CHAPTER II

Laski's Conception of Society

It is generally believed that Laski's ideas were mostly devoted to safeguarding the liberty of the individual and determining the limits of authority, and that he did not give much attention to the task of developing his own views on society. It is also believed that even his earlier idea of 'federal society' under which he pleaded for group autonomy is based on an extreme individualistic conception of society verging on anarchistic harmony. Such beliefs are maintained because we superficially read his political writings and arrive at hasty conclusions. But if we go deep into his political ideas and try to understand their implications we will find that Laski had his own definite conception of society. Although he did not make direct statements on society and there are a few stray remarks about society here and there in his books, his conception of society is implied in his writings.

Laski considered society as plurality of associations and groups when he aptly remarked while criticizing the classical theory of state absolutism
that "society is federal" and hence authority should also be federal. Such a view of society denies the idea of forced unity achieved by the authority of the state. On the contrary, he believed that unity is a matter of adjustment between the interests and activities of the various groups in society, including the state also. In place of an absolute state he put forth the idea of coordinate authorities in society competing for the loyalty of the individual. At the same time, he also recognised the role which the state plays in promoting the life of society, but he considered it (state) from a purely utilitarian point of view. The state, he firmly believed, is to justify its existence and its superiority to other groups on the basis of its contributions to the life of society and its members.

Laski maintained this view of society throughout his career. Even during the period when he came under the influence of marxism and accepted the necessity of a strong government with a view to changing the old economic structure of society, he did not approve of the view that society was to be submerged in the comprehensive functions of the state. He was constantly of the opinion that society is always superior to the state, and that it determines the character of state functions. It uses the state as it uses other groups
for different purposes in different situations and times. Thus Laski had a very novel, but a definite conception of society which we shall discuss now in detail with the help of his political writings. First of all let us examine Laski's earlier views on the nature of society.

(A) Society as Federal:

During the earlier period Laski regarded society as federal. To understand such a view of society held by Laski, we have to examine the implications of his arguments and his indirect statements made on society in relation to his criticism against the sovereign state as he did not write anything directly on the nature of society. Inquisitive by nature and the product of the period when the Victorian values were being questioned, he joined those thinkers who demanded a radical change in the conditions of the common people and opposed all orthodox dogmas regarding the social and political institutions. He examined the idea of state absolutism and found that in an absolute state individual liberty is not secure. It is exposed to political and economic tyrannies. He, therefore, thought that it was necessary to revise the old conception of an absolute state and its underlying emphasis on unity. In so doing, he started examining the nature of
society and based his criticism of state-absolutism and forced unity achieved by it from the standpoint of manifold life of society.

Defining the nature of society for the purpose of criticizing the idea of state absolutism Laski argued that society represents a multitude of groups and associations which compete for the loyalty of the individual. And the state is no more than one of these associations which works in cooperation with them for the progress of the members of society. He was of the view that the state has no exclusive, nor even superior, claim to the competing loyalties of the individual. He stated:

"Sovereign your state no longer is...........Nor can we doubt this polyarchism. Everywhere we find groups within the state which challenge its supremacy. They are, it may be, in relation with the state, a part of it; but one with it they are not. They refuse the reduction to unity. Men belong to it; but, also, they belong to other groups."

It is evident from the above statement of Laski that he was not ready, even for a moment, to accept a sovereign state which claims a complete supremacy in society. He thought that such a state existed only in theory, and not in practice. In practice, the state, according to him, has no inherent right to

1 SPS, p.169.
supremacy and to individual's allegiance. There are various groups in society which challenge every moment the supremacy of the state and claim equal allegiance with it. The state is not the creator of all other groups and associations. On the other hand, he insisted that the personality of the group was real and not conceded thereto by the state. Each group contributes to the development of the life of the individual and society as much as the state does. Hence there is no justification to the supremacy of the state over other groups in society. The state should justify, on the other hand, its existence by its contributions to the progress of society. He argued that "we stimulate its activities by making it compete with the work of other groups, co-extensive with or complementary to itself. As it may not extinguish other groups, so it may not claim preeminence. Like any other group, what it is and what it will be, it can be only by virtue of its achievement." Viewed in this way, the state, according to him, is not the only obligatory form of human association or the only representative and guardian of the general interests of society. But it is like any other group in society which works and competes with other groups for the loyalty of

2 Ibid., p.170.
the individual.

After examining and criticizing the old conception of state-absolutism, Laski attacked the idea that unity in society is forced by the state. Against this idea of forced unity, he pleaded for the federal life of society. He accepted the view of Herbert Spencer that society is not a unity in the sense the human body is. There is a single nerve sensorium in the human body which controls and unifies the various parts in the body. But there is no common consciousness in the life of society. The consciousness in society is local and individual. The parts in society are real and self-sufficing, and they cannot be reduced to unity. It does not mean that there is no harmony between the parts and that society is always in the state of anarchy. The harmony and organization in society, Laski believed, is achieved through the adjustment of various interests of the individual members. In society we find an agreement between the claims of different groups and their members, but there is no unity achieved per force by the state. The life of society is sustained through the cooperation which work...
Laski held the state like any other group in society, though with a vast range of functions. It assumes those functions which the individuals and their groups in society cannot discharge efficiently. If it obtains preeminence, he made it clear, over the wills of other groups, it is because it is entrusted by society with the work of adjusting the conflicting interests and activities of different groups, organizing the manifold life of society and maintaining an atmosphere which is necessary for the development of human personality. But it cannot discharge any of these functions without the active cooperation of the individuals and the groups. He frankly admitted that if the state existed with a definite purpose and functions in society, the groups had also grown with certain purposes and had important functions to discharge. The main purpose of all the groups (including the state), according to him, is to contribute to the happiness and enrichment of human life. And the individual gives his allegiance to them in proportion to their contributions to the progress of his life. If they fail to fulfill this purpose, they have no justification for their existence and they cannot claim any allegiance of the individuals. He explained that society which
exists in the form of individuals and groups of individuals has ultimately to determine their place and functions. And the state, he asserted, is no exception to this rule. It works, like other groups, during the pleasure of the members of society. Hence the idea of forced unity in society, maintained through the state, was not acceptable to Laski. He believed that in a society, which is full of associations and which (associations) enjoy a remarkable degree of confidence of and authority over the individuals, it would be incorrect to think of a unity forced by the authority of the state.

Laski, like Aristotle, seemed to believe that organization in society was based on three fundamental instincts in man such as the instinct of association, the instinct of organization and loyalty and the instinct of love and sympathy. These instincts explain, on the one hand, the necessity of various groups for maintaining the diverse interests of the individual, as also the need of harmoniously organizing them. He argued that "man is so essentially an associative animal that his nature is largely determined by the relationships thus formed. The churches express his feeling that he has need of religion. His desire for conversation and the newspapers results in the
establishment of clubs. The necessity of social organizations gave birth to the state. As his commercial enterprise began to annihilate distance, the trading company came into being. It would not, one urges, be over-emphasis to assert that in every sphere of human activity associations of some kind are to be found. They are the very life-breath of the community."³ Although these associations are independent in their spheres, there remains a need for coordination between them. But this coordination cannot be attained in society through force. He argued that the unity⁴ in society could be attained through the maintenance of diverse interests of the individuals with the help of various groups. For "the world is more like a federal republic than an empire or a kingdom."⁵ But the diverse interests in society can be maintained properly when the authority remains decentralized and divided among groups. He wrote that "since society is essentially federal in nature, the body which seeks to impose the necessary unities must be so built that

3. FS, pp.139-40.

4. By unity in society Laski meant only the coordination and adjustment between the various activities of the individuals and groups.

5. FS, p.169.
diversities have a place therein. In other words, it can be said that since the various groups help society in fulfilling its purpose and advance their claim for independent existence in view of their contribution to the social life, society remains essentially federal in nature. And its manifold life cannot be forcibly reduced to unity by the authority of the state.

From the above Laski's criticism of the idea of state supremacy and of the unity in society maintained by it, we can very well understand his implied conception of federal society. Further, his anti-authoritarian attitude and his idea of the division of powers were also rooted in his conception of federal society. He often cited William James's phrase that "we live in multiverse and not universe" and pleaded for a federal structure of society. In view of his plea for the recognition of diversified life of society he desired the authority of state to be distributed among the various groups. He criticized idealists for their identification of state and society. The identification, he believed, ignores the fact that there are social relationships which are as primary as the individual's relationship to the state, and that these relationships cannot be expressed through

6 GP, pp.26-35.
the state only. He reaffirmed the old truth that "the allegiance of man to the state is secondary to his allegiance to what he may conceive his duty to society as a whole." As the allegiance of man is not only to the state but also to several other groups, the authority must remain divided. He remarked that "the state is fellowship of men aiming at the enrichment of human life. It is an association like others: churches, trade unions, and the rest." Hence he did not like the idea of an all-absorptive state and pleaded for the decentralization of state powers with a view to attaining greater harmony in society.

Laski considered society as federal in nature. He said that it was integral to the proper understanding of any given society that it should be regarded as essentially federal in nature. It is federal from the point of view of its various problems in relation to its members. There is no single problem, he argued, to which men's activities are exclusively confined. Men differ in their problems.

7 AMS, p.122.
9 GP, p.37.
10 Ibid, p.89.
They appear as consumers, producers, medical practitioners, educationalists, artisans, religious men and so on. In view of their different interests or problems there are different functions in society which the various organizations undertake to discharge. According to him, there is government, on the one hand, to protect the common interests of the members, and, on the other, there are various other associations such as consumers' and producers' guilds, health and educational organizations, religious and vocational bodies and the rest which protect other special interests of the members. No single organization in society is fit to take over all the functions. That is why men build associations. He said that "associations exist to fulfil purposes which a group of men have in common. They support and imply functions." Thus he regarded society as federal not only from the point of view of its structure as we have understood from his repeated criticism of the state supremacy, but also from the standpoint of its different purposes and functions.

With reference to the above views of Laski on society, it can be argued that he did not mean anarchy by his idea of federal society as it is

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11 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
12 Ibid., p. 67.
generally believed. When he accepted the necessity of social organization, based on the natural instinct of organization and loyalty in man which, according to him (Laski), had given birth to the state, he left no chance for an anarchy in society. He approved of the leading role of the state in coordinating and organizing the multitudinous life of society. He only rejected the plea that the state can force organization and unity in society without seeking the cooperation of the individuals and their various groups.

At the same time, it can also be argued that Laski's conception of the individual liberty for the protection of which he maintained the theory of groups was also not based on an extreme individualistic conception of society verging on an anarchistic harmony. His individual was, for all intents and purposes, a social and political man like that of Aristotle. He thought that the individual always worked for the development of his personality through various groups in society. He is a member of several groups at a time because he considers them useful in his life. He obeys them so long as they work for him. And he withdraws his obedience to them as soon as he feels that they do not represent his interests. But this does not mean that the individual is utterly selfish and he judges the activities of the groups, including
the state, purely from the standpoint of his own interest. It is evident from Laski's arguments on the individual liberty and the theory of groups in the foregoing chapter as well as in the present chapter that although he considered the state and groups from a utilitarian viewpoint, he rejected the egoistic element in human nature as elaborated by Bentham.\(^\text{13}\) He defined the good as social which can only be attained within society. He described social good as "such an ordering of our personality that we are driven to search for things it is worthwhile to obtain that, thereby, we may enrich the great fellowship we serve."\(^\text{14}\) As such, his individual was not the individual living in isolation or in anarchy and working for self-interest. He rather firmly believed that there could be no progress and development of human personality in isolation or in anarchy. Whatever freedom, he asserted, the individual thinks necessary for the enrichment of his personality, he enjoys in society. In the same way, whatever development the individual is capable of, is only possible in society. Thus we understand that progress is

\(^\text{13}\) Refer Supra, chapter I of the thesis for Laski's criticism of Bentham's faith in the egoistic element in human nature.

\(^\text{14}\) GP,p.25.
possible only within society when the individual works in cooperation with his fellow-beings in groups and associations. An isolated wanderer on a desert island, he said, also enjoys freedom, but it is an abstract freedom in the sense that although he is at liberty to do whatever he can, there is practically nothing worthwhile that he can do. In this way, Laski dismissed the possibility of anarchy in society, and his conception of federal society was quite precise and realistic.

Laski maintained his conception of federal society and the decentralization of state powers with a view to protecting the individual liberty to the greatest extent during his earlier period. But after the publication of Grammar of Politics, when he came much closer to marxism\(^\text{15}\) and accepted the marxian idea that the economic forces in society remain fundamental in determining the character and function of the state, his conception of society changed. Instead of regarding society as completely federal, he now felt the necessity of a powerful government for regulating its (society's) manifold life which we shall examine now.

\(^{15}\) Supra, Introduction and Chapter I for detailed discussion of Laski's shift to marxism.
After the publication of Grammar of politics although Laski's earlier plea for federally organizing society underwent some change, his basic idea that society is federal in nature and the state is simply an agency of it remained unaltered. He now believed that society could not maintain its diverse interests and the associations could not function efficiently and independently so long as the economically dominant class continued to exert its influence upon the state government. In a capitalist society, he argued, a small class of persons, in possession of economic resources, dominate both the state and society, and there is no liberty and equality to the people. The industrial groups and trade unions cannot enjoy real freedom and safeguard the interests of the masses. The state in such a society does not represent the interests of the masses, but, on the contrary, it works as an agency of the economically dominant group in society. It uses its authority against the people on behalf of the propertied class. The urgent need of the present society, according to him, was therefore not so much to limit the authority of the state as it was to change the old capitalist order of society. Society has grown conscious, he felt, of increasing the powers of the government and using it as an
instrument for bringing about social and economic changes and establishing a classless society in which no class would dominate the people for its own gains and purposes. The state authority, he was convinced, which has been used so far by the propertied class for exploiting the common people, can be used now by society for changing the old economic structure. Only with the attainment of a classless society the need for a strong government would diminish. He emphatically remarked:

"Only when conflicts based upon property have been eliminated can we conceive of "a social organization" in which the truly federal nature of society receives institutional expression. And in such a social organization, authority can be pluralistic both in form and expression."16

He, therefore, postponed his idea of defining and distributing the authority of the state from the point of view of the federal nature of society for the time being and accepted the need for a powerful government.

Although Laski acknowledged that society was in need of a strong government for economic and social transformation, he continued to regard the state and its instrument of authority as the agencies of society. He insisted in The State in Theory and Practice that every society "must seek to sustain some stable relations of production in order to continue as society. It has to put behind those relations the

force of law. It needs, that is, a coercive instrument to secure the continuance of those relations simply because, otherwise, it will not continue to earn its living." The state's "primary function is to ensure the peaceful process of production in society. To do so it protects the system of productive relations which that process necessitates." The men who constitute the government have the right to exercise state's sovereignty and, thereby, to determine how the fruits of the productive process are to be distributed. But he also argued that since every society contained groups whose relations to the process of production were fundamentally different, conflicts were inevitable both between the groups and "between the idea each group puts forward as the expression of its idea of good which is born of the experience it infers from its position." The members of the dominant group, who control the machinery of state, may believe that they are attempting to promote the good of the whole society, the greatest possible satisfaction of the wants. But their conception of the social good reflects the values they have acquired from their experience, and that experience is a

17 STP, pp.92-93.
18 Ibid., p.93.
19 Ibid., pp.94-95.
function of their relation to the productive process. Indeed, for all of us, it holds that our conception of social good is "born, in predominant part, of our place in the scheme of social relationships."20

At certain periods, Laski also maintained in connection with the need of the state - authority that rapid and continued changes in the methods of production made it impossible for society to exploit fully the new productive potentialities as long as the old system of property relations existed. Some group in society then seeks to liberate the potentialities it sees in the productive process by changing those relations. If, however, it wishes to establish new property relations, it "must seek to capture the state in order to use the coercive power of the community to redefine them."21 Consequently, the basic struggles in any society are always struggles between economic classes to secure control of the sovereign power. In these class struggles, he remarked, the state is not a neutral agency, standing "over and above the conflicting groups, judging impartially between them. By its very nature, it is a coercive power used to protect the system of rights and duties of one process of economic relationships from invasion by another class which seeks to change them in the interests of another

20 Ibid., p.97.
21 Ibid., p.98.
process." And "the political forms," he said, "have always been mask behind which an owning class has sought to protect from invasion the authority which ownership confers; and, when the political forms have endangered the rights of ownership, the class in possession has always sought to adjust them to its needs." It follows from his arguments that in a capitalist society the democratic form of the state, wherever that exists, merely masks the power of plutocracy and its dependents who are no longer finding it suitable to the interests they seek to safeguard. As such, the political power is entirely derivative from, and subservient to, economic power.

On the basis of Laski's above analysis of state and the capitalist society, it can be deduced that in a capitalist society it is not the state which is dominant, but it is the economically dominant class that controls both the state machinery and the rest of society. The state, he repeatedly pleaded, has no will of its own. It only reflects the will of the dominant group in society. Hence his criticism, in his pro-marxian period, was mostly levelled against the property-owning class, and not against the state-authority. Rather he approved of it as a useful

22 Ibid., p.100
23 Ibid., p.293.
instrument of society for the purpose of economic and social transformation. Truly speaking, he never objected to the state-authority, working for the welfare of whole society, even in his earlier period. His objection was only to the monistic state of Hegel and Bosanquet which existed as a moral and spiritual agency having a will and purpose of its own, apart from the will and purpose of society. He, therefore, accepted the state-authority for all intents and purposes, and maintained that the government should be given all the powers it needed in order to reshape legal and political institutions to bring them into harmony with the working of the new socialist society. Its efforts to create and maintain the new society must not be hampered by the existence of limitations on governmental power.

Laski explained the popular dissatisfaction with the present political and economic systems and the demand for the creation of a socialist society as the consequence of the growing demands of the masses for welfare measures. Consequently, he came to the conclusion that no "mere changes in political machinery are adequate to the proportions of the problem........

24 See infra, Chapter III, Part A.
political forms, of themselves, can accomplish nothing."25 He realized that the scheme that he himself had once advocated for distributing the powers of the state government among the various groups in society were of no great value. On the contrary, he felt the need of a strong state vested with force and authority in view of the new demand of society, that is, the replacement of the old economic structure by a new socialist structure. A socialist society, he believed, would be a free and classless society in which no class would try to use the machinery of the state for exploiting the common masses in its own interest. On the other hand, the state would work as a representative institution of the whole society aiming at securing the individual liberty, economic equality and the general happiness of the people. He remarked that the Soviet experiences had made it clear that socialism meant the resumption of improvement in the material conditions of the masses and, as a result, a restoration of men's common faith and their allegiance to law. He specifically accepted the view that material improvement means ipso facto spiritual and intellectual progress, and that a good society is one in which men's demands are satisfied at

25 DC, p.149.
a constantly increasing rate. In the absence of material progress, according to him, it is rather impossible to think of any intellectual and spiritual development in society. For an average man the satisfaction of daily material wants such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine is necessary before he is asked to think of higher things. His mind becomes almost unable to function properly in the absence of satisfaction of his basic needs. Hence he must be made free from the material worries so that he can concentrate upon higher intellectual and spiritual things such as art, literature, religion, and so on. Even the great intellectuals, Laski argued, cannot stand aloof from the problems of the masses. Their minds and hearts are likely to be seriously affected by them. He remarked:

"I am concerned only to affirm that, as a working assumption for the people who live, not upon the heights, but in this work-a-day world, adequate external circumstances are likely to mean adequate internal fulfilment." 26

It implies that the greater the degree in which external circumstances all over the world are made adequate, the greater will be the number of satisfied men and women pursuing intellectual and spiritual values. It also follows that where the drive of society is towards an effort to make material

26 FRC, p.149.
circumstances favourable to mass well-being, the inner life of the citizens will be shaped towards the realization of happiness. He concluded that "good is the satisfaction of the demand on the largest possible scale; and a good society is one built upon an institutional basis which enables it perpetually to reach out to an ever increasing satisfaction of demand." 27

On the basis of the above assumptions it can be said that Laski regarded socialist society as the most progressive society from the viewpoint of general improvement of the masses. But he also admitted that a powerful government was necessary for the creation and maintenance of such a society. He argued that the government would enjoy considerable powers at least in the transitional period. And it would constantly work for the establishment of a new society. It would be entitled to use force against the reactionary forces if the latter threatened and checkmated the working of new society. All legal, political and economic institutions would be controlled and their working would be adjusted by the government as to suit the new conditions. As such, his idea during his pro-marxian period was of a government-regulated society. It was different from the idea of

27 Ibid., p.150.
state-regulated society in which the state as a supreme authority controls the entire life of society. But in a government-regulated society the society is being regulated by the consciousness of its needs making use of the machinery of the government for its own purpose. That is why, he did not fail to maintain, at the same time when he accepted the necessity of a strong government, that society is essentially federal in nature, and that the state is only an agency of it like several other groups and associations. Regarding the government too, he frankly admitted in his book, Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time (1943), that "a planned society imposed by the state power is not likely, for a long period, to admit the climate of freedom." 28

This shows that he also did not favour the idea of retaining a strong regulatory government, for a long period, in the interest of the diversified life of society. He approved of it only for the period during which society needs it for the establishment of a classless society.

Further, it should also be noted here that a strong regulatory government working as an instrument of society which Laski admitted for a temporary period for replacing the old economic structure was not a monistic state of the idealists. He always

28 RR, p.375.
considered such a regulatory agency from the point of view of the demands of society. What to speak of a monistic state, he was also suspicious of the regulatory control of a strong government. A strong state, by which he definitely meant, not the entire political society but only the regulatory government, has got a tendency to degenerate into a totalitarian state in the long run. That is why he did not stick, for a long period, to his idea of maintaining a powerful government which he had approved of during his pro-marxian period for the purpose of establishing a socialist society. And his persistent anglo-saxon faith in democratic methods and decentralization of state powers for preserving individual liberty and diversities in the social life became gradually dominant after the Second Great War. Along with, his idea of government-regulated society also changed. He again seemed to revert to his original idea of a federal society. But now he became almost definite about the type of society which he wanted to establish with a view to assuring economic security and the freedom of mind to the masses. Thus, during the closing stages of his career, he developed a dislike towards government-trained bureaucracy and wanted to establish such a democratic society as would restrict
the domination of a particular class in a community over the government. But, on the contrary, the mass of people would determine the policies of it. In this society, according to him, economic organizations and trade unions would become all the more powerful to play their role, and the state would be characterized by dominant economic associations working for the establishment of a free and equal society. He frankly stated that society should have a real democratic organization in which the individuals as well as their various groups, including the state, would work hand in hand for the amelioration of the whole society. Now let us see his views on society as a democratic organization.

(C) Society as a Democratic Organization:

Laski thought that to maintain the multitudinous interests of the people and the federal life of society it was essential to transfer the decision-making power into the hands of the people and their groups. And he seemed anxious, during his postwar (II) career, to safeguard society and its diversified life from both economic exploitation and governmental dictatorship. But again in the absence of his direct statements regarding society we have to depend upon and examine his remarks against the Soviet dictatorship and the American capitalist democracy in order to understand his implied conception of society in this period.
Analyzing the *Communist Manifesto*, Laski said that the establishment of economic democracy was its main aim. It proposed the democratization of power by putting the authority of the state into the hands of the workers. It assumed that the decline of capitalism had produced a working class mature enough to recognize that it must take its destiny into its own hands and begin the building of a true democratic society. In a true democratic society which is to be established gradually by the workers after the eclipse of capitalism, he believed, the formation of policy is not to be biased in the direction of any particular group in the community, but in which the interests of any individual in the operation of the state are approximately equal to that of any other. But contrary to it, he felt, Russia had established dictatorship of a few party leaders. He realized that the workers in the Soviet Union, instead of becoming conscious of their strength and role in the day-to-day policy making and administration as indicated in the *Communist Manifesto*, had become mere tools in the hands of some party bosses who dominated both the Communist Party and the state government. In its insistence upon artificial unity, the Soviet government had suppressed individual freedom because, suppression had eased the way of those who held
He remarked:

"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."

As such, the Russian government, according to him, had become almost monolithic in character through coercion and suppression of the freedom of mind. Although economic security was assured, he maintained, to the masses in the Soviet Union, there was no individual liberty and freedom of expression. The workers did not share in the formulation of the policies of the government. He believed that the Soviet government had ignored the needs and the nature of the federal society, and it held its laws supreme and binding upon all the individuals and groups in society. He clearly admitted that "it seems to me dishonest, indeed, to deny that Russian political institutions may be regarded as maintaining the possibility of democratization, but, unless words cease to have any real meaning, democratization has not yet seriously begun." He realized that the type of democracy

30 Ibid., p.213.
31 CM,pp.95-96.
which Russia had established was not a true democracy, because the authority had not been transferred to the people and they did not share actually the economic and political power. His frank admission was that even "when the foundations of Soviet industrialism had been firmly laid, there was no real relaxation of the dictatorship on its political side.......and the leaders of the Communist Party were, so to say, convinced of the need to perpetuate their own authority as a dictatorship." 32

In the same way, Laski criticized America, the leading capitalist democracy in the world, and said that there was little economic security to the individual. He argued that 'factor of consent' was not effectively operating in American society due to the serious inequality of economic conditions. He insisted that the power of wealth controlled higher education and scientific research in the United States. For example, "academic economists who showed signs of a disproportionate interest in alternative doctrines were hunted down in their colleges as angrily as theological unorthodoxy was attacked a century ago." 33 He remarked that the artist and writer were forced to accept the values of the businessmen or to flee the

32 DOT, p.190.
33 AD, p.193.
American society by finding refuge in Europe as Henry James did or by resorting to satire as their ineffectual weapon of protest. Similarly, he believed that the churches of America had promoted not religion, but 'religiosity', that is, the support of the folklore of a given social and economic order by an institution claiming divine authority. They have always supported the values which the relations of production have made it necessary to impose, either directly by urging devotion to the existing social and economic order or indirectly by offering to the victims of that order the consolation of visions of another world. Above all, he thought that the cinema, radio and virtually all of the press had become a branch of big business in America. No matter what the subject of discussion was, his analysis was, in a word, that the attitudes and values of Americans were for the most part similar, and that their ideas were those which businessmen had impressed upon their minds by means of the churches, schools, publications, radio, moving pictures and other instruments of capitalist domination. And the only hope, according to him, for the preservation and extension of real democracy and for the rebuilding of a 'common system of values' in America lies in the acceptance of the principles of socialism as well as in the revision of
existing economic and political institutions.

Thus from Laski's criticism of America and the Soviet Union we can easily understand the reasons for his hostility towards them as well as his implied idea of the type of society which he wanted to establish to secure both the individual liberty and economic security. His conclusion was that under both the systems the interests of the common people were not secure. According to him, both neglected the simple truth that society is federal in nature, and that its diverse interests cannot be subordinated under the force of the government to the aim of a particular class or a group of persons. He explained in the third revised edition of his book, Liberty in the Modern State (1948), that "all creative authority is essentially federal in character. The purpose for which authority is exercised is the maximum satisfaction of desire. To achieve that end, it is in the long run vital to take account of the wills of those who will be affected by the decision. For, otherwise, their desires are unexplored, and there is substituted for the full experience that should be available, the partial experience, perhaps suffused with a sinister interest, which is able to influence the legal source of decision."34 And to keep the interests of the

34 IMS, pp.82-83.
people alive it is necessary, he argued, to give them power to share in the government decisions. Maximum satisfaction of their demands is a function of maximum consultation; and "the greater the degree in which the citizens share in making the rules under which they live, the more likely is there allegiance to those rules to be free unfettered." As such, he maintained that the people who compose society are the real source of authority. They alone are competent to give finality to the decisions of the government. The government exists for the satisfaction of their common demands, and not for the protection of interests of any particular class or a group of persons in society. It is only a means to fulfil the common needs of the people. They therefore, be consulted before any decision by the government is being taken up. They expect that they should form an opinion on public affairs; and they become frustrated, he argued, when decisions are made arbitrarily by the government without knowing their opinion or consulting them.

Thus, during his last career, Laski was in favour of such a democratic society as would bestow the maximum freedom on individuals for the expression of their opinions on all matters. And the policies

35 Ibid., p.83.
of the government must actively respond to the views and demands of the people.

In view of the above analysis of Laski's ideas, it can be maintained that he had a definite conception of society which is reflected in all his political writings. Further, he judged the state all through his life as a purpose organization of society which we shall discuss in detail in the next chapter.