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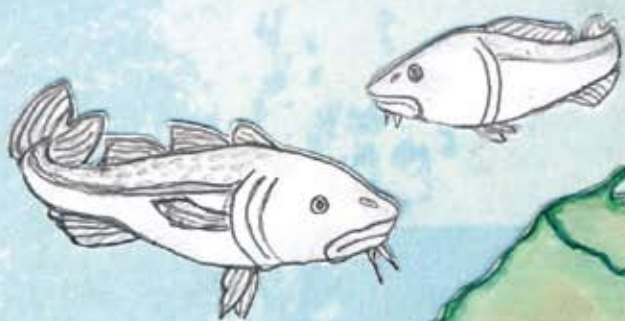
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CORRUPTION IN LATVIA

The oligarch as populist

COD DUMPING

EU regulations in troubled waters



Brezhnev & Poland
Mitterrand & Lithuania

interview: János Kornai

TOLSTOY AND CHECHNYA / TRAVELS TO DISSIDENT RUSSIA / TÖNISSON – ESTONIAN FREEDOM FIGHTER / LINNAHALL



TO SHED LIGHT ON THE COD

**A BALTIC JOURNEY WITH A CAMERA
AND A DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE**

As a child, I could hardly wait for lunch when my mother told me that on Friday we would be having cod with mustard sauce and potatoes. Fifty years later, a film has engendered almost childlike surprise in me at the link between my appetite for this Baltic fish, a fish that at times has been almost eradicated, and strange global developments.

It drives West African fishermen across the Mediterranean to Europe, turns Polish fishermen into petty criminals or drives them to their deaths, and insults the moral sense of well-to-do Swedish fishermen. It turns a friendly student from Umeå in northern Sweden into an uncompromising adversary of established scientists and experienced EU politicians.

FOLKE RYDÉN AND Ryszard Solarz, from Sweden and Poland respectively, investigated the ebb and flow of the cod stocks for the film *For Cod's Sake* (2010; *Alla torskar* in Swedish and *Dorschs Dilemma* in German). In 2006, there had been an urgent warning: environmental organizations demanded a moratorium on all cod fishing, since stocks were threatened with a drastic decline because of overfishing. The EU imposed limited restrictions, and in 2009, the news was good: the cod is back, the stocks are recovering, and all will be well.

The filmmakers asked themselves whether this was in fact the case. For them the cod is the “most important inhabitant of the Baltic”. Together with the herring, it has been the most important source of protein in this small sea for a few thousand years. Rydén and Solarz show pictures of the strange consequences that arise from EU fishing guidelines: for example, cod catches (and cod is the best food fish) are thrown back into the sea by fishermen by the ton only to rot on the ocean floor – “fish that everyone claims they want to protect”, says the commentator. Yet this is what the EU regulations specify must be done when the quota has been reached. Not one fish too many can come on land and into the cooking pot. Yet, they are dead, nevertheless, and thereby lost forever.

The cod reporter, standing erect with hat and microphone in cartoon insertions in the film *The Cod Report*, is very lively. “Will we survive?” he asks, and explains why over the last 60 years his fellow cod have at times been nearly eradicated because of ever-bigger boats and nets. “Only a few of them up there understand that everything is connected with everything else and that we need each other”, the clever cod says with a sigh from the Baltic Sea bed. He explains these connections to us humans with patience and humor. For example, he remarks that strong cod stocks would be good for countering the algae blooms in the summer, which for many of us spoil the fun of swimming in the sea.

The filmmakers take us along with Lo Persson, the Swedish student from Umeå, on a two-year trip to learn about the cod, a trip that takes us to Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Canada. Twenty-six-year-old Lo knew nothing about the cod problem when she started working on a research project at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.

Just as I actually know nothing when I buy cod in the supermarket in Roskilde, the town in Denmark where I live. Year after year, I am amazed that it can be bought so cheaply. Although we keep reading headlines explaining that the stocks are in jeopardy.

THESE HEADLINES ARE PARTICULARLY glaring when Persson begins to uncover the human dealings with cod. Since 2006, environmentalists have been demanding a total moratorium on all fishing. In 2007, the EU fisheries ministers did not immediately accede to this demand, except in the case of Poland because of the illegal fishing that was formerly widespread there.

Yet the small fishermen affected do not keep the moratorium. Rydén and Solarz accompany a young Pole on his small cutter, illegally fishing for cod: “What does it matter whether I or some Dane catches the fish? It’s all business.” He knows that there are hardly any inspections and he sells right in the harbor. “Baltic gold”, remarks Marcin Cholewinski laughing.

The film shows the bizarre EU management of this now rare gold in an impressive way. While the Polish fisherman on his rickety cutter takes a few hundred kilograms of cod out of the sea illegally, Rickard Solander, a Swede, is allowed to take 1.5 tons from the water each week with his extremely modern trawler. His huge net invariably catches eight tons. According to EU rules, he must throw nearly seven tons back into the sea, all dead. “You turn your back and try to think about something else”, he says sadly.

“It’s crazy, but everyone says it’s OK”, Cholewinski says about this dumping. “But when a Polish fisherman catches 300 kilos, all hell breaks loose.” Despite the fishing moratorium, he is going to buy three completely dilapidated old cutters in Sweden – and then not use them. His government pays the cod fishermen a monthly premium of €2,500 for every boat that they do not go out in to fish cod.

Kenneth Bengtsson, another Swede, will get €1 million when he scraps his commercial trawler Nordia af Hörvik. In the 1990s, the EU subsidized a huge expansion of the cod fishing fleet. Because of the severely diminished cod stocks, many of these commercial trawlers are now moving down to the coast of West Africa. And either subsidized by the EU once again, or working illegally, they are now destroying the foundation of food and work in African coastal states.



Doctoral student Lo Persson questions whether cod have really returned to the Baltic.



Fisheries inspection, Poland.



Marcin Cholewinski in front of his boat. He fishes for cod – illegally – which he sells openly on the docks.

Because no indigenous fish is laid on the table for food, the people must kill small wild animals, which have become rare. Fishermen from West Africa who are now out of work are getting into their boats and risking their lives, fleeing to Europe. There they are conveniently labeled “refugees of convenience”. What was it the behatted cod reporter said from the bottom of the Baltic Sea? “Only a few people up there understand that everything is connected with everything else.”

THE FILM IS NOT A simplistic condemnation or a black-and-white portrayal. The viewer learns – together with Persson – the chronology and contradictions of the developments. The long overdue EU resolutions arrived in 2008: fishing quotas for the eastern Baltic were halved and monitoring of illegal catches was intensified. In mid-2009, the media inform us that stocks are greatly increasing: the cod is back; we can catch more once again.

Persson asks: Can we really say that so hastily? She has learned in the meantime that the scientific estimates of stocks are “political compromises”. They only partially include the quantity of dead fish thrown back. Perhaps the cod stocks are much weaker than the levels officially estimated by the International Council for Ocean Research (ICES) each year? What conclusions should we draw from all this uncertainty?

It is officially estimated that seven percent of the catches are thrown back, dead, into the sea. Persson speaks with independent scientists who believe that 30 to 40 percent is a more realistic figure. She has gathered data for Sweden and presents her doubts modestly, but with determination, to Hans Lassen,

the relevant ICES member. “I have only been involved in fisheries for a year. But I think you are misleading people because of a lack of information”, Persson says. Speaking sharply, the ICES expert says, “Nobody gives a damn about somebody sitting in British Columbia and believing you are an expert in the Baltic. You are not credible.”

WHOM CAN I TRUST when buying fish in the supermarket nowadays? In the year that has passed since the appearance of Rydén und Solarz’s film, the cod stocks have continued to improve. Meanwhile the environmental organization WWF also says that consumers can buy cod from the eastern Baltic with a clear conscience. Since April, we also have held the internationally recognized certificate for sustainable fishing from the Marine Stewardship Council.

Dead cod are still thrown into the sea, however, perhaps five times as many as is officially accepted. If this is true, the stock estimates are far too optimistic. The film presents the ominous example of Canada: around Newfoundland, the stocks had also increased greatly again at the beginning of the 1990s. However, the cod then completely disappeared practically overnight.

RYDÉN UND SOLARZ hit the bull’s eye with the choice of Lo Persson as the film’s central figure, learning about the problems of the cod fishery. At the end, she presents her dissertation, full of informed doubts about the scientific mainstream view, and does not let the arrogance of the established scientists throw her. That is the way it is. You have to learn a bit about

problems like this if you want to understand them. But then you can also build on your own opinion.

The film does not conceal its intention to enlighten. The filmmakers use the medium of pictures to appeal to morality. Again and again, we see dead cod being thrown into the sea. That simply has to fill us with indignation. The pitiless hierarchy among the affected fishermen also enrages us. In rich Sweden, the somersaults of fishery politics lead to not-so-pleasant early retirement. In poorer Poland, it turns fishermen into day laborers, homeless people, and wrecks who drink themselves to death. The consequences in poverty-stricken Africa we have already seen.

A little postscript for all those who, like me, would like to eat fish with a clear conscience and enjoy learning more through outstanding documentaries: *Darwin’s Nightmare* (2004), directed by Hubert Sauper, shows what breathtaking global consequences the release of Nile Perch into Lake Victoria is having. This is also a must-see. ✖

thomas borchert

DPA correspondent, contributor to BW II:4 with a review of the movie *Into Eternity*

The systematic overestimation of the stocks. Like the inevitable hierarchy among those cast out.