Organising for Resistance: Grass roots struggles show the way!

What with Brexit, Tory backstabbing, a new Prime Minister, Corbyn being elected Labour leader (again!) and a US presidential election it seems the pantomime of parliament has never been livelier! In our opinion far too much attention has already been paid to the political manoeuvring of our so-called leaders, across untold pages of papers and websites. We've spelled out our own position very clearly in previous copies of Resistance, and recommend you pick up those if you want to see yet more pictures of politicians.

For this issue we instead put the focus where it belongs, on grass roots struggle - on the strikes, occupations and protests that are winning real change for workers across the UK and beyond. It is these actions that win real concessions for ordinary people. The politicians only ever play catch up. If they're offering us something good, it's usually only out of fear we're going to take something better if they don't!

If, like us, you don't trust any political party further than you can throw it, these pages should serve as a how-to guide for causing trouble and scoring victories by standing together rather than looking to the higher power of parliament.

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Solidarity with all workers: Byron Burgers face workers' anger

This August, Byron Burgers was at the centre of a dispute around their dodgy ethical practices, leading to a spontaneous campaign of demonstrations across the UK. Unlike similar campaigns, this one didn't have any key demands - it was simply about teaching the bosses a lesson.

Earlier in the year, Byron had called dozens of their London staff to a 'health and safety' briefing. Instead of the mundane meeting the staff were expecting, immigration officers burst into the room, before detaining everyone present and deporting 35 people. The company attempted to excuse itself by saying it was a legal requirement a claim that was quickly debunked by legal experts. Sources from within Byron suggested the actions only made sense if they were part of a 'back-room deal'. This could have been to enable bosses to dodge fines for breaching employment and immigration law. Either way, this attack on ordinary workers decimated lives and let those responsible off scot-free. The rest of the country wasn't going to stand idly by.

Current and former workers at Byron, including some who had quit in disgust at the deportations, called for action. The first demonstration took place at a central London branch at the centre of

the scandal, with hundreds of protesters forcing the restaurant to close. Actions quickly spread, with pickets, protests, and occupations across the country - there was even a 'biblical plague' of locusts released in several London outlets. Online, the company's social media presence also took a battering. The Bristol restaurant's Facebook page is still offline after being hijacked by a supporter of the protests. It was all an awesome display of working-class unity and self-organisation in the face of an attack by the bosses. Far from being divided by the discourse of migrants 'stealing jobs', people came together to deliver a blow to Byron's profits.

As well as the significant short-term impact on the owners' profits caused by the campaign, the damage dealt to their image will grossly effect the company in the long term. This isn't just due to the actions already mentioned, but to others that came to light as a result, including the millions in profits the company rakes in from its over-priced burgers being rooted via offshore havens, to avoid paying UK tax.

The next time a company has to make a decision on whether to screw up the lives of their workers, migrant or otherwise, we hope they look back on what happened to Byron and think very, very carefully about it.



Deliveroo & the gig economy fightback

In London, workers at bike food delivery company Deliveroo have taken action, including an unofficial strike, to fight against the imposition of a new contract.

The six-day strike was resolved in the cyclists' favour; the new pay plan would be optional, with riders able to opt back out. Riders had set up a crowd-funded strike fund to support themselves, which helped raise £10,000 by the time the dispute had ended. After the commencement of the strike, they were aided by the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), a new union formed from ex-members of UNITE and UNISON. All of this was achieved by people working collectively, without professional organisers or the involvement of the mainstream unions.

This type of work, known as 'gig employment', is on the rise, making employment increasingly precarious. Independent workers can supposedly choose when they want to work, on short-term contracts, but the employer decides whether or

not to use them. The results of this are that the workers have less consistent income, no notice of reduced hours or loss of a job, greater incurred costs, and the absence of the protections of those in traditional employment. For instance, Deliveroo riders have to pay for their own bike repairs and insurance, while also forgoing sick pay and holiday pay.

There are many issues with gig economy work, but there are also many opportunites. For example, it is much easier to strike without notice, and conduct other direct action. When most of the Deliveroo riders realised they were not happy with the new contract, they were able to band together and simply not work - this is something their contract allows and their employers can do little about. Uber drivers have already had similar strikes in the UK, US, and Kenya. With these employees leading the way and showing what can be achieved in such a short amount of time, we will hopefully see more wild-cat strikes and non-hierarchical organising in the coming years.



Postal workers' wildcat strike

by Bridgwater postman

Hundreds of Royal Mail workers carried out a wildcat strike on 24th August to defend their Communication Workers' Union Branch Secretary Chris Rye, based in Swindon, who had been suspended following a row with a manager.

The first walkout took place at the huge Dorcan Sorting and Delivery Office at 6am.

Chippenham Delivery Office workers walked out in solidarity later that morning. Back in Swindon, workers picketed until the start of the late shift at the sorting office, when the whole of that shift refused to go into the building to work.

Later that afternoon Royal Mail agreed to lift Chris's suspension, and the workers agreed to return to work.

Chris is currently on 'house arrest', in the sense that he has to stay for the whole of his shift at the CWU Union room at Dorcan, and not wander about talking to members. The Branch's position is that if Chris is formally charged with any offence, or if the soon-to-be-published enquiry into industrial relations at Dorcan does not completely vindicate the CWU, then further strike action is likely.

The initial success of the Swindon strike is entirely due to the lightning-fast response of the 'illegal' walkout. Many Royal Mail militants up and down the country will be encouraged, as many fear that the era of regular wildcat strikes throughout Royal Mail, endemic up to a few years ago, were a thing of the past.

Rent Strike: students make it an effective weapon



Students on rent strike at University College London (UCL) recently declared a victory after five months of withholding payment for their accommodation.

The UCL authorities agreed to make available £350,000 for 2016/17 in accommodation bursaries for those students in most need of financial support, increasing to £500,000 the following year. They also agreed to reduce rents in the lowest priced rooms (around a third) and to freeze rent on all of the others at a total cost of over £1m.

Students in the UCL Cut the Rent movement welcomed the offer, but warned that unless a social rents policy is put in place, they will continue with further action.

The strike, which involved 1,000 students, spread to other colleges across London, in what was the largest student rent strike in British history. This included Goldsmiths, where accommodation halls were handed over to a private renting company, Campus Living Villages (CLV), by the university authorities. CLV raised rents to £170 a week per room, triggering a protracted rent strike led by Cut the Rent campaigners.

CLV's attempts to intimidate strikers with threatening letters have failed, and the Goldsmiths authorities are wavering. Action is planned to spread the rent strikes to other universities around Britain in what could prove to be a significant movement. A widespread

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rejection by students of grossly inflated rents could act as an example to others who are forced to pay similar rates in the private sector.

The housing crisis has spawned many campaigns concerning rents, gentrification, and social cleansing. Already, coordination is developing

through the Radical Housing Network in London. Further efforts at coordination and liaison between different housing groups and student rent strikers would be a welcome step forward. Housing remains an important area of struggle and we need to create active solidarity!

Squatters take to the roofs to defend social housing



Bristol, like much of the rest of the UK, is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. Yet earlier in the year the local council took the decision to auction off a dozen of its properties. However things didn't go exactly to plan, thanks to the involvement of Bristol Housing Action Movement (BHAM).

BHAM is a network of squatters and homeless people that has been active in Bristol for over thirty years. Their first disruption of the council's plans was entirely accidental, as they squatted a park keepers lodge preventing it being cleared in time for the auction. Their second intervention had a bit more planning, as other groups and individuals protested outside of the Council's auction, BHAM announced they had occupied one of the nearby properties in protest. Whilst this short-lived occupation wasn't as disruptive as they'd hoped it did raise the profile of the campaign against the sell-off.

BHAM's attention switched to a council house in Avonmouth. Aided by two independent mayoral candidates a local man, Anthony, had occupied it to protest its sell off, and the inadequate accommodation he and his infant son had been placed in. After tea and biscuits in the occupied house, BHAM members agreed to help sustain the occupation using a legal loophole that allowed the squatting of residential premises as a protest — using it as a place to live would have been a criminal act.

This left the council in a difficult position, whilst the house had been auctioned off they couldn't guarantee a completion of the sale without getting themselves in and the protesters out. Despite having nearly six weeks they managed to tie themselves in legal knots until the last possible moment. In the meantime the buyer announced they wanted to back out, the neighbours and the media were in full support of the occupation, and the protesters had discovered numerous council lies about the state of the property. It was in a much better condition than official reports had suggested. A few county court bailiffs did arrive to attempt a last minute eviction. However as soon as the saw the barricaded terraced house, complete with two BHAM members in a make shift pirate ship on the roof, it was clear the council had lost.

In exchange for the end of the occupation the council refunded the buyer, agreed to keep the house in council stock, and handed the keys to a council flat to Anthony and his son. Buoyed up by this success BHAM later found another target; a housing association property in West Grove, St Pauls, which was due to go under the hammer. The police responded this time, perhaps believing they could deal with the occupiers in a more competent fashion than council had previously.

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Numbers of police increased as did a number of supporters gathered in the street outside. The stand-off was broken as a unit of riot police smashed their way in through the door and ran into the building with the senior police officer present. They emerged empty handed, as two activists were already out on the roof! In a farcical bid to get them down the police even managed to lose their ladder, which made a handy barricade to secure the skylight against any future attempts.

A third activist had announced the occupation at the auction, which halted its sale. Meanwhile with the heavy handed approach having resulted in failure the police were forced to ask nicely if the roof top activists would come down. The next morning they did, but not before ensuring the property had been removed from the auction portfolio and guaranteeing their own freedom from arrest.

Bristol City Council have since declared it will not sell any social housing it owns directly. Housing associations have made no such commitment, so the struggle to keep Bristol's social housing available will continue, as it does in many places across the country.

BHAM meet weekly and can be contacted via: www.squatbristol.co.uk

Organic Lea: Land for Food and Community

Organic Lea is an example of what can be done if people gain access to land. The founders wanted to establish a farm that was based on the principles of permaculture, a natural design system inspired by natural processes where everything is recycled and shared. This is an approach that challenges capitalism, which is not designed to conserve or save but instead to do whatever is necessary to make a profit. Food should be a way of connecting people; it is the basis of communality.

There were a number of factors that made it possible for a small group of individuals to get hold of the land they wanted, to expand their allotment project into a much larger-scale farm. This co-operatively-run farm was fortunate in that the site was council-owned and near a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This means that, at least in theory, the land is held in the public interest. Waltham Forest Council had targets for food growth and carbon emissions reduction so the farm project fits in with official policy. Most importantly, though, there was no other financial pressure on the land. The SSSI status meant that the land could not be sold off to developers.

The project started in 2009 and has gradually expanded its distribution networks. There are weekly stalls in nearby Leytonstone, as well as food boxes of Lea's produce. The members also host a range of community activities, including

volunteer programmes and regular open days.

Organic Lea is a small island in the ocean of capitalism. This is why it is part of the food sovereignty movement, enabling food to be controlled by and for people, to bring producers and consumers closer together. The food sovereignty movement has been a leading voice calling for land reform: "The demands of food sovereignty inevitably include a call for new patterns of ownership and land distribution, as part of its shift to local democratic control of food production."

It is difficult for others to follow the example of Organic Lea. Many similar community projects have struggled to establish themselves. This is usually because they are only able to get a lease for a few years, while Organic Lea has secured a 10-year lease. They may also face problems if the council decides it can make more money by selling off the land.

To gain access to land for projects such as cooperative food production (or housing or community and social centres), we need to turn private property into the commons. This means that land must be directly in the hands of the community - not something that can be sold off to developers.

https://www.organiclea.org.uk/ http://landworkersalliance.org.uk/

Land: What for? Who decides?

On November 12th and 13th, an event called 'Land for what and who decides?' will be held at the Camden Resource Centre on Holloway Road in London. It will bring together a range of groups and organisations who have different perspectives on land: housing, food, community, cultural and social spaces, green and open spaces, the needs of other species, and climate change.

Without land we have nothing to eat, nowhere to build homes, no resources to make the things we need, and no place to interact with others, play, or organise. Land contains our history and our memories. It is also the home of other species and is part of the environment that makes it possible for humans to live on the planet.

However, most land is owned and controlled by a tiny few. In the UK, 70% of the land is owned by just 0.6% of the population. Internationally, the British Queen is one of the world's biggest landowners, with 6.6 billion acres. In addition, land-grabbing has become common place in many parts of the world. Land-poor countries, such as China, South Korea, and the Gulf states, have bought up fertile land in places like Africa, with the aim of producing food for export to their own countries. An area the size of a football pitch is acquired every second in the global South.

Even 'public' land is restricted and being sold off to private interests. The results of this are: poor quality and expensive food; a high cost of housing, homelessness, and gentrification; a lack of community, and cultural and social space; restrictions on where we can go; a lack of green spaces and wild land; and a general degradation of our environment.

Struggles over land are central to the rural areas of the world, but they are also relevant in the cities too. Many urban grass-roots campaigns are essentially focused on the consequences of a lack of access to land. Housing campaigners struggle to defend what is left of social housing and battle with private landlords over high rents and evictions. Most of the prices of housing in cities like London is due to the high value of the land on which it sits. Fights against airport expansion and for green space, access to community, cultural and social venues are all based on the fact that property is either already private, being sold off, or co-opted for the benefit of private economic interests.

We have already seen the development of a land reform movement in Scotland, where the impact of large landowners is more visible. South of the border, however, there has not been such a direct focus on land and the need to challenge the whole system of land ownership. That is about to change.





Homeless fight back against criminalisaton



Bristol City Council recently attempted to criminalise rough sleeping, camping, and even parking in public areas, with a sloppily-worded injunction. We at the Resistance collective visited the people at the centre of the case to find out why, and discover how the Council's injunction had been defeated.

The group that occupies a small encampment in central Bristol - known as Tent City, despite there only being ten such shelters - moved there in April. The location had been suggested by local police, who had kicked them out of a nearby park. The site is certainly hard to spot, tucked away between a river, a small mound, and a fence that the Tent City residents have decorated with climbing flowers.

Stewart, who has lived there since the beginning, spoke to us about his experiences: "Even the police don't mind us, "cause we don't cause trouble, and we keep the place clean," he said. "Whenever the Council contact them, they just say it's a civil matter."

The Council had told the residents that they were likely to be left alone for a long time, as long as their encampment didn't grow too much. Locals were even more positive, reporting that they finally felt comfortable using the rest of the park, as drug dealers had been scared off. A person working in a nearby corner shop said that he'd felt safe taking his daughter to play there for the first time.

"Passers-by either ignored us, or came and spoke to us out of curiosity," Stewart added. "Some of the regulars even started helping us out by giving us supplies."

Compared to most experiences of homelessness, it was relatively idyllic. But it wasn't to last.

The first trouble from the authorities came in the form of an immigration raid. However, the border agency found no one to easily deport. Most were UK citizens who had lived locally, and those who were from abroad all had working records going back over five years.

Papers for the court hearing followed soon after, but were a cock-up right from the start. Firstly, they'd been served with only two days' notice, which is below the legal limit for this type of case. Secondly, rather than just the expected possession order (which would force the occupiers to move on), the papers included a proposed injunction. This travesty of a document, which no one in the Council has since owned up to writing, made it illegal for not just the residents, but any 'persons unknown' to sleep rough, park a vehicle, or camp on any public land in Bristol.

It would never stand up to scrutiny in court, but then again, who would give it the scrutiny? 'Certainly not a dozen homeless people', thought the Council. One of many mistakes they made. The Tent City residents came along to a Bristol Housing Action Movement (BHAM) meeting, and got themselves last-minute legal representation in the form of an expert from South West Law. Due to the aforementioned f'ups, the judge swiftly adjourned the case, and the Tent City solicitor was confident he could rip the Council to shreds in court.

But there was a snag. There was no recourse to legal aid, and even with a discounted rate, they would need £1,500 to fight the case.

Crowd-funding came to the rescue, with dozens of people donating to meet the target. By the time the second hearing rolled around, the Council were far less confident, looking to save face in any way possible. They offered a weak compromise, which was resoundingly rejected by the Tent City folks, who responded with a counter-offer that the Council had little choice but to accept. It included giving them four weeks to leave the site, and the removal of 'persons unknown' from the injunction - an important step, as it would set a bad precedent and allow public spaces to be

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closed off from homeless 'persons unknown' one by one.

The judge approved the new wording, but not before giving the Council a bollocking, both for bringing the original injunction to court in the first place, and for using the phrase, "no local connections" as an excuse not to give people the housing they had a right to. This was certainly true for Stewart, who previously worked in Bristol for years and used to live in a house here with his family. Since the case, he is hopefully going to get some decent housing. The night before the court hearing, the Council tried to fob him off with a place in a shelter, but he wasn't having that!

During our interview, the Council's only dedicated 'anti-social behaviour officer' and his police chaperone attended to serve the injunction. He explained that it usually fell to him to deal with Bristol's homeless population. The Streetwise team (as he is officially known), was set up to deal

With 'problematic' behaviour, but as services have been cut back, it has seen its remit balloon to include nearly every instance of rough sleeping. This is in sharp contrast to the 90's, when this responsibility fell to the Housing Outreach team.

Local Mayor Marvin Rees has recently announced a shift in how homelessness will be handled, with various Council services and charities to be housed in one 'City Office'. However, homeless folks in Bristol are somewhat sceptical. "Rees' city office sounds like the Hub," noted Ben Richie of BHAM. "Ironically the Hub building on Cumberland Street at the bottom of Stokes Croft has been left empty, apart from 2011 when it was squatted by homeless people." Instead, they argue, resources should be put towards helping those services that the homeless community genuinely value, and towards rough sleepers who are organising to improve their own circumstances - or at least not towards thwarting their attempts.

US prisoners unite against prison slavery



This September saw the biggest prisoner strike in history. Prisoners from 24 states, between 40 and 50 prisons, united against prison labour. The practice has been described as a continuation of slavery in the US - the thirteenth amendment allows slavery as 'punishment for a crime'.

Prison labour is a \$2 billion-a-year industry that employs nearly 900,000 prisoners. They are paid only a few cents an hour - or nothing, in some

States - driving down wages for the rest of the population. Many of the country's largest companies profit from it including Walmart, AT&T and even Victoria's Secret. On top of this, prisoners are expected to carry out maintenance to the prisons that hold them.

"They cannot run these facilities without us," strike organisers wrote ahead of the action. "We

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will not only demand the end to prison slavery, we will end it ourselves by ceasing to be slaves."

The strike had been organised months in advance by prisoners from across the country, using social media and a network of smuggled cell phones. It culminated in a mass refusal to work from the 9th of September, the anniversary of the infamous Attica prison uprising, and continuing for weeks in some areas. The strikers had but one demand: an end to free prison labour.

Retaliation has hit the prisoners hard, with supposed 'ring leaders' put into solitary confinement or being moved to different prisons, and a complete lock-down of some centres, much of which was pre-emptive.

Prison officials have released little details on the

strike, and in some cases have acted to prevent information from getting out. Because of this, it is not known how many prisoners participated in the action, but it is estimated to be in the region of 200,000. There have also been reports of riots and hunger strikes, accompanied by demonstrations outside some of the prisons, with protesters in cities all over the world showing their support. Neither the information blackout nor the repression has dented the prisoners' resolve.

For more information, search "Free Alabama Fam" on YouTube for broadcasts from inside the prison system, and take a look at the Incarcerated Worker newsletter produced by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) at iwoc.noblogs.org.

The Need for a New Fight Against Nuclear Power



The supporters of nuclear power have been waging a war of propaganda for several years now, with articles in newspapers and magazines and appearances on TV and radio. Despite widespread mistrust amongst the British public, they appear to have won over the Conservative Government, led by Theresa May. Approval has been given for the construction of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point in Somerset, which is set to be more expensive than any other object ever built on earth. It's not just Hinkley —

both Whitehall and Beijing hint that similar projects are green-lighted for Bradwell in Essex and Sizewell in Suffolk. Chinese General Nuclear (CGN) already has plans to design the reactor at Bradwell, and stand to own two-thirds of it.

The whole project of new nuclear start-up raises a number of concerns, particularly considering China's reputation for cyber-espionage. This has left some within May's administration, the civil service, and the secret services, deeply disturbed by the influence that China might have over British nuclear security.

Then there's the sheer cost of Hinkley, estimated at £37 billion across its lifetime. In return for a tidy investment of £18 billion, CGN and the French company EDF have been guaranteed three times the going rate for their electricity by the UK government. According to National Audit Office calculations, those guaranteed premiums are set to cost the UK around £30 billion.

The whole nuclear power project raises other questions, too. The plants can be used to supply material for British nuclear warheads. The radioactive waste product has to be disposed of somewhere, and the half-life of such waste is

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measured in the thousands of years. There are also fears of nuclear catastrophe, as showcased at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union, and more recently in Japan. Lastly, the set-up of nuclear power stations involves a high degree of centralisation and militarisation, reinforcing the idea of a top-down security state.

Opinion polls show only 25% of people are in favour of Hinkley Point. In light of this, we need to look towards the revival of a movement against nuclear power in Britain and elsewhere. Such a movement would have to be built around mass mobilisations and direct action, and not just more petitions. There is a rich 40-year history of successful global action to draw upon, from site occupations to road blockades, and the Stop Hinkley campaign itself is already well-established.

This movement should not just be opposing the government and the nuclear industry, but also the Trades Union Congress and the leaders of unions like Unite, GMB, and UCATT, who have been short-sighted enough to view these projects purely as job creation opportunities.

As Sue Aubrey, a spokesperson for Stop Hinkley, said: "The Government's nuclear delusions are trying to put the brakes on a renewable energy revolution taking place around the world. They can't bring themselves to admit that smart, efficient, and renewable energy systems are sounding the death-knell for nuclear power and are standing in the way of the West of England joining this energy revolution - they really do make King Canute look like an amateur. It's time that Somerset was given the opportunity to join the future."

Building an international anarchist movement: The 10th Congress of the International of Anarchist Federations



The Tenth Congress of the International of Anarchist Federations (IFA http://i-f-a.org) took place in Frankfurt in August 2016. Congress is held every four years and hosted by one of IFA's member federations, this time by the Germanspeaking Anarchist Federation (FdA https://fdaifa.org).

From the existing IFA membership, all organisations were able to attend, except for the Iberian FAI and the Bulgarian Federation who gave their apologies. The Anarchist Federation of Belarus, affiliated to IFA, was forced to disband in

recent years due to intense state repression, but a member of Belarus Anarchist Black Cross attended. There were also observer delegations present from anarchist organisations in Azerbaijan, Kurdish Iraq, Turkey (Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet), New Zealand/Aotearoa, as well as a German anarcho-syndicalist union (FAU). The Anarchist Political Organisation in Greece not only attended, but also announced their intention to ioin IFA.

An important feature of the congress was the much expanded affiliation of Latin American organisations. The Anarchist Federation of Mexico (FAM), Federacion Anarquista Local de Valdivia (FALV) from Southern Chile, and Iniciativa Federalista Anarquista (IFAB) from Brazil all became members on the first day, as were members of the collective behind El Libertario, an anarchist paper in Venezuela. Members of groups from Dominican Republic, Cuba, and El Salvador were also present. Together they have formed the

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Anarchist Federation of Central America and the Caribbean (FACC), which also hopes to become part of the international. There are plans for an 'All Americas' anarchist meeting in Brazil to take place in 2017.

To further the growth and effectiveness of IFA, two major structural changes were agreed. The first will make it easier for new groups and federations to join, even when they do not occupy an entire country. The second allows for quicker decision making within IFA, without compromising its democratic nature or anarchist structure.

The main political themes on the agenda were migration, 'fight for the city', and opposition to patriarchy, war and nationalism. The Slovenia and Croatia based Federation of Anarchist Organising (FAO) initiated a plan, which has since begun, for member federations to share perspectives and work together on issues around migration. In the

UK, AFed will be doing more of this in the coming months (see Resistance 160 for recent information about No Borders activism in the UK).

Despite IFA having been in existence since 1968, it is fair to say that we are still in the process of discovering exactly what it can practically provide for its member federations. Yet there is little doubt, especially among those in attendance, of the importance of building links with those from different backgrounds and locations, whether these be links of personal friendships, organisational networks, or something in between.

At the end of the congress, the French-speaking Anarchist Federation (FA) completed their period as the international coordinators of IFA (known as the Secretariat). That position now falls to AFed here in the UK, and we look forward to helping spread anarchy across the world.

Liked Resistance? Try Organise!

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.

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