

substantially improving the condition of its members without Government aid unless the circumstances are very exceptional.

The Trades Unions of Britain are more and more sinking into the position of mere benefit societies. The strongest of them cannot put a stop to overtime nor regulate the number of apprentices—two of the leading objects for which they exist. Everywhere we find engineers working overtime more or less, and everywhere we find engineers in greater or less numbers helping to swell the army of unemployed; yet the Amalgamated Society of Engineers is the most powerful and inclusive trade combination in the kingdom. With the Scottish Typographical Association (also a strong and well-supported organisation) the apprentice question constitutes a standing difficulty, the rule fixing the proportion of apprentices to journeymen being in most branches of the Association more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The Executive has sent to the Aberdeen Branch (of which I am a member\*) one admonitory remit after another, urging upon the Branch the necessity of taking action to bring the proportion of apprentices into conformity with the rule. Committees have been formed to deal with the matter, on one of which I have sat. The Committees have deliberated, reported, and suggested compromises, which have been rejected; circulars have been sent to the employers, soliciting, and latterly demanding, their co-operation in limiting the number of apprentices; but nothing has yet been accomplished, nor is the outlook at all hopeful. During the last six years hundreds of pounds have been paid out of the funds in out-of-work benefit and removal grants; yet the numbers signing the call-book as unemployed are this year substantially the same as ever. To make matters more desperate for the Unions, in the printing as in many other industries female labour is in some quarters largely employed. What has been said of the Engineers' and Printers' Unions is in a greater or less degree true of all trade societies. In view of such facts as these, is it not a little preposterous for Members of Parliament to tell the workers that if they want an eight hours day they can get it by striking for it?

But even if the Trades Unions could secure an eight hours day by means of strikes, no sincere friend of the workers would advise them to make the attempt if their end could be gained by

---

\* Since the above was written I have become an employer, and am thus ineligible for membership in the Union. I ought to add that some progress has been made with the apprentice question: the influx of boys to the trade has been at least considerably abated.