

Genesis of the "Base-Born"

FULSOME SENTIMENTALITIES about the war's liquidation of British class distinctions have burdened a number of books, articles and press report. Some of this stuff is palpably propaganda. Some is sincere admiration for the whole-hearted cooperation between laborites and reactionaries, conservatives and radicals, in the common struggle to maintain England's political integrity. All of it contains a wistful note: that out of the war may come a classless orientation of British society.

Age-old is the search for a formula for the abolition of the social distinctions which arise among men. That some of the brotherhood become masters, others slaves, that rulers and ruled spring from a common origin, has long presented an anomaly for which explanations have been offered by philosophers, theologians, political scientists, and even psychologists.

In the past century the popular recipe for a classless society has been the accentuation of class hatred to the boiling point, resulting in a class dictatorship stew designed to be the ambrosia of Utopia.

True, the moral and political reformers have sensed the economic essential of social stratification. But the presumption persists that either a moral regeneration or a political scheme would in some mystical manner break down the economic barriers between men. Only a few thinkers, like Moses, Patrick Dove and Henry George, have discerned the economic condition necessary to a classless society.

And then there were the French Physiocrats, and particularly Turgot, controller-general in the regime of Louis XVI, who advocated some reforms in taxation which threatened to topple over the class structure of his era. Because he advocated a tax on rent and the abolition of imposts on labor products, his opponents argued that "he proposed to degrade the upper classes; that his plans would obliterate the essential distinction between the nobles and the base-born."

It would seem, then, that before we can sing a paean to the passing of a classed society in Britain (or anywhere else, for that matter) we should look into the *essential distinction* between "nobles and the base-born." It does not consist of titles, because some of the base-born (like an Astor) can acquire titles; and even without these name-distinctions the essential of class differentiation can and does exist, as in the United States.

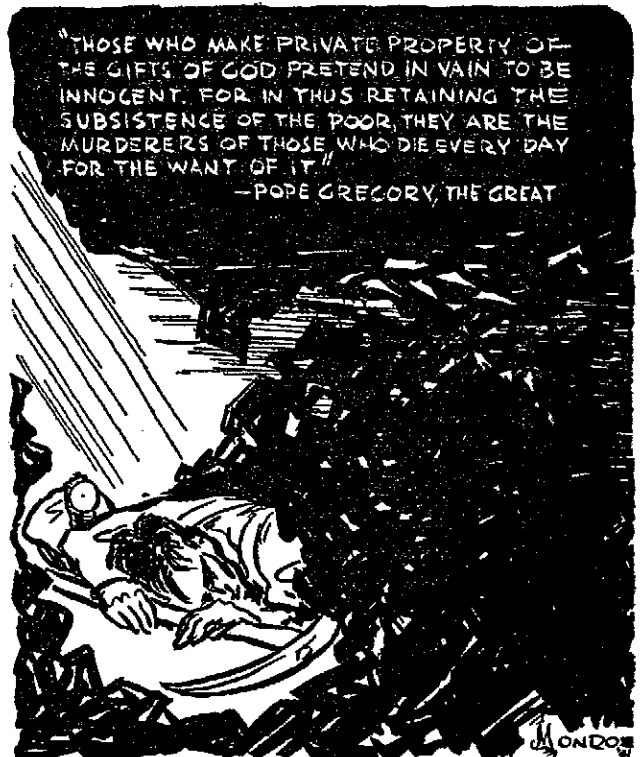
The one condition that in all ages and in all countries has made for the separation of peoples in-

to very definite group entities has been the power of one group to live by the labor of others. Whether the parasitic group acquires its power through brigandage, as in the case of the Nazis, or through hereditary privileges, as in the case of the Junkers whom they have largely supplanted, the result is the same: one class toils while the other class reaps. And, as George and Dove indicated, and Moses apparently understood, this power always rests on titles to land.

How, then, are the British treating titles in land? An answer is contained in a news item in *The New York Times* of October 7, headlined "Land Boom in England." It says:

"Value of land in Britain since war began has increased in some eastern counties as high as 100 per cent. Fire and life executors, trustees and other people with money to invest are putting it in farms and estates rather than in industrial securities."

Investment in land is done only where absolute private property in land is politically secured and traditionally accepted. Any popular demand for the public collection of rent would vitiate the desirability of such investments. Therefore, it is evident that in Britain there is no more disposition to weak-



NEWS ITEM, OCTOBER 17.—POLICE DYNAMITE PENNSYLVANIA BOOTLEG MINE.

en this "essential distinction" between classes than there is in the United States.

Indeed in Britain, as in this country, "government subsidies and guaranteed prices," we quote the words of a real estate agent given to a reporter of *The London Daily Express*, "have made the land the most attractive proposition of the day, and most people believe the attraction will last long after the war."

Therefore, though "Tories forget to wear the old school ties" and aristocrats fraternize with common-

ers in bomb shelters, the "essential distinction between nobles and the base-born" remains. It has weathered many wars and several revolutions. In the reign of Richard II, in the 14th century, John Ball, a "mad priest of Kent," inflamed a rebellious mob marching on London with the then ancient couplet:

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?

This war will not give the answer.