

Solidarity and Strength at a historic Efling Congress



Nearly 200 Efling Members Attended the Congress

The very first Efling Congress took place from February 26th to 27th, and it is safe to say it was a massive success. Nearly 200 Efling members came together at Austurbæjarbíó to discuss the most important issues facing working people and to shape the union's goals for the coming terms. During the opening of the Congress, the chairman of Efling emphasized that working people are essential to creating all value in society and keeping the capital area's welfare systems running. The message was clear: When working

people decide to stand together, they are unstoppable. Since 2018, Efling has been writing the history of working people in the capital area, and with this first Congress, we are starting to write the next chapter.

Clear Demands and Workplace Empowerment

A lot of diverse policy work took place at the Congress, where delegates discussed resolutions based on drafts submitted by the Delegate council. The result of this work was four

powerful resolutions and demands that the union has put forward and will use in the fight for better contracts in the coming terms. These resolutions tackle the most pressing issues for our members: reforms in the rental market, realistic access to owning a home, harsher penalties for wage theft and contract violations, as well as the targeted empowerment of workers in their workplaces. Guests, both domestic and from abroad, also addressed the Congress, adding even more depth to the discussion.

Efling Demands Increased Housing Security and Access to Homeownership

Resolution



Housing must be recognized as a human right, not an investment tool

Efling members demand that the government guarantees workers secure access to homeownership and that housing is recognized as a human right, rather than an investment tool for the wealthy. This is the core of the resolution passed on the final day of the Efling Congress on February 27th. Housing security is an absolute requirement for all well-being, and the current situation—where so many people live with constant insecurity

and out-of-control costs—is simply unacceptable.

To fix this, Efling demands much stricter rules against housing speculation in the country. We demand increased taxes on parties who own more than three properties, and that strict limits be placed on short-term rentals, which take apartments off the general market. There must be limits on investors buying up apartments to make sure that housing is used first

and foremost by the people who live here, not as bargaining chips on the market. The union demands that the government put together a timed and fully funded plan to build more apartments, working closely with municipalities and residents' associations so that the people already living there are taken into account. Land must be made available, and planning obstacles must be cleared out of the way.

Efling also calls for mortgage credit assessments to be made more realistic for working people, for interest rates to be systematically lowered, and for the government to place a cap on real interest rates. Municipalities themselves must take responsibility, build apartments, and sell them directly at cost. Additionally, a specific portion of all new builds should always be meant for first-time buyers, and it is urgent to expand the rules around interest relief.

Read all of the resolutions of the congress by following this QR code:



Efling Demands Reforms in the Rental Market

Resolution

Efling demands that the government immediately step in to fix the chaos in the rental market and guarantee real security for tenants. A resolution was passed at the Efling Congress rejecting the idea that tenants should have to live in constant fear of eviction or unfair rent hikes. This situation directly affects the financial security and daily lives of working people, so it is absolutely necessary to establish clear rules for the market. The union demands laws that enforce a real rent brake, preventing unreasonable increases both during a lease and between leases.

Efling also demands that long-term rental agreements become the general rule. To protect tenants from currency fluctuations and unexpected costs, it must be put into law that all rental contracts are made in Icelandic



Systemic changes are unavoidable to ensure tenants' welfare is put above profit-making

krónur. The housing benefit system also needs a complete overhaul. Benefits should be based directly on a person's income and actual housing costs, rather than acting as a roundabout way to subsidize high rent prices for landlords. At the same time, the union is calling for much stricter

limits on large-scale short-term tourist rentals, since this eats up the supply of apartments that could otherwise house families. Systemic changes are unavoidable to ensure tenants' welfare is put above profit-making.

Demand for Harsh Penalties for Wage Theft

Resolution



Efling's position is clear: strict and effective penalty clauses for wage theft must be put into law

Despite the much-talked-about “organized” labor market in this country, there is actually a lot of lawlessness when it comes to breaking contracts with workers. Decades have passed since bad actors figured out they could build the systematic underpayment of wages straight into their business models without facing any real

consequences. As things stand today, employers caught stealing wages only have to pay back what they stole, without facing any further penalties, and they can even keep breaking the rules with the exact same people. This kind of immunity is unheard of when it comes to regular shoplifting from a store, and it is simply intolerable

that it is allowed to happen when it comes to the very livelihood of working people.

To root out this national disgrace, Efling demands that Parliament pass clear penalty laws that ensure real consequences for companies and their subcontractors who engage in wage theft or violate the rights of union representatives. The right punishments should include steep financial fines or jail time, which increase for repeat offenses, and the names of convicted employers should be published publicly to protect both workers and honest employers. Alongside new laws, active enforcement must be guaranteed by empowering the Tax Authority, the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health, or the Police to follow up. The union also demands that the state, in cooperation with the labor movement, greatly increase education about labor market rights, aiming it specifically at immigrants as soon as they arrive in the country.

Empowerment in the Workplace

Resolution

Efling members have shown in recent years that working people can overcome obstacles, organize themselves, and take the lead in the fight for their own living conditions. Real inclusion is about workers earning respect in the workplace itself; it isn't just about unions being visible in public discussions. Despite an increase in union representatives and

targeted workplace visits, workers still face major hurdles. The biggest problem in Icelandic labor law is the lack of job security. The fear of being fired is the main reason why people in the general labor market hesitate to speak up against injustice or take an active part in union work. This systemic lack of power directly creates the conditions for bad management practices.

To fix this, Efling demands that Icelandic laws be brought into line with what is standard in our neighboring countries. Parliament must pass laws making it illegal to fire workers with-



Empowering members in the workplace is the foundation of the union's strength

out proven, objective reasons. During mass layoffs or restructuring, the “last in, first out” rule must also be put into law to protect people with long years of service. These laws must be backed by active monitoring and clear penalties if workers' rights are violated.

Alongside this, the union demands that unemployment benefits be raised so that workers keep an income as close to their previous earnings as possible if they lose their jobs, and that this right lasts for a reasonable amount of time.

Solidarity of Efling's occupational groups

At the congress, work was carried out in occupational groups, among other activities. There was strong solidarity between them.





Success isn't achieved without conflict: Lessons from Poland



Anna Bacia - Chairperson of OPZZ-KP Addressed the Congress

“The struggle of the workers at Emeis, the largest private long-term care provider in Poland, clearly shows us how much organized union campaigning can achieve, even in difficult circumstances and against fierce opposition from employers.” These were the words of Anna Bacia, chairperson of the Polish union OPZZ-KP, in her address to the Efling Congress. The union was founded at the end of 2018, and its first few years were marked by direct clashes and systematic resistance from employers against the workers organizing. Anna mentioned that she herself was fired in 2019 after taking on the role of union representative at her workplace. Retaliation like this shows in

black and white the systemic opposition workers face when they try to stand up and demand their rights.

Her struggle, however, was never isolated to just one institution. She had the support of her coworkers, as well as patients and their families, who helped out through things like petition drives and organized protests outside nursing homes. The UNI Global Union also supported her well; in particular, their financial support made it possible for Anna to keep fighting after she was fired.

According to Anna, this experience is incredibly valuable for the Icelandic labor market. It shows that even in a very hostile environment, it is abso-

lutely possible to build a strong labor movement that actually forces real changes. We are facing a reality where workers’

rights need to be defended fiercely, especially in professions where vulnerable groups work and the risk of abuse is real.

The conclusion from Anna’s speech is clear-cut: Success is never achieved without a fight. It requires organization, endurance, and real solidarity. When employers systematically refuse to negotiate and ignore the fair demands of their staff, working people simply have to be ready to use their strongest weapons to force a solution.

National Court Confirms Business Ban for 'Ítalía' Operators



Protests outside the restaurant Ítalía in September 2024

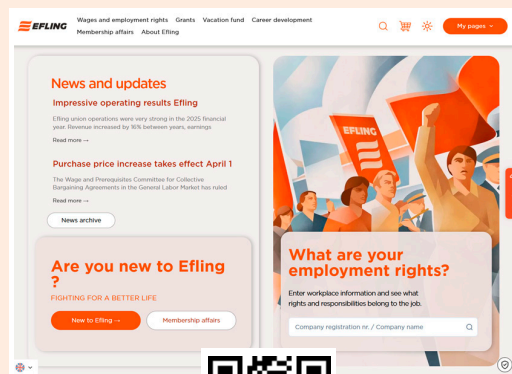
Taking a hard stand brings real results. On March 4th, the National Court (Landsréttur) confirmed a three-year business ban for the former owners of the restaurant Ítalía, Elvar Ingimarsson and Björgvin Narfi Ásgeirsson. Efling's actions against the long-term abuse, wage

theft, and rights violations against the restaurant's staff had a major impact. The union gathered testimonies from workers, organized a solidarity protest on Frakkastígur, and made sure the violations got detailed coverage in the media.

The National Court's ruling confirms the labor movement's demand: employers who systematically violate their staff's rights must be held truly accountable. This is a clear, measurable victory that shows the importance of direct action and solidarity among working people.

New Efling Website - A Big Step Forward in Member Services

Efling's new website has now been launched and with it a big step is taken in improving services for Efling members. A massive update to the site makes information about your rights much clearer and easier to access than ever before. Now, for example, you can quickly and securely find specific information about your rights just by entering the workplace you are employed at. The way collective agreements and wage tables are presented has also been redesigned so it's much easier to find exactly what matters to you. The look and function of the site were built from the ground up to answer the real needs of working people and guarantee direct access to the tools you need to claim your rights in the labor market. The site was built by the company Klick in close cooperation with staff across all departments of the Efling office.



Union Representative of the Month - Benni Bharat Sing



Benni Bharat is an Efling union representative at Heimabjónusta Sléttuvegs

1. What made you decide to become a union representative?

It's fun to be with the other union representatives and help my coworkers. They trust me and are very open to coming and talking to me. That's why I decided to become a union representative.

2. What has surprised you the most in the role?

First and foremost, how many coworkers I need to introduce Efling to, since many people don't know what it is. So, I've been explaining to them that Efling is our labor union and that we can get various grants, rent summer cabins, and more. I introduce myself as their union representative, so if any problems come up, they can come to me and we can talk it over, or we can get help from Efling, depending on what kind of help they need.

3. What do you think is most important for union representatives to protect in the workplace?

As union representatives, we always try to introduce ourselves to new staff; letting them know who we are and where they can go if they need help. For example, looking over a payslip or teaching them how to find things on the Efling website.

4. What was your experience of the Efling Congress, and should Efling hold more congresses in the future?

The Efling Congress was fantastic, and it was great to meet all these wonderful people. All the guests who came and gave speeches from Norway and Poland were amazing, and the presentation on housing from HMS was awesome. Efling does more than other labor unions. That's why I really enjoyed getting to know and working with the group I was in. This was the first time I went to an Efling Congress, and I want to see more of them.

I especially want to point out to the Efling staff; you did a fantastic job. All the organization was exemplary, from the meetings to the food, not to mention the awesome evening party. I also specifically want to mention members Karla and Sæþór, they made it so fun and were joking around a lot. I don't know what else to say, it was awesome. Go Efling! If we work together, we can do anything.

5. What do you find most fun to do outside of work?

I most enjoy spending time with my family, going to the movies, going for walks, mountain hiking, swimming, going for drives, and bowling.

6. Which song describes you best?

Survivor by Destiny's Child, because these days you're just trying to "survive" since everything is so expensive.