

MEXICO

The network of costal fishworkers

Mexico has more than 10,000 kms of coastline on both oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific. Some 330,000 fishworkers use a total of 73,000 boats to catch approximately 1.5 million tons, with a commercial value of around 1 billion dollars. In 1989, there were 94,000 persons organized in cooperatives, 25,000 artisan fishworkers organized in fishing unions or "ejidales", 5,000 workers in private fishing companies and 4,000, in semi-State companies. Most fishworkers live and work in the states of Veracruz, Sonora, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Bala California, Campeche, and Guerrero.

Since 1935, fishworker organizations have been dominated by the cooperatives, controlled by the vertical structures dominant in that country. However, those cooperatives benefited from the law which gave them exclusive rights to exploit numerous species, including prawns, oysters and the fish species with the highest commercial value.

A new organization emerged in 1993, generated by a coordinating instance for support organisms and a significant group of 58 cooperatives and associations in 9 states of the Republic. The constitutional meeting

for the *National Network of Coastal Fishworkers of Mexico* was held on January 30 - 31, 1993, in Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan and in Petacalco, Guerrero, neighboring cities on the Pacific coast of Mexico. The organization bears the name of Jose Luis Valdovinos, a regional leader who promoted the organization and was assassinated by persons unknown in 1992

In their conclusions, the fishworkers denounce the arbitrary treatment of poor fishworkers handed out by functionaries and politicians and call for renewed defense of their rights, principally more speedy processing for the legal constitution of their organizations, greater control of the sources of contamination, access to social security services, the elimination of the interference of political parties in the internal life of their organizations, participation in the debate about laws and regulations related to fishing, and greater coordination with Universities and research and development centres:

The organization has a national coordinating committee, made up of representatives of the diverse states. Melecio Perez Chan, of the fishing cooperative of San

Pedro, Tabasco, who participated in the International Conference in Rome, in 1984, and in Bangkok, in 1990, represents the fishworkers of Tabasco and has shown interest in maintaining fraternal contact with the

fishworker and support organizations of other countries which support the struggles of the fishworkers of Mexico. ■