



Instinct isn't enough

by Mahar Mangahas, May 13, 2017

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Demonstrating the importance of vetting policy-making by scientific research is a new book, “Unintended Consequences: The Folly of Uncritical Thinking,” edited by Vicente B. Paqueo, Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr. and Gilberto M. Llanto, Philippine Institute for Development Studies; downloadable for free at www.pids.gov.ph. It contains:

“Cargo truck ban: bad timing, faulty analysis, policy failure,” by Llanto. The truck ban in Manila saved commuters a few minutes of daily travel time, but was rightly set aside since the costs to consumers reached billions of pesos.

On labor policy: “The impact of legal minimum wages on employment, income, and poverty incidence in the Philippines,” by Paqueo, Orbeta and Leonardo A. Lanzona Jr.; “Trading off worker flexibility for job security: missed opportunities for more and better jobs,” by Lanzona and Paqueo; and “Beware of the ‘End contractualization!’ battle cry,” by Paqueo and Orbeta.

Though popular with organized labor, these policies have discriminated against the young, the inexperienced and the less-educated, and women. By leading to substitution of capital for labor, they have actually hurt employment as a whole.

“Food (in)security and the price of rice self-sufficiency,” by Roehlano Briones. The self-sufficiency policy has led to higher consumer prices, and thus to greater malnutrition. (See “End the NFA monopoly” Opinion, 4/22/17).

To me, the executive move to allow private importation is not a final solution, since the NFA’s legal monopoly still leaves ground for those angling for payoffs to seek a restraining court order.

“Beyond the rent: studying the unintended consequences of housing rent control law in Metro Manila,” by Marife Ballesteros and Tatum P. Ramos. Rent control led to ill-maintained houses, lacking in toilets, bathrooms and water supply.

“Planting seeds of self-defeat: effects of unrealistic regulations on the Caraga wood industry and forest conservation,” by Paqueo and Danilo C. Israel. The total log ban created powerful incentives for corruption. It raised the cost of tree farming and reduced the number of wood processing plants. Remaining natural forests have reverted to open access areas, attracting illegal loggers, kaingin farmers and informal settlers.

“Reducing the unintended consequences of open access fishing: lessons from the Zamboanga experience,” by Israel, Milva Lunod-Carinan and Paqueo. Realization of the danger of imminent exhaustion of sardine stocks finally led the fishermen and the government to agree on a three-month closed season for fishing around the Zamboanga peninsula.

“Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino program: boon or bane?” by Orbeta and Paqueo. The question has been thoroughly answered by very careful empirical research: Pantawid has definitely been a BOON. (See “Stopping Pantawid would be stupid,” 1/16/2016.)

“The irony of RH Law critics’ opposition to comprehensive sex education,” by Michael R.M. Abrigo and Paqueo. The critics wrongly claim that sex education leads to earlier sexual initiation and higher rates of sexual activity; but what is true is the opposite.

Our greatest hero, a scientist, said: “Di ko inaasahang paniwalaan ako alang-alang lamang sa aking sabi: maraming taong di natingin sa katuiran at tunay ... nguni’t ang hiling ko’y magisip, mag mulaymulay ang lahat, usigin at salain kung sakali sa ngalan ng katuiran.” (“I don’t expect to be believed merely on my say-so: many people don’t look at reason and truth ... but what I ask all is to think, reflect, investigate, and sift perhaps in the name of reason.”) – Jose Rizal, 1889, “Letter to the young women of Malolos.”

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