Laski's Conception of Individual Liberty.

In this chapter I propose to discuss Laski's views on individual liberty from the point of view of problems of growth and participation of human personality in social, political and economic life of society. Laski, I believe, thought that the individual freedom was exposed to innumerable types of tyranny in the complex modern society. He, therefore, endeavoured throughout his life to safeguard it against every sort of coercion, particularly economic coercion. And to that effect he even did not mind the revision of his political ideas from time to time. But in spite of certain contradictions in his views on individual liberty, for which his constant revision of social and political beliefs was responsible, he gave a well-argued thesis on individual liberty.

Let us now, first of all, examine Laski's earlier views on individual liberty.

(A) Earlier Views of Laski:

Laski's earlier views on individual liberty appeared in his writings, published from time to time, either through his direct discussion of the problems of liberty, equality and rights or indirectly through his criticism of the state. But before we actually discuss
his views on individual liberty, let us, first, examine
the various social and political ideas which influenced
them.

(1) Background of his Views:

During his earlier period, his treatment of
individual liberty was influenced as much by his fear
of social discrimination as by his concern for economic
security of the individual.

Laski himself had become the victim of social
discrimination. He was treated unfairly in spite of his
marked intellectual distinction. His sense that he was
alienated from the main stream of English life because
of his family's religious beliefs, although he did not
share them, and his feeling that the treatment that he
received at the hands of society was rationally indefensible
were no doubt sharpened by his experiences at Oxford,
which, he said, first made him aware of the intensity
of class division in England. It is difficult to avoid
the conclusion that Laski's strong feeling that his
Jewish background was the reason why he was treated
unfairly1 was a fundamental factor in his sympathy with
all who were discriminated against and put to a dis-
advantageous position in society for no obviously assign-
able reason. His personal experience of social dis-
crimination made him hostile to the existing society,

1. "Harold J. Laski" in Clifton Fadiman, ed., I Believe:
"The Personal Philosophies of certain eminent Men and
and consequently he developed a passion for justice for all men.

Similarly, Laski became hostile to an acquisitive character of society. He realised that the individual liberty could not be attained in the absence of economic equality. The Boston police Strike and strikes such as those at Ludlow and Lowell further deepened his faith in the struggle for the fair deal to the underdog. As a young boy he had realized "how the vast machinery of the state is used to crush any movement that questions the authority of those who own economic power." This fact agitated his mind much, and by the time he attained maturity he had become firm in his belief that the economic power, which in democracy rested with the propertied class, should be shared equally by all in order to assure economic security to every individual.

When Laski interpreted liberty in terms of economic equality he appeared to be a socialist in some sense, but his early socialism "was above all the outcome of a sense of the injustice of things as they were. It had not become an insight into the process of history." Combined with his feeling for justice for all men, his

2. Ibid., p.142.
3. Ibid., p.143.
early socialism was rooted in the deeply felt injustices caused by existing institutions. It was, above all, an outcome of his belief in individual liberty. Being emotional in character, it was much closer to the beliefs of Christian socialists, who had insisted on universal brotherhood and mutual help rather than to the theories of Marx and Engels.

The parallels between the views of Laski and those of Proudhon are particularly striking. Both of them regarded society as federal and pluralistic for the purpose of individual freedom rather than hierarchical in nature, and both were strongly opposed to the centralized state, the state which Marx wanted the proletariat to take over. For both Laski and Proudhon the focus of attention was the freedom of the individual in all phases of human activity, particularly in his daily labour, rather than his freedom in the narrow political sphere. Under the influence of Proudhon, Laski fixed his attention more on the division of state powers for the attainment of economic security to the individual than on anything else. He, therefore, shared an indifference towards the centralized government actions with a large number of French workers, and was deeply sympathetic to the revolutionary character of their trade union movement and the drive towards administrative syndicalism among the civil
servants. He specifically noted the Proudhonian basis of these French movements as well as his own preference for the socialism of Proudhon over that of Marx:

"Proudhon has displaced Marx as the guiding genius of French labour; and it is above all his federalism that is the source of the new inspiration." He argued that the reason of his abandoning Marx in favour of Proudhon lay in the fact that the latter "sought in a federalist organization of society - the clue to individual freedom."

Laski's major premise in the background of his acceptance of Proudhon's federalist organization of society was that "it is only by intensifying the active participation of men in the business of government that liberty can be made secure." He drew inspiration from the theory of federalism, as he drew from socialism,


5. AMS. p.114.


7. AMS, p.387.
with a view to safeguarding individual liberty against political and economic coercion in the modern centralized state. As such, his socialism and federalism were more humanistic and individualistic in character than what they are generally known to be. His attachment to them was more sentimentalistic than scientific. It was due to his young age that he did not give much thought to these theories. Rather he remained satisfied with their prima facie values which appealed to his highly sensitive mind.

Further, Laski was also inspired by pluralism, and he accepted it for maintaining his thesis of individual liberty. He elaborated the theory of groups, known as pluralism in politics, in order to safeguard the individual against the coercive authority of the state. It was his belief that the individual was more intimately connected with the groups in society than with the state, and that his interests could be best secured by making them more and more independent of the state control. But his pluralism was different from that of Figgis, Gierke and Maitland from whom he drew inspiration for maintaining freedom for groups, particularly economic groups, in the modern society. It was also different from the pluralism of A.D. Lindsay, MacIver, H.Krabbe, Paul Boncour and Leon Duguit. These writers were mainly concerned with group rights against the centralized authority of the state,

8. Refer Introduction to the Thesis for full discussion of Laski's pluralism.
while Laski's pluralism was more or less inspired by his love for individual freedom. His idea was to make individual interests safe through the division of state authority among the various groups in society.

Thus Laski was inspired in his earlier career by the pluralism of Figgis, Gierke and Maitland, humanism of Christian socialists and the individualistic federalism of Proudhon. But the burning passion that unfailingly guided him to draw inspiration from these philosophies was the attainment of individual liberty. Now let us, therefore, see what were his views on the individual liberty.

(2) Individual Liberty:

Since Laski was primarily concerned with the promotion of individual liberty, he rejected order and unity as ultimate political values. He emphatically remarked that "all that men are willing to sacrifice to society is the lowest and not the highest common factor of their intimate beliefs. For they are not simply members of a herd; they are something more. They are individuals who are interested passionately in themselves as an end, and no social philosophy can be adequate which neglects that ego-centric element." The implication of

9. AMS, p.320. Laski stated: "However valuable may be the benefits of order, they are useless so long as they stifle the spontaneity of human mind."

10. Ibid., p.177.
such a statement is quite clear. He did not want to reduce the individual to the position of a sheer member of a herd. On the other hand, he approved of the Kantian goal of the individual. Like Kant, he held that men were by nature equal and free. He also agreed to Kantian viewpoint that the individual is rational and has a will of his own. He was against the Hegelian idea that the "individual outside the state is an unethical abstraction". As opposed to such a Hegelian conception, he regarded, like Kant, liberty and equality as the necessary attributes of the individual. And while he also assigned proper weight and significance to society, state and people, it was the reason-endowed individual with the autonomous will that figured prominently in his political philosophy. Like Kant, he too was a thorough-going individualist.

Laski stretched his idea of individual liberty to such an extent that he came very near J.S. Mill and Bertrand Russell. Mill’s idea was that the whole world was not morally justified in suppressing the individual’s freedom of thought and expression for the sake of his development. If, unhindered by society, the individual reached the perfection of his personality, his services to society would be great. Society would be enriched by the 'variety' of characters in it. Laski also asserted

the same point of view. Instead of society or the state regulating the individuals and producing individuals of the same pattern, society should leave the individuals the widest possible margin for free development. Freedom, he argued, implies the chance of continuous initiative to the individual without interference by the state. It means absence of restraint. The mind of the individual is an active mind. He, therefore, must be trained in doing free thinking. He must be allowed to exercise his own will and his opinion should not be suppressed either by the state or by society in any way. Laski in his assertion of individual liberty pointed out that "liberty is nothing if it is not the organized and conscious power to resist in the last resort against the abuse of government." But in spite of his extreme individualism he rejected the egoistic nature of impulse as well as Bentham's elaborate calculus of pleasures. He argued that good "is either social; or it is not good at all. If man is to live in community with his fellows it is a necessary condition of his life that what he attains should, at least in the long run, involve benefit also to others. Social good, therefore, seems to consist in the unity our nature attains

12. *Foundations of Sovereignty* by Laski (1921), p.239; hereinafter cited as FS.

when the working of our impulses results in a satisfied activity."14 In considering social good as above the individual good for the purpose of society, he again came near Mill. But he differed from him when he did not favour the idea of granting liberty to the cranks like the latter. His approach to the problem of individual liberty was more positive and humanitarian than that of Mill's because he considered individual good as closely connected with the social good.

In the same way, parallels can be found out between the views of Laski and Russell. Laski argued that "myself is too distinct from other selves to accept a given order."15 What each of us desires in life is room for our personal initiative in the things that add to the improvement of our life. In fact, he supported the full freedom of conscience for the improvement of individual life. Russell also remarks that "if life is to be saved from boredom relieved only by disaster, means must be found of restoring individual initiative, not only in things that are trivial, but in the things that really matter."16 This remark of Russell tells us how he is also much concerned

15. Ibid., p.143.
with the problem of individual initiative. But both consider individual initiative from the viewpoint of social progress, and hence they admit proper checks upon the individual freedom. According to Laski governments may in fact "invade liberty while they claim to be acting in the common interest." Russell expresses the same opinion in a different way as below:

"If the community exercises no control, the same kind of individual freedom and initiative which may produce a valuable innovator may also produce a criminal. The problem, like all those with which we are concerned, is one of balance; too little liberty brings stagnation, and too much brings chaos." 18

Further, both react against the over-centralization of government administration. Both believe that organization should be much more flexible, more relieved by local autonomy, and less oppressive to the individual. Both seem to be influenced by Mr. and Mrs. Webb in their idea of vocational and industrial organizations for making democracy safe against the influence of the propertied class. Laski argued very much in the tone of the Webbs that vocational bodies would have a place of primary importance in the new state. He remarked:

"That is why, as Mr. and Mrs. Webb have pointed out (in the constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth what is desirable for the battle with capitalism, whether fought on the industrial or on the political field, may well be 'the one big union',

17. GP, p.143.
18. Authority and the Individual by Russell, p.47.
so organized and so directed that the whole of the allied brain-workers may prove as one with one will, and for one purpose." 19

He rejected not only capitalism for there was no economic security to the individual, but he also disapproved of state collectivism or state socialism as it destroyed individual freedom and initiative. Likewise, Russell also rejects both capitalism and collectivism. He in his Roads to Freedom makes the following apt criticism of collectivism as a destroyer of freedom:

"The only kind of work recognised will be such as commends itself to the authorities. Writing books against socialism or against any theory embodied in the government of the day would certainly not be recognised as work. Any new line of thought would be banned, unless by influence or corruption the thinker could crawl into the good graces of the pundits. These results are not seen by socialists because they imagine that the socialist state will be governed by men like those who now advocate it. This is of course a delusion. The rulers of the state then will bear as little resemblance to the present socialists as the dignitaries of the Church after the time of Constantine bore to the Apostles. The men who advocate an unpopular reform are exceptional in disinterestedness and zeal for public good; but those who hold power after the reform has been carried out are likely to belong in the main to the ambitions and secretive type which has in all ages possessed itself of the government of nations. And this type has never shown itself tolerant of opposition or friendly to freedom." 20


Although both appear as socialists when they oppose capitalism and show their concern for economic equality to the individual, they do not like the idea of too much state control. As they are primarily individualists, they retain the idea of individual initiative and freedom. The crude view that the national government was the sole agency was speedily found inadequate both because of the cumbersomeness of operation and because of the centralized bureaucracy that would necessarily result. Hence all genuine socialists, H.G.Wells, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, George E.Shaw, William Morris and G.D.H.Cole soon realized that public ownership and operation of industry was not enough but that it should be supplemented by democratic management as well. Some socialists like G.D.H.Cole, H.G.Hobson and A.J.Penty extended the idea of freedom and democracy to the industries and worked out plans for independent industrial guilds co-existing with the state. This later development in socialism influenced Laski as much as it influenced Russell, and consequently he did not commit to state collectivism at all.

As said before, Laski's faith in socialism was inspired by his faith in the progress of the individual, and not by any scientific outlook towards the processes of history as it was the case with Karl Marx. He considered the idea of self-government in industry and of independent industrial organizations against the centralized
administration of the sovereign state with a view to granting more and more freedom to the individual. As such, he regarded freedom as subjective and positive. Admitting this fact, although late, he remarked that "in 1925 I thought liberty could most usefully be regarded as more than a negative thing." It was interpreted as the existence of avenues for the creative activity of citizens. Liberty in this sense is a positive condition of life. It is also subjective in the sense that its realization depends, more or less, upon the personal efforts of the individuals. He himself stated in Grammar of Politics that "by liberty I mean the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves ..... A state built upon the conditions essential to the full development of our faculties will confer freedom upon its citizens. It will release their individuality. It will enable them to contribute their peculiar and intimate experience to the common stock." He paid his tribute to Acton's conception of liberty as "the assurance that every man shall be protected in doing what he believes his duty against the influence of authority and majority, custom and opinion." The individuals, he argued, are the rational beings, and hence they have to


work for themselves. They must be granted proper opportunities for the development of their life. Such an idea of freedom is similar to that of Green. Green regarded freedom as a positive power of doing and enjoying something worth-doing or enjoying. Freedom shall be freedom not for the animal wishes and desires, but for the social good. He defined freedom as denoting that "state in which the individual shall have realized his ideal of himself, shall be at one with the law which he recognises as that which he ought to obey, shall have become all that he has it in him to be, and so fulfil the law of his being."  

Laski attached moral and social qualifications to such an idea of subjective and positive freedom. He believed, as did Green and Rousseau, that the quality which characterized a man was 'moral freedom'. Man attains moral freedom when he remains aware of others while considering his own interests. Rejecting the egoistic side of man's nature, he implied by the term freedom as that harmony of impulses which comes when a man knows that he is doing something it is worth while to do. Liberty remains in doing things that add to our moral stature.  

23. *A History of Political Thought* by Phyllis Doyle, p.287.  
Thus he discussed the individual liberty in the context of other individuals in society. For him, individual good was necessarily a social good. Further, according to him, there is no difference between a moral action and a social action. A moral action, he argued, is always an action based on reason. And our action is reasonable when it is performed with reference to other individuals. True freedom does not mean license to do as one likes. He insisted like Green that we could not significantly speak of freedom except with references to individual persons, and that only in them could freedom be realized.

Considering liberty in subjective and positive sense duly qualified by moral and social considerations, Laski discussed liberty in three aspects i.e. private, political and economic. For him, private liberty meant freedom of choice and action in areas of life which affected the individual himself such as religion. Remark- ing upon this aspect of liberty he stated that "religion is a good instance of this aspect. I am not truly free to decide without hindrance upon my creed unless there is not merely no penalty on any form of religious faith, but, also, no advantage of a political kind attached to one form rather than another."25 The state should not interfere with private liberty.

25. Ibid., p.146.
By 'political liberty' Laski meant freedom of choice and action to be able to participate in the affairs of the state. There should be no discrimination against any individual. For political liberty to be real, he argued, two conditions are essential. First, every man must be educated to the point where he can express what he wants in a way that is intelligible to others. He put the case as under:

"Nothing is more striking than the way in which our educational systems train the children of rich or well-born men to habits of authority while the children of the poor are trained to habits of deference. Such a division of attitude can never produce political freedom, because a class trained to govern will exert its power because it is conscious of it, while a class trained to deference will not fulfill its wants because it does not know how to formulate its demands." 26

Though the efforts can be made to restore a balance between the opposite habits, yet it will never fully compensate for the defect of early training. Because the inculcation of deferential habits will never produce a free people. It is only when men have learned that they themselves make and work institutions that they can learn to adjust them to their needs.

The second condition of political liberty, Laski argued, is the provision of an honest and straightforward supply of news. Those who are to decide must have

26. Ibid., p.147.
truthful material upon which to decide. Their judgment must not be thwarted by the presentation of a biased case. He remarked that a people without reliable news was, sooner or later, a people without the basis of freedom. For to exercise one's judgment in a miasma of distortion is, ultimately, to go disastrously astray. In this way, political liberty depends upon education and a free press.

By 'economic liberty' Laski meant economic security and opportunity to earn one's living. It depends upon democratic organization and control of industry. The workers should have a share in the control of industry. He aptly remarked that economic liberty implied democracy in industry which means two things: Firstly, it means that industrial government is subject to the rights of the citizens. Secondly, it means that industrial government is managed according to the laws framed by the cooperation of the citizens and not by compulsion.

Further, for the guarantee of individual freedom, Laski remarked, certain conditions are necessary. He said that the freedom could not be achieved for the mass of men save under special guarantees. It can never, firstly, exist in the presence of special privileges. Unless every man enjoys the same access to power as others, he lives in an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty.

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p.149.
Nor, secondly, can there be liberty where the rights of some depend upon the pleasure of others. He remarked that our common rules should bind both those who exercised power as well as those who were affected by the exercise of power. As such, no groups of men should be in a position to encroach upon one's enjoyment of the rights which attached to him as a citizen. Thirdly, he argued that the state action should remain unbiased for the enjoyment of liberty. He wrote that "in any society the varied personalities of which it is composed, the weight of the different interests involved, the degrees of effort men will make, the amount of knowledge they will possess, are certain to bend its authority in the support of some special interest. The most we can do for the maintenance of freedom is to seek that system which will minimise the bias involved. That is why rights assume so vast an importance; they are guarantee of a minimum bias. They give us what assurance we may have that the state power will not be perverted to the use of some few." Along with that Laski wanted to organize the state on the pluralistic lines for the maintenance of individual liberty. He did not agree to Locke and Montesquieu that separation of powers ensured individual liberty. Rather the guarantee to the individual of his liberty, according to him, depends upon the following:

30. Ibid., p.150.
31. Ibid., pp.151-52.
The state must be organized on the principle of decentralization. If people participate in the exercise of authority, they will not let the state encroach on their rights easily.

The central government should be aided by consultative bodies.

The state should not interfere in the life and jurisdiction of other associations until their activities are subversive of social order. At the same time, he held that individual liberty cannot be realised in the absence of equality and rights. Hence he regarded them as indispensable for the maintenance of individual liberty. This brings us to the consideration of his views on equality and rights.

**Equality and Rights:**

Laski discussed equality and rights in the context of the purpose of the state. But behind his discussion of equality and rights, his passion for individual liberty worked as a decisive factor. Like a pragmatist, he attempted to judge the purpose of the state, not on some abstract ethical principles as idealists did, but on the practical achievement of the minimum standard of civilized life for all its members. In this connection, he emphatically remarked that "we start from the theoretic purpose we admit in the state. It aims at
the development of the fullest capacities for good 
possessed by its members. That implies at once liberty 
and equality." Accordingly, the purpose of the state 
is to secure for its members a certain minimum standard 
of civilized life and the conditions which guarantee 
that standard. By a minimum standard of civilized life 
he understood general equality of educational, political, 
and social opportunities. "For", he said, "if the object 
of the state is to enrich the social heritage through 
the enlargement of individual personality, then individual 
personality must be given that power of adequate expression 
which comes through knowledge as well as through economic 
and social security to make its needs known." For 
assuring a minimum standard of civilized life to the 
individual, equality of opportunities in social, political 
and economic spheres should be granted. Although he 
undoubtedly pleaded for social and political security 
to the individual in his earlier period, he became more 
concerned with the question of economic security after 1920

When Laski returned to England in 1920, the 
postwar boom had given way to economic depression and 
unemployment. The Lloyd George Coalition government made 
no serious effort to deal with unemployment or with the 
strikes in key industries such as steel and coal mining.

32. FS, p.88.
Increasingly his attention turned to economic problems and to the need for political action for their solution. At this time he stated that the dominant purpose of the state was to secure in England immediately the "basic minimum" to every individual. By "basic minimum" he meant, particularly, an economic minimum necessary for a decent living of the individual. Through economic minimum, which he also interpreted as economic equality, he wanted to assure economic security to the individual necessary for his self-realization.

While defining liberty as the positive opportunity of self-realization, Laski held that liberty was inseparable from equality. A society in which men are given an equal opportunity of self-realization is also a society where there is liberty and justice. By justice he meant the rendering to each man what was necessary for the development of his life. Justice for him was such an ordering of social arrangements as would give the maximum guarantee available that the wants of each individual received their due recognition in the totality of wants satisfied. He argued that though equality was the primary condition of attaining justice, no one could dare believe that it could be obtained under the capitalist system which practised privileges and distinctions. The real point that he wished to place in his discussion of liberty was that in the present hierarchically organized
economic and political order, opportunities for creative self-expression were denied to all, but a small group of men. Liberty, in the sense of free play of the creative impulses of men and a high degree of individual diversity, "is incompatible with the present system of property; for its result is a concentration of power in a few hands which makes the political personality of the average citizen ineffective for any serious purpose." 34

Liberty thus implies equality. Liberty and equality are not in conflict nor even separate, but are "different facets of the same ideal." Hence Laski remarked that we should recognise that liberty "is impossible save upon the basis of the acceptance of certain minimal standards which can get accepted only through collective effort." 35 He differed from Tocqueville and Lord Acton who concluded that liberty and equality were antithetic things because they understood by equality as an identical treatment. And an identity of treatment is always dangerous to the liberty of the individual and his self-realization. He remarked that "to minds so ardent for liberty as Tocqueville and Acton liberty and equality were antithetic things. It is a drastic conclusion. But it turns, in the case of both men, upon a misunderstanding of what equality implies." 36

34. FS, Preface, p.ix.
35. Political Thought in England by Laski (1920), p. 309; hereinafter cited as PTE.
36. GP, p. 152.
he insisted that to proclaim that men were born equal was not to say that they were born identical, and as such he defined equality as the expression of "an opportunity for the full development of personality." Equality, in its real sense, means, according to him, impartiality or proportionality i.e. equality among equals, and inequality among inequals. It implies that, other things being equal, the good of 'A' is of the same intrinsic value as the good of anybody else. If this end is to be reached, there must be complete absence of special privileges for any person or group of persons; an equal protection of law against the personal ends, but for the general advantage; and the provision of adequate opportunities for every one. The last mentioned condition was by far the most important for Laski. He argued that a state divided into a small number of rich and a large number of poor would always develop a government manipulated by the rich to protect the amenities represented by their property. In such a state there can be no harmony or adjustment between the interests of the property owning class and of the labouring class. To achieve harmony, he thought, no man in society should be so placed that he can overreach his neighbour to the extent which constitutes a denial of the latter's privileges.

37. AMS, p.132.
38. GP, p.157.
It can be achieved only through the maintenance of equality for all. And to ensure equality adequate opportunities must be maintained under the protection of law. But this does not mean equality of gains also. The gains will be achieved by the individuals according to their needs and contributions. Both individual needs and contribution should be considered for the distribution of gains. On this point he regarded the communist solution of equal distribution of gains as inadequate. For, in the first place, there is no total identity of needs between men; nor is their effort so equal as to merit an identical return. He said that "the communist principle is adequate up to the point where human urgencies are in question; it is not adequate after that point. And it is adequate only so far as its application wins the result of a deliberate effort on the part of those whose needs are satisfied to do work of civic quality. And since to do work of civic quality involves differentiation of function, it is, I think, clear that when the primary needs of all men are met, the differences they encounter must be differences their function requires; requirement involving always the context of social benefit."\(^3^9\)

Thus Laski's principle of equality had two ends in view. On the one hand, it guaranteed the satisfaction of primary needs to all the individuals, and,

\(^3^9\) Ibid., p.159.
on the other, it recognised the difference in their capacities. The consideration of equality from these viewpoints he held as necessary for the proper incentive to the exercise of individual initiative.

Laski not only interpreted equality from the viewpoint of individual liberty and initiative, but he also examined his theory of rights in the context of individual freedom. He regarded rights as those conditions of social life without which no man would be in a position to use his initiative and enjoy liberty. Accordingly, whatever is essential to the free growth of personality is the right of the individual.

In view of his hostile attitude towards the state and political power, it is not surprising that he expressed sympathy with natural right theorists, such as Locke. Locke attempted to limit the power of the state by postulating the existence of certain rights that were anterior to the state and had to be safeguarded against its interference. Laski believed in the natural rights, but he tried to redeem the theory of natural rights from its major error. According to him, the major defect of the theory was that it regarded certain rights as fixed and unchangeable. He argued that since the natural rights of the individuals were the armour evolved to protect their vital interests, their content would change as conditions changed. Even the modern theory of natural law, he believe
does not lay down "any eternal or immutable laws of human conduct; it simply urges that the research of reason cannot help reaching conclusions which are valid so long as the conditions they resume obtain. Such a generalization must be the necessary basis of all political action."40 He, therefore, insisted that rights were not natural in the sense that a permanent and unchanging catalogue of them could be compiled. But they were natural in the sense that the social facts demanded their recognition.

In his conception of natural rights Laski mostly followed his predecessor Prof. Graham Wallas. Prof. Wallas insisted that it was necessary to adopt a dynamic theory of natural rights. Natural rights must vary in their content with changes in general social conditions and institutions. Rights which may have been socially "natural" in a primitive community may have ceased to be such at the present time. Natural rights, then, are a product of social needs and interests, and must necessarily vary in their character with the development of the social order.41 In the same way, Laski thought that the rights were natural in the sense that the changed social conditions recognised them as the indispensable foundation for social relations. He remarked that "it is

41. Our Social Heritage by G. Wallas, chap.VIII. 42 AMS, p.4
a natural in the sense that the given conditions of society at a particular time require its recognition. It is not justified on grounds of history. It is not justified on grounds of any abstract or absolute ethics."  

He believed in a dynamic theory of natural rights, and he, therefore, admitted that rights continued to change as the purpose and notions of each society changed and differed from time to time. They were never fixed and immutable in the past, nor would they be so in future. The past cannot be called upon to validate new demands or new claims to rights. As such, rights are not historical, he argued, in the sense that they were won by men at some period of history and yet they are historic because at a given area and period they become necessary because of the character of the civilization of the period. Tradition offers little or no support for most of the rights listed by Laski in his *Foundations of Sovereignty* as the conditions that are necessary to the fulfilment of the duties of citizenship – free speech, a living wage, an adequate education, a proper amount of leisure and the power to combine for social effort.  

He added to this list in his later work, *Grammar of Politics* a few more rights such as right to work, right to property,  

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42. AMS, p.43.  
43. FS, pp.245-46; also refer Holmes-Laski Letters,1,116-17 (Dec.8, 1917).
equality before law and political rights of voting, being elected and holding public office.

Laski discussed rights from the point of view of the individual. They are necessary for the development of individual personality. In the present complex political and economic world where there are so many checks and responsibilities for the individual, the demand of rights become more imminent. He argued that in the community the interest of each citizen was of equal importance. No claim of 'A' at least at the minimum level of rights, can be recognised by the state which involves the surrender by 'B' of rights without which he, also, cannot be his best. The mutual claims of the state and of its citizens are the claims clearly justifiable by reference to a common good, which includes the good of all. On this ground, he asserted that if the rights were necessary, and we had made provisions for the grant of rights, we should organize the state in a manner so that the individuals had best opportunity to enjoy the rights. Rights, so discussed, seem to imply the state and the individual with a balance between their mutual claims.

Further, he believed that there was the interest of the various groups 44 in and through which the individual personality could find channels of expression. In order

44. Refer to Introduction of my thesis for the detailed discussion of the theory of groups which Laski accepted in his earlier period.
to protect their interest, they should also be granted rights. But accepting the rights of groups, he did not disregard the importance of the state in any way. He rather admitted that "it is not to dethrone the state from the position it now occupies of the coordinating factor in the community. But it is at least to indicate the way in which its power of coordination should be used. The state cannot, for instance, allow religious associations to determine the belief of those who do not belong to its communion; but it has no moral, and therefore at least ideally, no legal right to determine what the members of a given association are to believe." 45

He accepted the state as a coordinating agency working in the interest of the whole community. But he argued that we could not leave the groups within the community to define their rights by conflict, any more than we could permit individuals so to determine their rights. Rather we should live by common rules. 46 The rules must be so formulated that the freedom of the individual and the group is safeguarded against the coercive authority of the state.

While discussing equality and rights, Laski kept in view the importance of the state as a coordinating

45. GP, p.98.
46. Ibid., p.141.
agency of the community. But most important for him was the question of the individual. He regarded both equality and rights as indispensable for the enjoyment of individual liberty; for he considered liberty, in his earlier period, as a positive thing which could be realized by the individual himself through his own efforts. In this connection it can be said that the role of the state, which it plays from the viewpoint of the positive and subjective conception of the individual liberty, remains mostly of the negative type. Although he remained silent on this point, his views became clear when he discussed the position of the state indirectly in connection with equality and rights. He held that the state should not support the special privileges of the capitalist class in society; it should not check the individual initiative; and it should establish certain conditions necessary for the growth of individual life. The first two conditions, which Laski regarded as essential for the realization of individual liberty, deny any positive role of the state. But the last mentioned function of the state is of the positive type. The adequate education, living wages, and equality before law, which he considered as necessary conditions to be safeguarded by the state, come under the positive functions of the state. In fact, it is difficult to make a distinction between the positive and negative functions of the state. But his emphasis was on
the negative character of the state functions as he discussed them from the standpoint of the individual.

But gradually Laski started looking at economic and political problems from a marxian point of view. As a result, his ideas on liberty, equality and rights underwent some change. Let us now examine his changed views regarding the individual liberty during his pro-marxian period.

(B) pro-marxian views of Laski:

By the time Laski published his Grammar of politics, his earlier faith in pluralism, humanitarian socialism and federalism of Proudhon was shaken. At this stage marxism appeared to him to be more acceptable, although he could never completely commit to it. His contact with liberal philosophies left behind their own deposits. In marxism, the theory of dialectical materialism which explains the social and economic phenomena was acceptable to him. But he discarded the marxian plea for a violent revolution. This had its own repercussions on his views on liberty, equality and rights. Nevertheless his emphasis on individual freedom continued to be as it was.

To understand his position, it is therefore necessary to see how much he was committed to marxism and how much he differed from it before we actually examine his thesis on individual liberty during his pro-marxian period.

47. Safar Sunra. Introduction to the thesis.
Laski's fundamental sympathy for Marx arose from his belief that a relentless passion for justice was the driving force in Marx's life as it was in his own. He admitted that Marx's purpose was "the desire to take from the shoulders of the people the burden by which it was oppressed .... He transformed the fears of the workers into hopes, he translated their effort from interest in political mechanisms to interest in social foundations .... He was often wrong, he was rarely generous, he was always bitter; yet when the roll of those to whom the emancipation of the people is due comes to be called, few will have a more honourable, and none a more eminent place." 48 Though he rejected several views of Marx as we shall see, 49 he admitted latter's economic interpretation of politics. Like Marx, he argued that "there is no development of human life in which the governing ideas and institutions will not be found, upon examination, to be largely a reflection of a given set of economic conditions." 50 The political institutions in a capitalist society cannot work effectively for the welfare of the masses. They fail to assure either liberty or economic security to the individual

48. Karl Marx by Laski (1922), p.46; hereinafter cited as KM.
49. Infra chap. I (part B, Section 2).
as they are being exploited by the property-owning class for their own purpose. Even the industrial corporations of the workers, for which he pleaded in his early works, cannot safeguard the individual against economic oppression. In fact, he realized that the real danger to the individual was not from the state authority, but it was from the propertied class. He regarded state authority as an executive instrument of the class which dominated the economic life of society.

By 1930 the paralyzing effects of the great depression were evident throughout the world. During the twenties, Laski had noted that in periods of contraction the effects of capitalism upon the workers were very similar to what the marxists predicted such as large scale unemployment, wage cuts, general misery of the masses, and the elimination of many of the concessions made to the workers by employers and government. As the depression continued and deepened, his hopes for a peaceful transition to the socialist order faded. He saw anger and despair mounting among the workers, while the rich and powerful, bent on protecting their privileges at the expense of the poor, seemed less willing than ever to make the sacrifices that he regarded as essential if social peace was to be maintained. His earlier faith in the possibility of achieving socialistic pluralism by
democratic and constitutional methods was almost shaken, and he seemed to move closer to the marxist position that violent revolution in such a condition was essential.

Laski accepted what he believed to be the marxist analysis of the capitalist society and attempted, without much clarity, to use the principles of marxism to interpret the events of 1930's. He claimed that Marx provided socialism "with a programme and a philosophy more rooted in the objective facts that it encounters than any alternative of which we have knowledge," and that his prophesies were likely to be fulfilled within the next half century in Europe and America as they had been fulfilled in Russia. Perhaps the clearest statement of Laski's commitment to the marxist faith is contained in an article written by him in 1935:

"No tool at the command of the social philosopher surpasses Marxism either in its power to explain the movement of ideas or its authority to predict their practical outcome. On the nature and function of the state, on legal institutions, on capitalist habits, on historiography, on the development of philosophical systems, marxism holds the field against any of its rivals. On the breakdown of capitalist democracy, the decline of bourgeois culture, the rise of fascism, the role of non-revolutionary socialism, it has insights not possessed by any alternative method of analysis." 52

51. "Marxism after Fifty Years", Current History, XXXVII (March, 1933), 695.

Laski also accepted Marx's thesis that men's ideas of good and evil are determined by economic conditions under which they live. Men's ideas of right and wrong are largely born of their position in society; and when "this, with its profound habituations, is challenged, now, as in the past, they go forth to do battle on behalf of their ideas of right and wrong." Men think as they live; since the rich and the poor live so differently that they are, in fact, "two nations", "they draw their notions of good and evil, right and wrong from the way they live; and there is no bond of effective common understanding between them."

53. Refer Marx's own Words: ".....Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness: On the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production...." (Karl Marx, Selected Works, Vol. I, Engels ed., 1946, pp.300-01).


This is the classic Marxist argument that men's ideas and values are determined by their class positions and that all intellectual formulations are mere class-ideologies, disguised rationalizations of class interests and privileges. Laski, in his pro-Marxian period, seemed to accept this thesis due to his overwhelming pessimism about the possibility of achieving socialism through persuasion, although his own life had refuted this thesis and his own conscious mind did not accept it. His socialism or that of Marx, Engels, or Lenin, or the Fabianism of the Webbs, Shaw, Wells, Cripps and Attlee, cannot be explained on the basis of personal experience of proletarian poverty and exploitation. In fact, the leaders and the theoreticians of the European socialist movement and the critics of nineteenth century capitalism, such as Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, J.S. Mill and William Morris, to whom Laski so often referred, have, for the most part, been members of the middle or upper class. Their analysis of their society and their criticisms of its failings were based not on their experiences as members of the working class but on their insights into the problems and feelings of others. These insights were the fruit of the keenness of their observation, the power of their imagination, and their ability to analyze and express what they felt and thought. But driven by his experience that reason and persuasion had
become powerless to change the social environment, he committed to the above mentioned marxist thesis. Otherwise, as a believer in free thinking and positive aspect of individual liberty he always dismissed such a thesis. He admitted when he spoke of the *embourgeoisement* of large sections of the working class, particularly the technical and white-collar workers, that it was by no means true that all those who were objectively "proletarian" were driven by their economic status to accept "proletarian" ideas and values.

Further, during this period Laski, like Marx, also did not feel it necessary to discuss the institutions of the new society. By concentrating on a criticism of present institutions and on the promise of a future paradise that remains undefined, he like Marx created a kind of Sorelian myth that is largely immune to intellectual analysis. Under the influence of Marx, he developed such an acute hostility towards capitalist system and became so infatuated with the idea of state socialism that he even seemed to contradict, for a moment, his earlier faith in the freedom of human mind. But, as we shall see later on, he could not totally accept such a point of view.

Lastly, Laski accepted the theory of Marx and Lenin regarding the nature of the state and attempted to

apply it to the interpretation of fascism which, he thought, had become a danger to the human freedom. According to Marx and Lenin the state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. Accepting this viewpoint Laski maintained that the emergence of fascism conclusively demonstrated the validity of the marxist theory of the nature of the state. He interpreted fascism as an institutional technique of capitalism in its phase of contraction. It had entrusted unlimited political power to those who owned and controlled the means of production. It left undisturbed the private ownership of the means of production, which is the foundation of capitalism.

58. See the views of Marx and Lenin regarding the nature of the state: Mark Explained: "Arising out of class contradictions, the state becomes the state of the most powerful class, the class which rules in economics and with its aid becomes also the class which rules in politics...." (These words have been quoted by Engels in his book: The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (Moscow, 1940) p.141).

Lenin remarked: "The state is a machine for the oppression of one class by another, a machine for holding in obedience to one class other, subordinated classes."

(V.I. Lenin: Marx, Engels, Marxism (Moscow, 1947), p.433)

59. STP, p.112.
He remarked that "fascist dictatorship enables the uneasy marriage between capitalism and democracy to be dissolved by the simple expedient of forcing the masses, by terror, to renounce their claim to increased material welfare."\(^{60}\) In its attempt to maintain the profits of the capitalist class, fascism resorted to an aggressive foreign policy and to imperialist ventures so that popular attention could be diverted from domestic difficulties. He traced the foundations of World War II, which was started by fascist countries, in the implication of capitalism in its imperialist phase. He drew inspiration from Lenin\(^{61}\) in maintaining such a belief that international wars were the outcome of capitalism in its last phase of imperialism.

As a means of analyzing the factors in the rise of fascism, the mid-nineteenth century apparatus of a rationalistic economic determinism, which Laski borrowed from marxism, is altogether inappropriate. His analysis was erroneous because he did not see that fascism was an essentially new phenomenon of the twentieth century and not merely the last stage of "bourgeois" rule. The Leader and the Party destroyed the independence of all the institutions and organizations of the free society - churches as well as trade unions, chambers of commerce and business associations as well as

\(^{60}\) CTS, p.xv.  
\(^{61}\) Refer V.I.Lenin's Selected Works: Part I (Moscow,1946), pp. 642-740.
socialist and labour groups, the freedom of the businessman as well as the right of the worker to organize and to strike. In fact, his failure to understand the real nature of fascism, his excessive hostility to capitalist democracy, his belief that private property was the main source of power and that the effort to break the hold of those who possessed economic power should be the main goal of social action, and consequently his acceptance of a strong state, as we shall see, were the consequences of his acceptance of a simple marxist analysis of capitalist society and economic determinism of Marx. At the same time, he also continued to maintain his belief that the modern state performed a large number of functions for the benefit of the workers, specially in the fields of education, welfare, social insurance, health and housing, and that these services, which were of greatest benefit to the lowest paid workers, were largely financed by taxes that increased progressively as incomes arose. As such, he remained divided in his mind while he approved of the marxian viewpoints such as - (1) The political institutions in a capitalist society cannot work effectively for the welfare of the whole society, (2) men's ideas and their social relations are determined by their economic conditions under which they live, and (3) the state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class.
over another. And it cannot be said with certainty that these views of Marx were really acceptable to him. While on certain points, he undoubtedly differed from marxism and rejected them as we shall examine now.

(2) Rejection of Marxian views:

Although Laski accepted an economic interpretation of politics under the influence of Marx, he did not like his (Marx's) attitude towards individual liberty and democracy.

Marx had no faith in a type of liberty provided by the capitalist order. He dismissed it as a purely bourgeois ideal and was openly scornful of democracy as a bourgeois invention designed to deceive the people. For him, history was the story of clashes between determined minorities contending for power. Laski criticized such an attitude of Marx as early as in 1922 in his book, *Karl Marx* (1922). According to him, a democratic system was totally alien to Marx's temperament. Marx was essentially a prophet who had to dominate every movement he entered, and who had no patience with difference. "Contemptuous.....of all who did not think exactly in his fashion, he never learned the essential art of colleagueship." But, on the contrary, Laski loved freedom so much that he did not like the vigorous control and party discipline of marxism in spite of his attraction

63. KM, p.25.
for Marx and his theory of economic determinism. He called marxist policy a policy of Machiavellian manoeuvre, the essence of which is described by Longuet's citation of the line from Recine, "I embrace my rival, but it the better to choke him". Against such a policy he preferred freedom of thought and was constantly in favour of tolerating the difference in ideologies. He never believed in the policy of suppression of opinions of the opponents as Marx and his followers in Russia had believed in. He remarked in *Dangers of Obedience and Other Essays* (1930) that "we must rather have faith in the power of reason to direct the human spirit to the prospects of concession and sacrifice. We must rather seek to persuade our masters that our equality is their freedom." Like Mill, he believed that toleration of new ideas and of unorthodox behaviour was "not merely desirable in itself, but also politically wise, because no other atmosphere of activity offers the assurance of peaceful adjustment." And, like Mill, he was convinced that persecution would never be able to achieve a final suppression of significant truth. His fundamental belief was that "truth be established by reason alone; that

64. *Communism* by Laski, p.211.
departure from the way of reason as a method of securing conviction is an indication always of a desire to protect injustice."\textsuperscript{67}

Laski not only criticized Marx and his followers for their anti-democratic belief, but he also defended the freedom of the individual against what he described as the tendency within the Labour Party to discipline spontaneity in the name of conformity and unity.

"Expulsion becomes almost a monthly experience in the administration of the party; and expulsion rapidly breeds the mind accustomed to regimentation."\textsuperscript{68} He urged in his Faith, Reason and Civilization (1944) that the insights of one's conscience should never be sacrificed to the demands of any strategy. Our deepest obligation was not to any church or party, but "to that innerself in each one of us which we can never yield to any one's keeping without ceasing to be true to our dignity as human beings."\textsuperscript{69} His emphasis on the role of knowledge and reason in social and political affairs, his faith in the efficacy of methods of persuasion to accomplish

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p.288.

\textsuperscript{68} Marx and Today by Laski (1943), pp. 28-29; hereinafter cited as MT

\textsuperscript{69} Faith, Reason & Civilization by Laski (1944),p.33; hereinafter cited as FRC.
necessary changes, his hostility to irrational dogmas of all sorts, his cosmopolitanism, and his critical attitude towards traditional institutions made him the heir of the philosophes of eighteenth century France, who, as men and as thinkers, exerted so strong an influence upon him.  

Laski also rejected Marx's view that history is nothing but the history of class-struggle. Early in 1931 he remarked that "the thesis of the materialist interpretation of history seems to me in its large outline though not in its particular details, a thesis that is unanswerable." Unlike Marx, he held that historical events were misread if they were seen entirely in economic terms. "Religion, race, nationality, these have their ideologies which shape, even as they are shaped by the economic environment." He argued that historical materialism, because of its excessive rationalism and its over-emphasis on economic factors, ignored the fact that men's rational interest was often "overcome by distracting counter-currents of loyalty which afford them satisfaction superior to that which reason might afford."

70. See his essays on "The Age of Reason", "Diderot", and "The Socialist tradition in the French Revolution", reprinted in Studies in Law and Politics (1932); hereinafter cited as SLP.


73. Communism, p. 79.
Laski criticized fundamental marxist principle
that there existed inevitable laws of historical develop-
ment that enabled us to predict at least the next stage
of social evolution. Against it he argued that the "laws"
that governed a given system of production were "merely
tendencies which are, at each instant of time, subject to
a pressure which makes prophesy of their operation at
best a hazardous adventure."\textsuperscript{74} He noted that even if
economic classes disappeared, it did not necessarily follow
that other forms of class rule, such as the rule of a
doctrinal aristocracy, would not emerge. He also
criticized Marx for his assertion that the movement
towards socialism and communism was the inevitable result
of the breakdown of capitalism. The sequel to that break-
down, Laski argued, might be anarchy and the emergence of
a non-proletarian dictatorship. He noted that the marxist
affirmation that a new system of production would emphasize
better tendencies in human nature, and precisely the
tendencies a communist society required, was "no more than
a prophesy which may be justified in the event."\textsuperscript{75} He
questioned the belief of the communists that capitalism
would be unable to check their propaganda or stem their
relentless sweep to victory. He cited the examples of
postwar Italy, Bulgaria and Rumania to demonstrate that

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.84.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p.177.
"the counter offensive of capitalism has been proportionate to the vehemence of communist claims."76 We are somewhat bewildered by his rejection of the major thesis of marxism, the belief that capitalism would inevitably collapse and give way to a new economic system. For when he admitted "the possibilities that better industrial organization and the prospects of scientific discovery might easily make of capitalism a system able to satisfy the main wants of the workers,"77 he was denying not merely Marx's major premise but also his own earlier assertion that the demands of the workers could be satisfied only if capitalism was replaced by a new economic system. But the reason is that his free and empirical mind could not accept any of the principles of marxism completely. His faith in individual liberty, free thinking, reason and persuasion, which he permanently believed in, was mainly responsible for making him hesitant in accepting marxism. Hence he continued his attacks against marxism and could never assimilate fully any of its principles.

The main weight of Laski's attack on marxism was directed against its insistence on the inevitability of a violent revolution in the transition to socialism and the corollary, the belief in the necessity of an iron dictatorship during the period of consolidation. His first objection to the revolutionary method was a practical

76. Ibid., p.198.
77. Ibid., p. 87.
one that, given the overwhelming power of modern governments and of their instruments of control, the accomplishment of a revolution was now a qualitatively different problem than it was in 1848 or even in 1870. No revolution is possible in the face of a hostile army and navy, and that hostility is certain unless the revolutionary group has already attained control of the government by winning a majority. Also, differences in national background and religion, he argued, cut across the solidarity of the working class, particularly in a nation such as the United States, and appeals to these loyalties may prove stronger than the economic motive on which Marx relied.

But, over and above, Laski's main ground for rejecting the marxist doctrine, however, was his belief that security and freedom would vanish from the earth if profound belief in any cause was held to be justification for a resort to revolutionary violence. Violence is particularly inappropriate as the means of transition to a socialist or communist society in which the maximum development of men's cooperative and harmonious impulses will be essential. He noted that "the condition of communism is the restraint of exactly those appetites which violence releases." The example of the Russian revolution, he argued, makes it clear that the resort to violent overthrow of existing

78. KM,p.42.
institutions "entails the suppression of tolerance and kindness, sows cruelty and hatred, anger and suspicion, into the soil of human relations, has impaired at every point the intellectual heritage of the Russian people, and has been impatient of reason and fanatically hostile to critical enquiry." \(^79\) For him, the good society was one that provided for the fullest possible release of the creative energies of its members and in which intellectual and spiritual good were valued more highly than material possessions.

Laski maintained this early belief against violent revolution, somehow or other, throughout his pro-marxian period. He wrote in the second edition of Grammar of Politics (1930):

"Revolution is probably incompatible with the maintenance of civilized life for it is attempted on any large scale, its destructiveness will reduce the standard of living for vast populations to the level of the Indian ryot." \(^80\)

As such, he was of the opinion that if a communist revolution were successful, the resulting destruction, together with hatred and bitterness engendered, would make impossible the emergence of the society of justice and fraternity that was supposed to be its goal. He also

\(^79\) "Lenin and Mussolini", Foreign Affairs, II (Sept., 1923) 48.

\(^80\) GP, p. 540.
maintained that the special conditions that made the Bolshevik Revolution successful in Russia were not likely to occur again in any modern state; Lenin and Trotsky were rare, while "few governments are as outrageous as that of Tsarist Russia or as confused and incompetent as that of Kerensky." It is impossible for a secretly armed minority to seize power as long as the armed forces remain loyal to the government, and the communists have no reason to hope that in other countries the army and navy will be as totally disorganized and as susceptible to revolutionary propaganda as they were in Russia in 1917. He noted that an unsuccessful revolution would lead to dictatorship of the Right and to increased misery for the masses. Successful revolution, he further argued in his later book Democracy in Crisis (1933), is possible only when the authority of the government is completely broken, as it was in Russia in 1917. But "under the conditions of modern administration, except in the event of unsuccessful war, it is only seldom that a political system breaks down with such completeness." English and

81. Communism, p.236.
82. Democracy in Crisis (1933) by Laski, p.236; hereinafter cited as DC; see also his words in State in Theory and Practice (1935), chap. IV.

The success of Russian Revolution can only be repeated in the conditions of the Russian Revolution. When these are absent, the working classes can only attain power by remaining coherent and united, whatever may be differences, within their party organizations. The only way to secure unity of the working class actions is to defend these institutions at all costs, and to use the pressure of events to direct them towards a satisfactor
American workers, it was his belief, demonstrate an almost total lack of militant class consciousness; their "profound immersion" in bourgeois liberalism makes them totally unreceptive to revolutionary appeals. He knew very well the ruling class and the working class of both Britain and America. He said that in these countries the working class was so accustomed to bourgeois outlook and the ruling class so accustomed to the habits of compromise that it was not at all necessary to organize small disciplined revolutionary parties. Rather much could be achieved through compromise and persuasion. In support of this outlook of Laski, we can see his statement in his own defence against the libel case in 1946.83 Thus he

policy. Any other method than this is exactly that "playing with revolution", against which Marx warned the working class in measured words."

83. Laski was attacked in Daily Express on June 20, 1945 as advocating for violence. Laski was greatly hurt by this case and wanted to pursue the libel case in law court to clarify his position. Laski's case was that he never advocated revolution by violence either in the New York Market place or in other towns where he was accused of doing so; that his actual statement was to the effect that: "It was very much better to make changes in time of war when men were ready for great changes and willing to make them by consent through the urgency of war, than to wait for urgency to disappear through victory, and then to find out that there was no consent to change what the workers felt to be an intolerable burden. We had it in our power to do by consent that which in other nations has been done in violence." But Laski lost his case in law court. This was due to the impact of his words. Though he never meant violence in England, yet it was interpreted so and he was ultimately branded as a sort
completely dismissed the idea of violent revolution like Russell, particularly for England and U.S.A. in which Marx and Lenin strongly believed. He merely approved of Marxian thesis of economic power controlling political power and not its methods of bringing about social transformation. He shrank from accepting the Leninist conclusion that socialists should prepare for revolution so that they would be able to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and to defend socialism against the attacks of reactionary forces. His earlier phase left behind its own deposits, and the net result was that he continued his faith in the peaceful and democratic methods of social change. Truly speaking, he believed in 'revolution by consent' as opposed to violent revolution.

Further, his 'revolution by consent' has a deeper significance than what it is normally thought as change by constitutional means. It is not a revolution of violent and sinister creature plotting his country's downfall; whereas he believed himself to have devoted his great intellectual gifts and store of nervous energy to the task of explaining to his fellow countrymen how they might save Britain from passing through the agony of revolution to which most of Europe had been condemned by neglect of the lesson of history. His own words pleading against the case are enough to show his faith in constitutional reforms as against violent revolution.

that reduces the masses to some sort of spectators and not participants in it. On the contrary, it is a conscious revolution in which the masses participate consciously. As such, he was in favour of some sort of populist revolution which carried with it the support of the people after they were being convinced of its usefulness. At the same time, 'revolution by consent' must also be non-violent. He dismissed violent revolution thinking that it suppressed reason and understanding as pointed out earlier. It is based on sentiments and blind obedience to party dictates which results in anarchy when it fails, and in dictatorship when it is successful as it was in Russia. From both viewpoints such a revolution, according to him, is bad. While a 'revolution by consent' is always gainful. It is based on reason and voluntary support of the people. That is why he argued that socialists should continue their efforts to win the support of a majority of the electorate for their programme and should adhere to the principles of democratic constitutionalism. He remarked in Democracy in Crisis in 1933 that "what a socialist government does must seem to be just to the bulk of the opinion in society; and what it does must be done in such a way that the transition is not marked by the kind of abruptness which moves those affected to justifiable despair and indignation." 85

In this way, Laski did not go the whole marxist hog. He rejected Marx's fundamental belief in inevitable
laws of historical development, his theory of class struggle and his plea for a violent revolution. On the other hand, he continued to maintain his faith in the democratic methods of persuasion and free thinking. His belief in the positive liberty persisted, although in his pro-Marxian period he seemed to assert that liberty was not so much a positive condition as it was a negative condition. Now let us examine as to what extent his views on individual liberty, equality and rights underwent change during his pro-Marxian period.

(3) Laski's views on Liberty, Equality and Rights:

Laski's main concern in life was the protection of individual liberty. He tried to protect the individual against all types of coercion in society. In 1925, in *Grammar of Politics*, he maintained that since liberty was something positive, it could not be defined as the absence of restraint. But, subsequently, as he committed to Marxian viewpoint, an important change took place in his views on individual liberty. In the Preface to the second edition of *Grammar of Politics*, written in October, 1929, he said that "in 1925 I thought that liberty could most usefully be regarded as more than a negative thing. I am now convinced that this was a mistake, and that the old view of it as an absence of restraint can alone safeguard the personality of the citizen."86 Both in this and later

86. GP, Preface to the 2nd edition.
editions of the Grammar, however, he left unchanged the 1925 discussions of liberty in the body of the text; but in 1930 he outlined his new view of liberty in *Liberty in the Modern State*. The first words of this volume are:

"I mean by liberty the absence of restraint upon the existence of those social conditions which, in modern civilization, are the necessary guarantees of individual happiness." 87

This definition obviously does not embody the traditional view of liberty as the absence of restraint upon the actions of the individual; in essence it is the same as his earlier view that freedom is the system of conditions enabling the individual to attain self-realization by satisfying his demands. In succeeding paragraphs, however, and, in general, throughout the work, he used the term 'liberty' in a somewhat traditional sense, although he did not leave his plea for a positive concept of liberty as a thing to be realised by the individual himself. He stated, for example, that every rule and every compulsion was "a limitation upon freedom. Some of them are essential to happiness, but that does not make them for a moment less emphatically limitations." 88 He now insisted that there was an antithesis between liberty and authority, that "a man's freedom is born of a limitation upon what his rulers may exact from him." 89

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87. LMS, p. 1.
88. Ibid, p. 3.
He also conceded that, while liberty might be unreal if a man had no security in employment or insufficient education to enable him to express his needs and opinions, economic security was not liberty, and "deprivation of knowledge is not a denial of liberty. It is a denial of the power to use liberty for great ends."90

Although Laski stressed the importance of liberty, he believed that in our age men were interested in freedom not so much for its own sake as for the sake of the satisfactions it was able to bring them. The freedom desired by the poor is "the freedom to enjoy the things their rulers enjoy. The penumbra of freedom, its purpose and its life, is the movement for equality."91 He argued, as he argued in his early works, that by equality he did not mean identical treatment for individuals who differed in capacity and need, although he did advocate "identity of response to primary needs",92 as well as the guarantee of a minimum standard of living for all. Rather, equality is "an insistence that there is no difference inherent in nature between the claims of men to happiness. It is therefore an argument that society shall not construct barriers against those claims which weigh more heavily upon

90. Ibid., p.5.
91. Ibid., pp.218-19.
92. GP, p.160.
Approximate equality of wealth is essential if political equality and justice are to be attained. Differences in wealth or status over and above the minimum standard guaranteed to every citizen must be open to achievement by all, and they must be capable of being shown to be necessary to the enhancement of the common welfare. Each man has the right, he argued, to such a share of the essential dividend as permits him at least to satisfy those primary material wants, hunger, thirst, the demand for shelter, which, when unsatisfied, prevent the realization of personality. In return for this minimum payment, he thought, the individual has a duty to perform such functions as will produce the amount required for his maintenance. No one has a right to income or to property except as a return for functions performed on behalf of society. As such, Laski rejected the communist plea for equality of income for all. He did not even believe that his "common civic minimum" should be the same for all members of the community. He said that "the minimum we settle for each occupation will clearly involve differences built upon the costs that occupation involves." Above this minimum we must "also pay wages in such a fashion that we attract into each social necessary occupation a sufficiency of talent to run them adequately."  

93. LMS, p.9.  
94. GP, p.197.  
95. Ibid., pp.197-98.
For manual labour, differences in reward above the minimum will be based on individual output; for work that is not quantitatively measurable, rewards are to be set at the levels that will give the society an adequate number of doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professional workers.

Laski's main thesis in his pro-Marxian period was that inequality was an inherent characteristic of capitalist society, while a socialist society would necessarily be the "equal society". He argued that economic inequality in a capitalist society was the root cause of all other inequalities. He also said that freedom was meaningful only to a small minority in capitalist society which owned and controlled property, but in the next breath he maintained that men now enjoyed greater political and religious freedom than ever before. Particularly after the onset of the depression in 1929, he seriously overestimated the control that the economically powerful exerted over the political process as well as the degree to which ordinary men in capitalist society were the prisoners of poverty, ignorance and "dumb inertia". The masses have been so brutalized by the system of inequality that their only response to their situation is "a sense of angry despair or sodden disillusion". The poor "do not know the power that they possess. They hardly realize

what can be effected by organizing their interests. They lack direct access to those who govern them."97 This underrating of the political awareness and effectiveness of ordinary men, which occasionally comes perilously close to despair and contempt, led Laski to be exceedingly pessimistic about the ability of democracy to deal with its long-range problems and with the crisis of the depression. The crux of his analysis of the relationship between liberty and equality was his categorical assertion that "in an unequal society it is necessary to repress the expression of individuality. Every attempt at such expression is an attempt at the equalization of social conditions; it is an attempt to make myself count, an insistence on any claim, an assertion of my right to be treated as equal in that claim with other persons. To admit that I ought to have that freedom is to deny that the inequality upon which society rests is valid. And, accordingly, every sort of devious method, conscious or unconscious, is adopted to prevent my assertiveness."98 Thus his chief concern was to show that freedom, in any sense of the term, had no meaning except in the context of equality. Without equality freedom is, in Hobhouse's phrase, a name of "noble sound and squalid result." 99

99. Quoted in DC, p.207.
Laski, in the war period, again moved ahead with certainty from the negative concept of freedom to a positive conception, and he offered a variety of explanations of the meaning of positive freedom. First, he stated in the Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time (1943) that men now "judge the states under whose authority they live by their power to offer the masses economic security upon the basis of expanding welfare. That, in our time, has become the meaning of freedom to the masses all over the world."\(^{100}\) At another point he adopted the view that freedom was the recognition of necessity. "Every society is built upon a system of postulates the continuing life of which its members must agree to respect; and their freedom is only available within the limits of that respect."\(^{101}\) It follows that "if the introduction of planning into a capitalist democracy is to be compatible with the maintenance of freedom it must have behind it the general consent of citizens.......When a society accepts the decision to plan it is, thereby, providing itself with an overriding purpose to the general principles of which the mass of citizens must conform. Their freedom becomes a function of its necessities; the limits of their permissible initiative are set by the logic it implies."\(^{102}\)

\(^{100}\) Reflection on the Revolution of Our Time (1943) by Laski, p.297; henceforth cited as RR.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., p.382.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., p.383.
His view of freedom as the recognition of the necessary principles of the social order also rested on his thesis that the life of every society was based on a series of generally accepted postulates that no citizen could be permitted to reject. Given this view of freedom, it is not surprising that he concluded that the ideas of any group such as the Conservative Party would inevitably be persecuted once they were held to threaten the foundations of the new socialist society. Such an interpretation of freedom creates the following difficulty to a common reader in the first instance. Although a man may be free when he decides to sacrifice his individual liberty, in whole or in part, to the service of some cause, he is in no sense free if he is compelled to submerge himself and his interests in a social purpose. But when we link up this view of freedom of Laski to his another definition of freedom that he often gave the difficulty is solved. "The essence of freedom, given the framework of necessity within which each must discover it," he said, "is, I think, to be found in what I have called the sense of continuous initiative, the conviction that each of us, even if involved in a social purpose which transcends our private purpose, can yet contribute to its definition some emphasis which is our own."

103. Ibid., p.406.
104. RR, p.390.
And the "essence of a capacity for growth, which enables its possessor to affirm his or her personality, is the very secret of freedom." Laski insisted that in 1939, even in the democratic nations, only a "tiny minority" found in their daily lives this self-fulfilment that gives one the conviction that one is free. The idea of freedom, he said, involves the organization of those opportunities for continuous initiative through which alone the common man can find significance. At another time he spoke of freedom as the creation of "the positive conditions in which a people can affirm its own essence." In this way, he continued his earlier conception of liberty as a positive condition of life all through his pro-marxian period.

Further, Laski discussed his theory of rights also in the context of his idea of positive freedom. As we have already seen, he defined rights that inhere in each man as a member of society as "those things without which I cannot, in Green's phrase, realize myself as a moral being", or as "those conditions of social life without which no man can seek, in general, to be himself at his best."  

105. Ibid., p.391.
107. GP, pp.39 and 91.
He maintained this view of rights in his later works also. In *Politics* (1931) he defined a right as "a condition without which, in the light of historic experience, the individual lacks assurance that he can attain happiness."108 Since the purpose of the state is to make it possible for each man to achieve this self-realization and happiness, it must secure the substance of these rights to every citizen. Rights, therefore, are "prior to the state in the sense that, recognised or not, they are that from which its validity derives."109 Rights are correlated to functions, and, though their content varies with changes in time and place, the general test of rights is their utility to all the members of the state. The state, he argued, must secure them for each of its citizens. As such, he considered rights as those conditions which are necessary for the enjoyment of individual liberty.

On the basis of the above analysis of Laski's ideas on liberty, equality and rights it can now be stated with certainty that his thesis on individual liberty, even when he was under the influence of Marx, did not become weak. On the contrary, it remained as strong and positive as it was in his earlier period. He leaned to marxism due to his hostility towards the capitalist democracy which increased in the period of economic depression in Europe

109. GP, p.91.
as shown above. But after the second World War when economic conditions improved and the danger of fascism in Europe was over and Labour Party in England won the general elections, he again turned towards democracy with a hope that now the "government was in the hands of a political party built upon the strength of the organized workers and their allies." Notwithstanding, his marxist faith left behind its own deposits. Consequently, he developed, during the postwar period, his belief in some sort of democratic socialism. He maintained this new belief with a view to safeguarding individual liberty against both political and economic repression in society. This brings us to the examination of his latter views and their relation to his thesis on individual liberty.

(C) Latter Views of Laski:

(1) Genesis of his Views:

In post-war period, Laski in view of the above mentioned situation in England and Europe totally rejected marxian thesis that revolution and dictatorship are inevitable to socialism. He analyzed Communist Manifesto and remarked in the Introduction to it that "the Manifesto did not propose the exchange of one dictatorship for another;
it proposed the democratization of power by putting the authority of the state into the hands of a working class." But, contrary to it, in Russia, he believed, *communist Manifesto* was misinterpreted, and the dictatorship was established in place of the democratization of power. He also argued like Trotsky\(^\text{112}\) that even the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Marx regarded as a necessary phase for the establishment of a classless society, had been replaced by one man's dictatorship over the proletariat after the violent revolution in Soviet Russia. Thus, according to him, Russia had gone the way from monarchy and feudalism to the dictatorship of one man. It is different from the way (from capitalism to the dictatorship of the proletariat) which Marx fixed in his theory of Historical Materialism. This Laski conceived as worse. He regarded Russian dictatorship as some sort of totalitarian rule which permeated and summed up in itself every activity in social life. Such a rule is dangerous to the realization of individual liberty. Consequently, he developed hostility

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111. *Communist Manifesto* (1948) by Laski, Introduction, p.9 hereinafter cited as CM.

112. Trotsky described Lenin's idea of the revolutionary party, organized to fight the revolution in Russia, as the "replacement of the dictatorship of the proletariat by a dictatorship over the proletariat, of the political rule of the class by organizational rule over the class." *Political Thought* by C.L.Wayper p.227.
against it. He remarked in the third edition of *Liberty in the Modern State* (1948) that "the devotees of marxism in its extreme form have never doubted their right to impose their outlook upon the recalcitrant, even at the cost of blood. In a dictatorship like Moscow the suppression of liberty is termed as resistance to the admission of incorrect "bourgeois notions". He, therefore, maintained his faith in constitutional methods, and regarded the socialist party of England as the greatest socialist party of the world, and capable of bringing change in the economic order of England. He fully disapproved of undemocratic methods of Russia and preferred constitutional means for social transformation.

After World War II, new economic and political developments in England under the socialist government made Laski view things in the context of national importance. Consequently, he tried to find out a new variety of socialism, and he now completely left his belief in international solidarity of the working class which was the keystone of the *Communist Manifesto*. Socialists, organized as parties and, still more, as governments, had demonstrated, he said, that they were nationalists first. In each country they had made "their own conception of enlightened self-interest

Arguing his case further, he remarked that the stronger the trade unionism of a given country, the more intensely nationalist it became. In order to secure the greatest possible welfare for their members, unions had favoured tariffs and restrictions on immigration and opposed the admission of refugees. He also frankly stated that although he regarded the economic factor as fundamental in social change, he now more strongly recognised the force of other non-economic factors such as nationalism, religion, colour, race and tradition. He felt that for each country a separate system should be found in view of her own particular situations and problems. For England, he preferred constitutional means for bringing about social and economic reforms.

From the viewpoint of international peace also, Laski observed in his *Dilemma of Our Time* (published in 1952 after his death) that Russia was not friendly with Western democracies. Rather, it had become hostile to Western powers as it did not tolerate other ideologies except its own. Such an attitude of Russia he regarded as dangerous to world peace and human progress. Hence he


115. Ibid., p.8.
became fully convinced that it was only through democracy that freedom of thought could be best maintained. At the same time, he believed that if democracy was organized on the principles of socialism, both freedom of mind and economic security to the individual could be attained.

From the foregoing discussion of Laski's ideas it follows that the burning desire behind his arguments against the dictatorship of Soviet Russia and his plea for democratic socialism was for the attainment of both freedom of mind and economic security to the individual during the postwar period. This makes it necessary to probe into his views on liberty, equality and rights in this period.

(2) Liberty, Equality and Rights:

Although Laski still argued as he did in his pro-Marxian period that "freedom, in fact, is not only the abstract negation that the bourgeois era urged that it was," he now considered freedom definitely from the point of view of the individual's self-realization. Pleading for the positive freedom, he rejected the Marxian view that men were the blind instruments of destiny beyond their control, and insisted that "on the contrary, the ideas of men shape the purposes of the state power just

116. Dilemma of Our Time (1952) by Laski, p.72; hereinafter cited as DOT.
as the state power of any government shapes, the purposes
to which men lend the drive of their energy and emotion.117
Individuals, as such, are the real forces in every social
or political or economic change, and hence every change
and the method to bring that change should be in conformity
with their beliefs and should also promote their life.
The individual should not be coerced in any way. It was
the individual who recognized the need of the government,
and it is he who feels the need of change in it. The
government, therefore, should necessarily take him with her.
In any way, the government is not justified to suppress
the freedom and opinion of the individual members in
society. He strongly advocated freedom of the mind in
the thoroughly revised edition of Liberty in the Modern
State (1948). The most important thing in the realization
of individual liberty, he thought, is undoubtedly freedom
of the mind. The individual seeks for happiness, and the
state is an institution which exists to make his happiness
possible. He insisted that what the individual expected
from the state was to leave his experience counted in the
making of policy. Obviously enough if his experience is
to count the individual must be able to state it freely.

117. The American Democracy (1948) by Laski, p.557;
hereinafter cited as AD.
Laski argued that the right to speak it, to print it, to seek in concert with others its translation into the event, was fundamental to liberty. "If he is driven, in this realm, to silence and inactivity, he becomes a dumb and inarticulate creature, whose personality is neglected in the making of policy. Without freedom of the mind and of association a man has no means of self-protection in our social order." He added to the above-mentioned rights the right to free action as a necessary condition to the realization of individual liberty. The right to expression, right to association and freedom of action are indispensable for the development of individual life. And a denial of these rights is a denial of his happiness. The denial of these rights will be met with resistance from the individuals. He, therefore, insisted that no government, whether a capitalist democracy or a communist dictatorship, could dare suppress these rights or individual liberty. For him, it was not the government, but it was the individual liberty which was important. He frankly admitted that "I have sought, so far, to show that, however important be the political mechanisms on which liberty depends, they will not work of themselves. They depend for their

118. LMS (third ed. 1948), p.95.
creativity upon the presence in any given society of a determination to make them work. The knowledge that an invasion of liberty will always meet with resistance from men determined upon its repulsion, this, in the last analysis, is the only true safeguard that we have."\(^{119}\)

Thus he discussed liberty from the point of view of the individual in his work, *Liberty in the Modern State*, and considered certain rights as necessary for its enjoyment by the individual.

Along with, in other publications such as *American Democracy* (1949) and *Dilemma of Our Time* (1952) he also pleaded for liberty as a negative condition of life. Liberty in this sense depends mostly upon the state action. In this connection he criticised capitalist democracy. He argued that in a capitalist democracy the freedom of the individual was limited to the right to vote, while the ruling class saw to it that the vote was never used in such a manner as to threaten the fundamental laws of the market economy.\(^{120}\) The benefits of bourgeois capitalism have been, for the most part, confined to a small minority which possesses wealth and property, while the masses have been excluded from any real opportunity to enjoy freedom in any positive sense. In our age man's search for the freedom that fulfils his nature is frustrated

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119. *IMS*, p.94.

120. *AD*, p.260.
by social and economic conditions that enforce subordination upon him. To improve economic conditions, he believed, the old economic structure should be replaced by a new socialist structure. Without this individual freedom cannot become worth enjoying and meaningful. The state should work to assure economic equality to the individuals without which freedom in a positive sense has no meaning. While discussing freedom in both positive and negative sense, he also criticised Russian system. He did not approve of the idea of large-scale nationalized enterprises as maintained in Soviet Russia. He thought that large-scale nationalized enterprises seemed to show the same bureaucratic tendencies that were evident in the large privately owned corporations. He remarked that there had been no "attempts at serious experiments", and .... there was little that was really "exciting in the relations between management and men." He, therefore, repeated his earlier plea for "constitutional government in industry", as a means of winning the consent of the workers' representatives in the larger, and of the workers themselves in the smaller issues of policy and management. And he still advocated the greatest possible use of territorial and functional decentralization in the

121. Reflections on the Constitution (published in 1951 after his death) by Laski, p.201; hereinafter cited as ROC; also refer Trade Unions in New Society, pp. 155-56.
management of the nationalized industries. He made the startling conclusion that the whole-sale socialization of the means of production in Russia had not solved the problem of economic democracy any more than had the greatest technological advances in America. "Both leave the mass of workers instruments to be manipulated for ends in the definition of which they do not in any decisive way share." It is therefore necessary to safeguard the individual against both. For the enjoyment of individual liberty not only certain rights, as discussed above, are necessary, but, at the same time, the state must assure economic security to the individual.

Thus Laski regarded liberty as something to be enjoyed by the individual himself as much as he considered it as a state action. He endeavoured to safeguard it against every type of economic and political coercion in the state. In fact, he did not consider the state as an end in itself. Rather, he viewed its importance, as we shall see, in the context of the individual and the purpose of society. Let us, therefore, examine now his views on society which, like his views on the individual liberty, also remained at the centre of his discussion of the state.

122. TU, pp.144 and 158-59.
123. DOT, p.89.
124. Refer Chapter III of the thesis for the detailed discussion of Laski's views on the state.