

## ATOMIC POWER FOR GOOD—By Emilio Lemos Ortega

Since the catastrophe at Hiroshima, a certain word has come to occupy first place in the thoughts of the world—the Atom. As if by magic, the infinitesimally small has become an immensity and the improbable is a tangible certainty. Such is the result of research by the brains of those privileged people who are able to devote their lives to the study of nature and her laws.

Atomic energy has made its effective début before the ordinary man through the medium of a terrible, devastating and hellish explosion, which in a few seconds wiped out thousands of lives and vast accumulations of wealth. The first appearance of this new force, which science has put into the hands of men, could hardly have caused greater desolation and suffering—a bad omen. Nevertheless, to judge by the predictions of the scientists the discovery holds attractive prospects, with promise of abundance and comfort. The use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes would be equivalent to nothing less than the enlargement of our planet, something like the opening-up of another New World, richer far than that discovered by Christopher Columbus.

The vast polar regions and the enormous deserts of Asia and Africa—we are told—can, by means of atomic energy, be converted into groves of luxuriant vegetation. Disastrous weather conditions, such as ruin fields by long drought or the continuance of torrential rain, will be prevented, for atomic energy will give rain or sun wherever and whenever it suits agriculture. Night will be illuminated with the same splendour as day so that work can go on without interruption, and production can increase to the point where everyone has abundance. Many articles that are indispensable to-day will become obsolete and will seem to have a flavour of antiquity, as is the rush-light when compared with the electric bulb.

But will this gigantic progress of nuclear physics result in a manna from heaven, like that of which the Scriptures speak? Will there be satisfaction for all, absolutely all, by means of this enormously increased power of production? We harbour hopes in vain, because economic well-being will not come that way. The problem, the colossal problem, which confronts humanity, is not that of the production of wealth, but of how wealth is divided.

We give our most enthusiastic welcome—and why not?—to all material progress as to moral and intellectual progress, but let us avoid falling into dangerous illusion. Human society has only one problem—the faulty distribution of wealth. All the other problems, although apparently unrelated, are no more than simple manifestations of this great problem. This is borne out by progress in mechanisation and mass-production; for example, in the harvesting, threshing and cleaning of cereals with the use of one machine, worked by a couple of men, doing as much as formally required hundreds of workers; in the speedy transport and exchange of the products of regions thousands of miles apart, where formerly weeks, months and years would be required. But the event has made vain the faith in machinery as the fore-runner of general plenty. Progress in technology has failed to remove the spectre of poverty.

And history will repeat itself even with the superlative material advantages brought to us by the powerful productive force which arises from the disintegration of the atom.

Proprietors of businesses clamour for the adoption of governmental measures to revive trade, and Parliaments and Governments according to use and custom turn them out in profusion, erecting Customs barriers to hinder foreign competition, and giving subsidies to exporters at the expense of the taxpayer, in order to place them in advantageous positions in foreign markets. The most absurd Utopias are planned; and palliatives are applied until the stage will be reached at which the institution of individual property is abolished, the social economy passing from private hands into those of public functionaries. Anything rather than have recourse to the natural channels for the distribution of wealth, which the science of Political Economy points out to us.

Political Economy is, by nature, the guide of government and the politician. It is, like all the sciences, above political party labels, and its prescriptions are, like all natural laws, eternal and immutable, uninfluenced by race or custom. The economic factors—land, labour and capital—have the same definition in Korea as in Chile. The laws governing the distribution of wealth into rent, wages and interest, operate in the same way in Finland as in Spain. A knowledge of the nature and function of the laws of Political Economy is as indispensable to the statesman as the knowledge of anatomy is to the surgeon.

The acceptance and practice of the science of Political Economy would simplify public administration, promote tranquility, and clear the streams; and real social well-being would obtain among rational beings. But that acceptance and practice would compel the abandonment of many present false conceptions of life and things, these conceptions being the stubborn obstacles to changing the direction of national legislation. This is the Gordian Knot that makes difficult even the slightest real impulse towards social reform. With social harmony, how would those survive who base their comfortable life on litigation, quarrel and war? With scientific public administration, what would become of demagogy and political quackery? With the propagation of truth and culture, what would those do who depend for their bread on the ignorance of others? With a just distribution of wealth, what would remain to those who grow fat on the work of others? No, it is certain that the supporters of these vested interests will not yield even an inch of their positions. Their impious anxiety, their short-sighted egotism prevent clarity of thought, and they would risk their own destruction and that of the planet rather than renounce their prejudices and privileges.

*(Translated from the Spanish by R. D. Young.)*

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