

PAPER 2, Q4 AND Q5 MINI MOCK – STRIKES AND WORKING

Source A: Writer unknown, 2025, a Guardian editorial piece: ‘Birmingham’s bin strikes’

In the 1890s, a visiting American journalist described Birmingham as “the best-governed city in the world”. Inspired by the reforming spirit of its one-time mayor Joseph Chamberlain, England’s second city had become a showcase for a new kind of municipal government. Introducing better schools, libraries, parks and public baths, politicians were taking proactive responsibility for the health and welfare of the local population.

Preachers of what was then known as the “civic gospel” are thin on the ground these days.

Birmingham is currently a byword for political dysfunction, symbolised by the unhealthy piles of bin bags disfiguring its streets since an indefinite refuse workers’ strike began last month. Despite pressure from the deputy prime minister, Angela Rayner, who sat down with Unite representatives last weekend, the union and Birmingham’s Labour-run city council have now been in full-blown confrontation for close to six weeks. The impact has been particularly gruesome in poorer areas, where residents cannot afford the costs of commercial waste clearance. Desperate to finally score some political points after months of lacklustre leadership by Kemi Badenoch, the Conservative party and right-leaning media have been making a drama out of a crisis. Visiting Handsworth, Mrs Badenoch’s cabinet colleague/rival Robert Jenrick portrayed the mounting rubbish as symptomatic of a national malaise. GB News has launched a campaign to “Stop trashing Britain”. The reality is somewhat less apocalyptic, and far more specific to a city that has endured a perfect storm of maladministration.

The proximate cause of the strike is an attempt by councillors to cut bin service costs by reducing the number of workers and – in some cases – their pay rates. But the origins of the mess go back to the disastrously expensive failure of a new software system introduced by the council, and a landmark equal pay settlement which left it liable for payouts totalling hundreds of millions of pounds. Having declared effective bankruptcy in 2023, councillors have substantially hiked council tax while cutting services to the bone.

The 1.1 million or so residents in the United Kingdom’s largest unitary authority are thus receiving the rawest of raw deals. The government has urged Unite to accept the latest council offer aimed at ending the dispute, which includes a commitment to redeployment and a voluntary redundancy scheme.

Source B: Montagu Williams, 1894, ‘Round London: down east and up west’

IT is very difficult to make those who have always lived in a cheerful and comfortable home—and who have never had the opportunity or inclination to contrast their own happiness with the misery of the poorer classes—understand how an empty cupboard, starving children, and a sick wife can make life so hideous as to be almost intolerable; how night can be robbed of the blessing of sleep through the whole family being huddled together in one miserable little room ; and how damp walls and a leaky roof can make the best-tempered person uncomfortable, peevish, and finally ill.

In these papers on life in the East End I shall place before the reader truthful pictures of some of the places I have visited, and some of the industries I have investigated, in that quarter of London.

There are six or seven match manufactories in the East End, and they give employment to some thousands of women and girls. Until within a few years ago this industry was associated with a system of slavery of the very worst description; but I am happy to say that since the great strike at Bryant and May’s in 1880, matters have considerably improved.

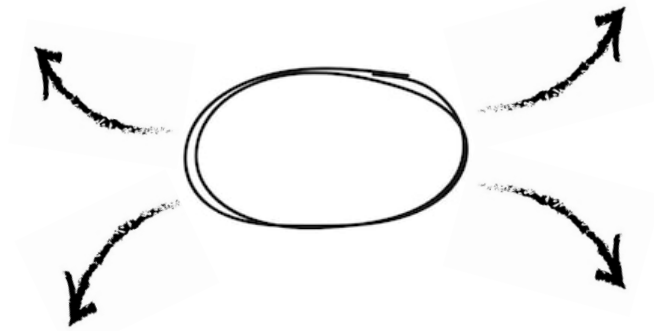
This firm, or, rather, company, is the largest of the kind in London, and, in the busy seasons, employs about twelve [-13-] hundred hands. In 1877 the business paid a dividend at the rate of twenty-five per cent., and at that time the hours of work were from six a.m. to six p.m. in the summer, and from eight a.m. to six p.m. in the winter, an hour being allowed for dinner and half an hour for breakfast. The earnings of the great majority of the girls were from four shillings to eight shillings a week. Strict discipline was maintained, and penal-ties were inflicted for the slightest breach of the regulations. If, for instance, a girl arrived at the factory five minutes behind time, she was frequently shut out for half a day; and for any little act of untidiness, such as omitting to clear away the litter from under the bench, a fine was imposed.

It should be understood that box-making is a very important branch of the industry, and is largely carried on by the girls and their parents in their own homes.

[illegible]

QUESTION 5

"Teenagers are often taught to work hard and aim high — but when they enter the real world, they discover that many jobs still offer long hours, low pay, and little respect. This needs to change"
Write a letter to your MP giving your views on working conditions.

[illegible]