

"Europeans only" housing legalised in Norway

Steve James
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A ruling by the Norwegian Supreme Court has upheld the right of private landlords to operate a racist letting policy.

The decision emerged at the end of a protracted legal case brought by the Institute Against Public Discrimination (OMOD) against the Eindoms accommodation agency. Eindoms, who let Oslo apartments on behalf of private owners, maintained a card index of available flats, on which any special wishes of the landlord could be noted. Potential Eindoms' clients were charged a one-off fee to view the index, which included flats specifying "a Norwegian in regular employment" as preferred tenant.

Eindoms were first acquitted in the Oslo City Court of violating paragraph 349a of the Norwegian code, which is aimed at preventing racial discrimination by businesses. The High Court ruled that the company had violated the law, but excused them on grounds of ignorance.

Finally, on August 17, the Supreme Court ruled that paragraph 349a did not apply to Eindoms, as the agency was renting flats for private individuals. The Supreme Court also ruled that it was legal for private persons to rent or sell to "Norwegians only". The court also legitimised selling lists proving the racist intentions of others. Eindoms' owner Heidi Hanson hailed the decision, claiming that landlords "want people who have some sort of idea of Norwegian culture and Norwegian way of living".

The decision highlights the extent to which immigrant workers and asylum-seekers are being scapegoated for all Norway's present social ills and uncertain future. The far-right Progress Party, which took 12 percent of the vote in recent local elections, campaigned on an aggressive xenophobic and anti-immigration platform, blaming immigrants for

increased crime and drug use. The reality is that immigrants, mainly from Iraq, Pakistan, the Balkans and Somalia, bear the brunt both of Oslo's accommodation crisis, and increasing social tensions in the country as a whole.

Despite serious overcrowding in some areas of Oslo, total production of new housing in Norway was down 19 percent this year. But in the poorest areas of Oslo, Akershus and Oestfold, new building has declined by one third. Permanent immigrants, of whom there are only 107,000 in a country of 4 million, are mostly concentrated in these areas—where schools have to cope with as many as 50 languages. Hundreds of migrant workers from Eastern Europe have been forced to camp out in car parks in northwest Oslo during the summer months, because Oslo City Council refuses to find suitable facilities. Refugees from Kosovo, Iraq and Pakistan have been dispersed to motels and abandoned military bases around the country. The University of Oslo now has 40,000 students, but it only provides accommodation for 15,000. Proposals have been circulated to farm students out to other universities simply because they cannot find anywhere to live in Oslo.

There have been a number of racist murders. The anti-racist group Non Fighting Generation told the *Guardian* newspaper about the murder of an Asian boy by a gang shouting, "kill the nigger". The boy fell in a river and drowned. Staff members at the state immigration service have been accused by immigrants of demanding bribes in return for entry rights. According to *Aftenposten*, two Sri Lankan brothers were told they could get temporary residence permits for Nkr 20,000—around US\$3,000. Unable to raise the money, both were deported. Police attempts to investigate the allegations were blocked by the

immigration service and the justice department.

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