

Noborder meets Blockupy II Refugee Strikes and Struggles against exclusion and exploitation

Berlin, 13th October 2012: led by self-organised refugees, who before had organised local protest tent actions in several cities followed by a one-month protest march through Germany, roughly 6000 protesters are marching through the German capital. Their three main demands are: the closing-down of the camps, the abolition of the residence-law and a stop to all deportations. Rarely before so many people throughout Germany took collectively to the streets for such demands. Since then anti-racist resistance has gained increased public visibility and remains dynamic and persistent: in Berlin a protest camp was even kept open over the winter months, the Nigerian embassy was occupied for its collaboration on deportations, bus tours to refugee residences in all German states and many more actions were undertaken. And from 13th to 16th June 2013 an international tribunal will be held in Berlin where the human rights violations, happening every day in the context of violent (neo)colonial relations, will be publicly denounced and where the network of resistance will be further strengthened.

From ‘Take the Square’ to Refugee Tent Actions

Exactly one year earlier, on the global day of action of 15th October 2011, the Occupy Camps, inspired by the occupation of squares in Cairo, Madrid and New York, started in Germany. Since the autumn of 2012, now refugees and migrants avail themselves of the political instrument of square occupations in Germany and elsewhere. On 23rd March 2013 demonstrations for the rights of refugees and migrants took place simultaneously in Bologna, Amsterdam and Berlin, each time with several thousand participants. In Amsterdam, the Hague and Vienna squares and later churches were occupied as well. The basic assumptions of the respective groups were as diverse as their composition and their specific demands. Direct connections are limited, but they do have the resistance to deprivation of rights and exclusion in common. Often the experiences of struggles gained alongside the transit routes are touched upon in the protests.

For this new wave of refugee protests and strikes within the EU corresponds with the persistent struggles at the EU's external borders. In Greek detention camps, where thousands are interned who intended to travel on towards north-western Europe and were detained during major raids, revolts keep recurring. In front of the UNHCR office in Tunis transit migrants go on hunger strike to demand the continuation of their journey to a country willing to receive them. In the Aegean, the Straits of Sicily and Gibraltar, boat-people again and again set out, despite the danger involved and in the face of the ‘push backs’ by border police and Frontex. Resistance against the EU migration regime occurs on a daily basis, in the Mediterranean as well as at airports, against exclusion and exploitation, against racist police violence and being forced to live in refugee camps. At Blockupy, we again want to put forward and make visible this multifaceted struggle for global freedom of movement and against all racist special laws. We are calling for the blockade of the European Central Bank (ECB) on 31st May 2013, for taking part in actions against those who profit from exploitation and deportation, and for attending at the major demonstration on 1st June 2013.

Against border regimes, exploitation and capitalist adjustments

On 31st May 2013 not only the ECB, but also the airport (see the box below), the towers of

Deutsche Bank as well as some stores of clothing chains on the shopping mile of Frankfurt are to be targets of creative forms of protest. In land grabs as well as food speculation, the biggest German bank continues to bear decisive responsibility for expulsion and impoverishment in the global South, two major reasons for flight and migration. Clothing chains such as H&M, Zara and C&A profit in a massive exploitation gradient from breadline wages – be it in Tunisia, Bangladesh or Pakistan – which are not in the last place sustained by the border regimes. Capital moves to low-wage regions for the location-independent production of e.g. electronics, textiles or spare parts for the automobile industry. There, millions – women in particular – are being exploited under wretched and dangerous labour conditions.

At the same time, the border serves as a filter for a ‘migration management’ which throughout Europe directs mostly young migrant workers at low wages towards the location-dependent sectors: in construction, agriculture, in private households and care, in the cleaning industry, the gastronomy, or also the sex industry, cheap and willing labour is needed, whose dumping wages and disciplining are virtually extorted by the provisions of foreigners' law. People who have no residence or work permit and who have to make do without social benefits, will generally find themselves outlawed and defenceless. Those who do not want to risk their legal status or who want to improve it, must provide proof of an income, no matter what the employment conditions are. This holds true for migrants from non-EU countries and - in the practice of the social and foreigners' agencies - for EU citizens as well, especially if they come from Romania or Bulgaria.

In the Shadow of the Towers

Not only in the Rhine-Main area thousands of people, who are pseudo self-employed or under an illegal temporary contract, are slaving away; they are often cheated out of their promised wages by mafia sub-firms or middlemen and have no social insurance. Those who profit first and foremost from this situation are the large (general) firms, which in their special offers take this hyperexploitation of migrants by subcontracting chains into account. Creating a publicly effective media scandal concerning such practices and giving encouragement and direct support to the persons involved, are therefore necessary.

In November 2012, thirteen Rumanian workers, employed in the construction of luxury houses in Frankfurt's Europe Quarter, with their public protest actions and with the help of the unions project ‘Fair Mobility’, succeeded in enforcing the payment of their withheld wages. In April 2013 the trade union supported counseling office MigrAr supported a Bulgarian worker, who had an accident while doing cleaning work and had at first been refused the necessary operation. The medical emergency treatment he needed could be provided to him also with the help of a media scandal. Both cases are but two tips of the iceberg, the everyday life offered by highly precarious work forms in the shadow of the bank towers, without which the much-vaunted service economy would have long since collapsed.

Greece, the crisis laboratory

Greece has turned into the experimental field for the neoliberal crisis attacks. The austerity programs dictated by the EU have led to massive deprivation of rights and impoverishment of large parts of the population: abolition of basic social security, evictions, wage cuts and last but not least increased racist exclusion of refugees and migrants by massive raids and internment. In the Europe of the crisis, the demand for equal rights is increasingly often responded to with ‘equal

precarisation' – top-down instead of bottom-up status adjustment. Today you do not have to be a 'sans-papiers' to be refused the right to basic medical treatment, or not to be able to sufficiently feed your children.

The 'Village of all together' is the name of an initiative on the Greek island of Lesbos, which was founded in support of the families that were particularly hit by the austerity dictates. When in October 2012 refugees washed ashore again there and remained completely unattended, the initiative opened a self-organised welcome centre. While throughout Europe the newly-arrived are being illegalized and confined, this project shows more than the possibility to organise transit differently. Instead of allowing the authorities to play people off against one another, new alliances of solidarity were created in response to the social attacks.

When will this phenomenon arise in our country?

We started out at the border and are now in the middle of social questions...

The new quality of the denial of rights and increasing precarity confronts us with new questions: How do we live, especially here in Europe? What has to be changed? What rights will we assume? What rights do we want to appropriate? What new alliances between precarious people have been created? What should this Europe be, in order for us to want to be part of it? Are we in fact talking about Europe or about global rights?

We want to take these questions along into all those small experimental fields in our daily lives. In all those small and large struggles for the right to stay and against deportations. In discussions concerning participation and dignity, wages, rent, health, education and all public goods. In our daily struggles for survival, in our circles of friends, in self-organised initiatives. We started out at the border and are now in the middle of social questions. This is an invitation to do part of the search together: for a Europe that welcomes people. For a Europe where we fight together for global social rights.

This call is supported by:

Action-alliance against deportation Rhine-Main, transact, no one is illegal Hanau and Darmstadt, Networks Welcome to Europe and Afrique-Europe-Interact, Caravan Munich, Abolish Borders Berlin ...

Program concerning migration during Blockupy II:

Tuesday, 28.05: regional information event – In the Shadow of the Towers: highly precarious work in Frankfurt and the resistance by and our support of migrants against these labour relations;

Friday, 31.05: Participation in the blockade of the ECB followed by actions concerning Deutsche Bank, clothing chains on the main shopping street (Zeil) and at the airport (Blockupy Deportation Airport);

Saturday, 01.06: Speech by a self-organised refugee during the central manifestation and an antiracist block in the first part of the Blockupy Demonstration

Box

Blockupy Deportation Airport

For Friday, 31.05, the day of the blockades, several groups call for participation in a demonstration at 01.00 p.m. in Terminal 1 of the Frankfurt Airport. We support this initiative which should be

more closely linked to the crisis protests and the resistance against the border regime. At their first arrival thousands of migrants and refugees experience the Rhine-Main Airport as a bottleneck for racist checks and internment, or later as the terminus before deportation. The everyday injustice of these exclusions and deportations reflects a modern Apartheid system which in the first place denies people from the global South their right to freedom of movement. The airport is just as much a checkpoint as a deportation platform and thus the central crime scene of a repressive border regime, which has been expedited throughout Europe by German governments, since the factual abolition of the right of asylum almost exactly 20 years ago. In this regard it will always remain a place where we will try to directly stop deportations, as well as to denounce those who are (co)responsible for and who benefit from this policy, from the federal police to the deporting airlines.