



Salvation Army
International Heritage Centre

Darkest England Gazette Research Guide

Labour campaigns



THE COAL WAR.

SIX WEEKS OF DESTITUTION. EATING TALLOW CANDLES.

While The Salvation Army took no political stance either in support or deprecation of strike action and labour rights, it features prominently in accounts of many strikes of the late nineteenth century, including the high-profile London Dockworkers' Strike of 1889 and the lesser-known Miners' Strike of 1893. This was because The Salvation Army consistently offered material support in these long-drawn-out conflicts during which strike funds were insufficient to provide food for striking workers and their dependants. Thus, without taking political sides, and often while actively hoping for an end to labour conflicts, it played an important role in the continuation of these disputes and sometimes contributed to striking workers' and trade unions' victories at an historical moment when the labour movement was gaining strength and influence.

Dock labour

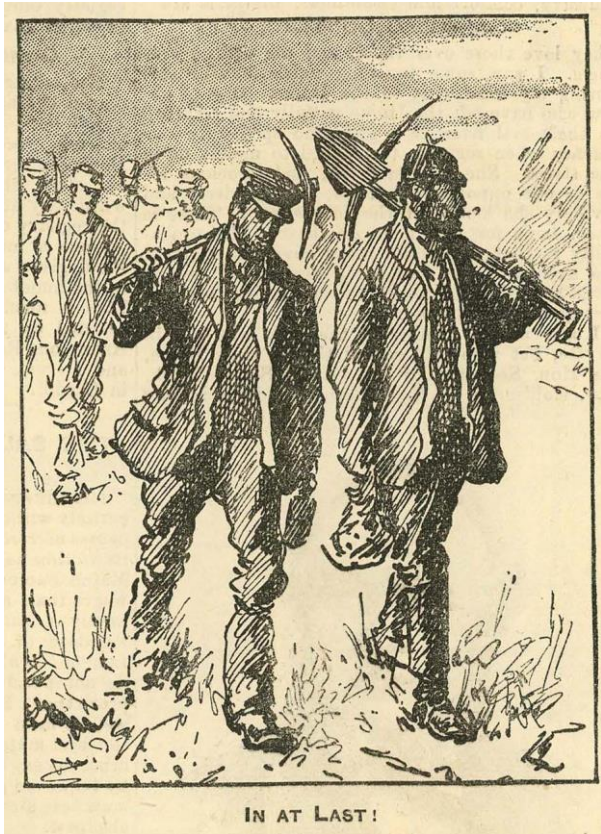
The *Gazette's* interest in London's docks and their labourers stemmed from the 1889 Dockworkers' Strike, an event that had received global coverage and widespread support. The strike, which had lasted from August until November, had seen highly casualised workers who competed for short shifts of underpaid manual work loading and unloading ships in the Port of London organise and form a trade union to demand a set duration for shifts at a fixed rate of pay. Throughout the strike, The Salvation Army provided food for the striking workers and their dependants. The strike culminated in the capitulation of the dock owners who agreed to the terms laid down by the union leaders regarding hours and wages for dock labour.

One objection that was made to the establishment of the dockworkers' union, however, was that this excluded workers who were not union members from seeking casual shifts at the docks. The *Gazette* addressed this issue in its double article 'The Regimentation of Dock Labour' in **issues 29 and 30**. The reporter interviewed two dock workers, only one of whom was a union member, to discuss how the circumstances of dock labour had changed and to answer the question:

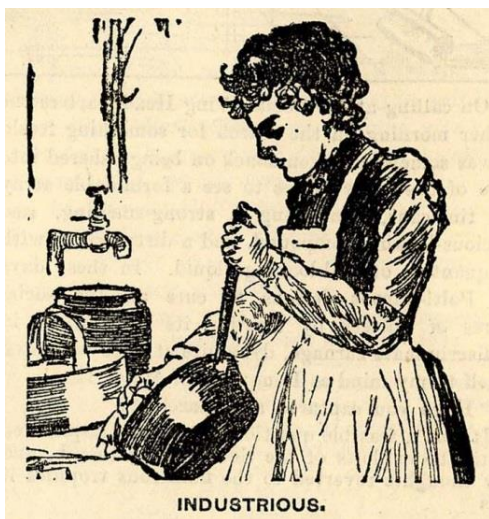
Is it better than of old? Has the great strike benefited the dock labourer individually and has it been the means of accomplishing what its originators anticipated it would, namely, the greatest good to the greatest number?' (**issue 29**).

Miners' Strike, 1893

The relatively little-known miners' strike of 1893 was a response to a proposed 25% cut to miners' wages as a result of a steep drop in the price of coal. The strike took place on a national scale, and lasted from August until December. The *Gazette* of 23 September (**issue 13**) recorded that the striking workers and their families had already suffered through 'six weeks of destitution', and special subscription funds were advertised in the paper to provide food for destitute families. The strike maintained a constant presence in the pages of the *Gazette* until 9 December (**issue 24**) when a triumphant poem announced that striking workers had returned to work and 'Coals Are Down Again!'.



Domestic service



While it was reluctant explicitly to support political labour initiatives, the *Gazette* itself sought to defend the rights of workers in one of the most inherently exploitative professions of the period: domestic service. As a group, servants were almost impossible to unionise due to the restrictions placed on their time by the nature of their work. Servants tended to live in their employers' houses, working extremely long hours, and receiving low wages as costs were deducted for their board and lodging. This live-in situation also restricted their freedom and opportunities to compare and discuss their conditions with other workers in the same position.

The Salvation Army placed many people, particularly women, who sought support from their institutions in domestic service. It also ran a dedicated Servants' Home in Notting Hill, London. Intended as 'a haven of rest to those weary workers the servant girls' (**issue 5**), it offered a refuge to domestic servants who were between jobs, sometimes because they had left exploitative working conditions. It acted as an employment agency as well, pairing employers with unemployed servants. In **issue 46**, Captain Acland, the Servants' Home Secretary, commented on the 'Domestic Servant Problem', noting the difficulties in ensuring good employment conditions for servants leaving the Home, because:

“... there is a growing request for young servants at low wages—say, under £10 a year. Many people think a servant quite necessary to keep up an appearance of grandeur, but as they really can't afford it, they look out for a girl who has lately left school, and whose mother is glad of an opportunity of her daughter getting a living.”

These practices, Captain Acland argued, made for poorly trained servants who failed to satisfy their employers' demands and who ultimately tended to leave domestic service to '[go] to a city factory, or [become] a barmaid, or a supernumerary at a theatre'. It is probable that this awareness informed the *Gazette's* decision to take up the cause of servants from **issue 1**. The first issue put forward a 'Servants' Charter' proposing eight 'articles' to improve servants' conditions in the hope of promoting harmonious domestic arrangements between 'good mistresses and good servants' and preventing young women from leaving domestic service for what it perceived to be less respectable work.

The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre,

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