

Unions and job quality in the UK: extending interest representation within regulation institutions

Abstract

This paper presents a counterpoint to a structuralist view of job quality (Kalleberg 2011) and argues that it can be understood as an outcome of contested power dynamics of interest representation within institutions of labor market regulation. The paper presents studies of unions in two sectors in the UK (healthcare and industrial cleaning) where 'bad jobs' are common. It examines how unions have sought to regulate job quality through representing new interests within existing institutions and by extending institutional regulation to new groups. The evidence highlights the contested nature of these decisions and the importance of collective actors in exercising agency in seeking to improve job quality. The evidence shows how new interests can be promoted within institutions to (seek to) improve job quality, despite internal resistance.

Key words: job quality, labor unions, interests, institutions, collective bargaining, union renewal, union organizing

Existing literature on job quality (perhaps most notably Kalleberg, 2011) has been criticized for taking a structuralist view of the labor market (Vallas and Prener 2012). Although Kalleberg (2012) has responded to this by emphasizing the interplay of structure and agency, there has been relatively little written about *how* collective actors influence job quality. This paper therefore examines how trade unions (try to) exert agency within institutions of labor market regulation to promote the interests of workers around issues of job quality. The paper looks at two sectors where unions have been active in addressing issues of job quality to understand how they develop and respond to the challenge of representing workers' interests as labor markets change.

Despite the lack of agreement on a single conceptualization of job quality (see Findlay, Kalleberg and Warhurst 2013 for a useful summary), Osterman (2013) summarizes that job quality studies tend to focus on the interaction of five components: compensation, diversity in the substance of work, control, stress and work intensification, and the employment contract especially with regard to involuntary non-standard aspects. This paper takes these components and examines how unions have attempted to expand their representational scope to improve aspects of job quality for two occupational groups: industrial cleaners and healthcare assistants.

There are lively debates about how processes of interest formation and representation can be understood when trade unions both have agency within representation and bargaining structures, and are also influenced by those structures. A particularly important contribution in those debates is that of Wailes, Ramia and Lansbury (2003)

who draw on comparative political economy literature to argue that studies of trade unionism (and labor relations more generally) need to take more account of how interests of particular groups are represented within institutions such as collective bargaining, wage setting bodies, etc. This “interest-based institutionalism” is helpful as it addresses the central critique that more institutionalist analyses risk seeing institutions as monolithic and unchanging structures. The challenge is to recognize the importance institutions exert over labor relations outcomes while also accounting for how collective actors (unions and employers) exert agency to promote their interests. What is less clear, however, is *how* particular interests – and especially those of more marginalized groups – are represented (or not) within institutions and how actors are able to create and promote new interests and institutions as labor markets change. This paper considers examples of how existing representative institutions have been challenged by pressures on job quality and have created the conditions under which new interests and institutions emerge.

Trade unions, declining influence and job quality

The paper reports evidence from a study funded by the European Commission looking at occupational groups where there are known issues with poor job quality, examining how trade unions have expanded their scope to represent workers they have not historically organized. The focus here is on cleaners and healthcare assistants in the UK where downward pressures on job quality are strong but where unions have had some success in broadening their representational remit around job quality issues. These occupational groups have not been core constituencies for the unions, so they present a

useful setting in which to explore the ways in which unions influence institutions to represent new interests.

Osterman's (2013) categories give useful measures against which to assess job quality within the occupational groups. We can see aspects of bad jobs in all of the components of job quality. For cleaners, pay is low, typically only just above the national minimum wage. Work is closely routinized and monitored. There are often few voice mechanisms (trade union representation and alternatives) and workers are often exposed to significant health and safety risks (chemicals, shift work etc.) with relatively low levels of information about risk management. Eurofound (2013) reports that involuntary part-time and fixed-term contracts are common across the cleaning sector and there are low levels of employer-provided training. By contrast, healthcare assistants (HCAs) do tend to operate in workplaces where there are voice mechanisms although, as we shall see, they are less well organized than many other occupational groups in the sector. Pay is relatively low, although often not quite as low as cleaning work, and again they confront extensive health and safety issues around shift work, heavy lifting, needle stick injuries, and abuse. Particular concerns relate to the lack of national regulation about what their job roles involve meaning that there is significant variation between employers with regard to access to training, career progression etc. In both sectors, jobs are typically relatively routine and tightly supervised. Importantly, both occupational groups are comprised of workers (often women) with relatively few alternative labor market opportunities.

A problematic aspect of some studies is the idea that job quality is a fixed characteristic of work. It is notable that there is relatively little attention paid in job quality literature

to the role collective actors and institutions may have in *improving* bad jobs. Access to union representation and collective bargaining are sometimes taken as independent variables of worker voice which might contribute to indices of job quality (Leschke et al 2012) or as a factor that helps explain a general decline of job quality in a particular setting (Vidal 2013, Applebaum and Schmitt 2009). Unions are rarely explicitly researched as actors that may themselves have an effect on changing (improving) job quality. This is problematic as it views union influence on job quality as a measurement that is fixed. Osterman (2013: 740) sums up this view succinctly: “Job quality is determined by decisions made by employers regarding the range of working conditions.”

This paper takes a different view informed by the extensive labor relations literature that studies how unions seek to improve job quality, although it is notable that this is not usually the language in which those studies are framed. Developing quantitative work by Bryson, Barth and Dale-Olsen (2013) this paper presents qualitative evidence that where union representation exists, some aspects of job quality are the outcome of collective agreement between unions and employers. As we shall see, the role of unions in influencing job quality is important even in the UK which has a more lightly regulated labor market and lower levels of collective bargaining than many other European countries. The analysis presented here is therefore a counterpoint to an understanding of job quality that sees unions as passive, in favor of a more active view of their role within institutions that can influence the regulation of job quality.

The broader context of the decline of union influence has also been a focus of lively debates on the pages of this journal. Many studies of union renewal efforts do take a

view of unions as key actors with an interest in extending membership and acting around issues of job quality. Many studies of union renewal have taken the approach of emphasizing the agency unions exert in their efforts to renew their membership and influence (amongst many others Simms et al 2013, Cornfield and McCammon 2003, Luce 2005, Burawoy 2008). These studies tend to focus on efforts of unions to mobilize workers, rather than how they extend existing representational structures such as collective bargaining which is the focus of this paper. There is a tendency to contrast organizing activity with representational work (Heery 2002) rather than examining how organizing activity can strengthen, extend and renew bargaining.

The central question addressed here is therefore how unions have represented workers' interests around job quality within institutional mechanisms for the collective regulation of labor markets such as collective bargaining, minimum wage regulation and legal regulation. What is clear is that, despite some serious constraints on their wider impact, unions can and do respond to the interests of workers in bad jobs, even where that requires a broadening of interest representation mechanisms. This is particularly important because unions often seek to organize these workers because of the risk that their terms and conditions may undermine job quality of existing members. In other words, there is recognition that the institutions of labor market regulation need to change as the structures of labor markets change.

Interests and institutions in labor relations

If the field of labor relations is the study of the regulation of the employment relationship, then the role of institutions is centrally important (Western 1997,

Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999, Thelen and Steinmo 1992). However, recent debates in labor relations have started to focus on how ideas and interests shape the behavior of actors (here: unions) within the employment relationship and within institutions regulating the employment relationship (Pontusson 1995, Pontusson and Swenson 1996, Hauptmeier and Heery 2014). This 'ideational turn' develops and extends an increasing focus on the role of ideas (and of particular importance here are ideas about how actors conceptualize the interests they represent) within institutions of political economy more widely (Campbell 1998, Campbell 2002, Hall 1998, Pontusson and Swenson 1996). Authors such as Brady (2007) and Wailes et al (2003) argue that adopting an institutionalist approach risks underplaying the interests of collective actors as potential explanations of why institutions behave in particular ways. Addressing this, interest-based theories argue that coalitions of interest groups create particular sets of interests that can be promoted within institutions (Rogowski 1989). Wailes et al (2003) argue that both institutions and interests are important in explaining labor relations outcomes. This approach has been taken up in a number of important comparative contributions (Pulignano 2006; Edwards, Colling and Ferner 2007) but relatively little attention has been paid to the process by which particular interest positions are both influenced by and influence institutions.

As trade unions are the main collective actors representing workers in those institutions regulating of job quality (specifically here: collective bargaining and legal regulation), it is therefore important that we consider how unions define the interests they choose to represent because some groups have historically been excluded or sidelined (Hyman 1999). Specifically, although regulating job quality is a central union objective, unions have long been criticized for a narrow focus of *which* jobs are

regulated (Hyman 1999). Excluded groups often include migrant workers, casualized workers and workers in newly emerging occupations who may also challenge unions by bringing new sets of interests that have not previously been represented. This paper starts to address a weakness of labor relations theory that tends to have a poor understanding of how workers' (or trade union members') interests come to be represented in labor relations institutions (Simms 2007). This paper therefore presents evidence as to how and why trade unions seek to represent workers with poor job quality. By examining case studies of union campaigns that include strong features of efforts to improve job quality, the dynamic interaction of institutions and interests becomes clearer. This data focuses on the UK but it is likely that these findings have a wider relevance in other national settings (cf Campbell and Brosnan 2005; Ryan and Herod 2006).

From this overview of two related, but largely separate, bodies of literature, three questions emerge that are addressed in this paper. First, what are the concerns of union around issues of job quality in these occupations? Second, how do interests around job quality come to be represented when workers in those occupations have not previously been included in institutions of job regulation? Third, what do those campaigns tell us about the circumstances under which unions choose to act to represent job quality interests within institutions?

The research

Bargaining for Social Rights (BARSORI) and its follow up project Bargaining for Social Rights at Sectoral level (BARSORIS) are European Commission funded, seven country

comparative studies (UK, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany Slovakia, Spain, Italy) looking broadly at collective bargaining for precarious workers with poor job quality. Country reports and comparative overview reports have been produced. BARSORI ran throughout 2011 and BARSORIS ran throughout 2014. This paper focuses on the UK evidence that mapped union policies and investigated case studies of sectors where particular pressures on job quality have created the context in which unions have sought to organize and represent these workers.

The rather ill-defined notion of 'precarious work' maps closely onto that of 'poor job quality' or 'bad jobs' in the sense of being precarious on a number of measures simultaneously. Osterman's (2013) five core components are used to evaluate occupational job quality: compensation, diversity in the substance of work, control, stress and involuntary non-standard employment contracts. Importantly, flexible work and/or low skill work is not argued *per se* to be associated with bad jobs because many flexible work practices can be associated with high quality work (Huselid 1995). However, we drawn on evidence that precarious work is more likely to be associated with poor job quality, even controlling for factors such as worker characteristics and occupation (McGovern, Smeaton and Hill 2004).

Four common sectors were selected across all seven countries and were identified because they illustrated particular ways in which unions have attempted to extend representation to precarious workers where job quality is either poor or worsening. For the sake of brevity, this paper focuses on two occupational groups (cleaners and HCAs) that illustrate particular tensions that emerge as actors exert agency in an effort to improve job quality. The research took a multi-method approach and involved

interviews with paid union officers, activists and employer organizations (40 in the UK in these sectors) asking about developments and initiatives at both organizational and sectoral levels. Interviewees were purposively sampled using existing knowledge and contacts within the sectoral representational bodies (unions and employer representatives).

Table 1 presents a breakdown of interviews across the two projects. The larger number of interviews in unions as compared to employer associations reflects both the larger number of unions in these sectors as well as some difficulties accessing employer organizations, especially in the cleaning sector. However, as the focus of this paper is primarily on union behavior, the reliance on secondary sources for employer data is not especially problematic. Union interviewees were identified because of their particular expertise in the sector either at a strategic level (e.g. with lead responsibility as negotiators or organizers) or because they had experience of a particular campaign. Interviewees were drawn from all the main unions with a track record in organizing the most precarious workers with poor job quality. Where possible, interviewees were the same over the two waves of research, although some had moved on to other roles. In those cases, their replacement was interviewed instead. As the focus of the research is on how unions develop agendas for representing (new) issues around job quality, attention was paid to interviewees who have some kind of formal representation role rather than on the broader group of workers themselves. That said, 3 interviewees were not paid officers and have been classified as ‘activists’. Participants are given pseudonyms but their organization and position are broadly described.

Interview data was supplemented by extensive desk research exploring trends in the sectors as well as reports and records of bargaining outcomes. Of particular relevance was material relating to organizing campaigns, organizing strategies, and evidence of strategic change in the sectors (e.g. market research reports) which helped contextualize the pressures facing both unions and employers. Data was recorded and analyzed thematically using Nvivo software. Initial data coding focused on identifying evidence of efforts by social partners (employers and unions) to regulate precarious work and views of interviewees about the effectiveness of these activities. Subsequently, the data was revisited to establish whether interviewees differentiate between ideas about 'precarious work' and 'job quality'. Importantly for the presentation of the evidence in this paper, the two are closely linked. Although participants rarely used either term directly, they frequently discussed the problematic aspects of job quality for the relevant occupational groups (and across the labor force more generally) including, but not limited to: low pay, close supervision and performance management, health and safety concerns, potential discriminatory treatment of workers from different backgrounds (especially migrant workers and young workers), involuntary part-time, flexible and fixed-term work, arbitrary treatment from supervisors, and lack of voice mechanisms.

Nurses and healthcare assistants: extending interest representation within unions and efforts to extend collective bargaining

The health sector was identified because it is an example of a labor market with strong institutional regulation but which at the same time has faced downward pressure on some aspects of job quality. The particular occupational group that is of interest here is

the expansion of the healthcare assistants (HCAs) role from the 1990s onwards. HCAs has existed since the emergence of modern nursing in the mid-1850s but remained a relatively under-developed role until the 1980s and 1990s when professional bodies took a clear decision to make nursing training more academic (Stokes and Warden 2004). As a result, far more training time took place in higher education institutes rather than in nursing settings, leaving a gap in provision that many hospitals filled with HCAs. Funding pressures within the National Health Service mean that employing HCAs has often been a more attractive option because they are employed by individual Trusts (employing organizations) on local terms and conditions. Nurses' terms and conditions, by contrast, are part of a national agreement with two main unions: the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Unison. This separation of roles allows employers opportunities to vary terms and conditions according to local labor markets, which in turn risks undermining the terms and conditions of nurses and worsening their job quality. The use of HCAs has also increased as employers have made efforts to comply with the European Working Time Regulations and working time for doctors has reduced (Stokes and Warden 2004).

An issue identified by all social partners is that HCAs have no compulsory or consistent training (Cavendish 2013). Any route to training and recognition of professional development is dependent on local terms and conditions. A recent review (Cavendish 2013) highlighted that this is problematic for patients and nurses as the role boundary between nurses and HCAs is blurred whilst at the same time limiting opportunities for career progression and pay increases to reflect higher level skills.

Unsurprisingly, unions representing nursing staff have had to carefully consider their position with regard to HCAs. As employers expanded their recruitment to the role in the 1990s, debates emerged in the two main unions about the extent to which they should seek to represent these workers. Unison took an inclusive and expansionist position, reflecting the fact that it has always had a broad membership and recruits occupational groups across the public sector. New structures were established to represent HCAs and to bring them together across branches, regions and nationally. Although there have been constraints on the effectiveness of bargaining with individual employing organizations (not least securing full recognition rights for collective bargaining), the interests of HCAs are effectively represented within the union. As one officer noted: “We listen to them. They have their own committee, issues, and the like. There are systems and structures to get that through...Even at the time that wasn’t that controversial.” (Rebecca, National officer, Unison).

By contrast, the decision by the RCN to expand representation to HCAs was highly contested and described at the time as “groundbreaking” (Health Service Journal 2000). In 2000, the RCN decided that HCAs with a Level 3 vocational qualification were eligible for membership. This was controversial because of concerns that the HCA role could be used by employers to undermine the professional status of nursing and to erode job quality. It also reflected a strong identity of the RCN of being a professional body for nurses rather than wider occupational groups. Nonetheless, concerns over erosion of job quality of the core membership (nurses) and a desire to recognize the nursing skills of HCAs drove the decision to extend the opportunity of membership to them. As one union officer explained: “It was always going to be difficult...There are real tensions. But I just think we had to do it. We have to represent them [HCAs] properly otherwise

employers will just keep pushing and that will be bad for everyone.” (Katherine, Regional officer, RCN). The College now has a specialist network representing HCAs and their interests and has adopted a formal position of campaigning for regulation of the role to ensure consistency across employers especially with regard to job descriptions, training, and health and safety. For both unions, more consistent regulation of the HCA role with regards to job quality concerns such as training, health and safety, and pay is an important focus.

The central point is how the increasing freedom around hiring HCAs and setting their terms and conditions given to local hospital Trusts during the 1990s was seen by unions as both creating jobs that risk being poor(er) quality than existing occupations and, as a result, risked undermining the job quality of nursing staff. This opportunity to create grades that break away from nationally agreed job regulation was enthusiastically adopted by many local managers seeking to control costs and fill personnel gaps. Both unions had to make active decisions about whether or not to extend membership to HCAs and represent their interests within local negotiation structures. The ability of local Trusts to set terms and conditions meant that the unions have had to develop more effective representation and bargaining structures at organizational, rather than national, level to represent the interests of both occupational groups; protecting nurses’ job quality and attempting to harmonize and improve the job quality of HCAs.

Inevitably, the effectiveness of these structures varies between Trusts meaning that some are effective at representing HCAs in local bargaining and others are less so.

Nonetheless, this illustrates how unions can use job quality issues as a starting point to (attempt to) represent the interests of new occupational groups within existing structures of job regulation.

Cleaners: extending collective bargaining and pressures for new forms of interest representation

Industrial cleaning illustrates how unions can initiate new ways of representing workers within a sector that has changed a great deal since the 1990s and where it appears, on first analysis, extremely difficult to establish representation. It also illustrates how pressures can build for new forms of interest representation, in this case through Living Wage campaigns. The sector is dominated by a relatively small number of large, multi-national employers that compete for outsourced cleaning contracts. Large contract providers increasingly offer a package of building management services such as cleaning, security and maintenance that provide opportunities for cost savings. The sector also has a very large number of small and micro businesses typically offering local services.

The sector has been the target of a number of high profile union organizing campaigns driven mainly by concerns over poor job quality. Particular issues relate to low pay, poor terms and conditions, problematic shift scheduling, non-payment of wages, unanticipated deductions from wages, and problematic health and safety. Migrant workers and others who have comparatively weak labor market positions (young workers, women returners, etc.) are over-represented in the sector. One union organizer pointed out that this often created an environment in which bullying was common, largely because managers were under strict performance targets and workers have relatively poor understanding of their labor rights.

This background has provided the basis for a number of important and high profile union initiatives to extend representation to these workers. Probably the highest profile is the Justice for Cleaners campaign in London (Wills 2008). It grew out of community campaign initiatives and was inspired by the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign run by the US union, the SEIU. SEIU organizers worked with the UK unions to build an organizing strategy that targeted large multi-national companies that had cleaning contracts for banks and other buildings in London's main business districts. Details of the campaign can be found elsewhere (Wills 2008), but the important point here is that unions put pressure on both the purchasing organization and the provider companies to improve job quality for cleaners. The aspiration was to establish collective agreements with the large cleaning companies that would be honored in the contracting process, thereby seeking to take wages out of competition across the city. By targeting several of the large cleaning providers at the same time, it was hoped that a standard rate and basic terms and conditions could be established to take wages and job quality out of competition during bidding.

Importantly, although the campaign was inspired by JfJ, at least some union officers were clear that it fitted with a wider strategy of expanding union membership to new groups. "It was responsive. We could see the success of Justice for Janitors and wanted to see if we could do something similar over here. Working with the SEIU helped that...But it was also a slow recognition that we had to expand out of our comfort zone." (Joe, National officer, Unite). However, this was not a unanimous view. It was a contested strategy, the legacy of which remains controversial. One officer Arun, noted; "There are still a lot of tensions... Whether it was worth it... worth all that time and

effort. Personally, I'm glad they did. But it was a fight [to decide to invest in the campaign]."

The campaign had some success in improving job quality and establishing collective bargaining rights with some contractors. However, the wider strategy was less successful and there is certainly no evidence of 'pattern bargaining' emerging where terms and conditions set in a lead employer are then adopted by other employers. Nonetheless, this campaign does highlight how a union that is prepared to invest can start to organize a highly fragmented workforce that often has little knowledge of basic rights and where downward pressure on job quality is considerable. Importantly, the unions have been central to the objective of establishing institutions of worker voice (collective bargaining) for the first time in labor markets that do not easily lend themselves to collective regulation.

Echoing similar initiatives in the USA (Luce 2005) the cleaning sector has also been an important focus for demands for a 'living wage' in addition to the statutory national minimum wage. This campaign was initiated by unions and community groups based in London where living costs are far higher than most of the rest of the UK. The calculation of the living wage in London is currently about 30% higher than the national minimum wage. The involvement of unions in these initiatives has been patchy and contested (Holgate 2009), but they have often been important supporters of and activists within specific campaigns and of the establishment of the Living Wage Foundation that promotes living wage initiatives. One union participant in this research noted: "It's frustrating. It [the living wage campaign] is so relevant to us. But getting everyone on board is so hard." (Dawn, Sector organizer, GMB).

This is an important development because it is an example of how, despite tensions and difficulties, unions (and community groups) have been able to develop new expressions of collective interests even where there are existing institutional mechanisms such as the national minimum wage regulating the labor market. The idea of the living wage emerged from analysis indicating that national regulation of pay inevitably disadvantages workers in areas of the country where living expenses are higher. Had there been higher coverage of collective bargaining, it is probable that unions would have preferred that as a route to determine pay, but in the absence of those institutions, unions have been willing to both help ‘create’ new interests (the living wage) and to pursue them within new institutional mechanisms. As one union officer put it: “The Living Wage campaigns are something we really want to be involved in... Obviously we’d prefer wider bargaining, but they’re having some real successes, so you can’t knock that.” (Arun, national officer, Unite).

These examples highlight the strong degree of agency exerted by the actors (unions) can have in creating new interests and institutions for regulating job quality. As with the HCAs, measurements of ‘success’ are difficult and usually dependent on other actors such as employers but the key point is that not only can unions decide to (try to) establish new forms of bargaining institutions, they can choose to look beyond existing institutional regulation (e.g. national minimum wage) to promote job quality issues.

Bargaining for interests (job quality) in collective institutions

Developing work by authors such as Valas and Prener (2012), Bernhardt (2012) and Madrick (2012) this paper argues that job quality not a fixed characteristic of work, but is the outcome of complex and interacting processes of agents pursuing their interests. Unions are rarely explicitly studied as actors within the context of job quality debates and this analysis therefore extends our understanding of how unions can create and pursue particular collective interests to (seek to) regulate job quality. As a result, the occupational groups studied illustrate how and why it is important to take an interest-based view of collective institutions that regulate employment (Wailes et al 2003). Using job quality concerns as centrally important interests to workers with (comparatively) low job quality, we can see the agency unions can exert within institutions of job regulation.

So has job quality improved? For some HCAs the answer is yes. Interviewees in all of the unions highlighted examples where their local influence had ensured that local employment policies were developed or extended to include HCAs including: grading, regulation of working hours and leave arrangements. However, as one noted: "It's patchy to say the least. Where you've got a management who are happy to work with us, things go well. But it varies so much...Sometimes it can be a fight." (Gillian, National officer, Unison) Examples of where union arguments had largely not been successful relate to training where there is still significant concern about the consistency, quality and quantity of training offered. Despite variation in effective ability to improve job quality, overall there has been a strong move by unions to represent the interests of these workers within existing bargaining structures and, where necessary, to develop and strengthen new structures of representation. As one union officer explained: "We are always having to make decisions about how we strengthen representation. I'm

always looking to strengthen [local] committees so they can stand up better, make sure jobs get better. That's what I do." (Susan, Regional officer, RCN).

For cleaners, the picture is more mixed. Some of the collective bargaining agreements with large contractors have survived several rounds of bargaining and have had a largely upwards effect on pay rates, sick pay, holiday pay, and shift scheduling. The officer responsible highlighted: "It's hard work, and we constantly have to be vigilant. But it's working... But I guess we'll never have the upper hand" (Joe, National officer, Unite). This was largely attributed to a judgment about the resources that would be required to extend collective bargaining. The Living Wage campaign is undoubtedly gathering momentum and is spreading nationally. It has also gained support across the political spectrum with both main parties pledging to increase the national minimum wage over time.

However, it is evident that unions are never entirely in control of the outcomes of the campaigns they run and the agency they exert in promoting new interests and new mechanisms for representation is always constrained, most notably by employer behavior. The tensions highlighted above also show how unions are not always good at embracing opportunities to extend their interest representation (see also Simms, Holgate and Heery 2013). Nonetheless, too often in discussions about trade unions there is an assumption that they are passive recipients of employer behavior. One of the strengths of the interest-based view of institutional job regulation (Wales, Ramia and Lansbury 2003) is in moving us strongly away from that perspective.

The evidence has shown how unions can promote and defend job quality by extending institutions of job regulation. So what are the circumstances that might lead unions to seek to do this? Where there are existing institutions of collective regulation (mainly, but not only, collective bargaining) unions have a base from which to seek to extend representation and job quality is, unsurprisingly, a central concern. It is also clear that where those institutions exist, and where poor job quality amongst a new group of workers (for example HCAs) risks undermining the quality of existing grades, unions have a strong motivation to organize and seek to represent those new occupations and interests. In other words, unions have a rationale to seek to extend existing regulation in an effort to increase job quality.

The industrial cleaning sector is important because it illustrates how unions can not only use existing institutions of regulation, but can seek to extend collective regulation of job quality even in a very difficult political and economic context (cf. Applebaum 2012). Here the mimetic effects of unions spreading innovative practice across national boundaries are important in explaining why both the Justice for Cleaners and the Living Wage campaigns took the form they did. The effects have been widespread and although there has been only relatively limited success in establishing collective bargaining, unexpected outcomes include the development and political influence of the Living Wage campaigns. Again, this shows that unions are not only agents within institutions such as collective bargaining, but also within political institutions, using affiliations and networks to secure changes in, for example, wage regulation mechanisms.

Job quality, then, is (at least sometimes) the outcome of contested and dynamic processes of power negotiation within institutions of job regulation. Undoubtedly, on aggregate the power of unions has declined over the past 30 years but unions still exercise influence, especially where institutions of collective regulation exist or can be established. Where such mechanisms are absent, such as in industrial cleaning, unions have made considerable efforts to organize and represent workers. To be clear, not all of these efforts have been successful (Simms, Holgate and Heery 2013) but it would be wrong to dismiss them, not least because they highlight on-going struggles over issues of job quality where unions seek to exert agency.

Conclusions

The central critique presented in the review of existing literature on job quality is that there is a tendency to see job quality as fixed and collective actors, especially unions, as having little agency in changing the job quality. By contrast, it is argued here that collective actors (unions) have a central role in resisting (threats of) downward pressure on job quality and can even extend representative institutions in an effort to attempt to (re)regulate job quality. This research therefore demonstrates the value of a dynamic, interest-based institutionalist approach (Wailles, Ramia and Lansbury 2003) to labor relations analysis.

However, a note of caution is also necessary. Despite evidence of change and adaptation of institutions to emerging issues of job quality, it would be wrong to suggest that these institutions are able to effectively regulate job quality across the entire labor market. The overall effectiveness of unions in regulating job quality depends at least in part on

employer behavior. As a result, although unions do have agency within these institutions, their capacity to act is, incontestably, highly constrained (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013). Nonetheless, these examples do show how unions can still be important actors in the regulation of job quality and can both influence and be influenced by institutions of regulation such as collective bargaining. This is important because it leads us away from a view of job quality as being a static feature of work, towards understanding the power dynamics and workplace, organizational, sectoral and national levels that influence job quality.

This conclusion has important implications for union renewal literature which has developed a particular focus on the mobilizing potential of union campaigns (Burawoy 2008, Cornfield and McCammon 2003, Turner 2005) in engaging new groups of workers. This research shows that it is important to also pay attention to how unions can use and extend existing institutional mechanisms as paths towards potential renewal. It shows that one of the driving forces for unions seeking to represent these workers is the risk they pose to the job quality of existing members. The evidence also demonstrates how closely bargaining and organizing strategies need to be integrated in order to capitalize on the gains of organizing activities (Heery 2002).

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Table One: Interviewees

Interviews	Industrial Cleaning	Health
2011: Union	TOTAL: 8	TOTAL: 9
	Unite (general union) x 2 Joe – National officer Arun – National officer	Unison (general public sector union) x 5 John – Senior national officer Rebecca – National officer Gillian – National officer Jane – Local officer Steve – Local officer
	GMB (general union) x 4 Mick – Senior national officer Dawn – Sector organizer Gillian – Sector officer Brian – National officer	Royal College of Midwives x 2 Jane – National officer Susan – Regional officer
	RMT (transport union) x 2 James – National officer	Royal College of Nursing x 2 Peter – National officer

	Keith – Regional officer	Katherine – National officer
2011: Employers		Katie – Officer of employer association Sanjay – Hospital HR manager
2014: Union	TOTAL: 9	TOTAL: 10
	Unite x 2 Joe – National officer Arun – National officer	Unison x 5 John – Senior officer Rebecca – National officer Gillian – National officer Jane – Local officer Bob- Local officer
	GMB x 3 Dawn – Sector organizer Gillian – Sector officer Brian – National officer	RCM x 2 Jane – National officer Karen – Regional officer
	RMT x 1 James – National officer	RCN x 2 Peter – National officer

		Katherine – National officer
	IWGB (independent general union) x 3 Hugo – Local activist Martina – Local activist Anita – Local activist	Unite x 1 Angela – Sector organizer
2014: Employers		Katie – Officer of employer association Sarah – Hospital HR manager