CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION.

Our critical analysis of Laski's views on individual liberty, society and the state clearly demonstrates the fact that he did not treat these terms as separate academic concepts. On the contrary, he considered them as interrelated terms and discussed them in the context of national and international situations. And as the situations changed from time to time, his ideas regarding them also underwent considerable changes.

As a political scientist, he examined the liberty of the individual, with which he was ardently concerned in life, in relation to other members of society and the state. He discussed it in both positive and negative aspects, but, particularly, he regarded it as a positive condition of life and held certain rights as necessary for its realization. He argued that we should recognize that liberty was possible upon the basis of the acceptance of certain rights and a minimum standard of material well-being which could get accepted only through collective effort of the individuals with the help of the state.

In the same way, Laski analyzed the nature and the functions of the state in view of the individual liberty and the purpose of society. His approach to the analysis of
the theory of the state was historical, undogmatic and realistic. From his historical studies he drew the conclusion that no particular form of state or government and no single theory of the state could be regarded as permanent or absolutely valid. Each theory of the state must, therefore, be studied in the light of its functions in the actual world. He maintained that until we knew the content of a specific decision made by any government we could not say that the decision was in the interest of the whole community. Nor could the state's command be defended as an expression of the general will of the community, since no such will exists. "The will of the state," he insisted, "is the will of certain persons exercising certain powers....The will of the state may be made to approach 'generality' the better it is organized for that end. But organization as such can never assure it of generality until we know the purpose to which it proposes to devote its powers."¹

To the historical analysis of the theory of the state he applied his pragmatic standard. According to this standard the purpose of the state was never the same, nor would it remain the same always. It changes as the demands of the people and their environmental situations change.

1. SLP, pp.256-57.
And the definition of the purpose of the state, as given by society, remains crucial in fixing the range of its powers. It is, therefore, significant that the greatest changes occurred in his discussions of the state's functions and of its relations to other social groups. The state, which, in his earlier period, he described as co-ordinate with other associations, was later defined as the regulating agency of society and the fundamental instrument of realizing social justice. He also applied pragmatic standard to his analysis of the law as an instrument for satisfying social needs. Echoing Holmes's reminder that the life of the law is not logic but experience, he said: "We have to search for the mechanisms of our law in life as it actually is, rather than fit the life we live to a priori rules of rigid legal system."

As such, Laski did not accept any particular theory of the state as valid purely on academic considerations, without reference to its political activities, or the means by which its ends were attained. The state is to be judged, according to him, with reference to its organization and its achievements in society, and its organization and its authority must be responsive to the demands of the people. He, therefore, always insisted upon the decentralization and democratization of the state powers. Very often,

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2. FS, p.261.
he argued that as society was federal, authority should also be federal. Without that, the authority of the state would become cumbersome and repressive. To curb the concentration of powers in the state government, he pleaded for the effective participation of the people and their voluntary groups in the process of administration. Although he also admitted the role of the state as the chief coordinating and regulating authority in society and was ready to transfer to it even the power of coercion in the period of economic and social transformation, he never held it superior to society and the people in any case. That is why he pleaded for both group autonomy and a strong state simultaneously.

Laski revised his theory of the state from time to time in view of the new economic and political situations. His political philosophy was not an academic political philosophy, and his treatment of the state was not an academic treatment. As he did not give any definite theory of the state and speak anything about the investigation of political phenomena, he cannot be regarded as a political theorist in the field of political science. As opposed to that, he was mainly concerned with the state in practice. His state was a purpose-state which always worked on behalf of society. He, therefore, tried to adjust its purpose and functions to the growing needs of the individuals in society.
He always questioned: What is the policy of the state? What is it doing for the material and intellectual progress of its citizens? And to what extent has it been capable of adjusting the interrelations between the various groups in society? All these considerations made him think of the state in the light of its purpose and achievements.

To understand Laski's correct position with reference to the above remarks, it would be necessary to outline some of his correlative views on individual liberty and political authority. He started his career with an attack on the monistic theory of the state sovereignty, as expounded by the idealists, considering it as dangerous to the individual liberty. To defend individual liberty against the coercive authority of the state, he, on the one hand, tried to establish the corporate personality of groups, and, on the other, he elaborated the individualistic theory of obedience to the state. His formula of "contingent anarchy", appearing as it does in his individualistic theory of obedience, worked as a revision of the relations between the individual and the state. He criticized traditional political thought for its concentration on state power at the expense of the political society (the people), for its over-simple assumptions about human nature and for its penchant for deductive reasoning. He remarked:

"The simple a priori premises of Hobbes or Locke, the intriguing mysticism of Rousseau's General Will, eloquence about the initiative of men and its
translation into terms of private property are no longer suited to a world that has seen its foundations in flame because to its good intentions an adequate knowledge was not joined. What we need...is the sober and scientific study of the conditions of social organizations." 3

Quite often Laski called for a new inductive political philosophy, centred less on political principles than on administrative functions and based on a realistic social psychology that would do more justice to the complex character of human personality and motivation than did the psychology of Aristotle or Machiavelli or Hobbes. He did not approve of the classical theory of human nature that regards it as static and fixed. On the contrary, he asserted that human nature is dynamic and evolutionary. Like Graham Wallas, he thought that the new political theory, seeking an institutional structure that would offer opportunities for the creative expression of the diverse impulses of men more adequate than those provided by the sovereign state, should be grounded in a satisfactory knowledge of the motives and desires of men. Each man must be encouraged to realize his own personality, while the state must be so organised as to give scope to the individual's sense of spontaneity and his creative impulses, thereby fostering the emergence of a wide diversity in the desires, attitudes and values of its citizens. 4 Since he was primarily

4. SPS, pp.24-25.
concerned with the preservation and promotion of individuality and spontaneity, he rejected order and unity as the final values.

In the pluralistic and pragmatic philosophies of Figgis and Maitland and James and Dewey he found a point of view that was extremely congenial to his own opposition to the revived state idealism, and to his conviction, which marked him as heir to the utilitarian tradition of Bentham and the Mills, that the state was to be judged in the light of its actual contributions to the well-being of its citizens. The test of the validity of state action is a pragmatic and utilitarian test. That is, how far successful it is in achieving its purpose, namely, the promotion of the good life for its citizens. Viewed in this fashion, the state becomes, he thought, what Duguit called "a great public service corporation".

Further, as he was aware of the dangers of concentration of powers in the state, he called its authority as federal. There are, he argued, various associations in society, and each of them has an important part to play in the development and enrichment of an individual's personality. But each association has only a partial contribution to make to the individual. The state, as one of these associations, can satisfy only the partial needs of the individuals, and therefore their allegiance to the state is partial. The
state cannot regulate the whole life of a man, and it must share this function with other associations. The state, in this sense, is not unitary; it is not absolute; it is not independent. It is rather pluralistic and federal as society is federal.

Laski thus argued in his earlier writings that the authority of the state should be federalized and mass participation in political activity be increased. If these principles reflect his adherence to the ideals of individual and group freedom, they also constitute limitations upon the exercise of power, weapons for defending labour and its organizations 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, and he conceived of the authority of the state as conditional. The state is given power to control men and their voluntary groups in order that it may satisfy their common needs; it commands obedience to its laws from them as long as they are in their interest. But gradually his belief that the individual cannot develop his personality and enjoy freedom in the presence of economic insecurity, which he had maintained somehow or other from his early childhood and which he called as the "central conviction" of his life, became stronger after the publication of Grammar of politics due to the changed political and economic situations in Europe. This belief was further strengthened
by his acceptance of Marx's economic interpretation of politics. As a result, his views on liberty, society and the state changed considerably.

Laski, during the period of economic depression in Europe, believed that the decentralization and dispersion of state authority were not the effective instruments to check the coercive authority of the state as long as the old economic structure remained unaltered. He argued that it was, therefore, necessary to change the old economic structure of society first. Only with the attainment of a classless society the need for state authority would disappear. He, therefore, approved of the necessity of a strong government with a view to bringing about a new economic structure and, at the same time, regulating the federal life of society. But he did not leave his earlier goals of individual and group freedom and the decentralization of state powers and paid a glowing tribute to Britain for its democratic way of life in the following words:

"Nowhere have I found in greater degree either the qualities which make private life lovely or in public relations the instinctive embodiment of the anxiety for fair play....When all is said against this people that can be said, British leadership seems to me to have been a beneficent thing in the history of civilization."5

While accepting the power of the state as a stage to bring classless society, he did not dismiss the fears of bureaucracy and ignore the need for safeguards. He said that "unless we recognise that decentralization is the

secret of freedom, government becomes 'they' instead of 'we'; and that sense of aloofness is fatal to the fulfillment of personality. Do let us ceaselessly remember that planned democracy is planning for the individual citizen, and not against him.  

Holding the purpose of society superior to that of the state, he still insisted upon the need of participation of voluntary groups in the process of administration. The state should give to the groups their due place in the inquiries and negotiations that precede any final decision of the government. Representatives of voluntary associations should sit with and advise government officials on political and economic questions of common interest. There should be a network of advisory committees and industrial councils to guide the government at all levels, and the rule-making powers should be more and more devolved upon territorial and functional assemblies in order to check the concentration of powers in the hands of the government. Such a mass participation and the democratization of state power, he regarded as highly essential to safeguard the individual and group freedom against the coercive authority of the state. His argument was that the atmosphere we required, if we wanted to attain happiness for the multitude, was one in which we were to gain

everything by common experience and not by force and compulsion. In a dictatorship the leaders insist upon an artificial unity, and, as such, there remains no scope for diversities in social life. The chief danger to society, according to him, is from the desire of those who possess power, because they develop, in the long run, the habit of keeping society static for their personal gains. But society, he argued, is not static; it is dynamic and diverse. And the path to happiness is not a single one. Men are not willing to yield the insight of their experience to other men's insight merely because they are commanded to do so. They love freedom and try to maintain it by all means because it is necessary for the development of their life. Laski remarked that "liberty cannot help being a courage to resist the demands of power at some point that is deemed decisive; and, because of this, liberty, also, is an inescapable doctrine of contingent anarchy. It is always a threat to those who operate the engines of authority that prohibition of experience will be denied."^7

In place of state dictatorship, Laski elaborated the idea of some sort of commonwealth of economic groups and trade unions, working side by side with the government. He pleaded that it was only with their consent and their collective effort that any economic and political change in society could be brought about. Thus he was in favour

^7. LMS (3rd edition), p.211.
of a conscious change in which the masses participate actively and consciously. He was so enamoured of individual freedom and democratic way of life that in spite of his acceptance of the necessity of a strong state, he completely dismissed the idea of an all-inclusive state. He argued for a limited state authority with a view to maintaining individual liberty. He did not want that its authority should ever degenerate into dictatorship as it had happened in the Soviet Union. As he was conscious of society and its federal structure, he constantly regarded authority as federal and believed that the state necessarily worked in society as one of its agencies. It is society which always determines as to what should be the purpose and functions of the state from time to time. Thus the state, for him, was a sort of purpose organization of society which aims at realizing social justice. And he adjusted the question of individual liberty to that of state authority on the basis of his idea of federal society.

Laski reflected the spirit of the period in which he lived. The time, in which he was born and lived, was the period of revolution and reform. The liberalism of the Victorian Age was crumbling down, and the various theories like pluralism, Fabian socialism and communism were becoming more and more popular. Under the influence of these theories, the claims of the people were put
forward with a view to raising their standard of living, and there was a general demand to modify the existing political institutions in order to bring an overall change in their economic and political status in society. The change in the position of the working class and women was urgently needed. For that it was urgent, first, to change the economic order of society, and, secondly, to review the classical theory of state monism. Laski studied the problems of his time and tried to find out a solution to them. He was not an arm-chair thinker, but, on the contrary, he was out and out a practical man. He was always ready to admit his mistakes and revise his political ideas in view of the changed political and economic conditions, and, as such, he was not at all dogmatic in his attitude towards any political and economic question. He remained sincere, throughout his career, to the cause of individual freedom and human progress, and discussed the authority of the state in perspective of the various demands of the federal society. Thus his theory of the state was a dynamic theory of state functions.

Laski was a political scientist who was deeply interested in public affairs. He influenced the practical politics of England of his time, and was admitted as the real leader of the Labour Party. With the help of his great knowledge and intellectual power he guided the
great political leaders like Attlee, Morrison and Bevin. Even the Beveridge plan, introduced in the time of the conservative prime minister Mr. Churchill in 1943 in order to bring reforms in the fields of insurance, health, child welfare, relief in old age and working conditions of labourers, seemed to carry its reformative spirit indirectly from Laski's proposals for a radical reconstruction of the economic and political order. Laski himself had admitted that a number of fundamental principles should be recognised immediately, even if they could not be completely applied for the time being. Certain sectors of economy must be placed under public ownership; the educational and public health systems must be radically reformed and extended; a great housing programme must be started; there must be provision for relief in old age; and the state should control imports and exports. Though Beveridge plan in the War period cannot be regarded to have been based on these principles of Laski, yet his indirect influence in its shaping is decisive. As a matter of fact, he was not satisfied with such meagre reforms as he wrote:

"These proposals do not assume the establishment of a socialist state at the end of war......Their purpose is different, though related one."  

These proposals only constitute, according to him, a beginning of the necessary movement to a free socialist state.

Further, he not only guided the governmental policies of England, but he also inspired the statesmen in other countries to take up the work of social reforms after Second World War. The conception of social welfare, which Indian leaders at present keep in view to reshape India's economy and politics, is similar to Laski's idea of social justice and fundamental reforms mentioned above. Thus we can very well find his influence in the practical field as it is found in the field of thinking.

Laski remained an intellectual leader of a great number of people in England and exerted his influence, directly or indirectly, in shaping the various policies of the country. If he did not stick to one political faith in his life, it was due to his over-conscientiousness which made him hesitant about every political theory of the state. But whereas other 18th and 19th century thinkers failed in adjusting the claims of the individual to those of the state, he succeeded with his factual and realistic approach to the problem. Adam Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Bentham and J.S. Mill were utterly practical who relied too much upon the selfish nature of the individual. As they missed the academic and conceptual aspects of the problem, they failed in reconciling individual liberty to state authority. On the other hand, Green, Bradley and Bosanquet were University professors and their approach was too academic. They were not conversant with the practical nature of the problem, and, as such,
they visualised things from a distance. Consequently, they also failed in finding out an adequate solution of the problem. Laski had an advantage over both sets of thinkers. He was both an academician and a practical statesman. He looked to the problem at close quarters and could succeed in presenting a well-argued thesis on individual liberty. He followed a middle path in opposition to the empty individualism of Adam Smith, Ricardo, Bentham and Mill and the pseudo-Hegelianism of Oxford idealists like Green, Bradley and Bosanquet.

As such, Laski's undogmatic approach and his sincerity to the human progress made him popular both among the common people and the intellectuals. They were attracted towards him because he spoke to them about the questions that were uppermost in their minds regarding the economic and political problems of their age. He told them not to be dogmatic in their outlook and judge things on the basis of their usefulness in social life. The age we live in is an age of reason and criticism. It is an age in which we question and examine everything before we accept it. We cannot approve of things because they were found valuable in the past. He, therefore, warned them that it would be sheer mistake to stick to one conclusion dogmatically. In his own life he was always found ready to admit the mistakes of his conclusions and revise them with a new vision. As a political analyst, he evaluated
political institutions and political problems in relation to the life of the people and attached importance to them in view of their purpose and functions in society.