

# The politics of fish: A force to be reckoned with

Fred Winsor, a co-ordinator with the provincial steering committee of the Fisherman's Association for Nova Scotia, has been involved in various community organizations for the last seven years. A graduate of Memorial University of Newfoundland and a student activist during the sixties, Winsor is now using the skills he developed at university and in the community to assist the inshore fishermen of the Maritimes organize and present their views on the future of the fishing industry in the Atlantic

region. He is devoted to this goal of helping the fishermen get a fair deal from the large fish companies and the government. He believes the time has come for Maritime fishermen to take a stand and not be pushed under the carpet by groups and individuals who profit from their silence.

Winsor was interviewed by Ian Temple of the **Dalhousie Gazette** on February 24, 1977 at the Dal Law School while he was attending a conference on the future of offshore fishing.

**Gazette:** So then it is a general state of mind the government is in which makes it more interested in bigness for the sake of bigness than in the more practical and realistic concept you and the Nova Scotia inshore fishermen have been attempting to promote.

**Winsor:** Yes, they have adopted a model which is fairly impractical for a re-newable resource, such as fishing. Yet they have persisted in persueing this model to the ultimate which is to the detriment of the majority of fishermen in the Atlantic provinces.

**Gazette:** With all the talk about a 200 mile limit is it realistic for you to expect the government to give the inshore fishermen a 50 mile territorial sea?

**Winsor:** The way we look at it is, if we don't have a 50 mile limit the inshore fishermen don't have too long before their industry will be dead, completely. It's in pretty bad condition right now.

**Gazette:** But is it practical to expect the government to respond to these demands?

**Winsor:** It depends on how powerful the fishermen want to be. They have the power to get this regulation. Our problem is to try to mobilize that power.

**Gazette:** So there is, in existence, a movement toward greater political activity, for example, protests etc?

**Winsor:** Again it depends on the position of the fishermen. If they are willing to fight for this kind of thing.

**Gazette:** And you are actively working toward a consciousness among N.S. fishermen which will ultimately lead to a strong political force?

**Winsor:** That has been the aim of most of the fishermen's organizations in the province: to attempt to do that, because we know that fishermen right now are not having an equal say in what's happening in the fishing industry, and have not been able to make their voice heard and listened to.

**Gazette:** How extensive is your support among inshore fishermen and the general public?

**Winsor:** Among the inshore fishermen the support for the 50 mile limit is unanimous. With the general public it has been just a matter of education. As soon as someone hears and understands what we are after and why; why fishermen want this thing, then, they are fairly sympathetic. Again, we have received very pathetic replies from a great many members of parliament and local M.L.A.'s.

**Gazette:** Who or what is your main opposition in this fight?

**Winsor:** Our main problem is changing the thinking around the present model that is being expounded by the large fish companies (such as National Sea Products, H.B. Nickerson and Sons Ltd., etc.) and by top level government bureaucrats. It is basically an education process aimed at correcting the present thinking which the bureaucrats and dragger companies have instilled into the minds of legislators and the public.

The thing we have to do is make the bureaucrats more accountable to the public; and the only way we can do that is to make the public more aware of what the situation is. The government has tried to convince the public that because we have a 200 mile limit all the problems of the fishing industry are pretty much solved.

This, in fact, is nothing but a joke. It is a misnomer. In fact, fishing, as far as we can see is not going to get any better at all. Even with the 200 mile limit in effect things will probably get worse. The government has a bankrupt philosophy on the fishing industry.

**Gazette:** Do you feel conspired against by anyone?

**Winsor:** I think it is really crazy, in some ways, sometimes you think there is a conspiracy because when you look at the fishing industry in British Columbia which is in a part of the country that was settled much later than eastern Canada, they have had an organized fishing industry for 50 years! They have had unions out there for approximately fifty years! In N.S. and in the Atlantic provinces generally there were some early attempts to organize unions which were unsuccessful but the union movement in the Atlantic provinces has really only been around for the last seven years or so. So it really is quite new.

**Gazette:** Then because your movement is so new and presumably your aims so little understood you are running into a lot of opposition. Are you considered (by government) to be a subversive organization?

**Winsor:** I wouldn't call it that. I think it is a whole lot of new ideas, new and different philosophies that in the past haven't been understood. Those philosophies are coming to light. Different ways of looking at things are coming to light and, by that, I mean the fisherman's perspective is placed on a lot of things. This hasn't, generally, been the case over the years.

**Gazette:** What group has the most representation at this conference?

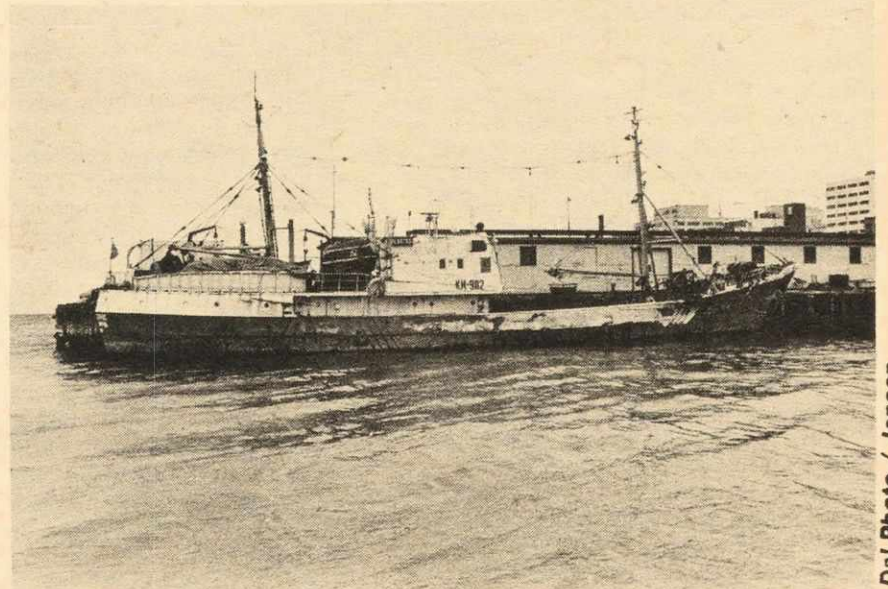
**Winsor:** Mostly professional people; scientists, lawyers, bureaucrats, politicians, those kind of people. As far as our group is concerned we are very much in a minority position because we aren't a very powerful organization.

**Gazette:** Powerful in the political sense?

fishing of those areas, which is really a part of Canada's continental shelf but which, of course, Canada in its' ultimate intelligence failed to observe. It's really very sad.

**Gazette:** So, whose interest will best be served by this 200 mile limit, and is it the most desirable outcome for you and the Nova Scotia fishermen generally?

**Winsor:** In looking into the 50 mile limit you first have to look at the



Inshore fishermen want a 50 mile limit in order to save their industry.

Dal Photo / Jensen

**Winsor:** Well it depends on your definition of political. Fishermen are potentially a very powerful force if they are able to get organized and present their position in a coherent, cohesive and united manner.

**Gazette:** So then your organization is, basically, one which is opposed to the governments present blanket policy of a 200 mile fishing zone, which is already in force. What, then, is your reason for supporting the concept of a 50 mile territorial sea?

**Winsor:** First let me explain. When we were first mentioning the fifty mile limit people thought we were crazy because...

**Gazette:** It seems not as valuable as a 200 mile fishing limit. 200 miles would seem to protect more of the ocean.

**Winsor:** Well, yes, you say you have a 200 mile limit, why do you want a 50. The problem is that most of the public doesn't understand what the implications of the 200 mile fishing limit are. The 200 mile limit is essentially a management zone that has been worked out between the federal government, with the emphasis on the offshore dragger fleet which constitutes only 25% of the fishing industry in terms of employment. The largest employer in the fishing industry, which is the inshore fishery is still left out in the cold. For that reason the inshore fishermen have called for a 50 mile territorial sea which means extending the twelve mile limit (within which large draggers cannot legally operate) out to fifty miles.

**Gazette:** If the 50 mile territorial sea is a more practical concept then the 200 mile zone, why then has the government not accepted the more logical alternative?

**Winsor:** I think it is intended to put it in a class with all the other superpowers, such as Equador and Iceland. Most countries when a 200 limit was declared, it generally took in their continental shelf. This was the philosophy behind a 200 mile zone. Canada, of course, emulated everyone else and just took 200 miles without any consideration for the geographical situation in eastern Canada and, as a result, we missed getting part of the Grand Banks, along with Flemish Cap, off NFLD. So, essentially it looks like we are still going to be tied into some sort of negotiation over the

philosophy behind us implimenting a 200 mile limit. The philosophy is essentially one of centralization and is intended to serve the interests of large companies and bureaucrats in Ottawa who think that way. It is pretty sad; we are into a philosophy or mentality that you have to industrialize the fishing the same as you industrialize in other areas. You get into economies of scale. You catch more fish. It's bigger and better.

**Gazette:** Was the fishing industry more stable up until, say, ten years ago?

**Winsor:** The fisherman is not affected by wage and price controls, because his wages and prices have always been controlled by the companies. But the fishermen (inshore) in terms of their technology, say, up until the end of the second world war, fished on what is called a optimum sustainable yield. That is, they caught about the same amount of fish every year.

**Gazette:** So now something has disturbed that balance and fishermen no longer can count on catching their quota?

**Winsor:** The technology of the fishing industry, now, is much more destructive. There is an incredible amount of fishing power and the ability to catch incredible amounts of fish in a very short time. Whereas up to the end of the second world war or the early fifties there were fluctuations in catch but it was based more on biological causes than on the amount of effort put in to an area. It is the technology that is being the most destructive thing in the fishing industry.

Inshore fishing, today, because of its ability to be very flexible and to be fairly selective in its fishing methods could be a good model for the future. The problem with the technology that has been adapted by the larger companies is that it is so unselective and therefore so destructive. It is not that we are against technology, as such, but we are very concerned about unselective technology. What we are saying is that if we are going to use new technological methods in the fishing industry those methods should be to the benefit of the fishing industry and the fishermen and not to their detriment.

**Gazette:** Thank You.