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The Political Economy of Training in Canada and England: Politics, pragmatism and public opinion in a post-industrial age
L'économie politique de la formation au Canada et en Angleterre: La politique, le pragmatisme et l'opinion publique dans une ère post-industrielle

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a research project that examined the role of training in two government-initiated, economic regeneration programs implemented in Canada and in England. The article proposes that training programs, especially those found as part of economic development schemes, must be understood within the broader political economy into which economic development programs are introduced. An analysis of economic, policy, and training literature reveals that training often remains unconnected to either economic development or broader policy discussions.

Résumé

Cet article rapporte les résultats d'un projet de recherche qui a examiné le rôle de la formation dans deux programmes de régénération économique, initiés par le gouvernement, implémentés au Canada et en Angleterre. L'article propose que les programmes de formation, en particulier ceux trouvés dans le cadre de développement économique, doivent être compris dans une économie politique plus large, au sein de laquelle les programmes de développement économique sont introduits. Une analyse de la littérature sur l'économie, les politiques et la formation révèle que la formation ne demeure pas souvent connectée ni au développement économique, ni aux discussions plus larges sur les politiques. L'auteur soutient que donner du sens au rôle de la formation dans les programmes de développement économique et social nécessite de comprendre que la formation est une réponse politique, dépendante de l'économie politique plus large.

Keywords: training, political economy, Canada, England

Mots clés: formation, économie politique, Canada, Angleterre

Introduction

The re-training of displaced workers is a common governmental response to industrial decline, increased unemployment and community depopulation. This article reports on a study of the place of re-training in economic development programs. The research examined two programs implemented to combat industrial decline in Canada and England. Following the closure of the northern cod fishery in Atlantic Canada, the federal government implemented The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy that encompassed the re-training of former fisheries workers as well as economic development and industry restructuring measures. Around the same time, the Labour government, then in power in the United Kingdom, implemented the Coalfields Regeneration Program designed to restructure former coalfields communities following the decline of the mining industry. The program targeted a number of areas including economic and social development, environmental regeneration, education and training.

The research focused specifically on the variables that influenced the inclusion of re-training for displaced workers from both industries within these programs. Regardless of the extent to which re-training, training and education was the focus of either program in the end, one of the key findings of this research was that to understand the continued emphasis on re-training as the key to economic development, despite mixed success, we must understand the

broader political economy into which these economic development programs are introduced. And regardless of the emphasis on re-training, an analysis of economic, policy, and training literature reveals that training often remains unconnected to either economic development or broader policy discussions.

Politics, regionalism, and public opinion all played a pivotal role in how these programs were developed and implemented. The role that re-training played in both programs was heavily dependent on political strategizing and the public perception of the value of regional programs and, indeed, of the industries themselves. The research used an interdisciplinary framework encompassing post-industrialism, economic and regional development theories and theories on adult education to analyse these programs and the role of re-training within them. This article draws on interviews conducted with individuals involved in developing and implementing various elements of these programs in Canada and England.

Education and training - a panacea?

The extent to which education and training are seen as the key to successful economic development and participation in the global economy is amply evident in even a cursory glance at the documentation of many national and sub-national level governments as well as international organizations and the literature. Discussions of the 'knowledge' economy are rife with reference to training and education as the key to participation in the global economy. Both the literature and policy documentation found in England and Canada emphasizes the need for a highly educated, skilled, flexible and autonomous workforce (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014a and 2014b; Livingstone 2010; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2008; Fenwick, 2006; Fenwick, T., Gao, Shibo, Sawchuck, Valentin, C., and Wheelahan, L. 2005; Livingstone and Sawchuck, 2003; Lloyd and Payne, 2003). Notably, Grubb and Lazerson (2005) refer to this as the "Education Gospel", (p. 1) Canadian government documentation, especially around the time of program implementation, confirms, "Countries that succeed in the 21st century will be those with citizens who are creative, adaptable and skilled" (HRDC, 2002, p. p. 5). The belief in the relationship between education, training and economic development is pervasive. "In some cases, this link is conceived in quite simple terms: conventional wisdom has emerged, wherein "better" education or training is assumed to lead automatically to improved economic performance" (Ashton & Green, 1996, 11). Further, Albo (1998) writes,

The acquisition of appropriate skills by workers is conventionally put forth by government employment departments and business associations as a simple proposition; that individuals improving their skill attributes will better their prospect of being hired in the labour market. (p. 200)

The heavy emphasis on the link between the acquisition of skills and economic development remains a high priority and is evidenced by the profusion of research and studies undertaken on human capital investment over the past 40 years and by governments' continued funding of skills based initiatives. Though there have been many significant criticisms of human capital theory, the emphasis placed on education and training as the key to economic development illustrates the continued popularity of the approach, especially among policy makers. In his discussion of the contemporary human capital theory, like many others Schugurensky (2007) notes that, at least in Canada and the US, the approach assumes societies are knowledge based and that the key to competing in the global economy is innovation, entrepreneurialism and lifelong learning. This view is widely held in the UK as well has only been amplified by recent economic crises. Livingstone (2010) writes, "In the current downturn,

both human capital theorists and knowledge-based economy advocates presume that more and better investment in schooling offers economic salvation” (p. 207).

Methodology

The research from which this article is drawn investigated government interventions in response to industrial decline in Canada and England. The research focused on government responses to the closure of two primary industries – the Northern Cod fishery on Canada’s East Coast and the mining industry in England - and the programs implemented to ameliorate the impact of the closures - The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy and the Coalfields Regeneration Programme. The study utilizes qualitative methods to examine the research problem. The study utilizes personal interviews with key stakeholders in both programs, government documentation and theoretical literature to better understand the factors that influence particular policy choices and program approaches and to understand how the relationship between post-industrial trends and economic development influences those choices.

Documentation relevant to the programs under investigation generated by both governments at all levels was also analysed for this research. Documentation included, but was not limited to, annual reports from the various departments and agencies involved in these programs, government audit reports, departmental press releases, task force reports, research studies, etc. and were located through web-based searches and through research participants. A significant challenge in undertaking this study is endemic to research that attempts to trace out and understand the policy history of relatively recent government policy initiatives. Both nations in question here, though open and democratic, have very restrictive laws about the public release of internal policy documentation. Civil servants and officials of related non-governmental organizations are also subject to official secrets laws as well as less formal, but nonetheless powerful in terms of their careers, norms regarding what they may disclose to a research. Even documents theoretically ‘public’, unless publicly presented by the government are often hard to locate. This has to do, in part, with a common failure of institutional and corporate memory in both public and private sector large bureaucracies.

Participants in this research worked with governments and community and non-governmental organizations around the development and implementation of the respective programs. There were several logistical challenges in locating participants for this research. The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) had ended when this research was begun and, as such, it was difficult to find individuals who had been involved in the program as many had moved onto different departments within the civil service or had retired. I was able to meet with one individual who was familiar with the program, though not involved, and he directed me to someone who had worked on the TAGS program. This individual was willing to participate in the research and identified two further individuals who also agreed to participate and subsequently identified several more participants. Locating participants involved in the Coalfields Regeneration Programme was also a challenge. There was extensive web-based information but this merely provided a broad overview of the program and was of little assistance in determining the Program’s policy history, how the Program was delivered and managed or how to identify individuals involved in the Program. Eventually through personal and professional networks and by emailing individuals for whom I could find contact information on government websites, I was able to identify two potential participants. As with the Canadian participants, once I spoke with these individuals they were able to identify others

who were involved in the development and delivery of the Program. Thus, participant selection for this research was accomplished by snowball sampling.

The study sample is also one of opportunity. There may be individuals involved in both programs who have different information or opinions to the study participants. However, I was only able to identify and locate those I did after an exhaustive search. There is, nonetheless, considerable consistency of views across the respective programs. Participants' views are also consistent with documents analyzed, for example between Canadian participants and Auditor General's reports. The small sample size is a product of the nature of this type of research. As noted above, the analysis of policy history or recent government policy initiatives is a challenging process. Restricted access to documentation on policy processes and deliberations, the particular way in which data is recorded, document archiving and personnel change contributed to the challenges in locating further documentation or potential participants.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 individuals. All participants held senior or middle level management positions within their departments, agencies and organizations. All were responsible for development, delivery and/or monitoring of program and/or policy elements of one of the two programs under investigation in this research. Despite the limitations noted above, all participants were open and honest in sharing their knowledge, experience and opinions. In the analysis, interviews were randomly numbered and designated with either a C, for Canadian participants, or an E, for English participants. Thus, in this article interviews are identified by the letter C or E and a corresponding number.

The Programs

The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy

In response to the collapse of the Northern Cod fishery, the Canadian federal government introduced The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS). Announced in 1994 with a fixed budget of \$1.9 billion (Cdn), the five-year TAGS program focused on economic development, industry restructuring and support for displaced workers (Auditor General of Canada, 1997) and was primarily the responsibility of two federal departments, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and one quasi-governmental economic development agency. Efforts to restructure the industry relied heavily on early retirement and re-training workers in the industry. Training was, by far, the largest adjustment measure of the TAGS program. A wide variety of training opportunities were available to TAGS participants and generally followed the offerings available to other federal employment insurance training programs.¹

In 1996, the Canadian government closed much of the TAGS program. The number of participants eligible for TAGS benefits was 51% higher than estimated (Auditor General of Canada, 1997) and, thus, more expensive than initially anticipated. The increase in eligible participants placed demands on the TAGS budget. The government chose not to increase the budget to cover this shortfall but to divert funding away from other TAGS components and into income support. Without funding for economic development, adjustment and capacity reduction

¹ Data regarding the number of TAGS recipients who underwent re-training was requested of HRDC but I was informed that individual institutions kept that data. I contacted a few of these educational institutions only to be told that they did not keep track of these numbers either. Thus, I was unable to secure further details regarding the types and locations of training.

measures as well as training initiatives, the program moved from one of active adjustment to passive income support (Auditor General of Canada, 1997).

The Coalfields Regeneration Program

The Coalfields Regeneration Program, implemented in 1998, was broader in scope than the Canadian program, focused on communities as a whole with elements addressing a variety of issues affecting former coalfields communities including, for example, economic development, health care, housing, the environment and crime. Initially, a 10-year plan, The Coalfields Regeneration Program had a considerable budget of over £1 billion per year plus an additional £354 million during the first three years (DETR, 1998c, p. 7) with potential for continued funding beyond that 10-year period.

At the time the Coalfields Regeneration Program was developed, coalfields regeneration was the responsibility of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). In May of 2002, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) was established as a department in its own right and was given the responsibility for coalfields regeneration (ODPM, 2002).

The Labour government also established several agencies and organizations to administer and deliver coalfields initiatives. Coalfields initiatives and organizations were not intended to replace existing national programs but to enhance those programs and ensure regeneration reached coalfields communities. The Coalfields Regeneration Trust was established as a charitable organization to facilitate the delivery of programs targeting community, social and, in some cases, training needs. Promotion of economic investment in coalfields communities fell to The Coalfields Enterprise Fund with English Partnerships spearheading physical regeneration. These organizations were established with the specific mandate of assisting directly in coalfields regeneration.

There were other existing and newly established governmental agencies that, while not specifically mandated with coalfields regeneration, nonetheless have programs accessible to coalfields communities. The then Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions and regional development agencies, for example, all offered programs that could have assisted in meeting needs found in coalfields communities. Significant investment, over £30 billion was also made to improve housing in former coalfields communities. Government put in place a series of recommendations designed to encourage coalfields communities to access non-coalfields funding sources available for development, like the National Lottery Fund, to a greater extent than had been done previously (DETR, 1998c). The most prominent non-governmental organization involved in coalfields regeneration, at that time, was the Coalfields Community Campaign (CCC), an independent lobby organization representing coalfields communities across the United Kingdom.

Findings

Training and the Programs

The approach taken to training in each program provides a distinct point of comparison. The re-training of displaced fisheries workers in Atlantic Canada played a significant role as a means of adjusting workers out of the industry, at least before the TAGS program was revised. While the TAGS program's documented focus on industry adjustment may not have placed as heavy an emphasis on re-training, both the reality and the literature show training to have been a significant adjustment measure. In her evaluative work on human capital development and

economic renewal in Newfoundland, Brown (1991) cites Robinson, “training was by far the largest adjustment option within TAGS” (p. 11). In the public sphere, TAGS equaled re-training. Re-training was *the* TAGS element receiving the most publicity and public debate.

Anecdotal evidence from both study participants and individuals in the region known to me, however, shows there were successful re-training stories. One of the study participants shared with me survey information from individual TAGS participants describing their experiences and the benefits TAGS had provided for them specifically with regard to training. These reports are all very positive. A cynical individual might be tempted to note that an HRDC employee would be unlikely to provide a researcher with negative responses. However, given the candid nature in which this respondent spoke about the program, I believe the participant would not have hesitated to show me examples of negative feedback. One needs to also consider that assistance provided to displaced workers would likely be welcomed by those workers. Whether TAGS participants would consider the assistance proved beneficial in the long term, i.e. whether they were able to re-enter the labour market, is another issue.

There is little to discuss with regard to training itself within the English program. Training was made available through existing governmental programs and specific coalfields initiatives. The significant point of departure between the programs is that the English program focused primarily on training provision for youth whereas the Canadian program focused exclusively on training provision specifically for displaced fisheries workers. There is, however, one notable exception to the education and training focus of the Coalfields Program. While the English program places the greatest emphasis on education and training for youth, at least two participants discussed work undertaken by a coalfields regeneration agency and local business associations in determining the employment and skills needs of non-mining sectors, namely the construction industry, and the provision of appropriate training to enable displaced miners to enter those sectors. So, while the emphasis within the whole program is on education and training for youth, efforts were made to link employer need to re-training and to provide that training to displaced workers.

The English program, then, seems to place less emphasis on training, at least in terms of training displaced miners. Almost all participants who discussed training noted that the educational emphasis for regeneration here is to keep children and adolescents in school and to encourage further and higher education as a way of re-directing youth away from the mining industry and to circumvent continuing unemployment. Several participants described training schemes implemented under the Coalfields Regeneration Program. Much of this training targeted young people who have not finished their formal education and those who have just recently completed their formal education. An English participant sums up this perspective best,

... our emphasis on education has been less to do with adults but has to do with the fact that...kids are now looking at a third generation of joblessness...our efforts have gone into the 16 to 18 years olds...There's not been a lot about re-training of miners because they've been unemployed since 1994 (EI 2).

What does not appear to be discussed at any length in either case is the reality of what training displaced workers in a region with few employment opportunities and focusing on the next generation might actually mean. Are training subsidies in these situations merely another form of social welfare? Are they merely a stopgap between other avenues of income support such as unemployment insurance?

The political, economic and social contexts

Atlantic Canada. There have been decades of vociferous debates as to the cause of the collapse of the Northern Cod fishery. The details of those debates are beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, what is important to note from those debates are the often, acrimonious relationships between key stakeholders and the salient historical decisions that many believe led to the collapse. Fishing had long been the mainstay of many communities across Atlantic Canada. With lagging unemployment and increased outmigration in the middle of the last century, both Provincial and Federal governments instituted policies to increase employment opportunities in the fishery. Harris (1998) writes,

Governments had always treated the fishery as the employer of last resort in Atlantic Canada. A confidential 1970 memorandum to the federal cabinet that sought to outline a plan for the economic rationalization of Canada's fisheries stated: "The main objective of government policy has been to maximize employment in Canada's commercial fisheries". The department [Department of Fisheries and Oceans] kept pumping out licences with little regard to the marine environment or the state of the stocks (p. 67).

The political wrangling over the fisheries was complicated by jurisdiction. Provincial governments had jurisdiction over fish plants, while the Federal government's jurisdiction over the ocean meant they 'owned' the fish. Each government was pitted against the other, by their own accord or that of the voting public, to provide employment opportunities. So at times, Provinces would build more fish plants and put it to the Federal government that they would have to raise quotas or, in essence, lose votes. And at times the Federal government would do the same, raise quotas forcing action on the part of the Provinces, all in the name of securing employment opportunities, and some would argue, votes. As one of the largest employers in the region, and the sole employer in many communities, the fishery became politicized to such a degree that the survival of the industry was less important than the survival of politicians. "Ministers, as it turns out, are far more interested in their stock of votes than in the stock of fish" (McMahon, 2000, p. 139).

The expansion of the fishing industry and its promotion as sole industry undermined potential diversification of the economy in many fishing communities. Why should anyone attempt to establish or invest in alternative businesses when fisheries policies sought to provide employment for just about everyone? Further, why should individuals invest in further education and training that might enable them to pursue alternative employment when jobs in the fishery were plentiful, and seemingly guaranteed? Higher education and training, for the most part, is not required for the vast majority of jobs in the fishing industry. Politicians and government officials alike focussed their efforts on maintaining and expanding an existing employment base without regard to the sustainability of its resource base and without concern for the consequences should that base collapse (Schrank, 2005; Harris, 1998; McMahon, 2000).

The history of dependency on federal funding has instilled an attitude, according to some writers, of lethargy and a lack of entrepreneurialism in areas with depressed economies (Higgins & Savoie, 1995; McMahon and Clemens, 2008; McMahon, 2000). Contrarily, the same dependence has created an attitude among the population of resentment towards both levels of government. The failure, or at least the public understanding of consistently failed economic development initiatives has created a mistrust of economic development organizations and government. As Savoie (1997) states, "But, of course, in politics perception is often reality" (p. 32). Years of make-work projects with seemingly little thought to long-term growth contributed to this belief, as did the mismanagement of industry including not only the fishery but coal and steel industries in the region as well.

Atlantic Canada remains largely underdeveloped economically. There are pockets of growth throughout the region – Halifax, Nova Scotia, St. John’s, Newfoundland and Moncton, New Brunswick, for example, but by and large, rural areas and smaller industrial centres continue to have high levels of unemployment and declining economies.

England. Coal was an abundant, indigenous resource in England. It was the source of energy that fuelled the industrial revolution and its workers, the miners, have been seen as the “consummate proletariat” (Wallis, 2000). In their discussions of the coal industry’s early years, Waddington and Parry (1995) cite Hall,

Within the space of half a century, coal was truly king and the men who were winning it had become politically and socially one of the most important and catalytic elements of the British working class (p. 8).

At the end of the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th century, coal was Britain’s primary source of industrial energy and demand for coal from steam powered industry at the time ensured the expansion of the industry. Waddington and Parry (1995) report that by the industry’s peak in 1913, 3,024 pits employed over 1.1 million miners. Since then, the industry has experienced expansion and contraction in response to developments and demands of the energy industry and, as with the TAGS program, political utility. Rising demand in the 1970s, though short-lived, placed the industry’s union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), in a position of strength that would continue and grow throughout the next two decades. By the 1981 recession, an abundance of coal on the international markets and a drop in demand again led to the closure of surplus capacity collieries (Wallis, 2000).

Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative party came to power in 1979. Her administration emphasized the primacy of a free market and the private ownership of business and industry. For Thatcher’s neo-conservative agenda, and for the duration of her administration, organized labour was a threat. The coal industry represented a microcosm of all the Thatcher government saw as wrong with British industry: it was state owned, 100% unionized and had seldom managed to generate financial surpluses. For the government, labour was a barrier to a free market economy and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was one of the most powerful labour unions in Britain (Wallis, 2000; Turner, 1995; Milne, 1994). In the pursuit of privatizing business and industry, the Thatcher administration introduced legislative measures seeking to restrict the power of trade unions in the early 1980s. Conflicts arising from this new legislation and the push to privatize public industry resulted in a yearlong mining strike from 1984-1985. The defeat of the union in that strike shifted the balance of power in the industry from union to management.

Throughout the 1980s, the industry was threatened not only by improved technology and its implications for less productive mines, but also by a steady decline in the market for coal. While declining markets, increased technology, international competition and environmental restrictions most certainly contributed to the decline of the coal industry in Britain, there are many who attribute its decline, and certainly the rapid rate of that decline at the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s not to a dated and inefficient industry but to a political vendetta on the part of the Conservative government.

The squeeze on coal would continue. And in the process, the worlds’ most advanced mining industry, billions of pounds of investment, and one of the country’s most skilled and adaptable workforces would be sacrificed in the service of the Tory vendetta (Milne, 1994, p. 24).

The pace and extent of closures is viewed as retaliation by the Conservatives who had faced humiliating labour relations defeats at the hand of the coal industry (Waddington & Parry, 1995; Turner, 1995; Milne, 1994). Conservative policies, it is said, had more to do with breaking the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the power of its president, Arthur Scargill, than sound economic policy. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had staged two successful strikes in 1972 and 1974. The defeat of the National Union of Mineworkers in the 1984-85 strike resulting in loss of political and bargaining strength for the NUM, gave the government the opportunity to implement policies restricting markets for coal, to begin the process of privatization of the industry and "...to exact full revenge for the humiliations of 1972, 1974 and 1981" (p. 13).

The Thatcher era was a difficult one for the coal industry. "There can be little doubt that the [then] present crisis confronting the British deep coal mining industry is the direct product of over a decade of sustained Conservative anti-coal policy" (Waddington & Parry, 1995, 11). The anti-coal sentiment had begun with the success of the strikes in the 1970s and the defeat of the Conservative government and was fostered by a specific political agenda. "From 1972, the NUM posed the single most powerful challenge to the increasingly determined attempts to reorder British capitalism and shift the balance of power sharply in favor of employers and the freedom of capital" (Milne, 1994, p. 306).

Discussion

This article draws on research that focused on policy formation and the factors that influence re-training policies and programs at the governmental level. It became clear during the data collection and analysis stages that the research questions could not adequately be investigated until the rationale behind the policies was understood. Discussions with study participants and the analysis of government documentation confirmed this. Throughout the interviews and document analysis, the political landscape within which such policies are developed emerged as the key to understanding why training and re-training were chosen as, or included in, government responses to industrial decline. Contextually, training in itself became a secondary issue. The primary focus of the majority of participants in this research was the political economic and social contexts from which each of these programs emerged. As the data collection and analysis for this research progressed, the need to understand the policy context, or foundation, became evident. The particular shape re-training programs took, and indeed the issue of re-training itself, increasingly emerged as a secondary issue. Thus, then, one of the key findings of this research is that understanding the policy foundation, the factors that influence policy choice, emerged as a more important and fundamental issue than the interventions themselves. What follows is a discussion of these key themes.

Regionalism and politics

Regional division emerged as a key element informing policy decisions and program development, especially in the Canadian case. Canadian regionalism creates barriers to national public policy development and implementation that England does not face. Political negotiation in Canada is a complicated and delicate process at and between the two levels of government. As a federal state, national and provincial governments in Canada have jurisdictional divisions that can create acrimonious and strained relations. These relationships add a complex layer of negotiation to the development of social and economic development programs and policies. The federal system in Canada creates an environment of struggle for power and authority. As noted

elsewhere in this article, both federal and provincial governments held jurisdiction over the fishery and both levels of government used the fishing industry for political advantage and many claim they did so to the detriment of the industry. Harris (1998) writes industry regulation really had more to do with politics than with the fishery "...federal and provincial governments lock horns for political rather than fisheries reasons, which in turn pits inshore against offshore [fisheries], province against province and community against community" (p. 70). He adds, "There wasn't a politician in the land who was prepared to accept the consequences of restricting entry to the fishery" (Harris, 1998, p. 69).

Regionalism has a significant impact on policy choice in Canada. The size and number of regions in Canada as economically weak as Atlantic Canada means greater competition for scarce government resources. The varying economic and political strength of Canada's regions heavily influences public perceptions of the validity of who gets what. Regionalism plays a role not only in terms of federal attempts at regional balance but also in the level of public and, in turn, political support a regional program such as TAGS would receive. In writing on the impact of regionalism in Canada, Bickerton (1999) notes,

Regionalism is a pervasive feature of Canadian society and politics – it is everywhere to be found: in our politics, in the structure of the economy, in our associative life, in Canadian culture and identity. It is entrenched in our political institutions, in party and electoral politics, in federal-provincial relations, in government policy and in the composition of the federal government itself. Finally, but certainly not least important, regions are present in Canada's constitution, wherein special regional rights are recognized (p. 209).

As a centralist state, England does not have to contend with another layer of government. The greatest concern for the Coalfields Regeneration Programme in this regard was to garner cooperation of the various government departments and regional agencies (themselves, at the very least, quasi-governmental departments) in making coalfields regeneration a priority and in delivering the program. These departments are, however, central government departments and are thus bound to the mandate of the government. A somewhat similar political relationship in England that might add a level of negotiation, albeit a less acrimonious one, to the Canadian federal/provincial divide in England would be between the central government and local authorities. In England, however, the balance of power is clearly with the central government. Political power is centralized. In any event, as noted above, many local authorities are strongly tied to central governments. Local resistance, then, is relatively easily overcome thus presenting, comparatively, a fairly uncomplicated political environment in which to develop and deliver social and economic development programs and policies. Regional difference in England is far less striking and, as this research is specific to England only and not Scotland or Wales, it is safe to say regionalism was a non-issue for the Coalfields Regeneration Program.

Politics and public opinion

During their interviews, English participants could not emphasize enough the level of political and public support for the Coalfields Regeneration Programme. Several pointed to the establishment of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the government agency leading coalfields regeneration (EI 5; EI 3; EI 2).

[The coalfields are an] extremely high priority. I saw John Prescott [former Deputy Prime Minister] ... and he's, as soon as he talks its coalfields. It's one of his priorities...So, having this sort of focused – having someone right at the very top, being

focused on this particular problem has enabled us to put in a chain of measures that, I think, otherwise would have been very difficult to get agreement on (EI 5).

Politically, commitment to the Coalfields Regeneration Program provided the Labour Party with several avenues to garner public support. The implementation of the Coalfields Regeneration Program following the inaction of the Conservative government in addressing issues arising from extensive mine closures and the decline of the industry in the 1980s and early 1990s provided a means by which the Labour Party could distinguish itself from the previous Conservative administration (EI 5; EI 2). The Coalfields Regeneration Program also provided opportunity to show the Party's commitment to its historically large and primary base of political support – the working class and especially mining communities.

I mean one of the reasons Labour came to power was this sort of – this feeling that there'd been great wrongs done to the country and, really, there were no more wronged areas than the coalfields (EI 5).

Beatty, Fothergill & Powell (2007) note political support for coalfields regeneration was evident in the years prior to the implementation of the Coalfields Regeneration Programme, noting several forms of regional employment initiatives. “It has never been the view of the UK government that the coalfields could not, or should not, be regenerated” (Beatty, Fothergill & Powell, 2007, p. 1656).

In addition to political support, the Coalfields Regeneration Program enjoyed popular support as well. Coal mining in Britain is widely recognized as the industrial backbone of the country (Turner 1995; EI 2; EI 3; EI 5;). At the time the program was implemented, there was a sense of appreciation for not only the dangers involved in coal mining but also of what the industry had done for Britain through fueling the industrial revolution to helping to create the British Empire to its contribution to war efforts. One study participant commented on the level of public sentiment,

...because of the strong attachment that not only people from coalfields areas have to their former industry but also the nation itself has a misty-eyed notion about miners...if you go to a meeting...and they think you have something to do with the coal industry, they always say ‘I knew a miner once’, or ‘My great grand-dad’s father was a miner. Everybody has to prove their connection, their pedigree (EI 5).

The combination of political and public support contributed to an environment where a program of the nature of the Coalfields Regeneration Program could exist. As one participant noted, “...we’ve had a window of opportunity of good will” (EI 2).

The popular and political landscape in Canada is vastly different. There is no national, popular sentimentality attached to the fishing industry the way there is to coal mining in England. The fishing industry did enjoy a period of popular public support during the “Turbot Wars” – the famous stand off between Newfoundlanders and the Spanish fishing fleet over foreign fishing off the east coast of Canada in the early 1990s - but that sentimentality was short lived. Atlantic Canada is not usually viewed as a strong political power base in Canada. While Atlantic Canada has had popular and notable political figures in recent years - Brian Tobin who led the protest against Spanish over-fishing and John Crosbie, former federal Minister of Fisheries - the region did not have the political clout to keep the issue of declining eastern Canadian fishing communities at the top of the national political agenda. While TAGS did receive extensive national press coverage during its time, and was discussed at length nationally,

there was not the will to sustain the matter of declining fishing communities on the national agenda either from politicians or the public as there was in England to keep coalfields communities on the political agenda. From a political perspective active lobby organizations, public support and political commitment have significant impact on the potential for large-scale social and economic development programs such as The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy and the Coalfields Regeneration Program.

There can be no doubt about the role public support plays in programs such as The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy and the English Coalfields Program. Economic development and social welfare programs are political and politics is about votes. Public opinion, then, can carry great weight in whether or not such programs even get off the ground.

Training

This research finds that while education and training were considered important elements for both programs, the emphasis on education and training was expressed differently in each program and that this difference reflects the focus of each program. A key objective of the TAGS program was to adjust fisheries workers to employment outside the industry and training played a significant role in that process. With the English program, the emphasis is on education for youth, not displaced coal industry workers, specifically. The focus of the English program is broader than the Canadian program. General education and training for younger generations supports a focus on broad-based social and economic development.

This research shows that a belief in and reliance upon human capital theory is evident in both the programs and in the political landscape that influenced those programs. Findings reveal that post-industrialism informs policy choice in both programs. This is shown in the significance placed on the role of education and training in economic development, for both these programs, at least as regards the official documentation for both programs.

That training must be understood to be a political response dependent on the larger political economy is a key finding of this research. Education and training policy choices in the context of these programs makes sense in a policy environment that focuses on human capital development and the new economy. This research reveals broad-based factors influencing the political economy of the two countries in which these programs were developed and implemented that, in turn, illustrate why training and education are chosen as a policy response in the context of that political economy.

Conclusion

Governments and agencies concerned with economic development continue to emphasize the primacy of education and training as key to that process. A quick perusal of policy documents and training initiatives of many governments, including Canada and the UK, illustrates this. The purpose of this article was not to negate the role that training can play in economic development initiatives but to illustrate the underlying factors influencing the continued reliance on training in economic development initiatives. In revealing these underlying influences, we are better placed to understand why national and sub-national level governments rely on training programs despite their mixed success. Communities in the regions examined in this study continue to struggle economically. This article illustrates the need to consider the reasons why governments opt to include training and re-training initiatives in economic development programs, especially if those initiatives prove unsuccessful.

This article has shown the extent to which politics, political strategizing, and public opinion influenced the design, development and implementation of both The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy and the Coalfields Regeneration policies and programs. By illustrating the political, economic and social contexts of the industries, training and the regions into which these programs were introduced, this article highlights the intrinsic connection between training and political economy. To understand the role of training in economic and social development programs, then, is to understand that training is a political response dependent on the broader political economy.

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