*"The Bonds of Unity": Some Further Reflections**

by Gregory S. KEALEY**
and Bryan PALMER***

> To write the history of the Knights of Labor is an impossibility. Its history was the history of the day in which it moved and did its work. I am aware that some young men fresh from college have tried to write the history of the organization but they failed. They applied logic and scientific research; they divided the emotions, the passions, and feelings of the members into groups; they dissected and vivisected the groups; they used logarithms, algebraic formulas, and everything known to the young ambitious graduate of a university.[1]
>
> T. V. POWDERLY

It is gratifying to see that our "interesting" work on the Knights of Labor has drawn comment on the significance of the labour upsurge of the 1880s.[2] But it is somewhat surprising that this response, written before the publication of our book-length study,[3] concentrates on an article that was meant to serve only as an introduction to the Knights of Labor experience and focuses narrowly on statistical material which we presented cautiously, as problematic and speculative. Nevertheless, Piva's response does clarify a statistical carelessness and draws attention to what we now recognize as a mild exaggeration of the Order's quantitative achievements *in comparison with those of the twentieth-century* labour movement. But because Piva's data are drawn from Canadian rather than Ontario estimates, because he overstates his case by drawing uncritically from the 1891 census, because he persistently offers a pessimistic assessment of the possibility of specific achievements in the 1880s, and because he so fundamentally misconstrues the particular context of that period, we are forced to respond on two levels.

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1 Terence V. POWDERLY, *The Path I Trod: The Autobiography of Terence V. Powderly* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 3-4, 102.

2 Michael PIVA, "'The Bonds of Unity': A Comment", *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, XVI (mai-May 1983): 167-72.

3 Gregory S. KEALEY and Bryan D. PALMER, *"Dreaming of What Might Be": The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1902* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

First, we will provide more precise data on the Knights of Labor and the percentages of the various work-forces they may have organized, basing this still speculative numerical construction not, like Piva, on national figures, but on specific Ontario statistical constructs. Unlike Piva, moreover, we want to stress that such figures are illustrative only; they are not definitive and the sources allow little certainty. Second, we will address the interpretive issues where we oppose strongly Piva's persistent pessimism and scholastic skepticism about the late nineteenth-century workers' movement. In all of this we insist, however, that the very direction of this debate is wrong. Our ultimate argument never was and never could be statistical. We gestured toward a comparison to 1919 and the CIO years because these periods of working-class advance are often cited as having had unprecedented organizational achievements, while the 1880s remain unexplored terrain. Nothing in Piva's response to "The Bonds of Unity" has convinced us that the Knights of Labor experience was not a quantitative and qualitative breakthrough for Ontario's (and Canada's) workers. As the first truly mass uprising of Canadian labour, it broke decisively from the limitations of earlier nineteenth-century efforts and it established the foundations upon which future organization of the entire working class could proceed. To argue that the Knights of labor organized an insignificant number of workers and to suggest that our reading of the 1880s is somehow suspect, raising the spectre of "better data", is serious distortion.

Piva's essential, and singular, contribution is to point out that we have engaged in problematic usage of "hands employed in manufacturing", "non-agricultural work-force", and the unqualified category, "work-force". Such categories are obviously different and we used them carelessly. Piva correctly notes that this has direct implications when comparisons are made between Knights of Labor achievements in the organizational realm and those of twentieth-century trade unions. "Hands employed in manufacturing" is indeed a relatively small sector of the potential organizable work-force, although a critically important one. As a reading of the 1891 census table on occupations of the people of Ontario reveals, it was from the manufacturing category that the Order would draw many of its advocates, including some of those in the construction industry, which Piva places outside of manufacturing (builders, carpenters and joiners, masons, plasterers, and roofers, for instance, are in fact included in this category in the 1891 compilations). But it is true that the non-agricultural work-force is the more appropriate category to be dealing in, although this is not, as we shall note, an unproblematic sector. Discussion of the unqualified category of total work-force, however, is largely irrelevant. Piva notes, for example, that when we refer to the percentage of labour organized nationally in the early twentieth century we cite a figure of 10 percent of the work-force. He assumes, apparently without checking the sources cited, that this is therefore the total work-force. In fact, the 10 percent figure is based on the non-agricultural work-force, as most historians will know. The comparison that Piva then makes, between the 3 percent the Knights supposedly organized and the 10 percent the trade unions and other bodies organized in the pre-World War I years is thus meaningless. The actual comparison is between percentages organized of the non-agricultural work-force, and the

percentages then become, according to Piva's own data, 5.6 and 10 percent. For purposes of clarity, then, it should be stressed that although we did use the term "work-force" in our original article (largely as a stylistic convenience), our actual categories were hands employed in manufacturing and non-agricultural work-force.

The question then arises as to how one computes the non-agricultural work-force. Piva implies that it is a simple task and suggests a quick look at the 1881 and 1891 aggregate tables on occupations, with adjustments based on eliminating "non-productive" and "agricultural" occupations. This will give a "reasonably precise calculation of [the] non-agricultural work-force". Perhaps, but we must recognize a series of complicating factors: first, that the 1881 and 1891 census classifications/organization differed, and comparison is therefore not a direct and simple procedure; second, that the resulting non-agricultural work-force will contain large numbers of non-working-class elements, some of whom were prohibited entry into the Knights of Labor (lawyers and saloon-keepers) or were unlikely to join the Order (employers, clergymen, doctors, professors); third, that over time (and especially into the twentieth century) certain work-force sectors (the remaining "agricultural" component of the "non-agricultural work-force", domestic service, professional elements — and census classifications between 1881-1891 shift markedly, again making comparison difficult) are declining whereas others are rising.

In regard to this latter complicated development, which demands far closer attention, we would make the elementary point that such changes in the composition of the non-agricultural work-force and such shifts in census classification serve to create statistical constructs that will dilute the Knights of Labor's organizational impact if Piva's procedures of analysis are followed uncritically and the results compared to twentieth-century figures on percentages of the non-agricultural work-force organized. Our original general comparison to the early twentieth-century years was not meant to bear such a burden, but merely to establish that the Order's organizational achievements were significant and in fact rivalled those of a later and better known period. But comparing the 1880s to the World-War-I years or the 1920s and 1930s is ultimately to compare different contexts where the organizable work-force is different. Thus, between 1881 and 1921, if one looks to the agriculture, fisheries, and mining categories, where some occupations remained as part of the non-agricultural work-force classification schema, the 1891 figure (which Piva is using) was the largest in the forty-year period, and declined after 1891. Domestic servants, always difficult to unionize, although the Knights to their credit tried, numbered 43,043 in 1891, but dropped precipitously to 26,738 in 1921. Those employed in the more unionized sector of manufacturing and mechanical pursuits, however, increased dramatically, from 130,214 in 1881 to 254,424 (including construction) in 1921. Our point is this: in the 1880s a larger percentage of the so-called "non-agricultural work-force" was unlikely to be organized, difficult to unionize, or isolated in small enclaves in essentially rural milieux than in the twentieth century when more of this non-

agricultural work-force was explicitly industrial and urban. Piva's recourse, pure and simple, to "the data", understates this critical problem.

Moreover, in an argument that turns so emphatically upon statistical precision Piva is himself willing to take problematic data and turn them into "simple facts". He never hesitates to use 1891 census figures, although they necessarily understate the impact of the Knights of Labor given the population expansion and growth in particular occupational sectors that took place between the peak of the Order's activity in 1886 and the compilation of the census material four to five years later. A part, surely, of the essential point of our original article was the need to explore local contexts, but Piva seems not to have the time to offer us an explicit comment on specific towns or cities. He actually goes one step further, cavalierly tossing out national figures of organization without questioning how comparable the data are with the Ontario experience.

One way around this would be to exclude certain occupations from the 1881 census tables to come up with a "working-class" work-force that corresponds to the realities of the period. Such a "work-force" construct would exclude accountants, clergymen, farmers, judges, manufacturers, shopkeepers, and teachers; but it would (in the Knights' own all-inclusive conception of class) include apprentices, cabmen, clerks, domestic servants, labourers (many of whom, in the census classification would actually be agricultural labourers and hence not included in the more precise twentieth-century census classifications of non-agricultural work-forces), lumbermen, mariners, miners, telegraphers, and the broad range of more traditional mechanical/industrial occupations. Although an arbitrary and problematic creation, this "work-force" gives us a more realistic grasp of the numerical dimensions of the working class. In 1881 such an "adjusted" non-agricultural work-force would have numbered 264,867. Taking the different tables presented in the 1891 census and establishing those agricultural occupations (dairymen, farm labourers, fishermen, lumbermen, miners, quarrymen, and woodchoppers) that could possibly be construed as working class in conjunction with similar occupations in the domestic, professional, trade and transportation, and manufacturing (all but contractors and manufacturers) sectors reveals a comparable "adjusted" non-agricultural work-force of 350,097. Halving the difference between the 1881 and 1891 figures would indicate an 1886 "adjusted" non-agricultural work-force of 307,482. Our peak Knights of Labor membership of 21,800 would thus represent organization of 7.1 percent of this adjusted work-force, while the addition of a modest 5,200 trade unionists (and there were at least this number who were not Knights) would raise the percentage organized to 8.8 percent. These figures, however "at risk" they may be in demographers' terms, are infinitely more realistic than figures presented by Piva. Of course, in any attempt to compare them to the twentieth-century organizational achievement, comparable adjustments would also have to be made, no doubt raising the percentage of this "adjusted" work-force organized. But, as indicated above, we would predict, given the shifts in the occupational structure, that such adjustments would reflect favourably on the achievements of the 1880s.

The figures presented above represent as pessimistic an assessment of the Order's impact as could possibly be put forward by any historian having any knowledge of the 1880s. We are convinced that they represent a gross underestimation of the advances registered in this decade by the Knights and the trade unions. If they deflate our earlier figures, they are nonetheless significantly higher than Piva's assessments. But because these numbers might well be contested and challenged and because they are not readily comparable to twentieth-century data, we will present reassessed membership figures as percentages organized of the traditionally-defined Ontario work-forces.

Table 1. — ESTIMATES OF UNION MEMBERSHIP IN ONTARIO AS PERCENTAGES OF THE GAINFULLY EMPLOYED

A) Knights of Labor Membership[a]			
Date	*Percentage in Total Work-force*	*Percentage in Non-agricultural Work-force*	*Percentage in Manufacturing*[b]
1881	3.46	6.68	18.4
1886[c]	3.16	5.96	15.3
1891	2.91	5.38	13.1

B) Trade Union Membership		
Date	*Percentage in Total Work-force*	*Percentage in Non-agricultural Work-force*
1901	3.62	6.11
1911	5.84	8.45
1921	8.92	12.11
1931	6.35	8.20

Sources: CANADA, *Census*, 1881, 1891, for the Knights of Labor estimates, and Appendices Ia and Ib for the percentage unionized from 1901 to 1931.

[a] In each case we have used 21,800 as the Ontario Knights' membership, a figure that Piva appears to accept.

[b] These figures differ slightly from those offered in our original article because earlier data were based on census estimates of hands employed in industrial establishments, whereas here we have used the broader category of those gainfully employed in the manufacturing/mechanical sector.

[c] $p^{1886} = \frac{(p^{1891} - p^{1881})}{2} + p^{1881}$

Given that Part A of the table is based on Knights of Labor membership alone, without any consideration of other trade unionists, these figures understate significantly the state of Ontario labour organization. If, for instance, we take our figure of 21,800 Knights and again add to it 5,200 trade unionists, then this increases the percentage of the total work-force organized in 1886 to 3.91 and raises the percentage of the non-agricultural work-force organized to 7.38. These figures, while not exceeding the 1911 to 1931 percentages organized, certainly approach them, and the latter (7.38 percent) is close to the general range constructed earlier from our "adjusted" non-agricultural work-force. And in the twentieth-century years as

well some of the larger percentage organized might well have been accounted for by working-class bodies — the IWW or the OBU — far closer in orientation to the Knights of Labor than to the craft unions Piva appears to champion. Thus even when we partially accept Piva's critique, the revised figures, however conservatively construed, do not warrant his conclusion that the Knights did not organize "a large portion of the non-agricultural work-force".

What of Piva's skepticism about the manner in which we computed the membership of the Knights of Labor. He raises a series of questions that he thinks invalidates our argument. Many of these queries are garbled and interchangeable, but let us proceed through them in his order. He first suggests that our reported membership figures must be suspect because, in some instances, they are too high. Here is the crux of the matter. As our book makes clear we have searched long and hard to dig up membership estimates for specific locales. Where we have firm numbers on dues-paying members for the metropolitan centres of Toronto and Hamilton, we have used these figures. They probably represent an under-statement of members, since inflated estimates on dues-paying members to the international headquarters would have cost the local assemblies sums that they would have been unwilling to pay. In other instances we have taken a range of sources — newspapers, Bureau of Industry Reports, and correspondence in the Powderly Papers — to suggest membership figures for a number of obscure locales that no Canadian historian has ever before ventured into with any sophistication. Piva may question such figures, and we do as well. But they are no less "factual" than the Department of Labour reports from trade unions that he bases his own twentieth-century estimates of organization upon.

Finally, *is* it impossible to organize 139 percent of the work-force in Merritton? (Note that we cite a range of 69.5-139 percent, but that Piva does not pose his skepticism in terms of that range, but rather solely in relation to the higher figure.) On a mathematical level, of course, this is absurd. But given that we presented these figures as gestures toward the importance of the Order in this obscure town, the figures need to be interpreted sensitively, not dismissed out of hand. Merritton, a small manufacturing hamlet in the Niagara Peninsula, had a population of 1798 in 1881 and 1813 in 1891. Our only reference to Maple Leaf Local Assembly 5933 (cotton workers) suggests that 500 working people joined the Order in 1886, and the LA continued in existence until 1893. Obviously some of the members of this mixed assembly lived on the outskirts of Merritton, beyond the census net, while others may well have been wives/daughters of workers in the mill. To dismiss an apparently overly high membership figure because it does not fit, logically, with the mathematics of computation is to write off an experience because the categories of analysis are problematic and unable to bear the weight of precision that some historians insist govern all study of the past. Surely the more significant point to stress is that in the small community of Merritton, where a cotton mill was established in 1884, the Knights of Labor provided the first institutional context for workers' organization, and achieved dramatic successes.

To pose the question in terms of the possibility of organizing 139 percent of the work-force is to pass by the history of accomplishment for the sake of an idealized scholasticism. Going beyond such scholasticism, but meeting some of Piva's appropriate criticisms, let us reconsider Table 3 of our original article. This table was based on the details provided for industrial establishments in specific Ontario districts, found in Volume III of the *Census* for both 1881 and 1891. The figures used were the reports of hands employed. As is now obvious, this is an understatement of the non-agricultural work-force, although it is a more strictly "working-class" reading of the manufacturing sector than will appear in figures on those involved in the manufacturing and mechanical/industrial realm, which include employers and contractors. But, to be sure, the "working class" of various manufacturing centres would have included many labouring in the Commercial/Trade and Transportation, Domestic, and Professional sectors. Using 1881 figures (the only local data available) we propose to eliminate the Agricultural sector altogether. (There would have been few lumbermen, fishermen, miners, quarrymen, and woodchoppers in these towns and cities, those that were there would have been insignificant in number, and those in existence will be partially counterbalanced by those employers that will be included in this "adjusted work-force" by taking all of those reported in the Industrial group.) Our "adjusted work-force" is thus composed of all of those in the Industrial sector, as well as those employed in the Commercial/Trade and Transport, Domestic, and Professional categories.

The problem is how to determine these latter figures. Taking all of those employed would distort dramatically. In our earlier aggregate adjustments for 1891 (where occupations are more explicitly related to particular sectors on the aggregate level) we found that our "adjusted" work-force contained roughly 90 percent of all of those in the Domestic category, only 8 percent of Professionals, and approximately 58 percent of those engaged in Trade and Transportation (which although not perfectly equatable with the 1881 category of Commerce, is used as an equivalent here). With an adjusted 1881 work-force composed of workers in these realms we can construct a revised table. Finally, in the 1881 census some, although certainly not all, labourers were shunted into a "not-classified" category. We have no way of knowing what other occupations were included in this indiscriminate lumping, although it would seem that the most transient and rootless of the unskilled would find their way into the census-takers "unclassifiables". Many of them, especially in country settings, would actually have been agricultural labourers, not usually considered in the makeup of the non-agricultural work-force. We therefore present two percentages, one excluding these non-classifiables and one including them.

While these figures are problematic and computed on the basis of an 1881 work-force (because of census limitations), they represent realistic rather than idealistic assessments of the percentage of the working-class organized by the Knights of Labor. If anything, once more, they understate the impact of the Order, especially if the lower percentages computed from an "adjusted work-force" including those "not classified" are taken as

representative. Since some of the smaller towns actually lost manufacturing/industrial populations over the decade we do not think any gross distortion results from using 1881 rather than 1891 figures. And as we shall note another method of estimating the "work-force" would yield similar figures. Trade unionists not involved in the Order would, finally, have to be added to such data to get a more complete understanding of labour organization in the 1880s. As should be clear, such organizational activity was far from insignificant, whatever the merits of Piva's skepticism. For many of these locales it would never be approached in the twentieth-century years.

Table 2. — "Adjusted Work-force" for Specific Locales and Percentage Organized by Knights of Labor in the 1880s

Locale	*1881 Adjusted Work-force (A) + Not Classified (B)*	*Knights of Labor Membership (Date)*	*Percentage Organized*	
	A *B*		*A*	*A + B*
Essex (Windsor)	4,079 + 2,580	616 (1887)	15.0	9.2
London	4,692 + 950	1,200 (1886)	25.5	21.3
Elgin East (St. Thomas)	3,688 + 1,265	1,500 (1886)	40.7	30.3
Brockville	1,831 + 709	430 (1883)	23.4	16.9
Toronto	21,394 + 4,647	5,000 (1886)	23.2	19.2
Hamilton	9,473 + 2,012	2,200 (1886)	23.2	19.1
Kingston	2,996 + 773	1,500 (1887)[a]	50.0	39.8
Cornwall	1,679 + 605	380 (1887)	22.6	16.6
Lanark South	1,833 + 686	425 (1887-88)	23.1	16.8
Ottawa	4,970 + 1,823	2,000 (1892)[b]	40.2	29.4
Lincoln, Niagara, Holland	6,648 + 4,408	1,795 (1886-88)	27.0	16.2
Perth North	3,237 + 2,209	675 (1886)	20.8	12.4

[a] We feel this figure is an exaggeration, but it comes not from any Knights of Labor source, but from an Ontario Bureau of Industry report.
[b] The membership total, which includes some Hull members, is distorted.

Piva also makes much of our two poles, employed in Table 4 of our original article, estimating the work-force of a number of Ontario communities at between 20 and 40 percent of the population. Much of this criticism seems to be mere posturing, for Piva's own book views the work-force of Toronto as 40 per cent of the population (although it is unclear how he computed the population base year to year),[4] while at the end of his critique he seems to accept our figure of 20 percent as "the more reasonable gauge". We made no such attempt to peg the range at either pole, but were suggesting that in the cities and towns of Ontario between 20 and 40 per cent represented a reasonable estimate of the non-agricultural work-force.

[4] Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto — 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), p. 147 n. 1.

Why, we must ask, is it unreasonable to suggest that the Knights of Labor organized between 36-72 percent of the work-force in Petrolia, 35-71 percent in Hespeler, or 43-87 percent in Gananoque? We have evidence suggesting that the Order organized 500 workers in Petrolia, 100 in Hespeler, and 500-800 in Gananoque. These membership figures are buttressed by impressive community-based activities — co-operative stores, rallies, parades, and other similar events — and, although they appear surprisingly high, they are not beyond belief. To approach the question of the percentage of the non-agricultural work-force that was organized in the major cities and towns of Ontario throughout the 1880s, we have taken membership figures for 1886, the peak year in Knights of Labour upsurge, and projected a population for specific communities that is derived by halving the population growth over the census decade from 1881 to 1891 and adding it to the 1881 population. From that population base, and taking the working-class work-force to be roughly 20 percent of the total population, the percentages of the work-force organized were not unimpressive. In Toronto and Hamilton, where the official dues-paying membership counts must be taken as understatements, the 1886 percentages of the work-force organized would have been 21.7 and 24.2 percent. Note that the Toronto figure corresponds to an adjusted 1906 figure — based on 40 percent participation rates — of roughly 28 percent for Toronto, but as Piva himself claims, this was the highwater mark of pre-1920 labour organization.[5] Moreover, the 1886 figure represents only those workers organized by the Knights of Labor. To achieve a true measure of the state of organization in 1886 consideration would also have to be given to those trade unionists outside of the ranks of the Knights of Labor. Adding only a modest 1,500 unionists to this figure would increase the Toronto percentage of the work-force organized in 1886 to over 28, comparing favourably with, if not surpassing, Piva's own estimation of labour's strength in one of Ontario's two major industrial centres prior to 1920.

In a host of smaller towns, when our figures are adjusted in this manner, they drop somewhat from the percentages claimed in our original article, but this decline is far from precipitous. In London, the 1,200 Knights corresponded to 28.6 percent of the work-force, while in Stratford, Chatham, and Woodstock the figures ranged from 23.6 to 35.7 percent. St. Thomas remains at the impressive and high level of 80 percent, while to the east Kingston drops to 45 percent, Cornwall to 14.7 percent, and Brockville to 15.7 percent. Hespeler's figure drops to the still significant 46 percent, Petrolia to 63 percent, and Gananoque (using the membership figure of 500, although as many as 800 are actually reported in some sources) to 76 percent. Such percentages, we point out, are well within the original range suggested, and correspond to the "adjusted work-force" figures presented earlier in this rejoinder. The only way in which these various data — however one estimates the work-force — can be discounted is to deny any validity to reported membership figures.[6]

[5] Ibid., pp. 146-47.

[6] For more detail on these and other places, see KEALEY and PALMER, "*Dreaming of What Might Be*", pp. 57-91.

Piva would clearly like to adopt such a course, but even suspending all doubt, he insists that such figures are maximums and then, in a rather startling *non sequitur,* he asserts that they could not be doubled. We never claimed that such static membership counts for 1886 could be doubled. What we did say is that if one adds up the peaks in particular locales, for different times, it is possible to use the figure 21,800 as the number of workers enrolled in the Knights of Labor over the course of the 1880s and early 1890s. (Much of this peak enrollment does indeed cluster in 1886-1887). This does not mean that at any given time there were 21,800 workers in the Order's local assemblies. It does not mean that in Gananoque in 1886, where the Knights organized large numbers of workers, it is possible to say that we can double the membership estimate of 1886 to come to the actual enrollment. Yet this seems to be what Piva is making us say. In actual fact we said something quite different. We said, simply, that if one takes account of volatility, and the numbers of workers who joined one year and dropped out the next, then over the course of its history the Knights touched, or enrolled, a figure perhaps double these 21,800 members. This, too, was a cautious estimate and across the province, over a significant time span, is undoubtedly an understatement. Thus Jonathan Garlock's data on local assemblies indicates that even before the Great Upheaval of 1886 memberships in Ontario's LA's fluctuated widely. In 1883 the total Ontario membership was 2,556. At the end of the next year, 1884, 2,488 workers had joined but 2,347 former Knights allowed their status to lapse or left the Order of their own volition. This left a membership of 2,697. The pattern continued in 1885 with 2,417 entrants offset by considerable losses, leaving the 1885 membership at 2,117. Thus, although the 1885 membership of the Ontario Knights of Labor was only 2,117, 7,461 Ontario workers passed through the ranks in a three-year period.[7] This is significant for such workers (and some were, admittedly, repeaters) learned vitally important lessons in the value of collectivity and working-class solidarity. Explaining why they left is an interpretive issue of some significance and difficulty and we have some suggestions to offer in our *Dreaming of What Might Be.* But the issue of immediate concern here is that the volatile nature of a working-class movement is not in itself cause for dismissal.

A more substantial critique would pose the problematic nature of estimating the work-force at all. Such figures are "at risk" in as much as it is impossible to establish how many workers moved in and out of various communities over the course of the 1880s, transiency being so widespread. But this opens up an insoluble dilemma, given the limitations of the source. We cannot create truly precise figures on the work-force over a single decade because so many workers were on the move. And if one could establish the actual work-force, taking into consideration the complex dimensions of labour turnover, the movement into and out of the Order was significant enough to establish our original point: a great deal of people —

[7] Jonathan GARLOCK, Comp., *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 560-70, 588-673.

perhaps double, even triple, the peak membership — were exposed to the Knights of Labor.[8]

Piva suggests that this volatility is a weakness, but he fails to appreciate how volatile class experience has always been. The Canadian trade union movement lost approximately one third of its members in the early 1920s, but historians have not yet abandoned study of the militancy of the war years and 1919. Sally Zerker presents impressive evidence of turnover in the Toronto printing industry, but this has not yet led to arguments that printers' unions are or ever were unimportant.[9] The Knights had no monopoly on the problems associated with instability as Piva's own data on Toronto unions in the first two decades of the twentieth century make clear.[10] Nor is Piva's understanding of the volatility of Toronto's Local Assembly 2305, the example he cites, particularly subtle. This local was at the very centre of the violent street railway strikes of 1886, where the Knights of Labor were forced to the wall by Senator Frank Smith, an Irish Catholic magnate and Tory cabinet minister. LA 2305 was used as a rallying point for those street railway employees originally driven from their own local, 4534, because it had been infiltrated by a "Judas" in Smith's hire. Those Knights who dropped in and out of the LA 2305 were not necessarily failing to stay with the Order. LA 4534 was strategically allowed to lapse in the winter of 1885. Many of the street railway workers associated with it secretly rejoined LA 2305 and, as trouble brewed on the street railway in 1886, others flocked to the new centre of street railway agitation. In March 1886 D. J. O'Donoghue reported that Alf Jury had steered 240 new members into the ranks of LA 2305, and in the same month the street railway employees decided to reform their own Knights of Labor Local Assembly. But they never got the chance. In the violent and crushing defeat that the workers suffered in the following months lay something of an explanation of LA 2305's membership losses. To see volatility, in this case, as "the inability of the movement to generate sustained enthusiasm, or even interest, among workers", is to ignore an historical experience of repression and the use of force to crush workers' initiatives, placing in its stead an idealized and voluntaristic reading of organizational shortcomings. To be sure, as we argue in our book, problems of leadership and disillusionment did drive some workers from the Knights of Labor, but to take such a one-sided view is to substitute hindsight for an interpretation based on the context and character of the class struggles of the time. It is also to elevate historical winners (or, in the case of the craft unions, survivors) to an historical predominance.[11]

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[8] For some comments on this problem see A. Gordon DARROCH, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion?", *Journal of Family History*, VI (Fall 1981): pp. 259-77.

[9] Sally F. ZERKER, *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union, 1832-1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 325-30.

[10] PIVA, *Condition of the Working Class*, pp. 146-47.

[11] On the Street Railway Strike, see Gregory S. KEALEY, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 199-212; KEALEY and PALMER, *"Dreaming of What Might Be"*, pp. 116-26; Eugene FORSEY, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 147-52.

Nowhere is Piva's willingness to do this more apparent than in his "reminder" that the 1880s saw the consolidation and founding of the Trades and Labor Congress. His suggestion that this body had a more sustained and longer term impact on the history of labour in Ontario than the Knights of Labor misses the main point entirely. Who does Piva think *created* the Trades and Labor Congress? Which organizational bodies does he think dominated it well into the 1890s? There was no artificial separation of the Knights and the TLC in these years. As Kealey's work on Toronto has already made eminently clear and as our book on the Knights of Labor reiterates, it was "the boys from 2305", led by D. J. O'Donoghue, who integrated the Knights of Labor into the trade union world of the early 1880s, organized the first TLC meeting in 1883, and consolidated the Order's presence in the TLC. As late as 1893, forty of the seventy delegates at the TLC were Knights of Labor, and the Order's leading figures remained influential in policy discussions. To misconstrue the TLC experience as something cut off from and outside of the history and impact of the Knights of Labor is to argue from the most distressing of ahistorical premises.[12]

It was just those kinds of premises that we have attempted to transcend in our study of the Knights of Labor. If we now accept that Piva has correctly pointed to a specific carelessness in some of our statistics, and if we now agree that more workers were organized on the eve of the 1919 upheaval than had been organized by Knights and trade unionists in the 1880s, we are nevertheless unrepentent about our larger argument. Out of Piva's comment we will make specific concessions. Across Ontario as a whole, we recognize that the Knights of Labor did not organize as high a percentage of the non-agricultural work-force as our ill-chosen categories implied in the original article. Nor did that percentage exceed those of all the pre-CIO years. But, in our own defence, we must continue to claim that the percentages organized were significant, that they rivalled those of the much better-studied and well-known upheavals of the war and immediate post-war years. In some locales they most certainly surpassed them, and in specific manufacturing towns and industrial cities, the percentage of the work-force organized by the Knights of Labor was extremely high. Finally, our awkward attempts to deal with Knights of Labor membership, while posing certain problems, were nevertheless necessary, and provide the first serious attempt to address the strength of the Order in the Ontario of the 1880s and early 1890s. We made no attempt to argue that these figures, and these alone, establish our case. For the figures themselves mean little outside of the more impressive context of working-class self-activity, of the range of social, cultural, political, and economic campaigns that the class waged in this period. To argue that our interpretation is distorted because our classification of particular work-forces was faulty and our comparisons to the twentieth century therefore overstated, is to remain stuck in the conventional wisdoms of an interpretation that pushes the experience of the 1880s into a corner of condescension.

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[12] KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, pp. 179-80; KEALEY and PALMER, "*Dreaming of What Might Be*", pp. 98-99; FORSEY, *Trade Unions*, pp. 434-70.

We are left, then, accepting some of Piva's criticisms but strong in our belief that the Knights of Labor did represent a qualitative and quantitative breakthrough for Ontario's workers. In the 1880s they were an unprecedented phenomenon. They did organize large numbers; their impact was felt across the province. Compared to the twentieth-century context that grew, in part, out of what they had accomplished, they measure up quite well, even in terms of the murky statistical constructs upon which one must rely. But the Knights' history, as Powderly knew, was not one in which a Gradgrindian obsession with "the facts" will tell us everything we need to know. The message of an all-inclusive organization of labour is not easily reduced to a percentage, just as the Order's role in introducing women into the workers' movement cannot be assessed simply in numerical terms.

Beyond the problems involved in an appreciation of the numbers drawn to the Knights of Labor lies the meaning of a workers' poetry expressing class discontents, the role and importance of the first widespread publication of labour newspapers, the difficulties and drama of the beginnings of independent labour politics, and the ultimate effect of countless struggles at the point of production. Does Piva think that he can come up with "better data" in such areas than we have used to argue through the significance of the Knights of Labor in our book? These data, as much as the always problematic and troubling figures, form an essential part of our interpretation. In conjunction with the numbers, which Piva often dismisses arbitrarily and understates persistently, they reinforce our convictions of the importance of this moment of the 1880s. We doubt that "better data" will turn up in such massive quantities that our interpretation of the Order's experiences will shift perceptibly. Certainly all of Piva's rather imprecise numerical musings have not done so, nor have his uninformed comments on volatility, the Trades and Labor Congress, and the historiography of the Order caused us to retreat from our basic position. Indeed, we are somewhat astonished that Piva frames his argument in an interpretive mould based on Gerald Grob's dated and explicitly intellectual history of the Order. New work on the social history of the Knights of Labor, an entire decade of scholarship, has obviously passed him by. It is writing that demolishes the premises of the Grob-Piva perspective.[13]

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[13] Gerald GROB, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961). For a historiographical discussion, see KEALEY and PALMER, "*Dreaming of What Might Be*", pp. 1-23. For a sampling of the new literature, see: Leon FINK, "Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor in Local Politics, 1886-1896" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1977); Jonathan GARLOCK, "A Structural Analysis of the Knights of Labor" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1974); Clare HORNER, "Producers' Cooperatives in the United States, 1865-1890" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1978); Susan LEVINE, "Their Own Sphere: Women's Work, the Knights of Labor and the Transformation of the Carpet Trade, 1870-1890" (Ph.D. thesis, City University of New York, 1979); Richard J. OESTREICHER, "Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1877-1895" (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1979); and Steven Ross, "Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1830-1890" (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1980).

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, we are left wondering if we did not get what we deserved. In attempting to assess the numerical significance of the Order in Ontario we were necessarily forced to use data and figures that were far from perfect. Against Powderly's advice we proceeded along this path because we felt it would enhance an appreciation of the Order's accomplishments. Considering that Douglas Kennedy's estimate that the Knights of Labor organized only 12,000 workers across Canada has remained unchallenged for 25 years and that Eugene Forsey's recent estimate of a Canadian peak of 14,132 in 1886 may be regarded as gospel truth by some, our efforts to gauge the numbers drawn to the various Ontario local assemblies was much needed.[14] But the days have long since passed when "young men fresh from college" are sufficiently interested in writing the history of failed workers' movements, like the Knights of Labor, to expect that this attempt would be appreciated for what it was. Today "everything known to the young ambitious graduate of a university" is marshalled to avoid confronting bodies of evidence that do not open up easily to "the facts".[15] Histories like those of the Knights of Labor are dismissed cavalierly and patronizingly. Mr. Powderly, of that ambiguous decade of the 1880s, meet Professor Piva. Like your acquaintance Samuel Gompers, whom he seems to be embracing in his suggestion that a particular kind of Trades and Labor Congress experience be elevated to prominence in Canadian labour history, he too has Marxist roots. Welcome to the "fastidious" 1980s, an age of certainties.

Appendix Ia. — GAINFULLY EMPLOYED IN ONTARIO BY OCUCUPATION GROUP, 1901-1931

Date	*Total Work-force*	*Non-agricultural Work-force*
1901	754,182	447,751
1911	991,166	684,509
1921	1,119,279	824,175
1931	1,346,214	1,042,549

Sources: CANADA, Census, 1951, vol. X, Table 62, for the total work-force and the non-agricultural work-force in 1901; and R. Marvin MCINNIS, "Long run Trends in Industrial Structure of the Canadian Work Force" (unpublished manuscript, Queen's University, 1973), and "Work Force by Detailed Industry Class, 1911-61" (unpublished manuscript, Queen's University, n.d.), for the work-force figures for 1911, 1921 and 1931. We wish to thank Professor McInnis for access to this material.

[14] Douglas R. KENNEDY, *The Knights of Labor in Canada* (London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario, 1956), pp. 121-22, and FORSEY, *Trade Unions*, pp. 143-46.

[15] For a devastating and extremely useful corrective for those who regard census data as a "pure" data source, see Margo Anderson CONK, *The United States Census and Labor Force Change: A History of Occupation Statistics, 1870-1940* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1978). See also Bruce LAURIE's thoughtful review of this volume in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, XXI (1982): pp. 139-44. An equivalent Canadian study is badly needed.

Appendix. Ib. — ESTIMATES OF ONTARIO TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1901-1931

Date	*A Number of Locals*	*B Number of Locals Reporting*	*C Percentage of Locals Reporting*	*D Number of Members Reported*	*E Average Local Size D ÷ B*	*F Estimated Total Members A × E*
1901	420	178	42.38	11,592	65.12	27,350
1911	702	419	59.69	34,530	82.41	57,852
1921	1,099	735	66.88	66,771	90.84	99,833
1931	1,046	811	77.53	66,317	81.77	85,531

Sources: The estimates for 1901 are based on ONTARIO BUREAU OF LABOUR, *Report*, 1901 (Toronto, 1902). The Bureau sent out 438 schedules to labour organizations. Since fifteen of the returned schedules came from Trades and Labour Councils or Federations of Trades, we have estimated the number of local union schedules at 420. For the other years, the estimates are calculated from statistics in *Labour Organization in Canada*, 1911, 1921, 1931.