SYNOPSIS

This thesis deals with the conception of individual and authority in the political ideas of Harold J. Laski. I have endeavoured here to show what Laski really meant by individual liberty, and to what extent he was able to reconcile the liberty of the individual with the authority of the state. For this purpose I have divided the thesis into four chapters.

Chapter One deals with Laski's conception of individual liberty. I have asserted in this chapter that Laski's individualism was rooted as much in his sense of social discrimination as it was in his sense of economic insecurity. He thought that the individual freedom was exposed to innumerable types of tyranny in the modern society. To safeguard individual freedom he went on embracing and experimenting with one political faith after another. With the result, that some contradictions appear in his views. Nevertheless, he gave a well-argued thesis on individual liberty.

Chapter Two discusses Laski's conception of Society. In this chapter I have attempted to refute the charge that Laski had no clear idea of society, and that he did not properly understand the distinction between society and state. My contention is that Laski had a definite idea of society, and that he discussed society
in three aspects - society as federal, society as regulated and society as a democratic organization. Even in the pro-marxian period of his career when he believed that the state organized the all-round functions of economic transformation, his conception of society did not become weak. It rather became stronger because he thought that it is society which grows ultimately conscious of using the state for bringing about social and economic changes. In fact, the history of Laski's political ideas is the history of dominance of society over the state. Society always determines as to what should be the position and function of the state.

Chapter Three deals with Laski's conception of the state. In this chapter I have tried to establish that Laski did not want to abolish the state like the anarchists and extreme syndicalists. Nor did he magnify it to the detriment of individual liberty like the idealists and the communists in Soviet Russia. He, on the other hand, viewed the state as an instrument of society. His treatment of the state was not an academic treatment, but a realistic one based on actual functions which the state performs in society.

In the concluding chapter I have tried to prove that Laski did not treat individual liberty, society and
the state as separate academic concepts. On the contrary, he considered them as correlative terms and discussed them in the context of national and international situations. Further, I have maintained that Laski was a political analyst, and as such, he was never concerned with any particular theory of the state. Like the Webbs, he was interested in the actual administration of the state. As an individualist and a great humanitarian, he always espoused the cause of freedom and progress in England and elsewhere.