

# A Study of “Role of Trade Unions in Industrial Corporate World” with reference to the play “Strife” By J. Galsworthy

**Mr. Mali Abhimanyu Sopan**

Assistant Professor, Abasaheb Marathe ACS College, Rajapur, Ratnagiri, India

**Abstract:** *The main focus of this research paper is to examine the development and role of trade unions for the welfare of the poor working class and just to upper classes of the society. It also analyses how such policies worked with help of the problems expressed in the play Strife. John Galsworthy, the English novelist and Nobel Prize winner is well-known for his literary series. Through his plays, Galsworthy exposes tyranny of prisoners, class discrimination, anti-Semitism, the obstinacy of capitalists and labor union leaders as well as other evils of society. His most esteemed plays are noted for their realistic technique and insightful social criticism. Several of his plays examine the contrast between the rights of the upper classes and the poor. Galsworthy as a dramatist has remarkable capacity to identify himself with the experiences of other people. Consequently this made him possible to be sympathetic with the people and their problems to comprehend life utterly.*

**Keywords:** Poor and upper class, industrial revolution, obstinacy, trade union, workers etc.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present play strife was his third play published in 1909. It became immediately popular and it was received with universal acclaim. Winston Churchill then praised strife is a fine piece of work which will long survive. It not only shows the conflict between the capital and labour but also the waste resulting from the conflict between two strong individuals.

*However, after the publication ‘Strife’ some people found it prejudiced. Very interestingly, the writer himself writes-*

*‘I remember that after a production of Strife at nothing ham a certain capitalist come up to me and said ”By love, sir I did enjoy that speech you gave to old Anthony,[.....] of strife at Oxford a Labor Fan came up to see me on the platform, as I was going back to town and said !’Ah’ that speech of Robert was a great; it got the blighters plumb center”*

Trade unions were legalized in 1824 when growing numbers of factory workers joined these associations to achieve better salaries and working conditions. Workplace had been prominent in struggle. From 1830 on attempts were made to set up national general unions most notably Robert Owen’s Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834. It involved a range of socialist from obesity to insurgents. That organization played a role in the remonstrations. An important development of the Trade Union Movement in Wales was rising in May 1931 where workers employed for reforming to protest against the low wages and unemployment. Gradually the protest spread to nearby industrial towns and villages. The flag of upheaval was hovered which has been assumed globally by the Trades Union Movement and socialist groups. In the later 1830 Trade Union was dominated by political activity. The aims of most socialists were to play leading roles. Chartism was a working class movement for political reform in Britain which emerged in 1836 and it was most active between till 1848. The strategy employed was to use the scale of support which established to put burden on legislators to grant manhood suffrage. Chartism was popular among some trade unions especially London’s small scale industries. Many trade unions were active in the general strike of 1842. They supported differentials in pay

and status. They focused on control over device manufacture among firms in the native labour market. The aristocracy of labour comprises the skilled workers who were proud and jealous of their monopolies.

After 1889 many of the New Unions began adopting mutual insurance policies. Insurance benefits increased the ability of unions to attract and retain members. In the industrial sector organized labor unions fought for better wages, reasonable hours and security in work. The labor movement led efforts to stop tyranny on workers. They strived to provide health benefits and provide aid to injured and retired workers. The Trade Unions in Britain were subject to severe subjugation until 1824 but then widespread in cities as London.

Trade unionism was quite rare amongst semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The union officials avoided militancy fearing that strikes would threaten the finances of unions. it increased the bargaining power of unskilled workers. Union played a prominent role in the creation of the labour presentation committee which effectively formed the foundation for today's labour union. Women were largely excluded from trade union formation membership until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. As women did attempt to challenge male supremacy the tenacity of middle class reformers hunted cordially. Afterwards this act became the women's trade union league. There were a few cases in the 19<sup>th</sup> century where women trade union members took initiative in the 1875. As a result there was enormous increase in trade union membership that affected all industries. The militants were most active in small scale industries. The new unions of semi-skilled workers were the most militant. Demand was very high for industrial labour large numbers of women were employed temporarily. The trade unions gave strong support to the war effort of cutting back on strikers and restrictive practices. Trade unions reached their peak of membership visibility prestige and radical power in the post war epoch.

Trade unions were formed in Britain during the industrial revolution for the sake of protect workers from unnecessary risks in excessive hours of work. The trade union movement was dynamically resisted by governments. But by the 1850s, unions had grown powerful enough to win better protection and contracts for their members. From the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the industrial revolutions exuded through Britain. New jobs were related these usually involved repetitive tasks and ruled by the clock. Before that there was those workers had often been paid for a specific project. The atmosphere in a factory was deliberately kept damp to ensure the cotton threads stayed strong and agile. Many workers suffered health problems owing to the constant humidity. Despite many factory owners wanted their workers to be efficient like the machines they operated.

"Strife" deals with a conflict between two classes or groups of the society i. e. the rich and the poor, the capitalist and the poor working class. In the beginning of this century, England witnessed tremendous industrial growth. This gave rise to the importance of the working class in England. The workers became aware of their rights. They realized that they were working hard to fill up the funds of the rich people. They also realized that the capitalist class is responsible for their exploitation. Their sweat and the tortures of their brains fatten the capitalist. Their hard works are used to make huge profit but they are paid very small amounts in return to that. The capitalists are interested only in their comforts and more dividends. The poor workers do not have sufficient food or accommodations.

During the industrial revolution the workers were at the mercy of their master. There were no Labour Welfare Laws such as the Workmen's Compensation Act. While working they were dying in an accident but instead of furnishing compensation they were blamed for their luck and not their employer who should have given him adequate protection. This gave rise to the formation of Trade Union in England. The Trade Unions made the workers aware of their rights. The workers realized that they would not get anything from their masters unless they organize themselves. At that time the Russian Revolution and the socialistic philosophy also gave rise to Trade Union.

In 'Strife' there is a reference to a 'Trade Union' whose Official is Simon Harness. This Union Leader appears to be a sensible man. He knows where to stop. He is not a firebrand like Roberts. He knows the responsibility of the Union. He is prepared to support excessive demands of the workers. He knows that there will be strike in other factories if the excessive demands are supported. He points out that the Union cannot bear any additional burden of strikers in other factories. He remarks that the Union has to fight for justice for all the workers. Harness has suggested a compromise which is rejected by Roberts and support Harness for a compromise. The attitude of the Union appears to be reasonable and sensible.

In “strife” there is a struggle between the adamant leader of workers and the chairman of the company Roberts and Anthony respectively. The workers of the Trenartha Tin Plates Works have been on strike for four months. They have been demanding higher wages. Anthony has already crushed strikers on four occasions and believes that workers cannot be masters. He wants to crush the workers at any cost. He believes in the old-fashioned, cut-throat tug of war policy of resolving industrial disputes. However the younger generation of Directors like Edgar has sympathy for the workers. They believe in giving the workers their due share. They accept the existence and the role of a Trade Union, in an industrial strife. The ‘Strife’ thus depicts the rise of Trade Union among the workers and the constructive role of the Trade Unions in industrial dispute

In act I the directors want to know the strategies of the Trade Union. The directors start the discussion on the policy of the Board in relation to the strike. At this point one of the directors Wilder says-

*“It’s this infernal three –cornered duel the Union, the men and we” (Page 14).....*

*“Well, who on earth would have thought they’d have held on like this without support”. (P.16)*

His remark shows his anxiety about the outcome of the discussion and an early solution for the problem. The meeting of the Board of directors is being held in the dining room of the manager Underwood. The workers on strike have fallen out with their Union. The Union is not ready to take up their case without the workers demand of higher wages for engineers and furnace men are dropped as it is unreasonable. The continuing strike has caused huge losses for the company. The directors never expected that each striking workers would stick out for four months. It is more difficult for the striking workers to continue the strike without the support of the Union. Moreover, the workers have been suffering starvation and misery. The directors now fear that the strike will continue and the company will be ruined. Wilder shows his disappointment and his indirect appreciation of the determination of striking workmen and their leader Roberts who is hot-headed and adamant. The representatives of the striking workers are supposed to arrive for the meeting with the directors. At the same time Harness, the Union leader wants to have an interview with the Board. Thus there are three parties involved in the strike. The triangular conflict is described as devilish because it is going to add to the complications.

The Union official Harness says *“Compromise is always done”* (page 22)

The board of directors is split on its policy towards the strike. Some board of Directors wants a settlement. However the Union has not supported the striking men. The union leader Harness comes to have an interview with the board. He wants to persuade the directors to change their attitude. Harness speaks frankly with the directors. He asks Anthony the chairman of the board of directors not to adopt a rigid position while dealing with the striking workers. He points out that some demands of workers are excessive. Consequently the Union has withdrawn its support to them. He is hopeful of settling the differences between the Union and the workers. He wants something favor of the workers before going back to them. He asks the board to recognize that workers are men like they. He asks Anthony to give up the old-fashioned tug of war business. He shows his surprise at the waste of force. He points out that the strike is going to end in compromise as it always does.

As Strike at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works had lasted so long without any sign of a settlement that the directors had begun to fear for their dividends. The stern chairman of the board, John Anthony, refused to consider any plan for compromise. To him there could be only one master at the plant and that was John Anthony himself. He had defeated four strikes in his thirty two years as chairman of the board and he was certain that a little more perseverance would defeat the strikers. Although the union had withdrawn support from the strikers because two of their conditions exceeded the prevailing standards, Simon Harness a trades Union Official had been sent to attempt mediation between the board and the workers. His interview with the directors accomplished nothing because of Anthony’s obstinacy. The meeting between the representatives of the workers and the directors was equally unhappy. Roberts and Anthony were in unyielding positions. Conditions among the workers were so terrible that many of them were ready to give in but Roberts remained adamant. Mrs. Roberts was dying her weak heart and hunger which the strike imposed upon them all. At one time she had been the maid in Underwood’s home. Enid Underwood went to visit her. Mrs. Underwood had tried to send

food to Mrs. Roberts but did not accept help from the daughter of John Anthony. Roberts was fanatic at a meeting of the men and harness the trades union official it became evident that most of the strikers were willing to compromise, to accept the union suggestions. When powerful orator Roberts appeared at the meeting they were once again convinced by his oratory. As he was speaking a young woman approached the platform and told him that his wife had died. As a result the men decided to accept the terms of the union compromise. The news of Mrs. Roberts's death was a blow to the directors. but the directors had decided to act in spite of him although they decide to accept the union terms. The terms agreed upon were those which the union had suggested to both sides before the strike began. But it had needed months of suffering to bring agreement in the dispute. The two leaders deserted by their supporters. Both defeated by the compromise.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Strife is a typical social tragedy of Galsworthy. It is the story of industrial conflict. The workers of Trenartha Tin Plate Works remained on strike for more than four months. All the efforts to bring about a compromise were rejected by the two parties because they were oath led by fanatics who refused to withdraw an inch from their positions. But ultimately a compromise is arrived at after both the parties have kicked their leaders. The trade union thus plays a crucial role in settlement between the workers and the directors of the company. The terms of this settlement the same as had been proposed to both the parties before the fight started. so the strife has done good to nobody.

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