

Gupni Th. Jóhannesson, *Troubled Waters: Cod War, Fishing Disputes, and Britain's Fight for the Freedom of the High Seas, 1948-1964*. "Studia Atlantica" No. 11; Reykjavik: North Atlantic Fisheries History Association, 2007 [orders to: Ms Josephine Affleck, Maritime Historical Studies Centre, Blaydes House, 6 High Street, Hull HU1 1HA, England (e-mail: j.affleck@hull.ac.uk)]. 323 pp., maps, illustrations, bibliography. 2,000 Ikr, €15, £10 (plus £2 s&h for non-members of NAFHA), paper; ISBN 978-9979-70-315-0.

This is a very thorough and scholarly work set in a period of fewer than two decades after World War II, when there were major international power readjustments. During these readjustments, one of the major developments was the run-down of the British Empire. A consequence was that British trawl owners had to withdraw their boats from distant waters, and most significant and newsworthy of these withdrawals was that from waters around Iceland.

British trawlers had fished in Icelandic waters for over half a century by then. It is important to understand that they had never been welcome to the Icelanders. They had operated under what they called the "notorious bacon and butter agreement," a legacy of the late nineteenth century, when Denmark still exercised control over Iceland. At the time, Denmark wanted access for its dairy produce to the British market, and was prepared to sacrifice Iceland's interests to secure that access. As a result, the only waters reserved for Icelandic fishermen were within a three-mile limit of the shore. When Iceland achieved full independence in 1944, fish and fishing limits were understandably major issues for its people: fish comprised ninety percent of Icelandic exports. When the confrontation with British trawlers came to a head, the British government supported the trawl owners and resisted changes in the fishing limit; it took its stand on international law, which was actually more ambiguous than Britain was prepared to admit. Since their country was a main market for Icelandic fish, the British believed that they held a strong card to play against the little country of Iceland and they were therefore prepared to exercise gunboat diplomacy to protect their trawlers. For a time, landings of Iceland's fish in Britain were even banned. This had to hurt Iceland, given Britain's role as a primary market for its fish.

Jóhannesson organizes his account into four sections. The first analyses the changed political situation in the period 1948-1952. This is followed by a second section labelled "Procrastination," when Britain began to realize its reduced importance in international affairs but effectively postponed a resolution. The third section deals with the nub of the question, and is labelled "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea." It covers the period 1956 to 1960. The final section is entitled "Pax Nordica," with the subtitle "Surrender on the High Seas." It deals with the period 1960 to 1964, when the old doctrine of the International Law of the Sea was on its way out.

Fishing is set in a context of other important issues: the book covers part of the period of the Cold War, when Iceland's strategic position in the North Atlantic was important to both the United States and the Soviet Union. The Americans established a base at Keflavik, which was important to Iceland for the revenue it generated for the national budget. More to the point, international power politics was always a complicating issue behind the fishing dispute. Conferences on the international law of the sea in 1958 and 1960 proved inconclusive and failed to help bring an end to the dispute.

As is evident in the references, a great variety of sources were consulted and assessed in this book. In addition to those in Iceland and Britain, they include documents in several other countries, including the United States, Russia, Denmark, Norway and Germany. Maps and other illustrations are important in the argument. Unfortunately –

and this may be a result of the printing process – the illustrations are not particularly good. Figure 2, which purports to show the three-mile limit around Iceland, is almost unreadable.

This work is knowledgeable, balanced and sensitive in its handling of a period of major adjustments in international power. However, it does terminate before the decade of the 1970s which is the decade that included the main changes in the international law of the sea, and it was in that decade that national fishing limits of 200 miles became recognized and accepted under international law. While this is a very fine book, it is necessary to consult other sources to see the process of readjustment of marine national boundaries to its end.

The Icelandic fishing dispute was not an isolated case. The dispute was set in a broader context. British trawlers also fished off North Norway, in the White Sea and off eastern Canada, and for Britain the acceptance of any new legal regime was prejudicial to its case and interests. The ball was effectively set rolling in 1948 when Norway claimed a four-mile limit measured from closing baselines as distinct from the low tide mark. In the dispute that the British trawlers (or more accurately, the trawl owners) had with Norway, a major event in international law was the decision of the International Court at The Hague in 1951 in favour of Norway. After this decision, Britain was in effect fighting a rearguard action, and one which the trawl owners were bound to lose.

The work is summed up in the conclusion. Eventual defeat for Britain is seen as inevitable, and Britain could have acted with a better grace and with more realism. Britain made miscalculations in its stance against a small country. Those errors are understandable, yet regrettable and avoidable; might was not right. In the modern world with the media of publicity, in this case the advantage was with the David of Iceland rather than with the Goliath of Britain.

In all this is a well-considered book that presents a fair and balanced account of an international issue that was to be epoch-making; many countries may not find fishing to be the biggest of international issues, but it is vital to Iceland. The manner in which Iceland successfully asserted her claim to the fishing grounds around her is traced with commendable detail, and the intransigence of the former imperial power of Britain is adequately shown. On the credit side, law rather than force did eventually prevail.