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ABSTRACT

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) is a benefit paid to workers who lose their jobs in industries that face increasing competition from imported goods. TAA is supposed to offset political pressures for protectionist legislation, and it has been justified on grounds of equity and efficiency as well. Research on TAA shows that it has failed to aid many workers in adjusting to job losses in industries hurt by imports. More than 97 percent of the \$4 billion spent on TAA from 1962 to 1986 went to pay cash benefits to workers unemployed from trade-affected firms. Retraining and relocation assistance accounted for less than 3 percent of TAA spending. The research suggests that TAA recipients had longer durations of unemployment than did comparable nonrecipients. A serious flaw in the system is that there are long administrative delays in certifying a firm or industry for benefits. Some researchers have suggested that paying benefits in a lump sum rather than weekly would increase the chance that a worker would seek employment or training. However, it must be considered that there may be no other jobs available that pay as well, so employees prefer to wait and hope for recall. Taking new jobs may be made more attractive by providing wage subsidies or reemployment bonuses. Recent changes in the program have increased emphasis on job search and retraining. (KC)

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TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE:

PART OF THE SOLUTION, OR PART OF THE PROBLEM?

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The National Commission for Employment Policy (NCEP) monograph series is dedicated to exploring important issues that influence employment and training policies and programs. This monthly publication will address a wide range of issues associated with the workplace and labor market. Research and information will be presented with the objective of enhancing public discussion concerning these issues and assisting those decisionmakers involved with the Nation's employment and training agenda.

The NCEP, established by the Congress through the Job Training Partnership Act, is an independent Federal agency with responsibility for examining broad issues associated with the development, coordination, and administration of employment and training programs, and for advising the President and the Congress on related policy issues.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There seems to be a consensus among those who have studied Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) that it has failed to aid many workers to adjust to job losses in industries hurt by imports. This paper discusses that view and related issues in the larger context of public policy towards structural adjustments and worker dislocation. Over 97 percent of the \$4 billion spent on TAA since 1962 went to pay cash benefits to workers unemployed from trade-affected firms. Retraining and relocation assistance accounted for less than 3 percent of TAA spending.

TAA is supposed to be an offset to political pressures for protectionist legislation, and has been justified on grounds of equity and efficiency as well. The paper traces the experience with the program through its most recent renewal in 1986. Research suggests that TAA recipients, on average, had longer durations of unemployment than did comparable non-recipients. Recent changes have increased emphasis on job search and retraining. Trade legislation under consideration in both the House and the Senate expands assistance to trade-affected workers and farmers, while the Administration has proposed an expanded program for dislocated workers regardless of the sector of their former jobs.

Trade Adjustment Assistance is paid to workers through the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, once the Labor Department has certified the eligibility of firm or industry for benefits. Administrative delays in making these certifications are among the most serious flaws in the system. Some students of TAA have argued that lump-sum payments, rather than weekly UI-like disbursements would lessen the incentive to remain unemployed and increase the chance a worker would enter training or take a new job. An important consideration is the fact that there may be no other jobs available that pay as well, so that workers may prefer to wait (and hope) for recall to their former employers. This happens often enough that some firms and workers may be using TAA as supplemental UI, rather than aiding movement to a new industry. Taking new jobs may be made more attractive by providing wage subsidies or reemployment bonuses. As it is presently constituted, TAA does not foster significant adjustment.

"Finally, it is worth noting that compulsory training, as suggested in at least one new bill, would also improve targeting on displaced workers. Obviously, workers who anticipate recall would be unlikely to enter training programs." (Louis Jacobson, 1986)

"If, however, training is mandatory--that is, if it is a condition for receiving supplemental readjustment allowances --then many workers will enroll simply as a way of obtaining added benefits." (Robert Lawrence and Robert Litan, 1986)

As the above quotations indicate, there is no scholarly consensus on the likely effects of requiring enrollment in training in order to receive cash benefits. There is rather more consensus, among the quoted authors and others, on the effects of Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), a Federal program which began in 1962. The consensus is that TAA has succeeded in providing compensation to at least some workers displaced by trade, but has been a failure in aiding worker adjustment to trade-related reductions in jobs. (See Stone and Sawhill for a recent view.) The goal of this paper is to put that consensus into a larger context of public policy towards structural adjustments in general and worker dislocation in particular.

It should be noted that TAA's failure in aiding labor market adjustment has been a bipartisan one, with administrations and legislators of both parties accountable. Over the past two decades, about \$4 billion has been expended on TAA. Less than 3 percent of this amount went to retraining or relocation assistance. Almost all of the rest represented compensation payments, most of which reached affected workers too late to aid transition to new jobs and/or under regulations which discouraged taking new jobs. To the extent that TAA has been consciously used by both workers and firms as supplemental unemployment compensation to finance temporary layoffs, the criticism about lack of transition aid is not applicable. One can then put forward a criticism of mistargeting of program resources, if aiding transition to new jobs was intended by legislators and administrators, or a criticism of mislabeling or deception if it was not.

RATIONALES FOR TAA

Trade adjustment assistance as a way of helping workers to find new jobs is a reaction to a specific kind of dislocation: reduced U.S. employment in the industries competing with increased imports. TAA as a program supported by politicians is a substitute, or believed to be a substitute, for protectionist legislation. Such legislation would seek to limit growth in

reestablished in the labor market than do workers unemployed for cyclical reasons or those who leave jobs voluntarily. Part of this difficulty is based on unfamiliarity with the current labor market, and part on the regional concentration of adversely-affected industries, and hence unemployed persons. The first area of difficulty is even more difficult for workers with less schooling or skills, while the second is even more difficult if declining firms are not being succeeded by expanding ones in other industries.

The case for compensating workers displaced by import competition is weakened in the eyes of some analysts if high wages had helped to put domestic output at a cost disadvantage. Steel and automobiles are two of the most frequently-cited industries in which international competition entered a previously protected market and made the old cost structure untenable. Recent wage and benefit concessions may have mitigated some job losses, but the wage expectations of workers displaced from such industries may be "unrealistic," delaying adjustment and prolonging unemployment. Given seniority-based layoff procedures, however, those who have benefitted least from entering a high wage industry are those most likely to be displaced from it, and their reemployment difficulties are no less real for being in part due to earlier union-management bargains.

The efficiency argument for introducing a program such as TAA is based on the existence of "imperfections" in markets for borrowing investment funds for new equipment or for training of employees. In the absence of such barriers, workers and firms would make necessary shifts in products, industries or occupations in response to market signals. There would still be winners and losers under perfect competition, but the nation's resources of land, labor and capital would be employed optimally.

Freer trade is a policy goal because living standards around the world are expected to be higher with international trade, compared to a competitive world without trade. With trade, nations can concentrate on exporting those goods and services in which they have a comparative advantage and import goods and services for which their resources are less well-adapted. Since comparative advantages are not static, but change as underlying conditions change, countries need to adjust over time to shifts in the optimal pattern of national output. Because imperfect information and financing constraints are the norm in the real world, well-targeted governmental intervention can reduce impediments to the economy's moving toward a more efficient distribution of resources, while reducing painful transition periods for displaced workers. From a national perspective, this is preferable to protectionist legislation.

Such legislation is supposed to protect firms in trade-affected sectors of the economy while they increase investment in equipment and worker training in order to become more competitive. A recent review of the major protected industries (textiles and apparel, steel, footwear and automobiles) by the Congressional Budget Office found that protection did not significantly increase the international competitiveness of the firms in

those industries (Congressional Budget Office, 1986). Protection did lower living standards for the rest of the U.S. economy and the world, because it kept more resources in less-productive uses than would have happened under a less-protectionist trade regime.

A final justification for protection of specific industries is based on national defense considerations. Certain industries or products are alleged to be crucial to national security and should not be provided wholly or largely by foreign sources of supply. If this is the case, it has been argued that the subsidies needed to maintain the domestic industry should be explicitly funded through the Department of Defense budget (Lawrence and Litan, 1986). Neither these subsidies nor the other costs of protectionism are now easily identifiable: trade adjustment assistance is an explicitly funded element of the Federal budget, that attempts to spread more broadly at least some of the burden of trade-related change, supported by the three rationales of politics, equity and efficiency.

HISTORY OF TAA

The program's history can be divided into four phases. Although trade adjustment assistance proposals were discussed in the 1950's, the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 was the first legislation linking economic injury due to imports with Federal provision of adjustment aid. The burden of proof was very much on the affected workers and firms: they had to show that trade liberalization had resulted in increased imports, which in turn were the "major" cause of reduced domestic sales and jobs. In any event, no petitions were approved prior to 1969.

During the remainder of the first phase, the first half of the 1970's, 35,000 workers received TAA, with about 10 percent receiving training, placement or relocation assistance, and the remainder receiving cash Trade Readjustment Allowances only. Payments were calculated as supplements to Unemployment Insurance (UI), but frequently were not disbursed until many months after displacement. This time lag was due primarily to delays in the Labor Department certification process once petitions for aid were submitted.

The 1974 Trade Act, marking the second phase, made it easier for workers and firms to qualify for assistance. It was no longer necessary to prove a connection between trade concessions and lost sales, and increased imports had only to be shown to be an "important" cause of lost jobs, not the major cause. Compensation payments continued to be integrated with the UI system, with TAA supplementing the worker's State UI payment while that lasted (usually 26 weeks) and maintaining that level (70 percent of the previous weekly wage) for up to 26 weeks more (a year in all). If the worker was in a retraining program when the year ended, TAA support could be continued for up to 26 more weeks.

Persistent delays in the Labor Department's determination of the

importance of imports to reduced domestic sales often meant that by the time a petition for assistance was approved, most of the workers had been recalled to their old jobs, implying mistargeting if the goal was aiding transition. The delays, combined with the program's implementation via UI, provided an incentive to delay taking a new job, relocating or retraining. Conditioning receipt of money on staying unemployed increased the average length of time people remained unemployed, according to statistical analyses of the labor market experiences of TAA recipients (Corson and Nicholson, 1981).

While training was ostensibly a key component of the 1974 Trade Act, the Federal government did not appropriate sufficient money to meet the demand for (re)training. Also, the Department of Labor did not enforce the provision of the legislation that made allowances contingent on training. Consequently, while 1.3 million workers received some amount of TAA allowances between 1976 and 1981, fewer than 50,000 entered training (Lawrence and Litan, 1986).

The third phase began with changes in TAA under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981. These changes included attempting to make eligibility more difficult to obtain, by requiring imports to be a "substantial" cause of job loss, rather than an "important" cause. This provision was never implemented and has been rescinded. Also changed, with more effect, was the method of payment: since 1981 TAA benefits only supplement the period of compensation under UI. That is, additional weeks are paid at the claimant's State-determined UI rate, which is typically 50 percent or less of the previous wage--the payments are not "topped up" to 70 percent of the previous wage, as under the 1975-81 rules.

Dollar outlays and numbers of recipients dropped substantially under the new regulations, which made the program both less attractive and harder to enter. The percentage of eligibles entering retraining in 1982-84 increased substantially over the 1976-81 rate, but the percentage of those who completed retraining who were placed in jobs using that training fell. (Lawrence and Litan, Table 3-7.) These results probably reflect a combination of program incentives and the slacker labor market of the 82-84 period compared to the earlier years.

TAA was extended to the end of Fiscal Year 1991 under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, signed by the President in April 1986. Changes in this fourth phase include a requirement that receipt of allowances is conditional on participation in a job search program, and that workers are to be encouraged, but not required, to enter job training programs. This is a compromise between the former provisions and those in several proposed versions of the reauthorization which mandated (again) retraining in order to receive income support under TAA. The Labor Department has made an administrative decision that States are not to use TAA funds for the development or administration of new job search programs, on the grounds that existing programs are adequate. The effect of these changes on the number and proportion of those receiving adjustment services remains to be seen. Given the quotations at the beginning of this paper, it is clear that

expectations will be both confounded and confirmed.

RELATED LEGISLATIVE APPROACHES

Title III of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) authorizes programs for dislocated workers regardless of the reason for their job losses. Title III programs are administered by States, with 75% of the funds allocated by formula to the States. The remaining 25% is distributed by the Secretary of Labor as "discretionary" grants in response to applications. In its December 1986 report, the Secretary's Task Force on Economic Adjustment and Worker Dislocation (chaired by Malcolm Lovell) proposed moving Title III programs and TAA training programs into a "Dislocated Worker Unit" separate from JTPA, and approximately tripling the funding level, to about \$900 million per year. In its FY 88 budget proposal, the Labor Department has proposed a similar expansion of funding. The realization that worker displacement will be an ongoing, chronic problem, rather than a "crisis" that can be solved once and for all appears to be gaining acceptance.

The House of Representatives is currently considering H.R. 3, first introduced in the previous session as "The Trade and International Economic Policy Reform Act of 1986," part of which would amend JTPA to authorize programs for workers unemployed through trade-related events. One provision is that the Secretary of Labor is given the authority to determine that entire industries are adversely affected by trade, rather than wait for petitions from workers and/or firms as under TAA. The expressed intent is to cut the time required to get programs established to aid workers (including farmers).

A broad range of activities is authorized for certified workers, as in Title III and TAA. Unlike Title III, displaced workers would be eligible for subsistence stipends under the trade bill, if they are not receiving UI or TAA payments. Other provisions establish a procedure to fund programs aiding adjustment, run by joint labor-management committees (as in Canada) and call for a demonstration program to test the idea of providing workers with direct payments of up to \$4,000 to finance training that they select from an array of "certified providers."

On the Senate side, Subtitle B of "The Omnibus Trade Act of 1987" (S.490) amends the TAA legislation to allow farm workers and workers at "secondary" firms affected by trade to be eligible for benefits. (An example of a secondary firm might be a farm implements dealer.) The bill also requires the Secretary of Labor to provide eligible workers with up to \$4,000 to finance training. Financing would be by an import duty, which was part of the original design of TAA. Fitting the temper of the times, the emphasis of TAA is to be changed from compensation to enhanced competitiveness.

Many other parts of both trade bills have implications for labor market policy, but lie outside the scope of this paper. It should be noted, however, that the Congressional approach seems to be based on the

trade/competitiveness or "cause-related" rationale, while the Labor Department and Task Force approach is to fold TAA training programs (although not necessarily separate TAA cash benefits) into generic displaced worker programs.

POLICY ISSUES

A central theme of policy analysis is that the implementation and execution of programs and policies may not match the rhetoric used when they are proposed. Often, too, policies are advocated and adopted because they make the best of a bad situation. Such is the case with TAA—especially when compared to the alternative of protectionism through quotas. If adjustment assistance could be provided to significant numbers of workers, in addition to the compensation represented by extension of UI benefits, TAA would be a more valuable offset to protectionism than it has been.

However, there is also the possibility that TAA may act like flood insurance: its availability as compensation may discourage movement of workers out of the danger zone (declining industry). This is more true the less timely is the certification process. The development of Title III of JTPA as a functioning alternative to TAA programs has helped reopen the debate on providing assistance to displaced workers, regardless of reason for displacement, versus providing assistance to workers displaced by trade in particular.

A major difference between TAA and JTPA is that once certified, a worker's TAA benefit is an entitlement, similar to UI, with which it is linked. JTPA programs are limited by a fixed budget authorization, provide no stipends, and entrance to them is controlled by program administrators. This could result in a situation in which some workers would be entitled to TAA payments while taking JTPA retraining courses, while other workers, with equal labor market difficulties, would have to obtain income support elsewhere. JTPA program administrators might then prefer to enroll TAA-funded workers over other applicants, on the grounds that their greater security of financial support promises a lower dropout rate.

If compensation to workers displaced by trade is regarded as an entitlement once their petitions have been approved, should retraining and other assistance also be an entitlement? By entitlement in this context, we mean guaranteed entry to a program. Program administrators need to have some control over admissions to particular courses, in order to match aptitudes and abilities to course requirements, but can an appropriate place be found for everyone who wants training? Evidence from demonstration programs operating prior to the start of JTPA as well as from Title III programs indicates that for displaced workers who want to stay in the labor force, a "cafeteria" approach makes sense. That is, a range of services should be available to fit the needs and desires of the diversity of experiences. The practical problem is that the number of "slots" in all programs currently

available is much less than the number of persons who would be entitled to program services if this approach were followed.

Another issue open for debate has to do with the fact that workers' labor market behavior can be affected by how benefits are paid. One view is that lump-sum compensation payments immediately upon displacement are preferable to periodic payments during the spell of unemployment. The latter approach can reduce the incentive to search for work and take a new job, opposite to the intention of trade adjustment assistance. The UI/TAA connection means that workers have reasons to wait until their benefits run out before taking new jobs. If TAA is primarily valued as a way to secure political support for liberalized trade arrangements, the argument for lump-sum payments is even stronger, since influencing subsequent labor market behavior is not an objective. It should be emphasized that a finding of negative average effects on job search and reemployment incentives does not necessarily mean that all or even most displaced workers shirk searching or refuse jobs they would otherwise take. However, to the extent that a significant minority of workers are likely to experience longer spells of unemployment, program costs are higher and labor market efficiency lower than would be the case under a lump-sum arrangement, under which all or most workers received a payment equalling some fraction of their maximum benefit.

A major problem with TAA remains the length of time required before workers establish eligibility and thus start to receive payments. One of the strongest findings coming from research and demonstration programs for displaced workers is that time is crucial. Intervention is most effective if begun before layoff, or at least early in the period of unemployment. TAA payments extending UI become effective at the end of UI eligibility, usually after six months of unemployment. It may take even longer than that, however, for the Labor Department to certify groups of workers as trade-displaced. In any case, workers who are unemployed from import-affected industries have some incentive to prolong their unemployment in order to qualify for TAA benefits. If the provisions in the trade legislation being considered by the House of Representatives remain unchanged in any final version, the Secretary of Labor will have authority to determine industry eligibility for TAA without having to wait for worker or firm petitions. This has the potential to shorten the delays in entering this program.

Another issue stems from the fact that workers in industries adversely affected by trade that are relatively high wage sectors of the economy frequently face a substantial drop in earnings if they accept jobs in other, lower-paying, industries. This can occur even in industries in low-wage regions, such as textiles in the Southeast. A consistent finding in TAA research and with other research on displaced workers is that a high proportion of workers laid off from declining industries return to their old jobs within two to three years. This may, in fact, be an outcome that is desired by both workers and firms, as already discussed. (For example, see the studies cited by Louis Jacobson, and the recent NCEP-sponsored study by Crosslin, et al.) Often this is because the old jobs are much higher-paying

than anything else available in more stable or growing industries.

One proposal to help overcome workers' reluctance to move to lower-wage jobs with better long range prospects is called "earnings insurance." (Lawrence and Litan, pp. 112-113.) The program would pay workers some proportion of the difference between their former earnings and the new (lower) earnings. The proportion would decline to zero over some period, such as a year. The period of time over which earnings insurance would be paid would be longer, and the proportion of lost earnings "replaced" would start at a higher level, for displaced workers who had had more time in the affected industry. (For similar ideas, see Committee for Economic Development, 1984, p. 65.) Such wage subsidy programs have been used by other industrialized countries--it is usually concluded that the major effect is to redistribute jobs towards displaced, experienced workers and away from new entrants to the labor force, who would have been hired except for the "price cut" on the displaced.

The Department of Labor and the State of New Jersey are currently conducting a demonstration research effort within the UI system which is also relevant to the issues just raised. One of the "treatments" to be made available to a subgroup of the sample is a "reemployment bonus." During the seventh week of their unemployment, members of the subgroup will be told that if they find full-time permanent jobs within the next two full weeks, they will be paid a cash bonus approximately equal to one-half their remaining entitlement (about \$1,500 in New Jersey). The bonus will then begin to decline by ten percent per week, reaching zero at the end of eighteen weeks of benefits. If such an approach encourages workers to move to new full-time permanent jobs (temporary and part-time jobs do not qualify for bonuses), it could be incorporated into TAA even if a State chose not to institute it for the regular UI program. (Stephen Wandner and Jon Messenger, 1986.) In addition to the bonus, classroom training, on-the-job training and relocation assistance services are being offered to other experimental groups. At the mid-point of the project, the average duration of unemployment insurance claims is lower for all experimental groups than for the control group. (USDOL Status Report #3, 1/23/87)

CONCLUSIONS

If government programs were subject to truth in labeling regulations, Trade Adjustment Assistance would have to find a new name. Very little retraining or relocation adjustment has taken place, largely due to the minimal amount of resources provided by the Federal government for such assistance, but also due to the reluctance of workers to shift jobs, for whatever reasons. Since the TAA program began, about 1.5 million persons have received cash payments for job losses and reduced earnings incurred in the national interest of freer trade, so that some Federally-financed adjustment has undeniably taken place. There is at least anecdotal evidence that workers and firms may view TAA primarily as supplemental unemployment compensation. In order for workers to be assisted more effectively to move

to jobs with a better future, however, more program resources would have to be devoted to assessment, counseling, training and job development efforts.

The use of earnings insurance, bonuses, retraining programs, etc. may help workers leave what amounts to a labor reserve for the higher-paying industries. This may encourage the firms in these industries to use layoffs and recalls less frequently as a response to cyclical fluctuations. The Nation would thus have a better policy perspective on structural unemployment if it were not masked by cyclical unemployment that is avoidable by improved workforce management.

Employment in industries producing goods which are internationally traded has historically been more subject to supply and demand shocks and cyclical variability than employment in industries serving only domestic markets. Displacement has disproportionately occurred in trade-sensitive sectors of the economy. Firms and workers in such sectors, since they are most directly affected, have been active proponents of protectionist legislation and other efforts to reduce their economic losses. The more widely-diffused gains to the economy have lacked an equivalent constituency. Trade adjustment assistance programs can offset some of this protectionist pressure if they are appropriately designed and adequately funded. The failure of TAA to achieve its stated objectives should not cause policymakers to throw up their hands in despair, but to roll up their sleeves and get to work to help design a system fostering real adjustment. There are some signs that this message has been received; not so much by the sudden realization of the correctness of economists' arguments, but by the "discipline of the deficit" and the need to improve performance in international competition.

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