

PROOF.

FABIAN TRACT, No. 38

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# The Municipalisation of the London Docks



The careless individual which allowed the control of London's riverside accomodation to pass uncontrolled into private hands has brought its own punishment. "The Docks" have as their product the casual dock-labourer of the East End; and the persistent refusal of the gigantic dock companies to take any steps to organise this labour or to systematize its employment is the despair of every East End philanthropist. "The Docks" offer a potent attraction to the shiftless casual. No questions are asked; no "character" is needed; habits of decent regular work are rather in the way than otherwise. The ever-present chance of a job of this kind furnishes a perpetual addition of strength to the temptations whereby industrial character is lost.

The London "Docks" are now, by successive amalgamations, in the hands of four huge companies (the largest two of which have further combined under a Joint Committee), having an aggregate nominal capital of over twenty million pounds sterling. Particulars of this capital are given below; and it will be seen that although the companies have been competing ruinously among each other, and with the wharfingers, a net revenue of over £570,000 is yielded annually, being about 2½ per cent. on the whole nominal capital. It is to save this income from jeopardy that the directors refuse every request and neglect every suggestion made to them to diminish the evil caused by their manner of employment.

The scandal of the Docks is not so much the low wages to be earned as the uncertain nature of the employment. In order to avoid the expense of a permanent staff, labour is engaged for a few hours at a time, and left to loaf and starve when not wanted. The Dock Companies recognise absolutely no duties towards those they employ. The "Joint Committee" of the two main companies is now probably the largest individual employer of labour in London, and there can be no doubt that, for magnitude of evil effect, this chartered industrial Leviathan is the worst.

(Table showing Capital, Dividend & Income of London Dock Companies.)

London - Docks.

THE NUMBER AND GRADES OF MEN EMPLOYED (OUT-DOOR STAFF) BY EACH OF THE THREE EAST END DOCK COMPANIES HAVE BEEN ESTIMATED AS FOLLOWS:—

	London & St. Katharine Docks.	East & West India Docks.	Millwall Docks.	Total.
Foremen, &c. ... ..	400	457	300	
Police ... ..	100	114		
Artizans and Permanent Labourers ..	570	247		
Total regularly employed ... ..	1,070	818	300	2,188
Irregulars: preferred for employment ("Ticket" men or "Royals")	450	700	500	
Others (maximum employed) ... ..	3,250	1,655		
Total of irregularly employed ... ..	3,700	2,355	800	6,855
Maximum employed ... ..	4,770	3,173	1,100	9,043
Minimum employed ... ..	2,170	1,418	300	3,888
Average employed ... ..	3,270	2,129	500	5,899

Compiled from C. Booth's "Life and Labour in East London," p. 190, the large figures being added as conjectural estimates.

These statistics (which do not include the Surrey Commercial Docks, employing probably 1500 men) are much below the estimate formed in 1886 by the Mansion House Relief Committee.

"The total number of daily applicants for casual labour at all the (London) docks may be roughly put down at 20,000. . . there would be from 7,000 to 8,000 men who, having

no regular employment, daily apply, and apply in vain, for such work" ("Mansion House Relief Committee Report," 1886, p. 7). Assuming, however, that those who apply in vain for work at 6d. per hour do not exceed, *on an average*, 3,000, rising to a maximum of 5,000, the influence of this perpetual lottery is unquestionably evil. In truth, the occasional employment of this class of labour by the docks, waterside and other East End industries is a gigantic system of out-door relief" (p. 202, Booth's "Life and Labour in East London"). It creates a demoralized and vicious "leisure class." "I venture to think," says Miss Beatrice Potter, "that the existence, and, I fear the growth of this leisure class in our great cities, notably in London, is the gravest problem of the future" (*ibid.* p. 204). "The conscience of the country was awakened to the iniquity of allowing the whole factory population to be deteriorated and brutalized by overstrained and absence of all moral and sanitary regulations. Why should we suffer the greater evil of a system of employment which discourages honest and persistent work, and favours the growth of a demoralised and demoralizing class of bad workers and evil livers?" (*ibid.* p. 206).

This "greater evil" is perpetrated for the sake of the dividends of the dock shareholders. To organize permanent employment at the docks, and make the docker into as a regular a worker as the railway staff, might cost a little more money and a little more trouble than the present happy-go-lucky anarchy. No body of shareholders will make this sacrifice, or any part of it; but why should not London take over the control and management of its own docks? The Clyde, the Mersey, the Tyne, the Wear, the Severn, and the Avon are in the hands of representative public authorities; and Liverpool, Glasgow, Dublin, Bristol, Swansea, as well as most other great ports, have their docks free from private control.

There is already a public authority for the River. The "Thames Conservancy Board," formed by 21 and 22 Vic., c. 104 and 27, and 28 Vic., c. 113, has jurisdiction over the Thames from Cricklade to Yantlet Creek, and consists of 23 members nominated by the Corporation of London, the Trinity House, the Lord High Admiral, the Privy Council, the Board of Trade, and the owners of ships, river steamers, lighters, tugs, docks, and wharves. One party only seems unrepresented on this queerly composed body governing London's River, *i.e.*, the people of London. It raised, in 1886-7, £85,530; spent £75,850; and owed £102,400 (H. C., 431, 1889, p. 39.)

The substitution for the Conservancy Board of either a committee of the County Council or a representative "Dock and River Trust," with power to take over the property of the four great companies, and levy dues adequate to cover all its expenses, appears to be the best practicable means of organising the demoralised dock labourers, and so healing the spreading social ulcer of the East End. The task of managing the London Docks would be great, but no greater than that already successfully undertaken by Liverpool, where the "Mersey Docks and Harbour Board" had, in 1886-7, a capital debt of £17,006,169, with receipts of £1,405,562, and expenditure of £617,228, with £791,731 for interest and sinking fund. (House of Commons Return, 431 of 1889, p. 39.)

no regular employment, daily employ, and apply to him for such work." (Mansion House Relief Committee Report, 1857, p. 72.) Assuming, however, that those who apply in vain for work at 65. per hour do not exceed, on an average, 4,000, being to a maximum of 8,000, the influence of this perpetual lottery is unquestionably evil. In truth, the occasional employment of this class of labour by the docks, water-side and other East End industries is a gigantic system of one-door relief" (p. 208, Booth's "Life and Labour in East London"). It creates a demoralized and vicious "leisure class." "I venture to think," says Miss Beatrice Potter, "that the existence, and I fear the growth of this leisure class in our great cities, notably in London, is the gravest problem of the future" (ibid. p. 204). "The conscience of the country was awakened to the inquiry of allowing the whole factory population to be ghettoized and brutalized by overworked and ill-paid, all moral and sanitary regulations. Why should we suffer the greater evil of a system of employment which discourages honest and persistent work, and favours the growth of a demoralized and demoralizing class of bad workers and evil hivers?" (ibid. p. 200).

This "greater evil" is perpetuated for the sake of the dividends of the dock shareholders. To organize permanent employment at the docks, and make the dockers into a regular worker as the railway staff, might cost a little more money and a little more trouble than the present happy-go-lucky anarchy. No little more trouble will make this sacrifice, or any part of it; but why should not London take over the control and management of its own docks? The Clyde, the Mersey, the Tyne, the Wear, the Severn, and the Avon are in the hands of representative public authorities; and Liverpool, Glasgow, Dublin, Bristol, Swansea, as well as most other great ports, have their docks free from private control.

There is already a public authority for the River Thames. The "Thames Conservancy Board," formed by 21 and 22 Vic. c. 101 and 27, and 28 Vic. c. 118, has jurisdiction over the Thames from Chislehurst to Yantlet Creek, and consists of 28 members nominated by the Corporation of London, the Trinity House, the Dock House Admiralty, the Privy Council, the Board of Trade, and the owners of ships, river steamers, lighters, tugs, docks, and wharves. One party only seems unrepresented on this quarterly composed body, the people of London. It raised, in 1887, £25,280; spent £75,880; and owed £102,400 (H. C., 1887, 1888, p. 88).

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