

HAROLD LASKI'S SOCIALISM*

by Ralph Miliband

Editor's note

*This essay, originally commissioned in 1958 or 1959 for a Fabian Society pamphlet but never published, offers unique insights into the influence of **Laski** on Miliband's thought. It reveals much about Miliband's own thinking in the late 1950s just as he was writing *Parliamentary Socialism*. Reading it today demonstrates, moreover, considerable parallels in many aspects of both their approaches to socialism over the course of their lives. In addition to so many of the themes and ideas in this essay having direct relevance for contemporary debates, the publication of Miliband's manuscript on **Laski** at this time contributes to the revival of interest in **Laski** occasioned by the two biographies published in 1993 (I. Kramnick and B. Sheerman, *Harold Laski: A Life on the Leji* and M. Newman, *Harold Laski. A Political Biography*, both of which were reviewed by **Miliband** in *New Left Review* 200, July/August, 1993). For reasons of length, and in light of matters covered in the recent biographies, a brief biographical sketch, near the beginning, and a section on 'Russia, America and World Peace', towards the end, have been omitted from Miliband's original manuscript.

I. Introduction

There are many different facets to Harold **Laski's** life. He was a teacher and a scholar; a political theorist who was also deeply involved in the politics of his day; a pamphleteer and a practical reformer; the friend and counsellor of the powerful and eminent, and also of the humble and the anonymous.

Laski brought to these activities an encyclopaedic learning, a vivid imagination and a tireless industry, **the** force of a warm and generous personality, an impish sense of humour and a sharp wit.

These gifts and the manner in which they were exercised have already been depicted, most notably in Mr **Kingsley** Martin's memoir of **Laski's**

personal and public life.' It is not my purpose in this essay to tell that story once again. Nor am I here concerned with a detailed analysis of all of **Laski's writings**.² My object is to examine **Laski's** main ideas on Socialism.

Laski was an immensely prolific writer. The books, essays, pamphlets and articles which flowed from his pen ranged over a wide field of history and jurisprudence, political theory, social philosophy and public administration. Yet, whatever the subject which **Laski** was discussing at any particular moment, it is social change and socialism which form, directly or by implication, the underlying themes of most of his writings, just as the cause of socialism provided the impulse for most of his activities.

It is his treatment of these themes which gave **Laski** so remarkable an influence on the intellectual configuration of his times. For a period of some twenty-five years, **Laski** contributed more to the discussion of the meaning and challenge of Socialism than any other English Socialist. From 1925, when his *Grammar of Politics* was published, until his death in 1950, countless men and women were given a new insight into the problems of their times because they heard or read **Laski**.

Much of **Laski's** most important work was deeply influenced by the sombre events of the nineteen thirties, and that grim decade, together with the ideas and attitudes which it engendered, now appears scarcely less remote than many earlier periods of history. Every generation tends to view its problems as wholly new and therefore incapable of understanding, let alone of solution, in terms of a diagnosis fashioned for an earlier era. The reaction to the thirties, which has been much enhanced by the propensity to breast beating of many who were intellectually alive at that time and who are still alive today has now been in full swing for a number of years. **As** part of that reaction, it is now fashionable to believe that **Laski's** writings are mostly irrelevant to the problems we ourselves now confront. I believe this to be a mistaken view.

In essence, **Laski** sought throughout his life to explore the conditions in which fundamental social changes which he deemed urgent and desirable in our society might be **realised** without the obliteration of freedom; how, furthermore, socialism as a form of economic and social organisation might be combined with political democracy. These questions remain of central importance in our own day. Compared to them, the controversy between socialists and the various schools of conservative thought assumes an air of even greater futility. For, in intellectual terms at least, the question is no longer whether we are, or should be, moving towards some form of socialist society, but how best it should be brought about.

This is why, now more than ever, socialists need to understand the meaning of their purpose and the implications of their aims. To such an understanding, **Laski's** writings make a substantial contribution. To none of these questions did **Laski** provide a final or conclusive answer. Nor, let it

be said at once, are his writings free from ambiguities and contradictions, the more so since his views evolved substantially over the course of the years. **Laski's** supreme merit was to ask uncomfortable questions and to provide an illuminating commentary on problems to which no Socialist can afford to remain indifferent . . .

III. The Nature of Socialism

Two dominant convictions were expressed in **Laski's** early writings, on which the impact of World War One is easily discernible. The first was that concentration of power in the state was fatal to liberty; the second was that the War had made more urgent than ever the achievement of large scale social and economic reforms.

The War's first effect was greatly to enhance the suspicion **Laski** had learned to harbour of the State's claim to the undivided allegiance of its citizens. Despite the variety of their subject matter, the essays which make up his first books are mainly concerned with a refutation of doctrines of allegiance based upon the view that the State had any inherent, prescriptive or even prior claim to obedience. In accordance with the political pluralism to which he was then committed he insisted that the State was only one association among many; whatever its legal right to enforce obedience, that right, as such, was devoid of any ethical validation. Like every other association, the State was always in competition for the allegiance of its members. It was always on trial. There was nothing to warrant the assertion that the verdict must necessarily be rendered in its favour. The nature of that verdict must always depend on its performance and on its ability to convince its members that their own good was involved in their acceptance of its commands. The price of freedom was contingent anarchy.

In a sense, **Laski** remained a political pluralist all his life. 'I confess to a frank fear', he said in 1949, 'of what I used to call the monist state'. He never ceased to view the Great Leviathan as a dangerous beast, never to be trusted, whatever its announced intentions.

Yet, he soon came to believe that political pluralism, in its insistence that the State was only one association among many, was entirely inadequate as a realistic description of the State's real nature. However much it might be necessary to refuse to the State the exalted status it claimed, its nature could not be determined by the mere denial of that status. Something else was needed.

But there was, he perceived, another grave flaw in the pluralist theory. For it made impossible the recognition of the fact that the State alone was capable, in the world of the twentieth century, of serving as the instrument of fundamental social and economic reform.

The War, besides enhancing **Laski's** distrust of the State, had also given a much sharper edge to his conviction that there was an imperative need for

vast improvements in the condition of the working classes. 'The main result of the recent conflict', he wrote, 'will be to bring the working classes to a new position in the State.' That new position, **Laski** did not doubt, would find political expression in the growing importance of the Labour Party, which he had immediately joined on his return from the United States. The Labour Party had, in 1918, declared itself a Socialist party, bent upon the transformation of Britain into a Socialist commonwealth. A new social order was to be built upon the **ruins** of the old. What was to be the nature of that social order? **How** was it to be achieved? These are the questions which form the underlying themes of **Laski's** major theoretical work of the twenties, the *Grammar* of Politics, which was published in 1925.

The *Grammar* of Politics is one of the most comprehensive attempts ever made by an English Socialist to give concrete meaning to the ideals of the Labour Party. Sidney Webb, who was not given to exuberant praise, called it a 'great **book**.' The modern reader is unlikely to go quite so far, not least because so many of the ideas of the *Grammar* have now been accepted as part of the common currency of contemporary thought. But there can be no doubt that it remains one of the few fundamental 'texts' of English Socialism.

The basic postulate from which **Laski** starts is that the purpose of social organisation is to secure to each member of society the fullest opportunities for the development of his or her personality, subject only to the impediment of natural aptitude and ability.

Such a society presupposes the recognition of rights to each of its members. Among those rights, the right of free speech and of assembly, of equality before the law, irrespective of race, **colour** and creed, must obviously figure high. But, **Laski** insisted, to these must be added other, scarcely less important rights, such as the right to work and to earn an adequate wage, to leisure and to education, to protection against insecurity, sickness and old age, as well as the right of the workers to share in the management and control of their enterprise.

Freedom, in any positive sense, has no meaning without rights. But neither freedom, nor rights, said **Laski**, could have more than a formal and contingent meaning in a society fundamentally divided between those who lived by their ownership of the means to life and those whose livelihood was wholly derived from their labour. In such a society, reward must, in the main, **depend** upon ownership and not function, upon property and not service.

In such a society too, the use of **material** resources must depend upon their owners' decisions; and those decisions were based on the search for profit, and not on considerations of public welfare. The conclusion was inescapable that so long as the ownership and control of property remained

RALPH MILIBAND

concentrated in private and irresponsible hands, so long must the lives of the vast majority remain stunted and mean, whatever their formal rights.

The good society must be based on an 'approximate economic equality' between its members. 'It is only by making identity the basis of our institutions, and differences an answer to the necessities of social functions that we can make our society call into play the individuality of **men**.'⁵ This was impossible as long as the existing system of property remained unaltered.

At the time he wrote the Grammar of Politics, **Laski** was still extremely cautious in his approach to the reform of that system. 'I do not', he wrote, 'envisage anything like the disappearance of private **enterprise**'.⁶ He was then content to advocate the nationalisation of 'obvious' monopolies and the rigorous control by the State of the operation of private enterprise. 'But', he said, 'Men will still be able to make fortunes', 'although they will be subject to heavy taxation upon income, and still heavier duties upon their estates at death.' And the product of that heavier taxation would be used by the State for a wide extension of social services.

'The achievement of greater economic equality would involve', said **Laski**, 'slow and painful experiment'. No doubt, the men of property would bitterly resent the erosion of their rights and privileges. But the gradual nature of the change and the persistent pressure of the working classes, speaking through the Labour Party, upon the democratic state guaranteed ultimate success. The road might be long and the journey slow but that the destination would be reached was not in doubt.

The optimism which pervades the Grammar of Politics stems in a large measure from the view **Laski** then took of the nature of the State. 'The State', he said in the Grammar, is 'the organisation for enabling the mass of men to realise the social good on the largest possible **scale**';⁸ it is 'the final depository of the social will'? Given this view there was no good reason to suppose that the State would fail to respond to the demands of the majority of its **members**.⁹ It is only incidentally that a different note is allowed to creep in. One of the major results of an economically unequal society, **Laski** suggests, is to gear the State's purpose to the interest of those who hold economic power. The State, in such a society, 'is compelled to use its instruments to protect the property of the rich from invasion by the poor.' But the implications of this notion which were so greatly to concern **Laski** in later years, are not explored in the Grammar.

The political problem which worried **Laski** at the time was of a different order. The realisation of the social good, in the sense in which it is defined in the Grammar, must obviously lead to a vast increase in the State's power. To deny the State that increase of power was to deny the possibility of reform. The question was how both to grant the State the powers it needed and yet to control the exercise of that power.

Laski sought the answer in the notion of power as federal. Authority, in

the **growingly** collectivist society, must be widely dispersed. The State must allow and indeed encourage the widest possible degree of popular participation in the exercise of power and responsibility. Ordinary men and women must be called upon, through a multiplicity of associations, to share in the making of decisions which affected them as producers, as consumers and as citizens. In this sense, democratic pluralism must be a fundamental feature of any society based on freedom and equality. **Laski** could only take that view because he deeply believed that ordinary people were capable of **making** a significant contribution to the shaping of their own destinies. At the root of his thought, there is a profound conviction that there existed in society reserves of civic responsibility and talent which it would be one of the major purposes of a new social order to release.

Laski remained faithful throughout his life to the ultimate objectives he had set out in the *Grammar of Politics*. But there was also much about the book which he found increasingly inadequate as a realistic description of the political processes as the twenties gave way to the thirties.

Until the late twenties, **Laski** was a Fabian Socialist; from then onwards, he considered himself a Marxist. So much confusion has come to surround that last label that some precise explanation of what it involves in relation to **Laski** is essential if one is to understand what he was about.

A great deal too much can be made of **Laski's** 'conversion' to Marxism. **Laski** did not suddenly 'discover' Marx at the end of the twenties. He had wrestled with him as early as 1921 and found his system unattractive and unconvincing? But the bitter social and industrial climate of the twenties, allied to the failure of the first Labour Government and the experience of the General Strike, led him to a progressively more favourable view of **Marx's** diagnosis. By 1927, he was describing Marx as the most powerful social analyst of the nineteenth century.¹²

The Great Depression completed the process. To **Laski** as to countless other critics of capitalism, the Great Depression seemed to offer conclusive proof of what had hitherto been little more than a plausible hypothesis. The intensity and the duration of the Depression appeared to confirm the Marxist prediction that the capitalist system was inherently incapable of overcoming its contradictions. It was now demonstrating, at the price of fearful human suffering, its inability to make use of the formidable productive power it had itself brought into being. Capitalism had become an intolerable drag upon the use of capital. **Laski** was careful to point out that the failure of the system 'would not be dramatic enough to have an intense or wide effect in a short space of time';¹³ in fact he considered that its decline might be appreciably slowed down by the kind of State intervention, of which the New Deal in the United States was an early example. But, he maintained, though the decline might be slowed down, the trend

itself was unavoidable.

Laski's Marxism involved much more than a simple acceptance of the validity of **Marx's** prediction of the inevitable decline of capitalism. On the other hand, it involved much less than the acceptance as scientifically true of that vast, all-embracing structure known as dialectical materialism. In that sense **Laski** was never a Marxist at all.¹⁴ In essence, what **Laski** took from Marx is contained in one single passage of the latter's writings, which so deeply coloured **Laski's** later thinking that it is worth quoting in full. I refer to the famous passage of **Marx's** Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social **revolution**.¹⁵

These formulations of course represent the essence of the Marxist interpretation of history. 'No serious observer', **Laski** said about it in 1948, 'supposes that the materialist conception of history is free from difficulties, or that it solves all the problems involved in historical interpretation. But no serious observer either can doubt that *it has done more in the last hundred years to provide a major clue to the causes of social change than any other hypothesis that has been put forward*.'¹⁶

These lines, as so much else which **Laski** wrote on Marxism, show well enough that he was not a convert to a new secular faith. Historical materialism to him was a supremely useful tool of analysis, not a mental straight-jacket.

It could hardly be doubted that Europe and the world *had* by the early thirties entered upon an era of crisis. The implications of that fact could not be other than immense and we shall see **presently** how **Laski** sought to define them. But the first consequence of his acceptance of historical materialism as a fruitful hypothesis was to give far greater precision to his view of what the achievement of a socialist order entailed.

The ownership and control of property had long occupied a place of importance in **Laski's** thought. He now placed property at the centre of the social equation. For, if it was indeed true that the factor which basically determined the character of society was its mode of production and its

property relations, it logically followed that any Socialist seriously interested in really changing the social order must, above all else, seek the socialisation of the means to life. Without that socialisation, the evils in capitalist society which Socialists condemn might be attenuated, but they could not be abolished. Without it too, the property relations of a capitalist society might be mitigated, but they must continue to exercise a predominant impact on the character of society. Socialism, in other words, required the socialisation of property; on any other view, it amounted to no more than social reform.

This is not to say that **Laski**, by the end of the twenties, had become the prisoner of an all-or-nothing, apocalyptic mentality, the most obvious consequence of which is always romantic futility. What he was concerned to stress was that Socialists and the Labour Party must cease to delude themselves with the belief that specific measures of social reform were synonymous with Socialism. Unless these measures formed part of a broader strategy designed to achieve the transfer of the means of production from private into social ownership, they must fail to eliminate the waste and inefficiency, the social inequality and the spiritual meanness of a capitalist order of society.

Such an assertion, it is worth noting, was entirely consistent with the Labour Party's own doctrine, since the constitution it had adopted in 1918 made the 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' the basis upon which was to be secured 'for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible.'"

But the experience of the first two Labour Governments had shown the width of the gulf which separated theoretical intent from actual practice. Their history, said **Laski**, could be defined as a determined attempt to evade 'the problem of the ownership and control of economic power which is the root problem of **equality**';¹⁸ 'the whole burden of its (Labour's) experience since **1924** has been the inadequacy of any policy which leaves untouched the fundamental basis of class relations.'"

It is of course true that the Labour Governments of **1924** and **1929** were minority governments whose power of socialist initiative was narrowly limited by the constricting mathematics of parliamentary strength. What **Laski** was condemning was not their failure to achieve socialism, but their obvious unwillingness even to begin the attempt. No doubt, they would have suffered defeat had they done so, but their failure would have been far less ignominious and debilitating than the defeats they suffered in any case. Socialists who had no intention of **acting** upon Socialist principles should leave the administration of a capitalist state to those who believed in the virtues of capitalism.

By the end of the twenties, **Laski** had arrived at the view that Socialism,

in any meaningful sense, meant the disappearance of existing class relations and that their disappearance was impossible without the **socialisation** of the means to life. Much of his thinking in the thirties was devoted to an exploration of the momentous implications of that view.

III. Capitalism and the Socialist Challenge

With the Great Depression, the collapse of the second Labour Government in 1931 and the rise of Nazism, **Laski** ceased to feel the confidence in the inevitability of a gradual evolution towards socialism, which had been at the core of the *Grammar of Politics*. The constitutional crisis of 1932, he believed, had raised in a dramatic form the question whether 'evolutionary socialism (has) deceived itself in believing that it can establish itself by peaceful means within the ambit of the capitalist system'.²¹ The task which Socialists set themselves, he now insisted, was one of immense difficulty. 'To transform the ultimate economic foundations of society', he wrote in 1932, 'is the most hazardous enterprise to which men can lay their hand.'²² Nor, obviously, was he referring to the multitude of problems connected with the creation of a new system of economic organisation. These problems, though real and grave, were, in any adequate perspective, much less formidable than the political hazards which the attempt to transform capitalism out of existence must entail.

The one sure lesson of history, **Laski** now said, was that violence had always been the midwife of fundamental social change. Faced with a resolute challenge to those of their privileges which they deemed beyond surrender, ruling classes had always sought to meet that challenge by suppression. The English, the French and the Russian revolutions were only the most conspicuous examples of a pattern to which there had so far in history been no exception. New systems of class relations had always been born amidst the smoke of battle and christened in human blood.

The thirties of the twentieth century hardly suggested that our own epoch was destined to inaugurate a new pattern of social change. For, when all else had been said about the specific characteristics of Italian Fascism and German Nazism, the fact remained that both Mussolini and Hitler had only been able to hoist themselves to power because of the support and encouragement they had received from Italy and Germany's respective ruling classes. And they had received that support because the essence of their programme was the destruction of democratic institutions, the functioning of which had come to present to those ruling classes a threat of social subversion they no longer felt capable of meeting within the framework of democratic institutions.

Both Fascism and Nazism might assert the need for a new social order. Yet, as **Laski** pointed out, 'the suppression of democratic institutions, both

in Italy and in Germany (had) been accomplished without any alteration in the economic relationship of classes in either country.*

Other instances of the same process were not lacking in the Europe of the 1930's. The special brand of Catholic authoritarianism which **Franco** sought to impose upon the ruins of the liberal Spanish Republic showed well enough that different countries might develop their own national forms of conservative reaction. But, in Spain as in Germany and Italy, it was the privileged interests who had eagerly welcomed the suppression of political democracy because of the challenge to property which it made possible. Nor was it possible to explain in any other terms the eagerness with which, some years later, so large a segment of the French ruling class had welcomed defeat and accepted collaboration with an enemy who might hold France in subjection but also offered a guarantee against social subversion.

Fascism, whatever its peculiar national variants, was everywhere the enemy not only of Socialism but of political democracy. The sympathy which it had encountered among the privileged orders the world over underlined the dangers which democracy, everywhere, confronted in the epoch of capitalist decline. More clearly than any other phenomenon, the emergence and spread of Fascism betokened the fact that political liberalism and parliamentary democracy were a luxury which a contracting capitalist order could ill afford.

Both, **Laski** argued in one of his most scholarly studies in the history of ideas,²³ had been the product of an attempt on the part of a nascent capitalist class to wrest from a landed aristocracy at least a share of political power. 'New material conditions ... gave birth to new social relationships; and, in terms of these a new philosophy was evolved to afford a national justification for the new world which had come into being.'²⁴

The thesis was of course not new. The real interest of *The Rise of European Liberalism* lay in **Laski's** brilliant demonstration of the manner in which liberalism, as the ideology of the middle classes, had been used as a justification for the removal of the multitude of barriers which prevented them from taking advantage of new economic opportunities.

The spokesmen of liberalism had preached individualism and freedom against the antiquated claims of frozen hierarchies; they had upheld reason and tolerance against superstition and prejudice; they had glorified progress against stagnation, enterprise against custom, scientific enquiry against consecrated ignorance, constitutionalism against arbitrariness.

The triumph of their ideas, said **Laski**, had represented 'a real and profound progress.'²⁵ Without that triumph, 'the number of those whose demands upon life would have been satisfied must have remained much smaller than it has been'; 'that', he added in a significant phrase, 'is the

RALPH MILIBAND

supreme test by which a social doctrine must be judged.²⁶

Liberalism had, of course, undergone profound modifications in the course of its long evolution. Initially grounded in the denial of the State's responsibility in economic life, it had moved to a more positive view of limited State action. Starting with a narrowly restricted concept of political participation, which excluded from effective citizenship the vast majority of those devoid of property, it had come to include universal suffrage as a vital part of its meaning.

But liberalism had never ceased to retain the essential stamp of its origin. The political democracy it helped to foster, said **Laski**, 'was established on the unstated assumption that it would leave untouched the private ownership of the means of **production**.'²⁷ That assumption had, save marginally, remained unquestioned so long as capitalism had seemed to be synonymous with economic growth and material progress. Once that ceased to be the case, political democracy must increasingly be used as a means of seeking to effect a radical change in capitalist class relations. Political democracy, in other words, must, by the law of its own being, seek the achievement of social and economic democracy. But in doing so, it was driven to invade an area of life which liberal doctrine had always held to be sacrosanct. Thus must the fears which had haunted so many of the intellectual progenitors of liberalism come to be realised. Property must, to an increasing extent, become a major target of attack on the part of those devoid of it. What this meant was that the men who had controlled the purpose of the State by virtue of their ownership of property would be required to surrender that control, so that their power and privilege might be taken from them.

The State, **Laski** now stressed, was not a neutral institution standing over and above contending economic classes within the social framework. It was the supreme coercive agency for the maintenance of a given set of class **relations**.²⁸ In every instance where a ruling class had been threatened in its fundamental privileges, it had sought to use the State to repel the threat; where it had failed, it had always sought to recapture the State power by the organisation of counter-revolution. In either case, the result had always been violence. 'A social order whose way of life is challenged will not easily accept the methods of a debating **society**.'²⁹

In such a perspective, the most vital question which confronted a party bent on a radical transformation of class relations was whether such a transformation could in fact be achieved by peaceful means.

To that question, Fascism had, in a number of countries, already provided an emphatically negative Answer. But in none of the countries where it had prevailed had parliamentary government and democratic institutions been more than relatively recent acquisitions.

Unlike those countries, Britain had a unique record of parliamentary

continuity and government by discussion. With, and through, her political system, she had weathered acute social, political and economic storms. What was the secret of that achievement? And how likely was it to be repeated in the age of capitalist decline? These are the fundamental questions **Laski** had already asked some years **earlier**³⁰ and which he asked again with even more anxious insistence in his *Parliamentary Government in England* (1938).

It is, I think, true to say that until the publication of *Parliamentary Government in England* no-one since Bagehot had seriously sought to relate the English Constitution and its workings to Britain's social and economic system. Its uniquely successful power of adaptation to changing conditions had been variously ascribed to the national genius for compromise, to the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, to the existence of a constitutional monarchy or to the harmonious combination of Cabinet rule with parliamentary control, and so on. **Laski** started from different premises. All these features of the Constitution, he suggested, were more in the nature of results than of causes. For the causes of the Constitution's adaptability, one must look deeper into the foundations of society of which the Constitution was the expression.

Britain had not been a political democracy until the first decades of this century. From the end of the seventeenth until this time, the foundations of society had never been seriously called into question. Echoing Lord **Balfour's** famous words, **Laski** argued that 'until our own day we have been governed in all fundamental matters by a single party in the state since 1689.'³¹ That party was the party of property.

It had not, obviously enough, been an homogeneous party. Its diverse groupings had often been locked in conflict, even bitter conflict. Issues like the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Parliament Bill of 1911, both of which represented a real shift of power within the propertied classes, had strained the Constitution to breaking point. In one fairly recent instance, that of Home Rule and the fate of Ulster, one section of the party of property had even been willing (and the willingness was not without ominous significance) to encourage preparations for armed resistance and civil war against the constitutionally elected government of the **day**.³²

Yet, it remained true that none of these issues, however violent the passions they had temporarily aroused, had ever brought into question the private ownership of property. The contending factions had always found that, however real their divergences, they were fundamentally agreed on *that* issue, which, as **Harrington** and Madison had said long before Marx, was the greatest of all sources of faction in society. Beyond its divisions, the party of property had always found unity in the perception that, transcending its own quarrels, there loomed a far more serious conflict with the unprivileged masses who remained excluded from the area of

economic, social and political power it itself occupied. That unity of those who ruled Britain had, above all other factors, been the secret of Britain's success in the maintenance of constitutionalism and government by discussion.

Even so, the achievement this represented was not one which **Laski** sought to minimize nor was he in the least blind to the importance of the political tradition which has thus been bred in British political life.

Nor did he underestimate the capacity, amounting to genius, which Britain's ruling classes had shown in acceding to the demands for social, economic and political reform with which they had been confronted. However reluctantly, they had always in the past had enough political sagacity to pay what Joseph Chamberlain had bluntly called ransom as the necessary price for the maintenance of their essential power and privilege.

There were, of course, many factors which had gone into the willingness to pay that price. But the most important of these, said **Laski**, had been the existence of an enormous fund from which to draw. Economic expansion had always provided the necessary reserves with which to buy off social discontent and to breed that sense of security which makes for generosity in politics.

The situation **Laski** held was now vastly changed. In a period of progressive decline, British capitalism was now less and less able to satisfy expectations which had, however, grown greater and greater. Here lay the seeds of social conflict far more acute and deep-rooted than any since the period of primitive capital accumulation which had straddled the decades of the Industrial Revolution, and during which the working classes had been far too weak to make an effective challenge to the power of property.

Now, however, the decline of British capitalism had led to the emergence of the Labour Party as a major political force. And, unlike the two parties which had traditionally alternated in office throughout the nineteenth century, the Labour Party was not agreed with its rivals on the fundamental issue of property. 'Between the frontiers of Conservative thought and those of the Labour Party in Great Britain, there is, in fact, a doctrinal abyss now unbridgeable in terms of the old continuity of **policy**.'²³ The two main parties, **Laski** claimed, were now divided by a fundamental antithesis of ultimate purpose. What was at stake was not a peripheral difference over specific policies, but the very essence of social and economic life.

In such a situation, 'the temptation to a party of property to use all its influence, direct and hidden, to rid itself of its opponents in an epoch of challenge appears to be **immense**.'²⁴ And, as the crisis of 1931 had already shown, its power to do so would be proportionate to the temptation. **As** he saw it, a Labour Government elected on a programme, the main feature of which would be proposals for extensive socialisation, would find

mobilized against its powerful economic and financial interests, ready, by virtue of their power, to threaten it with economic dislocation and national bankruptcy. The press these interests controlled would be shrill in its denunciation of the Government and its single-minded endeavour would be to sow fear and mistrust among the people. Nor, he insisted, was it possible to ignore the likelihood that the party of property would seek to use whatever organs of the State power were amenable to its influence for the purpose of destroying the Government. The influence of a Court deeply steeped in conservatism might be invoked; the House of Lords would be relied on to use all of its remaining powers to thwart the loyalty to the government of the day of the higher Civil Service and of the upper reaches of the Army. Nor did the social background and political leanings of their personnel make it wildly improbable that these attempts would meet with success.

At the end of that road, there clearly lay conflict of a kind which must rapidly make impossible the continuation of the normal processes of constitutional government.

Laski did not suggest that the fears he expressed, and which were widely shared in the Labour movement during the thirties, were bound to be realised. But he certainly thought at the time that the likelihood of their being realised was extremely high. In the light of history and contemporary experience, they were at any rate not fears which Labour could afford to disregard.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to look at some of the objections which, in the light of subsequent developments, have been raised against the whole of the foregoing analysis.

Without a doubt, much of that analysis, as presented here, without the refinements Laski brought to its support, strikes a jarring note on the contemporary ear. What was unorthodox but arguable in the very different climate of the thirties now tends to appear unreal. How unreal is it in fact?

The question is best considered by reference to three distinct and fundamental objections to Laski's analysis.³⁸

There is firstly the objection that the economic view upon which the whole argument rests is entirely unsound. Capitalism, we are told, is not in decline; on the contrary, it has discovered the secret of perpetual expansion which Jeremiahs like Laski deemed to be entirely beyond its resources.

It is certainly true that Laski – like Marx before him – gravely underestimated the vitality and power of adaptability of the capitalist system of production.

It is of course equally true that capitalism has bought viability at the price of massive State intervention in the economic process. No Government, however much it might be wedded in theory to the 'free enterprise' system would now dare to put to the test the claim that

capitalism functions best without State 'interference'. And it is no less important to note that the capitalist system has yet to prove that it can maintain a continuous level of effective demand without the massive military expenditure which has been such an important form of **pump-priming** in the post-war era.

Even so, it remains the case that, however wastefully, capitalist societies have been able – so far – to prevent the recurrence of the mass unemployment of the inter-war years. And, more positively, there can be no doubt that the growth in power and influence of the Trade Union and Labour movements have been such as to enable them to obtain within the ambit of capitalism, concessions substantial enough to lead to real improvements in the conditions of life of the working classes.

But, to take Britain alone, it surely requires heroic faith to maintain that the real social and economic advances of the post-war years have even begun to resolve the deep-seated economic ills which caused **Laski** to speak of capitalist decline. If anything, the economic sickness of our society has grown worse rather than better.

The impoverishment caused by the War, the post-war burden of military expenditure; the progressive disappearance of the colonial empire, the competition of more powerful capitalist economies and the emergence as new competitors of countries in the Communist bloc, the loss of British influence in Asia and the Middle East: these certainly tend, in a global perspective, to accentuate even more sharply the decline of Britain's economic status in the world. To check, even more, to reverse, that decline will be a back-breaking task. There is so far nothing to suggest that our present social and economic arrangements will be adequate to it.

Post-war capitalism has shown itself incapable of more than a partial and precarious resolution of the cycle of crises which have punctuated the years since the war. It has failed to remedy the technical obsolescence characteristic of much of British industry and it is clearly significant that where technical progress has been real, it has been, for the most part, the result either of nationalisation or of extensive state help to private industry. But it has, above all, failed to generate the kind of disciplined cooperative effort which can alone save Britain from the status of an impoverished client state, living on memories and interested charity.

The implication of all this is simple and obvious. It is that, though **Laski's** timing was faulty, his diagnosis was accurate enough. The decline of which he spoke may be much more protracted and its consequences therefore even less dramatic than he himself envisaged. But the decline itself can only be denied by a resolute escape from reality.

It has secondly been argued, among others by R. T. **McKenzie**, that **Laski** fundamentally misunderstood the nature and aims of the Labour Party.²⁶ The Labour Party, **McKenzie** contends, is in no sense that **revolu-**

tionary intruder upon the British political scene which **Laski's** 'romantic view' had conjured up. He vastly exaggerated the ideological gap between the parties; he 'seemed somehow to have convinced himself that the Labour Party after its nominal conversion to Socialism in 1918 had become a militant political force determined, as he put it in 1938, "to launch a direct parliamentary attack upon the central citadel of capitalism"; and equally determined, if that parliamentary attack were frustrated, to fulfil its purpose by other means.

The charge that **Laski** misunderstood the character of the Labour Party is easily refuted by his own writings on the subject. In truth, few people have so incisively condemned Labour's failure to distinguish social reform from socialism.³⁷

Nor was **Laski** a remote observer, spinning utopian fantasies in an academic void. He was a member of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party for some twelve crucial years. From his election to the N.E.C. in 1936 until he left it in 1948, he was in semi-permanent opposition to the orthodox majority within the directorate of the Labour Party.³⁸ More than most, he had ample opportunity to discover, as he often told his friends, that the conversion of a majority of the electorate to the support of fundamental social change would be a relatively easy task compared to the task of converting to Socialism many of the Labour Party's leaders.

In fact, what **Laski** argued was that, given capitalist decline, the Labour Party could not indefinitely postpone the choice of renouncing its principles or seeking to translate them into practical policies. In the first case, it could not avoid disruption, inside and outside the House of Commons. In the latter, it must expect capitalist resistance of a kind which would make the continuation of parliamentary government difficult in the extreme.

But, he also argued, the burden of extra-constitutional and anti-democratic action must be squarely laid at the door of the party of property. In the event of such action, the Labour Party must further choose between abdication and self-defence, which must clearly involve the suspension of the normal processes of constitutional government.³⁹ How he viewed that prospect we shall consider later.

The third objection to **Laski's** thesis rests on the belief that the Labour Party has already achieved a substantial part of its aims and that it has done so without any of the grim political consequences against which **Laski** warned the Labour Party in the thirties. The Conservative Party, in the period of Labour rule between 1945 and 1951, did not seek to upset the verdict of the electorate by anti-constitutional means; the House of Lords was not obstructive; on the contrary, it helped to improve Labour's legislative proposals; the Higher Civil Service and the Army served their

RALPH MILIBAND

Labour masters with loyalty and devotion. Nothing, in other words, seriously disturbed the even tenor of British political life. For **Laski's** most stringent critic to date, the experience of those years conclusively proves 'a serious, if not fatal, blow to **Laski's** fundamental thesis – that the capitalist class will not allow the instruments of democracy to be used to effect a transformation of the property system.' Indeed, says Deane, 'the failure of this prediction shatters the whole structure of his political thinking,'" no less.

Writing in 1935, **Laski** had said that 'if a socialist government in Great Britain or France or the United States were peacefully to transform the basis of the property system from private to public hands the argument that fundamental changes could be accomplished by democratic means would be immensely **strengthened**.'⁴¹ But 'that evidence', he had added, 'does not exist.'"

Deane's suggestion that it now does rests on an obvious misreading of Labour's achievements between 1945 and 1951. These achievements were real and **Laski** himself described them in 1949 as 'outstanding.' " But they are not the 'fundamental changes' of which **Laski** spoke and which define the meaning of socialism. Nor indeed does the Labour Party itself claim that they are. 'We are still two nations economically as well as socially' states one of its latest policy statements; 'half the nation owns little more than their personal and household effects; one per cent of the nation owns something like half the nation's private wealth.'" So much for Deane's Socialist revolution.

A Labour Government was able, in the propitious climate engendered by the war, to bring into public ownership the mines and a number of public utilities without encountering the kind of resistance which would have made parliamentary government impossible. But these enterprises were, by the time they were nationalised, at the periphery and not at the centre of capitalist **power**.⁴² And it is certainly worthy of consideration that when Labour sought, somewhat half-heartedly, to move inward from that periphery by **nationalising** part of the steel industry, it immediately faced, inside and outside Parliament, opposition of an entirely different **kind**.⁴⁶

The cooperation which a Labour Government can expect from private industry largely depends on the maintenance of a coincidence of interests. There is no good evidence to suggest that, if that coincidence did not exist, a Labour Government would not be faced with the bitterest hostility on the part of industry and its political spokesmen. There is, in fact, nothing to suggest that **Laski** was mistaken in warning, in the last months of his life, that:

if there is a danger ahead, it seems to me to lie in the use of great financial and industrial power to prevent the will of the electorate being made effective by the government of its choice . . . in a period of rapid social change, it is a risk that might easily become a grave

one, for it represents the effort of men, who though small in numbers, have the immense powers great wealth confers, to challenge, by means outside the ordinary conventions of Parliamentary life, the right of the House of Commons to support the Government of the day, and put its measures upon the Statute book. That is the method which invites all parties to a disrespect for constitutional tradition."

To **transform** the ultimate economic foundations of society remains 'the most hazardous enterprise to which men can lay their hands.' The experience of the post-war years does not 'prove' the willingness of the capitalist to abide by the verdict of the electorate when that verdict affects them deeply in their property and privileges.

What encouragement there is to be drawn from the experience of the post-war years derives from different factors. It derives primarily from the fact that Labour's power and influence in the country are immeasurably greater than they were in the 1930s. Given that power and influence, a Labour Government, carried to office by the support of the Labour movement and a majority of the electorate, and determined to carry out its announced programme, *might* be able to convince its opponents that resistance to its purposes was doomed to failure. And this was a possibility which **Laski**, even in the very different climate of the thirties, always refused wholly to discount. The fact of that refusal, and the reasons for it, are of central importance in **Laski's** thought.

IV. Socialism and Democracy

After the turn of the twenties, **Laski** was wont to proclaim himself a Marxist. But he was not at any time a Leninist, notwithstanding his admiration for Lenin's genius. He never accepted Lenin's assertions of the inevitability of violent revolution or his insistence that the most imperative duty of Socialists was to hasten its occurrence. **Laski** viewed Marxism, as I have suggested earlier, as the most useful of all tools of historical and social analysis; Leninism, on the other hand, he believed to be Marxism's strategic corollary in certain *specific* circumstances. As far as **Laski** was concerned, there was, so to speak, much more than a hyphen separating Marxism from Leninism.

Lenin's whole strategy, he held, was the outcome of the circumstances which must prevail in any society characterized by the absence of democratic habits and institutions. In such societies, it might well be true that the achievement of fundamental social change was inseparable from revolutionary violence.

But from the twenties onwards, **Laski** consistently condemned the attempts of the Third International to bind all working class parties to the acceptance of a strategy, the essential implication of which was that Bolshevik experience and Bolshevik practice were the only possible models for parties committed to the achievement of Socialism. Such

RALPH MILIBAND

uniformity, he predicted as early as 1927, could only be self-defeating; its price must be the stifling of political creativeness; its result must be failure to gain any insight into the specific needs and traditions of any particular country. The Communist strategy, he wrote some years later, was gravely deficient because it failed to take into account British differences from Russia or Germany or France. Long before the present Russian leaders began to speak of the possibility of reaching Socialism by roads other than that travelled by the Soviet Union, **Laski** was insisting that 'we shall wear our revolution with a comprehensive difference' and that 'the profound immersion of the British and American peoples in bourgeois liberalism has built a system of habits of which grave account will have to be taken.'⁴⁰ 'We cannot', he said again in 1947, 'escape from our own history any more than the Russians can escape from theirs . . . we shall have to build on over our foundations and recognize that whatever lessons we apply from the experience of Russia, both the method of applying them, and the outcome of their application will seem British or French or American when our task has been accomplished.'

It is this insistence which often gives to **Laski's** writings on social change an appearance of contradictoriness and ambiguity. It would no doubt have been easier for him piously to avert his gaze from the real world in which class conflict and violence gave the lie to his earlier optimism that the inevitability of gradualness was the magic formula of social change; or, alternatively, to declare, with equal dogmatism, that only through revolutionary violence was the new social order to be brought into being. In taking up either of these positions, he would have run less risk of being misunderstood. He would also have been a much less interesting thinker. For the position he did take up made him, to a unique degree, the mirror of dilemmas and doubts which confronted a whole generation, and which have not ceased to be relevant to our own. What **Laski** asserted was that Leninist conclusions did not necessarily and inevitably follow from Marxist premises and that the achievement of fundamental social change could not therefore solely be viewed in a Bolshevik perspective. Ambiguity arose because he felt it necessary to argue at one and the same time against 'reformist' complacency and 'revolutionary' rigidity. Complacency might spell disaster; reliance on rigid formulae must result in divorce from living reality.

Laski never ceased to hold the view he expressed in 1933, that 'in a constitutional state, based upon universal suffrage, it is an obligation upon any party which proposes to disturb foundations to do so upon the basis that the will of the electorate favours its innovations.'⁴¹ That obligation, in his view, did not merely stem from motives of expediency. Parliamentary democracy, as far as he was concerned, was not merely a convenient weapon to be used until it was possible to discard it. It was a system of

government which Socialists, in the context of British institutions, must make it one of their principal aims to preserve. Socialists, he argued, must not delude themselves into thinking that its breakdown would represent anything but a tragedy.

Laski believed this because of the intense suspicion with which he always viewed the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Dictatorship must always rest on the employment of arbitrariness as an habitual mode of government. Repression, albeit in the name of the proletariat, could not be selective and discriminating. The iron fist of the dictatorship must crush all those (and the number was unlikely to be small) whose actions and speech either did not, or appeared not to, coincide at any particular moment with the immediate purposes and policies of the holders of power. Many years before Khrushchev admitted to the **XXth** Congress of the Bolshevik Party the magnitude of the 'mistakes' which had **characterised** the Stalin era, **Laski** was asserting that those 'mistakes' were implicit in the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat. **Laski** was a libertarian to the root of his being. No-one who attended his lectures on the history of political ideas at the London School of Economics could fail to see that to him the drama of history was the struggle for toleration, for the exercise of reason in human affairs, for the extension of individual freedom.

It might well be that, if there was to be a Socialist regime in Russia at all, it must inevitably take the form of Police Socialism. But Russian experience itself was the best argument for seeking, in a country like Britain, to achieve fundamental social change by other means, which would make possible the preservation of liberties and political habits, the value of which it was blind folly for British Socialists to underestimate. This is why **Laski** was ready to see a Labour Government go to the utmost limit to conciliate its opponents, so long as conciliation did not involve a betrayal of its purposes. For, he said, 'to seek the maximum of consent on reasonable terms is to make the task of one's opponents a far more difficult one . . . when a party puts its policy into operation in terms of an obvious effort to do all possible justice to those whose rights it proposes to redefine, the latter are deprived of an emotional support of high importance. It is one of the supreme virtues of parliamentary democracy that it offers, as no other system, the opportunity to create this atmosphere'.²⁸

A Socialist government, said **Laski**, must not only govern *for* the people, but also with the people. It must, in other words, encourage that flowering of popular responsibility and initiative which are essential to the development of personality.

Much more clearly than in the twenties, **Laski**, in the last decade of his life, saw that the new social order would necessitate planning on an extensive scale and that the powers which a Socialist government must

RALPH MILIBAND

possess in the economic field were even vaster than he had earlier visualised. But the powers and controls which were essential to its purposes, he also saw, offered a fertile soil for the proliferation of power hierarchies, for whom the abuse of power must be a permanent temptation. Nor would abuse of power be less noxious because of the admirable intentions of those responsible for it.

In an increasingly scientific and technical age, moreover, it was inevitable that the expert should exercise an ever widening degree of influence in society. But, said **Laski**, 'no society ought to leave to experts the definition of its ends';²¹ 'the problems which the statesman has to decide are not, in the last analysis, problems upon which the specialisation of the expert has any peculiar relevance.'²² Power, in fact, must be responsible. And it would be responsible only in the degree to which it was widely shared and dispersed.

Returning in his later writings to a theme he had already explored in the *Grammar in Politics*, **Laski** insisted that authority in a Socialist society must be federal in character and combine the maximum amount of administrative decentralisation compatible with the necessary minimum of uniformity. Responsibility must be delegated to that multitude of **organisations** which, over the course of the years, had provided *so* large a training ground in the habits of democracy. A Socialist government must rely on the Trade Unions, the **Cooperative** societies and a multiplicity of similar popular institutions for the implementation of purposes the people themselves had had a share in defining. It must allow adaptation and experimentation, variety and initiative for, in the ultimate, 'authority . . . lives not by its power to command but by its power to convince.'²³

No less, it must seek to create an alert and informed public opinion. It must tell the truth, and allow the truth to be told, even when that truth was unpalatable to those in authority. 'We must not play tricks with the proletariat', **Jaurès** once said in answer to George Sorel's elaborate plea for ideological mystification. This was a sentiment which **Laski** wholeheartedly endorsed. Nor was there anything in the history of the British working classes, he said, which suggested that trust and truth would not evoke the kind of response which would immeasurably strengthen the government which relied upon them. On the contrary, the talent for disciplined initiative and the civic devotion which they had *so* often shown in the past gave Britain an outstanding chance to fashion a social order that was both socialist and free.

All democrats are not – unaccountably – Socialists. And all Socialists are not necessarily democrats. **Laski** was both, out of a belief that, only the marriage of Socialism and democracy gave their full meaning to either term .

V. Socialism and the Intellectual

No academic intellectual of his time was more profoundly involved in the world of politics than **Laski**. Most of the time that he did not spend in strenuous academic work was devoted to political activity, whether for the Labour Party or for a variety of other political and semi-political **organisations**.⁵⁴ **As** a speaker of quite outstanding powers and as one of the most articulate spokesmen of Socialism, 'the Professor' was in constant demand. And the quite astonishing rapidity with which he could turn out a pamphlet, draft a memorandum, or set out a statement of policy, led to innumerable calls being made upon him – seldom in vain. Few men have ever been so generous with their gifts in the service of good causes.

To many people – and not least to many of his fellow academics – an involvement in vulgar politics as deep as that of **Laski** always seemed in exceedingly bad taste. And their antipathy was not diminished by the fact that he chose to be involved in a brand of politics they found particularly uncongenial.

Others, on the other hand, felt, for different reasons, that **Laski** was dissipating his gifts and energies in directions which left him too little time for scholarly reflection.

Whether this be so or not is not a question which admits of any conclusive answer. It is, in any case, of far greater interest to ask why **Laski** felt driven to involve himself as deeply as he did.

In that involvement, there certainly entered a personal eagerness to play a direct part in the shaping of events and to be near the centre of political power. But only mean minds will find such an explanation in the least sufficient. For, besides much else, it leaves out of account the fact that **Laski** consistently refused to grasp the many opportunities he had of embarking on a political career that would have given him far greater power than he could otherwise ever have hoped to achieve.

The explanation, I have no doubt, lies in a different direction. It lies, above all else, in the view which **Laski** took of the role of the intellectual in an age such as ours.

Laski's supreme conviction was that we had entered, from the time of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, upon a period of crisis in our civilisation greater than any since the long drawn out conflicts which had marked the end of the Middle Ages and the emergence of the modern world. The root of that crisis, he held, lay in the clash between those who sought to perpetuate an increasingly inadequate economic and social system and those who saw in its transcendence the promise of a more civilised social order.

As in other ages of revolution, one crucial expression of that crisis was the breakdown in our traditional system of values, and the doubt, pessimism and despair which so deeply coloured the mood of our epoch.

In such an age, the intellectual, be he scholar, novelist, poet or playwright, could not, in the nature of his vocation, remain outside the area of conflict. He might dearly wish to seek aloofness; but the aloofness he sought inevitably ranged him on the side of the status quo, however real his distaste for its values. He might seek refuge in a private universe which shut out 'the crude and angry problems of the real world.' But he could only do so at the price of a divorce from reality which must spell triviality. Nor was it enough that he should be willing to denounce the sickness of our society unless he was also willing to base his denunciation on the affirmation of positive values. For without that affirmation, his protest, however angry or anguished, must merely swell the chorus of those who insist that our predicament, which is real, is also insoluble.

As Laski was at pains to make clear, his plea was not for the intellectual to turn himself into a party man 'addressing envelopes in the committee room of his party.' Nor was he even concerned to suggest that the intellectual must necessarily play an active role in politics.³⁹ He meant something far larger than narrow party identification.

What he meant was that the intellectual could only play a fruitful role in his society if he sought to help in the creation of a social order based upon the proposition that civilisation, in the twentieth century, required, not the perpetuation of property and privilege, but the enhancement of the dignity and the welfare of the common people.

The dangers to human values in an age of crisis, he said, were immense. 'The responsibility of the intellectual who sees the drift of his time towards the abyss is to mitigate its dangers by seeking, through the profundity of his alliance with the masses, to make their dreams and hopes seem practicable and legitimate. To stand apart from the danger as a neutral, even more, to lend his aid, when he has awareness of it, to the oligarchy in power, is a supreme betrayal of his function.'⁴⁰ 'In an age which like our own, is shaken to its foundations', he added, 'the intellectuals must have a sense of the urgency of the times if their work is to be creative.'⁴¹

It was above all this 'sense of the urgency of the times' which impelled Laski as a theorist, as a teacher and as a member of the Socialist movement, and which made him refuse to abdicate the responsibility he felt, as an intellectual, to understand and to make understandable to others both the nature of our predicament and the means to its civilised solution.

The manner in which he sought to fulfil that responsibility well entitles him to the claim that he was, in a phrase of Heine he liked to quote, 'a soldier in the liberation army of mankind'. As such, he will be remembered with as much gratitude by the men and women of the Socialist society of tomorrow as he is remembered today by those whom he taught, by precept and example, that life is a mean and pitiful adventure if it is not lived in the service of a great cause.

THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1995

NOTES

- 1 K. Martin, *Harold Laski* (1893–1950). A Biographical Memoir, (London, 1953).
- 2 Such an analysis has been attempted by an American political scientist, Herbert Deane. (H. Deane, *The Political Ideas of Harold J. Laski*, New York, 1955). I have tried to indicate what appear to me to be some of the major shortcomings of Deane's book in the *Stanford Law Review* for December 1955.
- 3 'The State in the New Social Order' in *Studies in Law and Politics* (London), p. 21.
- 4 In a letter to the author, K. Martin, op. cit., p. 71.
- 5 *Grammar*, op. cit., pp. 160–161.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 437.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 437.
- 8 *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 9 *Ibid*, p. 25.
- 10 *Ibid*, p. 176.
- 11 See *Laski's* amusingly supercilious view of Marx at this time in the M DeW. Howe (ed) *Holmes-Laski Letters* (1953). Also his Fabian pamphlet on Marx, published in 1922.
- 12 See *Communism* (London, 1927).
- 13 *The State in Theory and Practice* (London, 1935), p. 299.
- 14 Nor, it might well be argued, was Mam himself.
- 15 T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London, 1956), pp. 51–2.
- 16 *Communist Manifesto. Socialist Landmark* (London, 1948), p. 71.
- 17 Labour Party Constitution. Clause IV.
- 18 *Democracy in Crisis* (London, 1933), p. 35.
- 19 *The State in Theory and Practice*, p. 148.
- 20 For *Laski's* interpretation of the crisis and the lessons he drew from it, see *The Crisis and the Constitution: 1931 and After*, (London, 1932).
- 21 *Liberty in the Modern State* (London, 1932), p. 37.
- 22 *The State in Theory and Practice*, op. cit., p. 133. The passing years, it may be added, have richly confirmed *Laski's* insistence on the counter-revolutionary character of Nazism and Fascism. In 1945, after twelve years of Nazi rule, the single facet of German life which the Allies found basically unimpaired in Germany was its social and economic structure. The Nazi 'revolution', whatever else it had tried to achieve, had not sought to alter the broad contours of German class-relations. The same holds for Fascism in Italy, with an even longer period of undivided rule.
- 23 *The Rise of European Liberalism* (London, 1936).
- 24 *Ibid*, p. 13.
- 25 *Ibid*, p. 13.
- 26 *Ibid*, p. 18.
- 27 *Ibid*, p. 243.
- 28 For a detailed discussion of the nature of the State, as *Laski* saw it in the thirties, see *The State in Theory and Practice* (London 1935), Ch. II.
- 29 'The Decline of Liberalism' (Hobhouse Memorial Lecture, London 1940).
- 30 *Democracy in Crisis* (London, 1934), Ch. II.
- 31 *Parliamentary Government in England* (London, 1938), pp. 105–6. 'Our alternating Cabinets', Lord Balfour had said, 'though belonging to different Parties, have never differed about the foundations of society'. (Introduction to Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (World's Classics Edition, London, 1928, p. xxiv)).
- 32 For some recent evidence of the Tory party's attitude in the Ulster crisis and of the willingness of its leaders to press matters to the point of civil war, see R. Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858–1923*, (London, 1955), Ch. IX, X, XI.

RALPH MILIBAND

- 33 *Parliamentary Government in England* (London, 1938), p. 185.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 35 **Laski** himself sought to deal with the more general objections to the formulations of historical materialism. As I am not concerned in this essay with Marxism as such, I must refer the reader to **Laski's** own attempts to meet these objections. See, e.g. *The State in Theory and Practice*, Ch. 11.
- 36 R. T. **McKenzie**, 'Laski and the British Constitution,' *British Journal of Sociology*, No 3 pp. 260–263 (1953).
- 37 See, *inter alia*, *Parliamentary Government in England*, op. cit., pp. 185 ff and *Marx and the Present Day* (London, 1943), pp. 3 ff.
- 38 For a detailed account of **Laski's** political activities on the left of the Labour Party, see K. Martin, op. cit., pp. 102–122.
- 39 **Laski's** acceptance of the possibility that parliamentary government might break down and his discussion of the Labour Party's attitude in that event led to one of the most spectacular libel actions of the post-war era. **Laski** sued the *Newark Advertiser* for reporting him as saying at a meeting in Newark during the General Election of 1945 that if Labour could not obtain what it needed by general consent, 'We shall have to use violence even if it means revolution.' **Laski** denied ever having used those words. The action was tried before a special jury on the 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th November, and the 2nd December 1946. **Laski** lost the case. Special juries were abolished shortly afterwards. For a verbatim report of the action, see **Laski v. Newark Advertiser Co. Ltd. & Parlyb.** (Published by the Daily Express, London, 1947). The costs of the case, which were awarded against **Laski** were in the region of £15,000. The Labour Party opened a fund to cover that sum. The fund was oversubscribed with donations from all over the world.
- 40 H. Deane, op. cit., p. 290.
- 41 *The State in Theory and Practice* (London, 1950), op. cit., p. 146.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- 43 *Trade Unions in the New Society* (London, 1950).
- 44 *Towards Equality. Labour's Policy for Social Justice* (London, 1956), p. 19.
- 45 See, e.g. A. A. Rogow and P. Shore, *The Labour Government and British Industry 1945–1951* (London, 1955). This is an admirable case study which ought to be required reading for anyone who would be tempted to take Deane's argument seriously.
- 46 Rogow and Shore, op. cit., Ch. VIII.
- 47 *Reflections on the Constitution* (London, 1951), p. 93.
- 48 *Democracy in Crisis*, op. cit., p. 254.
- 49 *Ibid.*, op. cit., p. 249–50.
- 50 *Ibid.*, op. cit., p. 252.
- 51 *Ibid.*, op. cit., p. 177.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 53 *Trade Unions in the New Society*, op. cit., p. 42.
- 54 Not the least important of which was the India League. The cause of **Indian** independence was extremely close to **Laski's** heart and he was tireless in his efforts to help in its achievement.
- 55 Faith, Reason and Civilisation (London, 1943), p. 137.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 137.