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Private prison contract goes to nuclear weapons company

14 December 2010*

The Minister of Corrections has just announced that the first contract under the Corrections (Contract Management of Prisons) Amendment Act 2009 has been awarded to the British based corporation, Serco - the announcement is available at <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/mt-edenacrp-contract-manager-announced>

There are three main areas of concern about this decision. Firstly, there are many issues around the desirability of privatisation of prisons as expressed, for example, by the UN Human Rights Committee earlier this year about the government's privatisation plans: "... the Committee reiterates its concern at the privatization of prison management. It remains concerned as to whether such privatization in an area where the State party is responsible for the protection of human rights of persons deprived of their liberty effectively meets the obligations of the State party under the Covenant and its accountability for any violations, irrespective of the safeguards in place. (arts. 2 and 10)."¹

Secondly, there is the matter of Serco's less than positive record of running places of detention. One of the well documented cases is Serco's management of the Yarl's Wood detention centre in England, where conditions have been condemned by the Children's Commissioner in 2009,² and the Prisons Inspector in 2010³. Following a hunger strike by women detained at Yarl's Wood⁴ earlier this year, in March the British High Court gave the go-ahead for a judicial review into the cases of four women held at the detention centre⁵, and complaints were lodged with the General Medical Council about the poor standard of health care⁶.

In October, a court case was launched on behalf of two mothers whose children became ill after being detained in Yarl's Wood⁷. Also in October, it was revealed that 21 children had suffered injuries while being restrained at the Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in County Durham, another Serco run establishment⁸.

And as if that isn't bad enough, there is another reason for concern about this announcement - Serco is heavily involved with the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Serco is one of the unholy trinity of corporations that make up AWE Management Ltd⁹. AWE is the British Atomic Weapons Establishment, which produces and maintains the British government's nuclear weapons arsenal: "AWE covers the entire life cycle of nuclear warheads; from initial concept, assessment and design, through to component manufacture and assembly, in-service support, and finally decommissioning and disposal"¹⁰.

Apparently not content with their contract to manufacture and refurbish weapons of mass destruction at Aldermaston and Burghfield, AWE Management Ltd is currently bidding to take over the running of Britain's nuclear bomb base in Scotland¹¹.

So much for the provision in the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act (1987) which prohibits any agent or servant of the crown from aiding and abetting anyone involved in the manufacture or possession of any nuclear explosive device ...

* Update, February 2011

Figures released by Scotland's Liberal Democrat party reveal that Kilmarnock Prison in Scotland, run by Serco, has the poorest record of self-harm of all of the Scottish prisons. Kilmarnock Prison has the highest rate of inmates deliberately injuring themselves since 2004, with 280 incidents of self-harm during the past six years.¹²

References

¹ Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee: New Zealand, 7 April 2010, CCPR/C/NZL/CO/5 - <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/hrc98.htm>

² See, for example, 'Inside Yarl's Wood: Britain's shame over child detainees: Emily Dugan on the shocking treatment of families in immigration centres', The Independent, 26 April 2009 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/inside-yarls-wood-britains-shame-over-child-detainees-1674380.html>

³ See, for example, 'Yarl's Wood detained baby for 100 days, damning report reveals: Prisons inspector Dame Anne Owers says force used against children twice in last year at immigration removal centre', The Guardian, 24 March 2010 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/24/yarls-wood-children-baby-report> and 'Child asylum-seekers 'split from their families by force': Report on immigration centre reveals heavy-handed treatment of young detainees', The Independent, 24 March 2010 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/child-asylumseekers-split-from-their-families-by-force-1926169.html>

⁴ 'Asylum seekers win new strength to fight after Yarl's Wood hunger strike: 'We are determined to win justice for the violent and vicious way we were treated,' says mother in family detention centre protest', The Guardian, 2 August 2010 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/aug/02/yarls-wood-hunger-strike-asylum?INTCMP=SRCH>

⁵ 'Court allows judicial review over Yarl's Wood detention centre', The Guardian, 20 March 2010 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/20/judicial-review-yarls-wood-detention>

⁶ 'Demand for investigation of three doctors at Yarl's Wood: Complaint lodged with General Medical Council amid accusations of poor care at immigration detention centre', The Guardian, 22 March 2010 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/22/yarls-wood-doctors-investigation>

⁷ 'Child detention in immigration centres faces legal challenge: Home Office to fight high court case of two mothers whose children became ill after being detained in Yarl's Wood', The Guardian, 26 October 2010 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/oct/26/child-detention-immigration-centres-challenge>

⁸ 'Outcry as children injured in custody', The Northern Echo, 26 October 2010 - http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/8474763.Outcry_as_children_injured_in_custody/

⁹ The other two are Lockheed Martin and Jacobs Engineering Group

¹⁰ http://www.awe.co.uk/aboutus/what_we_do_27815.html

¹¹ See, for example, 'US companies bid to take over Clyde nuclear bomb base', Herald Scotland, 31 October 2010 - <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/us-companies-bid-to-take-over-clyde-nuclear-bomb-base-1.1064929>

¹² 'Private prison firm has worst self-harm record', Radio New Zealand, 9 February 2011

Mt Eden/ACRP contract manager announced

Judith Collins

14 December, 2010

Global services management company Serco has been selected to manage the Mt Eden/Auckland Central Remand Prison from next year, Corrections Minister Judith Collins announced today.

Serco, a British company with operations in Europe, the Middle-East, Asia-Pacific and North America, was one of three companies that sought the contract through a Request for Proposal process.

Following evaluation and negotiations phase, the Department of Corrections recommended to the Minister of Corrections that Serco be selected as the successful contract partner. This was endorsed by Cabinet yesterday.

This Government is committed to a world-class Corrections system in New Zealand. To achieve that, we must have access to world-class innovation and expertise, Ms Collins said.

The appointment of Serco as the contract manager for Mt Eden/ACRP will bring in new ideas and international best practice which will benefit the entire corrections sector.

Serco has a strong track record in managing prisons. I'm confident that the company will bring the high standards of professionalism, safety, rehabilitation and security expected by the Government to Mt Eden/ACRP.

ACRP was successfully contracted out under a National Government from 2000-2005 before the law was changed by the Labour Government to prohibit private management of prisons.

In 2009 the Government passed the Corrections (Contract Management of Prisons) Amendment Act 2009, which allowed private sector organisations to tender for contracts to manage prisons, on a case-by-case basis.

A number of the innovations introduced by the former contract manager were adopted by Corrections for use in public prisons and are still being used today.

The prison will operate within the current Corrections framework. All prisoners will remain the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Department of Corrections.

The contract manager will have to comply with all relevant New Zealand legislation and international obligations. Prisoners will still have the right to raise issues of concern with the Office of the Ombudsmen or Corrections Chief Executive, as they would in a publicly managed prison.

A contract is intended to be signed by 31 January 2011 and the site will be fully handed over to Serco by August 2011. The contract will be for six years, with the option to extend for a further four years. Probity assurance has been provided by Audit New Zealand. - <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/mt-edenacrp-contract-manager-announced>