
Interview: Hartwig de Haen

LDCs face 'chronic undernourishment'

During the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) summit, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) maintained an information office, and held two briefings off-site, to provide details on the world food situation. On Dec. 2, Marcia Merry Baker interviewed Dr. Hartwig de Haen, Assistant Director General, FAO Economic and Social Department.

EIR: At the WTO summit, there may be some part of a communiqué proposing that the 48 Least Developed Countries be allowed more duty-free "market access." But, in fact, these are the very nations that have food insecurity and need economic action.

De Haen: Yes, these countries are amongst those that have the highest share of chronically undernourished. They are highly dependent on food imports. They have difficulties in developing their own agriculture. These countries have been promised some help in the adjustment of the new international trading environment, in the so-called Marrakesh Decision on the negative effects of the reform process. This assistance has not been provided, partly because it is, in fact, difficult to prove, which part of their problem stems from trade problems, and which part from natural disasters, the Asian crisis, and so on. But this is, of course, let me say, rather bureaucratic argumentation. Because in fact, their import bills have risen very drastically in the last years.

EIR: About how much do you think it has risen during the last couple years of the financial turmoil?

De Haen: Well, I cannot give you a figure, but the increase is significant.

EIR: Is there one example that comes to mind of the situation—North Korea, or Indonesia, or somewhere—of the 35 nations where you have FAO missions? What shows the need for food?



De Haen: You have just said it. Thirty-five countries are currently in a situation of food emergency. This comes on top of the chronic hunger that we reported. These countries are mostly countries that have a severe political crisis. In fact, the major part have civil strife or war. These countries, of course, have, first of all, to get humanitarian aid, because many [of the hungry] are refugees and are totally devastated in terms of their support basis. And, on the other hand, the number of people in these countries that are directly affected by famine, are 52 million.

EIR: The total volume of food aid is declining internationally recently, is that correct?

De Haen: No, it has declined from the early 1990s, but it has recently increased. However, I must say that the increase is mainly because one particular country is now a huge recipient of food aid, and that is Russia.

From Summit Briefings

Cargill: 'We have far from a monopoly'

On Dec. 2, a WTO summit off-site briefing was held on a new "Food Chain Coalition," formed by the Washington, D.C.-based Emergency Committee for American Trade (ECAT), which is run by Cargill, Inc. and other food cartel companies. Their ECAT policy demands include a new multilateral trade round to lower remaining barriers to free trade, stricter WTO rules for compliance with seed and other patents (intellectual property rights), and low taxes on foreign-source income. The coalition is a public relations effort to promote the fraud that free trade will feed people. On Dec. 2, a video was released on the "story" of the food chain, and speakers included U.S. Reps. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.) and Cal Dooley (D-Calif.), ECAT president Calman Cohen, and Ernest S. Micek, who is chairman of Cargill, Inc. and of ECAT.

EIR: There are briefings this week by the UN FAO on world food shortages, in which the 48 Least Developed Countries stand out as having chronic malnourishment. FAO figures show that close to a billion people in these and other countries lack enough to eat. The grains they depend on for 40% of their diet, have gone way up in import-prices over the last three years. They are eating less. Still more "free trade" promises no help.

Cohen: I have not seen the specific statistics described, and an explanation for them. But I believe that, when you are