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UK Company Group 4 Securicor that Seeks to Guard the 2012 Olympics, Compromises Security of Major US Ammunitions Plant

Wackenhut-guard plant, operated by BAE Systems, provides explosives for missiles; "If it goes boom, it comes from here"

London – Group 4 Securicor, the London-based global security firm lobbying hard to stay in the race to guard the 2012 Olympics – and which is guarding this week's Labour Conference – has been rocked by allegations from its own guards at a U.S. ammunitions plant. Security officers have exposed lax practices at the Holston Army Ammunition Plant guarded by Wackenhut Services Inc. (WSI), which is wholly owned by Group 4 Securicor (G4S). The officers allege Wackenhut cheats during security inspections, cuts back on perimeter patrols to save on petrol, and has allowed civilians in rowboats, including teenage girls, to gain access to the plant by water.

The Holston plant in Tennessee produces explosives used in various missiles, as well as C4, a military plastic explosive. "I think you can safely say if it goes boom, it comes from here," said an Army spokesperson. The plant is operated for the U.S. Army by foreign-owned BAE Systems, which subcontracts to WSI. Wackenhut, the largest provider of security services to the US government, has a troubled performance record at nuclear weapons and nuclear power sites.

Wackenhut's problems at Holston come as G4S is positioning itself to win security contracts for the 2012 London Olympics, despite its record of problems in Britain and elsewhere. In the UK G4S has been criticized for racism and poor management at a UK prison; for poor services and facilities for detained immigrants; and for slipshod implementation of electronic tagging of criminals released from prisons, sometimes with violent or even deadly consequences. G4S has been found to have violated worker rights in Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, and the US.

Unfortunately for G4S, the Holston plant is not an isolated PR disaster. In the UK, their cost cutting approach to security and poor management record has brought about multiple security problems:

- **Electronic Tagging:** A National Audit Office study published in February 2006 concluded that Securicor Justice Services and another company handling electronic tagging of 11,000 released criminals failed to report 35% of breaches within twenty-four hours. The study also stated that only 85% of offenders were fitted with their tags within twenty-four hours, and that "such delays can be

damaging as the offender may not be electronically monitored during this period which increases the risk of further breaches or re-offending.” Problems with G4S’s tagging made the headlines in 2003 when G4S-tagged offender Robert Clegg violently murdered Bob Boardman, a disabled grandfather of three.

- **Private Prisons:** HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers reported that Securicor-run Parc Prison in Bridgend, Wales, has yet to escape its history of racism and poor management. In fact, the report, released last month, stated that since the last inspection, in 2002, this G4S institution “moved significantly backwards.” According to the report, this was a “disappointing inspection,” and G4S was “unable to meet three of our four tests of a healthy prison.”
- **Detained Immigrants:** In two recent investigations, Chief Inspector of Prisons Owers exposed serious problems with eight short-term holding facilities managed by G4S for the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. The reports stated that accommodation at the Coquelles freight terminal was “disrespectful and wholly inadequate,” and that services at London’s Heathrow Airport were conducted in a way that was “neither humane nor efficient.” Government investigators found that G4S held detainees in facilities described by staff as comparable to “dog kennels.”

G4S has made no secret of its ambition to be the lead security company involved in the 2012 Olympic Games. “With its history of potentially dangerous mistakes in so many other key areas and its poor record of respecting workers’ rights around the world those involved would be wise to take a long hard look at G4S, and secure cast iron promises about its intention to improve its act,” said Andy Gilchrist, UK spokesperson for the Service Employees International Union. “G4S needs to address the concerns of its employees worldwide quickly and properly if it is to impress anyone about its ability to manage a security operation such as the Olympics. It has to be hoped that the Labour Party itself is unaware of its poor record on worker rights and service delivery record.”

“The charge of lax security management by G4S at an ammunitions plant in the US comes as no surprise,” said Philip Jennings, General Secretary of Union Network International, the global union for skills and services with 15 million members in 900 unions. “G4S security officers from around the world have given UNI troubling reports on working conditions and labour standards. Companies should not be eligible to guard sensitive military installations or high-profile events - like the Olympics and the World Cup - unless they live up to their responsibilities to workers and the public.”

SEIU, the largest security officers’ union in the United States, has a national program to raise standards in the private security industry. More than 55,000 private security officers and public safety personnel are members of SEIU, which has more than 1.8 million members overall. The Focus on Group 4 Securicor campaign, coordinated by SEIU, brings together unions and NGOs from around the world to shine a spotlight on global security giant G4S’s bad practices. For more information see www.focusongroup4securicor.org