

# Anti Camp Action days

## in Blankenburg/Oldenburg

### 29.09. - 1.10.2006

## European Camp System

Although our protest focusses on single camps like Bramsche-Hesepe, we always have the development of the European camp-system as a whole in our view. When we speak of the European camp system we are referring to the fact that at the moment a system of different camps, which are complementing one another, is set up inside and outside the European Union with a very high speed. To these belong first refugee camps in front of the EU borders, like in the Ukraine, Libya or Mauretania; second huge camp complexes directly at the EU-borders, at the polish border to the Ukraine as well as at the italian island Lampedusa or the Canary Islands (Spain); and third different camps inside the different countries of the EU. The basic principle of these camps is isolation – be they situated in the Libyan desert, in the forests of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or in an industrial area of big cities in western Germany. The more refugees and migrants are isolated or socially closed out, that is the more sparsely their contact to the neighbours, to migrant-communities, to lawyers or political activists is, the deeper the control is getting a grip of them and the stronger they are exposed to harassment, humiliations and punishment by the management of the camp and the authorities.

With this politics of isolation the camp-bureaucrats are pursuing several, sometimes contrasting aims at once: In the first place as many refugees and migrants as possible shall be caught in camps in order to prevent them from entering the EU. This goes hand in hand with other measures for example the increasement of the number of border police, the technical perfection of the monitoring at the borders or the spying out of secret migration routes and meeting points. Putting people in camps is secondly a central requirement for deporting refugees and migrants as easy as possible, either directly to their countries of origin or into

the just recently set up refugee camps in Northern Africa, where it is then up to the governments of Libya, Tunisia or Morocco to decide what is going to happen to them. Thirdly the camp politics aim at deterrence respective illegalization – be it, that refugees and migrants prefer it to enter the EU irregularly (instead of going through an anyway almost hopeless asylum procedure) or be it, that they are worn down through their experiences inside the refugee camp and ‘voluntarily’ decide to live illegally. Both is calculated, at least to a certain level: people without any legal status do not cost the state money, and in addition they are available to the european labour market as cheap, flexible workers who are not organized in trade unions – be it in the agriculture, at construction sites, in the cleaning business, the catering trade, the sex-industry or in the private households of the middle class.

It is also important for us to point out that unfortunately it is only a minority who migrates out of curiosity and for the reason of discovering new places. The majority of people is looking for a better life – a life in dignity and self-determination, in safety and where they can exist above the subsistence level. In other words: They leave because the basis of their livelihood has been destroyed, because they have to get to safety from war and dictatorship or sexist persecution. Many of these reasons are directly or indirectly linked to the ruling (economic) world order. Therefore the politics of camps and migration have to be understood also as an attempt of the rich countries to keep up the world-wide extremely unfair conditions of allocation.

We decline the isolation of refugees and migrants without papers, no matter if they are put from the cities into the forests or to the Northern African desert camps. We stand up for the right of global freedom of movement. Everybody has the right to stay wherever and as long as they want to! We demand the stopp of all deportations and the immediate closing of the refugee camps – here and everywhere!

**For global freedom of movement!**  
**Equal rights for all!**

# The camp Blankenburg

Situated about 7 km outside of Oldenburg, the site of the Blankenburg cloister was established in 1294 as a Dominican convent. In the middle of the 16th century, the convent disorganized and the premises served as housing for the outcast of society, the poor, homeless, and the mentally ill. After the closing of the psychiatric hospital in Blankenburg in the beginning of the 1980s, the city of Oldenburg set up accommodations for resettlers from the GDR in 1989 for a short period and in 1990 it was turned into ZAST (central point of refuge) - a camp for asylum seekers. The ZAST in Oldenburg was one of the largest Erstaufnahmestelle for refugees in Lower Saxony. The second facility of this type is found near Braunschweig.

Against the background of a federal-wide tightening of the right of asylum, centrally administrated mass accommodations for refugees were already in place within the city of Oldenburg by 1986. In 1989, about 1,400 to 1,500 refugees lived in Oldenburg.

Seven hundred asylum seekers were then detained in the ZAST. With this, the city of Oldenburg 'deported' the refugees outside of the city limits to Blankenburg.

Refugees were to stay in ZAST for a maximum of three months and then be locally relocated outside of the camps. In 1994, however, the refugees protested because they had been, contrary to the legal regulations, detained over six months in the camp. Furthermore, families had to live with six or more people in rooms less than 20m<sup>2</sup> in size, adults were prohibited from working and the children were also not given access to schooling. As a reaction to these conditions, the gateway was blocked, 40 men went on hunger strike, and further occupants hindered the staff from serving in the canteen. Due to the public pressure, facilities for self-preparation of food and the possibility of school attendance for the children was promised. Sixty people were also relocated in communal accommodations. The tendency towards long-term detainment in the camp was even at this point clearly evident.

Since 1998, under the guise of 'Project X', refugees without valid identity papers have been sent to the ZAST Oldenburg. They are requested in writing to leave their residency to return to the camp with the purpose of establishing their national identity. Among the methods used to uncover nationality are: permanent interrogations, being brought to one's embassy, control over personal belongings which are then searched for clues of country of origin, systematic spying, and revocation of cash. Once the country of origin is supposedly exposed, the refugee is then deported there. Many of these refugees without papers go underground and become illegal. The project is perceived as successful in that no matter whether the refugee is deported or goes underground, the state is no longer obligated to pay for them. The experiences from this pilot project have become set components of the camp system in Germany.

At the end of 2000, an outpost in Bramsche/Hesepe was added to the functions of ZAST and operates essentially

## Camp as "total institution"

Camps have got the character of "complete institutions" they limit the interactions of the people which are forced to live there with the outside world; they limit the freedom of movement. The administrative organization of life at the same place at all times and inside a community forced to live together creates an "artificial" world, in which the freedom of action of humans is limited drastically and refugees are withdrawn the right of self-determination.

Since 1991 all of the authorities needed for the asylum procedure exist at the site of the cloister. Inside the ZAST Oldenburg are located offices of the aliens department, the federal office for the recognition of alien refugees (Bundesamt für die Anerkennung Ausländischer Flüchtlinge), the public health department, the social welfare office, the criminal investigation department, detention cells for deportation prisoners, the general social service (Allgemeiner Sozialdienst) and the "Diakonische Werk".

Additionally there security guards who partly have police authority, that is to say that they are allowed to arrest refugees, keep them in custody, check them and search them. The rooms of the refugees can at all times be entered and searched by custodians, the management and police officers. At the entrance of the camp gate keepers check the inhabitants and their visitors when entering or leaving.

The restrictions for refugees are intended. They are accommodated in camps so that they are exposed to permanent control. Through camps the refugees get isolated from society and integration is prevented. They are not supposed to build up any prospects but leave Germany as soon as possible.

as a deportation camp. This camp is regarded as a model project in Germany as the methods from Project X are implemented and improved there. The explicit goal here is to force the refugees to leave or to go underground by exerting repressive measures on them. The official, but sardonic, statement from the Bramsche deportation camp declares, "Together with refugees, we develop perspectives for a return to dignity".

Since the beginning of 2005, the ZAST was renamed to the ZAAB (central reception area and government office for foreign affairs) and developed from a Erstaufnahmелager to Sammellager. Together with Bramsche, a combination of centers for the arrival and departure of refugees emerged.

With the regressing numbers of refugees in the past ten years, communal accommodations have closed. The so called reallocation of refugees no longer takes place. From the day they apply for asylum to either the rejection of the application or their deportation, the refugees must live in the camps. As soon as it is assumed that the application for asylum will be rejected the refugees are moved from the ZAAB Oldenburg to the deportation camp Bramsche/Hesepe. This essentially means that all refugees can be send to the deportation camp as the rate of approval for asylum seekers in Germany is at this moment 0.9%.

According to the director, Christian Lüttgau the people stay on average one year in Blankenburg. There are, however, some who have had to live there for over three years. The

current official number of people detained there is 560, despite a capacity of 550 places. The majority of the people there come from Iraq, Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and African Countries. The refugees in the camp have residential restriction, which means they are not allowed to leave the district without permission. They receive 39.18 € in cash monthly, non-cash benefits and are not allowed to work, although some are chosen for work paying 1.05€ the hour. In 2006 a description of the conditions in the camp was sent in an open letter from the detainees to the government of the state of Lower Saxony. The content of the letter states: the refugees aren't informed about their rights; important information and summons are not translated; they are isolated; the public transportation is inaccessible and not affordable with 39.18 € per month; the food holds little nutri-

## The situation of female refugees

Millions of women and children worldwide are refugees. The reasons that force women to flee from their home-countries are various and countless: Women seek refuge in order to evade genital circumcision, forced prostitution, forced marriage, sexual torture or persecution because they are lesbians.... They decide to migrate because they don't receive proper education or don't have a chance to earn a living in their country of origin. Others have to leave their country because they are persecuted for political reasons. Other reasons for migration might be that women don't fit into or don't want to accept their (female) role-cliché in society. Women flee war and the consequences of colonialism. They take flight from the well directed destruction of their economical and ecological foundations of living.

80 % of all refugees worldwide are women. This fact is widely unknown, because most of the refugees who arrive in western countries are men. The further the way people have to go on their flight, the smaller is the amount of women among them. The conditions to organize a flight are more difficult for women. They usually lack money, contacts and education. In many cases women flee with their children and are therefore much less flexible. Many women only reach their own country's borders or get into a neighbouring country at best.

Few women reach Germany, where they usually don't have a chance of being granted asylum. The right of asylum in Germany is granted under certain conditions. The above listed specific reasons for women to flee their countries are not considered in most cases. So, for the majority of the asylum-seeking women, their flight ends in refugee camps or they are forced to live illegally. The inhuman living situation in these refugee camps is reported by many women who have to stay in the deportation camp in Bramsche.

R. tells: She fled from the Lebanon to Germany, because as a widow she was going to be forced to pass on her son to an uncle. After trying to commit suicide she managed to flee to Europe with her son. She hoped to be able to live a life of free-

tional value, and cultural differences are rarely respected. In cases of illness only the camp doctor is consulted. She only has office hours twice a week, isn't responsive to the patients and often simply prescribes Paracetamol, a pain medicine, for all illnesses. Furthermore she makes racial slurs. In the open letter the refugees demand accommodations outside of the camp and to be treated humanely.

We express our solidarity with the refugees and their daily struggles and call for the closing of the camp. Each person should have the opportunity to decide for oneself where and how he or she wants to live. Refuge and migration is not a crime and the principle, "Equal rights for all" is not negotiable.

dom, and being treated equally to men. The reality in Europe was different. She had to face racism and the impending deportation and deal with massive restrictions on her freedom.

Despite the fact that gender-specific reasons have been taken into consideration in the new German immigration-law from 2005, her reasons to seek asylum were not taken into account, but dismissed as "cultural customs" of her home country. In spite of current war in the Lebanon the camp-management pressed her to get the missing

Everyday-life in the deportation-camp is governed by humiliation, discrimination, sexual infringement and the lack of personal freedom: several people share one room and therefore don't have any private space. Private rooms for women like day-rooms or facilities for physical exercise do not exist. Even in the lady's restrooms women are pestered by guards or janitors. The camp-inhabitants are forced to eat the monotonous food that is served in the camp-refectory. But there is individual resistance: some refugees purchased small stoves so that they are able to cook their own food.

Looking at living conditions for children it becomes obvious how very inhuman the everyday camp-life is. In the camp-kindergarten, 2 teachers take care of 50 to 60 children. The toys are often broken or very old. New toys have been bought, but usually the children are not allowed to play with them. Sometimes even the children perform resistance against these more than strict rules: An example is Z. who resisted the teachers' ban to use new crayons. As a result, she was banned from kindergarten. Other children formed resistance and tried to get Z. back in. This disagreement ended with expelling all the children from kindergarten for one week.

The older children are taught for two hours a day at the camp-school. Most kids are not challenged sufficiently, because in nearly every grade the subject matters are the same. The law allows the possibility to attend a public school. But the camp-management decides arbitrarily about these allowances. Only 12 of 60 of the school-aged children attend a public school.

The provision of medical care is also more than inadequate. The medical practitioner at the deportation camp in Bramsche

for example prescribes the same painkillers and ointments for very different illnesses and injuries, and in many cases the prescribed medication is ineffective. Women are usually not allowed to consult a gynaecologist. The only reason the camp-management gives to justify this refusal, is the problems refugees are believed to have, communicating in the German language. In the camp in Parchim there is no medical practitioner at all. A nurse is the medical authority there. She denied granting a camp-inhabitant the medical treatment which was urgently advised by a doctor from outside the camp.

All these examples show very clearly the inhuman conditions of living in the deportation-camps.

## Abolish all camps!

## Program

### Friday, 29th of September 2006

3pm Greeting including some small snacks Volleyball, soccer and table soccer tournaments, circus for everybody to join in, games as desired, and a theater workshop for women

7pm Dinner

8pm Opening plenum, conversation about the situation in Blankenburg, Bramsche and other camps, information concerning the rights of refugees and migrants afterwards Live music

### Saturday, 30th of September 2006

9am Breakfast

11:30 Demonstration starting from central station Oldenburg

4pm Dinner

5pm Workshops: "Self organization of refugees", "Leftwing radical politics and antiracist work"

8pm Discussion about the prospect of antiracist resistance afterwards Movies

### Sunday, 1st of October 2006

10am Breakfast

11am Closing plenum

1pm Lunch

## The „feminist meeting“

The „feminist meeting“, a meeting of women, lesbians, transgender-people from the “no lager” campaign and other groups fighting against racism and patriarchy, exist since spring 2005. Here refugees and non-refugees meet several times a year to discuss about the situation in the camps, deportation, racism ... and to plan collective action. Furthermore we talk about exploitation and repression against women and girls in the different countries of origin (incl. Gemany) and the resistance against it.

In addition to participating in the “no lager” campaigns the feminist meeting has organized some campaigns of its own. On September 25th 2005, the international day against violence against women, at the „feminist campaign days“ in Hamburg we publicly criticized the disastrous health care of refugees through „dialog theater“ and flyers. On the 8th of March 2006 together with Iranian and Kurd women we demonstrated, among other things, against the Islamic laws of the Iran which are fatal for many women today and have been in the past.

Women from the deportation camp Bramsche have brought the subject of their situation and especially the inhumane treatment of children to discussion. There will be more public relations and campaigns concerning these topics.

## Who we are ...

We are an alliance consisting of different antiracist, autonomous and feminist groups and individuals, working regional and trans-regional. Some of us are directly affected by racist special laws, others aren't. Our ambition is to fight for a self-determined life for everybody. We are protesting against any kind of disfranchisement and exclusion of humans. For many years we have been fighting against the camp system in Germany which excludes refugees from society, controls them and stigmatizes.

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