

## Transnational network meeting on Flight & Migration 03/06/2007, Rostock

### 'No Lager -No Detentions workshop' - Sunday 2pm to 10pm at the Ehm Welk School, Knud Ramussen-Str

This had been advertised as a double slot workshop with input from No Lager (Bremen) and No Borders (London). Present from London were Greg and Rob, and the meeting began with brief introductions being made by each representative. Olaf, from No Lager began explaining the purpose of the workshop, which was designed to examine the issues which arise regarding the detention of migrants and the camps used to hold the migrants in.

After this each person present was then asked to give a brief account of themselves and what their area of interest was.

Greg then outlined the role that No Borders (London) had played in the United Kingdom, explaining the unifying principle as being opposition to all immigration laws and the structures which exist to facilitate the operation of such laws. It was explained that No Borders (London) actively seeks to work in co-operation with migrants, detainees and former detainees. Greg outlined the current situation in the UK in which UK based activists are currently working, explaining that that whilst the anti-asylum and anti-immigration structures within the UK are reasonably static around 2500 individuals are detained at any one time within the UK. Whilst this figure might have seemed small the numbers actually passing through this process annually could reach around 30,000 people. Greg also explained who the individuals are who are being placed in to the current system, asylum seekers, taken straight in to custody to await a decision or are individuals removed from their communities to be placed in detention. Most of the others are usually identified as being visa 'overstayers' or those who entered the UK without papers or a visa.

Greg also placed the current system within the context of a capitalist framework, in which the detention centres/prisons are run by private companies on behalf of the British state with a view to maximising profit from human suffering.

Greg was able to show how No Borders (London) was able to intervene and oppose the current system, using a combination of tactics - demonstrations outside the centres, visits to individuals within the centres, and by offering legal advice where appropriate. No Borders (London) also provided a brief overview of the conditions within the centres/prisons - with hunger strikes and riots taking place regularly. It was also made clear that No Borders (London) was working with other similarly interested groups to build a coalition against the detention centres, and this had proven valuable and useful to the group.

No Borders (London) concluded by explaining that the British government was keen to expand the current infrastructure and was seeking to build a new detention centre close to Gatwick airport in September 2007 - and extended an invitation to those present to participate if possible.

Olaf from No Lager then explained how No Lager functioned and what it sought to achieve. He explained the involvement of the group and its commitment to the staging of a demonstration on Monday (4th June) for Freedom of Movement and Equal Rights outside a local refugee camp, and explained that it had developed loosely from around 2002, with the idea of going to the camps where the refugees are forced to live by the German government. It was also hoped that by doing so the group could help break the sense of isolation which can easily develop and be experienced by those inside the centres, and the group also hoped to encourage refugee self-organisation. No

Lager had also sought to raise public awareness of the existence of the camps, which are often geographically situated to enhance the physical isolation of the refugees from wider German society. Ultimately No Lager sought to close all of the camps currently operating in Germany.

Individuals connected to No Lager were then invited to provide an insight in to the impact and necessity of opposing the refugee camps.

M explained that the camps in Germany were indeed situated to isolate those held within them, and inside you would see men, women and children of diverse nationalities living together - with 4,5,6 or more people living in a single room. The poor conditions within the local camp (particularly the food and poor pay) had led to a decision to strike on October 4th. This had led to many within the camp being transferred with no explanation offered. The struggle continues even though the demands made by the refugees have not been met, and it was recognised by all the No Lager activists present that maintaining opposition to the camps frightened the German authorities.

A explained that there had been a struggle against the conditions within the camps prior to the development and involvement of No Lager - but that with the co-operation between camp refugees and the group 4 camps had been successfully closed. A hoped that after the demonstration on Monday people would meet again to continue the struggle against the camps.

Activists from Holland "All are included" were also present and they were then invited to give an insight as to how they functioned and the struggles they had undertaken locally.

It was explained that Holland had created a large number of places for refugees, with a further 3,000 expected to be created within the next year. In Holland the majority of people held in custody are individuals who have been 'removed' from society, who have suddenly been deemed 'illegal' by the state authorities. Once in custody there was no limit to the amount of time an individual could be held for, and once released an individual would often be re-arrested almost immediately or told to leave the country. This has led to a climate of fear developing amongst migrants and the Dutch people with no one feeling safe. In Holland the activists are currently mobilising against the building of two prison boats, to be located in a harbour in Zandam (?). The activists from Holland wanted to know if other countries had used this method of detaining refugees.

These boats are essentially prisons, and the Dutch government appears keen to use them as they are cheap and also do not require planning or building permission. On the last European action day (the 7th October) activists from Holland managed to produce official looking flyers which were distributed to raise awareness of the boats, and activists were also able to successfully deconstruct fences surrounding the boats!

Some individuals asked the Dutch activists if they had been able to work in close co-operation with refugees and migrants, and they responded by explaining that their involvement and commitment to direct action meant that migrants or refugees would be placed in a difficult position if they were to take part - exposing themselves unnecessarily to arrest. Dutch activists explained that they would often conduct actions without carrying identification papers as a sign of solidarity and support. Generally one Dutch activist explained that there was little experience (thus far) of interaction with refugee or migrant groups, and little evidence (thus far) of any organising taking place within the migrant or refugee communities.

Otto and Andrew from the US were then invited to give an idea as to how they were working in the United States.

And explained that he was primarily involved in work relating to the Mexico and US border, with around 500 people per year crossing the border from Mexico to the US each year. During the process

of crossing many fall ill from cold, dehydration, starvation or by getting lost in the desert. This situation is not likely to improve as the US government has taken to announcing its desire to extend the fencing and security between the borders - all within the context of the 'war on terror' and 'homeland security'.

Despite this many from the US and Mexico were working in desert to provide humanitarian assistance to those crossing the borders.

Otto outlined the fact that at least 100 detention centres were operating within the US officially, with many more expected to be operating unofficially. Many of the detention centres are privatised and run for profit (by companies such as Halliburton). Despite opposition many were fighting to raise awareness of the detention centres, whilst the US authorities conduct raids on homes and workplaces to facilitate the deportation of those deemed 'undocumented'. Otto made clear that the speed and relatively low publicity accompanying them had made it hard for US activists to counter them.

And Otto concluded by announcing the intention of US activists to hold a camp November to combat the detention centres.

An individual from Italy then outlined the issues that had been of concern to Italian activists. Given its geographic proximity to Africa Italy had been dealing with the issue of migration for some time. The current system was introduced in 1998 by a Leftist government, which houses asylum seekers and detainees in the same detention centres (referred to as CPT's?) - which are also used as 'staging centres'. Italy has witnessed a strong movement against the detention centres - with a recognition that in order to dismantle the detention centres a strong radical approach was required. This had led to a 'dismantling action' in 2002.

As part of this process Italian activists are keen to identify and target companies involved in the maintenance of the camp and detention infrastructure. An example was given where on one particular day a single company was targeted across five towns - and when asked why such action was undertaken it was explained that by profiteering from involvement with the camp infrastructure a company was effectively placing itself as accountable for the operation of the system.

In the months prior to this meeting the Italian government had sought to run a publicity campaign that called for the detention centres to be revised and overhauled as part of a process of humanitarian improvement and to avoid accusations of functioning in violation of human rights. This had led to the need for a new campaign to develop amongst Italian activists, to counter the attempt by the Italian Leftist Government to argue that detention centres were acceptable provided that they had been 'reformed' or 'improved'. Italian activists were simply calling for there to be no camps - regardless of any supposed improvements the current government had sought to make.

The meeting was then suspended to allow delegates to take a rest, before reconvening for the 2nd session:

No Borders (London) began by asking if it might be possible for all of the groups and individuals gathered to consider organising and co-ordinating actions transnationally - which would of course require some work to effect the necessary communication required.

This was accepted as being a valid and worthwhile objective, and led to the following points being made by those present:

It was felt that it might be useful to compare and contrast between refugee and detention camps internationally.

It was felt that within the G8 states it appeared that efforts were being made to institute a single unified policy against migration (in all its forms). We should be asking why we are all involved in this struggle and raising the issue of freedom of movement internationally and publicly. In Turkey there has recently been a huge demonstration in Istanbul against these issues - we should recognise the effectiveness of international strategies and co-operation.

It was felt that activists should seek to break through prescribed borders wherever they exist - it was clear that many of the companies involved in the maintenance and implementation of state policy operated on transnationally - there were opportunities here to be explored.

It was similarly recognised that the media operates transnationally - there were opportunities here to be explored.

It was felt that an international network could be set up and maintained to exchange information and contacts and also to develop the ability to warn migrants as they travelled.

It was felt that where methods were not working - such as demonstrations - an effort should be made to institute a means of communication whereby NEW methods could be identified, explored, implemented and revised as appropriate.

It was also felt that there should be a recognition that 'conflict points' existed between activists, supporters and the refugees. Knowledge 'held' by the activists and supporters should be shared with the migrant communities as soon as possible - thereby avoiding accusations of a continuing imperialist mentality. 'Knowledge is power'

Points of joint interest:

Increase future co-operation

Sodexo - target

Look at feasibility of No Lager European Tour

Simultaneous actions /demonstrations - transnationally - to show solidarity

Recognise equality between refugees and activists

Attend call outs made by refugees and other groups - increase co-operation with similarly interested groups

More international meetings should be held on a regular basis

Activists should consider engaging politically with refugees regarding areas of concern to refugees

Publicise mailing list that is currently in existence OR consider creation of new list to address concerns outlined above

Meeting ends!

(Phew)