CONCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND AUTHORITY
IN THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF
HAROLD J. LASKI

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The present thesis is on Harold J. Laski with regard to his views on the interrelation of individual liberty and political authority. Along with, I have also discussed his views on society which remained at the centre of his thoughts and have maintained the following viewpoints:

1. Laski did not regard individual liberty, society and state as separate academic concepts. On the contrary, he considered them as interrelated to one another and discussed them in the context of national and international situations.

2. He examined the liberty of the individual in relation to other members of society and the state. Although he argued it in both positive and negative aspects, he mainly considered it as a positive conception of life and held certain rights as necessary for its realization.

3. His approach to the analysis of the theory of the state was historical, undogmatic and realistic. From his historical studies he understood that no particular form of the state or government and no single theory of the state could be regarded as permanent and absolutely valid. As a political scientist, he viewed every theory of the state in the light of its functions in the actual world.

4. I have refuted the charge that Laski had no clear idea of society, and that he did not understand the difference between society and state. I have maintained that he had a definite idea of society, and that he discussed the purpose of society in relation to the fulfilment of needs of the individual. At the same time, he regarded the object of society as crucial in fixing the range of functions of the state.

5. Finally I have maintained that Laski was not an arm-chair thinker. Nor was he an utterly pragmatic. He was both an academician and a practical statesman. He followed a middle path in opposition to the empty individualism of Adam Smith, Ricardo, Bentham and J.S. Mill and the pseudo-Hegelianism of Oxford idealists like Green, Bradley and Bosanquet and presented a well-argued thesis on individual liberty.

I have established these viewpoints regarding Laski on the basis of new interpretations and relations of his political ideas which would add to the better understanding of his views on individual liberty, society and political authority.