

The of it led to
disproportionate
accumulation



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The right to property is being widely questioned in recent times. Various arguments are advanced for its abolition or retention. Those who favour its retention urge that property has an ethical basis and it is essential for the realisation of the moral end of man. It is the reward for ability and, accordingly, it is necessary in some form for the existence of man, his growth and the development. Locke held that “ the supreme power cannot take from any man any part of his property without his own consent.

For the preservation of property being the end of government, and that for which men enter into society, it necessarily supposes and requires that the people should have property.” It is also maintained that since the man of property is protected from fear of starvation, he can find adequate leisure to become an intellectual explorer and, thus, create those conditions which contribute to the progress of mankind. Finally, property nurses the virtues of patriotism, love of one’s family, generosity, inventiveness, and energy all so essential for the progressive development of society. But the scramble for wealth and the traditions that grew out of it led to disproportionate accumulation with groups, classes and associations, and families. There have grown up corresponding systems of inheritance to perpetuate the possessions in the same social circles. The result is economic inequalities of a grave character which widen the social breaches and give the few power to control the conditions of the life of many. There results an “ ethical dualism” which is reinforced by “ temptations of egotistical and sensual gratification on the one hand and by servility and sychophancy on the other. Reputability and respectability adjust themselves to economic circumstances and tend to

ally themselves with the principles of capricious waste, contrary to the true social interests.

The system is materialistic in that it often divorces reward from responsibility and enjoyment of wealth from social function. Such a system of acquisition and possession is highly iniquitous and is widely deprecated now. Some even argue for its total abolition and maintain that equality is not possible if the right to property is allowed to continue in its present form.

Inequality, they maintain, is the cause of all our social, economic, and political ills. Such writers, who oppose the institution of private property as current, however, justify its retention to the extent needed for the development of human personality. For example, Laski is not altogether in favour of its abolition. But he does not concede the right to property which is not the result of one's own labour, or the possession of which is against the social good, or which is not necessary to one's function in society. He makes a clear distinction between owning and earning and holds: " Those whose property is the result of other man's efforts are parasitic upon society.

" Almost every State outside erstwhile Soviet Russia recognises and guarantees the ownership of private property. In Soviet Russia it was only the right to personal property of citizens which was recognised and guaranteed and it included their income from work and their savings, their dwelling houses and subsidiary household economy, their household furniture and utensils and articles of personal use and convenience. But the attitude to property in all countries, including Communist countries that still exist, has now changed with the increasing emphasis on social rights. It is

limited by the considerations of social justice and public welfare. If society does not create sufficient wealth to enable it to foot the bill of its expanding services, then it is obliged to take more of the income of the wealthy, in the form of taxes.

The government may even resort to the policy of nationalisation on the ground that social claims must supersede individual claims. Otherwise too, the right to property, like other civil rights, is not absolute. It is subject to limitations. The laws of every State regulate the ownership and transfer of private property. The government may requisition houses, buildings, sites and factories for public purposes, and even fix ceilings on their holdings and ownership.

It will, thus, be clear that the right to property, though all countries, would uphold, but on conditions which differ considerably today from those that were considered normal even a couple of generations ago. Today, there are many conservatives in Britain, too, who support their belief in the right to property on the grounds put forward in 1912 by Lord Hugh Cecil. “ The simple consideration,” he wrote, “ that it is wrong to inflict an injury upon any man suffices to constitute a right to property where such property already exists.”