

Swiss Government has made overtures to the other Powers with a view to some international regulation of labour being agreed upon; and the French Chamber of Deputies some time ago passed a Bill enacting a ten hours day, with a weekly holiday—thus making a greater reduction on the hours than we propose to make here, as the French have hitherto worked twelve hours a day on six days of the week.

The causes which create an unemployed class in Britain have similar effects abroad; though Continental Governments have a more humane method of dealing with their unemployed. When in France or Germany it is found that a number of men are out of employment a draft is made upon the public funds, and a grant is given to certain capitalists to be applied to increased production on condition that they will provide work for the idle hands, and that they will send the goods manufactured in this way out of the country. This is what is known as the bounty system, which is telling so severely on some of our own industries—foreign capitalists so subsidised being able to greatly undersell British manufacturers. It is reasonable to suppose that Continental politicians should be desirous of seeing the working day shortened, as a reduction of the hours would relieve them of the necessity of appropriating public funds for the carrying on of this bounty system.

It will thus be seen that the chief obstacle to the introduction of an eight hours day is neither an industrial nor an economic obstacle, but an intellectual one; that the main difficulty which advocates of this scheme of adjustment have to surmount is the difficulty of getting people to believe it possible and desirable of realisation.

I have endeavoured to answer the first and second categorical objections to the enforcement by Government of an eight hours day: with the third and last and least important objection I shall now deal. Re-stated it is (3) That if the workers want it they can get it for themselves—that is, by refusing to work more than eight hours a-day.

It is worth noting that this statement, with the objection to State-interference which it embodies, has been advanced, not so much by Trades Unionists themselves, as by middle-class members of Parliament. Thirty years ago the capitalist class denounced Trades Unions because of their alleged tendency to sap the manly independence which had formerly characterised the British workman; and when to-day we find the same class extolling these combinations as the self-helpful perfection of that manly independ-