

## Report from Rome by Ettore Tovo

### Trade war targets canned-tuna eaters

*Italy's parliament is under pressure from Greenpeace to outlaw Mexican tuna to "save dolphins." But who really benefits?*

**T**he ecologist cult Greenpeace has announced a series of initiatives against the Italian industrialists who can tuna, represented by the ANCIT, the National Association of Fish and Tuna Canners. These initiatives are supposed to blossom at the outset of 1991 into a boycott campaign against canning industries that continue to import tuna from nations which fish in the East Pacific.

Various ecological fronts and especially Greenpeace are accusing Mexico and other Ibero-American countries of having caused the deaths of 7 million dolphins between 1960 and the present, by using the fishing system called the purse seine technique. Italy's tuna canneries buy 80% of their supply from France and Spain, while the remaining 20% is mainly bought from Mexico. For Italy to replace that 20%, would require a full 60% of the tuna fished in the East Pacific.

Italy, with its 120,000 tons of tuna used annually, is in fourth place in the world among tuna-consuming nations, after the U.S.A., Thailand, and Japan.

This is why Greenpeace is putting heavy pressures on the Italian industries in this sector, hoping to force reluctant Ibero-American countries to use "dolphin-safe" fishing systems.

But there is another side to this coin.

The 40 Italian parliamentarians from all shades of the political spectrum who have agreed to sign the "dolphin-safe" appeal of Greenpeace would be well advised to take all as-

pects of the issue into account. The government which has most actively campaigned alongside Greenpeace for this change is that of the United States, demonstrating that the perfidious "collaboration" already evident in the campaign to "defend the whales" and to boycott Finnish fish exports, is still in place and consolidating.

In those cases, the U.S. government used ecologist claims as tools for a ruthless trade war against Europe and Japan. Moreover, as the Mexican weekly *Unomasuno* revealed, Mexico is under enormous U.S. pressures to grab its oil reserves, which have taken on decisive strategic significance in the context of the Mideast war. These reserves are now controlled by the Mexican state oil company, Pemex.

This is the strategic context within which a boycott action against Mexican tuna has to be seen. Presumably this is why the Mexican representative at the 17th meeting of the Inter-American Commission for Tropical Tuna (IATTC), held last June 26-28, scored the U.S. government demands for dolphin protection as pure and simple "trade war."

It is also telling that even Greenpeace's spokesmen admit that the only two countries which observe the ecologist dictates by using "dolphin-safe" methods are the United States and Panama, which is ruled by the puppet government of Guillermo Endara, installed under the protection of U.S. bayonets. The problem of tuna fishing in the East Pacific derives from the fact that the tunafish in that area (of the prized yellowfin variety)

and dolphins swim together in the same schools, which means that some dolphins do get killed by accident in the course of catching the tuna.

Italian tuna canneries have to cover about 20% of their supply with yellowfin tuna, because, given the high cost of labor in Italy per unit of product, that variety of tuna is the only one capable of maintaining high quality and low production costs. Moreover, it is not profitable to buy the raw product from countries that fish in the West Pacific, because the very long distances needed for transporting the tuna would add significantly to the cost per ton.

The United States, which developed the purse seine fishing system in the 1960s, has more recently abandoned it in favor of the "dolphin-safe" techniques. The result of the increased costs, is that 70% of the American tuna fishing fleet is lying inactive in California ports. To obey rules that guarantee zero mortality for dolphins, jointly imposed by the ecologists and the U.S. government, the U.S. fishermen have had to abandon the rich fishing waters of the East Pacific, or fish for younger tuna who do not share the dolphins' habitat.

That threatens future stocks, and furthermore, younger tuna have less value.

The other option is to make the very long trip to the West Pacific, where the waters already abound with fishermen. This has increased the American consumer's cost for canned tuna, since the government no longer buys tuna from Ibero-America.

Why have American canners gone along with Greenpeace? Heinz, for example, whose Starkist division is the biggest tuna canner in the world, has been a principal financier since the 1960s of ecology fronts like the World Wildlife Fund, for which it is one of the largest corporate sponsors.