On Sunday 10 May Boris Johnson tells construction, manufacturing, and other workers in England who can’t work from home, to get on their bike and go to work. Two days later, we’re told that working-class men in blue-collar jobs are twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than the population as a whole.

The Tories are sending workers to their deaths to safeguard the profits of their big business backers. Over 100 health workers have died. Many of those could have lived if they had had adequate PPE. Over 30 bus drivers have been killed by the virus because the bus companies put profit before lives. In fact, during this pandemic it’s even more dangerous to be a bus driver than it is to be a doctor!

If we go to the park we have to stay two metres apart, but social distancing can go out of the window on the factory floor, the building site, and the office, so that the capitalist economy can keep going and the profits rolling in.

It’s OK for workers to be jammed together on the tube and public transport, putting their lives and those of transport workers at risk, because the wealth of a minority is more important than the health of the majority.

Who cares if nursery and primary school children become mass spreaders of coronavirus? The most important thing is getting them into the classroom so their parents can go back to work for the bosses.

Without social distancing, PPE, mass testing and tracing, and other safety measures in place, the Tories are giving a licence to kill.

Yes, we have to stay alert. Alert to how the Tories and the bosses will try to make us pay for this crisis with our lives and our livelihoods. That means organising in the trade unions and in the workplaces to fight for the health and safety of all workers, and to defend our incomes and our jobs. And it means fighting for a socialist system where profit is not the driving motive, and the needs of society come first.

- PPE and testing for all
- No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed
- Workers’ and trade union control of workplace safety
- Collective workplace action to enforce safety
- Socialist planning, not capitalist market chaos
Boris Johnson’s muddle represents the government’s blunders, and the affects they have had. It has taken his eye off the ball over the past four months. Even many of the so-called ‘blue-collar workers’ were demanding that the government gave them more appreciation of the government’s support of those who refuse to work. On the eve of Johnson’s announcement of his government’s plans for the lockdown to begin on 12 October, a second wave of deaths risks promoting a huge working-class backlash. Boris Johnson’s speech that was a comical, if you forget how catastrophic, result of the government’s planning. Only even more public ownership would be open to serious scrutiny. And, if the government doesn’t act, then the workers will be taken into democratic public ownership to prevent them withdrawing. Johnson’s TUC General Council meetings have been called and turned into a council of war on workers’ subjects. If this isn’t forthcoming, then the left unions have to organise a new plan of action.

This should also include a discussion on how workers’ independent political organisation must be strengthened. The commitment of Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members to continue their protests and actions shows the workers’ refusal to work in unsafe conditions. Johnson’s government is clearly planning to force workers back to work, deeming the public will forgive us for mistakes. If any company wants their workers to return to work part time and claim 80% of their wages or protecting workers living and working in unsafe conditions. No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For a workers’ government and control. Kick out private contractors! For a democratically planned, low-fare, public-nationalised public transport system, with real worker control. Under a workers state, compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.

Furlough scheme extended
Workers need 100% of wages

In response to the government’s furlough scheme, the Workers’ International Committee for a Workers’ State announced that workers need 100% of their wages.

The announcement came as the Tories are move ing to kill the furlough scheme, even though people are still dying of the disease. On a daily basis, the 100,000 per day tests are continually not being reached and the charts over PPE provision continue to worsen. It is clear to see that the government is saying people can go and work in factories, professions and offices that are still putting homes before worker safety. That the government is putting the green light and will be the first to get the economy going, but none have any guarantees of the government’s blinkers, and the affected people will have.

The CTU has the highest number of Covid-19 deaths in Europe, and in the country. The real figures are believed to be far greater. The Trades Union Congress has called for a systemic plan to put workers’ safety first. The government must on the one hand introduce the workplace safety measures in places. This move must come once on Johnson’s statue on schools. Findings from new research show that workers in workplaces that have been closed for some time have been exposed to some of the worst conditions. This means that the government was unable to act quickly.

We are calling on the government to ensure that workers get the necessary safety standards at work. And that should be on 100% pay. There must be no dilution of the same non-social distancing, with clear their markings and safe capacity in all factory locations, offices, buses, trains, etc. A 13% increase in compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

SoCialiSM and inTErnaTionaliSM

Everyone’s health needs - free at the point of use. Free education, available to all at any age. Free publicly run, good quality homes to provide good quality homes - free at the point of use.

We demand...
Worker and parents should decide when it's safe to go back to school!

Ron Reader
Parent, North London Socialist Party

We are in the middle of a national crisis with Covid-19. We are parents of four and eight-year old twin daughters. It is inhumane to consider re-opening schools in such a manner.

Schools are busy and densely populated, and in terms of social distancing would undoubtedly be very difficult. Even if it were possible, it would be unhygienic to expect parents to keep track of their children on a rota basis in order to function as a school. Parents are already working long hours at home to support returning workers. Healthy adults and children going into school would mean that parents even more so have to work harder in order to support their children and their work. Parents would lose work if they had to stay at home due to their children being unwell.

We have reached a lower rate of infection, and have adequate PPE and testing in place. In the case of London Covid-19, we have the opportunity for a phased return of schools. If we return to school now, there is a very real danger that children, particularly the most vulnerable, may not have the resources to deal with the mental and physical health consequences of the pandemic. We need to be clear that returning children to school at this time would be very harmful to them.

We are writing to the NEU to agree with the NEU's test, since we believe it is not a question of whether we can return to school, but if we can safely do so. The NEU tested the Covid-19 plan and found it to be unrealistic to expect such a plan to succeed. The NEU has demonstrated through its work the extent to which the government has failed to take responsibility for the health of children and have instead given parents, teachers and health workers the responsibility for ensuring the safety of their children, teachers, and families. The NEU has demonstrated that school cannot be deemed a safe place to send children back to school.

The NEU points out that the WHO and the NEU set for schools to reopen.

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Workers and parents should decide when it's safe to go back to school!
Dispatches from the front: bosses prepare fresh attacks on NHS

Will Tories use lower hospital attendance to close wards?

As an NHS nurse I was asked by the Socialist to provide a note from the ‘front line’.

Well, in my own area, the district general hospital is running half-full and other in-bedded community hospitals have no patients whatsoever: this is in line with government guidelines to prepare for a rise in in-bedded requirements in response to Covid-19.

NHS wards have been ‘temporarily’ closed and staff told this is only during the current crisis.

Large numbers of staff are being redeployed to other areas while the current situation exists; often highly inappropriately, in that staff are expected to work in areas where they have little or no experience.

Community workers are facing additional pressures, as patients have been discharged from hospitals to home or to care homes. Of course, the scandal is the enormous death rates for residents of care homes, who originally were not counted in the government’s Covid-19 mortality rate.

Most care homes are private and pay mostly minimum wage rates to poorly trained staff. Their lack of PPE provision has been widely reported.

So, the real front line lies at the feet of social care workers at this moment. Deaths of social care workers have risen exponentially, with roughly twice as many deaths from coronavirus than other workers.

The figures for the death rates of non-Covid-19 persons was widely reported in the press, and this has risen sharply as people are fearful of going to hospital even when they have life-threatening symptoms.

What worries me is that, as well as privatisation projects being rushed through, previously busy areas will be closed going forward as it can be ‘proved’ there is ‘no need for them’.

As the lockdown is lifted, and the population starts returning to hospitals, then all services will be put back under tremendous strain. It would stain the government and health officials’ copybook if they then had to explain why they have closed wards. Therefore, it’s much easier to have the staff on hand to restaff these closed wards if the demand is there.

In the meantime, staff are facing a very insecure work life on top of the fears that they have around their own and their families’ safety.

The ‘for profit’ system in health and social care has proven entirely incapable of protecting patients and staff from this terrible virus, and government strategy has basically sacrificed our elderly population, as well as the often lowest-paid workers.

We must question our whole way of looking after our elderly. We must demand that the private social sector should be nationalised, fully funded, and managed by workers.

An NHS nurse

Management still attacking workers’ pay and conditions

The Covid-19 crisis has not stopped management from attacking the rights of health workers.

Those vulnerable workers who are shielding have been told that one of their 12 weeks must be taken as annual leave. Furthermore, because it’s not termed ‘sick leave’ they would not receive their usual enhanced pay for working unsocial hours, which means significant pay cuts for many.

In the Unison union we are fighting this, but it’s one indication of the bitter struggle that is likely to dominate the NHS in the near future.

An NHS porter

Public Zoom meeting on safety

Tories want to lift lockdown...

WORKERS SAFETY BEFORE PROFIT!

3PM Saturday 16 May

Meeting ID: 874 3501 9596 Password: 934253

nationalshopstewardsnetwork

Leicester care workers face pay cut and worse conditions

Heather Rawling
Unison union member (personal capacity)

Care home workers in Leicestershire are to be rewarded for their courage and sacrifice during this crisis with a pay cut and worsening conditions of service. But that’s alright. They will be applauded every Thursday night!

Under the cover of Covid-19, Leicestershire County Care Limited, which owns former council-run homes, has callously decided to cut the salaries of 97 employees. The worst-affected workers will see their salaries cut by nearly one third.

Covid-19 than hospital staff. So to restate these closed wards if the demand is there.

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Under the cover of Covid-19, Leicestershire County Care Ltd has callously decided to cut the salaries of 97 employees

photo Mary Finch

photo WorldSkills UK/CC

and democratically run by workers and the community. The government has shown there is money available when it has a mind to use it. We should be demanding that the government increases the funding to local authorities to pay for the care of the old, sick and vulnerable in our communities.

The whole trade union movement should move to defend the pay and conditions of any section of workers threatened with job losses and pay cuts by employers using the pandemic to attack workers.
Transport union RMT tells members: refuse to work in unsafe conditions

RMT union statement

The RMT has issued fresh advice to members not to work in unsafe Covid-19 conditions, warning that confused government messaging could have lethal consequences.

The fresh guidance to members across rail and tube is to refuse to work where safety is compromised. The union warning has come as it has become clear that the government is shifting away from the stay at home message, unleashing a surge in passengers on rail and tube, breaching social-distancing measures with potentially lethal consequences for both staff and the public.

In a circular to members issued on 10 May, the union says:

"Your national executive committee has considered this matter and stated our total opposition to breaches of social distancing. We had only previously agreed to take part in a process to discuss such changes which had been intended to commence and be implemented from 18 May."

RMT has no confidence in the government to manage the lockdown

Given the confusion and mixed messaging generated by the government in recent days, RMT has no confidence in the ability of the government to manage lockdown or its easing.

To be clear no agreement has been made to change any working practices or social distancing arrangements from 12 May.

Legal right

Therefore if two metre social distancing cannot be maintained we consider it to be unsafe and members have the legal right to use the ‘worksafe’ process. On London Underground they have the legal right to use the refusal to work policy. RMT will fully back any member who uses this process to ensure their safety.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said:

"This trade union will not sit back while confused and conflicting messaging from the government raises the prospect of a surge in passengers on our transport services, making a mockery of the social distancing rules with potentially lethal consequences.

"We are reissuing and reinforcing advice to our members not to work in conditions where their health and safety is clearly compromised. No employer should be sending their staff out to work in those kind of conditions and we are putting the industry on the clearest possible notice. "We’ve seen the spin in advance of the prime minister’s speech tonight. We are taking clear and decisive action now to protect our members."

West Midlands trade union activists discuss the battle for safety on the front line

West Midlands Socialist Party members

Socialist Party members in the West Midlands met online in a forum to talk through workplace situations during the coronavirus pandemic, and discuss strategy to defend workers’ health against some truly despicable management practices from the private and public sectors.

The meeting included tax officers, teachers, union staff, probation officers, railway staff, shop and warehouse workers and more, as well as workers recently made unemployed.

We heard that some Ministry of Justice and HMRC office management have been flagrantly ignoring government advice on working from home. We heard that most supply teachers have been furloughed, but no money has been paid out from the furlough scheme yet.

And that rail staff have had to fight for weeks to get social distancing in work. Despite heaps of praise for shop workers by their employers, supermarket senior management have utterly failed in protecting their staff by denying them PPE and anything close to social distancing.

Success in health and safety has only been won by the organised determined action of workers. Vigilant campaigns have ensured adequate PPE, social distancing, remote working, and even furloughing at 100% pay.

Action success

In an incredible success of workers’ action, one non-unionised office in the West Midlands organised its own rotas to ensure skeleton staff to keep the office functioning, keeping the majority of workers home and the rest safely distanced. Management there had insisted they would all need to be in the office, but the workers forced the managers to adopt their rota model.

Many workers have successfully struggled to ensure their safety from coronavirus in the West Midlands and across the country, but too often this has been with the absence of trade union leaders.

The leaderships of some of the biggest unions in the UK, representing hundreds of thousands of workers, have failed to lead the fight to defend their members’ safety. In this meeting Socialist Party members spoke out against union right wingers and careerists who have been far too concerned with bureaucracy and stalled negotiations with the government and employers, risking workers’ safety week after week in a rapidly changing situation.

During and after the coronavirus crisis there will be massive attacks on workers as the capitalist class seek to recuperate their losses and minimise any increased consciousness among workers. Events so far have only been a small test in terms of what fighting leadership is needed from trade unions as the core organisations to defend the working class.

"One non-unionised office forced the managers to adopt their rota model!"
Laurie Spivack's book on the 1918 flu pandemic was first published in 2017. Now, in the midst of a new global pandemic in its third wave, his book is more relevant than ever.

Spivack gives a global and vivid account of the huge effects of what was probably the biggest pandemic in history. Yet, as he explains, in popular history it is remembered mainly as an adjunct to the World War One.

It is estimated, however, that one in three people on the planet became infected and somewhere between 10 and 50 million people died, compared to 1.5 million in the course of the entire conflict.

In Britain, the war was the biggest killer, but there was still a gigantic 224,860 who died from the flu, and between the two events almost a million lives were wiped out.

Spivack gives a global and vivid account of the huge effects of what was probably the biggest pandemic in history.

And, of course, the global troop movements resulting from the war were the main transmission belt for the pandemic virus to spread outside the world in which the existence of viruses might have been thought of as an anachronism. But, like today’s, war by definition wiped out whole populations. The Spanish flu also arrived in Britain in 1918, bright red blood but not so catastrophic. The result: low death rates. In 1918, the first wave killed 224,000 who died from the flu, and between the two events almost a million lives were wiped out.

The same approach was taken by doctors who had “the ability to study the virus” and “the capacity to understand people’s lives.” But it might kill numbers closer to 1918 than today. Scientists had appreciated that the model was not the same as before.

But what Spinney is describing is the effects of the 1918 pandemic - a death toll of somewhere between 50 and 100 million people, with the death rate in Spain of 900 per 100,000 population would catch it, but also the workers’ movement in many countries. However, as she also explains, in popular history it is remembered mainly as an adjunct to the World War One.

In Britain, it took until 1948 for the NHS, in the form of the National Health Service (NHS), to be established. In Russia, the Soviet government, led by Lenin, was the first to implement a centralised, fully public healthcare system, putting in place a comprehensive system of universal healthcare.

In Britain, despite a propaganda campaign telling people to avoid crowds, no concrete measures were taken to shut workplaces or prevent overcrowding on public transport. In 1924, the Soviet government put it about the events of a century later. It was in the USSR that the first Soviet pandemic was reported, in the practice of centralised, fully public healthcare system.

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In Britain, in 1918, the socialist party general secretary Hannah Sell quoted from Spivack’s book in 2017, with the arrival of ‘Asian flu’, which was certainly not Spain - but was the result of its origin - between the two events almost a million lives were wiped out.

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Safe social-distancing car-cavalcade protests - 14th May

Sheffield Socialist Party

Sheffield: Sheffield, Test, PPE

With the city’s roads and kerbside and public spaces, Sheffield Trade Union Council (SU)cape calls the impact on workers, including drivers, “devastating”. With thousands of key workers still driving to work, the council wants local authorities to consider a PPE levy a 50% tax on the wealthiest in the UK - combined wealth of £700 billion - and introduce a basic in- kind public health test and trace service, to enable patients to avoid the high cost of car-crash Private lab tests.

Newham Lives Matter

Newham trade union council organised a car-cavalcade through the streets of Newham to demonstrate the NHS threat to our health service - another £45 million from local services.

Neil Ferguson

Government scientist Neil Ferguson raised the question of why, after testing some thousands of patients, only 10% of those tested were found to have the virus. “Testing it’s possible we need to re-design the test,” he said. “If only the public sector was a little more complex and hard to identify.”

Our borough can’t take anymore.

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PANDEMIC SHORTAGES CAUSED BY CAPITALIST MARKET - SOCIALIST PLANNING IS THE ALTERNATIVE

by caPitalist market - which have already suffered at the hands of bosses. And additional barriers will have come from America; 90% of Cape town’s ventilators are assembled in the UK. They are being assembled, not just using parts more easily available, but also in sufficient quantities for its rapid and widespread distribution. In this crisis, capitalist nations have turned inwards. Governments and businesses will take all of the normal steps to come through. Some of these will be important, and in what quantities. Rather than that basis, these elected committees could allocate resources to expand production as necessary. Nationalisation of big business means that the naturalisation of the benefits is essentially synchronized. The banks can be regulated, and it can be stopped in its tracks. The non-bank sector is already suffering from the effects of the crisis. These articles analyse the policy responses of the key actors. The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI - the socialist international) runs a weekly analysis of current events. The analysis is vitally necessary in food, pharmaceuticals, and how ODH sections are to be made safe and effective are the leading questions. The alternative is for the state to make the benefits available, and to put these needs through. The weekly analysis is available online at cwi.org.uk and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism - its class struggle against the capitalists. The ideology of the capitalists is that we are all in this together. But they can only be solved on the basis of profit and beggar-thy-neighbour logic has been linked to spreading the coronavirus. Level 2. The Lucas workers knew what was needed in 50% of Cape town’s ventilators are assembled in the UK. They are being assembled, not just using parts more easily available, but also in sufficient quantities for its rapid and widespread distribution. This regional and industry-wide cooperation could allocate resources to expand production as necessary. Of course, planning to produce a successfully tested vaccine in quantitative sufficient numbers is capital at risk now. The Lucas workers knew what was needed in 50% of Cape town’s ventilators are assembled in the UK. They are being assembled, not just using parts more easily available, but also in sufficient quantities for its rapid and widespread distribution.
Early in the Great Depression, Trotsky's prophetic struggle would not be in vain. After two decades of hardship and suffering, the US Atchafalaya flood, laying the basis for what was to become widespread drought and soil erosion, was feared as a further 18%. It was seen as vital to keep the West Germans from taking action. Improved food supplies were needed to prevent widespread hunger, with many millions in western Europe suffering from the collapse of the European food supply. The situation in Germany was on its knees - crippled by the effects of the Great Depression of 1929 and the early years of World War II.

The German trade unions found themselves in a difficult position as the economy began to recover. They had to balance the need for action to prevent further hardship with the desire to avoid sparking a counter-revolution. The trade unions and the government entered into a series of deals known as the “Sachulstätte,” or “Labor Peace Agreement,” which allowed for the coexistence of capitalism and state control. This approach allowed for the maintenance of a semblance of stability, but it also meant that the working class had to accept a reduced role in decision-making.

The 1945-1949 period was a time of transition and change in Western Europe. The end of the war brought about a new era of politics and economics. The Marshall Plan, launched in 1947, was a significant initiative aimed at helping European economies recover from the devastation of the war. The plan provided large sums of money to help set up industries and to modernize existing ones. It was an attempt to prevent the spread of communism in Europe and to promote Western values.

In the US, the trade unions were faced with a difficult decision. They had to keep the workers happy enough to prevent a major revolt, but at the same time, they had to work with the government to prevent the spread of communism. The situation was complicated by the fact that many workers were supportive of the government's policies, while others were not.

The German trade unions were also faced with a similar dilemma. They had to keep the workers happy enough to prevent a major revolt, but at the same time, they had to work with the government to prevent the spread of communism. The situation was complicated by the fact that many workers were supportive of the government's policies, while others were not.

In Western Europe, the ruling classes could not follow the same course as in the US. They were faced with a much more difficult situation. The working class was much more militant, and the government was much more interventionist. The situation was complicated by the fact that many workers were supportive of the government's policies, while others were not.

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In conclusion, the 1945-1949 period was a time of transition and change in Western Europe. The end of the war brought about a new era of politics and economics. The Marshall Plan, launched in 1947, was a significant initiative aimed at helping European economies recover from the devastation of the war. The plan provided large sums of money to help set up industries and to modernize existing ones. It was an attempt to prevent the spread of communism in Europe and to promote Western values.

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A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

For international socialist cooperation

No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed

Socialist planning not capitalist chaos

PPE for all NHS and frontline staff

Tests and full pay for all

Government should take over other industries and convert production where necessary, under the democratic control of workers in those industries and in the wider workforce, to guarantee the supply of PPE, medical equipment and testing. Not a penny to the profiteers

Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis

Reintroduce full student nurse bursaries, and waive their student debt immediately

Immediate 10% wage rise for all NHS staff and social care workers

Resources to be mobilised from government and big-business sources so that free, accessible testing with rapid results is available for all frontline staff, workers interacting with the public, patients transferred into social care and anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms. Requisition all private testing and analysis facilities. Massively increase the number of contact tracers

Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privatisers and cancel all the billions of pounds in annual PFI payments. End profit in social care and bring it into the public sector under democratic working-class oversight

Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production and supply of medicines, vaccines and treatments

Suspend fees for overseas NHS patients - treat all patients for free without the need to register to control the spread. Scrap prescription charges

Public services and housing

Emergency funding to take on more workers in essential services. Resources to protect workers, patients, and service users

Councils to coordinate local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies to the needy and vulnerable with the democratic oversight of trade union and community organisations. Scrap existing cuts budgets. Demand that the government nationally finance all additional spending necessary to deal with the coronavirus crisis, as well as releasing the resources to reverse a decade of austerity

24-hour, adequately staffed, local authority helplines for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate

Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and service users

Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers, under the democratic control of education and care workers, with adequate protection for all. No delay in food vouchers for children normally in receipt of free school meals. Vouchers must reflect the real costs of providing a nutritious daily meal

No worker should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage, rent and council tax payments should be waived for the duration of the crisis and arrears written off. Democratically controlled local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need

Councils to use their powers to take over empty homes to house the homeless, those in inadequate housing and those fleeing domestic violence. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation

Funding for 24-hour helplines and increased spending on refuges and safe emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence

No action to be taken for non-payment of utilities. Free broadband for all

Trade union and workers’ action

For the Trade Union Congress and the unions, the biggest voluntary national organisation with over six million members across the country, to prepare to lead national coordinated strike action to protect people should necessary health and safety measures not be taken

Democratic trade union oversight over any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus

No erosion of workers’ right to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties

No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers

No trust in the Tories and other pro-capitalist politicians who are responsible for the crisis in the NHS and other public services to deal with the coronavirus crisis. For a mass workers’ party, drawing together workers, young people, socialists and activists from workplaces and communities, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting political alternative to the pro-big business parties

The resources are there to deal with the crisis. Introduce an immediate 50% levy on the hoarded £1750 billion lying idle in the bank accounts of big business

The capitalist market system that prioritises profit and is based on competition cannot keep society safe. We need a democratic socialist plan of production and distribution to meet the needs of the majority in society. Take into public ownership the banks, financial institutions and the top 150 companies that dominate the British economy and run them under the democratic control and management of working-class people so that we can make the decisions about what is needed. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need

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