you say, Nalini. In fact, because it is so important to maintain this aspect of reciprocity, a fisherman who is dispossessed of his craft, will agree to work as captain and not as a crew member on the *pirogus* of investors from outside. In this way, he is still in control. He maintains his social status and remains within the system of reciprocity and in this way, a sort of security net is maintained.

Mike: Wait a minute there. I am still trying to understand Nalini, what is possible under the conditions you mention. If there is no intervention of some sort, the fishermen will continue to diminish the resource.

Nalini: Yes, that's right, Mike. In fact, in Kerala in India, I think there has been no real revolt in the fishing community although these safety nets have crumbled, because there has been an inflow of money from the oil-rich Gulf or Middle East countries. People have gone and made some money there, and remittances into Kerala are high. But if that source dries up, I wonder what will happen.

Aliou: It is difficult for me to understand the stratified social classes built up in the artisanal fishery.

Nalini: Aliou, you should see some of our fishing areas. I have seen the Gujarat fishery, for instance, evolve over the last 23 years. I had gone there first because their artisanal fishermen had ‘successfully’ made the transition to the outboard motors, when our fishermen in the South had rejected them. I was really impressed to see the whole community buzzing with life at one big village in Veraval. Fishermen fitted motors on to their small crafts and zoomed off to fish. Others would be returning from fishing trips to land huge catches of good-value fish, unmount the outboard motors, put them on their shoulders and walk off home. That was really impressive. There was also one section of artisanal fishermen who had much larger sized boats with large gill-nets. Their boats had inboard motors and they went on longer fishing voyages and they too landed huge quantities of fish.

But when I went back later, these gill-net boats had begun to change to medium-sized trawls like we had in the South. That spelt doom in my eyes. The fishermen were talking about a landing centre being developed, and several fish processing plants were coming up.

When I was there again in 1994, I spent a rather long time in the area. I couldn’t believe what I saw in that old fishing village, which had been so vibrant on my first visit. It was absolutely dead. Men and women were sitting idle on the beach. The small craft were lying overturned and there were just a couple that had ventured out and people were waiting to see what they came back with. It was depressing to hear the women talk about how the fishery had been destroyed after

the trawlers were introduced. Since they had their OBMs, they hadn't taken the subsidies offered then to buy trawlers, even if they understood that the trawl was not an ideal gear. Now, they had nothing and would sometimes go to the landing centre to look for wage work. Some of the small boats also worked as offloading craft for the trawlers. That was how the fisherfolk of Veraval earned their living now.

I can tell you heaps of stories like this. Another situation that has made a marked impression on me is what I saw happen over some years in the transient winter fishery of West Bengal. In the winter fishery, fixed bag-nets are used. They are fixed in the water for the duration of fishing. These fishing operations are huge, with one fisherman hiring a crew for the fishing season and setting up a 'transient' establishment at the landing area. This establishment includes living quarters for the crew—about 25 of them—a huge area to store the fish that is dried, and a drying area that is fenced off. All the drying is done by women and the poorer men, who also move to the area with bag and baggage during the season. Earlier, these families came from other fishing areas, but, over time, they are coming increasingly from inland villages, where there is no other agricultural work. The incomes got during this transient winter fishery season actually kept the people going. Yet, as the labour supply increased, wages fell and, over time, the catches began falling too.

On one visit, I noticed a huge construction coming up near one such transient winter fishery area. On enquiring, I found out that it was a fish drying plant, a quasi-government venture. I was shocked because this

would displace the poor women who came to dry fish. The fishermen's union used that as an occasion to organize the women in the area and they succeeded in seeing that the project did not take off.

So you really have to be watchful of what happens in an area, because if you are too late, there is no way of going back.

Mike: I would really like our fishermen to hear all these stories; they certainly are depressing. The dilemma the fishworker organizations face in Canada is how to recover fish stocks. You cannot de-mechanize the boats, but how will you recover the stocks?

Aliou: I don't think the big problem is the recovery of the stocks, but recovering what has been lost, the people who have been expropriated.

Mike: I think you are dreaming. What other actions by fishermen can you have? Is the State going to be able to handle that kind of situation? What will community mean in such a situation? I can only see that the interest of the community should be to recover the stocks for the community.

Aliou: Even if I'm dreaming, let me ask you a question. Are you going to recover the resource only for those who have the means to exploit them now? What about those who have already been dropped out?

Mike: That's an excellent point and I can begin to theorize idealistically, if you like. You can try to contain the fishing fleet that has developed and stabilize it in terms of capacity. Then the rest of the fishermen can benefit from recovery measures. I can't say it'll work easily,

because we are always struggling with things like this ourselves. But what's the alternative?

Aliou: My only answer is that I cannot compare because I do not know the Indian fishery well enough.

Mike: Well, I say all this with great hesitation because at home, that is what we call micro-management. And it's a dog's breakfast. But the basis of all we do is the conviction that the stocks will recover.

Aliou: What I am saying is that you cannot handle this issue on a micro-basis.

Nalini: So now do you understand what we are up against in our country? Can you understand better why the NFF has grown to be a social movement union?

On Self-financing as a Means of Sustainability

Mike: I think the ambition behind the model of the MFU was to be a membership-based organization that paid its own way, collecting dues from members. The only way you can be independent is when the members pay for the organization. But, in the experience of the Maritimes, it was never possible to finance the organization from membership dues until we got the necessary legislation.

Nowhere else in the Maritimes, outside New Brunswick, do members maintain a broad-based organization. They have no problem taking up single issues that affect them locally. Fishermen will pay unlimited amounts for a lawyer on a specific issue; there is no problem there. The midshore fleets thus have highly professional organizations, all of which finance themselves. Ironically, if you look closely, all

expenses are charged to the enterprise—the fees come off the running expenses of the boat, and the crew members, in most cases, are being taxed without being represented. So what can you conclude when you talk of broad-based organizations?

In our context, if you have to depend only on voluntary contributions, it is difficult to sustain an organization. It is a dilemma that runs right through the North Atlantic trade union movement. The trade unions demand that union dues be deducted at source from the worker's pay. After a while, the worker forgets why the union exists and begins to see his dues as a tax.

In the MFU, over the first 10-12 years of its existence, enormous energies and time were spent to fight for legislation that would allow for self-financing. So, one of the political actions of a broad-based organization involves winning concessions from the government to provide enabling legislation to be self-financing. It is easier to do this in the Canadian context because the fish buyer is obligated to make other deductions like unemployment insurance premiums and pension plan contributions. So there is an administrative system in place already.

Nalini: What you are saying, Mike, is that earlier, the MFU had broader concerns, and now, with the shrinking of those concerns, the organization has shrunk in scope too. At a particular point, you made a choice, and, in retrospect, it was the correct choice and it paid off, also because of other related factors like the lobster being a sedentary resource. So the MFU stabilized and is now secure.

But what will happen if, at this stage, you were to leave the organization and be replaced by a person without similar social consciousness, say, someone who is more of a technocrat? That will be the death-knell of the MFU. What should prevent that from happening?

Mike: You should never underestimate the anarchic character of the fishermen. This enabling legislation could be overturned in a matter of hours. We can be wiped out just like that. You are right about the technocrat type, but if conditions do change, the fishermen can also get rid of the technocrat types just like that too.

In terms of the organization, getting recognition has to take into account self-financing. If it doesn't, will it end up relying on supporters who draw their support from any source, say, from the Green Party or any old NGO?

Well, this makes me think of something else related to supporters. If you have no supporters, the organization actually doesn't need much money. Fishermen always fall into the trap of saying they can manage without staff as they would prefer their organization remains local so that they have control over it and can take up only local issues. We used to say that organizing fishermen is a bit like having a farm in the Brazilian rain forest and going away for the weekend and, on your return, realizing that the forest has grown over the farm. It is that fragile when you depend on voluntary support.

And then there are people who would say, "So what if the organization disappears? Fishermen have their own

ways of organizing when the need arises.” Well, you can’t discount that position and it is not one that we should take lightly. But we can ask, in return, whether the fishermen of the Maritimes would have been in as good a position without the MFU?

But let’s hear from you, Aliou.

Aliou: I too am concerned about the question of autonomy because of the complexities that money linkages bring about. But you make me conscious of several things.

I would like to indicate how complex it is to make an organization independent, and how complex is the relationship between a person’s professional and social obligations. People have all kinds of social obligations, to individuals, to religious leaders, and so on. Then there are complex relations between the organization and the State. The State often uses the organization to perpetuate its own ideas and to control it. This is not new. You know how during the two World Wars the traditional chiefs and religious leaders collaborated in conscripting people to go to war for the Europeans because the State could not do it directly.

Coming to what you have been saying, you are making a positive link between gaining recognition and being independent. I can see this as negative too. If you look at the CNPS, it is in search of recognition from the Senegalese government. At the same time, it has also gone to the international level to get recognition there. NGOs can lose their autonomy and gradually see a build-up of dependency.

Nalini: What happens next is that the NGO uses this relationship for its own gains.

Aliou: Of course. The other point is that it is difficult, in the context of Senegal, to collect dues for the organization. We have to raise other funds too, just like in India. These contributions come in so many different ways. At the local level, lots of voluntary contributions are made at local meetings, when people have to be hosted. The fishermen mobilize resources locally to make all this possible. They look on it as a social obligation, even if they have to borrow some money for the contribution.

The fishermen find it more difficult to finance a structure at the national level. This may also be due to the bad experience they had with the co-operative regime, when they got badly cheated. Therefore, they resist a national organization whose headquarters are away from the village.

The autonomy of the organization hasn't to do with money but with factors concerning power and autonomy from religion and State. It is also difficult to know whether the fishworkers we work with are as concerned as the supporters about such things as the sustainability of the organization. In my experience, these issues have never been raised within the organization; they have come from outside or from some ideological thinkers. One wonders whether sustainability is a priority for the fishermen.

One thing positive in what you have said, Mike, is that, as far as the organization is concerned, sustaining the resource will help to stabilize it.

Mike: What Aliou has said makes a lot of sense. There is the whole business of voluntary spirit that exists in the early stages of an organization. That never gets

properly recorded. In the MFU too, the fishermen have made enormous contributions. Whatever they do for the organization is at the cost of their fishing time. They too have hosted people endlessly.

In a sense, the voluntary spirit is the hard core of the organization in its early stages. That is lost when you reach a point of self-financing. Then, the fishermen who earlier did things voluntarily will ask for per diems, sitting fees, and so on.

Nalini: I feel this is where women are different. They continue to give freely of their time under very difficult circumstances. Very rarely do they ask for sitting fees, whereas most men see it as a right. This is because women are used to doing so much without counting the cost.

Mike: Well, we have been reflecting on the whole lives of organizations. We are trying to relativize and put nuances to what fishermen's organizations, in fact, achieve. What attracts some of us to work in fisheries is the fact that the ocean itself is so anarchic. The best plans of men and mice are constantly being undermined and reversed for reasons that you cannot predict.

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Three Essays

I

An Essay on the Maritime Fishermen's Union

by **Michael Belliveau**

Introduction

Two recent events have motivated me to return to a partially constructed essay on the MFU. The first was a nasty conflict that erupted this summer at the mouth of the famous Miramichi River in eastern New Brunswick. The conflict was precipitated by a unilateral decision of a band of native Mi'kmaq at Burnt Church to fish lobster 'out of season'.

The second event was the recent breakdown of the Constitutional Assembly of the WFF in Loctudy, France. The World Forum was the first attempt ever of small-scale fishermen and fishworkers to formally associate at a global level. After four days of debate and workshops directed to adopting a constitution, half the delegates walked out to form a second forum. The leader of the walkout is said to have stated that the split was inevitable and that he was satisfied to be free from the 'harvesters' to get on with his 'fishworker' concerns. (*See Editor's note on page 281 – Ed*)

An MFU type of organization is an easy mark for persons who build their fight around identity or race or numbers. Our members could be termed 'harvesters', although I always knew them as inshore fishermen. Our fishermen are mostly male, and on average are 47 years of age. Most of the crew members on our inshore boats are not in the MFU.

Burnt Church native people showed little or no grasp of the role the MFU was playing in this summer's dispute. Similarly, the Afro-Asian bloc that walked out at Loctudy appeared to be oblivious to the nature of our type of organization. As a result, I have an added motivation to write about the MFU.

On the face of it and from a 'world' perspective, the MFU could be seen as passé. After all, our members are overwhelmingly male, inshore captain/owners (as distinct from crew members). They are largely Caucasian and middle-aged. In short, they could be dispensed of as 'harvesters', and presumably less environmentally friendly because of that designation.

But I am not buying this kind of reductionism. In the present 'globalizing' context, I believe, more than ever, in the MFU type of organization that has been honed from 20 years of struggle organizing inshore fishermen, that retains a broad

membership base among inshore fishermen, that functions through a democratic structure and that maintains a progressive approach to the fishery and social matters. I believe the survival and development of our type of organization is even more important.

At the outset, I refer the reader to *A Word to Say*, a readable history of the MFU written in the late 1980s. This work by Sue Calhoun gives a well-documented background to the organization that is the subject of my personal reflections below. My longtime colleague in the MFU, Réginald Comeau, began organizing the fishermen on New Brunswick's Acadian Peninsula back in 1972. Five years later, the MFU was finally launched in the famous fishing village of Baie-Ste-Anne. Even in the 1970s, most of the fishing villages in this region were 'dirt poor', but Canada's post-war boom economy was inevitably trickling down even to its remote fishing villages.

Comeau himself grew up in the tiny fishing community of Val Comeau. His father eked out a living from the sea and the woods; salted herring and potatoes were the staple diet at the family supper. Comeau was the first generation of Acadians to go to university in significant numbers, but, like many of his student associates, he rejected the pull of the metropolis to return to his people. The Réginald Comeaus of this world make a story that runs through virtually all working-class movements.

I have no precise definition of the 'working class', but I count the fishermen of the MFU in this category, recognizing that the intellectuals around our organization used to always have some trouble figuring out how the fishermen fit into a sociological categorization. In the early days of organizing, we used to talk of them as 'dependent contractors' or 'tradesmen'; those opposing unionization of fishermen would say they were

‘independent businessmen’. Others talk of fishermen as ‘primary producers’, while yet others see them in social anthropology terms as ‘hunters’ and ‘gatherers’.

Truthfully, my own motivation for joining the MFU’s organizing work back in 1981 was at least partially to come to terms with what I believed to be a worldwide challenge. In my vague notions, I saw inshore fishermen as primary producers, or ‘peasants’, if you like. From this perspective, inshore fishermen were in the sector where most of the world’s population was. The challenge was to see whether this sector—the peasant farmer, the primary producer, the inshore fishermen—could organize effectively to defend and create a long-term future for this ‘way of life’.

So, I came to the MFU with a rather intellectual conception of the challenge. Not so for a person like Comeau, who knew the straightforward hardship of fishermen. Even the social security systems we now know in the Canadian fishery were barely functioning in 1972.

Interpreting the organizing experience of the MFU is fraught with ambiguities and ironies, and whether I have reached any conclusions about my original question will have to await the unravelling of this essay.

Fisheries in Canada

For the international reader, I should provide a little more detail about the Canadian situation. Canada has a vast continental shelf on its Atlantic seaboard. It ranges from Davis Inlet in the Arctic to George’s Bank, a stone’s throw from the Boston States, as they are still called by Maritimers. In Canada, ‘Maritimers’ are the people who live in the eastern provinces of Canada (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island or PEI and Nova Scotia). Newfoundland is separated from the Maritimes by the Gulf of

St Lawrence. It has a largely separate history from the Maritimes, having joined Canada only in 1949. In Newfoundland can be found half the fishery of Canada's Atlantic coast. The Maritimes have most of the rest of the fishery, while Quebec would have five per cent.

It is the fishermen of the Maritimes—the inshore small-scale fishermen—that the MFU set out to organize. The average inshore fishing vessel is approximately 12 m long and, on average, there are 2.5 fishermen to a boat. So, you find about 25,000 inshore fishermen in the Maritimes. Due to weather conditions (a sizeable portion of the Maritimes is frozen in for four to five months a year), most inshore fishermen would actually be at sea for 60 to 100 days a year. The fishery is seasonal and provides incomes that vary from place to place. The fishermen who hold licences are the owners of their own vessels, and they tend to have yearly incomes on par with most working Canadians, while the crew members or helpers vary considerably in the amount of fishing they get. Some work on a share basis in the pelagic and groundfish fishery; others are on a straight weekly wage.

Newfoundland is known worldwide for its cod fishery that has since been devastated. The Maritimes has always had a more diversified fishery, but, in recent years, the lobster fishery, which is almost entirely inshore (that is, in waters of 5-15 m in depth), produces over 60 per cent of the value of the inshore fleet's landings. The inshore fishermen in the Maritimes catch approximately Can\$450 million worth of landings per year.

All fishing communities have wharves where you find anywhere from 20 to 120 inshore vessels. While Newfoundland still has many remote outports, most fishing communities in the Maritimes are well connected by road to urban centres. Nevertheless, it is fish that makes them work.

Most fish caught by our fishermen—90 per cent—goes to the export market. The single largest centre for Canada's fish exports is Boston, where it is further distributed throughout the US. Japan is an important market for our herring roe, tuna, snow crab and lobster, and the EU buys up to 25 per cent of our exports.

Subsistence fishing has been practised by native peoples in eastern Canada for thousands of years. The commercial fishery, predominantly cod, was spawned by Europe in the 1500s. Canada's east coast fishing grounds have been the target of countless fishing nations, especially after World War II. These nationals included not only the Spaniards and Portuguese but also the Soviets, the Japanese, the French, the Americans, the Faroese, the Dutch, the Germans, the East Bloc and even the Cubans. This fishing frenzy culminated in over 800,000 tonnes of cod being captured in Canadian waters in 1968. In 1987, Canada claimed jurisdiction over its 200-mile EEZ and, since then, there has been an almost total Canadianization of the fishery—small comfort for the decimated cod fishery, where much of the original damage was done by international fleets in the 1950s and 1960s.

Canada is generally considered an industrialized Western nation. As such, the size of its inshore fishery is an anomaly in the Western context. The inshore supports hundreds of fishing villages, and lands as much as 70 per cent of the country's fish catch, especially since the virtual elimination of the offshore cod, flounder and ocean perch fisheries. Even the herring fishery that was heading toward total industrialization with the advent of a large purse-seine fleet in the 1960s is still 50 per cent made up of inshore small gillnet fishermen. (The MFU played an instrumental role in the reversal of a seiner-dominated fishery to an inshore fishery in the Gulf of St Lawrence, to which I will come back later).

Réginald Comeau and others began organizing on the Acadian Peninsula, the heartland of the Acadian people. Acadians have a distinct history in Canada. Having settled in Nova Scotia in the 1620s from France, they are some of the original European families to settle in North America. They flourished as small farmers until the French-English wars of the 1750s. In 1753, they were victims of 'ethnic cleansing' by the British, who controlled the colony. They were violently evicted from their lands by British troops and deported mainly to the US and the Caribbean. Many escaped by river and forests to coastlands on the Gulf of St Lawrence. The Acadian Peninsula juts out into the Gulf and is a major fishing centre to this day.

When Comeau started organizing, lobster catches were a quarter of present-day landings.. The rich herring schools were rapidly shrinking under heavy fishing pressure from the recently arrived purse-seine fleet. The cod landings were down to 10 per cent of the previous decade, and prices of fish were generally depressed. Nova Scotia fishermen had been through a very difficult strike in Canso, which highlighted the general plight of fishermen, and Newfoundland fishermen were organizing into a union. In general, there was a fishermen's movement driven by harsh working conditions in the industrial sector, incessant incursions on inshore fishing grounds by industrial fleets (national and international), and an apparent trend towards concentration among fish buyers and processors.

The Canadian fishery was bleak in the early 1970s. Some say conditions have to get bad for fishermen to organize, but this cliché is not demonstrably true. I have worked on the notion that people organize to recover their rightful share of power when there is a sense of possibility. In the 1970s, cod was almost as low as the moratorium levels of the 1990s, but there was recruitment (*number or percentage of fish that survive from birth to a specific*

age or size – Ed); there were strong year classes about to enter the commercial fishery (*A year class is fish of a given species spawned or hatched in a given year; a three-year-old fish caught in 1998 would be a member of the 1995 class – Ed*). There was also public money directed to the fishery for loan boards, price support and unemployment insurance, and licence buy-back programmes. And, perhaps most significantly, the federal government was preparing to assume control and jurisdiction over the continental shelf. This created new optimism and expectations. Along with the national recovery of jurisdiction also came the expectation that the fishery could be managed under a sophisticated regulatory regime of limited-entry licensing, stock assessment and catch limits.

A Fledgling Union

The changing regime in Canada's fishery management coincided with the ambitious organizing drive of the fledgling MFU from 1977 to 1984. Reginald Comeau claims he had no idea of launching a union, let alone an organizing drive across the Maritimes, when he started a small association of fishermen in places like Caraquet, Pigeon Hill and Val Comeau. "It just started to mushroom," he says. By 1978, Acadian fishermen all along New Brunswick's Gulf of St Lawrence shore were coming into the MFU. Comeau had no ambitions for a movement. He was after practical results for the local fishermen. "It was the outsiders that started seeing it as a movement—the intellectuals and the militants," he recalls.

In any case, the poorly financed MFU quickly moved to sign up inshore fishermen in the neighboring Maritime provinces of PEI and Nova Scotia. Key fishermen pitched in for these organizing drives, as did university professors and young educated professionals willing to work for peanuts. Locals of the MFU got formed quickly in major inshore fishing areas, where

fishermen came in by the hundreds. (*In North American usage, a local is a branch or chapter of a trade union – Ed*) There were marches and protests. Highways were blocked with fish, and huge seiners were stopped from landing their fish catches. Politicians were cornered and fisheries offices occupied. It was a period of energy and militancy, and the ambition was to unionize inshore fishermen across hundreds of harbours and thousand of miles of coastline.

This early burst of energy spanned a period of three, at most, four years. It was based on the general assumption that thousands of fishermen were conscious of being inshore fishermen, that the inshore was under threat from the new national fleet of offshore vessels and that the markets were increasingly being dominated by vertically integrated fishing corporations, which were gaining control of smaller companies and having an impact on local co-operatives.

So, in the first instance, the MFU organized on practical bread-and-butter issues relating to access to the resource and markets, but the model for organization that the MFU embraced and pursued was derived from the trade union movement. Organizing inshore fishermen did not have a legislative context of making formal application under a trade union act for certification to represent inshore fishermen for the purpose of collective bargaining with buyers. So, one of the central mobilizing tools that the MFU used was the demand for appropriate provincial legislation that would allow us not only to sign up members but to be formally certified as the representative of the inshore fishermen and to have a procedural way by which the buyers would be obligated to commence bargaining with the MFU in good faith.

The MFU wanted to have inshore fishermen recognized as workers with the same rights to collective bargaining as other

Canadian workers. In the minds of the MFU organizers, an important by-product of collective bargaining legislation is to have a dues check-off system. In Canada, the trade union movement won an important victory in the 1940s when Justice Ivan Rand recognized that all workers in a given certified bargaining unit should be obligated to pay the equivalent of union dues, even if they were not members of the union. This became known as the Rand Formula and its rationale is simple: if the majority of the workers in a collective bargaining unit have voted for union representation and they are successful in negotiating a collective agreement, then all workers benefit from the collective agreement and so should be obligated to pay dues, even if they refuse to become members of the union.

Again, for the sake of the international reader, I must point out that Canada has federal and provincial jurisdictions; the ocean fisheries are under federal jurisdiction, but the subject of labour relations is generally under provincial jurisdiction. So, the MFU, with its ambition to organize inshore fishermen across the Maritimes (meaning the provinces of New Brunswick, PEI and Nova Scotia), had to seek collective bargaining type legislation in three different provincial jurisdictions.

By the late fall of 1981, when I began working with the union in the province of Nova Scotia, the MFU had been successful in having the province of New Brunswick agree to recognize inshore fishermen's right to collective bargaining and were in the process of implementing appropriate legislation.

Again, I refer the interested reader to Sue Calhoun's book, *A Word to Say*, for details of this organizing period. What I am attempting here is a subjective reflection, based on my own association with the MFU, which began in November of 1981. The situation of the MFU in the province of Nova Scotia at that time was greatly different from that in the neighbouring

province of New Brunswick. Indeed, I was coming into a situation where the early enthusiasm, protests and militancy already had an air of defeat about them. The substantial numbers of fishermen who had rallied to the call for one united inshore fishermen's organization, who had directed their protests at both the federal fisheries management authority (the DFO) and the provincial government in Halifax, who had mobilized to get markets for their herring and squid, who had blockaded highways and occupied government buildings, had little to show for their actions, in terms of tightly structured union locals, with regular dues-paying members and hired staff. Their last hope was a collective bargaining draft bill that was to be enacted in early 1982, but the provincial cabinet in Halifax, Nova Scotia, slammed the door on this type of legislation for inshore fishermen shortly after I arrived.

So, when I started travelling to the fishing villages and meeting with fishermen on the wharves and in the bait sheds, I couldn't help but remember an encounter I had had with a social animator from the Dominican Republic. She described how an organizing team would go to different communities to get things moving; when it encountered a community that had had a recent failure in organizing, the team moved on to the next village. The team assumed that it would take another generation to recover from that kind of failure.

So, there I was, within a couple of months of joining the MFU, beginning to wonder whether the conditions still existed to build up the MFU. The Nova Scotia initiative appeared to be going downward at the same time as the New Brunswick initiative appeared to be winning. If we talk about an organization having a centre and a periphery, Nova Scotia was the MFU's periphery, especially with respect to inshore fishermen along the long shoreline that borders the Atlantic ocean (as distinct from

the much smaller shoreline that bordered the Gulf of St Lawrence). The herring fishery, for example, was central to the preoccupations of the MFU's Acadian fishermen in New Brunswick, but was of marginal interest to most inshore fishermen in the area of Nova Scotia, where the MFU was failing. Even the lobster fishery in Nova Scotia was largely different on the Atlantic coast than within the Gulf of St Lawrence. Nova Scotia fishermen generally sold their lobsters into the fresh market trade centred in Boston, whereas the New Brunswick Acadians were dependent on the processing sector that used the smaller Gulf lobster that were packed as various frozen products. Halifax and Nova Scotia were also centres for fishing companies, which were generally antagonistic to the interests of inshore fishermen, especially in the groundfish sector (cod, haddock, pollack, etc.). But the fisheries politics of Nova Scotia was also greatly influenced by the large numbers of inshore and near-shore operations in the region known as Southwest Nova Scotia. This region shared with Massachusetts fishermen the famous and resource-rich George's Bank. Despite there being large numbers of fishermen in Southwest Nova Scotia, the MFU had not been able to expand its organizing work into this area.

Shifting Gear in Nova Scotia

So, by the summer of 1982, we were faced with a dilemma: there were no prospects for winning legislation in Nova Scotia, and two of the three locals in the province were failing. MFU's governing council endorsed our proposal to look longer term and to begin exploratory work in the Southwest Nova Scotia region, while continuing to service locals at the other end of the province. At the same time, we abandoned the general demand for collective bargaining rights. Not only was there little interest from the fishermen in the southwest region in bargaining rights, the specific provincial government in Halifax was generally

anti-union. It was gradually eroding the trade union rights that Nova Scotia workers had won and, in the fall of 1979, had passed one of the most regressive trade union act amendments since the World War II. The amendment effectively broke the unionizing drive of the United Rubber Workers, who had gained support among workers at the Granton Nova Scotia plant of Michelin Tire.

The new organizing plan for Nova Scotia not only abandoned the specific demand for trade union-type legislation, but it also dropped much of the rhetoric associated with such a demand. Still, inshore fishermen were faced with issues of resource access and management that were under federal jurisdiction, and there were always issues related to market access and price. Our plan was to shift gear in terms of organizing rhetoric and emphasizing inshore fishermen as workers. There were certainly lots of other reasons for fishermen to unite. The new direction for organizing in Nova Scotia simply put emphasis on other aspects of the ambivalent nature of the inshore fishery. On the one hand, it was expected that inshore fishermen would be attracted to a union approach insofar as they know themselves to be working people. On the other hand, they are also independent operators and, as such, their problems relate more to the regulatory authority (DFO) and the market place.

The decision to expand the organizing efforts of the MFU into the rich fishing territory of Southwest Nova Scotia highlighted what had always been present in the MFU but was less evident because of the ideology of unionizing; that is, we are, first and foremost, a primary producer organization that derives much of its structure from the trade union model, but which carries out its practical work much like an association. In any case, contrary to most people's predictions, we gradually built up a very influential MFU local in the Southwest Nova Scotia region, a region long

known for its antagonism towards unions and where, in many villages, supporting unions was almost like going against religion. I believe that the work in Nova Scotia through the 1980s is a little bit of the hidden history of the MFU. People who have a longer association with the MFU in the Acadian context would not immediately see or believe that the work in Nova Scotia through this period ended up being a key factor in the survival of the MFU.

Today, the base of the MFU is still found along the Acadian shore of New Brunswick, which borders on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where the MFU was founded. As a surviving broad-based organization of inshore fishermen, the MFU has never been unidimensional, even if the dominant rhetoric of its formative years would make it appear that way. Organizing inshore fishermen is a multidimensional project, reflecting the ambivalent and complex nature of the independent operator or primary producer. Another way to put it might be to say that the MFU is a hybrid organization; it is not a union in the sense that trade unions are known in this country. The organizing efforts in the region of Southwest Nova Scotia made the hybrid nature of the MFU more evident.

The southwest region is not only culturally different, but the fishery itself is quite distinct from that of the Acadian inshore fishery of New Brunswick. Nevertheless, it was the Acadian aspect of the MFU that actually opened the door to the development of a dynamic local in Southwest Nova Scotia. The local (MFU Local 9) was founded in an area called the French shore on Baie-Ste-Anne. The first members of the local were also Acadians and their first issues were actually centred on the herring fishery on Trinity Ledge, a fishery dominated by the purse-seine fleet that not only landed most of the fish but also controlled the markets. The MFU was a natural choice for fishermen in this

specific area, given their common Acadian background and their interest in recovering some control of the herring fishery from the seiners.

The new local benefited from the brilliant work of Sandy Siegel, who joined the MFU in Nova Scotia in 1983 as an education officer, having left a successful career as a university professor. The competence of this staff person cannot be underestimated in attempting to analyze the success of the MFU in building inroads in this region.

One of the first challenges of the new local was to wrest back control of the over-the-side sales programme that was being run by the seiner co-operative. This was a period when the Canadian government authorized Russian trawlers to fish a limited quota of groundfish in Canadian waters in return for the freezer trawlers purchasing herring. By negotiating their own over-the-side sales, the new local not only improved market access for inshore fishermen but also gave them the base to build a voice around herring management issues, especially in terms of pushing back the large herring seiners from their traditional inshore grounds on Trinity Ledge. The competence and success of MFU Local 9 did not go unnoticed among other fishermen in the region, and, over the next three years, the MFU developed as a major force in the fishery of the region. It tackled issues of groundfish quotas; it developed its own marketing initiatives in the Boston market; and it was also representing fishermen on lobster issues in the single largest lobster zone in the country. MFU's work was instrumental in defeating the questionable issue of offshore lobster licences that would have expanded the holdings of the largest lobster company and brought company boats into the owner-operated lobster fishery. In this same period, the local also played a big role in having a ban imposed on oil exploration on George's Bank.

In general, MFU's long-term organizing plan for Nova Scotia was working. Not only did we expand into Southwest Nova Scotia but the other two locals were also establishing a stronger foothold in the fisheries of Cape Breton and the Gulf of St Lawrence region of Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia locals were voluntary locals, in the sense that they had no legislative context that provided for formal recognition and dues deductions. Under these conditions, as an organizer, you always had the sense of working like a farmer in the Brazilian rain forest; if you left the farm unattended for a weekend, you would come back to find it overgrown again. Still, the organization was bigger than any given local and this is an essential feature of the MFU; we are what we call broadbased. This is what distinguishes the MFU from a fishermen's association. Associations are usually based in one or two harbours, or they are often species-specific and formed around one issue. Associations had to organize around one strong fisherman, and, while they often survive in name for years, they usually come and go with the issue. The MFU definitely has associational features, especially in the locals that depend on voluntary dues payments, but it has also demonstrated a structure that has survived time, geography and a diversity of issues. In this way, it carries the potential of being a political force.

The decade of the 1980s must be considered the heyday of modern Canadian fisheries. Fish stocks were growing and international markets were relatively strong up to 1987-88. All major fisheries were performing, both in terms of landings and (apparently) management systems, as well as in terms of markets and prices. The backdrop to the success was the often unnoticed lobster fishery, where catches generally continued to climb during the 1980s. (Some analysts claim that the expanded landings in this fishery came from increased capacity, fishing technology and so on. This cannot be discounted altogether, but there is little

doubt that catch per unit of effort was expanding. In other words, the resource itself was growing.) The dominant model in fisheries management was derived from the groundfish sector, where after the declaration of the 200-mile EEZ in 1977, the DFO developed an increasingly complex management regime based on quotas, stock assessments, sector limitations, capacity restrictions and so on. Generally, the fishing industry co-operated in the development of this management system and, until 1988, most senior government officials and the corporate sector were priding themselves on having a worldclass management model, and favourably comparing their approach with that of the US, which was taking a different approach. But things changed for the MFU at the end of this period, as they changed for fisheries in general worldwide.

At the same time as the Nova Scotia component of the MFU abandoned its call for union-type legislation, the Acadian fishermen in New Brunswick were implementing their newly won fisheries bargaining legislation. The MFU won overwhelming majorities from the fishermen in votes formally conducted by the province to determine whether the MFU should be certified as the collective bargaining agent. There were legal challenges to the legislation, but, finally, by 1985, the MFU was accredited and commenced bargaining with the association of buyers, within the framework set out under the inshore fisheries bargaining act.

The first attempts to bargain collective agreements with the buyer group in 1985 were unsuccessful. But prior to the opening of the 1986 spring lobster season, the MFU finally reached a collective agreement that included union recognition and dues check-off from all fishermen selling lobster in the Acadian Peninsula. The essence of the agreement was fixed price for the lobster catch. But this was our only lobster agreement; it failed on the simple premise that fish buyers were interested in

negotiating a fixed price for lobster, and the price put forward by the buyer group in the spring of 1987 was lower than what fishermen knew individual buyers were prepared to pay. The companies knew that the MFU badly needed the dues check-off, which had been included in the 1986 agreement, and they attempted to leverage the negotiating team to accept the lower fixed price, in return for the dues check-off. They thought they had us in a bind because they were pretty certain that the union had no strike mandate. (It is virtually impossible for fishermen to contemplate a strike action in this specific lobster fishery that is only open two months of the year and which is so central to the fishermen's income.) We had to tell ourselves that to sign this kind of agreement just to get union dues was simply not acceptable. What was the point of maintaining an organization that gets a lower price than the open market would deliver? We walked away from the company negotiators and never returned.

You can imagine the dilemma within the organization and the impact that our decision to walk away had on the fishermen. And this, after one year of struggle to win the legislative right to collective bargaining. The fishermen were despondent and we faced the possible breakup of the very heart of the organization. But that was the same period in which association-type work in Nova Scotia was giving the MFU significant power and profile throughout the fishery. Since the Nova Scotia work was not premised on collective bargaining, and since the work at that juncture was somewhat successful, I believe that Nova Scotia, which had been a kind of periphery for the MFU, was the essential factor that got the New Brunswick sector through the crisis. The fishermen's leadership and the staff could see a future for a strong MFU without collective bargaining.

The history and development of the MFU has clearly been uneven. I haven't even referred to the MFU's positive work in

the large inshore fishery of PEI. The Island is situated to the south and west, within the Gulf of St Lawrence, and shares the same fisheries and fishing grounds with its Acadian neighbours. Inshore fishermen on the Island were very receptive to the MFU's organizers, but the drive to win bargaining rights legislation in the Island province ran into trouble in the mid-1980s when the province conducted a referendum on the issue and the leadership of the MFU on the Island decided to boycott it. The MFU's inability to consolidate its support on the Island warrants separate analysis and will not be addressed in this essay.

A Watershed Period

By 1988, the MFU had clearly reached a threshold. Its period of expansion in Nova Scotia had peaked and, with the inability to win collective agreements, MFU New Brunswick was facing serious morale problems. Still, the Acadian fishermen had made the MFU their organization; and the organization was widely respected in the broader Acadian community, which had been going through a social and political renaissance since 1960. In 1988, the province's electorate rejected the governing Conservative Party and voted in a new liberal government. It was the Liberal Party and its charismatic leader, Louis Robichaud, who had put Acadians on the provincial political and social map in the 1960s. After 18 years of conservative government, the liberals were re-elected, and they brought many Acadians into senior positions of power, people who were contemporaries of the founders and supporters of the MFU.

This proved to be very fortunate timing for an MFU in turmoil over having to re-consider the collective bargaining idea. The MFU immediately began looking for an alternative form of legislation that would provide for an automatic check-off. Eventually, the new provincial government, recognizing the years

of work of the MFU on behalf of the inshore sector and the value of fishermen being organized, introduced the Inshore Fisheries Representation Act. In essence, the act provided for the Rand Formula, without obligating the union to reach a collective agreement. Under this new act, the province's coast was divided into three regions. If an organization could demonstrate that it had the majority of support of the fishermen in a given region, then it could apply to the province to issue an order to the companies to deduct dues from all fishermen in the region and remit them to the recognized organization. Fishermen overwhelmingly re-signed with the MFU and, by 1991, the MFU was certified to represent all inshore fishermen on the Gulf of St Lawrence coast of New Brunswick. It was a stunning reversal, especially given the resistance of the companies to the new legislation. MFU New Brunswick was back on track.

On the other hand, after 1988, the MFU in Nova Scotia was lurching into difficulties. Over the next few pages I shall try to explain what happened. The one years following the 'Canadianization' of the fishery after 1977 saw the emergence of an elaborate fisheries management system. The national government not only assumed jurisdiction and control of its 200-mile EEZ, but also embarked on a large public enterprise to manage and eventually micro-manage, the fisheries. The centrepiece of the system was limited entry and quota allocations by fleet and area. The implementation of the system generated enormous conflicts between sectors. For example, there was an ongoing struggle between the Canadianized industrial offshore fleet and inshore fishermen. But there were countless complicated issues of quota allocation, total allowable catches, fleet restrictions and so on, and the forum where the conflicts were expressed was an elaborate system of advisory committees.

On the committees would usually be representatives of the fishing companies, specialized midshore fleets, processors, and inshore organizations, as well as DFO managers and scientists. In the end, fishing plans were set by the DFO after consultation with the industry. During the 1980s, the high-profile conflicts centred on the groundfish and pelagic fisheries, which were becoming more and more micro-managed through enterprise allocations in the offshore and individual quotas in the midshore dragger and seiner sector.

I have used the term midshore or nearshore sector without explaining its difference from the inshore fishery. Today, in all of Atlantic Canada there are approximately 600 midshore vessels, compared to 15,000 or more traditional inshore fishing operations. (The term 'traditional' is used fluidly since most of the inshore fleet is quite modernized in terms of electronics, durability and even engine power.) A typical midshore vessel employs five to six fishermen, but the capital-to-labour ratio is five times that of a typical inshore boat that employs, on average, 2.5 fishermen. These midshore vessels are normally high-tech, often steel, boats in the 20-m range, worth between Can\$700,000 to Can\$2 million.

I refer to this midshore fleet as the 'ascendancy' fleet because the fishermen who operate them tend to have risen from the ranks of the inshore fishermen. They were often singled out by small fish-plant owners, or provincial government development boards, for special financing and special quotas. Provinces financed them to ensure that fish supplies were landed in their provinces, thereby providing needed plant work in rural high-unemployment areas.

After 1977, the first wave of capital expansion in the Canadianization process went into the industrial offshore company-owned trawlers. It then followed quickly into the

emerging midshore groundfish draggers. In government terminology, these vessels were defined as inshore, with a number of horsepower tonnage restrictions and a 65-ft limit on their length, approximating vessels of the offshore. The pattern in the groundfish sector was for the powerful fishing boats and companies to demand a share of the quota, based on their recent catch histories. So, by 1982, the offshore company fleets had already established their own quota shares and were developing enterprise allocations. Similarly, as the midshore draggers expanded in number and capacity, they claimed recent historical catch as the basis for quota shares. Newfoundland's Gulf of St Lawrence midshore draggers were the first to carve out special quotas that led to a form of individual quotas. New Brunswick and Quebec's fleet of midshore draggers and Danish seiners went the same route, followed by those in the southwest of Nova Scotia. In short, they were establishing property rights based on recent historical catch. Needless to say, this was done largely at the expense of the large number of inshore fishermen, who relied on more 'passive' fishing gear like handline and longline.

Often, the ascendancy fleet of high-tech mobile draggers or Danish seiners also had access to shrimp and snow crab, but throughout the 1980s the midshore became more and more specialized into groundfish draggers, herring seiners, shrimpers and crabbers. While a typical inshore fishermen might earn a working class standard of living, fishing several species over a fishing year, the licence holders in the specialist midshore fleets were earning superprofits. It was difficult for the rest of the fishermen not to see these few midshore specialists as bastions of privilege—'privilege' because the DFO management system quickly froze the number of licence holders, while allocating quota based on recent catch history. (Of course, these high-tech boats had no trouble building up a history.) One simple example

of the 'bastion of privilege' would be the 80 snow crab operators on the Acadian Peninsula. In a typical year, their snow crab quotas represented a landed value of Can\$50 million. The 700 inshore operators in the same region would land roughly Can\$36 million worth of fish. It was a similar picture in the groundfish sector, where 10 per cent of the vessels under 65 ft (the midshore draggers) were being allocated 70 per cent of the general allocations.

By 1989, the inshore fleet of 8,000 vessels in the Maritime provinces was progressively being disenfranchised from the groundfish sector by the emergent midshore specialists who were supporting ITQ systems that protected their quasi-property rights. This was especially felt by fishermen in the MFU's Southwest Nova Scotia Local 9. At the same time, as quotas were being captured by the specialist mobile fleet, the cod stocks, in particular, were showing signs of stress, further creating the sense among inshore fishermen that they were being pushed out of the fishery.

I have often referred to the period commencing in 1988-89 as a watershed period. You could call it a regime shift. It was a period of upheavals in world history and Canadian politics. The historian Eric Hobsbawm writes of the "short" 20th century, seeing it coming to a close with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the 'East Bloc'. During the watershed period, people's world-views were put into question. The Soviet Union broke down. Canada entered into a Free Trade Agreement with the US. It was a moment in Canadian history where the traditional power bases of the two dominant political parties were breaking up. In Quebec, the Bloc Quebecois was forming and would capture the traditional Liberal Party base in Quebec. In the West, the rightwing populist Reform Party took shape by

attracting large segments of the right in the Conservative Party. Furthermore, the sovereignty movement in Quebec was re-establishing its force that would eventually lead to a full-scale referendum in 1996. The national government was progressively adopting policies of privatization and deregulation, in concert with World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes. It was a period in which Canadians were growing increasingly sceptical of the public political process.

During this period, commencing in 1987-88, we begin to see a change in the fishery. The markets for fish in Japan and the US were anticipating the coming recession. The period of relatively strong prices for cod were slackening and herring roe prices in Japan took a beating in 1988, precipitating a strike among our herring gill-net fishermen on the Acadian Peninsula. In 1989, in the fall season, lobster prices began an unprecedented decline that continued into the 1990 season, as North America fell into recession.

As the watershed period progressed into 1990, the price of lobster throughout Atlantic Canada fell to its lowest levels in 20 years. That created a general panic among inshore fishermen, even where landings were strong. The lobster industry was still in turmoil over a US trade bill, the Mitchell Bill, that prohibited lobsters that were legal size in Canada—Canadian lobsters, in general, tend to mature younger and at smaller sizes—from entering the US. Fishermen in Southwest Nova Scotia came under intense pressure from lobster exporters and the government to conform to the American size. In concert with MFU Local 9 in the southwest area, the MFU conducted a very sophisticated campaign that included the Department of External Affairs and lawyers from the Justice Department in Ottawa challenging the newly established free trade panel under the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement.

Senator Mitchell had argued that the new minimum size measure in the US were conservation measures that would be undermined if smaller Canadian lobster was allowed to be traded freely in the US. In the end, the sweeping bill was modified to prohibit only live lobster that did not meet the minimum size from entering the US. This left the Canadian lobster companies complaining that they would not be able to sell the smaller (but legal) live Canadian lobster, and so they demanded the Canadian government increase the minimum size of lobster in Southwest Nova Scotia to the American size. The MFU strongly resisted the corporate lobby argument that lobster marketing was already far too dependent on the Boston market and that Canadian entrepreneurs were acting like compradors, simply brokering this prized animal into Boston, rather than developing initiatives to market more in Europe and Asia. In the end, the MFU position prevailed and was proven to be right, as the companies quickly adjusted and reduced their dependency on the Boston market.

The readers should know that the two-clawed lobster found in eastern Canada and the eastern seaboard of the US is called *Homarus americanus* and is found virtually nowhere else. The Canadian consumer absorbs, at best, only 10 per cent of the landings of our fishermen. So lobster is an export commodity, 80 per cent of which traditionally went to the US and the rest to Europe and Japan.

The dramatic fall in lobster prices in 1989 and 1990 was generally attributed to a backup of various processed lobster products and the difficulty companies faced in financing inventories during the recession period. Interestingly, the large lobster fishery in Southwest Nova Scotia, where lobster is almost exclusively caught for the live market trade, was affected by a tightening of prices in 1990, but far less dramatically than the rest of the Maritimes. Furthermore, in the heart of this Southwest

Nova Scotia fishery, we find one of those pockets of 'elite' fishermen, whose landings and landed catch value were far above those of the average inshore fishermen in the Maritimes. Ironically, it was these fishermen who generated a spontaneous tie-up of vessels at the start of their November 1991 fishery after the general price drop had already re-stabilized in the rest of the region. But, we are jumping ahead of our story.

In 1990, we had an MFU local of some 200 fishermen along the north shore of Nova Scotia that borders on the Gulf of St Lawrence. The fishermen there were very similar to our Acadian fishermen in New Brunswick, fishing in the same general body of water, the Gulf of St Lawrence (quite separate from the Scotian shelf that extended off the east and south coast of Nova Scotia into the Atlantic), and faced with similar fisheries management issues. This local was smaller than those of New Brunswick, but had been with the union since its second year. The fishermen in the area were an English-speaking mixture of Protestants and Catholic Scots. They tended to have had more experience as tradesmen and with trade unions, and were adjacent to one of Nova Scotia's industrial areas, New Glasgow, where there were not only mining and steel works but also the French tyre giant Michelin Tire, which had established a major tyre plant there in the 1970s, and the multinational Scott Paper, which had established a large pulp and paper mill. It was this local that generated the highly esteemed bona fide licensing policy that was endorsed in 1982 by all fishermen in the Southern Gulf, including those of New Brunswick and PEI. This is the licensing regime under which most of the MFU members still fish.

The Gulf Nova Scotia local had always played a key role in the policy and governance of the MFU, and, by the late 1980s, was largely self-managing, in the sense that it did not rely heavily on the staff services of the organization. One of its local leaders

had been elected president of the MFU in 1997, even though the majority members of the MFU are francophone and he spoke only English. During the 1980s, some of the key members of this MFU local had also taken a very active role in the revitalization of the North Bay Co-operative, a fishermen's co-operative that not only marketed the catch but also did some processing of hake and herring. The North Bay Co-operative was a member of the federation of fishing co-operatives, the United Maritime Fishermen (UMF), that itself had its origins in the famous Antigonish Movement of the 1930s, which still has an institutional centre at the university, known as the Coady International Institute. (*The Antigonish Movement is a people's movement for economic and social justice that began in Nova Scotia during the 1920s. The Coady International Institute is a centre of excellence in community-based development, adult education and group action. Established by St Francis Xavier University in 1959, the Institute was named after Rev Dr Moses Coady, a prominent founder of the Antigonish Movement – Ed*) Through the 1980s, the North Bay Co-operative played a challenging role within the UMF, a federation of inshore fishing producer co-operatives that expanded into operating its own processing companies and even owned an offshore trawler. The North Bay Co-operative was seeking more autonomy from the federation structure, and was taking alternative marketing initiatives. By 1988, the UMF, as it was known, became bankrupt and never recovered as a federation of fishing co-operatives.

The majority of the members of the North Bay Co-operative were also members of Local 4 of the MFU. At the annual meeting of the co-operative in 1990, a debate developed over the future direction of the co-operative, especially with respect to investment in vehicles and approaches to marketing. As the meeting progressed, a kind of internal purge developed, whereby the manager and his bookkeeper were dismissed against the will of some members and for no apparent reason. It tore the

co-operative in two and it was clear the bitter split was going to spill over into the local of the MFU. The leaders of this internal coup in the co-operative were also fishermen who were developing a special status in the fishery because they held snow crab licences. According to the descriptions we were getting from fishermen members of the co-operative who ended up on the receiving end of the purge, the leaders of this takeover within the co-operative used innuendo and personal attack, suggesting misuse of funds and possible bookkeeping irregularities, all of which proved unfounded. While the apparent reason for this unpredicted fissure was a strong resistance among some members to expanding the co-operative in terms of investment and marketing initiatives, the 'coup' had a hint of a fundamentalist type of thinking—an unwillingness to tolerate intellectual ambiguity, an infantile belief that managers (and bureaucrats) were not needed to run a co-operative, and that it could be done by the fishermen themselves with minimalist infrastructure; suggestions of plots and collaborators were also heard. In particular, one of the leaders of the 'purge' was getting his feet wet as a rightwing populist; we were to hear more about him on the broader terrain of fishermen politics in the Maritime provinces.

As I said, the fishermen engineering the takeover in the co-operative tended to be also snow crab licence holders. These particular snow crab licences were limited to approximately 10 per cent of the fishermen in the area that the MFU Local 4 covered. The crab licences themselves had become quite valuable because of the returns the fishermen could make in the fishery over a three-to-six-week period. These licence holders were still considered to be inshore fishermen with other fishing privileges but they were taking on their own special-interest identity. This became particularly evident when the Government of

Canada extended its new programme of dockside monitoring to the inshore snow crab fishery in Gulf Nova Scotia. Some of the licence holders reacted with extraordinary emotion, given that, objectively, the new system would cost them pennies in comparison to what they were deriving from this fishery. Dockside monitoring was generally something that the MFU believed was useful in large-quota fisheries like herring to ensure that large landings by herring seiners were counted against the quota. Dockside monitoring was a logical requirement in fisheries that were being managed by individual quotas, as the snow crab fishery was. We could only assume that the strength of the reaction by this relatively privileged snow crab group cannot be attributable to the one cent per pound that they now had to pay for monitoring. It was also a more generalized reaction to government imposing fees on fishermen. It was only the tip of the iceberg and, in this sense, they were certainly not all wrong. (As the 1990s progressed, fishermen saw more and more fees and user charges.) The reaction to monitoring of their landings was probably also explained by the fact that some of the catch was not being reported, thus allowing individuals not only to catch beyond their individual quotas but also to avoid taxes on the unreported portion of catch.

In any case, this group of snow crab licence holders, many of whom were principals in the 'purge' of the North Bay Co-operative, were taking a position on dockside monitoring that put the MFU in an awkward position and made it very difficult to support them, even though the more general issue of new fees was a concern for all inshore fishermen. The MFU certainly could not oppose the principle of dockside monitoring in individual quota systems. In short, the position of the snow crabbers was contradicting the more general policies of the MFU, and it was not surprising that this group would enter into an

alliance with the Nova Scotia Fish Packers, the fish companies lobby group, to fight the imposition of the dockside monitoring programme. This was a curious move to make by a group that was posturing itself as the champion of the little guy in the fishery against Big Government and—as we shall see—‘Big’ unions (even if they were little unions like the MFU). We were beginning to see the emergence of a special group of licence holders whose good fortune depended on their exclusive access to the snow crab fishery, an access that was guaranteed by the very DFO that would be increasingly demonized by the movement taking shape and being spearheaded by a few of the snowcrabbers who had also divided the North Bay Co-operative.

To return to the lobster fishery in 1990, catches were at a record high for the 20th century and, given a weakening economy in the major market of the US, the traditional buyer-processing group was experiencing a back-up in lobster products both in US warehouses and in their own plants. Thus, financing of inventories became a critical issue and companies began to sell their products at discounted rates. The price drop, first seen in the 1989 fall fishery in Northumberland Strait, carried through to the main fisheries in the spring of 1990. However, the Southwest Nova Scotia fishery remained somewhat protected from the dramatic price drop because of its ability to hold live lobster and because of its proximity to the Boston market for live lobster trade. (Southwest Nova Scotia’s lobster was virtually all sold in the live trade, as distinct from the Gulf of St Lawrence, for example, where 70 per cent of the landings went to the processors.)

By 1991, we were already experiencing some improvement in price, but as the fall fishery in Southwest Nova Scotia began, the price for live lobsters fell to lower-than-expected levels, although not dramatically so. It was still a better price than what

the rest of the lobster fishermen in the Maritimes had received for their landings, which went into both the live and processed lobster trade. Nevertheless, a spontaneous tie-up of lobster boats began in the Yarmouth area in protest against the price fall. There did not seem to be much reason for such dramatic action, especially since the price fall was unprecedented in this fishery over the past 25 years. There was also a self-serving aspect to the initial action in Yarmouth since the fishermen in this specific area of the lobster zone were not as dependent on the first weeks of the season and tended to fish farther out, as lobster retreated from the cooling inshore waters to deeper waters, where temperatures were less responsive to the pending winter. The tie-up was spearheaded by a group of fishermen in the Yarmouth area who, for some years, had had remarkable annual catch levels that tended to differentiate their annual incomes considerably from those of the average lobster fishermen in the area. Amongst the ones sparking the spontaneous action against the price drop was a former member of the MFU who only the previous year had been asked to step down as president of the MFU Local 9. Interestingly, these fishermen had developed a friendship, through the MFU, with the leader of the North Bay 'coup' on the other side of the province. They presumably had mutual sympathies for the provincial Conservative Party that was governing in the capital, Halifax. Actually, the two of them—the former member of the MFU and the leader of the North Bay 'coup'—were selected independently to go on a marketing tour of Europe, just before the opening of the lobster season in the southwest region.

In any case, the spontaneous tie-up was driven by the Yarmouth area fishermen and small fish buyers with the hope of improving the shore price for lobster, even though it was fairly evident that the price was really determined by the live trade in

Boston. Our own MFU members in this lobster fishing area were somewhat bemused and sceptical of the tie-up since their work through the MFU over the previous years had given them an appreciation of what was possible in the live lobster trade. Further, they found it a bit ironic to see support for the tie-up coming from many fishermen who had for years spoken against the union, painting it as an organization that would force them into strikes in the lobster fishery. In any case, the majority of our members fished lobster in shallower waters, where the first weeks of the fishery mattered more.

Regardless, most of the lobster fishermen in the zone (Local 34) went along with the spontaneous tie-up, but up the coast, in the St Mary's Bay area, where the MFU was strong, there were a couple of lobster boats that continued to operate. Even though local MFU leaders did not fish, the gang in the Yarmouth area started saying they were trying to break the strike and were scabbing. This was turned into a widespread belief that was carried back to members in Gulf Nova Scotia by way of conversations between the two individuals mentioned above. The MFU president that year was also a fishermen from the Gulf Nova Scotia Local 4 and he and his activist spouse swallowed the Yarmouth/North Bay version of events, further alienating our key leaders in Southwest Nova Scotia. The tie-up lasted a week, with no clear change in lobster prices, other than a marginal increase that normally occurs as the Christmas season approaches.

Nevertheless, a new populist group emerged from the strike and continued a sustained attack on the MFU that demoralized leaders and members. The local has never since recovered its widespread influence in this important fishing region. Instead, the forces of rightwing populism continued to grow, fuelled by a series of developments in 1992 and 1993. The lobster strike seemed to be a tempest in a teapot, in the sense that the objective

conditions of fishermen in the area were generally far superior to those of lobster fishermen elsewhere. Also, in any case, there really did not seem to be much that could be done about the lobster market in the short run by tying up, especially in an area where much of the lobster can be held live in lobster cars after they have been caught. Yet, since 1991, the group has carried on and seemed to have had several spontaneous actions and rallies where preoccupations and emotions were out of sync with objective reality. Nevertheless, a kind of populist wildfire was taking hold of many inshore fishermen in the areas of Gulf Nova Scotia and Southwest Nova Scotia that had a devastating effect on the MFU locals in these areas.

In retrospect, the period of the 1980s, prior to what we are calling the watershed period, was a period of unspoken consensus among inshore fishermen that a reasonable fisheries management system was evolving, where there were many issues to be resolved but where there was a kind of general co-management agreement with the fisheries authority, the DFO. (The exception to this would be in the groundfish fishery, where inshore fishermen using passive gear like longlines and handlines were seeing a gradual diminishment of catch in the inshore grounds and where the implementation of quasi-property rights for the more powerful midshore and offshore fleets was gradually taking hold.) But, after 1987-88, the general consensus gradually unravelled, particularly in the Nova Scotia regions.

As the MFU was beginning to get rocked to its roots in Nova Scotia through the watershed period, in New Brunswick, MFU was consolidating into a widespread membership-based organization. Its Acadian members remained largely immune from the collective fears and paranoia that had gripped inshore fishermen in other parts of the Maritimes. There are several objective reasons for this, including the organization itself, an

inshore fishery that was less dependent on groundfish, stable herring and lobster catches, as well as increasing lobster prices. Since the fishermen had much more experience in a sound and well-run organization, they were more confident about the information that was provided, and they had more opportunities to debate and inquire into issues to determine their relative importance. The difference between working within a sound and experienced organization and relying on spontaneous populist reactions was especially highlighted during the growing crisis around the collapse of the cod stocks in 1992 and 1993. (The difference can also be attributed to having achieved a stable membership dues structure and a general agreement between inshore and midshore fleets.)

In short, the MFU on the New Brunswick coast, by 1991, was an experienced, functioning membership organization that enjoyed large majority support among the whole community of inshore fishermen. In Nova Scotia, the MFU as an organization could never claim more than 20 per cent of inshore fishermen as members. So it was in a weaker position to mediate the virtual social and ideological chaos that was showing itself in the fisheries of that province.

If there were forms of hysteria or semi-paranoia or conspiratorial thinking spreading throughout the fishing communities of Nova Scotia, even while the fishery itself was generally performing well, there were nevertheless identifiable reasons for growing insecurities. Those reasons can be first found in the groundfish sector, where government policy was progressively hiving off portions of quota for selected fleets of specialist midshore trawlers. In 1988, for example, one of the groups of fishermen backing the MFU Local 9 were small dragger operators still considered inshore fishermen. But when the opportunity arose for them to join an individual quota system

that was allocated largely on their average historical catches, they bolted from the MFU with little compunction or hesitation. In their minds, it all boiled down to an issue of bread and butter.

At the same time, the much more numerous fixed-gear inshore sector (longlines and handlines) was being squeezed into new licensing and enforcement regimes that was believed to be part of a general government plan to privatize quota. The insecurities were also exacerbated by the loss of herring markets to the seiner fleet of the area. (With the crisis and collapse of the East Bloc, over-the-side sales evaporated in Eastern Canada.)

My sense is that fishermen generally tend to pick up, instinctively, trends or tendencies in the ocean prior to them being formally recognized. There is little question that Maritimes fishermen, like their inshore counterparts in Newfoundland, were not only sensing deep trouble in the cod fishery, but maybe, at some collective level, they already believed the fishery to be collapsing. Of course, in saying this I do not wish to diminish the many inshore voices that were speaking out as early as the mid-1980s about threats to the cod resources.

I believe, in the 1989-91 period, fishermen were feeling the deep crisis looming in the cod fishery. In March 1992, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, John Crosbie, took the unprecedented step of closing the northern cod stocks. In December of that year, he confirmed the northern cod fishery would continue to be closed and several other cod quotas in the Atlantic region would be severely reduced. At the same time that he made these dramatic announcements, he also, with one stroke of the pen, cancelled thousands of what his Department called 'inactive' groundfish licences. These licences were held by inshore fishermen, many of whom had given up on the groundfish sector for the simple reason that catches in the inshore had diminished drastically. Crosbie's actions only confirmed the

fears of many fishermen in the Maritime provinces that they were being scheduled for elimination. For the MFU fishermen in the Gulf of St Lawrence, Crosbie's actions were inexplicable. Their bona fide licensing policy regime explicitly allowed a fisherman to retain his licences for five years without having to use them. This was fundamental to the concept of a multispecies approach to fishing, where fishermen could move away from a diminishing fishery without the fear of having to use their licences or face the consequences of losing them. Further, fishermen were affronted that they were being targeted when they had clearly lost their resource to the midshore and offshore draggers. Crosbie's move was a breach of trust and was a policy derived from the Newfoundland context, where there was virtually no limited entry in the inshore fishery.

The Crosbie licence cancellation announcement generated more insecurities among fishermen and became fodder for new rightwing populist formations. But the new policy was actually reversed by a very effective resistance by the MFU and allied organizations. This reversal was not achieved by the populist visionaries who were forming what they called the 'Bona Fide Defence Fund'. Their grandiose visions included massive legal action against the government for having bungled the management of the cod fishery. The legal action as articulated by the group's legal advisers had little chance of success but was attractive for all fishermen, including many of our own fishermen. Our own long-time legal adviser in Halifax, Ray Larkin, was able to convince our fishermen about the inadvisability of jumping into such legal action; it had no chance of success under our system—and he was proven right. The MFU, instead, focused on a more specific political battle: winning back the cancelled licences. It was an important achievement to have the minister reverse his decision and it contrasted our organization sharply

with the populist phenomenon of living out the cod disaster in a psychological and vicarious way. By this I mean that though these fishermen were not the ones so affected by the cod collapse, they were using the imagery of a collapse to build a climate of crisis and conspiracy among the fishermen.

Another event during the same period again served to generate fear among inshore fishermen that their status was being threatened. This time it came from the west coast of Canada through a Supreme Court decision recognizing that a British Columbia Indian had been wrongly charged for fishing without a licence for his own food and sustenance. The Sparrow Decision, as it came to be known, led to the assertion by Pacific coast natives of their inherent right to fish in previously limited commercial fisheries, particularly the salmon fisheries of British Columbia's rivers and estuaries. On Canada's west coast, the fishermen formed a coalition of fishermen's rights groups to resist the encroachment of natives into their fishery. This coalition contained, in its early formations, a broad range of fishermen's organizations, including the well-established United Food Fish and Allied Workers Union, long considered to be a progressive and militant defender of fishworkers and fishermen on the Pacific coast. The British Columbia union knew that the coalition was tending towards a rightwing populist, and possibly even racist, approach, but felt that by staying in the coalition, it could mitigate those tendencies.

The west coast coalition quickly embraced support from the new emerging rightwing Reform Party, which was gaining strength in western Canada. Coalition leaders were quick to find counterparts on the east coast of Canada and were instrumental in creating a virtual hysteria in the southwest region of Nova Scotia over the pending implications of the Sparrow Decision, that is, the threat of unregulated native fishing in and out of

season. This issue of a new native presence in the east coast fishery is developed at a later point in this essay, but, for now, we have to state that the reaction among the fishermen in Southwest Nova Scotia seemed to be grossly out of proportion to the objective threat the local area natives could pose since they—a few hundred souls—comprised only a small fraction of the population. In my judgement, the reaction has to be interpreted in the context of the broader psychological atmosphere and populism at play, which I have been discussing. This is not to say that the Sparrow Decision has not had implications on the east coast; we surely know this and we will return to it.

The cod moratorium got extended to include almost all of Canada's cod stocks. Interestingly enough, the only stocks exempted were those of Southwest Nova Scotia, where cod was thought to be part of a different discrete stock and ecosystem. The moratorium was of such historic magnitude that every other aspect of the Atlantic fishery seemed to be subsumed by this unprecedented crisis in one of the staple industries of Canada. Curiously, the ill-defined populist groups of Nova Scotia reacted to the moratorium as a kind of conspiracy. In 1993, they claimed that the dismal state of the cod stocks was being highly exaggerated by scientists, the government and the industrial fishing sector in order to drive out the little inshore fishermen. And they were tarring with the same brush fishermen's organizations like the Newfoundland union and ourselves, attacking us as collaborators. By now, the leaders of the populist coalition were using slander, false witnesses and division, always keeping a hold on some thread of truth and legitimate fear, while simultaneously elaborating a fictitious conspiracy by enemies. This aspect of the populism inevitably petered out as it was unable to demonstrate any material success and as the nature of

the cod crisis became more differentiated in the minds of fishermen. Nevertheless, the legacy of Nova Scotia has been to further fragment fishermen's organizations, to burn out rational leaders, and to leave the fishermen vulnerable to the next major fear (witness the 1999 Marshall case – *see page 254 — Ed*) The populist ideological upheavals that occurred especially in Nova Scotia during a period of similar upheaval around the world, following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, might well provide us with some hints of how we can get back to a broader understanding of social action and social struggle.

Ascendancy in the Inshore

The concept of a 'midshore' fleet is a fluid one. My calling it an 'ascendancy' fleet is a way of depicting the dynamics of a modernizing and Canadianizing fishery that was increasingly becoming institutionalized within an elaborate fisheries management system. In a sense, all fishermen were bought into the system, not always willingly, and often under protest. It is a system loaded with grievances and inequalities, but the authority of the federal State and the fisheries minister was generally recognized and accepted. The title of Sue Calhoun's book on the MFU, *A Word to Say*, is instructive, but, at the same time, perhaps misleading. Canada was not only claiming its 200-mile EEZ, it was also going to manage the fishery as a joint project with fishing interests. But it was never clear to inshore fishermen whether they were recognized as an indispensable party in this joint project. They wanted a word to say. But fishermen also wanted security of access and protections. In short, they wanted their rightful share of power. So, the MFU was part of a movement of inshore fishermen in the years leading up to, and following, 1977. Some would say the MFU was the lead organization of this movement in the Maritimes.

Inshore fishermen had a common cause and they had a basis for solidarity, at least within the framework of the fisheries management system. But inshore fishermen, as a constituency, are always an ambiguous group; some parts were 'ascending', not only because of hard work and fishing skills (although we don't discount those) but also because of financial backing by companies and provincial government interests, and, sometimes, because of luck—snow crab licences in some areas were actually won in draws—and certainly because the DFO management system was generating micro-interests and 'bastions of privilege'.

Ascending fleets not only emerged from the general inshore sector, but also arose within the MFU itself. The only real 'breakaways' that we have had as an organization since the onset of the 'watershed' period can be traced to this ascendancy phenomenon. But the nature of these breakaways, at least in some instances, is obscured by populist rhetoric. As I have said, the split in MFA Local 4 can be traced back to a small number of snow crab licence holders, and that of MFU Local 9 in Southwest Nova Scotia to an elite group of lobstermen. What is ironic to the MFU is that this populist group managed to project a militancy that attracted hundreds of inshore fishermen who were not normally part of the 'ascendancy' group; indeed, they were often amongst the most marginal and poorest.

I have been centering on one period, the watershed period, in Nova Scotia because, in my position in the MFU, I had to live through this specific populist movement. But, the phenomenon that I am attempting to capture is not unique to that time or place. There continues to be lots of manifestations of it in the present fishery, and it comes back in full force in the year 2000 as a result of the issue of aboriginal fishing, which I will discuss later. In the 1989-93 period, we find the MFU, possibly the leading voice of the inshore movement, itself becoming the target of

the militant populists. In their eyes, we were in league with the government; we were not militant enough (sic).

It was a curious period. In 1991, for example, we found ourselves onlookers as the ascendancy group (midshore draggers) in the Gulf of St Lawrence began looking like the militants: they occupied fisheries offices, blasted the science community, and stormed the capital. In Yarmouth, those who had feared the MFU would bring strikes into the lobster fishery were the ones now striking, while the MFU member fishermen in the same area thought a strike to be a futile and untimely action. The Bona Fide Defence Fund group, which was attacking the DFO and its scientists, and criticizing the Newfoundland fishermen's union leaders, the MFU and the Quebec Fishermen's Alliance, for being in bed with the fisheries managers, was led by fishermen who gained the most from DFO's micromanagement policies. But, for all this militant rhetoric, what were their actual actions? Hiring a lawyer, drafting a manifesto, and commencing an impossible legal action against the Government of Canada. In essence, the populists had no legal case—not because there were no huge blunders by the DFO, not because the cod collapse was not a fiasco, not because the public management system was not accountable, but mainly because the courts in Canada were not about to take on the job of assessing the country's vast fisheries management enterprise. Besides, Canada's Fisheries Act gives almost unlimited powers to the minister to run the fishery. In other words, the issues were, at root, political, and not legal.

This commonsense legal assessment from our legal counsel was quite acceptable to our elected council, but the populist leaders would have none of it. Their rallying cry was to go to court for the rights of inshore fishermen. I have asked myself for years why fishermen are so attracted by lawyers and court actions. Why is it that they dream of hiring lawyers and that,

whenever a spontaneous new group arises around a fishing issue, they think in terms of legal actions? There is a tendency to invest almost magical powers in pursuing a legal action to defend their rights. I say magical because there is very little evidence to demonstrate that legal actions have brought anything to the collectivity of inshore fishermen. Yet, it seems to be a feature of being a primary producer that you do not have the same kind of expectations of collective political action, so you think in terms of the powers of the judicial system to deliver fairness.

I remember many years ago a colleague bringing to my attention Karl Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, where he characterizes peasant farmers as having need for a referee. (*In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, written between December 1851 and March 1852, and published as the first issue of the New York magazine Die Revolution, in 1852, Karl Marx traces how the conflicts of different social interests manifest themselves in the complex web of political struggles, and, in particular, the contradictory relationships between the outer form of a struggle and its real social content. The 'Eighteenth Brumaire' refers to 9 November 1799 in the French Revolutionary Calendar—the day the first Napoleon Bonaparte had made himself dictator by a coup d'état – Ed*) They had no confidence as a class to regulate their own affairs or to have collective action in the broader framework of society and that it was therefore necessary to have an arbitrator. This has a ring of truth to it as it applies to inshore fishermen and, indeed, it is the DFO that is the present managing authority. The actual fisheries management system is a very elaborate set of conditions and regulations, and violations are subject to penalties and sanctions, and individual fishermen surely are afforded the due process of law. But matters of whether or not you qualify for a fishing licence, are permitted to fish in a certain area, allowed so much quota, restricted to a season, and limited to a certain size of vessel are not settled in court. In the final analysis, they are the decisions of the minister, usually mediated through his department and consultations with

the 'industry'. His decisions are certainly influenced by political and economic forces and so, it is the job of organized fishermen to ensure they get fair treatment. That is a job for the MFU.

We have seen many instances where unorganized fishermen raise significant sums of money overnight to go to courts for an injunction or other forms of adjudication. Invariably, the MFU concluded, in those same instances, that the matter was political and could not be worked out in the courts. When the year's fishing plan is announced for the snow crab fishery in the Gulf of St Lawrence and the inshore fishermen realize that all the quotas are allocated to a fraction of the fishermen, who would end up earning as much in one year as the other fishermen might expect to earn in 10 years, there is fury on the shore and there are cries for justice. But a court action would get them nowhere. It is not a judge who will make the minister re-consider the decision; that will happen only through other forms of action. Litigation is, therefore, misleading and is just a form of mystification and a means of dissipating fishermen's power.

It is the nature of our Fisheries Act and the powers provided to the minister that leave little room for the courts. Fishermen generally wish it were otherwise, but so do the corporate sector and the specialist 'bastions of privilege'. The corporate lobby stands for private property rights and wants its privileges protected under the Fisheries Act. In the mid-1990s, the DFO brought forward a series of amendments to the Fisheries Act that would, in fact, have allowed the minister to fetter his own powers by entering into contractual arrangements with a corporation or a 'class of persons' that could be vetted in the courts.

The MFU, along with the other major fishermen's unions in the country, successfully resisted these amendments to the Act, not because there was no attraction to formally negotiated

contractual partnership agreements, but because there was no provision to ensure that such agreements, while fettering the minister, are not compromising the interests of the collectivity of fishermen. We said to ourselves we would prefer to take our chances in the political arena, where a minister still has to think twice before he/she acts contrary to the interests of fishermen. As fishermen's organizations, we have a certain confidence that we can fare better with elected ministers than in a legalistic system that requires commissions, lawyers, licensing boards and so on. Why would inshore fishermen, as a collectivity, believe they could actually outcompete corporate and special interest groups on legal terrain that generally depoliticizes issues and hence favours the status quo?

The recent Supreme Court decisions in Canada recognize that Canada's native people have constitutional rights to fish. Some of the implications of these decisions for the MFU's fishermen are discussed below but the decisions serve also to remind fishermen that their status is not so secured. In fact, the licence permits they are issued are considered as privileges. They are not something a fishermen owns in a legal sense and even banks will not take such licences as collateral. Still, there is normally a *de facto* ownership, and licences are bought and sold among fishermen. But, the value of such licences is wholly dependent on the DFO's limited licensing policy. For example, our midshore snow crab specialists (the 80 licence holders referred to above) hold licences that are presently worth up to Can\$1.5 million. If the minister authorized the issuance of 200 new licences in this fishery, the value would drop enormously. No wonder such groups want to have legally binding contracts to fetter the minister's power!

In any case, these issues of rights and privileges are emotionally loaded terms, especially when an eight-generation

fishing family is chided by a brash young native leader that he has no right to the fishery, only a privilege. I take the view that there are rights, yet most inshore fishermen want and dream of a greater status in law because they live in a constant state of insecurity, and because they have little confidence of being able to organize collectively.

Populism and Secular Fundamentalism

But, to return to populism, every time we come across a group of disaffected fishermen, we cannot attribute their disaffection to rightwing populism. But we have seen enough specific examples to set forth a series of characteristics that define it. First, there is the allegation of secret information being always withheld, which, if revealed, would demonstrate a widespread conspiracy to get rid of fishermen. Such and such a document found on the Internet or passed on by an insider is said to confirm this, even if the document has already been available for some time. There is invariably a call for audits on the established fishermen's organizations, insinuating that corruption exists. There is usually a charge that organizations are selling fishermen out. The bureaucrats are indolent and exist only to draw huge salaries. There is an anti-intellectualism that focuses on informed leaders and staff who are not real fishermen. Fishermen can run their own show, while the staff are intellectuals who write stuff and go to meetings, but are always collaborating with government officials or the liberals or the 'tree huggers' or the bleeding hearts. Inevitably, the populists turn out to be anti-union and sometimes racist. There is always a 'visionary' who sees the big picture: that the institutions and corporations are conspiring to rid the fishery of the inshore and, of course, there are always at least partial truths in his/her vision.

In essence, the populist leaders are secular fundamentalists. They are tapping the feeling among fishermen that modern society

is undermining their way of life, that they are victims of Big Business, Big Bureaucracy and Big Unions. Where we have been strongly touched by the populist wave, it always seems to be charged with an emotional weight and psychic gravity that is out of proportion to the specific issue being confronted, and the militancy that gets expressed seems vicarious. The Bona Fide Defence Fund, for example, built much of its populist attack on the DFO around the loss of the cod stocks. But, the 'visionaries' in this group were not dependent on the cod fishery; in fact, they were doing very well in the crab, lobster and tuna fisheries.

Don't get me wrong—the loss of the cod stocks was an enormous trauma in Canadian life and it was a catastrophic failure of the Canadian management model, and has generated a prolonged crisis in fisheries management. But, the cod disaster is centred in Newfoundland. The MFU is based in the Maritimes inshore fishery, where cod represents a small portion of the fishermen's catches. Objectively, most of our fishermen did not have a resource problem in the 1990s decade and, generally, the management system (excluding groundfish) was actually working well. (This is not true for a minority of members who depended heavily on groundfish in Cape Breton and the Acadian Peninsula.) That is why it is difficult not to see the populist expression as psychological. The thinking was politically naïve and magical, bearing only a tenuous relation to the real threats to the livelihood of the advocates. The nouveau militants exhibited fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience. They did not look to organization but to the big court decision that would bring down the DFO, enshrine fishermen's rights and affirm identity. I speculated that this form of psychological militancy may actually be, at least in part, an expression of considerable unease and bad feelings associated with the protected status that the populist leaders actually had. If, in comparison with the cod fishermen, the

populists were holding a privileged status in an otherwise devastated fishery, they must have sensed their status was not easily justified to the public, when the industry had just finished off one of the truly natural resources of the nation.

The MFU was experiencing this 'movement' as a dissipation of energies at the very moment when some of us believed we could gain new influence over the future direction of fisheries management. The populism was reactionary because it served status quo interests; instead of winning a new deal for inshore fishermen with a weakened federal authority, it turned fishermen against effective political organization and splintered Nova Scotia into a plethora of instant associations with local visionaries voicing a cacaphony of contradictory positions. It is hardly surprising that the new groupings found their friends in the Reform Party, while a British Columbia fishermen's rights coalition similarly allied with this rightwing party. Is it not ironical that key backers of this rightwing party were the owners and managers of the largest lobster company in Canada? And, as we write in November 2000, this same Reform Party, that now calls itself the Canadian Alliance Party, has found enormous financial backing from the truly elite corporate Canada in the centres of banking and finance in Toronto.

The MFU began an ambitious project in the 1970s to unite the inshore fishermen of the Maritime provinces; the organizing phase was all but ending in 1988. Our base and role in the Nova Scotia fishery shrunk and was virtually abandoned on PEI. We were back to being a predominantly Acadian organization, with our main base of support in the New Brunswick inshore and, yet, the MFU has fought to retain a progressive role and, I will argue, it has evolved to become a more effective political force. The rest of this essay will attempt to demonstrate this proposition.

Professionalization

As I have said, inshore fishermen as a class are ambiguous and the MFU itself is a hybrid organization; it is not a union in the sense of an industrial trade union nor is it simply an association, although sometimes it refers to itself as a professional organization. I want to pursue this idea of professional fishermen and the professionalization of the fishery that has become part of the fisheries discourse in the 1990s.

In the late 1980s, the Newfoundland Fishermen's Union hired Fr Des McGrath as an education officer. McGrath is a legendary figure in the Newfoundland fishery. In 1972, as a Catholic parish priest, he teamed up with a St John's lawyer and former member of parliament, Richard Cashin, in a remarkable organizing project that resulted in bringing the Newfoundland fishermen under one union umbrella. After a period back in parish work, McGrath joined the staff of the union and began developing his concept of professionalization.

McGrath began with an extensive and successful 'Operation Lifeline' programme where leading fishermen from all over the island of Newfoundland would go through health and safety training, not only for themselves but also to be trainers back in their own fishing communities. During this work, he learned about a federal government programme that was promoting what was called 'sector councils'. The idea of the councils was for management and workers in a specific industry to assess and plan their labour force needs. McGrath believed that fishermen should have their own sector council since they were both managers and workers.

In 1990, I remember receiving a call from a senior DFO official informing us that his department had provided special funding for a new initiative in professionalization. I was perplexed

by the programme and the idea that fishermen should be designated a professional group. We knew that some of the ascendancy groups were fond of appropriating the professional designation for themselves, but it was never really something that our own inshore fishermen had raised. Nevertheless, we participated in meetings and discussions about the predominantly Newfoundland initiative. By 1993, though, we were still sceptical about professionalization. Here is what we had to say on the subject at a major industry conference in Moncton, New Brunswick, in November 1993:

The new professionalization programme has turned out to be carrying far more freight than we had originally believed. In fact, the freight borne by professionalization has turned out to be sufficiently heavy that the whole process in the Maritime provinces, at least, has bogged down since the last conference held in March 1991 in Moncton. It is now close to four years since the Atlantic Fisheries Adjustment programme announcement (which provided funds for a professionalization initiative); but the real wake-up call for us at the MFU came on 18 December 1992 with the announcement of the then Minister of Fisheries, John Crosbie, who, with one sweep of the pen, cancelled thousands of so-called inactive licences, while, at the same time, calling for the licensing of 'bona fide' or professional fishermen...

The cancellation of licences was the most evident arbitrary act associated with the former Conservative government's push for professionalization.

The MFU went on to say that it felt that professionalization was like a bus that they found themselves on, but it was not clear who was driving the bus. MFU fishermen had warned, in local consultations at the wharf level, that the government would push for professionalization, regardless of what the fishermen

said. By 1993, we were beginning to see that they might have been right. We stated at the conference that there were definitely some anti-democratic trends associated with the programme as it was emerging. We continued:

Professionalization has crept into fisheries talk everywhere; but, it is a vague, ill-defined term. In Newfoundland, in the 1988-89 period, it had specific and sensible meanings. But government, with industry collaboration, seems to have brought everything into the term: from the problem of overcapacity, to the promotion and extension of ITQ systems, to the cancellation of licences, to co-management, to building fishermen's organizations, to financing fishermen's groups, to consideration of income stabilization, to short-term adjustment and maintenance programmes.

Indeed, professionalization has become the terrain on which some fishermen and some DFOs are working out what may be a new Canadian fisheries management system in the wake of the rupture and loss of faith in a system that had evolved since 1977 but which appears to have brought us to the brink of catastrophe, at least in the ocean itself, if not within the coastal communities.

The inshore/offshore groundfish review process in 1988 had mainly left bitterness, partly because the offshore sector, holding 50 per cent of the quotas, stonewalled the process and refused to accept that capacity was a feature of the total system, claiming the problem rested with the midshore and inshore. DFO management mainly adopted the same position on capacity and proceeded to implement more ITQ systems as the solution. Fisheries Minister Bernard Valcourt popularized what we call the ITQ ideology in 1990, with his simplistic cliché "Better to have two fishermen do well than ten starve".

His populist turn of phrase moved the issue of capacity from a capital investment and technology problem into a human resources

problem, meaning that there were too many fishermen and too many unused inshore licences waiting in the shadows to be actualized, rather than too much high-tech fishing power. So, while the groundfish resource went into a free fall, at least partly as a result of overfishing by high-powered vessels, inshore fishermen's organizations were being asked to participate in a professionalization programme that, at the very least, would legitimize the DFO management regime's determination to downsize the fishery by eliminating people, the so-called 'unemployment insurance parasites' and by concentrating quota and operations within a self-managing elite.

Professionalization promises the monopolization of fishing by the few, and protection against moonlighters, the indolent, the poor and the UI abusers. "All professions are a conspiracy against the laity," claims George Bernard Shaw.

In the hands of a management regime that has suffered a loss of client confidence, professionalization is felt by many of us to be the regime's effort to win consent from fishermen's organizations for the Valcourt approach that two is better than ten. Professionalization is a kind of ideological justification for eliminating licences, reducing the numbers of fishermen, and extending private ownership and control of quotas. From this perspective, it is an ideology of exclusion and adjustment.

In exchange for this basic consent from the fishermen's organizations, the fishermen are promised income stability, control of the resource, new status and prestige, escape from the bondages of ignorance; and they are promised strengthened fishermen's organizations.

However, the MFU's experience since the Valcourt announcement of May 1990 has been one of continuous upheaval, and we ask, 'Where was professionalization when we needed it?'—if one of its components is the strengthening of fishermen's organizations.

The proud organizing achievements of the MFU in Southwest Nova Scotia, for example, were severely challenged by a split in the inshore mobiles over ITQs and the lobstermen's spontaneous tie-up in the Yarmouth area. While we were unable to finance a full-time organizer to get us through this divisiveness, professionalization had bigger fish to fry by organizing conferences and committees at the Scotia Fundy level.

We were being asked to embrace the benefits of professionalization at the same time as we were having to face a de-certification drive in eastern New Brunswick that was given credibility by the province.

In the Maritimes, only New Brunswick fishermen have a democratic means in legislation to determine what, if any, organization they want to represent them. After three-and-a-half years of professionalization promotion, neither Prince Edward Island nor Nova Scotia has made any progress on this organizational question.

A Human Resource Council will not resolve the organizational question and, until fishermen have an adequate democratic framework for determining representation, a sensible 'industry-driven' approach to training and certification becomes extremely difficult. Without this democratic framework for organizing, professionalization is easily used as a terrain for gaining advantage by special interests groups or by bureaucrats promoting rationalization. In March 1992, we were able to conduct formal consultations with several hundred inshore fishermen in the Southern Gulf. They were interested in so-called professionalization, to the extent that the programmes were carried out by the union.

The reader will detect a strident anger in our response to the way professionalization was going on. You have to remember that, by 1993, all the major cod stocks in Atlantic Canada had

collapsed. Richard Cashin called it a “catastrophe of biblical proportions”. In the Maritime provinces, our MFU fishermen were only marginally affected by the collapse, except for the Cape Breton Local; but, overall, fisheries politics was being subsumed by the disaster. It was a national trauma and we at the MFU had to watch out that we didn’t become one of the proverbial babies that gets thrown out with the bath water.

It is an understatement to say that professionalization got off to a bad start in the Maritime provinces. Fr McGrath’s interest in professionalization in the Newfoundland context made lots of sense. Licensing in the inshore cod fishery of that province was a fluid concept, at best, and virtually thousands of licences were held by people who did not make their full-time living in the fishery. Those who were dedicated full-time fishermen and who depended on the fishery smarted under a system where all kinds of ‘moonlighters’ would move in and out of the fishery, according to how good the catches and prices were. A mine would close down in northern Newfoundland and the premier would promise every laid-off miner a lobster licence, even though there were hundreds of inshore fishermen in the same area who depended on the fishery for their livelihoods and could not get such a licence. Or, the firemen in another town might have a licence that they would use to enter the fishery at peak times, while holding on to their full-time jobs. Teachers would do the same during their summer vacations, and so on. In the Maritime provinces, this issue had been largely eliminated in the early 1980s through the MFU’s ‘homemade’ bona fide licensing policy and its derivatives.

The Newfoundland open-ended system was also putting a strain on fishermen’s unemployment insurance programmes because thousands of individuals not attached to the fishery in a significant way would use the fishery as a means of entry into

the unemployment insurance system. In other words, the fishery was being asked to carry the biggest load of the general poverty conditions besetting Newfoundland. Professionalization was seen by the fishermen in that province as not only a means of gaining new recognition for their status and profession but also as a way of gaining new protections.

Notwithstanding the MFU's reactions to the way the central agencies were using the positive initiative from Newfoundland to carry other 'freight' in the Maritimes context, we did see professionalization as a way by which we could make new associations with other fishermen's organizations across the country, since there was substantial funding available that would allow us to meet nationwide. (The geographic size of Canada makes the running of national organizations very costly.) So, under the rubric of professionalization, we joined with the British Columbia fishermen's union, the Newfoundland union and several other smaller fishermen's organizations to form the CCPFH.

Burying the Hatchet

Although we didn't clearly think so at the time, the MFU's organizing phase was over by the end of the 1980s. The inspiration to organize inshore fishermen across the Maritimes under the MFU was no longer realistic. Like the stressed fish stocks, we reverted to our core spawning grounds in Acadian New Brunswick to draw our strengths.

But I remain fascinated by how the MFU as an organization was living out, in a microcosmic way, many of the trends we saw worldwide after the end of the Cold War. Yasser Arafat and the Palestinians were talking to the Israelis; peace accords were imminent in Northern Ireland; and South Africa's apartheid system

broke down under the co-operative work of Nelson Mandela and F W de Clerk. So too with us in the fishery. The MFU began talking with its 'ancient rivals' like the EFF and the PEI Fishermen's Association. The EFF had played a nemesis role *vis-à-vis* the MFU throughout our organizing phase. This federation of fishermen was set up with largesse from the federal government (see *A Word to Say*) that coincided with the militant organizing expansion of the MFU at the end of the 1970s. Perhaps it does not matter whether or not the government's largesse was a conscious union-busting move by federal officials; it had the feel of such a tactic. The most charitable view of the EFF was to see it as representing management ideology, which is surely part of the ambivalent consciousness of fishermen.

Following the MFU annual convention in 1992, our president extended an olive branch to the EFF and efforts were made to co-operate on programmes. But, in reality, the EFF was, by then, a group of small and disparate local associations that had little capacity to act and that retained lots of hostility towards the MFU. At the level of the two organizations, co-operation never really materialized into joint projects, but 'burying the hatchet' did provide a positive climate within New Brunswick, in particular, where there had always been local associations in some of the English-speaking villages that resisted the MFU. These local associations were affiliated with the EFF and, as relations eased with the federation, we made new efforts to reconcile with local associations like those in Botsford, Little Cape and Stonehaven. For the most part, these efforts were successful and throughout the 1990s, we had reached a kind of peaceful co-existence.

The PEI Fishermen's Association was also an MFU rival on PEI. They opposed the idea of unions and they too were

almost completely dependent on provincial government financing. The Association consistently opposed the MFU's idea of having organizing legislation. By 1988, we decided that our own resources were stretched to the limit and that we could not continue competing against the provincial government's funding. We decided to withdraw any formal work on the Island until such future time when the province stopped preferential treatment to one group.

As the 1990s decade progressed, relations with the PEI Fishermen's Association improved greatly. While never fully divorcing itself from the provincial government, it nevertheless demonstrated a real base of supporting fishermen, and there was much common ground for us to collaborate.

We also began to find some common ground with our midshore rivals on the Acadian Peninsula. They were organized in the Acadian Professional Fishermen's Association (APFA). They were the shrimpers, crabbers, seiners and draggers; most of them were owner-operator fishermen (who were reinvesting their profits in their own fish plants) and, as such, there was some common basis with other fishermen in the country. The APFA saw professionalization as something to be introduced for their crew members; while it was never stated openly, professionalization was a way of avoiding a possible unionization among the crew members. The executive director of this midshore association was a nationalist Acadian who never opposed the development of the MFU as such. He supported the idea of the emerging CCPFH and it was mainly through this Council that the MFU had any association with this group. It did not last long; the APFA split under the burden of special interest groups, especially in the snow crab sector and the executive director himself was pressured out after the MFU won entry into this exclusive fishery in 1995 (see below).

During the watershed period, our locals in Nova Scotia took a terrific beating, but they held on to their locals with a reduced membership base. In Southwest Nova Scotia, the MFU, along with many other inshore fishermen, was resisting the full expansion of the ITQ system to the inshore groundfish sector. Their alternative was to establish a form of 'community management', which, in practice, meant that quotas were allocated to management boards made up of fishermen's organizations. The local reached an agreement with the Bay of Fundy Fishermen's Association, whereby they would jointly manage their fixed-gear groundfish allocations. It proved to be a workable local experiment and continues to function to this day.

In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the MFU remained the dominant inshore fishermen's organization but still could only claim support from half the fishermen in that fishing region. Here, too, the spirit of co-operation led the local to join with three other smaller associations to jointly manage the remnants of the groundfish allocations. This partnership has been limited but workable, and now the area expects to use the new provincial legislation that provides a framework for fishermen to organize and collect dues. The legislation differs from that of New Brunswick insofar as it provides for the certification of more than one inshore organization in the same fishing region. This fishing region has approximately 600 inshore operations, and if the majority of fishermen agree that they should pay dues to one or more organizations, then these organizations can seek certification from the province.

As I reported above, our Local 4 on the north shore of Nova Scotia was devastated by the splits and divisions that first started at the North Bay Co-operative. A few of our long-term supporters, nevertheless, kept the local alive and they too began entering into new formations with other local associations to

create what has become known as the Gulf Nova Scotia Fleet Planning Board.

The fishery is conflictual at the best of times, and our Nova Scotia fishermen leaders, in particular, went through some horrible times as divisions and antagonisms among fishermen intensified after 1988. It truly took an emotional effort to 'bury the hatchet' with groups and individuals who had personalized their attacks and misrepresented the work of the MFU. But, if Nelson Mandela could do it with his South African jailers and Afrikaan racists, then surely we could try to work on local reconciliations. (*Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison, was the first democratically elected State President of South Africa between May 1994 and June 1999. He retired from public life in June 1999 and currently resides in his birth place, Qunu, Transkei – Ed*).

Burying the hatchet was important for the MFU, but entering into workable alliances with other organizations is more complex and requires much care, if we are not to weaken the power of our own organization in the process. We had built an inshore fishermen's organization that was capable of delivering realizable 'products' in co-operation with others, but we have to pick and choose. We hardly have the capabilities to be all things to all people. We had emerged from our organizing phase as a stable and well-run inshore fishermen's organization, but we were certainly not a movement, if indeed we ever were one. In some ways, we had become a professional organization; maybe we were still thinking globally, but we were acting locally. So, does this mean that we are now to be dismissed as a managerial group looking after the narrow interests of owner-operator fishermen, or are we better positioned to make a real political contribution to the 'movement', as it were?

The 'movement' is not my own terminology but leftwing people around the world still seem to use it. The best that I can

say is that there are progressive political forces that add up to what we call the Left and I assume this is what is meant by the 'movement'. I believe that the MFU can and is a progressive force, and can contribute to the Left, but we can only do this from our own limited sociological base. In the Canadian context, inshore fishermen are generating social power by virtue of their fishing work. This social power is always in danger of being consumed by the 'power eaters', be they politicians, resource managers, supporters or regressive fishermen leaders. The MFU represents some of the recovered social power of the inshore fishermen, and, because of this, it is able to play a political role.

Whistling in the Dark

When you are submersed in the daily realities of running an organization, you can be surprised by simple facts that make you think differently about the very organization. Some such surprise is contained in a presentation I made in 1994 at a workshop of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) in Cebu, the Philippines:

To this, we must say that the 1990s' MFU is not the same fishermen's organization as the 1970s' MFU. There are some simple sociological facts; the sociology in a nutshell is this: in the 1970s, we had some of the features of a movement, wives and families and coastal communities had at least some involvement. Our fishermen leaders tended to be in their late twenties and thirties, tended to have work experience outside of the inshore fishery, tended to have more education, and tended to have chosen to stay or return to the fishery. They were what we might call a 'strong year class'. They have moved through the fishery with the MFU right through to the 1990s. Generally, they bought into, and had influence upon, the general fisheries management consensus in Canada that managed with limited-entry licensing and a range of effort and quota controls.

They may have been a strong year class but there was very little recruitment behind them, partially because of their own approach to limiting entry. So what do we have in the MFU by the 1990s? We have fishermen who tend to be males between the ages of 40 to 55. We have fishermen who are almost exclusively the skippers of their own vessels, who have little or no connection with the rest of the trade union movement and whose families tend not to be as implicated in their more 'professional' (or 'modernized') operations. Indeed, our fishermen tend to have between Can\$100,000 to Can\$200,000 invested in the fishery (which, nevertheless, is still a relatively labour-intensive operation in the Canadian context) and some have living standards that sometimes exceed those of the Canadian middleclass norm.

You could say that the 1990s' MFU has a 'thinner' sociological base and, predictably, its membership is less likely to adhere to progressive solidarity-type ideals and is more demanding of 'bread and butter' interest group results.

...the fishermen's organizations are being asked to participate in shaping future fishery with less government income supplement and fewer participants. The government is intent on trimming the fishery to a 'core' of professionals that will hold the licences and the quotas in the future fishery and that will be self-sufficient in relation to State subsidy. The 'core' of professionals would have their professional organizations who would control licensing and, in the long run, co-manage the fishery.

It is for sure that we are in the midst of a restructuring in Canada. The last restructuring of the east coast fishery was in 1982 and it concentrated on setting up stable industrial fishery companies; the present, as yet unformulated, restructuring is tending towards the setting up of stable professional fishermen's organizations. The Maritime Fishermen's Union is being invited to participate in the restructuring, but our response has been ambivalent. We are

facéd with the dilemma of a primary producer organization. If we embrace wholeheartedly the process, we are taking a 'tripartite' and corporatist direction; we take on, or are delegated, some of the powers of the State and, in return, we yield our independence and voluntary character. Put this way, we have no choice; we must remain independent; we must remain a fishermen's organization that tries to follow a union line, a solidarity line. But, our sociology and the conditions of the fishery push us more and more in the direction of a professional association. And even our support, over the past 15 years, for a 'professional' licensing system has been a factor driving us in such a direction.

I should point out again who is missing from our own fishermen's organization. First, approximately half of the owner-operators in our inshore constituency in the Maritime provinces do not belong to any organization. Second, 95 per cent of the men (and sometimes women) who work as crew on the inshore vessels do not belong to our MFU or to any other fisher organization. Third, the families of our members, especially the wives who often help on the business side, but also the young who are sometimes apprenticing, are not in our organization. Fourth, most of the dockside handlers, weighers, truckers and fishplant workers in the inshore fishery remain unorganized and outside of the MFU. With our narrow social base and without linkages to the rest of the working people in the sector, the MFU will tend to be a professional interest group, expressing managerial ideology. This would be another huge irony for a fishermen's organization whose members and staff sacrificed much to be an oppositional organization, a fishworker organization!

But, I do not agree that the MFU is just a professional interest group. We continue to try to unite fishers across barriers of language, geography, gear type, fishing regions, provinces, and income levels. We remain broadly based in the inshore fishery. Our

fishermen continue to rely on the annual cycles of the fish, on their traditional fishing grounds, on their own skill and wit as fishers; many of the inshore fishers continue to share egalitarian principles, principles of fairness, and a basic solidarity with other fishers. They are fishermen that continue to resist the economic model of individual transferable quota systems that end up concentrating quotas in the hands of a few, often in the hands of business interests that end up having the fishermen back fishing for a company.

Maybe I am just 'whistling in the dark', and sociology and fisheries economics will relentlessly turn the MFU into a professional association, regardless. Perhaps! But, the fact also remains that the inshore fishery situation is a fluid one. The challenge for our fishermen's organization is to find its way back to a 'union line', recognizing that a 'union line' with inshore fishers is almost contradictory to their status as autonomous primary producers. If we do not find ways to include the preoccupations of our inshore crew-member fishermen, and ways of bringing the future recruits (the young) and the participating wives into the organization, it will be impossible to find a way back to a 'union line'.

The MFU history is full of ironies—perhaps to the trained sociologist, it is all very predictable, but I still see much irony. It is ironic that the federal Fisheries Department has bailed out the MFU financially on as many as three different occasions, the militant MFU whose earlier organizers were once booted out of the trade union central building for being radical sectarians. It is ironic that as the MFU fought for collective bargaining rights for inshore fishermen on the premise that there was a growing monopoly in the fishery, inshore fishermen were actually gaining more independence from their buyers as a result of better credit, more competition, better information flow, improved social security, and better returns to the vessel, all of which the MFU

also had a hand in creating. In the end, the MFU won collective bargaining rights for inshore fishermen but has seldom bargained. Taken at face value, the exercise seems to have been a failure.

Indeed, it is a complex task to evaluate the role of fishermen's organizations in defending the inshore fishers and the coastal communities. No one would have predicted that the lobster resource would have tripled over the lifetime of the MFU. This resource is the backbone of the inshore fishery (outside of Newfoundland), and the scientific community is at a loss to explain this resource expansion, when exploitation rates on legal size lobsters is as high as 80 per cent.

Ironically, this is probably the MFU's major success story and it derives from an MFU collaboration with government regulators and enforcers to ensure basic adherence to restrictions on size, egg-bearing females and limited entry. It was in its capacity as a professional organization of limited-entry licence holders that the MFU has contributed to a productive lobster fishery.

In 1994, following the cod collapse, I wrote:

It is also ironical that the inshore fleet of the Maritimes may now be in a better position to participate in a future cod recovery (within the Maritime provinces, that is, to again distinguish from Newfoundland, where inshore fishermen are almost exclusively dependent on the cod fishery). The inshore fleet is in a better position than the vertically integrated industrial fishing companies, not because of the militant struggles of the MFU and other fishermen's organizations but because of an unpredicted lobster expansion and because the specialized cod fleets have bankrupted themselves. There is a conjuncture here where the inshore fishermen's organizations can achieve future gains.

The present conjuncture has parallels from an earlier period. One of the commanding myths in the MFU is that of the inshore

fishermen's militant fight with the large herring purse-seiners. The purse-seine fleets arrived in numbers on Canada's east coast in the late 1960s; they landed millions of tonnes of herring in the Gulf of St Lawrence, before they bankrupted themselves and the resource by 1980. Because the MFU was organized and in place in 1980 and because the seiners were finished, the inshore fishermen won major concessions over future access to the resource, and, for some years now, we have enjoyed 80 per cent of the quotas, that is, 82,000 tonnes of herring. (Note: Prior to 1980, the quota allocations were reversed, with the seiners catching 80 per cent of the quota.) The herring resource in the Gulf of St Lawrence is now one of the most productive and best managed fishery in Atlantic Canada. It is now an inshore gill-net fishery and fished by a thousand inshore vessels; this is an anomaly for Western industrial countries, where pelagics are dominated by the industrial fleets. You cannot say that the MFU defeated the seiners. It was more dialectical; the seiners fished out their own resource base and were, therefore, exposed to gains from the inshore.

In both the cod and herring fisheries, the State was ineffective in protecting either the inshore fishermen or the resource against the expansion of catching capacity by larger and more heavily capitalized fleets. Organizations like the MFU were never really heard until most of the damage was done. The reason why we may be able to achieve some gains now in the present groundfish crisis is because our members have stayed with a multispecies fishery and have stayed somewhat organized and, of course, have had the good fortune of holding limited-entry lobster licences and, therefore, have a resource base.

To win these kinds of reversals, the MFU had to be there; the inshore fishermen had to be organized. We have 25 years of organization; we have built up a real collective practice; we have an organizational culture amongst our members and staff, built

up by actions and by working through a democratic structure. Sure, we have a narrow sociological base, but so what? We are who we are. The key is that, through the MFU, our inshore members have recovered at least a portion of the social power they generate as working, producing fishermen. Moreover, the MFU has a power that is premised on being progressive. There are very few identifiable inshore organizations in the country that can make a similar claim.

An international aid and development worker who assisted us with some international funding remarked on the culture of the MFU, in particular, the relationship between the fishermen and the staff. He noted that, often, you find with producer organizations that the staff runs the organization paternalistically or, conversely, the staff are not much more than hired business agents, who are not allowed a role in policymaking and simply carry out the orders of the fishermen in charge. I have noted that the populist and rightwing tendencies that are always present in the fishing communities reject the idea of staff. They say that fishermen can run their own organizations. In reality, there is no broadbased fishermen's organization in the country with an ongoing structure that does not have staff. Prior to the 1990s decade, the MFU referred to its principal workers as organizers. It is fitting that the job designations changed in the early 1990s; organizers are now local co-ordinators, regional co-ordinators or project officers. Regardless, it is the relationship of the staff to the elected fishermen and wharf representatives that is key to maintaining a progressive organization.

Historically, MFU staff have played many different roles in the organization, but the particular contribution that interests me—and the one I believe the international aid worker noted—is the struggle the staff have made to retain their independent

function and thinking in a kind of dialectical struggle with the fishermen. Staff thinking and ideas are no good if they cannot be worked out with the fishermen, while fishermen's thinking can easily lose its political force if not tempered against that of the staff. We have had good fortune with this relationship over the years and it is part of the essential culture of the MFU.

Another characteristic of the MFU that is usually taken for granted, but which should never be underestimated, is its basic democratic structure. It is the structure that distinguishes us from a local spontaneous organization of fishermen. Even to this day, when we hear the MFU being referred to as an association, we smart under the designation. We never became a formalized trade union, but we followed a constitution and a democratic framework. We maintained a broad base, and we depended less on one or two charismatic leaders. When you survey the world for fishermen's organizations, you simply do not find many that span large geographic areas, different inshore fisheries, diverse language groups and mixed races, and that maintain the basic principle of one person, one vote. In other words, the MFU is not a federation of small associations. A member is a member, not a member of an association that then joins an umbrella federation.

Our type of organization seems to run counter to the anarchistic tendencies of the inshore fishing culture. For example, our veteran fishermen are very conscious of the difference in how the MFU conducts meetings, compared to the spontaneous gatherings of fishermen. Holding an annual convention can be a financial and organizational burden for an organization like the MFU. Most unions hold conventions every two or three years. When we, as the staff, suggested that we go for a convention every two years, it was placed as a resolution before the convention and soundly rejected. Inshore fishermen just do not

have the opportunity to meet and debate the issues of the day in a parliamentary format and in a context that is usually less conflictual. Its democratic nature and structure is a valued component of the MFU, even if it does not take up much space in this essay.

Spontaneous gatherings of fishermen are a regular occurrence around the world, but planned gatherings of fishermen, where they are the main voices in an organized environment with accepted rules of procedure can become potential moments for consolidating and recovering the social power that I spoke of. Populist meetings, on the other hand, will tend in the other direction towards a dissipation of energies and social power. When meetings break down into shouting matches or towers of babel, fishermen will tend not to return. The nature of the meeting itself then becomes a key component of building durable organizations. Again, I should add that our type of organizational model will not function without dependable support workers who are able to find ways to not only organize themselves and others around issues but to also engage in forms of social animation.

During the upheavals of the 1990s, one of the biggest challenges facing the MFU was to keep our nerve. We had something going for ourselves, but the cod collapse and structural adjustment, with all that it entails, threatened to subsume us. As an organization, it was critical to keep a clear head. It was essential that we resist our reality being defined by other forces. By this, I mean that the inshore that we represented, especially in the southern Gulf of St Lawrence, had a stable resource base in lobster and herring. We had evolved an effective licence policy for our owner-operator multispecies inshore fleet. Our markets were reasonably strong. There was no reason for us to accept interpretations of the fishery that were based on the

haemorrhaging cod situation. There was every reason for us to demonstrate that fishing inshore with fixed gear was not only productive but also demonstrably a better management model than the one the DFO had developed for the cod fishery.

The MFU's membership adds up to approximately 10 per cent of all the fishermen of eastern Canada. So much takes place in the fishery that is outside of any power the MFU might have. Nevertheless, events transpire that open up possibilities for organized inshore fishermen to make gains. The MFU made a historic breakthrough in the snow crab fishery of the southern Gulf of St Lawrence in 1995. That is a case study that demonstrates my point.

This specific snow crab fishery developed after 1970. Over the years, it evolved as an exclusive product for niche markets in Japan. The fishermen who prosecuted it became increasingly specialized and were very successful in creating a form of monopoly. Using the backing of the provincial government in New Brunswick, it succeeded in having the federal licensing authority restrict entry to 80 licence holders in the Acadian Peninsula of New Brunswick.

The 'crabbers' were notorious, even in the 1980s, for having made 'big money' in the fishery. But, by 1994, their monopoly-like position was becoming untenable. While most of the country's east coast fishermen were reeling from the closure of the cod fishery, the crab resource was expanding. This was happening in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but it was expanding at the same time, almost exponentially, in Newfoundland. (Shrimp too 'bloomed' after the cod moratorium, apparently because waters were cooling, but most evidently because a major predator, the cod, had been vanquished.) The Japanese market was also strong due to weakened *Chionoecetes opilio* (Alaskan snow crab) stocks and a strong yen. Prior to the 1994 spring season, it was

clear that the 80 ‘crabbers’ in the Acadian Peninsula were heading for a Klondike. (*The reference is to a region of Yukon Territory, Canada, just east of Alaska and traversed by the Klondike River, where gold was discovered in 1896, leading to the gold rush of 1897-1898, when over 25,000 people sought their fortune in frozen conditions – Ed*)

At the same time, fishermen dependent on groundfish everywhere went not only bankrupt but were also being sustained by massive government aid. The government was forced to reconsider its allocation of snow crab to such a tiny elite of already ‘comfortable’ (and sometimes wealthy) snow crab licence holders. The ‘crabbers’ quickly scrambled to propose a fund from some of their surplus to aid groundfish dependents. This was done to fend off the possibility of losing some of their quota allocations to other fishermen. In New Brunswick, this tactic also worked to keep the dreaded inshore fishermen, represented by the MFU, from gaining access to the snow crab fishery. Our fishermen had argued for years that snow crab was found in their inshore and that they should have access to it as part of their multispecies approach to fishing. But, it was a demand that kept being denied.

It turned out that the ‘crabbers’ did achieve superprofits in 1994, even after contributing to the groundfish fund. Their position became less tenable in 1995, as our inshore multispecies fishermen were growing in militancy over this kind of inequality in the community, where they eked out a living wage, while crab licence holders got millions of dollars. Conditions were expected to be even more favourable in 1995, both in terms of price and catch. The very legitimacy of limited-entry licensing was challenged by such enormous profits accruing to a handful of licence holders on the Acadian Peninsula. One chartered accountant estimated that this group of 80 was worth half a billion Canadian dollars in an area of the country where the

unemployment rate was 20 per cent. The government's allocations of crab quota had to change.

The MFU was able to leverage the snow crab monopoly, now verging on scandalous proportions, for a political foothold. We proposed an alternative approach. We decided not to argue for a handful of new licences that would benefit a fraction of our members. The entire bona fide licensing system that we had promoted for the past 15 years was designed to generate reasonable incomes for the whole collectivity of fishermen, not just for new enclaves of the privileged few.

We proposed that 25 per cent of the snow crab allocation should accrue to the MFU as an organization of inshore fishermen. Fishermen could fish part of our MFU allocation on charter and the proceeds would be invested in a health insurance fund for all inshore fishermen in eastern New Brunswick. The rest of the MFU allocation would be broken down into individual allocations of 11,000 lb each and all fishermen would be eligible to enter into a draw to have temporary (one-year) access to snow crab. In practice, 11,000 lbs represented a good secondary fishery for the inshore fishermen—and 240 fishermen qualified for such allocations in 1995. We won the essentials of our proposal and, for the first time, New Brunswick inshore fishermen were allocated, through the MFU, 20 per cent of the quota formerly monopolized by 80 licence holders. It was a bold decision by the Minister of Fisheries, but the entrenched 'crabbers' were outraged. They howled from the rooftops; it was 'the end of civilization' as they knew it. The MFU had prevailed.

Our alternative model was enormously successful and the health insurance fund, established in 1995, is still providing for basic drugs for inshore families. The MFU had made a breakthrough because political forces had converged to weaken

vested interests. But the 'Crab Lords' were not finished. The sequel to the story is less pretty; it is not germane to my example, but it illustrates the role a broadbased progressive organization of inshore fishermen can play in a volatile and explosive fisheries conflict.

The Lords of the Crab

The term 'Crab Lords' was coined by the MFU in 1996, when the full power of the 'crabbers' was directed toward the MFU on the Acadian Peninsula. The peninsula is fish country and the base of its local economy is the fishery. The 100,000 Acadians who populate the area were the former victims of 'ethnic cleansing' in 1755 by British troops who rounded them up from their productive farms in Nova Scotia and deported them to the US. Many found their way by river routes and the woods to remote areas of New Brunswick, aided, in some instances, by Mi'kmaq Indian people through harsh winters and past the probing eyes of British colonial authorities. They learned to live from the sea and built up communities that spent 200 years in relative Canadian poverty.

By 1996, the crab interests were beside themselves. Both the price of crab and catches were projected to drop in the coming season, although they would still remain lucrative. When the DFO issued the crab plan for 1996 in early April, the MFU's 'temporary' share was included. All hell broke loose. The crab licence holders refused to accept the plan. They tied up their vessels and orchestrated street demonstrations. Buildings were smashed, barricades set up, individuals threatened and villages invaded by mobs of angry protestors, as police were forced to escort MFU leaders.

How could 80 snow crabbers create such threatening and riotous actions? The short answer is that they had Mafia-like control over local economies like Shippagan. By 1996, the licence

holders were not only displaying conspicuous wealth but had gained ownership of the major crab plants and had enormous influence over others who depended on crab for work. Furthermore, they employed crew who made excellent wages for a six-week fishery and who were superior in status and job security. Some were family members who expected to eventually take control of the enterprise; others were wage earners who had no union and no security. The limit on the amount of crab that could be caught would affect the amount of work plant hands could get, the income the crew would earn, and the number of temporary fishermen the crabbers would need. Furthermore, while the MFU's snow crab was being landed and processed on the peninsula, it was often delivered to plants not directly owned by crab licence holders. The situation was vulnerable to manipulation, intimidation and half-truths. Some of the women plant workers were out on the streets, ordered there by their boss. Members of crew were threatened with layoffs because quota was going to the MFU. The crabbers were successful in making the MFU the scapegoat for all the troubles of the fish plant workers. They were demagogic, stirring up passions and hatred towards the inshore fishers.

One evening, a mob of some 500 people marched into the village of Val Comeau, where the MFU president lived and where the small inshore community was long seen as a centre of MFU strength. The villagers got confused and fearful, and some headed to the woods, armed with hunting rifles. A promise by the MFU president to take their demands back to the inshore fishermen managed to defuse the fury of the mob that evening. The following evening, a thousand inshore fishermen filled the high school auditorium in nearby Tracadie. They were furious; there was talk of riot, retaliation, boatburning and so on. One demagogic word from the MFU leadership and the peninsula

would have been plunged into crisis. We were able to re-assure fishermen that the government was not going to cave in to the Crab Lords and that we were heading to meet with the fisheries minister. Since the MFU was well known and respected, and because the fishermen were used to working through the MFU—in short, because they were organized—chaos, anarchy and, possibly, bloodshed was avoided. The fishermen's decisions to go through the MFU in this volatile climate was key. The crab protests abated. The minister stuck to his position and the 1996 fishery proceeded without major incident.

However, quotas continued to decline in 1997, as scientists had predicted, and the MFU's share of the fishery was still only designated as temporary. It was time for the provincial government to show its bias towards local capital and against its own inshore fishermen. Under the guise of setting up a plant workers' fund to be financed by surplus revenues from the snow crabbers, the provincial premier backed the crabbers' five-year plan that effectively kept the MFU out of the fishery when gross revenues per licence holders fell below Can\$500,000. It was a sleight of hand and a capitulation to the mob terror unleashed the previous spring.

There is so much more to the story, especially on the matter of working-class vulnerability and gender issues, that cannot be told in this limited essay. Fishplant workers are mainly women, who are largely unorganized, earning wages barely enough to keep them above the poverty line. If they had any interests at all for fishermen, you would imagine those would be for the union-oriented inshore fishermen. In 1999, two of the snow crab lords sold their licences to interests outside the province. It meant nothing to them that their quota allocations might end up in fishplants far from the Acadian Peninsula, far from the very women who were forced into the streets on their account.

The snow crab story is not finished. The MFU was excluded for three years by the five-year 'partnership' agreement. But with prices and quotas again rising, we expect to be back fishing in 2001, when we will be able to complete our rotation plan that allows all multispecies fishermen to eventually have one-year access, before returning to the top of the roster list.

A fishermen's organization like the MFU will always be unstable because of the nature of the fishery itself and the character of fishermen as independent operators. Members want to see gains on basic bread-and-butter issues and not just on broad policy matters. By using a portion of the snow crab allocation to fund a health insurance programme, the MFU, for the first time in its history, was able to provide a benefit not only for fishermen but also for their spouses and children. The insurance programme has provided a kind of glue for the membership, an extra incentive to support the union during periods when there is no one dominant and uniting issue. The final years of the 20th century was that kind of period.

Shrinking Government

For the 19 years that I have been associated with the fisheries, there was always some public figure, political leader or technocratic planner who intended to 'rationalize' the fishery. For example, in 1985, a Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects called for a drastic reduction in the number of fishermen. During the inshore-offshore review in 1988, fisheries officials claimed there was a huge overcapacity problem, but instead of focusing on technology and fishing power, they actually exempted the offshore industrial fleet from their definition of overcapacity because they were on enterprise allocations. As late as 1994, a Task Force on Incomes and Adjustment in the fishery wanted to reduce the numbers of

fishermen by 50 per cent. On the west coast, in 1996, the fisheries department introduced the controversial Mifflin Plan in the salmon fishery that would force a concentration and shrinkage in this famous Pacific coast fishery. Indeed, the number of registered fishermen dropped from 19,000 to 8,500 by the year 2000.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) types, Canada was up against a 'debt wall' in 1993, the same year that the full dimensions of the cod loss were revealed. The collapse of this historical fishery, which first brought the Europeans into this continent, was the last straw for the 'rationalizers'. The country's managers were now openly talking of the fishery as a 'sunset' industry, even though whole regions of the country depended on the fishery. Even if the cod stocks recovered, the managers were determined to have a dramatically reduced fishery that would be largely privatized and self-financing. Public ownership and management of the fishery was clearly under attack. Indeed, government itself was increasingly under attack as being too big; not only was the population of fishermen to be shrunk, the DFO was also facing massive cutbacks.

We were into the era of privatization, de-regulation, and cost recovery, and one of the prized vehicles in the fishery to carry this vision forward was the ITQ system and its variants. The *National Globe and Mail* promoted ITQs as the answer to the new fishery. Newly formed rightwing think tanks, like the Atlantic Institute for Marketing Studies, conducted conferences in praise of ITQs.

To me, ITQs may have had the theoretical backing of the Chicago School of economics and the Treasury Board of New Zealand, but in Canada, ITQs were used to create privilege and drive people out of the fishery; they were implemented in

piecemeal fashion, generally rewarding the most recent history of catch—a kind of ‘might is right’ principle. Most of the aggressive dragger fleets, be they midshore or offshore, were under some form of ITQ by 1992, when the ancient Northern cod stock was closed. Since most cod was being caught under this much-touted system of ITQs, it is difficult not to conclude that they played a role in one of the greatest disasters in the history of the fishery. I, for one, find it astonishing that not only did ITQs escape from bearing at least a portion of the blame for our cod losses, they were being embraced ideologically with even more vigour following the collapse.

The ITQ approach was included within a broader framework of partnership agreements. These agreements were targeted at the specialist/ascendancy fleets and corporate fisheries like the offshore scallop fishery on George’s Bank. In a partnership agreement, the DFO would detail what a specific fleet would be allocated for a five-year period and what would be the fleet’s obligations in terms of dockside monitoring, observers at sea, scientific costs, air surveillance, licence fees and so on. The agreements provided protection to the quota holders; in return, the quota holders were paying new costs formerly picked up by the public treasury. That may have been a great deal for the elite specialized sector but it is generally inimical to the common good or interests of the collectivity of fishermen who make their living from fishing. Once again, the few offshore scallopers, midshore snow crabbers and mid- and offshore shrimpers were being offered more security and stability through privileged positions and frequent superprofits. But the national planners could argue that they were reducing the costs of running the fishery and improving control mechanisms.

The Fisheries Act was to be amended to give even broader scope to the partnership approach. The inshore fishermen’s

organizations, including the MFU, strongly opposed the proposed Sections 17 to 21 of the new Act on the grounds that the minister's powers would be even further co-opted by 'sweetheart' arrangements with corporate fisheries interests, to the detriment of the multispecies inshore fishermen. The example that the MFU knew the best came from the snow crab fishery, where partnership negotiations had commenced in 1995, in private, with representatives of the snow crab licence holders in the Gulf of St Lawrence. Remember, 1995 was the year the MFU finally gained access to the snow crab resource, and here were government officials quietly working out a long-term partnership agreement with the 80 midshore licence holders. When the first drafts came to light in early 1996, the entire inshore was astounded, and we went after the bureaucrats and politicians. This draft was withdrawn, but a more sophisticated version was finally signed in 1997, with the blessing of the premier of New Brunswick.

The partnership approach was offering nothing to the thousands of inshore operators. It was only really entrenching the status quo fishing rights of select fleets. The approach also appeared to be skewing DFO's science branch towards the interests of the select fleet. Here is a resolution that was passed at our annual convention that expresses the anger we had with the way science was going:

Whereas the Snow Crab Science Unit at DFO Moncton relies on the traditional snow crab licence holders to pay for their annual trawl survey;

Whereas this annual survey is the cornerstone of the Snow Crab Unit's work;

Whereas this same Snow Crab Unit completely by-passed the MFU in holding its recent science review process;

Be it resolved that the MFU commissions its own study to determine if this Snow Crab Unit, which is employed by the Government of Canada, is conducting its work in a fair and impartial manner.

Further be it resolved that the study inquire into whether it is in the general interest of fisheries management, including the interest of the bona fide (multispecies inshore) fleet to leave to the traditional snow crab licence holders to determine whether or not there will be an annual trawl survey.

In the end, the MFU did not commission an outside study, but was able to apply pressure on DFO's Science Unit; nevertheless, the basic issue remains to be resolved and that is that the scientists employed by the DFO have developed a special relation with the midshore licence holders, through the partnership agreements, whereby the financing of the trawl survey is paid by the licence holders. In 1997, when a dispute over the sharing of crab with the MFU was still raging, the crabbers withheld financing for the trawl survey, and it was not conducted for that year.

The general trend of the government to cut back and privatize, was placing a broadbased organization like the MFU in an increasingly difficult position. We were obligated to look after the interests of the collectivity of inshore fishermen. I tried to capture our dilemma in a presentation made to a fishermen's workshop in St John's, Newfoundland, in September 1997:

This character of being broadbased makes us enormously sensitive, and indeed vulnerable, to the apparent drive in the national government towards 'privatizing' the fisheries. It places us at loggerheads with the DFO as it progressively abdicates its role of manager of the fishery to brokering partnership deals with special interests or specialist fleets. It also places our organization under enormous stress, as the downloading of responsibility for the

common good must inevitably be shouldered by our type of organization. We are beginning to find that instead of fishers focusing on DFO as the architect of their problems, they are beginning to view the staff and executives of the MFU as the source of their inability to get what they want or need, regardless of the common good...

Unfortunately, the legitimate aspirations of fishermen and women towards more say in the fishery quickly plays into the powerful dynamic coming from Treasury Board planners who not only want to divest from the fisheries but make a profit as they go.

So, the broadbased fishermen's organization is caught in the ambiguities of co-management. On the one hand, fishermen are clearly attracted by the idea of having more control, and we have to work with this. On the other hand, the DFO and the Treasury Board, under the fine-sounding terms of co-management or partnering, are pursuing a highly questionable privatization agenda.

This is the agenda promoted by the corporate sector through the Fisheries Council of Canada and it is legitimized by people like Dr Art May, Memorial's President who, if last week's Saint John Telegraph Journal reported accurately, not only enthusiastically embraces privatization but has also flipped history on its head by blaming small-scale fishermen for the collapse of the fish.

We are into a very ironic situation where the overriding policy of the Government of Canada is working in favour of some very special interests, while the rest of us are left agonizing over the fate of the coastal working people and their communities.

I'll try to be more specific by following up on Dr Art May's model for privatization: the New Brunswick crabbers. This is a group of 81 licence holders who've had quite a time of it over the past

15 years. One respected accountant told me that this group is worth approximately half a billion dollars. This would mean the average area 12 snow crab licence holder is worth approximately 60 times more than the average Canadian. This is the same group that DFO planners have been actively wooing as a model partner. The basics of the partnership can be boiled down to DFO using the full powers of the federal State to grant private ownership of most, if not all, of the Southern Gulf of St Lawrence snow crab resource to this group of crabbers. In return, the group picks up some of the annual costs of the science and management of this resource.

This is all fine and dandy, until you realize that there is another fleet in the Southern Gulf. This is the inshore bona fide fleet made up of 4,000 owner-operator fishermen who pursue a well-developed and well-regulated multispecies fishery, relying first on the productive and widely dispersed lobster resource and then on a range of licences to make a full fishing season.

This fleet has permanent access to 10 per cent of the snow crab resource. In New Brunswick, however, the inshore bona fide fleet has no permanent access. Under the latest agreement between the DFO and the New Brunswick crabbers, our 1,400-strong bona fide fleet is allowed marginal and temporary access only when the average gross value of the crab licence holder landings reaches Can\$500,000 (this is what they call the economic viability threshold).

Make no mistake: the snow crab resource in the Southern Gulf populates many of our inshore fishing banks. It is not in exotic places accessible to a midshore vessel only. So, we have to ask what kind of policy drives the Government of Canada to sign a resource agreement that so favours an elite group, while the common good of one of the most productive and broadbased inshore fleets in the country is ignored.

At face value, it looks good that fishers are being challenged to assume responsibility for their fisheries. Who can quarrel with that? That's fine, but it is how the challenge is being implemented that concerns us. Considerations for the collectivity of fishers go out the window when the overriding agenda is cost recovery, downsizing of government and privatization of the fishery. You can imagine the force of the lobby coming from those individuals and groups who stand to gain from the privatization of the country's marine resources. The 20-year old APFA blew apart under the stress of the crabbers' drive toward private (and exclusive) ownership. All organizations are faced with potential fragmentation into special interest groups who see the chance of tying down their own 'piece of the pie', be it scallop or tuna or haddock or shrimp. DFO is apparently open to all manner of proposals, and is signing agreements that have enormous consequences for the common good of coastal communities, but which are not clearly scrutinized from the point of view of the common good.

At the present time, some of our bona fide fleet faces bankruptcy as a consequence of localized drops in the lobster catch and the collapse of herring roe price (not to mention the prolonged demise of the cod stocks). We cannot accept the inevitability of these bankruptcies when we see what DFO's public policy is doing. Our fishermen, for example, estimate that they are paying between \$5,000 and \$9,000 in new costs as a result of DFO requirements for licence fees, dockside monitoring, observers, science costs, wharfage fees and so on. But this is only one aspect of it. How can we accept the little guy's bankruptcy when we have watched a midshore mobile groundfish fleet (that appears to be one of the architects of the Southern Gulf cod failure) kept on artificial respiration with shrimp and crab quotas, special cod experiments, special vessel maintenance payments, Provincial Loan Board concessions, et al?

We do not believe that DFO has the right or the moral authority to decide who stays and who goes. Yet, from our vantage point, this is what it is doing in its privatization drive, and this is the context in which organizations like ours are being asked to shoulder responsibilities for resource management. And this is why co-management for us is fraught with ambiguities.

Things, of course, are not just black-and-white, and, while we challenge public policy, we recognize that there remains many broad areas of agreement that make it possible to work on a daily basis with DFO's public servants; nevertheless, the difficult context of which I have spoken remains.

In closing, I must take issue with Dr Leslie Harris, who also was quoted in Saint John Telegraph Journal, as saying that the continued trend towards private property rights (generally known as ITQs) cannot be stopped. Of course, it can be stopped, and it will take broadbased fishermen's organizations, working with those individuals who still believe in public policy for the common good, to do it.

Downloading of Responsibilities

One of our questioning members was recently profiled in a local weekend edition of the daily newspaper. At one point, he is quoted as saying that the biggest problem he has to deal with as a fisherman is the DFO management and MFU management: "At one time, there were a number of fisheries committees, such as one for lobster and one for herring, and the fishermen on the committee would sit down with the DFO people to discuss such issues as net size, catch limits, number of traps and so on. Now, however, DFO meets with the MFU. Now, half the time, you don't know what's going on. We don't know what the discussions are. It seems like the MFU is going into management. We already have management—the DFO."

He goes on to say that the MFU has a place but it isn't in management. As an organization, we are always sensitive to public criticism by our members, but I found these comments important enough not to ignore. They capture perfectly the situation our organization has been cast into as a result of the cutbacks and downloading of responsibilities formerly carried out by DFO.

It is one thing to enter into partnerships in discrete fisheries like snow crab, where there are a small number of licence holders earning rewarding incomes from lucrative fisheries. It is another thing to sign agreements covering thousands of inshore fishermen dispersed across hundreds of fishing harbours, and fishing several different species, all with discrete management plans. Inshore fishermen are not members of the MFU because it is a specialized interest group; they join it because it fights for the general interest of inshore fishermen. But, the more we become implicated in the negotiation and implementation of discrete harvesting plans, the more we are forced into positions of administration and authority. Instead of DFO being the target of fishermen's frustrations and demands, the MFU itself is seen as the responsible party. In theory, this is a move towards self-management and self-governing that is attractive to fishermen; in theory, it gives them a more direct say in how their fisheries are run. In practice, it can easily become a 'set-up'. The MFU does not have the powers of the minister; we are not the licensing authority, we do not have taxing powers. Furthermore, our members' access to the fishing grounds is limited by the quasi-property rights already allocated to the specialized fleets.

This parcelling out of the fishery has been going on ever since Canada's assumption of the 200-mile EEZ in 1977. By 1998, there were so many emotions around this parcelling out that I recall, in a spontaneous outburst during a high-level meeting

of the industry, likening it to apartheid. The inshore had 90 per cent of the fishermen but less and less access to the full fishery. Co-management is a nice concept, but under conditions of inequality, there is an aspect that is analogous to the governance of a 'bantustan' (*any of several all-black enclaves with a limited degree of self-government that existed during the apartheid regime in the Republic of South Africa – Ed*)

The apartheid analogy is not meant to imply, even for a minute, that the situation of Canadian inshore fishermen can be compared to that of Black South Africa under the apartheid regime. There is no comparison whatsoever. In fact, the objective conditions of inshore fishermen in the Maritimes improved demonstrably in the 1990s because of the ironies and reversals that took place especially in the lobster fishery.

The lobster fishery is almost everything that the planners did not predict or have in mind. It supports thousands of independent inshore fishermen. It is not managed by quota; it is a competitive (as distinct from an ITQ) fishery; there is a high degree of egalitarianism and it is spread over thousands of miles of coastline. The management of the lobster fishery does not depend on scientific assessment using surveys and year-class analysis. In many ways, this particular fishery has been co-managed for decades.

Management of lobster was not a top-down social experiment; it evolved by trial and error, dialectically between fishermen and the DFO regulatory body. Fishermen themselves promoted most of the restrictions like seasons, zones, limited entry and minimum sizes. Of course, there are problems in this fishery and it is being subject to enormous pressures under modern conditions that should be treated in a separate paper. But, as I have said above, there is a wide management consensus

in this fishery that has gone largely unnoticed and unreported by national planners and privatization ideologues. It also provides the objective base from which the MFU is able to resist the trends towards micro-management and corporate specialization. Our experience in the lobster fishery explains why co-management is ambiguous: one form of it we have practised long before it was embraced by public policy; the new forms of co-management coming from the policy visionaries can actually contradict and undermine the co-management we already had.

At the level of the MFU, the downloading aspect of co-management takes many different forms and covers many species like rock crab, groundfish (cod and flounder, in particular), herring, scallop and smelt and gaspareaux, not to mention lobster. For fishermen to have access to a few days of cod fishing, for example, we have to negotiate a fishing plan that identifies opening dates, the amount of quota, zones and so on. But we also have to collect fees for dockside monitoring and observers at sea, and we have to enter into agreements with the companies that carry out these services. In the low-priced rock crab fishery, we have to do all of the above and also ensure local community quotas are fairly implemented. In short, there are complicated administrative and managerial responsibilities that the MFU has assumed at the same time as we continue to adhere to a 'union line' in the fishery as a broadbased membership organization that must fight back in the policy and political dimensions of the fishery.

The simplistic notions of privatization, whereby the State (through the DFO) progressively withdraws from the public enterprise of fisheries management, has floundered on many fronts as the 21st century arrives. As much as the central planners scheduled the commercial fishery as a 'sunset' industry, they have run up against the realities of the political force of the inshore

fishery. It may prove to be a temporary setback in national policy direction, since there are many forces that may yet undermine the inshore fishery base from which the MFU works.

For example, the DFO itself has been subtly shifting its mandate from fisheries to oceans. In one sense, this could be seen as the 'greening' of a department that basically saw fishermen as its clients. Under an ocean mandate, priority goes to integrated ocean management plans. On the surface, this would seem to favour conservation and environmental protection. But, it also appears to be related to alternative uses of the ocean. In an advanced economy like Canada, leisure activities become priorities; this includes renewed support for recreational fisheries, boating and ecotourism. But, alternative uses also mean new aquaculture directions, sea mining, and oil and gas explorations. The 'oceans vision' leaves little room for fishermen as the major client group. Fishermen are viewed less as primary producers and engines of the coastal economy, and more like anachronisms.

The oceans vision is fraught with ambiguities and it too will have to contend with the surviving fishing culture of the east coast, which has defied predictions and which has resisted, to a remarkable degree, the industrialization of the fishery that seems to have decimated the inshore in Europe.

Aboriginal and Native Rights

An apparently unrelated phenomenon also appears to play into the oceans vision or, at least, the trend towards disengagement of DFO from the commercial fishermen. This is the recent Canadian Supreme Court decisions that have upheld aboriginal and native treaty rights. Unquestionably, on both the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts, the native peoples of Canada practised subsistence fishing prior to European contact and ever since, coastal bands have variously participated in commercial

fisheries. The coastal native people of the Maritime provinces are the Mi'kmaq; they represent perhaps three per cent of the coastal population of the present-day Maritimes.

In the country as a whole, the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples comprise about three per cent of the population. The history of relations with the Euro-Canadians is complex, but, collectively speaking, there is little question that native First Nations progressively lost their traditional territories and have been reduced to reserve lands. An aboriginal has the same rights and protections as every Canadian citizen, but, with respect to treaties and traditional territory, there has been a long tradition of neglect, fraud and outright discrimination. As a people, they carry enormous burdens of poverty and social breakdown, as well as grievances.

In recent years, the courts have arrived at liberal interpretations of some of their treaties and aboriginal rights. But there is an enormous amount of outstanding land claims and litigation, and, taken as a whole, the natives' place in Canada still remains to be addressed in a modern treaty process.

The commercial fishery on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts believes that Canada's federal government wants to use the fishery as a central piece in settling native issues. This would, in the minds of fishermen, result in large transfers of fisheries resources, access and control to Indian peoples. 'Robbing Peter to pay Paul' is how many fishermen see the issue. They feel they are being asked to pay the cost of settling with the First Nations, when such a cost should be borne by the society as a whole.

For native peoples themselves, there is a broad adherence to the principle of self-government. I am hardly the person to interpret how they see this being worked out in a practical way within Canadian society. There appears to be a whole spectrum

of adherents, who range in beliefs from full sovereign status to local municipal-type powers. But the principle of self-government definitely pervades their formal policy approach to the fishery.

Since the Sparrow Decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in 1990, which recognized an aboriginal right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, native fishing issues have increasingly preoccupied the commercial fishery, and the federal government has evolved a whole approach to accommodating the right. The centrepiece of DFO's approach has been the negotiation of communal fishing licences, band by band. (*According to Canada's Indian Act of 1985, a 'band' means a body of Indians – Ed*) The approach recognized, to a degree, the idea of self-management by the bands, whereby they would be allocated so much quota for their apparent food and ceremonial purposes, while, at the same time, they were helped with licences, equipment and training to enter the commercial fishery. On paper, it seemed to be a sensible and rational approach. In practice, the food fishery built up into an enormous issue for our fishermen, and it is MFU fishermen who have carried the burden of this new fishery on Canada's east coast.

Food fishery problems are centred in the lobster fishery, and the coastal bands exercising their food fishing rights are found mostly in areas where the MFU is the main fishermen's organization. From St Mary's Bay in Southwest Nova Scotia to the Bras d'Or Lakes of Cape Breton, to the Gulf Coast of New Brunswick and north Nova Scotia is where you find as much as 80 per cent of coastal Mi'kmaq people.

The MFU always believed the food fishery in lobster was manageable, and MFU fishermen, generally, kept an open mind about the issue. But it didn't take long, though, before it became a burning issue in specific areas. The lobster is quite a sedentary

animal and generally does not move more than a few kilometres from its spawning grounds. Its habitat is in shallow waters; as the water cools in the fall, it generally moves to deeper waters, but returns in the spring and summer to the warm and shallow waters of the bays. Fishermen themselves reflect this relative sedentary nature of the lobster and normally fish in the immediate areas of their own wharves and harbours, although the lobster licence that they hold actually permits them to move throughout a zone. The lobster zones vary in size, some extending to 200 and 300 miles of coastline. The fishery is strictly limited by seasons and the number of traps an individual fishermen can use. Lobster fishermen are very territorial and there are unwritten codes about where a fishermen with his traps are permitted. In extreme examples, fishermen have specific 'plots' in the water that are established by lines extending from the property they hold on land. Virtually every lobster bottom in the Maritime provinces is fully subscribed to; there is no such thing as an underutilized lobster fishery. In fact, scientists estimate the yearly exploitation rate on lobsters of legal size to be as high as 80 per cent.

There is nowhere to go to fish lobster where you will not encounter fully licensed commercial fishermen who adhere to their grounds as if it were property. As late as 1975, a Canadian, including an aboriginal Canadian, could purchase a lobster licence for as little as 25 Canadian cents. In tiny native bands like that of Burnt Church, there were 30 to 40 persons holding lobster licences during the post-War period, but catches were low, as were prices. Then, a freeze on the number of lobster licences was introduced as well as a government-sponsored buyback programme. Licences were also re-classified as A and B licences. Part-time fishermen could hold B licences, but could not transfer them. They would disappear with attrition.

During this period of transition to a limited-entry system in the lobster fishery, there remained many areas of resistance, where poachers were strong and continued to fish with few regulations, including out-of-season fishing. In the early years of the MFU, one of the most difficult and sometimes least recognized tasks of the organization was to bring an end to poaching. It is easy to characterize poachers as criminal, and there were organized rings that had this character. But many of the poachers were poor fishing families that relied on many marginal activities to keep bread on the table. Not everybody saw the merits of supporting a rigid system of licensing and limited entry.

As poaching was brought under control, native fishing went unrecognized. A status Indian could not raise money to purchase the equipment, gear and licences necessary to compete in the modernized limited-entry system. I do not have the story as to how the numbers of fishermen in a coastal band like Burnt Church dropped dramatically, but native leaders say that the new system was exclusionary and systematically worked to reduce native participation. This is a story that needs to be told and documented; it would help modify the righteous claims made by some present-day fishermen that natives had equal opportunity to lobster fishery but simply abandoned it. What role did outright discrimination play in keeping natives out? Where was the government itself on this issue? Did it not have a fiduciary responsibility towards native peoples?

The Supreme Court decision of 1990 that ruled that Sparrow had an aboriginal right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes originated from a fisheries charge on Canada's Pacific coast, but it did not take long before Mi'kmaq peoples of the Atlantic Coast began exercising their food rights. According to the Supreme Court, this right had priority over commercial fishing, and was only subject to considerations of

conservation. The court did not spell out what was actually meant by food, social and ceremonial purposes, and it was natural that some native bands would give it the widest of interpretations. The lobster fishery, which relied on seasons as a key component of the management plan, was vulnerable. Natives started fishing out of season, maintaining they were fishing for food. From the fishermen's perspective, this was a black hole that was undermining the lobster management system and opening the door to poaching and out-of-season commercial fishing under the guise of a food fishery.

There is a long history of relations between the Mi'kmaq and the Acadian peoples that pre-dates the deportation of 1755. So, it is not surprising to find that most of the coastal bands of Mi'kmaq are situated in areas where Acadians also live. Since most Acadian inshore fishermen are also associated with the MFU, it was inevitable that the MFU would become embroiled in this difficult issue of native fishing rights.

Under the Sparrow Decision, aboriginal people had a right to fish for food but not for sale. Yet, out-of-season lobster catch was going into the commercial trade and the DFO seemed to be casting a blind eye. In the Richibucto area of New Brunswick, the commercial season begins in August. In June, the Mi'kmaqs at the nearby Big Cove band would start putting traps in waters within eyesight of the commercial fishermen's wharf and bait sheds. The traditional fishermen were being asked to stand by and wait for the commercial season to open in August, while they saw lobsters being removed daily from the very grounds they would be fishing a few weeks later. How many lobsters were being taken, how many females with eggs extruding were killed, how many undersized were caught, how many traps were in the water, and whether the lobster was really going back to the reserve for food or into commercial trade for profit—these

were the questions and doubts that arose. From 1993 to 1999, summer tensions grew as the DFO seemed unable to satisfy anyone that this was a truly limited and defined fishery for food and ceremonial purposes. Fishermen were made to feel like chumps and they were affronted by the periodic appearance of native warriors bearing arms.

Our approach was to demand precise details from the DFO, while, at the same time, establishing talks with native people whereby they would substitute food fishing for access to the commercial fishery. Gradually, the Big Cove band, for example, agreed to limitations on the food fishery in exchange for commercial access. The DFO, under its aboriginal fisheries strategy, would work out commercial fishing agreements with the bands. The issues continued to fester, but at least there was some balance between removals from the food-cum-commercial fishery and a reduction in the number of commercial licences being used by commercial fishermen. Still, MFU fishermen were shouldering much of the fallout from the Supreme Court decision on Sparrow that gave priority to aboriginal food fishing over the commercial fishery. In practice, the court decision was being used by individual natives not for subsistence but for substantial commercial profit.

The Marshall Decision and Burnt Church

All along the Miramichi, in the Maritime provinces, beneficiaries of the aboriginal right to fish for food, like all native people in the country, maintained that they also had a treaty right to fish for trade. A Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq, Donald Marshall, was charged with fishing eel for commercial purposes out of season. Marshall was known nationally for having been found guilty of murder in a stabbing incident in Sydney, Nova Scotia and then having been finally exonerated after 11 years in prison

for a crime he had not committed and for which he had always maintained his innocence.

The Mi'kmaq took Marshall's fishing charge all the way to the Supreme Court, and, on 17 September 1999, the Court ruled in Marshall's favour and found that he was fishing under a treaty right negotiated with the British Crown in 1761. The decision acknowledged that the treaty gave Mi'kmaqs a right to fish and hunt for a moderate livelihood. It was a right that could be subject to regulation, but was immediately interpreted by the Mi'kmaq people as an enormous victory. It was variously interpreted by native leaders and band members as a right to fish when and where they so pleased. The commercial industry was once again thrown into the dark as to what the right would do to their fishery. Some tried to have the decision reversed, to no avail. The MFU took the position that the treaty right could be accommodated. After all, coastal Mi'kmaq people were not more than three per cent of the coastal population of the Maritime provinces, and only so many individuals would want to earn a 'moderate livelihood' from fishing. But the court had not provided for an adjustment period or an implementation phase, and the DFO had developed no contingency plans in the eventuality that the court would rule in favour of Marshall and the treaty right.

Within days of the Marshall decision, hundreds of traps were being set in the waters adjacent to the Mi'kmaq community of Burnt Church, which is at the mouth of the famous Miramichi river and which is situated at the edge of the Acadian Peninsula. This was in September of 1999. The commercial lobster fishery in this particular zone finishes at the end of June, after which it would become a closed area and would not be re-opened to commercial fishing until the following May. Interestingly, the Burnt Church band had just finished a 'food' fishery that had been authorized by the DFO to be fished out of season under a

communal licence. The amount of lobster allowed under this communal food licence was substantial, and, according to the fishermen in the adjacent community of Neguac, at least some of the catch was sold commercially.

The reaction of the commercial fishermen to the post-Marshall setting of more traps was outrage. Where was the DFO? How could this be happening to a fishery that they had fought for years to bring under control from the poachers? The modern inshore fishermen had investments in boats, gear and licences, and they were seeing all that go down the drain because of a remote and obscure decision of the courts on an unknown treaty negotiated 250 years ago. The MFU demanded a moratorium and a stay on the court decision until all parties could work out acceptable ways of implementing the treaty right.

But Ottawa was paralyzed by lawyers and politicians who didn't know what to do. There was a political vacuum and it seemed like fishermen's livelihoods were being sacrificed to larger political interests in a country that nine years ago had gone through a 78-day standoff with Mohawk warriors at Oka and Khawawake (in the urban area of Montreal). So, the build-up of traps at Burnt Church continued. The situation was on the verge of explosion after several Indian boats from the nearby Big Cove reserve moved in their traps from a lobster fishing zone that was open to commercial fishing and where they themselves had been fishing alongside our inshore fishermen. The regulatory authority, DFO, watched and monitored, without intervening.

Fishermen had had enough. On Sunday morning, 3 October, two weeks after the Supreme Court decision and in full view of the enforcement vessels and surveillance aircraft, the fishermen proceeded to haul up some 3,000 traps; they removed the meshing, stuck the buoys inside and let the traps

sink to the bottom. On land, they went in mobs to local fish buyers who were buying the out-of-season lobsters and demanded the records of purchase. They did all this without the support or endorsement of the MFU.

The MFU, in fact, had planned a demonstration for the following day at the nearby headquarters of DFO in Moncton. We proceeded with our demonstration, and it was only when the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Herb Dhaliwal, finally agreed to meet us the next day in a downtown hotel in Moncton that we dispersed. That was 5 October 1999, and the MFU found itself thrust centrestage in a conflict that, on the surface, appeared to be against the Mi'kmaq people.

I say 'on the surface' because, since the Marshall Decision, we have worked with all of our powers as an organization to reach an accommodation of native rights to fish for a 'moderate livelihood'. Our objective was never to oppose native fishing but to accommodate it within a fishing plan that would be feasible for both Mi'kmaq and commercial inshore fishermen. The Supreme Court itself was so shaken by the revolt of fishermen all over the Maritimes that it issued a clarification two months after the original decision. It was clear the court never intended to say the treaty superceded the authority of the Government of Canada to regulate the fishery. The court was saying what our own lawyer had already advised us. It was advising the government to negotiate, but it was also saying that the treaty right was subject to limitation and regulation, and that the exercise of the right cannot be at the expense of the rights of the rest of the fishing community.

To this day, we hold the Government of Canada accountable for the unfortunate actions of Miramichi fishermen on 3 October that eliminated so many native traps and risked armed violence between the races. It is difficult for us to accept

the simplistic argument that the authorities were unprepared for the Marshall decision. Whether or not they were prepared, they were seeing, on a daily basis, the buildup of an intolerable and explosive situation—and they did nothing to intervene.

Ugly forces had been unleashed in the Miramichi and the native leaders were blaming the MFU itself for perpetrating the aggression. One letter to the editor, written by a Mi'kmaq from the Tobique band, depicted the MFU as the New Brunswick equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan and Michael Belliveau as its 'grand wizard'. There were Mi'kmaq we had known for years who refused to talk to us and be seen associating with us in public. In their eyes, the actions of the fishermen were our responsibility; there was no effort to differentiate the role of the MFU from the spontaneous actions of a local group of fishermen. During the Sunday morning trap cutting of 3 October, the television cameras filmed one individual fisherman dressed up in Indian headgear doing a mock war dance. That was clearly a racial slur, and the image was broadcast across the country. In a meeting with some of the Burnt Church people following that incident, they said some of the residents believed it was I who was in the headgear! They were also offended by a quotation attributed to me in the *Saint John Telegraph Journal*. I had been asked about the buildup of native fishing and I had said we were not concerned with some "poor bastard" who was fishing in a dory in front of the reserve; it was the larger boats, especially the Big Cove ones that had sailed from the open zone off Richibucto to the closed zone in the Miramichi that we were worried about. The natives took my remark as racist. I had, in fact, used the term sympathetically in reference to persons who were truly without means and who were not a threat to the fishery. But the reaction was an indication of the heights to which emotions had risen.

Regardless, the fishermen's move to destroy and disable traps in the Miramichi put the MFU in a very awkward position. Had we simply come out and condemned the fishermen, we would have made it impossible for ourselves to play an organized role in what was becoming a nasty dispute. We had to work with what we had. The fishermen's actions were perhaps analogous to a wildcat strike in an industrial context. The lobster fishery that had developed over the past 30 years relied, in particular, on enforcement by the DFO, and DFO was refusing to intervene. In the minds of the fishermen, they believed that they had been forced into defending their own livelihoods.

The powers in Ottawa dithered while the fishing communities were boiling over. In Southwest Nova Scotia, over 500 fishing boats had amassed themselves in the harbour at Yarmouth as a show of strength, threatening the type of action that subsequently was carried out in the Miramichi hundreds of miles away. The situation in the Nova Scotian region was substantially different; there was not the same immediate substantial threat to the fishing stocks because there were very few coastal natives in the area. Demography cannot be overlooked when examining why things spilled over in the New Brunswick context and were managed in Nova Scotia. Big Cove is the largest band by far in Atlantic Canada that is immediately adjacent to the lobster resource, while Burnt Church, 50 miles up the shore, is the second largest. There was some post-Marshall out-of-season fishing being done in St Mary's Bay in Southwest Nova Scotia but it was being done by Mi'kmaq who were living 150 miles from the fishing grounds. It was a far more enforceable situation.

There are those who believe that Ottawa's dithering following the Marshall decision was not so innocent. There are

many dimensions to the situation of native peoples in Canada. Their present population is not much more than three per cent of the country, but they are vastly over-represented in the prison population and among the homeless. They have huge land claims based on ancient treaties. Their treaties are recognized in the constitution of the country. The federal government is responsible for the well-being of status Indians; they have a fiduciary responsibility towards our first peoples. Actually, the majority of Indians now live away from the reserves and in Canada's urban centres. The status Indians that continue to live on reserves live in conditions of poverty and social breakdown that are often appalling. In recent years, Supreme Court decisions have been favourable to aboriginal positions and this gives them a distinct kind of power. With respect to the ongoing sovereign movement in the province of Quebec, the native peoples have tended to be allies of the federal government, at least insofar as they are completely opposed to Quebec's independence and would demand their own forms of separation in vast areas of Quebec where they live. In any case, relations between First Nations and Ottawa are sufficiently complex that it is not inconceivable to believe that there were decision-makers on Parliament Hill who saw an open conflict between fishermen and local Mi'kmaq as somehow advancing their interests.

For my part, writing a year later, and following another traumatic summer in the Miramachi, the overwhelming conclusion I am left with is that the country has a fundamental problem of political relations with its First Nation people; a problem at the highest level of power in the land, and at the level of the cabinet and the senior bureaucrats. In 1999, our fishermen were made to look bad, like bigots, because the highest powers in the country had not sorted out their political relations with First Nations.

There is much fury and fear in the fishing communities about native fishing issues; it built up over a food fishery that was seen to be a commercial fishery in disguise. It reached almost hysterical proportions after the Marshall Decision that threw into question the very basis of limited-entry fishing plans. The MFU, which was set up to organize the underdog, the little guy in the fishery, was cast into an awkward position. If Mi'kmaq were getting into the fishery, it would be logical that they would join with their brother and sister fishermen in the MFU. You are a member of the MFU because you are an inshore fisherman, not because of your race or your colour or your language or even the species that you fish. The cause of Mi'kmaq fishermen should also be the MFU's cause. In practice, of course, Mi'kmaq fishing has been experienced by the inshore fishermen as antagonistic and a threat to their fishery. This is mainly because the natives have chosen, in many instances, to fish outside the accepted regulatory system.

In this context, the MFU has attempted to maintain a progressive position that is consistent with our union's history. We have worked hard to create room for effective participation of native people in the fishery. For whatever historical and cultural reasons, the natives have largely been excluded from the modern commercial fishery. Naturally, their leaders want to make up for lost ground and are using their Supreme Court decisions to aid them. Our position has been that working-class fishermen should not have to shoulder the ancient debt to native peoples, that it is a societal obligation that all Canadians must shoulder. In practice, we have succeeded in having the Government of Canada recognize this principle by buying up licences from commercial fishermen to allow for an orderly accommodation of natives into the fishery. There is always a yearly turnover of licences that can be voluntarily sold back to the government.

But the transition period has been fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings, both within the native communities and in the rest of the fishing population. As the 2000 fishing season approached in the Miramichi area, the Government of Canada had not succeeded in reaching an interim agreement with Burnt Church for the fishing season. The reasons are multiple and we cannot discount the sense of grievance within the band towards fishermen in the area who had cut traps the previous fall. Through a series of difficult meetings with our fishermen, we had succeeded in getting an agreement from them that they would replace the traps lost by Burnt Church people “within the context of reaching an agreement on a fishing plan”. The MFU believed it was making a breakthrough gesture of reconciliation, but native leaders interpreted it as an attempt to leverage them into an agreement and they discounted the gesture.

We were lurching into crisis in the spring of 2000 and, as the summer progressed, Burnt Church became the focus of the nation. This is not the place to recount the whole story, but the Burnt Church crisis, I believe, demonstrates the value of having an MFU.

Prior to the Marshall Decision of 17 September 1999, Burnt Church had utilized the Sparrow Decision to prosecute an extensive food fishery in August and September. There were years when catches apparently exceeded 500,000 lb. While it was supposed to be a fishery for food, social and ceremonial purposes, it was a fishery where some individuals were making thousands of dollars. One band member told us he made Can\$80,000 in a given year. From all accounts, the food fishery was a racket, where the benefits accumulated into the hands of a few individuals, including the chief.

Burnt Church has approximately 1,200 native persons. It is governed by an elected chief and band council, under a system

established by the Department of Indian Affairs. Prior to 1970, many of its people practised a fishery, including lobster, but, progressively, their participation dwindled, as the lobster fishery became more regulated. The community is right in front of Miramichi Bay, the fishing grounds for approximately 200 inshore fishing operations that include some 600 fishermen.

Following the Marshall Decision of 1999, many Burnt Church members took to the waters, but the Chief also invited the Big Cove boats in to fish. The Big Cove vessels were much like those of other inshore commercial fishermen and their presence made it obvious that we were not dealing with just a local artisanal fishery. Nevertheless, there was also what might be considered a sort of artisanal fishery conducted by many reserve members in small outboard motors, with many women taking part who were seeing some real dollars come into their homes. It is this latter small-scale fishing that activated a kind of 'communalism' in Burnt Church and appears to have laid the groundwork for a growing movement on the reserve to have their own treaty fishery. The fact that the artisanal group also lost traps on 3 October 1999 added to a sense of injustice and grievance among band members.

While it seems that the food fishery reproduced the internal system of privilege, favouritism and opportunism that band members have described to us, the treaty fishery promised far more equal opportunities, and gave rise to a fishing plan constructed by social activists. Within the community, you had the makings of a populist reform movement. Implicit and sometimes explicit in this movement was a questioning of the formal Band Council and Chief governance system. Among other things, some councillors and the Chief were compromised by the special benefits they had been deriving from fishing. This put them into contradictory positions with respect to negotiating within the process set up by the federal government to

accommodate the Marshall verdict. On the one hand, the populist group would be sceptical of an interim agreement that would lead to new licences, boats, wharves and so on, since they had no confidence that the community in general would benefit. On the other hand, since some of the councillors and the Chief were the main beneficiaries of out-of-season fishing, why would they negotiate an interim agreement that is based on fishing within the established season?

In the end, what appears to have happened with the Council and Chief over the spring and summer of 2000 was a split, whereby some were excluded from any effective influence and others simply joined the populist aspiration to have their own communal fishery in the spring and fall. But this is jumping ahead of our story.

It seems clear that there is a source of influence and power in the Mi'kmaq communities that is based on traditional beliefs. The populist grouping clearly drew from this source to win a kind of hegemony in the community. Indian pride and spiritualism supported the movement, and they fused with a unilateral interpretation of the Marshall verdict that claimed that not only did natives have sovereign rights never ceded under the treaty but that these rights had been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court and the Constitution.

What seems certain is that the populist grouping had a potent mix of internal protest towards the Indian Affairs Band structure, the promise of material gains (from fishing) for the little guy, and a new identity and pride for the community. A key sociological factor that we see in all kinds of such populist movements is the educated youth, who have usually been away, have broader networks, and thirst for change for their people. There is usually an unexamined psychological dimension in this return to the 'people' that can get in the way of effective political

accomplishment, but we hardly have the material or the space to develop that line of thinking here.

One thing that is clear is that the young, educated social and cultural activists at Burnt Church were able to plug into a network of Church workers, human rights advocates, environmentalists and professors. This outside support is apparently indispensable to making and sustaining a big action, but they can also enormously distort the group's assessment of the realities they face, and what is sustainable and effective political action.

In this particular case at Burnt Church, the supporters from the outside persistently demonstrated a wholesale ignorance of the modern fishery and its history. By maintaining their uncritical support of Indian rights, they fed into the myth of sovereignty and denial of social reality. In its simplest terms, the denied social reality is the fishing families of the Miramichi.

What we don't know is to what extent fear and intimidation were factors in moulding the populist group. We do know that attempts to meet with persons associated with the group were well received by those persons, but eventually vetoed. We know that one of our staff was driven off the Burnt Church wharf, with one person having drawn a knife. We know that a bullet was put through a commercial fishing vessel. We know that shots have been heard, guns seen. We know that a teenage daughter of a fishermen had to pass by armed warriors on the beach by Burnt Church. We know that rocks thrown at fisheries officer were vicious enough to cause serious injury. We know that one of the militants clearly stated that he would fight to the death at sea. We know that non-native residents at Burnt Church are living a constant threat of intimidation and violence. We know that non-native fishermen at the Burnt Church public wharf were

forced to move their boats out. Equally, we know that native young persons have felt fear of reprisals outside the reserve. We know that DFO senior officials have been verbally abused at consultation meetings.

In any case, the MFU had been meeting informally with some of the native leaders at Burnt Church in an effort to reconcile and have a meeting of minds over the impending lobster season. But, at the same time, the populist and militant group on the reserve had engineered their own fishing plan independent of any government agreement. The plan called for the use of 15,000 traps that would be tagged with their own issue of tags (not those of the DFO). The plan said there would be two different seasons; the second season would begin in August and continue to 31 October. (Remember that the regulated commercial lobster season in the Miramichi is between 1 May and 30 June.) The plan was taken directly to the community and over the heads of the Chief and Band Council. It was a statement of militancy and the proponents argued that it would be selling their rights to enter into an interim agreement with the federal government. The moderates in the community, with whom we had been talking, were replaced by the radical faction and made to feel they were sellout Indians.

The plan was guaranteed to lead Burnt Church into confrontation. It challenged the authority of the DFO to manage the fishery and it ignored the fisheries regulations in place. So began a long summer, as the populist group started putting unauthorized lobster traps in the water and returned 1,200 official lobster tags that DFO had issued under a communal licence. While this group was attempting to implement their treaty fishery, there were also 13 commercial operations fishing in the regular season alongside the other commercial fishermen. The unauthorized fishing was pursued throughout May and June,

despite several interventions by DFO officers and several court charges.

As the summer progressed, the militant group was apparently gaining support within the Burnt Church band and, come August, they began fishing again. The basic ABC arguments of the group and its supporters were those of an oppressed people, with Supreme Court rights, fighting a system of racist oppression, enforced by the State apparatus. As long as this equation could be maintained in the Burnt Church populist movement as the picture of reality, almost anything was justifiable in resistance. The curious phenomenon of Christian peacemakers obstructing the normal duties of fisheries officers can only be explained by this ABC construction of reality.

One of the radical architects of the Burnt Church fishing plan and a strategist of the 'treaty fishing' action became head of the 'local warriors' and Chief of Security; this too seems to be a logical outcome of the ABC reality. A cursory look at the volumes of email exchanged among the supporters suggest that they have never once considered that they may be spawning a local version of a militia group, replete with hardened teenagers and various forms of arms.

The DFO had not reached an agreement with Burnt Church, but nevertheless granted it a small food fishery under a communal licence that allowed for the use of 40 traps. This complicated their job of enforcement because the populist militant group put out several hundred of their own unauthorized traps; the fishery could not be closed entirely. Instead, the DFO had to go in with officers and vessels and check the traps and remove the ones that were illegal. There were open conflicts on the water between the DFO officers and Burnt Church natives. One fisheries officer was severely injured in the face by a rock.

A native boat was swamped by a fisheries boat in full view of the television cameras. The Mi'kmaq barricaded the main highway. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police surrounded the reserve. And the conflict built up.

The MFU took the position that this was a matter between the DFO management authority and the native band. As long as the DFO was seen to be doing its job, then we were able to convince our commercial fishermen to stay out of the fray. The growing confrontation was playing out as the militant faction had hoped. It was gaining enormous media attention and they were able to project the Little Guy vs the Oppressive State image. Questionable tactics of some of the fisheries officers only re-enforced the image.

As the government started getting bad press and began looking like the bully, it began to back off its basic enforcement objectives. Fishermen began seeing that, once again, Burnt Church natives were fishing lobster out of season, and the DFO was doing little to stop it. Tensions grew among the fishing communities and the fishermen. Another explosion looked imminent and, this time, it threatened to degenerate into a localized race war.

Native people from all over the country were embracing the Burnt Church cause; some of the churches passed resolutions that were general but nevertheless seen by fishermen to be against them and for the natives. As the crisis built up, the MFU called a press conference and blasted the government for its inept handling of the situation and called for a closure of the whole fishing area in the interests of peace. Here are some excerpts from our written statement that was carried nationwide:

In the immediate area of the Miramichi, you have 200 inshore vessels supporting 600 fishermen, who fish from Burnt Church, Néguaq, Tabusintac, Val Comeau, Tracadie, Baie-Ste-Anne, and

Pointe Sapin. These communities are fishing-dependent; there is really no other significant economic opportunity.

This is the social reality of the area, and we have said, and will continue to say, that Burnt Church leaders will have to come to terms with this. Over the past winter and spring, we had several contacts and meetings with native leaders in Burnt Church. We went over how their members could get into our professionalized fishery and make a long-term living out of it. We also tried to reconcile after the trap-cutting incident of last October and had offered to replace any lost traps as part of reaching a basic agreement.

These kinds of exchanges came to an abrupt halt just prior to the spring lobster season, when the promoters of the Burnt Church fishing plan effectively took over and rejected any discussions with the MFU. Among other things, this group proclaimed its own Burnt Church Fishery Act and some sort of sovereignty over its fishing plan. They also promised to fish come August in the closed season. Our position was that this was a regulatory matter for DFO; we expected basic enforcement, as we expect everywhere in the lobster fishery.

We now find the issue has been elevated to the level of grand farce, partially as a result of a media hunger for simplistic confrontation and because the regulatory body DFO cannot find the will to close down the lobster fishery in the Bay. We have never been briefed on the unfortunate incident last Tuesday in the Bay that has been repeatedly flashed on television screens around the world and that has paralyzed our national government.

Further, we will be engaging advisers to help us review the role of the media over the past month. It is our belief that there are media persons assigned to this story who have over-identified with one group in this dispute and have mis-characterized the nature

of the dispute; we will be particularly examining the work of the CBC in this regard.

We are asked, what will our fishermen do? We can only answer this: the MFU will not support, organize or encourage any direct actions in the water that takes enforcement into our own hands, but we will use all the peaceable means at our disposal to ensure that basic enforcement of our members' and their communities' livelihoods is done.

We will also say this. Everything about the history of the MFU tells you that we were formed to organize the underdog, the inshore fishermen who were, years ago, scheduled by the planners to disappear. We are organized on principles of fairness and without prejudice on the basis of language, creed, race and colour. We are absolutely in solidarity with native peoples efforts to break years of poverty and injustice, but solidarity is not a one-sided proposition, and we refuse to give credence to a deadend declaration of sovereignty that will inevitably isolate small bands of people and mislead them into thinking that they are not interdependent with the rest of us. Further, those who propose to be leaders in the community surely cannot ask the tiny band at Burnt Church to carry the burden of what is clearly an unresolved national issue of the relations between our first peoples and the broader society.

And no one should ask ordinary, hardworking inshore fishermen to pay the price for decades of national ineptitude towards one of our founding peoples. The fishing itself in the Bay simply has to stop. There has to be a moratorium and there cannot be boats on the water fishing while the larger issues are being sorted out.

The role of media persons in relation to the populist group has been seen by most of the fishermen as outright biased and basically one of advocacy journalism. Amateur footage was used

without attribution. Mediapersons never indicated they were subject to censorship, but it is a widely held belief that they self-censored in order to maintain approval from the populist group. Language in reports was often synonymous with the language of the group. As late as 28 September, the lead to a *CBC Newsworld* story on Burnt Church was “Raid on native lobster traps continue”. The clear connotation is that something wrong is being done to native people, even though the fishery was closed by variation order and the traps were not supposed to be there.

It took the MFU’s news conference on 5 September to ring the bell on the media’s mindless adoption of some ABC equation of social reality. There was a clear and visible shift in some of the media perspective following our aggressive re-entry into the media field. This was hardly a uniform change, especially after the fishery was officially closed on 22 September and the warriors vowed to fight on.

At the national level, the Assembly of First Nations had recently elected Matthew Coon Come. Coon Come became directly involved with the fight for a treaty fishery at Burnt Church in the middle of August. Remarkably, Coon Come did not look much different from the various supporters with their ABC equation of reality. We had thought his presence might bring about some mediation and negotiation; but, instead of bringing an element of political reality to the Burnt Church advocates, he simply added a further burden to the populist group by making it into a cause célèbre for native rights and, again, giving no recognition to the social reality of fishing families in the Miramichi.

Having no real access to native people at Burnt Church during the August/September ‘struggle’ period, it is difficult to know the pressure that must have been felt of having to live out the struggle on behalf of distant and not-so-distant supporters,

as well as the organized native rights organizations. At various times, there were rumours of shifts in band power relations, almost always centred on whether moderates and elected councillors were gaining some kind of governance over the reserve, and whether the people associated with the Chief of Security's intransigent position were being isolated and excluded.

The revelation over the week of 25-29 September that there were two different warrior groups competing with each other suggests there was some truth to the rumour that the Chief of Security and his militant and warrior followers were losing community support. The head of the second group of warriors was from Nova Scotia and appeared to be sanctioned by the traditional council of elders and chiefs to bring some kind of order and governance to the reserve.

During this last week of September, DFO had announced that they had pulled some 4,000 unauthorized lobster traps from the waters around Burnt Church over the previous six weeks. The treaty fishing proponents, for their part, gradually pulled back, as fishing itself diminished and weather became an issue. These last few days were volatile; some commercial fishermen had turned on the union itself and were in a riotous mood. One ventured into range of Burnt Church and put a bullet through the cabin of his vessel. There were incidents at the nearby wharf in Neguac and, generally, the affair wound down on a bad note, with everything 'hanging fire'.

The MFU had been cast in the middle of a storm. We had put enormous amounts of energy into finding liveable solutions. Throughout, we had maintained a consistent position that fishermen should not intervene on the water, while, at the same time, pressuring the highest powers in the country to bring the out-of-season fishing to a close. We didn't win any popularity contests in the process, but thoughtful observers believe that

we may have been the single most important factor in keeping the situation from exploding into a conflict that would draw in the army, the way it happened 10 years ago at Oka, a small town in suburban Montreal, where Mohawk warriors had barricaded off access to a piece of land considered to be an ancient burial site but which was going to be converted by municipal officials into an extension of a golf course. The standoff with the provincial government and then the army and the neighbouring population went on for 78 days.

A Strangled Discourse

In a recent conversation, a CBC national radio documentary producer used the term 'strangled discourse' to characterize Canada's relations with Indian peoples. The term resonated within me. Not only is much of the expression coming from the monologue of 'aboriginal nationalists', but most of the rest of the Canadian citizenry have a difficult time talking about native matters with any amount of frankness. Even though native relations are possibly the central political issue in the country, it was seldom even mentioned in the recent federal election campaign, except by the rightwing Canadian Alliance Party. Something must surely be strangling discourse, and until there can be new ways of talking, there may be many more Burnt Church situations across Canada.

The MFU has been thrust into an historical moment and I believe we can play an important role in loosening up the "strangled discourse". It is because we are organized that we have a chance. It seems to me that where fishermen abandon organization, they regress into very reactionary positions. These positions are encouraged by the Canadian Alliance Party, which will have no truck with 'race-based' fishing, as they say. Everyone should fish under the same rules. There should be no affirmative

action programmes, no special concessions on gear, vessels and even taxes. Fishermen are easily attracted to this position, and the MFU does not have a lot of room to manoeuvre.

We start from the premise that there is nothing illegitimate about our fishermen's deep attachment to their way of life; they and their families have fishing rights that cannot be dismissed. The Mi'kmaq aspiration to fish is also legitimate, and the Supreme Court rulings give them important tools to open up new access. The fishing issues can be worked out, just as so many other fishing issues have been worked out. But the discourse gets strangled on all sides by fear, racism, nationalism, manipulation and more. This is where organization can be indispensable.

Some Further Considerations

I remember setting out, 19 years ago, for a fishermen's meeting in a small fishing village in Nova Scotia, some four hours drive from my home. It was a Sunday morning and I got there in time for the meeting. Three fishermen showed up. I thought of the Biblical aphorism "Where three or more gather in my name..." I thought where three or more fishermen gather under the name of the MFU, there was a chance to move ahead. These are the kinds of thoughts that must keep organizers going all over the world.

Even three fishermen pulling back for a moment from the intense realities they live, to consider organizing under a union umbrella point to the essence of the MFU-type organization. The powers-to-be are always threatened by people gathering and whispering, as it were, among themselves in corners. To build organizations, you have to be jealous of your ability to be a caucus, to talk among yourselves without buyers or politicians or bureaucrats. In any early formation of an organization that

sets out to recover the social power attached to its members' production, there will be countless decisions to meet separately. The MFU belongs to its fishermen and its staff, not to the Left, not to the politically correct, not to university professors, not to government scientists and managers, not to the environmentalists, or the trade unionists, or the community activists, nor the women's movement or the internationalists. To maintain our ability to act independently and with specificity, we have to be clear about our relations with all such groups.

In my judgement, the truly radical aspect of the MFU is the simple fact that it has inshore members from hundreds of different fishing villages, spanning large coastal distances, from an assortment of cultures, who fish many different species, who follow a constitution and who want to claim their rightful share of the social power they generate. Such an organization, in the end, is an affront to the status quo and, consequently, generates no end of conscious and unconscious drives towards it. We are always embroiled in controversies with people and groups who are supposed to be friends in an amorphous cause to change the world. The controversies arise because we must fiercely hold on to our specificity. There is pressure to disperse and fragment into a species group or a quota group or an ideological group (of the Right or the Left) or a movement or whatever. The trick is to be able to keep your organizational nerve. To illustrate my point, I will wade into three sensitive areas: the issue of unemployment insurance, women and fisheries, and international association.

The inshore fishermen that we represent are primary producers and independent operators. Their counterparts in the agriculture and forestry sectors do not have a programme of unemployment insurance, but fishermen do. Each year, they can qualify for up to six months of unemployment benefits during the season when weather and ice and fish migration keep them

from fishing. In this sense, they are seasonal workers and qualify for unemployment insurance, like other workers. The corporate lobby group, the Fisheries Council of Canada, consistently opposes this concession to fishermen. We have seen the US launch countervailing action against Canadian fish products, claiming the unemployment benefit to fishermen was a subsidy. (The action was not successful because it was a benefit available to all Canadian workers.) We have had commissions like the Forget Commission that set out to reduce or eliminate the benefit, but without success, to date. In the early 1990s, the government established a task force to look into incomes in the fishery sector. One objective of the task force was to reform the unemployment insurance system for fishermen that would make it more tailored to the present fishing realities. The task force recommended that owner-operator fishermen should qualify for the insurance based on the value of their catch, up to a maximum insurable catch, rather than on the number of weeks fished that was being used at the time. This recommendation was widely supported by fishermen and was incorporated into a series of reforms of the unemployment insurance system that the Liberal government introduced in 1996.

These reforms of unemployment insurance benefited owner-operator fishermen, but for all other workers, the reforms constituted cutbacks to the programme and were fiercely resisted by seasonal workers, especially in New Brunswick. The reforms meant that a worker needed to have more weeks of work to qualify; benefits themselves were reduced as a percentage of earnings, and repeat users were penalized. There were marches and protest rallies, and confrontations with the politicians. The Canadian Labour Congress (Canada's House of Labour) in the Atlantic region picked up the cause of the seasonal workers and new leaders emerged from the workers. Our fishermen were in an awkward situation. They were faced with marginal cuts to

benefits, but their overall system had been improved. In some ways, they could not believe their own good fortune and certainly were not in a militant mood. Furthermore, inshore owner-operator fishermen were, on average, making reasonable livings and often resided in communities where employment was hard to find and where wages were low. In short, there was every incentive for them to keep their heads down, and so the MFU had no real base of support to join in the militant resistance that was swirling around them, especially in New Brunswick.

The MFU supported the unemployment insurance fightback in small ways, issuing press statements, providing office space, speaking at some of the rallies and sending some persons for the marches. The militants, including the trade union activists, were frustrated that the MFU was not doing enough and was not lending the full force of its organization to the fightback. They knew that fishermen carry political clout and they saw the staff as unwilling to mobilize the fishermen around the issue. But the reality was that it was not the fishermen's issue.

In retrospect, the government, consciously or otherwise, effectively neutralized the clout of fishermen by introducing positive changes alongside the marginal cutbacks. But the wrath of the people had been provoked and the Liberal government paid heavily in the 1997 election because of these cutbacks. In the Acadian areas, the electorate voted in two candidates with the New Democratic Party (Canada's party of the Left and the labour movement); this was an electoral revolt and unprecedented since Confederation. Fishermen may not have been able to take to the streets, as other seasonal workers had, but, in most areas, they revolted just as strongly at the polls because they were being affected in an assortment of ways by the general programme of downsizing, cutbacks and cost recovery that hit the fishing sector particularly hard.

To this day, unemployment insurance can represent as much as 25 per cent of an inshore fisherman's annual net income. The programme's applicability to inshore owner-operator fishermen remains an exception and, therefore, is always vulnerable to new government policy. The inshore fishermen's strength in the Maritimes that I wrote about earlier, and which is built on their success in the lobster fishery, is nevertheless potentially compromised by this significant government benefit. The payments continue to be a focal point of the corporate sector's attack on the inshore fishery, that it is a social fishery and not totally subject to the dictates of the marketplace.

The MFU could have been as militant and rhetorical as it wanted to on the issue of unemployment insurance cutbacks, but, in a certain way, that would have been phoney because it was not really the issue of our members.

With respect to women in the fishery, we face a similar dilemma, in that only a small fraction of women actually fish for a living, and so it is logical that our membership has few women. Fishermen's wives contribute to the inshore fishery in all sorts of ways that have been variously noted, but, given the societal dynamics that are going on in the families and the increasing differentiation of work where more and more partners are in the workforce but in very different and separate occupations, the issue of equal status and recognition is getting worked out through new opportunities in the workforce.

Nevertheless, some women and fisheries groups are critiquing the MFU for becoming professional and exclusive and, by implication, making the role of women more marginalized. The suggestion is that the more you get defined as a professional, the more you hide the joint nature of the fishing operation, since there is normally a woman employed in the household who contributes to the fishing operation. And the fact that we accept that the work of women is invisible indirectly leads to the fact

that more and more importance is given to technology at the cost of labour.

I am not sure about the theoretical analysis, but, at a more practical level, the issue of women and the MFU seems to be an artificial discussion. The MFU could attempt, for example, to amend its constitution to include wives as members. But, generally, there has been no real demand arising from the women for such an amendment. So why would the MFU make such a structural change when the benefits of doing so for the women have not been articulated by the advocates of women in the fishery? At various times in the history of the MFU, it gets recognized that women are absent and that we need more allies and should get them involved. But this is a utilitarian approach; it says nothing about the situation of the women themselves.

There is little question that the inshore fishery, as a way of life, is changing. Rural life itself is becoming more of an extension of urban centres. Still, inshore communities are managing to retain their populations and they are also modernizing, as the inshore fishery itself is. Presumably, feminist theory sees this modernization as patriarchal. In discussions raised by feminist friends, two basic contradictions emerge from our present phase of social development. First, the structural adjustments that have been imposed on us challenge our control over local resources. So the micro-management successes we hold on to now are also threatened and can be challenged if, for instance, the ITQ system one day also penetrates the inshore. This also impacts on our access to coastal spaces. On the other hand, destruction of the organic way of life has also led to the destruction of the organic production of food and to a growing number of toxins in whatever we consume—the toxification of primary production, if you like. Both these present conditions cause us to reflect further on the form of organization that was accepted earlier. The trade union form of struggling for rights is within the ongoing

form of development, a development that has grown to be more centralized, more capital-intensive and more exploitative of nature—patriarchal, as feminists say.

This may be true, but where do you go with that formulation? Are we to throw the baby out with the bath water? The feminists remind us that the MFU must pay attention to the broader issues of the production of life, and this is undeniable. But I would maintain that the MFU is biting off its portion of the global struggle simply by addressing the issues its members face. We have a critical stake in maintaining the ocean's productivity; damaged estuaries affect the inshore first; sustainable fishing is essential to the coastal communities; and sustainable inshore fishing is what the MFU is after—and so on. Obviously, women are critical to the sustainability of coastal communities; if the young ones leave, the community is finished. There is not much that the MFU can do directly about potential and actual realities like this, except to support broader political actions, where they emerge, in an effective way.

A very practical example of where the MFU has successfully kept the issues of the production of life in its work has been the establishment of a family health insurance programme with the proceeds that were earned from the snow crab allocation. This, in a small way, protects the family against the financial effects of sickness when other health cuts are being imposed through structural adjustments. It is one practical way that the MFU is keeping in touch with the families. I contrast our approach to using a quota for the collective interests of the members and their families with examples in other jurisdictions, where small temporary quotas have been allocated but strictly on an individual basis and where the fisherman himself derives all the benefit. So, we are very proud of having won a portion of the quota allocation that we could dedicate to a collective plan.

The women's critique of the MFU is potentially gratuitous. The MFU is organized on the basis of its members work activity, that is, fishing, an activity that historically has been carried out by males. From day to day, we have enough on our hands just attempting to maintain a 'union line' in a context of centrifugal forces. Still, the production of life is a larger political issue that must be supported, and we should remain vigilant to make strategic contributions.

The world's fisheries are under great stress. Coastal fishing communities everywhere are facing problems of overfishing from industrial fleets, displacement by tourist and recreational interests, erosion of fish habitat, and more. Aspirations for a world movement in fisheries flow inevitably from the conditions faced everywhere by inshore fishing families and their communities. The effort to develop a WFF is one expression of such aspirations, although the particular results of the Loctudy meeting are not the subject of my reflection here. (*The meeting of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers at Loctudy, France, turned controversial. See Troubled Seas in Loctudy, SAMUDRA Report No. 27 and Wag the Dog, SAMUDRA Report No. 28 – Ed*) I want to stay with matters directly pertaining to the MFU.

At times, there has been an air of artificiality to the MFU's internationalism. In the early days of its formation, the fishermen took part in exchanges with the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, in a programme promoted and supported by Oxfam Canada. I am guessing that one of the expectations of the organizers of these exchanges was to politicize the fishermen about Nicaragua so that they would form a political support base in this country. It was also seen as a form of international aid to a struggling new regime. The outcomes of those exchanges are difficult to trace, although the organizing experience of the MFU was of some interest to Nicaraguan activists, and there were amounts of aid in the form of material and training that benefited two

specific fishing areas. But the programme did not last and there grew a sense of 'Third World issues' being grafted on to the real work of the MFU, which was local.

The MFU's relations with the Senegalese fishermen were developed quite differently. The Senegalese had had a broad experience with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), whose aid was being actively questioned, after 1985, by the emerging fishworker movement in Senegal. The CNPS made conscious moves to build contacts with the MFU, partially as a means of countering the CIDA approach. Although the inshore fisheries differ considerably from one country to the other, the organizing work had much in common. Further, there was never a question of aid from the MFU to Senegal. We made conscious efforts to avoid aid relations. In this way, the interchange of fishermen and staff between the two organizations has proved realistic, and lacks the sense of something being grafted on to the MFU.

Canada has never had a distant-water fleet. On the contrary, Canada's marine resources have, until recently, been plundered by distant-water fleets of other nations. As I have noted above, the collapse of our cod stocks should really be traced back to the massive post-War fishing of European and East Bloc countries. In any case, in the organizational life of the MFU, foreign fishing has not been an immediate issue for our members, except in relation to French fishing from St Pierre and Miquelon, which was finally regulated at the International Court in the Hague.

The international issues that most directly touch our members are related to trade and markets. Our inshore fisheries rely on the Japanese to purchase herring roe, on Haiti for heavily smoked herring and 'pickled' gaspereaux, on the US, Europe and Asia for our lobsters. It is our dependence on world markets that is the practical base of our international interests. Trade and

market issues do not lend themselves easily to common solidarity actions with our counterparts around the world. This may explain why the MFU has not played a particularly strong role in the development of a formal organization at the world level. Just prior to the Delhi meeting in November 1997, where fishworker organizations assembled to see if they could form a world body (*See A New World Forum, SAMUDRA Report No. 19, January 1998 – Ed*), I wrote thus to Nalini Nayak, expressing caution about how ambitious a world initiative could be:

I believe most of us are neophytes in this business of maintaining effective broadbased organizations of fishermen, and there is not nearly enough reflection about what it takes to make up such organizations.

This is what worries me about moving to a world stage beyond anything more than the periodic associating as is being done at the World Forum. Just in Canada alone, we are trying to use the vehicle of the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters to build productive relations with other broadbased fishermen's organizations and I can assure you that we are a long way from becoming an organized force. We are always in danger of dissipating our own organizational energies and specificity, and of being subsumed by programmes and visions that serve to yield up the power of the working fisherperson to interests and forces that work against him or her.

I would hope that the World Forum will be an opportunity for the fishermen and fishworker organizations to come to know precisely who they are and what organized force they respectively have. There will be a tendency to slip off into representations of realities that do not correspond to the social and organizational realities of the different groups represented.

I might even go further and say that the basis for solidarity is only there in the most abstract of formulations. And, I am not really

convinced that there is one unifying issue. The closest that we may be able to come to a unifying issue is what I would call the development dilemma.

We all have a development dilemma because there is no surplus fish. So, if the dynamics of fisheries capital cannot be countered, every new development results in the diminishment of someone else's catch or access. In Canada, as I have said, at the national level, the level of the Treasury Board and the senior bureaucrats, they are scrambling to divest from the fishery and transfer it to private hands (to the ascendancy fleets). There are certainly political counter-forces at play that may modify the privatization drive (and the 'popular' fishermen organizations are part of the counter-force). But, it remains a remarkable phenomenon in a country that has just gone through a collapse of the cod stocks, a calamity of 'biblical proportions' in which micro-quota management (with its implicit privatization) was the cornerstone of national fisheries policy. But this is another question.

It is extremely difficult for fishermen organizations to come to grips with the development dilemma because it emerges as much from within its own ranks as from outside, and because the dynamics of fisheries capital are so powerful and persuasive. But, there are conjunctures when resource limits weaken ascendancy fleets and when popular organizations can capture the political terrain with alternative visions that promote the interests of the full community of fishing people. I hope the Forum is able to identify some of the conjunctures and is able to grapple with realistic counter-policies.

Most of all, I hope you are able to come to grips with the challenge of organizing fishermen and fishworkers as effective forces within their national and regional fisheries. And I am sure that you all will consider long and hard whether it is possible to launch a world initiative that can add to the force of organized fishing people.

2001

I don't like using the term 'globalization'. Forty years ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the term 'global village'. (*Herbert Marshall McLuhan, author of such influential works as The Medium is the Massage and Understanding Media was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada – Ed*) As a young undergraduate, the image resonated in me; it was fresh and captured the speed at which the modes of transport, travel and communication were shrinking the world, at least for some people. But the difference between 1960 and 1900, let's say, was basically only a matter of speed, and I believe the essential difference between now and then is also mainly the matter of how fast the world is shrinking. The way globalization is used in popular discourse, you would think that it is a recent phenomenon. In other words, its popular usage is ahistorical. Nevertheless, the speed at which systems are integrating around the world is destabilizing, and renders insight into the future even more difficult.

In the past few months, we have seen in the MFU some new expressions of the rightwing populism that I described was seen in Nova Scotia some 10 years back. This time, we are getting a taste of it in the very Acadian communities of eastern New Brunswick that were more resistant to the earlier phenomenon. It is premature to make too much of this latest version but there are signs in the broader society too that suggest we may already be moving into a new watershed period. It is difficult to imagine one single event so defining of a new watershed period as the downing of the Berlin Wall was to the era that ended in 1989. Nevertheless, some post-Cold War events are unravelling. The peace accord with the Israelis and the Palestinians is a glaring example; the recent post-election spectacle in the US is suggestive, where there is open talk of recession in the world's largest economy; Russia is apparently continuing to decline; and so on. (*Readers should perhaps keep in mind the fact that these observations were made*

nearly two years ago, before the recent exacerbation of the Israeli-Palestine conflict and the relative revival of the Russian economy – Ed)

If the MFU is about to live out another tumultuous period of populism from the right, I have to ask what is it this time that the fishermen are anticipating or sensing. There will be no dramatic cod collapse because the stock has not recovered, although this lack of recovery is itself unexpected and disconcerting. There is no apparent imminent collapse in herring or snow crab, and the lobster resource continues to show reasonably high catch rates. At the moment, at least, there seem to be no dramatic shifts in the resource, but I believe there is a potential economic problem in the cornerstone fishery, lobster. A recession can play havoc with a luxury product like lobster that is so dependent on the export market. The December price for lobster in the Southwest Nova Scotia fishery dropped significantly from the previous year, and this too is suggestive. Further, the lobster fishery in the Gulf of St Lawrence, in particular, is carrying too much freight. I mean that inshore fishermen are rapidly overinvesting and becoming, therefore, vulnerable.

The immediate rise of populist expression in the Acadian communities is clearly related to the events this summer in Burnt Church. In the eyes of some fishermen at least, the MFU itself became de-legitimized overnight because it was thought to be collaborating with the authorities and especially the DFO in its handling of the out-of-season fishing. The uncertainties around Mi'kmaq fishing aspirations are clearly great fodder for a new wave of regressive populism, but my guess is that if we are to get the kind of wildfire reactions we saw in Nova Scotia 10 years ago, where fishermen seemed to be living out bigger societal dramas in a psychological way, then it may be because we are in, or on the verge of, a new watershed period.

The end of the Cold War was an enormous and global regime shift. Is it possible that we are already having another 'regime shift'? The last time, it seemed like overnight the structures of the communist bloc were swept away. This time, if we are going to have a regime shift, it will be in the institutions associated with the West, including the institutions that have been managing the present phase of globalization. There are some signs close to home to indicate that citizens are losing confidence in some of the key institutions in society, but it is not clear whether this is a global phenomenon nor whether it presents an opportunity for positive change. What is certain is that MFU will not lack new challenges.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to provide a glimpse of the MFU as an inshore organization in the fishery of Canada's Maritime provinces. It was never my ambition to tell the story of the MFU. I have mentioned almost no names among the hundreds of fishermen that have worked in the MFU and have made it a credible force in Canada's fishery. Some of the individuals were acknowledged in Sue Calhoun's *A Word to Say*.

When I think back over the previous pages, I cannot imagine having written this essay without really commenting on the issue of finance that plagued the MFU for most of its history; also, an essay of this sort should have addressed much more thoroughly the role of staff. I have been conscious throughout of trying not to duplicate the themes that are discussed in the *Conversations* portion of this book. But, the real excuse for so much lack of detail and depth is time. This essay was pieced together hurriedly to provide the reader background on the MFU, which is my reference point in *Conversations*. The essay was also written to give the reader a taste of the issues in Canadian fisheries from the perspective of the inshore.

In the end, I am really only arguing one point:

As long as the MFU can maintain its reasonably broad—in the Canadian context—membership base of inshore fishermen, there will be conjunctures where we can play a progressive role that would be a worthy contribution to the worldwide struggle to keep the fishery in the hands of those who live it as a way of life with their families and communities.

Michael Belliveau

December 2000

II

An Essay on the Fishworkers' Movement in India

by **Nalini Nayak**

Introduction

In the pages that follow, I will try to give a brief historical overview of the fishworkers' movement in India so that my views in the preceding conversation can be contextualized.

Abbreviating a movement that spans over two decades into a short essay is not an easy task. The fishworkers' movement in India has its roots in spontaneous people's struggles that

commenced in the mid-1960s and organizational processes that supported its consolidation in the following decades. It is not one singular process. It has been the result of a conjuncture of several things; it has grown from one issue to the next, from one part of the country to another and has also acquired an international dimension.

This essay will only touch upon some aspects of the movement and will emphasize the constant struggle of the fisher people against the State to sustain their lives and livelihoods. It will also highlight the dilemma of an organizational process that seeks an alternative model of development.

Having been personally, and very closely, involved in the movement myself means that I look at it from my own point of view.

The Context

After achieving independence from British colonial rule in 1947, India launched into a phase of industrialization, heavily subsidized by the State. The nation's new democratic constitution attempted to shatter old feudal structures. But the deep-rooted caste system continued to play a significant social role even amidst the emerging industrial class. There was a rapid growth of modernization and urbanization.

Yet the majority of the Indian population continued to live in the rural areas as only a small percentage of the people were absorbed in the process of industrialization. Even at the turn of the century, only a meagre 10 per cent of the country's labour force was involved in the formal sector. India continued to be largely a rural economy, with over 70 per cent of the population eking out a livelihood from agriculture, artisanal trade or natural resources held largely as community property.

With the creation of the nation-State, and formalization of local governance, the tentacles of the State became all-pervasive and the process of erosion of the rights of local communities over their resources was initiated. Caught in the dilemma of a fast-growing population and the demands of a democratic polity, the State willingly accepted the Western model of 'growth' to 'enhance' production, and created an infrastructure of social development. A natural result of this logic was the development of a small and rich elite, and an ambitious and aspiring middle class, even as over half the population remained near or below the poverty line.

Modernization became only a veneer for an otherwise communal society in which religious and caste affinities continued to provide elements of social cohesion. Always in debt, the State was not able to develop large enough social security nets, with the result that the post-independent period in India has been one of continuous social unrest.

India's indigenous people—the *adivasis*—continued to fight for their autonomy and rights of self-rule. (*The Hindi word for tribe is adivasi, which means 'original inhabitant'. However, the Western experience usually recognizes only those peoples as indigenous whose foreparents were conquered by foreign invaders. In the Indian and South Asian context, indigenous/tribal peoples are the descendants of the first settlers or residents of a country who once controlled the entire territory of their habitat, before being pushed into relative geographical isolation by outsiders and invaders. They today suffer social, economic and political discrimination – Ed*) At present, they inhabit the rich forest areas in which also lie large underground deposits of minerals and oil. The 'outcastes'—the *dalits*—continued to fight social oppression and ostracism. (*Dalit is an ancient Marathi—the language of Maharashtra, India—word that means 'ground' or 'broken to pieces'. It is said the word was first used in the late 19th century by the Marathi social reformer*

Jotiba Phule to describe the appalling conditions of the 'outcastes' or 'untouchables', those beyond the pale of the Indian caste system – Ed) As they mobilized to confront discrimination, they met with even greater ostracism and violence. The agricultural workers' movements have fought exploitative landlordism in various parts of the country. The organization of displaced people—persons displaced by the construction of large dams and the expansion of urban centres—has challenged the course of ongoing development. The fishworkers, living on the margins of society, also took up cudgels against the State in an effort to protect their right to fish resources.

All these 'social movements' or workers' struggles have been very different from the trade union struggles of the organized working class, in which mainstream political parties have been the stimulants, ideologues or organizers. Most of these movements have been independent of political parties, not asking for a bigger share of the cake, but struggling to defend the right to life and livelihood of thousands of people whom the State ignores and does not hold itself responsible for. Today, these people have called attention to their existence mainly because they have organized under extremely difficult conditions and have articulated their demands and dreams of a society that will provide space and livelihood for all.

A Backgrounder on Indian Fisheries

India has a coastline of 8,041 km (according to the FAO), along which lie nine maritime States. Although each of these States is a unique cultural region with a language specific to that area, their fisheries share similarities of physical geography. According to A J Vijayan, one of the founder members of the NFF, "Towards the end of the 1970s, there were about 6.5 million people who depended on fishing and allied activities for a

livelihood. This represented about one per cent of the Indian population. Of these, about 3.5 million depended on marine resources, while the rest lived along rivers, lakes and backwaters. Of the seagoing fishermen, nearly 90 per cent were artisanal fishermen operating small traditional craft and gear. It was estimated that they owned about 150,000 fishing craft and 700,000 gear and tackle” (see *Need for Conservation* by A J Vijayan, in *Struggle to Survive: A Dossier on the Struggle of Traditional Fishermen and Fishworkers in India*, Indian Social Institute and Delhi Forum, New Delhi, February 1987).

The distinguishing feature of this artisanal fishery was its heterogeneity, conditioned by the physical geography of the coast and by the nature of the resource base. Being a tropical region, it was characterized as a multispecies fishery, where the resources, however, existed in smaller quantities than in temperate water zones. Fishermen generally used dugout canoes on the west coast because of the extended continental shelf and calmer waters there, and *kattamarams* (catamarans) on the southeast coast, where the continental shelf is narrower and surf conditions rougher. The craft grew larger further up the east and west coasts because of the extended continental shelf. Traditionally, large beach-seines were used along most parts of the west and southeast coasts, but, for the most part, there was a variety of large drift- and gill-nets that targeted different species and were operated differently. Hooks-and-line were used mainly in the southern areas, where the *kattamaram* fishermen have been considered exceptionally skilled.

A significant feature of this fishery is that it is decentralized and labour-intensive and adopts a complementary sexual division of labour by which the men fish and the women are involved in post-harvest activities, both being intrinsic parts of the fishery. Until the end of the 1960s, the fishing craft were not mechanized; the navigational skills of the artisanal fishermen of south India,

who, in some areas made week-long voyages, came to be known the world over. Like artisanal fishermen in other parts of the world, Indian fishermen have, over the years, adopted fishing techniques that they came across during their migrations or through contact with foreign traders. Adaptation was always tested over time and the evolution of fishing technology was, therefore, gradual and measured.

The estimated annual potential yield of fish resources for the Indian marine waters is 3.9 million tonnes. Of this, 53 per cent is in the depth zone of 0-50 m (inshore), in which the traditional sector is more than capable of operating to an optimal extent, 36 per cent in the 50-100 m depth zone (offshore) and only 11 per cent in the deep sea.

The modernization of the fishery and the resultant rapid changes commenced in the post-independence period. It was the Indo-Norwegian Project (INP) that gave an impetus to this modernization in 1953. The first phase of the project extended from 1953 to 1963, when its activities were primarily concentrated in Kollam (then called Quilon) in the State of Kerala in south India.

The stated objectives of the INP, which initiated modern fisheries development in India, were to:

- raise the productivity of the fishermen and increase their returns;
- develop an efficient system for the distribution of fresh fish and improved fish products;
- improve the health and sanitary conditions of the fishing population; and
- raise the general standard of living of the fishing population.

John Kurien, a social scientist at the Centre for

Development Studies, Trivandrum, and part of an activist group that was instrumental in organizing the first viably operating grassroots fishermen's co-operative in Kerala in the mid-1970s, has analyzed the INP. "Although the Norwegians intended initially to improve the efficiency of the local craft, they failed to do this, and the introduction of a smaller flat-keeled boat, designed in Norway, was an easier alternative," he writes. "By 1958, goaded on by the successes of private exporters of shrimp that existed in the Kerala waters, they introduced the trawl and purse-seine gear on to the small mechanized craft. This introduction got a boost with the growing demand for shrimp in the US and Japanese markets, and private investors were lured into the fishing industry. The INP provided infrastructural facilities like ice plants, and freezing and processing technology to cope with the increased production and thus further develop the export market.

Within six years, the trawl boats increased to 700 and their share of the shrimp catch rose from nil to 90 per cent. The INP strayed far from its brief as it was further pressured by private interests, supported by government allocations of the Second Plan, which grew from Rs0.27million to Rs6 million.

In the period 1967-75 there was a marked rise in fish production and the peak of 4,20,000 tonnes was reached in 1971. That level was close to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in Kerala waters. (*The maximum sustainable yield is the largest average catch that can be harvested on a sustainable basis from a stock under existing environmental conditions – Ed*) The major share of this increase was from the demersal species, especially penaeid prawns. During this period, the share of the mechanized sector increased to 16 per cent of the State's fish production.

It must be pointed out, nevertheless, that even in this period of rapid introduction of new technology, 84 per cent of the fish landings in Kerala were still from the traditional sector.

Fish prices also increased rapidly from Rs290 a tonne in 1967 to Rs1,760 per tonne in 1975. The total value of output rose from Rs105 million to Rs740 million in the same period.

From the early 1960s, all attention was focused on the penaeid prawns. From an export turnover of a little under 500 tonnes of frozen prawns at the end of the 1950s, by 1961, the figure had reached 1,462 tonnes, with an export value realization of over Rs4,000 per tonne, compared to the internal fresh-fish shore price of Rs150 a tonne. In 1962, having lost their access rights to Mexican waters, the Japanese paid Rs8,900 per tonne for prawns from India. The phenomenal export earnings of shrimp made both the INP and the fisheries administration of Kerala devote their undivided attention to the pursuit of prawns.

By 1963, the most notable structural change in the project area, consequent to the introduction of the new technology of fish harvesting and processing, was the creation of a new class of non-operating entrepreneurs or capitalists who owned the means of production and, through this, opened up avenues for a large migrant labour force recruited from outside the INP area.

The change in the technology and labour process in the realm of fish harvesting and processing, taken together with the entry of this new segment of the merchant class interests into the fish economy, was the death-knell of the fisheries development policy in Kerala, which had commenced with the stated objectives of providing cheap protein for local consumption, ensuring a more decentralized mode of functioning and greater spread effects with regard to employment generation. A sector that was relatively outside the mainstream of the economic and social processes of Kerala society was suddenly transformed into a respectable avenue for investment and involvement. The possibilities of a 'modernized' fishery emerged,

quickly breaking down traditional barriers of entry into the sector. The export-oriented thrust that began to get ingrained in the sector was blessed by the country's own attempt to boost foreign exchange earnings" (see *Norwegian Intervention* by John Kurien, in *Struggle to Survive*, 1987).

Subsequently, there were rapid changes in Kerala's fishery. Between 1976 and 1980, despite the continued rapid introduction of new trawlers and purse-seiners, there was an all-round decline in fish production. Overall, fish landings dropped to 332,000 tonnes. Pelagic catches declined to 220,000 tonnes, while demersal catches were more or less steady at 112,000 tonnes, and the prawn catch dropped marginally to 40,000 tonnes. Interestingly, the only increase in this period was in the catch of the mechanized sector, which almost doubled its output from 61,000 tonnes to 120,000 tonnes.

The most catastrophic decline was experienced in the landings of the traditional fishermen, whose production fell to 230,000 tonnes. This was below what they were catching between 1956 and 1959. Nevertheless, prices continued to increase and, despite the fact that fish production was as low as 279,000 tonnes in 1980, the prices reached a peak of Rs2,970 per tonne. On the export front, the same increase was experienced. Although the quantum of exports between 1975-76 and 1979-80 remained around 31,000 tonnes, the value realized shot up from Rs680 million to Rs1,040 million (figures from the Marine Products Export Development Authority, MPEDA, for 1970, 1978 and 1984).

The cumulative deterioration in the conditions of the majority of the fishermen became more apparent following an official socioeconomic census survey conducted by the Kerala Department of Fisheries in 1979. Only 2 per cent of the fisherfolk

population had qualifications of SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) and above. Housing conditions were poor: 48 per cent had shabby huts and only 16 per cent had pukka houses. Fishing villages were marked by their excessive crowding along narrow strips of coastline. Access to drinking water was meagre, and sanitary and lighting facilities were abysmal (from reports of the Department of Fisheries, Kerala, 1979).

The Beginnings of the Fishworkers' Movement

Spontaneous outbursts of the artisanal fishers occurred all over south India against the trawl boats that were increasingly fishing in the inshore waters. Sporadic protests were the hallmark in Tamil Nadu, the State neighbouring Kerala. The major revolt was in and around the fishing harbour of Tuticorin where, by the end of 1978, the fishermen had destroyed 11 medium-sized trawl boats and, in the course of the struggle, 16 fishermen had lost their lives. There were also protests in central Kerala, where one inshore fisherman lost his life when a trawl boat rammed into his country craft.

These protests first took on the form of organized collective action in the State of Goa in 1977. The artisanal fishworkers there were involved in hauling shore-seines or *rampons*, as they were locally called. These bag-like nets, sometimes a kilometre long, were payed out from large wooden outrigger boats, each of which consisted of around 70 to 100 persons. When the operations of this sector were hampered by the trawl boats fishing for prawns, which were to be exported out of Goa, the *rampon* owners (*ramponkars*) mooted an agitation under the leadership of Mathany Saldanha. (*Mathany Saldhana was General Secretary of the Goenchea Ramponkarancha Ekvott, Goa – Ed*) This young and dynamic schoolteacher had just led a successful struggle against a chemical plant that was polluting the sea with

effluent discharge. Having appreciated the support he received from the fishermen in the anti-pollution struggle, Saldhana was keen to support their struggle too. He was able to rally support from the public through slogans like “Fish for Goa” and “Save Goa, Save Our Beaches”.

The struggles of the *ramponkars* took the State of Goa by surprise. Without any history of organization, the *ramponkars* were able to command large numbers of workers to demonstrate on the streets of Goa. They got the support of the local people because fish, an indispensable component of the Goan diet, was either becoming scarce or very expensive. The *ramponkars* agitation made news all over the country. Not only fishermen but large groups of the population, including nature lovers and environmentally conscious citizens, came out on the streets also, demanding a ban on trawl fishing.

The initial mobilization of the fishworkers was not only a protest against modern technology destroying the fishery and, therefore, their livelihoods, but was also linked to conserving the ‘Goan way of life’ and preserving the beaches. But these were new demands and the fledgling movement was unsure whom these demands should be addressed to. Unable to find any framework or legal basis to oppose trawl fishing, the Goenchar Ramponkarancho Ekvott (GRE), as the movement was then called, realized that it had to first wage a struggle for marine regulation and this would have to be done at the national level. The GRE would, therefore, have to find other allies around the country and work out a strategy to pressure the Indian parliament to frame a Marine Regulation Act. At the national level, this would be a Herculean task, especially as there were no parliamentarians who came from coastal fishing villages. Those from the big coastal cities did not consider fishing an important sector of the economy. Parliament House in New Delhi was

located far from any ocean, and the largely non-fish eating population in the north of the country could not be expected to understand the implications of a demand relating to fish as a source of food and livelihood.

Xavier Pinto, a young Redemptorist priest, who was involved in the Goan outburst recalls, “Mathany and I made a trip all along the southern coast. We knew of some organizational activity among coastal communities in south Kerala, where successful co-operatives of artisanal fishermen existed. Through the activists in Kerala, we got to know other groups involved with coastal communities in south India. We met large groups of women fish-net weavers in Kanyakumari, who voiced apprehensions about machine-made nets entering the market and how those would eventually render them jobless. We invited all of them to a meeting in Madras. There were finally about 30 of us, representing 13 fishing organizations at the meeting. All echoed the same issues of conflict between the artisanal and trawl sectors, and diminishing catches. We decided that we should create a national organization and make a representation to the Prime Minister. We thus created the National Forum of Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen’s Rights to Marine Wealth. Mathany was elected Chairman of the forum, which was later called the National Fishermen’s Forum” (from the diary of Xavier Pinto).

What followed was a long legislative process that was pursued only because it was accompanied by people’s uprisings and protests all over the country. Getting a Bill passed in the Indian Parliament is no easy task. There was some support for the fishworkers’ cause from the Left parties and, finally, about 18 parliamentarians were willing to support the Bill. After a sit-in before the house of the Minister of Agriculture on 28 July 1978, the National Forum was assured that its demands for a Marine Regulation Bill and some welfare measures for fishermen

would be seriously looked into. It was the next Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who instituted the Majumdar Committee to study the reasons for the revolts in Tamil Nadu earlier in 1978. The Majumdar Committee strongly advocated a Marine Regulation Act at the national level. Unfortunately, its recommendation was referred to the State governments so that each State would create its own regulation and get it approved by the Centre. The lost battle for a regulation to be administered by a single central authority was to be the springboard for the irresolute struggles of the future.

In 1979, fishermen's organizations in different States initiated fasts (including a 367-day relay fast) and other public action to pressure the government to enact the legislation in Goa. In 1980, the National Forum presented the Central Ministry of Agriculture with a model copy of a Marine Regulation Act. The Minister agreed that he would act on it without delay.

From 1981 onwards, because of the pressure from fishworkers, some States began to formulate and pass Marine Regulation Acts, but the boatowners' associations, which were more powerful and better organized, instantly opposed these moves. Thus began a long process of litigation between the State, the boatowners' associations and the fishworkers. These struggles and experiences of litigation became a schooling for the fishworkers and their leaders in the process of building up a movement.

Structuring the Organization

Structuring the fishworkers' organization was the next step. In this phase, and for the decade of the 1980s, it was the State of Kerala that took the lead. Kerala is the State that was home to India's first project to modernize the fishery, with the assistance of the Norwegians, in the early 1960s. It is also the

one State in India where fish is an important part of the diet of the local population, as in Goa. The majority of the fishworkers in south Kerala were Christian.

In the southern part of the State, where the struggle gained momentum, the main fishery pivoted around the *kattamaram*. This was a very diversified fishery that engaged thousands of fishermen. In labour terms, it was a small operation, consisting of two to four fishermen with very traditional, but efficient, skills, using hooks and a variety of nets and sails, and, in some areas, going out for two to three days at a time. Women too were very involved in the post-harvest fishery, drying, processing and distributing headloads of fish.

More than a decade of NGO activity had been witnessed amongst the coastal communities of the south. In the Kerala fishing village of Marianad, people initiated participatory processes in new co-operatives to control the sale of their fish and free themselves from moneylenders and merchants. These struggles brought significant approval for a community that was otherwise considered backward and looked down on.

The process of forming co-operatives and generating data on the artisanal fishery provided the base for contesting the new modernization logic of the State and for valorizing the artisanal fishery. The process also revealed the subjugation of the poor fishers to the authority of the Catholic Church, which won material gains, even as the community continued to live in squalor.

Within the Church itself, there were groups of nuns and priests who opposed the institutional stand of the Church, and engaged with the struggles of the people. A process of creating people's organizations (POs) commenced. These processes and the growth of local community leadership succeeded in projecting

the artisanal fishery as a viable sector. Youth from the community began to assume leadership and challenge the oppressive social structures. The fisherwomen began to create their own local organizations of vendors. Soon, awareness grew in the community that rights could be gained only by struggle. SIFFS, an apex body of the co-operatives of the contiguous districts of Trivandrum, Quilon (in Kerala) and Kanyakumari (in Tamil Nadu), was already in place at the turn of the 1970s.

With the creation of these people's organizations, which were probably among the first of their kind in the country, the fishworkers, for the first time, did not have to depend on either the political parties or the Church for leadership. The active functioning of their organizations also brought them credibility; by being able to defend their positions with facts and figures, they were taken seriously.

SIFFS, in particular, entered into research and development for more cost-effective craft design and post-harvest technologies. In 1978, SIFFS conducted a Statewide seminar on depleting fish resources. The fishworkers were already aware of the problem, as they directly faced the crunch. But it was hard for both the officials of the Fisheries Department and scientists at large to accept the phenomenon of resource depletion. They viewed any decline in resource as a passing, cyclical phenomenon.

In the period 1978-80 two challenging processes commenced. The fishermen of Anjengo village in south Kerala created the Anjengo Boat Workers Union to expose the corruption within the Anchuthengu Refinance Scheme. This was a scheme initiated by the State government a few years earlier to assist the fishermen with mechanized boats, for which the fishermen received soft loans. As the boats were of poor quality, the fishermen could not get large enough catches to repay the loans. As a result, their boats were confiscated. The fishermen's

union then decided to protest. Some fishermen went on a protest fast, demanding the boats be released. Consequently, the government was forced to return the boats and conduct an enquiry into the corruption charges.

Women too had begun organizing. Women fish vendors at the Chirayankeezh market in Kerala demanded reduction of market taxes. Then the fisherwomen of Trivandrum District publicly protested the fall in fish prices consequent to the arrival of cheaper fish from the trawl boats. The women were forced to walk several miles to the market, as they were not allowed to travel in public buses with their baskets of fish. Therefore, under the banner of the Coastal Women's Forum, they took to the streets, demanding their right to travel on public transport. This took the government by surprise and embarrassed the Fisheries Minister; after all, it was not a demand for higher wages, but for the fundamental right to travel on public transport. More importantly, the demand came from women.

What triggered off a larger protest in 1981 was the fact that the government proclaimed a three-month ban on trawl fishing but withdrew it in three days. This was done at the behest of the then Education Minister of Kerala, who was out of the country when the ban was proclaimed. The minister had a personal interest in the trawl fishery, as he directly and indirectly owned several trawl boats. Enthused by the successes of their earlier, smaller struggles, the entire fishing community surged up in revolt. Joyachan Anthony, a young and dynamic fisherman, and Fr Thomas Kocherry, a priest who lived and worked in the fishing village of Anjengo, went on a hunger fast. This was the first organized struggle in the State that was led by a trade union not affiliated to any political party. To quell the struggle, the government instituted a commission to look into the matter. Meanwhile, it became clear to the emerging local leaders of the

movement and their supporters that the struggle would have to be taken forward through mobilization and creation of an organization of a political nature.

The State of Kerala has had a long tradition of leftwing politics. Workers of all sections, except in the fishing sector, were organized, and the concept of workers' rights was well accepted. But, as elsewhere in the country, the Left's consciousness related more to workers in the organized sector, since the consciousness of "class for itself" was conceived within the traditional framework of modernized industry. While there was political space for a more militant mobilization of workers, sustaining an artisanal or traditional sector was not within the ambit of the Left's consciousness. Thus, it was a significant breakthrough for the fledgling fishworkers' movement when it could prove, using data that was compiled by supporters and NGOs relating to the sector, that the artisanal fishery was more viable than the modern fishery on all economic and social counts.

Interestingly, among the activists were those with a more political consciousness, some who were concerned with organizational processes, and yet others who had a purely economic thrust. These activists, men and women, came from both within and outside the fishing community. The synergy created was the result of an interaction and collaboration between all these processes and people.

The process of structuring a political organization was greatly debated. By this time, as the result of the first spontaneous outburst of struggles, conscious priests from within the institutional Church began associating themselves with the struggles, as they continued to be important rallying points in the fishing communities. While it was clear that the political organization of the fisher people should be independent of, and

free from, all party affiliations, the bone of contention was whether it should be a class-based organization including fisher people from all coastal communities or a religious, community-based organization including only Latin Catholic fisher people, who were the majority of fisher folk in the southern districts of Kerala (the others being mainly Syrian Catholics).

This was the first big rupture in the process of building the movement. What finally took off was the mobilization of the fishworkers on a class basis, a process that gradually led to the registration of a trade union. Those priests who supported such a process remained in the trade union. In fact, the first president of the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF), as the union was called, was a Diocesan priest, Fr Jose Kaleekal. The Latin Catholic group grew initially, but its hold on the union gradually weakened.

Registering an owner-operator fishing sector as a trade union was indeed something new. However, it gave the fishworkers an identity as workers who had rights to a livelihood. Building up a trade union consciousness in a sector that was until then considered a vote bank for the Congress party was a new step. But Kerala's tradition of Left politics made the trade union concept more easily acceptable. At one stroke, the fishworkers were on par with other workers as a sector that the government had now to take seriously.

Yet, it was not an automatic process. The union had to prove its strength. That was achieved through the large and persistent struggles, in the form of hunger fasts and ingenious mass protests every monsoon time, from 1981 to 1988, demanding the imposition of a monsoon trawl ban from June to August.

The protests made the government sit up, although it felt uncomfortable about negotiating with a union that had no political

affiliation. The political parties, for their part, were caught on the rebound, seeing the massive turnout of people at KSMTF's demonstrations, and the way the union was able to sit around a table alongside other party-affiliated 'unions'.

Right from its first struggle, the KSMTF realized that the other political unions would appropriate the gains of its struggle. Indeed, that was precisely what happened. However, in doing so, the unions that blindly followed their party line were forced to take positions on crucial issues that had an impact on the life of the artisanal workers. These manipulative political party unions, together with vacillating scientists, wanted to buy time. The State government resorted to the creation of commissions to study the scientific basis of the demand for a monsoon trawl ban. It took three such commissions for the government to finally institute a one-time ban for 45 days in 1988. As it was only a temporary ban, KSMTF was forced to wage a struggle every year since 1988 to see that a monsoon trawl ban was proclaimed.

Meanwhile, the government tried to appease the people by sanctioning all kinds of welfare measures like accident insurance for fishermen, housing grants for the coastal people, special buses for women fish vendors, abolition of market taxes for small vendors, schooling grants for the children of the fishworkers, and old-age pensions. All these measures were a spillout of the larger struggle for the monsoon trawl ban, which also led to other important successes later: the creation of a Fisherman's Welfare Corporation; a Bill to register all fishworkers; and the creation of Matsyafed, a chain of fishing co-operatives based on the Marianad model. *(In the early 1960s, the Catholic Bishop of Trivandrum, Kerala, inspired by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, set up a development wing to promote the interests of fishing communities. A small number of lay volunteers were involved in creating the new community of Marianad, a fishing village off Trivandrum, which was to serve as a laboratory where innovations could be tested. One of these was a new auction system, which could be controlled and*

operated by fishermen for their own benefit. This proved successful, and the idea soon spread to other parts of Trivandrum, and the neighbouring district of Kanyakumari. The Marianad Matsya Utpadaka Co-operative Society became the model for fish marketing societies, and the team of voluntary social workers behind the Marianad initiative set up the autonomous voluntary organization, Programme for Community Organization (PCO), which, in turn, helped to establish SIFFS as a district umbrella body of fishermen's co-operatives. The 'Marianad Model' of fish marketing societies implies a member-based, marketing-oriented co-operative structure, with membership open only to active fishermen. The three core activities of the model are marketing of fish caught by members, providing credit for fishing equipment, and promoting savings of members – Ed). These were innovative structures that later inspired other States in the country to develop their own welfare programmes for the fishworkers.

A Trade Union with a Difference

At the outset, it must be stated that the NFF is a national trade union and a federation of autonomous fishworker unions and associations. Although most of the member federations were officially created after the birth of the NFF, the growth of the NFF was, in fact, coterminous with the rejuvenation and growth of these autonomous federations through struggles, the revival of dormant federations, and the widening of fishworkers' concerns. This indicates that at the State level, each member organization had its own *modus operandi* and political praxis, whereas the NFF has remained independent of any political party.

I do not intend to deal in great depth with the developments in each of the member federations; that would be too Herculean a task because of the number and complexity of the issues and problems that each organization has encountered. Nevertheless, reference will be made to them in the context of NFF's focus on national-level micro-issues and macro-level issues of development in the fisheries.

It must also be recognized that a trade union in the unorganized sector of a scattered coastal fishing population has had to involve several individuals and NGOs in sustaining the people's struggles. Some conscious individuals and a few NGOs that have a true stake in, and concern for, the union, have taken up the responsibility of local organization and animation. While some of these NGOs and individuals have enhanced the growth of the fishworkers' movement, the NFF, as such, has been an autonomous and independent trade union.

Despite being registered as a trade union, NFF functions more like a mass organization. Membership is not clearly defined; owner-operators, workers, women processors and vendors participate in the organization. While some of the larger associations have been able to afford full-time staff, the full-timers in the poorer fishing areas have been mostly voluntary workers or those aided by supporters. Thus, despite a fairly democratic constitution and the creation of local units, the smooth functioning of NFF depended on the interest and commitment of the voluntary full-timers. Membership fees are nominal and are usually collected during 'membership drives' than through ongoing member affiliation programmes. Membership is, therefore, very fluid. Although a membership list does exist, verification of membership is not practised, as it would be a very laborious task.

NFF demonstrates its strength not by its paid-up membership but by the number of people it can mobilize during the struggles. It is for this reason that the NFF functions more like a mass organization than a structured union. That is also one of the reasons why it has not been able to take the most advantage of the gains of its struggles.

Most mass-based unions in the informal sector in India function similarly. From the point of view of the KSMTF, which

has made significant gains for the fishworkers, this nature of organization has also been its bane. For instance, the union's full-timers are obliged to reach out to all fishworkers in times of need, to help them avail existing government assistance, for instance. But several of the welfare schemes are controlled by political parties, who often exploit the hard work put in by the independent union. On the other hand, KSMTF has successfully fought several legal battles, like the ban on purse-seining and the ban on night trawling. These have, in fact, been occasions for landmark judgements, where the Supreme Court of India ruled in favour of the artisanal fishers on the basis of Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the right to life and livelihood.

Unfortunately, KSMTF has not been able to ensure that these judgements are implemented. This is the result of the union's organizational structure as a mass-based organization that has little or no links with the independent co-operatives that focus on the economic activities of the fishermen or those that are organized by the State.

To some extent, this lack of co-ordination between the political organization (the independent union) and the economic ones (the co-operatives) is understandable, as communicating with a base that is so dispersed and still not very literate is extremely difficult. On the other hand, the fact that the co-operatives have only owner-operators as members means that the members of the co-operatives will use the union when it is advantageous to them. Otherwise, they do not wish to be inhibited by it.

In the initial stages, the NGO support network played an important role in mobilization in the co-operatives, and the union did receive an impetus from the NGOs. But once the union began

to have an identity and a dynamic of its own, and the leaders, now regarding themselves on par with other trade union leaders, began to wield power, the nature of the NGO support had to necessarily change. This relationship will continue to be a difficult one in the future too. The fishworkers' movement will continue to need NGO support, if it is to survive and grow, especially in areas of the dispersed fishery. Yet, the relative autonomy between the NGO and the movement has to be safeguarded.

In some cases, there is a tendency for the movement leaders to impose themselves, on the grounds of their legitimacy as elected leaders, insisting that the NGO should toe the line of the movement. There are also times when the NGOs want to call the shots, on the grounds of the support they offer, and fail to respect the independence of the union.

Today, the dependence on outside funding makes NGOs increasingly liable to get appropriated by the funders' interests. This can damage the thrust of the people's movements. This nexus between funders and NGOs is a very crucial one in countries of the South, where the process of globalization seems to camouflage it all the more.

When 'Fishworkers', Not 'Fishermen', Took Centre Stage

In 1984, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized the World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development. This was a conference that focused on the management of the EEZ, in the wake of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). A hundred fishworkers and their supporters from 34 countries had gathered under a separate umbrella, as the FAO did not pay heed to the existence of the artisanal fishers. The alternative meeting was the fishworkers way of making their presence felt.

The initiative to organize that alternative conference came from India, when friends in Rome, who were aware of the fishworkers' struggles in India, sent news about the FAO conference and suggested that the NFF be asked to participate. Not being recognized as a national trade union, NFF was denied permission. Hence, the Indian supporters decided that the presence of the artisanal fishers should be made visible in other ways. Spontaneously, friends from various NGOs all over the world rallied together and decided to organize a parallel conference of fishworkers and their supporters in Rome, with John Kurien as the organizing secretary.

The open letter to the delegates of the FAO conference from the fishworkers who had gathered for the alternative Rome Conference, as it came to be called, read: "You gather here, under the auspices of the FAO, to formulate and endorse policies which will affect the lives of millions of fishworkers. Much of this takes place without their participation. We meet to assert our rights to share the experiences of our life and struggles and to expound our perceptions of fisheries development and to build new links of solidarity and co-operation. The world over, and particularly in Third World countries, fishworkers do not receive a fair share of the wealth they create. They are victims of development and, in response, have begun to organize to demand their rights" (from the Report of the Rome Conference, ICFWS Document Secretariat, Hong Kong, 1984).

Besides creating a forum for fishworkers from the coastal fisheries of several countries to interact with one another, the Rome Conference also made two very significant contributions to the international discourse in fisheries. First, it introduced the category of 'fishworkers', as distinct from fishermen. In this way, it highlighted the reality of the Southern world, where fisheries was still a family occupation in which men, women and children were involved in different aspects and where any development

of the fishery had to take the development of the whole community at heart. It was clear that the involvement of women in the coastal fishery is what also made it viable and sustainable. Their contribution and spaces had to be recognized and safeguarded.

The second important aspect that was highlighted was the viability of the small-scale artisanal fishery. As a fishery that is diversified, environmentally friendly and capable of contributing to local food security, the small-scale artisanal fishery is a means of livelihood for thousands of coastal people.

Importantly, these positions were taken at a time when the whole world was trying to convince itself that there were large fish resources in the deep seas that the developing countries had no means to exploit, for which industrial fisheries and joint ventures were the answer. History subsequently called this bluff, when the very same FAO, which had given leadership to such thinking at that time, changed its position entirely a decade later, in 1994, and began consultations for a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, vindicating many of the positions of the first fishworkers' conference in Rome in 1984.

One important fallout of the Rome Conference was the creation of ICSF in 1986 at a conference held at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, and supported by SIFFS. The formation of ICSF was in direct response to the suggestions of the fishworkers in Rome, who realized that building their national organizations was imperative for any impact on policymaking at the national level. For that, they would need support, and that should be the task of a support network like the ICSF.

Support for the fishworker organizations can be conceived in various ways, but, in the ICSF, it boils down to an involvement in those issues that national fishworker movements think are beyond their abilities to tackle single-handedly and for which an

international network is necessary. Such an international network would also facilitate interaction amongst fishworkers of different countries, from the North and the South, so that they could not only build up solidarity but also try to better understand global developments in the artisanal fisheries. Essentially, ICSF has played such a role since its inception. Without claiming to represent them, ICSF has consistently tried to ensure that the issues and perspective of artisanal fishworkers find a place on the agenda of international institutions and in the language of global fisheries discourse.

ICSF was founded by people from different backgrounds—academics, activists and NGO workers. Their common link was an interest in sustaining the artisanal fishery and upholding the rights of the artisanal fishworkers. As an international NGO, ICSF is a very loose network that initially functioned on a totally voluntary basis. Eventually, it set up a small full-time co-ordination secretariat in Chennai, India. ICSF is probably one of the few international NGOs with roots in the South and that keeps the priorities of the South uppermost on its agenda.

The Kanyakumari March

By 1983, the old National Forum of Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth had been registered as a national trade union with the name 'National Fishermen's Forum' and Fr Thomas Kocherry had taken over as chairman. (The name was later changed to National Fishworkers Forum, in line with the nomenclature that was born in Rome.)

Towards the end of the 1980s, after a sufficiently long period of action in the southern States of India, the NFF decided to push for a nationwide mobilization campaign to give fisheries issues a national colour and to build up its profile as a national

trade union. The year 1989 witnessed a large mobilization of coastal communities through the 'Coastal March'. United by the slogan, "Protect Waters, Protect Life", two groups of people travelled along the east and west coasts of the country, southwards to the tip of India, meeting up in Kanyakumari, India's Land's End, on 1 May 1989, International Labour Day.

The march not only opened the eyes of the general public to fisheries issues, but turned out to be a major milestone in the history of the NFF, as the slogan "Protect Waters, Protect Life" struck deep and rallied thousands of men, women and children whose lives depend on water resources.

The Kanyakumari March, as it came to be called, projected the NFF as a worker's movement that was conscious of larger ecological demands. Though its call for marine regulation was essentially an ecological demand, the Kanyakumari March widened the ecological concerns of the participants and the general public, as water resources and coastal communities were being threatened in diverse ways, through industrial pollution, destruction of fish habitats and industrialization of the coastal zone.

What also made the news was that hundreds of women from a coastal community that was threatened by a proposed nuclear power plant joined the rally, insisting that the NFF take up the anti-nuclear issue as well. This was a very sensitive issue politically and caused the State to sit up and literally direct its guns at the movement. The final gathering of the Kanyakumari March was ruthlessly disrupted by the police, ending with the police opening fire on the marchers without any provocation.

The mobilization of fishworkers by the Kanyakumari March carried fisheries issues to the inland areas as well. With that, a new spate of dynamism and voluntarism entered the

movement. Having established more contacts along the east and west coasts of India, NFF then moved into a decade of national struggles.

Many participants expressed fears about the NFF being hijacked by the environmental groups that had lent extensive support to the Kanyakumari March. The general consensus, though, was that the NFF should continue to herald fishworkers' issues and participate in environmental struggles that affected their lives, but not allow itself to be used by environmental groups. Responding to the expectations raised during the March was already more than the NFF could cope with and it had to start to consolidate the gains of the March.

In 1989, there was a change of government at the national level. For the first time, the newly elected government was a non-Congress one. (The Indian National Congress had been in power ever since the time of India's independence in 1947.) The new government, which had several leaders who sympathized with people's movements, promised to be more people-oriented. The Planning Commission of India, in particular, proclaimed that it would focus on programmes for fuller employment and it asked the movements to make their suggestions in writing.

The NFF used the occasion to make a proposal for the 8th Five-Year Plan, based on a perspective of sustainable development and fuller employment. It gave the NFF the opportunity to provide a national platform for all those who had serious contributions to make in the area of fisheries and who could think of the macro-trends underlying the kind of alternative development that it sought. Unfortunately, the non-Congress government did not last very long, but the exercise of preparing an alternative development strategy did provide some openings for discussion with parliamentarians and bureaucrats. It was also at this time that a discussion for a CRZ Notification was mooted.

The Feminist Perspective

All through the 1980s, the feminist movement that was growing in India also influenced the NFF. Thousands of women in coastal communities actively participate in post-harvest activities. Valorizing their contributions to the community and making visible and protecting their spaces in the fishery was considered an important demand of the fishworkers' movement.

Several women who supported the fishworkers' movement were active in the feminist movement too. In the process, they not only stimulated the participation of women in the fishworkers' movement but also brought new dimensions to the analysis of the movement through a feminist perspective on fisheries and a feminist critique of development.

The presence of feminists in the movement has not been without its difficulties. Initially influenced by the positions of the 'autonomous women's movement', some of the feminists pushed for the autonomy of women in the organization. Others felt that the movement should be a united one of men and women, in which women's issues would find a place on the agenda. In the long run, this proved to be the right decision, despite several hiccups. It can proudly be said that the efforts made in mobilizing women in India had far-reaching ripples in the fishworkers' movement internationally.

It was the feminist perspective that swung the spotlight on to the living fact of fish as a source of food and affordable animal protein, and fishing as a means of livelihood. The feminist viewpoint focused on the 'nurture' aspect of fisheries. By introducing this perspective into the fishworkers' movement, the focus shifted to making women's work in the fishery visible, and protecting their existing spaces in the fishery. This pushed the union to take up issues related to daily life in the

community—supply of water, health- and child-care facilities, education, and so on. The nurture approach also opened up thinking to the need for conserving fish habitats, including mangrove vegetation and estuarine niches, and recreating destroyed fish habitats through artificial reefs.

From 1990 until the mid-1990s, the NFF organized formal training programmes to develop its cadre, with support from NGOs. The programmes included sessions on fisheries development, organizational strategies and trade union consciousness. From a duration of three days, the programmes stretched to 10 days by 1991, and catered to member organizations from all over the Indian coast. The training had to be necessarily multilingual, for which the NFF developed skills of simultaneous translation in at least five languages.

In 1995, on the urging of the then NFF General Secretary, who came from West Bengal, another experiment was tried to bring about a more personalized approach that would relate the theoretical understanding to people's lives and their personal convictions, as well as to the personal conflicts that they developed because of their involvements. The experiment began as a two-week period of living together, when activists and leaders, along with their spouses, engaged in housekeeping chores while simultaneously learning about unionization and consciousness-raising. This was a very meaningful and enriching period that contributed enormously to building up the union in West Bengal. Unfortunately—and probably because of the high quality of that first session—no further training sessions were undertaken.

One important input in the sessions was the discussion on patriarchy and a feminist perspective of fisheries development, which gradually began to have an impact on the consciousness of the participants. In 1993, this perspective led to a specific

Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme in the NFF, as part of a larger ICSF-sponsored programme undertaken by different fishworkers' organizations in other parts of the world. The WIF programme sought to create a core group of women leaders in the union to take up specific issues of women and see how their spaces in the fishery could be safeguarded.

The programme helped to impart some amount of theoretical clarity by tracing the links between technology development and the destruction of natural resources, and the marginalization of women in the fishery. Besides organizing specific sessions for the core group of women, a serious attempt was also made to collect data on women's involvement in fisheries all over the Indian coast. Although the exercise was not exhaustive, the resulting document, published by ICSF as part of its *Women in Fisheries Dossier* series, is the only one of its kind.

The core group of women that resulted from the training programme also took up the issue of injustice done to migrant women workers in India's fish processing plants. Under the auspices of the NFF, they organized a Public Hearing on the Struggles of Women Workers in the Fish Processing Industry in India at Cochin, Kerala on 23 and 24 June 1995 (see *SAMUDRA Dossier Women in Fisheries Series No.1*). Live testimonies of women workers from fish processing plants convinced the hearing's jury that serious consideration should be given to protect the rights of these migrant women workers and their spaces in the fishery. Subsequently, the NFF successfully intervened to ensure that the State's Department of Labour took the plight of these women seriously, insisting that the processing industry treat these women on par with other contract and migrant labour, according to legal norms. Although some States did respond positively to this call, the problem of poor working and living conditions of women in fish processing plants is not yet totally solved.

Despite these attempts to create gender awareness in the fishworkers' movement, there continued to be resistance to the more vocal and able women leaders that were emerging. The women of the core group were consistently chided by some members of the movement, and, by the end of the 1990s, most of them either withdrew from, or left, the movement. Nevertheless, the male leaders in the union took upon themselves to see that women's issues would still remain on the agenda. This was either because they were genuinely convinced about gender equity or because, by that time, a general ethos of recognizing women's participation had emerged. Ironically, the men seem more secure talking about women's issues than the women themselves.

In some States, some women organizers preferred to work only with women vendors or processors to build separate unions. But there was resistance to all-women unions becoming members of the NFF in their own right. At present, the official requirement is that the women's unions should be part of, and under, the State federation in order to be accepted. The male leaders refused to accept that the women could create a separate State leadership on specific issues.

There was also resistance to changing the name of the national union from the National Fishermen's Forum to the National Fishworkers Forum, as some State unions were not convinced of the need to represent women's issues, feeling that women did not make any substantial contribution to the fishery. This reaction came particularly from those States where women's involvement in the fishery was not considered paramount. This view resulted from a typically patriarchal perspective and not because there were no women involved in post-harvest fishing activities.

In 1999, the NFF took up a large national struggle to get women recognized as fishworkers and be eligible for the welfare benefits that fishermen got from the government. In some States, like Orissa and West Bengal, NFF's mobilization around this issue challenged the accepted norm that fisheries was a male domain and took the legislators by surprise. In response to NFF's campaign, the State had to accept the fact that women also earned their livelihoods from fish-related activities. The NFF had thus succeeded in projecting this issue to a national level. Interestingly, the demand for parity of women's representation in the WFF also came from men in India; it was finally carried through, despite initial resistance from some quarters. It is still to be seen whether parity for women was a mere token gesture or whether it will genuinely challenge power relations in the fishworkers' movements.

Growing into the Stature of a National Trade Union

In this section, I would like to reflect only on two important issues.

The turn of the 1980s saw stagnation and decline in marine fish catches globally, even as the demand for fish remained high. There was tremendous overcapacity in the Northern fishing fleets, which were heavily subsidized and constantly in search of new fishing grounds. This period was also one of extensive trade liberalization, with Southern countries keen on becoming competitive players in world markets. These Southern countries sought out foreign currency to catch up with the technological advancement of the North.

Around this time, two things happened in India. Firstly, the decline in fish catches, coupled with the need to earn foreign exchange, paved the way for a State-sponsored drive for

aquaculture as a solution. Secondly, the State began to claim that there were marine resources in the deep seas that the Indian fleet could not access and, hence, joint ventures with foreign companies would help exploit these resources.

The aquaculture-industrial fisheries combination was meant to meet India's foreign exchange crunch. But it was clear that the combination would jeopardize the artisanal fishery. That was the next big battle that the NFF had to wage to protect the coastal fishers and the livelihoods of the fishworkers.

Already, in the latter part of the 1980s, the NFF had sought alliances with other workers' unions challenged by similar processes. Textile workers in central India were on a long strike for compensation in the wake of the modernization of the textile industry, which led to the closure of hundreds of textile mills. The unions that represented workers both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy created a national platform called the Platform of Militant Trade Unions. However, that process of consolidation did not last long as the textile workers faced a stifling defeat, shortly after which their trade union leader, a prominent militant organizer, was killed, and a reign of terror grew in the political arena.

Nonetheless, the interaction with other unions that ensued from that process did pave the way for the future national struggles of the NFF. Subsequently, two national platforms in the unorganized sector began to grow as a result of the coming together of various people's movements in the country. One of them was the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and the National Centre for Labour (NCL), a national trade union of unions in the unorganized sector. The NFF was an intricate part of both these forums.

The Case of Aquaculture

In 1991, the Chilika Bachao Andolan led the first protest against the privatization of Chilika Lake for shrimp aquaculture. Chilika Lake, in the State of Orissa, is the largest lake in India. Thousands of fisherpeople fish for a livelihood in this lake, while others practise traditional aquaculture. Privatization of the lake was, therefore, a step against the customary rights of these coastal people. Moreover, the move threatened to damage the sensitive ecosystem of the area. Students, environmentalists and fishworkers joined hands to defend the lake. The struggle was led by a veteran freedom fighter, Banka Behari Das. An alarm was raised all over the country when 21 Members of Parliament signed a memorandum that appealed to the Prime Minister to stop the project on environmental grounds. The long struggle led to a court verdict in favour of the people. The private company that was behind the project, one of India's largest business houses, withdrew.

Efforts continued all over the country to privatize water bodies, especially as the government announced several schemes to introduce semi-intensive aquaculture in the coastal rice tracts, which local farmers were eager to take up as the price of paddy was low, while its cost of cultivation was rising. Traditional aquaculture was nothing new in India. It had been practised in several coastal areas that made use of the natural ebb and flow of the water systems in the rich wetland ecosystems. Numerous communities made a living from such aquacultural practices, which were not only integrated into the cycle of food production—intercropping of shrimp with paddy—but also sustained social interactions as local communities evolved their own ways of appropriating and sharing production and its surplus.

When semi-intensive modern aquaculture was introduced in India, other Asian countries had already seen the boom-and-bust cycle of the industry. In 1987, Taiwan was producing 21 per cent of Asia's cultured shrimp, the highest output in the Asian region. But attacks by viruses and bacteria decimated aquaculture production. In the process, the entire rich mangrove ecosystem was also destroyed, and the shrimp lands could no longer be used for anything. China then took over to produce 21.6 per cent of Asia's aquacultured shrimp. Using a more cautious approach, they continued to maintain high rates of production until they too were hit by disease in 1991. The Philippines and Thailand followed suit (see *The Environmental and Social Costs of Developing Coastal Shrimp Aquaculture in Asia* by Ian Baird, Earth Island Institute, 1993).

By 1992-93, the protests of the coastal people in the Indian States of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu against the growing menace of aquaculture were intensifying. Within a short spell of time, the coastal people had begun to feel the impact of intensive aquaculture on their freshwater sources and on their access to hitherto common lands. Andhra Pradesh had no history of traditional aquaculture. The pioneering aquaculture investors there came from Kerala. They were actually shrimp exporters, who probably moved to Andhra Pradesh to avoid tax payments in Kerala. The lure of lucrative returns made them shift their establishments from the west coast to the east coast of the country.

The 'Blue Revolution' promised fast returns, and soon found support amongst scientists, who were keen to experiment with new technologies. The governments of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu leased out vast expanses of their coastal lands to investors for little or no money. With absolutely no concern for the environment, many investors went about their new business

as if it were any other industry, using large machines to excavate tanks and then constructing long canals or pipelines to pump saline water into the tanks. They sunk bore-wells to pump in fresh water so as to maintain the required salinity levels in the tanks and then pumped out the used, polluted water into the neighbouring canals, thus polluting them.

At the start of the 1990s, the Indian government announced its New Economic Policy. Privatization and liberalization programmes were high on the agenda, while, politically, the process of decentralization commenced. This period saw a phenomenal rise in the cost of inputs in fisheries because of the devaluation of the rupee and the new import policy. By the mid-1990s, fish was increasingly being diverted into the fishmeal industry as there was an increasing quantum of by-catch from the trawl sector and fishmeal was an important ingredient in aquaculture. Fish consumers who depended on cheaper varieties of fish were increasingly deprived of fish for food. The struggle against intensive coastal shrimp aquaculture saw small farmers, fishworkers and environmental groups get together to demand a ban on intensive aquaculture. Many of these struggles took place outside the confines of the NFF, as there were several NGOs on the east coast that saw the potential for using the issue to mobilize large sections of the population.

The issue was taken to court by another veteran freedom fighter, S Jaganathan, of the Gram Swaraj Movement, with the support of the Campaign Against Shrimp Industry (CASI) and People Against Shrimp Industry (PASI). The work of ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, the Third World Network and some investigative journalists drew public attention to the problem. (*Vandana Shiva, founder of Navdanya, is chairperson, International Forum of Agriculture of the International Forum of Globalization. The Third World Network is based in Penang, Malaysia – Ed*) The Supreme Court of India delivered a

landmark judgement in 1996 calling for a cessation of all aquaculture activities in farms that violated the CRZ Notification of 1991. The other important feature of the judgement was a directive to the Government of India to constitute, before 15 January 1997, an Authority under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 to confer with all relevant powers to protect the ecologically fragile coastal areas, seashore, waterfront, and so on.

The Supreme Court's verdict caught the State governments napping. None of them had paid attention to the CRZ Notification of 1991. Moreover, the liberalization plans of State governments would be badly hit if the Supreme Court judgement were taken seriously, as numerous schemes were in the pipeline for the 'development' of the coastal zone and the tourism industry. No State government took action on the Supreme Court judgement. Instead, the governments of the coastal States, together with several interested parties, filed petitions in the Supreme Court against the judgement.

The Central Government's Ministry of Agriculture, on the other hand, drafted an Aquaculture Authority Bill in great haste. The Bill was tabled in the Rajya Sabha (India's Upper House of Parliament) on 19 March 1997 and passed in great haste at its next sitting, on 20 March.

As the issue gained national importance, the NFF took up the struggle, creating the National Action Committee Against Industrial Aquaculture (NACAIA) and two *jathas* (marches) were organized, one from Porbandhar in Gujarat and the other from Calcutta in West Bengal, to make people aware of the contradictions in the legislation, and to oppose the stand of the Central and State governments. According to NFF's Chairperson, Harekrishna Debnath, "The Aquaculture Authority Bill is one of the most anti-people legislations ever introduced in the Indian

Parliament. It is contrary to the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 and to the environment policy of the Central government, as reflected in the CRZ Notification. It is also contrary to the welfare of the rural population living in coastal areas. It is an act of gross injustice as it seeks to protect the documented, judicially recognized, ecologically disruptive effects of present-day shrimp culture pursued by the industry” (from the 1996 Annual Report of the NFF).

Already, in the early 1990s, the dreaded EUS (epizootic ulcerative syndrome) disease had hit fish species in the inland waters of many parts of the country, especially in Kerala, where thousands of inland fisherfolk live off the resources of the inland waters. In an attempt to increase production in the inland waters, the State’s Fisheries Department had actually encouraged the introduction of modern techniques of aquaculture. These necessitated the privatization of inland water bodies, which was the first big obstacle to the customary access rights of the fisherfolk.

The outbreak of EUS took everyone by surprise and led to massive loss of fish. The KSMTF, particularly its women members, led a long struggle for compensation from the government. Although the compensation they got was small, it was for the first time that fishworkers were being treated on par with agricultural workers, who used to gain compensation during crop failures from natural disasters.

India is probably the only country in the world where the development of semi-intensive aquaculture was challenged in this manner and where the Supreme Court took a stand in favour of the people, understanding the damage that the industry was causing to the livelihoods of people through the destruction of the environment.

The Struggle Against Joint Ventures

During the same period, the NFF waged a war against the government policy on joint ventures for offshore and deep-sea fishing. It was the mechanized sector of Maharashtra, comprising trawls and gill-netters, that was most vociferous against the government's joint-venture policy. Through their apex co-operative body, the Maharashtra Machimar Krithi Samithi, the traditional fishermen could access government support and subsidies to develop their fishery. By the late 1960s, the trawl sector was highly developed in this region and it was landing large catches of high-value species. There was also a fixed-bag net fishery that netted large quantities of Bombay Duck (*Harpadon nehereus*).

The employment generated for men and women in coastal communities was substantial. As a very enterprising community with a sizeable amount of accumulated capital, the fisher folk in this sector considered it their right to extend their fishery by entering the deep sea, as the inshore was already maximally exploited. The Maharashtra Machimar Krithi Samithi categorically demanded that the new Deep-sea Fisheries Policy of the Ministry of Food Processing be banned.

On closer examination, it became clear that there was no real ground for signing joint ventures to harvest the untapped resources of the deep sea. In 1992, the FAO published the report of a consultant who had analyzed the existing potential of the Indian fishery in the light of further development possibilities. The report concluded: "The main problem of the deep-sea fisheries is not so much its capital and operational costs, which have been generally fair by developing country standards. The primary problem is, by far, the situation of overinvestment in the shrimp business, and, subsequently, of economic overfishing

of the target resource. Therefore, the priority need for this fishery is not further development but resource management. The first step of this policy should be to decrease the pressure of the deep-sea fishing on the paenid shrimp stock through retargeting a substantial portion of its catching power on other resources” (*Study on Deep-sea Fisheries Development in India*, M Giudicelli, FAO, 1992).

In 1993, the total marine catch in the country was 2,720,000 tonnes; the total catch, including inland and aquaculture catch, was 4,768,000 tonnes. However, the proportion of shrimp produced by aquaculture was on the increase. Yet, over 200,000 traditional craft and about 20,000 mechanized craft depended greatly on this fishery. Moreover, with the motorization of the traditional craft, an important segment of the sector began to operate beyond the 22-km limit of the territorial waters, in an effort to catch more and make their fishing operations viable. It appeared that, with some minimal support, they could be helped to harvest the deep-sea resources at a much lower cost and to a greater social and economic advantage.

In June 1994, a Supreme Court judgement was passed in support of the Kerala Government’s ban on bottom trawling during the monsoon months, which nullified the earlier High Court judgement in favour of the Kerala Trawler Boat Operators’ Association. In this judgement, the Court wrote: “Public interest cannot be determined only by looking at the quantum of fish caught in the year. The government is under obligation to protect the economic interests of the traditional fishermen and to ensure that they are not deprived of their slender means of livelihood” (from the judgement of the Supreme Court in *Joyachan Anthony vs State of Kerala and others*, Civil Appeal Nos. 3532 of 1986, as quoted in NFF Annual Report 1993).

Despite this, the Central government went ahead with its new deep-sea policy. According to social scientist John Kurien, “Part of the answer to this contradiction is to be found in the present scenario in global fishing. Global marine fish catch has stagnated at around 85 million tonnes after 1989. Distant-water fishing vessels, the world over, are in a particularly bad shape. Their capacities were built up over the years with massive State subsidies, which promoted easy entry. Unfortunately, a fishing vessel once built, has a fairly long economic life and little alternate use other than as scrap metal. Redeployment to other less exploited fishing areas is, therefore, the only solution for owners who wish, for whatever reason or compulsion, to continue in business. The liberal Indian policy seems to have come at the right time for them. All the tabs have been taken off earlier norms for joint ventures. The State made the Indian EEZ one huge open-access regime and the resource was up for grabs. In such a regime, there are no property rights; it is possession that is proof of property. Hence, the scramble to get in as quickly before too many joined the fray. The scramble is really not for any particular variety of commercially valuable fish but for any fish resource, which can be harvested quickly, in order to obtain a profit on the investment made. On the part of the Indian government, it has provided every bait to attract foreign investment—subsidized fuel; 100-per cent export, with permission for transshipment at sea; no compulsion to dock in an Indian port during operations; and permission to use any foreign port as base operation for fishing in our EEZ” (op cit).

The NFF believed that the drive to make quick profits in a situation where resources were seriously under threat and where there were no management regulations would ensure the ecological ruin of the fishery. Many of the species are stocks that move in and out of the inshore, offshore and the deep sea

at different points in their life cycles. Consequently, merely because resources are harvested in offshore waters provided no guarantee that such action would not affect the resources in the inshore.

From February 1994, the NFF launched a nationwide struggle against the licensing of joint-venture fishing vessels. The first All India Fisheries Strike on 4 February was the first of its kind and a total success. With no fish in the markets, the strike caught the attention of all consumers, who began to be informed of the reasons for the high price of fish and its fall in supply. In May 1994, leaders of the artisanal and mechanized sector from all over the country created the National Fisheries Action Committee Against Joint Ventures. The committee, which comprised all the leading trade unions in the country, under the leadership of the NFF, with Thomas Kocherry as convener, pledged to continue the struggle until the demand for a ban on deep-sea joint ventures was met.

A Black Day was observed all over the country on 20 July 1994. The second All India Fisheries Strike on 23-24 November 1994 was politically crucial. All the political parties intervened in the issue in the Indian parliament on 14-15 December, and the Minister for Food Processing was forced to freeze the issuing of licences for deep-sea joint ventures, promising to appoint a Review Committee to re-study the matter. The P Murari Committee was thus appointed on 7 February 1995, but as it included only government representatives, the National Fisheries Action Committee decided to continue its agitation, with its convener going on a hunger strike in Porbandar, Gujarat, followed by a mass *satyagraha* (nonviolent sit-in) in New Delhi on 2 May 1995. These actions were supported by demonstrations in all the coastal States, which caught the attention of the parliament, which demanded an explanation.

Subsequently, the Minister for Food Processing agreed to withdraw all the licences issued to joint ventures, to reconstitute the Murari Committee and to change its terms of reference. Six individuals, representing different fisheries' interests, and 16 Members of Parliament, belonging to different political parties, were inducted into the committee. The committee then undertook a unique procedure of travelling all around the country for public hearings with local people, to ascertain for itself the pulse of the coastal communities on the government's deep-sea policy. The mass response of the people was indeed an eyeopener for the parliamentarians, who got educated not only on the negative impact of the deep-sea policy but on the actual living conditions of the coastal people and their various problems. Large groups of women participated in the public hearings, much to the surprise of the parliamentarians, who did not know that so many women were also involved in the fishery.

The factfinding process had a deep impact on the public. Yet, despite the positive recommendations of the Murari Committee, on 6 February 1996, the bureaucrats of the central government stalled the process of putting the recommendations into practice. It took another protest fast by the convener in Mumbai, and a series of mass protests all over the country, to get the government to finally agree to execute some of the recommendations of the Murari Committee.

That struggle certainly propelled the NFF to centre stage and, despite its independence from political parties, gave it the stature of an all-India trade union that was able to focus the problems of the coastal communities at the national level. Nonetheless, the struggle did create waves of discord within the movement itself. One important source of discontent was the initial base of the movement—the artisanal fishers. This group, which comprised motorized crafts, now had to join hands

with their traditional enemies—the small trawlers—to ward off the bigger evil of the deep-sea vessels. The movement's leadership saw it as a necessary alliance between groups of actual traditional fishermen, who had been fishing all their lives, against the industrial sector operated and controlled by outsiders. Yet, there remained doubts in the minds of the artisanal fishers. The other necessary but difficult experience for an independent union was to be hand in glove with mainstream political unions in the intensely active two-year period of the struggle.

The struggle against deep-sea joint ventures also elicited solidarity from all over the world, including from countries that were deploying industrial vessels in Indian waters. Groups lent support in various ways, by protesting to their governments. ICSF included NFF's then co-chairperson, Harekrishna Debnath, in its delegation to the second session of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, where he was able to make an intervention, which was also supported by Greenpeace International. That exposure to an international milieu of foreign communities that were also being affected by new liberalization policies gave the movement's leadership a new insight into the expansion of capitalism. It also won for itself new allies.

Thus, although global fisheries have always been interlinked by centuries-old trade, this period was possibly the first time in history that the world's fishworkers and coastal communities realized that they had something to defend against a common enemy. In 1996, the FAO celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding with a Conference on Food Security at Quebec in Canada. The CCPFH decided to invite fishworker organizations from other parts of the world to interact amongst themselves on that occasion. As one of the members of the Canadian Council, Michael Belliveau, was also a member of ICSF, he suggested

inviting movements that represented coastal fishers. Among those who were invited were representatives of NFF and SIFFS. Enthused by the successful struggle against joint ventures but seeing in it only a fragile victory in the wake of the new globalization policies of the WTO, these groups easily lent support to a suggestion to create a WFF. The NFF hosted the founding meeting of WFF in New Delhi on 21 November 1997 and Thomas Kocherry was elected its first Co-ordinator.

Conclusion

I hope that this brief history of the fishworkers' movement in India has helped readers understand the particular context and manner in which the NFF, a trade union with a difference, grew in India, and why I have referred to it as a social-movement union, very different from a trade union in the conventional sense. This history will also, I hope, help those not familiar with India get some idea of the complexities of the country's system of governance and the difficult terrain such a dispersed people's organization has had to traverse.

One probably has to know India fairly well to appreciate the role that the NFF has played in highlighting the cause of the coastal fishworkers. Organizing a countrywide movement in a sector where over 60 per cent of the population is illiterate, and speak nine different languages, is no mean achievement. Despite the fact that numerous people have contributed to such a gigantic organizational task, none of it would have been possible if the actual leadership of the NFF had not been willing to commit itself wholly and completely to the cause. No movement can be sustained over such a long period and continue to grab news headlines without dedicated leadership, which is not lacking in the NFF.

Having said that, I will now try to dwell on what I consider to be the shortfalls of the movement. Among the several gains of the movement, the most significant have been the judgements that the Supreme Court of India pronounced in favour of the people in cases of litigation filed by the movement. Unfortunately, several of these judgements have not been implemented, for lack of an organizational infrastructure. As the State is biased in favour of monetary interests, it lacks the political will to execute the Supreme Court's judgements. Political pressure from mainstream political unions is not forthcoming as they remain largely unconvinced of the viability of the artisanal fishery. The movement itself, because of its mass nature, does not command a significant place in the day-to-day activity of the fishworkers; it is, therefore, unable to reap the benefits of its own struggles.

As mentioned earlier while assessing the nature of the mass movement and its membership, this shortcoming has its roots in the social process' dichotomy between its economic and political logic, two sides of the same coin that have, in this case, been kept quite apart. That is, the fishworkers' union has little or no connection with the matters of the fishing co-operatives wherever they exist. The co-operatives have their own agenda and make use of the union when it suits them, and vice versa. To the extent that the co-operatives are made up of the better-off fishermen, their aspirations are naturally to grow bigger and go deeper into the sea to make ends meet. Neither have the co-operatives tried to halt such competition for resources nor have they attempted any conservation or management strategies. The strategy of the union for legal battles to safeguard the rights of the inshore fishermen thus often falls short of expected gains, as these are not translated into the reorganization of the fishery.

On the other hand, the effort that the fishworkers' movement makes to safeguard the rights of the 'traditional fishing community' is also questionable. While the 'traditional fishers' are vehement about conserving their access rights to the resources, nowhere do traditional fishing norms still hold sway. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity is a live reality in coastal communities. With the modern State having taken over control of the resources by displacing the earlier system of local government, the traditional management systems have been eroded and the traditional community differentiated. Old community norms of control no longer exist. There is thus an urgent need to redefine what constitutes the coastal or artisanal fishery, and to clearly spell out whose interests and access to resources have to be safeguarded.

In India, most work is still caste-determined and any aspect of a 'traditional' occupation is deeply rooted in caste identity; a person's occupation is determined by his or her caste. A trade union that is class-based has also to mediate caste issues, but as caste itself gets politicized and seeks to enter the 'mainstream', the efforts of purely class-based organizations get defeated. To explain this further: A major demand of the backward castes is to strive for niches and spaces within mainstream development, from which they have hitherto been excluded. In the course of capitalist development, which is based on individualism, it is only the more fortunate individuals of the backward castes who get to enter the mainstream, while the others remain backward. Identity politics, as this politics of difference has been termed, comes into play when actual economic power grows beyond the ambit of politics. This is increasingly so in this phase of globalization, when the role of the State in defending the rights of its citizens gets overrun by the interest of finance capital. In this context, the process of identity politics subsumes class under

the caste framework and risks political advancement for an economic base.

Though the growing differentiation within the artisanal fishery is a reality, it is an area that has not been addressed. The rapid motorization that took place since the early 1980s introduced destructive fishing techniques like large ring-seines and mini-trawls into the artisanal fisheries sector of India. In the upper coastal regions, the large gill-netters were transformed into trawls. While ownership of the craft remained with the members of the coastal communities (traditionally, fishing castes), the number of craft or motors owned varied, thus causing the growth of a non-operator/owner class, on the one hand, and large-scale marginalization of the less fortunate, on the other. The shift in terminology from 'fishworker' to 'fisher people' or 'fishing community' is a sign of this ambiguity, which is beginning to be recognized but is yet to be adequately addressed.

A structure like that of the NFF does not facilitate such questions being addressed. Being an apex federation with a federal structure, the NFF has no direct control over the activities of its member unions. Regular and deeper debate over these issues is also made problematic because of communication difficulties, both in terms of language and geographic distances.

The absence of a larger movement for social transformation creates a political vacuum in which a movement like the NFF operates. Having remained independent of political party affiliations and not being, therefore, led by electoral politics, the NFF seeks to project the need for a more people-centred and participatory political process, which the present parliamentary form of democracy does not permit. The NFF also demands an alternative development paradigm, where life and livelihood for all and not growth and profit for a few will be the guiding

principle. But these are long-term objectives and cannot be fought single handedly. While the NFF has built more broadbased alliances to work towards these objectives, such a movement remains on the periphery of the Indian political system.

Moreover, people-centred development has, at its core, the issue of gender equity. The artisanal fishery has proven to be viable and resilient because of the participation of women in the fishery, making the fishery a family-based occupation with a complementary sexual division of labour. Again, while the fishworkers' movement has tried to put women's issues on its agenda, no attempts have been made by the members to evolve ways by which women's spaces in the fishery can be safeguarded. Having been themselves bitten by the modernization bug, the artisanal fishermen are also trapped in the logic of getting the best prices in order to pay for the new costs in fishing operations. Fishermen would rather give the last of their catch to an export merchant rather than to their women for local sales or for their own consumption.

A cost-and-earnings study by SIFFS in the mid-1990s indicated that 60 per cent of the fisherman's earnings went to service capital investments, which, in fact, means that the fishermen are fishing more to refuel business houses than to feed their own families. On the other hand, whatever earnings the women get by selling fish returns directly to the home and the community, thereby ensuring food security. The fishermen's co-operatives are largely male-dominated and there is very little consciousness on the close tie-up between profit-making, patriarchy and the exploitation of nature and women. The logic of a subsistence economy is overrun by the logic of a capitalist economy and, in the process, even a movement that struggles for an alternative is not able to intervene creatively.

One has to also admit that there continued to be ideological differences within the movement. Although this is nothing unusual, these ideological differences seem to get shoved under the carpet because of interpersonal disagreements at the leadership level. These differences have to do both with different perceptions of leadership styles, alliance building and the importance given to national *vis-à-vis* local issues. While some of these differences could be sorted out if more time could be found in already tight schedules, not addressing them promptly only leads to bigger problems that threaten the creative dynamism within the movement. One can even talk here of a generational gap, in the sense that each movement or leader wants to make an own experience instead of learning from the experiences of older movements and former leaders. As an example, consider what I would call the false orthodoxy of structure. While any functioning organization requires a minimum of structure, the unorganized sector, like that of the artisanal fishery, requires numerous hands, heads and hearts from outside the formal structure to make it operational. The leadership of the formal structure often tends to see this as a threatening proposition and instead of encouraging it, tends to marginalize it.

Reflecting on the preceding narrative, it is clear that the fishworkers' movement has its grass roots in the fishing communities but functions effectively at the provincial, national and even international levels. This kind of functioning is necessitated because borders or boundaries have never restricted fisheries. Yet, while the fisheries themselves are so 'fluid', organizations tend to be more restrictive. The local leadership insists on giving priority to local issues and resists involvement in national issues. On the other hand, the national leadership tends to impose national agendas on the base. Negotiating

between the two is not always easy. But it is clear that a movement like the NFF needs a national framework in which to operate. Mediating local and global issues becomes more an organizational and structural problem, rather than an ideological one.

The position of such a movement in the present phase of globalization is also very precarious. As a movement of the informal sector, it confronts the nation State and demands an alternative political process and development paradigm. But, it also needs a strong State to offset the impact of globalization. In its efforts to affirm its sovereignty, the State is forced to make compromises, further complicating its task. For instance, on the international arena, the NFF may find itself defending the positions of the Indian State, but for different reasons, as in the case of the social clause that the International Labour Organization (ILO) is trying to negotiate.

To end, as a middle-class supporter of a working-class people's movement, I can say that I have learnt a great deal about the complex social reality we live in. Associating with the struggles of the fishworkers makes me question my middle-class aspirations as well as the promises of the growing Information Technology age—the icing on a cake that does not exist. If struggles of the unorganized people have to make headway, larger sections of the middle class should relate to, and support, these struggles by taking these issues into the mainstream. Assisting grass-roots organizations to reorganize on the principles of participatory management, supporting viable alternatives in the subsistence artisanal fishery and continuing to strengthen fishworkers' solidarity across the country will continue to be the challenges of middle-class supporters. Broadening alliances and expanding the support base is the only way to challenge

globalization and its destruction of human societies. Working out creative alternatives cannot be the task of unions alone. Large groupings of heads, hearts and hands have to work simultaneously towards such a process.

Nalini Nayak

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III

An Essay on the Fishworkers' Organization in Senegal

by **Aliou Sall**

Introduction

From colonial times onwards, the development of the industrial fishery in Senegal received greater attention than the development of the artisanal fishery. This trend continued after independence, as the artisanal fishery was considered doomed to disappear.

The priority given to the industrial fishery led to investments and subsidies from banks and investment companies, well before independence. Only with the artisanal fishery development programme of the 1970s did artisanal fish processing and trading receive any attention.

Traditionally, three communities were involved in the artisanal fishery—the Wolofs of Guet Ndar, the Lebous of Cap Vert and Petite Côte, and the Seres Nyominkas of the Saloum Islands. The *pirogue*, the local dugout craft used, goes back, according to certain sources, to the 16th century.

Senegal's artisanal fishery is characterized by its dynamism. Market factors and the state of the resource have induced changes in the practices of fishermen, traders and processors. The craft, for example, have undergone several modifications over the years to adapt to the evolution of the industry. The introduction of the outboard motor to the *pirogue* revealed the great capacity of the artisanal fishery to adapt to technological innovations. Nowadays, it is common to see *pirogues* of over 20 m propelled by 55 hp engines. Beyond its capacity to adapt to, or adopt, new technologies, the artisanal fishery develops its own 'survival strategies', such as a combination of gear, to face the progressive degradation of the resources.

The introduction of the outboard motors constitutes the turning point in the modernization of the artisanal fishery. The co-operative movement played an important role in the testing and popularization of the motors even if, as we will see later, this movement was a complete failure in rural Senegal.

In 1972, the government launched an extensive programme for the motorization of *pirogues*. This would have tremendous impacts on the working and living conditions of fishermen and other players in the fishery. The objective of the State was to

motorize the entire fleet. For this, the central administration would rely on the co-operative movement, which began just after independence in 1962.

Role of Co-operatives

Beginning in 1962, the State established co-operatives through a programme that had a triple objective: modernization of the fleet, modernization of production, and advancement of the fishermen themselves. Funding was provided by the Senegalese Bank for Development (BNSD), which, in 1965, became the National Development Bank.

The first phase of co-operative credit, which began after 1962, operated as follows: The BNSD focused on funding fishing gear. It funded the co-operatives directly for the acquisition of motors, on condition that they transfer them to their members. In 1972, the motorization programme, relying on the experience of co-operative credit since 1962, was used as an opportunity to reform the co-operative movement. That year, the State launched a national programme of co-operative reorganization. At the same time, it decided to cancel the sector's debt. That reform resulted in:

- primary supply co-operatives working under the supervision of the Fisheries Division; and
- co-operatives in the form of groups and unions undertaking marketing by acquiring and managing fishing gear.

One of the most important components of that first phase was the creation of a centre to assist the motorization of *pirogues* (Center d'assistance à la motorization des *pirogues*) in 1972, with Canadian funding. Its mission was to support the process of motorization of the *pirogues*.

Between 1972 and 1982, 95 primary supply co-operatives, 17 processor co-operatives and five regional unions of co-operatives were created, as well as the National Union of Co-operatives. At the root of the new hope placed in the artisanal fishery was the grim future due to the wave of droughts in the 1970s.

The second phase of the artisanal fishery reform project consisted mainly in improving financial systems that were already in place. Co-operatives were now allowed to deal directly with the banks without supervision. Guarantees for loans were based on the principle of solidarity amongst the members of the co-operative.

In the second phase, close to 90 per cent of the *pirogues* were motorized, that is, 11,000 motors were distributed, resulting in a significant increase in landings. This represented a total volume of 6 billions CFA francs in financing. Besides funding for motorization of craft, the outcome of the credit co-operatives was not very promising, and not what the government and the artisanal fishermen had expected.

There were a few positive results during the period. Co-operation contributed to the modernization of the fishery by facilitating access to credit and allowed for practically the whole *pirogue* fleet to be modernized. Co-operatives also served as a base for saving-and-credit schemes, even if these were shortlived. The introduction of motors and the subsequent increase in landings gave an impetus to the use of cold storage by artisanal processors and traders.

The weaknesses were related to the difficulties, inherent in the co-operative movement, in having fishermen accept the consequences of the guarantee system. Besides, the State, by frequently granting debt relief in the rural sector in general,

created dangerous precedents, with the result that today fishermen are in perpetual conflict with banks and creditors.

Significance of the Artisanal Fishery

Today, the *piroque* fleet comprises 11,600 *pirogues*, of which 91 per cent are motorized. Fishing gear, which have undergone major changes in usage, include gill-nets, shore seines, purse seines, handlines and traps of different types.

Landings amounted to 415,000 tonnes in 1996. Most of this production goes for local consumption. In spite of its informal characteristics, the artisanal fishery contributes to 60 per cent of the fish exported by processing plants.

According to the last census of 1977, the artisanal fishery employed around 52,000 fishermen. The role of the artisanal fishery as a job creator for dispossessed people coming mostly from rural areas, is increasingly visible. Indeed, fishing and related activities, such as processing, helps limit urban drift. Apart from contributing to the food security of the subregion, the artisanal fishery also contributes to the national wealth by earning foreign exchange.

A combination of positive factors has contributed to the development of the artisanal fishery, narrowing the dividing line with the industrial fishery, and thereby paving the way for a more visible integration with the industrial sector. Notable among these positive factors are the motorization of the *pirogues*, the scarcity of the resource and the dynamic nature of the markets. Motorization permitted the artisanal fishermen to extend their territories and compete with the industrial fishermen. Increasingly, the major issue for the artisanal fishermen today is access to the resource. Further modernization of the fishery through new equipment like depth sounders and GPS are increasingly being used. Such equipment allows the sector to target resources outside the traditional artisanal zone.

According to CRODT, motorization multiplied the landings of sardinella fourfold between 1970 and 1980, as motors raised the harvesting capacity of fishermen. By enlarging their territory, they also worsened working conditions as they were now forced to fish farther and farther from home and faced conflicts with the industrial fleet at sea.

Yet there is an interdependence between the two sectors through an exchange of large amounts of fish that blurs the distinction between the two sectors. Thanks to motorization, 'collector' or pick-up boats (*bateaux ramasseurs*) on contract have succeeded in collecting products from Senegalese fishermen fishing as far as the offshore of Angola.

The scarcity of the resource forces some Senegalese fishermen to get their supply through transshipping. Even though prohibited by law, transshipping is on the increase and is challenging the development of the artisanal fishery in the area of *la petite Côte*. The expansion of the market for *yeet* (sea snails or gastropods, *Cymbium sp.*) in Asia and its success in the subregion has led to its overexploitation, which forced the fishing administration to impose a moratorium on the stock. The crisis was precipitated when parallel transshipping of *yeet* started along the Senegalese coast, especially in the Mbour-Joal zone.

The dynamism of the markets also greatly contributed to the complementary nature of the artisanal and industrial sectors. Species like lobster, cuttlefish and octopus would not have been considered resources without the existence of foreign markets, especially the Japanese market and, more recently, the European markets. Consequently, the small-scale sector, Japanese importers and Senegalese exporters have come together in a relationship mediated by local brokers.

The above factors will continue to influence the conditions of cohabitation between the artisanal and the industrial sectors in Senegal's fisheries.

Crisis in the Industrial Fishery

The different interest groups in the industrial sector are represented by three professional organizations: Le Groupement des Armateurs et Industriels de la Pêche au Sénégal (GAIPES), L'Union Patronale des Armateurs, Mareyeurs et Exportateurs du Sénégal (UPAMES) and Le Groupement des Industriels, Mareyeurs et Exportateurs du Sénégal (GIMES).

The Senegalese industrial fleet is largely obsolete, with the average age of vessels being 20 years. Most of the fleet, which includes trawlers and sardine and tuna boats, suffer from lack of maintenance.

In the sardine fishery, the nine boats in operation in 1994 were reduced to five in 1996. These range between 20 and 25 m in length, with gross registered tonnage of 60 to 120, and fish for pelagic species on inshore grounds. The overall potential of the inshore pelagic resource is estimated at between 200,000 and 450,000 tonnes. In 1996, 7,800 tonnes of pelagic fish, consisting mainly of ethmalose (Bonga shad), sardinella and chinchards, were landed, commercially valued at 522.6 million CFA francs.

The management of the sardine fishery is a source of conflict between the State and Senegalese artisanal fishermen. Sardinella accounts for more than 70 per cent of the catch. It is because sardinella plays such a key role in the survival of the artisanal fishery that the fishermen and women affiliated to the CNPS are constantly expressing their concern about its future. The first reason for concern is the opening up of access to the

pelagic species to the European fleet, mainly to Dutch and, lately, French fleet owners. The second reason is linked to the presence of 20 Russian boats in the sardine fishery. According to the fisheries department's statistics, only 30,000 tonnes of sardinella were landed by this Russian fleet in 1998. Due to the suspected underreporting of catches by the Russian fleet, there is a real risk of overexploitation of this resource.

The Senegalese trawler fleet is made up of 152 vessels, of which 91 are freezer trawlers and 61 are icebox trawlers. The total landings, essentially composed of high-value demersal species (benthic fin fish, cephalopods and crustaceans), were estimated to be 50,000 tonnes, worth close to 23 billion CFA francs.

In 1996, the tuna fleet was composed of 42 canner seiners and longliners, of which two were Senegalese. Ten of these have their base in Dakar, where they land their entire catch, while the remaining 31 land only occasionally in Dakar.

The total landings of tuna in Dakar are around 30,000 tonnes, worth 10 billion CFA francs. Three species are landed: yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye. The landings decreased by 25 per cent in 1996 (35,600 tonnes in 1995), due to a reduction of the fleet and also because of the scarcity of the resource.

Some of the demersal and sardine fisheries are facing overexploitation. Access to the coastal demersal resources, where the annual potential yield is estimated to be 130,000 tonnes, is a source of conflict between the artisanal and the industrial sectors. Exploitation of these resources by foreign vessels is one of the reasons why artisanal fishers are against fisheries access agreements.

According to the 1998 Master Plan of the Department of Fisheries, certain coastal demersal species, in both the artisanal

and industrial fisheries, are declining. These include crustaceans, spiny lobster, cephalopods (octopus, cuttlefish) and fin fish. According to the institutions in charge of research and planning in the fishery, the demersal resources of the EEZ are fully exploited. Some fishing zones like the shrimp grounds and the intermediate grounds of the shelf between 30 m and 60 m have seen a decline in the resource over the last few years due to intensive trawling activities. Species like catfish, tongue soles and groupers are showing signs of overexploitation. The bad state of the coastal demersal resource can be appreciated by comparing the increased effort with the landings. During the period between 1995 and 1996, the fishing effort of the Senegalese trawlers increased by 30 per cent, without any significant increase in the landings.

The decline of the demersal resource is affecting the security of the artisanal fishers. In recent years, our fishermen have been arrested on the borders with Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau. The issue was debated during the National Fisheries Day held in 1998 in St Louis, and CNPS has demanded a review of the fisheries access agreements signed between Senegal and foreign countries, including countries of the EU.

The conflict between the artisanal and industrial fisheries and the inefficiency of government surveillance and enforcement sometimes induce fishing communities to challenge the central authority. In the village of Fass Boye, 120 km from Dakar, for the last 10 years fishermen have been organizing a vigilance group, whose objective is to survey and intercept ships caught fishing inside the six-mile zone. Several arrests were made and captains held as hostages until the relevant authorities arrived.

Scarcity of resource has also led to an increase in the activities of the pick-up boats (*bateaux rammasseurs*). This type

of fishery, which began in the 1980s and was traditionally practiced by the Koreans, expanded greatly in the 1990s. In 1995, the Spanish and the Portuguese entered the fishery too. In 1992, several fishers from Kayar were jailed in Liberia and then released. In 1998, over 100 fishing units were seized by the Angolan coastguard. Fishers abandoned by their pick-up boats were released after being jailed for a few days. Their equipment was confiscated by the Angolese authorities. These events created such an uproar that the Senegalese minister of fishery went to Angola to negotiate the recovery of the fishing gear. The illegal status of many of these pick-up boats forces them to operate in countries where war is going on, like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola.

Working conditions on board these boats are bad. The fishing trips are long (40 days) and the fishers are paid a piece rate, 200 CFA francs per kg. But the fishermen increasingly accept these inhuman conditions because of resource constraints and the need for revenues. The devaluation of the CFA franc led to an increase in the price of gear and spare parts, which are not available in the domestic market and have to be imported.

Forty per cent of the demersal resource is black hake. The deep demersal resource, between 150 and 1000 m depth, consists of shrimp and finfish hakes, rock fish, gulper shark, angler and pink lobster.

According to the Fisheries Department, the deep demersal stock (shrimp and hake) do not seem to show any signs of overexploitation. However, the recent increase of the Senegalese fishing fleet to around 50 units can represent a threat to the shrimp fishery. Hake, which migrates in the Senegal-Mauritania zone, do not show any sign of being threatened, since fishing effort on that resource has reduced in the last few years.

Trawling, which is the main harvesting method for the demersal fishery, especially for shrimp, constitutes the main threat to the aquatic ecosystem. Pair trawling, which is still practised, even though it is against the law, has led to the disappearance of many habitats that were traditional fishing grounds for line fishing.

Given the highly migratory nature of the main species, namely, yellowfin, bigeye and skipjack tuna, and their large area of distribution (the Atlantic), the potential of the Senegalese EEZ is hard to estimate, but is said to be between 15,000 and 20,000 tonnes.

These estimates of the principal stocks correspond to the maximum equilibrium Catch (MEC) obtained by a model. (*The maximum equilibrium catch is equivalent to the maximum sustainable yield, which, according to the FAO, is the highest theoretical equilibrium yield that can be continuously taken—on average—from a stock under existing—average—environmental conditions without affecting significantly the reproduction process – Ed*) These species are not subject to competition between artisanal and industrial fishermen, but are mainly fished by the Europeans and the Japanese under fisheries access agreements with Senegal.

Social Practices in the Fishing Communities

There exists a contradiction between the principles and rules that govern the management of fishing co-operatives and those that govern family-based organization of the fishery. There are interesting changes in the recruitment of manpower and in the conditions of work contracts. The number of relatives within enterprises is declining, while technological innovation has led to changes in manpower recruitment. For example, the introduction of new technology, like seine nets, not only favours more recruitment but also necessitates strong young fishermen. Often, physical prowess is more in demand than maritime knowledge and fishing techniques. Despite the breakup of the

tradition of family labour, and the trend to recruit a more mobile workforce and despite the emergence of new types of non-fishing owners (intellectuals, professionals, exporters, processors, etc.), the family-run enterprise still remains the prevailing model in Senegal's fisheries. The organization of fishing operations and fish processing and the wholesale of fresh fish are all still dominated by kinship ties. That explains why the co-operative movement has failed to take off in Senegal—it is largely incompatible with the prevalent family property model. Facilitators, commissioned by the government to lead the co-operative movement, never understood that the co-operators were attending meetings not as individual co-operative members but rather on behalf of a whole family.

Another reason for the failure of the co-operatives was their misuse for personal gain by the presidents and those serving on the board of directors, who usually represented a pro-establishment network. Often they were village or district chiefs, or simply high-profile persons who collaborated with the State, participated in local politics and were attuned to maintaining the power equations of the status quo. Curiously, the vast majority of former officials of the co-operatives continue to be on the local committees of the grass-roots organizations of the ruling party. Through such participation in the reproduction of political power, the co-operative movement individualized or privatized the fishing environment.

Besides the family factor in the organization of coastal communities, other factors have contributed to the failure to 'modernize' the fishery in general. The informal nature of the artisanal fishery and its marginalization have also resulted in informal credit arrangements and trade networks that are as efficient as those implemented through the Canada-Senegal aid agreements. In fact, the survival of the artisanal fishery can be

said to be due to some of these informal institutions that competed with the co-operatives.

Fish processing in the artisanal sector is essentially done by women. About 30-40 per cent of the landings of the artisanal fishery (mainly molluscs, crustaceans and pelagics) are processed.

Politically, despite the absence of effective support from the government, the traders of processed fish contribute to the integration of the countries in the subregion through their trading. Culturally, the use of traditional technologies brings about a certain valorization of local knowledge. Several new techniques introduced by the Northern countries, like electric ovens for drying and smoking fish, have proven unsuccessful. Part of the reason for failure is the traditional Senegalese taste for fish processed in a particular manner.

Informal Credit Markets

Among these institutions, the most familiar and perhaps the most important are those dealing with credit and markets. The success of informal credit in the artisanal fishery arises from the incapacity of the formal financial institutions to efficiently meet the funding needs of the fishers, processors and brokers. The very high interest rates set by the informal credit sector can only be attributed to the failure of the formal financial markets to adapt to the fishing sector. Different types of credit are needed: short-term, to finance fishing trips; revolving, to buy fresh fish for processing; and mid- and long-term, to buy equipment either for processing or for trading.

The formal sector not only recognizes the informal one but also contributes to its survival and dynamism. This is the case with the very modern export processing plants that finance the artisanal fishing operations on which they depend for 60 per cent of their supply. In order to ensure the loyalty of the

fishermen, these exporters provide substantial funds through their brokers, who are the main players in the informal credit sector. All along the Senegalese coast, particularly in the areas of Mbour, Hann and Kayar, can be seen this indirect and very efficient involvement of the fish processing plants in the informal credit system. The minimal success of banks in advancing credit to the sector has also contributed to strengthening avenues for informal credit.

This aspect of the Senegalese fishery is often ignored or simply misunderstood by technocrats. That explains the failure of numerous State projects aimed at marketing. Take the case of the three procurement centres financed and set up by Canada in the 1970s in Kayar, Joal and Rufisque, with the aim of providing Senegal with the infrastructure to handle and distribute fish in the same way that the Canadians did. By the 1980s, the project failed. A project that aimed to help both producers and buyers could not match the traditional solidarity between buyers and fishermen, a relationship that was conventionally characterized as that between exploiter and exploited.

The Market for Fish

Senegal is a large consumer of fish, and fish plays an important role in meeting the protein needs of the population. The national average per capita consumption is 26 kg per year. Consumption has risen substantially since the liberalization of fish trade and the progressive withdrawal of the State from the frozen-fish sector. However, since the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 and following the increases in exports, there has been an upward pressure on prices, especially of 'noble' species.

The country's main market is the central fish market of Dakar, which receives products from all the coastal regions, including Dakar itself, and from other countries of the subregion,

notably Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau. Dakar is also a transshipment point for the interior markets, which are supplied by merchants and producers, mainly women.

In 1999, Senegal exported 124,423 tonnes of marine products worth approximately US\$310 million. The European market absorbs up to 60 per cent of the total exports. The devaluation of the CFA franc has greatly contributed to the expansion of exports. However, meeting international standards has been difficult for fish exporters.

The African market absorbs 35 per cent of the total exports of frozen and other value-added products. Processed fish occupies an important place in this local market, which has nevertheless remained underexploited because it is not well understood. The Asian market now takes 5 per cent of marine exports from Senegal, mainly shark fin, cephalopods and gastropods. Products like murex, cymbium, sea snail, mussel and shark fin, which used to be discarded, are now harvested. The US market is still not very accessible to Senegalese exporters, though there are real opportunities there. Exports to the US are still limited to whole fish (fresh or frozen) and to molluscs.

Alternative Insurance Schemes

Fishing involves so many risks that the need to be insured is greatly felt by fishermen. Several initiatives have been made by insurance companies to offer fishermen a variety of products. Among them insurance for equipment has been the easiest one to manage. However, the companies face constraints, inherent to the fishery, which they are unable to solve. For example, the inspection necessary for the issuance of an insurance policy and for settlement of claims add up to transaction costs which the insurance agents say they are unable to recover. Fishermen can, after all, modify their vessels any time, and accidents at sea do not leave any trace in the water.

In this context, alternative insurance mechanisms have emerged to satisfy claims of equipment loss and compensation for families in case of death. In certain cases, the fishermen, especially the migrants, have even introduced insurance schemes to compensate for the loss of revenue from poor fishing seasons.

The Impact of the Rome Conference

The 1984 Rome Conference, organized parallel to the FAO's official conference, encouraged participants from Senegal, led by Dao Gaye, at present the General Secretary of CNPS, to develop a collective awareness as well as an aspiration for autonomy.

One of the main demands of the participants at the Rome Conference was that those who had taken the initiative to found ICSF should support them in the future to form an international organization of fishworkers. If the fishers from India or Chile, for instance, already had at the time powerful organizations with politically charged demands, the Senegalese fishers were still victims of co-operatives, limited to negotiating for economic and material benefits.

The contact with other fishers at the Rome Conference stimulated the Senegalese to integrate issues of deteriorating resources, coastal zone management, fishing regulation and the development of tourism. Though these problems were not new to the coastal Senegalese communities, such an international meeting helped them reflect on the challenges thrown up by a globalizing environment.

The Rome Conference also helped the Senegalese fishers fight feelings of helplessness and incapacity in the face of policymakers and co-operation agreements. Indeed, sharing experiences with the Asians and Latin Americans helped demystify the centralized power of the State. One thing that

particularly impressed a Senegalese fisherman, who later became the General Secretary of CNPS, was the mobilization skills of the small-scale fishermen of India, who used their catamarans to confront industrial fishing boats in the middle of the ocean.

Rome 1984 was also an opportunity for the Senegalese to question the false dichotomy of a rich North vs a poor South, which was the way conventional development discourse projected the issue. Senegalese fishermen no longer accept that the South is organizationally backward compared to the North. The fact that, organizationally speaking, French fishermen lagged behind the Chileans and the Indians was often used as an illustration. For people from a country colonized by the French for more than half a century, these were stirring aspirations. At the same time, acknowledging the problems and constraints facing some coastal communities in the Northern hemisphere stimulated international solidarity.

As an autonomous organization, CNPS is indeed a precedent in a country with a long tradition of creating, by decree, national organizations with strong links to the State. Since the 1960s, no important decision concerning the co-operatives or the Groupement d'Intérêt Economique (GIE) or the Economic Interest Group has been taken without the involvement of the government department responsible for co-operatives. Senegal is still regarded as a showcase of democracy in West Africa. In 1998, for instance, a gathering of the country's major opposition parties demonstrated before the French National Assembly to plead for some fundamental rights at the same time as the Chief of the Senegalese State was addressing the French parliament. This action came after a ban on a march that was planned a few weeks before.

Despite this veneer of democracy, any decision to create an organization outside the State network is considered a

nuisance, as evidenced by the political pressure applied on the leaders and some supporters of CNPS from 1985 to 1992. That is why they felt that a permanent link with an international network was important for both solidarity and security.

Participation in the Rome Conference thus gave the leaders of the CNPS both local credibility and protection from political repression. But manipulative tactics and pressure were applied in many instances, the most flagrant being the case of forcing the first president of CNPS to resign and join the competing organization, which was closer to the powers-that-be.

It was only during the 1980s, and more precisely after 1987, that a new consciousness to develop organizations with political agendas and union-related issues developed. That was how the CNPS was born in 1987, in the fishing village of Soumbedioune. It now has a membership of 12,400, according to the last census of July/August 1998.

Remembering the context in which the CNPS emerged will help those who are unaware of the real story behind the organization understand the complex organic relations that CNPS maintains with NGOs and institutions like the Church (which supported it, and did so in a country that is 92 per cent Muslim). Besides the problems related to the resource and the need to build a strong national organization, other factors contributed to the emergence of CNPS. Amongst them was the demand from people from fishing villages who later constituted the core of the team of CREDETIP or the Centre for Research for the Development of Intermediary Fishing Technologies, which became a partner of CNPS. It was to avoid drawing CNPS into complex relations between leaders and supporters that we established CREDETIP, as an NGO, in 1990, three years after the creation of the CNPS.

The involvement of these resource persons, who were from fishing villages but were not themselves fishermen, had a real effect on the emergence of leaders. They brought to the CNPS an accumulated experience of broadbased militancy in the fishing villages. For example, in the village of Hann, between 1976 and 1979, they had organized free tuition for the children of fishermen. Thus it was not just a coincidence that the most important meetings that took place between 1987 and 1991 (with the exception of the General Assembly) were also held in Hann.

The Importance of Hann

We should note the importance given to Hann as a location that has played an extremely decisive role in the first years of CNPS. The first facilitators of the project were from this village and their commitment has its roots in a very localized activism that was being practised in the 1970s. Beginning in 1974, a group of six, including two future employees of CREDETIP, studied the problems of schooling in fishing families, and of the expanding industrialization along the bay, which made it the most polluted one in the continent. Through this process, they also became aware of the problems in the fishery of Hann, where a French company, *Pêcheurs de France*, had been established with a large female workforce, even as a major Japanese fishing company was also being established in the village.

Hann also provided protection against political sanctions of the State authorities. We must recall that some of us come from strong and popular families that represent traditional power in a country where the State is not the only expression of political power. There is, in fact, a balance between the State and religious and traditional powers. This tends to get weaker in the process of cohabitation. But it is difficult to precisely define the boundaries between these three axes of power.

The first president of CNPS was the president of the Hann's Young Fishermen's Association, founded in the early 1980s under the tutelage of the First Assistant to the President of the Dakar Urban Community, who is now one of the symbolic heads of the party that has been dominant since the 1960s. His assistant became Mayor of Hann, which became a district in the decentralization process. Indeed, the leaders of associations play ambivalent roles, because they represent the interest of fishers to the political authorities even as they represent the interest of the authorities to the fishing communities. The ambiguous status of the first president of CNPS later jeopardized his relations with the organization's base.

How CNPS Emerged

The first reason for the emergence of CNPS as a force to reckon with was the disappointment with the co-operative movement, which did not deliver what the fishing communities expected. This was due to several causes. First, the co-operatives had not been managed in a transparent and democratic way. Favoritism in their management had led to discriminatory practices. While certain fishermen had difficulties equipping themselves through the co-operatives, others had managed to acquire several fishing craft and gear. Alongside this discriminatory practice was a disastrous management of funds that made the State indebted to the fishermen. This paradoxical situation was created by co-operative bureaucrats who collected millions of CFA francs from the fishermen as initial contribution, to be eligible for co-operative credit. Fishermen claim that several hundreds of millions of CFA francs are still due to them. Some co-operative board members shared the profits of the co-operatives instead of distributing them on a *pro rata* basis amongst the members. In the 1980s, more precisely between 1984 and

1986, Malic Gueye, currently the national treasurer of CNPS, led a campaign in St Louis denouncing the role of the State in this programme. He demanded an interview with the President, who finally met them at his secondary residence of Poenguine in the region of Petite Côte.

The second reason for the growth of CNPS was the blind eye the co-operatives turned to the other important issues that faced the coastal communities. The co-operative movement, and, later, the GIE, chose to concentrate on economic concerns like access to credit and equipment, thus getting reduced to a piecemeal, project logic. Aid sponsors and the overwhelming majority of development brokers, including NGOs, continue to maintain this 'development politic', as they intervene almost exclusively to satisfy economic and material demands. This explains why the co-operatives are the main forms of organization that exist in the Western African fishery, from Senegal to the Gulf of Guinea. While the co-operative's objectives have been mainly supply of credit to equip fishermen, and marketing through the creation of commercial centres in Rufisque, Kayar and Joal, other important issues have been bothering the fishing communities. For one thing, resources are diminishing. The dramatic decline of the pelagic catch by the seiners led to a major crisis. In 1986, the fisheries administration felt the operations of the seiners were no longer viable, and a reduction of the fleet had to be considered.

Another concern was the progressive loss of traditional rights of access to the land on the coast. The need for an organization to defend the rights of fishermen and women who rely on the fishery for a living was thus strongly felt. This became all the more important in the absence of a national platform for debate on fisheries issues.

Africa has a long tradition of association, though mostly oriented towards projects at the village levels. For instance, the fishing village of Fass Boye, situated some 150 km from Dakar, is known for its decades-old success in maintaining a sentinel committee against illegal fishing by the industrial fleet. Battu Tefess, an association from Mbour, has had a long experience of resistance against the development of tourism. But these actions have always been limited to very local action. It was really the resource crisis that drove the fishermen to regroup themselves around a national organization.

Between 1987 and 1989, CNPS ran a mobilization and awareness campaign throughout the main fishing villages, with the demand for improved living conditions, better safety at sea, and defence of fishers' rights. Meetings were held in the main fishing centres, where many issues were debated. The main themes were linked to the resource, the deterioration of safety of fishermen at sea, the difficult cohabitation with the industrial fishery, the problem of tourism development in the inshore zone, the increase in cost of fishing equipment and the scarcity of spare parts for outboard engines.

Fishing communities are not homogenous and the importance of issues varies greatly between localities. During the mobilization phase, in Mbour and its surrounding areas, the problems of tourism and availability of land were much more pronounced. Intrusion of industrial fishing vessels in the inshore zone and the resulting damages were more frequent in Joal, Mbour, Fass Boye and Casamance.

Beginning in 1990, CNPS gave priority to safety-at-sea and resource issues. This led CNPS to criticize fishing policies and to formulate a few specific demands, namely:

- an evaluation of the resource available for artisanal fishermen;

- better appreciation of local fishing effort;
- an extension of the artisanal zone from 6 miles to 12 miles;
- a ban, or at least a limitation, on the activities of the industrial vessels fishing at night since most of the accidents involving artisanal fishermen occurred during the night; and
- delimitation of the 6-mile limit in order to eliminate the incursions of the industrial fleet within the zone.

This first campaign was held against the backdrop of the renewal of the fisheries access agreements, which were identified as the main enemy. For the next 10 years, fisheries access agreements with other countries and with the EU would preoccupy CNPS.

Fisheries Access Agreements

Senegal signed its first fisheries agreement with the EU in 1979, which consisted of a protocol agreement renewable every two years by both parties. However, CNPS only began to get involved in the issue in 1990, following its recognition in late 1989. Between 1990 and 1992, CNPS campaigned through two networks: ICSF and the French coastal communities. Only from 1992 did CNPS sit in, for the first time, on the negotiations between the EU and the Senegalese government. During CNPS' 1991 convention, the first public debate on the problem of the fisheries access agreements occurred, and a specific workshop was held on the subject. An initial attempt, with the participation of fishermen, to evaluate more systematically the damages caused by the industrial fishery had already been done in 1990.

The results of that inquiry, although incomplete, gave an idea of the important losses (of nets and lives) suffered by

artisanal fishermen due to the incursions of the industrial fleet close to the shore. This was happening at a time when the resources were getting increasingly scarce.

Fisheries access agreements are generally negotiated through successive rounds in Brussels and Senegal. CNPS has been present at these different rounds. Its interventions essentially sought to bring about a fair evaluation of the resource, with data being made public, a recognition of the resource problem already affecting the local fishery (artisanal and industrial) and an extension of the exclusive inshore zone from 6 miles to 12 miles. These demands were justified on the basis of the importance of the inshore fishery, its place in the economy, its contribution to foreign exchange earnings and the inability of the inshore resource to support the expanding fishery. CNPS asked for a moratorium, or at least a strict limitation, on night industrial fishing (since most accidents occur at night) and a demarcation of the industrial and artisanal zones.

The debate with the government began in 1993, when CNPS denounced the silence of the members of parliament on the problems of the fishermen. When environmental movements and political pressure groups from abroad supported CNPS, contacts with the members of parliament increased. The Senegalese members of parliament took an active role in a joint session with the members of the European Parliament in Dakar, following a request from parliament on the impact of the fisheries access agreements. CNPS also participated in the joint commission, which traditionally focused on agriculture but, for the first time, gave priority to fisheries. Fishermen from CNPS were invited to make a presentation, which centred on two essential points: how to integrate the artisanal fishery into the development programmes of Senegal and how to revise policies that were so heavily focused on fisheries access agreements.

In 1994, CNPS reached an all-time high. The renewal of the fisheries access agreement with EU was delayed for several months, resulting in the closure of the tuna factories, pending negotiations. At the same time, there was solidarity with fishermen from the North at a crucial moment in the history of the French fishermen who protested and destroyed important quantities of fish around the Rungis market in Paris.

The energetic campaign of CNPS to have greater involvement of fishing communities in the fisheries access agreements forced the government to realize that they were not facing a simple associative movement but rather a trade union. Hence the fisheries minister at the time and some of his senior officers tried to destabilize the organization. The minister's antagonism to CNPS reached its peak the day a delegation of CNPS blocked his entourage as they were leaving Joal, a village about 110 km from Dakar. This happened when the fishermen, travelling in an overloaded public transport vehicle, were stopped by the police. The fishermen then decided to block the road, saying, "If we can't pass, the ministerial cortege won't pass either." The problem was settled after an intervention by the minister's bodyguards and the police. For the first time, the minister had experienced the expression of counter-power.

The tension between CNPS and the fisheries administration increased from the time of its first campaign on the fisheries access agreements between Senegal and the EU. The industrial sector later discussed with CNPS the new fisheries policy, proposed by the government in 1993, to arrive at a common position. CNPS eventually organized a meeting where the representatives of the industrial sector, for the first time, shared not only their meals but also their concern regarding fisheries management.

Senegalese are avid fish consumers, and many feel that the scarcity of fish was linked to access of foreign vessels to Senegalese resources. A large number of Senegalese participated in live radio programmes to express support to fishermen. The media, particularly private radio, has succeeded in presenting the problems of the sector to a population that depends heavily on fish. A good number of newspapers in Dakar had just begun to include pages and articles exclusively on fisheries. All this contributed greatly to a certain valorization of the fishery, especially the artisanal sector.

Besides this recognition from the population, the campaign against the fisheries access agreements gave a special profile to CNPS, especially amongst organizations traditionally locked in co-operation with the State. With the support of the media, mainly through broadcasts in the national language all over the country, CNPS could easily make fisheries access agreements a key theme of its campaign.

Role of Women

From 1996 onwards, women gave a strong push to the movement. That year Senegal had just signed an agreement with the EU on pelagics, mainly for *yaboye* (sardinella), the main species marketed and processed by the women. The agreement on *yaboye* drove the women to take more responsibility inside the movement and to claim more power in the decision-making of CNPS. The women's demands soon became so strong and politicized that we began to speak of a movement within a movement. From actors, the women became leaders. Today, they have a much more responsible role within CNPS than they had at the beginning.

It is important to understand that women's representation in CNPS is not the opportunistic strategy we see in many organizations, designed to attract funding from Northern partners.

Many organizations and movements, even governments, 'involve' women but without really giving them the power to intervene in decision-making. Women are now part of the CNPS board and they have revolutionized the union from the inside. Their involvement has widened the concerns of CNPS and led to talk about a social movement in the fishery.

In fact, CNPS owes its politicization to the active role played by women who, as early as 1992, started to participate in negotiations on fisheries access agreements. That was historic, considering that the women, traditionally devoted to post-harvest tasks, were not considered as having a stake in the debate on the resource. The Senegalese government as well as a good number of Senegalese viewed this debate on resources as one for intellectuals or ecologists. The government often accused CNPS of being manipulated by environmental organizations like Greenpeace International. This was a strategy to discredit the CNPS and also a way for the State to deny the existence of the resource problem.

The idea of boycotting the funding that comes from the financial compensation part of the fisheries access agreements was proposed during a meeting of CNPS' Women's Board, in Hann, in 1992. During the last agreements between Senegal and the EU in 1997, the women, once again, demonstrated their militancy and firm will to fight against the access of foreign vessels to our resource. Not only did their protests against the agreement increase CNPS' credibility, but it was also very useful in making the movement itself known to the Senegalese public outside the maritime sector. The intense campaign spearheaded by the women at the local level as well as at the international level to stop the agreement, allowed a sector as marginalized as fisheries to be the object of public debate. Similarly, issues related to the development of tourism and to the occupation of the

coastal zone were progressively put on the agenda of CNPS, thanks to the women. This contribution of the women in the conscientization of the maritime communities surprised observers of the sociocultural milieu of Senegal. Indeed, the role of women in the artisanal fishery sector was ignored for a long time. Moreover, the administration still considers women processors as mere housewives or 'unemployed'.

The gender division of labor in the artisanal fishery makes women the main players in processing and in small-scale fish brokerage. Their specialization in this subsector made them the natural antagonists of tourism, and led them to fight to preserve, what is for them, a right to the land. They are the first ones to experience the impact of collaborations of tourism promotion agencies and the State. The development of vacation villages in the area of Petite Côte, and, more recently, the tourist camps in the area of St Louis, makes it necessary for the women processors to go farther than their traditional preoccupation with things like access to credit or infrastructure.

In 1990, for the first time, the women of the CNPS raised the issue of market and toll taxes that were paralyzing their commercial transactions. They asked that this issue be put on the agenda of the 1991 and 1994 CNPS Conventions. Access to credit or transportation problems were previously seen as issues related to the commerce of fish. CNPS then started to realize that the taxes represented administrative constraints to the marketing of fish. With the support of ICSF, a study was completed, followed by a seminar at Kayar, where the fisheries administration and finance officers were invited. CNPS thought it was necessary to involve the State in this event inasmuch as it had more to do with a political will or decision to improve the situation than with an ordinary development project. It was one

of the more concrete actions of the CNPS and most of the taxes have since been abolished.

All these issues have been gradually integrated into the programmes of CNPS at the request of the women, whose levels of consciousness and mobilization are much higher than those of the men. How can this be explained? In my opinion, it is because women are more exposed than men to the eventual consequences of State politics that they feel more the need to react to difficult situations.

In 1995, women were integrated into the National Bureau of CNPS, and began to play an active role in campaigns and advocacy actions abroad. The General Assembly of 1998 attracted a significant number of women. Despite their integration in the National Bureau, they also chose to keep active their local women's cells, which gave them the additional power to discuss issues that are specific to women.

Alliances with Fishworker Organizations Abroad

In 1990, a delegation of five leaders of CNPS visited France for the first time, to meet their colleagues in Guilvinec, Brittany. The trip, funded by Le Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement, the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), was widely covered by the French media and some articles ended up on the desk of the Senegalese Minister of Fisheries. This particular minister did not appreciate the fact that these fishermen made public the issue of the fisheries access agreements, which were considered a State matter, mainly because of their importance for foreign exchange.

While the trip went well, allowing CNPS to gain some support from the militant French maritime world, it later led to a loss of trust from some sympathizers. This was the result of an

article by a senior officer of Senegal's Fisheries Administration, published in a French paper from the Brittany area. In that article, the delegates of the CNPS were described as belonging to a sectarian Muslim group. It was a well-prepared strategy with the objective of cutting funding to CNPS from the Northern NGOs. It proved all the more effective since the trip had been completely funded by CCFD. Following the publication of this article, a priest and member of the CCFD offered his resignation, wondering how a Catholic humanitarian organization could support a fundamentalist movement.

But this campaign against CNPS had a very positive effect by activating, at the local level, a new alliance with the local church. Indeed, the Archbishop of Dakar, Cardinal Yacinthe Thiandioum, who has credibility at the international level and at the Vatican, reacted directly to the article with a letter to CCFD. In his letter, he took a political stand in favour of CNPS and the Senegalese coastal communities in general and declared that he was himself originally from an artisanal fishing family from Petite Côte. For those who know Senegalese reality, such a reaction from the head of the church was not surprising, firstly, because it is common in Senegal for a part of the family to be Muslim, while another part is Christian, and, secondly, because the Cardinal, according to people close to him, owns some artisanal fishing gear himself!

It was in this particular context that CNPS started to collaborate with Church organizations, namely, Mission pour la Mer and Caritas. Two important initiatives were born from this collaboration. The first was an animated debate with the elderly fisherman, Malic Gueye, acting treasurer of CNPS and grand scholar of both the Bible and the Koran, on Islamic-Christian dialogue. Gueye believes that there is in the Christian and Muslim sacred texts a theology of the environment addressed to the

leaders of all religions, indicating how the resources are to be managed. In 1992, during a meeting of CNPS, Caritas and the Mission pour la Mer, Gueye thought of gathering Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss the problematic of the resource. Though the project was not fully realized, regular informal contacts are still maintained with Abbe Seck, the priest at Joal, who is very active in propagating Islamic-Christian dialogue. The alliance between CNPS and the local church resulted in a pastoral letter in 1993 from the bishops on the situation of the fisheries resource in Senegal and of the urgency to put in place means of improving its management.

In 1994, assisted by the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA), CNPS held its second campaign against signing fisheries access agreements that would cover the 1994-96 period. (The ones binding Senegal and the EU for 1992-94 were coming to an end.) The campaign launched in 1994 was supported by a certain number of members of parliament, including the 'greens' of the European Parliament and some socialists. The alliance with these parliamentarians allowed Senegalese fishermen to be heard in parliament. Some leaders succeeded in making presentations at sessions normally reserved for the members. But the collaboration, mainly of ecologists and socialists, with the members of parliament hurt CNPS in surprising ways.

The socialists, mainly the French and English, suddenly stopped supporting the fishermen, following lobbying by some influential members of Senegal's ruling party (also socialist) who claimed that CNPS was the right wing of the Senegalese opposition.

CNPS' alliance with the ecologists made the establishment claim that there was no resource problem in Senegal and that it

was all a manipulation of the international environmental movement. Yet, at that time, Greenpeace International, for instance, was not collaborating with CNPS, except to exchange some documentation. The demonizing of the ecological movement by the government was designed to weaken the credibility of the fishermen.

In 1994, as paradoxical as it may seem, CNPS fishermen, while condemning the fisheries access agreements, began to claim their share of the compensation fund allocated for the support of the artisanal fishery. This stand may seem contradictory, but it can be explained. For a radical organization like CNPS, to obtain a share of the compensation implied a political recognition of itself by the government. Secondly, it proved to fisheries authorities that it was possible, using these funds, to envisage an alternative programme for the development of the artisanal fishery. One such idea involved funding a research project for a database different from those developed by existing research centres. These ideas were stymied by counter-offers from the government, including one for the provision of expensive vehicles and fishing gear. One of the biggest mistakes of CNPS was to accept this offer, which created strong divisions amongst leaders and between leaders and members. A similar division also occurred in the two other organizations that received the same benefits from the State, namely, GIE and FENAMS, the federation of fish merchants.

Grants of around 52 million CFA francs from the fisheries access agreements and the availability of vehicles weaned some leaders away from collective union claims to individual survival strategies. The minority of fishermen who benefited from these grants saw their integrity and honesty being questioned by some members who thought they had failed the overall philosophy of the movement to promote solidarity.

These developments also led to conflict between fishermen and the women, who had started to assert themselves more efficiently in the organization after 1996. The women demanded that a part of the fund be put in a separate account over which they would have full responsibility. After several meetings with the fishermen, they got this point conceded. Though it threatened to jeopardize the stability of the movement by potentially marginalizing the women in the leadership, the process was, nevertheless, positive for them from one point of view. As a learning process, it strengthened their political consciousness and negotiation skills.

The Impact of Legislation

Fisheries legislation in Senegal got transformed in the mid-1980s, ending up with the adoption, in 1987, of a complex set of rules and regulations. Decree 87/27 of 18 August 1987, known as the Maritime Fisheries Code, set an example in the subregion for other coastal States to consider resource management issues in the light of the 1982 UNCLOS. However, the decree was never applied in toto and is today obsolete as it has been overtaken by recent changes in the fishery sector.

Threats to the environment and the overexploitation of fish resources led the State to commit itself to improved resource management. At a convention, the fisheries commission for the subregion announced certain practices and rules for better stock management. But Senegal, though a member of the commission, has not yet integrated these practices and rules into its own legislation.

A new fishing law adopted in 1998 (Law 98-32 of 14 April 1998) sought to incorporate the biological, socioeconomic, political and technological conditions needed for the management of the fishery. CNPS attempted to popularize the law in two

steps. Fishermen first engaged a Dakar-based Camerounese lawyer fluent in Senegalese maritime law to provide briefing sessions. Later, the law was discussed in the different fishing areas of Soumbédioune, Hann, Joal, Mbour and St Louis.

The fishermen's reaction did not take long to come. Four points of the Code were unanimously and immediately rejected by the fishermen: payment for a fishing licence in the artisanal fishery; the introduction of a new status for the artisanal fishery with the notion of a mechanized fishery for vessels using onboard engines; mandatory declaration of all new constructions or modifications of *pirogues*; and, finally, the banning of monofilament nets in all Senegalese territory.

The position taken between the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999 by CNPS against the implementation of the new fishing law restored the credibility of the organization and even won some support from non-members in the community. This solidarity was weakened by the monofilament nets issue that later split the movement between those using monofilament nets and those using handlines. This explains why relations were, and continue to be, very tense between the CNPS leaders of Kayar and those of St Louis.

Access to the resource was often a source of conflict between residents of Kayar and migrants from St Louis fishing, respectively, with handlines and gill-nets. Cohabitation between fixed-gear and mobile-gear fishermen in Kayar is difficult, and a bloody conflict in the 1970s ended up with several being seriously wounded and many others arrested. The ban on monofilament nets, as scientific and valuable as it may have been, served only to wake up an ancient social volcano that had been lying dormant for the last 20 years. The implementation of such a ban would require that the St Louis fishermen, the vast majority of whom

use monofilament gill-nets, be compensated to allow them to re-equip themselves. Some of the CNPS leaders, including the Secretary General, are from Kayar where there is a long tradition of migration of fishermen from St Louis fishing with gill-nets.

The new law was a source of division within the movement, and some members soon became frustrated and began to mistrust some leaders, believing that they had discreetly approved the law without considering the wishes of the members. These doubts about the leaders were fanned by some public servants. They also formed the basis of new alliances among fishermen using the same gear.

The growth of the octopus fishery affected CNPS too. In the area of Petite Côte, and more precisely in Joal, there is a very dynamic cephalopod artisanal fishery. The cuttlefish fishery started in the 1970s, while the octopus fishery began in 1986. Both were indirectly stimulated by the Japanese market. Export plants, which gave fishermen access to informal credit, encouraged the use of traps (for cuttlefish) and jiggers (for octopus). The octopus fishery is a very lucrative activity that led to the migration of fishermen to Joal, between 1994 and 1996, and also contributed significantly to changing the working habits of some fishermen.

Between 1994 and 1996, the Petite Côte, which includes Joal, where the main landings of octopus occurred until 1999, was the site of a major migration of fishermen. A huge capital investment in vessels occurred, mainly during 1995 and 1996, after the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. In 1996, the administration imposed a closure of the octopus fishery for three weeks. This decision, which had serious consequences on the fisheries dynamics in general and the movement of fishermen in particular, was taken after scientists noted that octopus was close

to overexploitation in the countries where the fishery was the most developed—Senegal, Morocco and Mauritania.

Given the large gap between the perception of scientists and the industry on the state of the resource, and the failure of the scientists to manage the fishermen's expectations, what followed was a test of credibility for research. In fact, according to the fishermen, at the end of the biological closure period, only old year classes would be left in great quantities. The disappointment of the fishermen was even more because many of them, especially a large number from St Louis, were coming to Joal for the first time, having taken large loans from buyers to finance their fishing trips.

The 1996 season was one of the worst in the history of this fishery in terms of landings. The administration and the scientists were accused by the fishermen. According to the fishermen, the closure was ineffective for two reasons. Firstly, the fishery was closed to the artisanal fishery only and not to the industrial sector. Secondly, the fishermen felt they knew more about the resource than the scientists.

The discontent of the fishermen affected CNPS. Its image as an organization defending fishermen's interests was tarnished as the fisheries administration continued to claim that its leaders had participated in the consultation meetings that led to the biological closure. In Joal, the CNPS local committee had already organized weighing equipment for the fishermen to cope with the landings from 319 *pirogues* that supplied the processing plants.

In 1997, the closure of the octopus fishery was increased from three weeks to a month. The season proved worse than the previous one. This again divided the fishermen, even at the leadership level. The situation was used by some people, very close to the ruling party, to put in place a new union. The leaders

of the CNPS in Joal initially took part in the organization of this new union. They travelled to St Louis to promote it, but the new union did not last very long because the fishermen soon saw through the political ambitions of the founders.

The experience with the octopus fishery closure and the ban on monofilament nets forced the fishermen to demand that important meetings with the administration include more members from the CNPS' mass base. It is in this context that we must look at the importance given to the participation of fishermen in CNPS' last General Assembly in Mbour on 23 September 1998. Several commissions were created to ensure the participation of a greater number of members in the decision-making process.

The Impact of International Aid

Since its creation in 1988, CNPS has had relations with some development organizations from the North. The very paternalistic attitude of the NGOs from the North and their lack of experience in working with a union in the informal sector resulted in very little funding for the partners.

In 1987, only CCFD of France, through its Oceans Programme, was willing to give financial and political support for institutional improvements and for building up the negotiating capacity of CNPS. From 1989, Misereor, the German Catholic Church development agency, and Bread for the World of Germany, started to give their support by way of a project spearheaded by CREDETIP and directed at fishing communities. This programme, which lasted until the end of the 1990s, dealt with training and support of the communities to defend their rights. Beginning in 1990, the Canadian Catholic organization D&P, agreed to fund a long-term programme to promote solidarity between members of CNPS and the MFU.

Collaboration with these partners from the North was important in building international links between maritime communities. The resulting exchanges between organizations greatly helped CNPS in its different campaigns against fisheries access agreements and tourism. Links with this first generation of NGOs from the North contributed to the education and development programmes in fishing communities carried out by local NGOs like CREDETIP. The support of these Northern groups in institution-building and consolidating the negotiation process improved the credibility of the local NGOs, who were previously refusing to follow a project-based approach. Often government officers criticized the local NGOs for not adopting a project approach. The project logic also sometimes generated conflicts among CNPS members.

During the 1990s, under the direction of the fisheries minister of the time, the Federation Nationale and the Federation Nationale des GIEs de Mareyeurs were created. The Fenagie Pêche, which was integrated into a national network called Conseil National de Conservation des Ruraux (CNCR), enjoyed financial support not only from several NGOs but also from the government. This was facilitated by the fact that the former president of the Federation of Senegalese NGOs (FOSNG), which entertained long-term relations with foreign funding agencies, was also the president of CNCR. From 1995, this federation of fishermen received significant funds from NGOs, traditional partners of the FOSNG, from the prelatore of the Senegalese embassy, and even indirectly from the World Bank. Such funding challenged some of the gains made by CNPS since 1991, which desired to eventually bring to an end the dependency on foreigners for our fishing needs.

After the first convention of 1991, CNPS started a programme of credit and savings. The goal was to provide fishermen and women with a sustainable system of credit. NGOs

are involved in the funding of development through their role as financial brokers. But micro-credit, which must be seen in a geographical and not exclusively sectoral context, is far from able to meet the funding needs of today. The difficulty that NGOs face in recovering loans comes from the fact that a good part of the credit is used outside the activities related to the fishery.

The direct involvement of the NGOs often kills initiative. Thus, the rather large funds handed to the members of Fenagie Pêche led some CNPS members to question the usefulness of savings programmes, when money could be got from other partners. In 1999, some leaders of Fenagie Pêche, in collaboration with a Senegalese NGO, went as far as to offer funds to very influential leaders of CNPS. This kind of co-option is a method often used by so-called broadbased organizations and NGOs. Indeed, in the beginning of the 1990s, two of CREDETIP's facilitators were thus co-opted.

The majority of NGOs operate credit programmes that target mainly women. In order to maximize funding, NGOs often have to 'feminize' and 'environmentalize' their programmes. But this approach weakens the autonomy of the women's organizations. In some situations, the credit programmes seem to have polarized organizations. These experiences led CNPS to decide not to renew its ongoing programmes but to act as an intermediary between communities and local financial institutions, concentrating on credit unions.

Despite its internal contradictions, CNPS has, more or less, succeeded in maintaining itself, thanks to its choice of goals, such as resource conservation, safety at sea and the fight for fundamental rights. But the direction of the organization is greatly influenced by external cultural and religious factors that contribute to maintaining the power of the State.

Again, we must stress that Senegalese society is co-managed by the traditional, religious and State powers. These powers are maintained by networking and a reciprocal client relationship in a very subtle and informal process. For example, during the last convention of CNPS, the presence of the supreme chief of the Leboue community, one of the three main maritime communities of Senegal, was considered by a good number of fishermen as the beginning of a political alliance between the movement and the government. This claim was based on the complex nature of the relations between the traditional chief and the State. The Leboue community represents a very important vote bank in the capital city of Dakar, where they have traditionally owned most of the land. Since independence, a good number of the ministers of the government are from this community.

Conclusion

The CNPS has, therefore, succeeded in valorizing not only Senegal's artisanal fishery but also the fishing communities dependent on the fishery, while simultaneously bringing to the open the manner in which fisheries access agreements favour the North, at the expense of food security for the peoples of the South.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APFA	Acadian Professional Fishermen's Association
AT	Animation Team of ICSF
BNSD	Bank for Development, Senegal
CASI	Campaign Against Shrimp Industry
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCFD	Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement
CCPFH	Council of Canadian Professional Fish Harvesters
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine
CFFA	Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNCR	Conseil National de Conservation des Ruraut
CNPS	Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaut du Sénégal
CREDETIP	Centre de Recherches pour le Développement des Technologies Intermédiaires de Pêche
CRODT	Centre de Recherches Océanographiques Dakar-Thiaroye
CRZ	Coastal Regulation Zone
CUSO	Canadian University Service Overseas
D&P	Development and Peace, Canada
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EFF	Eastern Fishermen's Federation
EU	European Union
EUS	epizootic ulcerative syndrome
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FENAMS	Federation of Fish Merchants of Senegal
FOSNG	Federation of Senegalese NGOs
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional
G8	Group of Eight (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and US)

GAIPES	Groupement des Armateurs et Industriels de la Pêche au Sénégal
GIE	Groupement d'Intérêt Economique
GIMES	Groupement des Industriels, Mareyeurs et Exportateurs du Sénégal
GPS	global positioning system
GRE	Goenchar Ramponkarancho Ekvott
ICFWS	International Conference of Fish Workers and their Supporters
ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
IFREMER	Institut Français de Recherche pour l'exploitation de la Mer
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INODEP	Institut Oecuménique au service du Développement des peuples
INP	Indo-Norwegian Project
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
ITQ	individual transferable quota
KSMTF	Kerala Swatantara Matsya Thozhilali Federation
MEC	maximum equilibrium catch
MFU	Maritime Fishermen's Union
MIA	Multilateral Investment Agreement
MPEDA	Marine Products Export Development Authority
MSY	maximum sustainable yield
NACAIA	National Action Committee Against Industrial Aquaculture
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movements
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCL	National Centre for Labour
NFF	National Fishworkers Forum
NGO	non-governmental organization
NUPAUB	Núcleo de Apolo à Pesquisa sobre Populações Humanas e Áreas Úmidas Brasileiras
OBM	outboard motor

PASI	People Against Shrimp Industry
PCO	Programme for Community Organization
PEI	Prince Edward Island
PO	people's organization
SIFFS	South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies
SSLC	Secondary School Leaving Certificate
TAC	total allowable catch
TESCOD	Technical Services for Community Development
UI	unemployment insurance
UK	United Kingdom
UMF	United Maritime Fishermen
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Convention on Environment and Development
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UPAMES	L'Union Patronale des Armateurs, Mareyeurs et Exportateurs du Sénégal
US	United States of America
WFF	World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers
WHAT	World Humanist Action Trust
WIF	Women in Fisheries programme of ICSF
WTO	World Trade Organization

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