

Poor get poorer . . . because of government agreements

A TAMU economist says that some non-profit institutions are frustrating the hopes of their supporters and many only lead to further impoverishment of the poor.

One of the major culprits pointed out by Dr. Rufus Waters are International Commodity Agreements (ICA). In this kind of organization, a commodity like tea or coffee is frozen in volume, trade, and price.

Waters explained, "ICAs were first created by private producers in

the face of declining prices for their products. They were used to control, at various times, rubber, coffee, sugar, tin, wheat, tea and copper."

U.S. government cooperation has allowed the first large scale ICAs to appear. The Coffee Agreement was accepted by the U.S. because it would bolster the earnings of those who controlled the Latin American governments and whose nations were major coffee producers. This would be a politically less painful

way to transfer wealth from the U.S. consumers to the administrators of the Latin American governments than by directly taxing U.S. citizens.

The original arguments for ICAs had been that they could raise prices, and hopefully incomes, for the producers of selected primary commodities. They turned out to be an ill-disguised form of aid.

"The poor in the producing nations are the little farmers who are denied the right to produce more so

that price can be kept high," Waters said. "Those who gain are the three required groups of administrators: one in the producing region, one in the consuming region and an international agency in between."

"While explicit bribery seldom comes to light, it is more usual that the legislators of the consumer nation are rewarded for their support of the ICA with the right to allocate special privileges," he noted. "In the case of the Sugar and Coffee agreements, this took the form of

the right of U.S. legislators to allocate quotas and to decide what domestic businesses to reward with protection."

Thus, legislators acquire the valuable right to give certain favors to the producer nations and domestic groups. The legislator can also appear at the same time both for and against the payment of foreign aid: he may vote against aid appropriations but for ICAs.

A system of production controls in turn requires an increased

number of officials which enhances the power, authority, and rewards of senior bureaucrats through their right to select employees and allocate jobs.

"ICAs make nonsense of the oft-stated goals of economic development, greater income equality, more efficient land use, and rural development," Waters said. "Where poverty is already widespread, it seems doubly unkind to deny to the peasant the highest available return on his resources."

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