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Uncle Sam's Torture Trade

Workers Solidarity Movement

1996

From September 1991-December 1993, the U.S. Commerce Department approved over 350 export licenses, worth more than \$27 million, for torture and police equipment under commodity category 0A82C. According to the Export Administration Regulations, this broad-ranging category includes: saps, thumbcuffs, thumbscrews, leg irons, shackles, and handcuffs; specially designed implements of torture; strait jackets, plastic handcuffs, police helmets and shields; and parts and accessories.

Another export category, 0A84C, combines electric shock batons and cattle prods with shotguns and shells. Over 2,000 licenses were granted for these items. This information was obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request for data on gun exports.

By lumping controversial items (like thumbscrews) together with non-controversial ones (like helmets) into broad general categories, the U.S. authorities hope to hide their squalid little deals with torturers. This makes many suspect the worst, especially when these commodities are licensed for export to governments with well-documented records of human rights abuse. For example, Commerce approved \$10.5 million to Saudi Arabia, where

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government officials *continued to torture and otherwise abuse detainees, including citizens and foreigners*, according to the State Department's latest human rights report.

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