

Whaling & Whale Protection: The Soviet Point of View

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There is the opinion that modern whaling is done exclusively by Soviet and Japanese whalecatchers. This is not true. Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the United States, Brazil, Portugal, Peru, Chile, South Africa, Spain and other countries are responsible for a bigger part of world production. Unlike the USSR and Japan, which are engaged in deep-sea whaling, the rest of the above-mentioned countries are engaged in shore whaling.

In case of deep-sea whaling the whaling nations catch a few whales from each population, whereas shore whaling may result in complete destruction of whole populations, since whaling is restricted to one and the same zone. We are firmly convinced that the shore stations, the activities of which can hardly be controlled, represent a real threat to the whale population.

It is appropriate to add here that the Soviet Union has never exceeded the quota established for it and in many cases whaled far below its quota. Over the past few years the Soviet Union has gradually been curtailing its whaling industry.

Over the past five years whaling in the Soviet Union has dropped by 71.5 per cent. The only whale species still being hunted in the USSR is the little picked whale. The strength of its population is so great that it is possible to catch several thousand whales a season without the slightest damage to it.

Those who criticize the Soviet stand on whaling argue that the mentality of the dolphin, one of whale species, is close to that of man and that to kill a dolphin is a terrible thing. I would like to remind them here that the Soviet Union stopped hunting the dolphin 15 years ago on its own initiative. But up to now some 20,000 to 30,000 dolphins have been dying annually in the tuna nets placed by the U.S. and the Japanese fishermen.

It is possible to say now that in the future the whaling industry will undergo certain changes. Whale farms will be organized, where tamed dolphins will help man raise whales. Scientific recommendations will ensure the rational exploitation of marine resources for the benefit of humankind with no damage to nature.

That's why the Soviet Union is as much concerned over the future of whales as the other whaling nations. It has invariably come out in support of all initiatives aimed at conser-

ving those whale species which are threatened with complete extinction. The Soviet Union has reaffirmed its stand at the recent session of the International Whaling Commission held in Brighton, England.

It is true that the International Whaling Commission, which has been functioning for almost 35 years, has made several grave mistakes which has a major role to play in the tragic fate of some whale species. In some cases the commission has been used in a foul political play against the Soviet Union.

The commission's achievements, however, must not be overlooked. One of them is the introduction of regulation for the whaling industry. The commission has defined the duration of whaling seasons for different species and the areas outside the Antarctic where factory ships may operate. It has specified a sanctuary area in the Antarctic which can be opened or closed at will.

It has also developed special legislation for whaling, where a limit is set to the actual number of whales which may be killed in any season. The commission

has banned the hunting of the Greenland right, blue and humpback whales. These measures taken by the commission had a major role to play in preserving the number of whales and in conserving the species.

How effective are the commission's whale-protection measures today? There are regulations in force which set limits to the number of whales of certain species which may be killed and others which ban whale hunting altogether. Thanks to these measures the situation is improving. Thus, the number of gray whales has reached the optimal level, and the strength of the Greenland whale population is also recovering.

Being a specialist in natural sciences, I fully appreciate the feelings of the people who advocate a complete ban on whaling. We

believe, nevertheless, that this question requires a realistic approach. Humankind is experiencing an acute shortage of animal protein. There are traditional whaling nations in the world.

There are people, like the nationalities inhabiting Chukotka in the Soviet Far East and the American Eskimos, whose diet depends largely on whale meat and blubber. The Japanese cook prepares many dishes using whale meat. There is no sense in man overlooking the riches of the ocean. Soviet specialists believe that we can and must reasonably exploit marine resources, whales included.

Soviet specialists think it is expedient to thoroughly study the possibility of experimental and strictly regulated whaling. Naturally this research must be done by groups of scientists from different countries.