

Would You Let this Man Stand in the Way of Your Bottom Line?

International Friends of Wei Jingsheng

1996

Not if you want to succeed in business today. In the modern international marketplace, competition is tough. If the corporations which have brought us the standard of living we have recently come to enjoy are to continue doing so against an increasing foreign challenge, the killing field must be made level. The only way to do that is to do business with the Peoples' Republic of China.

Sure, people disappear in China, from well-known dissidents to a lot of people we don't even hear about, but people disappeared in Latin America, particularly during the seventies and eighties, and it didn't hurt the marketplace appreciably. In fact, leading advocates for the broader interests of the business community at the time, such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick, were full of praise for the security forces that did the job. And, let's face it, a lot of these people in prison in China are probably troublemakers anyway. They might very well have no more use for the kind of world Business is making than they did for the one Communist Party officials have already built. Given a chance, they could easily come to see the relations of production in our two worlds as fundamentally the same. Besides, political repression may be a little unsightly, but it makes for a far more manageable labor force and brings wages to more competitive levels.

European and Japanese companies have already discovered the benefits of this historic opportunity and so have an ever-larger number of American firms. Three decades of the Maoist program of capital accumulation through ideological terror, regimentation and austerity have created the foundation for unparalleled economic growth. Add to that the increased market orientation of the Deng Xiaoping era, and you have a bonanza! This largest of all economies of scale promises unprecedented profit. Our factories in China make workers do things we wouldn't dream of asking them to do in the States, Europe, or even Japan. Finally, operations in China can be a laboratory for new techniques that can be brought back to the United States when restrictive environmental and workplace regulations have been reformed and the work force has become more conditioned to a globally competitive environment.

People who complain so loudly about the harshness of conditions in the Peoples' Republic of China should remember that life can't always be fair here either. Business imperatives are pretty much the same everywhere, and everywhere businesses and governments have to deal with the demands of special interest groups like workers, consumers and people who care too much about the ecological consequences of development. The game is just played a little rougher in China, that's all. We should take the long view: the qualitative line dividing our two ways of life is narrowing all the time. In China, those now employed are working more profitably, wealth is beginning to trickle down and there is a growing middle-class that can afford to live well. This is the essence of modern society everywhere. And here in America, people are being educated to accept a diminishing public sphere, increasing censorship and police presence, productive prison populations and a government more protective of its secrets as the fair price of an orderly and comfortable society. Americans support the Contract with America; there is no

reason why we can't support a Contract with China, too. People in power everywhere are finding it tougher to be nice guys, so why should we be so hard on the Chinese?

The rising international class of managers and entrepreneurs, and the governments which represent their general interests have the same concerns around the world; there's no reason why we can't get along. Why, more and more, we even enjoy the same lifestyles! American businesses have used the transfer of plants and services to China as a way of dealing with the pressure of employees and environmentalists, just as our enhanced support at this difficult time is allowing China's administrators and businessmen to deal better with the forces threatening them. After all, we don't have to like everything it does to see that, if the present regime is overthrown, our own losses could be catastrophic.

It is true that increased cooperation between our two increasingly overlapping spheres of economic interest has had its share of problems, but as our governments have become more reasonable, most of these are disappearing. The high price of bribes and arbitrary changes in regulations are temporary phenomena and will change just as soon as the People's Liberation Army and the Communist Party are reformed. There is only one problem which we and our Chinese friends find truly disturbing: that is the danger that the hostile forces we are both facing, rebellious workers, human-rights and environmental extremists, may follow our example and begin cooperating among themselves. Those who speak of global human rights don't understand how easily the implications of their logic can be extended beyond the capacity of our system to accommodate. The burgeoning cynicism felt toward the institutions of government, business, religion, and their underlying principles, by ordinary citizens in China, the U.S. and around the world, could become an explosive desire to destroy our entire political economy and much else, and replace-it with a different social organization of production, consumption and life in general directly responsible to them. If that ever occurs, the international business community and the world's governments may well face extinction. But such a situation isn't likely to happen. Not unless you contact:

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