CHAPTER III

Laski's Conception of State Authority

From Laski's ideas on society in the previous chapter it has become clear that he considered the state as a useful agency of society. The state works as an instrument of society for attaining social justice which means, according to him, the welfare of all the individuals based on equality and freedom. To attain this purpose the state undertakes sometimes the work of adjusting and coordinating and sometimes of regulating the manifold life of society. Its functions change as the purpose of society changes from time to time. The demands of the individuals and the various groups, who compose society, remain always crucial in fixing the range of functions of the state. Viewed in this way, Laski believed that the state would never remain superior to society, nor would its authority become coercive to the individuals and the groups coexisting with it in society. On the contrary, it is society which determines the purpose of its functions and the range of its authority. But it does not mean that the state has got no functions to discharge in society and that it should, therefore, be abolished. Laski was never in favour of abolishing the state like the anarchists and extreme syndicalism.

Nor did he try to magnify it to the detriment
of individual liberty like the idealists and the communists. He duly recognised its usefulness, but he viewed it as a purpose organization which must work for the welfare of society and its individual members. His treatment of the state was not an academic treatment, but a realistic one based on actual functions which the state performs in society.

In this chapter I shall discuss his conception of the state in view of my above remark that the state is a purpose organization of society. But as the views of Laski regarding the functions of the state changed from time to time, I shall examine the state in three aspects - the state as a coordinating agency, the state as a regulating agency and the state as an instrument of realizing social justice. First of all, let us examine his views on the state as a coordinating agency of society.

(A) State as a Co-ordinating Agency:

Laski developed his conception of the state in his earlier period with reference to his thesis on individual liberty and federal society as a plurality of associations. He regarded it as coordinate with other groups as well as an instrument of society for adjusting and coordinating the activities of various groups with a view to attaining social justice and providing the greatest possible freedom to the individual at the same time.
When he considered the state as a co-ordinating agency, he started criticizing the conventional views on sovereignty and the theory of obedience to the state. Let us, therefore, start with an examination of his criticism of state sovereignty.

(1) **Criticism of Conventional Views on Sovereignty:**

Laski started his early career when anti-Hegelianism was in vogue at Oxford. Bosanquet was mainly responsible for the revival of and introduction to the Hegelian conception of the state in British political philosophy. He attempted to establish the supremacy of the state over society. He thought that society was within the state and that it derived its meaning from the state so that "if we take the state in its fuller sense, not as a political mechanism using force, but as a general organization and synthesis of life, which includes and correlates all other organizations, we shall see it as a group of groups, a community of communities, embracing and sustaining the whole field of cooperation."¹ Bosanquet thus came very near the Hegelian view of the state as a moral organization absorbing the will of society. To Bosanquet, the "state is an ethical idea, since it is the final working concept of life as a whole."² When this revived Hegelian idea of

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¹ Political Thought in England by E. Barker, p. 71.
² The Philosophical Theory of State by B. Bosanquet (1899) p. 298.
the ethical supremacy of the state got mixed up with the idea of the legal supremacy of the state, as expounded by John Austin in the middle of the 19th century, the state became both legally and morally supreme. Such a conception of state became the subject of severe criticism at the time when Laski was at Oxford. L.T. Hobhouse attacked the Hegelian idea of state authority, calling it unsound from the viewpoint of individual freedom, in his book, The Metaphysical Theory of the State (1918).

The other dominant philosophy at Oxford was pluralists' philosophy. A group of pluralist thinkers came forward and challenged the theory of state absolutism by putting forward the claims of various groups in society. Maitland, following Gierke, elaborated the legal theory of the "real personality" of groups. Human aggregates, he urged, exist in their own right independently of the state. They are merely accepted by the state, but not created by it. J.N. Figgis spoke of the religious groups and argued that they maintained their independence against the state in the Middle Ages. All these writers tried to show the ineffectiveness of the idea of the state as morally and legally supreme. In the same way, Ernest Barker asserted that the groups in society existed prior to any act of the state, each as a juristic person created by a common conviction among its members of its corporate character and function.3 He held that this view

3. Refer "The Discredited State" by E. Barker in Political Quarterly No. 5 (Feb., 1915)
necessitated a revision of general theory as to the nature of the state and its relation to other associations. He wrote:

"We see the state less as an association of the individuals in a common life; we see it more as an association of individuals, already united in various groups for a further and more embracing common purpose." 4

Laski, being inspired by his tutor Ernest Barker, joined the thinkers who were challenging the idea of the supremacy of the state, and for that purpose he accepted the theory of corporate personality of groups. He applied this theory to the modern trade unions in society. He spoke on behalf of trade unions in the tone of the pluralists. Although pluralism may be said as a reaction to the Hegelian conception which elevates the state to a mystical height viewing it as "God on earth", and investing it with not only supreme moral but also supreme legal authority, it attacks mainly the legal conception of state sovereignty. Laski also directed his criticism, among other things, against the legal supremacy of the state.

Prof. Laski, most persistent and prolific in his attacks, argued that "it is impossible to make the legal theory of sovereignty valid for political philosophy" and that "it would be of lasting benefit to political

science if the whole concept of sovereignty were surrendered.® Professing the theory of groups against state's legal sovereignty he stated that whatever the theory of state authority might be, it was clear that in practice, in order to satisfy the various needs of man and society, the various types of associations had come into existence. All these associations, apart from satisfying the various needs, play an important part in the development of human personality. Each association, functioning prior to any permission given by the state, acts as one of the agencies through which common beliefs of the community find their expression. The state's role in this expression of common beliefs is principal but not exclusive. The state should accept common point of view that permanent associations have rights and duties as groups, whether or not the state has accepted them as corporations. He said that just as the state was bound, morally and practically, to accept the sense of community that individuals were subjects of rights and duties within themselves, not derived from the state, so it was coming to feel the practical and moral necessity of recognising the common opinion that groups which acted in an integral way became right-and-duty bearing units, regardless of whether the state had by some formal act endowed them with legal personality or not.

The same thing was asserted by Dr. J.N. Figgis and Professor R.N. MacIver. They criticized the prevailing idea of the state omni-competence. The late Dr. J. Neville Figgis disapproved of the efforts of a modern political leader who tried to invade the proper spheres of such essential social groups as churches, trade unions, local communities and the family. He advocated a policy which attributes to all such groups the character of public associations, and accorded them a large discretion and initiative in controlling their respective interests. Similarly Professor MacIver also believes that the state is just one of the forms of human association, possessing legal and coercive power. Practical experience also tells us that the human organizations in society are innumerable, and that many of them, because they are more homogeneous and represent a closer community of interests, attract deeper loyalties than the state and, if permitted to act autonomously, prove themselves to be more effective agencies of social coordination.

Laski, in order to prove that the doctrine of sovereign state is practically untenable, often referred to actual instances of the state impotence in the face of determined resistance by the groups within society.  

6. SPS, refer Chap. I and Appendix A for examples.
He told us that the British Parliament, during the World War, could not dare enforce the anti-strike provisions of the Munitions Act against the defiant Welsh Miners or to put into operation the Irish Home Rule Act against the rebellious Ulsterites. In the same way, the Railway Brotherhood in the United States (in 1916) forced Congress, by threat of a strike, to enact an eight-hour day. Citing these familiar instances of effective pressure by private groups upon the highest organs of government, he asked "what validity or importance there is in a doctrine that attributes sovereignty to an official authority which is compelled by unofficial groups to adopt policies to which it is opposed."7 In fact, it is useless to hold the authority of the state in too high a position. It cannot enforce its decisions against the will of the people and their organizations. Rather it has to work in coordination with other groups in society. It is through coordination of mutual interests, and not by compulsion, that adjustment in the manifold life of society can be best attained. He remarked that "we believe that this (sense of unity and spontaneity) can best be achieved in a state of which the structure is not hierarchical but coordinate, in which, that is to say, sovereignty is partitioned upon some basis of function. For the division of power makes men more apt

Laski viewed modern society as an arena in which the state and many other groups are engaged in a struggle; the wills of these groups necessarily differ, and often no "general will" emerges from the conflict, and no ultimate reconciliation of the competing interests is possible. He stressed that the will of the state was no more than a competitor with the wills of other groups and that, in advance of a trial of strength, we had no way of determining which of these wills was superior. But he also indicated, at the same time, that the will of the state was formed by the struggle that took place among the competing wills of other social groups; the law of the state was regarded as the result of a successful effort to harmonize or compromise the conflicting interests of other groups.

In this context Laski refused to accept that law was entitled to a superior status and insisted that law, as the expression of the state's will, should have no pre-eminence over the expression of the will of any other group in society. He stated:

"Whenever in a state a group of persons large enough to make its presence felt demands the recognition of certain claims, it will not recognise a law which attempts defiance of them; nor will it accept the authority by which that law is enforced."

10. Ibid., p.44.
His conclusion was that a law was good and should be obeyed only if and when it had triumphed in a trial of strength against the expressed wills of other groups, that is, if and when it had already been obeyed voluntarily. Social groups frequently find themselves in conflict, and there is constant competition for the allegiance of those who are members of more than one group. The group will that emerges triumphant from this Darwinian struggle is, by definition, the will that is to be called good. He argued that "the state gets its commands obeyed when it can and to the extent that it can; while it may emerge victorious from a given struggle with a church or a trade union, that group or another one may, on the morrow, return to the fray with greater strength and force the state to beat a hasty and undignified retreat." 11

As such, Laski's starting point was a denial of the theory of absolute sovereignty. The claim, he suggested, that the state is omni-competent is fatuously unreal. No one would argue, for instance, that the state should interfere with the purely religious ritual or with the privacy of family life. Even in its accustomed sphere obedience to the commands of the state is not at all a foregone conclusion. Society presents us with

numerous groups, each dominant in a particular sphere. And it is not at all certain whether in any clash between a special group and the state the members of that group would transfer their allegiance to the state. He, therefore, remarked that a class conscious member of a trade union would uphold his vocational group against a capitalist state, a nationalist would side with his national group against a hostile state, a member of a church would support his religious group against the secular state. What we actually see in society is not a hierarchical structure with an all-inclusive state, but a federal structure, with the state functioning alongside many coordinate groups.

Laski believed that the state came into origin, like other groups, with a definite purpose in society, and it existed to make good life possible. But this general assumption, however, is of little value; more important is it to know whether the means used by the particular government are in harmony with the ideal purpose. Sovereignty of the state means for concrete purposes the sovereignty of government. We have, then, a right to question whether the acts of government coincide with the rightness of the end of the state. He questioned: Was the British government right in carrying on war against American colonies? Was the German state
right in invading Belgium? His answer was that history demonstrated that the instruments of state had constantly been used for the class and selfish interests. The governments have always acted against the demands of the people and their organizations inside their own states, and outside they have encroached upon the rights of other peoples. Such actions of the state governments have always been condemned and disobeyed by the people. He argued that the state was founded and the vast powers were delegated to it by the people on the ideal of voluntary participation in the common tasks. And the citizenship must become what Aristotle meant it to be, the capacity for "sharing in the administration of justice and officers." As the state reflects the needs of the citizens, it should allow them participate in its policies and activities. It is on the basis of their voluntary cooperation and consent that the acts of the state government can be held valid. In this way, Laski attacked the conventional theory of state sovereignty which held the state authority legally and morally supreme. As opposed to that, he viewed the state as coordinate with other groups, working in cooperation with them for the welfare and development of all the individuals in society.
To such a revised conception of state sovereignty he consistently joined an individualistic conception of obedience.

(2) **Individualistic conception of Obedience:**

Laski approved of Newman's principle: "Man should do that which he deems morally right, and the only obedience he can render is the obedience constant with his ethical standards." He applied this principle specifically to the state as follows:

"The only ground for the state success is where the purpose of the state is morally superior to that of its opponent. The only ground upon which the individual can give or be asked his support from the state is from the conviction that what it is aiming at is, in each particular action, good. We deny, that is to say, that the general end of the ideal state colours the policy of a given act of a special state. And that denial involves from each member of the state continuous scrutiny of its purpose and method."

Each citizen must see the purpose of the state in order to determine whether it is "morally superior" to other purposes; he should obey the state only if he is convinced that the aim of a given state act is good, and that it promotes the development of his life. The state, like any other group, is entitled to a man's allegiance when its act is in accordance with its end. But the individual alone can judge whether a given act of the state is an adequate fulfilment of its purpose, the

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13. AMS, pp.45-46.
promotion of the individual life. "To acquiesce in its sin, to judge of it by criteria other than those of individual action, is to place authority before truth." Laski made it clear that, faced with the commands of the political authority, "an individual may decide on a course which enables justice to be done even though the state perishes in the doing of it." As such, peace and order are neither the highest human values, nor the final end of the state. "The supreme interest of the state is in justice, and it does not necessarily follow that justice and order are in perfect correlation." He further argued that the orthodox theory of the sovereign state, by its beatification of order and its failure to inquire into the purposes for which order was maintained, placed itself at the disposal of the economically dominant group in society. His disparagement of the value of order, like his general attack on sovereignty, must be understood in the light of his hostility to the capitalist order which the state supports and his chosen role as a defender of a new "labour order". "There are times", he declared, "when the business of law is not the maintenance of an old equilibrium but the creation

15. AMS, p.316.  
16. Ibid., p.385.  
17. FS, pp.28-30.
of a new one. It is to that task that our efforts must today be directed." He thus maintained that order could be sacrificed to the demands of the people and their groups.

Such a view of Laski regarding the law of state - its function and obedience to it, was criticized by W.Y. Elliott in his book, *Pragmatic Revolt in Politics* (1928). Elliott remarked that such a theory "snatches the majesty from law and reduces it to sheer rags and patches without seeing that it renders the very individuals helpless against any repression." Against this objection it can be argued that Laski did not deny the value of law by recognizing the personality of groups. He accepted its function for the maintenance of just order in society on the basis of voluntary cooperation of the individuals working through various organizations. Law, he maintained, is not majestic because it is law, but it becomes majestic when it upholds social justice by maintaining good life of the individuals in society. At the same time, he asserted that some of the groups like family, tribe and church are prior to the state. These groups do not depend upon the will of the state, but upon the voluntary cooperation of the individuals for their own benefit.

18. AMS, p.379.

19. *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics* by W.Y. Elliott, p.151
The state, therefore, cannot dismantle them in any way. The state is a political organisation and its law is to adjust the interrelations between the various groups, leaving them free to look to their own interests so long as their activities are not against the general interests of society. He thus recognised the true role of the state which it is to play in society, and he was not against the voluntary subordination of the individual to the rules of the state. He made it clear when he said that a man felt no reluctance in subordinating his will where he realized that such a subordination was for his benefit. We are all apt to think similarly that the inevitable rightness of the commands of the state cannot be accepted on the sheer plea that they are the commands of law, and hence must be right. Their rightness or wrongness can be judged on the moral consciousness of the individuals. Thus Elliott's criticism of Laski's theory of obedience was based on his misunderstanding of the real function of law.

Further Elliott's idea that "a community in which there is a general willingness to accept the law arrived at by constitutional means, and in which the limits that are put upon corporate interests are those merely of survival in the general conflict, is a community not under law,"20 but in the state of anarchy is also

20. Ibid., p.151, and underlined portion mine.
Laski did not mean by his individualistic theory of obedience and group theory any sort of anarchy as already shown in detail, in the foregoing chapter. Here it will be sufficient to remark (in connection with Elliott's criticism) that he never conceived of a community without law. He was fully conscious of the importance of law, although he tried to judge its value on the basis of its function in society. When he attacked the idea of unconditional obedience to the laws along with the sovereignty of state, he did not want to teach irresponsibility to the legal imperatives and do away with the implied idea of authority in it. By holding the individualistic conception of obedience to the state laws he only desired to make the laws fully responsive to the demands of the people. And when he tried to divide the authority of the state his main idea was to ensure the individual liberty as well as preserve the federal structure of society. He thought that through the division of powers, the coercive authority of state would be checked to the greatest extent. Hence it would not be correct to argue that his individualistic theory of obedience and his group theory, which he elaborate side by side, would lead to anarchy at all.

Laski spoke of social solidarity and social justice in his early as well as later works, which Elliott thought "is an ideal and not a fact", and which, if at all,
could only be attained in Elliott's opinion when the state represented a will of sufficient permanence and stability and the sovereignty of state, as the necessary condition of a government, was recognised. This belief of Elliott is equivalent to the monistic theory of the state in which the subordination is forced on the individuals to the commands of the state in the form of constitutional or other laws irrespective of their rightness or wrongness. But, according to Laski, social unity (by which he understood social organization) and social justice are to be attained through the cooperative efforts of the individuals working through the various groups in society. Such an idea of social unity is more sound and reasonable as the real unity of human society depends upon the diverse activities of the individuals. The loyalties of men are various as their interests are many. Recognising this fact, he said that the state "is one among many forms of human association." He argued in his Grammar of Politics (1925) that "no association can legislate for the whole of myself." The state must compete with several other associations such as churches, trade unions, employers' associations, friendly societies, political parties, professional associations. In any instance of conflicting demands the state's pre-eminence

21. AMS, p.65.
over other associations depends upon the superiority of its actions in that instance. "We give to this particular group (state) no peculiar merit", and our obedience to it remains rather conditional.

Such a doctrine of obedience of Laski is in part a justification of recent political proposals for a decentralized application of social control. There are, for example, the proposals to give greater recognition to vocational groups within the government service, by enlarging the powers and responsibilities of associations of public employees; the projects for re-invigorating local governing units by enlarging their functions and increasing their administrative autonomy; and the suggestions that the state, in recognising the control of industry so as to bring about a fairer distribution of wealth and broader opportunities of self-expression, should enlarge private systems of joint control, under state auspices, rather than establish a direct governmental administration or regulation of industrial enterprises. In the modern time there is a widespread demand that public employees should be granted the same rights of association and collective bargaining that employees in private enterprises have. Most proposals for state ownership now include plans for a considerable devolution in the ordinary administration of the socialized industries. The principle behind this is that a state owned

22. Refer "The Personality of Associations" by Laski, *Harvard Law Review*, XXIX(1915-16); underlined portion min
enterprise should be managed not by politically minded ministers, but by boards selected by the groups particularly concerned in the efficient and equitable operation of the enterprise. Another reaction against the all-inclusive centralized authority has been in the direction of a greater localization of a governmental control. The aim is to preserve popular self-government against control by a central government which, however, democratically constructed as to suffrage and the distribution of representation, is too far away from the mass of citizens to know their needs and opinions. Nowadays the vocational groups are taking an increasing part in determining the action of formal governing bodies. This appears in the lobbying activities of associations of working class, professional men, farmers, manufacturers, traders, bankers, etc.

Governments, indeed, often take the initiative in securing the cooperation of these associations in formulating policies of legislation or administration. Several European countries have recently made an attempt to coordinate and regularize this sort of group activity, by setting up democratic economic councils jointly representing labour organizations; associations of industrial employers, chambers of commerce, professional associations; farming, banking, and insurance groups; and consumers' societies. But these proposals for the decentralization of state powers do not mean in any way
that the state has no function to discharge in society, and it should, therefore, be abolished. The state is an important organization of society, and as such it supervises the work of associations and coordinates their activities. It organizes the life of society working in cooperation with other groups. But it cannot coerce them for the interests of any particular group in the community. Laski recognized the necessity of the state in view of its important adjusting and coordinating functions in society. He, although maintaining that both individuals and associations should be recognized as having domains of free existence unassailable by the state, asserted that the state was sovereign where general interests, demanding the exertion of power for their maintenance, were concerned. But if the government, in its governmental practice, is bad, said Laski, it will then not be called just.

Criticizing Laski, Elliott also remarked in his book, Pragmatic Revolt in Politics, that "the dangers inherent in the absorptive personality of the economic group, for instance, are equally as great as those involved in the doctrine of what has been called by Hobhouse "metaphysical state", but he overlooked the fact that Laski never allowed an absolute authority to economic groups as he denied it to the political state. He simply recognized the personality of an economic group like that of the state.
He made it clear that the life of these groups was based on the voluntary cooperation of the individual members, and whatever importance they had in society, it was only by their relation. Hence to think of an absorptive personality of such groups is to misunderstand the thesis of Laski.

Whatever rights groups may claim or gain, the state will still remain a necessary adjusting force in society. And it is even possible that if groups are destined to gain new ground, the state will also gain, perhaps even more than it loses, because it will be forced to deal with ever graver and ever weightier problems of adjustment. Thus Laski's proposed scheme of economic institutions involved a considerable concentration of power in a single political organisation over the several economic units. He wanted public employees participate in the management of public enterprises. For each private industry he wished to set up a council, representative equally of owners, users, workers and the government. He empowered this council to make decisions in matters relating to wages, working conditions, hours of work, the security of employment and settlement of labour disputes. Nevertheless, he proposed state ownership of those industries which because of their general importance and their

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23. Refer GP, chap.IX.
indispensableness to the welfare of community, are of public character, and so must "be operated for use and not for profit", with only as much devolution in controlling management as will not interfere with the community's right to set minimum standards of efficiency, decency and fair play. Moreover he was in favour of endowing the national political parliament with the power not only of determining the policies of public enterprises but also of defining basic standards of hours, conditions, wages in private industry and fixing prices of the necessities of life. He stated clearly:

"Legally no one can deny that there exists in every state some organ whose authority is unlimited; "and" that government is most important of institutions which few, except theocrats, could be found to deny."24

He approved of the "ultimate reserve power of the state," and defined it as an association to protect the interests of men as citizens. He agreed that "to satisfy the common needs, it must control other associations to the degree that secures from them the service such needs require", and conceded finally that "clearly a function of this kind involves a pre-eminence over other functions."25

Thus he duly recognised the authority of state and the importance of its laws, but he attempted to test them from

25. GP, pp.62, 69, 70, 75.
the viewpoint of man and society in their manifold needs and pursuits. For this reason he held obedience to the state as conditional. Man obeys the commands of the state when he feels that the latter acts for his benefit. Like Russell, he repeatedly stated that for him the only final values were the individual and his unfettered moral and intellectual development. This was, in fact, his individualistic theory of obedience as applied to the theory of state sovereignty.

In reference to the above arguments of Laski it can be maintained here that he did not transfer the obedience of the individual from the state to the social or economic group, and we should not, therefore, conceive of any danger of coercion by the absorptive personality of an economic group as H.A. Deane and Elliott thought.

26. Refer Russell's "A Freeman's Worship" in his Philosophical Essays (1920).

27. Refer The Political Ideas of H.J. Laski by H.A. Deane, p. 29. Deane argues: "When he (Laski) is discussing social groups and their relationships with the state, the individual is lost to view; he insists that, for the most part, the average man thinks and acts as a member of some group or fellowship. When, on the other hand, he turns to the individual's relation to the state, particularly in the context of the moral problem of obedience, he pays little attention to associations of men and maintains that his pluralism is an individualistic theory of the state."
Remarking on the importance as well as the limited authority and functions of the groups in society Laski wrote:

"It is obvious that, taken merely as an individual, my will is lost amid the myriad competing wills which strive with my own for expression. That is why men build associations that, from the collective strength of the wills fused there, they may secure the chance of self-determination. Associations exist to fulfill purposes which a group of men have in common. They support and imply functions." 28

It is plain from his statement that no association can legislate for the whole of man. "The Jones," he argued, "who realizes that some part of himself lives in each of these associations, who seeks by means of them to shape the lines of his wants and hopes, is the ultimate Jones who belongs to only himself." 29 The individual cannot surrender the whole of himself to any of the associations in society. All the associations try to win the obedience of the individual by their acts, and there remains a constant competition among social and economic groups for winning his loyalty. The state also takes part in this competition. In view of this fact it cannot be argued that Laski's individual is lost either in groups or in the state.

In spite of his attack on the conventional theory of state sovereignty and his plea for an

29. Ibid.
individualistic theory of obedience, group autonomy and the decentralization of state functions. Laski approved of the utility of the state for the purpose of social organization and fulfilment of common needs. He said that "the state is working, directly or indirectly, to secure common needs at the level which the society as a whole deems essential to the fulfilment of its general end."30 Although the state is like several other organizations in society, it is the most important of them in view of its peculiar function which it discharges. It is not an organization, he believed, which exists to serve some special interests of the citizens as do other organizations. On the contrary, it represents those interests in society which are of common importance to the people. It undertakes the work of organizing the manifold life of society. It adjusts and coordinates the different activities of the groups and decides their disputes in the interest of the whole community. Thus, he recognised the state and its important role in the complex society. His only objection to it was that its supremacy could not be accepted on mere theoretical grounds. He objected to its idealization and wanted to erect safeguards against the abuses of its authority. He judged its

30. Ibid., p.70.
importance on the basis of its practical achievements and contributions to the life of community. For him, the purpose of the state was not superior to that of society and its members. Rather, it was the purpose of society and its members which he held superior to that of the state as well as of other organizations, and to that effect he sought to create such institutions as shall best serve their purpose. The true criterion of judging the worth of institutions, he thought, should be whether they contribute to the welfare of individuals. He questioned: What are institutions for if they are not conducive to the happiness of men? And his answer was that we should rightly be suspicious of any doctrine that attempted to absorb the individual in spacious wholes.

Really speaking, Laski, like Bertrand Russell, considered freedom to be the most vital element in an individual's life. In Laski, as in Russell, we find the most emphatic expression of that demand for individual freedom which is a characteristic aspect of contemporary thought. This does not imply a return to the anarchic individualism of a century ago, but it predicates a reorganization of institutions that will give most men an opportunity for creative freedom. Therefore, Laski stressed, like the Webbs, individuality, decentralization, participation of workers in order to avoid the evils of
state power. He recognised, as emphatically as Russell or liberal socialists like the Webbs and others, the necessity of protecting and encouraging variation and growth of the individual life. But, after the publication of Grammar of Politics, he became gradually convinced that it was not possible to organize the society on the lines of maximum individual freedom and group authority as long as the old economic structure remained unchanged. Nor could the state act as a coordinating agency of society and represent the interests of the masses truly. He also came to believe that it was not possible in that system to find any effective solution to either the problem of employment, or to the problem of raising the standard of living of the working class, or to the problem of individual liberty and social justice. He, therefore, thought it necessary to change, first, the old economic structure of society, and to that effect he postponed, to some extent, his early proposals for complete decentralization of state powers till it was not changed. In view of this new conviction, his conception of state authority changed. During the period of change in the old economic structure, he accepted a more positive role of the state as a regulating agency of society than what he had conceive of it earlier. This brings us to the examination of his changed conception of the state.
(B) State as a Regulating Agency:

Laski's pragmatic standard for determining the extent of the state's powers made government sometimes weak and sometimes powerful. The definition of the purpose of the state remained crucial for him in determining the range of its powers. In view of the newly acquired purpose of the state, as per needs of society, during the period of replacement of the old economic structure by a new one, its position, according to him, would change. It would not only supervise and coordinate the activities of various groups in society, but it would also regulate their life. Now let us see to what extent he gave power to the state.

(1) The Extent of State Power:

The state, which previously he described as coordinate with other associations, and which worked only as an adjusting and coordinating agency of society, was now defined as "the keystone of the social arch" and "the fundamental instrument of society". He defined:

"The modern state is a territorial society divided into government and subjects claiming, within its allotted physical area, a supremacy over all other institutions. It is, in fact, the final legal depository of the social will. It sets the perspective of all other organizations. It brings within its power all forms of human activity the control of which it deems desirable... It moulds the form and substance of the myriad human lives with whose destinies it is charged."31

Although this description of the state closely resembles that given by orthodox theorists which he had disapproved 31. "Law and the State", SLP, p.21.
of in his early writings, his attitude towards the purpose of the state remained quite generous and expansive. Borrowing William James's definition of good as the response to demand on the largest possible scale, he used it to define the state as "an organization for enabling the mass of men to realize social good on the largest possible scale."32 In more concrete terms, he asserted that the state was "entrusted with power in order that it may satisfy, or organize the satisfaction of, the wants of men on the largest possible scale. It acts through a body of agents, the government, to that end and no other end."33 This formulation of the state's purpose, though it is obviously based on the Benthamite principle that the state should act to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, gives to the state a far more positive role than does the utilitarian theory.

Although he continued his insistence, as we have already discussed previously,34 that the will of the state could not be equated with the will of society as a whole, he now admitted that the state's will was the urgent aspect of the whole, "in the same sense that the skeleton is a vital aspect of the body", and that

32. Ibid., p.25.
33. Ibid., p.245.
34. Supra, chap. II of the thesis.
it "may be the largest will we normally encounter."
It is "the will which is adopted out of the conflict
of myriad wills which contend with each other for the
mastery of social forces." He specifically recognized
what he had previously denied - that the state differed
in kind and not merely in degree from other human
associations:

"I cannot, in any fundamental way, withdraw from
its jurisdiction. I cannot appeal from the
tribunals it has created. It is the ultimate
source of decision within the normal environment
about which my life is lived. Clearly, that
attaches to its will an importance for me greater
than that which belongs elsewhere." 36

How are we to reconcile the diverse and
sometimes incompatible demands of the different groups
and individuals that make up a community? Laski now
flatly rejected the anarchist or syndicalist solution
of this problem by his statement that the will of any
given association could not be accepted as a final will.
He admitted that "the problem of so weighting associations
that each receives not merely an equal, but, more, its
due place in an institution which congeals them into
unity is an insoluble one." 37 His new position was that
the state represented men as consumers, as "centres of
universal decision", in contrast to the specific interest

35. GP (3rd edition, Sixth impression, 1934), p.35.
36. Ibid., p.38.
37. Ibid., p.69.
groups, which represented men as producers. In order to protect men as "undifferentiated persons" whose needs are identical, the state must be given the power to coordinate the various functions in society and to enforce and interpret the common rules by which the rights of groups are defined. Although this view of the state as the final coordinating and regulating agency in society represented a major shift away from Laski's earlier thesis of federal authority, he was still anxious to preserve a measure of independence for other social and economic groups. In controlling associations the state should concentrate its attention on their general activities which interest every member of the society. On the other hand, group activities that are "primarily specific in their incidence" are of concern to the state only to the degree that their results bear upon the rest of the community.

Laski's discussion of the proper extent of action by the state show the influence exerted upon him after his return to England in 1920 by the Fabians, specially Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and by his membership in the Labour Party. He argued that the state could

In his letters to Holmes Laski frequently mentioned his admiration for Fabians.
fulfil its function of protecting the interests of individuals as consumers only if there was appropriate economic equality in the community. This equality, in turn, can be assured only if the government so controls "the production and distribution of wealth that the general interest of the community is not regarded as the happy result of a mere sum of private interests, but is a recognised minimum in which each citizen has an equal share."^39 The state's interest in the production of essential goods and services is therefore "immediate, direct and comprehensive. It must ensure such a supply of them as will serve the total need of the community. It must see to it that their quality is adequate..... The failure to secure these services being fatal, it is obvious that the state cannot risk their production by private enterprise."^40 This line of argument demonstrates the extent to which Laski's increasing stress on the need for governmental action to mitigate the inequalities that result from the "normal" workings of economic institutions was leading him away from his earlier position. The state must be given enough power to enable it to control other organizations, particularly economic groups, so that each citizen will be assured that minimum of satisfaction which is necessary to the development of his personality and to the performance of his civic duties. It is charged with

39. GP, p.87.
40. Ibid., p.435.
the task of adjusting men's diverse needs into a general pattern that will give the maximum amount of satisfaction to them.

It has already been said that an important reason for Laski's early attack on the conventional theory of state sovereignty was his belief that the state was hostile to the aspirations and claims of the workers and their unions. During the period up to 1921, he insisted that the traditional state organization, being outmoded and unjust, was being and ought to be replaced by a new set of political institutions based upon the trade unions. But, by the mid-twenties, however, his interest in any form of guild socialism practically declined. With the post-war decline of the Liberal party, the Labour party emerged as an alternative party to form the government. Viewing the possibility of the Labour party to become the governing group in England, he became more and more involved in Labour party activities and came to regard himself as its intellectual spokesman. He, therefore, could not afford to minimize the powers of the state or its role as the instrument for creating the new and more equitable social order that he desired. He started arguing in favour of a strong state with a large measure of power over recalcitrant groups and individuals. With the result, that his conception of the role of the state and its relations to other groups in society shifted towards the more powerful theory of the state as

41. Supra, chap.1.
supported by the Webbs.

In dealing with the crucial problem of the degree of control that the state may properly exercise over group activities Laski, although now admitting that associations cannot be conceded a liberty to overthrow the state, however continued his insistence that a government "may interfere with an association only when it has moved to action which cannot logically be interpreted as other than a determination to overthrow the social order." 42 As long as groups confine themselves to the expression of grievances or the advocacy of opinions or actions, they should be free from any government control. At another place in Liberty in the Modern State, he argued that voluntary associations should be immune from state control unless "their activities are intended directly to alter the law, or to arrest the continuity of general social habits." In discussing the question of government control of trade unions and strikes, he said: "No limitation upon freedom to associate is, I urge permissible unless it can be demonstrated that clear and decisive advantage to the community, including, be it remembered, trade unionists themselves, is likely to result. There are some inconsistencies among his formulas; the

42. IMS, p.168.
43. Ibid., pp.137-38.
phrases "intended directly to alter the law" and "intended to arrest the continuity of general social habits" are so vague that they would give a government far greater control over group action and opinion than would the first formula, which limits government interference to situations in which a group has clearly acted with revolutionary intent. Nevertheless, his position seems to be that as long as essential industries remain under private ownership, with no restriction by the state on the employer's liberty to make what profits he can, there is no justification for attempts by the government to prevent interruptions of production in such industries by denying the workers' right to strike. 44

In later works, *Democracy in Crisis* (1933) and *The State in Theory and Practice* (1935), Laski's attraction towards the authority of the state became greater. He seemed to reject the early doctrine of authority as federal and argued that the sovereignty of the state, the target of his early attacks, was essential if the state was to fulfil its function of bringing about the social and economic changes in society. The fundamental weakness of his early doctrine was, according to him, that it "did not sufficiently realize the nature of the state as an expression of class relations. It did sufficiently emphasize the fact that it was bound to claim an indivisible and irresponsible sovereignty because there was no other way in which

44. Ibid., pp.158-59.
it could define and control the legal postulates of society. It was through their definition and control that the purposes of any given system of class relations was (sic) realized. If the state ceased to be sovereign, it ceased to be in a position to give effect to those purposes."45 He insisted that only when conflicts based upon property were eliminated, we could conceive of "a social organisation in which the truly federal nature of society receives institutional expression. And in such a social organisation, authority can be pluralistic and federal both in form and expression."46

Although Laski was committed to marxian faith during these years as discussed in the first chapter, he did not completely abandon his earlier goal of dividing the authority among the groups in society with a view to assuring the freedom of mind and the full participation of the individual in the work of administration. He still insisted that its achievement should be postponed until a prior objective, the classless society, was attained. As a political scientist, he never completely approved of the traditional views of the nature and purpose of the state. He tried to analyze the theory that the state was above groups and classes and attempted to promote the general interest. He denied that it sought to realize the rights

45. GTS; reprinted as Introductory chapter to the 4th edition of Grammar of Politics, 1938., pp.xi-xii.
46. GP, p.xii.
that were the necessary conditions of the development of its citizens. He also denied that the purpose for which it maintained law and order was the maximum satisfaction of demand. All these propositions describe the ideal state of the philosophers. They refer only to state in theory, while Laski was concerned with what the state was in practice.

All past and present theories of the state are merely pleas for justifying the use of state power. In opposition to them, he demanded a realistic analysis of the activities of actual governments. His own theory of the state was not an ideology. On the contrary, it was based on facts and practical needs of society. That is why he did not forget his earlier goals of individual freedom and group authority while he pleaded for a strong state in view of the new purpose of society. When he spoke in favour of the state, he made its purpose clear. He argued that since the capitalist state was essentially a coercive authority working in favour of the dominant economic group, it was of no use limiting its power by legal or political mechanisms. On the other hand, the new socialist state must be given all the powers it requires to create the new economic structure.

In fact, Laski accepted the sovereignty of the state with a view to establishing the new economic structure. But he was cautious, at the same time, of the dangers of the coercive authority of the state and a planned society under state-collectivism. He warned that "a planned society may

47. STP, p.179.
easily be built by the sacrifice of individual freedom to that collective state power operated by the rulers of the society." Hence there is a need for safeguards against the danger that a planned society will lose its democratic habits and fall into the hands of bureaucrats greedy for power. As such, he did not regard the state authority as absolute and final as the orthodox theorists or the Marxists in Russia regard it. To such a conception of state power he also attempted to adjust the idea of group freedom in order to protect the diverse interests of the people and assure individual freedom. The conception of individual and group freedom, in practice, constitutes limitations upon the authority of the state. Now let us, therefore, discuss his conception of limited authority in order correctly to understand his theory of the state as a regulatory authority.

(2) Conception of Limited Authority:

Although Laski accepted the state as the final coordinating authority in society, he was still anxious to preserve some independence for other social and economic groups. He carried along from the earlier period a large measure of suspicion of political power. He still argued that authority should be, to some extent, federalized and mass participation in political activity be increased.

These principles, which reflect his continued adherence to the ideals of individual and group freedom, also constitute limitations upon the exercise of power, weapons for defending labour and its organisations against hostile action on the part of the state. There was, therefore, a fundamental ambivalence in his attitude towards the state's final coercive power. The state, he argued, must be given the authority to control men and their groups in order that it may satisfy their common needs, but that authority must be regarded with "sufficient suspicion" as there is tendency in every government to degenerate into coercive and irresponsible authority. After grasping the nature of state authority, he became hostile not only to the capitalist state which promotes the interests of the few and hampers the activities of the underprivileged and their associations but he also disapproved of the coercive authority of the socialist state. His hostility towards the capitalist government was well-known during his life-time. But when he analysed the ideas of Communist Manifesto and criticized the authoritative rule of the Soviet government, his hostile attitude towards a very strong socialist state also became clear. In his anxiety to discredit a strong state, he frequently warned that the agents through whom the state's purpose was expressed would misinterpret that purpose or pervert it to their own ends. The final answer to all the schemes which, from Plato's Republic onwards, have advocated
rule by a wise and expert elite is the fact that men have learned that "if, over any considerable period, they are governed by a section of themselves, it is in the interest of that section that they will be governed." It is a clear lesson of history that "no class of men can retain over a period sufficient moral integrity to direct the lives of others. Sooner or later they pervert those lives to their own ends." He maintained that the holders of power, even if they are not dictators, "will always deny freedom, if, thereby, they can conceal wrong for it is the law of power's being to hate the process of rational examination. It will not, unless it must, brook criticism of its pronouncements." Realizing that every ground which exists for controlling power to a body of men is a ground also for erecting safeguards against their abuse of the authority confided to them, men have attempted in every age to create an institutional pattern through which power must be exercised and by which it can be controlled. As a result of these limitations on the exercise of authority, power has now become, he argued, by its very nature, "an exercise in the conditional mood. Those who exert it can only have their way by making its objects commend themselves, as, also, its methods of pursuing those objects, to those over whom it is exerted."  

49. DO, p.208.  
50. GP, p.290.  
51. DO, p.10. and IMS, p.212.  
52. IMS, pp.169-70.
Since any system of direct democracy is impossible in a modern national state, the government must be made and kept responsible to its citizens if we are to minimize the dangers of divergence between the interests of rulers and those of the ruled and abuse by the rulers of their power. The only way to guarantee that the government in any state will actually carry out the purpose of the state, Laski remarked, is "to take steps to see that the decisions made by the state take full account of the interests that will be affected by those decisions.....The sovereign power must be compelled, a priori, to make a comprehensive effort to embody the wills of those over whom it rules in its will before it is entitled to act upon them."53 The system of government must be democratic, even in a socialist society. For, he believed, in a democracy, where there are regular opportunities for the people to change their rulers, the interests of those who wield power are more securely linked with the interests of the people than under any other form of government. Rousseau's remark that the English are free only on election day is a constant reminder, however, that free elections at regular intervals are a necessary but not a sufficient guarantee of responsible rule. Laski held that the traditional separation of powers and the checks-and-balances doctrines of the eighteenth century theorists, designed to prevent the irresponsible use of power, led in practice to a confusion of powers and to a government far

53. SLP, p.255.
more irresponsible than the British Cabinet system. As opposed to the distribution of power among the three coordinate branches of government, he advocated that the centres of authority should be multiplied by conferring power on territorial and functional bodies and that the voluntary associations of men ought to be brought into direct contact with the state and its agents. Only by these means will the government constantly be forced to recognise the real needs and desires of its citizens and to make its decisions embody their wills to the greatest possible extent. Only thus we can ensure that the governors will, in fact, seek to promote the well-being of all the people.

Laski fully recognised that there was a crucial difference between the nature of the state and that of the voluntary association; the latter lacked the instruments of ultimate coercion possessed by the former. But he still maintained that the other associations of men were as natural as the state and denied that they owned their existence to the state, or that the latter was entitled, by means of its agents, to prescribe the terms upon which they could live. There is no necessary or a priori unity in society; groups have different and sometimes conflicting interests, while each individual is a centre of diverse interests whose individuality cannot be reduced to the sum of his group affiliations. "Our groups do not grow together," he said,
"into a vast monistic whole. We build them together as and how we can. We find the means of connection by the discovery of kindred purpose, of sameness in difference, of like origin. The oneness we achieve is a contribution we ourselves make. But we make it only in a partial way."54 Although admitting that the state has men's "interests in trust to a degree with which no other body can....compete,"55 he held that the coordination of the functions of other groups achieved by it should, if it was to be legitimate and adequate to its purpose, be a creative coordination which not only took account of the interests of individuals and groups, but integrated them in such a harmonious and coordinating way that would increase the well-being of all parties concerned. Recognising that voluntary associations are "the spontaneous expression of felt needs in the experience of men",56 to which political institutions have not made an adequate response, the state must make use of these groups and of their knowledge if it hopes to understand and satisfy the wants of the countless citizens "whose wills can hardly hope, in any other articulate and coherent form, to reach the central focus of power".57 If, on the other hand, the state ignores the claims that these associations make in the name

54. GP, p.261.
55. Ibid., p.75.
56. Politics by Laski, p.67.
57. DO, p.67.
of their members, it will discover that men will refuse to admit its title to obedience and will follow instead the commands of their church or trade union.

Laski continued his insistence on the need for consultation with the groups before the government takes up any final decision, and, as such, he continued his argument that all "creative authority is essentially federal in nature." The process of being consulted gives man a sense of being significant in the state. It makes him feel that he is more than the mere puppet in the hands of the government. But it is important to note here that Laski's conception of authority as federal in nature, with its stress on the devolution of powers to functional associations and on the participation of voluntary groups in the process of administration, shifted, as compared with his earlier writings, from a descriptive category to a normative principle. That is, his earlier attack on the theory of the centralized and sovereign state rested on the charge that the theory no longer adequately represented actual political facts; industrial and professional groups were, to an increasing degree, making the rules that regulated their fields of activity, with the result that the state as the general coordinator of social life was fast disappearing. Now the main residue of his earlier federalism seems to be the argument that the state can adequately accomplish its essential task of maximizing the
satisfaction of human wants only if it is compelled to incorporate in its process of decision-making the wills and demands of the groups that stand between the state and the individual. Representatives of voluntary associations ought constantly to meet with and advise government officials at all levels, and the power to make detailed regulations, particularly of economic life, should be handed over by the state to representative bodies in industry. His thesis was that the authority should be federalized if the state's purpose and the goals of its citizens were to be realized.

To attain maximum satisfaction of human wants the state should allow the individuals and groups participating in the inquiries and negotiations that precede that decision. To each government department and agency should be attached permanent, specialized advisory bodies made up of representatives nominated by the groups concerned with the agency's work; each such committee should be consulted by government officials before a decision is made on any subject falling within the sphere of its special knowledge. Each advisory committee would have power to comment on proposals for new legislation, to suggest new laws or administrative changes, and to examine orders issued by a government department under powers delegated to it by the legislature. Advisory councils of this sort, on the national, regional and local levels, will, according to Laski, "interpret law, and

58. GP, pp.377-87.
therefore they will make the law. For they will bring into the light of day the true consequences of law, as those are felt by the men who suffer them. They will determine, therefore, the way in which it is applied. They will indicate, accordingly, necessary change and necessary amendment. They will give each interest in the community organic connection, as an interest, with the state. They will infuse its purpose with their own purposes.  

He also proposed the establishment of committees of members of the legislature to advise the various executive departments. Each such committee would be in constant touch with the Minister and would carry on inquiries. It would thus be able to bring before the legislature accurate information and competent opinion about the work of the administration, although, in contrast to the committees of the American and French legislatures, it would neither make final reports to the assembly nor have power to initiate or amend legislative proposals.

He continued to advocate that Parliament devolved some of its rule-making powers upon territorial and functions assemblies in order to relieve the central government of some of the task that now overwhelmed it and in order to draw a larger number of people into an active relationship with the work of government. The areas of local government need be revised to make them correspond to the functions to

59. Ibid., p.386.
be performed by them. Also, each local body should be
given general control over all administrative functions
within its area, the confused complex of separate bodies
dealing with education, health, housing, transport, etc.,
in a given locality should be eliminated. He insisted
that the central government should retain the power to
set and enforce minimum standards in such fields as
education, housing and health, as well as the general
reserve power to alter, as social needs changed, the areas
of local government and the sources from which control
was exercised. In addition, the central government will
have control over local taxing powers as well as a general
right to inspect and report on all activities of local
authorities.

Laski firmly believed that the institutional
structure that he proposed—a network of advisory committees
at every level of government, together with a series of
industrial councils as the organs of representative govern-
ment in the economic field—would greatly increase the freedom
of the average citizen by affecting a wide distribution of
power within the state. The system, he remarked, "provides
for the admission that law affects only a small part of
social life; and it therefore surrounds each organ of legal
competence with bodies entitled to advise and so made that
their advice is fully weighed."60 Under this arrangement,
he concluded, "ordinary men and women are given the

60. Ibid., p.429.
opportunity to make fully known that upon which they believe their happiness to depend. It will be open to the state to deny their will, but it will be the nature of this system to make that denial a much more difficult, sometimes even a more perilous, adventure than it is today. As a system, also, it strives at every angle of its compass to make its working a mechanism of education to those who encounter it.61

Thus Laski attempted to limit the state authority. He remained as much conscious of the abuses of a strong socialist state as he was of the abuses of a capitalist state or of a monistic state appearing in the theories of the idealists. The chief danger, he argued, which always confronts a society is the desire of those who possess power to prohibit ideas and conduct which may disturb them in their possession. They are rarely concerned with the possible virtues of novelty and experiment. They are interested in the preservation of a static society because in such an order their desires are more likely to be fulfilled. Their ideas of right and wrong lie at the service of those desires. The standards they formulate are nothing but methods of maintaining an order with which they are satisfied; and those they repress or resent, are equally methods of establishing a new order in which different demands would secure fulfilment.62 He, therefore, continued

61. Ibid., p.430.
to maintain his earlier idea of individual and group freedom

Further, his idea of group freedom and devolution of powers to functional associations became stronger after World War II due to the changed economic and political situations in Europe as previously discussed. With that, his conception of the state as a regulating agency of society also changed. After the Second Great War he became quite clear in his views regarding the purpose and functions of the state. He now conceived of it as an instrument of society for realizing social justice. This needs further discussion of his ideas.

(C) State as an Instrument of realizing Social Justice:

After the Second World War Laski thought that the purpose of the state was not so much the establishment of a new economic structure as it was the attainment of social justice. Even his main idea behind a new economic structure was of the attainment of social justice. Although he did not define his idea of social justice, it becomes clear from the implication of his words and arguments that, for him, social justice meant both economic security and the freedom of the mind to the individual. He, therefore, thought that the social justice, the main purpose of the state, could be best attained in a society where the structure of the state was completely federal and the masses, working through their voluntary associations, were allowed to participate more and more in the process of administration. In fact, he wanted
to establish a sort of democratic commonwealth in which both the government and the voluntary associations would work hand in hand for the attainment of social justice which we shall examine now.

(1) Democratic Commonwealth:

While Laski expressed his fear of the monistic state and of the concentration of power in a few hands, he proposed for effective decentralization and for a wider evocation of the citizen's interest and initiative in politics for curbing centralized power.63 At the root of our failure, he thought, lies our inability to arouse the interest of the ordinary citizen and worker by allowing him to "participate in some activity which makes him significant in and to himself, and gives him the desire for..... spontaneous collaboration on the planes of political and economic life."64 Since democracy means participation, the ability of each man to make his own experience articulat in the shaping of the law by which he is ruled, the "oligarchical bureaucratization" of the trade unions, especially the large mixed unions in Great Britain, is a serious threat to democracy.65 Most significant was his frank admission that "we do not get rid of the economic system in which

63. TU, p.42.
64. "Efficiency in Government", in The Road to Recovery, p.6
65. TU, p.170.
ownership, by definition, becomes a method of exploiting men and women....merely by transferring ownership from private to public hands, and then seeking to plan the processes of production. The problem is the much more complicated one of planning the whole economy of the society in such a way that each worker is able, at the level of his effort, to cooperate in defining the end and the means of that part of the plan in which he is involved as producer, while as consumer and as citizen he can participate in judging the operation of the plan as he experiences its results upon himself."66

Laski admitted the fact that both in Russia and the Western Democracies the mass of workers were treated as instruments to be manipulated for ends in the interpretation of which they did not have any share. He also criticized the role of the trade unions in these countries. There, the trade unions had either surrendered their rights to the central government or had become bureaucratic in character. He remarked that "while, under modern conditions, the worker ought not to contract out of his trade union, the union ought not to be an organization which is nothing more than the instrument of the state purpose, as it has become in an ever-greater degree in the one party state."67

66. DOT, p.89.  
67. TU, p.163.
of the workers' standard of life means trade union independence; only where that genuinely exists as something the rank-and-file worker believes in it is likely that the real source of trade union decision will be inside and not outside the membership. But the fact, according to Laski, is that, given the concentration of power, as it is concentrated in a community like the Russian, decisions are taken for the workers, and not by them. A union which lends itself in this way to the domination of one man or even a small group of men is failing to achieve one of the single most important functions of trade unionism - the training of its rank-and-file in the art of self-government. It is as dangerous, he believed, in the United States or Great Britain as it is elsewhere for workers to feel that decision-making is not their function. The result is to make them inert and apathetic in one of the major realms where activity and alertness are the safeguards against their becoming mere adjuncts of the machine they serve. Centralized power, he argued, "is not less corrupting in the industrial than it is in the political sphere; and the trade union member who accepts orders without scrutinizing them and relating them to his own experience may come very rapidly to find that he has lost his freedom not merely to act, but even to speak, at the very moment when that freedom is most valuable to him."

68. Ibid., p.164.
Laski's conclusion was that the trade union member who left its problems to be thought about, still more, to be decided upon, by his fellow members or by his officials was defeating one of the primary purposes of trade unionism. That is even more the case in the immense unions of our own day than it was when they were relatively small organizations fighting for their existence. He argued that some of the large mixed unions in Great Britain had lost much by the remoteness of that relation between the central executive committee and the mass of members, who did little but paid their dues and remained detached from all other activities for which the union was responsible.69 Hence, according to him, to make trade unions work effective two things are necessary. First, there must be internal democracy in the trade unions which means the full participation in their decisions by the workers. And, secondly, they must be able effectively to display their strength in the political arena. If there is serious weakness in either of these aspects, the whole structure of a democratic society based on free and democratic working of trade unions and industrial groups would be in peril. Laski, therefore, insisted that the unity of the workers in the trade unions should be maintained by making unions democratic. If unions are necessary for curbing the concentration of power in a

69. Ibid.
few hands, who carry out the work of the government, it is also necessary that they must be democratic and the unity of the workers should not be disrupted. Once a democratic organization begins by dividing its members into those with full rights and those with limited rights only, it faces the danger that it may become the image of what it seeks to destroy by using the very tactics it has attacked. A free society, he maintained, cannot use proscription as a normal method without ceasing to be a free society. And if proscription is pushed too far, it has the worst result of all - that of splitting the trade union movement into factions, each of which is in grave peril of hating the other more than it hates the exploitation to which both are subject.

Thus Laski now believed that only decentralized state machinery, working in consultation with democratic trade unions, would lead us towards a society where men "may share in the shaping of the effort to produce in a way that evokes from them both the sense that what they are doing is worth doing, and that they can bring to their task an activity of reason that prevents the widespread conviction that they have been emptied of what makes life an adventure in responsibility." The state, as such, should be democratically organized. To safeguard both economic and political freedom, which Laski implied or meant by his idea

70. DOT, p.85.
of social justice, it is necessary to make the organization of the state fully democratic. No state can hope to achieve social justice without the full cooperation of the masses. The masses are not the mere adjuncts of the state machinery, but, on the contrary, they are the active participants in the administration. Although the role of the state, he admitted, in organizing the multitudinous life of society is principal, but not exclusive. It adjusts the various activities of the individuals and the groups in society, but it cannot coerce them. It does not exist for its own sake, but for the realization of the purpose of society. Hence the state, according to him, is nothing more than a sort of purpose organization working on behalf of society for the welfare of all the individuals. Such an idea of the state as a purpose organization became all the more clear during his last days as we shall finally see.

(2) The Purpose State:

Although Laski, however, retained his belief during his postwar career that a strong state was necessary for maintaining a new economic structure in place of the old one, he made it quite clear that it could not neglect the question of individual and group freedom. The state must give sufficient freedom to the individuals, and it should recognize the status of various groups in society. Without providing sufficient chance for the individuals to display their initiative and spontaneity, the state rule
would become burdensome and coercive.

He was conscious of the multitudinous demands of the people and of the role which the various groups in society play in fulfilling them. He, therefore, was against an absolute and an all-inclusive state even in a socialist society. He argued that no state could dare disregard the demands of the people; he was against every such state, whether a capitalist state or a socialist state, which attempted to do so.

Laski pleaded for the complete decentralization and democratization of state powers. He said that the state should work through consent and cooperation; and it should be entitled, as a chief coordinating and regulating agency of society, to use force only against those reactionary forces which were found working against the general interests of the masses. Further, it must adjust its organization, its authority and its policies to the growing needs of the people and society. As such, Laski's state was some sort of a purpose state whose extent of powers were to be determined in view of its purpose in society.

His idea of this sort of state was definitely an improvement upon his previous theories of the state in which he either mainly criticized the state or he considered it mostly as the chief instrument of society for the establishment of a new economic structure. Now he thought that the
state was neither an enemy of the individual and group freedom nor could it be employed by society as an instrument mainly for replacing the old economic structure by a new one. On the other hand, he regarded it as an organization which always aims at fulfilling the diverse needs of society, but with the cooperation of the individuals and their groups. Though Laski nowhere defined the state as a purpose organization of society, yet it becomes evident from the nature of his discussion of the functions of the state. Also, while attacking the capitalist state during his earlier career, he had repeatedly said that "the character of a government, the ends for which it will exercise its supreme coercive power, are set by the parallelogram of forces in the society."71 On this basis, it can be argued that if the state works, according to him, as an "executive instrument" of the economically dominant group in society, then, in a democratic socialist society, which is free from class character (class of capitalists or bureaucrats or elites), it will work as an organization for realizing the purpose of society - the welfare of all the individuals.

71. RR, pp.239 and 294.