

CROSSING BORDERS

movements and struggles of migration



We take the opportunities presented by two events, the European Social Forum in Malmö in September as well as the Euro-African Meeting in Paris in October, to publish another issue of our newsletter. Crossing borders includes 8 pages this time: on one hand, summarizing and giving brief reports about the transnational chain of migration-related actions, on the other hand bringing into discussion some key aspects of migration in 4 key countries. "Where is the world migrating?" is our relevant introductory headline. And you will find texts about the situation in Germany and Italy as two important actors in Europe, about Mali as an example for the developments in Africa, and about USA, where we want to follow the "sleepy giant", who awaked 2006 in a never seen dimension... please help to distribute crossing borders! You can find the printout, which soon will also be available again in various languages, at www.noborder.org. Contact us at: frassainfo@kein.org

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Where is the world migrating?

Over the past year, the struggles taking place were again really strong. On the one hand, migrants continued to move all around the world, despite all the risks that migration involves, death among them. Almost everywhere, in the countries of arrival as well as in the places that they come from, migrants are organizing against the exploitation, discrimination, racism, deportations and detentions. On the other hand, national governments and international organizations are increasingly tightening the border regime. Their strategy seems not to be that of closing the borders, leaving a few small gates that they could be able to open at their necessity and pleasure. Rather, it seems that they have clearly understood that the migrations cannot be stopped. They know perfectly well that migrations provide an essential labor force to improve profits and to face the present economic juncture. Actually, governments do not want to stop migrations, but to manage them across multiple spaces, which they aim to operate in a coordinated manner. But still migrants are a powerful disturbing factor in the harmony of global governance. It is not an extravagation to say that the world is moving on the waves of migrations. Migrations are at stake also when the problems appear to be the financial storms, the oil price, the transformation of welfare, the reduction of the wages of all workers, the management of wars in seemingly far lands, the establishment of order in small or huge cities. No national or international politics can avoid facing the constant and uncontrollable flows of migrations, the uneraseable presence, within the State, of a migrant labor force, which subverts every known model of national politics. Migrants force on the State and on Capital a transnational dimension, even though the State and the Capital pretend to close themselves within the national and international order. That is why we ask: where is the world migrating?

Europe is defining its outside by increasing the military control at the borders. Frontex seems to be a higher level of improvement in this politics of harmonization. Yet, despite its declared aims, the agency seems unable to guarantee the extreme control it promises. It functions within a framework of selective inclusion: its true target is to manage a sustainable quota of illegal migrants, so that some of them can be included according to the need for migrant labor, while others are ex-

cluded in order to avoid an over-availability of labor force. Moreover, Europe is centralizing the political management of migrations. Detentions and deportations are increasingly a European level issue, aimed at both obstructing the arrival and the internal movements of migrants. However, the borders defined in this way can be easily crossed by Capital: the last agreement signed by Italy and Libya clearly shows that migrants are intended to be an exchangeable commodity. To the extent that the government of Libya will be able to impede migrations, Italy will to the same extent increase productive investments on the other side of the Mediterranean sea. Thus, bilateral agreements mean also a selective recruitment of migrant labor-force. As in the Malian case, migrants are allowed to leave the country only insofar as they are useful, and their skills available to be exploited in exchange for a low wage.

France, Italy, but also the United States, provide evidence of a political use of fear against migrants. Increasing criminalization and racist politics are reshaping migrants' everyday lives. The raids in the work places and the increasing use of detention both in Europe and in the USA are just another border, though sometimes an invisible one, aimed at forcing migrants into silence and invisibility. Migrants have to work hard, to be always available, to accept every sort of wage and labor condition. It is not by chance that both in the US and in France repression increased immediately after some important mobilizations or strikes against the exploitation of migrant labor and for legalization. Migrants are not even allowed to imagine a better future in their country of arrival, much less to realize it: when families are not materially broken by deportations, family reunions are strongly hindered, the opportunity to find housing somewhere is becoming impossible, and social security is completely cut off. What we call racism, institutional racism beside the popular one, is nothing but one of the higher peak of precarization of labor and life we have ever faced. Borders are not only on the border, for they are acting materially on the life of all the workers by precarizing their conditions and dividing them. This is the imagined destination of world's migration today.

[continued]: What is at stake here is how to increase migrants' capacity for autonomous political organization. In Spain, in France and also in Italy there are a lot of strikes organized and sustained by migrants, who are protagonists in the struggles against the exploitation of labor. They refuse to be only a disposable workforce, which is exploited in Europe or the U.S. and then can be thrown away. Migrants accept less and less the wages of fear. If migrants cross the borders, migrants' struggles cross the borders too. The experience of the transnational chain of migration-related action has been a first attempt to connect several particular events within the same political frame, the struggle against the border regime and the exploitation of migrant labor. This experience has to be evaluated within the European Social Forum in Malmö in order to improve the networking process on a transnational scale. It has been not an arrival, but a starting point. The same function should have other political coming together as the Euro-African process in Paris in coming October. Frontex has to be regarded as a crucial target because its role within the management of migrations: one of the station of the transnational chain, in Warsaw, pointed out the possibility of focusing on different experiences of organization – like the African or the Ukrainian one – against the same monster of the border regime. Finally, another border has to be crossed, that is the border of fear. If criminalization and repression are the main instruments to keep migrants hidden, and so divide them from native workers, one of the main challenges is to open up a political space of communication, where differences are invested within a common struggle. The Euro May Day in Milan was an important step in this direction: more than 80.000 precarious workers there recognized that migrant labor is today a fundamental lever for the precarization of the labor as a whole. These are the experiences that ought to be multiplied in order to change the direction of world's migration.



Demonstration against precarity and for social and labour rights for all, Sevilla, 23rd of February 2008

Transnational Chain of Actions:

In February the chain of actions started as an attempt to create a new form of transnational cooperation and communication within the migration-related network. The following comprises some sentences from the common call and brief reports from the respective stations. More information can be found at noborder.org and a first evaluation is planned during the ESF in Malmö. From the call:

“All over the world capitalist exploitation is unimaginable without the global differences, constructed through filters and zones, the hierarchies and inequality, and through external as well as internal borders. Illegalisation and deportations on one hand, selective inclusion and recruitment of a migrant workforce on the other, are two sides of the same coin: migration management for a global apartheid regime, whose most precarious conditions of exploitation are based on the production of hierarchies in terms of rights and on racist discrimination. (...) The increasing movements and daily fights of refugees and migrants challenge the external borders of Europe as well as the social and legal borders within Europe itself. The manifold struggles undermine, crisscross and attack the brutal and murderous system of migration control and racist exploitation. This transnational chain of actions is a step towards the linking of these struggles, an attempt to build communica-

tion and organisation across the borders, knowing that the demands for freedom of movement and the right to stay aim directly at the “heart of the monster”, which migrants everyday and everywhere are fighting against.”

Station #1: Amsterdam

The first stop of the Transnational Chain of Actions was on February 2nd 2008. Labour organizers, theorists, media and migrant activists from the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK came together to discuss and share best practices in the fight against precarity and insecure labour conditions. The event "Migrant / Media / Metropolis: New labour struggles in the global city" attempted to challenge traditional labour practices, inspire and bring together a sharper network of social activists, academics, media makers and artists to join contemporary urban labour struggles like the "Cleaners for A Better Future Campaign" and the domestic workers' struggle. In March this year the Dutch cleaners won a breakthrough contract which improved their wages to 10 euros an hour and increased their benefits with the active support of social movements, artists and academics.

Station #2: Sevilla

In September 2006 more than 100 migrant associations, social movements and social organisations made an important step creating the Spanish network for immigrants rights (REDI in Spanish). The goals of this network are to coordinate the different organisations, to exchange information and news and to launch campaigns and mobilisations against existing migratory policies and for immigrant rights in Spain. As part of this process, two weeks before the general elections, REDI called for a common day of action on February 23rd with the slogan "Against precarity and for social and labour rights for all". More than 10.000 people took the streets in Sevilla, Valencia, Burgos, Madrid, Barcelona, Pamplona and Tenerife. In Sevilla, 2.000 people marched demanding a new regularisation process and the closure of detention centers. After this successful day the process of coordination continued with actions and demonstrations on June 21st against the European directive and a national demonstration was held in Madrid on September 14th as part of the World Social Forum on Migration.

Contact with REDI: redi@riseup.net.

Report and pictures of February 23rd:
estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/73073/index.php

Report and pictures of June 21st:
estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/74104/index.php

Station #3: Turin

Many groups of migrants and antiracists from cities in northern Italy met to discuss the relationship between migration, the management of the borders and the precarisation of contemporary labour. The perspective of migrant labour has been regarded as crucial for understanding the instability of contemporary capitalism, the local and metropolitan proliferation of borders as instruments of selective inclusion and exploitation of migrants. The meeting was an important step towards the organisation of the first Euro-MayDay which focused on the political centrality of migrant labour.

Station #4: Bamako

Some 200 hundred people came together during the two open days in Bamako/Mali on March 15th and 16th, organised by the Association Malienne des Expulsés. Discussions took place on the repression against and the resistance for the undocumented in Europe, but also on the deportations from Northern African countries to Mali. These deportations are undertaken on the basis of readmissions treaties with European countries. The Call of Bamako, adopted at the end of the meeting, was a direct attack on the externalisation of European border controls. It called to an end to cooperation with Frontex and with the International Centre for Migration Management, a new EU-job centre in Bamako for circular migration as an answer to so-called "irregular" migration

More info at: noborder.org/chain08/display.php?id=430

Station #5: London

In London on March 29th 2008, over 200 people attended the Trade Union and Community Groups Conference Against Immigration Controls. The conference was hosted by the Finsbury Park local branch of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT). Many of the people attending were there as delegates of local trade union branches, migrant community groups or political organisations. Speakers included migrant rights activists, asylum seekers and undocumented migrant workers. Fol-

lowing the conference, regular co-ordination meetings of the various groups involved have continued. This has been the basis for organising a series of community based workshops on workers rights and dealing with workplace checks and raids on migrant workers. The coalition formed through the conference, now known as the Campaign Against Immigration Controls (CAIC) which has also been involved in supporting anti-detention centre protests, and has been active in supporting a strike by migrant cleaners on the London Underground. The bosses used the irregular status of workers involved in this struggle to try and intimidate them, and CAIC has been able to provide practical help and support to resist this.

Station #6: Athens

In April in Greece an action day was organised as part of the transnational chain of actions. There were several actions in different Greek cities under the slogan "open borders and asylum for refugees", as the Greek policies on asylum and border control are getting worse every day. In Athens a demonstration was organised, which, despite the rain, was quite successful. More than 300 refugees participated, mainly from Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan. Actions and discussions were also organised in Thessalonica, Patra, Volos, Mytilene, Samos and Chania where many people participated.

Station #7: Milan, Euro MayDay

With the slogan "No borders-no precarity", migrants coming from many Italian cities opened a parade composed of 80.000 precarious workers. The message was clear: the threat of illegality, the link between labour contracts and residence permits, detention centers, all are fundamental levers of a process of precarisation which is a general concern. Beyond the communication with the EuroMayDay in Aachen, the parade of Milan made the link to the struggles of migrant workers in the United States, who were demonstrating for the mass legalisation of all undocumented migrants.

More information: lavoromigrante.splinder.com
and coordinamentomigranti.splinder.com

Station #8: Warsaw

June 6th led us to Warsaw, Poland, where the headquarters of Frontex, the infamous European Union migrant hunting agency, is based. The evening before there was an info event, while June 6th saw a press conference in the morning and a demonstration in the afternoon, right in front of Frontex' offices, which are located on the 22nd floor of a shiny new skyscraper in the heart of Warsaw. Around 50 people came together, some from abroad, most from Warsaw. Our banners and shouting did attract some attention, and in the end, even the executive director of Frontex came down to have a closer look. He invited some of us to come up and have a talk (typical EU style: "we can talk about anything..."), which we did, but only after the demonstration had moved on to the presidential palace to protest deportations to Vietnam. Altogether, it was good that we did the action in Warsaw, it is a starting point for an image pollution campaign against Frontex.

Listen to an edited recording of the upstairs talk:
www.freie-radios.net/portal/content.php?id=23733 More
More information about frontex at: <http://frontex.antira.info>

Station #9: Hamburg

More than 1000 people took part in a one week action camp against racism and deportations, which happened in cooperation with the first climate camp in Germany. "Reclaim the market" was the title of a blockade that took place in and outside a supermarket to criticise the exploitation of migrant workers in the agricultural sector and to demand "bio-products and papers for all". Another protest was directed against a Frontex training academy in Luebeck. The most spectacular final action took place in and around the Hamburg Airport: A "warning strike from outside against the charter of shame". About 1500 people participated in this demonstration and took part in simultaneous activities inside the airport and blockades of the streets outside. During the whole day one of the terminals was completely turned into a protest zone against deportations.

More infos at: <http://camp08.antira.info>

More reports and pictures also at:
umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/ereignis/antiracamp_hamburg08.html

Station #10: ESF in Malmö

During the European Social Forum from 17 - 21 September 2008 in Malmö there will be a first evaluation of the chain of actions in the context of the workshop "Transnationalisation now!" (Migrationrelated Networking) on Friday the 19th of September from 1530 to 1700h. In addition there will be a seminar about freedom of movement against the EU-border regime on Friday the 19th of September from 1800h to 2100h and an Assembly of the Migration Network of ESF on Saturday the 20th of September from 0930h to 1230h.

More information on the ESF at: www.esf2008.org



The transnational banner at the EuroMayDay08 in Milan, Italy

The driving force for externalisation... and a complex picture inside about some aspects of migration in Germany

Asylum statistics in both Germany and Europe have reached historic lows. In 2007, Germany registered about 20.000 new requests for asylum, the lowest number since 1977. The dramatic drop in the number of asylum-seekers continues in 2008 and is most of all a result of externalisation policies. The EU enlargement process was the first crucial step in the shift of "migration-management" to the east, as new member states have been obliged to adapt the Schengen-standards. With the full implementation of the Eurodac fingerprint system and the Dublin II convention in the last years, the "old" member states in central Europe – and Germany as a driving force - have pushed for the creation of an asylum system that put the "main burden" on eastern and southern EU countries. These border states are simply deporting refugees and migrants in increasing numbers to countries outside the European Union, including the Ukraine, Turkey and countries in northern Africa.

Increased border security, additional readmission agreements and more charter deportations have been the central elements on the agenda of the last German EU-presidency in 2007, when interior minister Schäuble – together with former EU-commissioner Frattini – established a so-called "future group" to draft a long-term strategy for "inner security" with a clear focus on "border-management". In these plans Frontex, the EU border agency and a project largely initiated by the German government, plays a crucial role and should become

"an effective joint tool to combat illegal immigration in the EU. In future, Frontex must have sufficient capability and authority to train and coordinate with the border police of each individual member state, so that illegal immigration in Europe becomes the exception rather than the rule"(German Interior Ministry).

The expansion of the EU mentioned above has had other effects too and has led to a more complex picture of migration (not only) in Germany. For example, previously, Polish or Hungarian citizens could travel to the west, but until 2004 without the permission to stay and work. Romanian and Bulgarian citizens remained completely illegalised for a subsequent three years. By 2007 all these Eastern European citizens were able to move with less and less restrictions and received more and more rights to stay and work. The expansion of the EU can thus also be seen as a massive legalisation process. Is this the "price" that is paid for to achieve the more important economical target of "gaining" new open markets in the east? Or did this happen because the old border regime was being constantly undermined and could not be upheld anymore? In any case, tens of thousands of Eastern European migrants who have continuously been victims of (border)control and raids in Germany in the past that have had the consequence of detention and deportation, cannot be mistreated in such a way anymore. Today they move with much more self confidence, although a visual political articulation is seldom. Their right to work is still restricted by various limitations, but they have many more options to resist or refuse (hyper)exploitation. "Where is the world migrating to?" was an initial question; If we consider the developments described above, it seems to be an open process and a contested field between appropriation and exploitation...

All European countries are searching for low paid workers, mainly in sectors such as construction, agriculture or the service industry, which cannot so easily be outsourced to the Global South. Binding residency permits to labour contracts and the concept of selective (and temporary) inclusion, have been and remain crucial elements of migration policy, also in Germany:

"In an effort to control migration in Europe, the Labour Department has proposed, among other things, that Germany develop and promote a "circular migration" policy as a tool for migration and development, taking into consideration existing skills in the German labour force and the needs of the national economy" (Interior Ministry, Jan. 2007).

This supposed innovation is nothing more than the return of the old European guest worker model, dusted off and given the new, more refined name of "circular migration". Implicit in the term is a vision of migration that sees migrants first and foremost as a source of labour and not as human beings with hopes and plans, nor with the ability to resist and to fight for their rights...

Refugee and migration-related struggles in Germany have never been mass mobilisations. Nonetheless, everyday somewhere in Germany there is resistance against deportations, or refugees protest against the dehumanising conditions in camps. A wide spectrum of antiracist networks is active on various levels, in part for more than 10 years now (for example No One Is Illegal groups or the Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants). "Manifold but divided" could be an adequate characterisation. Given that the migration-related movement has not really been able to bundle its potential and come together at least in specific campaigns and mobilisations, it has failed to create a broader dynamic within society. However, in the last few years, a few groups have made first attempts to link migration issues to labour issues and to connect the struggle against illegalisation and deportations with other political social conflicts. This strategy succeeded last year during the anti-G8-week in Rostock, when 10.000 people joined our demonstration "For Freedom of Movement and Equal Rights" on June 4th. Another initiative, the "Initiative for Global Social Rights", brings together left-wing union activists and a variety of NGOs and follows the same intention - namely to create more cross-over debates and projects, where freedom of movement is one of the fundamental demands.



demonstration in Hamburg on the 16th of August 2008

Mali Stop Cigem, an EU-outpost watchtower of Migration Management'

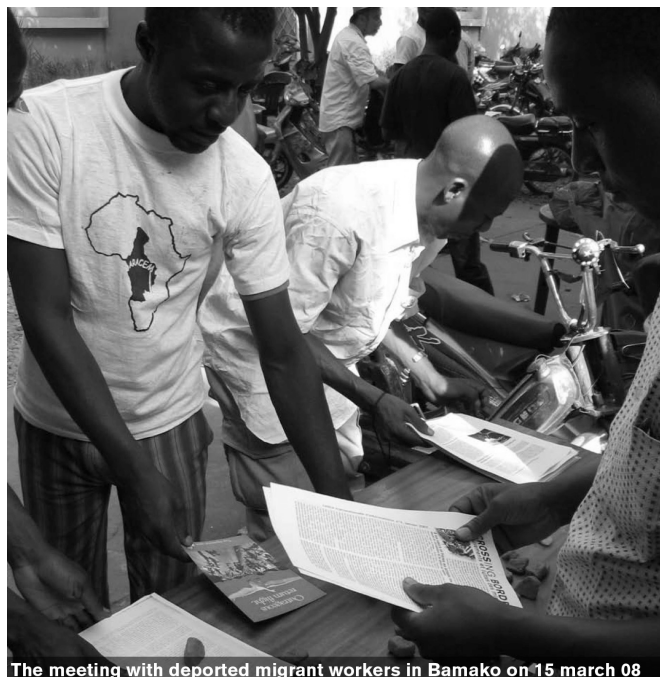
On October 6th 2008, the European Union will open a Centre for Migration in Bamako, the capital of Mali. AME* has clearly analysed that the "Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations" (Cigem) aims at "controlling migratory flows in order to hinder, deter and to discourage potential migrants". The center is part of the new EU policy, explained in the 'European pact on immigration and asylum' which EU governments want to force African leaders to accept at the second EU-Africa-summit on Migration and Development in October in Paris. This new pact "invite[s] Member States to devise policies for economic migration", aims to "give priority to temporary or circular migration" instead of freedom of movement, promises no more mass legalisation of undocumented people, the "return of irregular aliens", which is synonymous with re-admission agreements to be able to deport people, "joint flights", "biometric identification of illegal entrants", and "more effective border controls" with an intensification of "cooperation with the countries of origin and transit".

Originally Cigem was supposed to function as the first European job center in Africa. However, this title was abandoned later on, whilst selective inclusion has remained one of its top tasks. This is referred to as "Immigration Chosie" - selective immigration, specifically directed to the needs of European labour markets and of course to low paid sectors. The AME* is warning of a new phenomenon of "Kleenex workers" - workers to be disposed of after use like a paper tissue. This was the experience this year in Morocco, when some thousand women were recruited for the strawberry harvest in Spain. To get a temporary visa for the job the Moroccan women had to fulfill certain requirements such as proving that they had a family with small children in order to guarantee that they would return afterwards. "The increasing flow of Sub-Saharan migrants to Europe and the struggles for the regularisation of Sans-papiers all over Europe are confronted with outside as well as with inside practices of exclusion and exploitation. The globalisation of repressive and restrictive measures against migrants is manifested in the dehumanising treatment of migrants in Maghreb countries as well as in the establishment of Frontex", so the framing analysis of AME. Consequently AME calls for "a synergy of actions, for a globalisation of actions to support and defend the rights of migrants, in transit-countries as well as in the target-countries". AME organised a conference in Bamako last March within the context of the transnational chain of actions (see report), and their representatives also took in the World Social Forum on Migration in Madrid and will take part in the ESF in Malmö. They will also participate in the actions against the EU-Africa Summit on Migration and Development, which include a counter-summit (17th October), a demonstration (18th October) and a concert. The conference in Bamako ended with a call and the following demands to the Malian government:

- refuse to sign the bilateral re-admission agreements with France and Spain which pave the way to the establishment of quotas of chosen immigrants, precipitating the increased expulsion of Malian 'Sans-Papiers' workers
- stop granting 'Laissez Passer' which facilitates the deportation of Malians
- legalise all undocumented migrants and enable the reunification of families

- demand that the French state return the belongings of deported people and implement the right to receive benefits according to the contributions they paid in taxes whilst working
- denounce the EU return directive which is a real humiliation for all African people
- refuse collaboration with the Frontex Agency, created to manage the externalisation of European borders
- stop the opening of the International Center for the Management of Immigration, "CIGEM". Its money should be used to assist deported and refouled people
- assist all deported and refouled people who went to the west to help their families and to help their country develop
- create a mixed committee including representatives of the government and of those deported to evaluate the impact caused.

Through its activities AME seeks to connect the demand for freedom of movement with a radical criticism of neo-colonial EU politics in Africa. "We always said that politics of so-called development aid and development cooperation have failed and did never meet the vital needs of the African population [...] To pay for their migration policies, the European Union and more specifically France, use money that should have been allocated to investment in African countries. These funds will not be sufficient to meet even the basic needs of our countries. The fact that in Mali the proportion of money sent back by migrants is far more than the money sent as so-called aid clearly demonstrates this. These funds which are said to be for development are in fact now spent on migration control; The 10 million Euros from the EU Fund for Development were used to finance the future Malian 'Cigem', whose purpose will be to control migration and fight irregular migration."



The meeting with deported migrant workers in Bamako on 15 March 08

* The AME, the "Association Malienne des Expulsés", is a grassroots organisation of deportees who seek to pass on the experiences of deportees from European and African countries to the 'candidats au départ'. They are very active in directly supporting the 'refoules', who were arrested, detained and deported during their attempts to reach Europe. They clearly criticise both the EU governments and the collaborating African governments responsible for the consequences of this dehumanising deportation and border regime.

Italy: a Summer of Security

In July, the Italian parliament enacted a number of “urgent measures concerning public security”. In this way, a summer of security begun for migrants: the openly racist speeches made by some members of the majority in the parliament, and their thinly veiled justifications of the assaults against the Roma camps were not enough. New rules now enforce the Bossi-Fini law, which was left untouched by the previous center-left government. The so called “pacchetto sicurezza” acknowledges the rule approved by the European parliament that establishes an 18 month maximum for the detention of migrants (previously 2 months in Italy). Those who use a false identity can now be detained for a period of 1 year to 6 years. Those who receive a prison sentence of more than 2 years (previously 10) can now be expelled. Those who do not obey an order to leave the country can be detained in prison for 1 year to 4 years. Even the new European citizens can be expelled, if they act criminally or if their wages are too low. The mayors of Italian cities have been given extraordinary powers: they can report the presence of illegal migrants to the police authority, who in this way are enabled to expel them. Last, but not least, the army is already patrolling the streets of Italian cities, so that everybody will feel much more secure.

Of course, these are repressive measures. But, they only can be understood as a part of a more general project aimed at the legal guarantee of the exploitation of migrant labor. Migrants’ opportunities to travel to their countries of origin, or move around inside Europe is being extremely restricted: the long procedure necessary to renew their residence permits obliges migrants to stay in Italy if they don’t want to run the risk of being blocked at some internal or external frontier. At the same time, the possibility to stay is strongly under attack, because of the precarity of the residence permit (which can be lost after a long period of unemployment or irregular jobs) and because of the new “measure of justice” enacted by the government against migrants. Indeed, according to the new law, the houses rented to undocumented migrants may be confiscated. The effect of this rule is not the one proclaimed, that of punishing the proprietors who exploit undocumented migrants. Rather, the cost of rented accommodation has quickly grown, and the wages of migrants are likewise impoverished. Moreover, the government is making some important changes to the way the social security system works: in order to apply for social housing, migrants will have to be resident in Italy for a period of ten years. As if that is not enough, migrants are now also excluded from the chance to receive the social income which is given to those people who, when they are 65 years old, have a pension under the minimum level established by the law.

All these rules are consistent with the fundamental mechanism of the Bossi-Fini Law: the link between labor contract and residence permit. The police patrols increase every day, the fear of migrants is fuelled in order to “secure” the citizens, and migrants are all targeted as potential criminals. The only chance of rejecting this charge remaining to the migrants, is to be available for every demand of their employers, to be hidden and silent, especially when they are undocumented. While the government justifies all these measures as a way to struggle against illegal migration, migrants continue to cross the Italian seas and frontiers, they are a fundamental resource of the Italian economy – even when they work illegally and without documents – and they pay the price of “security” and of the enforcement of the Bossi-Fini Law.

The government is seeking to optimize the exploitation of migrant labor and to make it difficult for migrants to stabilize their life in Italy. To do this, it feeds fear, and directly or indirectly attacks the wages and the rights of migrant workers, increases patrols to the limit of persecution, and limits the possibility of family reunion. This politics is aimed at forcing migrants into silence, and at reducing their possibility of organization and struggle. After this summer of security, the future for migrants is increasingly precarious, as is that of all workers in Italy, no matter what their citizenship status. However, even under attack from this politics of security, even if fear is growing, migrants see the possibility of making their voices heard, despite the silence of trade unions and political opposition. The word Strike is circulating and points to this possibility.

Two Years After Mega Marches: U.S. Immigrant Rights Movement soldiers on

In 2006, the United States saw its biggest mobilizations in its entire history. Starting in Washington D.C. With tens of thousands of demonstrators, and continuing with millions of people marching in cities like Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles, the mobilizations gave a clear indication that there is something big brewing in the U.S.

Two years later, the immigrant rights movement is still processing the lessons learned from the mass mobilizations as well as the failed legislative fight that ensued for Immigration Reform. Coupled with the upsurge in devastating community and workplace raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), immigrant rights leaders and activists are underlining the importance of leadership development in order to keep communities safe and to continue the struggle for recognition of rights.

Local Enforcement

With the failure of any attempts to pass any immigration reform bills, the anti-immigrant groups began to focus on

local governments and local law enforcement in order to solve the immigration “problem.” The reasoning was to make living in some areas so unbearable that they would self-exile or self-deport. Policies included fines for landlords who rented to undocumented families and 287G agreements, where local law enforcement agencies team up with ICE in order to turn “criminals” over to ICE after criminal arrests.

In city of Los Angeles, the police department (LAPD) is not allowed to arrest people on perceived immigration status, but Sheriff's Department, which is run by the county, has an existing program 287G agreement with ICE, where they conduct exit interviews with those exiting the jail system. The agreement is to interview people after they have served their sentence. People who are not able to pay their fines, but have no charges against them and are jailed by LAPD are sent to the county jails to serve their time. Consequently, if you got put in jail for selling hot dogs, you might end up getting deported. The effects have

been devastating on immigrant families. Last year, a mentally ill U.S. Citizen, Pedro Guzman, was deported and missing for three months in the border city of Tijuana. Children are being left in the care of other relatives while their parents are in detention and if they are eventually deported.

Workplace Raids

Since the 2006 marches, communities across the country are experiencing, with startling frequency, workplace raids. The most recent raids in Potosi, Iowa and in Laurel, Mississippi, where 395 and 481 workers respectively were taken into custody in massive sting operations, are a clear signal of the anti-worker, pro-criminalization policies the Bush Administration has run with over the past 8 years.

The raids have taken on a new face in that they are targeting workers with criminal charges for use of false documents or identity fraud. This lends to the credence to the Bush Administration's claim that they are "merely" doing away with the "criminal illegal aliens."

The effects of raids on immigrant communities have varied. Children have approached their school principals asking if their parents are safe. Mothers battle depression as their children ask why they are wearing an ankle bracelet (monitoring device). Parents have hiding places for their children in case ICE knocks at their door.

But there are some hopeful responses to the raids as well. Employees have warned co-workers when ICE arrives; undocumented students across the nation are still fighting for access to higher education, and grassroots leaders are trying to figure out. One NGO, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) has developed a Know Your Rights DVD that exemplifies how to protect yourself in case of a raid or encounter with law enforcement officials. Interpreters and attorneys who witness the processing of raid victims are re-thinking their roles and trying new and creative strategies in order to combat the deportation of these workers. But the fact remains that legalization is still a long way off.

Making the Case for Immigration Reform at the Ballot Box

One of the biggest lessons out of 2006 came from the November 2006 Congressional races. The millions of people on the streets did not translate to cold hard votes in the Congressional races as the Democrats picked up some new seats, and the debate for immigration reform continued to focus on enforcement measures and criminalization. It was clear that multiple strategies should be used

in order to advance justice for immigrants. Local organizations who had already started conducting civic engagement activities with voters joined together with national organizations in order to explore the possibilities of a nationwide effort of civic engagement in immigrant communities.

A national campaign for Naturalization began soon thereafter spear-headed by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (www.naleo.org). Not too long afterwards, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) announced fee hikes for the citizenship application as well as for the cost of renewing green cards. Despite the challenges, 2 million eligible residents have applied for citizenship since then. In another attempt to thwart the efforts, many of these applicants are still waiting to be processed and will not become a citizen before the November Election.

But the efforts don't just end there. Nationally, groups, nationally and local and in conjunction with unions, are coordinating messages and priority areas for Get Out the Vote programs for November 2008. The conversation has gone beyond the need for work in "swing" states, as an immigration reform bill will need 60 votes in the Senate and 235 votes from Congress before any President will actually sign a bill. The challenge will be in being able to prove that these concerted efforts actually had an impact in local races as well as making sure the winner of the Presidential race is clear that it was not their campaign alone that helped them win the elections.

Taking the Fight to the Next Level

While most efforts are focused on a legislative strategy, immigrants rights leaders are also doing some deep thinking about how to elevate the struggle of immigrants into mainstream America.

Cross-sectional alliance building is a key part of amplifying the struggle. Bridge-building between African American civil rights groups, as well as with the traditional left in the U.S. at a broad scale is still tenuous. In order to develop deeper alliances with these and other important sectors, we have to re-frame the issue of immigration to go beyond legalization. In the battle of ideas, the racist, anti-immigrant have prevailed, framing the current debate as a simple case of law and order. Several different national networks and coalitions are currently struggling to create a space to dialog about these issues around a broader social justice framework that speaks to the needs of all communities. The challenge has been trying to balance these long-term conversation with the urgency the raids which continue to separate families.



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