

How to exploit foreign workers and almost get away with it

Four Polish workers came to (reportedly) the best country in the world. They ended up knowing the true face of an industry whose main objective for providing a public service is maximum profit.



The following text is a resume of the articles published in NUMGE's "Fagbladet", regarding the case of the Polish workers in Asker municipality, starting in November 2011.

In 2010, the company Ragn Sells won the tender for waste management in Asker municipality, just outside of Oslo. Their offer was 20 % less than their predecessor, Veolia. It didn't take long before the complaints started, as the company was not able to collect the waste they were supposed to within the agreed time. While Veolia used 19 workers and 11 trucks, Ragn Sells set out to do the same amount of work with 14 workers and 8 trucks. The workers were hired by Ragn Sells through Adecco.

These workers were brought in from Poland, working twelve hours a day, six days a week for three weeks in order to fulfill the contract. They were also told not to take any breaks and not to use the event data recorder. When four workers refused to work this schedule any further, they were summoned to a meeting with Adecco. They were given two choices: Either quit voluntarily and get paid for the rest of the week or get fired and blacklisted. The Polish workers asked if they could continue working for the two remaining weeks of their layoff period. Adecco refused. As it turned out, their replacements were already set to take over.

What Adecco didn't know was that one of the Polish workers was taping the entire conversation.

When Adecco heard about the recording, they claimed that the incident was a mistake and explained that they wanted those who had been given the ultimatum to contact Adecco for another job. Adecco regarded the four Polish workers as still employed by Adecco, but in January they had still not received their salaries. Instead, they received a letter from Adecco stating that they would get their salaries, but only if they signed a new contract, prohibiting them from speaking publically about their experiences with Adecco.

By signing the contract, they also waived their right to any judicial follow-up of the case.

Once again, Adecco was confronted, and this time they promised the Polish workers their salary without signing any contract. They finally got paid halfway through January.

Experiences like this with Adecco are in no way exceptional, something that may be confirmed just by reading a few polish websites or blogs. There are numerous examples of similar malconduct.

Ragn Sells was also confronted on their practice of hiring workers through Adecco instead of employing them. Ragn Sells promised that the service would be undertaken by means of regular employment as soon as the temporary contracts ended on February 1st. Ragn Sells has won tenders in ten Norwegian municipalities. Only in three of these instances they have employed workers, the rest are hired through subcontractors. Ragn Sells still argues that the numbers of workers and trucks they are using in Asker is enough in order to fulfill the contract.

Ragn Sells:

- Operates in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Poland.
- Earnings: 4 billions NOK
- Employees: 2800 people, 230 in Norway

Fagforbundet has reported the municipality to the police for allowing the company to violate Norwegian law, hereunder the use of short term contracts. This has resulted in Asker demanding regular employment in Ragn Sells. But still we get reports of Estonian workers getting underpaid and working 12-hours days. Fagforbundet has still not closed the case.



FAGFORBUNDET