

U DES**Records relating to Harold Laski****1922-1977****Accession number:** 1978/03; 1981/09**Biographical Background:**

Harold Joseph Laski was born in Manchester in 1893, the second son of Nathan Laski and his wife Sarah Frankenstein. His father was a cotton shipping merchant, a leader of the Jewish community and a Liberal. Harold Laski was educated at Manchester Grammar School and studied eugenics under Karl Pearson at University College for six months in 1911. He met Frida Kerry, a lecturer in eugenics, and they married in that year, just as he began an undergraduate degree in history at Oxford University. Frida Laski lectured in Glasgow and she and Harold Laski were destined to have a distance marriage in its early stages (Dictionary of National Biography; Eastwood, Harold Laski, p.5).

In 1914 Laski was awarded a first class honours degree and the Beit memorial prize. He worked for a while with George Lansbury on the Daily Herald. When the war broke out he failed his medical and in 1916, the year his daughter Diana was born, he was appointed lecturer in modern history at McGill University, Montreal. In 1916 he joined the staff of Harvard University and there associated with Oliver Wendell Holmes and Felix Frankfurter, both of whom went on to be appointed to the Supreme Court. He was friendly with Franklin Delano Roosevelt and there is a letter in the collection from this former United States president. In 1919 Laski was savagely attacked for his sympathy with the Boston police strikers and he turned his back on an American academic career, taking a post at the London School of Economics in 1920 (Dictionary of National Biography; Eastwood, Harold Laski, pp.16-19, 109).

Harold Laski became professor of Political Science in 1926 and held this post at the London School of Economics until his death. He retained an interest in American political thought and excited controversy when he took a Marxist approach to American politics in *The American Democracy* (1948). He is supposed to have seen in America, more acutely than England, the struggle between capital and labour. Laski was a prolific writer of works of political philosophy and political theory. His other works included *Studies in the problem of sovereignty* (1917), *Authority in the modern state* (1919), *A grammar of politics* (1925), *Democracy in Crisis* (1933), *Parliamentary government in England* (1938) and *Reflections on the constitution* (his Simon lectures at Manchester University which were published posthumously in 1951) (Dictionary of National Biography; Eastwood, Harold Laski, ch.5).

Harold Laski was also involved in Labour politics and was friendly with Ramsay MacDonald through the 1920s. In 1923 MacDonald offered him a cabinet post if he would stand for parliament, but he turned down this offer as well as a further offer of a seat in the House of Lords made in 1929. In 1931 he became disillusioned with Labour Party politics and his friendship with MacDonald came to an end. From that date he extended his Marxist philosophy, arguing for the rest of his life that social revolution was inevitable. In 1932 he joined the Socialist League and in 1937 took part in a joint effort with the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party in an attempt to form a Popular Front against the government of Neville Chamberlain. He was on the executive committee of the Fabian Society through most of the 1920s and 1930s and was a close friend of both Leon Blum and John Strachey of The Left Book Club. Between 1934 and 1945 he served as an alderman on Fulham council and was chairman of the libraries committee. In 1937 he returned to the Labour Party fold, joining the executive committee and he served on this until 1949 (Dictionary of National Biography).

During the Second World War Laski suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of overwork and over-commitment. Despite this he chaired the Labour Party conference in 1944 and was chair of

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the National Executive committee from 1945 to 1946. During the 1945 election he undermined the leadership contest of Clement Atlee, and the Conservative press (and Winston Churchill) were quick to demonise him. He took out a libel case against one of the papers and this hung over him during a year of travel in 1946, on trips made with Denis Healey, the new International Secretary. He lost the libel case and the costs of £13,000 came out of public donations. Never a healthy man, his health failed further, but he continued to overwork, attending 40 meetings in 30 days during the February 1950 general election. A month later he contracted influenza and died. His influence persisted, through past pupils and friends, like John Saville who helped acquire his papers for the Brynmor Jones Library. In 1954 the Harold Laski Institute of Political Science was opened in India. Frida Laski outlived her husband by over a quarter of a century.

Custodial history:

Donated by Granville Eastwood, 27 Jan 1978 and 8 Sep 1981

Description:

These are papers compiled by Granville Eastwood and include files of photocopied correspondence, press cuttings, printed brochures and articles, book reviews by or concerning Harold Laski, a file on Laski's criticism of Clement Atlee and the 1945 general election, a carbon copy transcript of Eastwood's biography of Laski with draft chapters and source notes and details of quotations used, and some miscellaneous newspapers of 1926 including 'The British Worker', 'The Sunday Times' and the 'Daily Mirror'.

Arrangement

U DES/1-9 Papers accumulated in connection with Granville Eastwood's biography of Harold Laski
U DES/10-18 Miscellaneous

Extent: 2 boxes

Related material:

Papers of Harold Laski [U DLA]

Finding aids: Entry in Modern political papers subject guide

Access conditions: Access will be granted to any accredited reader

Language: English

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U DES/1	<p>File. '3 Correspondence; U. S. S. R. [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]; India; Italy'</p> <p>Mainly press cuttings, including references to Krishna Menon and the Harold Laski Institute of Political Science, Ahmedabad.</p> <p>Also includes:</p> <p>a) 'The Laski Memorial Lecture, 1957. Laski - the Teacher and the Political Scientist with a postscript on 'The Dangers to Democracy in India', by Gurmukh Nihal Singh, Governor of Rajasthan (30 Jun 1957)</p> <p>b) 'Laski Institute Review', Vol. IV, No. 1 (2) (Dec 1959)</p> <p>c) 'The Laski Institute. A brochure giving a general outline of the nature and work of the Harold Laski Institute of Political Science Ahmedabad' (1960)</p> <p>d) 'The Harold Laski Institute. First Decade. A brief report of the activities of the Institute' (1964)</p> <p>1 file</p>	1946-1974
U DES/2	<p>File. '4 Used'</p> <p>Correspondence, press cuttings and extracts.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <p>a) Photocopy letter. Harold J. Laski to Charles Regan (7 Feb 1949)</p> <p>b) Photocopy letters. Harold J. Laski to Lloyd D. Thompson (7 Nov 1949, 1 Feb 1950)</p> <p>c) Minutes. Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Laski Society (17 Dec 1951)</p> <p>1 file</p>	1949-1974
U DES/3	<p>File. '5. U. S. A. [United States of America] Correspondence'</p> <p>Including:</p> <p>a) Photocopy letter. Harold J. Laski to J. G. Wootton (21 Feb 1950)</p> <p>b) Photocopy manuscript article by Laski for the newsletter of the North Hackney Labour Party</p> <p>1 file</p>	1974-1975
U DES/4	<p>File. '6. U. S. A [United States of America] Correspondence, press cuttings and extracts.</p> <p>1 file</p>	1974-1975
U DES/5	<p>File. 'Review of Books' by or concerning Harold J. Laski</p> <p>Press cuttings including photocopy letter from Felix Frankfurter to T. R. Powell (20 Mar 1953).</p> <p>1 file</p>	1922-1971

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U DES/6	<p>File. Press cuttings, extracts and correspondence The cuttings and extracts relate to Harold J. Laski and those connected with him, and to the London School of Economics. Correspondents include Lady Wootton, Lord Boyle and Lord Chorley. Includes: a) Letter. Harold J. Laski to Lance (19 Mar 1935) b) Photocopy letter. Harold J. Laski to Morgan (14 Dec 1946) c) Photocopy. 'The Webbs and Soviet Communism', by Laski (Webb Memorial Lecture) (4 Jun 1947) d) Manuscript. Incomplete article by Laski 'On Being An Infamous Person' 1 file</p>	1935-1974
U DES/7	<p>File. 'Criticism of Attlee; 1945 General Election; Potsdam Conference; Libel Action' Press cuttings and extracts including photocopy of a letter from Harold J. Laski to Clement Attlee (14 Jun 1945). 1 file</p>	1932-1971
U DES/8	<p>Copy. 'Harold Laski', by Granville Eastwood Carbon copy transcript of biography. 1 item</p>	c.1977
U DES/9	<p>Bundles. 'Details of Quotations Used' Arranged by chapter, with some with related correspondence. Bundles: 1) Mrs Laski 2) Ralph Miliband; Norman MacKenzie; Victor Gollancz Ltd. Also includes photocopy of 'On the Study of Politics' (inaugural lecture of Harold J. Laski at London School of Economics (22 Oct 1922); and extracts from Clare Market Review of articles on death of Harold J. Laski (1950) 3) Includes 'Labour and the Popular Front' (Labour Party) (May 1938); and 'The Secret Battalion. An Examination of the Communist attitude to the Labour Party', by Harold J. Laski (Labour party) (Apr 1946) 4) Otto Nathan (estate of Albert Einstein). Also includes 'Laski's Concept of Socialism and Israel', by Yaakov Morris (Harold Laski Institute of Political Science) (1970) 5) Includes 'Harold Laski Revisited', by G. L. Mehta (Harold Laski Institute of Political Science) (1960) 6) Includes photocopy letter from Harold J. Laski to Clement Attlee (1945) 7) Sir Max Aitken 8) Includes obituary (photocopy) of Harold J. Laski from Manchester Guardian (27 Mar 1950) 8 bundles</p>	1922-1970

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U DES/10	Paper. 'Intellectuals and Politics: Harold Laski Revisited', by George Feaver A paper for the 46th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, University of Toronto. 1 item	3-6 Jun 1974
U DES/11	Publication. 'The British Worker' (Trades Union Congress) Nos. 1-3. 3 items	5-7 May 1926
U DES/12	Publication. 'Special News Bulletin' No. 2 Promoted by 'Business Organisation'. 1 item	6 May 1926
U DES/13	Publication. 'The British Gazette', (His Majesty's Stationery Office) 1 item	7 May 1926
U DES/14	Publication. 'Daily Mirror News Bulletin', No. 3 1 item	7 May 1926
U DES/15	Publication. 'Sunday Times' 1 item	9 May 1926
U DES/16	Publication. 'Daily Mirror' 1 item	11 May 1926
U DES/17	Agenda. Special Conference of Trade Union Executives at Central Hall, Westminster On the topic of conscription. 1 item	19 May 1939
U DES/18	Report. General Council to the Special Conference of Trades Union Executives 1 item	19 May 1939