



## **THE COALFIELDS RESEARCH PROGRAMME:**

### **DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 5**

### **RETRAINING THE WORKFORCE**

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## 1. Introduction

In each of the four areas of this research (Cynon Valley, Easington, Mansfield and St. Helens) there have been substantial resources devoted to regeneration of places hit by the decline in coal production. In this paper we examine the way these policies are directed towards the former miners, their families and communities. The paper starts by examining the extent of unemployment in each of the areas and puts this in the context of the coalfields more generally as well as the national figures. We then go on to assess the relative levels of training and qualification in the four areas and again measure this against that found nationally. The paper proceeds by exploring how those responsible for coalfield regeneration discuss and think about project the human qualities of *their* places. It is argued that there is a noticeable contradiction in the messages produced for differing audiences at different times. On the one hand there is the positive 'spin' on the legacy of the coal areas with their ability to supply large amounts of hard working, loyal and flexible workers while at others the same areas are described in exactly opposite terms. The paper concludes by attempting to explore some of these contradictions by situating them within evidence from others involved in coalfield regeneration.

## 2. Unemployment and the coal districts

The four places that form the basis of this research were in various ways dependent on the coal industry for a large percentage of their adult male employment. Unemployment in the English and Welsh coalfields peaked at over 18% in January 1986. This compares with a figure of just over 14% nationally. From this high the figures for the coalfield follows a downward path until mid 1990 when, like the national figure, they again rise to 16% in January 1993. However, these statistics disguise the true scale of local unemployment in parts of the coalfields. In the colliery villages of the English and Welsh coalfields unemployment levels have remained well above both the national level and the rest of the coalfield. Unemployment here rose to the height of 22% in late 1986 and remained at 16% in mid 1995 (Coates and Barratt Brown 1997: 8). But even these figures underestimate the true extent of unemployment through the exclusion of the long term sick from the register. In two of the areas we are studying for example the claimant count is dwarfed by the estimate made by Beatty and Fothergill. In Easington the official statistics put unemployment at just over 10% whereas the Sheffield Hallam study puts the real level at 36%. Similarly in the case of Mansfield the official figures place unemployment in the area at 11% while the Beatty and Fothergill study shows the hidden figure at nearly 26%. Using this same methodology the figure of 'real unemployment for all pit villages comes out at some 26.7% (Coates and Barratt Brown 1997: 32-33). The Coalfields Task Force, using the same figures cite unemployment figures for the coalfields as 20% for January 1997. The claimant unemployment count in the English coal fields stood at 105,000 in January 1997 (DETR 1998 10). Employment within the industry fell from 279,200, of which 218,800 were miners in September 1981, to 13,000 and 10,000 respectively in March 1997 (Coates and Barratt Brown 1997: 19).

Looking at our areas more closely we can see how these figure compare to national trends. Figures from the North East TECs (North East TECs 1998) showed the problems of the former Easington district coalfield in relation to the region as a whole. In July 1992

unemployment for the region was just under 140,000 peaking at 150,000 January 1993. This figure in turn fell to just under 100,000 by July 1997. In the areas we are examining figures range between 9-11% and 3-5%. Unemployment in the region as a whole remains above the national average by over 2% and the percentage of long term unemployed over 6 months is consistently above national average, with 56.2% regionally and 53.3% nationally in July 1992 compared to 51% and 48.7% respectively in July 1997.

In Rhondda Cynon Taff male unemployment according to the census figures stood at 22.2% in August 1991. In March 1995 there were 9,261 people registered as unemployed in the district of which three-quarters were males. Since 1991 there has been a rise in number of long term unemployed. In the wake of the various pit closures since 1985 2,976 jobs have gone within Rhondda Cynon Taff area. The population of the district stands at 233,000, of which 113,000 are male and 120,000 female. 21.1% of the population suffer from long term limiting illness (1991 census).

In the North Nottingham area there were 9540 unemployed December 1997, representing 5.2% of workforce. Again like the other areas studied men were the majority of those without work, counting for over 78% of the total. For Mansfield itself three wards shared the highest levels of unemployment in 1991 of between 15.4% to 18.9% while a further five shared figures of between 12.3% to 15.4%. In terms of long term limiting sickness three wards were in the highest category of 14.78 to 15.11% while a further five had level between 13.25% to 14.78% (Census 1991). In St. Helens one ward (Parr and Hardshaw) had an unemployment rate of between 22.1% to 22.2% while a further seven wards had unemployment levels of between 13.4% to 22.1% (Census 1991). In terms of long term limiting illness two wards have the highest figures of between 16.5% to 17.11% (Parr and Hardshaw and Broad Oak). While a further six ward share figures of between 13.39% and 16.5%.

### **3. Education and training**

The coalfields emerge poorly in comparison with other areas in terms of education and training. Figures from ten English LEAs showed that the proportion of pupils attaining 5 or more GCSE passes at A-C was below the national average. For England as a whole the average was just over 46% while in the LEAs that we are examining the figures were 37% for Durham, 38% for Nottinghamshire, and 40% for St. Helens (DfEE figures in DETR, 1998,11). And the Coalfield Task Force went on to note:

At the time of the 1991 Census just 9% of coalfields residents of working age had formal post-18 educational qualifications, and just 7% in pit villages, compared to 15% in England as a whole. At the same time, just 32% of 17 year olds in the coalfields were staying on at school or college compared to the national average of 41% (DETR . 1997,11).

In the North East the figure on school leavers destinations in 1992 and 1996. Show that there was a rise of 6% in the number going in to education post 16 from 54% in 1992 to 60% in 1996. However, the figures for training show a decrease of 11% between the same dates from 27% to 16%.

### **4. History Work**

In the absence of the coal mining industry how are the former workers and the communities that grew up around the industry thought of? Does their re-interpretation continue now they are post coal industrial? And how does an older occupational identity fit with the new demands being made of it? In each of the four areas studied in this project the legacy of the industry was understood in a dualistic way with both positive and negative readings of the past available. A positive take on the former coal industry workforce is most apparent in the literature from, and interviews with, economic development departments from both district and county councils. Perhaps understandably the printed literature, designed as it is to attract inward investment, makes much of positive inheritance left in the wake of closure. In Easington the workforce is described as:

...a large pool of skilled and semi-skilled labour. Historically a strong work ethic runs through the people of this former mining community. They are proud and hard-working, energetic and friendly. In short Easington people are great people to work with.

The County Durham Website also speaks of ‘...a loyal and adaptable workforce and good labour relations’ (County Durham Website 1998). Interestingly these positive attributes are spoken and written as being almost *sui generis* in their relationship to community. It is almost as if there is an invisible force that anyone from these places imbibes and absorbs into their very being or self. Elsewhere such rhetoric is echoed, in South Wales for example the local council notes:

While Rhondda Cynon Taff has been taking great strides forward to meet the challenges of the future, so has its skilled and flexible workforce. Proud of their heavy industrial past, today’s workers are equally proud of the way they have adapted to embrace new, diverse industries such as avionics, plastics and food processing...It has also welcomed flexible working patterns, built up excellent labour relations and shown higher than average productivity levels. It is little wonder that the local labour force has impressed so many new investors.

Under the banner ‘*World Class Workforce*’ North Nottinghamshire TEC, responsible for the Mansfield area, describe their vision as being to produce an ‘increasingly adaptable and flexible workforce with skills relevant to the needs of business’ (North Nottinghamshire TEC 1995/1998 Corporate Plan). Mansfield business guide (1998), produced by the District Council to attract potential inward investors, states:

The spirit of this north Nottinghamshire town comes *naturally* from its people; gritty and tenacious, renowned for their guts and their appetite for hard work. It is their drive and ability to adapt by learning new skills which have put them in a position to reap the rewards of the 90s and beyond (1.1) (emphasis added).

Much is made in the same document of the low wages, or rather the ‘competitive rates’, the area can boast with an average level of £268.50 in the district as against £306.80 for Nottinghamshire as a whole and £351.70 nationally (Mansfield District Council business guide 1998 3.3). The District Council goes on to discuss the nature of the workforce at some length, under the headline ‘Productivity and the work ethic’ the brochure boasts:

Local people have a *natural* resilience and adaptability, and if you consider drive and determination important, you will find these resources in abundance within the district. The *tradition* here is to get on with the job, as borne out by the regional statistics (3.1) (emphasis added).

The council stresses the way the collapse of coal has presented possibilities for other enterprises stating ‘The mining industry has also left a legacy of varied trades and

professions, from plumbers to planners, from electricians to statisticians (Ibid. 3.2). Finally the flexibility within the area and its workforce is highlighted:

A flexible, competitive and efficient labour market is important to achieving growth and job creation. Flexitime, overtime and shift patterns are established working practices within Mansfield (3.6).

Thus while the industry has collapsed, or completely disappeared there is a sense in which these are *still* mining areas. The industry has left but the work ethic it inspired and demanded remains. Tradition and heritage take on a positive cadence within such rhetoric, mining seemingly being able to resonate outside the immediate areas themselves. The Coalfields Task Force report also makes note of these qualities:

There is also an important cultural dimension. The way of life that was focused on the local pit offered a high degree of social cohesion and resilience within communities, *and a strong work ethic*. There was a tradition of teamworking and mutual support both underground and above ground, characterised by a helping, caring attitude towards colleagues and neighbours (DETR 1998 8) (emphasis added).

It would seem that such agents both draw on, and crucially reproduce, the stereotypical miners in their own practice. Here it could be argued that these areas have an edge over their non-mining competitor places in that *they* can trade-off an occupational identity that has historically enjoyed a high profile. As we saw in the previous Discussion Papers mining as an industry can stand for several things simultaneously within popular culture and this quality is actively drawn on. This theme was taken up by a member of the East Durham Taskforce:

...whilst the coalfields have gone, the people are there, there's two -ways about it...I mean the culture of those people goes back, you know, certainly, a century...there is a very strong work ethic. But there is a very strong work ethic...they are very hard working people...

The same interviewee went on to discuss how the district and the county council built on the reputation of mining workers in their promotion of the area.

What we'd say, we've got it, you know, mining, workers are traditionally, you know, resilient, they've got this quite good reputation. We tend not to have industrial relations problems, you know, to the same extent as some of the other countries and certainly probably other parts of this country. So you would sell it on that basis.

Material from the East Durham Development Agency (EDDA) sought to highlight similar qualities:

If there's one thing that characterises the people of the North East of England, it's the capacity for hard work. They've lived through the good times. And the bad times. What ever they've got they have had to work hard for. They have acquired, in the process, a responsible, flexible attitude to working practices which to many employers is a refreshing change from attitudes elsewhere (EDDA undated).

In the examples from East Durham and Mansfield there seems a greater tendency to stress the continuation of a tough and macho attitude to work even though much of the literature isn't gender specific. It would seem that hardness of employment in the coal mining industry is equally a resource to be drawn on by those willing to invest in the area. But this

macho image also stands for other qualities, those of honesty and respectability. It is the very tradition, the historic virtue of work in the industry that is of value.

Interestingly, the issue of poor industrial relations often emerges in 'grey' literature and in the interviews carried out. While one might assume that there would be a wish to gloss over, or ignore this history it seems to be positively harnessed again as affirmation that a negative has been overcome. This frankness about the past can at times be startling with a publication from Easington stating '...in the mid-1970s Britain was a legend for abysmal industrial relations, strike-happy unions, demarcation disputes and British Leyland workers sleeping on the job' (place to be 4). This would seem to echo Hay's point about the way the 1970s, and in particular the Winter of Discontent, are used ideologically both as an interpretation of past failure and present success (See Hay 1996).

In Mansfield we have an echoing of the positive aspects of coal mining, the following quote is from the head of a public/private partnership Mansfield 2010 involved in economic regeneration in the district:

And the people are little short of miraculous, in terms of, you know, their approach to life, and their determination. I mean, they're by no means a bowed people. I don't know how they compared specifically with other people, but I, as an outsider, have been very impressed by the approach of individuals. More impressed by the approach by individuals than by their agents, such as, local authorities and what have you. I see these squabbling hierarchies, the actual people are genuinely nuggets! *And that is traded upon, in that they are presented to the potential inward investors as one of the strengths of the area.* The actual people are used to team working, in very bad conditions, awkward hours, and you know, they are very co-operative. *So the workforces, is low skilled, low educated but good* (emphasis added).

This latter point is particularly important in re-stressing the essential character of the potential employees. This is a set of individuals who have few skills and little in the way of education and yet they are 'good'. This sort of account is replicated by the TEC in the area, a respondent from the organisation was asked if employers were keen to take on former miners:

Generally yes, they have got a pretty good reputation...the kind of attributes that they've got they are pretty flexible, they work really well in teams, and they have been used to a fair amount of change the last 20 to 30 years. They are in pretty good demand, once you get hold of the terms and conditions issue they are problematic. As I say a lot of miners would have taken anything just to get a step on the labour market. (North Nottinghamshire TEC).

And in the local district council the view is replicated:

...well, traditionally, you had workforce here that's, worked on, sort of, on a shift basis, had to work under hard conditions etc so, we sell the workforce as hard working, er, you know, can sort of, work any patterns really, in that sort of sense, so that that's how we sell the sort of workforce in that sort of sense (Mansfield District Council, Economic Development)

In St. Helens a Borough economic development officer mixed a discussion of the mining industry with examples from other large paternalistic employers in the area, the town having not only been an important part of the Lancashire coalfield but also to the glass manufacturers Pilkingtons and the drugs company Beechams. Interestingly, in light of the criticism made elsewhere - see above and below - there is after all a *positive* aspect to paternalistic employment patterns:

But the legacy those big companies left here, which was the work ethic, if you wish, the discipline and indeed the fact that most of them were going on a continuous shift basis and imposed that discipline as well, and people are still very interested that they had that kind of employee, an employee who is willing to be flexible is there. That has been a *big* help to us. Indeed I remember when that was coming through when we had the redundant miners, that certainly, if you were an underground skilled tradesman, electrician or whatever, people were beating a path to your door for those guys, because the pick was just like gold. They didn't stay unemployed for more than a day, as far as I remember. (St. Helens Economic Development).

Here the presence of a number of big employers creates an industrial district wherein both specific sector skills are created and reproduced but there is also a work ethic ingrained over several generations. Specifically with regard to the mining industry it is important to note here that it is the skilled workers that are being used as examples of success, little seems to be said or known about what happened to the unskilled. The same interviewee stressed the way the Borough distinguished itself, in terms of a work ethic, from Liverpool. St. Helens it must be pointed out is part of Merseyside:

I certainly do! The whole thing, the discipline, the ethic. When I first came, what did they used to call it? 'A fair day's work, for a fair day's pay!'. But it is still there. In the '70's anyway, there was a problem we had to counter here, which was 'oh! you're part of Merseyside'. Both at the County level and eventually District level, you would say to prospect investors, as you brought them in, as you crossed the M57, you'd say 'this is where the culture changes. This is the cultural dividing all right! This is where the accent changes. Listen, watch...' Once you said that, they would in fact see it, and it is true. It is entirely different (St. Helens Economic Development).

So we have here a set of accounts that is generally positive about the legacy of the deep coal mining industry. The demise of the industry has left an inheritance of a strong work ethic, deeply embedded not only in former miners, but their families and the wider communities. Such a work ethic seems singularly apposite for the modern world of work with its need for flexibility of function, variable shift patterns, team working and general adaptability. One way to understand this development is to view it as a process of objectification wherein the potential workforce in an area take on a set of desired and largely positive characteristics. In stereotyping communities and individuals in this way District and County councils as well as a raft of agencies involved in the regeneration of the coalfields seek to package and sell these attributes to would be investors. Thus there is a process of commodification occurring where the workforce alongside the structural features of the former coalfields become a set of solutions for business, on the one hand vast labour exchanges with multi-talented potential employees and on the other offering vast tracts of green field sites ready and waiting for development. In this way we can see the way in which the workers, or potential workers of the former coalfield areas fit in to and form part of the package offered to inward investors. Here the positive is emphasised and the negative ignored or reinterpreted in order to provide a positive take. But this largely positive interpretation can be juxtaposed to a more negative reading, sometimes from the same agencies and actors.

## **5. A Negative Inheritance?**

In this alternative reading the past now becomes a fetter on future possibilities and trajectories. Here coal mining, the communities and the culture they contained are all seen as unwanted contingencies. In one sense it is possible to see the decline of the industry as a

welcome 'creative destruction' of past contingency. In this reading the coal industry is cast as 'old' and of creating a culture of dependency, lacking innovation and flexibility, 'Yesterday it was coal. Today it's microtechnology' (EDDA undated). Once again the coal industry is portrayed, as it was in the inter-war period, as old fashioned in comparison to other sectors of the economy in the 'nanosecond nineties' (Peters 1992). The historic legacy with regard to the ex-miners, their families and communities now becomes an attribute in need of modification. Communities, therefore, are deemed to have the 'wrong sort of culture', in this sense culture becomes a drag in Munro's phrase (1998).

This negative view of the past can be seen as useful in several ways. Firstly, there is the sense in which the problems associated with the past can be commodified as part of the process of winning extra funding for areas from a range of European and central government initiatives as well as some Lottery and private sector resources. In this sense having the 'wrong sort of culture' is an important element in the construction of the coalfield districts as 'needy places'. Secondly, the failure of the past can be harnessed to argue for the need for radical change in expectations with regard to a whole range of life style issues, but especially here towards the world of work. Often the critique of the past offered by those attempting regeneration in the coalfield area is couched in a culturalist analysis. A respondent from the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) in the North West noted the way the culture of the industry was deeply entrenched in the St. Helens area:

People have been mining coal in the same sites, where my pit was they had been mining coal there since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, so the geographically the miners have always been where the coal is so everybody who has lived there has always been part of the *mining culture and tradition*, not for a few decades but hundreds of years and that has to have an effect on the socialisation on the people who live there. And considering the pits didn't shut, started to shut until on a large scale in the last decade we are only ten years down the line. That social process is still having an impact and effect on the community...

A member of St. Helens Borough economic development team discussed the coal mining past in the area:

Without a doubt, without a doubt! Yes. It goes back 450 years. So I think it has left, not just the physical mark, it's in the psyche all right.

This legacy is often interpreted as having prevented the emergence within the former coalfield regions of a dynamic entrepreneurial culture which it is imagined exists almost universally elsewhere in the UK. Ideologically there is a coupling occurring here between the market and modernity. The past industry and culture can be seen as inherently old fashioned because it was not fully integrated into a market system. This perception was illustrated in an interview in St. Helens where it was noted:

...there hasn't been a great block of enterprise culture, now whether that is changing and the reason that we have said there hasn't been a great, sort of, enterprise culture. Now whether that is changing and the reason we have said that there is not a lot of people being, sort of, gone in and starting their own business...traditionally there has been a reliance on, you know, four major companies, in the Borough and everybody worked for Pilkingtons, aunties, uncles, nephews, nieces and whole families, again, we saw that with SmithKline Beecham, whole generations in there...

Note the way absence of enterprise, dependency, reliance and tradition are coupled in a negative sense. Yet it was aspects of these very qualities that are traded on in other areas



(see above). In Mansfield the military metaphor is employed to explore the issue of dependency by a leading member of the Mansfield 2010 partnership:

Er, partly history. A number of elements of history. The local authority in the, at the height of the coal mining area, I mean it became, almost, an off shoot of British Coal. If you go into a coal village, it's a bit like belonging to the Military. You know, you're living in your own camp, everything is provided for, by the Coal Board, your entertainment is provided, your house is provided, your health is provided, your sport is provided, it's almost, in a coal mining community, like being signed up to the Military. 'The Military will provide'. The Coal Board, provide everything you need, including good salary and a car. And the local authority represented that, you know, it was propped up and sustained by coal miners, by shop stewards, by Coal Board money, you know, if ever they wanted to do something, they'd go to the Coal Board and say 'we'd like a new thingy here'.

The same interviewee drew out the perceived problems that this situation created:

...in an area like Mansfield, particularly, you'd find this sort of very introspective world, that was totally self-sustaining...So you've got a lot of culture, in looking culture, that you start with, which doesn't break down very readily, it doesn't break down.

This attitude is reflected at the local district council level, once again the dependency on coal extraction has major implications:

Well, obviously, within the, with mining industry there was a lot of dependency culture...generations were coming from mining industry, and quite often once they were in, they felt there was a job for them for life. You know. And it was available at leaving school, so this dependency culture that's been built up, for everything...there is both a cultural change that is required and also, kind of, sort of, new expectations, to a certain extent, in terms of making sure that people can then link back into labour market really. So I would say that for a mining era, created dependency culture really. And now because of the changing, you know, the changing global market etc and new employment conditions, people are having to adjust to that really (Mansfield District Council, Economic Development).

And he went on talk about the 'parochial' nature of the communities and the way this prevented people from travelling to employment outside their immediate location. In all four districts there have been attempts to tackle the problem of lack of enterprise, and this possibly reflects the priorities of the previous governments. This trend is clearest in the Mansfield area where latterly local government publications have chosen to focus on the issue, one of the latest states 'the level of self-employment locally is significantly lower than nationally - entrepreneurship must be encouraged'. (Agenda for Change MDC13). And in another recent policy document this problem is again noted:

Enterprise Culture - Developing a more entrepreneurial culture within Mansfield will need to remain high on the agenda for the foreseeable future. To widen the base of the entrepreneurs we will need to consider the development of programmes aimed at introducing young people to business, and building on the current business start-up programme to encourage self-employment (Mansfield Economic Development Plan 1997/8 p15).

And the local North Nottinghamshire TEC also saw its role of changing attitudes to work:

The emerging trend towards still greater flexibility in employment relations, and the associate growth in job insecurity, may present a real challenge to the vast majority of the employed workforce in North Nottinghamshire since most are used to long continuous periods in work, usually with the same employer.

In the case of South Wales this lack of entrepreneurship seems to be due both to the legacy of the coal industry and to a politic objection to capitalism. As the MEP for the Rhondda Cynon Taff area put it:

Well it has grown up because of the nature of the coal industry. It leads essentially one industry one class societies, people worked in the coal industry and that was it. There was relatively full employment most of the time and if you didn't work in the industry you became a teacher or a preacher or maybe a shopkeeper. Sometimes you would leave the valleys sometimes you would stay there. *But the idea of someone working outside of the public sector, it was unheard of. An antipathy towards capitalism, you know 'the world is not about making profits is it?'* So I mean there is actually a cultural change require (emphasis added).

But the council has recognised this absence and has produced a response that it hope will tackle the problem at it roots. In a statement on economic development under the title 'Young People's Enterprise' the Council says it aims to:

Provide financial support to voluntary organisations to develop young people's enterprise.  
Carry out feasibility study into the establishment of a young people's enterprise centre.  
Develop an enterprise element into the school curriculum (Rhondda Cynon Taff Economic Development Statement 1997/8 20).

This tradition of a lack of enterprise in the coal field areas is also recognised in the report from the Coalfield Task Force:

The coalfield communities have lagged behind the rest of the United Kingdom in creating employment through small firm development. Reliance on a single large employer has not fostered the creation of the entrepreneurial skills necessary to establish and grow small firms (DETR, 1998, 17).

And later in the same document the Task Force suggests that it is to the past that the communities should look for a revival of their fortunes:

Pit closures have dealt a sudden and irreversible shock to the culture of coalfield communities. Regeneration programmes must seek to build on the cohesion and strong work ethic that has traditionally characterised the coalfields (DETR, 1998, 34).

This stress on the value of enterprise and entrepreneurship could be seen as a continuation of the ideas and aspirations of the Thatcher and Major administration (Burrows and Curran 1991; Cross and Payne 1991). Indeed, New Labour's pro-business attitude took on a greater entrepreneurial rhetoric with Peter Mandelson's elevation to the DTI. The Minister is quoted as saying, after a visit to Silicon Valley in the USA, 'Setting the tone culturally is a key thing, showing the government is responsive to technological change and small companies' ('Mandelson plans a microchip off the old block' *Financial Times* 23/10/98; see also 'Mandelson backs drive to encourage entrepreneurs' *Financial Times* 15/12/98)

In the north east there is a similar concern with a lack of enterprise by the inhabitants of the region (this is in spite of Easington District Council claiming the area was full of 'enterprising people in their advertising). One supposed manifestation of an absence or failure of entrepreneurial spirit is seen in the North East TEC figures on regional self employment which stands at 9% as compared to 12.5% for Great Britain as a whole in May 97. The TECs in the region have produced a joint report entitled '*Building and Adaptable Workforce*' (NETEC 1998) which is almost entirely concerned with evolving strategies for

convincing the local population that they have to become more flexible. But there was evidence to suggest in some areas that while there was an enterprise culture, it was seen as not one that would be officially sanctioned:

...and what we've been trying to look at again...it's the culture within East Durham and I'm convinced because I'm trying to do something. The culture is ... I'm not gonna say Arthur Daley....but being enterprising in the broadest sense...I ain't got a job, I can work the black economy...and I'll earn money (Durham and Darlington TEC 16).

It is not easy to separate out the issues of culture, enterprise or dependency since in the discourse of regeneration the three themes are often run together or used as synonyms for each other. At times enterprise, and measures of entrepreneurship, stand as barometers of willingness to consider self-employment on the part of a particular population. At other times the same terms seem to be taken as ways of gauging economic activity per se. While at others it is taken to mean the willingness of workers to apply and take jobs outside their areas. The critique offered in all four places studies would seem to fit within a discussion of 'culture', with enterprise and dependency being two sides of the same coin. Thus there is a wish to see dependent places and un-enterprising ones, as independent and enterprising. The issue of dependence as the negative other to enterprise would often crop up in conversations during our fieldwork. In the case of South Wales the local MEP spoke in terms of a dependency culture deeply ingrained in the area:

Well inevitably I think there is a dependency culture there, if you like. The inactivity levels are very very high in all of these communities.

He spoke of the way the election of the new government in 1997 had led to an even greater demand on the part of his constituents for jobs to be *brought to* the Valleys rather than them move to where some were being created along the M4 corridor. He argued that there had to be a re-emergence of self-reliance in the Valleys but that that would require a 'big cultural change'. The interviewee at North Nottingham TEC made a comparison between the Mansfield area and the wider issue of coalfield insularity:

School- college-HE low achievement. The characteristics are always the same in coalfield communities, I could see exactly the same when I was in Barnsley and Doncaster. Presumably it was some sort of security that protected them from needing to change. In other words these are the industries that are sustainers they're there they're going to be there we don't need to do anything else and they provide us with a pretty well reasonable standard of living, certainly compared to the rest of the industry locally. So perhaps it's some sort of insularity that comes out of coalfield communities. Whatever it is it's the same, my experience says it's the same as other coalfield communities, the attitudes are the same. Lack of aspiration and therefore expectation.

What is being linked or elided here is the nature of the areas as coalfields and the sense in which this produces an absence of enterprise. What is suggested therefore is that the work culture or the work ethic permeated the extra-work community and culture. Such an explanation is able to account for poor qualifications and educational attainment at school and college, a lack of willingness to travel to find work, a reluctance to start one's own business and become self-employed. An interviewee from North Nottinghamshire College also located the discussion about lack of willingness on the part of men to get involved in higher education within a cultural framework:

I suppose a number of reasons, it's cultural I think partly...I mean traditionally people I suppose knew that they were leaving school and they would get a job down the pit. And

although that hasn't happened for a number of years it's difficult to get out of that culture isn't it.

In all of the places in the study issues of education and training were seen as important, and as historically neglected because of the coal industry. Again the coal fields construct themselves as 'needy places' through this absence. This emerges in the work of the Coal Field Task Force:

Particularly in more isolated mining communities, there are few large companies and no strong experiences of starting small businesses. The tradition of young men moving straight from school to pit produced communities in which formal educational qualifications were perceived as unnecessary (DETR, 1998, 8).

Figures from the North East Tecs point to the area being below national averages at both NVQ levels three and four, and Nottingham is also below national targets and levels for NVQ and school qualifications.

In this negative reading of the past the legacy of the coal industry becomes problematic. Interestingly such interpretations are articulated through the discourse of 'culture'. Such a development in itself could be seen to owe its genealogy to the growth in recent years of culturalist critiques of organisations, and in particular the idea that corporate success can be ensured by companies' having 'the right sort of culture' (Champy 1995; Deal and Kennedy 1988; Peters and Waterman 1982). Here the central role of management becomes the nurturing, or more precisely the creation of the kind of organisational culture that will ensure the successful survival of the company in the new, changed environment of the global market and flexible economy. Underpinning such a view are essentially unitaristic conceptualisations of both cultures and organisations. Susan Wright (1994) has written:

Culture has turned from being something an organisation **is** into something an organisation **has**, and from being a process embedded in context to an objectified tool of management control (Wright 1994, 4).

Earlier Lynn-Meek (1988) attacked what she believed was the misappropriation of sociological and anthropological understandings of culture by management theorist. She particularly objected to the way such groups adopted and then adapted structuralist functionalist notions of culture. The attraction for those studying organisations in such a way was the fact that a functionalist framework allowed a dualistic labelling of any group healthy/functional and non healthy/dysfunctional. Importantly it is management here who become the arbiters of what counts as either right or wrong within such a cultural landscape. While this kind of approach to culture within organisations has been immensely popular it has also been adopted by a range of public sector organisations. The logic of the argument, over how to tackle this question seems to have been taken furthest in the Manton area with the hiring of a North American 'culture change consultant'. As a member of staff from North Notts college explained:

...in essence it's an evangelical approach to changing attitudes in local communities, it appears to have some success so watch this space. With a view to having 12-15 people who act as facilitators, mentors or promoters or what ever in the area so that they will help to change the culture of the area..

Du Gay and Salaman (1992) argue that culture, in this unitarist sense, is a device that has been deployed rhetorically in a wide variety of organisational settings, and that at times this

is both inappropriate and damaging. Du Gay (1996) has also highlighted the way in which the 'enterprising subject' is taken as a role model not only for modern worker but also as one that should be aspired to in extra workplace situations. To be a 'good' worker or person is therefore linked to one's ability to be enterprising. Only the enterprising are fully human. The important point to make here for our purpose is that such a 'cultural turn' inevitably involves the simplification of complex structures and processes. In essence then it could be argued that this is what is occurring in both positive and negative accounts seen above. Here at times the former coal mining identity and culture can be seen as valuable, one that can be celebrated, commodified and 'sold' to inward investors. At other times the same culture can be labelled as old fashioned, backward looking, inflexible and unsuited to the fluid dynamic labour market of the late twentieth century. It is a short step to argue that the culture needs to change if the lot of the former coal communities is to improve.

To stay with the theme of enterprise for a little longer it is worth noting some of the critique that were produced by academics in the wake of the Thatcherite embrace of Victorian values and the need for a reinvigorated enterprise culture. Burrows and Curran (1991 9-10) note the way the new right have seen anti-enterprise and the social democratic collectivism as synonymous. And that further the right's position is crudely idealist and follows an 'agent-centred model'. Put simply enterprise or lack of it is the product of personal motivation, or lack of it. Thus failure of individuals or communities to be 'enterprising' is *their* fault and responsibility. But as Mason has noted it is vital to recognise the structural constraints that exist in any context, "the possibility of entrepreneurial praxis is thus historically conditioned and will always be inherently spatially uneven" (Mason 1991 quoted in Burrows and Curran 11). More recently, Rob MacDonald's work on young entrepreneurs on Teesside again stresses the importance of the context in which actors and businesses operate. MacDonald emphasises the importance of market demand and the need for strong supporting networks of family and friends in order for most small business to survive. Both of these factors were rare in the group that MacDonald studied because of the economic depressed nature of Teesside and the class background of the would-be business people.

Self-employment grew from two million in 1980 to three million by 1988. Considerable stimulus was given to this sector with some 200 legislative initiatives for small firms enacted from 1980 to 1985 (Burrows and Curran 20). The number of businesses registered for VAT increased by ¼ million plus. But the same authors note that the increase in small scale businesses may reflect crisis in Fordist production rather than a new set of social relations at work. And that further the rise in small businesses is counter cyclical, greater rise in times of recession. Put simply the rise in the number of smaller business may be seen as a sign of sickness rather than a healthy economy.

While successive political administrations have trumpeted the need for cultural change and entrepreneurship evidence on the ground points tentatively to a far more realistic evaluation as to the prospects of self employment and the type and quality of training available. As a member of the Mansfield Unemployed workers centre explained:

A lot of them (ex-miners) went off into training which, I know NVQs are poor quality and I am sure some NVQs aren't, but I expect a lot of it is just number crunching. I mean, we went and said that we know of one provider, where the instructors were actually doing the work, which the students would be assessed on. The TEC basically took the contract on, for 6 months and then let them back in again, still doing the same thing as they were before."

And he went on to explain the way policy directed toward retraining redundant mine workers had exacerbated the problems of an already slack labour market:

You got these people again, because they have got redundancy, they were trained in things like, Construction jobs, Gardening, areas which were already cutting back anyway, and suddenly you got this extra pressure on the work force of all these miners who had gone through this training with British Coal Enterprise, coming in and taking jobs. Even to the extent that you have got to come through with quite high qualifications from these training providers, which they still didn't have the ability to (do the job). Certainly, people in the building trade got very resentful about it, because they were saying 'there's people coming in prepared to work for lower wages than we have. Everybody is upset about the miners, we lost a quarter of a million jobs, over 10 years and nobody gives a monkey about that. Then they are coming in and are suppose to be qualified to do this and that, and they can't even hold the plans up the right way'.

And for those that did go in to business there were even greater problems:

So that was a problem. The other major one was self employment, because that was a big option. There was a lot of pressure to put people into self, you know to go self employed, which the support is there for the first 12 months. Well, for the 12 months you have got your redundancy money, you have got optimism. For 12 - 18 months, you are getting a bit desperate. Between 18 months and 24 months, when most of these businesses go bust, by then the supports gone. It just goes. The ticks are in the boxes right up till 18 months, no more ticks after that, so nobody gives a monkey.

A member of a TEC in the North East admitted that people had been pushed in to going on courses on self employment by the Benefits Agency in order that they didn't lose their benefit. Members of the TEC then had to 'counsel people out' of the ill thought out idea because it would ultimately mean the individual would be in an even worse position. The other form of lack of enterprise as we have seen is the perceived unwillingness to take other jobs. This was seen as being because of a variety of reasons including lack of willingness to travel or reluctance to take on different types of work. But what is rarely addressed in the literature from those involved in regeneration is the absolute scarcity of work. As a worker at the Aberdare unemployed worker's centre explained:

Greater part of the miners didn't find jobs, and we used to say over the last ten years if you were over 30 years of age you went for a job in this valley, no employer would admit it publicly, and no one of managerial position in the Benefit Agency would admit it publicly, and I don't blame them. But it was understood in this community that if you were over 40 you were just going through the bloody motions applying for a job, that was the score. But then you have also got the position that where you have jobs, it's like everywhere else they are part time jobs.

And the same interviewee continued about the age related policy adopted by a local employer:

You have got Hitachi up there in Iswyln whose 5 or six years old, the owners in his seventies but they had a company policy that they wouldn't employ anyone over 35 years old, they won't admit it publicly and the bloody owner of the factory is over 73 years of age. And they pay peanuts now in industry.

In the North East there was a similar recognition that the labour market that now existed could not support all those that had been made redundant:

Fifty-five year old men, that have left the pit, and when the collieries closed the decision was made, not their decision but the decision was also made in their own minds that they will never get another job. Now, that's the stark reality of the situation, erm, the jobs that are coming, that have come into the district and a number of them are for women as well, you know, so a lot of men haven't had the opportunities really (John Smith, East Durham Task Force).

This lack of employment generally had profound consequences for those whose job it was to encourage people to undertake retraining and educational courses. One interviewee, from Aberdare College noted the way it was an intergenerational problem:

There was one woman who was about 45/50, who was her daughter, and her granddaughter, and they were, the grandmother stood up and said "why should I be trained? Why should I go to these basic skills classes? there are no jobs anywhere!" You have an attitude from the grandmother, you have one from the daughter, granddaughter. It's the attitude.

And the call for communities to embrace education and training also comes up against the hard reality in some areas that employers themselves may not want their employees to get greater levels of qualification. As a member of North Notts. Tec pointed out one employer's attitude in his area:

"I don't need it, I don't need empowered young people, I need people to sit at this machine and do that, I don't want them thinking" two industries locally tell us that textiles and construction, their standards are NVQ level 2....So you've got two big industries locally saying "I don't want you to have too many aspirations, cos it doesn't suit my picture of the labour market".

This more subtle appreciation of the nature of the work ethic and attitudes to retraining seem to be most apparent in South Wales. Several interviewees noted the contradictory nature both of strong occupational identities that were the product of the coal mining industry and the rejection of work now:

...and there is a positive and a negative thing here. First of all there are young people today who would never put up with what my generation and certainly his generation would put up with. It manifests itself unfortunately in the worst extremes of total indifference to the older generation, to community pride, although I can understand, I hope I can understand some if not all the reasons for that because of this alienation of youth who have never found a job and bare in mind we are talking about youngsters now and it is a repeat performance of the '20s and '30s. Young people who have never, ever done a days work! And the negative feature of it is that there is no out let, and if there is an out let it is against society, and it is against the parents generation, or other people or their own peers. There is an underlying positive feature to it and that is they won't put up with just anything, now I am not tarring all the young people with the same brush, but they will say 'I am not working for that'. Now I can remember a time when most of my fathers generation when it was 'you be lucky my lad you have got a job, your uncle has been up the pit and he has got a job for you, now you be lucky!, your uncle or your grandfather, or your father was out of work for 12 years. But unfortunately that change has resulted in far too often in discharge of you know energy and revulsion against society but in the wrong way. But you see that with young people and how it affects their daily lives (Aberdare Unemployed workers' Centre).

And the same interviewee talked about the positive role work had had:

But the work ethic is a much bigger thing than that. Now what the younger generation have missed out on is the work ethic and missed out on an important thing and I will draw

the parallel from my own experience when I started work I not only started work with my peers, I not only started working in industry with my fathers generation but I was actually working with my grandfather's generation. And I learnt from it!.

And Davie Guy from Durham NUM also noted a similar socialisation process that work had produced:

Young people entering the mining industry were very very quickly brought into an atmosphere of self-discipline, because when they got underground you have to have good discipline...There is a code of conduct, for health and safety and you might have three generations of people working in the mine and the elderly generations was always very well respected.

A member of South Wales Police spoke in similar terms:

"No! I mean, they are hard areas. I mean, they're hard drinking. I mean the culture of South Wales has been physical labour, dangerous, physical labour, in the mines, you know, it's a dangerous occupation, yet it was a proud occupation. I think, every miner that you would talk to was extremely proud of the occupation, proud that he was doing a 'man's work' and took a great pride in that. And allied to that, I mean was, they were heavy drinking areas, lots of pubs and there was a community spirit. And I think, people took a tremendous pride in the fact, you know, that they were doing an honest day's toil, and there was a wonderful community spirit. You know, the coal industry, you know, they felt, you know on the picket lines, that they were fighting for their way of life".

The absence of that type of work for most in the valley had had tremendous implication:

"Yeah, yeah. But then, there is a problem, there is no, how can I say? Male figures, that they can identify with, or adopt as role models, you know. As I said, when I was growing up in the Cynon Valley, as I said, you had people going to work in the mines, in the pits, you know, they were in employment, the family unit was still intact.

Other interviewees noted the way the lack of a work culture had effected expectation and attitudes to work. One responded in particular focussed on the way important links between life stages were now missing that in the past would have been filled by work:

...but you go onto those estates and you see people, male and female, but more male, my age group, who are there and they're possibly the second and third generation of unemployed people, right, and again it's this expectation that there's no need to work because it's totally alien to them and the money comes in and they're just sort of being kept down really at that level because they don't know anything else, they've no other way of life and the problem there is that, I have to be careful how I say this, when I say they're afraid of work I don't mean they're afraid of physical labour but they're afraid of the unknown

And she went on:

I always give this example to anyone....if you go through your own life, your first major change in your life is when you go to secondary school probably because you can't remember starting school, so you go through school and you worry about going to secondary school... So you jump over into secondary school and some people miss that jump and they fall out at that stage...people don't like secondary school.....but most people carry on through secondary school...the next major jump in you life is employment, from school to employment, and I mean if you miss that jump from this cliff to that cliff there...it's an abyss and it's really hard to get out of that, so when I say people are afraid of



work, it's the physical fright of the unknown As an example of that sort of jumping over that second gap, and that frightening step (Wales Co-op).

The result in South Wales at least was interpreted as being a significant group of people had simply dropped out of the labour market because of little or no connection with it:

You see, you know, driving home in the nights, you'll see a group of them standing by the bus stops drinking lager about five o'clock in the evening because basically they've got no expectations of themselves, they've got no expectations to work, they get a good...not a good living that's totally the wrong word...but they're satisfied with what they've got then because possibly they've got a girlfriend, with two children, so she's having income support (Wales Co-op, p14).

And as a member of Rhondda Cynon Taff economic development department noted this had implication for the area's ability to attract companies on the basis of the availability of high quality labour force:

What they've done is, they've created success and jobs 80% of those jobs are going to be taken from other companies. Companies are having to put their rates up in order to retain their staff. So it does have a knock on effect I think companies like Wales are now starting to develop problems of availability of work force, you're now getting into that core availability, it's getting less and less and less. And you are now getting down to, you know, the young people. You're down to that core of people, and being totally ignored with.

This sentiment was echoed by the South Wales Police:

And the social skills and the literary skills, the abilities and capabilities that a workforce has got there I don't think is all that high. And I don't mean to be derogatory to the perspective employers, but I would think that there isn't that pool then, of a well trained workforce, within the Cynon Valley, so, I mean I can't, personally, see that things are getting better in the short term.

This last section has attempted to show the complexity of the situation that exists in the communities themselves. Put simply an analysis built on simplistic understandings of culture and enterprise ignores the complex interrelationships between individual and collective agency and the structures that both enable and constrain them.

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