

Refugee Protests in Osnabrück– Deportations and Demonstrations We are all human beings!



By Naife (Refugee activist), Frieda and Lisa (Supporters)

No Lager Osnabrück in May 2014

Frieda and Lisa: First of all, we want to talk about the context of the current protests. As the name of our group, *No Lager*, implies, the main issue was a group fighting against one of Lower Saxony's biggest Lagers- the deportation camp Bramsche-Hesepe.

For more than 10 years, a group of activists from Osnabrück tried getting into contact with Refugees in that huge isolation camp. It is located in the middle of nowhere and up to 600 people had to live there. There were demonstrations, the *No-Lager*-action tour and camp, blockades. Even if there were times when there was hardly any contact and some activists got house banned, there was also periods of time where we were in a good contact with Refugees from the Lager. In 2012, when the protest all over Germany started, we organised a camp in the centre of Osnabrück with the slogan "better in a tent than in a Lager".

As there were elections in Lower Saxony in the beginning of 2013, we started putting pressure on the parties, visited pre-election events etc. In the end the coalition of SPD and Green Party stated they'd change the migration policy. Well, there has not been a real change, but at least people don't stay in the Lagers longer than a few months anymore – compared to up to several years before this is an advantage.

Consequently, the cities of Lower Saxony were asked to develop new concepts for accommodation as they'd be facing bigger amounts of Refugees who were in the Lagers before. So did the city of Osnabrück. We tried to intervene assuring at least some basic demands developed by the Refugees in the two *Heime*.

Concrete demands were: single rooms, more kitchens and bathrooms, no mould, a transfer to private flats as fast as possible and free German classes for everybody. But even though we visited their meetings, the responsible persons of the city (Integrationsbeauftragte and Migrationsbeirat) just ignored the voices of the Refugees.

Finally, the conditions in the two existing *Heime*, which are at the outskirts of the city, did not really improve. In comparison, the new *Heime* that opened in the end of 2013 are a bit better – e.g. the average of persons sharing one room is now three instead of four. But the most important factor of this kind of progress is the location: One of the *Heime* is located very central in Osnabrück- in a neighbourhood with social projects and next to our autonomous centre "SubstAnZ"!

Naife: We, the Pakistani people and people from Somalia and Eritrea first met in the ZAST (Zentrale Aufnahmestelle) in Friedland, near Göttingen. From there, we were transferred into different cities in Lower Saxony. Some of us came into the same *Heime* in Osnabrück. Soon after arriving here, more and more got rejected their asylum requests. We made up an own refugee group in one of the *Heime* to try to find a way to handle the situation. But we did not know anything about the laws of Refugees in Lower Saxony and we did not have the resources (money, people, knowledge, etc.) to organize own protests. In that situation we met with persons from the *No Lager* group. Some people came to the *Heime* to talk about the actual political situation and to try helping the Refugees in Osnabrück.

First we didn't know who they were. We were sure that these guys are from police as they asked so many questions. One girl even said she studies immigration! We made a ranking of who is the chief, who is still in Police training etc. Today we can laugh about that!

Frieda and Lisa: In the beginning of 2014, the *No Lager* group was in a phase of searching for a new focus as the fight against the Lager Bramsche-Hesepe was partly won and we couldn't intervene into the concept of accommodation anymore. We asked ourselves how to get into closer contact to refugees as we already had tried to work with people from the *Heime* the year before, but there had been no continuity in working together.

One day, thanks to a helpful member of the city council, we got the information that about 80 of the Refugees in Osnabrück are going to be deported in the following months of spring and summer 2014. We were shocked and started searching for contact in the *Heime* with more effort than before. We talked to the people and informed them about the upcoming deportation and learned a lot about their current situation. We wanted to help building up a network between the different *Heime* in Osnabrück. Together with Refugees we already knew, we mobilised in Osnabrück and invited for the first big plenary. For the first meeting we also invited an experienced activist from Hannover so that not only we as white people were the ones talking about the situation. It seemed to be important to hear from somebody who is already here for a long time, who knows how things are working and that they need to act instead of reacting. From there on a huge group of Pakistani, Eritrean and Somali people started participating in the weekly (sometimes even more) plenaries in *SubstAnZ*.

Naife: In the first plenary we were like 60 people from different *Heime*. There were different nationalities and languages (somali, urdu, arabic, english, german and tegriniya), but we managed to find translators. For a lot of us it was the first plenary at all. The structures were unknown, there were rules we did not know. We got information about our rights in Germany and somehow for some people it was the first time they talked about their rights! We explained our problems and there once was a lawyer invited to one plenary. He told us about rights, possibilities and boundaries of asylum law in Lower Saxony. We agreed that refugees and supporters are willing to stop the deportations! There was so much energy in the group and Refugees were happy when they recognized these many supporters!

Frieda: We were nervous at the beginning and overwhelmed in the end! The first plenaries with about 60 people and translation into 4 languages were a big challenge but a big relief too – from now on, the fight really became a common fight as the current cast of *No Lager* never experienced before!

We were impressed how the Refugees managed the translation although lots of them didn't experienced plenaries before. We all recognized the importance to get active and to start protesting against the upcoming deportations.

Naife: The week after, we got the information about the minister president of Niedersachsen, Stefan Weil (SPD), coming to Osnabrück to give an open conversation for Osnabrück's inhabitants. Refugees and supporters went there together with about 50 persons to tell him about our problems of deportations. We made small banners and papers writing demands on it but we were not allowed to talk to him, we had to stay outside. There, we were shouted out the problems and our demands for stopping deportations. There was no good response. Afterwards, without having talked to the president, we talked to the media about the situation.

http://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/osnabrueck_emsland/Lampedusa-Fluechtlinge-protestieren-bei-Weil,lampedusa197.html

Frieda: The supporters contacted with the NDR. They were interested in following the protest of the Refugees. We gave an interview to the NDR. Stefan Weil's only commentary concerning this action was in TV that he did not know about these deportations, but anyway there was the law that could not be changed, blablabla. He was not interested at all.

Naife and Frieda: Before going to the minister president we knew about a deportation that should be carried out within that night at 2:30 in one of the central *Heime* that is luckily in the neighbourhood of our AZ SubstAnZ. In a spontaneous plenary, we decided how to stop this deportation. Finally as conclusion, we planned to block the front door of the Heim. Within one hour, we mobilised at least 60 Refugees and supporters to stand in front of the door. Finally it worked out, the deportation was stopped and the Ausländerbehörde and police left the *Heim*, they did not intervene. Afterwards, the person got one more month Visa to stay in Osnabrück.

http://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/osnabrueck_emsland/Lampedusa-Fluechtlinge-protestieren-bei-Weil,lampedusa197.html

Naife: Within the next (only!) four days we organised and mobilised together for a first demonstration in March 2014. At least 600 people took part, walking through the centre of Osnabrück! Our aim was the town hall where randomly at this time was a meeting of the Sozialausschuss, politicians discussing the deportations. We mobilised in different *Heime* and had good results with some Refugees, but also lots of them felt scared as they did not know the reaction of police.

The demonstration was so important for us. Even they were scared they used their effort to demonstrate because the own case problems are so huge. The main focus was to tell the people to face the reason why Refugees are coming and to question the big problems we have in our home countries. Our impression of the first demonstration in Germany we ever went to was that we did not need to fear the police, we felt protected also by supporters. We did not meet people before who are supporting Refugees like this. The protest was full of effect, demands for Refugees rights were shouted out and we had speeches at different points of the route, where we expressed our situations. A lot of people joined us on the walk and we distributed flyers and information papers.

<http://www.noz.de/lokales/osnabrueck/artikel/460653/demo-in-osnabruck-600-burger-unterstuetzen-fluechtlinge-1#lightbox&47270&1&460653>

Frieda and Lisa: From the supporters perspective it was great how many people appeared at the demo – we would not have expected that so spontaneously. The press was there and the demo was an important step to draw the attention of Osnabrück's citizens towards the actual and inhuman political process of 80 deportations!

The demo ended in front of the town hall where Refugees and *No-Lager*-people talked to politicians of the reunion about deportation. Two politicians were talking to the demonstrators, facing the Refugees for the first time (not only as numbers on papers). They said they'd be happy to see our political engagement and motivation – but in the end they said nothing really important... But still- we got much publicity and a lot of people realized that many politicians just talk and don't help.

Lisa: parallel to the autonomous organisation people from Josephkirche and the Stadtteilbüro Rosenplatzquartier who were organised in a round table started to talk about the deportations, too. The round table already existed since it was clear that there were refugees to come and live in their neighbourhood. That is not bad – first we had feared in Osnabrück might come up a racist discourse when more Refugees are accommodated in the city centre, but actually the exactly opposite happened!

First, it was more for charity – they organised stuff the Refugees might need and German classes, but than they were confronted with the deportations, too.

Naife: From the meeting of the round table we did not expect big results, because first we know *No Lager* and only afterwards we got to know about the round table although they already existed for a long time. They never really got into contact with us. They talked more about us than with us, even though there are some really nice people in that group. They concentrated their work on the families and said they'd only organise church asylum for families. But the single men have families, too! That is very selective.

They announced to organise the second demonstration, although they tried hard, organised busses and so on, there were some conflicts, too. For example they had phrases in their announcement for the demonstration that sounded too paternalistic and exclude (e.g. "our Refugees"). In the end, around 450 people came – it was good but not as great as the first one.

<http://www.noz.de/lokales/osnabrueck/artikel/470168/abschiebung-von-fluchtlingen-aus-osnabrueck-stoppen-1>

Naife: In the last weeks, lots of people got letters for deport when they went to renew their Aufenthalt at the Ausländerbehörde. We started to think about a demonstration at Ausländerbehörde because Refugees are really scared of that place and with *No Lager* we organised another protest in front of Ausländerbehörde.

<http://www.noz.de/lokales/osnabrueck/artikel/475258/fluchtlinge-bitten-lasst-uns-bleiben>

Naife and Frieda: Some Refugees and people from *No Lager* talked to the responsible persons of the Ausländerbehörde, it was very frustrating because of the incredibly ignorant attitude of these persons...

Another deportation was planned for the next morning, and again we mobilised a new blockade. This time there already existed a phone chain for people to come spontaneously. Again we blocked the doors, and this time press was there too. The police came and talked to us, the people showed up peaceful resistance. The deportation car approached first but finally left the crowd of demonstrators, they even parked in a different street when they saw so many people! One more deportation was prevented and again we got lots of publicity! Even the minister of the inner of Lower Saxony was asked questions concerning our Protests:

http://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/hallo_niedersachsen/hallonds21600.html

<http://www.noz.de/lokales/osnabrueck/artikel/475404/osnabruecker-verhindern-abschiebung-von-fluchtlings>

Naife: We appreciate the behaviour of the police until now. We are happy that until now the fight was passive, more and more people are supporting us and join the Refugee movement in Osnabrück at the moment and we hope it's going well in the future.

Lisa: We know that there has been violence for example in Göttingen so that we are not too optimistic but still hope that things develop differently here... We will see!

Frieda: In any case, we will not give up fighting all together against deportations, the inhumanity of asylum politics and the Dublin- III- procedure!

STOP THE DEPORTATIONS!
WE ALL WANT TO LIVE TOGETHER

kein
mensch
ist
illegal