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Paul B. Sears

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# The Making of the TVA

by

ARTHUR E. MORGAN<sup>1</sup>

Prometheus Books 1974

205 pp., \$10.95

The Tennessee River drops more than 350 feet in the 650 miles between its sources in the South Atlantic States and its mouth. Flowing southwest as though flowing toward the Gulf of Mexico, the Tennessee turns west in northern Alabama in the direction of the Mississippi River, then sharply north until it discharges into the Ohio River near Paducah, Kentucky. In this great U-shaped course the Tennessee passes through an area richer in mineral resources and timber than in good agricultural land. Profits from these resources have tended to flow outward to urban fiscal centers. Geography and history, combined with other factors, have led to inefficient subsistence farming and scant employment.

In the pressures of World War I the combination of phosphate, fuel, abundant labor, and water power focused attention on the Tennessee Valley. Plants were built for the production of fertilizer and munitions. In the following years Senator George Norris, whose state of Nebraska needed fertilizers but had rivers which were sluggish and thus unsuitable for water power, insisted that the Tennessee should be developed for the public good. When Franklin D. Roosevelt inherited the depression in 1932, he and Eleanor had already shared an interest in this region. They were also familiar with the engineering and social work of Arthur Morgan in Ohio. As a result Morgan was asked to develop and execute a plan for using the long course, steep gradient, and abundant water of the Tennessee River in developing the resources along its course.

Now in his 97th year and as lucid as ever, Morgan has written a personal account of this adventure. *The Making of the TVA* is a valuable sequel to his earlier book *Dams and Other Disasters*.<sup>2</sup> Both books exemplify the problem of two incompatible approaches to public problems in this age of specialization.

Wary of the ambushes and pitfalls of politics and bureaucracy, Dr. Morgan hesitated to accept directorship of a Tennessee Valley Authority until assured by the President that he would be free from partisan pressure in selecting personnel and that his mission included the welfare of people in the valley. It is interesting to note Dr.

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1. Former Director, Tennessee Valley Authority.

2. A. Morgan, *Dams and Other Disasters* (1971), reviewed, *Sears*, 13 Nat. Res. J. 546 (1973).

Morgan's estimate of President Roosevelt as a man of insight and imagination, receptive to ideas, but incurably political in his thinking and content to leave the execution of his ideas to others.

So far as technical engineering of dams, locks, etc., were concerned, Morgan records no serious problems. But, despite promises to the contrary, political pressures appeared. Dr. Morgan refused to comply when urged by James Farley to give preference to deserving Democrats. He also had to preside over a board whose two other members almost consistently outvoted him. One board member was David Lilienthal, chosen for his work on behalf of public electrical power; the other, Dr. Harcourt Morgan, was a Canadian-born agricultural scientist who had become president of the University of Tennessee. The special interests of these men were paramount for them: generation and distribution of energy for Lilienthal, production and promotion of fertilizer for Harcourt Morgan. In contrast, Arthur Morgan had long practiced conclusive engineering analysis, that is, weighing consequences as well as design and education. To his colleagues, each of whom was intent upon the field of his own expertise, Arthur Morgan's broader concern for social and community problems seemed visionary, irrelevant, and officious.

Under these circumstances, conflict was inevitable, with Dr. Arthur Morgan the loser. He was also the victim of maneuvers less than forthright, resulting in a summons to defend himself before President Roosevelt. On this occasion he remained mute rather than engage in recrimination and was removed from office.

At long last he has presented his case. Doing so, he recounts the obstacles in shaping what, to my knowledge, is the American achievement which foreign visitors most often wish to see. He also records magnanimously a curious instance of poetic justice: his chief opponent, David Lilienthal, eventually sponsored what were essentially Arthur Morgan's ideas on community development and concern for human welfare.

PAUL B. SEARS\*

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\*Professor Emeritus, Yale University.