

RESISTANCE

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Mass walk outs in South Africa

Strike action by public sector workers in South Africa has been met with violence and threats by the government.

Over a million workers in several unions walked out on indefinite strike on the 18th August, and at the time of writing, have stayed out. The government has sent army medic scabs into the hospitals and attacked pickets with rubber bullets and water cannon. Crowds blocking roads in Soweto were beaten and teachers in Johannesburg fought back against police with stones and bricks. In response to the solid strike action the government is attempting to impose a deal, signing the draft wage offer into law on 19th August.

The striking workers are demanding an 8.6% wage rise and an increased housing allowance in what is being

seen as a major challenge to President Jacob Zuma's authority. The unions that have come out were strong supporters of his leadership campaign in 2009 and there is much anger that union demands are not being met. The government claims that the 8.6% is simply not affordable, in an echo of governments across the world in this time of 'austerity'. This claim rings hollow against the background of the recent World Cup, subsidised to the tune of \$5 billion with corporate sponsors walking away with an untaxed profit of \$4 billion. As the nurses and teachers union, NEHAWA, puts it: 'We will refuse to be robbed in broad day light by a few government fat cats who are committed to creating poverty conditions in our country.'

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BAA: Strike threat forces management's hand

Contrary to the claims of millionaire prime minister David Cameron, who attacked BAA workers resisting a real-terms pay cut by claiming strikes "never work", the threat alone of a walkout at many of Britain's airports has forced management to increase their offer by a third.

The strike by security staff, firefighters, and other vital airport workers would have led to the closure of some of Britain's busiest airports.

The new offer, which the Unite union is recommending to its members, sees the 1.5% offer increased to 2% and the offer of a bonus of at least £500 should certain targets be met. However, whether workers will accept this is another issue – 2% is still a pay cut with inflation running at 3%, and it seems

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Mass walk outs in South Africa

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The recent action comes against a background of rising militancy, and repression, in South Africa. Stewards' strikes during the World Cup were met with similar police violence (see last issue) and an ongoing strike of auto workers involves 31,000 workers making very similar demands to those in the public sector. The South African working class has suffered greatly during the economic crisis with inflation during 2008 hitting 13.7% and still running at 4.5% today. Unemployment is a massive 25.2%. The wave of strikes and protests are a response to this as workers resist further attacks on their living standards.

The state violence directed against strikers and the determination they are showing in keeping the strike solid is an important sign. The South African state, despite the supposed 'revolutionary credentials' of the ANC govern-

ment, is playing the same game as governments across the world. They create the mess, workers suffer to clean it up. South African workers, and others across the world, are refusing to put up with it.



BAA: Strike threat forces management's hand

► Continued from front page

the union may be taking the criticism of right-wing papers to heart following its high-profile involvement in the BA cabin crew walkouts. That dispute remains ongoing, with no new strike dates announced despite cabin crew rejecting BA's latest offer. It is a possibility that the union is worried about gaining a "militant" reputation – the last thing we need given the scale of attacks on our living standards to come and the scale of resistance needed.

And still the Greek fire burns - truck drivers strike

Late July to early August saw truck drivers in Greece locked in a bitter dispute with the State over its signing of the EU-IMF structural adjustment agreement and the unprecedented austerity measures that followed. The plans outlined in the agreement mean that in exchange for financing the country's €300bn [£261bn] debt, the Greek government has agreed to deliver cuts in public services, reduction in pay for state employees and the privatisation of state assets. Workers are paying a particularly heavy price for the bailout - the public sector accounts for around 40% of Greece's economy, higher than most other European states.

The government's cost-cutting has led to widespread discontent and there have already been lengthy struggles with both energy and air traffic control workers



over privatisation of industry. The electric company union GENOP, despite being a traditional supporter of the ruling socialist party, PASOK, has threatened long-term black-outs across the country in response to plans to sell off power plants. Similarly, a truck driver's dispute was ignited by special measures to abolish individual ownership in the industry and replace it with large private firms. As a result of strike action, petrol

stations across the country have remained empty.

PASOK responded by announcing the controversial "civil conscription" emergency order which makes strike action impossible by obliging workers to perform "personal services" or face arrest. The Greek state has used this legislation before to break strikes by bank workers (1979), flying mechanics (1986) and dockworkers in recent years

(2002 and 2006). In spite of this, workers resolutely defied the order and voted to continue the strike. The law requires “invitations” for civil conscription to be personally delivered to individuals, so striking workers have resisted by finding increasingly ingenious ways of hiding from the authorities, effectively forcing the system to collapse under the weight of its own bureaucracy.

Athens and Thessaloniki also saw

clashes between strikers and riot police as attempts were made to blockade scabbing lorries taking fuel to the cities. After the government enlisted the army to move fuel supplies, the union voted to end the strike and re-enter into negotiations, despite defeating the civil conscription plan. However, this vote was lost by a narrow margin and the reluctance exhibited by workers in following the back-to-work order

suggests discontent within the rank-and-file with the way the union leadership has handled the latest phase of the dispute.

With the decision arguably handing an easy victory to the government, the struggle intensifies for workers in Greece and it appears increasingly likely that this year the country will spearhead another winter of discontent throughout Europe.

Bangladeshi garment workers increase the pressure

Workers in the garment industry in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka have taken to the streets following the introduction of a new minimum wage structure. The minimum wage of Tk1600 has increased to Tk3000 after talks involving union representatives hand-picked by the government itself, a move which the Bangladesh Daily star calls “surprising and utterly unacceptable”.

This new figure falls far short of a real living wage of Tk5000, which garment workers have been demanding for years. In response to the decision, several thousand took to the capital, blockading roads and smashing windows in the commercial and business districts. Heavily outnumbered, the police used truncheons and teargas against the protestors.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina warned that “anarchy and destructive activities” would not be tolerated, claiming that those involved in the destruction must be provocateurs because, she contends, it would be

illogical for workers to cause damage to the factories in which they work! The PM claimed she was instrumental in securing the rise in minimum wage, demanding that the workers accept the changes and return to work.

The garment sector is, rather unsurprisingly, the country’s highest export earner (\$12 billion foreign exchange earnings last year), with companies including Marks and Spencer, Gap, Asda and Wal-Mart lining their pockets with the aid of cheap Bangladeshi labour. Increased worker activity in countries

such as China mean Bangladeshi garment worker wages are amongst the lowest in the world, constantly failing to keep up with the rise in inflation and living cost. Estimates also suggest that over 80% of Bangladesh’s two million garment workers are female, with beating and repression of these women a common occurrence.

With the recent successes of agitating garment workers throughout the rest of Asia, this may be a promising start for those struggling to secure a decent living wage in Bangladesh.



George Fontenis, 27th April 1920 - 9th August 2010

French anarchist George Fontenis passed away on the 9th August, 2010 at the age of 90. ‘Alternative Libertaire’, the libertarian communist group that he remained a member of until his death, described him as “an untiring fighter for libertarian communism, a supporter of the Algerian independence fighters, a trade unionist, one of the leading figures of May 1968 in Tours and a pillar of the Free-thought movement”. A man dedicated to the struggles of libertarian labour organisations he was considered one of the few remaining activists with first hand experience of

anarchist movement in the 1940’s and 50’s. Among the many revolutionary organisations that he worked with throughout his life was the French Anarchist Federation, with whom he was an early activist before being elected General Secretary in 1946. He is remembered by those who knew him as warm, jovial and gifted with both humour and great insight, an image reaffirmed in a documentary about his life that was made in 2008 - “Georges Fontenis, parcours libertaire”. He is survived by his wife Marie-Louise and family.

ON THE FRONTLINE: *Workplace Roundup*

Factory workers strike in Coventry

Hundreds of employees of Meggitt Aircraft Braking Systems in Holbrooks in Coventry took strike action twice at the end of July, after company bosses awarded themselves massive bonuses while at the same time cutting and freezing the wages of their employees.

Company bosses received £1.7 million in bonuses, after Meggitt, which makes aeroplane parts, made savings of £1.5 million achieved as a result of slashing sick pay allowances and making redundancies in 2009. The company made £494.2 million in gross profits in 2009. However, prior negotiations for a pay increase for staff had been refused with management claiming there was no money available.

At the same time, staff are currently being regraded, with some losing as much as £17,000 a year. All other employees have had their pay frozen. According to Unite, which conducted the strike ballot, a 4% pay increase would cost less than a quarter of the bonuses given to three top managers - Terry Twigger, Stephen Young and Philip Green, who received £770,000, £463,000 and £353,000 respectively plus shares.

Manchester College prison teachers strike

Prison teachers employed by the Manchester College, which has recently seen strike action at its campuses in Manchester, have struck in the same row over the imposition of new contracts. Significant pay cuts as a result of the new contracts are likely for many staff.

The college runs courses throughout England, and the strike hit over 70 prisons in Liverpool, Birmingham, Yorkshire, Dover, the Isle of Wight, and other locations around the country. Some sites saw mass pickets, and many sent delegations to a rally in Manchester.



Sheffield Supertram staff vote to strike indefinitely

Workers on Sheffield's tram network have voted to strike on the 16th of August over the de-recognition of a union rep by management. The strike could last indefinitely.

The dispute follows network owners Stagecoach breaking off all contact with Unite's branch secretary, Mick Fletcher, after he discussed the content of meetings with management with the union's membership. The alleged indiscretion relates to last year's pay dispute, with the offence being that Fletcher answered members' questions directly over whether increased pay offers were likely to come as a result of reduced bonus payments. Stagecoach claims this could have unduly "influenced" the vote on the offer.



London hospital drivers and firefighters balloted

The Fire Brigades Union has launched a ballot of its members in London after management scuppered negotiations and moved to cancel existing contracts and impose new ones on staff, which would involve different shift times and working hours. Ballot papers are due to be issued at the end of the month, with action possible from September onwards.

Meanwhile, members of the GMB union employed by the London Ambulance Service are being balloted at the time of writing over the privatisation of key services. The staff are employed to transport patients across the capital to sites and take them to and from hospital. The South London Healthcare NHS Trust has put the service out to tender.

BBC proms under threat from strikes

The BBC's annual jingoistic extravaganza, *The last night of the proms*, is under threat from co-ordinated strike action by the BECTU and NUJ unions and the musicians' and actors' unions.

BECTU has scheduled a 48 hour walkout by its members at the BBC which coincides with the last night, the 11th of September. The walkout comes following BBC bosses' plans to slash pension entitlements, which has led to mass meetings at the Corporation and a "flood" of unionisation according to BECTU and the NUJ.

With the NUJ saying it will respect prom-night pickets, and with the actors union Equity and musicians' union doing the same, the BBC faces the prospect of significant disruption to the event, with performers, reporters and other BBC staff walking out.



Southampton librarians strike

Library workers in Southampton struck for two days on the 12th and 16th of August in protest against the council's scrapping of two libraries and the replacement of staff with unpaid volunteers.

The strikes follow earlier action in June, after the council announced the closure of Millbrook and Thornhill libraries last year. Millbrook remains one of the last remaining public services in that area of the city.

The attacks on public services and public sector workers under Southampton's Tory council show what is coming on a national scale, with the "big society" of volunteers being the pretext for booting people out of work and rolling back vital services.



Bullshit Busters: Liberating the NHS? Not quite...

The white paper published on 12th July outlines the government's radical shake-up of the NHS which, it is claimed, will 'liberate' the health service from bureaucracy and inefficiency. However, the reality of this restructuring is undoubtedly going to be very different from what has been promised.

In total, the government aims to cut the NHS budget by £20 billion by 2014. This translates into up to 10,000 jobs being cut or lost, as estimated by a recent Royal College of Nursing report. These will include not only managerial positions but front-line staff, dispelling the government promise that front-line services will not be affected by the proposed changes.

Strategic health authorities and primary care trusts in England are to be scrapped, with their budgets being controlled by GPs themselves, who will be made to form themselves into regional consortia. While this

may look good on paper, some have expressed worry that this will force doctors to double as managers and bureaucrats, resulting in these additional responsibilities likely being outsourced to private companies. What were once public hospitals and services are to be devolved into 'foundation trusts' which will, again, have the power to further devolve services to private companies. For those raising the question about the closure of hospitals unable to manage their budget, Health Secretary Andrew Lansley commented "We have to face the fact that not all organisations will succeed."

The NHS white paper is being sold to us under the rhetoric of 'choice' when, in reality, there is no choice at all. The introduction of a shambolic part-privatised health service is undoubtedly only the tip of the iceberg in terms of public spending cuts we are going to face in the next few years.

International solidarity with Berns Cleaners

On Friday 13th August, the Cleaners' Defence Committee held a protest in support of migrant cleaning staff who had worked at the Berns Salonger hotel and nightclub in Sweden.

Berns Salonger are owned by London & Regional Properties and the demonstration took place outside their offices in Baker Street, London. The Cleaners' Defence Committee were established earlier this year to organise solidarity with migrant cleaners at the UBS bank in the City of London. The protest, attended by AFed members, was supported by the Latin American Workers' Association, Colombia Solidarity Campaign, Hands Off My Workmate, Industrial Workers of the World, Solidarity Federation, The Commune, National Shop Stewards Network and the RMT Finsbury Park Branch. There were about 50 people on what was a lively and noisy demonstration that caused severe embarrassment to London & Regional Properties.

The confrontation between the cleaning staff and Berns has been going on for some months. Berns have a notorious record for mistreating their cleaning staff

but avoid any direct responsibility by employing them via sub-contractors. The cleaners have to work inhumane hours, sometimes up to 22 hours a day, 7 days a week. Working these hours, they have little option but to sleep on cardboard boxes in the workplace.

The main union, Landsorganisationen i Sverige, commonly referred to as LO, has been unable or unwilling to organise these paperless workers. The Swedish Workers Central Organisation (SAC) have successfully organised the cleaners at Berns, campaigned for better conditions, higher pay, less hours, and above all, dignity for the staff. The result of each struggle, won by blockades of the night club, has been that Berns bosses have moved the cleaners form one staffing company to another.

The SAC organised cleaning staff have worked for seven years and for three different companies. The SAC argue that Berns have a responsibility for these people, from Bolivia, Peru, Mongolia and Chile, despite moving them from one staffing company to another in order to avoid responsibility for their exploitation. Now after rolling successes from the

SAC, the staffing company NCA, has fired all janitors at the Berns hotel due to "economic problems". Berns have attempted to look respectable by saying it would hire back some of the staff directly, and offered them continued work, however all syndicalist organised cleaners have been left out. This is blatant union busting. However, after months of blockading that is starting to cost Berns, the cracks are starting to show. Booked DJs and artists have refused to play at Berns, forcing them to cancel events.

Berns refuse to give in on principle. This is why pressure is being applied higher up on their owners, London & Regional Properties, with an international campaign aimed at shaming them and costing them money. The protest outside their London offices on the 13th August was carried out at the same time as a protest by comrades in Germany. In a period of intensifying attacks on workers, it is important to stand side by side with those struggling as we do. But, it's far more than an injury to one being an injury to all - in this case, a victory to one will be a victory to all in that it shows we can take on the bosses and win.

Glasgow protest to stop deportation of journalist

On Monday 2nd August, the National Union of Journalists staged a protest outside of the UK Border Agency office in Glasgow against the deportation of fellow journalist and asylum seeker Charles Atangana to his native Cameroon.

The protest was attended by some fifty journalists, trade unionists and friends of UNITY, the asylum seekers' union in Glasgow. Charles Atangana has been in the UK since 2004, when he fled Cameroon after being arrested by President Biya's security forces and then stripped, beaten and detained for 40 days. His initial asylum claim has been rejected and the Home Office also initially refused him the right to appeal this decision, leading the NUJ to call for a stay of deportation

until the appeal was granted.

Following the protest on 2nd August, which demonstrated the mounting pressure placed on the Home Office by Charles Atangana's supporters, his deportation which was planned for later that evening was cancelled and the UKBA announced that Charles would be allowed to appeal the decision. Less than two weeks after the Glasgow protest, Charles was released on bail for a set period of six weeks. This gives him and his supporters some much-needed time to mount a legal challenge against the Home Office's rejection of his asylum claim.

The UKBA protest in Glasgow was successful not only because it drew attention to Atangana's case and built solidarity for asylum seekers amongst those attending, but because the mere

presence of a supportive crowd standing outside the immigration office provides support and protection for other asylum seekers who were checking in at the time. Asylum seekers are frequently required to 'sign in' at designated places once a week (or, in some cases, every day).

This sign-in can be a huge source of anxiety, not least because it is often during these check-ins that many asylum seekers are detained without warning. Even a small, static protest outside centres like the immigration office in Glasgow can have a powerful effect, as those attempting to sign in can walk into the building with the knowledge that there is a crowd of people waiting outside to make sure they return safely. And a crowd of journalists? Even better!

Pride in Liverpool

Saturday the 7th August saw Liverpool's first Pride march, with over 21,000 flocking to the city centre to enjoy the festivities. The march itself was estimated at 2,000 strong, including banners from unions and activist groups as well as dancers, drummers and local businesses.

It was well-supported by residents and visitors, who lined the entire route from St. George's Hall to the Victoria monument, cheering the procession on its way. The only opposition was from a small group of Christian fundamentalists, who waved placards from behind their police cordon and feebly attempted to shout Leviticus quotations over the samba drummers. Aside from a few boos, they were confronted only by a general tutting and shaking of heads.

The greater threat to the spirit of the day

came in the form of the multitude of corporate promotions that set up shop in Dale Street, from banks and accident claims lawyers to betting shops, crowding the genuine LGBT information and campaign stalls into obscurity. As with Pride in other cities, the event was seized upon by businesses and politicians as an opportunity for self-promotion, and a scramble for the pink pound (and pink vote) ensued. In one particularly shameful example, Seacombe Tory councillor Denis Knowles was to be seen attempting to improve his public image after his recent brief suspension for making homophobic comments on his Facebook. He had referred to Labour party leafleters as: "of the limp wisted variety and definitely NOT local", but at Pride told PinkNews.co.uk that he had "plenty of gay friends" and was praised for helping out on the LGBTory stall. Meanwhile, independent LGBT artists and activists had faced frustrating obstacles when trying to persuade the organisers to give

them stall space.

The crowds may have come out in support of the event, but being openly and visibly gay in Liverpool on any other day of the year is still decidedly risky. If Liverpool Pride hopes to truly be a show of support for Liverpool's LGBT community, and not a mere spectacle, it has to be less for the benefit of its corporate sponsors and more for the people and organisations who directly confront homophobia and transphobia every day – in our workplaces, on our streets and in the politicians who wave their rainbow flags with hypocritical pride.



Defend Wanstead Flats

The Metropolitan Police intend to build on Wanstead Flats, an area of common land in East London used as a park by the community, despite great opposition from local residents. The police have applied to the City of London Corporation, who manage the land, to build a temporary operations base on the Flats for the duration of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Over 250 residents attended a recent public meeting at Durning Hall Community centre in Forest Gate. Residents in the packed out hall expressed their anger at the plans which include using 8 acres of Wanstead Flats for a police base including stables and holding cells.

Opposition was particularly fierce to the plans to amend the Epping Forest Act 1878 despite existing allowances in the act for use of the Flats when this is beneficial to the population of London. During the second world war these allowances were used to allow allotments on the Flats, suggesting that there is no real legal need for the changes. Instead, this amendment seems to set a frightening

precedent for future development on and enclosure of the Flats and similar areas.

Residents also expressed anger at the lack of proper consultation. Only four exhibition events were held over a six week period, half of which during the summer holidays when residents are away. The lack of consultation looks like an attempt to rush plans through before people can object. Since the opposition became clear, the Met Police launched a flashy new website to try to sell the operations base to residents.

Following the Forest Gate meeting, the Save Wanstead Flats campaign was started. The campaign sits in a long tradition of working class people organising to ensure free use of the land and to prevent development. In 1947, for example, the Wanstead Flats Defence Committee, made up of sporting organisations, religious and political groups, trade union branches and local residents helped prevent the compulsory purchase of the land to build housing.

The campaign has begun by calling for the Police, City of London Corporation and local councils to come to a mass public meeting in the Autumn, where they can answer residents anger at the

proposals. On Sun 5th September the Save Wanstead Flats Campaign is organising a mass community picnic on the very site of the proposed police station. This picnic will bring local people together in a show of opposition to the planned Met base as the start of a community campaign.

It is essential that what little common land there is should be protected and these plans show that this can only be done through the actions and organisations of local people if land which is supposed to be ours can so easily be closed off.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

11th September

Bristol Anarchist Bookfair, Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol
<http://www.bristolanarchistbookfair.org>

11th September

Herstory – Radical Women's Fundraiser, Edinburgh
<http://edinburghanarchafeminist.noflag.org.uk>

18th September

Radical Workers' Bloc at Lib Dem Conference, Liverpool
<http://liverpoolsolfed.wordpress.com>

22nd September - 27th September

Leeds Queer Film Festival
www.queermutinorth.wordpress.com

25th September

Kendal Anarchist Fair, Shakespeare Centre, Kendal
anarchyupnorth@riseup.net

25th September - 26th September

Soapbox - a weekend of radical feminist discussion, workshops, and entertainment
<http://edinburghanarchafeminist.noflag.org.uk/>

2nd October

Manchester Anarchist Bookfair, Dancehouse Theatre, Oxford Road, Manchester, M1 5QA
<http://www.bookfair.org.uk/>

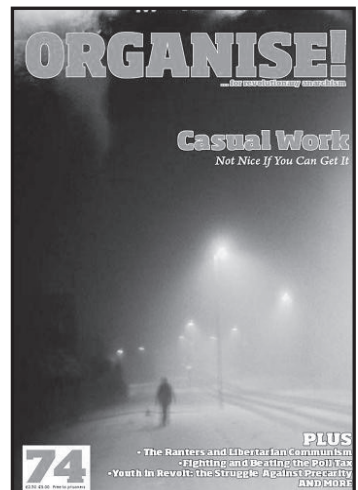
3rd October

Demo at Tory Party Conference, Birmingham
<http://toffsout.wordpress.com/>

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Organise! is the Anarchist Federation's theoretical and historical magazine. It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to give a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues, and initiate debates on areas not normally covered in agitational journals.

You can order or subscribe online at www.afed.org.uk, or get in touch with your local AF group for a copy.



ANARCHIST FEDERATION

The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of class struggle anarchists (based in Britain and Ireland, but with many contacts overseas) which aims to abolish Capitalism and all oppression to create a free and equal society. This is Anarchist Communism.

We see today's society as being divided into two main opposing classes: the ruling class which controls all the power and wealth, and the working class which the rulers exploit to maintain this. By racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, as well as war and environmental destruction the rulers weaken and divide us. Only the direct action of working class people can defeat these attacks and ultimately overthrow capitalism.

As the capitalist system rules the whole world it's destruction must be complete and world wide. We reject attempts to reform it such as working through parliament and national liberation movements (like the IRA) as they fail to challenge capitalism itself. Unions also work as a part of the capitalist system, so although workers struggle within them, they will be unable to bring about capitalism's destruction unless they go beyond these limits.

Organisation is vital if we're to beat the bosses, so we work for a united anarchist movement and are affiliated to the International of Anarchist Federations.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Web: www.afed.org.uk

England & main national / international postal & email addresses -

Write to: **BM ANARFED**, London, WC1N 3XX, England, UK.
email: infoafed.org.uk

International of Anarchist Federations:
www.iaf-ifa.org

LOCAL GROUPS & CONTACTS

England

Birmingham (including West Midlands)

birmingham@afed.org.uk

Brighton (including Lewes)

brighton@afed.org.uk

Bristol

bristolafed.org.uk

East Anglia (including Norwich & Cambs)

eastanglia@afed.org.uk

Hereford

hereford@afed.org.uk

Hull

hull@afed.org.uk

East Kent (including Broadstairs, Canterbury, Margate etc.)

eastkent@afed.org.uk

West Kent (including Maidstone, Gravesend / Dartford, Medway towns and Swale)

westkent@afed.org.uk

Leicester

leicester@afed.org.uk

Leeds

leeds@afed.org.uk

Lincoln

lincoln@afed.org.uk

Liverpool/Merseyside
liverpool@afed.org.uk

London

london@afed.org.uk

Manchester

manchester@afed.org.uk

Mansfield

mansfield@afed.org.uk

Newcastle

newcastle@afed.org.uk

Nottingham

nottingham@afed.org.uk

Preston

preston@afed.org.uk

Sheffield

sheffield@afed.org.uk

Surrey / Hants

surreyhants@afed.org.uk

Worcester

worcester@afed.org.uk

York

york@afed.org.uk

Scotland

General Scotland contact

scotland@afed.org.uk

Edinburgh & the Lothians

edinburgh@afed.org.uk

Glasgow

glasgow@afed.org.uk

Stirling

stirling@afed.org.uk

Wales

General Wales contact

wales@afed.org.uk

Cardiff & South Wales

cardiff@afed.org.uk