

# **BREAK ISOLATION!**

## **Close down all refugee camps – abolish residence obligation!**

For a society without exclusion and oppression –  
for self-determined life and refugees' self-organisation

### **DEMONSTRATION IN ERFURT ON OCTOBER 22<sup>ND</sup> 2011**

#### **Camps – Controlled Life in Isolation**

According to the „Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz“ (law concerning social services for asylum seekers) refugees are forced to live in mass accommodation while their procedure for granting the right of asylum is under way and often even after it is finished. Camps in the federal German state of Thuringia spread out over all districts. When choosing locations for them, the priorities are usually to keep costs low and to maintain a distance to the local population, as public authorities have frequently confirmed. That is why the majority of the camps are located in small towns and villages, also often outside the urban area, in most cases in former barracks of the NVA (Nationale Volksarmee, the army of the German Democratic Republic) or administration buildings of the GDR. In order to avoid responsibility and keep the costs to a minimum, most of the districts leave the running of the camps to private companies. This means that, since profit is the main priority, living conditions that are already bad grow even worse.

The purpose of the camps is to wear refugees down in terms of health and mental well-being; to make deportations go as smoothly and inconspicuously as possible; and to suppress any form of political and legal resistance against bullying and violations of the law. The camps are run by directors and „Betreuer“ (wardens) who are responsible to the migration office and guarantee a thorough control of the refugees' private lives. The wardens have far-reaching competencies to decide about the residents' lives - e.g. whether they receive shopping vouchers, can see a doctor, can use learning opportunities, get working permissions or even receive their private post unopened and on time. This provides a huge scope for abuses of power and bullying, which creates a general mechanism of suppressing political resistance. According to experience, refugees have to face serious consequences including faster deportation for publicly criticising the situation – or sometimes for merely having visitors.

#### **Residenzpflicht (residence obligation) – Racist controls and suppression of Political Self-Organisation**

Another means of isolating refugees is the residence obligation law, which requires refugees to stay in the one district allocated to them. While some other federal states have completely abolished this law, Thuringia modified it this year: the permitted moving space was extended to four districts – four out of 23. There is an official possibility of applying for a vacation, thus gaining permission to leave the district. However, permission is hardly ever granted. When there was a nationwide refugee conference in Jena, Thuringia in April 2011, refugees from the federal state of Lower Saxony were denied permission to leave the district and therefore could not participate. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees stated that asylum seekers did „not have the right to be politically active“. This means that any action and meeting of the refugees' network can be criminalised according to this law. The police check for people violating the residence obligation law in train stations and city centres in Thuringia, specifically controlling people they perceive as „not German“. Violations of the residence obligation can lead to punishment fees or, in cases of repetition, to imprisonment. Residence obligation is therefore the main means German public authorities use to persecute refugees who are politically active.

Seeing that continuous political activism in exile is often important for being granted asylum, this situation shows clearly that the assumed fundamental right to asylum is obviously a lie: not only does Germany forbid political refugees to be politically active; it continues to persecute them like their countries of origin did.

#### **„We are here because you destroy our countries“**

Unfortunately, this slogan of the *Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants* will not lose its topicality. Stressing the importance of political asylum is an attempt to stigmatise so-called „economic migrants“ and set the public up against refugees, especially in times of crisis. The aim of this strategy is to conceal the structural global causes of flight and to prevent people from realising that they are the same structures that lead to crises and poverty in this part of the world. Who are those „economic migrants“, then? If the expression refers to people from Tunisia who, being free from Ben Ali, flee to Europe to find a better life - then the question that must follow is: who supported Ben Ali for years, doing billion dollar deals with him and his clan and thus sustaining extreme financial inequality and an omnipotent repression system? If the expression refers to people from Senegal who cannot sustain themselves by fishing anymore - then the question that must follow is: who sent the high-tech fishing fleets that overfish the West African sea? If it refers to people from

Afghanistan who have not only been deprived of any base for agriculture, but have also had all infrastructure destroyed, including their own houses – then the question must be: who has been waging war there for a decade?

If somebody leaves everything behind and flees, illegally crossing dozens of borders facing danger of death and paying through dehumanising clandestine employment on the way, then they must have a good reason. And in most cases it's the same reason that leads to exclusion, rising poverty and more and more cuts to fundamental liberties in this country: capitalism in a world of national states with increasingly strong security systems.

## **The VOICE Refugee Forum**

Founded as a reaction to the repressive situation in a refugee camp in Thuringia, the network called *The VOICE Refugee Forum* has for 17 years been fighting deprivation of rights and freedom. A large number of campaigns against deportation, isolation camps and residence obligation have frequently proven the necessity of autonomous self-organisation. The VOICE is not dependent on continuous financial support and functions without any hierarchic structure. The focus of its activism is always the fight for self-determination and continuous public presence of the refugees' voices. In Thuringia alone this made it possible to close down many isolation camps, to stop deportations and to prevent punishments for violations of the residence obligation law. For example, Miloud L Cherif has for several months successfully resisted his persecution for crossing a district border. He refuses to pay any fee („*My freedom is not for sale!*“) and managed to avoid imprisonment through civil disobedience and public protest. Meanwhile, refugee activists in other federal states have begun to build networks of their own and make their voices heard. Refugees in Sachsen-Anhalt have long been fighting the isolation camp Möhlau. Baden-Württemberg saw its first refugee conference this year, along with several actions against deportation and enforced embassy hearings.

## **Break Isolation**

This is the title of a campaign in Thuringia that has been intensified over the last year: a campaign against the isolation of refugees through their obligation to live in camps and the ban on moving freely across district borders. There is now a network of individuals and groups that, aiming to break this isolation, support The VOICE. They help with current actions, but also create documentation material and help to inform the public through regular visits to the camps and meetings with refugee activists.

Through self-organisation of refugees and solidarity within the community, the campaign showed the maltreatment of refugees in Gerstungen, Gangloffsömmern, Breitenworbis and Zella-Mehlis, and this success encouraged many refugees and non-refugees. During the campaign, the resistance drew more attention to the situation of refugees and the practice of isolation camps in Thuringia.

**That is why we will demonstrate against exclusion and suppression in Erfurt on October 22nd 2011! The main focus will be on the situation in Thuringia; however, it is identical with that in other parts of Germany, and the world. Refugee activists from all regions of Thuringia, Caravan activists from the nationwide network and many other supporters will take to the streets together.**

## **Support the refugees' resistance!!**

Show solidarity for an autonomous, dignified and free life for everybody!  
Instant closure of the isolation camps in Gerstungen, Breitenworbis and Zella-Mehlis!  
Residence obligation and isolation camps have to go – everywhere!

### **OCTOBER 22<sup>ND</sup> 2011 ERFURT**

**10am:** manifestation at the „Anger“

**2pm:** demonstration from the central station