

# FISHERIES

## CONCERN FOR CONDITIONS OF THE FISHWORKER

The fisheries sector has been among the most disorganised and neglected in the economies of most developing countries of the world. Invariably the actual producers (fishermen and women) reap only a small part of the return on their catch; it is the middleman-trader and retailers who appear to derive most from the labours of the fishworker.

Recent decades have witnessed the growing involvement of Governments and international agencies in fisheries development projects in the Third World, particularly countries like Sri Lanka. Simultaneously, there has been occasional agitation by small fishermen in those countries for betterment of their conditions. This could be expected in a situation where the activities and the industry built around the fisheries development schemes did not ensure that it was for the benefit and the development of the fishermen and related workers themselves. There is growing evidence that their living conditions have deteriorated at different levels in various parts of the Third World, since the wealth from the sea seems to have accrued to those who have the entrepreneurial power and/or the control over the trade.

An attempt was made recently at a meeting in Hong Kong where those representing the interests of the fishworkers met to plan an international conference where fish workers could work out a plan for betterment of their conditions. The International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters will take place in Rome from July 4-8, 1984, according to spokesman Professor George Kent of the University of Hawaii at the conclusion of the three-day planning meeting in Hong Kong of fishworkers' representatives, concerned social scientists and technologists from Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States.

(Fishworkers include children, women and men engaged as crew members, small fishers, processing workers and sellers).

"By any measure fishworkers are among the most disadvantaged in every society, despite the fact that they are major suppliers of protein", said Professor Kent.

Several factors prevent fishworkers from reaping the full benefit of their labour, including competition from large-scale fishing operations, destruction of fishing grounds through pollution, control of the market by middlemen and big corporations, the seasonal nature of their occupation and chronic indebtedness.



International agencies, national governments and local administrations have taken some action in support of fisheries development but often it has not served the interests of fishworkers.

Fishworkers in several countries have organised themselves to resist these pressures. Many however remain unorganised and vulnerable.

Professor Kent said the main concern of the conference in Rome will be to examine the socio-economic situation of fishworkers and to promote their solidarity and cooperation.

The International Conference in July, 1984 is timed to coincide with the FAO World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development.

L.A.