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Welcome to Beijing. Want a blindfold?

Â Death penalty: Always unjustÂ A clichÃ© before death by firing squad is to blindfold the soon-to-be executed person. Is the blindfold a gesture to the firing squad victimÂ or more an effort to keep the target more still to save expending excess bullets and excess time? Â In China, the final insult for a long time was the government's billing of the executed person's family for the killing bullet, fired to the back of the head, which would have made the bean counters happy for avoiding wasted bullets. By now, China has invested into lethal injection vans, which have carried out executions as swiftly as fourteen minutes after sentencing. According to the Times, in 2004, China's "Supreme Peopleâ€™s Court announced that it would in future review all death sentences. The government has also indicated it will reduce the number of crimes that carry a mandatory death sentence."Â However, China's rampant death penalty machine continues. Just yesterday, China executed its former chief food and drug regulator, Zheng Xiaoyu,Â for corruption concerning the approval of drugs.Â Also this month, a Chinese court sentenced China's former drug approval head to death -- with a two-year reprieve for officials to decide whether to carry out the execution -- for taking bribes and for undermining public confidence in China's food and drug regulatory agency. If China thinks its death row and other stiff sentencings will restore global confidence in its exported would-be edibles, I have a bridge in Brooklyn to sell Hu Jintao.Â China's death penalty machine moves forward with a fury, withÂ judges in capital casesÂ acting as the puppets of the Communist party; no jury trials here.Â The extreme inhumanity of China's death penalty system -- which has gone as far as sentencing even evangelicals to death (and later reducing their sentences, possibly to try to placate George Bush II as a prelude toÂ his meeting with China's president) -- Â might cause advocates of the American death penalty system to gloat that the U.S. death penalty machine is overly-replete with sufficient safeguards. But why? The American death penalty machine is but an unjust watered-down microcosm of China's death penalty monstrosity; moreover, by maintaining the death penalty, the United States has little moral authority to pressure China to stop its ongoing slaughter by execution. Â While the United States remains the only Western industrialized country to execute people, industrial giant Japan hasÂ dozens of inmates on death row.Â Japan's immediate past justice minister refused to sign any execution orders. However, apparently to reduce the death row population to under one hundred, this past April, the current justice minister gave the green light for three men to hang, and hanged they were. This came on the heels of four ChristmasÂ day hangings in 2006. Â Â Among the many reasons I have given against the death penalty, the irreversibility of an execution is one of the most compelling arguments, particularly seeing how often innocent people are wrongfully sent to death row. Fortunately, joining the United States' spirited death penalty abolition movement is an infant abolitionist movement in China, with one of its leaders being Qiu Xinglong, who is a law dean atÂ Xiangtan University. Â Look around your home, alone, and see the dominance of Chinese-manufactured products, starting with your electronics -- including computer components -- and moving on to appliances, children's toys and stuffed animals, and cups and plates (and do they contain lead, considering all the adulterated food products that have been coming out of China lately?). Just as I have recommended favoring doing business in American states that do not have the death penalty, I advocate thinking twiceÂ about buying Chinese-made products. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00