

Norway targets immigrants for attack and discrimination

By Simon Wheelan
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In Norway, as throughout the rest of Europe, the government is targeting immigrants and asylum-seekers for political attack. Refugees are caught in a Catch 22 situation with regards to their citizenship status in Norwegian society. Whilst politicians from all parties demand that unemployed immigrants learn better Norwegian, they have simultaneously created a rule which penalises those who enrol in language courses. Unemployed immigrants who wish to learn Norwegian lose their unemployment benefit if they take up a language course. Consequently, in order to make ends meet they are forced to seek social security assistance.

The head of the Oslo and Akershus county job centre stated: "The criteria for unemployment benefit are completely clear in the regulations. Foreigners who are receiving benefit lose their right the moment they choose a Norwegian course in the daytime."

News that refugees were being deliberately penalised in this way coincided with allegations that the Norwegian Criminal Police Centre (KRIPOS) keeps illegal criminal archives containing the particular identification of gypsies. According to reports, files are held on specific members of the Norwegian Romany community. These specify the individuals' likelihood to offend and previous offences, where applicable.

Whilst the KRIPOS denied the allegations, the ruling elite are certainly creating a hostile atmosphere against gypsies in particular. At the end of July the Norwegian Justice Department denounced Slovakian gypsies arriving in Norway who were fleeing persecution as merely economic migrants with no rights to asylum.

The same month witnessed a plethora of inflammatory statements regarding immigrants and asylum-seekers. Two Progress Party (PP) politicians stated that Norway was in the process of being "ruined"

by immigrants and asylum-seekers because they are bringing a crime wave to Norwegian shores. Carl Hagen, leader of the quasi-fascistic PP, has demanded a virtual ban on allowing immigrants into Norway. The PP, which is described as an "extreme right-wing organisation" by United Nations political analysts, is currently the second most popular party in Norway according to opinion polls.

At the party's AGM in February the leadership denounced as "a multiracial melting pot" the Oslo suburb known as "Gamle Oslo" (Old Oslo). This is a deprived, run-down area, which is home to a number of poor immigrants who depend on social security. Hanna Haraldson of the PP said, "I am afraid of them, I hope there won't be any more of them, they are dangerous."

This situation has been deliberately inflamed by a number of government statements. The Norwegian Central Bureau for Statistics, for instance, released figures in July that claimed the crime rate among non-Western immigrants, was higher than that of Norwegian-born citizens. These claims took little notice of the social conditions suffered by many immigrants.

These assertions were followed by statements from officials in charge of the country's asylum centres that many immigrants lose "respect" for the Norwegian legal system. The reason for this, they argued, was that the police and prosecuting authorities do not come down hard enough on lawbreakers whilst they are being held in such centres. The solution, they contended, was to deport "criminals" at an earlier date.

Just 107,000 immigrants have become citizens of Norway in the last 20 years. In 1998 only 8,600 people moved to Norway whilst 4,400 emigrated from the country. The largest national group to seek citizenship in Norway were refugees from Pakistan.

Immigrants are systematically discriminated against in the employment sector. One recent report published by the Department of Immigration showed that they fared particularly badly in public sector employment. One reason for this is the discriminatory attitude shown by other employees towards immigrants, the report stated.

There is evidence that the state deliberately cultivates such attitudes as a means of holding down the wages and conditions of Norwegian workers in general. In a revealing statement, the Chief of Research at the National Bureau of Statistics said that increased immigration was necessary. Without the cheap labour immigrant work force, he argued, services would be poorer and salaries higher.

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