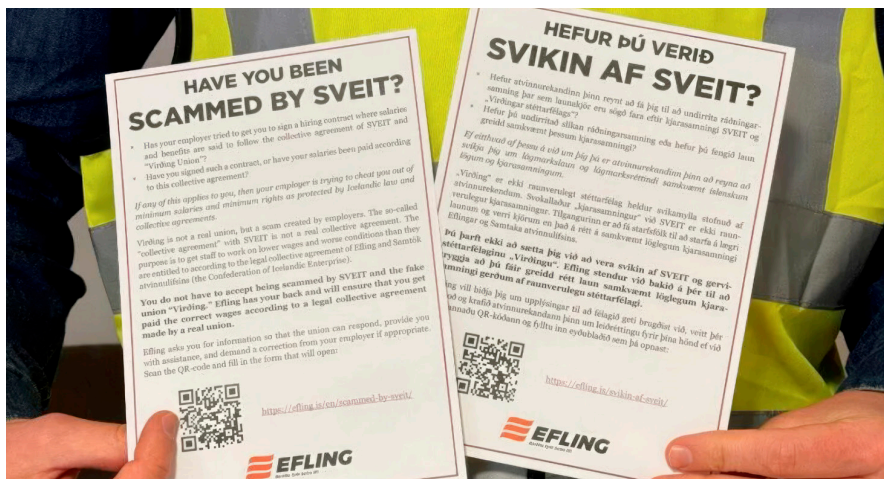


# SÓKN

-Offense is the best defense

Tbl. 1 | 9. January 2026

## Solidarity Prevailed: Plans for Wage Cuts in the Restaurant Sector Thwarted



Flyers distributed by Efling's field representatives at workplaces

The conflict between Efling and the pseudo-union „Virðing“ and the employers' association SVEIT demonstrates once again the importance of solidarity and vigilance among workers. Through the combined efforts of members, union representatives, and Efling staff, a deceptive scheme that would have led to significant wage cuts for restaurant sector employees was exposed and stopped.

### The Employers' Scam

The core of the issue was an attempt by the Association of Companies in the Restaurant Market (SVEIT) to enforce worse terms than those stipulated in the legal collective agreement between Efling and the Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise (SA). When Efling refused to negotiate for poorer terms, the employers resorted to establishing their own „union“, Virðing, and making a collective agreement with it. It was revealed

that board members of Virðing were owners, managers, and close relatives of restaurant owners, some of whom were also representatives of SVEIT. The goal was to have newly hired and unsuspecting staff work under this new agreement, which would have meant a significant pay cut and inferior rights, including the reduction or elimination of premium pay for evening and weekend work.

### Efling Responds

As soon as Efling became aware of these plans, it responded forcefully. Field representatives and union representatives from Efling went to workplaces, informed staff about the situation, and warned them against registering with Virðing. The union publicly condemned these methods and published a list of the companies behind the scam to inform the public and consumers.

Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, president of Efling, stated in a discussion on the matter that legally mandated minimum terms apply in Iceland, and it is simply illegal to pay lower wages. A statement from Efling spoke of „fraud and deception,“ describing Virðing as „not a real union but a scam run by employers for the purpose of cutting wages and workers' rights.“

To underscore the seriousness of the matter, Efling, SGS and ASÍ took the fight a step further and filed a formal complaint against SVEIT with the Icelandic Competition Authority. The complaint points out that the association's actions amount to illegal collusion between companies to suppress wages. The complaint has been formally accepted, and the matter is now under investigation by the authority.

### A Victory for Solidarity

Thanks to the swift response and solidarity of its members, Efling has successfully defended the terms of its members in the restaurant sector. A number of companies have already confirmed to Efling that they will respect the union's collective agreement, and many have withdrawn from SVEIT. This victory is an important reminder that the labor struggle is never over and clearly demonstrates the strength of Efling. Efling will remain vigilant against employers' attempts to undermine workers' rights.



# At the Dawn of a New Day: The Roots of the Efling Members' Struggle



*Workers on the Hauksbryggja pier at Mýrargata during the interwar years*

To understand today's struggle, it is necessary to know the history from which we have grown. Efling's story did not begin with the union's founding in 1998 but on the wind-swept docks and in the cold laundries of the early 20th century. Our roots lie in unions like Dagsbrún and Framsókn, founded by people who refused to accept lawlessness and oppression.

## Conditions That Demanded Change

At the beginning of the 20th century, the conditions for workers in Iceland were dire. An industrial revolution in the fishing industry and growing urbanization in Reykjavík created a new reality for thousands of men and women. The workday was long, often 12-14 hours, wages were low, and all facilities were poor. There was no workplace safety, and people had no rights if they fell ill or were injured. As historian Sigurður Pétursson pointed out at an Efling union representative course in February 2024, a state of complete lawlessness prevailed. Wages were often paid in goods from company stores, leaving people entirely dependent on their employers.

## The First Unions

### – Dagsbrún and Framsókn

From this soil, the first labor unions sprang. On January 26, 1906, seven-

teen laborers gathered at the Goodtemplar House in Reykjavík and founded the workers' union Dagsbrún. As historian Þorleifur Friðriksson describes in his book *Við brún nýs dags* (At the Dawn of a New Day), these were mostly dockworkers and day laborers who saw that the only way to improve their conditions was to stand together. Dagsbrún's initial demands were simple but radical: recognition of the right to bargain and for wages to be paid in cash, not company store credit. The union proved its right to exist with its first strike at the harbor in 1913, where a hard fight for higher wages was fought.

Working women have an equally remarkable history. They performed the lowest-paying jobs, often in fish processing, laundries, or cleaning—hard work that paid poorly. On October 25, 1914, they founded the women's union Framsókn. At the time, the hourly wage for men was around 35 aurar, but for women, it was only 20 aurar. Framsókn thus fought a two-front battle: a class struggle and a women's struggle for equality and decent living conditions.

## The Struggle, Then and Now

The first demands of workers centered on the fundamental right to be recog-

nized as a negotiating party. The fight was for the very right to exist: the right to form unions, recognition of the right to bargain, and to be paid in cash. Once this foundation was laid, the struggle for the rights we now consider self-evident began. Issues like shortening the workday to eight hours, statutory sick leave, the right to summer vacation, and access to decent housing became central goals of the movement. These rights did not come about on their own. They were won through a hard struggle, with strikes, solidarity, and the unwavering courage of those who paved the way.

The story of Dagsbrún and Framsókn is the story of Efling. These unions, along with others, laid the groundwork for the powerful union that Efling is today. When we fight for higher wages, better housing, and expanded rights, we walk in the footsteps of our foremothers and forefathers. The struggle is the same, though the challenges are new. Their legacy is our most valuable provision for the journey ahead.



# Policy-Making for the Efling Congress in Full Swing: Housing, Wage Theft, and Empowerment in Focus



*Delegates' Council Meeting, November 13<sup>th</sup>*

Preparations for the Efling Congress, a new and important forum for policy-making within the union, are now in full swing. The Congress will be held on February 26th and 27th. The Efling Delegates' Council is

currently leading an organized policy-making process to lay the groundwork for the discussions and resolutions that the Congress will address. The process officially began at a Delegates' Council meeting on November 13th. Lively discussions were held on the issues that are most pressing for members. Three main themes emerged and will form the core of the policy-making:

## **Housing Issues:**

The status and rights of both renters and homeowners.

## **Wage Theft:**

Actions and remedies against the scourge of wage theft.

## **Workplace Empowerment:**

Ways to strengthen the position of members and union representatives in the workplace.

At the meeting, work was carried out in groups where council delegates exchanged views and laid the foundation for the work ahead.

To deepen the discussion and build the policy on a solid foundation, the work will continue at the next Delegates' Council meeting on January 15th. Two experts have been invited to give presentations and answer questions.

Lars Christian Fjeldsted, a lawyer from the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), will discuss the

successful fight against wage theft in Norway and the recent legislation that makes such conduct punishable by law. Jónas Atli Gunnarsson, from the Housing and Construction Authority (HMS), will discuss the situation in the Icelandic housing market.

Following the presentations, the delegates will resume the discussion in a structured manner.

A special workshop session will then be held on February 5th, where the Delegates' Council will finalize the preparations. All this preparation is aimed at presenting well-crafted proposals to the members at the Efling Congress itself, where they will jointly shape the union's policy. The policy work within the Delegates' Council is the heart of Efling's democratic policy-making and ensures that the Congress's decisions are based on broad and deep discussion.



# Empowerment in Action: Union representatives Sharpen Their Organizing and Communication Skills



*Gintautas Varskevicius, Efling's union representative at Eir, shared his experience with workplace meetings.*

Union representatives, the cornerstones of Efling in the workplace, gathered on December 17th and 18th for a diverse course aimed at empowering them in their roles. The focus was on practical knowledge in organizing methods, meeting management, and confident public speaking, all with the goal of strengthening the fight for better terms directly from the workplace floor.

## **Methods for Building a Majority**

Karl Héðinn Kristjánsson, an Efling staff member, reviewed the „Organizing 4 Power“ methodology. This framework, which has been used successfully worldwide, is about consciously building majority support

in workplaces and society to achieve just demands. Efling has used these methods in its struggles and will continue to do so.

Atli Antonsson, also an Efling staff member, discussed the importance of workplace meetings and how best to organize and conduct them to achieve success. Workplace meetings are one of the most powerful tools union representatives have to activate and inform their colleagues. It was particularly useful when union representatives who have already held such meetings shared their valuable experiences with the group, leading to lively and educational discussions.

In the afternoon, Sirrý Arnardóttir, a well-known media personality and speaker, took over and covered the art of presenting with confidence. Union representatives often need to be spokespeople for their colleagues, sometimes in challenging situations. Participants had the opportunity to practice impromptu speeches and received practical advice that will be useful in their roles.

The course was a success, and the atmosphere was excellent. Well-trained and confident union representatives are the key to a strong union and better workplaces.



# The Workplace Meeting: Your Most Powerful Tool



Vinnustaðafundur hjá Sorphirðu Reykjavíkurborgar í umsjón Magnúsar Emils Bech

A workplace meeting is your opportunity to meet your colleagues, discuss common interests, and strengthen solidarity—all without the interference of supervisors. Efling encourages all union representatives and members to utilize this right, which is guaranteed by collective agreement. Meetings can be held twice a year during work hours, with the first hour being paid.

## Why hold a workplace meeting?

The goal is simple: to build connections. As Atli Antonsson, a project manager at Efling, points out, a powerful working class is built on strong workplaces. The meeting makes the union visible, because

Efling is not just an office in Guðrúnartún—Efling is you and your colleagues.

## At a workplace meeting, you can:

**Build solidarity:** Discuss what is going well and what could be better.

**Get organized:** Form an independent group that can act when needed.

**Found your own Efling Club:** By meeting regularly, you create a strong unit that employers will take seriously.

Success in the fight for better terms, both in the workplace and in collective bargaining, is built on these connections that are formed on the ground.

## How to get started?

The process is simple. A union representative, or another employee on behalf of their colleagues, contacts a supervisor to find a suitable time and place. Efling assists with preparations and can send a staff member to the meeting if requested. And last but not least—the union provides a cake to make a good meeting even better. Numerous workplaces, such as hotels, preschools, and waste collection services, have already held successful meetings. Use this right—a stronger workplace starts with a single meeting.



# Union representative of the Month

## - Rosaline Regalado Gimenez



Rosaline Regalado Gimenez is Efling's union rep at Daggar hf.

*How do you like to recharge after a long or demanding workday?*

To recharge after a demanding workday, I go for a walk while listening to my favorite playlist. At home, I enjoy cross-stitching as a pastime. I also do light exercises, incorporating stretching into my bench routine, and I enjoy cooking a simple meal. Sometimes, I take a power nap to get my energy back. If my children have free time, we play a game of UNO together.

*Why does union solidarity matter in your workplace?*

Union solidarity is incredibly important in my workplace. It provides protection against injustice, support against harassment, and safeguards against at-will firing. When an indi-

vidual is unfairly targeted, the Union offers legal advice and representation at disciplinary hearings. Union solidarity

builds trust, promotes fairness, and gives us a stronger collective voice. Additionally, with solidarity, you always have a partner in your corner.

*What does a good work environment mean to you, in practice?*

For me, a good work environment is about transparent communication from leadership, a healthy company culture, and changes that take employees into consideration. It's about feeling respected, heard, and valued. It's having a fair opportunity to grow. Plus, it means being able to do your job without undue stress and pressure.

*What are you most looking forward to in the year ahead – at work or outside of it?*

I'm looking forward to the year ahead. Leading with responsibility and seeing peace and unity at work is a significant goal, and there are always more lessons to learn from experience. I'm hoping for more progress in our Union organization. Being active and knowing your rights is important so that we can raise awareness among the younger generation about their future. Knowledge is power. Justice for cleaners.

*What should everyone know about cleaning work that often gets overlooked?*

Cleaning work is tough and often underappreciated. We deal with chemicals, risking our own health for the sake of hygiene. Our physical strength is tested every day with heavy tools. We are on the frontlines in dirty areas, yet we receive no extra benefits from the company.

*What advice would you give to someone who's considering becoming a union representative for the first time?*

Leadership is all about empathy, communication, and courage. My advice to new reps is this: If you're dealing with issues from coworkers, try to address them calmly and professionally. If someone is being difficult, focus on the issue, not the person. As a new representative, your obligation is to represent and listen to members, communicate clearly, and fight for their rights. Keep members informed. Don't be afraid to ask for help from more experienced reps or union officials. And remember, it's about the members, not personal agendas.