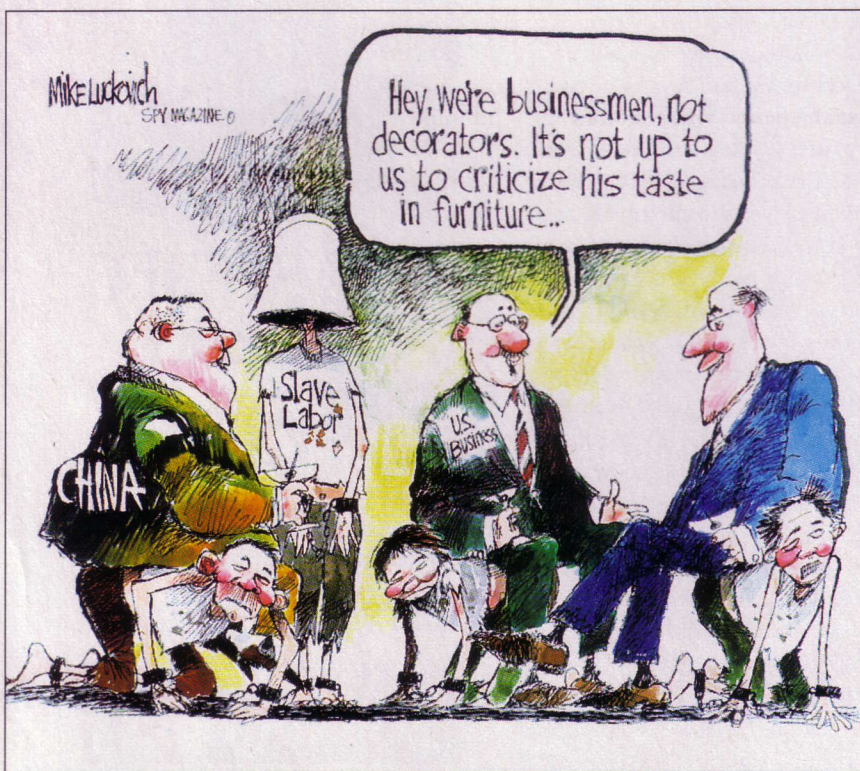


# Re-education Through Labor

A billion apple-eaters can't be wrong—can they?

ONE IS NIBBLING on one's morning scone, sipping one's latte, and skimming the *Journal* when one notices that financial news has uncomfortably veered away from housing slowdowns and rocky pharmaceutical stocks. "To have Western standards," declares Chrysler chairman Robert J. Eaton. "That's absolutely ridiculous."



One's hands begin to shake. Multicultural creep on the Dow?

Oh, *phew*, nothing like that. Eaton is just pulling the proverbial rug out from under a Chinese employee, Gao Feng, who was arrested on suspicion of being a Christian and then, upon his release, was fired for missing work without a reasonable explanation. "We can't assume [Gao] is 100 percent right and the government is 100 percent wrong," explains Eaton, demonstrating his American verve for due process and the democratic way. "We're a minority shareholder in a [joint-venture] company. We can't dictate."

Eaton is gearing up for his late-summer trip to China with 24 other top corporate executives and commerce secretary Ron Brown. It's the glorious consummation of the recent Clinton directive to de-link human rights policy from trade policy. After years of a forced interest in China, American business is now free to stop worrying about prisoners of conscience and "re-education through labor." Clinton has decided to let business be business.

But somehow there are still all these pesky media distractions. First the truant Christian is demanding his job back—loudly. Then comes an all-too-credible report that Chrysler's joint-venture company, Beijing Jeep, has been quietly (but not quietly enough) contracting work out to Beijing Autoworks Industrial Corporation [BAIC], a known prison labor outfit.

"What is a labor camp?" says Franc Krebs, president of Beijing Jeep, responding to the charge. "I've never been able to find one myself." After the allegations are specifically articulated—*Oh, THAT labor camp*—Krebs adopts Eaton's I'm-no-authoritarian rap. "We have kind of a distant relationship with BAIC," he says. "I don't go into his shop and tell him how to run it."

To go into another man's shop and demand, say, a halt to the use of electric whips and "punishment beds"? To insist on protection from 180-degree flames and on bandages for open baton wounds? How Western; how absolutely ridiculous.

"We're businessmen and we're playing our role," insists Hewlett-Packard's Jim Whittaker. "Certain issues are really government-to-government issues, and are being dealt with, some more successfully than others. It's the federal government that should be reflecting the human rights policies. I don't believe U.S. business should be a message carrier or an arm of the federal government."

For a strict nonpartisan, however, with only a vague sense of the human rights climate in

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