

**“Let Alone the Introduction of a Low-Wage Sector...”**  
**Assessing the German Private Security Industry: a Trade Union’s View**

*Peter Bremme*

**An interview with Peter Bremme, regional team manager for the Department of ‘Special Services,’ United Service Union (ver.di) in Hamburg, Germany, on current trends within the German private security industry.**

*Volker Eick: Peter, our readership for this interview is rather broad and, most likely, mainly North American. Could you therefore briefly describe the union ver.di?*

**Peter Bremme:** Germany’s labor system is based on co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*) and industrial relations (*Sozialpartnerschaft*). The stakeholders are the employers on the one side and unions and works councils on the other. Works councils are the advocacy groups of employees in the companies, democratically elected and thus legitimized; in the best case, they are unionized and/or oriented towards the unions. Even though under restricted conditions, works councils are allowed to codetermine issues of the company in line with the Industrial Constitution Act, e.g. concerns such as recruitments, transfers of employees, or the introduction of new technologies and hours of labor. If it comes to more far-reaching decisions, works councils get left out. Here, it is still the case that private capital decides on the deployment of the means of production.

Approximately 2.1 million members make ver.di one of the largest independent, individual trade unions in the world. As a multi-service trade union we look after people employed in over 1,000 different trades and professions, making us, hopefully, fit for the challenges of the 21st century. On a European level and worldwide, ver.di is well interconnected through the *Global Union Network* (UNI). In addition, the different sectors run their own networks such as UNI Finance for financial services; further networks include those for logistics, temp work, arts and entertainment. As a further example, longshore(wo)men coordinate their worldwide network through the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF).

Both our business environment and society at large are affected by profound change.

The differences between branches of industry are shifting and different fields of business merge seamlessly into each other, this is also true for private security.

Company structures are changing, new job contents and new types of jobs are emerging. Even the established rights of employees are being challenged. Employees are more than ever dependent on the support a strong trade union can give them. Therefore, ver.di combines its experience from numerous different wage negotiations. There is no other organization with a comparable level of expertise about jobs and different branches in a modern service sector, enabling ver.di to provide comprehensive support in all job-related issues.

*Volker Eick: In detail, what sectors does ver.di ‘Special Services’ entail? What are your duties within the field of private security, in particular?*

**Peter Bremme:** The Department of ‘Special Services,’ on the one hand, organizes employees in the classical sectors of real estate, tourism, consultancy, market research, technical control boards, vessels’ MOT control, political parties and organizations. The department, on the other hand, is a melting pot of outsourced occupations and branches out of which many are endemic low-wage sectors. Take as examples employees in the

sectors of call centers, temp work, private security services, amusement parks, fitness centers, household-related services, and the self-employed. Private security, meanwhile, professionalized itself into further subsections. Along with classical guarding, ver.di organizes employees working in the sectors of cash-in-transit (CIT), airport and air passenger control (aviation), and event management. Noteworthy, former state duties are taken over by private security companies (PSCs).

**Volker Eick:** *Can you give some examples?*

**Peter Bremme:** The most striking example might be the fact that even the German Federal Parliament, the *Bundestag*, is guarded by private security; military compounds and police headquarters are controlled by PSCs as well; in addition, the guarding of prisons and detention facilities such as asylum seekers' deportation centers is contracted out to PSCs as well; further, public transport is under private control.

We observe that, emerging from so-called multi-tasking service providers – more often than not cleaning contractors – new services are provided, including the integration of security services into their supply chain. So-called integrated security service providers, for instance, offer to banks not only to provide the complete CIT service but also the guarding of their bank buildings, personal protection, securing events, facility management, and cleaning services. The security provider would always claim that the whole staff self-evidently is vetted, i.e. ran through a security clearance.

**Volker Eick:** *You have been one of the first union activists and operatives to launch an Organizing campaign in Hamburg within the private security industry in 2006. One of the few papers available in English claims that ver.di “adapted a number of organizing techniques, such as strategic research, building organizing committees and corporate campaigning. The primary goal was to win a sustainable core of trade union activists in the industry, who would then be able to continue the rank and file organizing. The concrete aims of the campaign involved concluding a new collective pay agreement in Hamburg and establishing a works council in one of the major security companies in Hamburg. In the course of the campaign, ver.di succeeded in winning a couple of hundred new members. More importantly, it managed to significantly increase the number of activists in the industry. The trade union also reached an improved pay agreement, which was accepted by activists, and managed to establish a works council in a small number of companies.”<sup>1</sup> Would you agree on this? And further, how do you see Organizing in perspective?*

**Peter Bremme:** The main result of the Organizing campaign in Hamburg in 2007 has been the development of an able to act, labor conflict-ready, active and unionized power. We doubled or degree of organization, established many new works councils, and are that much accepted by the employers that they do not dare to head for any other so-called union.<sup>2</sup> Further, we have been able to implement the topic of Organizing within other sections of ver.di; last but not least, we are part of the success the active membership achieved within the Industrial Union of Metal Workers, *IG Metall*. They are currently rolling out organizing methods in comprehensive ways and currently go for organizing employees within, firstly, the wind and, secondly, within the solar energy sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Heiner Dribbusch, “Trade union strategies to recruit new groups of workers – Germany,” <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn0901028s/de0901029q.htm> (accessed February 9, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> On so-called unions, such as the GÖD, cf. footnote 3.

Acknowledging this kind of optimistic intermediate results, it, nevertheless, cannot be belied that ver.di does not go for Organizing as the central motor for substantial change. Even though we do have a subsection that concentrates on membership development, the impact field of Organizing within what we call ver.di's 'matrix organization' is still limited; further, decision makers within ver.di are lacking the courage to stimulate transformation processes on the ground. Last but not least, financial resources for organizing projects are limited.

The largest future investment decision of ver.di's directorate, namely hiring 25 additional full-time employees, was not directed toward Organizing but to expel, or at least to push back, allegedly competing DGB member unions from service and industry areas ver.di perceives as its vested fields of expertise. Nevertheless, plenty of grassroots projects and regional Organizing networks (such as in North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower-Saxony, Hamburg) are in operation insisting on chances that go with Organizing. It is such networks I perceive to have the largest potential for change.

**Volker Eick:** *English speaking readers most likely struggle to believe that Germany does not know a cross-sector minimum wage. Among the few industries where ver.di achieved a minimum wage so far is the private security industry. Why was it such a hard struggle to achieve the minimum wage?*

**Peter Bremme:** A few clarifying words at the beginning: In the 'good old times' of what some scholars call Rhenish capitalism badly paid jobs have been a reality, too. Since the foundation of West Germany unions did not feel it beneath themselves to tariff *Leichtlohngruppen* (low-income groups with reduced salaries) which allowed for wages for females being as below as 40 percent compared to male salaries – self-evidently for the same work male workers did. The German Federal Labor Court, in 1955, was necessary to call attention to the fact that such a misogynous wage agreement is incompatible with the principle of equality and with the German Basic Law. The enhancement of profit opportunities by a regulated low-wage sector was rendered possible when the Wall came down. West-German entrepreneurs undermined the highly-regulated wage system of the GDR by successfully evoking a 'blossoming paradise of wage dumping' – not in China or Vietnam but right on the doorstep. Working more for less, wage deductions down to the 40 percent known from the 1940s and 1950s, and increasing hours of labor – all that became frequently reality. The allegedly progressive Red-Green government under then-chancellor Schröder and then-foreign minister Fischer deregulated the labor market and created the preconditions for the en masse extension of the low-wage sector. "Everything that creates jobs is a social endeavor," this was the mantra under which a deregulated new labor market was created. Furthermore, submissive unions stood by to agree on cementing such tariffs; ver.di too needed to step up to the plate. One of the collective bargaining agreements we agreed on included the €4.70 per hour contract for the private security industry in Thuringia.

**Volker Eick:** *Are you about to start crying in my arms now, poor union boy? Because it was such miserable union life back then?*

**Peter Bremme:** No, don't worry, I won't. But after the Wall came down, ver.di, as other unions, was confronted with a situation that included the following challenging elements: Employers put forward a business model based on low-cost supply which was based on low wages and could only be enforced through massive repression against the

workforce. Employees were disillusioned by the state-unions of the GDR and were no longer able to detect any meaningful sense in organized solidarity. A government, eager to develop a low-wage sector, constrained employees to work in more than just one job in order to make a living. In turn, the identification with the work environment decreased as did their willingness to organize themselves against these attacks and for better working conditions. Trade unions referred to organizational models that solely focused on core workers. Related, workers in precarious jobs were identified as financially unattractive if not as a financial burden and, accordingly, were anything but center stage.

Only in 2006, a change occurred. The trade unions *ver.di* and *Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten* (NGG, Food, Beverages, and Catering Industry Trade Union) were the first in demanding a minimum wage of €7.50 per hour in a federal campaign as an answer to a basically non-unionized and hard to organize low-wage sector. Such a readiness to head for new roads grew by 2006 and benefited from the adaptation of US-American and British models field-tested in Germany for the first time ever.

**Volker Eick:** *And how do you respond to criticisms that it's 'too little, too late'?*

**Peter Bremme:** Too little, too late? Yes, sure, too little, too late. Studies clarify that in the case of Germany only a two-digit minimum wage will protect against old-age poverty. But have the unions, given their degree of organization of about 25 percent, been strong enough? Further, didn't it take the unions quiet a while within their own faction, and in particular among the industrial trade unions, to convince themselves that a minimum wage will not be counter-productive and that its introduction will not jeopardize the concept of free collective bargaining? In hindsight, one could claim the unions would have needed to thwart the introduction of *Leichtlohngruppen*, to inhibit the harming battery of the GDR into a wage dumping paradise, let alone the need to circumvent the introduction of a low-wage sector. But, was it in the power of the organized workforce to do so?

**Volker Eick:** *During the last decade, the German Federal Association of the Security Industry (BDSW), your social partner when it comes to wage bargaining, decided to bargain with a 'Christian,'<sup>3</sup> or 'yellow' union, the GÖD, and not with ver.di in many Länder. How do you explain this close link; will the minimum wage have an impact against this industry-friendly 'union'?*

**Peter Bremme:** In order to provide a more comprehensive background, let me start with the year 1905. This was the year, when *Siemens* created the first yellow union within the German Reich. In 2008, it was again the directorate of this industrial corporation that made use of a yellow union for its purposes: The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Unabhängiger Betriebsangehöriger* (AUB, Syndicate of Independent Employees), established by Wilhelm Schelsky, son of German sociologist Helmut Schelsky, got millions of Euros from *Siemens* to fight the *IG Metall*. According to the German magazine *Stern*, several of his consultancy companies received roughly €45 million to support this endeavour in 2001 alone. According to Schelsky, the *Siemens* deal was not about tax evasion and abetting of infidelity (impeachments he was confronted with) but about being "active as an undercover lobbyist for Siemens" against the *IG Metall*. "I had a clear mission

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<sup>3</sup> The GÖD (*Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienst und Dienstleistungen*), or Union for Civil Service and Services, claims to be in favor of "sane cooperation, and not of class struggle," <http://www.goed-online.de/Allgemeine-Artikel/warum-christliche-gewerkschaften.html>.

coming from the top management.”<sup>4</sup> Such missions, according to the TV magazine *Report Mainz* are not limited to industrial companies but, as the headline “Mobbed-up Pseudo-unions” suggests, is well known and also involves the trade and service sector. The journalists have been able to convince a so-called Christian Union, the *Deutscher Handlungsgehilfenverband* (DHV, German Salesclerk Syndicate), one of the sister ‘unions’ of the GÖD, to sign a tariff bargain undermining union standards in Saxony for just €5,000. As the journalists summarize, “after 1.5 hours we obviously reached an agreement. The 80 employees would get a contract agreement with 12-hours shifts. Included are: surcharges for night shifts – gone; Christmas bonus – gone; vacation pay – gone. All this could have been made possible together with the Christian Union within a company agreement for just €5,000.” Employment law experts call such agreements “corruption. Once you allow for being financed as a union by the opposition party, it needs to be judged as corruption.”<sup>5</sup>

The GÖD claims to be active in all classical sectors of public services, and its umbrella organization is the *Christlicher Gewerkschaftsbund Deutschlands* (CGB, Christian Union Federation) with allegedly 317,000 to 280,000 members. In the security sector alone, ver.di has a membership of about 15,000, an area the GÖD does not even cover, while ver.di as a whole has more than 2.2 million members – that’s seven times the size of the GÖD. What makes the GÖD attractive to employers’ associations is its willingness to be ready for battle (i.e., being brought to heel) if the employers are in search for an organization that will agree upon the degradation of tariff regulations. While the GÖD has been already undermining achievements ver.di was able to negotiate since the mid-1990s, we currently observe with sincere sorrow a further development: The *Deutsche Polizeigewerkschaft* (DPoIG)<sup>6</sup> recently changed its statute and is now able to organize employees within the private security industry. In Frankfurt, first aggressive attempts are already under way.

**Volker Eick:** *When you gave your talk at our Berlin conference in August 2010,<sup>7</sup> you claimed, “A lot needs to happen, before the private security industry in Germany can really be viewed as what their glossy propaganda brochures suggest it to be.” You were mentioning “fraud cases, wage dumping, an inhumane tone to subordinates, and an exploitation mentality.” Are we talking here about the few ‘usual suspects,’ about the few ‘black apples,’ or are we to identify a systematic denial of appreciation and even regular breaches of labor laws?<sup>8</sup>*

**Peter Bremme:** From my point of view the profit orientation within the private security industry, as within other industry and service sectors, to a large extent determines both business ethics and practices. Even well-funded companies refer to a daily routine of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stern, “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Unabhängiger Betriebsangehöriger,” <http://www.stern.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsgemeinschaft-unabhaengiger-betriebsangehoeriger-90461144t.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Cited at Thomas Dauser and Gottlob Schober, “Gekaufte Pseudogewerkschaften,” <http://www.swr.de/report/-/id=233454/nid=233454/did=3220422/1hwd30t/index.html> ().

<sup>6</sup> The German police are organized in three different unions: The *Gewerkschaft der Polizei* (GdP, Union of the Police) as a member organization of the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB, German Federation of Trade Unions) represents all employees within the police. The *Deutsche Polizeigewerkschaft* (DPoIG, German Police Union), a member organization of the unions within the *Deutscher Beamtenbund* (dbb), is available for all civil servants within the police; further and independent from any holding association, the *Bund Deutscher Kriminalbeamter* (BDK, Federation of German Detectives) represents unionized police detectives.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://policing-crowds.org/security/article/urban-security-work-spaces-policing-the-crisis-policing-in-crisis/>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also the chapter by Eick (*in this volume*).

the normal exploitation system. Admittedly, not all cats are black but no private security company gets beyond the ‘all cats are grey’ status. Such a statement is not only justified by complaints of our membership. Allow me for a few brief examples:

In 2004, the homepage of the Federal Public Employment Office offered the following occupation: “watch(wo)an, protection of property, €3.96 per hour plus surcharges, full-time/72 hrs;” a few months later, the security company *Hebold Sicherheitsdienst* offered €4.12 per hour in Germany’s east; in Berlin, the same company goes for even €3.96 per hour; some companies offer even lower wages. To clarify: €3.50 per hour and given an 8 hours shift translates into €28.00 per day. Given a 40 hours week, this translates into €616 per month before taxes. Obviously, this is not enough; therefore, a 60 hours week turns into a kind of normal shift allowing for €850,00 per month, gross – minus social security contributions, we are talking about €680,00 net; for working 243 hours. Obviously, it is impossible to raise a family based on such income. In Hamburg, where I am based, the following case caused a stir: A high-end hotel hired cleaning personnel for €7.87 per hour but added that waiting time for customers still occupying the respective hotel room would not lead to payment for the respective latency – in essence, cleaning personnel received €2.46 per hour. Bearing in mind but not mentioning further examples, 1.2 million employees earn less than €4.50 per hour in Germany.

Already such an incomplete highlight allows for some conclusions: The private security industry is accepted as a low-wage sector; this applies to the working conditions and to the wages. As the Public Employment Office’s job offer clarifies, it is also the state that identifies the sector as such and takes it as an opportunity to integrate unemployed and job seekers into the labor market under low-end and low-cost conditions; even wages that are below the basic unemployment benefits – i.e. Hartz IV allowance, €374,00 per month for a single household – are accepted, even though it is clear that such wages would need further public subsidies to meet legal requirements. In essence, it is the tax payer who finally subsidizes the exploitation and wage fraud within the private security industry – and beyond.

Let me give you two further examples: In Thuringia, the private security company *Plato Ltd.* did not follow the tariff agreements and, instead, paid €4.11 per hour (not €4.32), paid not the agreed on surcharges for night shifts, for Sundays and vacation shifts; did not compensate for overtime work; did not provide holiday pay; and allowed for just 24 days (and not 28) of vacation. In addition, *Plato* required from its employees to pay for work material (staples, paper), toiletries, and for working clothes out of their own pockets; further, staff was forced to work through breaks – even though deducted from accomplished working hours. The security company *Patrol Sicherheitsdienst Ltd.*, based in the city of Gera (Thuringa) followed the same track: not following the bargained wage agreement, no surcharges for night, Sunday, holiday shifts; demanding up to 24 hours shifts; no work breaks allowed for; and overtime compensations not paid. According to our knowledge both companies are member organizations of the BDSW. From our point of view it seems that companies as those mentioned above take it for granted that there is no necessary to follow tariff agreements.

Again, such an incomplete highlight allows for some conclusions: The weaker the unions the more likely such working conditions; further, management bodies flagrantly circumvent and subvert legal and tariff standards. Finally, given that I am able to claim that all this took place in Germany without any opposition, also means that employees have been starting to fight back – this is not the least important observation.

Even though, I could easily go on with examples like this, let me instead summarize such observations in a more systematic way.

**Volker Eick:** Yes, please, and could you focus on what might be called wage dumping? It seems the difference between the written law and the practices on the ground are not that decisive as one might think. Would you go so far as to say, they do even match in some ways?

**Peter Bremme:** There are several roads for employers to take advantage of (the lack of) regulations within the security sector – that even allow for fraud; the first being wage dumping: Wage dumping is more likely due to increased competition between the several *Länder* in Germany and between the nation states within the European Union (EU); employees in Thuringia (wages below €5,00) are deployed in western parts of Germany where wages are higher (not following the so-called *Erfüllungsortprinzip*, i.e. wage payments should apply to the area where work is provided).

Wage dumping is more likely through subcontracting; contracts (in particular, offered by governments) are accepted and cleared correctly – except for that the executing company is a subcontractor who pays lower wages to its employees for competitive reasons.

Wage dumping is more likely because of contract deregulation based on disguised, or ostensible, self-employment, freelance workers, and service contractors; employees are hired based on daily internships and ‘test labor.’ Their work is, if at all, recognized as an internship relation but will be billed to the customer based on a full-time contract.

Wage dumping is made possible through internships and trial work; PSCs extensively exert labor market (re)integration measures and respective application and training coupons, provided and distributed via the Public Employment Offices, not only in order to keep employees for long in cost-effective integration measures but also to cash up public grants. Further, trainees are deployed and deducted as full-time staff while only compensated with the official trainees’ salary (roughly €500,00 per month).

Wage dumping is also possible based on outsourcing and tariff non-compliance via transfer of undertakings (§ 613a BGB, rights and duties during transfer of undertakings); the moment, a PSC recognizes that a contract does not allow for the calculated profit the contract will be handed over to a subsidiary company not paying agreed wages (*Brink’s*, for instance, hires downgraded employees to accompany full-time staff in its security vans). Both German lobby associations, the BDSW (security services) and the BDGW (cash in transit), collaborate with ‘yellow’ unions and are/have been striving for the establishment/support of unions more convenient to their demands such as the GÖD and the *Interessengemeinschaft Geld und Wert* (IGW, Interest Group of Cash in Transit Employers).

Finally – given that I have been mentioning wage fraud already –, wage dumping is possible due to temporary employment; employers ‘lend’ their private security guards to other PSCs to be deployed, for instance, as strikebreakers in the retail sector (as happened in Hamburg with colleagues employed by *Kötter Security*). In addition to wage dumping one should keep in mind that the reduction of rewards also works through ‘wangling the wage screw’ by making overtime work mandatory. ‘Mandatory overtime’ might refer to one of the following working conditions: Given that the attainable income based on a weekly 40 hours work shift is that low, overtime easily reaches 250 to 300 hours per month.

At the very same time, such a dependency on overtime work functions as a disciplinary instrument as colleagues not subordinating themselves under given rules and regulations might be left aside for overtime opportunities. To give you an example, a couple of months ago, a colleague participated in constituting a works council and, in return, has been dubbed by the management as a business-damaging ‘ringleader;’ his retribution

being a maximum of 80 working hours per month – including all consequences: long-term indebtedness at his bank; arrears of rent; contract termination by his telephone provider. Further, well known are practices such as not, or not correctly, paying for overtime work; employers refuse to record work shifts longer than 10 hours per day (to avoid confrontations/compensations according to the Working Hours Act); breaks are accounted as eligible on pay slips but are not granted while on duty; employees demand the substitution of legal holidays with vacation – you name it...

**Volker Eick:** *Sound horrible – and hard to believe as we are talking about Germany, not let's say, India. Given that, what's your forecast, your perspective?*

**Peter Bremme:** Put simply, cheating and defrauding will go on. The point of departure, though, has slightly improved, i.e. to avenge fraud and to make it litigable step by step meliorates. Meanwhile, we achieved the minimum wage within the private security industry which also goes with new inspection tools. In addition, several *Länder* introduced so-called *Vergabegesetze* making pay rate commitments with the unions a precondition for public procurements.

**Volker Eick:** *In 2009, the German Interior Ministers' Conference decided to integrate the private security industry into what the federal and state governments call 'security architecture.' Thrusting aside that it is pretty unclear what the foundation and pillars of such an 'architecture' might look like, does such a move have an impact on the unions, and if so, what kind of?*

**Peter Bremme:** The German Interior Ministers' Conference tries to hide its ambition to save monies by outsourcing state-financed contracts to the private security industry behind new-speak such as *Sicherheitsarchitektur*, a glossy brochures term. Eventually, well-paid jobs in the public security service sector are transferred into the low-wage sector of private guarding. The politically explosive power of such a move lies within the state's decision to hand over sovereign rights and duties to the private sector – and therewith the bulk of controllability, transparency, and responsibility. What the magazine *Der Spiegel* calls a “paradigm,”<sup>9</sup> is the privatized juvenile prison in the city of Hünfeld in Hesse: “Beside the 115 state-employed civil servants 102 employees of the British service company *Serco* are on duty. The private employees keep the building in shape, do administrative work, prepare meals – and they care for the prisoners. Whether consultation, leisure offers or employment, the private guards are all over and care for rehabilitating the inmates. Roughly 45 percent of the prison is privatized, right up to medical and psychological treatment. *Serco*'s employees are sitting behind CCTV monitors, too. In case an incident occurs they are to call their state-employed colleagues as any reprimand, according to the Constitution, is to be deployed civil servants as are the keys of the holding cells. The pilot scheme is to run for five years. After the first year, both *Serco* and the Hesse Ministry of Justice declare themselves satisfied. Everything goes according to plan, no riots, no suicides or jailbreaks, instead high employment within the prison firms. Cost saving is substantial: Compared to a similar, state-led only prison, it runs for annually €600,000 less, and building costs were €100,000 per custodian – compared to an estimated €250.000 under state control. Similar semi-private prisons are under way in Burg (Saxonia-Anhalt), Offenburg (Baden-Wuerttemberg), and Bremervörde (Lower Saxonia). While in Hesse the contracts for construction and for operation have been invited for in separated tenders, the next tenders are to encompass contracts for the whole prison – as far as the current

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<sup>9</sup> Ole Reißmann, “Private Gefängnisse” *Der Spiegel*, January 31, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/0,1518,463009,00.html> (accessed February 9, 2012).

laws allow for. Lower-Saxonia prepares for such tender in 2012, Baden-Wuerttemberg currently shops around, and Saxonia-Anhalt just started. A consortium around the building trust *Bilfinger Berger* and the private security company *Kötter Security* got the contract for the prison in Burg.”

It is feared now that prison personnel unskilled for rehabilitation will curtail current standards of professional care and will lead to the reduction of care to administrative tasks only. What we do know already from some semi-privatized detention facilities in Hamburg is that guards in a youth’s detention center confined youngsters with belts to their beds, or forced them to take barbiturates as the private security guards lacked any further pedagogic competence to deal with them otherwise. With some cynicism one could say: Where such profit orientation leads responsible public bodies and representatives to privatize any state duties, the only response is to recommend to inmates and to personnel alike to buy shares of such companies – as profits are guaranteed and lacks in service and salaries can be substituted by the respective dividends. In fact, what happens there is that the PSCs’ employees went for a strike to better their salaries and working conditions.<sup>10</sup>

**Volker Eick:** *Would you agree that we also observe an intensified concentration process within the security industry as a whole, and if so, is this a trend to be appreciated by the unions in general, and by ver.di in particular?*

**Peter Bremme:** It is no question that we are witnessing a concentration process; already the facts published by economic magazines leave no doubt. Just recently, world market leader in private security provision, G4S, and in particular its CEO Nick Buckles, wanted to take over the Danish ISS. Even though the G4S Board of Directors declined, another take-over took place. The German *Securlog*, one of the leaders in the German cash-in-transit business (CIT), recently has been taken over by the Spanish *Prosecur*, the latter now being in a pool position within the European Union. To give a brief background on such deals as I understand them: Worldwide operating companies long for offers by private security companies (PSCs) providing integrated security concepts encompassing the whole production and service portfolio; such demands can only be met by big players. For this reason, the pressure for PSCs is immense to transform themselves into global players – either through growth on the market or by taking over competitors. In parallel, the big players are searching for sub-contractors able to fill their portfolio gaps and willing to accept lower prices. In turn, the security market creates the mega-trend of ‘market concentration of the few’ – what you call the oligopoly on the private security market – and the related trend of ‘diversification of the many,’ i.e. security service provision by newly established micro-companies, mainly functioning as subcontractors. Both developments are ambivalent trends: While it is generally easier to bargain with larger companies on tariffs and standards – smaller companies more often than not are not organized in employers’ federations and only rudimentarily follow tariffs – their concentrated power allows them to create security sector ‘dictatorships.’ Such a development cannot be welcome. What’s left in the basket for the unions, in turn, is the establishment of its own powerhouse – and that’s an organized security sector.

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Goiny, “Mitarbeiter der Sicherheitsfirma Kötter legen in der JVA Burg die Arbeit nieder” (April 5, 2011), [http://www.bsbd-berlin.de/aktuelles/archiv2011/110405\\_warnstreik.html](http://www.bsbd-berlin.de/aktuelles/archiv2011/110405_warnstreik.html) (accessed February 9, 2012).

**Volker Eick:** *Given the growing acceptance, at least on the governmental scale, of for-profit policing, do you think the industry as a whole needs more regulations? I am asking, because Germany, Austria and Cyprus are the only countries in the European Union (EU) that do not know a federal or state law that clarifies what private security guards are allowed to and are not allowed to do. At the same time, they take over more former state tasks. What is your view on this?*

**Peter Bremme:** Admittedly, I am a supporter of regulation. Already based on operative experiences it is important to develop, implement, and communicate definitions and task descriptions of the public and the private sector alike, especially at the intersections of both of these areas. The current trend that, for the first time since the end of World War II, a private army is to be established on German soil to be deployed against alleged pirates at the Somali shore makes one prick up their ears. A newspaper report clarifies how extensively a ‘security world of tomorrow’ is emerging: In June 2010, the daily TV news started with the headline, ‘German mercenaries heading for civil war in Somalia.’ A private security company, called *Asgaard German Security Group* (then based in Telgte/North-Rhine Westphalia, now in Ireland), planned to deploy more than 100 former *Bundeswehr* soldiers at the Horn of Africa, to ‘bring to power’ the warlord Galadid Abdinur Ahmad Darman. The report was not without piquancy as Darman fights the current interim government as illegitimate while the European Union supports it with military advisers and instructors – among them 13 members of the German *Bundeswehr*.<sup>11</sup> All these developments bawl for more regulation and clear legal and political standards.

**Volker Eick:** *There are two more developments within the private security business that do encompass German companies – both shifting for-profit policing into the military realm –, and are kind of disturbing: military operations abroad and the fight against so-called piracy. In both cases, representatives of the security industry are not ruling out the participation of their members. From an internationalist workers’ perspective and from an anti-war viewpoint, do you think that the unions are too silent on this issue? What is your view on this?<sup>12</sup>*

**Peter Bremme:** On planet earth, Germany, given its history, is the least country to give military advice to other countries, let alone establishing and/or financing state-led or private intervention armies. As all of us know, this is exactly what the so-called Red-Green government of [then-Chancellor] Gerhard Schröder and (then-Minister of Defense) Joschka Fischer did. Since the war against Yugoslavia – followed by interventions in Afghanistan and at the Horn of Africa – the unified Germany passed off military interventions as mutual help; reasoned such interventions, Fischer and Schröder as the main proponents, with a moralized ‘1968’ heritage; and justified the war against Yugoslavia with ‘Auschwitz’ that never may occur again. The current response is the military doctrine of ‘defending the freedom of Germany at the Hindukusch,’ i.e. defending the freedom of trade for German export goods and the freedom of protecting transit routes for raw materials. While Germany’s last Federal President, Horst Köhler, was to resign for propagating military interventions for economic reasons, the then-Minister of Defense, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, established a professional army ready for ‘war’ a couple of months later. The current government

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<sup>11</sup> Peer Heinelt, “Diskrete Gewalt. Zum Boom privater Söldnerfirmen” *Jungle World*, 25, 24. Juni 2010, <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2010/25/41178.html> (accessed February 9, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Volker Eick, “A Charter for Boarding: The German Government Contracts out Counter-Piracy Operations,” <http://policing-crowds.org/security/article/a-charter-for-boarding-the-german-government-contracts-out-counter-piracy-operations/> (accessed February 9, 2012).

now has a professional army at hands, clearly heading for (economic) interventions. To what extent this will go hand in hand with private armies, only the future will show. Howsoever, ver.di unequivocally opposes such tendencies and cooperates with political movements and unions sharing such an anti-war perspective.

**Volker Eick:** *In a globalized world – admittedly not a very innovative observation, but nevertheless – international cooperation and solidarity are of utmost importance. The Organizing project in Hamburg has been such a collaborative project supported by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).<sup>13</sup> You also have been part of a fact finding mission to South Africa in 2007,<sup>14</sup> organized by UNI Property Services,<sup>15</sup> the global union for security guards, looking at the working conditions of security guards and the racist practices against them by Group4Security (G4S); in 2008, a similar mission went to India for the same purpose.<sup>16</sup> My question is not that much about the missions' details and findings – the sources quoted in the footnotes offer some insights – but more generally about experiences, developments, and shortcomings of such campaigns. In other words, can you briefly describe opportunities and current deficits (and, may be, solutions) of such campaigns?*

**Peter Bremme:** In answering your question I will focus on the international experience and leave aside what happened in Hamburg. What impressed me the most about all the missions you are mentioning is the extent such unionized solidarity campaigns really improved the working and living conditions of the employees. In 2003, while we went for the US to support the work of the SEIU with a focus on the private security company *Securitas*, we learned that the shareholders fired the whole anti-union management and demanded real improvements for the workforce in the respective countries where *Securitas* operates. Further, at least on paper, the first global agreement between SEIU and a private security company has been achieved to allow for a safer ground in attempts to organize the workforce in unions on a global scale. Recent successes, for instance, include the abolition of *Securitas*' particular racist practices in South Africa against workers and the payment of pending overtime premiums to colleagues in Mozambique. Our last trip to Tunis led to the adoption of a collective bargaining agreement that will improve the working conditions of non-state security and cleaning personnel. Such concrete improvements aside, such solidary international union work develops forms and methods now adopted in other countries as well. Good research is a mandatory precondition for solid campaigns as is the development of action approaches to be implemented on an international level. As a further example, our fact finding mission in South Africa, then already selected as the host country of the FIFA World Cup 2006, allowed us to exert pressure onto security companies to improve the working conditions of their employees on a global scale. While security companies were competing for contracts to secure the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, we even exerted leverage on their respective management representatives. Admittedly, such campaigns could be more successful if the rich western countries, in particular Germany, would invest more monies to co-finance such campaigns and allow for training of local personnel in such countries. By the same token, organs of workers'

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://www.seiu.org/our-union/>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://policing-crowds.org/urbanization/urban/world-cup-2010-privatizing-security-in-south-africa-g4s/>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://www.uniglobalunion.org/apps/iportal.nsf/pages/latest100En>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. <http://policing-crowds.org/security/article/g4s-security-the-inequality-beneath-indias-economic-boom/>; see also the chapter by Ferus-Comelo (*in this volume*) on the working conditions and salaries of private security guards.

participation (workers' confidants, works council members, supervisory boards) should learn more about such forms of cooperation. I would love to see us having the same technical standards for campaigning in the different countries globally. Such standards, then, would allow us – supported by an Academy for Global Campaigning – to achieve shared aims together with UNI. Why, for instance, not having US-colleagues from *DHL Express*<sup>17</sup> working together with German and other unionists to convince the German parent company, *Deutsche Post*, to introduce more union-friendly environs on a global scale? If it would be possible, even further then, to create a positive climate among the workforce for supportive campaigns, negotiations about self-organizing could elaborate with a new depth and, thus, create a new sense of unions in a globalizing world.

*Volker Eick: Looking at your answer from a different angle, and let's speculate a bit, what – in the light of achievements and deficits – should be the main politico-economic foci of ver.di in the nearer future?*

*Peter Bremme:* First, ver.di needs to implement a minimum wage of €10 per hour. Comparable to how we achieved better wages for the cash-in-transit employees by first successfully demanding a minimum wage, we should aim at substantial wage improvements for other sub-sectors within the private security industry. As for a focus, we should go for the larger units within the larger companies. Thereby, we can take advantage of international framework conventions. If we could, then, go for the same companies on a European level (such as we did, I a test case, in an organizing campaign together with Solidarność in Poland) this will enlarge the unions' sphere of influence. What we do need are real tariff contracts in the respective industry sectors that do no longer allow for the attractive tariff tourism between the different *Länder* (federal states) in Germany. The moment, we achieve, at least, a regional tariff contract (North, South, East, West) where roughly the same wages per hour are paid and where we are, then, are to head for a nationwide tariff contract, we will have made real progress on our way for more just wages. Such aims need to be coordinated with those unions we are partnering with on the European level, so that we can go for transnational aims to be fixed in the respective national collective bargaining contracts.

*Volker Eick: Peter, thanking you for the time you shared with me in order to answer my questions.*

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<sup>17</sup> *DHL Express* is a division of the German logistics company *Deutsche Post* providing international express mail services. DHL is a world market leader in sea and air mail.