

many important issues have been ignored by environmentalists in their hasty desire to condemn the WTO. One of these issues is the difficulty of regulating process and production methods (PPMs).

The U.S. ban was applied to PPMs. Basically, the United States stated that only shrimp caught in a particular way would be acceptable for the U.S. market. This ban flies in the face of global commitment to freer trade. The idea that like products cannot be discriminated against is one of the fundamental tenets of a free-trade regime. Shrimp are shrimp, regardless of the method by which they were caught. Once we allow countries to regulate on the basis of PPMs, trade barriers will be erected everywhere.

As well, if countries can begin to specify exactly how goods should be produced, then countries without those technologies will be at a severe disadvantage. Environmentalists often claim to look out for the poor and for less-developed nations, but allowing regulation of PPMs will certainly not help these countries. Once a rich nation such as the United States says that some good must be produced in a certain way, less-developed nations are already at a disadvantage in trade compared with areas such as the EU that probably already have the technology. The purpose of free trade is to make countries better off. By allowing less-developed countries to engage in trade, new markets are opened and new money can begin to improve the welfare of people in the country. Regulation of PPMs would send us back to the days of isolationism, and less-developed countries would be hurt the most.

Free trade provides benefits to everyone. Through specialization and the theory of comparative advantage, countries that trade can have more of the goods they want than if trade did not happen. Obviously, more goods mean that people are better off and can have a higher standard of living. Is not this the world we want to leave to our children?

Endnotes

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