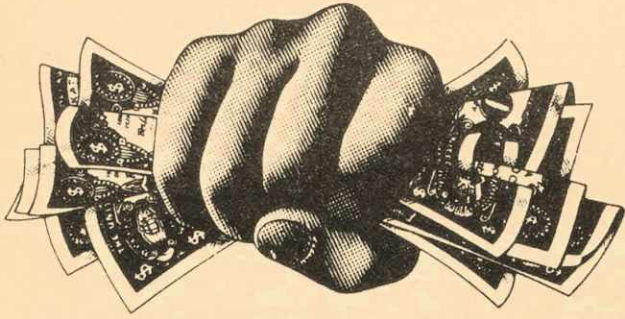


Profit could bring extinction of whales

Ban on whaling ineffective



by Anne Martell
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On December 21, 1972, Canada's environment minister, Jack Davis, announced the termination of East Coast whaling — an action which spells closure for three Canadian whaling plants. One is at Blandford, Nova Scotia and the remaining two are at Dildo and Williamsport, Newfoundland. The former employs about 100 men while the latter each employ 50 for the season, which runs from mid-May to the end of November.

In a telephone interview, John Mullally, assistant to the minister, said compensation would be forthcoming to both employers and employees, and alternate employment would be provided if possible. But no plans are available at the present time.

Mr. Mullally was non-committal about the length of the ban.

"Of course it will be longer than five years... probably more in the vicinity of 10 or 15 or 20."

He spoke in terms of the whales reaching sustainable yields, at which time the ban might be lifted and whaling resumed.

But the chances that the whale population will reach healthy levels in one or two decades are slight indeed — considering the average gestation period of a whale is one year, and that once born, the baby whale nurses for an additional six months, and in some species up to two years. Add to this the fact Norway, Japan and Russia are continuing to take 39,000 whales from the oceans annually and the chances turn into an impossibility.

Canadian waters have been the scene of whaling for many years. The Basques used Cape Breton and Newfoundland as bases for their operations throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as did the British and the French. The waters then fell to the flourishing Nantucket industry of the eighteenth century.

Whalers scoured the coasts

In the late 1700's, as a result of the American revolution, a whaling community made a brief appearance at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, composed of American whalers attempting to export their catch into Britain under her colonial preferential rates. But because Britain's policy discouraged colonial whaling, (for it detracted from her own) the venture was short-lived and eventually was transferred to the shores of Wales.

During the 1800's the waters off Canada's eastern coast were scoured by hundreds of whalers from all over the world. The result was the near extinction of the Blues, Rights, Fins, Sperm, and Humpbacks. But the whalers were not easily discouraged and they turned to the waters of Antarctic in search of fresh supply.

Whaling was revived temporarily in Canadian waters during the 1920's but because of a slow replenishment of stock, it collapsed once more in 1930. The advent of the second world war gave the whales a brief respite, as man halted his oceanic hunt to wage war on his own kind. But as Mowat points out in his "Whales for the Killing," the war also took its share of



whales — for many thousands undoubtedly perished by anti-submarine torpedoes though cases of mistaken identity.

The Norwegians re-established commercial whaling off the East Coast in 1945 and operated from bases in Williamsport and Hawkes Harbour, Newfoundland, until the collapse of the whale stock six years later.

Nor were the remaining whales to be left in peace. For once the Norwegians departed, the whales around the U.S. Navy base at Argentia became targets for the Navy's anti-submarine training program. The number of whales which lost their lives "in the name of democracy" is beyond conjecture.

"Tremendous Possibilities"

The whales' return to Nova Scotian waters in 1960 was noted eagerly by the Karl Karlsen Company, a sealing, scalloping and fishing establishment at Blandford, by Mr. Karlsen, a Norwegian immigrant, in the late 1940's

"We didn't make any special studies to find out about the quantity of whales in Nova Scotia waters," Mr. Karlsen stated in 1962. "Our ships knew there were some from sighting them on trips around the eastern



seacoast."

And the Nova Scotia government, in constant readiness to welcome new industries — regardless of their outcome — welcomed the possibilities of whaling, with open arms.

In April, 1962, the Karl Karlsen Company, in cooperation with the provincial government, began whaling operations on an experimental basis. By 1964 the experiment had proven itself profitable, and the Blandford plant expanded to include whaling on a permanent basis.

At the same time, that greatest of Canadian opportunists, Joey Smallwood, was fostering the re-emergence of whaling in Newfoundland waters. By 1965, more than 50,000 of the species had been slaughtered.

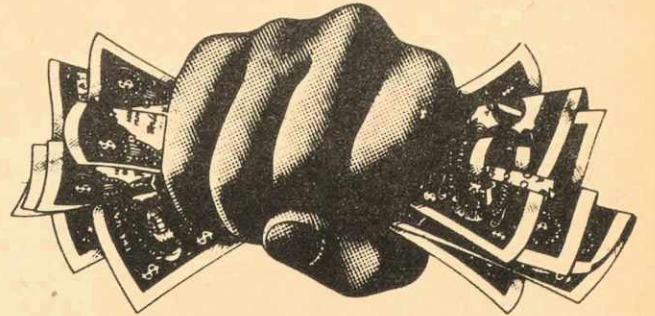
The second stage of the Newfoundland operations opened with Smallwood offering generous subsidies to foreign whalers stationed in his province. Eager acceptance of the offer resulted in the re-opening of the Williamsport factory by the Japanese, and the enlargement of the Dildo plant by a combination of Japanese and Norwegian interests.

The number of whales taken by these three plants over the 1964-71 span is colossal. The Blandford plant can boast 1,458 Fins, 654 Seis, 64 Sperm and a number of Minkes and Humpbacks — while the two Newfoundland plants racked up a total of 2,114 Fins along with several hundred Seis, Sperm, and Minkes.

When the whaling ban was announced, Mr. Karlsen was quoted in the Halifax daily newspapers as saying the government's announcement came as a shock.

He said he had agreed with a catch limit of 53 Fin whales and 70 Sei whales and also that there should be no quota on sperm whales.

"I advised the minister that these quotas would permit the company to continue an economic operation and that we were very anxious to have scientists carry out the necessary research in order to enable them to set annual quotas commensurate with the sustainable yield."



Although South Shore PC member of parliament Lloyd Crouse also criticized the total whaling ban on the grounds it was caused by "uninformed social pressure," scientists have in fact been studying the whale population in this area for several years.

Will Canada's ban be effective in its attempt to replenish the declining whale stocks? Unlike that of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration which banned whaling in 1970, along with the importation of whale products, the Canadian ban is not inclusive.

John Mullally said the subject of whale imports does not fall under the department of fisheries' jurisdiction, but under that of the department of trade and commerce. He did not know whether that department was considering such a ban for Canada.

The ban does not extend to whaling on Canada's West Coast. Although no whaling operations have been carried on in Canada's Pacific area since 1968 (because of a scarcity of whales), Mr. Mullally admitted if the whales were to make a comeback, operations would be resumed.

Hopefully the ban will be more effective than the International Whaling Commission, established in 1946, has been. This body, comprised of 17 whaling countries, was set up ostensibly to protect the threatened species and to regulate the hunt — but in fact it has been little more than a front for whalers.

The quotas set by the commission on whale species have been higher than the stocks could stand; the regulations forbidding the killing of Blue Whales, Humpbacks, and all species of the Right Whales came too late — at a time when they were threatened with biological extinction. In other words, the whaling companies were guaranteed profits as long as there were sufficient whales to prove economically feasible.

Nor can the commission always enforce its regulations. Many so-called pirate ships, flying under flags of convenience, scour the oceans for whales, ignoring both the regulations which set quotas and those which protect certain species. It is estimated that more than 2,000 whales are taken annually in this manner.

Then there is the case heard by Nova Scotia's courts last month. The Karlsen Company was charged on six counts of taking undersized whales during the first five weeks of the 1972 season. By the Whaling Convention Act the company was liable to a fine of up to \$10,000.

But the courts, in passing judgement on the first two cases, ruled in favour of the company, finding that there was "no intent" involved in the undersized catches. (This is comparable to a court ruling that the driver who passed through a red light at 60 m.p.h. is not guilty because the action was not intended.)

Moreover, the Act stipulates that to measure the catch, a tape, attached to a pole stuck into the wharf at the whale's head, be stretched the length of the whale's body. The wharf at Blandford, however, is made of concrete, precluding the possibility of driving a pole into it. It did not matter that the whales were at least five feet under the legal size. What mattered in the courts was the missing pole.

Unless man's nature undergoes a drastic change during the next four years, the remaining species of the great whales will be virtually extinct. But business is business and profit is profit — and as long as whaling continues to prove economically viable, the hunt will continue.

Pressure must be put to bear on those nations which have not declared a moratorium on whaling operations. And it must be done now.

