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**The Hans Singer Memorial Lecture:
Bonn to honour one of the 20th
century's outstanding development
researchers**

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The Hans Singer Memorial Lecture: Bonn to honour one of the 20th century's outstanding development researchers

Bonn, 11 May 2009. 18 May 2009, is the date set for the first [Hans Singer Memorial Lecture on Global Development](#). The lecture series, a joint initiative of the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), the Institute for Political Science and Sociology / Institut für politische Wissenschaft und Soziologie (University of Bonn), and the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), was created to honour one of the twentieth century's most influential European development researchers, whose academic career began at the University of Bonn. It was in Bonn that he was to acquire his first academic degree, in economics, in 1931. He had already gained the support of Joseph Schumpeter, at that time a professor of political economics in Bonn, for his planned doctoral studies. However, Schumpeter, who was later to achieve eminence in his field, soon left Bonn for a position at Harvard University. Singer was in the midst of writing a new dissertation when he was forced to flee the National Socialist terror regime because of his Jewish background. In 1934 he arrived, by a roundabout way, in the UK, where he was soon to become a member of the group of Cambridge scholars around John Maynard Keynes.

Since World War II, Sir Hans Singer – he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1994 – shaped, in key ways, both the academic debate on the countries of the South and the practice of development policy. From 1947 to 1969, Hans Singer held a number of prominent posts in the United Nations' development sector. From 1969 to 2006, the year of his death, he was a member of the teaching and research staff of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Brighton (UK). Hans Singer devoted the better part of his life to efforts to give the economic sciences a new, emphatically moral orientation geared to practical applications and advisory work. That may be the reason why he has, until today, received relatively little recognition in his own discipline, that is, outside the field of development studies.

It was at the United Nations that Hans Singer developed his widely acclaimed theory on the long-term deterioration in the terms of international trade for developing countries specialised in the export of primary products, the so-called Prebisch-Singer Thesis, a hypothesis that has since become a core element of international economics. According to the Prebisch-Singer Thesis, integration into the world economy on the basis of exports of agricultural and mineral commodities works to the detriment of this group of countries, while at the same time the industrialised countries stand to benefit, disproportionately and systematically, from international trade. Hans Singer identifies the root structural cause of this interdependency, with its alarming implications for development policy, in institutional disparities in the labour markets of developing and industrialised nations. In connection with a mission to Kenya in the early 1970s that he headed, together with the renowned development scientist Sir Richard Jolly (IDS), on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Hans Singer also published some pioneering findings with immediate relevance for development practice. Together, the two development researchers developed the innovative idea of redistribution with growth, a concept that involved a reassessment and acknowledgement of the informal productive sector.



Alongside the theoretical impulses he provided for development research, Hans Singer published a number of key conceptual contributions bearing on the development and qualification of international institutions, most of them part the United Nations system, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).

The prodigious list of Hans Singer's publications bears witness to an extraordinary creative power and at the same time serves to document the breadth of the interests that accompanied him in the course of his scholarly career, encompassing a period of over 70 years. He held his last lecture, on the origin of the 0.7 percent goal set for development policy, one week before his ninety-fifths birthday. It was no doubt his own biography that induced Hans Singer to work unceasingly for social justice, human development, and poverty alleviation, which he saw as the central concerns of scholarship and politics. He furthermore trusted in the ability of international institutions, and the United Nations in particular, to create and sustain peace.

Hans Singer received broad international recognition and was honoured on numerous occasions; a total of five commemorative publications were dedicated to him in his lifetime. In Germany, the University of Freiburg awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2004. This year's Hans Singer Memorial Lecture, by Prof. Paul Collier, University of Oxford, will revisit, based on current empirical data, Hans Singer's intellectual legacy, the hypothesis on the deteriorating terms of trade for commodity exporters. The lecture, set to be held once a year, will alternate between Bonn and Brighton. This approach, it is hoped, will serve to enhance the response to Hans Singer's phenomenal legacy both in the country of his birth and at the centre of UN activities in Germany, the city of Bonn.



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