Chapter - III

Strive of the Common Man

STRIFE
Strife, meaning strike, is not only the conflict between the capitalist and the proletariat that Marx had predicted as an inevitable stage. The capitalist exploitation of the labour, the failure of negotiations leading to the overthrow of the capitalist system forms the structure of a Marxian work. Liver Raymond Williams literary texts have been disenssed as setting up conflicts between the base and superstructure, the former representing the working class and the latter the capitalist class. Long before the advent of working class writers like Arnold Wesker, Galsworthy inspite of his aristocratic background, pioneered the Marxian literature. Strife needs to be read as a forerunner of Look Back In Anger which dramatises class conflict and Wesker’s trilogy which represents the working class struggle against the capitalist system.

The play also, in the words of R.M. Mottram, deals with that

“great wastage that takes place when antagonism is sufficiently bitter and sustained to leave the fighters, the best equipped shock troops on either side, still fighting long after the principles for which they fight have been forgotten and most of their adherents made peace and gone home.”¹.
The play **Strife** takes place on 7th February in the afternoon, close to Trenartha Tin Plate works on the borders of England and Wales. The workers of this factory have been on strike since October. As it is Winter the workers have been suffering terribly due to cold and starvation. The factory is in loss. They have lost fifty thousand pounds. The strike has been going on because of the uncompromising attitude of Mr. Anthony, the chairperson of the company and Roberts, the leader of the workers.

The play opens with the Board meeting taking place in the dining room of Mr. Underwood, the manager of the factory. A special meeting of Board of Directors had been called to review the strike situation and to discuss the question with Harness, an official of the Union and the representatives of the workers.

Mr. Anthony presides over the meeting. He is a typical capitalist who believes that the workers should be paid as little as possible and should be dealt with an ironhand. The other directors of the company are Mr. Wilder, Mr. Scantlebury, Mr. Wanklin and Mr. Edgar Anthony, the son of Mr. Anthony. Edgar is very sorry about the sufferings of the labourers and their families caused by the prolonged strike. Wilder, Scantlebury,
Wanklin are worried about the loss of the company and want to put an end to the strike.

As the meeting starts, Mr. Wilder says that the fire in the fireplace is very hot and asks to put a screen in front of it. This device is shown by the dramatist to show the difference between the capitalists who enjoy and are comfortable in their warm rooms and the labourers who are suffering from cold and starvation.

Edgar has great sympathy for the workers and their families. He reads out an extract from a local newspaper. The paper said that if the Directors who control the factory from their arm-chair in London would condescend to come and see for themselves the condition of the workers during the strike even their hard hearts would melt with pity. Wilder says that the editor is "a ruffian" and should be shot dead. Enid brings a screen and puts it in front of the fire. Tench reads about the last meeting of Directors in which it was resolved that a special meeting should be held on 7th of February at the house of the Manager to discuss the situation with Mr. Harness and the representatives of the workers.

Mr. Wanklin asks Tench about the game of Union. Tench replies that the Union did not support the strike of the workers
of Trenartha Tin plate works because they thought that if the demands of the workers were reasonable then their demands regarding the wages of engineers and furnacemen were excessive. They were afraid that if they supported the demands of the engineers and furnacemen at Harper’s and Tinwell’s factories would go on strike. But inspite of the lack of support from the Union, the strike continued for more than four months. This was because of the workers leader Mr. Roberts Wilder says that the strike is ruining their company and there is no compromise between capitalists and workers. The company is in loss. It is losing its customers and the value of their shares is going down.

Tench reveals that due to the strike, the company has lost fifty thousand pounds. This shocks the Directors. Wilder thinks that when the workers have sent Roberts to them in December they should have accepted some of the demands. But Anthony refuses to surrender. He is not prepared to accept any compromise.

Scantlebury asks Anthony to think of the interests of the shareholders. Edgar says that they should think of the sufferings of worker’s families. But Anthony is adamant. He says that if they gave way to the workers once they would soon come up with new demands. He replies that he has always fought against
the workers and none could beat him to that day. Wilder says that Roberts is leading the strike because he has a personal grievance against the management. Edgar says that they did not pay him enough for his discovery. Tench tells them that the company has paid him seven hundred pounds for his discovery out of which they made a hundred thousand pounds.

Wilder suggests that they should utilise the services of Harness to get the whole thing settled. Underwood says that Roberts would not let the men accept any compromise. Scantlebury says that Roberts is a fanatic person. Wilder says that he is not the only fanatic. At this moment Harness comes to the meeting. Now the Directors stop discussing among themselves. Harness tells them that the workers are far more in the right than they. The question arises among themselves whether they should start supporting the workers. Anthony says that they should start employing workers. He says that they would break the strike by employing free labour. But Harness tells that they can not have free labour. He tells the directors frankly the attitude of the Union. They are not supporting the workers because their demands regarding the engineers and furnace men are in excess of the rates prevailing in other factories. Harness says that he would persuade the workers to withdraw their demands that afternoon and if they do so, the
Union will support them. He asks the directors to stop war with the labourers. He tells them to recognise those people are men like themselves and they want what is good for them as we want for us. He asks them to end in a compromise and to make a firm and a right decision. Pity is not important for workers, they need justice to be done. He asks the directors to take their final decision only after they have discussed the question with the workers. Anthony nods and agrees to it.

Roberts, Green, Bulgin, Thomas and Rous come in. They are offered chairs but Roberts says that they would prefer to stand in the presence of Directors. Mr. Anthony asks them the purpose of their visit. Roberts says that they have come to hear what the Board has to say. Mr. Anthony replies that the Board has nothing to say. Then Roberts says that they are wasting the Director's time and they start to move. Wanklin speaks very politely to Roberts and detains him. Thomas tries to say something but he is not able to continue. Anthony tells Roberts that since the men had asked for this conference the Board wishes to hear what they have to say. Thomas tries to say something but he is unable to continue his talk. Roberts says that if he were to tell something about the workers lives, it would take him the whole day and if the Directors hear all the complaints they would never come there. Harness asks him to
explain his proposals clearly and be reasonable. Roberts asks them to come to their quarters to see the sufferings of their families. Roberts sarcastically tells him to take some champagne with his lunch. Thomas says that they only want justice. Robert tells him that they cannot expect justice from these Directors. He reminds Thomas that when he has gone to London to present the point of view of the workers, Mr. Anthony had told him they were discontented dogs—'never satisfied' and that he was foolish, uneducated man who knew nothing of the wants of men he spoke for. Anthony tells him that there could be only one master, meaning that it is 'capital'. Roberts says that the labour will be the master. They remain silent. Underwood suggests that Roberts may permit the other workers to speak. They only stammer some words. Scantlebury tells Roberts to let the poor men call their souls their own. Roberts replies that the men should certainly be allowed to keep their souls intact because their bodies were languishing due to the actions of their employers.

When Wilder says, "Thank God ". Roberts says bitterly that his God is a wealthy God who has no time to listen to the grievances of the workers. Roberts says that they have been exploited so much that they cannot be squeered any more as everyone of them are starving. But though they are starving they
would prefer death to surrender. He wants to know whether their demands would be accepted. He says that they would not change their demands. Anthony tells him plainly that they would not accept a single one of their demands. Roberts warns the Directors that if they were thinking that the men would surrender in a week or two they were wrong. He warns Anthony that this would be the last fight of his life. Anthony remains calm and adjourns the meeting till 5 p.m.

Everyone is shocked at the events that had taken place. When the worker's representatives have left Harness comments that neither side had shown any conciliatory spirit. When Harness leaves Enid comes to announce that lunch is ready. The Directors start moving. Enid now tells them that she wants to talk to her father alone. Wanklin and Underwood leave. Tench is collecting the papers. Enid suggests to him that he should go and have lunch. When he leaves Enid shuts the door and asks her father whether the strike is settled. He says no and tells her that he doesn't want to come to any compromise. She tells him that the workers are suffering a lot and Robert's wife Annie is in a miserable state. Her heart is weak and since the strike began she has not been getting even proper food. Anthony asks his daughter to give Annie what she needs. But Enid says that Roberts doesn't allow her to take anything from them. Enid tells
her father to stop the strike and the suffering caused by it. She says that he is not giving any way to solve the problem.

Anthony tells her to remain interested in novels and music and not to advise him on matters of business. The problem of this industrial struggle is too far reaching or her to understand. If the demands of the workers are met they will ask for more and more. Her culture and her comforts would then disappear and they would face the same problem like the labourers whom she is pitying Enid does not understand what relation all this has with the strike. Anthony says that it will take one or two generations to understand the significance of this class struggle. Enid says that the strike will ruin the company. Anthony tells her that she should allow him to be the best judge of that. Enid tells him that she can not stand by and let poor Annie Roberts and the children of the workers suffer. She tells him that the strike is putting too much strain on him and Dr. Fisher has advised him not to take strain. She appeals to him to think of his children and change his rigid state.

Tench then enters on the pretext of getting some papers signed. After Anthony has signed the papers he tells him that he depends entirely on the company for his livelihood and he is passing sleepless nights because he sees the fortunes of the
company declining. He tells that the Directors are going to overthrow him as chairman if he continued to stick to his strong views. This upsets Anthony. He asks Tench to ring the bell. When his servant Frost comes he asks him to bring whisky and soda. He tells him that doctor has advised him not to take drink on an empty stomach. Frost comes closer to him and says that the strike is putting too much strain on him. Anthony is left alone.

In the afternoon of the same day Mrs. Roberts a thin and dark haired women of about 35 is seen sitting in an old arm chair in her cottage. She looks weak but her eyes show patience. There is a meager fire because there are very few coals. The other women in the kitchen are Mrs. Yeo Mrs. Rous, Mrs. Bulgin and Madge Thomas who is twenty two years old.

Mrs. Yeo says that in the whole of that week she had received only six pence. She notices that Mrs. Rous, an old lady, is shivering. So she asks her to come near the fireplace although there was not much fire in it. Mrs. Rous recalls that the winter of 1879, when her husband died was the severest. That year Mrs. Roberts was only seven years old. Her husband was working on the acid in the factory and got a poisoned leg and he died two days later. She says that in those days her husband did not
get anything from the factory because there were no compensation acts. Mrs. Yeo says that this winter is the severest because of the strike.

Mrs. Bulgin says that they had been living on bread and tea for four days. She says that it is very hard for the children to feed. She makes them lie down on bed for if they run they feel hungry. Mrs. Roberts asks Mrs. Rous to have some tea. But she refuses to take as there is only one cup of tea and she tells her to keep it for Roberts. The three women leave.

Madge Thomas is very much opposed to Roberts. She is in love with George Rous, the son of Mrs. Rous who is a strong supporter of Roberts. She tells George that she can not have her as long as he supports Roberts. She tells that the suffering of the workers is due to Roberts. She wants her father and George Rous to lead the men against Roberts and end the strike. She tells Mrs. Roberts that Harness and workers have come and they have to decide that afternoon whether they should continue to support the demands of the engineers and the furnace men. Annie says that Roberts would never give up the cause of the engineers and the furnace men. Madge replies that it is because of Robert's pride that the strike continues. Enid Underwood now comes to meet Mrs. Roberts. She asks how she is feeling. She
replies that she is feeling better. Enid asks her why she had sent back the articles of food sent by her. Annie tells her that she did not need those things. Enid in reply says her that Roberts is the main person to cause suffering among the workers. Madge in anger tells Enid not to come again and spy on them. Annie requests Enid to forgive Madge. Annie says that the workers say that it is because of Enid’s father that there is no compromise. Enid agrees with this. She wants to know what she can do to help her. She notices that Annie doesn’t even have coal. Annie tells her that Roberts has to meet the men at four. Enid asks if she can stop his going. She just smiles. Enid says that she would be alright if she gets proper nourishment.

Enid says Annie that she has sympathy with the workers but they demand more wages. Enid tells her that the share holders are really not better off than the workers. Mrs. Roberts does not believe this and only smiles. Enid adds that the workers do not have to pay taxes and if they do not waste money in drink and gambling they would not have suffering. Annie tells that the workers need some pleasure after their labour. Enid replies that Roberts does not involve in these pleasures but the other workers waste money. Annie says that according to Roberts working man’s life is all a gamble, from the time he is born to the time he dies. They live from hand to mouth. They have no
savings and whatever they have is spent and they have no money when they are sick. That’s why Roberts doesn’t want to have children. Enid tells Annie that Roberts is given large amount of money for his new process but Annie says that it has been wasted in the strike. Annie suggests Enid to go away before Robert’s comes. Enid says that she wants to meet him and promises to remain calm.

Roberts enters the room quietly. He pretends not to recognize Enid. Enid tells him that she wants to talk to him. Enid appeals him to come to some compromise at least for the sake of his wife. Roberts tells her not to appeal for the sake of her father. Roberts replies that Mr. Anthony stands for tyranny. Mrs. Roberts makes a movement to rise but sinks back in her chair. Enid tries to lift her up but Roberts shouts at her not to touch his wife. Enid says that he is mad. Roberts then tells her that the house of a madman is not fit place for a lady. Enid makes her last attempt but she fails. She tells him to have pity on his wife. Roberts says that he has no more to tell. Just then Underwood comes there looking for his wife. Roberts tells him that there is no need for him to escort his wife. Before leaving Enid makes an appeal to him for the sake of his wife. But Roberts advises her to make this appeal for the sake of her husband and her father. Enid controls her feelings and goes out.
with her husband. Roberts asks his wife whether she is feeling better. He wraps his overcoat round her. He tells his wife that he has to attend the meeting at four. He says that none but the old robber Anthony is in a mood to fight. It would be difficult for him to persuade the workers to continue the strike. He says that they are cowards. Annie suggests that men can not see their wives and children suffering. Roberts says that they only pretend. Mrs. Roberts then says that they should see the suffering of children. Then Roberts express his view that the labourers should not produce children because they are only breeding slaves. He says that they do save a penny for a time like this one. Annie tells him that it is natural for the men to lose their spirit in the face of starvation. She says that all of them are not as strong as he. Roberts tells her that his aim is to persuade the workers to send the Directors back to London without making any compromise. He thinks that they will surrender very soon. He leaves for the meeting with the determination that he would rather die than surrender.

He goes out to attend the meeting. After some time Thomas arrives there. Annie tells him that Roberts has gone to the worker’s meeting. He says that they must arrive at a compromise with the Directors. Annie tells him that Roberts will never agree for compromise. Thomas replies that there is none
to support him now except the engineers and George Rous. He has talked to the chapel people and they are in favour of ending the strike. Mrs. Roberts is worried about Mr. Roberts.

Thomas replies that Roberts has done what all he can do and now he has gone against human nature. So chapel does not support the strike. Just then Thomas daughter appears and tells him to hurry up for the meeting. She appeals to him to oppose Roberts boldly this time.

George Rous comes there. Madge tells him that if he supports Roberts it would mean killing his own mother. Rous replies that he has taken an oath to support Roberts. Madge asks him whether he cannot break his word for the sake of his love for her. Then he decides to oppose Roberts and rushes off to the meeting. Madge is happy because she has turned Rous against Roberts. She finds Annie as cold as stone and tells her that she would get some brandy. But Annie refuses. Madge hears the sound coming from the worker’s meeting and complains that women are waiting.

The workmen are crowded in an open muddy space near the high wall of the factory. Roberts stands a little away from the crowd leaning against the wall. Harness is standing on the platform and has been addressing the workers. Harness tells the
workers to be reasonable. Some of their demands are in excess of the wages in other factories. He tells them if the Union supports them they are forced to support the strikes in a dozen factories. Unions live by justice to all. Their demands are excessive at the moment and if they cut them down they would support them. He appeals to the workers to join hands with the Union and get victory. Jago asks Harness if the furnace men are paid enough. Harness replies that they are not paid enough, but they were paid as much as furnace men in other factories. Evans and Jago oppose Harness but other workers wants to turn them into blacklegs. He could rather starve than do that.

Thomas now moves towards the platform. He says that they are suffering not because of the employers or the Unions but because they had gone against nature. Chapel wants them to end the strike by accepting a compromise. He appeals to the workers to give the power to their representatives to talk to the Directors. "It is better to take their beating like men than to die like dogs". All God fearing people should accept the advice of chapel and accept compromise. The workers agree with him. Jago who represents the interests of engineers wants to go to the platform. But the workers don't accept it. He feels angry and says that everyone should have the right to say what he likes. He tells the workers that engineers and workers had at been in
same boat so afar and now it is a dirty thing for the labourers to abandon them.

Now George Rous jumps to the platform. He says that they should yield to human nature. Roberts is shocked at his attitude. Rous tells him that he has changed his mind. He agrees with Harness who say, “Stand by us and we shall stand by you”. George Rous supports the Union. He says that Roberts had told them to fight the robbers by themselves and to squeeze the breath out of them. But actually their own and that of their families are squeezed out. He says that Roberts is responsible for all their sufferings and tells them not to listen to him as his tongue has got hell fire. He supports Harness and his Union telling that without Union they are like a handful of dried leaves, a puff of smoke. He appeals to them to give them authority to negotiate terms with the employers. The crowd seems to agree with him.

Roberts now quietly ascends the platform. At first the workers are not in a mood to listen to him. Later he faces the crowd with great confidence. He controls the crowd by his powerful speech. He tells Bulgin that if he wants to break his head he can do so after his speech. He asks them if there was anyone there who stood less to gain and more to lose from the
strike than he. He is against the faith of Thomas in Nature. He says Nature is not pure or honest, just or merciful. Those who live over the hills and are going home when it is snowing at night have to fight every inch of it. A man can be a man only by fighting against nature. The principles of Thomas are only his selfishness. For his own purpose Thomas had invented the idea of chapel and Nature. He tells that Thomas wants them to go to the employers on their knees kin the hope that they will throw a crush of bread on them.

Roberts says that surrendering is the work of cowards and traitors. Harness is a clever person but they should not believe his words. He says that the Union had deserted them. He wanted to remind them what their fight was. He says that it is the fight of the country's body and blood against the blood-suckers. It is a fight of labour against exploitation. "Capital is a white faced, stony-hearted monster" which fattens on the sweat of the labourer's brow. It buys their bodies and their brains at its own price. He says that they have seen his work and paid him seven hundred pounds and they gained one hundred thousand pounds by it. They make the labourers work a lot with empty sympathy and will not give a sixpence out of their dividends to help. He appeals to the workers to give him a free
hand to tell the Directors plainly that the workers will have nothing to do with them unless all their demands are met.

He tells them that the present strike is aimed for the benefits of the labourers and their children and grand children and not for themselves alone. He says that they have to defeat the Capitalists or else their lives would become miserable. He says that they should not lose their hope when victory is within sight. The crowd is tremendously excited. Evans and Jago strongly support Roberts.

At this critical turn when the entire crowd has turned in favour of Roberts, Madge appears and tells Roberts that his wife is dying. He doesn't believe it. Thomas repeats the news. He leaps down from the platform and runs home. Madge tells the men that Roberts need not hurry as his wife is already dead. She calls the striking men as blinded hounds and warns them that if the strike continues many more wives will die.

Thomas says that Roberts has been punished as he has gone against the nature and Chapel. Evans tells them that Roberts has lost his wife in fighting for their cause so they should support him instead of over throwing. Rous, on the other hand says that Mrs. Roberts death is a warning to all the
workers. If the strike continues they will have the same tragedy in their houses. Now most of the people turn against Roberts.

Thus Roberts is overthrown in the very moment of his victory. A fight starts between supporters and opponents of Roberts. Very soon the supporters of Roberts are overpowered by the opponents. Rous sums up the feeling of the crowd by saying that they will make their terms and talks with the Union.

It is five o'clock in the evening. Edgar and Enid are seen sitting in the drawing room of Underwood. Edgar tells his sister that the strike is a beastly business and he wished that their father should not attend the Director's meeting. Enid tells Edgar that she has gone to Roberts house and has seen the condition of Mrs. Roberts. Roberts is simply killing his wife. Edgar has sympathy towards workers and says that Directors are killing her. Enid says that she does not feel half as sympathetic with them now as she did before she went there. She says that they are continuing the strike because they hate the Capitalists as a class. Enid describes the pathetic condition of Mrs. Annie and she says she still supports Roberts. The condition of the families is miserable. She hopes that her father would make some concessions to stop the strike and suffering of the workers. Edgar says that his father will not change his mind and the result will
be that he will be voted down. Enid says that other Directors will not dare to remove him from the chairmanship. Edgar says that they are panic because of the losses of the company due to strike. Enid says that it would be a shock for their father as he has worked as a chairperson for thirty years. Edgar says that his sympathies are entirely with the workers. Enid tells her brother to do all he can to support their father. Edgar promises to do all he can to prevent any embarrassment to him. He goes into the dining room.

Anthony comes into the drawing room. He asks her whether she has gone to Roberts house. She admits that she did. Anthony tells her that she is trying the impossible task of bridging the gulf that separates capital from labour. It is like filling a sieve with sand. He says that conflicts between the two classes began during Industrial Revolution. Enid says that she is thinking of what would happen to him if he is beaten in the meeting. She appeals to him not to go to the meeting as he is not well. Anthony does not listen to her and goes into the dining room where the other directors are present.

Enid tells Frost to bring the representatives of the workers to the drawing room when they come. Frost tells her that Mr. Anthony had eaten nothing the whole day. He had taken two
pegs of whisky on an empty stomach. He is very difficult person to deal with. Regarding the strike his idea is that the Directors should outwardly support Mr. Anthony and then quietly fulfill the desires or demands of the workers. If they oppose him he will become violent. He tells Enid that he had suggested Mr. Wanklin to humour Mr. Anthony. Mr. Wanklin suggested that he should tell Mr. Anthony about his principle. He asked Mr. Anthony that morning whether the strike was worth the trouble that he was taking. Mr. Anthony asked him to mind his own business. Enid asks Frost whether he knows Roberts. He says that Roberts is not one of the harmless socialists. He says that he has got prejudice against Capitalists. He is against all persons belonging to the higher classes just because he is born in a lower class. Enid asks Frost to go and ask the Directors whether they would have any tea. As Frost opens the door one can hear sounds of discussion going on between the Directors.

Madge now comes to see Enid. She tells her that Annie Roberts is dead. Madge says that Annie died of cold and hunger. She looks at Enid so bitterly if she is responsible for Annie's death. Madge says that she and her father have killed her. Enid tells her that her father is not well. Madge says that Anthony will become alright if he hears that Mrs. Roberts is dead. Madge leaves after insulting Enid.
Anthony enters the room and sits calmly on any armchair. Edgar comes and tells that Wilder had insulted him. Edgar says that Wilder had called his father as an old and feeble person and he doesn't know what he was doing. Wanklin and Scantlebury come into the room. Wanklin tells Anthony that Wilder had sent his apologies through him. Then Wilder himself comes in and asks Anthony to forgive him. Mr. Anthony accepts their apology. They all settle down and conference starts there.

Wanklin says that if the strike is not ended before the General meeting of the share holders the Directors will be severely criticised. Anthony wants them to remain firm. Wilder says that businessmen should adjust themselves according to the circumstances. Wanklin says that they are a part of a machine and they should see the profits of the company. He appeals to Anthony to bring the strike to an end. Anthony bluntly refuses.

Edgar now comes from the dining room and tells about the death of Mrs. Roberts. Edgar asserts that all of them were responsible for her death. Anthony replies that “War is War”. But Edgar tells them that they should not wage war against women. Wanklin comments that in such conflict women are generally the worst sufferers. Edgar says that he would prefer to resign his position on the Board rather than go on starving women like
this. He says that all that had happened was that they had starved one woman to death. He says that a struggle like this finds out the weak spot in everybody. If this strike would not have been like this the woman would not have died and all the misery would not have taken place, Wanklin tells him that none of them is opposed to settlement except Mr. Anthony.

Wilder then passes an amendment to the Chairman's motion that the dispute should be settled by Mr. Simon Harness. He requests the Chairman to put it to vote. Before putting it to vote Anthony gives a fine speech representing the Capitalists.

Anthony says that he has been made the target of an attack by his colleagues on the Board and he wants to answer their criticism before putting the amendment to vote. He says that he is seventy six years old and he has been working in the company as Chairman for thirty two years. He has seen the company pass through good and evil days. He fought against the workers for four times and defeated them everytime. He asserts that he is strong enough to uphold his principles. He says that the workers have received fair wages. Their complaints have been listened to. It is argued that times have changed. He says frankly that he will not change with the time. There can be only one master in a house. People say that Capitalists and labourers
have same interests. But it is not true. It is absurd. Their interests are poles apart. Wanklin had stated that the Directors are only parts of a machine but it is false. The Directors are the machine. Sentimentalism and Socialism is rotten. If some of the demands of the workers are considered they would immediately ask for more. This will ruin the company.

Anthony says that he has been fighting to protect the interests of the capitalist class of his country who are facing the threat of confusion and mob government. Then he comes to the attack which has been made upon him by his son that he is responsible for Mrs. Roberts death. He says that in a fair fight enemy has to suffer and he can not be blamed for it. They should have thought of this before they started the fight. Edgar tells him that it is not a fair fight and strike is the only weapon for the workers.

Anthony replies that employers encourage the workers to go on strike. He would never accept it. Edgar tells him that they should be merciful. Anthony replies that they should be just.

Edgar says that what he considers just may be unjust to another person. By hearing these words from his own son Anthony breaks down. His own son has accused him of injustice, inhumanity and cruelty.
Anthony says that if the amendment is carried they will be failing in their duty to themselves and to all the Capital. Infact, they will have to fly like dogs before the whips of their own workers. He tells them if they are prepared for all these things, they may vote for the amendment. He puts the amendment to vote. Except Anthony, all the Directors vote for the amendment. He resigns as Chairman telling that they have disgraced him.

The representatives of the workers are brought in. Thomas, Green, Bulgin and Rous stand in a row. Wanklin asks Thomas about their meeting. Thomas tells that Harness would speak to them on their behalf. Harness enters with a piece of paper in his hand to settle the matter. Then Roberts who doesn’t know what happened in the worker’s meeting arrives and tells Anthony to go back to London as the worker’s demands will not change and will not surrender. Harness tries to stop Roberts but he gives his speech saying that the workers will not surrender. He says that they may break the body but not their spirits.

Harness tells Roberts that he has no authority to speak and many things had happened in his absence. The Directors quickly sign the agreement. Harness tells Roberts that the agreement is signed by both sides and the strike has come to an end. Roberts is shocked and with a lot of agony and anger
he tells his fellow workers that they had deceived him. Roberts checks the agreement and sees that it is not signed by Anthony. He says that the agreement is not valid. But Harness tells that the Board has signed it and Anthony is no more a chairperson. Roberts now bursts out into a half mad laughter.

Harness tells him to go home. The word 'home' pains Roberts immensely because with the death of his wife he has no 'home'. Anthony rises with an effort, lifts his hand as it to salute Roberts but lets it fall. Roberts wonders. Anthony and Roberts bend their head to each other in a token of respect and they go out.

Tench tells Harness that it was a very painful scene. Harness says that the result of the strike is waste and suffering, a woman dead and the two best men broken. Tench replies that the agreement is the same as it was before the fight. A strife only causes unnecessary suffering. It yields no other results.

**Strife** appeals to us on many levels of meaning. It is a play about the clash between Capital and Labour, the waste of force involved in the caste feeling of capital pitted against the caste feeling of labour, the nemesis of extremism, the conflict between opposing wills, the generation gap represented by Anthony and his children—Enid and Edgar, the lack of cohesion
between leaders and followers, the conflict between two classes, the inability to change with the times lead a life of peace and prosperity, and the logic that 'fanaticism and inflexibility alike over reach themselves in a society which ought to thrive on mutual understanding, especially in trade disputes. In a bigger way, the play illustrates the idea that class is destiny. Anthony doesn't fight for himself but for his class. He represents the Capital. His belief is that masters and servants are two different classes. They have different fates and destinies. Their sensibilities, their ideologies, their attitudes are different. Masters and men cannot be equal. Where two men meet the better man will rule.

The interests of the two classes the labour and capital are poles apart. They can never be same.

Though written about a topical problem, a five month old strike in a Tin plate factory, Strife has a touch of universality in its theme. In simple terms its gist is the Marxian thesis of class struggle in history. Galsworthy points to the way of peace and prosperity in the midst of class struggles. It is the way of 'mutual understanding the way which Tench and Harness had found out before the strife began. Philosophically too, the play has a universal idea. It is, in Galsworthy's own words, the
perishing of the sword by the sword. The fatal things, says the dramatist, is strong will minus self control and balance.

In Strife Galsworthy presents conflict at various levels. The dual fight takes place between two uncompromising ideologies, Capital and labour. Simultaneously runs the tug between two individuals, Anthony and Roberts, representing these ideals respectively. Within the Capitalist group there is a tension between the two generations. Anthony the father behaves in the 'rule with the iron hand', and his children Edgar and Enid plead for a more compromising and tolerant outlook to such problems. Within the same group there are few like Scantlebury who are not so stubborn or fanatic, but on the other hand are prepared for compromise. They are ready to yield and let down even their leader as they do finally in the case of Anthony. Similarly within the Labour group we find some ideals existing. Collectively, almost following the mob – instinct, they glamour for certain general privileges but their social awareness has not yet become strong enough to withstand all pressure and resist temptations. People like Madge and Rous still have only half understood ideals. Their's is not a conscious revolt. They turn against their own leader and make black legs of themselves.
Another parallel conflicting trend is at the individual level when there is a clash between opposing ideals within one's own mind. Duty towards one's family runs counter to this type is Roberts. Galsworthy shows the disastrous effects of extremism when individuals identify themselves with the causes they represent. Roberts and Anthony in *Strife* are victims of such extremist attitudes. He made it clear that the strike theme was just a foil and that the Universal appeal was not conditioned by the exigencies of the topic. The audience should go not to see Capital and Labour 'get a hoist' but "to see human nature in the thick of fight, the heroism of die-hardism and the Nemesis that dogs it."\(^8\).

The protagonists, Anthony and Roberts are 'heroic' in their dogmatism and stubbornness. And, apart from this, they represent the eternal and universal friction of the two great powers always at work in nature, the friction between which supplies the energy that drives the world forward. Thus, in a limited sense it becomes a necessary evil and an inevitable condition for social progress.

Galsworthy is a master of situations. *Strife* abounds in such extremely tense dramatic moments. The meeting between Enid and Annie Roberts is striking instance. Enid is torn between
her affection for Annie and a sense of superiority and insult because of Robert's cynical and hostile attitude. Annie has no other choice except to stand by her husband's honour and ideals, inspite of her affection and respect for Enid. Roberts has to fight his soft feelings and evince attitude of hostility towards Enid. When the three characters meet, tension is created because they represent not only their individual selves, but clashing ideals. Another instance of Galsworthy's mastery over situations is the scene when Madge the fire brand breaks into Enid's room to inform her of Annie's death. A very suggestive and mildly symbolic touch is effected by the baby frock Enid had been stitching. Madge in her typical sardonic manner tries to make Enid feel uneasy and perturbed. A very significant contrast is drawn here by the slight touch. Madge, coming from Annie's house conveying the news of her death represents life that is barren and wasted. Annie who was longing for children had to die childless. Here is an atmosphere of waste, frustration and hopelessness, contrasted with a prosperous flowering life as envisaged by Enid.

Galsworthy's master piece is the last scene where Anthony and Roberts meet. W.L. Courtney remarks about the impact on the average audience, "It is impossible to avoid a feeling of dissatisfaction with a play which is intended to excite the keenest
interest, but which finally resolves itself into a drawn battle...ending in an impose or on a note of interrogation. But it also explains why such a drama can never be popular in the best sense of the term and must belong to the intellectual drama of a clique rather than to the nation at large."  

This criticism is not applicable to Strife because the very purpose with which it was written was quite different. Being a problem – play, it specifically concentrates on class – war and its undesirable effects.

Galsworthy claims that he is an impartial observer in the clashes between his major characters. This is true but not absolutely. In Strife, Roberts and Anthony are allowed to present their cases with utter objectivity, yet we find that Galsworthy’s sympathy is with Roberts.

A.C. ward comments,

"In the earlier part of the play, the scales are held dispassionately by the dramatist, and the audience feel only the desperate futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides. But at the end of the story, Galsworthy
destroys in a moment the illusion of impartiality." 2.

A. Nicoll states that:

"Society, that invisible presence, determines that the rich shall be preferred to the poor. So in Strife Galsworthy does not make either Anthony, director of the company, or Roberts, leader of the workers, a man who governs events. Both, possibly possess iron wills. They have determined to fight to the bitter end, but they are not individualities as the Shakespearean heroes were. Anthony takes his strength from what may be called the Capitalist faith, Roberts takes this from the faith of the rebels. Fundamentally, each is incapable of doing otherwise than he does. The play well illustrates Galsworthy's fine treatment of that tremendous impression of waste which Prof. Bradley so ably discerns in the Shakespearean drama. All the modern author's tragedies gain poignantly from this impression. Strife ends with wasted lives and
settlement the terms of which are precisely the same as those proposed at the beginning of the struggle.”

A.C. Ward comments:

“In Strife (1909) the case for both sides is seen for a space, clearly and in due proportion. When the play begins, old John Anthony is presiding, with adamant resolution, over a meeting of the directors of going on for four month, through a hard winter, a tentative movements on both sides towards a settlement are prevented from making progress only by the persistent. No compromise! Cry of John Anthony for the owners, and the equally unyielding No surrender! Of David Roberts, the men’s leader. But at a critical moment, when the men are wavering, Robert’s wife dies. Both sides yield simultaneously, and throwing over their leaders, accept the precise terms they had rejected four months earlier. In the interval there has been suffering, privation and death.
on the side of men, and heavy financial loss by the owners. In the earlier part of the play the scales are held dispassionately by the dramatist, and the audience feels only the desperate futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides. But then by his choice of incidents at the climax of the play, Galsworthy destroys in a moment the illusion of immortality. The death of Mrs. Roberts is not an appeal to human instincts of harmony and justice. It is an appeal to humanitarian sentiment which fundamentally has no bearing upon the real problem of Strife. 

The play has no heroes in the traditional sense of word. Neither Roberts nor Anthony is a heroic figure. They are the two best men, both broken. Nicoll rightly says that:

"Galsworthy makes neither Anthony nor Roberts a man who governs events. Both have iron will and are determined to fight to the better end, but they are not drawn in individualistic heroic terms. The one takes his strength from what may be called the
Capitalist faith, the other from the faith of
the rebels.”

In *Strife* as well as in other plays of similar themes, Galsworthy makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act as mere puppets. They have very little independent existence. Even when they are individualised they are intensely typical. All of them show their weakest spots in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer from internal schisms and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Hence it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy's plays.

*Strife* alludes to Marxian ideas and analysis centering on capitalist working and class confrontation. But the play goes beyond the dialectic and probes deeper and wider the humanitarian aspects. As Schalit put it:

"This is a great and powerful drama and I do not think that, so far, Galsworthy has surpassed it. The writer has treated his subject with the utmost conscientiousness; according to his own words, he had the
opportunity from 1899 to 1954, of studying the relations of capital and labour at first hand. But to particularise the work as a profound study of social problems would not be doing justice to its ethical and artistic content. All the suffering comes from the implacability of the two extremists, Anthony and Roberts. So it is ever in party struggle—extremism with its demogogy and its pride and its greed of power waste life, cause infinite trouble. Only through mutual toleration, mutual concession and agreement can human society progress. And, however much we may sympathise with the Anthonys and Robertses enemies of society. The "Fisher of Men" Milton in "The Patrician" and many other Galsworthian autocrats arouse our absorbed interest and sympathy, but we should never dream of wishing that such dictators should come to power." 6.

Commenting on the technical perfection of the play setting two equal forces of against each other, R.H. Coats observes:
"From the point of view of technique Strife is faultlessly constructed, the parallelism of the play is perfect. Anthony balances Roberts, Enid balances Annie, Edgar balances Thomas, the Directors balance the workers. Even Rous, who wavers because of devotion to his sweetheart, balances Wilder, who wavers because of anxiety about his wife. The whole play closely resembles a game of chess, with the powers arrayed in front and the more powerful pieces drawn up behind. As in that game, the fortunes of way sway critically from side to side, grievous havoc is wrought among combatants swept off the board, and the end at last is - stalematic."
References:


7. Coats, R.H.: "John Galsworthy as a Dramatic Artist" (Duckworth, London)

8. Eric Gillet: "Ten Famous Plays of Galsworthy" (Duckworth)