

The Truth About Soviet Whaling

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Translated from Russian by Yulia V. Ivashchenko

Preface

I have always condemned (and to do anything more was not within our power or abilities) the illegal and sometimes destructive whaling by the Soviet Union. This opinion was expressed in numerous documents, including reports and records of presentations at scientific and other meetings; these documents are the witnesses to this condemnation. However, none of these documents ever saw the light of day: all of them were marked with the sinister stamp “secret.” When necessary in this memoir, my opinion of the whaling will be supported by data drawn from these documents.

I was not and did not want to be a member of the Communist Party; but I always acted lawfully, and I never had thoughts of publishing the things that I promised to keep secret. Moreover, as it was in the interests of our State at the time, I did my best to ensure that no confidential information was leaked (I was working as the expert on whaling in the “Primorskiy Kraylit”¹).

I do not know how clearly I have managed to express my position regarding the whalers themselves, but even during the whaling period and now in this memoir I do not indict the whalers for what was happening in this business, especially during the last few years before whaling was stopped. It would be the same as accusing soldiers for their actions during

¹Translator’s note: Primorskiy Kraylit was the regional administration body. The staff controlled all materials for publication, including data on whales, with the goal of ensuring that none of this information was made public.

a war. But whose fault was it? I have tried to explain all these things in this memoir.

We can now hope that these older unhappy times have been consigned to the past. The new administration has allowed people to reveal the real history of the country, including even the most brutal parts.

A more realistic and accurate interpretation has now been made of many events which occurred during various periods of the development of different types of socialism and communism in our country. The government declassified everything that was possible, including most of the documents related to whaling.

However, to date none of these whaling documents (except for some numbers found in highly specialized papers) have actually been made public. There have been no published analyses or interpretations regarding what happened.²

This is not justifiable, and from the perspective of both citizens and scientists it makes no sense to continue to play hide and seek (as some people are still doing), and to not reveal the formerly hidden truth about Soviet whaling.

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Vladivostok
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²Editors’ note: In the international realm, this is no longer the case; Soviet illegal whaling has been the topic of considerable discussion at the International Whaling Commission and elsewhere. However, official discussion of this topic by officials of the Russian government remains extremely limited, and the government continues to maintain that all interpretations of “alternative catch data” should be submitted to them for review.

Introduction

“Is there not a real greatness in whalers? Heaven itself testifies to the greatness of our profession.” Thus wrote the seaman, whaler, and greatest writer of America, Herman Melville, in the most prominent novel of the 19th century, *Moby Dick* (1851).

Without doubt, in the 19th century it was like this. In those times the whaling business was one of the most dangerous professions; whalers entered into single combat with a whale and were not always the winners. Lengthy and arduous whaling expeditions on sailing ships in unknown waters, knowledge of the sea and a love of it, all allowed Melville to speak with enthusiasm of this profession.

The last few decades of Soviet large-scale whaling had nothing in common with greatness or heroism. The powerful catchers with artillery-like harpoon guns, harpoons that pierced a whale, and sonar to follow the whale underwater, all left the whale with no chance. And there was nothing resembling single combat.

Whalers acquired the ability to kill all the whales that they found, and they did not miss this chance, often leaving a desert in their wake.

The whalers themselves moved from stinky holds to luxurious cabins; thus, the officers lived in two-room cabins decorated with wood, with baths and toilets, telephones and refrigerators.

For many whalers these conditions were much better than they were back home.

I do not want to say that the work on the whaling fleets was, as we say,

“a gift,” but it hardly was any more arduous than on Soviet fishing vessels, which were fishing almost year-round in Arctic waters.

Gone were the noble traditions of professional whalers of the past, when the whalers themselves managed the industry; they were replaced with other “managers,” namely the plan and gross output³. These represented a frightening concept of what natural resource management should be, but they were connected to each other like Siamese twins, and they drove everything.

The plan: the foundation for building a new type of State. What State? It is hard to find anyone who knows. And maybe even a new civilization? Yes, yes! The official sources were saying that Soviet people were representatives of a new civilization (imagine that!) The plan: a concept formulated in Soviet economic science as “a most important *weapon* (emphasis mine) in the construction of Socialism.” In principle, this is a normal concept (but for some reason with military overtones), but it took on a completely perverted form and misshapen content during the process of socialist development under the leadership of the Communist Party. Plans were very different in nature: one for the state (the most important one), for each region, city, and area; current, contrary⁴, daily, monthly, quarterly, annual, and many others. But the problem lies not in the names but in the essence. And the essence represented an increasing race for output, set by deadlines at the expense of product quality. The plan: it is a worker in a plant specifically making metal shavings, solely to meet the calculated byproduct of metal shavings set by a plan.⁵ The plan: it is turning a new

³Translator’s note Gross output (вал in Russian)—the total amount of received products (in this case whales killed), by weight.

⁴Translator’s note: Contrary plan (встречный in Russian)—a competing plan put forward by one organization in response to the plan of another.

⁵Translator’s note: The point here is that plans for particular metal products calculated that the production of these products should generate a residue (byproduct) of X quantity of metal shavings, so in some cases factories directly produced these metal shavings solely to meet this “target” byproduct in the plan. Stupid but true.

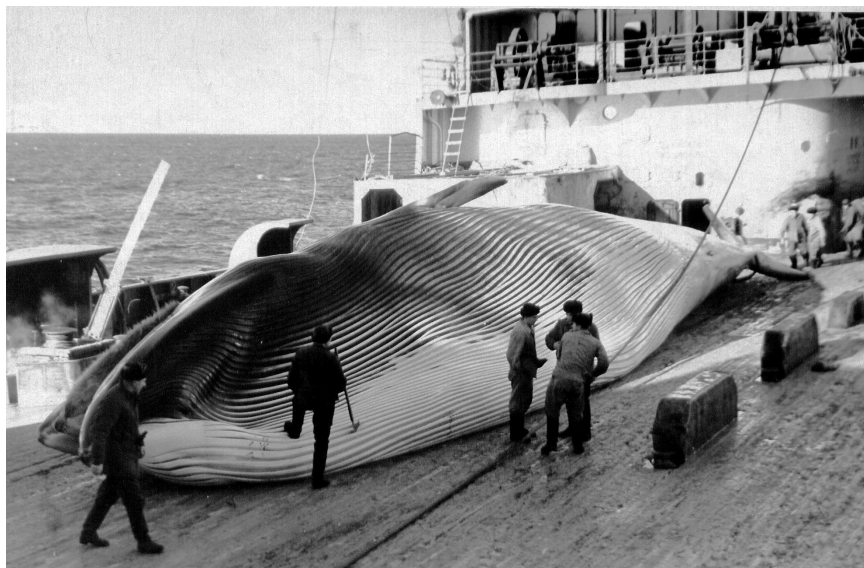


Plate 1.—Fin whale on the deck of the factory ship *Sovetskaya Rossia*, prior to flensing. Photo: A. Berzin.

product into scrap-metal to meet a target for scrap metal. The plan: it is falsifying production numbers, resulting in “Hero of Socialist Work” awards⁶, later leading to suicides of middle-level leaders (who were, relatively speaking, more honest). Yes, this was happening.

The people’s view of this situation is captured in a joke about one of the plan types, the contrary plan: Before going to sleep a wife says to her husband, “Honey, let’s do it twice tonight!” and the husband replies with delight, “Let’s do it three times!”—knowing in advance that he can do it only once.

Another example comes from Russian reaction to a certain phrase in a dictionary of foreign terms, where we find the concept that management planning is impossible when the means of production is privately owned. To this statement, a Russian reacted humorously as follows. Question: Is planning of the birth rate possible in a socialistic state? Answer: No, because the working tools are in private hands.

Meeting the plan for raw products almost always involved exceeding tar-

⁶Translator’s note: This, one of the highest awards, was given to people whose output greatly exceeded plan targets.

gets, and the more the better. And if the State plan was met and even exceeded, then from the “center”⁷ came new requirements to meet a regional or an area plan, and after that a city plan, and so on. Then there were, in addition to the plans themselves, their “blood brothers”: so-called socialistic obligations, additional production achievements that were specifically dedicated to the next conference of our beloved party, or to some other significant event in the life of the country, region, city, area, or village.⁸ It was a bewitched circle: nobody would dare to not meet the plan, and when you met it, you would receive the gratitude of the chiefs, and an even higher plan for the following year.

It seems to me that, where natural resources were concerned, the “unplanned” capitalistic system was more reasonable and more economic than the planned socialist approach. In the latter case, plans were calculated from a completely erroneous principle that is possible only in a developing socialist state: targets based upon the amount of the

⁷Translator’s note: i.e. Moscow.

⁸Translator’s note: In other words, specific quantities of products, made in excess of plan targets, were sometimes “dedicated” to the party or the state.

previous year's production, plus some increase. And nobody was interested in the price for meeting this plan! This price was very high. Part of it involved completely ignoring international whaling rules established by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Whalers killed indiscriminately: prohibited species, during prohibited time periods, in prohibited areas, small-sized whales, and lactating females (Fig. 1). For some populations this price was excessively high and they paid for it with their own existence. This led to an unprecedented misrepresentation of the data on whale catches presented to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics. And as a result, an enormous fraud was perpetrated within the international scientific community.

Another concept—no less frightening, ugly, and absurd—was that of “gross output.” This was a typical creation of socialism and would be impossible in any other system. Gross output: this is when nobody is interested in a living object itself, and the only thing they care about is the size of the catch. It is reports giving figures in tsemtner⁹ and metric tons, even if it is fish that were thrown out, or rotten whales. It was important to report up through the hierarchy that the plan had been met in terms of gross output. The great Russian actor A. Raikin used this concept in a joke, saying in the words of a lavatory attendant, “I get paid not for quality, but quantity.”

Finally, there was the complete disregard for all scientific recommendations. Meanwhile, during all the years of pelagic whaling on all the factory ships working both in the Antarctic and North Pacific, scientific groups were collecting data. They conducted watches all day long collecting biological data. Using these data, the scientists wrote large annual reports giving an estimation of the condition of the whale resources, as well as other important whaling issues. These reports were bound, sealed with sealing wax, and marked with the stamp

⁹Translator's note: This unit of measurement, *tsemtner* (центнер), is equivalent to 100 kilos.

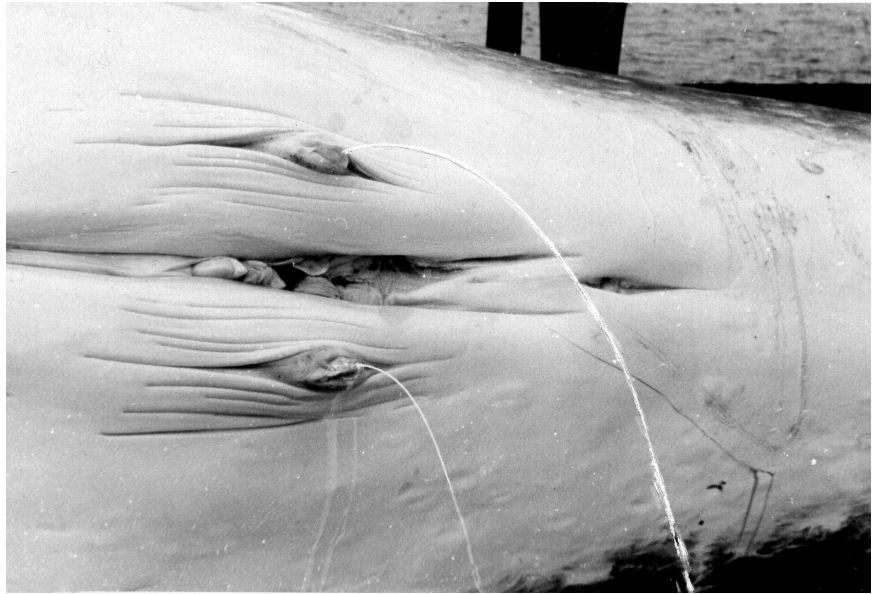


Figure 1.—Lactating fin whale female on the deck of the factory ship *Aleut*, 1959. Photo: A. Berzin.

“secret,” then consigned to the shelves of special storage areas.

Unique biological data contained in these reports did not see the light of day. Reports of numerous closed scientific committees, giving the presentations and notes of scientists outlining to higher organizations warnings of the poor and even dangerous condition of many whale populations, were not saved. None of these reports were responded to (most were probably not even read), and later were consigned to the knife and the fire.

The Beginning

From the moment that the U.S.S.R. declared its power in the Russian Far East, the question was raised regarding the use of marine resources, including whales. However, in that destroyed country there was no time to think of the immediate creation of a national whaling industry. It was decided to leave the whaling business in the hands of foreigners. In 1923 the Soviet government granted a concession to the Norwegian joint-stock company “Vega,” which involved the right to hunt whales for a 15-year period in the Bering and Chukchi Seas. The company had five catchers

and the factory ship *Comandoren-1*. During two seasons the company killed about 600 whales; however, according to the Soviet literature the agreement was later canceled due to violations of whaling rules.

The Soviet government made a decision to initiate national whaling. A joint-stock company from Kamchatka bought a large (11,000 ton) American cargo ship named *Glen Ridge*, built in 1919, and sent it to Europe, to Oslo, where her conversion was initially planned to occur.¹⁰ The famous captain A. Dudnik was in charge of the transit, and later also supervised the conversion. During a conversation with the Soviet consul in Oslo, Alexandra Mikhailovna Kolontay, A. Dudnik suggested that the *Glen Ridge* be renamed the *Aleut* after the small but

¹⁰Editors' note: The *Glen Ridge* was built by the Standard Shipbuilding Corporation, Shooters Island, New York, for the U.S. Shipping Board. She was 5,055 gross tons (2,454 net). *Glen Ridge* was sold in 1929 to Souzmozrverprom (Soviet State Shipping Company), Vladivostok, and converted to a factory ship in Leningrad in 1931. She was fitted with a whale boiling plant supplied by A/S Myrens Mek., Vaerksted, Oslo, and also with three German Fauth plants for whale-meat meal and three De Laval whale oil separators.



Plate 2.—The factory ship *Aleut* in Morzhovaya Bay (Kamchatka), 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

brave ethnic group that lives on the harsh Commander Islands.

However, conversion of the *Aleut* in Norway was obstructed because of pressure from other powerful whaling companies that did not want another whaling fleet in the North Pacific. A. Dudnik received the order to transfer the *Aleut* to Leningrad, where it was sent to the naval shipyard for conversion.

The cargo ship needed to be modified into a modern (for the time) whaling factory ship with a slipway, a blubber processing unit, and systems for lifting and cutting whale carcasses. At the time, the shipyard had no specialists who knew how to deal with a whaling factory ship, and, in addition, the technical abilities of the yard were quite limited. Because of this some complications appeared, and these were natural and understandable. However, artificial complications were also created that made no sense to an ordinary person. It was the usual scenario: the high administration gives the order, but the “lower” levels either do not receive this order at all, or under no circumstances do they fulfill it. And vice versa: the administration does not react to requests from the lower levels of the organization. The great Soviet comedian Arkadiy Raikin expressed this new type of terrible Soviet management

interactions between different levels of managers in a skit. The skit went as follows: managers at the factory receive a request from the other factory (for example, from some metal factory) and, trying not to have to think and especially not to actually do anything, they make a decision: “Let’s send a fool!”¹¹ So they send a telegram in response: “Load oranges in barrels!” This expression “Send a fool” came into our lives on a regular basis.

And here, suddenly, the ship-builders all claimed together, as if they had come to an agreement (and perhaps they had), that it was impossible to make a whaling factory ship from a cargo vessel.

In other words, a big idea with great promise gradually sank in the bureaucratic bog. Everywhere A. Dudnik ran into a brick wall of indifference and arrogance. It was the first signs of the growing administrative system that later developed its full power, the fruits of which all of us knew very well.

An unexpected ally for A. Dudnik appeared from an unexpected place: the famous scientist, academic, and

ship-builder, A. Krilov. Krilov familiarized himself with the situation and with documents for the factory ship, and also studied the opposing arguments, and he assured A. Dudnik that the *Aleut* would be a wonderful whaling ship.

The absolute support of this famous scientist played a major role: the conversion of the cargo ship received the status of a government order and the process began rapidly (at that time, with a young system, to get this status was enough!) Nevertheless, it was not easy: there were difficult technical questions to decide during the work on the hull, in the hold, and on the decks. Because of delays, the *Aleut* could not begin whaling until the 1931 season.¹²

The creative initiative, persistence, and motivation of A. Dudnik were not welcomed by the local administration, and they began the process of driving him out. Dudnik could do no more than his best¹³, and after the next meaningless rivalry he requested to be released from

¹¹Translator’s note: This expression is uniquely Russian and cannot be easily translated; here it means “Let’s play stupid and pretend that we don’t understand the question.”

¹²Translator’s note: The reference to 1931 appears to be the author’s error, since later in the memoir we learn that whaling did not begin until the following year.

¹³Translator’s note: The Russian expression here translates to “could not exceed himself,” meaning he had reached the limit of what he could do, materially and psychologically.

the position of captain of the *Aleut*. This was what the higher-level leaders were waiting for, and with one signature they offered to give everything to a captain named Burghard. They were not afraid that they would damage an ongoing state project; and if that happened—well, who cares? Probably it was the beginning of the time when nobody would take responsibility for anything, and the famous expression—hard to explain, but absolutely Soviet—was born: “Nobody gives a damn.”¹⁴

Finally, after many problems the conversion was complete and on the 27th of July 1932 the *Aleut* said goodbye to Leningrad with three whistles, and began the long journey Leningrad–Kiel–Jamaica–Panama Canal–Revillagigedos Islands¹⁵–San-Francisco–Bering Sea. And from the Bering Sea, at the end of the season, the vessel was supposed to go to her home port in Vladivostok.

In the port of Kiel, *Aleut* was joined by three brand-new Norwegian-built steam catchers. They received names according to the new period: *Trudfront*, *Avangard*, and *Entuziast*.¹⁶

Having no experience in the whaling business, the Soviet government invited foreigners of different specialties and nationalities, although these were mostly Norwegians, and also Swedish, German, and American. These had already arrived to join the *Aleut*.

Now with its full complement, the fleet left Kiel on the 16th of August. It passed through the Atlantic Ocean, Sargasso and Caribbean seas, then through the Panama Canal, and on the 12th of October the fleet entered the Pacific Ocean. They decided to undertake some test whaling off the Revillagigedos Islands. The first whales were killed on the 25th of October, and a new page in the traditional trade of the Russian people was opened. It was the beginning

¹⁴Translator’s note: In Russian, this expression is “ВСЕМ ВСЕ ДО ЛАМПОЧКИ.”

¹⁵Editors’ note: The Revillagigedos lie several hundred miles off the Pacific coast of Mexico, and belong to that nation. Today (and probably then) the local waters are a wintering ground for humpback whales; sperm whales are probably also found there.

¹⁶Translator’s note: The names mean “Work-front,” “Avant-garde,” and “Enthusiast.”

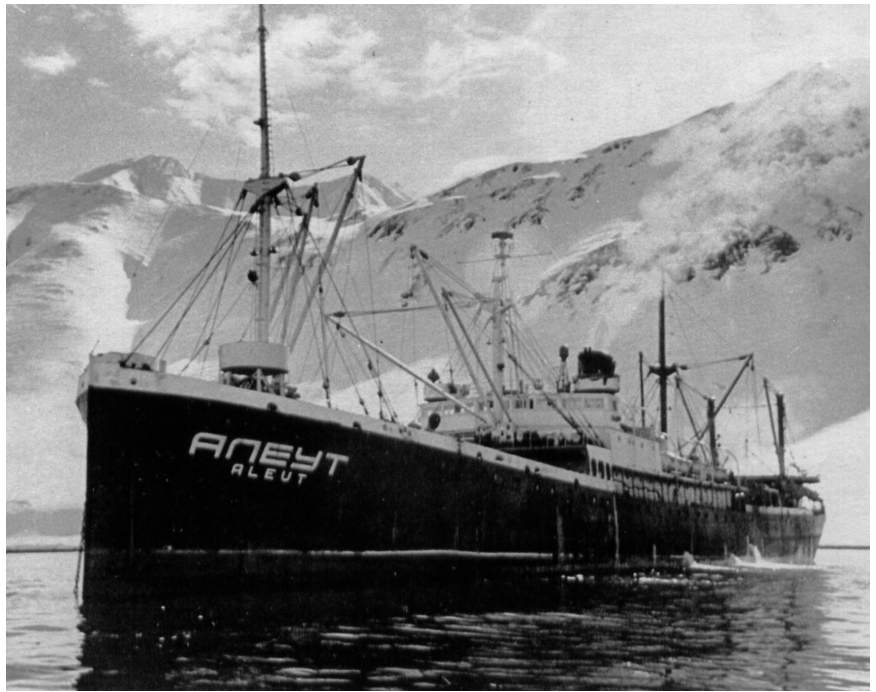


Plate 3.—The factory ship *Aleut* in Morzhovaya Bay. Kamchatka, 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

of Soviet whaling, which continued for almost 50 years.

At this point the leaders of the *Aleut* changed their plans: it was obvious that there was no reason to go and work at a time that was almost winter¹⁷, so they made a wise decision: to continue the test whaling at the Revillagigedos Islands, and afterwards to make a stop at Honolulu en route to Vladivostok. In two weeks the fleet killed 21 whales, and into the holds of the factory ship were lowered the first tons of precious product that was procured domestically.

At the end of this test the fleet turned to the northwest, toward their native shores. What happened subsequently was completely unexpected by the fleet crew. Until recent years this event was not published even in the Soviet literature. Trying to avoid a strong typhoon which developed just before New Year, the fleet arrived unexpectedly at an unknown Japanese naval base with

¹⁷Translator’s note: Presumably the author means working in the Bering Sea, the fleet’s original destination.

long-range guns and submarines, which was built on one of the islands of the Bonin Archipelago. This base was so secret that it was not shown on nautical charts. It was only because the whaling fleet succeeded in quickly establishing radio communication with Soviet ports (and therefore with the whole world) that it was not destroyed. V. Ivanizkiy described this event in detail in his book¹⁸, and expressed the opinion that it was “a threatening, but largely unknown prelude to Pearl Harbor.”

The *Aleut* whaling fleet arrived in Golden Horn Bay in Vladivostok on the 21st of February 1933. Following the incident with the Japanese naval base, Captain Burghard was dismissed by a decision from “above,” and A. Dudnik was again appointed to the position.

After accepting the fleet, Dudnik began preparations for the first whaling season as fast as possible. He saw that the biggest problem lay in the hiring of

¹⁸Translator’s note: The book was *The Brave Captain*, by V. Ivanizkiy, 1990.

specialists. Foreign specialists arrived with the *Aleut*: three harpooners, two whale observers, and other specialists (one in processing/flensing whales, a mechanic for the blubber processing, and one seaman). Dudnik staked a lot on the foreigners, because among the crew of 100 people only three knew the whaling business, at least somewhat. The inexperience of the crew was, in the captain's opinion, the major problem.

On the 28th of May 1933 the *Aleut* started its first full whaling season. The first whale, a 15 m sperm whale¹⁹, was killed off the shores of Kamchatka. All people free of watch responsibilities went on the deck to meet the whale. The new tradition of initiation into whaling was born on the factory ship, where one should slap a whale on the belly. I do not know who was the first to do this, but the existence of the symbolic "Touch A Whale" Club was known for a long time. Those who entered the club were mostly people who had had the chance in Antarctica to touch the head of a minke whale that was surfacing to breathe. When the first dead whale was lifted up the slip to the processing deck, music was heard over the empty sea: it was the orchestra playing the hymn, the International.

The next whale killed was the infamous blue whale—the biggest animal on the planet. To lift this giant, two 30 ton lifting hoists were used. This animal was 26.5 m long and did not fit on the processing deck. For three days the crew was processing this whale! Three days of heavy and also dangerous work, in blood and blubber up to their ankles.

There were a lot of whales to work, but nevertheless the fleet leaders thought it necessary to explore all coastal areas of the Bering Sea, and they even went to the Chukchi Sea. In all places whaling was very successful.

The first season was completed by the 6th of November. The whaling plan target was fulfilled and even exceeded. However, the fleet administration was unhappy with the assortment of final products, in particular that only 415

¹⁹Genus and species of whales are listed in Appendices II and III.

boxes of canned goods were produced, and the blubber (1,114 tons) was all of poor quality because of excessive acidity. Already during the second season, when 339 whales were killed, 4,574 boxes of canned goods were made. Without any doubt, it was a reflection of the gross output. After some time the number of whales caught increased fivefold and there was a corresponding change in the plan towards raw products and not canned meat; the canning line was dismantled.²⁰ The blubber is bad? Who cares! The only important thing is to get as much raw product as possible. It is why dead whales became rotten. There was a joke: it's good that the water is cold, so the whales are going bad more slowly.

It is necessary to mention that descriptions of the first years of the Soviet whaling fleet's work are practically absent from the Soviet literature (or perhaps they occur in just a few places).

One of the first Soviet whale scientists, B. Zenkovich, in his book *Around the World After Whales*²¹, honestly described the first season, the first whale catches, and the work of the foreign specialists. One cannot say this about later publications. Thus, A. Vakhov in the book *Blows on the Horizon*²², talked such nonsense that even now to read it is shameful and disgusting. The book tries to create the impression that all the reactionary powers of the world fell upon the Soviet whalers. This book is filled with a spy mania and a hatred of everything foreign. Foreign specialists are all either alcoholics, spies, or terrorists. It gives the impression that even the whales were enemy agents: now they breach out of the water to fall upon the catcher, now they hit

²⁰Editors' note: Initially, the idea was to create products, including cans of meat, on the factory ship itself. However, when the volume of whales caught increased dramatically, it was no longer practical to conduct canning operations on the ship (because of the time involved in processing the whales), so they concentrated on raw products which would be processed later on land.

²¹Translator's note: Zenkovich, ВСТАВКА ОТ РУКИ НЕ ВИДНА, 1936, Leningrad, "Molodaya gvardiya."

²²Translator's note: A. Vakhov ПОЛСТРОЧКИ НЕ ВИДНО, 1955, Khabarovsk.

the catcher in the stern and break the propeller. An observer on the mast, by the evil intent of the foreign harpooner, fell upon the deck from a great height together with the breaking mast. The Japanese intentionally caught a catcher in nets. Someone tries to burn or catch a factory ship with warships. Enemy spies introduced into the country sink a ship supplying the fleet with coal, and foreign companies send poor-quality coal and whaling rope. Probably for this goal of sowing conspiracy, A. Vakhov renamed the single and well-known Soviet whaling fleet. The *Aleut* was renamed the *Primorye*²³, and the catchers became *Trud* ("work") and *Front* ("front"). Try to guess his intentions!

Here are just a few quotations from this shameful book.

"The splashes of water from the exploding shells were rising around the whales. Americans opened fire. Obviously the gunners were not very experienced: the shells were flying past whales. But here one of the whales rushed and went underwater ... Seamen had known for a long time that American whalers killed all whales they found and had no mercy for small whales or calves ... The usual way of foreign whaling involves a complete extermination of whales ..."

Here is one more characteristic quotation from this book:

"Stepanov (the political officer on board) said: 'The fight will not be over like this. We must meet the enemies again! The enemy will pay for it!'"

The book has a "happy" ending: the enemies (almost all Trotskyists²⁴) are severely punished, and inevitably the Soviet reality triumphs.

²³Translator's note: *Primorye* is the name given to a coastal region of the Russian Far East.

²⁴Translator's note: People who supported the ideas of Leon Trotsky, who was part of the original revolution but split with Lenin and went into exile in Mexico, where he was assassinated in 1940.

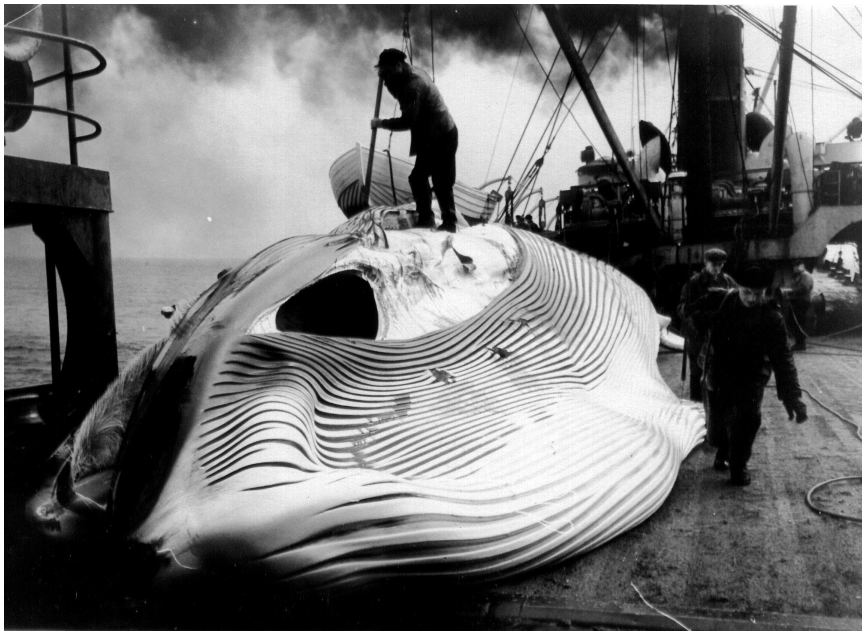


Plate 4.—The beginning of fin whale flensing on the factory ship *Aleut*, 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

The parts of the Vakhov book that I have decided to quote are a complete lie about Soviet whaling. In particular, I note that during my work I talked to whalers that worked together with the foreign specialists, and their opinion about them was unanimous—they were good guys! Of course there were no American whalers or predators and especially no spies and terrorist acts. It was the writer’s dirty lie that had a clear intention (to fool readers, to increase suspicions about spies, which later received the semi-official name of “counter-propaganda”); it was a common thing for this period at the peak of the Cold War.

The truth was this: there were harsh working days during the first years of this business, which was new for the country. Russia was starving; the authorities were destroying so-called kulaks²⁵, and they pushed people into collective farms. The level of repression was growing.

The whaling fleet operated on coal. The coal dust was everywhere. Black smoke poured out of the stacks. There

²⁵Translator’s note: Private property.

was no space to turn around in whalers’ rooms, which were full of cockroaches; even in the captain’s room there was so little space that when he was seated another person did not have anywhere to sit down.

The absence of experience was visible at each step. It turns out that to kill a whale is easier than to process it. People could not do simple things: turning the carcass from one side to the other during the flensing, finding the joint to separate the head from the body, separating a spine into parts. The Norwegian master whaler of course explained and demonstrated as he could, but it was hard to understand him. It was very naïve to think that three foreign specialists, even knowing the process very well, could teach a hundred and fifty people the new techniques.

There were not enough leather boots for the processing crews, and the deck constructions often could not withstand huge loads: the lifting systems, built for 10 tons, were lifting loads of 40–50 tons. One day a tragedy almost happened. A 40 ton fin whale was being processed on the stern deck. During the moment when it was being turned onto

its other side, one of the supporting systems snapped and the heavy carcass started to slide across the deck toward one side. The factory ship listed on its side and the whale started to slide even faster. Right under this side of the factory ship was a catcher. Somebody yelled: “It will destroy the catcher!” Luckily, the whale carcass came to a halt at the “knight”²⁶. It was only later, in Vladivostok, that they created a safe, full-metal bulwark instead of a fence made from cables.

During another season a similar situation occurred when one of the processing crew did not have time to run from a whale that was sliding towards him and he decided (which was the right choice) to jump overboard; otherwise, the carcass would have crushed him. The ship was adrift, so to retrieve a seaman took only a few minutes.

But the amazing nature of Kamchatka made up for all the complications of this lifestyle. During the first years of whaling the factory ship stayed in the very beautiful Walrus Bay on Kamchatka for almost the whole season, and the catchers were killing whales close by and bringing them to the factory ship. On the shore of the bay they built a small storage facility to keep some whaling equipment over the winter, which was to be used the next year. One guard lived there. Later, an avalanche fell from the mountain side and destroyed this human influence on the incredible shores of the bay. Nobody wanted to restore anything.

The terrible wave of repressions did not pass by the *Aleut*. The Captain-Director of the *Aleut*, A. Dudnik, was rewarded in 1936 with the highest government award—the Order of Lenin. The following year (1937) the fleet for the first time did not meet the plan target. Immediately “national enemies” were found. The arrests began. V. Ivanizki [one of the authors mentioned above] witnessed the flywheel of repression turning, including in Vladivostok. The top manager of the

²⁶Translator’s note: The metal post (the capstan) used for securing the mooring lines.

Crabmorzvero Trust²⁷ was arrested as well as many other leaders of the city. In 1938, A. Dudnik was arrested. The style of arrests “from Moscow to the borders”²⁸ was very similar everywhere. A few people in the NKVD²⁹ appeared on the *Aleut* the night before she put to sea. The factory ship with its catchers was already away from the docks and ready to leave. Boats were retrieving the last seamen from the city and carrying back families. The only thing remaining was to complete formalities with the port captain. But instead of representatives of this service, a different group arrived on board. What followed was a search and then [Dudnik was placed into] a cell for interrogation. The charges exceeded those of any sick imagination. An interrogator: “We have reliable witnesses to your long-time connections with the Japanese secret service . . . We have known for a long time about the criminal intentions to sell the whaling fleet to a Japanese fishing concern . . .” (from the book of V. Ivanizkiy). What followed was jail, beatings, attempts to make A. Dudnik bear false witness, and so on.

I began studies of whales on the *Aleut* in 1957, 25 years after the beginning of Soviet whaling. In the previous year the fleet was reequipped and for the first time worked on liquid fuel. Of course it was a great change in everything: in work and in the life of the whalers. Nevertheless, living conditions on board remained practically unbearable.

In the majority of the crew’s rooms it was very hot. It was not possible to open portholes, because blood and blubber from the processing deck were streaming down upon them, and during storms (when the whaling stopped) water splashed into the windows. The cement deck was almost burning hot and whalers made themselves wooden sandals (it was comfortable to take a shower in these sandals). During the nights everyone suffocated from the stuffiness

²⁷Translator’s note This was the organization managing crab and marine mammal resources.

²⁸Translator’s note: These are the words from the famous patriotic song of this period.

²⁹Translator’s note: The NKVD was the original secret police, the forerunner of the KGB.



Plate 5.—The factory ship *Aleut* and catchers at anchor in Morzhovaya Bay, Kamchatka. Photo: A. Berzin.

and were glazed with sweat. Because of this, many processing people were dead tired, and they slept in the corridors without even taking off their stinking blubber-soaked working clothes and spike boots. When there were no whales to process the corridors shined with cleanliness and everything was filled with a dense smell of eau-de-Cologne and even very expensive perfume. Only the most naïve people or beginners in the business could think that whalers would maintain such personal hygiene. There was never alcohol on sale on the Soviet fleets (but at the same time there was no “dry law”) so whalers went bowing to the manufactured goods stall.³⁰

The food on all Soviet fleets was equal to the living conditions: boring bland porridge, dry potatoes, onions, carrots, and half-decayed cabbage.

On the other hand, unlike on other Soviet vessels, on the whaling ships it

³⁰Translator’s note: A small store on the factory ship which sold a number of everyday things.

was possible to eat a lot of meat (whale meat, of course), and it was delicious in different dishes: meatballs and steaks. Cooks made jellied meat from the fins of baleen whales. For ourselves we cooked whale brains, fried testicles, and boiled kidneys from young whales. It was possible to fry a whale liver, which by taste was similar to cow liver. The liver must be well soaked in salty seawater before cooking to remove vitamin A, concentrations of which in the whale liver are so high that it is dangerous for humans. I loved sometimes to indulge myself with frozen raw meat (very thin layers of frozen meat) from a whale heart. Some people drank a whole cup of [melted] whale blubber every day.

The factory ship *Aleut* was initially a cargo ship, not suited for people working on the deck. It did not ride well in waves and went into oncoming seas “like an iron” (a seamen’s exact expression), taking huge masses of water that swept away everything in their path.

I once witnessed a big wave coming inbound that lifted up slabs of meat weighing a ton or more and caused them to envelop one of the deck workers. When his comrades came running up to this pile of meat, pressed to the bow superstructure, they were greeted with an unpleasant picture: the hand of the man was sticking out of this meat mountain. Luckily, everything ended well: the sheets of meat were removed and the man was carefully lifted to the light of day. He did not suffer.

Here it is good to remember that men on the processing crew have not only great health but also exceptional strength, even though they don't stand out like that. Once, we were enchanted watching an almost artistic performance of two flensers, who by the sweep of their flensing knives easily and even gracefully cut thick (up to 20 cm or more) blubber layers like paper by making almost meter-long cuts, and putting them in the blubber kettles. Some time later, one of the large, healthy scientists on the factory ship decided to try his strength and asked for a knife from the processing man. He swung his arm and hit the blubber layer with all of his power, but the knife, to his and our surprise, cut into the layer only 2–3 cm.

Conversion of the *Aleut* to work on liquid fuel allowed the fleet to go offshore, and in 1957 a period of pelagic operations began involving easterly movements to the Commander and Aleutian Islands. There were lots of different species of whales, and often by ten o'clock the command was sent to the catchers: "Stop hunting." This meant that the number of catches had met or exceeded the processing capability of the factory ship.

In those years, whalers as a rule took blubber, and for sperm whales they were also separating the head.³¹ Small amounts of baleen whale meat were used. The *Aleut* did not have its own freezers, and the refrigerated cargo ships (called by whalers "giraffes") were too slow to freeze meat and transport it to

³¹Editors' note: Sperm whale heads contained valuable oil-like substance (spermaceti), which was collected separately.

Vladivostok. Whale bones were partially used for making flour. What was left of the giant whale carcasses was thrown into the sea through the slipway. The huge remains of these sea giants (which whalers called "shashlik"³²) marked the factory ship's path. Ships going to meet the fleet would run across these "shashliks" and understood that they were in the area where the fleet was working.

Another good navigational cue was the heavy—without exaggeration, sickening—smell from processing whales. This smell literally hung in the air, and during windless weather could be detected a long distance away, before the factory ship appeared on the horizon. When you transferred from the supply ship to the factory ship, the nausea came into your throat and it seemed that you would never get used to this smell. But after a short time, just a few minutes (for different people this time could be different), one stopped noticing the smell. Nevertheless, I knew a few scientists that could never get used to this every-day, every-minute stink. If there is any effect of this smell on the human body, it is no longer possible to determine this.

Analyzing whaling data, it is possible to say that violations of the whaling rules were happening even when whales were abundant. Even if these violations were small, and even if an inspector was present on the factory ship, this information was not given to the IWC. Overall, the topic of Soviet national inspection of whaling deserves to be described separately.

National Whaling Inspection

On the 15th of June 1948, the Soviet Union, represented by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, ratified the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, the basic document that stipulates all whaling rules. However, it is possible to state that during all the years of whaling (until 1972 when international whaling inspections were introduced) Soviet whalers never followed any of the rules of whaling (as provided by the Convention), and all

³²Translator's note: *Shashlik* means "kebab."

this was happening with the blessing of our leaders.

Thus, whalers from the *Aleut* did not pass up a chance to kill a right whale, even when [other] whales were abundant. I was present during the processing of one of these giants. It was a huge animal. It was necessary to cut off its pectoral fins to lift it through the slipway. All whales are miracles of Nature, but this was a miracle of miracles.

During the first years of whaling in the higher latitudes of the Bering Sea, whalers killed gray whales without any hesitation; as with right whales, it had been prohibited to kill this species since 1946.³³ And all of these things were happening with a [national] whaling inspector on board the factory ship.

The contingents of national inspectors varied, but mostly they were not the best specialists or people. A contingent could consist of corrupt captains of catchers or sealing vessels, or failed scientists; and, of course, employees of the fisheries organizations. For example, when I worked on the *Aleut* the inspector—who was this in title only—was an ex-militia man who hardly even knew of the existence of the international rules of whaling.

For the first season on the *Sovetskaya Rossia* fleet, the position of national inspector was given to Gennady Solyanik (the son of the famous—and now one can say infamous—A. Solyanik³⁴). This was a mockery of common sense, because this person knew a lot ... in particular he knew what his father was doing in the Antarctic. From his father Gennady inherited only presumptions and arrogance. Who would this inspector be checking, and especially punishing? Probably all this was well thought-out, and everybody knew who should be appointed: if there was some

³³Editors' note: International protection for both right and gray whales was agreed in 1935, but since neither Japan nor the U.S.S.R. were parties to this earlier treaty they were in theory free to kill both species until they signed the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

³⁴Editors' note: Solyanik was the most notorious of all Soviet whaling captains; Berzin devotes an entire section to him later in this memoir.

obstinate inspector who suddenly began to actually perform his duty and get in the way, it would be a problem. Everything was clear in this case.

The idea of this position was that it had responsibility, and to a large extent the work of the whole fleet would depend upon this person. In reality, it was a parody of a serious job.

The Soviet national whaling inspection scheme was itself the creation of a vicious system. Judge for yourself: how could you imagine that an employee responsible for making the fleet follow the whaling rules, and for punishing violations of these rules, was being paid by the same fleet? Even better, his salary depended upon the amount of raw products obtained; therefore an inspector was completely dependent upon the fleet leaders. You can imagine what it would be like if you were the regular employee of a company, controlling the work of your director, writing accusatory reports about him to higher organizations, and levying fines for mistakes made during the work! How is it possible to bite the hand that feeds you? It is a sin!

There are just a few solutions: to quit if you cannot put up with the complete deprivation of your rights, and your dependence upon the fleet leaders; or they will fire you if you cross your leaders, in other words if you merely try to honestly do your job. But there is one more solution that almost all the inspectors used: "I see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing" . . . We suggested using these words of Indian wisdom as a hymn for the Soviet national whaling inspection.

It is well known that many ways were created to "deal" with different kinds of inspections, and there were of course some of these for whaling inspections. The favorite and well-tested (but primitive) method was to get an inspector drunk. In truth, I knew one inspector on a land station (who until recently was in a very high position in this system: the head of the Okhotskribvod³⁵), who happily received this treatment, and plentifully so; but when whalers returned to

³⁵Translator's note: This is the organization that manages and controls fisheries in the Okhotsk Sea.



Plate 6.—Flensing of a sperm whale head on the factory ship *Aleut*, 1957. Photo: A. Berzin.



Plate 7.—One of the *Aleut*'s catchers brings whales to the factory ship. Photo: A. Berzin.

the station, sure in their “success” and their safety in case of poaching, the inspector was there on shore waiting for them.

More “intellectual” methods were also used. An inspector was invited to spend a day on a catcher boat for the purpose of learning the whaling process and the situation in the area. At the end of the day the catcher would receive an order from the leaders of the fleet to search for whales over a great distance, for a week or longer. Of course, this completely freed the hands of the whaling leaders, and this method was used when whales of species that were illegal to kill were seen in the area.

The “Manual” for the whaling inspectors described their rights and responsibilities, but it finished with the paramount and unprecedented point that an inspector should use all his power to help meet the plan target for whale catches. Why wouldn’t you help if your salary and your relationship with your bosses depended upon it? Is this not a theater of the absurd?

According to the same “Manual” there should be two inspectors on each factory ship for 24-hour control over the whale catches: this involved identifying the species of whales, sex, size, and physiological condition (maturity, pregnancy, and so on). As a rule, inspectors preferred not to appear on the processing deck at all, and the biological data on the whales (those that the inspectors wanted) were taken from the scientists. I remember that they asked me to give them my graph of sperm whale foetal growth to make their work even easier when filling in the fetus size in their reports.

Some of the data were created according to instructions from the leaders of the fleet and from the Ministry. Regarding violations of the whaling rules that should be reported, everything was very simple. The Ministry gave exact instructions concerning what should be said in the report: this many small-sized whales, this many lactating females (usually it was 5%), and so on. The report would of course state that violations occurred, but all of them were at the level of a chance or mistake and nothing more. Of course,

the whale catch information reported to the IWC had nothing in common with the real catch; we have already discussed this, and will do so again.

I have in front of me a document entitled “Temporary order to apply sanctions for violations of the existing whaling rules according to IWC recommendations,” which was signed by Vice-Minister of Soviet Fisheries Resources Zhigalov on the 6th of December 1977. It is as if it was created as a joke: for killing prohibited whales a fine should be imposed (could be imposed): for the Captain-Director and the harpooner of the catcher the fine was from 25 to 50 rubles. For the killing of lactating females the fine was from 15 to 50 rubles. Those fines were levied (or were supposed to be levied) upon fleet leaders whose [monthly] salaries were a thousand rubles or more.

When I was taking part in the second All-Union meeting on marine mammals in 1959 in Leningrad, I told the main whaling specialist from the Ministry of Soviet Fisheries Resources, V. Tveryanovich, that the *Aleut* fleet was taking gray whales, violating the rules whenever possible. I was fondly thinking that thunder and lightning would come down upon the whalers’ heads, with all the subsequent consequences. How big was my surprise when thunder and lightning really fell, but on my head? Moreover I was accused of slandering our “valiant whalers” and “members of the party.” The latter was the bigger crime.

After the introduction of international inspection³⁶, the position of national inspector became even more ambiguous. For example, if some unpublished violations somehow suddenly became known, the “guilty” person was a national inspector who suffered the punishment. This, for example, happened to a former scientist of our institute, the whaling inspector on the *Dalnyi Vostok* fleet, M. Lobatsevich. During his time as inspector 22 blue whales were illegally killed; when this became widely known he was fired as if he had killed these

³⁶Editors’ note: Again, this was the International Observer Scheme, introduced by the IWC in 1972.

whales himself or had at least given the order to do this.

The Soviet national whaling inspection was a fake construction; it was like a “fig leaf” giving the outward appearance of honesty, and was characteristic of the system of that period.

The Second Kuril Whaling Fleet

In 1948 the second Kuril whaling fleet began its work. Depending on the year, anywhere from 12 to 15 catchers were involved in hunting whales. In the past, these catchers were American mine sweepers given to us during the Second World War but without any rights to use them after the war. As usual, we quietly ignored this agreement, although it was prohibited to write about them, take any photographs, and, of course, to publish pictures of these so called “amiki.”³⁷

These were all-metal, powerful, and fast ships with two propellers; they were easily maneuverable for successful whale hunting. They did not require much modification, just the mounting of a harpoon cannon on the bow.

The catchers of this fleet had names: “*Purga*,” “*Buran*,” “*Musson*,” “*Vyuga*,” “*Taifun*,” “*Uragan*”³⁸, and so on in the same style; consequently, the fleet acquired the nickname “stormy weather fleet.” The catchers were based at five land stations in the Kuril Islands that had been built by the Japanese.³⁹

With continual dense fogs and very fast tides between the islands, this area is considered one of the most difficult in the world. This was an area where whales could often be found. Bad weather conditions and imperfect navigational equipment would sometimes lead to the wrecking of catchers.

In 1951, three years after this fleet began work, the whale scientist B. Zenkovitch wrote in a letter to the U.S.S.R. Minister of Fisheries A. Ishkov:

³⁷Translator’s note: The word “amiki” is slang for “Americans.”

³⁸Translator’s note: The names of these catchers translate to, respectively: *Blizzard*, *Snowstorm*, *Monsoon*, *Blizzard* (a slightly different kind to the previous), *Typhoon*, *Hurricane*.

³⁹Translator’s note: These stations were taken over when the U.S.S.R. took possession of the Kuril Islands, which had been under Japanese control prior to World War II.

After I became familiar with the data on the catches of sperm whales [meaning those of the Kuril fleet], I was convinced that the majority of hunted whales are young, immature sperm whales, that in 3–5 years' time would have yielded twice as much blubber. At present, the whaling trade in the Far East is pursued in a manner which is not reasonable and not expedient.

In three more years, the scientific group's chief for studies of Far East cetaceans, S. Klumov, wrote in his report of "complications regarding fulfillment of whaling plan targets around the Kurils in 1955," and noted that

... the declining number of whales observed led to a significant increase in the amount of time to find a whale. As a result, this forced the whalers to take any whales encountered in the target area regardless of size. This would explain the large numbers of "small" sperm whales⁴⁰ brought to the land stations ... The question arises regarding the expediency of this manner of whaling. First, this trade leads to the further depletion of stocks; second, it is not expedient and not profitable from the economic point of view.

In the next report, for 1956, the same scientist wrote:

The whaling plan target is overestimated and does not reflect the real condition of whale populations in the area around the Kuril Islands ... it is necessary to develop a complete and rational way of using all whale products.

How long will we continue to discard great wealth into the sea? When will a sensible process be established on the factory ships, which now work poorly despite their superficial success? All these

questions were raised multiple times before the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Fisheries and other organizations. However, no one seems to think it is important to correct defects and abnormalities in the whaling industry, nor to discuss this topic in any detail instead of simply counting the quantity of raw products⁴¹. They ignore outrages taking place in the whaling industry regarding complete use of whales, as well as the huge loss of whaling products. Evidently we have too great an abundance of natural resources, so we can waste them and manage them so poorly.

We could state with full support that in these and all subsequent years our warnings, which were appeals to common sense regarding this irrational use of Nature, were like a voice crying in the wilderness.

The target levels of the whaling plan were twice higher than what could be supported by the available natural resources, and the situation with whales around the Kurils was getting worse.

Every year, the *Aleut* fleet passed along the Kuril Islands on the way to and from their primary hunting area⁴², not to gaze at their beauty but to keep working and hunting whales with a stretched-out line of catchers.

Land stations began to stand idle, especially the ones on the southern Kuril Islands, and then one after another they closed.

Whaling from land stations has many advantages compared to factory ships; it provides greater opportunities for the rational utilization of raw whale products, primarily through an almost unlimited working space. This was always a limiting factor on factory ships.

During later years the workers forgot about creating additional types of final products: gross output targets overwhelmed the wise and expedient use of very valuable raw products.

The most southern land station on Shikotan Island (named "Ostrovnoy") was the first to close. A photo that I took in 1955 shows the last whale brought to the station before it was closed (Fig. 2). The whale is "voting"⁴³ with a lifted flipper caused by decomposition gases in the body after being towed for too long to the station from the place where it was killed. Soon after the other land stations on Iturup Island ("Kosatka" and "Yasniy"⁴⁴) were also closed.

Whalers knew that no matter what, the plan must be met! Looking for whales they would go farther and farther from the islands and bring rotten baleen whales to the stations, those which could not be used for food. This was not regarded as a problem by anybody. The plan—at any price! And whalers were killing everything. Small-sized sperm whales were especially numerous, and in this case the stations would help: they developed an almost unbelievable strategy in which two or sometimes three small whales (usually females) were added together and recorded in the station journal as one (legally catchable) large male; these data were sent to different organizations, all the way to the IWC.

Many right whales, the hunting of which had been prohibited since 1946, were caught during these years around the Kuril Islands. Because of old or defective systems involved in lifting whales to the processing deck, many carcasses lost their flukes during this operation. It was impossible to retrieve the whale; [its products] were lost to humans back at home and it became instead food for many other marine creatures.

It is impossible to estimate the number of right whales in the area around the Kurils now, and it could be assumed that these whales were hunted almost to the level of extinction. Of course none of the right whale catches were reported to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics, even if there was a whaling

⁴⁰Editors' note: Small sperm whales = whales with a body length below the legal IWC limit of 11.6m.

⁴¹Translator's note: The raw whale products were blubber, meat, and sometimes bones.

⁴²Translator's note: The primary hunting area for this fleet was the pelagic region of the North Pacific.

⁴³Translator's note: This expression means the flipper was raised in the air like a hand "voting."

⁴⁴Translator's note: "Kosatka" and "Yasniy" mean "Killer Whale" and "Clear."

inspector at the station. At the present time [the 1990's], very few right whales are recorded in the straits between the northern Kuril Islands.

According to S. Klumov this sort of outrage was happening not only on the fleets and land stations. Frontier guards had gone wild and brutally practiced bayonet fights on seals in their haul-outs, while pilots-in-training practiced their skills by dropping bombs on whales. S. Klumov said that he wrote about this to the U.S.S.R. Minister of Defense. I do

not know the Ministry's reaction. However, what reaction could there be in the 1950's during the communist regime? Thank God, the scientist [Klumov] was not arrested.

The last and most northerly station on Paramushir Island ("Podgorniy") was closed in 1964. Land station closures involved immediate abandonment of houses, libraries, clubs, medical centers, and stores, not to mention the work buildings, and presented a very depressing picture. In the boilers for a long

time one could find hundreds of kilos of blubber.⁴⁵ The wind blew through empty window frames of empty houses, and drove pieces of paper, newspapers, and books along the streets. Probably this would be the way it would be after a nuclear bomb had been used. It is the way only transient people would act: plunder everything possible, then leave it and move on.

Whalers now had new grounds to work in the central and eastern regions of the North Pacific, but not for long.

Later, when it was getting worse and worse with whale resources in the North Pacific, the question was raised about resuming the hunting of baleen whales from land stations. After calculating the cost of reconstruction, they came to their conclusion: it was not profitable! Of course, to break is not to build ...⁴⁶

Soviet Whaling in the Antarctic From the Beginning to the End

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the U.S.S.R. received (or more accurately, took) as a reparation, the German factory ship *Viking*. This vessel had been built in 1929 in England and was part of the German whaling fleet. She was a two-deck oceanic ship with a displacement of about 30,000 tons, and she became the largest ship in the Soviet whaling fleet. This factory ship with ten catchers received the symbolic and weighty name *Slava* (= "fame," possibly referring to that of the [Soviet] system and, of course, of the Communist Party). In 1946, *Slava* began her first whaling season in the waters of the Antarctic; it was also the first such expedition for the U.S.S.R..

For the first few years the fleet was primarily working in the southern part of the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent waters of the Indian Ocean. The catch was not

⁴⁵Translator's note: The text actually says "food and technical blubber," which refers to the two types of blubber that were utilized. Baleen whale blubber was used for food, while sperm whale blubber was considered inedible and was used for other purposes.

⁴⁶Translator's note: This is the transliteration of a Russian expression which means that it is always easier to destroy something than to build something.



Plate 8.—The factory ship *Sovetskaya Rossia*. Photo: A. Berzin.



Figure 2.—The last sperm whale caught from the Ostrovnoy shore whaling station, Shicotan Island, Kurils. Photo: A. Berzin.



Plate 9.—A catcher of the early period (the old type) in the *Aleut* fleet, 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

large, but in subsequent years it began to increase very rapidly; thus in 1947 only 386 whales were killed, and in the following years, respectively, 824, 1115, 1736, 1988, and, finally, almost 3000 whales during the 1951–52 season. The majority of the catch was of fin, blue, and, of course, humpback whales.

The original data from the first years of whaling were not saved, but as soon as some appeared (from the season 1948–49), distortions were apparent in the data on whale catches that were presented to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics.

Thus, during the 1948–49 season the fleet caught 112 humpback whales and reported only 8 animals. True and reported catches for the following year were, respectively, 511 and 36 whales; and later, having a sense of complete impunity, they killed about 950 humpback whales and reported only 8(!) However, the number of reported fin whale catches was larger than it was in reality (and a few times more sperm whales).⁴⁷ Per-

⁴⁷Editors' note: Fin whale catches were actually over-reported in order to disguise catches of illegally taken species. This may have been true for sperm whales in the first years, but overall sperm whale catches were greatly under-reported over the entire period of illegal whaling.

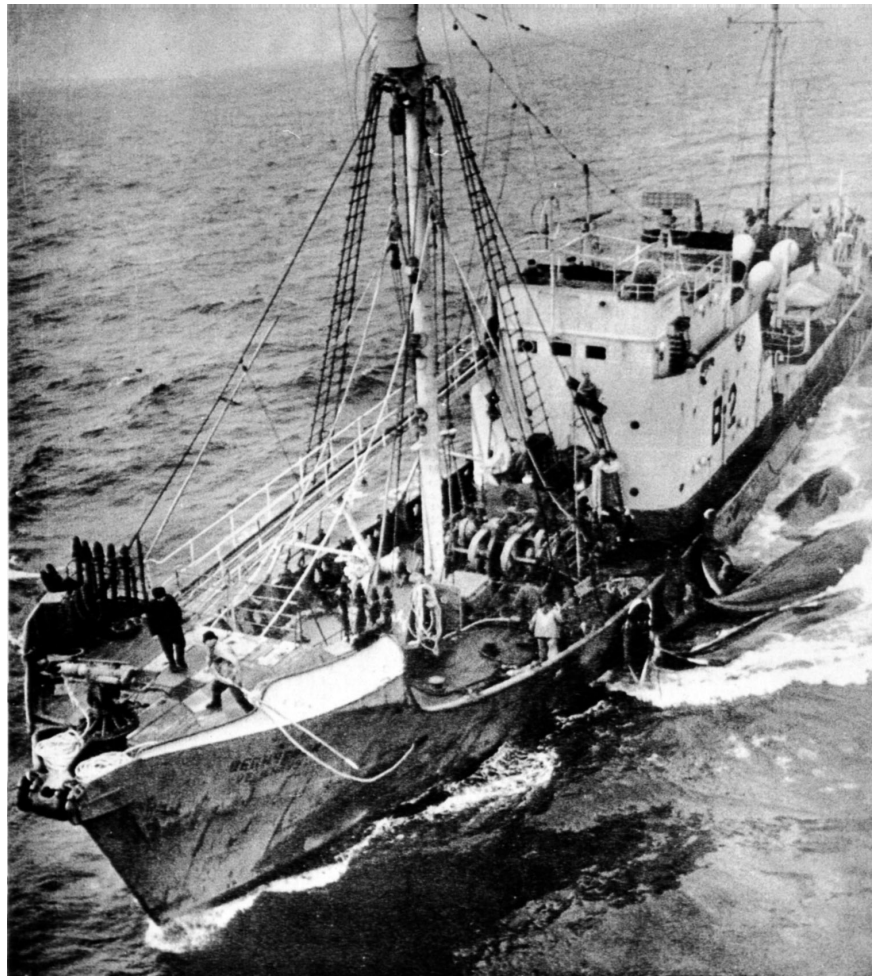


Plate 10.—A catcher from the *Sovetskaya Rossia* fleet comes to deliver whales. Photo: A. Berzin.

haps there was already a pathological passion to lie? To lie when you need to, and when you don't.

It is impossible now to establish who first began this "initiative," and whether it was an impromptu creation of the fleet leaders, or already at this time stemmed from orders given from above. It does not matter, and the important thing is that since the early years of Soviet whaling in the Antarctic there was disinformation given to the international scientific community about the whaling results.

By 1955 three populations of humpback whales, in the Atlantic and in the western part of the Indian Ocean (western Atlantic, South Georgia, and East

African)⁴⁸, had over a prolonged period become depleted [by other whaling nations], and further catches from these areas were prohibited.

The populations of humpback whales in the waters of Australia and New Zealand were almost untouched. A small number of whales were hunted by land-based stations in these countries.

The *Slava* fleet found large aggregations of humpback whales off western Australia. They moved from the Atlantic to these areas, and during the 1957–58 season levied the first destructive strike on these whales, killing about 1,500

⁴⁸Translator's note: Names of the different populations.



Plate 11.—A catcher in the Antarctic next to an iceberg. Photo: A. Berzin.

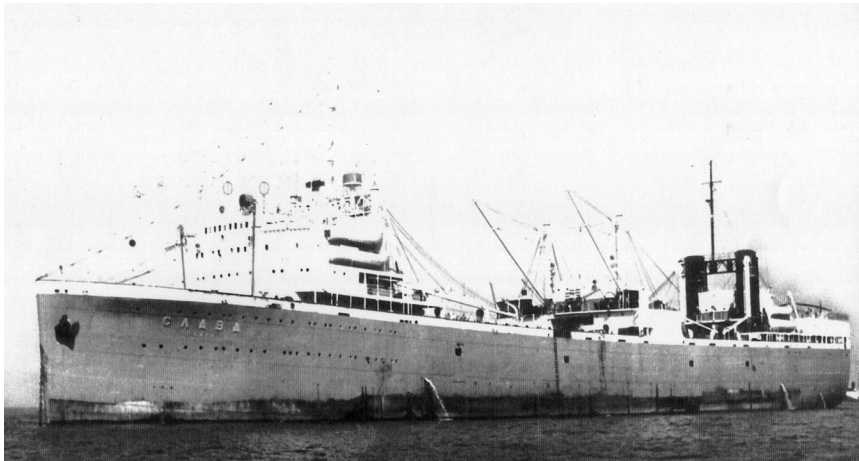


Plate 12.—The floating factory *Slava*. Year and photographer unknown.

humpback whales in just one month in 1958. But this was apparently not enough, and during the same season the fleet began intensive whaling on humpback whales of the East Australian population. During this season they killed more than 2,200 humpback whales. During the next season more than 4,000 whales were killed. And all of this was accomplished by just one fleet without the help of the “main power”⁴⁹

⁴⁹Translator’s note: Meaning the other Soviet whaling fleets.

of Soviet whalers. It was the beginning of the rapid decline of all humpback whale populations in the Antarctic.

At the end of the 1950’s and beginning of the 1960’s the Soviet Union undertook an unseen expansion of the whaling fleet in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere. And the problem lay perhaps not even in the number of vessels. At the time this was happening the populations of baleen whales (those that had been legally hunted) were already depleted and the major whaling countries were beginning to reduce

their whaling fleets. Thus, Norway and England sold large factory ships, and there was only one reason: the whaling business was unprofitable given the baleen whale resources in the Antarctic at that time.

At this time in our country the opinion was quite widely held that the natural resources of the ocean were endless. This completely erroneous theory caused a lot of damage, but it was convenient for the Soviet industrial system and it is even possible that they were the ones who perpetrated this idea.

In a normal economy of a normal state, the capacity of the resource would be carefully assessed, and only after this assessment would any decisions be made regarding the amount of outlay and profits. But that is in a normal state. In the Soviet Union it was different, and more precisely the opposite. The fisheries industry administration did not even think it necessary to consult with scientists, who by this time already knew very well the condition of whale resources in the Southern Hemisphere; consequently, the industry made the decision to build a few whaling fleets. To build—ah, to build! In a Soviet way! Since the creation of the U.S.S.R., people possessed with a mania about size (to create meaningless things just to be able to say: this is the biggest in the world!) were everywhere, including in the fisheries department. One can imagine with some certainty how these people thought: “What is the biggest factory ship?”—“The Dutch *William Barendtz*? It’s 43,500 tons? Let’s make one bigger! Make one? Not enough! Two!” As it was said, so it was done. At the Nikolaevsk shipbuilding factory on the Black Sea, the two sea giants (of 45,000 tons displacement) were built as one project. The ships were more than 200 meters long and 26 meters wide, with living space for 600 people. Each factory ship was designed to process 75 large baleen whales (up to 50 tons each) or, in other words, 3,700 tons of whale products a day.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Editors’ note: In addition to the arithmetic being wrong ($75 \times 50 = 3,750$), since only a part of each whale was used there would have been far less than 3,700 tons of products from 75 whales.

But this was not enough. The Soviet Government thought it expedient to convert into a factory ship a giant German cargo-passenger vessel named *Hamburg* (received by the U.S.S.R. as part of war reparations), together with the construction of the two new whaling factories. This seven-deck vessel had an unusual history. It was built in 1926 and worked on the Hamburg–New York route until 1936 (until the Second World War). During the war *Hamburg* was used for different tasks and it was sunk in April 1945. In this condition *Hamburg* remained until September 1950 when the hull of the ship was lifted, covered by a layer of mud a meter thick, with holes in the sides and destroyed superstructures. The ship underwent repair and a major conversion in Belgium and East Germany. The ship was named after the person who established the city of Moscow, Yuriy Dolgorukiy (although why they did this is unclear since the vessel had no connection with Moscow), and the ship's second life began with its base in Kaliningrad. But to someone even all this was not enough: in Kiel (Germany) the building of two more factory ships was ordered, each with a displacement of almost 30,000 tons, for whaling in the North Pacific.

In November 1959, the first of the new whaling fleets, named *Sovetskaya Ukraina*⁵¹ (Fig. 3) left its base in Odessa to begin work, and was followed by the aging *Slava*. At the end of October, 1960, from its base in Kaliningrad the *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* left to “help” the Ukrainian fleets in the Antarctic. And finally, in the autumn of 1961, the fleet with the grandiose name of *Sovetskaya Rossia*⁵², with its base in Vladivostok, left from Novorossiysk to kill any remaining whales in the Antarctic.

What can we say? Speed, size! But in the fervor for a fast pace of construction, based on such a gigantic scale, small defects were missed. In the first season aboard *Sovetskaya Rossia* a few shipbuilders from Leningrad and Niko-

⁵¹Editors' note: This was the name of the factory ship, and therefore also of the fleet, which included catchers, scouting ships, and various supply/support vessels.

⁵²Translator's note: “Soviet Russia.”



Figure 3.—The Soviet whaling factory ship *Sovetskaya Ukraina*. Year and photographer unknown.

laevsk went along to rethink, redo, and change things en route, as was usual in our country. And probably all this would be okay, except . . .

Picture a sunny and unusually calm day for Antarctica, the 4th of January. It is the middle of the summer. On the deck the processing of a large baleen whale was almost complete. Through a large hole on the port side the intestines of whales were thrown down into the sea; all one needed to do was to put one end into the hole and after that, according to the technology of whale processing, one quarter of a kilometer of intestines, twisting like they were alive, disappeared through the big black hole, which went over the side into the water.

As usual we were taking samples and measuring the internal organs. And suddenly, one of the seamen involved in processing a whale fell, flew across the blubber-covered deck and, together with the intestines, disappeared into this hole before our eyes and those of everyone on deck. Everybody ran to the side, and the emergency signal was sounded: “Man overboard!”

The factory ship began to turn, but it was going at full speed; consequently, when the head of the seaman appeared at the surface there was a significant distance between him and the ship. Attempts to launch a rescue boat were unsuccessful, as should be expected; the boat had other ideas, and wouldn't start.

Someone called the closest of the catcher vessels. Through the binoculars

it was possible to see how the seaman was swimming, pushing away intestines that were floating next to him, which were the cause of his tragedy (as we subsequently discovered, the leg of the seaman was caught in one of the intestinal loops). Pushing away the intestines was a mistake that deprived him of his only chance for survival in this situation. On the contrary, he should have tried to climb (or at least hold on to) the pile of intestines which were floating on the surface. To everyone's surprise numerous large sea gulls were literally diving on the seaman's head, something no one would have thought of beforehand. We could see how he was trying to brush aside the birds, fruitlessly expending his precious and probably last energy.

The catchers showed up. The seaman's movements slowed, and after about twenty minutes his head sank beneath the surface.

Everybody watching the tragedy had the same unsettling feeling: right before your eyes a young, completely healthy man is slowly perishing, and you are forced just to watch as he is dying, and you can do nothing.

He did not drown: the high-density seawater was buoyant, and he was wearing very oily, almost waterproof clothes.

When the seaman was lifted onto the catcher and brought to the field-hospital on the factory ship it was apparent that there was not a single scratch on his body; but death occurred due to hypothermia in the freezing water, which had



Figure 4.—The seaman's funeral: the body is lowered into the water. Factory ship *Sovetskaya Rossia*, 1962. Photo: A. Berzin.

a temperature of about 0°C. In a photo that I took one can see the traditional funeral of a seaman (Fig. 4); however, as a privilege of being a whaler, instead of being weighted with a metal grate, two harpoons were tied to the body. Guards of honor are posted and changed. Now the body is lowered into the water. The factory ship makes a circle of honor, the horns sound. The position is recorded in the log-book of the ship; and if one day the fleet should pass through this area again, the horns will sound.

That same day, in just a few minutes a fence was made from simple pipes and was placed around the edges of the hole, sufficient to prevent a similar tragedy. If someone in our “boiling and busy” existence⁵³ cared about human life, this fence would have been envisaged in the original project and constructed ahead of time.

Unlike other big ocean-going vessels, on the whaling factory ships tens of people work round the clock on the slippery decks. There, they carried out continuous lifting operations in an open sea, with a lot of openings to the sea, and with a unique giant slipway up to 6 m

⁵³Translator's note: This is the transliteration of a Russian expression which originates from a poem, and means a life that is incredibly busy.

wide going down to the water. In such conditions it is necessary not just to have a rescue boat (and maybe not only one, given the size of a factory ship) but also to keep it constantly ready. But again, this is only if the life of people is judged to be important.

I was a witness to one additional, no less tragic moment. When you work with such giants as whales, you must be very careful. One seaman on the catcher that came to the factory ship to deliver whales was forgetful of this and did not see that his leg was inside a loop of steel cable, which was attaching a whale to the catcher. A wave pushed the whale away from the vessel, the loop rushed out and ... in a couple of minutes this seaman was lifted onto the factory ship deck in the “basket” (a special device for transporting people). The seaman with cries and tears was swinging upside down by his leg (that had been cut under the knee as if by a knife).

During the same voyage, after the end of the season and while passing through tropical waters, a seaman who was sleeping very deeply close to the hole in the stern (which was used to pass harpoons onto the catchers) fell overboard through it. This time everything ended happily: the sea was warm, and the seaman was a good swimmer; the factory ship turned

and with lights on went back, followed its own gigantic trail and soon found the seaman. People shook hands with him and congratulated him as if he had been born a second time.

In the next season, 1962–63, one of the processing people fell into the blubber boiler with its super-heated steam of up to 150°C. He was pulled out, but by all medical standards there was no chance for him to survive, because so much of his skin was burned. The chief doctor in the fleet made the decision (there was no alternative) to put his entire body into a bath full of spermaceti.⁵⁴ I do not know the details, but the man survived.

Of course, you cannot call a job aboard a whaling fleet a “gift,” especially in terms of health; but there is no need to dramatize it. It is no harder and is certainly less boring than work on small fishing vessels that fish almost year-round from the Arctic to the Antarctic. And in terms of trauma and different dangers, including lethal ones, there are no fewer of them hiding in the modern city day and night, on the streets and in your own apartment.

When *Sovetskaya Rossia* arrived in the Antarctic, the total number of whale catchers (just the Soviet ones) in the Antarctic fleets was about 70. These powerful diesel-electric catchers were specially built at the shipyard in Nikolaevsk.

Antarctic waters reminded one of a broad main road with four lanes of traffic, but completely unorganized. During only the 1961–62 season the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet met with catchers (“dolphins”)⁵⁵ from *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* four times, with the factory ship “*Slava*” and her catchers five times, and eight (!) times with the ubiquitous *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet. Overall there were seventeen meetings with compatriot whalers in just one season in the waters of the distant Antarctic. During the same period there were only four

⁵⁴Editors' note: A special oil-like substance found in the heads of sperm whales.

⁵⁵Translator's note: For some reason that isn't clear here, the catchers from the *Yuri Dolgorukiy* were known as “dolphins.”

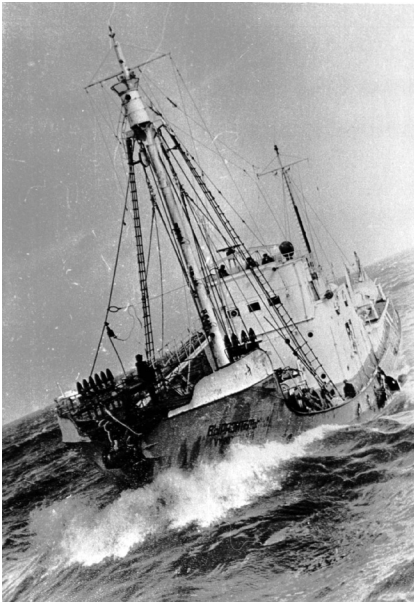


Plate 13.—A catcher in the Antarctic. This kind of weather is typical. Photo: A. Berzin.

meetings with all the foreign whaling fleets. In these waters of the Southern Ocean whole caravans of supply ships went from Odessa, Kaliningrad, and Vladivostok to the south and back. It is of course good, but surprising, that there were no collisions between ships or with icebergs, or other kinds of accidents in the foggy and windy Antarctic waters.

During its first season⁵⁶, the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet did not linger anywhere but transited the eastern part of the Indian Ocean sector of the Antarctic straight to the area of concentration of the eastern and western Australian populations of humpback whales. Exceeding its high-target plan, it continued whaling for humpbacks, and during the season killed an incredible number of whales—7,500! The *Slava* fleet also did not spend its time doing nothing, and during the same season killed 5,500 humpback whales (the fleet simply had less power). For almost the entire season both fleets did not leave particular places, sometimes remaining for a long time. Thus, the two fleets, under the

⁵⁶Editors' note: The Antarctic whaling season of 1959–60.



Plate 14.—The *Sovetskaya Rossia* whaling fleet en route to the Antarctic. Photo: A. Berzin.

united command of Captain-Director A. Solyanik, killed in one season about 13,000 (!) humpback whales.⁵⁷

There were so many whales that the helicopter pilots joked that if they had to make an emergency landing they could maybe land on the backs of humpback whales that were close to each other. It was the case; but it did not continue this way for very long.

The *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* fleet in its first season (1960) also did not stop anywhere en route and went to the more eastern areas of distribution of the eastern Australian and New Zealand population of humpback whales. All season the fleet was working on whales from these two populations. The number of whales killed during the season was not so impressive for such a big fleet—fewer than 3,500.⁵⁸ Part of the reason for this was probably the absence of experience and not knowing the area, because during the same season the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet killed more than 5,500 humpback whales and *Slava* killed more than 4,000.

⁵⁷Editors' note: It is worth emphasizing that in this and the following season (1960–61) these two fleets killed almost 25,000 humpback whales, resulting in a crash of the population and the closure of shore whaling stations in both Australia and New Zealand.

⁵⁸Editors' note: Berzin's figures are somewhat inaccurate. In the 1960–61 season *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* killed 2,910 humpbacks, *Slava* 4,046, and *Sovetskaya Ukraina* 5,573 (Clapham et al., in review).

Based on rather vague data which spoke of large humpback whale concentrations, and of the successful fulfillment of target plans for whales by the Soviet fleets, *Sovetskaya Rossiya* went for its first season into the areas of concentration of the western Australian population. It did not find concentrations of humpback whales, as they had expected, and killed only 40 whales of this species. The *Slava* and *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* fleets later went through these areas with about the same result (probably they did not believe that this population had been so successfully devastated at their own hands). The search of these areas by two catchers also did not give positive results. So by 1961, this was already the situation with the western Australian population of humpback whales.

The *Sovetskaya Rossiya* could get about 850 humpback whales only after they went through the Ross Sea and the Balleny and Scott Islands. The total number of [humpback] whales killed during the first season was about 1,700; this total represented a quarter to a half of what each of the Soviet fleets took in the previous years. The reason for it was not inexperience because exactly the same situation occurred with the humpback whale catch in other Soviet fleets. During this season (1961–62), *Sovetskaya Ukraina* and *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* caught a little more than a thousand whales each, and *Slava* killed a little more than 1,600 humpback whales. In

the five-year period from 1957–58 to 1961–62 the Soviet fleets killed over 37,000(!) humpback whales in the waters of the eastern part of the Indian Ocean and in the Pacific Ocean sectors of the Antarctic.

I do not want to bore the reader with these sad numbers, but the picture of the disastrous depletion of humpback whales is just staggering, and 4–6 years later the catch of these whales would fall to zero. The statistics speaks for themselves, and comments add nothing.

In this case there were no whales and everything was clear, but if the leaders of the whaling industry had looked at the analysis of biological data of the whales by scientific groups (or had asked the scientists), they would have known about this crisis a long time before it happened. For example, what did the humpback whales killed by the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet in 1961–62 look like (I was involved in the biological analysis)? In January, the fleet caught 370 humpbacks; of these, 40 whales were 8 m in length or smaller.⁵⁹ From the 5th to the 13th of January about 200 humpbacks were killed; of these, 80 whales were about 8 m long. In some days in January, whales with a body length of about 8 m made up to 30% of the catch. All of them were illegal to hunt—calves.

One of the most zealous captains, an executor of the terrible plan, reported to his base that they killed 17 “rucavichek”⁶⁰ (the code name for humpback whale calves)! What a problem: such a tiny thing set against the scale of the building of developed socialism, to kill helpless babies!

It is necessary to add that the portion of the catch involving mature females was small, but 80% consisted of the reproductive part of the population (those that were pregnant or lactating).

I will quote a part of my report after the 1961–62 season on the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet:

⁵⁹Editors’ note: This length (8 m) is on average that of a humpback in its second year of life. Anything smaller was likely a first-year calf, as Berzin suggests.

⁶⁰Translator’s note: The meaning of this word is “small-sized gloves.”



Plate 15.—A humpback whale prior to flensing on the deck of the factory ship *Vladivostok*, 1966 (after the ban on humpback whale catches). Waters of the eastern Aleutian Islands. Photo: A. Berzin.

“In five years of intensive whaling by first one, then two, three and finally four fleets, on the three groups of humpback whales, western Australian, eastern Australian and New Zealand, these groups were so reduced in abundance that we can now say that they are completely destroyed!”

Hardly anyone among the whalers, from those who killed the whales to those who processed them, knew that international whaling regulations permitted humpback whales to be hunted for only four(!) days a year, beginning on January 20th. Soviet whalers, under the control of the “valiant” national inspection scheme, killed these whales during the entire season: from the first to the last day, as soon as they found them. You do not want to believe in this truth. But there are documents that bear witness to this: in the first season (1961–62), the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet killed 1,570 humpback whales, and of these more than 1,540 were killed outside the legal time period (20th–24th January).

Since 1956 the hunting of humpback whales had been banned. But banned

for whom? Again, not Soviet whalers; for them “the law was not written.”⁶¹ In two seasons (1965–66 and 1966–67), the Soviet fleets caught the following: *Sovetskaya Rossiya*—460, *Yuriy Dolgorukiy*—14,000, and *Sovetskaya Ukraina* even more—18,000 humpback whales.⁶² How many were reported to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics? None! We did not kill them and that’s that . . . we are good.

As time went on, this deception of international science and the public was conducted more and more smugly: 7,500 killed and 450 reported, more than 4,000 killed and fewer than 100 reported. In

⁶¹Translator’s note: This expression means that some people act as if the law never existed.

⁶²Editors’ note: These figures given in this section are substantially in error, and it is not clear whether Berzin was confused or whether the person typing the manuscript (who may not have been Berzin) made mistakes; an unpublished figure produced by Berzin gives combined catch totals that appear to be correct (and which are very different from what he says here). The largest single-season total for any one Soviet factory ship was 7,520 humpbacks by *Sovetskaya Ukraina* in 1959–60. The biggest combined humpback catch by all Soviet fleets in one year was 12,945, also in 1959–60 (Clapham et al., In review).

5 years of whaling, 37,000 humpback whales were killed, but only 1,800 of these whales were reported to Bureau of International Whaling Statistics, that is one twentieth(!) of the reality.

The crime against Nature is obvious (and I will be talking more about this later); and, as in any crime, the guilty people try to hide it.

Scientists from Australia (or New Zealand, I do not remember exactly but it doesn't matter)⁶³ were writing at this time that some unknown biological catastrophe happened to the humpback whales in those populations. Trustful and naïve people ... Although where did normal people think all these whales went?!⁶⁴

One day during the illegal hunt for humpback whales by the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet (this was also when I was working there), a few humpback whales were floating off the stern of the factory ship, attached by steel cables and "waiting" to be lifted onto the processing deck. Suddenly a foreign ship appeared on the horizon (that was easy to determine, knowing the movements and positions of our own catchers) and headed towards the factory ship. The fleet administration made a fast—and as it turned out, a wrong—decision to quickly lift these whales onto the deck, which is what the people began to do. By the time a Norwegian catcher (as it was later discovered) approached the ship closely, each lifted whale was "greeting" the guests by waving long white pectoral fins that could not be confused with anything else. Here they made a decision befitting petty criminals: open the tops of the blubber boilers! And

⁶³Editors' note: The principal scientist raising this issue was the Australian Graeme Chittleborough (see Chittleborough, R. G. 1965. Dynamics of two populations of the humpback whale, *Megaptera novaeangliae* (Borowski). Aust. J. Mar. Freshw. Res. 16:33–128).

⁶⁴Editors' note: Actually, Chittleborough was hardly naïve. In his 1965 paper he explicitly states that unreported catches were probably occurring, and it is apparent that he had suspicions about who was responsible; although he never named the country, he cited falsified data on two Discovery tag returns that others knew had been submitted by the U.S.S.R.. However, even Chittleborough greatly underestimated the scale of the illegal catches.

swirling steam covered the deck and the whales. Did it help? Hardly.

This decision prompted an incredible, almost genius-like technical development in case the situation should recur in the future: the fleet leaders decided to build steam pipes on the sides and superstructures next to any sign that could be used to recognize a fleet (for example: the sign "Vladivostok" in the Antarctic meant that [the ship] could be only *Sovetskaya Rossiya*).⁶⁵ If you were caught, turn on the steam in the pipes and be afraid of nothing because no one could prove anything. This is not a new trick: criminals of all times have used masks while carrying out their crimes.

The Soviet whalers' crime against Nature in the Antarctic was not limited to the elimination of humpback whales.

For many generations of whalers, blue whales were always a favorite object of the hunt, so blue whale abundance in the Antarctic was already significantly depleted before the appearance of the Soviet whalers. In the catch by *Slava* in one year there were about 300 blue whales;⁶⁶ other fleets killed far fewer. Since 1965 there was a ban on the killing of blue whales because of the rapid decrease in their abundance; but this ban did not exist for the Soviet whalers, nor did other bans and limitations. This was the criminality of Soviet whaling.

This was written in the scientific reports of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet:

"The resources of true blue whales are severely damaged, and the amount of these whales in the catch was calculated as a few individuals. Continuing violations of the ban would lead to the complete elimination of this species of baleen whale in the Southern Hemisphere." (Report of 1969–70).

⁶⁵Translator's note: i.e. the port of registry sign on the stern (Vladivostok) would identify the vessel because *Sovetskaya Rossiya* was the only such vessel from this port working in the Arctic.

⁶⁶Editors' note: In this and the following discussion it is necessary to distinguish true blue whales, *Balaenoptera musculus*, from pygmy blue whales, *B. m. brevicauda*. Most of the illegal Soviet catch consisted of the latter.

"The rarity of sightings of blue whales show that this species is in danger of extinction. Despite the decision by the IWC to completely ban the hunting of blue whales, our whalers every year kill almost all blue whales encountered. In view of very low abundance of blue whales in the world's ocean, and if reported violations are not stopped, it will be a straightforward explanation for the extinction of the largest animal on the planet and thus will be one of the greatest crimes of mankind." (Report for 1970–71).

On the conscience of Soviet whalers lies the extinction in the Southern Hemisphere of the closest relative of [true] blue whales—the pygmy blue whale.⁶⁷

The catch of pygmy blue whales began in 1962–64, by all of the Soviet fleets simultaneously. This hunt did not continue for long; in the beginning it increased rapidly and subsequently just as rapidly declined to zero. The largest number of these whales (more than 1,800) in 1964–65 were killed by the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet. Other Soviet whaling fleets during the season killed far fewer of these whales: *Slava*—from 250 to 800 whales, *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Yuriy Dolgorukiy*—up to 500 whales each. From 1969–71 on, the Soviet fleets did not catch pygmy blue whales—there were no whales left.

Here is a quotation from the scientific report of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* in 1965–66: "Groups of pygmy blue whales in the Great Australian Bight are almost completely eliminated." I do not want to believe it myself, but not a single pygmy blue whale was reported to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics.⁶⁸

"Humpback, right and blue whales could quite reasonably be added to the species in danger of extinction.

⁶⁷Editors' note: Pygmy blue whales, while depleted today, are not extinct.

⁶⁸Editors' note: The total catch of pygmy blue whales by the U.S.S.R. was 8,439, of which ten were reported.

Neither limitations nor bans could help save them.” (Scientific report from *Sovetskaya Rossiya* from 1973–74).

One might obtain the impression that these barbaric methods of work were commonplace only on the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet. Unfortunately, it was not the case. Here is a quotation from the report of the scientific group on *Slava* in 1964–65:

“It is necessary to mention that the title [see below] does not take into account modern whaling methods. *Limitless destruction by the whaling industry* [author’s emphasis] rules out any possibility of an abundance forecast.”

The title of the study is “Biological basis for a rational whaling industry”, and it was the same for all scientific groups on the whaling fleets; this appears reasonable and beautiful in itself, but in this particular case the real whaling situation made a mockery of the title.

Until 1962, Soviet whalers paid no attention to sei whales: fast swimmers, with the smallest amount of blubber of

the large whales. This continued until the time when the resources of humpbacks and other economically valuable species of whales were severely depleted in the high latitudes of the Antarctic. In the 1962–63 season the leaders of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet, understanding that there was no reason to rush in the Antarctic, begin catching sei whales to the west of Australia, in the area around Amsterdam and Saint Paul islands, north of 40°S in the central part of the Indian Ocean. They worked during Oct–Nov in waters where the killing of baleen whales was completely prohibited by international rules, but this prohibition and all others were deliberately and systematically violated by Soviet whalers.

The area was very good for whaling: the large and untouched aggregations of baleen whales, and the nice stable weather (something you cannot say about the Antarctic) helped to rapidly increase the sei whale catch.

Beginning in 1963, the number of sei whales killed by Soviet whalers gradually increased, and in particular in the catch of *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. Soon this species became the principal component of the catch. Thus, while in 1964 only 670 sei whales were caught, in 1965 this number was twice as large, and in 1966

almost 2,500 whales were killed. Whaling on this species reached its peak in 1967, when in only two months almost 3,500 sei whales were killed in a very limited area.

Scientists from the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* whaling fleet were continually warning that if whaling continued with the same intensity, in no more than 5 years sei whales in the Indian Ocean would be as rare as humpback, blue, and right whales. The scientists’ opinion was that:

“Whaling proceeds towards the full elimination of this species. And all this happens in the areas where baleen whale hunting is completely prohibited by the rules of the International Whaling Convention.” (Scientific report of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet for 1970–71).

This forecast was too optimistic: the next season, from the 15th of November through the 2nd of December the fleet went through the whole central region from the western coast of Australia to the shores of southern Africa, and in 18 days of whaling killed only 127 sei whales.

In the report from the following season we can read:

“Numerous reminders of scientists working on the fleet regarding excessive whaling pressure on the sei whale population inhabiting the central part of the Indian Ocean, as well as all suggestions concerning the decrease of the catch in this area, were as usual ignored. Unlimited long-term whaling has had a negative influence on the condition of the sei whale population, and the extirpation of the ‘Amsterdam’ group of sei whales is self-evident.” (Scientific report from *Sovetskaya Rossiya* for 1971–72).

In 8 years of whaling (1963–71) by the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet in the central part of the Indian Ocean, about 13,000 sei whales were killed.

It is more or less possible to say that recruitment was absent within this



Plate 16.—The officers’ mess on the factory ship *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. Photo: A. Berzin.

population during this period, because pregnant and lactating females were hunted without limitation; so part of the recruitment was killed before it was born and the other part [calves] died because the mothers feeding them were killed also.

Scouting vessels and catchers were dispatched in different directions and searched over a huge area of the central part of the Indian Ocean, from Australia to Africa, but they did not find any aggregations of sei whales.

Thus, the sei whale catches in the central part of the Indian Ocean led to the elimination of this species in the area. In any case, in the 1970's nobody was catching these whales because there were already none left.

The short history of destructive catches of sei whales in the central part of the Indian Ocean is typical of the Soviet whaling enterprise, and is a prime example of the ruinous influence of overexploitation that came with large violations of the rules of the International Whaling Convention.

Whalers, and perhaps all seaman, give very precise nicknames. Thus, western whalers likened sei whales to fast horses, and Soviet whalers called them "dogs"; the area where they were (in the past) in the central part of the Indian Ocean had the name "dog's kennel." You cannot create anything better.

Right whales were unanimously called "locomotives"; I would even say it was a kind name, because of their large size, thick body shape, and completely black color. This charitable name did not protect these whales from the Soviet harpoons, and right whales—the hunting of which had been banned everywhere since 1946—were caught wherever they were found. But until 1962 the number of right whales killed was not significant. Thus, the *Slava* fleet in the 1958–59 season killed three right whales, and two were killed by *Yuriy Dolgorukiy*. As usual, the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet was "ahead" of everyone else in the number of right whales killed; in the first season they took 80. Even though these were intentional and serious violations of the international whaling rules, they were only "flowers," as we say in Russia;

the "berries"⁶⁹ were to follow and they appeared very soon. In 1962 one of the most disgusting crimes of the Soviet whalers was perpetrated, performed by the best whaler of our country: the Captain-Director of the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet, A. Solyanik. He had information on the population of right whales in the Atlantic Ocean off the Argentinian coast. Without hesitation he led his fleet into these waters and found there a right whale population untouched by whaling. The amount of raw whale products and blubber⁷⁰ he obtained in a short time was double that of that year's plan target. They did not take meat—there was no time for it! The total number of right whales caught was 1,314 animals.

The *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* whaling fleets that came to the area at the end of the season did not find right whales. I will come back to this in the next section.

Soviet fleets also caught large numbers of fin whales. At one time it was the most numerous whale. By the time the "army" of Soviet whalers arrived, the fin whale resources were not in good condition.⁷¹ During the 1961–62 season the maximum number of fin whales were killed: almost 4,000. But already the following year the number of whales caught decreased to 2,800. In the following seasons the catch continued to diminish: 2,100, 1,500, and so on. Beginning in 1975–76 and during the following years fin whales were not present in the catch at all.

Here is a quotation from a scientific report:

"Analyzing the fin whale catch by the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet southeast of the Herd Island, we often noticed the depleted nature of the population created by the unlimited

⁶⁹Translator's note: This expression means that it is just a beginning (flowers) and the things that follow (berries) will be much worse.

⁷⁰Translator's note: The word given here means blubber to be used as a food product for human consumption.

⁷¹Editors' note: The total 20th century fin whale catch in the Southern Hemisphere was 720,000 animals, by far the largest total for any species. This included a quarter of a million fin whales taken in a single decade, the 1950's.

whaling. A similar situation with fin whales was the case in other areas worked by the fleet. Data from the examination of fin whales, and of the results of our fleet's work (in the Pacific sector of the Antarctic) represent direct evidence that commercial resources of fin whales in this area have been practically eliminated. Once again we highlight the necessity of immediate action in regulating exploitation of the fin whale."⁷²

In our arguments with industry people about assessments of the whaling situation, as a rule they would say: "Do Japanese whalers behave any better?" I think, first of all, one should start with oneself. It is difficult to speak for others, and it is not appropriate to refer to others just to cover up your own sins.

Second—and this is very important—it is obvious to everybody that, for the Japanese, seafood products, including whales, are more than one's daily bread (actually, they do not eat bread and so this Russian proverb⁷³ is not appropriate here). It is why the Japanese were always arguing about the whaling quota only in relation to "edible" baleen whales. And we, without a twinge of conscience, allowed the wasteful decay of these whales during all periods of Soviet whaling.

Here we can read in documents:

"Despite the critical need, meat from half of the fin whales killed was decayed." (Scientific report of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet from 1972–73).

In the Japanese whaling operation, if the processing staff could not complete the processing of whales, other people whose work could be delayed came onto the processing deck to help. With special baskets secured over their shoulders with a belt, these people cut with

⁷²Translator's note: The source of this quotation is not given.

⁷³Translator's note: The proverb referred to involves "daily bread" in the sense of the expression from the Pater Noster.



Plate 17.—Sawing up a whale head on the factory ship *Aleut*, 1957. Photo: A. Berzin.

large knives and very precisely cleaned all the remains of meat from a baleen whale's bones.

The product yield for the Japanese was up to 90%, but for us it was only up to 30%. And this is not all: the Japanese were making 60 to 80 different types of products from the whale meat, while in the best case we made only about 8 to 10 types.

I write this to say that even if the Japanese conducted some illegal whaling (although I have no information of this kind), it is at least understandable.⁷⁴ I should not say that as a scientist, but it is possible to understand the difference between a motivated and unmotivated crime.

Now it is time to talk about the sperm whale catches by the Soviet fleets in the Antarctic. Until the 1960's, the *Slava* fleet killed a very small number of these whales: up to 130–150 whales. In the 1970's, with the arrival of the other

fleets the sperm whale catch increased to 1,600–1,800 whales. During the same period, other fleets killed many more sperm whales. The record for sperm whale catches belongs to the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet: 4,000–5,600 sperm whales during one season.⁷⁵

I already noted previously that very often the catch numbers tell us very little. The sperm whale catch by the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet is a sad and instructive example. The lines from this fleet's report for the 1972–73 season sound like an alarm bell. In that season, a large number of lactating females were killed. In April 1973 the fleet was working on female sperm whales. On some days the percentage of lactating females in the catch reached 45%. At the same time it is important to note that weather and whaling conditions resulted in a decrease in the number of these malicious violations. A high percentage of lactating females in the catch reflects destructive whaling and complete irresponsibility on the part of the captains and the harpooners aboard the catchers (in the report, there fol-

lows a list of vessel numbers for the six catchers with the largest number of violations, provided by the author). Despite this, two of these catchers obtained "prizewinner" status from the results of the season. The catch of a hundred or more sperm whales a day, with up to 30–32% being lactating females, must be recognized as completely inexpedient. Include in the catch were animals with a body length of <5 m, although selecting larger animals was possible. When resting females were available in the whaling areas, the killing of lactating females could not be explained by commercial necessity. We personally witnessed catchers hunting lactating females with calves next to them, and we saw calves following their dead mothers and swimming onto the factory ship slipway. Killing lactating females after the plan target had already been met should be considered a direct crime.

At a closed scientific meeting at TINRO, the authors of the report compared whaling in the Antarctic to the ruthless extermination of people in the Osvenzim [Poland] fascist concentration camp. As with many others, this alarm bell was not heard by the people to whom it was addressed. It did not penetrate the thick walls of the various special archives because nobody needed to hear these disturbing alarms; there was a need only for new work accomplishments, and achievements in the creation of something, as the moment required.

In 1966 the *Slava* fleet finished whaling in the Antarctic and was relocated to the North Pacific to hunt whales, with a new base in Vladivostok. In 1975, *Yuriy Dolgorukiy* ended its whaling career. The *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleets continued to work in Antarctic waters, on the diminishing whale resources.

Beginning in the 1972 season minke whales became a regular target of whaling, and from 1977 on it was the only baleen whale species killed by Soviet fleets in Antarctic waters. In terms of the sperm whale catch we can say that the condition of this resource was decreasing due to whaling in warm waters:

⁷⁴Editors' note: We now know that Japan was falsifying catch data from its coastal sperm and Bryde's whale fishery as recently as 1987. The extent of any additional violations are not currently known, although there is no indication that Japan's illegal whaling was on anywhere near the scale of that practiced by the Soviets.

⁷⁵Translator's note: It is not clear why these ranges are given, here and elsewhere.



Plate 18.—Balleny Islands, Antarctic: the whaling area. Photo: A. Berzin.



Figure 5.—Alexei Nikolaevich Solyanik, the General Captain-Director of the Antarctic whaling fleets *Slava* and *Sovetskaya Ukraina*. Photo: A. Berzin.

“There is a major impact of whaling also on sperm whales. It is not the first year when biologists from the scientific groups have provided data showing a constant decrease in the mean age of sperm whale populations. The sperm whale’s breeding areas have become the areas of its elimination.” (Scientific report of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet for 1973–74).

The 1979–80 season was the end of the whaling life for the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet. I was told that fleet leaders organized a goodbye banquet for the whole crew. Huge and usually rough men were hugging and crying (and I understand them, I would do the same). What was the reason? “We still may be seamen but we will never again be whalers . . .” You could say: there is no need of such whalers! It is possible to agree with this and also possible to argue. And it is absolutely obvious: this catastrophic situation with whales in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere would not have happened if not for this destructive whaling that was organized and inspired by the party leaders of the country of developed totalitarian socialism. Although to be honest, some

people were saying that the system we had was not this at all.⁷⁶

The General Captain-Director

Soviet whaling is inextricably connected with the name of A. Solyanik⁷⁷—member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Hero of Socialistic Work, the Deputy of the Supreme Committee U.S.S.R. (Fig. 5). One could say that Solyanik represents a whole era in Soviet whaling. Even more than this, he is a reflection of the system of this period and thus deserves to have a section to himself.

Even now I can recall the New Year’s edition of the newspaper “Vechernyaya Moskva” (“Evening Moscow”) in which A. Solyanik was named together with other great people of the country as “legendary.” Actually, big criminals could be also termed “legendary” and in this (and only this) did he deserve the title. He was an exceptional and even eminent person.

⁷⁶Translator’s note: The wording here is poor and difficult to translate precisely into English; the meaning is that, despite the party leaders’ stated goal of developing a socialist state, in the end it wasn’t clear what kind of system actually existed in reality.

⁷⁷Translator’s note: His full name was Alexei Nikolaevich Solyanik.

To a wide circle of people, even those who knew whaling pretty well, Solyanik was known as the permanent Captain-Director of the *Slava* fleet and later of *Sovetskaya Ukraina*, as the pioneering explorer of new whaling areas in the harsh and unknown waters of the Antarctic. Very few people know that A. Dudnik (already known to you as the first Captain-Director of the *Aleut* fleet) prepared and led the first season of the *Slava* fleet. He succeeded in everything but one thing—to take on in the position of a mate a person whom one could trust completely during the work. By order of the “eternal”⁷⁸ Minister of Fisheries Resources for the U.S.S.R., A. Solyanik was assigned to this position. Dudnik knew Solyanik from work in the Far East; he knew his business qualities and also knew his very negative human characteristics that were manifest under the protection of the all-powerful Minister. We will talk more of these negative qualities later.

⁷⁸Translator’s note: “Eternal” here means that the Minister held this position for a very long time.

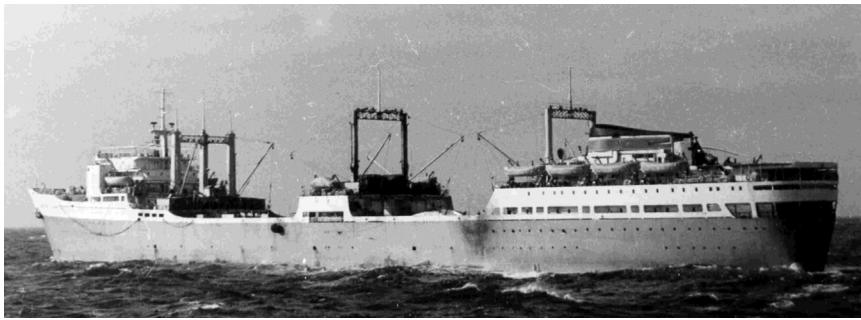


Plate 19.—Factory ship *Sovetskaya Ukraina*. Year and photographer unknown.

Dudnik felt that he was up against a brick wall and was thinking that it was not possible to undertake this difficult expedition with a person whom he could not trust; not wanting to lose his dignity, he resigned.

In her first season, the *Slava* fleet sailed under the command of a famous captain of the ice-breaking fleet, a polar seaman and participant in many arctic expeditions named V. Voronin (but I don't think he knew Solyanik). Solyanik immediately obtained the higher position: in the first season he already sailed not as the mate but as vice-captain for whaling. As should be expected, Voronin did not go in the second season; Solyanik pursued his goal without regard for anything, and—simply, as we would say—he “ate” the famous and steadfast man. The next season and in all those that followed, the *Slava* fleet was under the command of A. Solyanik. It was the beginning of the “Solyanik era” as has been noted by V. Ivanitskiy.⁷⁹ The name of V. Voronin was forever erased from the history of the *Slava* fleet.

In 1959 Solyanik became the Captain-Director of the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet and took control of his old alma mater—the *Slava* fleet. He awarded himself (according to the whalers) the rank of General Captain-Director.

Three decades of the new Soviet system had already produced its results: the specialists of the future administrative system were growing like mushrooms, and A. Solyanik was the first

but already the brightest representative of this cadre.

In 1961, when four Soviet whaling fleets were already working in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere, Solyanik (I am sure that this happened with his advice) was made the Chairman of the Whaling Committee of all Soviet Antarctic whaling fleets. Probably the idea was that he, as an experienced “sea wolf” and whaler, would use his knowledge to distribute the fleets in the vast space of the Southern Hemisphere and thus improve the success of Soviet whaling fleets in the Antarctic. Solyanik had developed an overblown life philosophy, “one’s shirt is closer to the body”⁸⁰, even if this goal was attained by smugly defrauding one’s colleagues. Being the head of the whaling committee he knew everything about the work of the other fleets: who was where and how the catches were going. Solyanik thus had a broad overview, and using this perspective he chose the best whaling areas for his own fleet and tried to keep other fleets out of these regions; and if he allowed them in at all this would happen only after he had worked there himself. He did not balk at direct lies, giving false positions of the fleet, and in the case of good catches he distorted the results of the work. Sometimes misinformed and confused leaders of other fleets were leaving good areas, and after a long passage came to empty areas (that perhaps had already been cleared of whales).

Whalers described one such situation; even if this case did not happen in reality it was certainly in the style of Solyanik. One of the fleets had a successful hunt of protected species of whales, and during this time a helicopter with Norwegian markings appeared over the factory. No one imagined that this could be a trick, and so the leaders of the fleet immediately gathered all the catchers and immediately left the area to avoid trouble. And the author of this “trick”—Solyanik—then brought his own fleet into this area and began a successful illegal hunt.

Solyanik was a person with a great deal of energy and initiative. Foreign technical equipment ordered by him was brought straight to his summer house.⁸¹ By this time the situation was almost unreal. People in Odessa saw that during parades Solyanik marched ahead of the column of working people, and only after him came the city administration.

Solyanik was also a skillful diplomat. One case serves as an example. At this time it was very complicated to come into a foreign port. One day the *Sovetskaya Ukraina* fleet was on the way home after the season, and was passing the Tristan da Cunha islands. One could not even think about going into foreign ports, except for rare visits that were planned. Solyanik had never been on these islands; yet without much hesitation he sent a greeting message to the governor of the islands. What was wrong with that? Immediately he received an invitation from the governor to visit the islands. Solyanik right away notified the high Moscow administration about this invitation and obtained permission to visit. What could the administration do in this case?

Overall, Solyanik did not like people, and perhaps even hated them. He did not care about people in any way. But he had a list of birthdays of all the factory ship crew, and every morning he spoke on the radio and congratulated any person with a birthday. In reality it is a tiny thing to do, but how nice it was to hear this gesture, even for the people who did

⁷⁹Translator’s note: Ivanitskiy, V. 1990. The Brave Captain. Far East Publication Center.

⁸⁰Translator’s note: The meaning of the expression is “My priority is myself.”

⁸¹Translator’s note: In Russian the term for such a summer house is a “dacha.”

not have a birthday that day! Everybody should learn this. It is also true that he had an old “special” notebook, not with whalers’ birthdays but rather with notes about the birthdays of the party leaders and other famous and—more importantly—necessary people.

Solyanik also had a good sense of humor, which is well known as a characteristic of smart people. When there are no whales, times are very boring and even difficult, especially in the Antarctic with its cold, low pressure and unceasing ocean waves. Solyanik perfectly understood this, and did what he could to improve the crew’s mood. One day, for example, he announced on the radio that those who wished to land on an iceberg should get a medical check, dress more warmly and appear on deck. Later, when all those wanting this trip gathered on the deck, Solyanik sent them instead to do dirty work on the ship’s hull, since they were obviously people who were healthy and not busy. And there is more . . . During the first year of work on the *Slava* fleet, there were pigs in the hold and perhaps even cows. Once over the ship’s intercom Solyanik mentioned that the next supply tanker would bring to *Slava* the best breed of sheep. And because these were very sensitive animals he suggested to the officers of the factory ship that they take these sheep into their staterooms. It was said that many people, knowing the character of the captain, prepared to get a roommate.⁸²

I will devote more lines below to the personal characteristics of Solyanik, but before we move to that we should talk about his crime against Nature (it is not possible to call it anything else) in the Southern Ocean, and especially the Antarctic.

It was Solyanik who finished off populations of humpback whales in the Atlantic Ocean.⁸³ When whale resources were severely depleted there he moved the fleet to the eastern portions of the

⁸²Translator’s note: This may have been a joke on Solyanik’s part; it isn’t clear what actually happened. The point here is that, knowing Solyanik, some people apparently thought he was serious and wouldn’t dare disobey an order from him, no matter how ridiculous the order might be.

Indian Ocean, to the shores of Australia, and later to the shores of New Zealand.⁸⁴ They began to kill humpback whales in these areas. In one year the fleet killed up to 4,000 humpback whales.⁸⁵ When *Sovetskaya Ukraina* came to the Antarctic, Solyanik, with two fleets under his command, killed almost 13,000 humpback whales in a single season. It was the beginning of the rapid end of all humpback whale populations in the Antarctic. A few years later, humpback whale catches by these fleets would consist of only tens of whales a season. Is it possible to call this anything but a crime?

Solyanik achieved his success in different ways, some of them criminal, and some of them smart and well thought-out.

It is known that he subscribed to (or was regularly reading) the publication *Norsk Hvalfangst-tidende*.⁸⁶ In an issue of this journal he read that Argentina was going to make an agreement with the Japanese whaling industry to hunt the whales that inhabited the waters off Argentina. Without hesitation, Solyanik led *Sovetskaya Ukraina* into this area in 1962 and of course found there an untouched population of southern right whales. His bandit’s assessment was correct: in a short period the fleet made a two-year target plan for producing blubber. These whales were never seen again off Argentina.⁸⁷

⁸³Editors’ note: It is not clear what Berzin is referring to here, since with the exception of some modest humpback catches between Brazil and South Georgia, there were no known Soviet takes of humpbacks in either the North or South Atlantic. Some 1,400 humpbacks were killed in the Atlantic sector of the Southern Ocean (IWC Area II), but almost all were taken by the factory fleet *Yuri Dolgorukiiy*, which was not under Solyanik’s direct command.

⁸⁴Editors’ note: The word “shores” isn’t accurate here; most of the catches being referred to were in the Antarctic, nowhere near the coast of either country.

⁸⁵Editors’ note: In 1958–59, *Slava* killed 4,039 humpback whales in IWC Area IV south of western Australia.

⁸⁶Translator’s note: This was a whaling-related scientific journal whose English name was *Norwegian Whaling Gazette*.

⁸⁷Editors’ note: In actual fact, despite these large Soviet catches, the right whale population off Argentina has rebounded well and is today growing at up to 7% per annum.

As a result, when the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet visited the area after the end of their season in the Antarctic they found only orphaned calves calling for their mothers, which had been disposed of in Solyanik’s boilers. Truly, it was an example “worthy” of imitation by other “builders of communism”! Very sadly, it became this way . . .

Thus, this unique population of whales that had been protected by humans was practically destroyed in less than one season. There are not enough words to pass judgment on this terrible action by Solyanik. As you would imagine, none of the information about the catch of these whales was ever reported to the IWC.

One should objectively note that the depletion of this population happened with a silent blessing from the highest level. And this is not my imagination. I have in front of me a secret telegram from Solyanik, the address section of which lists the high leaders of the party and the country.⁸⁸ More than ten names were in the address section, but for some reason I remember that the name of the party leader of Ukraine was the last; or perhaps a copy of this telegram was sent to him. In the telegram Solyanik noted the thousands of tons of whale blubber secured; more importantly, he also gave the whale species that had been killed. The lack of reaction to this message cannot be interpreted in any way except as an approval and a blessing.

The General Captain-Director was at the height of his fame, and nothing was suggestive of any problem, when suddenly, like a thunderbolt out of a blue sky, on the 21st of July 1965 an extremely critical article by A. Sakhnin was published in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.⁸⁹

The publication of this article was not a simple matter. There is a story that this

⁸⁸Translator’s note: Berzin also mentions here “the red government paper” which perhaps refers to telegrams that were reserved for government (perhaps high government) officials.

⁸⁹Translator’s note: The name means “Komsomol truth.” This has sometimes been translated into English as “Truth for Youth” (meaning those in their late teens and early twenties), but it was read by everyone.

journalist came to Ishkov, the Minister of Fisheries Resources, and told him of his intent to write a very negative article about Solyanik. There was nothing to do but for the Minister to say that he supported the initiative of the journalist, who introduced himself as a correspondent for the newspaper *Izvestiya*⁹⁰, and that he also blamed Solyanik (who was his favorite).

However, as soon the journalist left the Minister's office the latter immediately called the editors of the newspaper *Izvestiya* and asked them not to print the article about Solyanik. Evidently Sakhnin had foreseen this scenario and gave the article to the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, where it was published with the title "During and after the expedition." This brilliant article, rare for this period in its honesty and directness, hit not in the eyebrow but in the eye⁹¹—and not only Solyanik. It deserves to be published here, with minor editing:

DURING AND AFTER THE EXPEDITION

The United Antarctic Whaling Fleet was returning to Odessa after an eight-month expedition. On the approach to the port harpoon guns on the catchers fired, rockets rose, and a flag man on the helicopter pad waved a helicopter into the air.

The reports from a gunnery salute, fireworks and the celebratory circling of the helicopter over the fleet all continued until the ship came close to the pier. From the dock, filled with people, the sounds of a march were heard. This is how heroes should be greeted. The whalers had earned these greetings by their hard work.

With a group of colleagues I came onboard four hours before the ship berthed and now was witnessing

⁹⁰Translator's note: The name of this well-known newspaper means "The news."

⁹¹Translator's note: The expression means that the hit was very accurate.



Plate 20.—Sawing up a whale head on the factory ship *Aleut*, 1957. Photo: A. Berzin.

the joyful docking. Somebody next to me asked, "And how will they carry the coffin?"

The Antarctic fleet was hunting sperm whales in the tropics. At night, the catchers drifted. At dawn, everything started to move. The seamen on watch climbed to the tops of the masts and sat at this great height, swinging in their "baskets" and looking for whales. At the same time, the captain, navigators and harpooners appeared on the bridge. The surrounding area was divided into sectors and everybody searched his own zone with binoculars.

The fleet searched the ocean for hundreds of miles. Here and there was heard, "A blow on the starboard side!" "A blow on the port beam!" Guns were fired, shooting harpoons with long, sharp grenades attached to endless synthetic lines. The harpoons cut into whales, the grenades exploded inside. And later, people towed the dead whale's body to the ship. They thrust hollow pikes into the body, and powerful pumps filled the whale with air. The car-

casses were inflated⁹² and floated like giant pontoons on the surface. A flag was inserted into the body with the number of the catcher that had killed the whale, as well as a buoy that transmitted a radio signal. Using these signals, the catcher or the factory ship could later relocate the carcass.

On the factory ship it was especially hot, in both a literal and figurative sense. The Antarctic fleet was prepared for work in cold weather and had a difficult time in the tropics. This was well known to the General Captain-Director of the fleet, the old and experienced whaler Solyanik. Here is a strange thing: he did not give a single order to the factory to prepare the ship for tropical conditions when the fleet was staying four months for repair. He never visited the ship during the repair period.

So although the fleet was prepared for working conditions among ice-

⁹²Author's footnote: Whale carcasses did not appear obviously bloated but because of the air pumped into them floated at the surface.

bergs and cold, Solyanik led them to the tropics.

It is not advisable to remain for long periods in the tropical sun, especially for people who are used to the Antarctic; but they had to stay, with long working days.

A carcass stripped of its blubber on the stern deck was moved to the processing part where the whale meat was removed, and the head, vertebrae and ribs were sawed up.

Tons of whale intestines decayed under the tropical sun. Scorching air was saturated by noxious vapors. Clothes were now wet, now crusty and dry, with lines of dried sweat. Solyanik saw all of this.

Seamen from the blubber boiling room were envious of the deck. Up above on the deck it was much easier, with the temperature not rising above 45°C. And below in the blubber room it was up to 65°C. It was much easier on the deck: the air did not become stagnant, and if anyone found it absolutely unbearable he could run to the side and get some fresh air. But below there was nowhere to run, and noxious air had nowhere to go. Solyanik did not care to make special constructions to deal with this.

The engineer/blubber boiling man named Ivan Bachrov was a huge, tall person with great health and an athletic build, and he never paid any attention to inconveniences. If we must do, so we must. But he became angrier and angrier about his powerful body and muscular arms that were getting weak and disobedient. And most important was his head: it was foggy, and his body was swinging from side to side like a drunk. Ivan held out. He was not a softie and could keep going. On the tenth day in the tropics he went for his night watch. He went to his boilers, of which there were three under his supervision.

Immediately after he arrived a loud call sounded and the red light went on. This was the signal from the deck: the first boiler is full, you can begin the boiling.

Ivan made a few turns of a valve and steam super-heated to 150°C rushed into one of boilers with a whistling sound. Inside the boiler a steering drum began to spin. He rushed to the third boiler where the boiling was already complete. Using all his weight, he pushed on the heavy valve lever of the pipe through which a dense mass was supposed to pass into the blubber separator. The fifty-kilo valve was very hard to shift and the mass was not moving. He hardly moved the lever back and forth a few times. He was in a rush because the phone by the second boiler was ringing, and the light was blinking: the boiler is full and you should start the boiling soon. In the first boiler the pressure had risen to the limit, and the steam should immediately be stopped. Ivan was rushing between the heated boilers, blubber-separators and settling tanks, opening and closing valves. Blubber and hot water were dripping from somewhere. The hot stinking air was burning his throat. Blood was pulsing in his temples. It would have been good to have a powerful spurt of chilled air but the air conditioner was hardly working because it was made for the Antarctic.

When he found a free minute Ivan went to have some water. For the whole blubber processing department, where during one watch more than seventy people worked, there was just one standpipe with water, this being also calculated for the Antarctic. There (in the Antarctic) you do not need a lot of water, but here—up to a whole bucket of water for each person.

At the station next to his he heard some noise: it turned out that the

blubber-boiler Vitaliy Bistryukov had fallen and lost consciousness because of heat stroke. The 27-year-old man, previously a diver and good sportsman, could not stand it. He was taken up to the deck via a steep ladder, and was brought round. There were no significant changes in his body; just that his blood pressure was 100 over 55, and his pulse 140 a minute. Everybody was in this condition by the end of the working day, but Vitaliy was in the first hour of his watch.

Solyanik was told about the accident. “Anything can happen,” he replied absent-mindedly. This is where everything began to happen. The seaman Onishko lost consciousness during the watch, and then the next day Skomorokhov, then Pokotilov, Fatikhov, Panchenko . . .

Ivan was holding on, just trying to get through the night watches. He barely lasted until dawn, and went to his room to sleep. He knew that he must eat, that his stomach was empty; but he couldn't eat, and just wanted to drink. It would be nice to have a glass of water diluted by some dry wine. Physicians found that this mixture relieves a thirst very well. Because of this there is a clause in the contract: wine or juice will be regularly provided in the tropics. And all seamen of the Soviet Union get this. Solyanik prohibited the provision of wine, probably because he did not take enough on board. And perhaps because it was better to use wine as an incentive for meeting the target plan. Solyanik announced to the whole fleet that for every five sperm whales caught, there would be five bottles of wine . . . He kept his word. On all the vessels people listened whenever Solyanik gave an order. “Give to this one three bottles, and to this one eight bottles . . .”

Ivan did not get wine. He crawled back to his room. Heat. No air conditioner. An overpowering smell of whale products. He decided to sleep there. Ivan was tossing and turning in the bed for a long time; his eyes hurt, and his eyelids were closing, but he could not fall asleep. It was not possible to sleep in these conditions. He got up, took a mattress and went out on deck.

The tropical sun was rising higher. The processing deck was busy. Wet from whale blubber and blood, people were cutting and sawing, and with hooks were moving pieces cut from a whale's body and putting them into the boilers. Around the superstructures people were walking with mattresses. It was the night shift.

Solyanik saw these people with mattresses. He was told that it was unbearable in the rooms and that it was necessary to leave the tropics. He answered, "You are putting personal interests over the interests of the state."

Ivan was looking for a place in the shade. From time to time, those

who were working and those with mattresses bitterly looked up at the same place. Ivan knew where they were looking. He did not want to look there, but lifted dull eyes to the upper emergency bridge [the flying bridge]. The holy of holies on any ship. Here all the necessary equipment was set up, and in case of bad weather damaging the main bridge, control could be made from the emergency bridge. It is the highest place on the ship; one can see far ocean space, decks, superstructures and the stern. And this bridge could be seen from anywhere on the ship.

Ivan raised his eyes to this bridge, spat and kept going. Solyanik and Svetlana⁹³ were playing, chasing each other and jumping into the swimming pool which had been constructed on the flying bridge (the whalers who witnessed this all said that they were naked). The swimming pool was a surprise for Svetlana; it was made during the trip at Solyanik's order and under his guidance by the crew. I saw this pool, laid out with tile, with inside

⁹³Translator's note: Svetlana was Solyanik's wife.

and outside ladders, with beautifully curved railings. The control panel looked pitiful and unnecessary next to this pool. The whalers were thinking that [in doing this] Solyanik insulted the flying bridge, and the whalers.

It would be wrong to think that Svetlana was a sponger or just a wife living off her husband. No, she was working. In truth, for many years the position that she had did not exist, and Solyanik created it when he took his wife with him on the expedition. People thought that her job could be done in just a minute by the man measuring whales. But Solyanik saw better. To show everybody what an important job Svetlana was doing, he set her salary at that for a chief specialist in the blubber boiling and processing department, which was a leading part of the whole industry. So Svetlana must have deserved it. There must be a reason why foreign newspapers in ports visited by the fleet published her photo on the front page.⁹⁴

Under the wing of his powerful father, Solyanik's son Gennady was working as a leader of the scientific group on the scout ship, and also with his wife. Why not, just like his father? Solyanik gave a good salary to his daughter-in-law with the position of mast lookout (Gennady's wife and Svetlana were laughing a lot about this), so the salary they were collecting for eight months was not bad.

And in the blubber boiling area people were collapsing. The chairman of the trade union decided to check working conditions in the blubber department himself. He worked there one day, and the next went to Solyanik and said: "We must immediately leave the tropics."

⁹⁴Translator's note: Needless to say, this and the previous sentence are sarcastic in nature.



Plate 21.—Alexei Solaynik and his wife Svetlana shopping in a store in Sydney, Australia. Photo: Yuri Mikhalev.

Solyanik asked the fleet crew: “Who is voting to leave the tropics with a lot of whales, where the salary will be large, and go to the Antarctic where it is not known if there are any whales?”

Almost all the catcher crews, who were separated from the life and work of the blubber department, voted to stay. The blubber department and the flour [bonemeal] production line voted to leave. As a visionary leader the captain had foreseen it: “I can do nothing”—he parted his hands—“I follow the decision of the majority, so we are staying.”

With the first supply ship heading home was sent the first group of seamen from the factory ship who could no longer work. At a meeting associated with this event, Solyanik said, “They were whiners, ninnies and slobs. Real seamen do not run to doctors, do not leave and are not afraid of complications.”

A few days later the seaman Chegorskiy climbed up onto a part of the boiler to clean knives. The temperature above was about 70°C. Five minutes later he came down again. Although the air was burning his throat it was possible to inhale but not exhale. Chegorskiy was one of the best people on the ship and one of the strongest. Ovsyannikov should have been doing it, it was his sector, but Chegorskiy did not let him: “Where are you going? You are old. Stay down here, and turn the switch on and off when I tell you.” And he went there again. In a few minutes he fell. People rushed to him and Ovsyannikov yelled: “Careful, careful!”

But all this was for nothing. Chernogorskiy did not lose consciousness, but he died. Nonetheless, the investigation commission created by Solyanik wrote that the temperature above was only 56°C and

not 70°C, but the whalers do not believe it. They showed the place where Chernogorskiy died; it was three meters above the working place of the blubber-processing people, where the temperature on this chilly night was 52°C.

After Chernogorskiy’s death, Solyanik announced: “The blubber factory insists on leaving the tropics. Today we take a course to the Antarctic.” He kept his promise. But a day later, in the same tropical latitudes, they found a few whales. The General Captain-Director gave the order to stay, without explaining anything to the people.

Thirty-nine healthy and strong people that became disabled were sent home with the supply ships. There were not enough people. They asked for new people. On a refrigeration vessel that came to take whale products, seven new people arrived. Among them was the old whaler Avramenko, who had not been previously taken on the expedition because of very obvious signs of high blood pressure. Here at sea the doctor again examined him and found a blood pressure of 210 over 100. “Immediately back home!” he said. “On the same refrigeration ship.” He gave the same conclusion to the personnel manager. And the manager reported it to Solyanik. The General Captain-Director called the doctor: “Why you are sending back people when we do not have enough?”—“He is hypertensive, and hot sun is absolutely prohibited for him. Anything could happen.”—“It is not a problem; we will put him on the easy job—cutting liver.” To cut liver one must be on deck in the tropical sun.

A few days before coming to Odessa, Solyanik gave an order by radio to the captain of one of the catchers: come up on the starboard side to receive an important

package, and by night deliver it to Odessa and then return to the fleet. The catcher came, and from the factory ship was lowered the coffin. The coffin with the body of Avramenko.

[Berzin inserts a comment here:]

In the Moscow newspaper “Express gaseta”⁹⁵ issue number 42–43, the ex-whaler V. Ruban claims that every year in the United Antarctic Fleets Sovetskaya Ukraina and Slava 5–6 people died, and approximately the same number went crazy. When the fleet arrived, and right after docking to the ceremonial sounds of an orchestra and fireworks, these mentally sick people were transferred in a special car from the port to a mental hospital. The article, under the column “Investigations,” was entitled “Crazy people transferred with music.”

A. Sakhnin continues:

It is time to answer the question: how could this happen? Whaling underwent broad development in our country soon after the end of the war. The State paid special attention to this new business. All the needs of whalers were satisfied. Solyanik, as the head of the *Slava* fleet, promoted the fast development of the new industry. Endless publications about whalers in newspapers and magazines began with Solyanik. Books and movies were made and everywhere he had an honored place. And with this came ambition, arrogance and conceit. If someone made a critical remark, he was immediately discharged from the fleet. Fire, dishonor and knock down anybody who dares to say a word against Solyanik, or to author a complaint about him! This “technique,” open and crude suppression of critics, became the main method in Solyanik’s work. To work with him was getting harder. He killed in people any feeling of fairness,

⁹⁵Translator’s note: “Express newspaper.”

honor and self-respect. Solyanik fired hundreds of whalers.⁹⁶

I do not know if it makes a difference, but to all the people who were obedient and worked well, the General Captain-Director was generous: he gave them apartments, dachas, vouchers for a place in a sanatorium. With these rewards he enticed into his fleet the best whalers, and first-order captains and harpooners, especially from Vladivostok where these people lived very poorly. So you can understand these people . . .

How is it possible? What about seas, oceans, unknown countries, the Roaring Forties. The Antarctic, a fascinating whale hunt—who among the young and strong could resist the romance of this? And respect! When the fleet returned the whole of Odessa came out: Primorskiy Square, the endless embankments, all the streets and squares were filled with people. In this way the city was greeting heroes. The popularity of whalers was increasing. That the State paid them high salaries played a major part too.

[Berzin inserts a comment here:]

Here I want to interrupt for a moment this exceptionally timely and tragic story. In reality, [Soviet] life was even worse. I hope the journalist will forgive me, but the 1960's were not like the 1930's, when people were enthusiastic and naively romantic, doing things for the nobility of the idea. By the 1960's, nobody (and probably it was the same way in the rest of the world) would think to build cities in the taiga backwoods.⁹⁷ Seamen in the Antarctic were driven neither by romance, nor by honor, but only by high salaries with a bonus paid in foreign currency. Seamen were not dreaming about unknown countries and far-away cities; but in contrast,

⁹⁶Translator's note: Berzin adds here "(Those who didn't please him)."

everyone was thinking that at the end of the whaling season the ship would stop in one of the ports (for example, Aden or Singapore) which had cheaper prices than other places. This would give an opportunity for the seamen to buy more things in foreign currency, usually clothing. For many of them, this provided an opportunity to sell these things at a profit back at home. This is all very sad but it is the truth. It was not me who created the common and (at first sight) amusing expression: "The more days, the more clothes." Amusing? No. In the favorite port of all Soviet whalers, Singapore, local sellers in the clothes markets yelled: "Come here, Russian speculator!" Is it funny? No, it is sad.

Thus it was our everyday poverty, and the absence for many seamen of elementary domestic comforts, that pushed young and not-so-young people to do everything: a fraud, a bribe, the buying of a fake medical certificate (in Odessa there was even an official tax on these kinds of certificates), all to join the expedition, often with a risk of losing one's health. And everybody was thinking that it is the last time they'd do this, and perhaps he'll be lucky and nothing bad will happen. Sadly, for some this did indeed happen.

Because of all this, the number of people willing to join the fleet was increasing every year.

So, given all this, could Solyanik be seen as not guilty in the deaths of whalers on the fleet? Guilty! A thousand times guilty! He was whaling for a long time in tropical waters (which—by the way—were areas prohibited for whaling), knowing that the fleet was not modified for work in those conditions. The reality was that he put people into

⁹⁷Translator's note: These two idiom-rich sentences, which are easily understood by any Russian, are impossible to meaningfully transliterate into English. They include terms like "nude romantic" (someone who is an impractical purist in their romantic view of the world), and doing things "for hurrah" (purely for the nobility or glory of the task). The reference to the taiga backwoods relates to the early days of the U.S.S.R., when cities were planned in unusual and sometimes impractical locations simply because this satisfied the socialist ideology of high government officials.

inhumane conditions, in conditions that not even trained sportsmen could bear. Solyanik did not give a damn about people; he was sure that he would get away with everything.

I want to get back to the Sakhnin publication.

A. Sakhnin continues:

Anyone who made a critical remark directed at him was called into his office, as whalers say "called on the carpet."⁹⁸ He would look through this individual's personnel file, then blow up at him, warning that he would be fired. And he was not only warning. On the expedition before this last one, he sent a telegram to the personnel department about firing 111 people. Not one of them knew what he was fired for. In response to the remark of the trade-union chairman that people were complaining about his unfair actions, Solyanik said, in the presence of several others, "I was chopping these complainers into pieces like a cabbage head."

The General Captain-Director arranged all his actions in a way that made it hard to implicate him. He was announcing that he was not making any decision by himself, but that everything was decided by the whaling committee or by the entire crew.

I was among the whalers for a month and a half. I support the serious charges above that the whalers level at Solyanik.

First, that he has a complete disregard for people: their dignity, interests, health and life. The most powerful argument for this is the work in the tropics, which was planned in advance but for which the ship was completely unprepared, and

⁹⁸Translator's note: This expression is the same in Russian and in English, and its usage is obviously not confined to that of whalers.

which as a result claimed victims. Second, his boundless ambition, bragging, ostentation, mismanagement, large losses, making products of poor quality, et cetera. Third, his crude suppression and punishment of critics, being the method he used to hide his own blunders and arbitrariness. Fourth, his abuse of his business position; in particular, the unacceptable practice of hiring his family (nepotism), and the illegal use of money.⁹⁹

Protecting his ambition, Solyanik tried to instill in everyone the idea that he was untouchable and that complaining was useless. In order to do this, he employs such fantastic lies that people become confused. As one of the whalers said, “Solyanik opens the boss’s door with his foot.”¹⁰⁰ Solyanik himself agreed with this view. In his first talk with me, he led me to understand that there were people who would not allow others to offend him.

It is the time to call things by their real names.

Whether or not the timing was intentional or coincidental, the article was published in the newspaper during the annual meeting of whalers, which happened in 1965 in Kaliningrad. Yet the day before, before a full audience, Solyanik made a presentation regarding the results of his fleet’s work, and with his characteristic politician’s manner he praised the work of other fleets, fully understanding that everybody knew his own fleet had taken first place.

At the end of the day, Solyanik and his wife left in the light-blue “Volga”¹⁰¹ of the public prosecutor, which was waiting

⁹⁹Translator’s note: Berzin adds here “(of course, State money).”

¹⁰⁰Translator’s note: Meaning that he had such a good relationship with high officials that he could dispense with the courtesies required of others, and that the officials would always support him.

¹⁰¹Translator’s note: The brand of Soviet-made cars commonly used by officials in the U.S.S.R..



Plate 22.—The process of lifting a fin whale onto the deck of the factory ship *Aleut*, 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

for them at the decorated facade of the building. I and the Captain-Director of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* whaling fleet, I. Lyul’ko, were standing watching this scene and thinking about where we could go.

But the next day, half of the people sitting in the meeting audience were not listening to presentations but were instead rustling through copies of the newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda”; and the other half were searching for this publication in the city’s newspaper stands. I rushed to a nearby stand but the seller answered with a smile that all the newspapers had already been sold. Many people were buying a few copies at once. Honest and decent people who were to one extent or another connected with the whaling industry—those that had met Solyanik one way or another—were shaking hands with each other and saying, “Finally!” And the famous whale scientist, Professor S. Klyanenberg, sent congratulations to the scientists from Moscow that were taking part in the Kaliningrad meeting.

The Sakhnin article was stunning, and I would even say frightening in its portrayal of the severe and monstrous

truth concerning what was going on in Soviet whaling. Furthermore, this was all happening in the industry’s ideal, in its avant-garde.

On the other hand, if one thinks a little about this, one could conclude that there is nothing unusual about what was written in this article, and that everything that was said reflected the Soviet reality of those years: complete disregard for people, their dignity, interests and even their life, ostentation, mismanagement, crude suppression and punishment of critics, nepotism, almost fantastical lies et cetera, et cetera.

And despite the fact that for anyone who had ever met Solyanik the facts described in the newspaper were not a big sensation, they were so well put together by the author that things reached a critical mass, as in the modern bomb, and blew up. People looked around as if they had just been awakened from hypnosis. Those who were weaker were protesting the General Captain-Director by throwing ink-pots¹⁰² at his house, while more courageous people wrote to

¹⁰²Translator’s note: Quite literally, some people threw pots of ink at Solyanik’s house.

the higher authorities along the lines of this: what a good thing you did to “lead Solyanik to clean water,”¹⁰³ because people just like Solyanik also existed in the coal industry and in the forest industry . . .

As a result of the article, the mass media in foreign countries spoke of the need for an international discussion about slavery in the U.S.S.R.. I think that this must have been seen by the highest levels of the Soviet authority.

In 1988, the September 23rd edition of “Izvestiya” published two big stories by A. Sakhnin under the title “But it was only the Beginning,” in which he talked about what happened after his article was published in “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, and the subsequent fate of Solyanik, which was very instructive and typical for these times. I quote only small portions of these articles because they contained much political discussion:

Despite the irrefutable facts given in the publication, a real battle began around Solyanik at different levels. The authorities in Odessa rose as one body to defend Solyanik. “Komsomolskaya Pravda” was charged with slander and faking facts, and even with causing “political damage to our home country.” It was a simple and effective argument.

In the decision of the Regional Committee, which was sent to the CC CPSU¹⁰⁴, they said: “The heroic work of the communist collective was portrayed as the slavery of dependent people.”

The battle around Solyanik continued. After the Regional Committee, the article was discussed at the meeting of the State Fisheries Committee that was led by Minister Ishkov. Vice-Minister Ritov

“trampled” the newspaper with special fury. They disproved even those facts that were accepted by the Regional Committee. Along these lines, the meeting’s conclusion was sent to the CC CPSU.

Then there was a meeting of the highest political authorities in the country. At this meeting Brezhnev¹⁰⁵ made a long and confusing speech. He talked about Solyanik’s merits, then his crimes—although he called them mistakes. He said that a real leader “must have a politeness, a simplicity in his communication with people. You [Solyanik] did not always do this correctly . . .”

It was hard to listen to this. What politeness was he talking about? Brezhnev knew very well what crimes Solyanik was guilty of, but Brezhnev continued in the same style and even found an opportunity to bring in his own experience: I myself worked by open-hearth furnaces as a teenager . . .

Everybody saw that, by the irrefutable facts and documentation, Solyanik must be dismissed from the party and prosecuted.

But Brezhnev compromised, as later he would do ten, a hundred times. “Yes,” concluded Brezhnev, “we are making a decision that is not easy. But taking everything into account, and to set an example, the Secretariat of the CC CPSU has decided to relieve Comrade Solyanik from his position. Otherwise people will not understand us.” Solyanik was also removed from the membership of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. It was a different time, and even this decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee was interpreted as a major

victory in the Solyanik affair. But those who lost did not resign. They had their revenge.

After the first Sakhnin article, the chief editor of “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, Voronov, was fired. Later he was sent as a correspondent into East Germany, where they kept him for 14 years. Every time there was an attempt to recommend him for various responsible positions, someone from the highest authorities appeared. And it was only many years later that Voronov was chosen as one of the secretaries of the writers’ union of the U.S.S.R..

Solyanik’s friend, the Minister Ishkov, was quietly sent into retirement (after he obtained a huge—for those times—sum of money that he received from the Mafia). This happened in connection with a prominent scandal involving big swindlers known as the “Ocean Case.” His assistant Ritov, who was the most active and inventive of Solyanik’s protectors, was condemned to execution by shooting, because of the Ocean Case. There was talk that he was “removed”¹⁰⁶ because he knew too much about where the threads of the Ocean Case were leading.

Sakhnin writes:

In its 20th anniversary season, *Sovetskaya Ukraina* was led by a benevolent and calm man named Morgun. Morgun had no less experience than Solyanik. This anniversary expedition was very hard. Someone on shore did everything they could to spoil it. They did not send ships to take whale products. All the refrigerators were full with meat; all the decks were overloaded with bags of whale flour [bone-meal], and there was no space to keep the store of blubber, which on some days was increased by a thousand tons. They did not send fuel, and when there was fuel left for only two days the information came that the supply tanker would

¹⁰³Translator’s note: This expression means to expose the truth about a person or event.

¹⁰⁴Translator’s note: CC CPSU = the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

¹⁰⁵Translator’s note: Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. from 1964 to 1982.

¹⁰⁶Translator’s note: “To remove” here means to kill.

be there in 22 days. This meant that for twenty day they should drift, and for twenty days stop whaling. And then a storm of unprecedented power began as the Antarctic weather blew up. The catchers were covered by ice in the fog. But the enthusiasm of the whalers was so great that they managed to overcome everything. The next season went very successfully too.

In the third season (without Solyanik), a telegram announced that Captain-Director Morgun had fallen into the hold. The depth of the hold was 13 m, so of course he died. The whalers thought (and it wasn't only their opinion) that Morgun had been killed. There was no obvious reason for the Captain-Director to be in this area, and if he happened to be there (perhaps because of someone's call) he would not stumble and fall into the hold. And not only because he was an experienced seaman, but also because the height of the metal railing around the hold was more than a meter. Even if he decided to look down into the hold he could not fall in. I know this hold very well: we were unloading meat blocks from it. Only the most naïve people could believe that the Captain-Director came to this hold, obviously at night, and fell into it. Nevertheless, no one could prove anything (and most likely did not want to). Very often even in a city no one can prove anything, and what can one do in the Antarctic? The shadow of Solyanik lay over the death of Morgun. In those years the term "ordered murder" did not exist in the country. Now, twenty years later, we can say with great confidence that Morgun was a victim of exactly this action, perhaps the first in the country (perhaps not) who was killed for reasons other than politics.

As might be expected, following his failure Solyanik's young wife immediately ran away with a scientist from the fleet, to the great pleasure of almost all scientists, who had had enough of "General Despot."

Alexei Solyanik was assigned to the position of captain of a fishing vessel, which was catching and processing



Plate 23.—The factory ship *Sovetskaya Rossia* just before leaving her home port of Vladivostok. Photo: A. Berzin.

shrimp. Somebody from Odessa said: "From shrimps, Solyanik will make whales." However, this prophesy did not come to pass.

He learned nothing from everything that had happened and acted the same way, violating all the fishing regulations and maritime laws, including international ones, and did not admit his guilt. First, he was caught fishing illegally in foreign territorial waters. There was a trial at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and a large fine. But Solyanik continue to rage like he was crazy. He collided with a foreign vessel and seriously damaged it. And again there was an international trial.

Everything indicated that his state of mind was damaged, writes Sakhnin. There was talk that he became paranoid: he wound barbed wire around his room on the ship so that no one could get in and pay him back for everything he did to people. And this is not surprising.

Later he commanded a cargo ship for a while. This was the end of the sea career of the General Captain-Director, the "legendary" A. Solyanik. Not long before his death he offered to build with his own money (!) a trawler, which would be named "Aleksy Solyanik." This initiative was not supported.

The biography of Solyanik, his development, his almost lightning ascent from a simple whaler to the legendary General Captain-Director, his energetic and often immoral (from a human perspective) activity and, finally, his ignominious end ... they were very typical of those times. The Party created Solyanik and placed him on a pedestal of fame; and, with little thought, the Party cast him down and destroyed him.

International Inspection and Scientific Studies

The international scientific community could clearly see the ineffectiveness of existing controls over whaling through national inspection, which was a part of fleet operations and funded by the whaling itself. Consequently, the necessity of international inspection was proposed for a long time, 10 years before it was actually introduced.

The primary, and probably sole, reason for the annual failure of an international agreement on inspection of the whaling fleets, was the open opposition by leaders of the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Fisheries Resources, who were taking the leading positions at the IWC as representatives of this major whaling nation.

I confirm this. During an annual whaling meeting that took place in



Plate 24.—Flensing a sperm whale head, and collecting spermaceti. Photo: A. Berzin.

Vladivostok in 1964—which, like all similar meetings, was secret—Suchoruchenko, the vice-minister of Soviet Fisheries Resources who at the time was also Vice-Chairman of the IWC, delivered the opening talk. From the podium he declared with a self-satisfied laugh that “your obedient servant” had put such a “bomb” under the Agreement on International Whaling Inspection that it would not “raise its head for a long time.” The “bomb” he referred to, introduced during the discussion of this issue at the IWC, was the condition that Soviet inspectors must be permitted on all foreign vessels and factory ships hunting whales, as well as land stations. What was the reason for such a requirement? Easy! “You are all capitalists so it means that you are all working together and we cannot trust you” (this is almost a direct quotation). He was right: 8 long years were needed before the agreement was signed and the whalers were somehow brought under control—particularly Soviet whalers—and this delay proved very costly for the whales.

There is one distinctive detail of our past reality. After the passage of the international whaling inspection agreement, one of the aspects was that the salary (in British pounds) given to

inspectors was disproportionately high for the period (and even by present standards). Consequently, the Soviet Ministry of Fisheries Resources was mobbed: people sent poison-pen letters, notes, and outright denunciations of others.¹⁰⁷ If previously nothing had been important to anyone, after the passage of the inspection agreement everything came to the surface like dirty foam. Previously honorable people stepped on the heads of their colleagues, drowning them,¹⁰⁸ to get to this cherished goal, and were ready to do anything just to become an adequate candidate for the position of international inspector and to work with a foreign fleet.

Finally it happened, what should have occurred a long time before: an agreement on international whaling inspection was signed and came into effect in the 1972 season. International inspectors began to perform their duties on all the whaling fleets.

¹⁰⁷Translator’s note: Berzin means here that some people reported or fabricated charges against others solely to take them out of the running for the job of whaling inspector in the hope that the accusers would stand a better chance of being appointed to the position.

¹⁰⁸Translator’s note: This is the transliteration of a Russian expression; it is not meant literally.

The very fact of the presence of an international inspector on board, who could at any moment appear on the processing deck and enforce the whaling regulations, introduced considerable discipline into whaling and made the catch data that were presented to the IWC much more reliable. The most important function of international inspection was to enforce the whaling quotas, although according to scientists from the Soviet whaling fleets, some violations of this continued even after 1972.

I absolutely do not want to discredit the inspectors, especially when I cannot prove anything (it was not the task of the scientists on the fleets to oversee others’ work—they had enough of their own), but the functions of many of the international inspectors in the Soviet whaling fleets were reduced solely to viewing whale catch summaries, often fabricated, that were produced by Soviet national inspectors. According to the observations of scientists aboard one of the *Sovetskaya Rossia* whaling fleet’s expeditions, international inspectors came up on the processing deck only four times during the entire period of work, and only for a short time, despite the fact that they were supposed to be on deck all the time when whales were delivered and processed.

As a rule, one of the fleet’s officers was “attached” to the international inspector (unofficially, of course). His responsibilities included organizing well-timed leisure activities for the inspectors: for example, to play someone at chess or checkers, to organize a lunch or dinner with the “captain and officers” of the fleet, or a reception—of course not without “this” [alcohol]. Everything depended on the situation on the processing deck and the “whaling situation.” When the circumstances were especially complicated there, these “curators” were told to simply not allow the inspectors onto the deck for any reason. I think you understand what we are talking about. It is hard for me to make these claims (though I do not see an alternative), but maybe because of this “attentiveness” one can read in the scientific report:

“During this season the fleet for the first time worked under the conditions of international control; however the killing of a large number of lactating females continued. The violations of the whaling regulations reached their peak. On some days the percentage of lactating females reached 45%. Nevertheless, no effective action was taken, either by international inspection, or by the fleet leaders” (Report of the 1972–73 season).

Thus, the controls regarding the species of whales brought to the factory ship, as well as data on their size, sex, physiological condition, and other biological characteristics, were enforced only by biologists from the scientific group aboard the fleet.

Nevertheless, without any doubt, 1972 was the critical moment in Soviet whaling in both Antarctic waters and in the North Pacific.

It is now time to talk about the work of the scientists on the whaling fleets. First of all, a few words about common questions regarding the whale studies.

I am convinced that there are no other mammals as difficult to study in the wild as whales. With various degrees of complexity, any other mammal is possible to find, no matter how rare; and one can watch its life, find its den, its tracks, remains of its food, feces, etc. A scientist studying whales would not find any of these. Herman Melville wrote: “A whale spends only one seventh of its life at the surface.” And nobody knows where he prefers to spend the rest of the time, leaving the scientist a very short time to admire a blow, part of the back and, for some species, the huge blades of the fluke. That is all. However, during the whaling season the scientist could work upon its corpse. We will talk about this later.

Despite the huge scale of Soviet whaling, the development of this science was slow. In particular, the population structure of large whales was very poorly studied.

Until the later years, whaling quotas were set by the IWC on the basis of species, which had fatal consequences

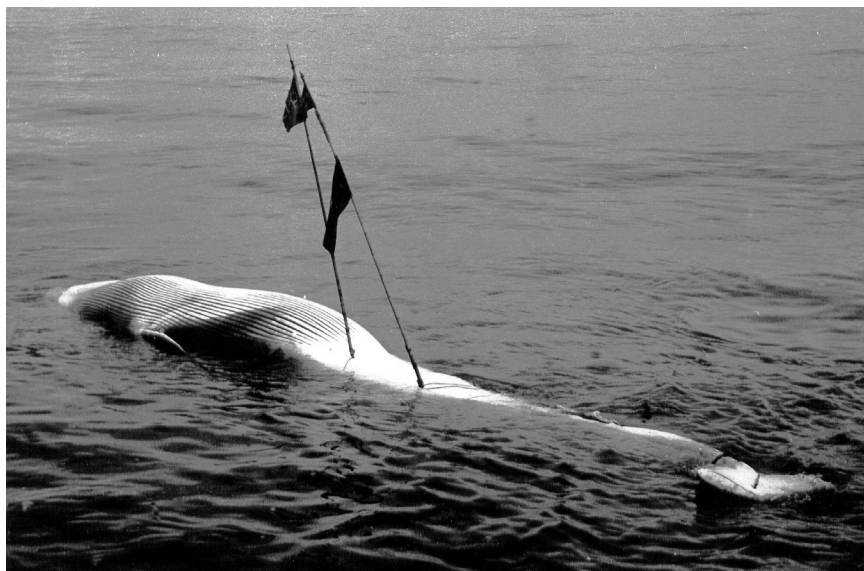


Plate 25.—Fin whale with a catcher's flag, 1959. Photo: A. Berzin.

for whales. Populations should be the basis for determining whaling quotas. The most abundant species could be completely wiped out if whaling occurs without taking population structure into account. Even the most complex computer model would not help if this is not done. Unfortunately, this was exactly what was happening in the whaling field. Consequently, studying the population structure of whales became the principal goal of our studies on the whaling ships.

Different approaches to the study of population structure were investigated, and despite the initial disagreement of many scientists, it finally became accepted that one of the most reliable methods was that with a basis in genetics. This could involve studying morphological variation and searching for heritable characteristics.

We found such morphological characteristics, and based on these morphogenetic studies the population structure of sperm whales in the Pacific and Indian Oceans was clarified. A large part of the study of population structure of minke whales in the Antarctic was conducted by scientists from the Far East institutes.

The IWC was charged with the survival of all exploited whale species,

but was unable to rationally manage this effort. One of the main reasons was the fact that it didn't pay enough attention to population structure in estimating whaling pressure. In most cases this could be explained by simply not knowing the population structure in one or another area, but sometimes it came from the unwillingness of the industrialists to follow scientific recommendations regarding this structure, recommendations that made it difficult to realize the maximum profit with the lowest expenses. For example, in the 1970's scientists from the marine mammal laboratory at TINRO found, in addition to the two previously recognized populations [of sperm whales] (eastern and western), a third—central—population. Scientists from the United States supported this separation, but the IWC—obviously supporting the whalers that were funding (to a large degree) the IWC's work until the latest period of pelagic whaling—established a quota based upon the existence of only two populations of sperm whales. In this case, half of the sperm whale quota (not one-third) was assigned to the western region of the North Pacific, in the areas where Japanese whaling stations worked. In any case, I myself read the letter from the Japanese Minis-

ter of Agriculture to the Soviet Minister of Fisheries Resources, requesting that the latter not support the position on separating three populations of sperm whales in the North Pacific. In return for this support, he promised to give to the U.S.S.R. part of the Japanese quota on sperm whales in the Antarctic. I do not know the U.S.S.R.'s position on this question at the IWC meetings, but the final result is known—it was decided that only two populations existed in the North Pacific. It is also possible the U.S.S.R.'s representative in the IWC's Scientific Committee did not know the data well and did not have the necessary integrity, and thus could not convince the Scientific Committee regarding the correct separation of the sperm whale populations. As for the Far Eastern scientists, who had the actual data, none of them were even invited to the Scientific Committee. I have mentioned principles, and probably in vain, because there was no place for principles; each person who was traveling internationally (at least it was the case with the Soviet Ministry of Fisheries Resources) received a so-called "technical mission/task" briefing, put together by employees of the same department (i.e. in this case completely expressing the interests of the whalers and signed by one of the leaders in the Ministry), in which, in a few points, the position of the Soviet Union was stated. The person traveling signed this document and thus obligated himself to adhere to this position. And if he disagreed? Then another person would go—the one who agrees! And for God's sake don't deviate from this and express any opinion which is different from the points of the "technical task." Losing your job was a very real possibility, and this actually happened.

On the other hand, do you know who represented the U.S.S.R. at the IWC, the organization charged with protecting whales? You will not believe it! It was A. Solyanik himself, during the height of his robbery in the Antarctic.

Another and also very important objective of whale studies from the fleets, which was thoroughly conducted, was examination of the condition of whale

(or population) resources by species, and changes in these factors as a result of whaling. With this purpose, scientists, working for 12 hours a day on the processing decks, determined for each killed whale the species, the precise size, its sex, and physiological condition. After recording this they took materials to determine the whale's age: the so-called ear plugs from baleen whales and the front teeth from the lower jaw of sperm whales. From females of all species ovaries were taken [and by the number of corpora lutea¹⁰⁹ the age of the animal could be determined].¹¹⁰ In other words, as far as possible, a complete biological analysis was conducted of each killed whale.

It is regrettable that no international program of studying whales was ever developed, with standardized methods.

Despite conducting work that resolved questions of whale biology and was thus important to the existence and development of the whaling industry [of the current and future of the whaling fleets]¹¹¹, the scientists were in a position that was rather like that of a stepson. To begin with, they worked 12 hours a day on the processing decks together with the men processing the whales, in cold weather and immersed in blood and blubber; yet for this work the scientists' salary, set by the administration, was at the lowest rate of pay like that of a seaman/cleaning person, and the same ration of working clothes was given to them as to people working in an accounting office (!)

I was aware that on the Japanese whaling fleets everybody working on the processing of whales helped with the collection of the biological data from the catches. When I once asked the Communist Party representative on the factory ship for assistance, noting

¹⁰⁹Translator's note: The Russian words here are желтое тело.

¹¹⁰Translator's note: This part of the sentence was crossed out in the text, possibly by the author. As a matter of biology, the age of female whales can be roughly estimated from corpora bodies in the ovaries, although this requires knowledge of ovulation cycles and other data.

¹¹¹Translator's note: This part of the sentence was crossed out by the author.

to him how important the data were for assessing the conditions of whale populations, he gave this worthy response: "This is the first time I have heard the idea of industry helping science." What an attitude to science this revealed, that the highest levels of administration did not understand the normal and essential interactions between science and industry.

And how is it possible to see as anything but disdainful and perhaps even as insulting the tactless and discourteous actions of the Captain-Director, who thought it was unnecessary to invite scientists to the fleet industrial conferences in which the present whaling situation was analyzed and the next fleet plans were determined. Here is what may be read in the report of the scientific group from the *Sovetskaya Rossia* whaling fleet for the 1964–65 season:

"The importance of the participation of scientists in the industrial meeting should be so obvious that it goes without saying. We may say only one thing: biologists understand much more regarding the migrations, distribution and timing of whale concentrations than the Chairman of the Trade Union of the fleet."

This latter person—and I am not even talking about the Secretary of the Communist Party—was seen as necessary in all sessions of industrial and scientific meetings; during these times his attendance was a required formality, but in my view was close to stupidity.

The disdainful and disrespectful administration attitude to the science was inevitably echoed by others in the fleet, because as is well known everything or almost everything begins with the head. It is why scientists on the deck heard from one side or another around them: "Do not disrupt our work, stay out of the way!" or "Let's put him on the hook!"¹¹² It would be different only if you would offer them alcohol.

¹¹²Translator's note: Meaning the blubber hooks that were used during the flensing of the whale.

And once, one of the best and most competent, and I would even say most progressive of the Captain-Directors, after listening to criticism from a scientist on the factory ship that was processing undersized, pregnant and lactating female sperm whales, furiously threatened the employee, saying that if he continued to pursue his analysis of the fleet's work he could find himself "accidentally" slipping on the deck and falling into the blubber boiler.

In fairness, it is important to say that this captain apparently came out onto the processing deck later or just looked on it from above and was convinced that the scientist was correct [about the whales being taken], and that same night made a decision to change the hunting area.

Any scientist who worked on the Soviet whaling factory ships and who tried, one way or another, to make them follow the rules of legal whaling, and collect true information about what was happening, had a very hard time. For example, one scientist (now a professor) had been working on the *Slava* fleet in the beginning of 1950's, and he attempted to inform the high levels of Soviet administration regarding illegal and destructive whaling by Captain Solyanik; he was dragged through the courts and put in jail as a result of the most ridiculous false accusations leveled by Solyanik.

Although it did not happen very often, whaling data were sometimes concealed from scientists. Thus, "at the beginning of September, with the approval" (and I think, with the order) "of the fleet administration, the factory ship began to falsify data on whale lengths and also to hide original data on the whale catches from the scientists on board, with the excuse that inspectors from the State Inspection Board would use data from the scientists' reports."¹¹³ Consequently, the scientists had to measure the whales themselves"

¹¹³Translator's note: As noted previously, it appears that the factory ships and the directorate wanted to exclude scientists and not let them see original data, using any excuse they could manufacture. The logic behind the specific excuse regarding the State Inspection Board is not clear from the text.



Plate 26.—The lower jaw of a sperm whale, showing the teeth. Photo: A. Berzin.

(extract from the scientific report for 1970). This happened more and more as time went by. As sad as it is, and as hard as it to believe (but fact remains as fact), on the northern whaling fleets, as a rule, it was prohibited (!) for scientists to come up on the flensing deck when right whales were being processed.¹¹⁴

At one closed industrial meeting about whales attended by regional leaders of the fishery industry in 1965, we made an effort, supported by scientific findings, to warn the industry of the necessity of increasing whaling catches cautiously in the North Pacific, given that we had seen the first signs that some whale resources were declining (the mean size and age of whales was reduced, et cetera). In response, they said that we should "stop being such wimps" and accused us of "holding back the development of Soviet whaling."

¹¹⁴Editors' note: Given the extremely depleted status of right whales in the Northern Hemisphere, these catches represented one of the most extreme crimes of Soviet whaling; indeed, Soviet catches of these animals almost extirpated right whales from the eastern North Pacific. According to Nikolai Doroshenko, a biologist who was present at the time, the Soviet authorities were apparently aware that these catches were extremely sensitive even by their standards, and thus they banned biologists from the flensing deck when right whales were being processed.

During the last years of whaling, we were hearing that we did not put enough effort into saving and protecting whales. This was said by the same people who were most actively involved in the criminal robbery that illegal whaling represented, and who did not listen to any of the scientific recommendations. Meanwhile, there were large numbers of documents that we wrote to the different organizations—regional and State, texts of presentations, talks, et cetera. What about the dozens of reports from the scientific groups working on the factory ships, and results of studies from the laboratory which analyzed changes precipitated by the whaling, with conclusions and recommendations? These would not be of just one volume, and I have already written about their fate.

One cannot demonstrate the administration attitude to, and understanding of, the work of scientists with a single example, but I will relate this because it comes to my mind frequently. We were taking a sample of food from the stomach of a whale on the deck of the factory ship *Aleut*. The portly laundress comes up on the deck, and dries her hands on her apron, having just washed the bedsheets of seamen who have been at sea for many months. She looks at

our job and mutters disrespectfully, “You worthless scientists . . .”¹¹⁵

The attitude to science of industrial leaders was not far removed from this. Because of this, and the general mentality of the fishing and other industries, if the profits in any business became reduced, so immediately was the quantity of funding available for the corresponding studies, and sometimes these were stopped completely. This was completely true concerning whale studies. Thus, when the Soviet fleets ceased whaling, initially the scope of whale studies was reduced, and next they began to break up the special labs: they closed the laboratories in Kaliningrad and Odessa, and the largest group of specialists studying whales in Vladivostok was reduced over 15 years to a tenth the size! And this was happening at a time when in the civilized world, including in countries that did not hunt whales, studies were broadening and the number of researchers was increasing.

Nevertheless, the whale studies of the Far Eastern specialists are continuing, mainly thanks to contacts with scientists from other countries. Thus, in particular, collaborative marine mammal projects have been successfully undertaken with American specialists over two decades through

¹¹⁵Translator’s note: There is no transliteration of this Russian expression into English; it carries considerably negative and derisory connotations. Essentially, the laundress belittled and demeaned the validity and serious nature of the scientists’ job.

a Russian–United States intergovernmental agreement in the field of environmental protection.

Briefly looking at the near future for whale research (after whaling will be stopped) one should seriously discuss the question of the reproductive biology of different species and the speed with which they can reproduce. The main point of the problem is that until recently reproductive rates of whales, in particular in the Antarctic, were calculated by biologists and mathematicians based on the official catch statistics and modern abundance. If the number of whales actually killed was much more—and for some species such as humpback whales it was many times more—it is obvious that to attain current abundance levels whales must have higher (more intensive) reproductive rates; these need to be reviewed and recalculated, to settle one of the principal questions of whale biology.

In view of the current situation, even more importance must be given to reliable monitoring of large whale populations, in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere and the North Pacific. In order to determine or clarify their seasonal migration and wintering areas, it is necessary to conduct collaborative satellite-tagging work by scientists from different countries.

From Sakhalin to Alaska: “Red-hot Iron”

It is necessary to say that in the North Pacific in the 1960’s, perhaps

even more monstrously than in the Antarctic, there took place the destruction of all species of whales by Soviet whalers.

The oldest fleet, the *Aleut*, hunted whales in the North Pacific for 30 years. It continued intensive whaling, first going into the northeastern areas around the western Aleutian Islands in 1962. This fleet had a lower processing capacity [than later, larger factory ships], but working in the Gulf of Alaska and Bristol Bay caught more than 1,200 humpback whales from pristine populations in these areas. In the same year, another fleet coming from the Antarctic, the *Sovetskaya Rossia*, caught almost 600 humpback whales in only 20 days. In 1963 two new fleets, the *Dalniy Vostok* and *Vladivostok*, began whaling in the northeastern areas. Thus, in a limited area in 1962–63, four Soviet fleets were working. In 1967 another fleet, the *Slava*, started whaling after the end of the Antarctic season.

Look at the map of the North Pacific showing the routes of four Soviet fleets (excluding *Aleut*) for just one season.¹¹⁶ How would this picture appear if you would add to this “net” the searching areas of catcher boats stretched in 200-mile-long lines for each fleet? Where could whales hide for long from humans with such [searching] techniques?

All fleets caught as many whales as they could. Even the largest whale populations could not sustain this pressure, and the whales’ abundance was decreasing very rapidly (the whale resources were melting before our eyes). Was this bad? Very bad, and even a little frightening, but other things were even scarier. One of the most experienced whalers, a Vice Captain-Director for whale catching, during a meeting of the whaling ships’ captains, said very cynically: “We should leave a desert behind us . . .” It was the way things were arranged, and a direction to act. As a result, whaling ships went like a red-hot iron through the working areas, leaving empty seas after them; some of

¹¹⁶Editors’ note: This map is not available.



Plate 27.—The factory ship *Dalniy Vostok*. Year and photographer unknown.

these seas remain this way more than 20 years later.¹¹⁷

Let us follow the dynamics of baleen whale catches by the fleets *Dalnyi Vostok* and *Vladivostok*. In 1964 they caught about 170 blue whales, and after 1971 there were no blue whales available to be caught. Some 2,500 fin whales were caught in 1964, but by 1975–76 this species had disappeared from the catch. Almost 2,800 humpback whales were also caught in 1964, and since 1971 no one could find any more to catch. To date, no one has seen a humpback whale near the Commander Islands. There are no more humpback whales around the Aleutian Islands and just recently, in 1959, there were so many whales!¹¹⁸ In the early morning there was a “forest” of humpback whale blows from horizon to horizon around our science vessel. But in a few years in this area one could find only floating humpback whale carcasses (without skin and blubber) from horizon to horizon.

What about the right whales inhabiting the eastern North Pacific, and protected by all existing regulations and agreements? The “honor” of this population’s elimination belongs also to the Soviet whalers. Even now I see in front of my eyes many tens of blows, like giant butterflies, and the black backs of these whales between lines of fog, observed from a scientific ship in Bristol Bay in 1959.

I am talking about “elimination” because in the many [subsequent] scientific expeditions for studying distribution and abundance of whales in the eastern North Pacific we could not find a single right whale. I calculated that the right whale catch by Soviet fleets was more than 500 whales. It is not a

¹¹⁷Editors’ note: This is certainly true, several decades later, for some species, but less so for others. Humpback whales have made a remarkable recovery in the North Pacific. Right whales are still critically endangered, and blue whales remain virtually absent from some of their former high-latitude habitats. The status of sperm whales is unclear.

¹¹⁸Translator’s note: Fortunately, this is no longer the case in either the Commanders or the Aleutians, though humpbacks have probably not yet recovered to their pre-whaling abundance.

small number, but much less than was actually killed.¹¹⁹

In 1965, five gray whales from the eastern population were caught (the animals obviously stayed late in the area concerned). It has been prohibited to catch this species since 1946, because the population was severely over-hunted in the previous century.

As you may understand, the style of working in the north was no different from that employed in the Antarctic, and the catch numbers for humpback and blue whales (I am not even mentioning right and gray whales) were not presented to the IWC. For example, in 1962–65 the *Sovetskaya Rossia* fleet caught about 1,500 humpback whales in the north and not one of them was reported to the IWC because it was not legal to catch any baleen whales in the north after the season in the Antarctic. The same was happening with blue whales: in 1962–63, 200 blue whales were killed and again none were reported to the IWC.

And now here is one more example of the Soviet whalers’ crime against Nature and its resources. In 1967, TINRO organized an expedition on a moderate-size fishing boat, which had for a long time been used as a scientific vessel, according to the scientific plan of work to study the distribution and abundance of whales in the western North Pacific (read—to find new aggregations of whales).

To their general amazement (and pleasure) in areas southeast, east, and north of Sakhalin they discovered large aggregations of right whales, and in the area of the Shantar Islands were many bowhead whales. These whales had not been wiped out by whalers in the previous century, as all specialists (including me) thought, and had successfully reproduced.

¹¹⁹Editors’ note: It is not clear whether Berzin is referring to catches of right whales throughout the North Pacific or just in the eastern population, where the recorded catch was 372 whales (see Doroshenko, N. V. 2000. Soviet whaling for blue, gray, bowhead, and right whales in the North Pacific Ocean, 1961–1979. *In* Soviet Whaling Data (1949–1979), p. 96–103. Center for Russian Environmental Policy, Moscow.). Several hundred other right whales were caught in the western North Pacific.

The scientific institutes involved worked for and were supported by the industry, and they reported to various organizations. We reported these results, even with some pride at what we had found. One of the first organizations we reported to was, of course, the leaders of the Whaling Fleet Administration in Vladivostok. Only later did we realize that this was a large mistake, and for the whales that we had discovered this mistake was fatal.

Just the next year the administration decided to correct the “mistake” of the previous century’s whalers, and sent two fleets to the area where right whales were found. Moreover, everything was well thought-out, and it was arranged that no scientists were present on the factory ships. Consequently, there are no records (even in the secret documents) about right whales killed in the Okhotsk Sea, and even the number of whales killed is unknown.¹²⁰ According to information given by people involved, at least a thousand whales were killed.

Just 2 years later—in 1969, as I’ve learned—one of the fleets looking for whales with a line of catchers stretched out over a distance of about 200 miles, went from southern to northern Sakhalin with good visibility and did not find a single right whale. As a result of this barbaric act, priceless scientific data were lost regarding a very poorly known whale.

A few whalers who love exotic things keep in their apartments (or perhaps have now already thrown out as garbage) the huge, luxurious black baleen (up to 3 meters long) of this marine giant.

We scientists as usual were accused of being ignorant of these resources, because supposedly the whalers found a lot of baleen whales (balaenids of course) in the western North Pacific, without any help from scientists. When someone said this to me, very nastily, I could not understand what they were talking about at first. How could I imagine that something like this could be done . . . ?

I was interested to know what the highest fisheries authorities thought

¹²⁰Editors’ note: This is not strictly true, since Doroshenko (2000) reports partial records of these catches.

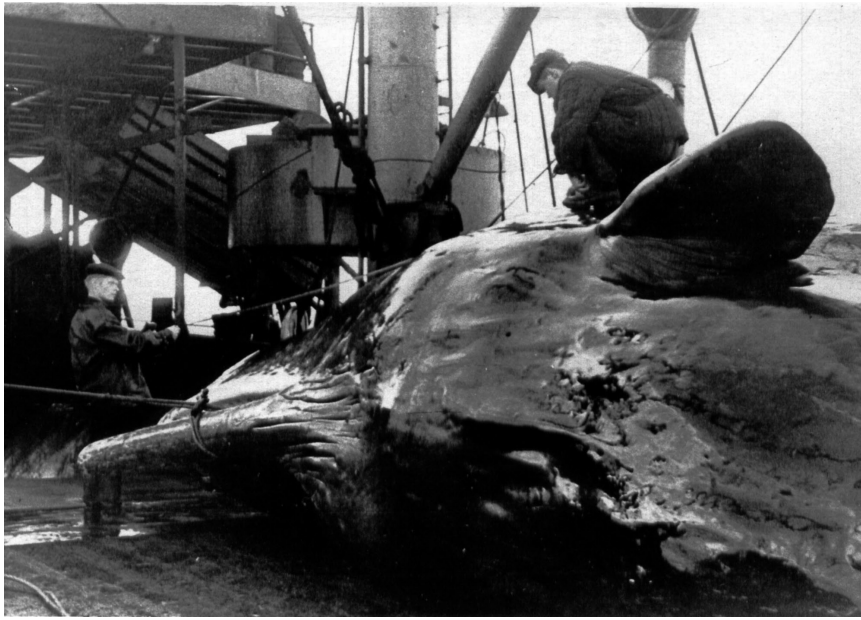


Plate 28.—The author (on the left) with an assistant, taking measurements of a sperm whale. Photo: A. Berzin.

about this, and in the same year in Odessa during an All-Union Whaling Meeting, I decided to approach the Minister of Fisheries Resources, A. Ishkov. Previously he never thought it necessary to attend these meetings—obviously there were more important things to do. At this time he was the special guest of A. Solyanik.

I approached him during one of the breaks and said approximately the following: “OK, we killed all the right whales off Argentina, and maybe they would have been caught by Japan anyway according to the agreement¹²¹ (I knew that all that was rubbish and that Soviet whalers had committed a crime). But in this case I was interested in his opinion about the situation with illegal whaling in the Okhotsk Sea.¹²² Why did we deal with the right whales in our waters in just 2 years? Deep in my soul I hoped that this high chief perhaps did not know of all the acts of his subordinates. But the Minister sharply and rather rudely asked the man standing

next to him, his deputy, who I was; and then without hesitation the Minister answered, as he was prepared for this, and stated that he knew everything perfectly: “See, Berzin, let’s improve our agricultural program over the next few years, then we can stop whaling entirely”(?!). And this was almost 30 years ago. Very soon we really did stop whaling, but not because we “improved” agriculture (we still haven’t “improved” it), but simply because we killed all the whales.

But let’s return to the short history of whaling in the eastern North Pacific and listen to scientists who worked with the northern fleets, and what they said about the situation with whale resources in the second half of the 1960’s and 70’s.

“Bristol Bay is empty at the present time, while in previous years many fin and humpback whales were caught there. The catastrophic condition of the North Pacific blue whale population is obvious, and continued whaling will lead to the complete extinction of this species. Analysis of biological characteristics shows the very poor condition of the fin whale population in all whaling areas of the North Pacific.

To save the rest of the population it is necessary to immediately stop whaling on this species.” (Scientific report for 1966).

This was the situation in 1966. Continue reading ...

“Since a few years ago the fleets no longer visit the Gulf of Alaska, the area off Kodiak Island, once rich with baleen whales, especially humpback whales. In a few years (2–3 years) of whaling the abundance of humpback, fin and blue whales was reduced to the minimum. Despite the [IWC] ban on hunting blue whales, a few were taken each year. These catches were not important to the industry and were opportunistic in nature. Because of this, the last tens of whales (and maybe single individuals) have disappeared, and if strict protection is not applied now this species could become extinct in the North Pacific. Humpback whales were numerous even a few years ago and were whaled in the thousands; now they are almost exterminated, and in the 1969 season only four whales of this now-rare but economically very valuable species were killed. Humpback and blue whales in the North Pacific could be considered practically exterminated. Despite the prohibition and the annual TINRO recommendations regarding ending catches of blue, humpback and other protected species of whales, the fleets still continue to catch a few of them in what constitutes a major violation of international agreements on whaling.” (Scientific reports from the 1969 and 1970 seasons).

When whaling was almost done with mysticetes in the North Pacific, a widespread style of catching occurred which was ruinous for baleen whales; the main point of this was as follows. During large catches of sperm whales all the production lines were busy with processing; but here one catcher sees a baleen whale, and naturally reports it

¹²¹Editors’ note: The “agreement” referred to here is presumably that between Argentina and Japan mentioned in an earlier section.

¹²²Translator’s note: This sentence was crossed out in the text by the author.

to the factory ship. The catcher gets the command: Start the hunt! The whale is caught and brought to the factory ship. According to the technical instructions, the processing of baleen whales should occur only after careful cleaning of sperm whale products from all production lines, beginning with the deck (in particular the processing deck was to be washed with boiling water!) In this case, nobody cleans anything, the processing of sperm whales doesn't even stop, and a baleen whale (with very precious food raw materials) had been processed with sperm whales. There was even a special term created: "zakashalochivanie."¹²³

You may ask, what do one or two whales matter? But this was exactly the tragedy: today one in this area, tomorrow one in another area. Thus the last individuals of rare species were killed without reason: humpback and right whales, being useless so called "by-catch." It could well be argued that, thanks to this "whaling," to date none of these species have been observed in the former areas of Soviet whaling.

During all years of whaling in the North Pacific the main part of the catch was composed of sperm whales, and these numbers grew from year to year. Thus, for example, in 1964 the sperm whale portion of the total catch was approximately 60%, and in 1965 it was already up to 87%. It should be noted that the number of sperm whales caught increased not gradually but rapidly, and from 1966 on sperm whales made up more than 90% of the total catch.

Until the introduction of international inspection¹²⁴, there was an uncontrolled catch of an excessive number of female sperm whales that was twice the number of caught males. The age of females in the population continually declined,



Plate 29.—Soviet catcher, Bering Sea, June 1967. Photo: Jim Mills.

and the catch included more and more females that had only recently attained sexual maturity. An analysis of the age structure (scientists on the factory ships analyzed the age of about 1,000 sperm whales) showed that, by 1972, females of the older age class (> 25 years) had disappeared from the catch, which contained increasing numbers of juvenile females. A steady decrease in the mean age of males was observed; furthermore, males of the older age group—older than 23.5 years—completely disappeared. In the 8 years of whaling on sperm whales their mean size decreased by two meters!

“At present small sperm whales¹²⁵, with the conventional minimum size defined for pelagic fleets at 11.6 m, make up 75–85% of the total sperm whale catch. In some months, especially in the eastern region, this percentage could rise to 90%, when the catch is primarily

females that cannot attain the conventional size even at older ages.” (Scientific report for 1976).

If you count all other violations of the whaling rules, it is possible to say that during certain periods Soviet whaling was conducted with a 100% violation of the established international rules of whaling.

As during the whaling of baleen whales, there was the same enormous distortion of the reported statistical data about sperm whale catches. Data presented to the IWC had nothing in common with the reality of the situation. For example, in 1970–71 (before the introduction of international inspection control) Soviet fleets caught more than 9,000 female sperm whales in the North Pacific, and officially reported fewer than 1,800; in contrast, they reported killing 5,700 males but reported 12,300(!) (Details from a report by the author entitled “Whale stock status in the North Pacific in 1975”). Furthermore, the unthinkable then happened. Based on these [falsified] whaling data, which were naturally believed,

¹²³Translator's note: “Zakashalochivanie” (закашало́чивание) is a made-up word which is impossible to transliterate, but means something like using or being like a sperm whale. The point here is that sometimes a baleen whale was processed with the same equipment that had just been used to process sperm whales (which, unlike mysticetes, were not considered fit for human consumption). Thus the processing of the baleen whale was conducted “like a sperm whale.”

¹²⁴Translator's note: i.e. the International Observer Scheme, introduced by the IWC in 1972.

¹²⁵Translator's note: Small sperm whales = whales with a body length below the IWC minimum size limit of 11.6 m.

the Scientific Committee of the IWC decided that there was excessive whaling of males and low exploitation of females, and they decreased the legal minimum size from 11.6 m to 9.2 m(!), thus making it legal to kill females, the most important reproductive portion of the population.¹²⁶

Scientists were not interested in the details of the statistical data forwarded to the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics. We of course knew that these data were not correct and we never used them; for our work we used the real data. But in this case we were terrified, because “officially” the IWC was correct, and we could do nothing. We could not yell: do not believe it! This decision of the IWC was possibly one of the most fatal of all for whales.

I am quoting:

“The ill-considered decision to reduce the minimum legal length for sperm whales to 9.2 m allows whalers to catch almost everything and is particularly damaging with regard to female sperm whales. Because of this, TINRO objects to this new size regulation and insists upon a reintroduction of the previous minimum size limit of 11.6 m. The introduction of a new minimum legal size of 9.2 m gave the opportunity for the Far Eastern fleets to exploit aggregations of small whales on the breeding grounds.” (Scientific reports for 1973–77).

But nobody read our reports; I want to emphasize this—NOBODY! And to anyone who could read it this IWC decision was only for the good, since even with the international observers on the factory ships it became

¹²⁶Editors’ note: This is one of the more important points made in this memoir. Put simply, the U.S.S.R.’s over-reporting of males (to disguise catches of females) led the IWC to lower the minimum size limit for sperm whales in hopes of taking pressure off males by allowing whalers to take more females. Yet the reality was that the Soviets had been hitting females heavily all along, and this decision by the IWC simply exacerbated the situation, with disastrous consequences for the population.

possible to comfortably kill sperm whales of almost any size, and it was now allowed to whale in the southern areas.

“The result of this was that some breeding areas for sperm whales became deserts. Whale concentrations west of Honshu Island, where catches would comprise 80–120 females and small males, were destroyed, as were aggregations at Mellish Bank¹²⁷, north of Milwaukee Bank north-west of Hawaii, around the Queen Charlotte Islands, and in a number of other areas. The total catch for a day could reach 100 animals. With this number of catches the factory ship could not keep up with the processing of the whales, and some of the carcasses would stay in the water for up to 33 hours after the kill; at the same time the killing of new whales did not cease. The September target for whale catches and products was set at 260% (!) of that in the initial plan, and was achieved only by catching under-sized sperm whales including many lactating females. Even though by the middle of October they had exceeded all plan targets, the factory ship continued whaling in the [southern] area, catching small-sized whales and lactating females.” (Continuation of the quotation from the scientific reports of 1973–77).

Yes, in the giant cascade of whaling rules violations, the catch of lactating females was simply criminal. Here is the quotation from my report in 1975:

“The worst part was a continued increase in the number of lactating female sperm whales caught, despite the domestic and international prohibitions on such catches. In previous years, given the proportion of lactating females

¹²⁷Translator’s note: The identity of this shoal feature, which is probably represented phonetically here, is not clear; in Russian the word is Меллиш.

in the catch (for example in 1965 it was about 10%), we would refer to these as opportunistic catches; however, in the last years before the international controls were established it is necessary to call this a directed hunt of lactating females. These numbers increased in some southern areas to 32% of the mature females taken, and in some periods (in 1971) up to 45%—in other words, the maximum number of lactating females that were available in the population.”

And this is how it was happening at sea during whaling. In 1971, I was continuing a study of the comparative morphology of whales on a factory ship in the North Pacific. After I had done a lot of work on this, I found time to “shake an olden time”¹²⁸ and made a trip on one of the catchers. The director of the fleet granted me this opportunity, and I boarded the first catcher that came to the factory ship to drop off whales and receive more water and fuel.

At this time the fleet was working at 20° [N] latitude, north of the Hawaiian Islands. The weather was quiet, sunny and warm, as it is supposed to be for these blessed places. This was the area inhabited by small sperm whales, and lactating females with calves. The masthead lookout saw the blows of two sperm whales: one was small but of regular size, but the second was very small. The catcher immediately approached the whales.

As I mentioned previously, the industry declared that occasional catches of lactating females could in principle occur: in the water, when a whale suddenly appears in front of a catcher it is impossible to determine the animal’s physiological condition, and not possible to wait to take the shot.

However, now the catcher was knowingly chasing a female with a calf. When we approached the whales, the hunt was developing in a disgusting and calculated way that was not used elsewhere.

¹²⁸Translator’s note: The transliterated expression “Shake an olden time” means doing something one used to do when one was young, trying it again at an older age.

The whalers were focused not on the female but on her calf, which tried to stay close to the mother but needed to surface to breathe more often than his mom and by this action unintentionally showed not only where the female was and her path underwater, but also the place where she would surface. The whalers' estimation was flawless. It was completely obvious that this was their regular way of hunting, and furthermore was so routine that whalers did not have even a shadow of doubt that they were right and had permission to hunt like this. Even my presence on the bridge did not deter them.

At this time the whalers were unlucky. The calf either "loved" his mom too much and did not want to "help" the whalers perpetrate this crime, or he was already sufficiently grown up and felt some independence; so every time he surfaced separately from his mother. After swearing profanely at the calf the whalers went to look again for some other mother-calf couple that were easier to approach and more accessible.

The whalers were looking more and more like pirates. Even now I can recall seeing the bow of a catcher moving through warm blue tropical waters, and a harpooner behind the gun, dressed only in bathing trunks and with a red bandana on his head, chasing, obviously, a female with a calf . . . What a greatness this was . . .¹²⁹

There was a case of a lactating female with a calf, and the stomach of the latter still contained milk. With similar methods of hunting there were cases when a small (8 m) mother and her calf were killed by a single harpoon, which ran through the mother and pierced her calf. When it was pulled up to the ship's side the calf was pressed to the mother's body and the two of them presented a terrible picture. Not one for squeamish people.

This is the meaning of "the plan at any price."¹³⁰ But wait! How one

¹²⁹Translator's note: This is a sardonic reference to the quotation from Melville which opens Berzin's memoir.

¹³⁰Translator's note: This was a common Soviet expression which meant that fulfillment of the industrial plan's objectives must be attained by any means.



Plate 30.—The beginning of the flensing process involving a large sperm whale. The factory ship *Aleut*, 1957. Photo: A. Berzin.

could exceed the plan by 260%?! And what normal person could understand and explain how it is possible to catch 2.6 times more whales than the official target, despite knowing full well that the resource had already been depleted? Even if you take into account that initial industrial plan targets were twice those recommended by science, it became obvious that in the some cases five times more whales

were killed than the resource could support.

Even at the end of the 1950's (I was a witness to it), a tall man flensing sperm whales would need to request a 200-liter barrel [for the resulting oil]. And by the end of the period of sperm whaling, a short man could often use a flensing knife at the level of his chest. Somebody suggested with black humor to not bother butchering the sperm whales, but



Plate 31.—The *Aleut* whaling fleet in Severo-glubokaya Bay (northern-deep) (Koryakia coast), 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

simply see them as a sausage to be put through the blubber boiler.

In 1980, because of the severe decline in whale resources in all the whaling grounds of the world, oceanic pelagic whaling was prohibited.¹³¹ Thus, Soviet whaling came to an end.

The Communist Party and Whaling: The Empire of Lies

In previous years, prior to the establishment of territorial waters around the Kuril Islands, Japanese and Russian whalers worked in the same areas. Whalers told me (and it must have been the truth because one cannot fabricate this sort of thing) that when there were

no whales around, the Japanese—who were very familiar with the way the Soviets did things—would, during the “Captains’ hours”¹³², say insultingly over the radio, “Russians! There are no whales—call a meeting!”

Indeed, this was nothing unusual during whaling around the Kurils. There were no Japanese whalers around the Commander Islands (or we didn’t see any), but the party representatives on board needed no hints from the Japanese to call these meetings anyway. When no whales were found for two or three days, the party representatives would call together the captains and harpooners from the catchers to give them a

dressing-down (otherwise why would you make tired people come to a meeting?) You may find this amusing, but I can tell you that the next day, whales were found.

These types of meetings were the inspiration for a successfully defended Ph.D. dissertation entitled “The role of the Communist Party in the Development of Soviet Whaling,” by a man who later rose to a high position in the party system. What conclusion did he come to regarding this role? You can only guess, because this dissertation was classified as secret. Secret from whom? Who shouldn’t be allowed to know of the positive role of the Party? The party members? The whalers? Probably the whalers, so they wouldn’t laugh. Russians, with their unmatched sense of humor, wouldn’t miss an opportunity to make a joke about this and similar topics: “How will we know when communism has finally arrived? From the secret letter

¹³¹Editors’ note: It is not clear what “prohibition” event the author is referring to. The IWC passed a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1982, which went into effect in 1986 (although it has been easily circumvented by Convention loopholes).

¹³²Translator’s note: The “Captains’ hours” were periods when all the catchers communicated with the factory ship and reported on the situation with whales and catches, and received instructions accordingly. The point here is that the Japanese whalers knew that the Soviet whalers would be listening to the radio at this time, and so could be taunted.

of the Party's Central Committee!" This dissertation was yet another example of farce and demagoguery.

How would you describe, except as sanctimonious hypocrisy, the address of Soviet Fisheries Minister Ishkov in 1967 when, through the central media, he urged all nations to follow the humane principles of the U.S.S.R. in not killing dolphins, "our younger brothers in intellect"? What a great idea. It might seem so, unless you knew that this address followed upon the U.S.S.R. wiping out all the dolphins off the Soviet coast of the Black Sea. The absurd paradoxes of former Soviet reality were even worse than this! I remember well that, almost the day after this address was published, I was summoned to a special (secret) office to read through and sign a secret telegram from the First Vice-Minister of Fisheries, V. Kamentsev. In this telegram, our institute was assigned the job of urgently addressing the question of how to organize a hunt for dolphins in Far East seas!

I think that farce and demagoguery represented a major portion of the long-term activity of the Party. Party slogans included: "Everything for the people's welfare," "Everything in the name of the people," et cetera. And people responded accordingly. For example, they would say "Spring will pass and summer will begin . . . thanks to the Party for this."

Installed on all vessels that were going to foreign countries were trusted representatives of the Party oligarchy—the commissars—who also had the position next to the captain.¹³³ One of these was aboard our vessel during the joint Soviet–American expedition to study the distribution and abundance of whales in the central area of the Pacific Ocean. It was hard to explain to our American colleagues what kind of work this person did. We said (without any hint of what we felt about this) that his work involved indoctrination, including talks with individual crew members and organization of their free time, et cetera. The conclusion that the Americans came to was completely

¹³³Translator's note: This would be the equivalent of the first mate, or Executive Officer.

surprising; because they had nothing similar to this, they assumed that his role was like that of a priest on their ships . . .

As a rule, the people who became commissars were the ones who couldn't find another job. They were not very smart but were very conceited, self-important individuals, especially after they had been given a taste of power, and especially over other people. Those who were thinking about a career in the party system, who could speak loudly and authoritatively from a podium, and who curried favor with the boss¹³⁴, these people could climb the party ladder quickly, and high up.

I knew one of these Party representatives very well, and for a long time. He began his career as a commissar, and soon after he rose to the post of Secretary of one of the leading departments of the Party's Primorskiy Kraikom.¹³⁵ He ended his Party career in Moscow in an office of the government building on Old Square.

Russian people have a good sense of humor, and even when they should be crying they laugh (probably because they have nothing to lose). Often they express their opinion about different events (concerning their own country), facts and bosses at different levels in the form of jokes. Here is one of them: On the counter of a store there are different types of brains. Among them are commissar brains, which are being sold for a price many times higher than those of farm animals. "Why are the commissar brains so expensive?" asks a customer. The assistant replies, "Do you know how many commissars we have to slaughter to get one kilo of brains?"

In the scientific report of the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* fleet for the 1970–71 season, there was a very interesting and illuminating analysis of the results of the catchers' work. There was a comparison of the captains and harpooners of the catchers which had the largest number

¹³⁴Translator's note: The expression in Russian is literally "carry the boss's briefcase."

¹³⁵Translator's note: The Primorskiy Kraikom was the regional committee of the Communist Party in Primorskiy Krai, an area in the Russian Far East centered around Vladivostok.

of violations of whaling regulations (the catcher numbers were listed in the report). Naturally, these catchers were the ones who killed the largest number of whales, and they took first place in the socialistic competition among catchers; they received not only the largest bonus but also medals, including the one named "Hero of Socialist Work."¹³⁶ The captains with the smallest number of violations, and who therefore came in last in this competition, received not only much smaller bonuses but were also dragged in front of local Party Secretaries and forced to listen to threats of dismissal—and afterwards getting heart attacks. Afterwards, these captains (and from a human standpoint I completely understand them) said to themselves, or perhaps even aloud, "To hell with your regulations . . ."¹³⁷ And this was the true role of the Party in Soviet whaling! The only way to interpret these actions was that they were intended to coerce whalers into violating the regulations, or even directly ordering them to do so.

At the broadest level, only the Communist Party oligarchy was guilty of all these outrages with Soviet whaling; this was the singular authority in the country, which was (according to the Party's slogans) "directing and leading," and the "brain, honor and soul of our times." In an attempt to gain favor, the apparatchiks¹³⁸ from the regional Party offices demanded that the plan targets for whale catches, and other socialist responsibilities, be exceeded. With the Party's blessing, whalers destroyed whale populations in our own, in foreign, and in international waters. This is how it sounded (these are quotations from the puppet¹³⁹ newspapers, those that were completely devoted to the Party line): "To mark the 50th anniversary of the Soviet authority, all Far Eastern whaling fleets achieved new heights of success."

¹³⁶Translator's note: As noted in the Introduction, this was one of the highest awards given in the U.S.S.R..

¹³⁷Translator's note: Meaning the whaling regulations. The original expression here is much more profane than my translation!

¹³⁸Translator's note: Bureaucrats.

¹³⁹Translator's note: The Russian term is "pocket" newspapers.

“The anniversary year target plan was greatly exceeded.” “Since 1964, whaling fleets that work in the North Pacific began to lengthen the whaling season by two months, following the directions of the Party.”(!)

I already wrote about the secret telegram from Solyanik to the national leadership, where he honestly reported the end of work on (prohibited) right whales off the Argentina coast (meaning that all had been killed), which produced this many tons of blubber. What should this bandit hide from his advisers? It is obvious that neither members of the Politbureau nor the leaders of the Soviet government had any feeling in their souls or consciences. This is another example of the Party leaders’ very negative role in Soviet whaling. After what he did, Solyanik could (with a clear conscience) make another hole in his jacket in which to attach his second “Hero of Socialist Work” star. He should have been sued for this “work” in an international court, and not only him alone!

The Indian Ocean, 1962, after an 8 month season, the whaling fleet *Sovetskaya Rossia* was going to Singapore for “crew rest,” as it was officially and hypocritically called. In reality everybody well knew, even salesmen in Singapore, that they went to buy things, and leave behind in this city no more and no less than one million Singapore dollars. Our Captain-Director said later that this much money was not spent there even by the American Seventh Fleet.

Here the commissar’s real work would begin. What kind of work could it be? Just try to split 1,200 people into groups of three to four, and each group must have a party member, or (in the worst case) should consist of a commanding officer, a woman, and regular seamen. According to a written schedule, half of these groups must go on shore before lunch and the other half after lunch. Commissars were seriously thinking (without seeing it as any offense to human dignity) that a Russian seaman couldn’t be allowed ashore for a whole day because then he would certainly have a drink at lunch, will behave “badly,” and it would be a disgrace to the whole Soviet country and to our flag.

So Soviet whalers went into the city markets in the tropical heat, and not just “went” but ran—because the time available was only until lunch! Seamen were covered with sweat carrying goods that had lain around for years. I heard one of two local, half-naked English-speaking men in white shorts who were watching this scene say to the other (verbatim): “These are Russians coming, hungry for things!” The local tradesman in the Singapore markets were yelling to Soviet whalers: “Come here, Russian profiteer!” This was the real disgrace to the country and the Soviet flag! It would have been much better if a seaman would have had a drink, even become drunk after all—it would be understandable after an 8-month-long cruise. Anyway, what a seaman does after his watch is his own business, as is the case everywhere else.

The Party oligarchy was an absolutely unprecedented creation of Communist totalitarianism, monstrous in its form and content. Instead of confining itself to political activities as occurred in the rest of the world, the oligarchy decided and sometimes toyed with people’s destinies (including non-members of the Party), and commanded everything and everyone in the country: its economy and industry (sometimes without the slightest understanding). And they had the highest privileges in the country (that they decided for themselves), while at the same time they were responsible for nothing and to no one!

And who else but a party lout, who does not care about people (luckily we do not have party louts now, although the behavior still exists) and who thinks only of gaining favor, would decide to send the *Sovetskaya Rossia* fleet, without due warning¹⁴⁰ after visiting Singapore, to work in severe northern waters? This, despite the fact that in eight and half months of hard work, the fleet had already met the plan target for whale catches in the Antarctic and that almost 1,500 crew from the fleet were getting ready to meet families and friends in a few days in Vladivostok.

And once again people put on working robes and took in hand the processing tools and flensing knives that had already become hated objects. When the fleet came to foggy Alaska there were many people with progressive, rare medical conditions that developed from nerves (this has some proper medical name), when a person becomes unresponsive and indifferent to everything around them. For example, a whale processor could cut his hand and not react to this injury at all. On the factory ship, with all its ropes, knives, hooks, and saws, this situation became very dangerous.

The Chief Doctor of the fleet wrote a report to the Captain-Director saying that he could not be responsible for the lives and health of people, and suggested to the captain that he stop whaling. Because of this or something else, this inhumane season was finally over. You should have seen the frenzy, and I would say spiteful enjoyment, with which seamen were tearing off the decrepit and rotten false deck¹⁴¹, like they emerged from a state of numbness and were perhaps remembering what a stench it gave off in the tropics. While they were doing this, worms were emerging from under this deck. The captain forbade anyone from tearing off this deck. I did not avoid similar nervous conditions that were reported for other seamen. I had a lot of sea experience prior to 1961, and always on returning home, even after short (one to two-month trips) I would feel this joyful agitation (like many others) at the first appearance of my native shores. I would run out on deck to look again and again on the long-awaited shores, go onto the bridge a few times a day to lean over a map and calculate how far we were from Vladivostok, as if by doing this we would get closer and the ship would be in her home port earlier.

In contrast, in 1962 after the hardest ten-and-a-half month season, I did not feel any emotion when the Kuril Islands appeared (although I remember I noted this but thought to myself that

¹⁴⁰Translator’s note: For some reason, these three words were crossed out by the author.

¹⁴¹Editors’ note: The false deck was a temporary cover laid over the real deck beneath the duration of the whaling season; it was torn up and replaced between seasons.

it was all rubbish and still a long way to Primorye). Then there was Primorye and the shores of Peter the Great Bay. And there was only a cold emptiness in my soul . . . Only when we could see Vladivostok's TV tower and the city with its numerous bays, and when the air resounded with the roar of ships' horns and with the sound of everything that could hoot (many people even thought that a war began!), only then did I start to cry . . .

There was a huge celebration in the entire city, which was greeting its whaler heroes. And for the first time (and the last), pioneers¹⁴² presented flowers to me. I also felt myself a hero and did not entertain a single thought that we did something illegal, let alone criminal. The justification? Only one: after living for so long in a prison-camp state¹⁴³ it was hard for someone to separate good from bad.

There were many commissars on the fleets. Almost all of them were freed from any other work and were equal in rank to the regional Party leaders (e.g. First Secretary, etc.). Therefore they needed assistants and deputies. And of course their salary should correspond to their position. Also on the whaling fleets the Komsomol¹⁴⁴ leaders were freed from work and had no other worries except to advise the Komsomol portion of the crew. I can still remember a Komsomol leader's voice on the phone (on the factory ship), in the middle of the night: "Alfred Antonovich (that is me), let's drink a shot . . ."

Once, one of the Captain-Directors who was not completely infected with the contagion of the Party, received a telegram from Vladivostok with a demand to give suggestions for cutting back staff. In his response he offered to fire one of the commissars. In the ferocious response he was accused of "political short-sightedness." And, as always, scientists were cut back.

¹⁴²Translator's note: The Young Pioneers were an organization associated with the Communist Party and included children from ages 10 to 16.

¹⁴³Translator's note: i.e. the U.S.S.R..

¹⁴⁴Translator's note: The Komsomol was a part of the Communist Party to which younger people (aged 16 to 25) belonged.

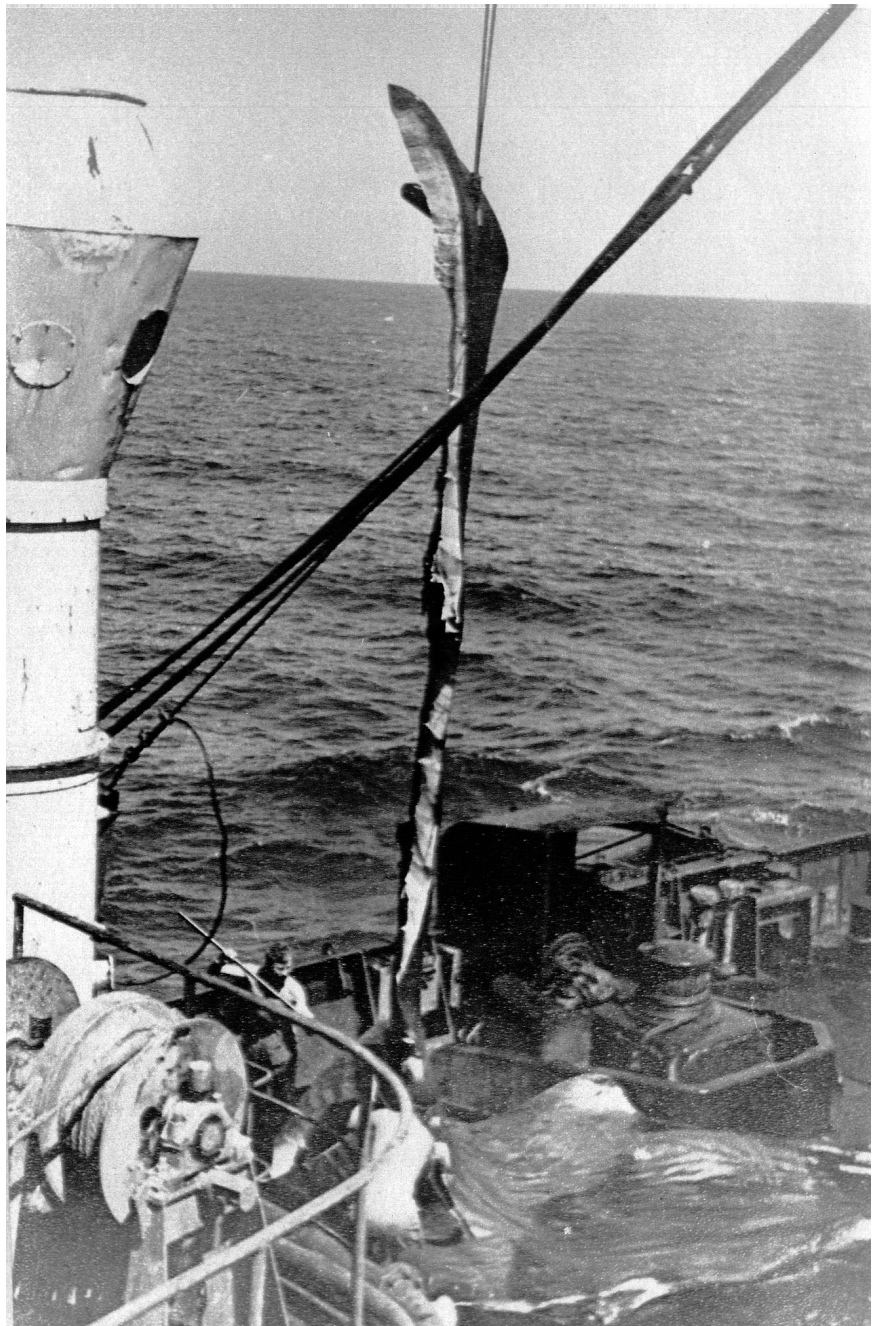


Plate 32.—A section of sperm whale blubber being loaded into a boiler on the factory ship *Vladivostok*. Photo: A. Berzin.

I want to utter one thought, which at first may seem a little blasphemous. If you think about it, any criminal is more honest than the Party's bureaucrats that were in charge of Soviet whaling. A criminal committing a crime or simply violating the law of

the state knows that he could be caught and punished accordingly. In this light, he is more honest (understand me correctly!) than a "legal" criminal from the office, such an omnipotent nonentity, who is not only sure of complete impunity but who could

also count on advancing his career or receiving a medal.

Moreover, when the Soviet Union plundered or simply destroyed its natural resources, it was very bad, but it was the internal business of the country. In the case of whales, the Soviet Union pillaged and destroyed foreign and international natural resources, and the leaders behind these acts thus became malicious domestic and international criminals.

One could say about the most remarkable robberies and crimes: “the robbery of the century,” “the crime of the century.” But none of them could be compared to these crimes before Nature and the Communist regime’s theft of foreign and international whale resources, some of which could never recover. Will not recover? Who cares that they will not recover? Who needs these whales at all? You think that this kind of logic is not possible. Yet it is, even if it is hard to believe in this. There were some leaders of the fisheries industry who not only did not doubt that their deeds in the world’s oceans were right, but who also tried to create some fantastically stupid justifications for them. I myself heard from the podium¹⁴⁵ approximately the following words (but exact in meaning): “There are no whales left? Why do we need this intermediate processor? Without whales there will be more krill, and we will catch it and process it ourselves into fish products.” This idea was realized in the form of whaling factory ships converted into krill factory ships and sent to the Antarctic. However, this industry was not profitable and the amount of krill [in the ocean] was the same. Maybe even less? Nature usually does not forgive rude interventions in its balance, in this case the destruction of food chains in which whales occupy a very important place at the top. Humans calling themselves the “King of Nature” unfortunately very often forget that they are just one of the links in natural chains (and to be honest, not a very good one).

¹⁴⁵Translator’s note: The Russian expression here (“heard from the podium”) is not literally translatable, but means something heard in an official speech at a meeting.

President Reagan in his time called the Soviet Union an “empire of evil.” At first many people in the country were outraged (and me too) because it was very unexpected: Soviet citizens did not expect at all that their country, which they thought (and were convinced) was guarding peace in the whole world, could deserve such an offensive name, and from whom?! From the head of such an enlightened country!

With time, though, and after some reflection, the majority of normal-thinking people considered this definition to be defensible.

I will take courage and add to this expression that the Soviet empire could be called also an Empire of Lies!

I think (but I would not assert this, it is my personal opinion) that to be an empire penetrated by one of the most repulsive vices of mankind—lies—this is even worse than to be an empire of evil, especially since evil is often obvious and open, as during a war: you see this and know who and where your enemy is.

For seventy Soviet years the industry of lies was created, shaped, and perfected in the country. Lies were encouraged and cultivated, and people were forced to lie.

Lies in art, lies in movies, on TV, on the radio, and in newspapers. One of my colleagues was saying: “Why do I need *Crocodile*?¹⁴⁶ When I go to work I buy the newspaper *Pravda*¹⁴⁷ and all the way to the institute I am dying from laughter.” Lies in the numbers of the Central Statistics Department. And facts about Chernobyl were lies, dreadful and inhumane, deserving of damnation. Lies about the history of our country, which the leaders of the country changed to suit their needs. To the latter, people reacted with a wicked grin: “An institute of experimental history has been created!” One cannot say it any better than this; as the saying goes, any further comment is superfluous. People were lying whether they

¹⁴⁶Translator’s note: This was a humorous magazine in the Soviet Union.

¹⁴⁷Translator’s note: *Pravda* was the famous newspaper of the U.S.S.R.; the name means “Truth.”



Plate 33.—One of the captains of the Aleut whaling fleet, 1958. Photo: A. Berzin.

needed to or not, and I would say that the lying was pathological and at all levels. From the most blatant lie at the international level such as: “TASS¹⁴⁸ is authorized to announce . . .” (these people knew that they were boldly lying, as did the whole world), to naive but proud lies like: “*Soviet* means the best.” Sometimes they were self-assured but silly, as for example in this poetic sentence: “As it’s known, the earth begins with the Kremlin”; or they were absolutely idiotic: “The whole Soviet country is song and dance all day long.” Just think of the meaning of these words! You could hear on radio and at concerts singing like: “Like an owner, a person walks through the boundless native land,” or “How wonderful it is to live in the Soviet country . . .” And all of these were promulgated in the 1930’s when the country was surrounded by the barbed wire of fearful GULAG’s¹⁴⁹ . . .

¹⁴⁸Translator’s note: TASS was the official news agency of the U.S.S.R.

¹⁴⁹Translator’s note: This well-known word was actually an acronym for the Russian words for “Main Department of Prison-Camps NKVD” (the NKVD was the former name of the KGB).

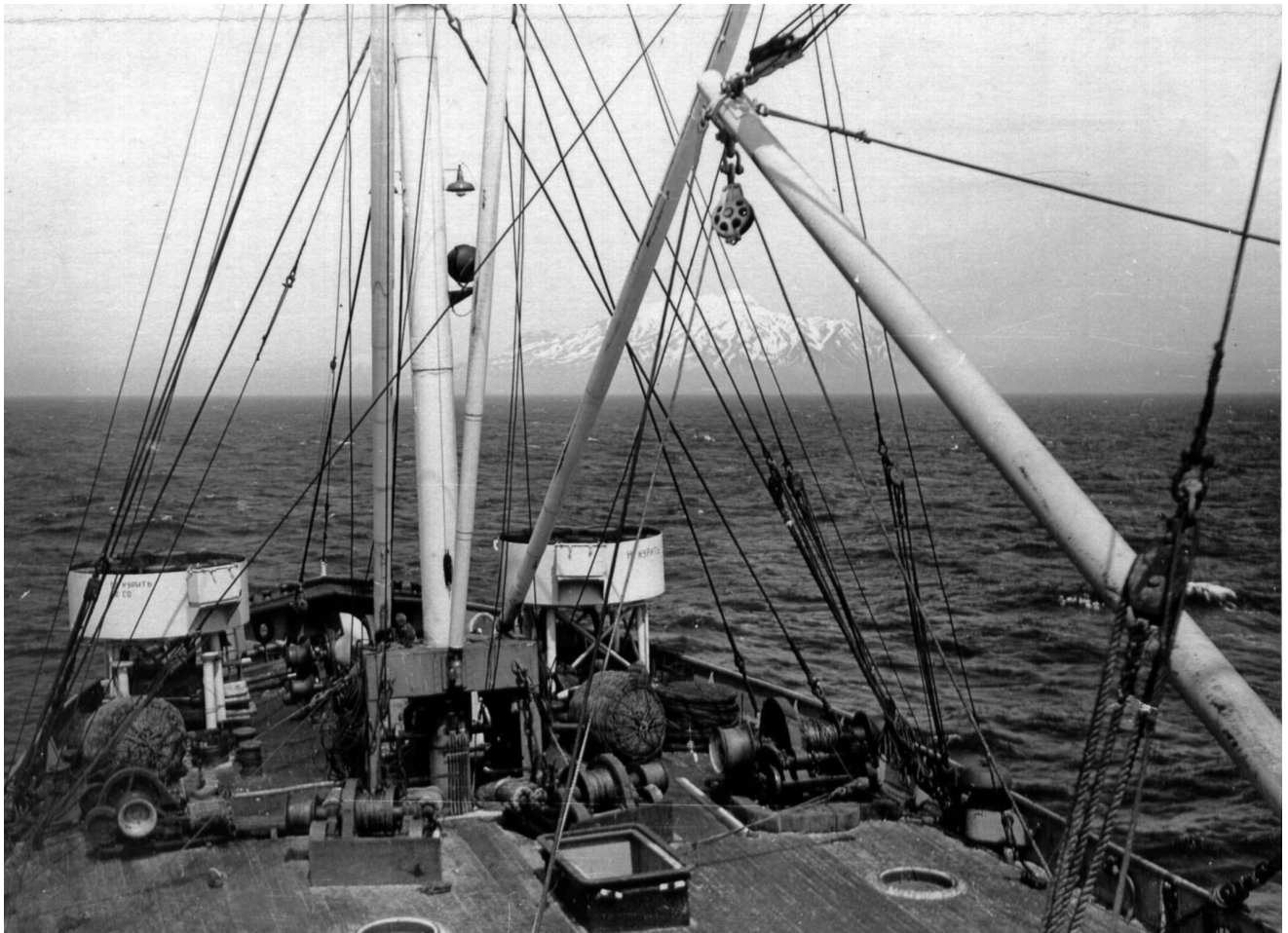


Plate 34.—Bow of the factory ship *Aleut* at sea. Photo: A. Berzin.

Later on, people responded to these slogans with this joke: In kindergarten, a teacher asks the kids during class: “Where is the most delicious porridge? Where are the best teachers? Where are the most delicious candies?”, and to all these questions the kids respond in unison: “In the Soviet Union!” A small boy, brought to class by his older sister because there was nobody to watch him at home, quietly started to cry, and said: “I want to go to the Soviet Union!” Although this sounds like it could be a kids’ joke, in reality it’s far from this, and far from funny.

Until recently, the best intellectuals were reviled by the “obedient majority.” They were evicted from the country and

were immediately recorded as traitors to the homeland for speaking the truth, and for their refusal to lie.

Russian people were learning the truth from “behind the hill”¹⁵⁰, from samizdat¹⁵¹, and from enemies’ voices (like the Voice of America), which were suppressed by powerful jamming devices built in all the large cities of the country. How many times was something solemnly promised, at conventions, and conferences, and

¹⁵⁰Translator’s note: This expression means publications or other media or information from foreign countries.

¹⁵¹Translator’s note: This word cannot be transliterated; it means hand-produced copies of prohibited literature which were not available for open sale.

in the newspapers, to the chronically deceived people, but not fulfilled? How many time were acts, which according to any sane mind should be punished, welcomed and even rewarded? I am not straying from my memoir’s subject: isn’t the life and work of Solyanik and those similar to him an example of this?

I have written about this not just for the sake of talking, and not to throw a stone after the collapse of the empire, but to repeat one more time that the entire period of large-scale Soviet whaling was accompanied by continuous bold and uncontrolled lies. Sometimes the reason for these lies was unclear; the lie was inexplicable and unnecessary. Sometimes the lies



Plate 35.—A catcher of the Kuril whaling fleet, wrecked on rocks in the Kuril Islands. Photo: A. Berzin.

were so awkward and incompetent that the official Soviet statistical data had donkey's ears sticking out.¹⁵²

Lies became an inalienable part and perhaps even a foundation of Soviet whaling. In other words, it could not exist without lies, could not fulfill and exceed plan targets. Without such lies this gigantic and destructive business could not exist. Maybe in the whaling industry of this one-sixth part of the world¹⁵³ lies were concentrated and glaringly obvious [for those inside the system].

The effort to hide these lies created a completely perverted secrecy, which sometimes bordered on the moronic.

For example, an absurd incident occurred in 1980 during a Soviet-American cruise on a Soviet ship to study the abundance and distribution of whales in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.

¹⁵²Translator's note: This Russian expression means something that is obviously not correct.

¹⁵³Translator's note: Meaning the U.S.S.R., which occupied 1/6 of the land in the world.

During a meeting of the ship's officers at the beginning of the cruise, they discussed the suggestion of the Vice-Captain (I will remind you that this was a commissar) that none of the American scientists should be allowed on the bridge or in the navigating room. Why? So that the Americans would not see our charts! However, not to allow them to go to these places was uncomfortable. So the decision was made to copy the charts using tracing paper(!) The Americans were surprised and even shocked to see that Russians sailing in such dangerous waters were using tracing paper charts (of course they did not know the underlying reason, and didn't ever suspect this). They gave us wonderful American navigational charts of our coast, marked with all radio lighthouses and their signals, and other navigational features. Those who saw these charts said that they were much better than ours. When the ship came into the village of Provideniya on Chukotka, the border guards took away these charts, and the responsible

department kept them secret . . . from whom?!

This is what the newspaper *Izvestiya* wrote on the 2nd of March 1994 on this topic:

“The necessity of constant falsifications defined the destiny of the whaling industry as one of the most secret types of economic activities. This falsification made it easier for the whaling industry to ignore any rules.”

On the Antarctic whaling fleets, in addition to the regular requirement for foreign voyages that informants (within the crew) be present, an employee of the KGB was assigned. Before ships went into foreign ports the crew were given instructions, and falsified whale catch numbers were given to seamen that they could use in case of questions.

All radio communications about whaling were conducted using special coding tables developed by the KGB. At the same time numeric codes for some parameters were changed daily on all vessels (actually, I should correct myself: twice a day!) These tables were more reminiscent of acts during wartime or of reconnaissance codes than a way to communicate during peaceful industry actions. They included expressions like: “foreign planes appeared”; “foreign ships discovered”; “sink illegal whales” . . .

The book about illegal Soviet whaling essentially finished with the previous sections. In this section I have tried to point out some highlights, and explain the mechanisms driving what was going on during the whaling described in this memoir.

Epilogue

Many years have passed since the events described here occurred, although the consequences of this barbaric whaling can be seen even now, and it is a shameful mark on the initiators and leaders of that industry.

The U.S.S.R. Minister of Fisheries, A. Ishkov, was a Hero of Socialistic Work and a deputy of the U.S.S.R.'s Supreme Council. On one occasion a

scientist was trying to protect the whale resources from destructive whaling and he reminded the Minister about his descendants.¹⁵⁴ Ishkov returned an abominable, criminal, and chilling response that should be carved upon the grave stone of the Soviet economic system: “These descendants will not be the ones to fire me from my job.” But, just in case, he ensured no descendants would know anything of what was going on in the whaling industry under his leadership by hiding all the documents about whales and whaling “behind seven locks.”¹⁵⁵

Even now, some of Ishkov’s followers that are hopelessly pervaded by this ideological spirit of secrecy try to hide the “awl in a bag.”¹⁵⁶ I have kept a quite recent (1994) telegram from the Fisheries Industry Administration to our institute’s administration and myself, that “prohibits the transfer of original whaling data to the American side.”

A lot of information has been declassified and made available to the public, including some top military secrets; yet over Soviet whaling the stamp of deep silence has been laid, although in formal terms some documents (those that were not destroyed) have been declassified.

The time has come to completely tear away the curtain of mystery from this industry and to collect the surviving data. One person cannot cover in sufficient detail almost 50 years of Soviet whaling history.

I hope that this memoir has accomplished its objective of making the truth about Soviet whaling available to the international community. And to publicize to this same community the lies with which the communist regime tried to cover up its crimes

¹⁵⁴Editors’ note: The scientist was Yuri Mikhalev, another of the former Soviet biologists who worked to correct the catch record after the Cold War. Mikhalev was summoned to Moscow after complaining about the illegal whaling, and in his meeting with Ishkov told him that he was concerned that there would be no whales left for their grandchildren. Ishkov reportedly replied, “Your grandchildren? Your grandchildren aren’t the ones who can remove me from my job!”

¹⁵⁵Translator’s note: This expression means to hide something very well.

¹⁵⁶Translator’s note: The meaning of this expression is to hide something very obvious.



Plate 36.—Humpback whales breaching, Silver Bank, North Atlantic, 2005. Photo: MONAH project.



Plate 37.—Two humpback whales breaching, Silver Bank, North Atlantic, 2005. Photo: MONAH project.

against the great creation of the Highest Mind—Nature.

The Soviet Union did its best to ensure that our descendants would never see whale blows on the horizon. But the whales did not want to become

extinct: single animals found each other in the spaces of the ocean and brought forth new life. The abundance of some populations of large whales in the Antarctic and the North Pacific is slowly increasing.

I am not afraid to repeat myself when I say that, to me, the highest-priority task in international science is to concentrate all efforts on the monitoring of large whale populations, especially in the whaling areas.

When I started to work on this memoir, some serious people asked me: “Do you really need it?” I would like to respond to them using the words of the remarkable Russian writer (and Nobel laureate) Alexander Solz-

henitsyn, who said during a meeting with the citizens of Vladivostok in May 1994: “There can be no acceptable future without an honest analysis of the past.”



Appendix I Plate.—Soviet catcher with two minke whales. Year and photographer unknown.

Appendix I Modern Russian Whaling in the Far East

IAN HART

Modern whaling by Russia in the Far East was started by a Naval Lieutenant, named Akim G. Dydymov, in 1889. Dydymov built a whaling station at Hajdamak, some 180 kilometres east of Vladivostok, and contracted the building in Norway of a modern ‘Fryn type’ catcher named *Gennadij Nevelskoj*. The first whale was harpooned on the 10th of November 1889. Much of the production was profitably sold to Japan. But on the 31st of December 1890, the catcher was

lost with all hands off the eastern coast of Korea, and the enterprise came to a halt.

The next attempt to undertake whaling was conducted by Count H. H. Kejzerling, a member of the Baltic Russian-German aristocracy. In 1895 he founded the Pacific Whaling Company and secured a 25-year concession to hunt whales along the Russian Pacific coast. He purchased the redundant station at Hajdamak and commissioned the building in Norway of two modern catchers named *Georgij* and *Nikolaj*. The ships’ harpoon guns were manned by Norwegians, and the remainder of the crews were Russian, Korean, and Chinese. An annual catch of some 110 whales was achieved with most of the production being sold to Japan. How-

ever, this came to an abrupt halt when the station was completely destroyed by fire in 1901.

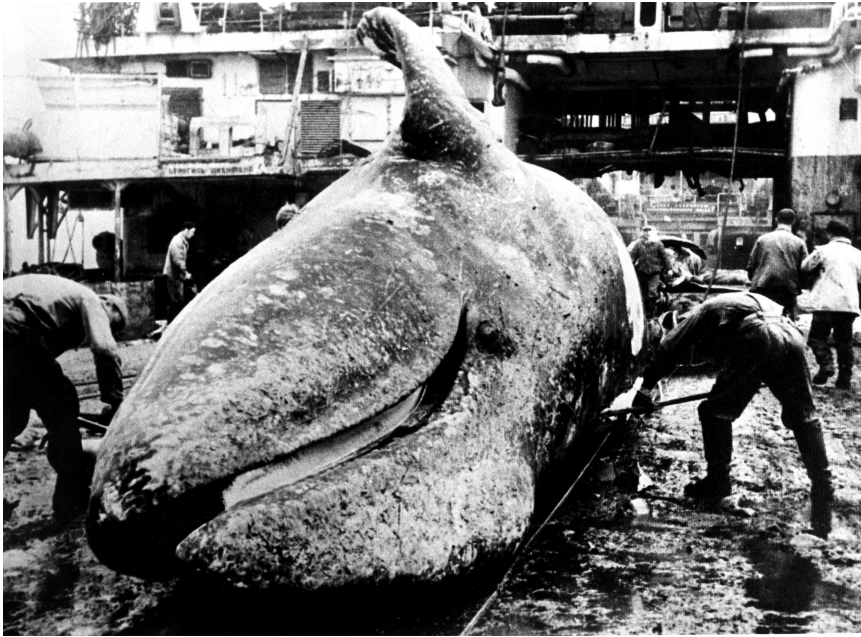
In 1899, the company also purchased a British freighter and in 1902–03 converted her at Danzig into the world’s first modern floating factory ship, named *Michail*. The first whale was delivered to the ship in July 1903, and by the 21st of October 1903, some 98 whales had been secured. The enterprise continued until it was brought to a halt by the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. The factory ship and the catchers were suspected of acting as spy ships; they were captured by the Japanese and the crews were interned as prisoners of war. Thus ended the first period of modern whaling by Russians in the Far East. Although there were several attempts to revive it, it was not until 1932 that a new chapter in Russian whaling began with the commissioning of the factory ship *Aleut*, as related here by Alfred Berzin.

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Appendix II

Reported vs. Actual Catches by the U.S.S.R. in the Southern Hemisphere, 1948–73

PHILLIP J. CLAPHAM and C. SCOTT BAKER



Appendix II Plate.—A gray whale on the deck of the factory ship *Vladivostok*, Gulf of Alaska, 1964. Photo: A. Berzin.

Reported vs. actual catches of whales by the U.S.S.R. in the Southern Hemisphere, 1948–73. Note that some catches were actually over-reported; this was to disguise takes of protected species by over-reporting catches of species which were legally hunttable at the time. Reproduced from Clapham and Baker (2002).

Species	Reported	Actual
Blue whale, <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	3,651	3,642
Pygmy blue whale, <i>Balaenoptera musculus brevicauda</i>	10	8,439
Fin whale, <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	52,931	41,184
Sei whale, <i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>	33,001	50,034
Humpback whale, <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	2,710	48,477
Bryde's whale, <i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>	19	1,418
Minke whale, <i>Balaenoptera bonaerensis</i>	17,079	14,002
Southern right whale, <i>Eubalaena australis</i>	4	3,212
Sperm whale, <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	74,834	89,493
Other species	1,539	1,745
Total	185,778	261,646

Appendix III

Soviet catches of large whales in the North Pacific, 1961–1979

PHILLIP J. CLAPHAM and ROBERT L. BROWNELL, JR.

FF = floating factory ship. Source: Yablokov and Zemsky (2000).

Species	Total caught	Reported to IWC	Eastern NP catch	Eastern NP period	Remarks
Right, <i>Eubalaena japonica</i>	508	0	372	1963–67	342 taken in 1963–64 in Gulf of Alaska and SE Bering Sea
Gray, <i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>	139	0	139	1964–70	124 taken in 1967 in Bering Sea
Fin, <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	8,980	10,148	?	(1961–75)	Locations unknown. Catches over-reported.
Sei, <i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>	4,376	7,868	?	(1961–75)	Locations unknown. Catches over-reported.
Blue, <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	1,205	517	1,197	1961–71	GOA 1961–65 (760), off Pacific NW 1966–72 (112), central N Pacific north of 40 N 1965–72 (325)
Humpback, <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	6,793	4,254	6,793	1961–71	Peak catch of 2,625 in 1963, dropped to 77 in 1966. Catches primarily in eastern Aleutians, Gulf of Alaska and in SE Bering Sea.
Sperm <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	106,053	86,741	?	(1963–79)	Mostly pelagic: FF Dalnij Vostok and Vladivostock. Catch by sex: males 73,173 (reported 72,532), females 32,880 (reported 14,209). True catch data not available for three other FF's; Brownell et al. (2000) estimate total Soviet N Pacific takes for 1949–71 at ca. 180,000 sperm whales. Add to this the 1972–79 total catch (32,338) for grand total (known + estimated, 1949–79) of 212,338.

Note: bowheads are not included because the only known takes (133 in 1968) were all in the Okhotsk Sea.

Notes

Sperm whale catches were under-reported by the U.S.S.R. beginning in about 1948 and continuing through to the early 1970's, when the International Observer Scheme came into effect (Brownell et al., 2000). In the North Pacific, true catch data are available for two floating factory ship fleets: the *Dalnij Vostok* and the *Vladivostock*. Catches were misreported both in total and by sex, with true catch totals being as fol-

lows: males 73,173 (reported 72,532), females 32,880 (reported 14,209). True catch data not available for three other floating factory fleets; using correction factors derived from the *Dalnij Vostok* and *Vladivostock* data, Brownell et al. (2000) estimated total Soviet North Pacific takes for 1949–71 at ca. 180,000 sperm whales. If one adds to this the 1972–79 total catch (32,338), the grand total of sperm whale catches in the North Pacific (known + estimated, 1949–79) is 212,338 whales.

Literature cited

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- Yablokov, A.V., and V. A. Zemsky (Editors). 2000. Soviet whaling data (1949–1979). Center for Russian Environmental Policy, Moscow, 408 p. [In Russian and English].



Appendix Plate III.—Humpback whales under Makushin volcano, Unalaska Island, Aleutians, 2005. Photo: NMML/Phil Clapham.

Errata

Berzin, Alfred A. 2008. The Truth about Soviet Whaling. *Marine Fisheries Review* 70(2):4-59.

On page 9, footnote 21 should read:

²¹Translator's note: Zenkovich, ВОКРУГ СВЕТА ЗА КИТАМИ, 1936, Leningrad, Molodaya gvardiya Leningradskoe otделение.