

Canada's Atlantic Coast fish follies

by Lucylle Boikoff

A number of recent events designed to further impoverish Canada's East Coast fishermen have sent them reeling. These include the reported depletion of ground fish stocks, the proposed changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act, and the two-year-old ban on seal hunting.

The stated reason for the current low quota and bans on fishing generally, is that Maritime Provinces fishermen, as well as Russian, Japanese, U.S., and other foreign vessels, have "over-fished" Canadian waters. Some vessels have high-speed freezing and canning equipment aboard, competing with onshore operations in Canada. Such entities as National Sea Products are threatened, and may have to close their doors to more than 3,000 fish plant workers—*sans* pension and *sans* severance pay.

Federal Fisheries Minister Bernard Valcourt has come up with a \$584 million proposed aid package, but will require Canadian and foreign fish processors to pay "royalties" or "stump tax" on future fish harvests, just as lumber companies pay taxes on trees. This is in addition to steep licensing fees. The threatened fishermen recently joined the Canadian Auto Workers Union (a breakaway from the UAW) to strengthen their bargaining power. Larry Wark, the director of the Canadian Auto Workers, thought that the use of "royalties" to fund severance pay and pensions to those laid off, was an "excellent idea."

Another aggravation to the beleaguered Canadian fishermen will be the proposed revisions in the Unemployment Insurance Act, passed by the Canadian House of Commons and now before the Senate. The changes require a longer period of work in order to qualify, and will be paid out for a shorter time. Initially, the federal government was guided by policies which made up for regional disparities, but the new plan, according to Yves Rabeau, an economist with the University of Quebec in Montreal, will narrow the gap between the less-favored U.S. unemployment insurance plan and that of Canada.

The seal hunt ban

At one time, the fishermen of the North Atlantic Maritime region could supplement their income with the seal hunt, as well as providing employment in the fur industry. The seal hunt netted an income of \$1,400-5,000 per person annually, before 1987. In 1986, however, the Royal Commission on

Seals and Sealing put a ban on the seal hunt, which went into effect in 1988. They did this on the basis of a questionable video that consisted of songs on "eco-crime" donated to Greenpeace by U2, World Party, INXS, and Annie Lennox, showing film clips on the white coat hunt. Not shown, were the seal pups sprayed with aerosol paint and hugged by celebrities, whose seal mothers could not identify them because of their noxious odor.

Seals consume 1,400 kilograms of fish per year, do heavy damage to fishing equipment, and infest the fish harvest with parasitic worms. The last seal census took place in 1983, when there were about 2.5 million, allowing for a permissible catch of 200,000.

The organizations of Young Newfoundlanders Fighting Back and the Canadian Sealers Associated were not pleased with World Wildlife Fund's doctored postcards depicting blood-spattered sealing vessels, especially as some eco-fascists in this group were earning salaries 5 to 30 times higher than those of the seal hunters.

The 35,000 people making a living from fishing in Newfoundland alone would like to see quotas lifted, the present unemployment insurance structure maintained, and hatcheries and fish farms created to replenish fish stocks. If measures like these are not taken, Newfoundland might well become the 51st state of the United States.

Correction: In the June 22 issue, there were several errors in the article, "Canada drowns at Meech Lake" on page 48. The fifth paragraph from the end should have read:

Quebec passed a law in 1978 known as Bill 101 or 'Loi' 101. That legislation made French the only official language in the province. In December 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada declared a section of Bill 101 unconstitutional.

Quebec immediately passed a new language law and made use of a revised provincial override law providing that statutes of Quebec shall operate "notwithstanding" the fact they may violate the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The Canadian Charter itself has a "notwithstanding" clause, section 33. This results in certain rights and freedoms being fully entrenched in the Charter while others are entrenched unless overridden by the Parliament or a provincial legislature.

By establishing a legislative override in a such a constitutional context, Canada went beyond all bounds and has created a unique precedent with no equivalent in either international documents on human rights or in any human rights declaration issued by western nations.