
European Community

Behind Great Britain's 'mackerel war' ploy

by William Engdahl

Great Britain opened the new year by slapping a ban on commercial fishing by Denmark in coastal North Sea waters Jan. 1, in keeping with a City of London policy of monopolizing raw materials within the most advanced industrial nations of Europe. Britain's ban followed Denmark's rejection of a new fishing agreement forced through the European Community at the end of December, which would allow Britain to take 38 percent of the total annual catch of fish, as compared to 23.5 percent for Denmark.

Unable to use the EC immediately as its enforcer, the British have now resorted to confrontation. Recalling the dispatch of Her Majesty's Navy against Argentina in the Malvinas war last spring, British officials have already boarded several Danish fishing trawlers, and a force of 22 Agriculture and Fishing Ministry and Royal Navy ships, and Royal Air Force surveillance planes have been dispatched to enforce the measure on the Danish fishing fleet.

The Danes immediately moved to challenge the British fishing restrictions, notwithstanding continued deployment of RAF Nimrods, the British equivalent of AWACs, to fly low over the contested areas. Danish Captain Kent Kirk, a member of the European Parliament, was arrested Jan. 6 after he deliberately sailed his fishing vessel, with 20 newsmen aboard, into waters within the 12-mile zone set by Britain. Kirk was subsequently fined £30,000 by a British court.

Kirk's avowed intention was to force the issue to the European Court of Justice, since the British regulations had not been unanimously accepted by the 10 members of the EC. Danish fishermen had had rights of access to these waters before Denmark entered the EC in 1972, but gave them up to accept EC fishing quotas.

The British measure will do nothing to improve Britain's industry, but it will put a dent in the vital supply of fish for Europe. Before the new quotas were arranged, Britain was already forced to destroy more of its mackerel catch than the entire amount Denmark wants to take. The large fish multinationals, such as Findus and Ross, have shut down all their primary processing facilities in the United Kingdom because they were so antiquated they could only be operated at a major loss. One observer, who recently toured British facilities, remarked that the U.K. industry is "somewhere be-

tween the Stone Age and the last World War—at least 30 years behind the times."

More than 30,000 tons of the 600,000 tons of mackerel, a valuable human food fish, taken by British fishermen from the waters off the west coast of Scotland, rot before they can be processed for foods, and must be turned into fishmeal for pigs, because the industry cannot handle the catch.

Denmark, which has the most capital-intensive and productive agriculture sector in Europe, must fight the British ban to avoid severe consequences to its own economy. Denmark began a major modernization drive for its fishing industry five years ago, and its primary processing capacity doubled in that period.

Britain now wants to take another 20,000 tons of the mackerel catch—from the disputed waters off the coast of Scotland—away from the Danish quota, an amount the British clearly cannot begin to process. This will force a 25 percent reduction on the active time of the Danish fishing fleet, from 12 months down to nine, and the losses of thousands of industry jobs, according to an industry source in Copenhagen.

"This is dirty, and we are angry," stated Poul Toerring, chairman of the Danish Fishing and Export Association. "This is a strange kind of Machiavellianism on the part of the British." Britain collects a subsidy for its fishing industry from the EC due to its inability to market the fish it is too backward to process.

The "dirtiness" of the British policy is demonstrated, according to industry sources, by the fact that the British violate their own mackerel quotas consistently. The British fishermen sell the excess fish, in a floating black market operation, to Soviet and Bulgarian "fish factories." More than one observer has reported large plastic bags of cash being dropped from the Russian ships in exchange for the British catch—transactions which, of course, are never reported. It is not yet known whether illegal narcotics are also exchanged in this way, to help finance the increasing international activities of Yuri Andropov's KGB and Bulgarian intelligence networks.

The "mackerel war" is the most recent in EC-controlled attacks on the modern industrial and agricultural capacity of Europe. After the infamous "cod war" with Iceland several years ago, Britain enforced a 50,000-ton limit on the Icelandic cod catch, while expanding their own quota to 115,000 tons. British fishermen have never caught more than 90,000 tons.

The dairy industry has also been decimated. Just as the U.S. dairy industry is now being attacked for producing alleged huge surpluses, the European press used to decry the supposed existence of a "butter mountain" to force the imposition of production quotas. Denmark, with the most productive, scientifically bred dairy herds in Europe, was forced to give its farmers "EC bonuses" of 1,000 kroner per animal, to slaughter herds it had taken 50 years to develop. Now Denmark must import portions of its dairy needs.