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1

Representation at Work: Themes and Issues

Edmund Heery, Geraldine Healy and Phil Taylor

Introduction

One of the most striking social changes to have occurred in the life times of contributors to this book has been the substantial collapse of a system of worker representation founded on trade unions and collective bargaining – what Henry Phelps Brown (1990) described as the 'counter revolution of our time'. Three decades ago, more than half the UK workforce were members of trade unions and collective institutions regulated the terms of employment for most of those in paid work (Brown *et al*. 2003: 199; Waddington 2003: 220). These arrangements have been heavily eroded in the intervening period. Trade union membership has stabilised in recent years but fewer than 30 per cent of UK employees are now members and in the private sector union density has dropped below 20 per cent. The majority of employees are no longer covered by collective bargaining and unilateral decision by the employer is now the most frequent method of setting the terms of employment (Cully *et al*. 1999: 108). Moreover, where collective bargaining survives, it is often a 'hollow shell' exerting negligible influence over managers (Millward *et al*. 2000: 179–83). These developments have raised concerns about the emergence of a 'representation gap' (Towers 1997). The right and aspirations of workers to participate in the governance of enterprises are being frustrated it is felt, by the decline of representative institutions.

How might the representation gap be filled? Those seeking an answer to this question have offered two main solutions, both of which have stimulated considerable debate and a substantial programme of research. The first proposes the revitalisation of trade unions. There has been a spate of books in recent years concerned with the 'rekindling', 'renewal' or 'revitalisation' of the trade union movement, which start from the premise that unions can re-build their status as representative institutions if they undergo an effective process of change (Frege and Kelly 2004; Cornfield and McCammon 2003; Fairbrother and Yates 2003; Bacharach *et al*. 2001; Turner *et al*. 2001). Advocates of this position differ widely in their interpretation of the

challenge facing unions and the necessary adaptation they must make; their views are often bitterly opposed. But they are united in seeing a continuing role for trade unions and collective bargaining in representing people at work.

The second position is less frequently and often less clearly articulated but identifies a role for new or alternative institutions of worker representation. There is a managerialist version of this argument, which claims that employee involvement and other programmes devised by managers are sufficient for the expression of worker voice (see Kaufman and Taras 2000: 540–1). A very different version accords priority to advocacy, campaigning and mutual assistance organisations that operate in civil society and which frequently are grounded in the new social movements of identity (Osterman *et al*. 2001: 131–47; Abbott 1998a). A third version points to the state as the critical vehicle and stresses the value of statutory systems of worker representation that endow citizens with rights to participate in the governance of their employing organisations (Frege 2002; Adams 1995: 180). A central question that arises for all versions of the second position concerns the relationship between alternative institutions of worker representation and trade unions. Proponents of a replacement thesis suggest that alternative institutions can replace trade unions though there is a sharp division between those who welcome and those who decry this claimed effect. Proponents of a complementarity thesis, in contrast, believe there is scope for fruitful interaction; that unions can work alongside and in concert with other institutions. The two solutions to the problem of the representation gap can therefore overlap as the task of union revitalisation is defined in terms of integration with other institutions of worker voice (Hurd *et al*. 2003: 106–8; Verma *et al*. 2002: 379).

This book consists of 12 empirical investigations into the current state of worker representation in the UK that seek to test these arguments. Eight chapters deal with trade unions and consider the prospects for union representation in the new service industries, the steps unions have taken to represent a more diverse workforce and recent experiments with labour–management partnership. The remaining chapters examine forms of non-union representation. Four alternatives are considered: statutory works councils, employment agencies, which place workers in employment and claim to act on their behalf, advocacy and advisory organisations, and social movement organisations campaigning for workplace justice. These last two types are investigated through case studies of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) and the East London campaign for a living wage, respectively. Institutions of worker participation created by employers, such as involvement or profit-sharing schemes, are not considered, mainly because a substantial research literature already exists (see Heller *et al*. 1998; Hyman and Mason 1995). The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background against which the later, more focused contributions can be viewed. To this end, it

surveys the debate and research on the future of worker representation, considering union revitalisation and alternative forms in turn.

Union revitalisation

Recent work on trade unions in Britain and other developed countries is both voluminous and highly variable in terms of subject matter, method and argument. One way of imposing order on this variation is to sort accounts of union revitalisation on the basis of their main level of analysis. We recognise that the different levels of analysis may in practice overlap and interrelate to one another, but suggest that making these analytical abstractions brings into sharp focus the differences between the approaches. Thus, societal models of revitalisation hold that unions must adapt to long-run changes in society and economy, which require a 'new unionism' matched to the interests of a changing workforce. Institutional models, in contrast, suggest that the task of revitalisation is to adjust union activity to the structure of opportunity provided either by the institutions of industrial relations narrowly conceived or the broader institutional matrix of different 'varieties of capitalism'. With organisational models, the task of revitalisation is internalised and is dependent upon changes in union government to allow more effective management, greater democratic participation or the expression of diverse interests. Finally, actor-centred models emphasise the need to renew the population of leaders and activists occupying representative positions in unions, the underpinning belief being that unions can exercise strategic choice and that different choices will be made by representatives with novel characteristics. In what follows we review each of these types of argument. We set out what we believe are the central assumptions of the different versions of union revitalisation and illustrate them with recent contributions to the literature. In each case we also examine the responses of critics to all four positions and identify the types of argument that have been used to counter each.

Society

At the heart of the societal argument is the belief that unions are under a growing selective pressure to adapt or evolve. The source of this pressure lies in deep-seated changes in economy and society that are altering the structure of interests and preferences that workers bring to their employment and, by extension, to trade unions. This, in turn, requires a new form of unionism better matched to the requirements of a changing workforce. Unions must perforce adapt to their environments, in this essentially evolutionary viewpoint, or cede their niche to other representative institutions and ultimately become extinct. If unions are unable to develop new forms, according to Kochan (2003: 177), then they are unlikely 'to avert the downward trend in union representation, influence and contribution to the welfare of the British workforce and society'.

The nature of the adaptation posited by advocates of the societal argument varies, depending on the underlying theory of social change to which they subscribe. Three versions of the argument are presented below though others are readily identifiable in the literature on trade unions (Heery 2003: 279–83). A particularly influential version of the argument suggests that unions are under pressure to change their relations with employers and strike a fresh bargain founded on partnership or 'mutual gains' (Kochan and Osterman 1994: 147–65). In one formulation of this argument, favoured by North American writers, the pressure for co-operation with employers emerges from fundamental change in methods of work organisation (Bélanger *et al.* 2002: 45; Appelbaum and Batt 1994: 123–45). The spread of high performance work practices requires employers to invest in high commitment management to secure necessary levels of worker skill, commitment and flexibility. This, in turn, provides new scope for identifying shared interests between employers and employees. Within the high commitment workplace regime there is opportunity for workers to realise their interests in development, involvement and job satisfaction (Appelbaum 2002). Accordingly, a new unionism can emerge that centres on these previously neglected or latent interests and which co-operates with employers to embed new forms of production, and their associated management practices, within the economy (Frost 2001b).

The theoretical reference point for adherents to this position is theories of post-industrialism or post-Fordism, with their relatively benign interpretation of changing patterns of work organisation. The reference point for a second, less upbeat formulation, favoured by British writers, is theories of globalisation. According to Brown and colleagues (Oxenbridge *et al.* 2003: 324–32; Brown *et al.* 2000: 616–19; Brown *et al.* 1998: 73), exposure of domestic markets to international competition has effected two broad changes in interest representation. On the one hand, distributive bargaining to secure either a wage premium or restrict effort levels has become less tenable. On the other hand, the heightened competitive threat encourages workers and their representatives to develop a 'productivity coalition' with employers, in which security of employment is exchanged for flexibility. Therefore, although the structural trigger is different the perceived effect is similar: a broadening of shared interests between workers and employers.

In both formulations of the argument a central adaptive response of unions that is identified is the development of labour–management partnership at enterprise level. Accounts of formal partnerships suggest that they usually consist of a substantive element, with unions seeking to reinforce high commitment management through agreements on worker security, single status, fair treatment, training, development and involvement, and a procedural element that promotes consultation on business strategy and joint-working on business operations and de-emphasises distributive wage bargaining (Terry 2003a: 462–7; Heery 2002: 22–4). The essential point,

however, is that these changes in union representation are seen as part of a long-term adaptation to the changing needs of workers, founded in the transition to a new production regime, new conditions of global competition or a combination of both (Knell 1999: 9–11).

The second version of the societal argument adopts a different take on the evolution of employment relationships and emphasises the transfer of risk from employers to employees and the growth of contingent work. Worker interests are being transformed, in this interpretation as employers divest themselves of traditional obligations to their employees under the pressure of more intense competition. The restructuring of public services under the influence of the 'new public management' provides an additional source of change, resulting in the growth of sub-contracting and precarious work in a sector previously characterised by stable employment (Hebson *et al.* 2003; Allen and Henry 1996). The theoretical reference point for this version of the societal argument lies in notions of an emerging risk or network society, characterised by the hollowing out of large bureaucracies, the decay of internal labour markets and their replacement with, frequently short-term, market exchanges (see Nolan and Wood 2003: 165–7). Unions, on this view, must adapt to a terrain, in which long-term, secure employment is giving way to new forms of contingent work, defined by their insecure status (see Chapter 4).

One consequence that has been suggested is that unions must shift their primary site of representation from the workplace or enterprise to the external labour market. For Cobble (1991), 'worksite unionism' is no longer appropriate to the needs of a 'post-industrial workforce' and unions must organise workers either on the basis of occupations or geographical communities (see Heery *et al.* 2004a; Wills 2002c; Cobble and Vosko 2000; see also Chapter 6). This 'extra-enterprise' representation of workers, in turn, has been seen to require three elements. First, the exclusion of workers from enterprise-based systems of welfare and skill formation suggests that unions themselves should meet these needs through the expansion of individual services. Attention has been focused on union benefit systems, training and development schemes and systems of labour market information, all of which can directly support contingent workers in a mobile career (Osterman *et al.* 2001: 111–19; Benner and Dean 2000). Second, the level at which collective bargaining is conducted should be shifted upwards to the multi-employer level to allow the broad regulation of contingent labour markets. The function of multi-employer bargaining, moreover, should be to establish minimum conditions that support worker mobility between firms without penalty and to ensure the provision of public goods within regional or occupational labour markets, such as the supply and accreditation of training (Wial 1994). Third, in both British and American writing on contingent work, there is an emphasis on unions forming coalitions with political agencies, community and advocacy organisations, in some cases to press for

protective regulation and in others to better facilitate provision of labour market services (Erickson *et al*. 2002; Wills 2002c). Partly this arises from the lack of bargaining power of contingent workers, by virtue of their contingent status, and their need to draw on the resources of other groups and institutions. Partly too it arises from the requirement for representation beyond the enterprise, which of itself draws trade unions into joint work with other organisations that operate within civil society (Frege *et al*. 2004). In the network economy, unions may have to become networking organisations.

The final version of the societal argument summarised stresses the fragmentation of worker interests and the need for unions to represent diversity. The material basis for this change is seen to lie in the feminisation of the workforce and other changes in workforce composition, such as an increase in migrant or ethnic minority labour. It is seen to lie, too, however, in the strengthening of social identities grounded in gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and other characteristics (Ledwith and Colgan 2002: 1–2). For this version of the societal argument, the pressure for change arises in the overlaying of the labour movement with new social movements, with the associated articulation of demands for equal treatment and freedom from discrimination to which unions must respond. In this case the point of reference for at least some versions of this argument lie in theories of post-modernity, with their emphasis on the decline of traditional solidarities (and associated grand narratives) and the fracturing of social identity (Selmi and McUsic 2002).

The conception of changing worker interests that underpins this position has several components. At its core is acceptance that there are multiple, equally legitimate interests to which unions ought to respond: that the needs of women, minorities or identity groups should not be subordinated to a putative general or class interest. This in turn implies that women and minority workers have an interest both in equal treatment, the removal of discrimination, and in 'diverse treatment', an acceptance of their specific, particular needs (e.g. that, women may require particular forms of employment, such as properly regulated part-time work). The adaptive responses that are believed to be required of unions flow from this conception. If unions are to respond effectively to a more diverse workforce then they must accept women and minority groups as part of their constituency, withdraw from discriminatory practices, promote equality of opportunity and engage with diversity (Dickens 1998: 29–36; Ledwith and Colgan 2002: 9–21). This, in turn, will require internal changes to systems of union government and management to give voice to women and minority workers (see Chapter 5). It will also require external change, such that unions pursue equal treatment or entitlement to diverse treatment in their political, legal, collective bargaining and servicing activity (see Chapter 7). If unions are to adapt effectively to a changing workforce, on this view, then they must undertake a twin reform to allow both the expression

of diverse interests and intervene more effectively in the system of job regulation to ensure those interests are realised.

Response

Critics have developed two broad responses to societal models of union revitalization. On the one hand, they have attacked the presumed sequence of underlying change in economy and society, transformation of worker interests and adaptive union response. This line of attack, in turn, has generated three types of argument. First, it has been suggested that economy and society are more stable, and worker interests less fluid, than has been suggested. Thus, critics of partnership have pointed to the limited diffusion of high performance work practices and the continuing prevalence of traditional forms of work organisation (Danford 2003; Waddington and Whitston 1996; see also Chapter 8), while critics of the need to adapt to contingent work have pointed to the persistence of long-term employment (Rainnie 1998). It is incontrovertible that there has been a feminisation of paid employment and there is very broad acceptance of the need for unions to respond to this change. But some have questioned the distinctiveness of the interests of women workers with the implication that union form and function need not radically alter (Waddington and Whitston 1997: 534–5; Kelly 1990: 37). The hallmark of this critique therefore is that the core structural features of capitalist societies are relatively enduring and that as a consequence worker interests are relatively fixed and undifferentiated. Those who hold to this position often accept that unions must undergo a process of revitalisation but they do not accept that this must comprise a radical evolution of union form to cater to a rapidly changing set of worker interests.

The second position accepts the societal change argument but claims that its elements have been wrongly specified. Critics of the partnership thesis, in particular, have often advanced a radically different interpretation of the evolution of worker interests that stresses the degradation of work and erosion of employment standards (Upchurch and Danford 2001: 115; see also Chapter 3). Unions must adapt to change on this view but this requires the rediscovery of militancy to counter the imposition of new types of management control, characteristic of a malign phase of neo-Fordism (see Chapter 8). The third position shifts the focus of attention to union responses and holds that these arise from causes other than a functional adaptation to long-run economic or social change. Once again, this argument has arisen particularly in the response to the partnership thesis. Thus, Heery (2002: 24–5) has suggested that many formal partnership agreements represent a short-run adaptation to immediate crises of business performance, while for Kelly (1999) they have emerged from a cyclical process of employer counter-mobilisation. The essential point is that adaptive responses on the part of trade unions are seen to arise from immediate contingencies or cyclical processes rather than deep-seated, directional change.

The other response to societal models of union revitalisation emphasises cross-sectional variation. One version of this response emphasises variation within national economies. Thus, Roche (2000) in a commentary on theories of the 'new industrial relations' has questioned the coherence of recent change and averred that the dominant pattern is one of 'contingency as trend'; that is the increasing fragmentation of national systems (see also Katz and Darbishire 2000). For Roche, there is an increasing diversity in patterns of management and employment relations that reflects the variable exposure of sectors to the world economy. In some industries, the importance of competition based on quality and value-added can provide the basis for union revitalisation through partnership but elsewhere the material basis for this strategy is lacking. Essentially, this position rejects the implicit claim in much societal argument that there is 'one best way' to revitalise the labour movement and holds instead that there should be increasing variation in strategies of interest representation; that unions should become portfolio planners rather than repositories of best practice (see Jarley 2002: 228–33).

Another version of the cross-sectional critique stresses variation between national economies (Thelen 2001: 71–2). American proponents of the societal argument, in particular, have tended to use the single case of the US as a basis for making general claims about the evolution of worker representation in 'post-industrial' societies (e.g. Cobble 1991). The risk inherent in this method is that the particular can be mistaken for the general; that the challenges facing American trade unions may reflect a particular inheritance or institutional context that are not found elsewhere. The suggestion that representing contingent workers requires the re-creation of multi-employer bargaining may carry less force in countries that have never experienced the collapse of bargaining at this level; the suggestion that unions should represent diversity by pressing for improved conditions for part-timers may have less relevance in countries where there is better childcare and a higher proportion of women take full-time jobs. What this critique suggests is that the task of union revitalisation is, in part, specific to particular national contexts and it is this belief that lies at the core of the institutional models to which we now turn.

Institution

Institutional accounts of union revitalisation contend that unions must match their form and practice to the prevailing institutional context, usually though not exclusively within individual nation states. That context itself tends to be viewed as a structure of incentives, as providing a series of opportunities and constraints, which union representatives can read and to which they must adapt. Two main versions of this argument are current. The first suggests that union revitalisation rests on a successful adaptation to the immediate institutions of industrial relations, particularly the structure of collective bargaining. The second, in contrast, builds upon the 'varieties of

capitalism' literature and argues that union strategic choices are constrained by the wider institutional forms of co-ordinated and liberal market economies. Particularly in this second current, it is assumed that the pattern of revitalisation must vary from national case to national case; that national union movements will differ in terms of the methods used to restore their fortunes. In some institutional contexts there may be a heavy reliance on organising to re-build membership and collective organisation but elsewhere, political action or renewed relations with employers may assume greater importance (Frege and Kelly 2003: 10–11). National institutions matter, in this line of analysis, and this implies a variable pattern of union revitalisation.

The first version of institutionalism found its classic expression in Clegg's (1976) argument that 'trade union behaviour' varied in accordance with the structure of collective bargaining. Union membership, structure, government, workplace organisation and strike activity, according to Clegg, derived from the distinctive pattern of bargaining that had emerged in each national economy. This line of reasoning has reappeared in the recent literature on union revitalisation, rather curiously, in the influential 'union renewal' thesis pioneered by Fairbrother (1996; 2000). In an analysis of public sector trade unionism in Britain, Fairbrother (2000: 323) has argued that the decentralisation of collective bargaining to workplace level can potentially stimulate the 'renewal' of trade unionism. This is so for two main reasons. First, under devolved bargaining the agenda of union representation is more likely to reflect the immediate concerns of workers and so provide a stronger basis for democratic participation and activism. Union renewal for Fairbrother comprises the re-creation of active workplace trade unionism. Second, and relatedly, decentralisation is likely to stimulate necessary union militancy because it provides an opportunity for workers who directly experience 'coercive social relations' (2000: 5) to vent their frustration. Under the preceding, centralised arrangements, in contrast, union activity was dominated by senior, paid representatives, who were themselves removed from alienating conditions of labour, and who favoured an accommodative or 'reformist' form of trade unionism. Decentralisation of bargaining, therefore, provides an opportunity for renewal, understood as the combination of a more combative union policy and a more participative form of union government.

If the renewal thesis stresses the opportunity afforded by institutional change, the second type of argument tends to emphasise constraints. A defining argument of the varieties of capitalism literature is that there is a pronounced synergy across the various institutional domains of each main form of capitalist society (Hall and Soskice 2001). In 'liberal market' economies, like Britain, there is a reinforcing logic that runs through modes of business finance, the institutions of corporate governance, corporate structures and strategies and systems of labour management (Gospel and Pendleton 2003). This logic embraces the short-term management of business assets and a bias towards arms-length, relatively adversarial relations,

between financiers and business, between businesses and between business and labour. In 'co-ordinated market' economies, like Germany, in contrast these same elements display a different combination, which encourages management for the longer term and greater reliance on high trust relationships. Applied to the question of union revitalisation in Britain, this set of claims has supported the argument that union strategies will not succeed if they fail to match the prevailing institutional context. In particular, it has been argued that union attempts to revitalise by seeking more co-operative relations with employers will have limited success if other institutions, such as modes of business financing, promote short-term, adversarial relations (Heery 2002: 25–6). Partnership on this conception may only be fully capable of development in co-ordinated market economies, where there are appropriate institutional supports (Turnbull *et al.* 2005; Streeck 1992). In liberal market economies a more adversarial form of trade unionism may be better suited to the institutional environment, with attempts at revitalisation focused much more on building the collective capacities of labour through aggressive organising campaigns (Heery and Adler 2004).

Response

One response to institutional argument has been to accept its basic parameters but to suggest that the implications of a particular set of institutions for union revitalisation have been wrongly specified. Critics of Fairbrother's renewal thesis, for instance have suggested that devolved bargaining encourages adoption of narrow, economistic goals and hinders the co-ordination and cross-subsidy of union activities that is essential if unions are to reach out to new groups of workers (see also Heery 2003: 289–90; Terry 2000). It has also been pointed out that decentralised bargaining structures are associated with wider income inequality and a wider gender pay gap because they allow economic insiders to maximise returns to their bargaining power (Almond and Rubery 1998; Whitehouse 1992). One commentator's opportunity, therefore, can be another's constraint and there is continuing debate over the precise implications of bargaining structures for union behaviour and bargaining outcomes.

The second response to institutional argument has been to point to and seek to explain variation within a common institutional framework. The core propositions developed here are that institutional constraints may not prove absolute, may be susceptible to the influence of trade unions and other industrial relations actors who can help refashion their institutional context and that scope remains for strategic choice (Gospel and Pendleton 2003: 571–5). Formal and informal partnerships are a feature of enterprise employment relations in the UK (Oxenbridge *et al.* 2003: 324–6; see also Chapter 9), despite the seemingly inhospitable institutional context, and this raises the question of what conditions promote experiments of this kind. It may be that partnerships are likely to emerge in particular types of

organisation, possibly in integrated businesses that are relatively immune from the threat of hostile takeover, which have a strong personnel function and an inherited management style that emphasises consultation. The structural characteristics and ideological character of the enterprise union might also be significant. Partnership may be found where the union is weak or dominated by an unrepresentative oligarchy (Taylor and Ramsay 1998) or where the influence of the wider union has altered the character of representatives (Samuel 2005) or developed their capacity to shape business restructuring (Frost 2001a). Whatever the precise feature that is identified, however, the key point is that within-system variation may be explained by reference to the internal structures of trade unions and the characteristics of representatives. It is to these variables that we now turn.

Organisation

The third type of union revitalisation argument identifies the reform of the system of union government as a central task. The aim is to shift the locus of control over union policy and decision-making, typically to allow the expression of hitherto neglected interests. The system of union government is viewed as a screen that can amplify or diminish the voice of competing groups within unions, whether these are rank-and-file members, paid officers, senior representatives, women workers or members of minority groups. If union government is reformed through changes in the formal structures of democratic participation or the union's management structures and processes then new voices will be heard, leading to an adjustment in policy and activity and a necessary revitalisation of trade unions. This argument comes in a number of different forms. In perhaps its classic, but still very influential form, there is a critique of oligarchic or bureaucratic control of unions by unrepresentative paid officials. In this version, a prerequisite for revitalisation is a challenge to oligarchic domination of unions, typically through the mobilisation of rank-and-file members. In a second, increasingly influential version there is a stress on the need to secure the articulation of different levels of union government, such that activity at workplace level is supported and co-ordinated through action at higher levels. In a third version there is an emphasis on the need for union government to represent diversity. The key features of reform that are advocated here, include strengthening the position of women and minorities in formal union democracy and the adjustment of union management systems to ensure the greater responsiveness of decision-makers to the interests of women and minority union members.

Critics of trade unions, from both left and right, have repeatedly made the argument that union behaviour, what unions do, is a function of union form, how unions are governed. The Conservative critique of trade unions in the 1980s rested on this kind of argument; that unrepresentative union leaders were engaging in militant or excessively political action, which was

contrary to the interests and preferences of ordinary union members. The prescription that followed was that union government should be changed to allow greater member voice through the medium of secret ballots to determine the composition of union executives, strike action and the creation of political funds (McIlroy 1995: 169–71). More recently, left critics of labour–management partnership have developed an argument that possesses the same underlying structure. It is argued that partnership agreements are contrary to the interests of workers in that they have failed to secure notable improvements in terms and conditions and have often been the means through which business restructuring or the intensification of work has been effected. Given this mismatch between interests and activity, it is suggested that partnership must stem from a failure of union democracy and typically it is presented as the work of a detached hierarchy of representatives or paid officials, out of tune with rank-and-file members (Danford *et al*. 2002). On this line of argument, the revitalisation of unions requires a more militant policy and the rejection of partnership, which in turn requires member mobilisation and wider democratic participation. There is an obvious overlap here with the union renewal thesis outlined above: the devolution of bargaining gives an opportunity for renewal precisely because it allows union members more readily to control bargaining activity. Where this occurs, where the union hierarchy is dissolved in the membership, then a more combative policy, fully reflective of worker interests, can result (Fairbrother and Stewart 2003: 173–5).

For many left critics of union bureaucracy it is axiomatic that the 'development of more vibrant and participative forms of union … must come from within the workplace rather than from outside the union, from a political group, or from above, at the national level' (Fairbrother 1996: 142). A second position, however, suggests that revitalisation requires a closer integration of union activity at different levels and concedes a more significant role for the union centre in supporting, co-ordinating and, *in extremis*, controlling union activity at workplace level. The defining recommendation of this position is that the revitalisation of unions requires a closer articulation of union activity at different levels, particularly in liberal-market economies with a devolved pattern of industrial relations. Thus, Frost (2001a) has argued that the effective negotiation of work organisation at enterprise level requires local unions to be integrated into the wider organisation and able to draw upon the expertise of the union centre if they are to develop more than a reactive stance to management initiatives. Similarly, in the literature on union organising there has been a stress on the value of articulated national and local activity. Voss and Sherman's (2003: 69–74) research on organising locals in California, for instance, identifies a strong connection to the centre amongst those that have undergone the most thoroughgoing revitalisation. A feature of much of this work on articulation is an emphasis on management processes in providing the link

between the union centre and its periphery. It is through union training, performance management and planning and review mechanisms that the centre supports and guides its constituent branches (Colling and Claydon 2000; Waddington and Kerr 2000; see also Chapter 7). Indeed, Heery *et al.* (2000a: 1004) have characterised recent organising initiatives in Britain as a form of 'managed activism', in that they use project management and human resource development techniques to develop an activist-based organising capacity at local level.

Where there is articulation there can also be contradiction and another feature of this position is preparedness to countenance central control of lower levels as a means of resolving intra-organisational conflict. Thus, in studies of organising in the US it has been observed that policy has led to the suspension of local unions that were opposed to increased investment in organising activity (Waldinger *et al.* 1998: 113). On this view, the national leadership of the union can embody a general interest (targeted in this instance on growing the union and drawing new groups into membership) and legitimately overrule representatives at lower levels who act to defend sectional interests. The privileging of interests that emerge and which are expressed at workplace level, which characterises the renewal model, here gives way to a greater recognition of the problem of sectionalism within unions. For the articulation school there is a stress on the need to forge and pursue a general interest at the centre of unions, on occasion, against internal opposition.

The third version of the union government argument emphasises the need to adapt systems of democratic participation and management to the interests of women and minorities. Some advocates of this position have drawn upon theories of union oligarchy and stressed the need for women workers to challenge a male-dominated bureaucracy (Healy and Kirton 2000: 343–7; see also Chapter 5). For others, there has been an overlap with the case for articulation, with commentators suggesting that progress towards equality requires greater co-ordination of union activity and a restraint of the autonomy of male-dominated bargaining groups (Colling and Dickens 2001: 151; 1998: 401). Whatever the precise form of the argument, however, there is a strong common emphasis on the need for 'internal equality' within unions, if 'external equality' is to be secured by collective bargaining and other interventions in the labour market (Dickens 1998). Internal equality itself is seen to be advanced through measures that reform formal union democracy, together with union management systems. There is an emphasis, that is, on measures that promote the election of women and members of minorities to representative positions with significant decision-making powers, together with management changes that include the appointment of women's and equality officers, the arrangement of training in equality bargaining for union negotiators and provision of group-specific training for women and minority activists (Greene and Kirton 2002; Colling and Dickens 2001: 139–43).

It is also generally believed to require measures that include 'radical' as well as 'liberal' equality initiatives, particularly to advance the interests of minorities (Kirton and Greene 2002: 171; Cockburn 1989). Liberal equality initiatives are defined in terms of the removal of barriers to equal participation in trade union activity by women and minorities and include provision of childcare and the scheduling of meetings to facilitate attendance, women- and minority-specific training to provide a basis for wider participation and gender and equality monitoring of union membership. Radical initiatives, in contrast, focus on equality of outcome and are designed to ensure that decision-making is exposed to new influences. Steps recommended include a commitment to proportionate representation for women and minorities in union structures, the creation of reserved seats on representative bodies and the establishment of dedicated committees and conferences with an input into union decision-making (Kirton and Green 2002: 159). A third theme that has come to the fore and which has shaped union government in UNISON is the principle of 'self-organisation', providing funding and support for women and minorities to devise their own form of organisation within the union while retaining a connection to the wider system of government (McBride 2000; see Chapter 5). This principle encompasses both liberal and radical conceptions of action in that self-organisation furnishes a supportive platform for women and minorities to participate in general union government, while also guaranteeing a degree of influence within union decision-making beyond the self-organised group.

Response

Central to all organisational versions of revitalisation is an assumption of a tight linkage between worker interests, union form or system of government and union behaviour; behaviour that is congruent with worker interests is dependent on an appropriate form of government that allows those interests expression (see Fairbrother 2000: 324–6). A common response accepts this basic framework but seeks to explain failings of union behaviour despite seemingly appropriate forms of government. Thus, Conservative critics of unions in the 1980s noted the failure of initial legislation to alter the character of union leadership and so pressed for further refinement of the individual balloting procedures that they favoured. The result was legislation that required unions to rely upon postal, not workplace ballots, despite the fact that the latter guaranteed a higher level of membership participation (see Undy *et al*. 1996: Ch. 4). Advocates of the renewal of trade unions through decentralised government and member mobilisation have similarly reacted to the failure of workplace militancy by noting the 'bureaucratisation of the rank-and-file' and the need to further renew workplace trade unionism by widening participation, collapsing hierarchies and generating fresh mobilisation against incorporated elements of workplace leadership as much as the external union (Hyman 1989; Beynon 1984: 371). Finally, feminist critics of

gender-based participation have complained of tokenism or noted the limited impact of changes in government on the bargaining behaviour of unions (McBride 2001). The main response has been to call for the superseding of liberal forms with ever more radical systems of participation that will guarantee favourable outcomes. In this kind of 'internal' critique of union government, therefore, there is a prescription for the refining of union forms to permit the stronger expression of member voice and ensure that failings of union behaviour are eradicated. Union government is flawed on this view but never irremediably so and it is believed that a final reform can ensure union behaviour is fully reflective of members' interests.

Other responses depart from the underlying assumptions of the organisational model. It has been suggested, for instance, that there is no one-to-one relationship between worker interests and union form; that there is no essential system of governance that allows expression of workers' essential interests (Heery and Kelly 1995: 157–8). One implication is that there may be two or more ways of governing unions that allow an effective link to be made between the needs of union members and the behaviour of their representatives. The interests of women and minority trade unionists are seemingly advanced by a system of union government that promotes their activism and guarantees access to decision-making positions (Colgan and Ledwith 2002; Healy and Kirton 2000; see also Chapter 5), although it is recognized that such 'guarantees' may be thwarted by traditional cultures and practices. But they may also be advanced by 'union managerialism'; by market research into the preferences of niche union consumers and systems of human resource development and performance management that require paid officers to engage with these preferences (Heery 1996: 180–8). Seemingly very different activist and consumerist reforms of union government may combine therefore to ensure a change in union behaviour and they may both do these by opening up direct lines of communication between women and minority workers and union leaders that circumvent the traditional system of member participation.[1]

A second implication is that the contribution of a single form of government to the revitalisation of trade unions may vary over time or from context to context. A decentralised pattern of union government that accords wide autonomy to workplace unionism may facilitate member participation, lay activism and challenges to state incomes policy or employer-led restructuring in a context of full employment or sheltered product markets; arguably the situation in UK manufacturing in the 1970s. Where these conditions are absent, however, as they are in the present context, the isolation and weakness of workplace organisation may become apparent, leading to compliance and passivity: 'wildcat cooperation' not militancy (Heery *et al*. 2003: 104–5). Another source of variation may be the attitudes, ideologies and characteristics of union representatives. The reform of union government may facilitate the access of women trade unionists to positions of power. But

individual women will use those positions differently depending on their ideology, connection to factions and in the light of their own experience (Colgan and Ledwith 1996; Ledwith *et al*. 1990). It is to a consideration of factors of this kind that we now turn.

Actor

Actor-centred models of revitalisation focus on the characteristics and attributes of union leaders and activists and contend that renewal is dependent on drafting in a fresh cohort of representatives who will behave differently. Once again, this argument comes in different forms though in all cases there is an underlying belief that unions have scope for strategic choice. There is a voluntarist assumption at the core of these models: the characteristics of leaders and activists matter because they influence the choices that are made (Heery 2003: 290–5; see also Smith 2001: 21–3, 189–95). Union leaders at all levels are believed to have the capacity to interpret their roles in an active sense, with major implications for the pattern and outcomes of union behaviour. And there has been a focus in research on the ideology, identity and experience of representatives, which are believed to underpin this interpretation.

Ideology has been the focus of the first, neo-Leninist, version of this argument. The key characteristic of union representatives that is identified in this formulation is whether or not they subscribe to a left-wing ideology, which in turn may be associated with membership of a socialist, communist or Trotskyist political party. In McIlroy and Campbell's (1999: 23) words, '[t]he activities of "politically motivated men" (and women) should be restored to the history of industrial relations' (see also Calveley and Healy 2003; Darlington 2001; 1998). The functions of such representatives have increasingly been discussed in terms of the mobilisation framework developed by Kelly (1998: Ch. 3; see also Darlington 2001; Gall 2001). Kelly identifies four primary tasks, all of which contribute to the mobilisation of workers in collective action. Leaders can promote a sense of injustice by attributing grievances to action by employers, promote group cohesion and identity, persuade workers of the benefits of collective action, such as striking, and, 'defend collective action in the face of counter-mobilising arguments that it is illegitimate' (Kelly 1998: 35). All of these actions are more likely to be taken by left union leaders because of their 'overtly ideological and solidaristic…commitment to trade unionism' (Darlington 1998: 70), that is, because of their left affiliation. They can contribute to revitalisation because it is an axiomatic belief of neo-Leninists that union militancy is the most effective means of protecting and advancing workers' interests (Darlington 2001; Kelly 1996a). If unions are to restore their fortunes, for these writers, they must re-build their capacity for collective action and this will require a prior strengthening of the traditional left and its activists.

Identity is the focus of the second version of the actor-centred argument. The core argument here is that revitalisation requires leaders who are more

representative, particularly of the female and minority workers whom unions must increasingly attract into membership (Kirton 1999: 213; Kirton and Healy 1999: 31). It is representativeness that is the key characteristic of union leaders in this formulation; they must share the identity of those they seek to represent (see Chapter 5). Representativeness is considered important for several reasons. First, it is likely to shape the attitudes and behaviours of representatives themselves. Having women representatives or representatives drawn from minorities can 'make a difference' (Heery and Kelly 1988), in the sense that they are more likely to identify with those who share their characteristics and accord priority to their interests in their activities as organisers, bargainers and lobbyists. They are likely to be 'equality aware' (Colling and Dickens 1989: 32). Second, it may also shape the response to trade unions of those workers who are represented. Women and minority workers may be more likely to join unions if they are recruited on a 'like-to-like' basis. They may also be more likely to identify with unions if representatives are similar to themselves and more likely to become active if there are role models with shared characteristics (Kirton 1999). It follows that union revitalisation requires increasing the proportion of women and minority leaders at national, intermediate and workplace levels. In the well-known formulation of Colling and Dickens (1989: 32), if issues relevant to women (and minorities) are to appear 'on the table' then women (and minorities) have to be 'at the table', with the opportunity to negotiate on their own behalf. That relevant issues do appear on the bargaining table is important for the reasons advanced above; the feminisation of the workforce and the strengthening of diverse identities amongst the working population. Making union leaders more representative of the new, emerging workforce may therefore be a precondition of revitalisation.

The final version of the actor-centred argument emphasises the prior experiences of union representatives. The assumption here is that the values, beliefs and skills of representatives are formed largely before they assume their representative role and that altering the source of recruitment to representative positions will substantially shift the pattern of leader and activist behaviour. This argument comes in a variety of forms. Kelly and Heery (1994) have suggested that there are significant generational differences in the values and behaviours of union representatives, which reflect conditions during their initial socialisation into the labour movement. Their research on paid officers indicated that those who entered unions during the period of rank-and-file mobilisation in the 1960s and 1970s but who were studied in the 1980s, a period of labour retreat, were often more militant in their response to employers than the workers they were representing. Representatives in trade unions, as in other organisations, therefore, may be socialised into a particular 'strategic recipe' that is applied even in altered circumstances.

A more recent version of the argument has stressed the innovative role of activists recruited to representative positions from new social movements

beyond trade unionism. For Turner (2003: 40–7), a critical element of the recent (partial) revitalisation of American trade unionism has been the infusion of activists from other movements who have displaced conservative officials and pushed the American Federation of Labor – Congress of International Organizations (AFL-CIO) and several major unions towards a greater focus on organising. Indeed, for Turner, mature social movements, like labour, can only revitalise themselves if they experience a transfusion of this kind; renewal must always involve fusion and learning from beyond the institutional frame of the labour movement. A similar argument has been developed at a lower level of analysis by Voss and Sherman (2003: 65–9) in their analysis of union locals in California. A distinguishing feature of revitalised locals, they report, was the presence in key leadership positions of activists with experience of other movements, such as community organising, Central American solidarity groups and anti-apartheid. These activists prompted revitalisation in several ways but two themes stand out. The first is that they brought a reinvigorated sense of movement to trade unionism, a passion and a commitment that was lacking in established, routinised bargaining and grievance-handling. Their contribution therefore has been to try and recreate trade unionism as a social movement: to 'put the move back in the labor movement'. The second theme has been their knowledge of new ways of organising, drawn from the campaigning upfront style of some of the new social movements. In other words, they have brought knowledge and skills to trade unionism and allowed unions to draw on the 'repertoires of contention' (Tarrow 1998: 20–1) developed by younger, fresher waves of protest.

Response

The primary response to actor-centred arguments has been to claim that structure trumps agency; that the autonomy and scope for choice of leadership and activist cohorts is limited (McIlroy 1997: 116–17). Thus, Charlwood (2004) has suggested that the election of a new set of left officials to leadership positions in British unions is unlikely to result in a return to militancy because the constraints of the environment in which they operate are too strong. He points to the failure to truly ignite of the firefighters' and postal workers' disputes of 2002–03 as signal examples of the limited capacity of ideological transition at the apex of unions to trigger change. A similar argument has been made by McBride (2000) in her critique of gender-democracy in UNISON. The increasing presence of women in representative positions, she argues, has had only a modest impact on the union's 'external' behaviour because an internal structural constraint – the insulation of largely male bargainers from the system of representative democracy – limits their influence. Arguably this type of critique of actor-centred models of renewal can be made from the vantage of any of the other three models. Changing the population of union representatives may fail to trigger

revitalisation if the long-run trend in society and economy is running against trade unionism, if the institutional environment is hostile and if the internal structures and processes through which representatives operate have been subject to insufficient reform. Actor-centred arguments rest on a belief that leaders have scope for strategic choice but this invites sceptics to question that scope and point to limiting conditions.

More nuanced approaches recognise that it is the interrelationship between structure and agency that leads to the reproduction or transformation of the rules and resources that shape the conditions of work. For example, Healy and Kirton (2000) drew on the availability of power resources to consider the ways that women may challenge union oligarchy and Kirton and Healy (2004) provide evidence of particular conditions that may lead to passive union identities to become politicised. Equally, Kirton and Healy recognise that the context in which trade unionists work and live will be critical in enabling or constraining mobilisation. Within this approach, just as actors may be constrained, structures should not be viewed as determining.

Summary

We have suggested that four types of prescriptive model for the revitalisation of trade unions can be identified in current literature. However, while all four are strongly prescriptive – they suggest how the labour movement must change if it is to survive – they can also be presented as theoretical models from which a research agenda can be derived. The societal models, for example, suggest that new forms of union organisation will first be manifest at the leading edge, where there is strongest pressure on unions to adapt to changing worker interests. If the three examples outlined above are used then the following testable propositions can be derived: that partnership will be found and will work most effectively either in organisations that are exposed to global competition or in those applying high performance work practices; that unions will shift their locus of representation 'beyond the workplace' and seek to compensate for diminishing worker security when they are seeking to recruit or have a sizeable body of contingent workers in membership; and that unions will seek to represent diversity when their job territory is diverse. A second type of proposition can also be derived from this literature. The societal models have an evolutionary cast; underlying them all is the belief that unions face a selective pressure to develop new forms. What this suggests is that adaptation will be found where pressure is strongest. In other words that declining unions, or union movements facing crisis, will be most prone to innovate and develop new methods of representation, whether these rest on partnership, contingent work or diversity (see Chapter 6).

The institutional models suggest one of two things. The first is that change in trade unions will flow from change in the institutional environment. Fairbrother's renewal thesis has already been treated as a testable

proposition in this way with authors seeking to establish the impact of devolved bargaining on union behaviour and vitality, with rather mixed results (e.g. Colling 1995). The second is that unfavourable institutional contexts will undermine non-concordant innovation. Work of this kind is best undertaken through comparative research and Turnbull *et al.*'s (2005) evaluation of partnership agreements in the British, Irish and German airline industries is a notable example. This research evaluates a common innovation in different institutional environments and suggests that experiments with partnership are more productive in co-ordinated, not liberal, market economies.

The research agenda that can be derived from organisational models focuses on the link between union government and union behaviour: is it the case that particular, desirable behaviours are associated with particular forms of government? In some cases this question has been pursued through evaluation of changes in union government or management systems, assessing their impact on other aspects of union activity. For the critical issue of gender and diversity this has taken the form of establishing whether changes in 'internal equality' generate further change in 'external equality', in union bargaining behaviour (e.g. Kirton and Greene 2002; McBride 2000). In other cases, research has focused on innovative behaviours, practical examples of union revitalisation, and traced backwards. The aim here has been to identify the systems of union government from which significant innovation has emerged (Heery 2004a). A focus on behaviour is also implied by the fourth, actor-centred model. The key issue here is whether union representatives with particular characteristics 'make a difference' in the sense of fulfilling their representative roles in significantly distinct ways. To date, both survey and qualitative research has been used to this end, seeking to establish the particular contribution to revitalisation of representatives with distinctive ideologies, identities and experiences (e.g. Calveley and Healy 2003; Voss and Sherman 2003; Healy and Kirton 2000; Darlington 1998; Colgan and Ledwith 1996; Heery and Kelly 1988; see also Chapter 6).

The empirical propositions that can be derived from the four types of model are, to a degree, competing. They each refer to a particular level of analysis and this raises the question of which is most important: is the revitalisation of unions determined critically by broad social and economic change, the institutional context, systems of internal government or the characteristics of representatives? Indeed, some of the core debates in industrial relations analysis have concerned the relative importance of influences operating at different levels. For example, there is an established and ongoing debate over the relative contribution of economic trends, the institutional framework and union strategy to the aggregate level of union membership (Mason and Bain 1993). But the four types of argument can also be seen as complementary and interrelated. Arguably any satisfactory programme of research into union revitalisation must proceed at all levels and consider the

impact on unions of broad social change and institutional patterns, while also examining internally generated change arising from new forms of government or new cohorts of representative. Moreover, we believe the real task of revitalisation for unions must embrace action at all levels. Unions must engage, that is, with the changing nature of the workforce and pursue strategies that are congruent with the existing institutional framework. But as part of such engagement they should also pursue internal reform and draw in fresh cadres of activists.

Non-union representation

The decline of trade unions has generated interest in other institutions of worker representation (e.g. Osterman *et al.* 2001; Freeman 1995: 519–20; Chapter 5). Arguably, union decline has both created a need and furnished an opportunity for other organisations and movements to fill the representation gap and provide a fresh channel for representing workers' interests. Moreover, and in more speculative vein, it may be that long-run change in the composition and organisation of capitalist societies is leading to the fragmentation of the system of representation. A plurality of institutions may better match the requirements of a society, in which there are multiple and competing identities seeking representation at work, a cardinal theme in postmodern accounts of social change (see Kelly 1998: 114–16). They may also reflect a more disorganised phase of capitalist development (Lash and Urry 1987), characterised by the break up of encompassing and authoritative representative institutions of both capital and labour.

Whatever the precise cause and long-term significance of non-union representation, which are inevitably controversial, we feel the issue is worthy of systematic consideration by industrial relations researchers. In what follows we seek to assist this process by performing three preliminary tasks. The first is to map the range of non-union institutions of worker representation, using the UK as a source, and identifying the particular characteristics of different types of representative body. The second and third relate to the relationship between non-union institutions and trade unions. We consider in turn the argument that alternative institutions can replace trade unions and so act as barriers to their revitalisation and the contrary claim that revitalisation is dependent on unions forging alliances with other types of representative institution.

Types of non-union institution

It is possible to identify three broad types of non-union representative institution, distinguishing each in terms of their point of origin. There are bodies that seek to advance workers' interests that have been created respectively by employers, by the state and by NGOs and other voluntary bodies in civil society. In some cases these institutions are of long standing. There

is a very long history, for example, of employers creating staff associations and establishing non-union consultative committees. In each type, however, there has been recent innovation with new organisations being created or established organisations assuming an expanded or more significant role. Both employment agencies and voluntary organisations, like the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB), have become more significant labour market actors in recent years (see Chapters 11, 12). There is no authoritative research that demonstrates we are witnessing a shift from a union-based to a plural system of representation: it may be that union decline simply results in the decay of worker representation *per se*. But innovation suggests that change of this kind may be taking place and provides an additional reason for examining non-union institutions.

Employers have always created institutions of worker voice, often in response to a rising challenge from trade unionism (Ramsay 1977). Staff associations have been established as channels of communication within individual enterprises and non-union consultative forums remain common: indeed, the statutory recognition procedure introduced by the Employment Relations Act (ERA) 1999 has stimulated fresh use of bodies of this kind as employers try to forestall unionisation (Heery and Simms 2004: 6). According to the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS), consultative committees are found in just under a fifth of non-union workplaces and in the private sector 58 per cent of workplaces without union representation report the presence of a non-union worker representative, up substantially from the 1980s (Gospel and Willman 2003: 151–2; Millward *et al*. 2000: 115). There have also been developments at the multi-employer level. While there has been a secular decline in employers' associations in recent decades there has been the emergence of issue-specific employer forums, several of which seek to promote the interests of identity groups within the workforce. *Opportunity Now* advocates the cause of gender equality within the business community, *Race for Opportunity* does the same for race equality and there is an *Employers' Forum on Age* and an *Employers' Forum on Disability*. A final type of institution that can be placed in the employers' camp, are labour market intermediaries, such as employment agencies. Clearly these are profit-seeking organisations whose primary orientation is to the needs of business clients but they do discharge a representative function for workers in certain respects. This is most obviously the case when specialist entertainment agencies or other agencies dealing with skilled workers, find work, negotiate pay and promote the careers of worker-clients (Purcell *et al*. 2004). Organisations of this kind serve the labour market needs of workers to the extent of bargaining on their behalf. Agencies may also deal with qualitative interests that arise in the labour process. According to Druker and Stanworth (2004: 66; see also Chapter 11), they can provide a degree of worker voice, resolving minor grievances that arise on work placements.

It is difficult to generalise about such a range of institutions but we believe that representative bodies created by or associated with employers are likely to display a series of characteristics. First, they are likely to have a unitarist rationale, emphasising the shared interests of workers and employers: the employers' forums for instance have emphasised the business case for equality at work (Dickens 2000b: 144). Second and related, they tend to promote integrative forms of representation, information-sharing and consultation, not bargaining. Third, the substantive agenda they promote may be relatively costless for employing organisations: encouraging equality for women and ethnic minority managers while neglecting inequality arising from low pay (Dickens 2000b: 153). Fourth, they are likely to advocate voluntarism and reject advancing worker interests through the closer legal regulation of business activity. Some of the employers' forums have advocated strengthening law and the larger employment agencies are happy to see legal regulation if it drives out low cost competition (Purcell *et al.* 2004). But generally, representation of worker interests through employer-created bodies is assumed to require no more than a voluntary response from employers themselves.

The second type of non-union institution consists of state-created representative bodies. In the UK there has been a marked increase in the number, and arguably the significance, of such institutions and the formal institutions of worker representation are moving towards the pattern seen in much of continental Europe, where trade unions exist alongside statutory works councils. Statutory institutions of worker representation can be classified along two primary dimensions. The first of these is the range of interests that they are allowed formally to represent and a distinction can be drawn between issue-specific representative bodies and those with a more general representative remit. Examples of the former in the UK include non-union health and safety committees and representatives, arrangements for consultation on collective redundancies and the provisions in the Working Time Regulations and Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations for the negotiation of 'workforce agreements' to provide for flexibility (see Chapter 10). Institutions that allow for more general representation include European Works Councils (EWCs) and the regulations that will shortly implement the 2002 EU directive on information and consultation in national undertakings. The latter will allow a system of statutory works councils to be established across UK business for the first time.

The second dimension relates to the powers of statutory institutions. State-created representative bodies may have complete control over certain issues (e.g. social programmes within the enterprise), a right of veto or codetermination over others (e.g. health and safety), a right to consultation (e.g. on collective redundancies) and a right to information (e.g. on business performance). The typical pattern is for councils to be given stronger rights when they deal with vital interests of workers (e.g. protection from

hazardous working practices) or with interests that are of secondary concern to employers (e.g. provision of sports, leisure and welfare facilities). Their powers generally become more attenuated as the agenda of representation moves towards the vital interests of the employer and deals with business planning, performance and finance (Hyman 1996: 71). In the UK, general institutions of worker representation have been endowed with relatively weak rights of representation, restricted to information-sharing and consultation and have been denied the strong rights of codetermination seen in Germany. It remains to be seen, whether this will adversely affect their functioning as representative institutions.

What are the distinguishing features of statutory worker representation? Most obviously they confer rights upon citizens (unlike legislation that 'licences' the activities of voluntary bodies like trade unions) and, as such have universal coverage. Indeed, this principle of universality was established in the UK by a decision of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 1994, which ruled that Britain's transposition of the directive on collective redundancies was unlawful because it restricted rights of information and consultation to recognised trade unions (see Chapter 10). However, the principle of universality is qualified both in European and UK legislation. In particular, coverage by regulations is restricted by workplace or company size and the new rights to information and consultation are confined to undertakings with 50 or more workers. This threshold is regarded as high by many and as representing an unacceptable qualification of citizenship rights in the interests of 'flexibility'.

The traditional rationale for statutory participation has focused precisely on the question of citizenship and the need to extend democratic participation of citizens from the political to the economic sphere. Works councils have been viewed as institutions of industrial democracy. Increasingly, however, this democratic rationale has been supplemented by or even given way to a business case rationale. Workforce agreements that allow for the tailoring of working time and other regulations to the needs of particular companies are advocated because they allow flexibility and reduce the negative effect of state regulation. The final distinctive feature of statutory participation is that the representative institutions created are regarded as serving an integrative purpose. This can be seen in the pattern of issue-specific powers conferred on works councils and equivalent bodies, which seeks to balance the respective interests of employers and workers. It is also seen in the balancing of rights with obligations: works councils typically operate under a peace obligation and are charged with co-operating with the employer. There is a formal even-handedness underlying legislation of this kind, in which the (ideally) neutral state balances the respective and equally legitimate interests of worker-citizens and their employers.

The third type of non-union representative body comprises voluntary, charitable, mutual aid and other NGOs formed within civil society. There are

many organisations of this type with an interest in employment relations, which display quite diverse characteristics (see Chapters 12, 13). They can be classified in a number of different ways. Thus, a distinction can be drawn between membership organisations, often created for purposes of mutual support, and advocacy organisations, which speak on behalf of an identifiable constituency but which rely on public and corporate donations and subventions from the state to undertake their representative function. Examples of the former include the Indian Workers' Association, small, local organisations that offer mutual support to those suffering from asbestosis and other conditions and the homeworking projects that provide advisory and other services to homeworkers under the framework of the National Group on Homeworking (NGH) (Gilbert 2002). There are many examples of the latter. The CAB is of this type (see Chapter 12) and there is a multitude of campaigning and charitable organisations that provide representation for particular groups of workers, including well-known organisations like Age Concern, Mind and Oxfam. Some organisations assume a hybrid form, in which services are provided to members but support is also derived from donations and grants. Examples include the London and Manchester Hazard Centres, the Maternity Alliance and the Institute of Employment Rights.

Another distinction can be drawn between organisations that are focused on the issue of employment and those which encompass it within a broader representative purpose. Thus, Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER) is an advisory and representation service for lesbians and gay men that focuses specifically on discrimination and problems at work, whereas Stonewall has a much more general remit that covers all aspects of gay and lesbian identity, including employment. In the area of international labour standards a similar division can be seen. Oxfam campaigns broadly for the eradication of poverty and includes within its focus the protection of workers in developing countries and marginal employment. Labour Behind the Label has worked with Oxfam, for example, on a campaign to highlight the exploitation of workers manufacturing sports clothing in the run up to the 2004 Olympic Games (*The Guardian* 4 March 2004), but is an organisation focused specifically on the protection of clothing workers. A final distinction can be drawn between unitary organisations, like Oxfam, and federal organisations. Many campaigning organisations, such the Maternity Alliance and Labour Behind the Label are of the latter type: they have been created by a number of primary institutions, including charities and trade unions, to campaign on a specific issue, perhaps for a fixed period of time (see Chapter 13).

Because of their diversity it is difficult to specify the defining characteristics of voluntary representative organisations. However, one tentative generalisation relates to the levels at which they perform their representative role. Organisations of this kind very frequently provide services to individual workers, including distributing information, providing advice and representing

workers before courts, tribunals and other types of hearing. In many cases this work is confined to workers belonging to a particular identity group or possessing a particular interest for which representation is required: gays and lesbians and those experiencing homophobic discrimination in the case of LAGER and Stonewall. Voluntary bodies also frequently represent worker interests at the level of the state and seek to obtain changes in government policy and legislation, relating to their specific constituency. Thus, both LAGER and Stonewall have advocated stronger legal protection for gays and lesbians and have supported this position through research, publicity and lobbying. Oxfam and other organisations with an interest in development have done the same for international labour standards, while the Maternity Alliance campaigns for stronger state support for working parents. There is a tendency to a bifurcated strategy of representation amongst voluntary organisations, therefore, that targets individuals on the one hand and government on the other (see Chapter 12).

This generalisation is not absolute, however, and it is possible to identify instances of voluntary organisations engaging in other types of representative work. For example, in some cases they seek to organise workers collectively, often on a particular issue or for a particular campaign (see Chapter 13). This is particularly apparent in mutual-aid organisations, such as those concerned with homeworking or industrial disease. Commitment to collective action may also include promoting trade unionism. In developing countries NGOs have sometimes played an important part in union-building (Rock 2001: 26–7) and in Britain groups like NGH have advocated union organisation for the workers they represent (Gilbert 2002; see also Chapter 13). Relations with trade unions may also embrace attempts to influence their policy and practice. A proportion of voluntary organisations target other institutions, including trade unions but also employers that are involved more directly in the formation and regulation of employment relationships. These efforts can include arranging training for managers and trade union representatives, providing advice and issuing model policies or standards of good practice. The whistle-blowing charity, Public Concern at Work, for instance, offers training and advice to employers (and trade unions) on the effective management of information disclosure. A final point at which voluntary bodies may seek to represent workers' interests is through public campaigns targeted at consumers. This has been a feature of recent Fair Trade campaigns, in which voluntary organisations have both used consumer pressure to influence employment practice in the supply chains of large, private sector firms like Adidas and Nike, and created new companies of their own to guarantee acceptable employment standards. The bifurcated pattern may be dominant therefore but breaks down in particular instances, depending on the nature of the organisation's mission and objectives.

A second area in which voluntary organisations may be distinctive is in terms of their conception of purpose. Compared with employer- and state-created bodies they are much more likely to regard themselves as partisan, as created to advance the interests of their constituency or membership rather than a putative general interest. LAGER and Stonewall are committed to securing justice and improved employment conditions for gays and lesbians: other interests such as those of employers are secondary. Again, however, there is variation. Public Concern at Work advises individuals on how to disclose information and may provide support in cases of victimisation. But it defines its mission in terms of promoting the public good through the effective management of information disclosure; an activity which it regards as benefiting all parties to the employment relationship. The Hazards Centres in contrast side much more definitely with the interests of workers: they exist to a large degree to improve health and safety through campaigns against bad employers (see also Chapter 13). Variation on this dimension, we feel, is likely to reflect the origins of voluntary organisations and the extent to which they have an institutional connection to the labour movement. The Hazards Centres are closely linked to trade unions and employ the discourse of trade unionism and share its conceptions of purpose. Public Concern at Work, in contrast, has emanated from the consumer movement and as a consequence is less 'unionate' in its ideology or activities.

Like most empirically derived typologies our classification of non-union representative institutions is fuzzy around the edges and, to a degree, the different categories overlap. Thus, voluntary organisations have worked closely with employer-led campaigns and, indeed Age Concern was involved in the creation of the Employers' Forum on Age (Duncan *et al.* 2000: 220) while Help the Aged is a member organisation. Many charities concerned with representing people at work (including the CAB) also receive subventions from the state. There is also overlap with the system of representation through trade unions. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is also a member of the Employers' Forum on Age and individual unions receive funding from the state for a number of their activities through the Union Learning and Partnership Funds (see Chapter 7). In 2004, moreover, the UK Government announced the creation of a union Modernisation Fund, reflecting the role of unions in delivering a number of state policies. Finally, unions have co-operated with and are among the primary backers of many voluntary organisations that focus on employment. As we have seen not only the Hazards Centres but also LAGER, the Maternity Alliance, Labour Behind the Label and the Institute of Employment Rights are voluntary organisations which rest on union support. This overlap raises the question of alliance-building and the extent to which union and non-union institutions of representation complement one another. First, however, we wish to consider the alternative

view; that alternative institutions pose a danger to unions and threaten to supplant their representative role.

Replacement

The replacement thesis has been developed in two main versions. On the one hand, advocates of replacement of unions by new institutions have argued that unions are deficient vehicles of representation, at least for some groups within the workforce. On this line of argument, the emergence of new institutions of representation represents a functional adaptation to the (changing) interests of workers and is both necessary and desirable. On the other hand, defenders of single-channel representation through unions have questioned the effectiveness of non-union institutions. The argument here is that unions are independent institutions that have been developed by working people and are the best means to promote their interests. Alternative institutions of representation, in contrast, have been created by other actors in the employment system and operate frequently against the interests of workers; they exist primarily to serve other, contradictory objectives.

An example of the first type of argument can be found in the work of Crain and Metheny (1999). Its starting point is an observation that unions have often failed to deal with, and indeed been complicit in, sexual and racial harassment by co-workers. In the US this has led to a recurrent pattern in cases of this kind, in which:

> …the victim complains directly to the employer, causing the employer to take disciplinary action against the harasser. The union then often files a grievance on behalf of the harasser protesting the discipline, and the victim becomes the key witness for the employer. Thus, the common scenario finds the female victim of discrimination or harassment pitted against her union and her co-worker harasser(s), and represented by a nonlabor group, by the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunities Commission], or by the employer itself. (Crain and Metheny 1999: 1553)

Harassment, it is further argued, is a manifestation of deeper conflicts of interest and intra-class exploitation that are masked by trade unionism and the 'united front' ideology on which it rests. It follows that greater scope must be allowed for women and minorities to form their own separate organisations, even their own unions, or rely upon non-union, identity groups to advance their interests at work. In the US context, in which the argument has been made, this further requires the reform of American labour law to remove the principles of majority rule and exclusive representation for majority unions that form part of the Wagner Act framework. Crain and Metheny are not antagonistic to trade unionism *per se* but they envisage a multi-institution framework of worker representation that allows greater scope for non-union organisations to represent and bargain on

behalf of competing interests. This is necessary, they contend, if the interests of those who need representation most, women and ethnic minority workers, are to be advanced.

An example of the second kind of argument can be seen in Kelly's (1996b) critique of works councils. Unlike other evaluations of statutory worker participation, this is developed explicitly from the perspective of employees and unions and is concerned with the capacity for works councils to fill the 'representation gap' in the UK labour market. Kelly argues forcefully that they will not. He points to the weak, largely consultative powers of works councils, which are likely to be particularly apparent in Britain, questions whether employers will embrace councils and work co-operatively with them and sees them as bearers of a debilitating ideology of social partnership. The latter is believed to be particularly harmful in a context of employer militancy and will help undermine the vigorous defence of workers' opposed interests through trade unionism. Kelly also feels that works councils may forestall union revitalisation: 'if … there were a recovery of union membership and militancy, it would be utter folly to derail such a movement by colluding with employers in the promotion of weaker forms of worker representation' (1996b: 60).

Both of these versions of the replacement thesis have drawn responses from critics and there is a continuing debate over the relationship between trade unions and other forms of interest representation. Thus, Selmi and McUsic (2002) have replied to the call for separate organisation for women and minorities by arguing that this directs attack away from the primary source of oppression at work, the employer, divides labour's house and neglects the scope for the internal reform of trade unions to embody a more inclusive conception of solidarity. For Selmi and McUsic the need to recognise and represent diverse interests implies the kinds of union revitalisation strategy described above; not separatism.

Kelly's critique of works councils, for its part, has elicited a response from Hyman who has suggested that statutory participation may offer the, 'least-worst option for British unions' (1996: 62; see also Chapter 10). Central to Hyman's argument is the belief, based on the experience of councils in Germany that unions can operate effectively through systems of statutory participation, which provide them with access to the workplace. For a weakened union movement, like Britain's, statutory support for collective organisation may be necessary to help unions gain a foothold in companies from which they previously have been excluded. They provide a means of requiring employers to respond to worker representatives when unions lack the power to ensure this response themselves. Hyman also makes the point that works councils are often reliant on unions: they require the expertise, network and supporting ideology that unions can bring to their operation in order to become effective. In other words, the two types of institution can achieve a concordant, not competitive, relationship.

Complementarity

Hyman's argument is a variant of the complementarity thesis; that unions can work co-operatively with other institutions of representation to mutual advantage. This argument also comes in a number of different variants. First, it can be argued that unions and non-union institutions fulfil distinct functions and represent discrete, non-overlapping interests of workers. Thus, it has often been suggested that the dual channel of representation in continental Europe through works councils and trade unions, allows the pursuit of integrative, co-operation with management at one level and the pursuit of distributive goals through collective bargaining at another (Clegg 1976: 83). The two institutions of representation allow workers to follow different, non-competing aims. Another example of this division of labour can be seen in union backing for voluntary and campaigning organisations. The latter may permit unions to address issues that extend beyond their core competence of bargaining and representation at work, such as environmental protection or international labour standards, through organisations that have greater legitimacy, expertise or are better suited to the work of campaigning or lobbying. The essential point is that the different types of representative institution are used to serve different purposes.

Second, it has been argued with increasing frequency that unions and other forms of representative institution can form alliances or coalitions (Clawson 2003: Ch. 4; Ledwith and Colgan 2002: 20–1). Labour–community coalitions have been an important feature of the recent wave of living wage campaigns in the US and, more latterly, Britain (see Chapter 13) and coalitions have also been formed in the context of industrial disputes, union organising, anti-globalisation and anti-sweatshop campaigns (Frege *et al.* 2004). In the latter cases, unions' coalition partners, in the US, have often been student organisations, reflecting a new wave of campus radicalism. But unions have also worked with faith, community, ethnic and consumer organisations. The defining feature of coalition is that unions and their partners engage in joint working, perhaps under the shadow of an umbrella or federal campaigning organisation. The relationship therefore goes beyond working in parallel to embrace working in concert.

The purposes of coalition are various. In part, coalition reflects a change in union goals and a greater convergence of goals with those of new social movements. As unions have responded to pressure to represent new social identities within their own ranks so they have been drawn to co-operate with external bodies that are also concerned with representing the interests of women, ethnic minorities, older, disabled and gay and lesbian workers (Frege *et al.* 2004). Coalition also arises because unions and other organisations may be able to exchange resources: the different types of institution have distinctive but complementary competences. For unions, for example, the benefits of coalition with voluntary organisations include access to the following resources: expertise, physical and human resources, connection to

new constituencies, capacity to mobilise social protest, and legitimacy (Frege *et al*. 2004). Working in coalition is one way in which unions can sidestep the perception that they are a non-legitimate special interest.

Third, it has been argued that unions and non-labour organisations can go beyond coalition to create a more symbiotic relationship, in which there is an effective fusion of the two types of institution. Hyman's defence of works councils points to this kind of relationship. In Germany, he argues works councils and trade unions have become integral to each other's operations. Unions 'capture' works councils by winning elections and thus acquire a presence (with associated legal supports) in the workplace. Works councils, for their part, rely upon the support of unions, their expertise, training and networks, to function effectively as organs of representation. Another example of this kind of overlapping relationship might be the entry of new social movements into trade unions, where they participate in union politics and act effectively as pressure groups seeking to tilt union policy towards the needs of their constituencies. Unions, in turn may benefit from this relationship by acquiring a line of connection to groups who previously stood outside labour's ranks but whom unions now need to organise. The relationships between unions and the women's movement (and its associated organisations) and more recently gays and lesbians and organisations of the disabled, arguably provide models.

There is very broad support for the complementarity thesis amongst academic commentators on trade unions at present that arguably reflects the increasing receptiveness of unions themselves to working with non-labour organisations (Heery 1998). There is also recognition, however, particularly in the literature on coalitions, that co-operation with non-union bodies can prove difficult. The relationship between unions and environmental, feminist and development organisations has often been fraught, reflecting the fact that the interests of these movements may overlap with those of unions but are not the same. Stronger environmental protection or fairer access to and treatment at work may impose costs on union members and the ethos, culture and forms of practice of single-issue campaigning bodies are often alien to trade unions. These problems can be overcome and there are many instances of successful labour–community coalition (Clawson 2003: Ch. 4; see also Ch. 13). It may also be, however, that the most enduring coalitions emerge when they deal with issues that are relatively remote from the core interests of trade unions and their members. Joint work, that is, may be easier to develop when issues have relatively low salience.

Summary

In this section we have described some of the main forms of non-union institutions of worker representation and reviewed the debate over the relationship between these institutions and the trade union movement. As with

our review of the theme of union revitalisation, the focus has been on prescriptive argument, on the case made for unions working with or avoiding entanglement with non-union bodies. Again, however, we believe that the review also sets out a research agenda. One line of inquiry that we feel should be pursued with some urgency is to carry out a fuller mapping of the different forms and functions of non-union worker representation. The WERS series has allowed this to be done for employer-created representative institutions that operate at workplace level (Gospel and Willman 2003). But there is a need to look in greater detail at non-workplace and non-employer created bodies, particularly the very large group of campaigning and voluntary organisations that now have an interest in the employment relationship. Part of this mapping exercise could usefully look at trends over time: is it the case that we are moving towards a more pluralistic system of worker representation and, if so, what are the causes of this development? Answering this question would allow employment relations researchers to connect with a much wider range of social theory that is concerned with social identity and its transformation.

A research agenda can also be constructed from the competing arguments about union relationships with non-labour organisations. Both the replacement and complementarity theses are ripe for empirical testing, we feel, for different types of issue and different types of non-labour body. As part of such a test, it may be possible to identify the conditions under which productive coalition or ruinous rivalry, emerge. Already American scholars have engaged with questions of this kind and, for example, have identified the key role of 'bridge builders' who link unions with non-labour campaigns (Rose 2000; Brecher and Costello 1990). More work of this kind is needed. The UK appears to be moving very definitely towards a dual system of worker representation based on statutory works councils and trade unions and it is vital that researchers identify the patterns of interaction and effects of these two types of institution (see Chapter 10). There is also a particular need to research the relationship between unions and voluntary organisations. An overdue feature of recent work on trade unions has been the greater emphasis on questions of equality, diversity and identity (e.g. Ledwith and Colgan 2002). Developing this theme, we believe, of necessity implies looking in detail at the relationship between unions and specialist, non-labour bodies that offer representation to workers on these issues.

Contributions

The 12 empirical chapters that follow fall into four clusters. The first cluster consists of chapters that examine the issue of union revitalisation by examining the prospects for unionisation amongst three groups of workers who are often seen as emblematic of the 'new economy'. Jeff Hyman, Cliff Lockyer, Abigail Marks and Dora Scholarios report research into the attitudes

to work and trade unionism of software workers. Peter Bain, Phil Taylor, Kay Gilbert and Gregor Gall perform the same task for call-centre workers but also examine recent attempts at union organising in call centres. And Mick Marchington, Jill Rubery and Fang Lee Cooke assess the efficacy of partnership and organising approaches to the representation of workers who work across organisational boundaries; temporary workers and sub-contractors.

There is rather scant encouragement for those who hope for union revitalisation in any of this first set of chapters and in combination they underline the scale of the challenge facing unions in Britain. The bleakest prospect is found in Hyman *et al.*'s chapter on software workers for whom unionisation is low and declining, who display little commitment to collective action and who, in many cases, have the human capital to navigate the labour market successfully as individuals. Amongst call-centre workers, in contrast, support for unionisation is quite high and there is a solid core of unionised workers in call centres established by unionised firms. But Bain *et al.*'s study points to the weakness of union organisation and identifies powerful structural constraints (e.g. tight management control and high labour turnover) on union-building. Finally, Marchington *et al.*'s study of workers in multi-agency environments questions the relevance of attempts at revitalisation that seek either to build partnership with the employer or build effective organisation through aggressive organising, because both are predicated on continuous employment in a single enterprise.

Despite attesting to the difficult context faced in the new industries, the authors of all three chapters point to opportunities for trade unions. These are construed differently in the different cases, however, and what emerges from the group of studies is the likelihood that there is no single route to union revitalisation but that, strategies of organising and representation, have to be tailored to the structural properties of different forms of employment (see Jarley 2002: 228–33). Thus, Bain *et al.* argue forcefully that the thorough application of an organising model is required to unionise call centres. Hyman *et al.*, in contrast, recommend labour market organising and the need for unions to develop forms of representation that are appropriate to the needs of mobile workers, many with significant human capital, who may value support in maintaining their skill set and finding employment. Chapter 4 by Marchington *et al.* also recommends organising at the level of the labour market but stresses that a basic requirement for this to occur is a change in the structure of employment law, which currently licenses and largely confines union activity to the workplace (see also Heery *et al.* 2004a).

If the starting point for the first cluster of chapters is to examine workers, the starting point for the second cluster is to examine unions and their policies and practices. In Chapter 5 Geraldine Healy, Harriet Bradley and Nupur Mukherjee examine the activities of black and minority ethnic women trade union activists against the background of broader attempts by unions to represent a more diverse workforce. In Chapter 6 Edmund Heery, Hazel Conley,

Rick Delbridge, Melanie Simms and Paul Stewart look at attempts by unions to accommodate the interests of workers in non-standard employment, including part-timers, agency workers, freelances and those on fixed-term contracts. Finally, Anne Munro and Helen Rainbird use a case study of UNISON to examine union responses to the lifelong learning agenda and examine the newly established role of Union Learning Representative.

This group of chapters intersects with the wider debate on union revitalisation at a number of points. The chapters by Healy *et al*. and Heery *et al*. are concerned with tracing union responses to what are often seen as significant long-term shifts in the labour market, an increase in diversity and the growth of contingent work. All three chapters, moreover, examine the response of unions to a changing institutional context and trace developments in union policy and practice to the changing opportunity structure afforded by state policy. This is particularly marked in Chapters 5 and 7. Union engagement with the interests of black and ethnic minority workers has been stimulated by the Stephen Lawrence Report (MacPherson 1999) and the subsequent amendment to the Race Relations Act. Unions' increasing engagement with workplace learning has stemmed from developments in training policy and the growing propensity of the state to use trade unions as agents of policy delivery in this area through the Union Learning Fund and other initiatives (Ludlam and Taylor 2003: 736). In both cases, the opportunity afforded by the state has accentuated processes of functional specialisation in trade unions, seen most graphically in the creation of the new roles of Union Learning Representing and, in UNISON, Lifelong Learning Advisor (LLA).

All three chapters in this group emphasise the link between internal, organisational change within unions and the development of 'external' policies. They stress the interconnection between both sides of the union representation process. All three also emphasise the importance of articulation and the need for developments at workplace level to be supported by changes at higher levels in trade unions. Thus, in Chapter 5 there is a stress on the importance of self-organisation and union-wide networks in providing support for activists from black and minority ethnic groups, while in Chapter 7 there is a very strong emphasis on the need for Union Learning Representatives to be integrated with the wider union. This is vital, it is argued, if the work of these representatives is not to fall under the sway of management and if the learning and training policies they develop are to reflect the independent development needs of workers, as opposed to the training needs of employers. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 emphasise the identity of union representatives and the fact that individual differences influence the way in which representative roles are performed. In Chapter 5, in particular, evidence is presented of the important part played by black and minority ethnic activists in promoting trade unionism within their communities and in challenging racism at work.

The third cluster of chapters deals with the vexed question of labour–management partnership. A critical take on partnership is offered in the chapter by Andy Danford, Mike Richardson, Paul Stewart, Stephanie Tailby and Martin Upchurch. Their chapter dissects an experiment in labour–management partnership in the aircraft industry and states trenchantly that partnership works against the interests of workers and union. Their conclusion echoes that of Kelly (1996a) that the restructuring of employment in the context of globalisation requires militant trade unionism, not partnership, because the scope for shared interests between employer and employee is diminishing. Sarah Oxenbridge and William Brown adopt a more favourable position in Chapter 9. Their evaluation of partnerships in a number of organisations identifies two broad clusters: there are 'shallow' partnerships, often in the service sector and inscribed in a formal partnership agreement, and more 'robust' relationships, which are also often informal (see also Kelly 2004). Although Oxenbridge and Brown believe that partnership can offer a means to revitalise unions they offer a nuanced position. Even in successful partnerships, they argue, union representatives can be placed in a difficult position because the benefits to the union of co-operation with management may be relatively intangible while workers have to surrender significant concessions.

The final cluster of chapters deals with representation through non-union institutions. In Chapter 10, Mark Hall and Mike Terry review the evolution of statutory forms of worker participation in Britain since the 1970s and provide an assessment of the likely impact of the new regulations on informing and consulting workers, which give effect to the Information and Consultation Directive 2002. In Chapter 11, Jan Druker and Celia Stanworth examine the activities of employment agencies and use original research to assess the extent to which they represent the workers they place with client organisations. In Chapter 12, Brian Abbott presents a novel assessment of the work of the CAB and, again, seeks to identify the specific characteristics of, and evaluate, its role in representing people with workplace problems. Finally, in Chapter 13, Jane Wills examines the East London campaign for a living wage and argues strongly for this kind of community-based coalition to advance the interests of the most marginalised and exploited workers in Britain's urban labour markets.

All four of these chapters have something to say of relevance to the replacement and complementarity theses. The case for replacement emerges strongest from Druker and Stanworth's chapter which, again, makes uncomfortable reading for those who espouse union revitalisation. The authors are under no illusion with regard to the partial and compromised nature of the 'representation' agencies afford to the workers they place in employment but they do describe a process of grievance-handling which contributes to the very low level of demand for union membership identified amongst the agency workers they researched. Their findings echo the results of other

research which has pointed to the effect of employer-sponsored voice in damping demand for union representation (Fiorito 2001; Rundle 1998).

The other three chapters offer more hope for complementarity. The East London living wage campaign has been developed with the active support of trade unions and Wills argues that involvement in campaigns of this kind offers an opportunity for unions to engage with the interests of contingent, low-paid workers. Abbott similarly describes joint working between the CAB and trade unions and argues that the representation-work of both institutions serves different constituencies and can be regarded as operating in parallel to a very large degree. Finally, Hall and Terry argue that the new works council legislation offers an opportunity for British unions to rebuild influence within the economy and can reinforce other initiatives that seek to develop labour–management partnership. Albeit in different ways and with different emphases these chapters make the case for a pluralist system of worker representation based on trade unions interacting positively with non-union institutions.

Employment relations research in Britain is now largely concentrated in business schools and with few exceptions the contributors to this volume are business school academics. Unlike other subjects taught in business schools, however, employment relations has never accepted the primacy of employer interests or framed its research agenda solely in terms of the needs of managers. The separate and equally legitimate interests of workers have always provided an alternative starting point. This can be seen very definitely in the present volume. The representation of the interests of workers has always been and must always remain central to the subject of employment or industrial relations. In the real world of work, however, that task of representation is undergoing significant change marked by the decline of trade unions, attempts at their revitalisation and the seemingly increasing significance of non-union institutions. Our book we feel is true to the established concerns of the field of employment relations. But it also reflects this changing context and in this way, we hope, points to the future.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank William Brown for helpful comments on this chapter.

Note

1. However it may be that these reforms emerge from and require the continued mobilisation of women and minority activists if they are to be sustained. They do not emerge in a vacuum (McKenzie 2003; Healy and Kirton 2001). The agency of particular union members and activists in challenging and sometimes changing union form and structure should not be underplayed.

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