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## ARTHUR E. MORGAN'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

By ROY TALBERT, JR.

The Tennessee Valley Authority has become an accepted government corporation in the United States, and many people have forgotten the stormy days of its creation in the era of the New Deal. A prominent figure in those times was Arthur E. Morgan, appointed first chairman of the TVA Board of Directors in 1933. Morgan's role in the development of the TVA has never received the historical scrutiny which it deserves. Generally, historians have considered Morgan a simple idealist who hindered the work of the other board members (David E. Lilienthal and Harcourt A. Morgan), who began a bitter and public feud with Lilienthal over power policy, and whose dismissal from office by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938 was followed by an embarrassing congressional investigation.<sup>1</sup>

Research indicates, however, that such a description of Arthur Morgan is at best an over-simplification.<sup>2</sup> When he accepted the task of building the TVA from an act of Congress into a viable organization, Morgan was already a remarkable man. As an engineer he had completed some seventy-five land reclamation and flood control projects for municipal, state, and federal governments. From 1914 to 1919 he directed the largest water control project, excluding the Mississippi, ever attempted in the United States—the Miami Conservancy

<sup>1</sup> See David E. Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, 2 vols. (New York, York, 1964); Charles H. Prichett, *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study in Administration* (Chapel Hill, 1943); Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949). In regard to studies of the New Deal and interpretations of Morgan, the most balanced account is in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston, 1960). William B. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York, 1963), is somewhat critical. In their review of Selznick's *TVA and the Grass Roots*, Rexford G. Tugwell and E. C. Banfield ("Grass Roots Democracy—Myth or Reality?" *Public Administration Review*, X [Winter, 1950], 47-55) have much praise for Morgan. Thomas K. McGraw's excellent M.A. thesis at the University of Wisconsin: "Morgan vs. Lilienthal: the Feud within T.V.A.," won the 1968 William P. Lyons Master Essay Competition and will be published by the Loyola University Press. McGraw and the author are in essential agreement concerning Morgan's role in TVA.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a portion of the research for a recent thesis: Roy Talbert, "The Human Engineer: Arthur E. Morgan and the Launching of the Tennessee Valley Authority" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1967).

District, with headquarters in Dayton, Ohio. Morgan's engineering record alone recommended him for the leadership of the TVA, but there was another side to his life. In 1920 he became president of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he remained until going to TVA. Morgan undertook the job of remaking Antioch because, as he said, "I believe it is near enough dead to start over in the form I dream of."<sup>3</sup> At Antioch, Morgan first revealed, on a fairly large scale, his social ideas. His greatest contribution was the cooperative concept in college education which emphasized the experiment of living and had the students spend half their time working on jobs outside the academic arena. Antioch became a leader in progressive education on the college level.

As president of the college, Morgan issued a bi-monthly publication called "Antioch Notes." Here he showed a highly developed social consciousness and a deep concern for the proper utilization and integration of human and natural resources, and he explained his philosophy of personal integrity which he insisted should be applied to all areas of existence.<sup>4</sup>

A year before his appointment to TVA Morgan wrote a play, *The Seed Man*, in which he set forth his view of the good life. As art the work is poor, but the hero personifies many of the virtues in which Morgan believed—hard work, open and straightforward dealings with others, direction in life, and proper moral and ethical habits. In 1936 Morgan wrote *The Long Road*, a book which gave further expression to his philosophy. Recently a most interesting Morgan journal has come to light. Kept by Morgan as a young man from the years 1899 to 1902, this notebook reveals a remarkable philosophical journey. Morgan moves from a small town, Baptist background, through books such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and *Equality*, to what he terms "Christian Socialism" and the Society of Friends. There is a striving for religious and physical purity which suggests such nineteenth-century men as John Humphrey Noyes, the iconoclastic socialist of Oneida, and Sylvester Graham, the health food enthusiast. His conversion to reform, as recorded in the journal, is almost a spiritual

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Lucy G. Morgan, *Finding His World: The Story of Arthur E. Morgan* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1927), 96-100. This is a tender biography of Morgan written by his wife.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur E. Morgan, *A Compendium of Antioch Notes* (Yellow Springs, 1930).

experience, and he seems to be driving toward a kind of secular perfectionism similar to the religious perfectionism of the 1840's. The journal also reveals transcendentalism as a major influence on the young Morgan.<sup>5</sup>

This article proposes to examine Morgan's concept of TVA insofar as it involved his social philosophy. It seems certain that he envisioned the Authority as more than an exercise in dam building and electric power. The depression and the New Deal had fired him with enthusiasm, and he believed that President Roosevelt saw the TVA as a "project in social and economic planning."<sup>6</sup>

To Arthur Morgan the definition of the New Deal could be rendered in simple terms:

It is that the moving spirit of our social and industrial life shall be neighborliness and not the predatory impulse, that we shall guide our social and economic affairs by a realization of their total effects, to the neighbors and to the future, as well as to ourselves and to the present.<sup>7</sup>

In short, Arthur Morgan believed that Roosevelt wanted the TVA to become the very essence of social and economic planning.

The TVA gave Arthur Morgan a national platform from which to express his ideas on reform and planning. As chairman, he received hundreds of invitations to speak, and it is from his speeches that the TVA which he envisioned unfolds. From the beginning of the corporation, in the spring of 1933, to the end of that year he gave eighteen addresses before such varied groups as the Central Labor Union in Knoxville, the National Conference on City Planning assembled in Baltimore, and the American Institute of Electrical Engineers in New York City. At the same time Morgan wrote articles for *Fortune Maga-*

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<sup>5</sup> Morgan, *The Seed Man: or, Things in General* (Yellow Springs, 1933). A long-hand draft of this play, dated January, 1932, has the preface: "Frequently of late I have heard the expression, 'I am tired of your abstract philosophy. It leaves me cold. Let's get down to cases.' So be it." File Drawer 15, Arthur E. Morgan Papers (Olive Kettering Library, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio). The Antioch College collection is hereinafter cited as Morgan Papers. See also Morgan, *The Long Road* (Washington, 1936). The Morgan journal is in the Morgan Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, "The Tennessee River Valley Project as a Great National Experiment," in National Conference on City Planning, *Planning and National Recovery* (Boston, 1934), 103-09.

<sup>7</sup> Address before the National Academy of Sciences, Boston, November 20, 1933, Arthur E. Morgan, "Speeches and Remarks" (typewritten speeches, collected and bound in 1940 in two volumes, Tennessee Valley Authority Technical Library, Knoxville, Tennessee), I, 9.

*zine, Literary Digest, Current History Magazine, and Survey Graphic.* This output continued throughout his tenure with TVA.

Morgan's first national address set the tone for the rest of his public messages. On August 15, 1933, over the NBC radio network he informed the nation of the progress of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Chairman dealt with unconventional activities which he deemed proper in the social and economic development of a region. He called for careful planning, for the encouragement of co-operatives and the rejuvenation of small businesses, for changes in the basis of land tenure so that destructive use of the soil would not be tolerated, for alterations in the structure of local government, and for elimination of real estate speculation.<sup>8</sup> These and other basic ideas occur throughout his speeches.

Arthur Morgan's concern for the people in the Tennessee Valley heightened as pleas for assistance poured into his office. A young man wrote, "It is four years since I graduated from high school. I have not had a job yet. I want something to do. I have hunted and hunted—just give me a chance—I don't care what it is."<sup>9</sup> With double the normal work force, Morgan still could not hire all the unemployed. Something was wrong; the conventional system had failed. As Morgan diagnosed the malady: "There must be a critical deficiency of some essential social vitamins. What we face is real malnutrition—a scurvy of the social order, a political pellagra, a beriberi of business."<sup>10</sup> The depression forced men as never before to look about them for an answer.

Morgan stated the issue in terms of the improper utilization of human and natural resources:

I say that the business of "social and economic planning" is the elimination of waste. If we can do that here, there and elsewhere, we shall have accomplished most that "social and economic planning" can hope to accomplish. The elimination of waste is not just a job of discovery, like Columbus discovering America; it is a job of design, like designing an automobile, which was a gradual, careful, continuous process of design, refinement, experiment, re-design, etc.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> NBC radio address, in *ibid.*, I, no page.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Address before the Ohio Society, New York, November 13, 1933, "Social and Economic Planning," in Arthur E. Morgan, "Speeches and Writings" (typewritten speeches and articles, collected and bound in 1935 in two volumes, Tennessee Valley Authority Technical Library, Knoxville, Tennessee), I, 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Address before the Ohio Society, New York, I, 5.

With planning and the elimination of waste, Morgan believed that the United States could realize its great possibilities in the production and distribution of wealth. His program was a war to end waste and create a new social order. His method was pragmatic: "The primary and controlling characteristic of such an order is that it will be governed by policies which are desirable in the light of their total consequences."<sup>12</sup>

In building this new social and economic order the Tennessee Valley was the Chairman's laboratory, his opportunity to demonstrate his ideas; once accomplished, the rest of the nation would follow suit—an assumption characteristic of most "men of vision." The TVA represented Arthur Morgan's trumpet call for a reawakening of the American spirit, not that aberration known as rugged individualism, but a spirit of co-operation. Such a spirit would recognize that "the increase of the general good is the mainspring of social and economic effort."<sup>13</sup>

Morgan's plans for a new social order depended heavily on two developments: the building of an "enlightened character" in the American people and the use of pragmatism (not to be confused with practicalism) in treating social ills. Morgan saw the depression as a demonstration of the failure of a ruthless, competitive society, and an indication that the country needed another kind of foundation. The very survival of modern society seemed to Arthur Morgan to require a new system.<sup>14</sup> His answer to the problem was phrased in the term *character*:

There is only one basis on which the universal play of abilities among men can work to the fullest extent. That is by the self-discipline of enlightened, socially-minded character. Given such character, the infinitely varied capacities of men to contribute to the social good can be cumulative—or more than that, can be factors multiplied into each other—with resulting total increase in present welfare, and in the rate and the range of social progress.<sup>15</sup>

This statement is an example of the Utopian strain in Morgan's thought. His presupposition seems to be that men can develop an

<sup>12</sup> Address before the Tennessee Valley Institute, University of Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 20, 1934, "Social and Economic Planning," in Morgan, "Speeches and Writings," I, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Address before the Ohio Society, New York, I, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

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"enlightened, socially-minded character," and that with the exercise of discipline all men can be good.

Arthur Morgan's concept of desirable character involved three elements. First, there must be purposefulness and direction; that is, one should have a "vision of the life it would be well to lead, of the kind of a world which, so far as wisdom, judgment, and good will can determine, it would be well to live in." Secondly, there must be good will supplemented by action; good intentions must be accompanied by "the skilled and disciplined drive of desire which presses toward the realization of aims and purposes." The third element is an absolute necessity—the ethical or moral quality. An individual with character makes "the habitual choice of means that are wholesome in their own effects."<sup>16</sup> Essentially, Arthur Morgan called for a moral rebirth in the United States. The emphasis on discipline is found throughout Morgan's writings. Discipline seems to be one of his key symbols; this appears clearly in the strict physical and spiritual regimen exhibited in the journal he kept as a young man.

Acting along this line of thinking Morgan developed what he labeled "An Ethical Code for the Staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority." This code was based on the belief that the foundation for the success of the TVA lay in ethical attitudes and conduct. "If, as the result of our effort," Morgan contended, "the Tennessee Valley should become the richest and smartest part of America, but if in getting that result we should leave an example of deceit, exploitation, favoritism, patronage, extravagance, bad personal habits, and selfish personal ambitions, our efforts might do more harm than good." The code set high standards for TVA employees, including strictures on their private lives:

Dissipation and other habits which destroy health and the full possession of one's powers are in direct conflict with any reasonable ethical code. . . . Employees of the Tennessee Valley Authority should live moderately and economically, avoiding competitive expenditures. . . . Tennessee Valley Authority employees should maintain wholesome and self respecting standards of personal conduct. Intemperance, lax sex morality, gambling, and the use of habit forming drugs are not in keeping with the spirit of the Tennessee Valley Authority personnel.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>17</sup> Morgan, "An Ethical Code for the Staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority," July 15, 1933, Morgan Papers; also available in Roy Talbert, Jr. (ed.), "Arthur E. Morgan's Ethical Code for the Tennessee Valley Authority," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 40 (1968), 119-27.

Such a moralistic code was considered unacceptable or unnecessary by Morgan's fellow directors, and it was never adopted.

If the foundation for his new social order was enlightened character, Arthur Morgan felt as strongly that the means of achieving that order must be pragmatic. He applied the pragmatic test to all principles and acts: that is right which is good when judged by its total consequences. An ethical act, therefore, is one which is good for the future as well as for the present, for society as a whole as well as for the individual.<sup>18</sup> The Chairman's pragmatism condemned the shortsighted spirit of expediency and opportunism which prevented a person from seeing the total result. Moreover, Morgan believed this approach to be the traditional American attitude—distrust of abstract political theory. This attitude accepted that course which worked best in application. The TVA Chairman delighted in pointing out, "Communism, socialism, capitalism, autocracy, dictatorship, all these have been cordially approved by the American people, provided they are controlled by good motives, and provided they work well in actual practice." Illustrations were numerous: Henry Ford was an economic dictator, boards of trustees for colleges were oligarchies, public schools were communistic, post offices and highways were socialistic.<sup>19</sup>

Even though the United States had taken an unpragmatic course in the development of political policies, Arthur Morgan expressed faith in democracy as the best possible form of government. The Chairman, however, used an unconventional definition of democracy:

Democracy is a principle of government, not any particular set of laws or constitutions. The principle of democracy is that the whole people shall share in the development and determination of public policies and programs, each to the extent of his or her ability; and that the purpose of government is to promote the greatest possible well-being of the whole people.<sup>20</sup>

Morgan felt that contemporary suffrage standards were wasteful: "In the determination of public issues the ballot of the most stupid and ignorant voter counts as much as that of the wisest and most public spirited. By this arbitrary device valuable resources of public judgment are lost."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> "Government in Business," no place given, May 25, 1933, in Morgan "Speeches and Remarks," I, 43. Similar statements appear throughout Morgan's speeches.

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, "Democracy," *The American Magazine*, CXVIII (October, 1934), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 67.



Many of Morgan's statements, like the one above, seem to indicate a totalitarian, or at best paternalistic, attitude. Such attitudes in the hands of a moralist who believes he has determined certain fundamental truths can easily lead to regimentation. Willson Whitman, biographer of David E. Lilienthal, has charged:

By temperament and always with the very best intentions, Dr. Arthur Morgan was an authoritarian. He had the energy of the sincere world saver, and although the plan was not his, the Tennessee Valley Authority was to him what the League of Nations was to Woodrow Wilson. He wanted the best for the Valley, but like a good old-fashioned parent he expected as a matter of course to guide the growing child.<sup>22</sup>

The cases of both Arthur Morgan and Woodrow Wilson involve a man committed totally to an ideal.<sup>23</sup> Each had the unfortunate ability to seem pharisaical—self-righteous and censorious of others' manners and morals—and to annoy other men greatly by parading his virtue.

If Morgan depended on character and the pragmatic method as the basis and approach for his new social order, the over-all concept remained social and economic planning. Using his nation-wide radio address of August 15, 1933, as an outline, Morgan's specific suggestions for the Tennessee Valley can be traced throughout his speeches and articles.

Business obviously needed assistance. The TVA Chairman saw the need for economic aid, but also for moral change: "The accepted philosophy of business is disappointing, no less than are its lapses from accepted propriety."<sup>24</sup> American business needed, Morgan thought, a basic change in attitude—the concept of stewardship must be generally accepted: "I think a change of temper must come through our American life; I think that is the heart of the New Deal, that whoever has control of the vital interests of people shall use that control in a spirit of trusteeship and not primarily in a spirit of profit."<sup>25</sup> Once businessmen became socially conscious of their obligation, he believed, the taking of excessive profits would cease. They

<sup>22</sup> Willson Whitman, *David Lilienthal: Public Servant in the Power Age* (New York, 1948), 31.

<sup>23</sup> A strong supporter of peace, Arthur Morgan served on the Executive Committee of the League to Enforce Peace, the organization which helped develop the idea of the League of Nations. See Box LEP, Morgan Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Address before the National Committee on Education by Radio, Washington, D. C., May 8, 1934, in Morgan, "Speeches and Writings," II, 9.

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would manufacture, distribute, and sell as cheaply as would be consistent with good working and living conditions. Morgan insisted that trusteeship meant that entrepreneurs would refrain from taking great incomes and from spending on a scale impossible to others whose needs were similar.<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Morgan's ultimate goal, not only for the Valley but for all of society, involved the development of a spirit of professionalism in business. Professionalism meant the creation of standards and guide lines, with the professional receiving only a modest salary, instead of extracting all that the traffic would bear. One's ability and resources would be used to promote the best possible industrial conditions. "The relationship we want," declared Morgan, "is that of a president of a great university, the manager of a great hospital or the commander of an army. Any one of these would scorn to profit immediately from his activities."<sup>27</sup>

On November 9, 1933, Morgan made a speech about business in the Valley which was later cited as one of his wildest schemes. The Chairman was invited to speak before the Third Conference on the Companionship of Agriculture and Industry, conducted at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. This group consisted mostly of county farm agents and home demonstration agents. Having no time to prepare an address, Morgan gave an extemporaneous talk taken down by a stenographer. The University later published the speech in mimeographed form.<sup>28</sup>

In his speech Morgan discussed the possibility of a region's setting up its own economy; his point was that if the undertaking were made, the region should attempt to build a complete and unified economy, not just a fragment. Maintaining a high level of speculation, Morgan launched into a discussion of his approach to this hypothetical problem. He would create a co-operative system with central purchasing, sales, and distributing organizations. "I think I'd have that cooperative organization have its own tokens of credit—a sort of local

<sup>26</sup> Morgan, *The Long Road*, 71-72.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan, "Vitality and Formalism in Government," *Social Forces*, XIII (October, 1934), 5.

<sup>28</sup> U. S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, *Hearings, Investigation of the Tennessee Valley Authority*, 75 Congress, 3 Session (1938), I, 331.

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money." Each person producing for home consumption would be paid at least in part in the money of the co-operative. This arrangement would bring into existence a currency with which the inhabitants could buy their own products, as opposed to outside products. The people of the region would be compelled to buy from each other, and the local exchange of goods and services would increase.<sup>29</sup> "A sort of local money" returned to haunt Morgan; he could now be accused of advocating a separate coinage system for the Tennessee Valley.

Another suggestion frequently made by Morgan concerned the number of counties in the area. In the historic development of the county system in the United States, the Chairman observed that counties were originally laid out in small units because of the slow transportation of the day. Under modern travel conditions, this seemed a ridiculous situation. "If we can make six or eight counties into one, and make other changes, we may cut in two the cost of local government . . ."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Arthur Morgan suggested that the TVA study the possibility of combining counties. The minutes of August 30, 1933, read: "The problem of amalgamating county units and the various difficulties connected therewith were presented by Harcourt A. Morgan." The Board rejected Arthur Morgan's plan,<sup>31</sup> and nothing came of his pragmatic method of cutting the cost of local government and lowering taxes of the people.

Morgan offered a similar solution, which proved equally unsatisfactory to the rest of the Board, in the matter of soil erosion. The TVA had a legitimate interest in soil care; what good was it to build dams if the rivers choked with silt washed from the fields? Moreover, Arthur Morgan considered the farmer to be merely the custodian of the land, which he held in trusteeship for future generations. If a farmer managed his land poorly, Morgan argued, a part of it should be taken away and put in forestry or given to those who would treat it properly. In short, he wanted the laws of land ownership changed to prohibit men from owning and occupying land unless they managed it in the interests of a permanent agriculture. Morgan seemed to call for

<sup>29</sup> Address before the Third Conference on Companionship of Agriculture and Industry, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, November 9, 1933, in Morgan, "Speeches and Remarks," I, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Address before the Ohio Society, New York, I, 12.

<sup>31</sup> TVA Minutes, August 30, 1933, Morgan Papers. (Xerox copies of the official TVA Board Minutes). What would have been accomplished by a study such as Morgan proposed is of course unknown, but studies made of other questions did bear some fruit.

a strictly enforced agricultural zoning system. As he understated the impact of his suggestion, "Such a legal change would constitute one element of a social revolution."<sup>32</sup>

Land zoning was not a visionary concept when Arthur Morgan announced it in the Valley,<sup>33</sup> but the almost casual manner in which he proposed to confiscate a farmer's land must have seemed to some a frightening thought. Action such as he desired probably would have caused more than a social revolution—the squirrel rifles would have come down from the walls.

These general ideas represent a part of the new social order which Arthur Morgan planned for the Valley. His most imposing work, however, was connected with the TVA's first major task, the building of Norris Dam. As chief engineer, Morgan had direct control over the workers as a result of the Board's decision to build the dam by force account rather than by contract. His innovations came in the area of housing and training for these workers. In hiring men Morgan insisted that, in addition to considering technical competence, the men should be judged on physical, mental, and ethical fitness, personal traits, economic habits, cultural characteristics, vocational fitness, and public service mindedness.<sup>34</sup> Instead of the conventional bunkhouses for housing, Morgan suggested that a model village be built near Norris Dam. This was the beginning of Norris, Tennessee. Here low-cost, but well-planned houses were built, completely electrified and coming with a small plot for subsistence farming. Employees had a co-operative bank, co-operative laundry, co-operative shoe repair and clothes pressing service; future plans called for a co-operative store, dairy, and chicken farm.<sup>35</sup>

The TVA training program, initiated by Arthur Morgan and headed by J. Dudley Dawson (one of Morgan's Antioch faculty mem-

<sup>32</sup> An appeal of this sort appeared in most of Morgan's speeches; a typical statement is in his address before the National Academy of Sciences, Boston, November 20, 1933, "Speeches and Writings," I, 37.

<sup>33</sup> The first application of the zoning method to a distinctly rural land problem occurred in Oneida County, Wisconsin, May 16, 1933. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 15 vols. (New York, 1930-34), XV, 539.

<sup>34</sup> "A Suggested Method for Determining the Qualifications of Persons being Considered for Employment by the Tennessee Valley Authority," May 16, 1933, "Morgan, TVA, 1933-1934," Box 2, Morgan Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Address before the Technical Club, Engineering Club, and other Groups, Madison, Wisconsin, October 1, 1934, in Morgan, "Speeches and Writings," I, 140-42.

bers), centered on the new village of Norris. Courses offered included farming, dairying, stock breeding, chicken raising, working in iron and wood, accounting, drafting, engineering, foremanship, the management of co-operatives, and forest management.<sup>36</sup> The purpose of the training program was to educate the men, in their spare time, for useful jobs when their work on the dam came to an end.

The entire story of Norris, Tennessee—of its unique government, its school, its religious organization, and its people—is too lengthy to give here. The village exists today, a conventionally attractive Tennessee municipality, unlike the Norris in the days of Arthur Morgan's TVA.

During the Congressional investigation of TVA in 1938, after the Chairman's dismissal, many of Arthur Morgan's suggestions for changes in the Valley were dismissed as visionary schemes and vagaries. Willson Whitman maintains, "The fact was that many of Dr. Arthur Morgan's recommendations for the Valley were good but impractical."<sup>37</sup> Such criticism had never disturbed Morgan; he embraced the term visionary and believed in aiming for the improbable rather than the possible.

For purposes of perspective, one should note that in 1932 and 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt called for many of the same programs for the nation which Arthur Morgan urged for the Valley. Comparisons between New Deal personalities and Roosevelt are drawn so often that the approach may seem trite. It is probably also a cliché to argue that Morgan represented a unique case, yet there are some ideas held in common by Roosevelt and Morgan which seem significant. Morgan preached experimentation; Roosevelt declared, "The country demands

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* See also Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Norris Project* (Washington, 1940), 331; Floyd W. Reeves, "TVA Training," *Journal of Adult Education*, VII (January, 1935), 48-52.

<sup>37</sup> Whitman, *Lilienhal*, 35. For an account of Morgan's dismissal by Roosevelt see the *New York Times*, March 12, 19, 22, 1938. Morgan had publicly attacked his fellow directors in a front-page article in the *Times*, January 17, 1937, and in the *Atlantic Monthly*, LX (September, 1937), 339-46. Because of the public nature of the feud, Roosevelt called a hearing at the White House, March 11, and asked Morgan to substantiate or retract his charges. Morgan refused to participate in the proceedings and insisted on a congressional investigation. The President gave the TVA Chairman a week to reconsider, but at the next meeting, on March 18, Morgan remained adamant. After another futile meeting on March 21, Roosevelt's recourse was to issue an ultimatum that Morgan respond within twenty-four hours or be convicted of contumacy. Morgan left Washington that day, and on March 22, Roosevelt dismissed him. Congress was not inactive during these strange proceedings; several members called for an investigation of the TVA. Eventually a bill sponsored by Senator Alben W. Barkley, a Democrat from Kentucky, provided for the investigation.

bold, persistent experimentation." Morgan called for social and economic planning; Roosevelt said, "The plans we make during the present emergency . . . may show the way to a more permanent safeguarding of our social and economic life. . . . In this sense I favor economic planning. . . ." Morgan suggested control of soil erosion and changes in the laws of land ownership so that a man's poorly managed land should be taken away from him and put to better use; as governor of New York, Roosevelt initiated a study to determine how the land might best be utilized, a kind of land zoning system. Arthur Morgan wanted to combine small counties; Roosevelt urged "that counties be consolidated and that a greatly simplified form of county government be set up to replace cumbersome forms and many officials."<sup>88</sup>

This article has expounded the ideas of Arthur Morgan regarding social and economic planning in the Tennessee Valley. It is easy for the theoretical liberal to contemplate the genius of these ideas and the "new order" which would have come if only they had been enacted. In the context of the Tennessee Valley, 1933, such meditation represents little more than idealistic escapism. The implications of these ideas affected not the intellectuals but white, Anglo-Saxon individuals, more rugged than the mountains in which they lived. In plain truth, the people of the Valley would have reacted violently to attempts to implement Morgan's proposals. Morgan's insistence on the immediate need for change alienated many, some of whom were in positions of power. Nathan I. Bachman, United States Senator from Tennessee, complained to Morgan:

Finally, I do resent, on behalf of my people, and for myself, the suggestion that we are in need of a new cultural civilization, which you continuously advocate in your addresses. A people whose forbears went with Sevier to Kings Mountain, destroyed Ferguson and forever broke the hope of British domination of this country, and later under Jackson annihilated Pakenham at New Orleans are surely in no need of intellectual or sociological admonitions in the pursuance of their welfare. They are of a breed that helped make these United States and will help save them in their hour of travail.<sup>89</sup>

The popular acceptance or rejection of Morgan's ideas says little about their philosophical validity; it does indicate, however, a degree of truth in Harcourt Morgan's warning of the impracticality of some

<sup>88</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward* (New York, 1933), 13, 51, 81-82.

<sup>89</sup> Bachman to Morgan, October 19, 1933, TVA Central Files (Knoxville, Tennessee).

of the Chairman's plans. The "various difficulties" involved in pursuing these schemes probably would have caused a political tempest in which the TVA might well have capsized. Arthur Morgan, in attempting the improbable, seems to have been willing to accept that risk. The practical restraint of his fellow directors kept the TVA from running aground on this particular shoal. Less than two months after the official establishment of the TVA the power of the Chairman was limited by a decision of the Board to designate areas of responsibility for each director.<sup>40</sup> This division meant that Morgan's wide-ranging ideas for social change in the Tennessee Valley were confined, and it meant the beginning of disagreement in the Board which would lead eventually to his dismissal.

Morgan was defeated almost before he began. His social and economic plan never got beyond the most general stages. While his suggestions were vague and ill-defined, it is possible (especially in the light of his views concerning Norris, Tennessee) to see an outline which indicates that had he been able to maintain effective leadership of the TVA, the Authority of today would be quite different. Perhaps more importantly, Morgan represented a curious combination of the Utopianism of the nineteenth century with the pragmatism of twentieth century progressivism. The term secular perfectionism, which was used earlier, seems best to describe the social philosophy which Morgan espoused in the Tennessee Valley Authority.

<sup>40</sup> TVA Minutes, August 5, 1933, Morgan Papers. Arthur Morgan was assigned responsibility for integrating the several parts into a whole, for all engineering and construction work, educational and training programs excluding agriculture, "matters relating to social and economic organization and planning," land and regional planning, housing, and forestry; Harcourt Morgan gained control over "all matters relating to agriculture" and the various fertilizer programs; Lilienthal became responsible for all aspects of power, all legal matters, and the economics of transportation. For a more complete discussion of this divided authority arrangement, see Pritchett, *The Tennessee Valley Authority*. While aware of its problems, Pritchett concludes that, under the circumstances, this arrangement may have been the best. On paper, Morgan seems to retain a great deal of power, but the significant part is the split in the Board; Arthur Morgan was now a minority member.