

Spirited Differences: Doukhobor Sectarianism, Freedomite Terrorism and Government Policy

by

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Abstract

This thesis braids ethnography with political analysis to explore the nature, scope and breadth of Doukhorbor sectarianism in order to illuminate the nuances of difference within the Doukhorbor community. A major focus of this study is the development and functioning of the Sons of Freedom (Freedomite) branch's terrorism and its effects on the Orthodox and Independent branches as well as majoritarian society, particularly in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Another important area of discussion concerns the formulation and application of government policy to Freedomite violence and its effects. Finally, the thesis seeks to isolate the complex factors that brought the violence to an end by focusing on three significant historical events: the violent Freedomite attack on a Saskatchewan Independent leader's home in 1936; the BC government's New Denver forced schooling program (1953-1959); and finally, the trial of Orthodox Doukhorbor leader John Verigin in 1979. Ultimately, this work offers ideas and approaches for understanding other sectarian conflicts defined by terrorism.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One	1
Introduction	4
Methodology	8
Historical Discourse	12
Chapter Two	12
From Russia to Canada: History, Communication and Doukhoborism	
Factors Complicating the Identification of Early Doukhobors in the Historical Record	14
Origins of Doukhoborism	16
Spread and Evolution of Doukhoborism	18
Doukhobor Colonization of the Caucasus	19
Meltdown	22
Burning of the Arms, Persecution and the Diversity of Doukhobor Experience	26
The Beginnings of Canadian Doukhoborism and the Emergence of Sectarianism	29
Peter Vasilievich Verigin's Influence from Russia	30
Rise of the Freedomite Branch	38
Chapter Three	38
The Three Branches of Canadian Doukhoborism	
Independents	41
The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood and Conflict with the Province of British Columbia	46
The Freedomites	48
The Death of Peter Vasilievich "Lordly" Verigin, the Arrival of his son Peter Petrovich "Chistiakov" Verigin, and the Explosive Growth of the Freedomite Branch	51
The Relationship between Language, Signs and Freedomite Violence	54
Entangled Relations between Community (CCUB) and Freedomite Doukhobors	57
Chapter Four	57
Evolution of Sectarian Differences, Motivations for Freedomite Violence and the Effects of Societal and Government Actions and Reactions	
Formative Processes Driving Inter-Branch Tensions	61
Collapse of the CCUB and Leadership Issues	65
Geographic Dispersions of Doukhobors in BC and Personal Relations from the 1950's to the 1970's.	67
Societal Attitudes, Government Actions and Policies to Freedomite Violence and their Effects on Doukhobors	72
The New Denver Residential Education Program	84
Chapter Five	84
A History of Violence	
Freedomite Terrorism in Saskatchewan	87
St. Peter's Day Horror in Blaine Lake	90
The End of the Line for Freedomites in Saskatchewan	

Freedomite Terrorism in BC	92
The Effects of Terrorism on the CCUB and USCC	93
Anatomy of Freedomite Violence	98
Victimization in Freedomite Communities	103
The Beginning of the End for Freedomites: The Trial of JJ Verigin	104
Chapter 6	114
Conclusion	
Epilogue	122
Sectarianism Today, Attitudes about the Past and the Legacy of Violence	
Appendix	129
Glossary of Russian Terms	
Bibliography	130

Chapter I

Introduction

Nestled beneath the Selkirk and Monashee mountain ranges on bluffs above the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers in Brilliant near the town of Castlegar, British Columbia is a building that has few architectural equivalents in North America aside from high security federal government buildings. From a distance, the exterior of the bulky rectangular structure resembles an above ground bunker; it is possible to make the case that it is. The walls are made of foot-thick concrete and bricks. The few small narrow windows along the sides are inaccessible from the ground. At night huge flood lights on the roof brightly illuminate the building's expansive grass covered grounds; not one of the many trees around the building is located close to the structure. The complex was purposely engineered to withstand a powerful dynamite blast and/or gasoline arson attack, and the grounds were landscaped with an eye for adding natural beauty without providing cover for would-be attackers with incendiary intentions.

From a distance the rectangular building may appear to be a cold impregnable fortress housing some unfeeling national security agency. As one comes closer, it starts to shed its austerity. Symbols such as doves, and plaques with inscriptions in Russian and English dedicated to peace and harmony adorn the building. This is not Orwellian double speak - the sentiments are heartfelt. They are the values held by the Orthodox Doukhobor community - an ethno-religious group of pacifists to whom this building, the Brilliant Cultural Centre, or *dom* as they call it, belongs.

Inside the protective shell is the heart of the building. A large auditorium is unpretentious, yet spacious and bright, reflecting the Doukhobor ethic of material simplicity. This shines through in the plain hand made wooden benches that are arranged in rows facing a stage whose curtains are opened and closed by hand. However, if the decor is basic, the auditorium's acoustical engineering is sophisticated. The interior was designed to resonate sound and immerse, overwhelm - even drown the audience in the rich, powerful and unique Doukhobor harmonies with their hauntingly complex musical dynamics.

The *dom* itself has no precedent in Doukhobor history and stands in stark contrast to the exotic architectural styles that the group brought from Russia when they established their tight-knit communities on the Canadian prairies at the beginning of the twentieth century. The building is the Janus face of

Doukhorism, a vivid symbol of its duality - light and dark, yin and yang. It is in one sense an expression of community and togetherness - the unity of the Orthodox branch and a symbol of its resourcefulness and skill; but, it is simultaneously a monument to the violence which wracked Doukhorism for most of the twentieth century.

The intensely pacifistic Orthodox branch represents the largest cohesive Doukhor community in the world. Its organization, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC), which is led by the Verigin family and traces its roots directly from the main Doukhor communal enterprise of the early twentieth century, built the *dom* to replace a community hall that the Sons of Freedom or Freedomites destroyed by fire in 1975¹. The new *dom* built in 1979 is much larger than the old community hall and in a significant way represents renewal. It is also, at the same time, a symbol of defiance. It is an attempt to erect something that the group's alter ego, the Freedomites the fundamentalist most extreme branch of the Doukhobors fighting the hardest against assimilation, could not take away through burning and bombing as they attempted to do with virtually every other major enterprise the Orthodox Doukhobors built in Canada. Sectarianism and its accompanying violence is the main focus of this study.

This longest most sustained terrorist campaign in Canadian history, the second longest in North American history, is an especially interesting area of study in today's context of a worldwide "war on terror." This struggle is defined in part by the dynamic of sectarianism.² Trying to peel away the thorny layers and understand the characteristics, complexities and details of sectarianism has bedeviled both governments and law enforcement agencies as they desperately try to develop mechanisms for ending or controlling the violence.

Understanding the intricacies of sectarianism requires that ethno-historians attune themselves to a particular culture's melody of differences. The late Edward Said criticized anthropologists for conceiving of cultures as "perfectly contiguous [or] totally synchronous." Instead, he proposed that they be regarded as "permeable defensive boundaries between polities... [that represent] zones of control or of

¹ Although the term Sons of Freedom or *sini svabodi* has commonly been used to refer to this Doukhor branch, I use the gender neutral term Freedomite or *svabodniki* which is also a commonly used term among Doukhobors.

² The Ku Klux Klan's campaign of terror against the African-American population in the United States was far longer. Being raced based, this terrorism was also substantively different and incomparably bloodier.

abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing.³ Acknowledging Said's position on the complexity of culture, Doukhorism may be fittingly compared to a grand musical performance. We can listen to synthesis of sound combining as one, or we can train our ears to hear the complex notes and voice ranges emanating from the performers. We must put our own musical tastes and proclivities aside and listen carefully – very carefully – in order to hear the dynamic ballads played by these cultural troubadours. The cultural productions in this context become less harmoniously structured musical arrangements and are more jumbled as an arbitrary collection of sounds. Players in these performances may identify with the same musical group, but as we listen to them intently we catch errant violins, out of place flutes and vocalists singing different songs in different pitches. We come to understand that cultural concerts are medleys of tunes, lyrics, tempos and styles. Some voices in the group are louder than others -- some sound more mellifluous, some are less so -- but all tell a different story about aspects of the cultural group and it is incumbent upon scholars to understand how they all fit together.

In a profound way, learning to listen to the music of culture is relevant to this study of the Doukhobors. Music is at the heart of Doukhor culture and it is the preeminent way that Doukhobors express themselves. What Wendy Wickwire has observed about native oral history can be applied to the Doukhobors' oral historical songs. They "live and are alive" in the words, tones, cadences and rhythms of the songs that stretch back hundreds of years.⁴ When each Doukhor sings, he or she infuses the words with their own power, and meaning.

This case study of sectarianism that led to terrorism may provide ideas, tools and observations that can help inform policy approaches to other violent sectarian struggles. In the case of Islamic terrorism, non Muslims frequently allege that "too many people [are] sympathetic to radical Islam" and

³ Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Winter, 1989): 225.

⁴ Wendy Wickwire, "To See Ourselves as the Other's Other: Nlaka'pamux Contact Narratives." *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXV, 1 (March 1994): 20.

"too many people in the Muslim community do not fully cooperate with authorities."⁵ This is a familiar refrain to Doukhobors who heard the exact same accusations leveled against the entire community regardless of the branch. This study attempts to tease out the issues that complicate the notions of "sympathy" and "co-operation" in a sectarian terrorist context.

Studying the historical dynamics of sectarianism and terrorism within the Doukhobors' community is useful because the group is relatively small in size with between 10,000 and 15,000 people actively involved in the culture at the height of the last vestiges of violence at the beginning of the 1980's. Given this context, the Doukhobor community represents a veritable social laboratory where important elements can be isolated and manageably examined. Also, the Doukhobor communities are local and accessible. An analysis of Doukhobor sectarian terrorism that considers societal and governmental reactions will shed light on the mechanics of power in Canada and important historical characteristics of its liberal order.⁶

Methodology

This study fuses ethnographic and political/legal analysis. Ethnographically it combines Clifford Geertz's "thick description" approach which prescribes detailed explanations of cultural processes, with Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogism," the assessment of language that considers how interlocutors interpret and understand each other.⁷ These tools applied together help penetrate cultures and cultural views while at the same time avoiding, as much as possible, research that tends towards harmful generalizations and essentialistic portrayals. Politically, this work considers the dynamics influencing and shaping the creation

⁵ Congressman Peter King from New York claimed that Muslims are not cooperating on the war on terror. According to him, "The average Muslim, no, they are loyal, but they don't work, they don't come forward, they don't tell the police ... They won't turn in their own. They won't tell what's going on in the mosques. They won't come forward and cooperate with the police." http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=37099.

⁶ Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review*, 81, 2000, 620; Michel Foucault, *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Descriptions towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973):13; M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse and the Novel", in the *Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

and application of government and police policy towards the Doukhobor branches and how the different Doukhobor branches interacted with the legal/political system over almost one hundred years.

This study begins with an overview of the Doukhobors, their origins and their religious, philosophical and cultural characteristics that defined their beliefs in Russia. It then explores how the major turmoil of the late nineteenth century shaped the sectarian divisions that would emerge in Canada. The discussion then extrapolates the catalysts for division in Canada. The remainder of this study focuses on the nature, scope and breadth of Doukhobor sectarianism and how Freedomite violence functioned in this context. I will analyze three significant historical events to reveal important elements about the interplay of Doukhobor sectarianism, violence and cultural power relations. These cases include a violent Freedomite attack on a Saskatchewan Independent Doukhobor leader's home in 1936, significant issues surrounding the New Denver forced schooling program for Freedomite children seized by the BC government beginning in 1953, and finally the 1979 trial of Orthodox Doukhobor leader John Verigin on four counts of conspiracy to burn down a co-op, community centre, post office and residence.

Freedomite violence was terrorism: the bombings, burnings and accompanied nudity were without any precedent in Doukhobor history and contravened the most basic Doukhobor philosophy of non-violence. However, a social support network in Freedomite communities allowed violence to occur and perpetuate itself. Violence deleteriously affected Doukhoborism in Canada but eventually ceased. The Freedomite branch demonstrated considerable agency and sophistication in its interactions with the legal system, using the courts along with the press as agents for acting out a grand drama to further its evolving causes. The study concludes by considering the range of opinions in the Doukhobor community regarding the impact and legacy of Freedomite terrorism within the context of the Doukhobors' general, if not perpetual, struggle against assimilation. The study highlights religion and family. It also considers criminality, class, politics, the law, gender, culture, economics, language, race, as well as daily life.

A diversity of source material informs this work. As well as the extensive published studies of Doukhobors in both English and Russian, I have referred to hundreds of newspaper articles, dozens of government documents and reports both in Canada and Russia including memorandums, letters and court documents. Doukhobor sources I have used include pamphlets and reports from organizations and

symposium meetings, diaries and personal writings, photographs from record album covers spanning decades, film interview transcripts, prayers and hymns found in the Doukhobor living book, field work observations and most importantly, oral history.

Over the course of three years, I have conducted over a dozen formal interviews and countless informal interviews with Doukhobors from every political, geographical, philosophical and religious perspective possible, as well as with people who I refer to as "former Doukhobors," or those who abandoned the culture altogether and have completely assimilated into Canadian society. Lastly, I have canvassed the opinions and observations of people who have worked for the government on Doukhobor issues, and of non-Doukhobor members of the general public who have had experiences with the various Doukhobor factions.

I have formed many different relationships with Doukhobors from the various groups over the years. While I did not personally know many of the interviewees, I chose them based on their reputation and standing in the larger Doukhobor community and the recommendations of others. My interviews have either been written or taped, or in some cases a combination of both. Interviewee identities have been carefully safeguarded: no names have been cited unless participants have agreed.

I have intentionally provided limited contextual information about the individuals who have contributed data and quotes in my study, and I have chosen not to use pseudonyms for several key reasons. Given the small size of the community in which I worked, there is a danger that even the smallest details about a person could reveal enough recognizable information to compromise his or her identity. Lastly, given the sensitive nature of the topic, several interviewees expressed serious concern about their physical safety should their identities be revealed. It was their trust in my assurance of complete anonymity that made them feel comfortable enough to speak frankly and honestly about their experiences. The identifiers I chose to use, when I felt it was feasible to do so, were the person's gender, branch background, general age, and geographic background.

For informal interviews, I took detailed notes about the substance of the interviews. Under this rubric, I have included casual conversations with people after I disclosed the purpose of my study. Every assertion in this work based on oral testimony has, to the greatest extent possible, been corroborated

with other oral testimonies and written documents. When I have been unable to corroborate testimonies I acknowledge this. I have also drawn on my memories of stories and of conversations with relatives and family friends. Some parts of my family's personal history, have been passed down through word of mouth over generations.

Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge my own position vis-à-vis Doukhorism and its sectarian divisions. With respect to the ethno-historical thrust of my analysis, Kirin Narayan's exploration of "insider/outsider dichotomies and her ideas regarding "shifting identities" and "hybridity" in research postures has played an important part in orienting my analytical position on my subject.⁸ I was raised in a Doukhor family strongly involved in choirs and organizations. My patrilineal roots are in the Saskatchewan Independent side of Doukhorism; my matrilineal roots are rooted in the Orthodox branch of Doukhorism. I have gained values and perspectives from both sides. This study will reveal that the two are often at stark and contentious odds with each other. While I have very little direct family lineage in the Freedomite community, I have close connections to it through family inter-marriage and friendships. Thus, one might label me an "insider." However, in many ways, this study also represents that of an outsider's perspective. I did not grow up in either the Orthodox Doukhor heartlands of Grand Forks or Castlegar, the main Independent areas of Blaine Lake or Saskatoon in the north of Saskatchewan or Kamsack, Canora or Verigin in the south, and I was also not raised in the Freedomite heartlands of Krestova, Gilpin and areas around the Crescent Valley. While I have visited these areas numerous times, I have spent most of my time in Vancouver where I was born and raised. Although I learned and participated in the prayers, songs, language and the culture, because I was raised far away from the main centres of Doukhor activity, many Doukhobors may consider me an "outsider". Regardless of the label, my observations and research have been decades in the making.

This study could easily encompass a multi-volume set of books. Given the restrictions on length, I left out numerous important issues affecting Doukhor sectarianism. I therefore proceed with the caveat that this study represents the beginning of a dialogue about this complex issue rather than an end. It is my hope that it stimulates further forays into this fascinating, controversial and under explored area.

⁸ Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist," *American Anthropologist*, 95 (1993).

Historical Discourse

Most studies of the Doukhobors have been situated within the broader fields of Canadian Studies, Immigrant Studies, Ethnic Studies or Slavic Studies. The most important early writings in English about the Doukhobors in Canada were by Aylmer Maude *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* and J.F.C. Wright's book *Slava Bohu*. Maude was a disillusioned Tolstoyan who, nonetheless, attempted to write a scholarly unbiased book. Wright's book is very readable and sympathetic to the Doukhobors; however, it is hampered by a narrative style that resembles a novel.⁹

By the middle of the twentieth century, many publications presented a profoundly negative picture of the Doukhobors. The media and politicians frequently blamed the Doukhobors as a group for burnings and bombings that beset the Kootenays through much of the twentieth century. Within this environment, stereotypes and racist characterizations about the culture, language, habits and appearances of the Doukhobors proliferated in British Columbia and across Canada. One of the most important examples of this negative picture was *Terror in the Name of God* by Simma Holt.¹⁰ Holt, an accomplished investigative reporter for the Vancouver Sun, produced the first book-length study about the Sons of Freedom in 1964. Although it is not a scholarly study, it is significant as it reflects many of the strongly conservative views held by the general public. Secondly, it remains the only book-length investigation of the internal dynamics of the Freedomites; thirdly, it gives the only detailed account of police operations against the Doukhobors; and finally, it sold more copies than any other book ever written about the Doukhobors and forged the Doukhobor image held by many people in both the U.S. and Canada.¹¹

While Holt relies on an impressive array of primary government sources that have not been

⁹ Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors*, (New York: AMS Press, 1904); J.F.C. Wright, *Slava Bohu*, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1940).

¹⁰ Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God - The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964): 166. She made the same claim in 1964 that Rep. Peter King and others in the US make about Muslims in the US supporting terrorism today. Holt stated "Even the Orthodox, who cried out for police protection, refused to offer any evidence or even any useful information. The Independents were the same; they claimed to despise what the Freedomites were doing to the Doukhobor name but would not help. These are brothers, sisters, cousins and friends, with a strong blood bond between them."

¹¹ Although out of print now, in its first printing *Terror in the Name of God* sold 35,000 copies. John Friesen and Michael M. Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition*, (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989):xi.

available to researchers since and her discussion provides a detailed inventory of violence known to authorities, her analysis is plagued with problems. She accepts the reports of police and government uncritically. In fact, her writing is unambiguously sympathetic toward police action and government policy, in many ways justifying it regardless of the action or context. Her use of secondary sources is highly selective and includes no works by the Doukhobors themselves. The book's most significant problems are her characterizations and generalizations implicating the entire Doukhobor community in terrorism. Although she begins by trying to draw distinctions among the three branches of Doukhoborism, she discards the dichotomies and makes generalizations that blur the divisions. For example, she applies the term "Doukhobor" to refer to those individuals who are "Sons of Freedom" or "Freedomite Doukhobors." She emphasizes the fluidity between the groups without a detailed explanation of its nature and states that there is considerable sympathy for the Freedomites among Orthodox and Independents. Her analysis falters ethnographically because she does not explore the defining cultural differences between the branches in a meaningful way. Finally, she never adequately explains why the serially victimized Orthodox and Independent branches sympathized with Freedomite violence.

In 1968, two academics from the University of British Columbia produced a book about Doukhobor history and culture that was meant to challenge the numerous misconceptions that Holt's book and many media publications had spread among the public. *The Doukhobors* by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic is the most comprehensive, integrative study of Doukhobor history to date. It provides detailed accounts of the factionalism and violence. Their work, however, is far from complete. My study will build on their work and flesh out the more defining aspects of sectarianism; but will also challenge the usefulness of their assertion that in "discussions with members of the USCC, who were nearer to the problem [terrorism] than most outsiders, yet strongly critical of Sons of Freedom methods, we found a general agreement that the idea of an organized terrorist conspiracy was entirely false." Woodcock and Avakumovic assert that "in most cases the acts have been plotted and carried out by small groups, or even individuals acting autonomously."¹² I will challenge this notion and attempt to show

¹² George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968): 328.

that while some Freedomites undoubtedly acted independently, there was a social infrastructure which was sympathetic to the use of violence, encouraged it and allowed it to be perpetuated.

Although both severely dated, *Terror in the Name of God* and *The Doukhobors* remain the defining works on Doukhobor sectarianism and Freedomite violence. They were written well before the Freedomite terrorist surge of the 1970's and the trial of Orthodox Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin. Woodcock and Avakumovic wrote before the advent of the "new history" and its embrace of interdisciplinary approaches and the emergence of class, gender, family, and daily life as tools of analysis that have come to prominence in the last 30 years.

Doukhobors themselves have written in limited ways about their own sectarianism. Peter Malloff produced a book in Russian which attempted to unravel the differences in Doukhoborism. Once a Freedomite leader, he glossed over the serious violence that the Freedomites perpetrated and at times attempted to justify it. John Soukeroff, John Philip Stoochnoff and Koozma Tarasoff also wrote about the Doukhobors: but none of them explored the intricacies of sectarianism.¹³ Doukhobors have tended to write cautiously about sectarianism likely because of community sensitivity. Moreover, many Doukhobors feared a critical analysis of the topic would contribute to the bad press that all Doukhobors were getting. It was enough work just to challenge stereotypes and negative portrayals. The passage of time has led to a more positive discursive climate about the Doukhobors and the cessation of Freedomite violence. In this environment, an opportunity to engage in an open and honest dialogue about the more difficult aspects of the past has emerged.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to address the issue of language and my use of the term terrorism which has become complex and emotionally charged in the wake of the 9/11 attack on New York City's World Trade Centre Towers. Language referring to the violent activities of the Freedomites has evolved away from the term terrorism. The British Columbia government tends to substitute the word "depredations" for terrorism; even among Doukhobors in publications such as *Iskra*, the term "terrorism"

¹³ John Soukeroff, *Istoriia Doukhobortsev*, (North Kildonan, Manitoba, 1944); Peter N. Malloff, *Doukhobortsi, ikh istoriia, zhizn i bor'ba*, (Thrusms B.C.: Peter N. Malloff, 1948); John Philip Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors As They Are*, (Toronto: 1961); Koozma Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, (Grand Forks: Mir Publication Society, 1982).

largely fallen from usage. The term has come to possess multiple meanings and has been affected by the problem of subjective interpretation. This has usually been a function of the political or religious context in which it has been used. An in-depth discussion of the nomenclature and dynamics of the term, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It is appropriate to characterize the violence as terrorism, the term used by the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors, the government and the media when it was occurring. Moreover, a dissection of its elements reveals that the bombings, burnings and threats in their various forms, not to mention the long sordid list of other criminal activities, were committed, purposefully and clandestinely. Different people pursued personal, political and religious goals within the Freedomite community whose social system allowing violence to occur. Above all, the violence and threat of violence resulted in victims experiencing extreme multi-generational terror.

Chapter 2

From Russia to Canada: History, Communication and Doukhorism

This chapter traces the rise of Doukhorism and shows that historically it was a highly adaptable social/religious system characterized by a plurality of views. The splintering of Doukhorism in Canada along its three main lines – Independents, Orthodox and Freedomites – was the result of geographic, social, economic, philosophical, historical and familial differences latent in Russia. The latter were transported to Canada, and raised by government policies having to do with land registration, public schooling, and registration of vital statistics. In this milieu, the Freedomite branch emerged mainly from a segment of Tiflis Doukhobors who had suffered greatly as a group for upholding the values of New Doukhorism introduced in Russia during the mid 1890's. In the face of group disintegration in Canada, these people held on to rigid interpretations of their extreme Doukhor beliefs as a reference point and anchor of stability during a period of fluidity and flux.

Factors Complicating the Identification of Early Doukhobors in the Historical Record

If there is a persistent theme in the historical literature exploring the Doukhobors, it is that of mystery.¹ Despite the writings of historians emphasizing the secrecy and obscurity of the group, ironically, their very location at the fringes of Russian peasant society and their opposition to Russian authority brought attention to them and revealed more about the Doukhobors and their relationship with the Orthodox Church than, in many respects, the nature of the relationship between ordinary Russian peasants and the Church generally.²

Historians have trouble discerning early Doukhobors in Russian history for a multitude of reasons. One of the most important is that many people who embraced core principles of what would eventually be known as Doukhorism originally referred to themselves generically as "Christians", believing that they most closely followed the tenets of early Christianity thus

¹ Simma Holt stated that "the Doukhobors have had two hundred years training in duplicity and evasion, and novices to their ways are no match for their agility in leading non-Doukhobors off the trail." Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God - The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964):167.

² Robert Nichols, George Stavrou, *Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978):5

obscuring them in the historical record.³

Another important complication is the lack of written evidence from Doukhobors themselves mainly because of the reliance of "proto-Doukhobors" on an oral tradition. Those Doukhobors who might have been able to write down the stories of their lives and beliefs chose not to do so out of a concern for self-preservation and survival since the Russian government and Orthodox Church severely punished converts from Orthodoxy, the original faith of most Doukhobors. As the group came into greater conflict with the Orthodox Church, Doukhor oral culture adopted a protective mechanism allowing adherents to protect their history and culture internally; should they be arrested or forced into exile their cultural treasures remained with them. This embrace of oral culture was also religiously motivated. Doukhobors believed the written word was something dead and inanimate, whereas ideas and thoughts transmitted through oral methods were dynamic, alive, and infused with the spirit of the person who delivered the messages. Within this context, the group's history, philosophies and teachings were transmitted through prayers, hymns and folk songs (*pasalmi, stikhki, pesni*;) with the totality of this canon becoming known as the "living book" (*szhivotnaya kniga*).

The very act of "remembering" became an integral part of Doukhor culture. Learning different songs and prayers was a life-long project. To aid in remembering, songs and prayers were encoded with cadences and rhythms that acted as mnemonic devices. One's ability to recite prayers and remember all the words to important songs helped determine a person's standing in the community. Men and women who possessed prodigious memories and voluminous repertoires commanded great respect and played an invaluable role at general meetings (*sobranie*), weddings (*svadbi*), funerals (*pohorini*), remembrances (*pomenki*), and prayer meetings (*molenyie*).

Doukhor oral culture also possessed meaning beyond the literal words. The effort to learn such a large body of songs and prayers (no one could possibly know them all) required a lifetime of work and commitment and represented a heavy investment in the culture and furthermore, was a tangible expression of dedication to the group and to God. As the canon of

³ Vladimir Chertkov, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, (London: Free Age Press, 1900), 9.

Doukhor oral culture expanded, remembering became a communal effort with each person contributing his knowledge as a part of an organic whole. Even though Doukhorism is based on individual rationalism and reason, Doukhobors have placed a great emphasis on the group. A central belief within Doukhorism is that only within the collective union of people acknowledging the presence of God in one another can individuals attain the highest level of spirituality.

Origins of Doukhorism

Scholars and Doukhobors themselves cannot agree on the precise details of the origins of Doukhorism. Nevertheless, it is clear that Doukhorism at its core was a form of peasant protest or rebellion in late 17th and early 18th century Russia. It represented a pacifistic spiritual insurgency by a class of people who were politically, socially and economically marginalized, — essentially slaves under a harsh and inequitable feudal system. Completely alienated from the power structures of the country, the peasants, nevertheless, were expected to fight to maintain this formal power structure, to spread its influence abroad, and to accept whatever social engineering policies the political and religious elites imposed on them. These policies usually served the interests of the upper classes not the peasants.⁴

According to historians, in the latter half of the seventeenth century the *Raskol*, or Russian Schism – ostensibly a split in the Church over the Patriarch Nikon's introduction of uniformity of rites and books based on the Greek model in 1653 – gave rise to a proliferation of religious dissenters of whom the Doukhobors were likely one group. This dispute over liturgical changes such as the three fingered sign of the cross and three pronunciations of "hallelujah" replacing the two fingered sign and two pronunciations of "hallelujah," soon became overlaid with issues of power within Russian society and Russian politics as different actors sought to increase their influence and role within the church in relation to government and in society.⁵ Priests who were tortured and exiled to the peripheries of the Russian empire spread news of injustice and corruption of the faith to people who already resented and distrusted central authorities. This situation caused tremendous religious and social upheaval, releasing discontent that had been

⁴ Frederick C. Conybeare, *Russian Dissenters*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 90-93

⁵ Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 60-65.

building under the old religious system and creating new expressions of iconoclastic religiosity.⁶

Prior to the Nikonian reforms which elicited outrage and led to the *Raskol*, Orthodox Christianity had been so localized that villages chose and paid their own Orthodox priests. In turn the latter were responsible to the community. Orthodoxy took on the particular characteristics of each town or village and met its needs. Religion in these contexts was Christianity based on the varied collection of religious texts that made up Orthodox scripture braided with local superstitions, folklore and pagan beliefs. Under the Nikonian reforms, Moscow appointed priests often choosing them more on personal connections and political allegiances than ability and respect in the local community. Because central authorities paid the priests to watch and report on parishioners, local communities often regarded priests as little more than spies.⁷

Religious centralization eventually merged with nation-building processes characterized by intense administrative centralization and the collection of vital statistics. Most of the population became objects to be studied, counted, categorized and ultimately controlled with the church tasked with collecting most of this important data.⁸ Under this system, the Orthodox Church and the Czarist political leadership became, in a *de facto* sense, one. The Czar or Czarina was the defender of the Orthodox faith and the church was required to support the Czar or Czarina and inculcate deference to him or her in the parishioners.

In this intense political/economic/religious and social milieu Doukhorism was born. It was a Christian spiritual movement with significant political overtones. It was also a protest movement, an expression of peasant dissatisfaction with prevailing church and government systems. It sought a divorce from the nation-state of Russia which it saw as corrupt and unjust serving the interests of the few and perpetuating an endless cycle of violence leading to human suffering and misery. Under Doukhorism the only authority was God. God created people and gave them the gift of reason that they could use to find their way in life. Because individuals carried the spirit of the Supreme Being inside themselves, everyone was equal and no clergy were needed. Doukhorism sought a localized union of like-minded people assisting one

⁶ Georg Bernard Michels, *At War with the Church, Religious Dissent in Seventeenth Century Russia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 180-185.

⁷ Conybeare, *Russian Dissenters*, 70-74.

⁸ Conybeare, *Russian Dissenters*, 90-93.

another to live the most equitable and peaceful life possible.

Doukhobors were Christians, but unlike most other Christian groups in Russia, they saw Jesus Christ not as a divine being but as a mortal man.⁹ Doukhobor elder Eli Popoff encapsulated the Doukhobors' view in the following way: "if every human being is a light bulb, Jesus was one that shined a bit brighter."¹⁰ The Doukhobors also saw the Bible as a collection of important historical documents created by human beings, possessing allegories, lessons and wisdom rather than being the literal words of God.

Spread and Evolution of Doukhorism

Historians once universally attributed the name "Doukhor" to a derisive comment by Russian Orthodox Archbishop Ambrose of Ekaterinoslav in 1786. Russian Anthropologist Svetlana Inikova, however, has asserted that the word was coined that same year by Nikifor, Archbishop of Slovenia, as a derisive reference to people who rejected the Orthodox Church, the worship of icons and Jesus Christ's divinity (among other things).¹¹ The term was intended for people who wrestled **against** the spirit of God; however, the meaning was inverted and re-interpreted by these believers to mean people who wrestle **with** the spirit of God.

Near the end of the eighteenth century, the dual forces of proselytization and the state response of exile spread Doukhorism to many parts of Russia. The heart of the movement could be found in Tambov, Voronezh, Kharkov, and Ekaterinoslav. Smaller populations could be found in Astrakhan, Stavropol, Kuban, Tavria, Kherson, Poltava, Kursk and Orel; exiles could also be found as far away as the Baltic Sea on the island of Ezel, in Finland (which was under Russian control), in the far north in Arkhangel and throughout Siberia including the Kamchatka peninsula.¹²

⁹ The Doukhor *pasalom Doukhobretz Tot* expresses this idea.

¹⁰ It is possible that Doukhorism traces its lineage back to Arianism. An 1805 paper believed to be written by Doukhobors from Ekaterinoslav entitled *The Origin of the Doukhobors and Their Doctrine* shows the group to be well acquainted with stories about Arias and the Council of Nicea. See Alexander M. Evalenko, *The Message of the Doukhobors*, (New York: The International Library Publishing Co, 1913), 110.

¹¹ Svetlana Inikova, "Spiritual Origins and the Beginnings of Doukhor History", in *The Doukhor Centenary in Canada*, edited by Andrew Donskov, John Woodsworth, Chad Gaffield (Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa: Institute of Canadian Studies at the University of Ottawa, 2000), 1-21.

¹² Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors*, (New York: AMS Press, 1904):11.

It took decades for a loose body of belief systems based on individual rationalism and reason, with its accompanying disparate views to coalesce and find coherent form under the overarching banner, Doukhoborism. Issues such as rejecting the Orthodox Church including its priests and icons, and challenging Czarist authority cut across Doukhobor fault lines of geography, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Aylmer Maude, the author of the first significant English language history of the Doukhobors, wrote that "different individuals and different groups would express themselves variously, yet almost all would show a united front on matters on which they differed from the Orthodox Russian Church."¹³

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, regional groupings had their own spiritual leaders. These Doukhobor clusters assumed the character of their leaders' styles and beliefs. It is useful to use "thick description"¹⁴ to flesh out the Doukhobor concept of the *voszhed* (spiritual leader) and its role within the culture because outsiders have frequently misunderstood it as being a "king." The leaders, or *voszhdi*, have played a crucial role in influencing and shaping the direction of Doukhoborism particularly for those Doukhobors who came to Canada. The historical *voszhed* possesses the spiritual and rational capacities of what Doukhobors believe Jesus possessed, but this person is not the actual physical re-incarnation of Christ because, as a mortal person, his human form does not exist. Instead they believed that the enlightened spirit of Christ was passed on after his crucifixion through succeeding generations. Doukhobors believed that this person attained a position of considerable respect and veneration in the community, but was not the incarnation of Christ because he or she possessed the natural frailties of humans.¹⁵ In fact, in the canon of Doukhobor songs, almost none celebrate any specific Doukhobor leader.¹⁶

¹³ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 11, 15.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Descriptions towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

¹⁵ Venerated Doukhobor matriarch Anna Markova stated during a Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Symposium Meeting that "leaders are also human beings and not 'gods'...that they do have human faults." See Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, *Report of the United Doukhobor Research Committee in the Matter of Clarification of the Motivating Life-Concepts and the History of the Doukhobors in Canada (Symposium Meetings 1974-1982)*. Transcribed, edited and translated by Eli Popoff. Castlegar, BC: Selkirk College, 1997), 54, 75.

¹⁶ Freedomites have taken a different approach. The Freedomites celebrate Stephan Sorokin, a non-Doukhobor who came to the Freedomite community of Krestova in 1950. He was accepted by a substantial number of them as their "spiritual pastor" and *voszhed* or spiritual leader. In 1986, the Krestova Youth choir released a recording dedicated to Sorokin and containing songs

These *voszhdī* have provided words of guidance and inspiration that have survived long after their deaths, however, no "bible" of their words exists.

Every Doukhobor believed to some extent that the *voszhed* represented a unifying force. The *voszhed* occupied a point of intersection of the various often tendentious family, kin, economic, political, historical, social and religious differences. He or she is supposed to exist above this fray, possessing a venerable family name with important historical roots providing leadership continuity. Personal characteristics of the *voszhed* include charisma, knowledge, oratorical abilities, and intense spirituality. The spiritual leader resolves conflict, mediates and balances competing views, often tempering the most extreme opinions. This person sets the group's priorities, provides hope and strength and can be likened to a sort of final court of appeal. He or she may help lead a prayer ceremony but then takes his or her place in the same simple manner as everyone else.¹⁷

Doukhobor Colonization of the Caucasus

Canadian Doukhobors trace their lineage to the Milky Waters settlement of Tavria province settled between 1802 and 1820. Between 1840 and 1845, the Russian state, with a newly instituted policy of banishing sectarians, exiled the Doukhobors to the Caucasus. Forced to start anew in a foreign land with a harsh climate, Doukhobors displayed their prodigious ability to adapt and prosper under adverse conditions. They incorporated living strategies -- including new agricultural methods, foods, languages, dwelling styles and business enterprises -- from their neighbours into their settlement.¹⁸ Among their most significant adaptations was their use of arms. In the Milky Waters settlement the Doukhobors had peaceful neighbours such as the Molokans and Mennonites. The relentless attacks of marauding hilltribes, however, combined with weak central authority and made the use of guns and swords a necessity for survival.

explicitly and implicitly referencing him. Orthodox and Independents regard Sorokin as an unscrupulous criminal. More will be discussed about S.S. Sorokin and his legacy later in this study.

¹⁷ When J.J. Verigin assumed a leadership role in in the 1940's he eschewed this title and only accepted the role of Honourary Chairman. While elders may use and understand this complex and powerful term, Doukhobor youth by and large have little or no understanding of its nuances and historic application.

¹⁸ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 88, 100,101.

By 1886, the Doukhobor community had become quite prosperous and a veritable nation within the Russian nation; however, political unity masked profound cultural, spiritual, social and economic differences. As the group grew and spread geographic and social distances became greater. Villages celebrated different festivals and practiced different traditions.¹⁹ While many Doukhobors maintained their traditional pious beliefs, many people – particularly communities more distant from Orlovka (Tiflis), the main centre of Doukhobor culture - ate meat, drank alcohol, gambled and served in the military. Economically, the Doukhobors had employed a communal economic system upon settling in the region. Although a *Sirotzke dom* system still fulfilled its traditional function as a treasury with lending and charitable functions for those experiencing economic difficulty, individualism emerged as the group prospered. In this climate, economic stratification took hold and some Doukhobors became very wealthy, owning profitable business enterprises and significant land holdings; other Doukhobors, however, were very poor and were forced to work for wealthier Doukhobors and others.²⁰

With all its geographic, economic, social, philosophical and human complexities, *Doukhororia* was homeostatic, always able to re-establish its equilibriums and maintain stability regardless of internal flux and external challenges and threats. The stabilizing influence of the *vozshed* was integral to this system. With a stable head, *Doukhororia* functioned organically as the sum of its parts as a sort of theocratic-communal, quasi-democratic union of villages. Governance was mainly administered at the local level with elders playing the lead role in decision making. If an issue involved the greater Doukhobor community, consultations were held with other villages.²¹ Doukhobor religious principles, morality and etiquette underpinned social relations between members of the community.

Meltdown

Everything changed the day Lukeria Kalmakova, one of the most venerated Doukhobor leaders of all time, died in 1886. Her passing represented a watershed moment in Doukhobor history. The ensuing battle over leadership churned up community differences, creating waves of

¹⁹ Svetlana Inikova, *Holidays and Rituals of Doukhobors in the Caucasus*, n.d., <<http://www.doukhobor.org/Holidays.htm>>

²⁰ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 118, 226.

²¹ Nikolay Zibarov, *O sozhzhenii oruzhii dukhoborami*, (Purleigh, UK 1899).

discord that breached the traditional levees of stability holding the group together – family, culture, religion and history. These differences and animosities spread outward draining Doukhobor society of its strength. The next fourteen years were very important because the struggles would have epic consequences. Intense factionalism led one group to migrate to Canada. This group was heavily influenced by this late period in the Caucuses, the period that had spawned the “true Doukhoborism.”

Lukeria Kalmakova died childless and therefore without heirs. While she had provided political and spiritual leadership for the Doukhobors, behind the scenes, her brother, Michael Gubanov and an influential elder, Alex Zubkov had an important role administering the economic affairs of the community. Michael Gubanov believed that his administrative role and relationship to Lukeria were enough to make him the legitimate leader. However, a young man, Peter Vasilievich Verigin stood in his way. Lukeria had recognized Verigin's keen intellect, physical stature and charismatic personality and had spent years grooming him for leadership. A majority of Doukhobors recognized Verigin; only a minority recognized the Gubanov/Zubkov faction. The ensuing leadership struggle resulted in competing factions and became focused on control of community assets at the *Sirotzke dom*. The Zubkov/Gubanov faction appealed to Russian authorities. Ultimately, the dispute was decided according to Russian property laws and the courts awarded the assets to the Gubanov/Zubkov side, infuriating supporters of Verigin and spawning a new era of hostility between the two sides. Members of the opposing sides stopped cordially greeting each other, stopped praying with each other, ceased talking to one another, burying dead together in the same cemeteries, meeting and marrying each other.²²

The late 1880's and 1890's saw the most ferocious factionalism in Russian Doukhobor history up to that point. It manifested itself mainly in the family. The family, the core of Russian peasant culture and the foundation of Doukhobor society, was ripped apart as husbands and wives separated, divorced and annulled marriages; parents feuded with children and vice-versa. Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, cousins, uncles and aunts were forced to choose sides

²² Maude, *A Peculiar People*; George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*; J.F.C. Wright, *Slava Bohu*; Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus*.

in the fractious leadership struggle. The Doukhobor community, which once represented a stable, distinct nation, collapsed. In this firestorm of enmity, village, family, clan and neighbourly rivalries and tensions exploded. In perhaps the most glaring example of how the leadership struggle became personal, inlaid with issues of family and power, the Kotelnikov side -- Verigin's former wife's wealthy family -- became so bitter and hostile toward Verigin and his family for what Peter had done to their daughter and grandson, that they used their power and influence to align their family and friends in support of the Gubanov/Zubkov faction which was known as the Small Party.

Sectarian anger became so pronounced that violent clashes ensued and the state militia was forced to intervene in order to keep the peace. Within some villages community members from the Large Party who recognized Verigin's leadership appealed to authorities to allow them to move to other villages. In some cases, opposing sides separated and formed distinct villages. In others, Doukhobors from one side of a village swapped their homes with people from the other side in a nearby village in order to homogenize their communities.²³ The government, which saw Verigin as the source of all the trouble, exiled him in the hope that his absence would calm the situation. It did not, and eventually became worse. Verigin, realizing that the group could never turn back from this social/political and religious course, added substance to his group's differences with the Small Party by introducing a spiritual and cultural renaissance that would change Doukhobor identity and history forever.

Through a network of messengers, Verigin instructed the Large Party Doukhobors to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, tea and meat. Holidays were abolished and the group was to hold prayer meetings regularly. He forbade marriages between the two antagonistic sides and instituted sexual prohibitions so that families had no children. He also commanded that women not leave their villages. Materially, he ordered Doukhobors to again embrace communalism wholeheartedly and pursue a path toward group socio-economic equality through debt forgiveness and material re-distribution. Arguably, Verigin's most important directive to his followers was not to cooperate with local government officials. Doukhobors no longer paid bribes, or made state directed economic contributions but more importantly, they would not obey

²³ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 228-231, 235.

conscription laws or register vital statistics such as marriages births and deaths. The Doukhobors were making a clean break with government.²⁴

Burning of the Arms, Persecution and the Diversity of Doukhobor Experiences

Within the Large Party support for Veriginism varied. In the Bashkichev, Karaklis and Ormashen areas of Armenia, the Doukhobors initially supported the strict lifestyle changes but lapsed after a couple of months.²⁵ The Large Party also split between the Fasters also known as the Third Party, registered party or White Party, who were the most radical and were mainly, but not exclusively, found in the Wet Mountains of Tiflis, and those Doukhobors affiliated with the Vorobev party concentrated in Slavjanka (Elizavetpol). This latter group led "the same life-style as the members of the 'unregistered' [Small Party] and like them... [were] obedient in all respects to the government; at the same time, however, they recognize[d] Verigin as the 'Doukhobor Christ' and join[ed] the 'fasters' to pray." It was not always clear who was on what side. Even with intense surveillance, the Russian government had such problems differentiating among the different Doukhobor factions that the leader of the Vorobev party or Middle Party was forced to appeal to the governor not to confuse the factions and blame the Middle Party for the actions of the Fasters.²⁶

The defining moment of this period of Doukhobor resistance to the state was the Burning of the Arms by members of the Large Party. In 1895, Peter Verigin conceived the idea of having all of his supporters destroy their arms in one dramatic show as an unambiguous articulation of their opposition to violence. The Doukhobors near three villages gathered their guns and swords and burned them in huge bonfires. By destroying every tangible symbol of violence, the Doukhobors hoped they had eliminated the last vestiges of their corrupt relationship with the state.

For Canadian Doukhobors, the Burning of the Arms is a hallowed event –possibly the most important in this group's history and a point of unity and agreement for all regardless of the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 251, 252.

²⁶ *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhobor Emigration to Canada*, edited and translated by John Woodsworth, (Manotick, Ont: Penumbra Press, 1999), 94.

branch. It helped forge the group's identity as a strong willed and defiant culture and represented a tangible reference point for their pacifism. Canadian Doukhobors have celebrated the event through singing, theatrical events, and in countless speeches at important gatherings. References to the event adorn t-shirts, posters, have been commemorated in events such as the Youth Festival in the Kootenays, and have inspired Doukhobors to pursue a variety of pacifistic campaigns. As the defining moment of the sectarian struggle in the Caucasus it pays to look at the event closely.²⁷

Of the dozens of villages in the Caucasus, only three villages burned their arms. In *Spasovka* (Kars) the event attracted almost no attention from authorities. In *Slavianka* (Elizavetpol), government officials gathered evidence and arrested a few people but released them later. In *Orlovka*, however, the event had tremendous effect and this had much to do with Small and Large party relationship dynamics. *Orlovka* was the most important centre of Doukhoborism because, among other things, it was the location of the *Sirotzke dom*. It was also ground zero in the sectarian conflict between the Small Party and the Large Party. When two thousand Large Party members began gathering their weapons for the burning, Small Party members informed the authorities of their fear of an attack from the group.²⁸ The State responded with alarming barbarity.²⁹ The Cossacks used their horses to ride down and whip the people who had gathered to pray around the fire all that night. Men and women were beaten and killed; the Cossacks engaged in gang rape of women in the presence of their husbands and fathers.³⁰ After this orgy of violence, the bloody and wounded survivors were forced on a long-march into exile. Along with another 2000 Tiflis Doukhobors who supported their brethren, family members and friends were split apart and sent to live throughout the Armenian and Georgian lowlands rife with disease and pestilence. The Tiflis Doukhobors who participated or supported the participants in

²⁷ Every year the Youth Festival, held during the Victoria Day long weekend in May at the Brilliant Cultural Centre, has a theme. In 1995, the centennial celebration of the Arms Burning was one of the most elaborate. It featured speeches, songs and plays recreating the event. The published program for this festival features a comprehensive discussion by D.E. (Jim) Popoff regarding the Orthodox Doukhobor's view of what happened and its significance to Doukhoborism.

²⁸ Canadian Doukhobors believe that the Small Party's intention was less out of fear than to see the Large Party attacked.

²⁹ Zibarov, *O sozhzhenii oruzhiia dukhoborami*.

³⁰ Fyodor Egorovich Dyachkov, "The Trail of Blood", *Iskra* nos. 1954-1974, translated by D.E. Jim Popoff.

the great arms burning lost their possessions, family members and for roughly 1000, their lives. What they gained however was an elevated spirituality and an identity strongly infused with a martyrdom ethos.

The majority of Kars and Elizavetpol Doukhobors, however, suffered no persecution apart from intense surveillance and travel restrictions. They played an invaluable role in keeping many of their Tiflis brethren alive by donating food and money. Only people who refused to fulfill their military service from these two regions suffered as much as the Tiflis Doukhobors.³¹ The persecution for not serving in the army cannot be understated. Hundreds of men from Kars and Elizavetpol were imprisoned in small, filthy, bitterly cold or exceedingly hot (depending on the season) conditions barely surviving on meagre food rations while enduring torture. Others were put into penal battalions and made to wear chains, some were exiled to the coldest parts of Siberia. Through common experience, Doukhobors exiled to Yakutsk attained an identity all their own.³²

The terrible persecution broke the spirits of some Large party Doukhobors. Many of them, unable to endure any more suffering, bowed to their brethren, remorseful for giving up, and switched sides, joining the Small Party.³³ Given their total disregard for the high death toll among the Tiflis Doukhobors, there is every reason to believe that authorities would have tolerated the death of every last Doukhobor rather than change political course.³⁴

Only the intervention of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and his followers averted this

³¹ In fact many Tiflis Doukhobors were only able to come to Canada because Doukhobors from other regions sponsored them.

³² Thirty six conscientious objectors were from Kars, 44 from Elizavetpol and aside from three Tolstoyan-Stundists who joined the Doukhobors, the rest were from Tiflis. Many, though not all, were joined by their family members. See Jon Kalmakoff's geneology website <<http://www.Doukhobor.org/Siberia.pdf>>

³³ Vladimir Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, (London: Free Age Press, 1900):65.

³⁴ See Vladimir Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 1-5, 42-43. He states that "more than four thousand people were suffering and dying from hunger, disease, exhaustion, blows, tortures and other persecutions at the hands of the Russian Authorities" and describes this suffering in detail by region. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 107-108. They write that authorities "sought to keep the persecution of the Doukhobors secret by suppressing communication with the outside world and censoring press reports within Russia. They hoped to starve them [Doukhobors] into submission without public discredit." Breyfogle in *Heretics and Colonizers*, 273, concurs with Woodcock and Avakumovic but takes a softer line by stating that the Russian government sought censorship to "reduce public knowledge about -- hide the Doukhobors' defiance of power and what high level authorities increasingly came to see as their own embarrassingly savage response."

horrific if not genocidal situation. Tolstoy had become estranged from the Orthodox Church and entered a writing phase contemplating the most just and pure form of Christianity. He heard of the Doukhobors suffering for their beliefs that included pacifism and communalism and saw a group that shared kindred views to his own. His national and international stature allowed him to champion the Doukhobors' cause without worrying about suffering the wrath of the state.³⁵

Because of the efforts of the Tolstoyans in concert with the Quakers in raising money, bringing worldwide publicity to the persecution of the Doukhobors, and negotiating with British and Canadian governments, over 7500 Large Party Doukhobors came to Canada in 1899.³⁶ They were a minority of the Doukhobors but were the most willing to take a chance and to endure a long arduous boat trip. They had separated from family members and friends in the Caucuses and turned their back on Russia, the only home they knew and the cradle of their faith. Such a bold fateful decision suggests they were the most extreme of all the Doukhobors. But the group was anything but homogenous; one might characterize the four boats as vessels of difference.

The emigration was formally organized along geographic divisions with each of the three regions – Tiflis, Kars and Elizavetpol – grouped according to their villages. Both geography and economic circumstances divided the people. Kars and Elizavetpol Doukhobors were relatively wealthy compared to their Tiflis brethren. Socially, many of the Doukhobors on these boats did not know each other. Sergej Tolstoy, Leo's son, who accompanied them on the second ship, the *Lake Superior*, observed extreme differences between the groups and problems in communicating without his help.

There is some discontent between them [Elizavetpol Doukhobors] and the Kars contingent; it is expressed in little ways and it is hidden, but it is there. One of the difficulties I had in looking after their affairs was precisely this division of the whole lot into 675 from Kars and 1,225 from Elizavetpol – and the two do not know each other well. The Kars people moved out of Elizavetpol Province twenty years ago, and while some still have relatives in the other contingent, there has been little communication between the contingents for these twenty years, and since then a new generation has grown up. I am writing all this of course, because I have grown rather tired of playing the role of

³⁵ Josh Sanborn, "Pacifist Politics and Peasant Politics: Tolstoy and the Doukhobors 1895-99," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XVII, No 3 (1995): 52-71.

³⁶ The first boat load of the most indigent Doukhobors was actually the third boat to land in Canada because it went to Cyprus first. Conditions were horrific and many people died of disease before negotiations were undertaken with Canadian authorities who accepted the Doukhobors as immigrants.

Doukhobor leader.³⁷

The intensity of their beliefs in Veriginism also varied. Some people wanted to be associated with the community he led on their own looser terms: they respected him but did not want to follow his strict prohibitions against private landownership and personal activities such as smoking and eating meat. Some of these people, especially from Elizavetpol intended to be fully independent as soon as they arrived in Canada.³⁸ For others, intense persecution during the final years in the Caucuses had hardened their strong, steadfast belief in the new Verigin religiosity.

Among all Canadian Doukhobors, faith and persecution, or faith and suffering, became like yin and yang –balancing forces – one incomplete without the other. High cultural value was put in the idea of "enduring", which became a source of empowerment and pride. Throughout the twentieth century in Canada, cultural reverence for the martyrdom in the Caucuses crossed all factional lines and inspired some of the most powerful, haunting, rather mournful songs which are the veritable anthems of Doukhobor choral tradition today.³⁹ One branch that emerged in Canada, the Sons of Freedom or Freedomites, fanatically clung to the idea of martyrdom, distorting its meaning, pursuing it in furtherance of a cause to insure that all Doukhobors lived according to the most rigid interpretations of Doukhobor philosophy.

The Beginnings of Canadian Doukhoborism and the Emergence of Sectarianism

The Doukhobors settled in four reserves in the Assiniboia, and North West Territories of Canada: the North Colony, South Colony with its Spirit Lake annex, and finally the Prince Albert colony. Pre-existing divisions in the Caucuses were transported to Canada where they manifested themselves in village settlement. The three groups tended to settle along geographic affiliation; economics also played a part with the wealthiest Doukhobors mostly from Kars and

³⁷ *Sergej Tolstoy and the Doukhobors: A Journey to Canada*, edited by Andrew Donskov, compiled by Tat'jana Nikiforova, trans by John Woodsworth, (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa, 1998), 359.

³⁸ *Sergej Tolstoy and the Doukhobors: A Journey to Canada*, 315.

³⁹ *Speetya Arli Bayaviya, V Barbe za Svabodoo* and *Spooskaetsa Solnsa Za Stepi* are arguably the defining Doukhobor songs expressing this martyr ethos. The latter song even uses onomatopoeia in its chorus to poignantly express the sound made by chains and shackles as Doukhobors dragged them on their marches in captivity. Another example of this cultural regard for suffering and sacrifice can be found in a Doukhobor child's education. Regardless of the branch, children learned about the suffering of their ancestors through elders who told stories of their experiences and showed the horrific scarring on their bodies from the terrible whippings they received from authorities.

Elizavetpol choosing to settle away from the poorer Tiflis Doukhobors. Sulerzhitsky conceptualizes the nature of these economic relations by stating that the Kars and Elizavetpol groups "came to Canada with means –and some families with large means... power here was on the side of the rich and the well-to-do. These with few exceptions, at once set up a different life. 'Each for himself' was their guiding principle."⁴⁰

Having come on the third boatload, Cyprus (Tiflis) Doukhobors settled near their Tiflis brethren in the South Colony and were left with the least desirable land in the area. The Kars Doukhobors who came on the last boat had the strongest element of individualism and insisted on settling on their own, far from everyone in the Prince Albert colony. Timing of settlement, geographic affiliation and power gained from wealth resulted in Kars and Elizavetpol Doukhobors tending to have better quality land than their Tiflis counterparts.

Almost immediately, disagreements over the type of "Doukhor" economic/social/religious framework that ought to govern life in Canada further cleaved the group. Some villages became fully communal. The North colony comprised of Tiflis Doukhobors was the most united group and adopted communalism with the village as the central organizing unit. In the South colony, farming and living was disorganized owing to heterogeneity of views. Village life organization ranged along a spectrum – from full independence to full communalism and everything in between. In the Prince Albert colony, where the strongest elements of individualism existed, there were significant differences among the villages. Of the ten villages, four lived communally and six independently.⁴¹ Personifying the problems, and exacerbating differences between and within villages was conflict resulting from poorer Doukhobors becoming indebted to wealthier Doukhobors.⁴² At a meeting of the elders of all the settlements in 1902, one elder testified to the tremendous differences and regional affiliations that plagued the group when he said, "Who are the Kars Doukhobors, or Elizabetpol, or Wet Mountain? What are these divisions for? Now they have divided into villages and each village seems to be another people or

⁴⁰ L.A. Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, translation by Michael Kalmakoff, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1982) 166.

⁴¹ Carl J. Tracie, *"Toil and Peaceful Life" Doukhor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan 1899-1918*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1996) 92-94.

⁴² Inikova, Svetlana, *History of the Doukhobors in V.D. Bonch Bruevich's Archives, (1886-1950's)* edited by Koozma J. Tarasoff, (Toronto: Legas and Spirit Wrestlers Associates, 1999) 48,49.

nation.⁴³ The main problem was that no leader wielded influence over the whole group and so could not bridge their differences.

Because of these internal disputes and the Doukhobors' varying backgrounds and histories they understood officials in different ways and sent mixed messages to the government.⁴⁴ In the North Colony, Doukhobors in the village of *Voznesenie* categorically told a representative of the Canadian government that signing their names for particular homesteads would contravene God's law. Conversely, Prince Albert Doukhobors believed that freehold of land for a nominal amount of money was in accordance with "God's Law."⁴⁵ The entire settlement process had become a tangle of complications – frustration for the Doukhobors, a nightmare for bureaucratic administration, and political embarrassment for the ruling Liberal government that had brought them over.

Matters grew worse as Doukhobors began moving from village to village depending on whether they were communally or individualistically inclined. In some cases entire villages began to dissolve and then re-established themselves in other localities, even being renamed. Sometimes these villages were established completely outside of allotted lands. Exacerbating this chaotic process was the government's disorganized surveying system.⁴⁶ Philosophical disputes over living communally or individually, battles over sharing of resources, issues of indebtedness and usury between Doukhobors meant endless quarrelling that fractured the communities. Many Doukhobors, particularly from Tiflis who had lost every material possession in the course of resisting the state for Doukhorism, saw that many of their compatriots from Kars and Elizavetpol, who had not suffered religious trial, were tending towards individualism. The Tiflis Doukhobors became dismayed, disillusioned and frustrated that the group was not collectively building the utopia they set out to do.

Ultimately, the main issue of contention between the majority of Doukhobors and the Canadian authorities was a fundamental clash of views of land "ownership." Overwhelmingly,

⁴³ L.A. Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 175.

⁴⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse and the Novel", in the *Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 206.

⁴⁶ Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life," 20,21.

Doukhobors understood the land to be owned by God, the privilege of using a given parcel of land derived from the labour one invested in it, rather than from a document or written contract. Conversely, the government operated by formal bureaucratic rules that required documentation delineating ownership as the foundation of a system where private property was protected and guaranteed by law. The two views were irreconcilable.

Peter Vasilievich Verigin's Influence from Russia

The person who could provide direction and unity was in exile far away in Russia. Although his fate was inextricably tied to the Doukhobors who journeyed to Canada, Peter Vasilievich Verigin had been very much on his own journey. Since the great schism in the Caucasus, Verigin's family had lost all its wealth and Verigin himself had spent nearly 15 years exiled in various places throughout the peripheries of the Russian empire. During his imprisonment and exile, Verigin learned much from conversations with other political dissidents that he used to formulate his religious renaissance for the Large Party Doukhobors. Of all the people he talked to, no one influenced his thinking more than Leo Tolstoy.

In such works as *Confession* and *The Kingdom of God is within You*, Tolstoy argued that the path to happiness and self fulfillment could be found in a personal relationship with God. At its core, his belief was pacifistic, based on the idea that the endless cycles of violence plaguing humanity were the product of a nefarious state system that encouraged war and the exploitation of the lowest classes. To end this violence, it was necessary to cease participating in this system. In Verigin, Tolstoy's thoughts mixed with traditional iconoclastic Doukhor philosophies rejecting the Czar and the Orthodox Church. This fusion became the Large Party Doukhorism – a real life experiment where many of Tolstoy's Christian ideals were actually being lived.⁴⁷

The two men engaged in a lengthy and frequent correspondence that often consisted of philosophical debates about Christianity. These private exchanges were neither meant to be official guides for life nor blueprints for the Doukhobors' settlement in Canada -- they were musings and a negotiation of ideas which led to both interlocutors' philosophical and spiritual

⁴⁷ "Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence" edited by Andrew Donskov, translated by John Woodsworth, (Ottawa: Legas, 1995). For an important discussion regarding Verigin's and Tolstoy's relationship see Josh Sanborn, "Pacifist Politics and Peasant Politics: Tolstoy and the Doukhobors, 1895-99, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXVII, No3, (1995), 52-71.

growth. In 1901, the Tolstoyan Vladimir Chertkov published Verigin's letters in Russia. In 1902, one of them reached Canada. In it Verigin emphasized that the Doukhobors ought not to register for land privately or use money, should cast off virtually all man made items and seek a Promised Land "freed from the violence of human hands" where they may attain sustenance from wild fruit, berries and vegetables. It complicated the Doukhobors' already tumultuous social situation.

These fanciful thoughts had no precedent either in the religious awakening Verigin had led in the Caucasus, nor in anything he said after he came to Canada. As such, they can only be considered as philosophical contemplations, or playful idealizations. Some Doukhobors, however, regarded them as iron clad guidelines and they became the philosophical underpinnings for the eventual emergence of the Sons of God later known as the Sons of Freedom or Freedomite branch of Doukhoborism.

These extreme Doukhobors came to believe that registering parcels of land with the government and therefore "owning" them privately represented a serious transgression against God. If forced to apply for individual patents, the righteous path required that Doukhobors abandon their traditional agrarian economic mode. In "doing right by God" they believed that He would take care of them by providing food naturally.

Rise of the Freedomite Branch

The most extreme elements in the Doukhobor community were influenced and excited by the non-Doukhobor Tolstoyan anarchist A.M. Bodyanski who lived among them and inflamed anti-government ideas and captured their imaginations with talk about a warm southern "promised land."⁴⁸ The most zealous Doukhobor activities first emerged in the village of *Terpennie* among Orlovka Doukhobors from Tiflis – the same community that had suffered the most in Russia for burning their arms.⁴⁹ Leaders of this group were determined to send a dramatic message to all Doukhobors regarding how far they had drifted from what members of the Large Party had suffered for in the Caucasus. They rejected modernity including money,

⁴⁸ He eventually left the Doukhobors in frustration saying "no more impenetrable group of people exist than the Doukhobors." Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 214.

⁴⁹ Sulerzhitzky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 167. The author remarked that Tiflis Doukhobors, of which the Orlov group was among the most dedicated, had exhibited the highest moral development of all the Doukhobors and "may be considered the best group of all."

farming, and materialism. As the Doukhobor community disintegrated, these people began preaching among their brethren, the Cyprus Doukhobors (also from Tiflis) who were receptive to these messages because they desired unity and dedication to the New Doukhoborism above all else.

In 1902, the residents of the village of *Truzdenia* set animals free, dispensed with metallic objects, and in the first Canadian case of Doukhobors using fire to destroy material items, the most zealous of the group burned sheepskin coats, leather boots and horse collars. These largely Tiflis Doukhobors gave away their money and set off on a trek in the freezing weather evangelizing "as Jesus had done" and singing psalms on their way to the North Colonies before heading to Yorkton and Minnedosa. Sources differ but the number of men, women, children and the elderly numbered between 1500 and 2000 or less than a quarter of the total Doukhobor population.⁵⁰

Participants in the pilgrimage began referring to fellow Doukhobors from the Prince Albert Colony and Good Spirit Lake – mainly from Elizavetpol and Kars Doukhobors – who did not participate in the trek as "No-Doukhobors;" those who did participate became known derisively as "Mad Doukhobors." The police eventually corralled the trekkers and sent them home on trains. Many "Mad-Doukhobors" blamed the trek's failure on the non-participation of the "No-Doukhobors," opening up another contentious division.⁵¹ This prairie trek was the first tangible expression of Freedomite beliefs, however, the vast majority of trekkers were neither Freedomites nor would they become Freedomites. The trek was a reactionary response by people who were confused, frustrated and in many ways directionless.

Verigin was determined to usher in a process of unification. After arriving in Canada in late 1902, he gathered a large group of Doukhobors, praised communalists, and persuaded many Independents to return to communalism. He commanded great respect among the majority of the most zealous Doukhobors who had rejected farming and material possessions and used his influence to bring them in to the communal fold. He argued for farming in a way that respected

⁵⁰ J.F.C. Wright, *Slava Bohu*, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1940), 188,189; Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 215.

⁵¹ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 190.

traditional Doukhobor values and downplayed registration as a mere formality. According to Canadian homestead law, to gain title to their land, immigrants were required to pledge an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. Noting that the Doukhobors still had three years to consider various approaches to the oath,⁵² Verigin organized a committee of representatives from each of the growing factions to sign for land and gave them all input into the organization and direction of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB). Verigin had suppressed or channelled most of Doukhoborism's most extreme tendencies. Some individuals, however, clung obstinately to their extreme beliefs and Verigin could do nothing to change this.

By 1903, the Sons of God had adopted the name *Svobodniki* or Freedomites in English and a new tactic, nudity. That year, approximately 45 individuals went on a nude trek preaching from village to village in Doukhobor colonies. There is no record of nudity ever being a part of Doukhobor culture in Russia; this new cultural development was a purely Canadian Freedomite phenomenon. Theories as to the origin of this new tactic that startled authorities and the Canadian public are varied and uncertain. One theory is that a visitor from a nudist colony in Oregon introduced it to Doukhobors during their first years in Canada. Another theory relates to an obscure story about Lukeria Kalmakova having a nude woman put in a large basket and lowered into a well so deep the bottom could not be seen. She then had the woman raised and said, "I am showing you an example of what will be happening in the future."⁵³ This theory was probably conjured up to justify nude behaviour well after the practise had taken hold as a form of protest.

Freedomites have frequently claimed that nudity represents an expression of their anti-materialist stance and that it has religious connotations providing a link to the first man and woman mentioned in the Old Testament, Adam and Eve. At a time when social stratification was becoming a problem in Doukhobor society, shedding clothing was the ultimate form of social levelling, a dramatic way of expressing humility and equality. In a practical sense, when engaging in protest, given prudish Canadian social views of the naked body, taking off one's clothes was an

⁵² Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 100-102.

⁵³ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 196; Joint Doukhobor Research Symposium, 65.

effective way to provoke authorities and exert power from a position of weakness.

One of the great historical ironies of Freedomite nudity which came to define Doukhoborism generally in the twentieth century is that Doukhobors had had a reputation for their clean, well stitched and brightly coloured handcrafted clothes. The men were always well dressed in dark blue military-like tunics and women wore long draped dresses coloured in their signature vibrant blues and red hues. Sergei Tolstoy had remarked in Russia that the Doukhobors stood out from all other ethnic groups in the quality and colour of their attire.⁵⁴ Lally Bernard, who toured Doukhobor villages in Saskatchewan when the Doukhobors first came to Canada, extolled the qualities of the clothing,

Their gala dresses are a blaze of color, and even the tiny children are as gay as a garden of poppies. It is very delightful; this mass of brilliant coloring against the transparency of the prairie atmosphere, and the note of color added to the picture by a group of Doukhobor women in one of the great hay meadows has a value easily to be recognized.⁵⁵

At the time and in the decades after, the Freedomites' nude tactics represented a cultural aberration that shocked the public and most importantly, the majority of Doukhobors. Nudity had clearly marked them off as a distinct splinter from mainstream Doukhoborism.

The most extreme Doukhobors with their alarming new cultural adaptation were neither influential enough nor numerous enough to influence the vast majority of Doukhobors who, meanwhile, yearned to build a huge communal utopia in Canada. All they needed was a strong central administration with keen organizational acumen to bridge the differences in the group and harness its tremendous passions and abilities. They got this with Verigin who united the majority of Doukhobors to build the CCUB which would become the largest communal organization in North American history. He kept tight control of the CCUB's administration and organized a system to pool the fruits of farming and wages earned by men working on railroads. By 1903, the CCUB Doukhobors were able to purchase the most modern machinery making them among the most productive farmers on the prairies.⁵⁶ As the CCUB prospered, a small number of

⁵⁴ Donskov, *Sergej Tolstoy and the Doukhobors: A Journey to Canada*, 250.

⁵⁵ Mary Agnes Fitz-Gibbon, *The Canadian Doukhobor Settlements, A Series of Letters by Lally Bernard*, (Toronto: Briggs, 1899) 43.

⁵⁶ Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life", 121. The Doukhobors had purchased 4 horse drawn steam engines with threshers and 2 self propelled steam engines with threshers at a total cost of

extremists, no longer content only to take off their clothes and destroy their own possessions, began a campaign to influence Community Doukhobors by releasing their cattle from corrals and destroying ripened grain. Their antics turned very serious when a group of them tried to burn and destroy implements and equipment including part of an expensive and rare binder and threshing machine.⁵⁷

By bringing tremendous embarrassment to the community and breaking Canadian laws, these radicals raised the ire of Verigin. In Saskatchewan, he first tried to persuade them to cease their destructive and nude behaviour using reason; when this proved fruitless, he ordered community members to whip them with branches as happened after a nude pilgrimage in 1903. Verigin also used community membership, the traditional Doukhobor mechanism of coercion, as a tool against them, banishing the most hard core members from the larger community. And finally, when nothing else worked, he appealed to the police and courts.

These Freedomite attacks on Community equipment and grain were the first instances of a tactic that would become their *modus operandi* when committing violence against Doukhobors from other branches: they were carried out clandestinely. As in the Caucuses, the Community Doukhobors began guarding their farms at night, except now they were not on the look out for Mohammedan tribes, but fellow Doukhobors.

In addition, casting a shadow over the CCUB's success were growing tensions with the general public and the government. Canada was a young insecure country accepting immigrants from throughout Europe as part of a grand nation building experiment predicated on immigrants assimilating.⁵⁸ Doukhobors did not want to assimilate. Their failure to vote or participate in politics alienated them from the democratic system and meant they wielded no political power or

\$15,250 dollars or over \$300,000 adjusted for inflation. They also purchased 14 square miles of land with their earnings. I use the term "adjusted for inflation" to mean what a particular cost during a certain historical timeframe is equivalent to in 2008 dollars. <http://www.bank-banque-canada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html>.

⁵⁷ When the culprits were found after a 14 day investigation, Verigin insisted they be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The culprits were given three year prison sentences.

⁵⁸ Immigration policy was conducted on a racial hierarchy with Africans, Native peoples, and Asians representing the least desirable immigrants with Eastern Europeans located just slightly above, followed by Northern Europeans, Western Europeans and English as the most desirable. See Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers 1896-94*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).

influence. Their balking at registering vital statistics and refusal to take oaths – the basics of citizenship – made them seem not only unpatriotic, but in the eyes of the public, decidedly ungrateful to the country that had provided them refuge. Moreover, increasing immigration from other parts of Europe to the Canadian West put pressure on lands and significantly lowered their value as settlers while the Doukhobors' linguistic and physical isolation not to mention their seemingly mysterious ways bred suspicion and resentment in the general public.

It was within this social and political context that the Doukhobors approached the impending deadline for the oath of allegiance as required by land settlement laws. By 1905, large segments of the public and many members of parliament believed that the Doukhobors were receiving special treatment from the government and particularly from Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton who had helped bring them to Canada. Under enormous pressure to take a tougher stand against the Doukhobors, the Laurier government took advantage of Sifton's resignation on another issue to appoint a new minister of the interior. Frank Oliver, the new minister, was a newspaperman from Edmonton who had led the charge against the settlement of the Doukhobors near his hometown when the group was evaluating where it might settle. As minister, he closely examined Doukhobor issues. Particularly irksome to Oliver was their steadfast refusal to swear an oath of allegiance to the British monarch as part of the process of taking out patents on their lands. In 1905 and 1906 Oliver had a census taken of the Doukhobors and assessments made of farmland use and the leadership of Peter Verigin. His investigations led him to conclude that if the Doukhobors refused to swear an oath, their land entries would have to be cancelled.⁵⁹

As the deadline loomed, Verigin recommended that the Doukhobors not take an oath but left it up to each family to decide for itself what to do. He then visited the United States and Russia. Officially, his journey was to enquire about if the Doukhobors might be allowed to re-settle in either of the countries. The US might have been an option, but Russia was unrealistic since in order to get permission to leave six years earlier they had had to sign a document promising never to return.

⁵⁹ The Doukhobors were never told that by law they could do an affirmation rather than an oath.

Confronted with the government's ultimatum, the Doukhobors made their decisions. Over 7000 Doukhobors refused to pledge an oath and the Canadian government embarked on the largest land expropriation ever to affect an immigrant settler group. In 1907, the total CCUB land loss was approximately 283,000 acres – 50,000 of which were cultivated. All that remained for the Community Doukhobors was the land that they had bought and 15 acres per person which the government allotted them to avert complete economic dislocation. The government enticed approximately a thousand Doukhobors to leave the communal system, take oaths of allegiance, fulfill the terms of the *Homestead Act* and become independent farmers.⁶⁰

The government's expropriation of land together with the abandonment of roughly a thousand Doukhobors from the CCUB for independence, combined with stories about authorities mistreating Freedomites imprisoned for nudity (a death occurred in one case of incarceration) enraged Doukhobors from all branches who believed the government was being heavy-handed. To many, it seemed that their experiences in Russia were being played out in Canada and some began to demonstrate solidarity in a struggle against government by becoming Freedomites. By 1908, arrests, imprisonments and vigorous Freedomite proselytization pushed the group's numbers to over 100 – still less than 1 per cent of the total Doukhobor population -- but a significant increase nonetheless.

Doukhorism in Russia was a complex culture and rebellious belief system born out of a climate of peasant alienation. As it grew and spread it came to be characterized by difference. Although the leader or *voszhd* bridged the differences in the community, leadership issues frequently led to fracturing within Doukhorism. The seeds of Doukhor sectarianism were transplanted from the Caucuses to Canada. They were the product of regionalism, economic disparities, varying interpretations of Doukhor philosophy, family connections and ultimately historical experience – especially the meaning of the suffering and struggle that many Doukhobors had endured. Diffuse competing views coalesced into three main outlooks. The Sons of Freedom or Freedomites during a period of turmoil found a reference point for their

⁶⁰ Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 162.

Doukhorism in the most extreme interpretations and applications of principles introduced by Peter V. Verigin. The Community Doukhobors pragmatically followed Verigin's guidance and adaptations. Finally, the Independents desired a relationship with the Doukhor community in Canada but possessed an individualistic bent tinged with assimilative tendencies.

The towering figure of Verigin temporarily subsumed Doukhor differences, but it was a fragile state of unity because in the same way that interpretations of Doukhorism varied along branch lines, so did the meaning that Verigin possessed as *voszhd*. The Freedomites' extreme spirituality complicated their intense devotion to Verigin, frequently leading them into conflict with him. Community Doukhobors, among whom were many with contemporary quasi-Freedomite tendencies, wanted group prosperity and peace and strongly backed Verigin and his strategic advice in dealing with authorities. Most Independents viewed Verigin through the lens of egalitarianism, as co-equal rather than someone possessing quasi-divinity. Many Independents had come to Canada with every intention of being independent; others became Independents when, after living in the communal system, they felt their interests were better served on their own.

The government's pressure to abide by Canadian land laws exacerbated differences latent in Doukhorism; the 1907 land expropriation released these forces of discord. The government's actions struck at the very heart of a people who considered themselves "children of the soil" – bound to it by labour not legal documentation; many Doukhobors perceived that the government was attempting to force them to commit a sacrilege in order to weaken a pillar of their culture and faith with the ultimate goal being assimilation. In this context, three different philosophical views emerged, capturing the Doukhor community's varied views on land and economic enterprise, the role and meaning of religion in daily life, the influence of history and what the most appropriate relationship with government was with respect to registration of vital statistics and public education. Doukhobors would advance in three main paths none of which would travel neatly and clearly in its own direction. Instead, they would undulate and tributaries would flow from each stream occasionally mixing with one another and sometimes even impeding each other's progress.

Chapter 3

The Three Branches of Canadian Doukhoborism

The formative processes driving the Freedomite branch to terrorism occurred in the 1920's with the watershed moment being the death of Peter V. Lordly Verigin in a mysterious train explosion. This chapter discusses how each branch of Doukhoborism – the Independents, the CCUB, and the Freedomites -- had its own unique elements.

The Independents

The Independents were a multi-faceted group that differentiated themselves from other Doukhobors by registering land, becoming Canadian citizens, supporting public schooling for their children, and most of all rejecting Peter V. Verigin's leadership. Generally speaking, an independent Doukhobor can be anyone who does not identify with any formal organization. So theoretically he could have a wide range of religious, philosophical and ideological ideas. In reality, however, most self identified Independents organized together and saw themselves as harbouring distinct views from those attributable to the Freedomites or Orthodox. Most of the Independents lived in Saskatchewan which became the heartland for those who sought to preserve the core cultural aspects of Doukhoborism such as pacifism, song, prayer and language while accepting the financial, social and political aspects of Canadian society. By 1907 there were over 1000 Independents; three years later there were well over 1800. They had become a diverse group. Some Independents shared resources and carried on a communalism all their own; some farmed individually but sought close association with other Independents, and some had little to do with any Doukhobor organizations of any kind.

Filling out the ranks of the most spirited Independents were the Yakutsk Doukhobors who came from all Doukhobor regions in the Caucuses but whose time together in exile gave them an *esprit de corp*, a unique identity, and fiercely independent ideas acquired through exposure to numerous political exiles. Upon arriving in Canada in 1905, they committed themselves to communalism but their unceasing questioning of various aspects of CCUB administration frequently led to disagreements with fellow community members and most importantly, Verigin. In coming late to Canada, they saw themselves as different and were seen as different by the

Community Doukhobors otherwise known as Orthodox Doukhobors who had derived a distinct identity – rather ironically – as “Canadian” Doukhobors tracing their lineage to the migration of 1899.

A significant number of Doukhobors moved between the CCUB and Independent camps during the first decade and a half after Verigin came. Verigin persuaded some of those who were Independents on arrival to join the commune but some became disillusioned with collective living and returned to independent farming. Sometimes families would split with one sibling staying in the CCUB while the other left. The opposite was also true. For some people, the decision to abandon the CCUB was often as basic as a concern for privacy and control over personal finances. Many others, however, left because of tremendous frustration over perceived inequality within what was supposed to be an egalitarian CCUB structure.

Under Peter V. Verigin's tenure no cash was used in the commune. All families were expected to grow their own food in their gardens and orchards and contribute any earnings from the sale of produce and cattle to a central office. Most men had woodcarving skills and made things such as their own furniture and women, with their exemplary sewing skills, made clothing for their families. Items they could not produce such as tools or staples such as flour or salt could be obtained from the CCUB office. If a family needed cash for medical care it had to appeal to the central office that, according to some disillusioned communalists, did not always provide the money. Aggravating the frustration of such families was their perception that members with family connections to people holding influential positions within the commune received surplus benefits. Some villages such as Slavianka and Oospenia near Prince Albert became populated with many disillusioned former communalists. In the course of the conflict with the government over land, Independents developed a palpable enmity toward Peter V. Verigin whom they regarded as authoritarian. While some Independents played a leading role in their own community administration, most opted to apply the mantra of Doukhobor egalitarianism developed in the early 1800's at the Milky Waters settlement in a literal sense: no one was more equal than another.

In time, Independent affiliations in Saskatchewan tended to fall along regional lines so

that areas in the North such as Blaine Lake and in the South such as Kamsack and Canora identified most strongly among themselves. They did, however, send representatives to meet other Independent groups from across Saskatchewan and gathered periodically for *sobranie* and *molenyie*. In 1916 the formation of the Society of Independent Doukhobors of Canada united Independents from across the province.

By the 1920's, individual Independents were the wealthiest and most integrated Doukhobors in Canada. They kept their spirituality but many shed such external manifestations as traditional clothing and wore the fashions of the day even to prayer meetings – to the chagrin of Communalists and Freedomites. Many had automobiles and even became merchants and professionals. They eventually changed how they conducted prayer services, for example, bowing far less in religious ceremonies, eliminating kissing and developing their own singing harmonies and food variations. Approximately 370 Independents went to Russia in 1922 but returned after they were drafted into the military in the midst of post-revolutionary strife.

Independents maintained their Russian culture and language at home (grandparents were often responsible for teaching the children) or in organized community groups. Nevertheless, although the degree of familial interest in public education depended on a range of generational, familial, social and economic variables, they almost unanimously favoured public education so their children would learn the ways of Canadian society; many children completed at least grade seven or eight before turning exclusively to farming. By the time a boy had reached 16, he might enter an arranged marriage and begin a family, farming on land provided by his father. By the second or third generation, a minority of the Independents were ambitious and invested in the education of the eldest male child, particularly if he were deemed gifted and encouraged their children to become professionals. Working the land was a difficult life and these parents sought a better less arduous future for their children. Russia had not afforded them this opportunity, but Canada did and the families were grateful.

While not all Independents had the same goals for their sons, most tended to raise their daughters to work on a farm. During the first two decades in Canada, if girls went to school, they seldom went beyond the primary grades but stayed at home to learn traditional domestic skills

from their mothers and grandmothers. In addition, they often performed difficult physical labour that shocked many of their English neighbours with their Victorian values. Doukhobor women had always played an almost equal role in farm duties in the Caucuses and this tradition continued in Canada. In the first few years of settlement in Canada when the men were away earning wages building railroads, the women were largely responsible for breaking the land and establishing farms and villages. Photographs of women pulling ploughs to break the soil are among the most celebrated in Doukhobor culture. As second and third generation Independents appeared and land became scarcer, families began to educate their girls. By the Second World War, women from the Independent community were attending vocational schools and working as stenographers, telephone operators and other traditional female professions engaged in by their Anglo-Canadian female counterparts.

On the whole, the Independents embraced a dual identity, attempting to fuse Canadian and Doukhobor ways. While the group held a range of views about economics, religion and politics, they were generally the most pragmatic and integrated Doukhobor community. Their history in Canada differs markedly from their Orthodox brethren who, at the personal and familial level, had little or no personal interaction with majoritarian society except when the government intruded in their lives and demanded that they obey provincial laws.¹

The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood and Conflict with the Province of British Columbia

The CCUB represented the vast majority of Doukhobors. They recognized Peter V. Verigin's leadership and placed the collective welfare of Doukhoborism over their own individual interests through a communal living arrangement. Canadian land laws did allow Doukhobors to create a communal utopia without compromising their principles and pledging an oath by buying land outright. For five years, Verigin prepared for the day of reckoning over land by saving money from the sale of grain. He took these funds and leveraged the lands left after the great expropriation to borrow approximately \$100,000 which he used to buy 5700 acres of private land

¹ Many Orthodox Doukhobors born during the existence of the CCUB in Canada never learned to speak English.

at Waterloo, near present day Castlegar, BC and around Grand Forks. Through hard work and a policy of economic austerity, the CCUB purchased more land around Champion Creek, Glade, Pass Creek and Crescent Valley. By 1916 it had bought 19,000 acres and 22,056 by 1931.²

Between 1908 and 1912, some 6000 to 7000 CCUB Doukhobors migrated to the Castlegar and Grand Forks regions (and trickles continued thereafter) to re-establish themselves.³ Their economic expansion was a showcase of resourcefulness and adaptability. These Community Doukhobors established dozens of neatly appointed villages and turned wild country into a wondrous bounty of orchards and gardens fed by sophisticated irrigation systems. They eventually built roads, bridges, a ferry system, brick factory, a jam factory, sawmills, flour mills, grain elevators, planer mills, box plants, seed cleaning and drying mills, a wooden pipe factory, blacksmith shops, bakeries, oil-pressing plants, fruit-tree spray manufacturing works, packing houses, stores, cultural centres, offices, community halls and co-operatives.

Visitors marvelled at the development. Even William Blakemore, who investigated complaints against the Doukhobors for the provincial government, admitted:

A glance will suffice to show that an enormous amount of work has been done in a short time. The clearing alone would have been impossible to private individuals. It is the abundance of Community labour that has achieved such marvellous results. The energy and enterprise of the Community have excited general admiration...their orchards...are the cleanest, the best-kept, and the heaviest cropped of any in the district.⁴

Community Doukhobors believed that their troubles with the public and government were behind them. In fact, they were only beginning. The public began to see their new rather insular neighbours with their decidedly different culture, in abstract generalities. The local business community accused the Doukhobors of not contributing to the local economy by buying wholesale from outside merchants. This bred suspicion and hostility toward the entire Doukhobor population.

The BC government also had problems with the Doukhobors who resisted sending their

² John P. Zubek and Patricia Ann Solberg, *The Doukhobors at War*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952) 83.

³ William Blakemore, *Report of the Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia*. Victoria: King's Printer, 1913. This report provided the number 7000; a CCUB letter says 6000 by 1914.

⁴ Blakemore, *Report*, 35, 36.

children to public school and registering vital statistics⁵ Saskatchewan's laws regarding vital statistics and education had been in their infancy and, given the rural nature of settlement, were not always enforced. In fact, Saskatchewan did not pass a School Attendance Act until 1916 and the Doukhobors had few, if any, school problems. Conversely, BC enforced laws relating to school attendance and the registration of vital statistics.

The Community Doukhobors did not oppose education *per se*: being a Doukhobor meant an intense education in the spiritual and moral aspects of the religion including long and intense memory work, learning the Russian language including, in some families, reading and writing. But education included the learning of practical skills. Depending on the family's skill set, fathers taught their sons blacksmithing, carpentry, horse raising, farming and other vocations, while mothers taught their daughters gardening, sewing, baking, canning and cooking and child rearing.

The members of the CCUB (Community Doukhobors), however, resisted the public schools because they saw them as promoting assimilation, patriotism, nationalism, the glorification of war and celebrating material accumulation – all of which conflicted with their values.⁶ One Doukhobor elder recalled that Peter V. Verigin “was not opposed to literacy. He was fearful of influences tending to sway the youth away from the ideals Doukhobors carried with them in their lengthy march through history as wrestlers for peace, as humble workers of the soil, striving for brotherhood on earth.”⁷ It is possible that Verigin harboured fears that public schooling might inculcate children with values and ideas that could lead them to challenge his leadership. An examination of BC's curriculum suggests that such fears were not misplaced. The curriculum was a socialization effort based on the inculcation of a middle-class, Anglo-Saxon value system and it possessed a strong assimilative thrust. It was characterized by the teaching of an individualist, capitalist ethic with an emphasis on patriotism – particularly deference and subservience to the British sovereign - and the teaching of history which celebrated violence, or

⁵ Foucault discussed how power does not like “zones of darkness” and “shadowy areas of society.” Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 153.

⁶ Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Report, 12.

⁷ *Grand Forks Gazette*, 21 May 1980.

waging war, as noble especially in the service of the British Empire.⁸

A CCUB family's decision about sending a child to school appears to have been predicated on several factors. Some Community Doukhobors philosophically opposed schooling and nothing could change their minds. Doukhobors did build some schools but exercised a high degree of caution about what was taught. School attendance was also affected by how fairly or unfairly the people believed the government was treating community members. In this context, holding children back from school was a method of protest. More often than not, however, decisions about school attendance depended on a practical matter: the need for the labour of children to harvest crops or pick vegetables and fruit.⁹

Community Doukhobors also had difficulty reconciling themselves with the mandatory registration of vital statistics. While the CCUB kept detailed records about families and finances in its organization, giving such information to the government was an entirely different matter. The Czarist government in Russia had used vital statistics to keep track of military aged males and the Doukhobors suspected that the Canadian government might similarly use the data to compel Doukhobors to serve in the army. In cases such as marriage registration, the Doukhobors had practical problems fulfilling the provincial government's requirements because without an officiant they could not be legally recognized. A Doukhobor marriage consisted of two families coming together and parents blessing the union of a couple; the endorsement of the congregation was also a part of this process. Some government officials and community leaders feared this simple ceremony had a "weak moral force" and might lead to community degeneration.

In 1912, the problems between the Doukhobors on one side and the public, and the government on the other impelled the provincial government to launch a Royal Commission to investigate the history, culture, religion, economics and lifestyle of the Doukhobors and the sources of tension among the various stakeholders. After researching the "Doukhobor problem" Commissioner William Blakemore released his report. It disproved many of the negative

⁸ See John McLaren, "The State, Child Snatching and the Law," in *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law*, edited by John McLaren, Robert Menzies and Dorothy Chunn, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 286; Margaret Hill, "The Detention of Doukhobor Children," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 18 (1986), 51-58.

⁹ Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Report, 192-194.

stereotypes about the Doukhobors describing them as “industrious settlers” who heavily invested in the surrounding economy and did much to improve its economic capacity. Blakemore stated that the Doukhobors’ objections to certain laws and institutions were “based upon their religious beliefs and conscientious scruples, and their attitude is genuine.” Blakemore believed that their attitudes would be “modified as they become better acquainted with the true character of...[Canada’s] institutions.” If local residents feared that the Doukhobors would ‘swamp’ the surrounding population, Blakemore remarked that local landowners did not have to sell land to the CCUB.

For the Doukhobors, the generally sympathetic tone of the Commission report with its recommendation of a policy of “patience” was overshadowed by its proposal to cancel their exemption from military service and its assertion that “the real problem before the government of British Columbia [was] not the Doukhobors, but their leader – Peter Verigin.” The report advised putting pressure on his leadership by exacting collective fines against the group for failure to follow provincial laws.

Battles over vital statistic registration and public schooling continued. The government responded by collectively punishing the CCUB with fines and seizing property and imprisoning people who broke the registration laws. In this context, a small number of CCUB Doukhobors rebelled – they stopped paying their dues to the central office, preached to other Doukhobors and occasionally took off their clothes in protest. These people, who interpreted the situation as another instance of an unjust government unfairly persecuting them for their religious beliefs, also feared that sending their children to school and registering vital statistics would put them on the path to assimilation and thus, ruin.

In 1914, the CCUB warned the Attorney General of British Columbia:

All the Doukhobors, and there are six thousand people in the commune, they will take off their clothes which were left after the robbery by the Saskatchewan government, and would throw them in the faces of the officials in Nelson and Grand Forks. They would remain naked on the streets and this would be a good illustration reflecting the attitude of the government officials toward the Doukhobors.¹⁰

¹⁰ Inikova, *History of the Doukhobors in the Archives of Vladimir D. Bronch-Bruevich (1886-1950's) an Annotated Bibliography*, ed. Koozma Tarasoff, Toronto: Legas and Spirit Wrestlers Associates, 1999, 61.

This is the only instance contained in the historical record of the CCUB threatening nudity. It however, never followed up on this threat. It appears to have been the organization's strategy to use the behaviour of its extremist brethren as a bargaining chip, a way of exerting leverage with a seemingly inflexible government.

The Freedomites

Freedomites represented the radical wing of Doukhorism made up of people clinging to a static inflexible interpretation of its religious tenets. This branch grew primarily as a result of people migrating from the CCUB who could not compromise their views with government expectations and/or reconcile their pacifism with government coercion to enforce provincial laws relating to registration of vital statistics and school attendance; another catalyst was the effort of Peter P. Chistiakov Verigin (Peter V. Verigin's son) to reconcile growing sectarian tension.

Prior to 1920, engaging in nude demonstrations was a dramatic way to express a break with communal principles and becoming a Freedomite. For most of these people, nudity represented a very small part of their lives if only for the practical reasons of cold winters when stripping was far less frequent. The majority usually shed their clothes only in moments of protest and intense religious zeal in group settings such as *sobranie* and *molenyie*. As Freedomite numbers grew and instances of nudity increased, certain people often assumed leadership roles, instigating acts of stripping by shedding their clothes first. At times of protest particular songs were sung as triggers for disrobing. By 1919 in BC, only a dozen or so adults engaged in public nudity but these Freedomites caused the CCUB community angst by attracting unwanted attention from authorities, business operators and the public because their nude displays were frequently done in what Canadian society considered inappropriate contexts: near schools, churches, in front of downtown businesses and residential neighbourhoods. Whenever the government received complaints about this behaviour, authorities came to the CCUB Doukhobors – specifically to Verigin, for answers.¹¹ More than once, an exasperated Verigin informed the BC government that he had “no control over them [naked Freedomites]” and asked police to arrest

¹¹ Selkirk College, KCIR Cabinet, J.A. Fraser to A.M. Johnson July 22, 1919.

the responsible troublemakers.¹² In 1919, he decided to create a tangible and clear separation between the CCUB and the Freedomites by providing the Freedomites with land near Grand Forks on the bank of the Kettle River.

A parsing of their writings and preachings reveals the core tenets of Freedomite beliefs:

- Do not pay taxes to government
- Do not buy and sell land or engage in speculation or usury in any way
- Do not hire help and try not to be hired
- Recognize no authority except that of God
- Reject military service and the killing of humans; also the killing of animals is wrong as is their use as beasts of burden. The only way to survive is vegetarianism
- No personal property and no marriage unions allowed
- Government schools are evil because they teach violence, patriotism (which leads to war and is sacrilegious) and assimilation
- No parents have their own children, all children are children of the world
- Nudity is not shameful. The human body created by God belongs to God
- Communalism is the most righteous form of living, with freedom for everyone within this environment based on human rationality and reason
- Reject modern technology as evil

Although these were the general philosophies Freedomites espoused, in reality, they engaged in a range of behaviours. Many were wanderers, going from Doukhobor village to village proselytizing. Many more were largely sedentary, living among Community Doukhobors but taking a hard line on dealing with government. Economically, some of the poorer Freedomites chose not to work at all and survived on vegetables and fruit from communal gardens and orchards. Many Freedomites, both men and women, tended to work at odd jobs, eking out a meager existence picking fruit or vegetables; men worked in the forestry industry or the railways and many women worked in canneries. By the 1930's the behaviour of a significant number of men became totally disconnected from their quest for peace, non-violence and rejection of materialism and modernity. They gave up walking and began using modern and efficient means of travel such as automobiles and trains to spread their message. While elderly Freedomite men wore simple white cotton clothing and rubber boots or basic sandals, the younger generation born in Canada dressed in more modern clothes and adopted hairstyles that made them indistinguishable from the general population. Many of these younger people expressed themselves through violence.

¹² British Columbia Archives GR 1323, Peter Verigin to A.M. Johnson July 28, 1919.

The Death of Peter Vasilievich “Lordly” Verigin, the Arrival of his son Peter Petrovich “Chistiakov” Verigin, and the growth of the Freedomite Branch

After the Blakemore Commission report, the government pressed the CCUB to have Doukhobors register vital statistics and send their children to public school consistently. The CCUB was, in fact, building schools and many children were attending. Freedomites, however, were determined to reverse this trend and by 1920 were burning the newly built schools; in 1923 a rash of school burnings occurred.¹³ Apparently believing that the CCUB was responsible for arson as a way to avoid sending its children to school, the provincial government used fines and seized property to put pressure on the CCUB. That strained relations between the state and the CCUB. And then, a tragic event irrevocably complicated Doukhobor/government relations.

On October 28, 1924 a bomb ripped through a train coach carrying Peter V. Verigin. Canadian Doukhoborism’s patriarch was killed and the spiritual, administrative and economic pillars of the CCUB were shaken.¹⁴ For the Community Doukhobors, the loss was devastating – akin to a close knit family losing its beloved father; it cast a pall of grief and sorrow over them. It was another watershed moment in Doukhobor–government relations and its importance cannot be overstated. It is important to understand how the Doukhobors negotiated meaning from this event to understand its effects.¹⁵ The Doukhobors’ culturally ingrained distrust of power and authority and their tumultuous historical experience with all governments provided the “conceptual horizon” from which they processed the discourse prevailing around them preceding the explosion.

Doukhobors saw and heard hostility everywhere and certainly it was present. The public believed that returning soldiers were entitled to free or cheap land. Many asserted that it ought to be the Doukhobors’ land because the group had not sacrificed for “King and country,” did

¹³ Evidence based on CCUB records found in Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Report, 248-250. Also see William Soukeroff, “Origin of the Freedomite Movement,” reproduced from *Vestnik* (April 8, 11, 15) in <<http://www.doukhobor.org/Soukeroff.htm>>. He states that 11 schools went up in flames in 1921 and 1922.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the various theories about the explosion see <www.canadianmysteries.ca>.

¹⁵ M.M. Bakhtin, “Discourse and the Novel”, in the *Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

not respect vital statistic and education laws, or engage in public life and therefore contribute to the betterment of the community. Other Kootenay residents regarded the Doukhobors as a "menace to the district." Farmers in areas where Doukhobors lived and worked, including the Okanagan, regarded them as "worse than Orientals" for exploiting their women and children in the fields [thus] "menacing the livelihood of white producers."¹⁶ Government and societal hostility often blatantly co-mingled as in 1922 when J.W. Jones, an MLA from Kelowna, derisively spoke about the "unique problem" that groups such as the "Chinese and Doukhobors" presented to BC and specifically to fruit growers in the Okanagan. Only three weeks before Verigin's death, a judge had called for the CCUB to be "squelched."¹⁷

It is this climate of racism and prejudice that pervaded the economic, political, social and cultural spheres around the Doukhobors. The interplay of antagonistic discourses and negative historical experience shaped the way the Doukhobors derived meaning from the explosion, making them believe they were under siege. The overwhelming majority saw Verigin's death, not as an accident, but the culmination of years of government and societal machinations against them – a decisive blow in a protracted struggle. For them, either the government or business/community interests – or both in tandem – had assassinated Verigin to bring about the collapse of the CCUB because this successful collective model was a threat to the prevailing Canadian economic system which was based on individualism. Based on the evidence the most likely cause of the explosion was a bomb, but who may have planted it to this day remains a mystery.¹⁸

The death of Peter V. Verigin, who posthumously became known to the Doukhobors as *Gaspodni* or Lordly, resulted in a political vacuum within the CCUB. A small schism occurred over leadership. Approximately 200 members recognized his surviving mistress, Anastasia Golubova as the leader, while the vast majority proclaimed his son Peter Petrovich "Chistiakov" Verigin, who was still in Russia, as the leader. The schism escalated into a dispute between the CCUB and the breakaway "Anastasia" Doukhobors over assets the latter group believed it was

¹⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 24 February 1920.

¹⁷ *Nelson Daily News*, 9 October 1924.

¹⁸ The fact that authorities never solved Peter Verigin's death seemed all too convenient for Doukhobors and served to confirm that the government was hiding its role in his death.

contributions to the communal organization. The bitterness became so intense that, to the embarrassment of the CCUB, Anastasia Doukhobors even appealed to the BC government to settle the dispute. Eventually the small breakaway faction established an independent communal system in Shouldice, Alberta.¹⁹

In 1925, the BC government resumed its relentless punishment of the CCUB, arrested more people and levied ever heavier fines for non-compliance with school attendance and vital statistics laws. Many Doukhobors believed that the government was opportunistically striking at them during a period of intense weakness. The economic condition of the CCUB worsened as investor confidence in it withered. The weak and vulnerable temporary leadership of the CCUB saw no choice but to reach a compromise with the government: it agreed to send children under the age of 15 to public school.²⁰ Many members of the CCUB, however, saw this as a dangerous capitulation and turned defiant and bitter.²¹ For these angry Doukhobors, their steadfast concern for preserving Doukhobor culture and principles ran headlong into the government's inflexibility and desire for "law and order;" no compromise was possible. In this context the Freedomite movement began to grow, fed by Doukhobors from the CCUB who saw their cause as resisting the government and preserving their beliefs at almost any cost. They employed a three prong strategy to accomplish this: passive resistance through nudity, refusal to register vital statistics and send children to public school, backed up by a cohort of people who launched relentless arson and bombing attacks. Their workplaces offered them access to explosives which they frequently stole and stockpiled. Within this cohort a particularly dangerous generation of young men emerged for whom violence and intimidation became their religion. Gasoline, kerosene, dynamite – even guns were weapons they would employ in their quest to save Doukhoborism.

For embittered Doukhobors, what had happened in Russia and Saskatchewan had happened in BC: rigid government policy had raised Doukhobor divisions in relief. The angriest

¹⁹ Many elders from this community maintain a fiercely proud identity to this day.

²⁰ USCC Doukhobors eventually began running candidates in school board elections for trustees in order to influence the school curriculum. Rank and file USCC members enthusiastically participated in elections to ensure their candidates were elected.

²¹ Library and Archives of Canada, RG 25 Vol 1427 File 1925-671, CCUB Semeon Makortoff to W.L. Mackenzie King, April 13, 1925; *Grand Forks Gazette*, 17 April 1925; *Nelson Daily News*, 6 April 1925; BCA, GR 1323, CCUB W. G. Sherstobitoff Director to Premier John Oliver, 16 April 1925; *Vancouver Sun*, 2 March 1925.

most defiant of the group became Freedomites. They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause of "returning to Russia" in fulfillment of what they believed was a prophecy by Lukeria Kalmakova in the Caucasus detailing how the Doukhobors would go to a foreign land but return as a result of a vanguard group of Doukhobors suffering persecution. The Freedomites conceived of the notion of *billeti* or "tickets:" through the prisons they would fulfill their destiny and return all Doukhobors to their motherland, Russia.

For the vast majority of Doukhobors who remained in the CCUB, it was a time of great insecurity as they waited for their proclaimed leader, Peter P. Chistiakov Verigin (hereafter Chistiakov) to arrive. He led a faction of the Middle Party that had remained distinct from the Large Party and the Small Party. CCUB representatives went to the Don region of Russia in 1925 to ask Chistiakov to come to Canada and assume the leadership mantle. He was embroiled in many legal problems in Russia, even serving time in prison. He had also amassed debts that the Canadian Doukhobors needed to pay for him before he could come to Canada.

Chistiakov did not arrive in Canada until 1927. With the instability of the three year leadership interregnum the number of CCUB Doukhobors flowing into the Freedomite branch began to increase. It turned into a torrent under the leadership of Chistiakov. His complex role in the growth and behaviour of the Freedomite branch has, regrettably, been misunderstood by many Orthodox Doukhobors, Freedomites as well as non-Doukhobors. It is important to assess this role because Freedomites have asserted that Chistiakov, more than anyone else, encouraged them to bomb and burn.

The Relationship between Language, Signs and Freedomite Violence

In 1927, soon after he arrived in Canada, Chistiakov delivered one of his most famous speeches, praising the Freedomites as "ringing bells" and "vanguards" for their struggles for Doukhoborism and resisting assimilation. Many Freedomites regarded his speech as validating violence; Simma Holt asserted that it was proof that Chistiakov encouraged Freedomite violence.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and "intertextuality" – the idea of situating communicative exchange within the history of dialogue between interlocutors – applied within an ethno historical framework illuminate the range of understandings that were negotiated between

Chistiakov and Doukhobors from the various branches. Freedomites understood Chistiakov within the history of their historical relationship with his father, Peter V. Verigin, combined with their notions of the role of communication between themselves and the *voszhed*. Chistiakov planned to fulfill the most important function of the *voszhed*: to unite the different factions of Doukhobors in Canada just as his father had done 25 years earlier. His father, however, had severely rebuked Freedomites for their behaviour over the course of many years. He also alienated Independents by discouraging interaction between them and Orthodox Doukhobors. He even went so far as to lobby the government during World War One to exclude the Independents from its promise not to conscript Doukhobors.

When Chistiakov arrived in Canada he warmly embraced both the Independents and the Freedomites in an attempt to bring about reconciliation. His words to the Freedomites were a conciliatory gesture and the product of a nuanced understanding of Doukhor sectarianism. He praised those Freedomites – the majority at the time - who peacefully and stoically rejected materialism and attempted to adhere as best they could to Doukhor principles of “toil and peaceful life.” Chistiakov was born and raised in the lashing crosswinds of Doukhor factionalism and he, as much as anyone, acutely understood its intricacies. He personally straddled three factions spread across two continents – the Veriginites through his father, the Small party in Russia through his mother’s family and he had headed the *Vorobev* or Middle Party in Russia; indirectly he had relatives in all the other factions. His speech, meant to return the Freedomites who had been outcasts under Peter V. Verigin to the greater Doukhor fold, inadvertently fuelled its growth.

Freedomites looked for double meanings because *voszhd*i often spoke in parables, embedding lessons or advice in their speeches that required listeners to interpret for themselves what was being said. They “negotiated” the meaning of his words to be praise for their various defiant behaviours. Many community members understood his language to mean that Freedomites represented the righteous Doukhor path. While some Orthodox increasingly sympathized with Freedomites they remained strongly committed to the CCUB. Another cohort of Orthodox Doukhorobors, however, began to liquidate their few possessions and gravitated to the

ranks of the Freedomites.

Seeing the effects of his words, Chistiakov realized he had made a grave miscalculation: if all the Community Doukhobors renounced their possessions and lived a transitory if not nihilistic life, the entire CCUB enterprise would collapse because the Community Doukhobors were its backbone. The flow of Orthodox Doukhobors to the Freedomite branch was only eased when Chistiakov back-pedalled on his earlier statements, re-assuring the greater CCUB community that he had not meant to alienate them. Some Communalists, but not all, returned to the CCUB. By 1929/1930 the number of Freedomites had increased significantly to roughly 1000 – less than 10% of the total Doukhobor population in Canada, but a significant statistic nonetheless because it represented the largest increase to that point in Canadian Doukhobor history.

One of the most important triggers for violence became Freedomite interpretations of semiotics – perceived signs and language that acted as cues. Some argue that they behaved like dutiful soldiers, essentially “following orders.” Sometimes a group of extremists or individuals would wander through the community inciting people to burn. Often these people professed to be conduits through which a “leader” was ordering an arson attack. Most often when he was alive they claimed that that “leader” was Chistiakov. Curiously, no violent offender ever stated that any “leader” **directly** told them to commit arson or bombing. Instead, the messages were always passed on second hand through obtuse, cryptic or coded language. Like a schoolyard game where words attain their opposite meaning to cause confusion and fun, Freedomites used interpretive helter-skelter, rooting for the most obscure meanings to justify violence. Through this linguistic smoke and mirrors Freedomites even interpreted scathing verbal haranguing from people such as Chistiakov who railed against them not to burn, to actually mean burn.

Orthodox and Independents who worked closely with Chistiakov attest that no branch of Doukhoborism caused him more angst than the Freedomites. One can only imagine the profound frustration of repeatedly rebuking a group, sometimes in the most intensely obscene language, who affixed little or no literal meaning to the words. Doukhobor leaders throughout history have frequently used parables and metaphors to imbue important lessons. Chistiakov’s mastery of this may provide clues as to why Freedomites were so prone to interpreting his words in such a

disjointed way and affixing meanings corresponding to their own narrow interests and proclivities.

After the death of Chistiakov in 1939, Freedomites played the same interpretive acrobatics by attempting to blame burnings on their own family members including siblings and cousins from the Orthodox branch. High-standing members of the Orthodox community had to be careful about what they did, said, what they wore and who they were seen with, especially if it was a relative.²² If an Orthodox Doukhobor were seen with a Freedomite, the latter would often claim that the meeting was about planning a fire. This situation often affected family relationships so negatively that Orthodox Doukhobors either completely disassociated themselves from their kin to avoid any possibility of association with burning, or instructed Freedomites to drop relatives off at a neutral place. Interaction often occurred at the end of a driveway in full public view, so that both parties' intentions were transparent and there was no chance for misinterpretation.

Entangled Relations between Community (CCUB) and Freedomite Doukhobors

Before 1930, an outsider, trying to differentiate between Community Doukhobors and Freedomites would have faced an almost hopelessly mystifying puzzle. A casual observer would not have understood the substantive everyday differences between the factions because Freedomites outwardly looked like their Community brethren and openly referred to themselves generically as Doukhobors. They generally wore the same clothing and spoke the exact same Doukhobor Russian dialect. In the Brilliant, Ootechenia and Grand Forks regions, the residences of the two groups tended to be interspersed. Freedomites, or those with strong Freedomite sympathies, either squatted on CCUB lands or lived a normal productive existence in communal villages espousing, however, the most zealous Doukhobor views. The two groups regularly mixed at meetings, prayed together and sang together. Chistiakov was the CCUB leader and the Freedomites recognized him as their leader too.

Sectarianism cut across family lines, and relations between parents, siblings, aunts and uncles were maintained even in the face of serious – even contentious – philosophical

²² Freedomites were known to interpret "cues" such as a red tie or red ink in a letter as a sign to burn.

differences. Yet, in every day life, the two groups knew who belonged to what factions because of their personal relationships and lived out their differences in their own social systems almost completely independent of the world around them.

In this climate, Orthodox reactions to Freedomites or people with Freedomite sympathies varied. They tended to see them as somewhere between a well meaning group, a curious oddity or, at the extreme end of the spectrum, a nuisance. Community Doukhobors represented the vast majority of Doukhobors, but were, in a social context, hemmed in. On one side was pressure from the dominant society in the form of serious racism and prejudice (much of which it must be said was the result of the behaviour of Freedomites and the public's inability to differentiate between the groups), and on the other side, from Freedomites attempting to impose their views upon the CCUB.

Relations between Orthodox and Freedomites must also be placed in context. In BC, before 1929/1930, arson was mostly limited, although not exclusively, to schools.²³ As frustrating and expensive as these attacks were, these buildings were not part of the economic, social and spiritual lifeblood of the communal system. For the average Community Doukhorbor the BC government, with its rigid enforcement of various laws and coercive measures against the commune and individuals, probably represented a bigger headache than the Freedomites. In a practical sense, the Orthodox could at least communicate with the Freedomites in the same language; the two groups also had a shared sense of history of their struggles in Russia and voyage to Canada before sectarianism became anchored and, of course many were related to each other. Canadian society, on the other hand, was not welcoming or accessible to most Orthodox.

Until the late 1920's there was great fluidity between the different branches especially between the Independents and the CCUB. CCUB compromises with government during a leadership vacuum and the suspicious death of Peter V. Verigin in a violent train explosion both

²³ The exceptions to this were Peter V. Verigin's home in the village of *Otradnoe* in 1918, a sawmill in 1920, a residential communal home in 1921, the residence of P.V. Verigin above Peter V. Lordly Verigin's tombstone in 1924 and Community Prayer Home 1928.

increased the number of Freedomites and heightened their militancy. Peter P. Chistiakov Verigin's efforts to manage and control the Freedomite branch's extremism had the unintended consequence of making it grow. Despite growing differences, the various branches shared complex familial, social and religious connections throughout the tribulations of the 1920's.

Chapter 4

Evolving Sectarian Differences, Motivations for Freedomite Violence, and the Effects of Societal and Government Reactions

This chapter posits that important social, economic, political and religious events beginning in 1929/1930 solidified the process of branch affiliation and stoked inter-branch tensions. In this context, the interplay of government policy, spatialization, CCUB organizational dynamics, and leadership issues led to radical tendencies among the Freedomites that significantly accelerated assimilative processes affecting all Doukhobors. Through a sectarian prism this chapter reveals the nuances surrounding the evolution of Freedomite and Orthodox culture with respect to issues of language, geography, singing and dress.

Formative Processes Driving Inter-Branch Tensions

Before 1928/29, Freedomite communities in BC were dispersed, so that much of the violence was *ad hoc*, that is, carried out by small groups with no community-wide coordination possible. However, events between 1929 and 1935 changed the situation markedly. By 1928, Chistiakov was becoming increasingly frustrated by the Freedomites. He had changed the financial structure of the CCUB and decentralized it so that rather than allocating most of its production to the central office, each village made a contribution (the amount set by the central office); families could keep anything above and beyond this amount – should they earn it.

Some Doukhobor villages, however, had troubles earning a living as the Great Depression began to grip Canada after 1929. Krestova was such a place. A CCUB hinterland, Krestova was to the CCUB what the Doukhobor communities in general were to Canada: a far off distant periphery. In Krestova the land was less fertile and the infrastructures for water such as pumphouses often did not work. The CCUB also did not bother fixing them in a timely fashion. Destitute residents saw themselves as the forgotten ones, outcasts, outsiders and forsaken by the larger community; they burned various community buildings in protest. When the CCUB remonstrated them for not guarding community buildings, they became even more disillusioned, arguing that they cared little for material possessions when their very survival was at stake.

Many Doukhobors did not participate in the regular economic affairs of the CCUB either

because they did not want to, or could not because, as in the case of Krestova, they were destitute. Exasperated with these non-contributors, Chistiakov began evicting hundreds of Freedomites from CCUB lands. Homeless Freedomites and destitute and disillusioned Community Doukhobors began wandering en masse and coalescing into groups setting up make-shift camps around Nelson and Porto Rico, BC. These camps became concentrated Freedomite clusters that welcomed fundamentalist views; people fed off of one another's extremism, and tolerated hyper zealous behaviours. Growing fanaticism in these enclaves changed the nature of relations – for the worse – between Community (CCUB Doukhobors) and the Freedomite branch.

In 1930, on the first day of a spring meeting in Brilliant, the attendees gathered to choose a central executive for the Named Doukhobors of Canada. Chistiakov had constituted this umbrella organization to respect the differences between the CCUB and Independents while organizationally binding them around shared core principles expressed in a document known as the Declaration. Another item on the agenda was to develop a plan to explore a move to Mexico; Chistiakov created what he referred to as a "White Horse Fund" to fund a delegation to make detailed assessments there. Based on private written accounts by John G. Bondoreff, the Secretary of the Named Doukhobors of Canada at the time, a group of Freedomites from the Porto Rico camp disrupted the event by stripping nude as Chistiakov spoke. The meeting was adjourned until the next day during which Chistiakov, frustrated with their disruptive behaviour, began physically evicting them from the meeting; a melee ensued as Orthodox and Independents forcefully removed the Freedomites.

More serious activities by Freedomites from Porto Rico occurred during the St. Peter's Day celebrations that year. Chistiakov returned to the Kootenays in an attempt to smooth over relations between the various factions. He toured the communities giving speeches, listening to choirs and visiting with friends and family. At one of his speaking venues Freedomites set massive fires in the distance for everyone to see. That same weekend, they burned saw mills, logs, and power lines and set dynamite to at least one brick school. Members of the executive of the Named Doukhobors of Canada found evidence that the perpetrators of the school bombing had come from the Porto Rico camp and reported this to police but the evidence was not strong

enough to warrant charges.

During 1929 and 1930, various groups of Freedomites were imprisoned for the maximum six month term for nudity. Incarceration, however, accomplished little as Freedomites resumed their nude protests after being released. In 1931, the Federal government, believing that the appropriate solution for a group which hungered for martyrdom was to increase the sentence for nudity, amended the Criminal Code. What became known as the "Doukhobor Law" made public nudity punishable by three years in prison. That year, large numbers of Freedomites held nude protests against the government's attempts to collect census data; a large contingent of Freedomites also shed their clothes to protest the fact that Chistiakov had evicted them from community lands.²⁴ The police rounded up hundreds of Freedomites from across the Kootenays. Adults were sent to Oakalla prison in Burnaby before being incarcerated at a specially built prison on Piers Island off the coast of Vancouver Island near Sidney. Their children became wards of the state. Some were sent to the Protestant Orphan's Home in Victoria; some to an industrial school in Coquitlam on the mainland, and some were fostered by English families in the Lower Mainland. Most importantly, many Orthodox and Independent families became foster parents in the belief that they were helping the children by rescuing them from institutional settings. The Freedomite parents, however, saw the effort differently. To them, members of the other branches were colluding with the government.

The Piers Island penal colony represented a major turning point in Freedomite history. Some children, most of whom spoke only Russian and had spent their entire lives in an insular Russian speaking world, were suddenly thrust from their familiar surroundings by uniformed police and placed in cold institutional settings. Even foster homes with English families were frightening and traumatic. Oral testimony relates how some children were poorly fed - if not starved in some of the homes; other children recall neglect, alienation and physical abuse.²⁵

²⁴ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 298; John P. Zubek and Patricia Ann Solberg, *The Doukhobors at War*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952), 126.

²⁵ A few children had a reasonably positive experience in foster care and even today, in at least one case, the great grandchildren of the non-Doukhobor foster parents and the grand child of a children placed in foster care maintain a relationship and carry on correspondence with one

The Piers Island Prison program produced a key statistic: While approximately 600 Freedomites were in prison, there was an abrupt downturn in arson and bombings. In the long term, however, the penal measure was a monumental failure. It created animosity, dislocation, and fed the group's insatiable thirst for martyrdom. From the children put in industrial schools came the post war generation of arsonists and bombers that would ravage the Kootenays.²⁶

The Piers Island prison operated from late 1932 to early 1935.²⁷ After it closed, parents and children re-united in an atmosphere of rage. Returning to the Kootenays, they were veritable refugees. Without money, land or homes; they had little but each other, an increased spirituality born of what they believed was persecution and most of all a bounty of anger. Freedomites felt they were sacrificing for the good of all Doukhobors and saw themselves as martyrs; but their CCUB brethren shunned them. Hundreds of Freedomites – pregnant mothers, children, husbands and elderly - wandered from CCUB village to village sleeping wherever they could find a refuge, proselytizing and disrupting communal life. This chaotic mass of people threatened the stability of the CCUB. In order to alleviate the problem, Chistiakov designated Krestova as a settlement for these wanderers; it was a case of social sequestering. These people became squatters paying neither taxes nor CCUB dues. Social divisions became spatially defined.

Chistikov's attempt to isolate and contain the Freedomites backfired. In allowing the most fanatical Freedomites to settle in one area, he unintentionally concentrated a group with extremist tendencies, thus establishing a context of entrenched violence. The RCMP herded Freedomites in Grand Forks to Crown land near the Kettle River and the railway tracks in an area known as Gilpen. It and Krestova became sanctuaries of fundamentalism – hothouses nurturing the most extreme views. In this context, fanatical expressions of religiosity such as nudity and arson aimed at resisting the government and teaching the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors a lesson became normalized.

another.

²⁶ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 318.

²⁷ According to Zubek (147) the cost was \$3 million, or according to the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator roughly \$42,500,000.00 adjusted for inflation.

Collapse of the CCUB and Leadership Issues

The 1930's was a period of intense flux in Doukhobor society. While the CCUB may have seemed a closed, insular society to outsiders, it was highly integrated into the Canadian economy. It relied on the banking system to finance its operations and development and on regional, provincial and national markets for its fruits, vegetables, jam, brick, flour, timber and other products. This made it vulnerable to economic fluctuations. Financial misadventures, Chistiakov's seemingly endless legal problems, his declining health and erratic behaviour²⁸ alienated many Doukhobors and helped weaken the organization.

Despite CCUB members giving virtually everything they had to repay its debt, in 1938 National Trust and Sun Life Assurance Company foreclosed on the CCUB which caused its collapse. In 1939, the companies began issuing eviction notices to all Community Doukhobors whose villages had been owned by the now defunct organization. Several thousand Doukhobors were affected. The situation was critical: had every Doukhobor been evicted, the Kootenays would have suddenly had a massive population of homeless people with nowhere to go. Through events beyond their personal control, Community Doukhobors who had worked for decades to build their communities were rendered landless. Having their economic and social base taken away caused significant community demoralization. To its credit, the BC government intervened to avert a massive refugee problem by purchasing the debt and letting Community Doukhobors become tenants paying very low rent.²⁹

Although his health had gradually deteriorated over the years, Chistiakov's death in 1939 was a difficult moment for the Doukhobor community because it caused a leadership vacuum. Members of the CCUB's successor organization, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC), named Chistiakov's son Peter Verigin III or *Ystrabov* (meaning the Hawk), as leader, but he was still in Russia. Chistiakov had adopted his 17 year old nephew J.J. Verigin as his son and the young boy reluctantly became interim leader until such a time as *Ystrabov* would arrive.

²⁸ It is a well known fact among Doukhobors that Chistiakov struggled with alcohol throughout his life. His substance abuse problems undoubtedly played a part in what Independent and Orthodox elders recall were particularly dramatic mood swings in his latter years.

²⁹ Many Doukhobors believe that the government should not have allowed foreclosure to proceed in the first place since the total assets of the commune were far in excess of the debt.

Freedomites had several opinions about J.J. Verigin. A considerable number became frustrated and angry at him because he refused to be the traditional *voszhed* exercising considerable influence and power; born with the family name Voykin, another cohort did not believe he was close enough to Verigin lineage to be the legitimate *voszhed*. For many Freedomites this meant a leadership void had opened up. Several freedomites took the opportunity to claim a leadership position in their branch.

Factional struggles among the Freedomites during the 1940's and 1950's were intense and frequently violent. In 1947 a group of several hundred Freedomites split from the main body and started a commune in Hilliers on Vancouver Island. They eschewed the name "Doukhobors" and referred to themselves as the "Elders of the Spiritual Community of Christ." It was a largely peaceful commune under the leadership of Michael Orekoff "Verigin." However, after his death in 1951, the experiment began to decline and in 1953 it was abandoned altogether and members returned to the Boundary and Kootenay region.³⁰

The most important development in the Freedomite community was the emergence of Stephan Sorokin as leader. A non-Doukhor born in the Ukraine who came to Canada in 1949, he arrived in Krestova in 1950. In his long career as a religious wanderer, Stephan Sorokin had originally belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church before becoming a German Baptist missionary.³¹ He had heard about the Doukhobors while traveling in Europe and after arriving in Canada, visited the Independents in Saskatchewan. According to oral history, Sorokin represented himself in Blaine Lake as *Ystrabov*. Independent leaders there were highly sceptical and questioned him closely, even asking him to reveal if he had the tell-tale physical marks that *Ystrabov* was supposed to have. They quickly determined that he was a fraud and sent him away. Sorokin then found his way to Krestova where another Freedomite leader John Lebedoff, who hoped to use the man to further his personal ambitions, introduced the enigmatic wanderer. The majority there accepted Sorokin as the long lost Doukhor leader. Over the next three decades, sometimes overtly and sometimes cryptically, Sorokin represented himself as *Ystrabov* to the Freedomites. Several interviewees remember that their parents taught them that Sorokin

³⁰ Footnote 17 on page 92 contains further discussion of Hilliers.

³¹ *Edmonton Journal*, 30 December 1978.

was *Ystrabov* and even took them to the leader because he had healing powers.

Neither evidence nor genetics were on Sorokin's side and the USCC membership regarded him as a malevolent fraud. *Ystrabov's* sister (J.J. Verigin's mother) wrote from Russia confirming that the man was not her brother. She, of all people, knew better than anyone that Sorokin was misrepresenting himself. When she eventually arrived in Canada in 1960 she stated publicly that he was not her brother. Her words, however, fell on deaf ears as Freedomites believed that Anna Markova was manoeuvring to have her son be the leader. Despite word from the Red Cross in 1962 that *Ystrabov* had died in a Stalinist prison camp in 1942, Sorokin continued to play a rueful game hinting that he was the lost Verigin – signing the name *Ystrabov* to documents he circulated and even putting images of a hawk on his letterhead.³²

The Freedomites in Krestova had split. Most of them recognized Sorokin as their leader. They abandoned the name "Sons of Freedom" and united under the administration of a new organization mimicking the USCC name, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Reformed Doukhobors. The Fraternal Council governing this group was an assemblage of the most violent and fanatical Freedomites in British Columbia who suddenly proclaimed that they had changed their ways. Over several decades, Sorokin split his time between Uruguay and Krestova living on the financial contributions of his followers.³³ For about 30 years the Reformed Doukhobors led by their Fraternal Council engaged in a two pronged war against the USCC. They produced a steady stream of slanderous hate literature condemning and denouncing the Orthodox organization and particularly its leader J.J. Verigin. Fraternal Council members also operated their own cells and helped instigate, fund, plan and commit clandestine arsons and bombings against Orthodox property and businesses and government targets.

The other significant group of Freedomites operated outside the formal Reformed Doukhobor organization. They clung to their old "Sons of Freedom" or "Freedomite" moniker and had their own fractious internal battles, particularly over leadership. Most significantly they openly

³² The reality, however, was quite the opposite. For many years, Verigin's mother expressed serious apprehensions about having her son become leader because the pressures of the position were so great.

³³ Sorokin ended up owning large tracts of land around Krestova and many Freedomites became tenants.

condoned burning and nudity. Sorokin and his "Reformists" claimed that Freedomites were "Verigin's Army" and operated at his behest. The relationship between the Reformed Doukhobors and Freedomites was complex. They sometimes clashed and used violence against one another, at other times they worked closely together; kinship ties were extremely close and membership easily flowed from one side to the other. Ultimately, Reformed Doukhobors were apt to use Freedomites as tools to commit arson and bombings against an organization they both disliked, namely, the USCC.

A curtain of enmity separated Freedomites of all persuasions from the Orthodox. USCC Orthodox Doukhobors largely saw the Freedomites as a group of fanatics, dangerous and embarrassing to Doukhoborism as a whole. Conversely, the Freedomites saw the Orthodox as sanctimonious and self-righteous – claiming to represent "true" Doukhoborism while compromising with the state on education and adopting capitalist tendencies.

No aspect of Doukhobor culture bore the signs of branch tension more than Doukhobor choral culture. Few people heard each other's choirs perform because neither side was welcome or felt comfortable at the other's events and the two branches evolved in different ways.³⁴ By the 1980's and 1990's (with the exception of formal performances) Orthodox choirs frequently sang only the first few and the last verses of long songs rather than every verse. Choir photographs are also revealing. With few exceptions, Orthodox Doukhobor dress came to mirror the popular North American fashions of the day. By the 1950's and 1960's men might wear traditional tunics but increasingly wore western suits and ties at performances. Among women, the style changes were even more pronounced. The 1950's saw women wearing long skirts in the conservative colours of the time; by the 1960's, the skirts were shorter (particularly among the young girls) synthetic yarns appeared, and colours became more vibrant. Orthodox women gradually introduced elegant brooches to keep their handkerchiefs around their heads and adopted hairstyles identical to those worn by their non- Doukhobor counterparts.

Among Freedomites it was different. The men overwhelmingly continued to wear traditional tunics and *kasavartki* and women kept their dresses long, their colours and materials

³⁴ Several elder Orthodox Doukhobors stated that the first time they heard a Freedomite choir sing was at the 1967 Expo in Montreal.

simple; they continued tying their handkerchiefs as they always had without brooches and they kept their haircuts simple: a tell-tale sign of a Freedomite girl was that she wore long hair with straight cut bangs. Freedomites never deviated from singing every verse of every song. In the 1980's male Freedomite youth adopted suspenders, white shirts and black pants as their attire. Freedomites even developed their own collections of songs about their lives and leaders, especially Sorokin that Orthodox still do not sing or allow to be sung in their community halls.

Geographic Dispersions of Doukhobors in BC and Personal relations throughout the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's

The main Freedomite communities were in Krestova, the Crescent Valley and Gilpin with smaller concentrations in places such as Glade and Winlaw but Freedomites lived throughout the Kootenays. Owing to their large numbers, Orthodox Doukhobors resided throughout the Kootenay-Boundary area with the important centres being Brilliant, Ootechenia (including Kamena and Ostrov where Selkirk College is presently located), Pass Creek, Raspberry, Thrums, Tarrys, Shoreacres, Slocan Park, Winlaw, Perry Siding, and Glade. In Grand Forks the areas of Tambovka, and Sion had large Orthodox populations. These communities, however, were not homogeneous. Goose Creek near Krestova for instance had a significant Orthodox community and most places with large Orthodox populations also had Freedomite families.

What has at times baffled non-Doukhobor observers is the fact that Orthodox and Freedomites could live near each other despite such major differences. To understand this dynamic it is important to distinguish between macro and micro contexts. Relations at the organizational level between the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ and the Union of Spiritual Communities of Reformed Doukhobors were terrible. Many families on either side were antagonistic to one another and were protective of their group for the various reasons already discussed. However, it is important to recognize the subtle nuances characterizing the range of their relationships. A Doukhobor elder from a staunch Orthodox background who grew up around Krestova recalled being friends with many Freedomite children and playing with them during the week. However, on Sundays his family, as did most Orthodox families, attended prayer meetings

at Brilliant while the Freedomites stayed in Krestova to attend their prayer meetings.³⁵

Conversely, Freedomites living in Orthodox communities went to Krestova on Sundays for prayer service while Orthodox families stayed in their communities. Freedomite families in largely Orthodox areas never alienated their neighbours by openly stripping nude or engaging in burnings or bombings. If they engaged in any nefarious affairs, it was in the context of their Krestova connections.

Factors determining where families from different branches chose to live included affordability, the location of in-laws, and the level of involvement a family wished to have in their branch's activities. Living in the main hubs –regardless of the branch – often came with certain expectations about the level of dedication and involvement in community affairs. In Orthodox centres this frequently meant more rigorous participation in *moleniye* and *sobranie*, volunteer work, choirs and committees. For Freedomites, however, living in Krestova or Gilpen often meant engaging in nude demonstrations and burnings of their own and other people's homes – something many Freedomites may not have wanted to do. Trapped by their historic familial affiliation to the Freedomite branch, some individuals wanted to participate in Doukhoborism but to avoid the troubles in places such as Krestova and Gilpen. They often moved to peripheries but also intermarried into other branches.

Few Orthodox Doukhobors ventured into Freedomite communities. Orthodox boys looking for girls, however, might, at their peril, venture into Freedomite enclaves. These could be dangerous trips as Freedomite boys would violently attack their cars and either attempt to beat them up or chase them out of the community. Mixing also occurred in peripheral areas where Orthodox and Freedomites were interspersed. Most mixing occurred when Orthodox youth brought Freedomite relatives to social occasions or when the two groups shared recreational areas such as beaches and parks.

When an Orthodox and a Freedomite became romantically involved and wanted to marry, this frequently caused strife in both families. Some Orthodox families were so distraught by such unions that marrying a non-Doukhobor would have been far more acceptable. Independent

³⁵ Interview, 7 August 2006.

families could be equally obstinate about relationships with Freedomite families. The opposite was true for some Freedomites parents whose children married into staunch Orthodox or Independent families. During the 1960's and 1970's, in such mixed marriages, Freedomites, both male and female, overwhelmingly joined the USCC rather than vice-versa since many moderate Freedomites had more in common spiritually with the USCC than with the extremism of the Freedomite community. To join the USCC on one's own was awkward because the established family supports were not there. While the USCC officially accepted those who renounced bombing, burning and nudity, the rank and file harboured deep suspicions of "converts" until they proved themselves. Marriage into the USCC through a respected Orthodox family granted the incoming Freedomite spouse an anchor in the community and therefore greater legitimacy. In fact, Orthodox parents demanded that the partner join the USCC as a prerequisite for marriage. They frequently demanded this too of Independents.³⁶

Societal Attitudes, Government Actions and Policies to Freedomite violence and their effects on Doukhobors

Among non-Doukhobors, anger at the Doukhobors for the Freedomites' violent rampages increased through the late 1940's and especially in the early 1950's when the Freedomites caused incendiary havoc across the Kootenays. The Canadian Pacific Railway was under siege with the serial bombing and burning of bridges and tracks causing massive delays and large expense as authorities defused and removed explosive charges, repaired de-railments and salvaged lost cargo. The CPR reported tens of thousands of dollars in property damage to rail lines and bridges forcing it to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in protective measures. This, however, did little to appease the concerns of railway workers who were fearful of working in rail lines running through Doukhobor districts.

The Joint Legislative Board representing all railway employees "respectfully requested" the Attorney General to give "early attention to the Doukhobor problem." The railway's decision to restrict train operation between Nelson and Rossland, Nelson and Midway and Nelson and Slocan City caused economic hardship for both the company and its employees. Moreover, the

³⁶ Interviews, July 2006.

latter added, "it is miraculous many serious accidents have not occurred resulting in injury and death to railway train and enginemen." At one point railway unions threatened to strike unless the government and the CPR took drastic measures to protect trains going through "Doukhobor country."³⁷ Only the government's expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars on 24 hour bridge guards, floodlighting, and the sending of patrols ahead of passenger trains kept limited train service going and averted a disaster.

The situation was so hazardous across the West Kootenays in the early 1950's that even children were finding bombs near railway bridges. On December 28, 1952 the CPR reported that near Creston, "children playing found 30 sticks of unwrapped dynamite in a paper carton...there was a clock in a box connected to two dry cells which had a lead to a dynamite cap. [The] Bomb had been ignited but fuse failed probably account of weather."³⁸ Despite massive efforts to guard and search for incendiary devices, little more than luck – a faulty fuse or late detonation – often saved trains from catastrophe.

As large a problem and costly as bombings and burnings of railway infrastructure were, it actually represented a small part of the overall violence. Sawmills, schools, barns, homes and power lines were being burned or destroyed throughout the West Kootenays. In 1952 the city of Nelson almost lost all power after an attack on the power lines running to the city. According to the President of the Nelson Junior Chamber of Commerce, a successful attack "would have put the City of Nelson in darkness for an undetermined but lengthy period and destroyed valuable electrical equipment which we are told might take months to replace."³⁹ Insurance companies threatened to withdraw insurance on businesses and schools and the wariness of investors to expand vulnerable enterprises inhibited economic development. Some sawmills put "war walls" around them to prevent arson attacks. The situation represented nothing short of a guerrilla war.

The RCMP asked the provincial government to authorize and pay for a major increase in the number of officers in the region because the existing force was overwhelmed. The *Nelson*

³⁷ BCA 7625 GR 1725, British Columbia Attorney General Correspondence, Joint Legislative Board to Attorney General, 1951.

³⁸ BCA 7625 GR 1725, British Columbia Attorney General Correspondence, CPR Vice-President William Manson to Attorney General, December 29, 1952.

³⁹ BCA 7625 GR 1725, British Columbia Attorney General Correspondence, Nelson Junior Chamber of Commerce President J. Morgan to Attorney General, January 21, 1953.

Daily News and other newspapers demanded that the government protect citizens. Churches asked the government to protect the population and arrest those responsible for the violence. Anglo-Canadian vigilante groups, frustrated by the lack of law and order, sprang up in places such as Appledale and Creston. People did not want Doukhobors living near them because they feared violence. The situation was reaching a critical mass and seriously embarrassed the government which looked impotent and weak in the face of a challenge by what the public regarded as a small group of bizarre backwoods fanatics.

In 1948, a provincial Royal Commission headed by Mr. Justice Harry Sullivan had investigated the Doukhobors in an effort to find ways to quell the violence. Freedomites enthusiastically participated in the Commission hearings. However, they were so disruptive with their histrionic recriminations against one another that they created a chaotic if not anarchic atmosphere undermining the integrity of the enquiry. The frustrated judge adjourned the proceedings indefinitely and recommended that the government apply the laws of the province forcefully against the Freedomites.⁴⁰ The government then asked UBC President Norman Mackenzie to gather a consultative commission of academics to research and help inform government policy on the violence racking the Kootenays. This Commission, headed by UBC Anthropology Department Head Dr. Harry Hawthorn, exhaustively examined Doukhobor society, history and culture. At the same time, a separate committee was created to make recommendations to authorities about the massive Freedomite population that was crowding the prison system. The government hoped that its consultative committees would help shape a successful Doukhobor policy.

A detailed discussion of the outcomes of these committees is beyond the scope of this study. What is pertinent is that they recommended all sorts of measures and concessions including the release of prisoners, special detention facilities for the most incorrigible offenders, all sorts of special rehabilitative treatments and legal recognition of things such as Doukhobor marriages. With respect to education, the report emphasized that culturally sensitive teachers be hired, that aspects of Doukhobor culture such as the Russian language be incorporated in

⁴⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 327.

the curriculum; on a harsher note, however, it recommended that truancy laws be enforced.

Most of the Freedomite prisoners had been set free because they had "promised to behave;" the result, however, was more violence including widespread arson. Authorities considered relocating Freedomites *en masse* to Adam's Lake (near Kamloops) but this elicited such rage from local inhabitants that the plan had to be shelved. The public demanded that something be done and made their feelings known through the ballot box.

The fortunes of the Freedomites became inextricably linked to developments in provincial politics. The Liberal-Conservative coalition that began examining the "Doukhobor situation" in 1948 lost the 1952 election to the Social Credit party which won a minority government. In 1953, the Socreds promised to deal forcefully with the "Douk problem" and this issue helped propel them to a majority government. The party's power base was rural BC; areas such as Kamloops, Kelowna and the Kootenays had lost all patience with the Doukhobors. Social Credit had promised the public that it would act forcefully and it did.

In April 1953, Attorney General Robert Bonner unveiled a new policy aimed at the Freedomites. He stated that the estimated 453 truant Freedomite children would be apprehended and enrolled in school pursuant to the Child Protection Act by force if necessary. He also warned that any nude demonstrations would be met by wholesale arrests.⁴¹ An internal government memo reveals that the Attorney General's office was so determined to stop the violence that it seriously considered putting "a curfew law into operation with respect to Doukhobors by providing that no one shall be allowed to be at large after nightfall in a certain area, without permit from the R.C.M.P."⁴²

In response to the government's increasing hard line and as a result of internal power struggles in the Freedomite community that summer, a frenzy of protests in Krestova resulted in hundreds of dwellings being reduced to ash leaving many families homeless. In the wake of this dislocation a large contingent of Freedomites migrated to Perry Siding and began living in tent encampments near the public school. The Attorney General readied police to move in and

⁴¹ *Arishenkoff et al V. British Columbia* 2002 (BCSC) 488.

⁴² BCA 7625 GR 1725, British Columbia Attorney General Correspondence, Deputy Attorney-General E. Pepler to Attorney-General R.W. Bonner, May 8, 1953.

arrest members of the group at the first sign of nudity or violence.

Children who lived in this camp recall nudity as a normal part of daily life. Parents whose children attended the Perry Siding School complained of "a large number of Sons of Freedom parading nude in plain view of the school."⁴³ On September 9, 1953 approximately 40 officers arrested 144 adults and took custody of 104 children. The adults were taken to Vancouver to face trial; the children were placed under the care of the Superintendent of Child Welfare and housed in what during the war had been a TB sanatorium for Japanese Canadians in the small town of New Denver.⁴⁴

On September 18, 1953, Premier W.A.C. Bennett delivered a carefully crafted speech about the Doukhobors in the provincial legislature. He briefly recounted their history before describing how costly Freedomite violence had become.⁴⁵ In fiscal year April 1st 1951 to March 31st 1952, the BC government spent \$170,002.12⁴⁶ on a Doukhobor Consultative and Research Committee, an enhanced police presence, and guards on bridges and at schools. The following year it spent \$233,432.93⁴⁷ to increase the number of RCMP officers stationed in Nelson by thirty. As well, sixty guards were employed protecting railway operations, including 13 bridges; flood lights were installed in several places to illuminate other infrastructure. Prison facilities were upgraded and the government was even negotiating with Stephan Sorokin to relocate Freedomites and Reformed Doukhobors (Freedomites by another name) to Uruguay.

The premier introduced some conciliatory gestures to the entire Doukhobor community. He stated that, among other things, the Doukhobors should have the opportunity to own their own lands by signing for them individually, that they be enfranchised both provincially and federally, and that their marriages be recognized. He concluded: "all citizens of British Columbia must obey the laws, or otherwise a state of anarchy would exist. This Government will not shirk

⁴³ *Arishenkoff et al V. British Columbia*

⁴⁴ BC Ombudsman Public Report 38: *Righting the Wrong: The Confinement of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor Children* (April 1999).

⁴⁵ *Excerpts from Premier W.A.C. Bennett's Policy Speech*, 18 September 1953, (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1953).

⁴⁶ Approximately \$1,349,165.76 adjusted for inflation.

⁴⁷ Approximately \$1,852,563.47 adjusted for inflation.

its responsibility, no matter how difficult the situation becomes."⁴⁸

Politicians distinguished between the "troublesome Freedomite sect and the Doukhobor community at large," however, government reports and newspapers overwhelmingly referred to individuals engaging in unlawful behaviours simply as "Doukhobors" or the diminutive, derisive term "Douks." Complicating the situation was the fact that Freedomites often referred to themselves as Doukhobors without qualification. The nuances of Doukhobor sectarianism were lost to the public that became thoroughly confused by the differences between the branches.

Orthodox and Independents pleaded for everyone to differentiate among the various Doukhobor groups. The behaviour of the Freedomites was not only life threatening, but it embarrassed Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors who saw their faith and culture reduced to the status of a bizarre cult in the eyes of British Columbians. It was a time of increasing integration of Doukhobors, particularly the younger generation in Canadian society and those who started making "English" friends and participating in non-Doukhobor social life were confronted by a climate of racism and prejudice in stores, schools and other social contexts. As a result, many Doukhobors became ashamed of their heritage as jokes about their cultural proclivities for nudity and burning were common place in public discourse.

The New Denver Residential Education Program

With over 100 children in the BC government's care because of the arrests of the parents at Perry's Siding, authorities conceived of a plan to end truancy. The government concluded that truancy, violence and nudity were linked with the latter two behaviours being a function of the first. Put another way, the government believed that Freedomite hatred of government and society was being generationally perpetuated because children were not attending school and being given the opportunity to broaden their minds. Authorities were determined to break this cycle and make "Canadian citizens" of them.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Excerpts from Premier W.A.C. Bennett Policy Speech, 18 September 1953.*

⁴⁹ Dr. J.F.K. English Deputy Minister of Education, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, n.d. Michel Foucault asserted that power ought to be examined at its "more regional and local forms...where it invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques and equips itself

The Department of the Attorney General and the Department of Education had joint responsibility for policy regarding the Freedomite children in government custody, but a local committee based in Nelson was formed to look into "Doukhobor affairs." It consisted of officials from the Departments of Education, Health, Welfare, Lands, Public Works and the RCMP.⁵⁰ With many parents serving prison terms at Oakalla for nudity, the government was unsure about the most prudent long term plans for the children its care. Officials decided to pursue the least expensive option first and asked the USCC for help by fostering the 104 children.

According to the *Vancouver News Herald*, Orthodox members steadfastly refused to take the children and asserted that they ought to be "placed in Freedomite homes," that is, with Freedomite families whose adults were not in jail. These Orthodox members illuminated the stark difference between the branches by stating that they personally "ha[d] no objection to education" and that hypothetically if they were to take the children they would send them "to school as a matter of course." One Orthodox member at the meeting pointedly asked, "[w]hy don't the Sons of Freedom send their children to school and avoid all this trouble?"⁵¹

This meeting reveals at least two important dynamics. First, it shows the toxic state of relations between Orthodox and Freedomites. Orthodox Doukhobors believed in education but had learned a painful lesson in the 1930's when they fostered children whose parents were incarcerated on Piers Island. For their "help", the Orthodox Doukhobors suffered a campaign of systematic bombings, burnings and intimidation. The meeting did show that at least in this case, government officials recognized that only a few Doukhobors (Freedomites) were a problem and were prepared to let the children to grow up with Doukhobor values so long as they were peaceful, law-abiding values. The government then made plans to house the children in its care

with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention...where it is less legal in character." According to this approach the history of New Denver may be useful for understanding power in British Columbia and Canada. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 96,97.

⁵⁰ BC Ombudsman Public Report 38: *Righting the Wrong: The Confinement of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor Children* (April 1999).

⁵¹ "Orthodox Douks Refuse to Adopt Sons' Children," *Vancouver News Herald*, 22 September 1953.

at the New Denver Dormitory until the parents agreed to send them to school.⁵²

The long term objectives of the program were:

- To socialize and Canadianize the children so that they would respect and support the democratic form of government that prevails in this country.
- To attempt, by demonstrating the beneficial results of education, to change the antagonistic attitude of the Freedomite parents, so that the parents would voluntarily withdraw their children from the dormitory and send them to the public schools of the district.⁵³

According to a government report, children at New Denver Dormitory were initially "rebellious, suspicious and hostile." They behaved insolently and destroyed windows, doors, walls, ripped curtains, flooded bathrooms by plugging toilets and sinks, threw food, attacked staff, stripped naked, screamed, prayed and cried. Staff and police officers physically forced the students to go to the classroom and begin their studies. In a bold move meant to send a strong message to their parents one of the first assignments for students was to copy a letter in English to be sent home, containing the words "mom and dad...we are now in school."⁵⁴

The New Denver program morphed over its lifetime from 1953 to 1959. For the first year, the children lived and received schooling in the same building, making it a *de facto* residential school – the only non-native forced residential school program in Canadian history. Most of the students had arrived "unable to read, write or do arithmetic." To address these deficiencies, the school instituted an accelerated curriculum to raise their scholastic level so they could be mainstreamed into the local public school system. The children "progressed quickly both in attitude and educationally" and within a year, over three quarters of the students had been placed into the local public school; the remaining students continued to upgrade their education at the residential facility and eventually they too were mainstreamed.⁵⁵

While the Freedomite children were reported as being "well behaved" in public school, at the residential facility serious behavioural problems led to a breakdown in order and dirty, derelict conditions. In 1956, the New Denver residential facility was transferred from the

⁵² Nelson Allen, M.A. Superintendent of Schools, *Canadianization of the Freedomite Children*, n.d., 1.

⁵³ English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 1.

⁵⁴ English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 1; Nelson Allen, *Canadianization of the Freedomite Children* 1, 2,6.

⁵⁵ English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 7.

Department of Welfare to the Department of Education's administration and new rules were instituted. Many former students referred to the rules as "abusive;" staff called them "strict." The rules limited how often students received care packages and where they could store them because food had rotted in lockers and hiding places throughout the school. Students were also required to fulfill duties such as cleaning the facility rather than having staff do it. These measures appear to have improved conditions markedly.

Over the course of New Denver dormitory's six year existence, it became the home of between 170 and 200 Freedomite children seized by RCMP who systematically hunted truant Freedomite children by raiding homes, searching farmyards and forests. Astonishingly, no precise number of children who were in the care and custody of the state is available because government records are woefully incomplete.⁵⁶ Moreover, not all of the children were truants. One bizarre case reveals how haphazard police techniques could be. An interviewee who comes from an Orthodox family that lived near Krestova in the 1950's, recalled that when he was coming home from public school one day police picked him up and took him to New Denver. Despite his insistence that he did attend public school, neither the police nor the school staff believed him. At New Denver, he demonstrated a scholastic ability so far ahead of the other children, that the teachers employed him as a helper to teach the other students. It became apparent that he had attended school as he had claimed. The police took him away and dropped him off near his community (not at his house) and he walked home again.⁵⁷

Some truants did not attend any school. Some people in the Doukhobor community have referred to them as "hidiers" who spent a difficult, often traumatic childhood eluding police by hiding in cellars, forests, haystacks, and even in specially crafted furniture; some parents sent their children away to live with relatives.

⁵⁶The report *The Canadianization of the Freedomite Children*: by Nelson Allen, Superintendent of Schools, states that a total of 170 children passed through New Denver in four years (the school was in operation for almost six years); The Arishenkoff et al v. British Columbia judgment also states that 170 children passed through New Denver; the Ombudsman's report provides no number; the BC Government's Statement of Regret states that approximately 200 students went through the system and a CBC news report 2002/02/25 quotes former New Denver student Irene Popoff saying 150 students attended.

⁵⁷ This Orthodox Doukhobor, an important well respected leader in his community, has never been part of any compensation proceedings.

Individual parents sought to challenge the government and launched several lawsuits to get their children back. When some children were briefly released on technicalities, the government immediately remedied the issues and the children were quickly re-apprehended. Every court case that parents filed ultimately failed because as Professor John McLaren has observed, the government's actions were "probably within the law" at the time.⁵⁸

Not until September 1958 – a full five years after the New Denver program was established – did the first families finally agree to enrol their children in schools.⁵⁹ Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors overwhelmingly wonder how Freedomite parents could have gone without their children for so long. The reasons for the defiant stance of parents are complex and ultimately each set of parents had to decide on the most appropriate course of action for their family. Interviews with former students shed light on why parents waited for so long.

As mentioned earlier, Freedomites were prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause of "getting [back] to Russia" by suffering persecution [See p. 51]. The parents of a little girl who was a student at New Denver told her that they were putting the responsibility of getting to Russia on her shoulders that she would have to suffer at the institution for the Freedomite cause. She recalled it as a heavy burden.

Social pressure could affect parents' decisions. One former New Denver student from a particularly activist Freedomite family recalled:

The rules were that Sons of Freedom are not supposed to send their children to school, and if anybody does send their children to school, or has any intention of sending their children to school, to leave the community. So a lot of people that did want to send their children to school went to different parts of B.C...to avoid the commotion and threats. A lot of people knew that if they do send their kids to school, somebody would come down and burn them down.⁶⁰

In October 1952, the Canadian Press reported the extent of the intimidation going on in Freedomite communities writing that families who were "sending their children to school have been terrorized, their homes entered by hooded men in the early morning hours and the

⁵⁸ John McLaren, "The State, Child Snatching and the Law: The Seizure and Indoctrination of Sons of Freedom Children in British Columbia, 1950-1960", in *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual and the Law*, editors John McLaren, Robert Menzies and Dorothy E. Chunn, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 282.

⁵⁹ English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 6,7.

⁶⁰ *The Spirit Wrestlers*, Transcripts of Interviews by Larry Hannant and Jim Hamm.

occupants threatened.⁶¹

A parent of a child who attended New Denver stated that parents organized an *ad hoc* group. Government documents refer to the "Women's Committee of Freedomite Doukhobors," however, a sub-committee of the Fraternal Council also included men. The committees organized protests and planned strategies for undermining the New Denver program. Protests involved hundreds of Freedomites –relatives and non-relatives alike –swarming New Denver and engaging in what the government referred to as "wild, frenzied, haranguing of staff;" the government kept as many as a dozen RCMP officers on patrol to control the angry crowd.⁶²

A notable event changed the security regime at the dormitory and the way parents interacted with their children. In 1956, several women in Nelson assaulted Emmett Gulley, a Quaker working with the government on Doukhobor issues and heavily involved in shaping the government's New Denver policy, and tore off his clothes. They blamed him for the seizure of their children. The government, concerned that children had become "frightened by displays of hysteria" during visits, that staff might be physically attacked as Gulley had been, and the dormitory dynamited or burned, erected a fence around the perimeter of the facility and instituted a "pass system" whereby only parents – not friends and distant relatives – could enter on the first and third Sunday of every month, provided they promised to behave. Very few parents ever exercised the option of entering the facility to see their children between the time the fence was built in July 1956 and August 1959 when the New Denver program was closed.⁶³ The vast majority chose to stand outside the chain link fence, attempting to touch, kiss and talk to their children as best they could through the metal wire. Religious services, *molenyie*, were held along the fence that became an enduring symbol of the New Denver institution and for Freedomites' persecution.

Aside from organizing protests, parent groups acted as mutual support systems at an

⁶¹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 October 1952.

⁶² Nudity was used as a form of protest. One parent whose child was in New Denver stated that Stephan Sorokin, leader of the largest number of Freedomites at the time, had cautioned the group to only use nudity when absolutely necessary.

⁶³ J.F.K. English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 6,7,8.

emotionally difficult time.⁶⁴ The two functions, however, became interwoven. The meetings gathered groups of people who lived in tight knit, insular communities where emotions and religious convictions ran high. For Freedomite parents these close mutual connections may have helped them cope with the loss of their children, but tragically it also perpetuated and sustained the momentum of protest because peer pressure dissuaded people from being the first to capitulate to government demands. Parents who wanted to break from the group and visit the children by using the pass system were derided and scorned by other parents. If any parents agreed to send their children to school, tremendous peer pressure was brought to bear on the family (in the form of violence, threats of violence and ostracism) because, the other parents regarded this as "selling out" which served to undermine the overall "cause." The evidence, therefore, suggests that intense religious fanaticism mixed with extreme community social peer pressure and intimidation played a significant role in shaping parental attitudes.

The government reported that by late October 1958, parents were beginning to abide by its conditions and agreed to send their children to public school. To do this, "a considerable number of Sons of Freedom families...moved from the Krestova area to get away from the pressure of the fanatical group, and in many cases their children are attending school voluntarily."⁶⁵ Some students turned fifteen, the legal age to be released from New Denver, and left on their own accord, to live with extended family members elsewhere in the province. Some of these children eventually signed siblings out of the school because their parents would not.

Unfortunately, many young children spent the formative years of their youth in the cold institutional setting of the New Denver dormitory which could not replicate the warmth of parental love at home. In 1998, a group of former students appealed to the Ombudsman's office for an investigation. The Ombudsman agreed to hear the complaint and used the *Ombudsman Act* and particularly the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* "as a guide to the rights that have been infringed" even though neither the Act nor the Convention existed at the time of the New Denver program. The Ombudsman eventually ruled that the institutionalization

⁶⁴ One mother committed suicide during this period.

⁶⁵ English, *Statement re: the Work of Mr. John Clarkson*, 8.

of the children violated important sections of the Ombudsman's Act.⁶⁶ According to the report, children's complaints of suffering "loss of love, nurturing, guidance, childhood... [and] and their claims that they experienced physical and psychological maltreatment" were substantiated.

The Ombudsman made several recommendations to government:

- Provide a clear acknowledgement that the government was wrong in the manner in which it apprehended and confined the children of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors in the New Denver institution.
- Provide complainants with as full and adequate an explanation as is reasonable and appropriate...for why, as children, they were apprehended and confined in New Denver.
- Make an unconditional, clear and public apology...
- Consult with the complainants as a collective to determine the means by which they want to be heard, and the appropriate form of compensation.
- Refer this Report to the Commanding Officer "E" Division and urge him to consider the role of the RCMP in the matter and the appropriate action to take.

The New Democratic government in power at the time the Ombudsman's Report was issued did not act on its recommendations and, in 2001, 55 former students filed a court action against the new Liberal government alleging that they were "systematically and intentionally or negligently maltreated, humiliated and degraded" by the province of BC. The plaintiffs' specific allegations were that they were:

- Hunted and arrested by police officers
- Confined in a prison environment and regime
- Denied all proper access to their families; the one hour meeting with family on the first and third Sunday of each month was rather than comforting, extremely hurtful, humiliating and degrading as the visits were conducted with the children on the inside of the chain link perimeter fence and their families on the outside, with RCMP police guards present
- Punished by having their visiting rights with family cancelled
- Forbidden to practise their religion or use their mother tongue, Russian
- Physically abused including excessive strapping and beatings
- Sexually abused including denial of all privacy including being forced to change, toilet and shower in full view of the other children and the staff; some of the plaintiffs were sexually assaulted by staff and older children; all of the Plaintiffs were forced to live in this state of sexual degradation and exploitation
- Denied proper food, accommodation, health care and education
- Forced labour
- Denied any and all cultural rights; the Defendant belittled and denigrated the Doukhobor community, religion, language, values and customs; vegetarians were forced to eat meat; pacifists were forced to put on boxing gloves and fight; the confinement and the regime were designed by the Defendant to drive the Plaintiffs away from their family and community

⁶⁶ These included subsections (a)(ii), (a)(v), (a)(vi) and (b)(iii) of s.23.

The government fought the case. For the former students, the statute of limitations prevented the case from proceeding, but the court stated that if the plaintiffs proved "misconduct of a sexual nature" the case could be heard. The former students could not meet the court's standard to prove sexual abuse and the case was dismissed.⁶⁷

An issue clouding an accurate understanding of conditions at New Denver is the failure of the majority of former students (by all estimates over 100) to take part in either the Ombudsman's investigation or, the class action lawsuit against the government. The reasons why many former students did not participate may have to do with the complicated range of experiences that they had and which were articulated during my interviews.

Several former students stated that being at New Denver without the love and affection of their parents made them unable to form relationships as adults, be good parents and less able to deal with difficulties in life. Many blamed New Denver for alcohol and drug addiction. Some former students, however, regard their time at New Denver differently. One former student who was very meek and insecure when she went into New Denver, asserted that going through the experience made her "stronger" and able to deal with adversity and challenges in life. She and several other students recall that their fondest memories were of participating in extra-curricular activities that their parents would not let them do at home such as going to dances and parties, playing sports such as hockey, baseball, volleyball, basketball, track and field, swimming and canoeing in the lake, going on school excursions to places like Vancouver and Banff, watching films and listening to record albums.⁶⁸

Several former students claim that they experienced abuse at New Denver. Staff strapped them for various infractions such as saying Doukhobor prayers at bedtime and speaking Russian at school. Some students, however, were never strapped for speaking Russian. Many former students – both male and female – recalled bullying by other children and suffering emotional and physical hurts from older larger children.

⁶⁷ *Arishenkoff et al v. British Columbia* (2002) BCSC 488.

⁶⁸ Many Freedomite children interviewed recalled that their parents did not allow them to partake in extra-curricular activities such as sports. As adults, many of these people from Freedomite families did not understand why; while others explained that the concept of uniforms and teams promoted militarism. Some Freedomite children, however, were allowed to dance and play sports so long as it was in their own communities.

Asked about how relations with parents were after their experience at New Denver, many former students said that they talked very little about New Denver in their homes. Generally, the students felt that their education and regimentation at New Denver created a disassociation from their parents and siblings. One former female student felt her parents had been ignorant for letting her go there, but because they were not educated, they could not be expected to know any better. A former male student "felt as victimized by my parents and the other students as I do New Denver." He credits New Denver with giving him an opportunity to receive an education that he otherwise would not have had.

The cost of the New Denver program including caring, feeding, housing administering, supervising and policing the facility cost the government roughly \$7 per child per day, or approximately \$250,000 per year.⁶⁹ The total cost of the six year program to the taxpayers of BC, adjusted for inflation, was approximately \$11,000,000 and it did nothing to stop the violence in the Kootenays. In fact, in a significant way it exacerbated it.

After the New Denver program ended, the Freedomite community met in Krestova to celebrate the children's sacrifice for the "cause." Elders in Krestova began organizing these students for "a new mission and the mission is to start burning anything we can, and instructions will be coming...to start on God's mission again." A Freedomite related that "my parents told me that the crimes that we commit, especially bombings and burnings, that this will be for the salvation of all Doukhobors. And the more commotion we create it will save Doukhoborism because the rest of the Doukhobors won't have time to settle down."⁷⁰

There emerged a cohort of former New Denver students - some bullied at the school, others themselves bullies - who came home angry and alienated. Under the tutelage of their parents, many of whom were extremely violent burners and bombers, these children learned the art of incendiary Freedomite warfare. One former student watched his father make bombs in the family living room by candle light and learned this dark art from him. He and other former students traded their feeling of powerlessness in the New Denver institutional setting for the power,

⁶⁹ University of Victoria Special Collections. Theo Karpoff, Doukhobors and Freedomites. Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs.

⁷⁰ *Spirit Wrestlers*, Transcript of Interviews by Larry Hannant and Jim Hamm.

prestige and sense of belonging provided by engaging in group arson and bombing raids. These young men gained a sense of self-worth, fulfillment and acceptance in their communities as the people ready and capable to accomplish burnings when necessary. They were the new generation of spiritual vanguards and foot soldiers for the Freedomite cause and would blaze a new path for Doukhobors from all branches.

The formative processes leading to large scale terrorist violence and irreconcilable inter-branch hostility occurred between 1929 and 1935. Economic and social dislocation coupled with coercive government policies such as the Piers Island prison camp program fed Freedomite anger and paranoia and increased the violence from these communities to unprecedented levels. The physical concentration of Freedomites in their own enclaves created a social infrastructure supporting and encouraging violence to firmly root itself and flourish. Freedomite communities became zones of cultural insularity bound together by tightknit kinship networks. They collectively and pridefully viewed themselves as the outcasts, the underdogs – as workhorses doing the “necessary” work of saving Doukhobor culture; however, they re-imagined the role of martyrdom in Doukhobor culture and history, lashing out at fellow Doukhobors and the government, seeking to induce their own suffering, while disregarding the plight of their victims. The evolution of Freedomite culture spawned new ways of interpreting language and considering leadership; both developments became closely associated with triggering violence.

Government policy toward the Freedomites was shaped by consultative processes and pressures from academics, the business community and the public. However, the efforts made to quell the violence and stop the nudity through incarceration and the seizing of children ultimately failed because they satisfied the antagonistic role that Freedomites required in the narrative they had created for themselves. In this way, the process became a sort of feedback loop where coercive government action legitimized, validated, fueled and perpetuated cycles of violence that continued for decades. Each action Freedomites undertook to compel the other branches to change their collective behaviours resulted in bitterness and distance. This process pushed the different branches in different evolutionary directions. The most significant articulations of non-

violence related to differences between Orthodox and Freedomite cultures became manifested in appearance, singing and geographic dispersion. The Freedomites' behaviour also created stereotypes in the public causing significant embarrassment among all Doukhobors.

Chapter 5

A History of Violence

This chapter elucidates the nature, breadth, scope, scale and costs of Freedomite violence and its effects on individuals, families, Doukhor organizations and the public. It illuminates the range of relationships of Freedomites, Independents and Orthodox Doukhobors to this violence and assesses the government's roles in this. I will put forth several arguments. First, the violence unequivocally represented terrorism and was the product of a complex social infrastructure involving many different people playing a variety of roles. Second, police efforts to stop the violence failed chiefly because authorities misunderstood the complex dynamics of sectarianism in Doukhor culture. Far from being hapless victims of state "persecution," Freedomites exercised considerable agency by provoking authorities, exploiting their ignorance of sectarianism and Doukhorism generally, and by using the justice system against itself and for a range of parochial causes including settling personal scores and leadership struggles. Finally, Freedomite terrorism ended as a result of three main factors. First, the high profile trial of Orthodox Doukhor Honourary Chairman J.J. Verigin revealed Doukhor sectarianism as never before and discredited the Freedomite community. Second, the resultant Kootenay Committee for Intergroup Relations (KCIR) and its successor the Extended Kootenay Committee for Intergroup relations (EKICR) brought all the stakeholders in the violence together allowing an airing of religious and political grievances. Finally, the death of Stephan Sorokin freed the Freedomite community to change its hostile posture and sign the Interim Accord binding all signatories to peace. This peace took root and endured because the majority of Freedomites took responsibility for their own community members' behaviour.

Freedomite Terrorism in Saskatchewan

To understand the nature, breadth and scope of the Freedomite's record of arson and bombing one must turn to Saskatchewan where Freedomite violence originated and where it was the costliest and most dangerous during a period lasting from about 1918 until the late 1930's. After this phase, the centre of gravity for violence shifted to BC with the gradual and prolonged

migration westward of the most hard core Freedomite elements.

When Peter V. Lordly Verigin moved thousands of Community Doukhobors to BC following the 1907 land expropriation, he left behind the CCUB administrative centre in the town of Verigen and the most radical elements of the community.¹ Freedomite activism only smoldered in the first ten years after the CCUB move to BC partly because of Peter V. Lordly Verigin's leadership acumen but also because Doukhoborism was in a massive state of flux, with the branches still consolidating themselves as Independents and Community Doukhobors. Even those who eventually became Freedomites shifted in and out of the CCUB and often went back and forth between Saskatchewan and BC. By 1918, the CCUB was battling with the BC government but prospering as a whole and the Independents were a much more cohesive group.

For approximately 20 years starting in 1918 there was much violence in Saskatchewan. In 1918 six Freedomites torched Peter V. Lordly Verigin's home in *Otradnoe*, an exotic and expensive structure costing well over \$5,000 (\$100,000 adjusted for inflation). The Freedomites soon escalated their behaviour and openly threatened the CCUB community. Peter V. Lordly Verigin warned BC's Deputy-Attorney General that "in Saskatchewan, they say they will burn the Grain Elevators, and in British Columbia they threaten to burn down a Jam factory at Brilliant, and other valuable buildings owned by the Community, because they say it is not necessary to treasure up riches."² In the Kylmore area in southern Saskatchewan, Verigin's home was again torched in 1923. In 1929, a community home was destroyed in the same area and a prayer home in the town of Verigen, which was also the residence of Peter P. Chistiakov Verigin (Lordly's son), sustained arson damage. Arson attacks in this southern region of Saskatchewan reached epic proportions in 1931 when two log granaries and fifty bushels of wheat were burned at Kylemore. The town of Verigen suffered relentless attacks with the burning of a lumber yard and the destruction of a flour mill. A giant grain elevator and an annex were also burned to the ground along with 500 sacks of flour and 5,000 bushels of wheat; a second grain elevator suffered fire damage. The total cost of the damage and destruction was over \$2 million dollars. With attacks

¹ It is important not to overstate the social distance between all the people identifying with the two branches. Each branch had people whose views varied in intensity so that relations were often friendly enough that arranged marriages between members of the different branches took place.

² BCAC GR 1323 Ministry of Attorney General, Peter Verigin to A.M. Johnson, 28 July 1919.

on a CCUB owned flour mill and grain elevator in Alberta, the total damage in the two provinces was over \$2.5 million dollars - and this only refers to property loss, not the cost of labour to construct it.³ If included, the cost could easily double.

Although the monetary value of the damage was less than that suffered by the CCUB, Independents in the northern most communities near Blaine Lake and Langham suffered a greater loss of buildings – particularly schools. In 1921 and again in 1926 schools in the Orlov District were suspiciously burned. Between 1929 and 1932 in the villages near Prince Albert, 25 schools were destroyed by fire. The local Independents were so frustrated that the Doukhobor Secretary Treasurer of Troitzke school appealed to the Ministry of Education for “some protection with regard to the burning of the schoolhouse.” The Independent Doukhobors attempted to raise funds to build fireproof brick schools but could only afford a few.⁴ In 1935 the Blaine Lake area suffered what the *Regina Leader Post* called an “epidemic of school burnings.”⁵ In all, 40 or more schools were burned with a total loss of between \$1.5 and \$2 million dollars.⁶ Many schools in Doukhobor districts in Saskatchewan only survived because the incendiary devices (frequently oil soaked rags stacked in the corner of a building) failed to burn, the fires were snuffed out in time, or the perpetrators were chased away by Independents who guarded schools at night.

Very few arsonists were initially caught because they usually acted at night and stealthily blended back into their communities. The Independents blamed the Freedomites but did not know which ones; nevertheless, the Independents sometimes found evidence at the scene and co-operated with police to bring the arsonists to justice. In 1931, police in conjunction with a group of Independents, tracked footprints in the snow from a River Hill school burning to the houses of two outspoken Freedomites, Joe Podovnikoff and Bill Stupnikoff. In 1932, both arsonists were

³ From “A List of Asset Losses of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood from Acts of Unsolved Arson to December 31, 1931 In the Province of British Columbia and In the Province of Saskatchewan,” from official records of Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Limited by William A. Soukeroff, Secretary published in the Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Report (Symposium Meetings 1974-1982), 248-250. I articulated the dollar figures for the various years into 2008 values by using the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator and added them together.

⁴ *Bridging the Years, Era of Blaine Lake and District 1790-1980*, (Manitoba: Friesen Printers, 1984), 209, 264.

⁵ *Regina Leader Post*, 30 June 1936.

⁶ The cost of an individual school from *Bridging the Years, Era of Blaine Lake and District 1790-1980* is roughly \$2,500 – \$3,500. Forty schools burned works out to roughly \$120,000.00 in 1931. Adjusted for inflation this calculates into roughly \$1.7 million dollars.

outspoken Freedomites, Joe Podovnikoff and Bill Stupnikoff. In 1932, both arsonists were sentenced to terms totalling six years⁷

St. Peter's Day Horror in Blaine Lake

Of all the acts of destruction and violence unleashed by the Freedomites in Saskatchewan, one event exemplifies how violent and extreme certain wings of their group had become, the wide level of support that violent Freedomites enjoyed in their communities, and how yawning the divide between the Independents and Freedomites had become by the mid 1930's.

John G. Bondoreff, a former Secretary of the Named Doukhobors of Canada – one of the largest Doukhobor organizations to ever unite Orthodox and Independents – had served the organization from its inception. After retiring, he began writing a Doukhobor history and a personal memoir focusing on his time as Secretary. He was ardently anti-communist at a time when a small but significant number of Doukhobors had become attracted to the ideology.⁸ He was very critical of the Freedomites for what he called their illogical, hypocritical and decidedly “un-Doukhobor” behaviour. More than once, they warned him to stop writing. Having lived in the Slavianska/Blaine Lake area of Saskatchewan where numerous schools had burned, he knew that the Freedomites were capable of serious violence yet he continued to denounce them.⁹

St. Peter's Day, 28 June, was always a special day for Doukhobors. Originally it was the day that all Orthodox Russians and Doukhobors commemorated Saints Peter and Paul. It became more invested in meaning for Doukhobors as a day to honour Doukhobor leader Peter V. Lordly Verigin (whose birthday was on that day also); it was also the day on which the

⁷ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 332; *Bridging the Years*, 264. In other arrests of Freedomites for burnings, in 1934, two young Sons of Freedom men were imprisoned for attempted arson. In a later case, Bill Voykin was sentenced to three years in Prince Albert penitentiary for arson.

⁸ Bondoreff had a significant role in drafting the “Declaration” creating the Named Doukhobors of Canada which outlined core Doukhobor beliefs and unequivocally established the group's separation from politics. He wrote this document in part because many members of the public thought that because the Doukhobors did not believe in the divinity of Christ, they were not a religion and in part because the public and government suspected the Doukhobors of being communist sympathizers at a time when Cold War paranoia gripped Canada.

⁹ He was my great grandfather. According to oral history, surviving personal letters and audio tapes, he was an outspoken critic of the Freedomites. A letter he wrote in the 1930s to Peter J. Soloveioff, a friend in the Kootenays, described the Sons of Freedom's violent activities and was read at the Joint Doukhobor Symposium in 1978. See Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, *Report of the United Doukhobor Research Committee in the Matter of Clarification of the Motivating Life-Concepts and the History of the Doukhobors in Canada (Symposium Meetings 1974-1982)*, 408.

Doukhobors had burned their arms in Russia. As such it became a distinctly Large Party or Canadian Doukhobor holiday. On St Peter's Day June 28, 1936 RCMP officers warned Bondoreff that his family was in great danger. For his safety, the RCMP instructed everyone in the house to go to the St. Peter's Day celebration and stay there; the RCMP placed an officer at the home to watch over it.¹⁰

A few kilometers away, at a large field under a big circus tent the (Named) Doukhobors held St. Peter's Day Celebrations. The celebration included a *molenyie* (religious service) followed by speeches, picnics, choral singing by Doukhobor groups from all over Saskatchewan and sporting events such as a baseball tournament. Nothing hinted at the horror that would occur back at the former Secretary's home.

From the second floor of the house, the RCMP officer observed a car pull into the yard, drive around slowly as if to survey the grounds, and then drive away. Later, the car returned and three men holding a package got out and entered the house. The officer came downstairs and ordered them to carefully put down what he feared was a bomb. The intruders did not obey and attempted to flee with the package. The policeman fired five shots - one of which ripped through the hand of one man. The constable attempted to pursue the attackers, however, they surprised him as he exited the dwelling. They had picked up pieces of wood that lay nearby, and ruthlessly bludgeoned him, until a neighbour, who had heard the shots, came over to see what was happening. The attackers stole the officer's gun and escaped. The officer, horribly beaten and bloody, crawled into the home and phoned the operator to report what had happened.¹¹

Family members returning to their home later that day had a horrific experience. Blood pools and smears covered the cupboards, tables and floor; there were bullet holes in the kitchen door. The children recall that one of the most emotional aspects of the scene was the condition of the hand-woven fine white table cloth which their mother had laid out for the special meal the family would have that evening. The officer had used it to cover his wounds before he bled into

¹⁰ This story was recounted by John G. Bondoreff in an unpublished personal testimony written in Russian entitled "The Attack on my Home," n.d. translation by Vi Bondoreff.

¹¹ An acquaintance, completely unaware that I knew the story of the attack, told me during the course of a conversation about Freedomite violence that one of his relatives had boasted about how he had repeatedly struck the officer but that the constable would not die.

unconsciousness and it lay dishevelled and drenched in blood on the kitchen floor. Aside from the blood, the family saw the dynamite found behind the *banya* (steam bath) at the farm; John G. Bondoreff's son and father discovered the wrapping for the package containing the bomb underneath the home.

The assault on the officer resulted in one of the largest man hunts that the district had ever seen. The family was placed under 24 hour police guard as dozens of RCMP searched the region from Prince Albert to Regina with every resource at their disposal. Their most important lead was that one of the criminals had been shot in the hand; an all-points-bulletin required hospitals to report anyone admitted with hand injuries consistent with a gun shot. Because the man who lost his finger turned up at hospital five days later, the men involved in the attack were eventually caught. During the five days it took police to find the assailants, family members took turns staying up at night watching out the window, fearfully anticipating another attack. As one family member recalled in an interview, "none of us could sleep anyway because we were all having nightmares; we had nightmares about the attack for years after." Compounding the effects of the memories of the day of the attack were the death threats that the family received for years after the event. The father took protective measures such as covering a bedroom window with a steel plate because he feared that he and his wife would be gunned down in their beds. He feared traveling lest his family be hurt or killed while he was gone. If he could not avoid traveling, he arranged for a guard to protect his wife and children.

Four men, Sam Markoff, Sam Markoff Senior, John Antifaev and William Hudikoff, were arrested in connection with the attack. Markoff and Antifaev were eventually sentenced to five years and two months and four years and three months respectively; these were later reduced to three years each.¹² The other two men were released without trial.

Bondoreff, who visited John Antifaev in prison, reported that the latter said he had attacked the home for \$500 promised to him by a Freedomite named Ivan Malov. The money, however, was never paid. RCMP chief investigator De Rosse, who came from Montreal to investigate the Freedomites, later told Bondoreff that Malov, the ringleader of the attack, had

¹² *Regina Leader Post*, 4 July 1936.

earlier gone to police in Radisson, Saskatchewan offering to orchestrate an event implicating Chistiakov in a serious crime so that they could arrest him if they paid him \$15,000.¹³ Malov blamed Chistiakov for the attack but the Doukhobor leader categorically denied this.

Following the capture of the attackers, Freedomite communities across Saskatchewan began "threatening to burn down schools and destroy cemeteries" throughout the province unless the government released the prisoners. In the uproar, at least one school in Buchanan was burned and numerous graveyards were disturbed. The behaviour of the Freedomites was so violent and unrestrained that Attorney General, T.C. Davis mobilized provincial resources in an attempt to bring law and order and declared that the police intended:

Under instructions from my department, to stop this kind of vandalism in this province and every possible effort will be made to convict any persons engaged in this kind of thing and to prosecute them to the limit. There is no place for this type of action in Saskatchewan and we propose to use the entire forces of the province, if necessary, to stamp such practises out.¹⁴

The collective nature of the Freedomite reaction to the arrest of the perpetrators of a violent thuggish crime is noteworthy. The Freedomite community was prepared to stand by its own people no matter how violent their crimes or who they were. Exactly how many Freedomites were rampaging is not clear, but it was significant enough for the Attorney General, who previously had been ambivalent about the arson against Doukhobor schools, to threaten to use the full resources of the province to control the situation.

The End of the Line for the Freedomites in Saskatchewan

If there is a watershed period in Saskatchewan's troubles with the Freedomites it is the mid to latter half of the 1930's. In these years the most radical elements in the group turned their fiery gaze westward and blazed a trail to British Columbia where their fellow Freedomites had strong cohesive communities in Krestova and Gilpen and CCUB Community Doukhobors lived in their largest concentrations. As the Freedomites left, the Independent Doukhobor communities in

¹³ Chistiakov had numerous legal problems with the Canadian government which tried to deport him to Russia because they believed that he was "both a Bolshevik and the leader of the Sons of Freedom" and responsible for their violent erratic behaviour. For a detailed discussion see John McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits: the Strange case of Peter Verigin II," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXVII, No3 (1995), 95-130.

¹⁴ *Regina Leader Post*, 9 July 1936.

Saskatchewan around places such as Blaine Lake saw an abrupt cessation of school burnings. One of the last schools, Slavianka, burned in late 1936.

Many reasons explain the mass migration of the hard core Freedomite criminal elements from Saskatchewan to BC. They had worn out their welcome in Saskatchewan. Neither the provincial government nor the Independents tolerated their unlawful behaviour. Because Independents were more integrated into society as teachers, lawyers, business owners and even police officers, they and authorities seemed to be comfortable and eager to work with each other to stop the Freedomites. The most fanatical Freedomites may have realized that the Independents were a lost cause, assimilated and immovable in their stances towards land, education and lifestyle. Freedomite violence had only hardened the resolve of the Independents. However, with the Orthodox community's material existence subverted by the collapse and liquidation of the CCUB between 1937 and 1939, the death of Chistiakov, and the establishment of a new organization the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, the Saskatchewan Freedomites possibly saw an opportunity to exert their influence in the dislocation and confusion of the time. Moreover, Chistiakov had moved the administrative centre to BC in 1931 and BC had become overwhelmingly the main centre for Orthodox activity.

Finally, soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, Canada imposed compulsory national service either in the military or, for pacifists such as the Doukhobors, alternative service. In Saskatchewan these laws were enforced; some Independents were imprisoned for resisting service while others accepted alternate service by building roads at a camp in Lac La Ronge. Freedomites were attracted to BC where alternative service laws were not enforced and work opportunities in logging, construction and the railways were available.

Several Orthodox and Freedomite interviewees reported that the Freedomite community in BC had become particularly radical during the last half of the 1930's.¹⁵ In fact, it is possible to track the migration of the most hard core Freedomite criminal elements by name. These men were known for their violent behaviour and had either served time in the Prince Albert penitentiary or had confessed to police about their violent activities only to resume their activities in BC.

¹⁵ Interview 7 August 2006; interview 8 August 2006.

Saskatchewan and Alberta, came to BC to resume their incendiary activities.¹⁶ Two of the men who attacked the Former Named Secretary's home, Sam Markoff and John Antifaev, also moved to BC. Joe Podovnikoff, who served time in the Prince Albert penitentiary for burning the River Hill School, also moved to the BC interior.¹⁷ This is just a small snapshot of the cohort of violent Freedomites that made BC their home.

Freedomite Terrorism in BC

If the record of Freedomite violence in Saskatchewan is sordid, in BC it is horrific. The range of criminal activities for which Freedomites were charged, convicted or implicated in included: arson, attempted arson and conspiracy to commit arson of community centres, libraries, schools, prison cells, hospitals, villages, grain elevators, factories, mills, post offices, government offices, law courts, bridges, CPR stations and freight cars, gas stations, water stations, water pipelines, stores, a blacksmith shop, a bathhouse, a golf club, porches, barns, sheds, a Buddhist temple, a bus depot, beer parlour, hotel, oil plant, prison, a memorial site, orchards and 10,000 boxes used for fruit transport. Use of dynamite resulted in the bombings, attempted bombings and conspiracy to bomb targets such as ferries, power pylons, trains, coffee shops, residential facilities (New Denver), microwave towers, tombs, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, railway bridges, railway tracks, schools, and government vehicles. Other crimes include possession of explosives, assault and sexual assault, weapons possession, mischief, making explosive devices, obstruction of justice, and assaulting a police officer.

Violence in BC lasted longer and was more destructive, dangerous and expensive than in Saskatchewan. The burning of over fifty schools in Doukhobor districts in BC was attributed to

¹⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 88.

¹⁷ His life story is emblematic of the difficulty of conceptualizing Doukhobor sectarianism. He became infamous among Orthodox Doukhobors as the chief propagandist for the Hilliers commune on Vancouver Island discussed on page 62. He along with the leader of that commune Michael Orekov Verigin were both from Saskatchewan. Both men were convicted of "seditious conspiracy" in 1950, before having their convictions overturned on appeal. After the commune dissolved in 1953 Joe Podovnikoff gravitated back to the Freedomite centres of power in the Kootenays and became a spokesperson for the Fraternal Council. In 1962 he was arrested and charged along with 69 others with conspiracy to intimidate the Parliament of Canada and the BC Legislature before the group was eventually acquitted for lack of evidence. In his old age, he made a rather miraculous *volte face*, apologized for his previous behaviour and joined the USCC. To the chagrin of many Orthodox Doukhobors, he became a leading figure as a "USCC elder" in such endeavours as the *Joint Doukhobor Research Symposium 1974-1982*.

Saskatchewan. The burning of over fifty schools in Doukhobor districts in BC was attributed to Freedomites and if attempted arson and damage to schools are added, the number is significantly higher.¹⁸ School destruction, however, represented a small percentage of the property destroyed. Between 1918 and 1983 there were thousands of individual acts of destruction. From 1940 to 1983 alone, Greg Cran counted roughly 600 individual acts of destruction in addition to the hundreds of individual dwellings razed during mass burnings of entire villages as occurred in Krestova in 1950, 1953 and again in 1962.¹⁹

A team of USCC researchers working on the J.J. Verigin trial in 1979 (which will be discussed later) compiled a list of over three hundred different Freedomites charged with over 600 felonies between the 1940's and the late 1970's. In many cases several people were charged for single acts. Although she does not differentiate between BC and Saskatchewan, Simma Holt states that authorities counted 1,112 attacks on property by 1962.²⁰ In 1961-1962 there were over 380 separate burning and bombing incidents.²¹ A conservative estimate suggests that Freedomites carried out between 1,500 and 2,000 separate burnings and bombings in BC over a 60 year period and made countless threats of burnings and bombings. Adding the number of charges laid for nudity makes the number of individuals involved in criminal activities and the number of prison years skyrocket.

The effects of Terrorism on the CCUB and USCC

Tragically, and needlessly, virtually every school, community centre, prayer hall, co-operative, factory, saw mill, flour mill and grain elevator and other enterprises and structures constructed by the CCUB were reduced to ashes. Today, due largely to Freedomite violence, aside from a few village complexes, the only surviving CCUB structures in British Columbia are a flour mill and Fructova School in Grand Forks and the Brilliant Bridge in Castlegar. The school and bridge, however, both came close to being destroyed. Fructova School was targeted at least

¹⁸ See Zubek, *Doukhobors at War*, 157. He estimates that by 1937 fire and dynamite destroyed 75 schools and damaged 25. If the number of schools attacked in Saskatchewan is added, the total number of schools destroyed by Freedomite arson is nearly 100

¹⁹ Gregory J. Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked, Doukhobors, Public Policy and Conflict Resolution*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) 141-151. Over the course of years some Freedomite families burned their own houses three or more times.

²⁰ Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, introduction.

²¹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 350.

twice by arsonists (1947 and 1950); the Brilliant Bridge was targeted at least once in 1947 and survived mainly because BC taxpayers paid for a long and costly guard presence.

The CCUB's successor, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC), fared little better in the wake of relentless Freedomite arson and bombing. Virtually every USCC building either faced fire or its threat. Over a dozen community halls, several offices, two Co-operative enterprises, a library and residences burned. Two of the most devastating fires, were the Co-operative in Grand Forks (1975) whose contents of rare cultural treasures, including irreplaceable documents and books (many from Russia), were destroyed and the USCC Grand Forks community hall (1978). A conservative estimate of the cost of CCUB and USCC property destruction is extraordinary: well over \$5 million dollars and \$15 million dollars respectively. The cost of labour, donated supplies of priceless documents and books lost would easily double the loss.²²

Even more fearful for Orthodox Doukhobors was the threat or actual burning of numerous villages and homes. In 1961 and 1962 Orthodox Doukhobors began to take private possession of the properties they lived on.²³ Freedomites regarded this Orthodox "deal" with government as another betrayal of Doukhobor values. Members of the main organizational Freedomite body, the Fraternal Council organized a cell of 6 to 8 men and women to intimidate the Orthodox into not signing for their properties individually. In August 1961, a gang of Freedomites executed a clandestine incendiary strike, described by one witness as "diabolical," that turned parts of the

²² The USCC number does not include increased costs to the organization from skyrocketing insurance rates that in 1979 alone went from \$3,000 per year to more than \$10,000 per year (\$8,000 to \$28,000 adjusted for inflation) and interest paid on loans to rebuild structures. See *Grand Forks Gazette*, 21 November 1979.

²³ After the CCUB collapsed in 1938, the government bought the assets from the mortgage holders to avoid a mass eviction of Doukhobors. Orthodox Doukhobors, who desired a more communal arrangement, had resisted signing for individual plots for many years. After spending many years and thousands of dollars surveying the lands, the government opened up the former CCUB lands for sale to any Doukhobor regardless of the branch. By 1961, John Verigin as Honourary Chairman of the USCC decided to sign for his lands and the entire community followed suit. Doukhobors bought land at 60% of the 1939 assessment meaning that it was worth 100% more than its selling price. (*Castlegar News*, 21 June 1962.) As a corollary, not long afterward, the government drew up plans to build a highway through many of these lands and expropriated portions of these properties on generous terms. In exchange for her property, my grandmother received three huge plots of land nearby and a twenty thousand dollar cash payment. She provided land for her sons and used the money to build a spacious, and at the time, modern new home.

Orthodox community of Ootechenia into an inferno. The arsonists used gas bombs in bottles to raze two large Orthodox villages – Gleboff-Osachoff village and the Cheveldaeff- Koftinoff village along with several homes. Gretchen Village was also targeted but failed to burn. In Cheveldaeff-Koftinoff, two small children inside nearly burned to death and an elderly woman fled with her clothes on fire. In addition, 35 fruit trees, several sheds and an old car in the Champion Creek area were destroyed. Because of hot, dry conditions and strong winds, families with homes near the fires, struggled to keep all of Ootechenia from turning into a vast plateau of ash. Chaos and confusion reigned as the community coped with the dangerous situation.

The attacks left 14 families representing 60 people homeless and destitute; 40 people had narrowly escaped death.²⁴ Damage was estimated at \$100,000.²⁵ The *Nelson Daily News* quoted Orthodox Doukhobors pleading "isn't there anything the police can do? We live in constant fear. We have to work all day and then sit up all night for fear of being burned alive." Another Orthodox Doukhobor declared, "We've had enough. I've been up all night on this fire. My house wasn't burned so I'll have to stay up tonight and guard it and then go back to work in the morning. This can't go on. The RCMP is going to have to do something."²⁶

That horrific violence and the abject fear they endured throughout significant periods of their youth forms a litany of instances reported by interviewees from a vast cross section of the Orthodox community. Almost half a century later, they are still haunted by nightmares about the night and have graphic recurring dreams about being burned alive in their homes. One interviewee who witnessed the fires as a young girl remembered: "it was either fear of the Cuban Missile Crisis and nuclear war, or that the Freedies were going to burn down your home while you

²⁴ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 347; *Nelson Daily News*, 21 August 1961.

²⁵ Approximately \$700,000 adjusted for inflation.

²⁶ A detailed description of the elements and dynamics of a Doukhobor village deserves a book on its own. Doukhobor village life can be divided into two eras. Before the CCUB collapse in 1939, a village consisted of two large two-storey dwellings parallel to one another. On the front and back of each building was a large porch; the bottom floor consisted of a common kitchen with a fireplace (*petch*) and a common area. On the top floor were eight bedrooms. Perpendicular to these structures was a *kladavooshka* resembling a motel with a porch in front and approximately six bedrooms, each with a private entrance. Other structures in a village included barns and a *banya* (bathhouse); each village had its own garden and orchards. From six to eight families lived communally and almost totally self-sufficient. Following the CCUB collapse, many families continued to live together but gained a degree of privacy and independence with their own section of the buildings, kitchen and garden plot.

slept.” Compounding their fear of being burned was watching their frightened parents. One interviewee from Shoreacres recalled “looking at dad’s face and seeing him really scared, and that scared me even more.” Adding to the children’s upset was the disruption to family life caused by the guard duty the USCC organized to protect its property. No longer did a parent or grandparent tuck the children into bed or comfort them at night because the parent had to leave after dinner to stay up all night and make sure community property was not attacked. Children feared their parents would be hurt; parents recall terrifying nights standing in front of community halls – usually for 12 hours in a row - holding sticks with which to chase attackers away should they come. Particularly frightening instances occurred when their dogs detected intruders hiding in bushes or lurking in shadows.

Family reactions to the threats against homes differed. People guarded their own villages and patrolled at nights looking for bombs. At least one interviewee recalled how as a little girl she would take a stick and sit on her porch in an effort to protect her family’s home. In one poignant case, an elderly Orthodox woman whose family had a significant leadership position in the USCC told that when she saw a group of men she knew to be Freedomites rowdily walking down the road near her house, she gathered her young children, and hid them in a shed behind the house.

During the last surge of relentless burnings and bombings of the 1970’s, Orthodox Doukhobors wrote desperate letters to newspapers in an attempt to dispel myths and misconceptions about Doukhoborism and because they were under siege, to seek help – any help. Encapsulating the Orthodox Doukhobors’ attitude toward the violence affecting their lives was an anonymous letter from an elderly Doukhobor to the *Grand Forks Gazette*:

The intention of this letter is not to cry on somebody’s shoulder but to try to bring to the attention of our neighbours, the public at large and maybe in some degree, the authorities, the intolerable situation that exists amongst our USCC members – we are getting to the end of our endurance. To this date our people have individually been mainly silent probably due to fear of reprisal by burning, innuendo, and slanderous libel directed at those who dare to speak up against terrorist acts.

Many requests were made to various departments of law enforcement like the attorney general, justice council etc. and appeals to members of parliament and the premier of BC to try and sit down and find a solution to this problem that has been plaguing the area for decades now with millions of dollars of loss in property and endangering of lives. So far our pleas have been to no avail. Perhaps our neighbours think like the authorities. It has been often stated through the press that this is our internal problem and is nothing more than a struggle for leadership between the two factions of the Doukhobors, the USCC

and the Sons of Freedom. No concrete action is being taken and we have to continue to live under pressure of terrorists, not only for fear of losing our hard-earned roof over our head but also our lives.²⁷

The letter articulates the helplessness that many of the Orthodox felt at the time of the violence. They had no faith in police to protect them and find the arsonists and bombers; they felt frustration and sadness that the public suspected them of knowing who the criminals were but not coming forth with evidence. There is no evidence of Orthodox people having any idea of who the criminals were. The sectarian divide precluded this. Furthermore, given the losses suffered by Orthodox families and the USCC organization, the dislocations to families and the community, and the fear the violence engendered, the suggestion that Orthodox Doukhobors somehow supported their attackers is ludicrous. Aside from a few non-Doukhobors who burned structures or attempted to burn them to make it look like a Doukhobor did it, Freedomites were overwhelming the culprits. As the letter states, and as many interviewees indicated, when Orthodox Doukhobors publicly challenged the Freedomites or gave what little information they might know to police, they often did so anonymously for fear of reprisal from Freedomites.

The situation was so dire for Orthodox Doukhobors in the Kootenays that three weeks after the letter was written, Bob Brisco, Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament for Kootenay West, told the House of Commons that "some 16 homes of members of the Orthodox community of Doukhobors are reported to be on a Freedomite Doukhobor hit-list, and these homeowners are weary from guarding their homes and [are] in fear of their lives."²⁸ He asked the government to provide a greater police presence to protect the Orthodox population.

While arson and bombings came in waves over the next decade and a half, by 1979 – the last year of the most horrific Freedomite violence – attacks and attempted attacks on Orthodox homes had peaked. The *Nelson Daily News* wrote, "Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, for whatever reason continue to appear at the homes of Orthodox Doukhobor people with gasoline and matches. Sometimes there is fire – sometimes there is none. But always there is terror for

²⁷ *Grand Forks Gazette*, "Letter to the editor *The Silent Majority*," 8 December 1978. The front page of the *Castlegar News*, 24 August 1961 claimed that certain segments of the public believed that "Orthodox Doukhobors are aware of who the terrorists are and have not cooperated with the RCMP in making the names of terrorists known." The paper did not refute this claim.

²⁸ *Grand Forks Gazette*, 28 December 1978.

those suffering or anticipating such attacks.²⁹

The most striking aspect of this campaign of arson was the asymmetrical nature of the violence. There is no evidence of any sort of revenge, reprisal, or retaliation from the Orthodox or Independent branches, making the Doukhobor sectarian violence one-sided. What this means is that for roughly 60 years, Orthodox and Independents sustained a destructive terrifying onslaught and only responded by re-building, guarding and appealing to police and the media for help. In many ways this "one-sided civil war" seemed to confound authorities who could not conceive that Orthodox could be serially victimized without lashing out, retaliating or playing a clandestine role in it themselves. This passivity was totally alien to many segments of Anglo-Canadian culture and the ultimate expression of pacifism that appears to have almost no historical precedent

Anatomy of Freedomite Violence

Woodcock and Avakumovic claimed that in most cases arson was "plotted and carried out by small groups, or even by individuals, acting autonomously."³⁰ Historical evidence, however, suggests that they simplify a complex community social system fueling, inciting and encouraging violence. The historical record is filled with instances of Freedomites acting in large collective numbers, either by nude demonstrations to show solidarity for fellow members charged with crimes, or acting violently in large organized groups. People from the Freedomite community of Krestova report that as many as 500 people – a significant number in such a small community – attended mass meetings in the 1960's that discussed ways of carrying out burning and bombings.³¹

Other examples of mass participation abound. In August 1925, approximately 100 Freedomites began demonstrating in the Slocan Valley; their numbers grew to 300 as they established a camp and engaged in nude parades. In 1931, 150 Freedomites paraded nude and demonstrated in Grand Forks as they resisted census enumerators. In 1932, roughly 745 men women and children engaged in nude demonstrations in Nelson and 600 adults were arrested. That same year in Grand Forks, 131 people were arrested following their nude march protesting

²⁹ *Nelson Daily News*, 21 May 1979.

³⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 328.

³¹ *Spirit Wrestlers*, Transcript of Interviews.

the penitentiary sentences of Freedomites in Nelson. Freedomite group action began to include mass acts of community arson at least as early as 1946 in Krestova. Over a period of two weeks in 1947 Freedomites burned a private dwelling (owned by John Lebedoff, himself a violent Freedomite leader), a chicken coop in Goose Creek, a village, a flour mill in Krestova and three dwellings in Shoreacres. The number of Freedomites involved in these burnings ranged from 30 to 150. The worst group action that year involved a raiding band of 300 Freedomites threatening to torch the entire village of Shoreacres (*Pladarodnoe*). Although they never reached the intensity of those weeks in 1947, burnings by large groups continued. In 1950, 36 Freedomites burned the home where J.J. Verigin was sleeping. In 1951, 400 Freedomites were arrested for committing burnings and nudity in and around Krestova. In 1953, over one hundred people were involved in burning over 400 homes in Krestova; in 1962 approximately 1,300 Freedomites torched hundreds of their dwellings in Krestova, Goose Creek and Winlaw. Between 1977 and 1979, 29 Freedomites attempted to burn Passmore Hall, 12 Freedomites were arrested for attempting to burn JJ Verigin's mother's home in Brilliant and 19 Freedomites were charged with arson following the burning of CP Rail property in Slocan two days before a sentencing hearing for a fellow Freedomite found guilty of two counts of conspiracy to commit arson.³²

Freedomites who lived in epicentres of violence such as Krestova remembered how people would come to homes to recruit people to engage in burning. During mass burnings, members of the community were often told: "either you burn your home down or it will be done for you." Groups of young men arrogantly and openly asserted themselves as gangs. They dressed in similar ways, drove fine cars and engaged in intimidation tactics including beating people or threatening to do so. Interviewees report that Freedomites knew that those who were "of a certain temperament" could easily find a role in committing burnings, that is, there were identifiable pathways or an infrastructure for those inclined to channel their energies into violence.

Internal Freedomite leadership struggles forced people to take sides. In the 1940's when followers of John Lebedoff and Michael "the Archangel" Orekoff clashed, the battle was played out in public as houses of opposing sides were fire-bombed. In the 1960's the followers of John

³² This list is compiled based on an analysis of hundreds of newspaper articles from the *Grand Forks Gazette*, *Castlegar News* and *Nelson Daily News*.

Lebedoff and Stephan Sorokin engaged in a violent struggle for power in the community. One could hardly be neutral in these contexts.³³ While Stephan Sorokin led the Reformed Doukhobors, his "goons" or "henchmen" came around regularly, collecting money, and warning several moderate Freedomite families that if they did not "donate" they would be put on a "black list" meaning their home would be targeted for burning or they might be assaulted.

In this closed, tight-knit context with little exposure to the outside world, paranoia and gossip became braided and served as news. Word quickly spread regarding who was involved in burnings and who was not. Many raids appear to have been organized on an *ad hoc* basis, usually in response to some development in relations between the CCUB or USCC and the government or between Freedomites and the government. The most violent Freedomites frequently went into the community to recruit bombers and arsonists using people's deference to community authority and nebulous references to "orders" as motivation. Many Freedomites may not have had prior information about where, when and who was carrying out specific violent acts. But oral evidence suggests that most people generally knew who was involved in committing these acts. Many people played a range of different roles in their execution.

Aside from the people who actually committed burnings and bombings, supporting roles included donating money, helping to organize acts for others to commit, or playing a logistical role lending arsonists vehicles, driving them to targets, or transporting equipment and explosives. People showed solidarity with violence by stripping nude (in many cases a precursor to arson or as an act of intimidation given its link to the Freedomites) and admitting to crimes they did not commit to cover up for others. Some people believed that violence was necessary for the Freedomite cause and supported it vocally even if they did not burn, bomb or strip themselves.

The most important element in enabling violence was family and kinship support networks. To understand this dynamic, it is necessary to understand that the family has always played a vitally important part in Doukhobor social relations. For those born before the early 1970's, the family and/or family name is a yardstick, passport and resumé to be carried wherever

³³ Freedomite leaders have included Peter Malloff in the 1930's, Michael "Verigin" Orekoff, and Joe Podovnikoff in the 1940's and 1950's; John Lebedoff, 1940's – 1960's; Mary Malakoff, 1960's-1970's and her former husband Stephan Sorokin from the 1950's to the early 1980's. Other minor figures attempted to assert a leadership role throughout the 1980s and 1990's.

one went.³⁴ Standard greetings and meetings among Doukhobors who know each other have always involved questions about how family members are doing; people who do not know each other always begin with a discussion of who one's parents or grandparents are (or were) and where they live or lived. In this way people find a grounding and common understanding and, in many cases, a bearing for the way their relationship progresses because it establishes a history and a level of trust between interlocutors. One's family's reputation helps guide one's behaviour, impelling a person to uphold the highest moral standards. In this context, each generation is the totality of his or her ancestors' pasts. This accumulation of family experiences comes with certain responsibilities. Throwing this away by engaging in disrespectful behaviour simultaneously disrespected one's precious family lineage and the culture. Doukhobors forgive but they have extraordinary memories. Committing a violent act was the most egregious thing a Doukhobor could do; it would certainly represent grounds for Orthodox community action and in a worst case scenario, ostracism.

In Freedomite communities, where most people had family ties to violence, kinship networks played little or no mitigating role in preventing violence. More importantly however, social relations in the communities encouraged and perpetuated violence because anyone serving prison time for almost any crime -- so long as it was justified in support of saving Doukhorism -- was celebrated as a martyr. One interviewee conveyed a story illustrating the reverence Freedomites had for community members in prison or in police custody. During a funeral in Krestova, a man, on a day pass from prison arrived late handcuffed, shackled, and escorted by two uniformed police officers. Upon his entrance, the entire community stood up, offered words of lavish praise and prayer before bowing down, touching their foreheads to the ground and holding the position which expressed deep respect, for several moments. He was given a hero's welcome. After he paid his respects to the deceased, the officers escorted the man with star status back to the waiting police car and the community repeated its prostrations, veneration and praises.

³⁴ This has changed with the new generation of Doukhobors -- many of whom are not aware, or even interested in Doukhor history or genealogical lines and have had their family situations complicated by intermarriage with non-Doukhobors.

While suffering at the hands of government was an important right of passage for many Freedomites, members of the community particularly enjoyed using and concomitantly making a mockery of the Canadian justice system. Freedomites were notorious for staging grand public spectacles and playing games with police, prosecutors and judges. For decades the provincial and federal governments spent millions of dollars for policing and prosecutions but could not stop the violence in the Kootenays. When arsonists were incarcerated, violence often continued because a steady stream of recruits could be counted on to continue the struggle. Because police often based their cases on false confessions, the wrong people were imprisoned and the real perpetrators remained free. Other Freedomite tactics included serially implicating each other, recanting and making up fanciful stories. In this frenzied, hysterical atmosphere it is possible that people lost track of who had actually committed what crimes.

One of the most poignant examples of the Freedomites' penchant for game playing with police illustrates how they used the legal system as a weapon against each other and against the system itself. In 1961 the Crown prosecuted 70 of the most hard core arsonists and bombers who were part of the Fraternal Council (under the leadership of Sorokin). Freedomites had spent decades bombing and burning innumerable structures, yet, the Crown believed that the charge against the Fraternal Council that had the greatest apparent likelihood for success was conspiracy to intimidate the British Columbia Legislature and the Parliament of Canada – neither of which had ever been attacked. The Crown's case featured the testimony of convicted arsonist and self proclaimed "messiah" Mike Bayoff, a supporter of "deposed" Freedomite leader and convicted felon John Lebedoff. In court, Bayoff accused the Fraternal Council of conspiring to commit bombings and burnings. Freedomites affiliated with the Fraternal Council countered that Lebedoff was "responsible for the bombings and terrorism in the Kootenays." It never occurred to the Crown that it might have become a pawn in a Freedomite factional leadership struggle. Capping the absurdities marking the trial, rather stunningly, eighty-four Freedomites who had agreed to testify for the Crown against the Fraternal Council suddenly refused *en masse* to testify. The case collapsed.

For years afterward, the Freedomites played similar games in court including contriving

testimonies, changing their stories, making absurd accusations against one another, confessing to crimes and then denying they committed them, stripping, singing, wailing, repeating the veritable mantra of police brutality, conveniently forgetting how to speak English, and wearing specially designed clothes which easily unraveled in court. Yet, prosecutors and police continued to rely on them in an effort to secure convictions. The result was the waste of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money and no end to violence.

Victimization and Freedomite Communities

The Freedomite campaign of violence caused numerous physical and mental casualties. In the mid 1940's, Mary Nazarov was burned to death in Krestova when kerosene was thrown on her during a factional struggle between the Freedomite followers of John Lebedoff and those of Michael Orekoff. On August 12, 1958, twenty year old Freedomite Philip Pereveresoff was killed when a bomb he was working on in Kelowna went off. His alleged companion, Harry Bojey, lost the sight of one eye and had his lungs seriously injured.³⁵ In 1962, 17 year old Harry Kootnekoff blew himself up when dynamite he was carrying as he was driving accidentally detonated.³⁶ Another young man in the car was permanently blinded and another boy went deaf. There is no way of knowing how many people were physically wounded but did not report their injuries. What is lost to Freedomites who have attempted to justify the attacks is the immeasurable mental anguish that it caused to their own families as well as to the Orthodox and Independent communities that led some towards alcoholism, drug abuse and worst of all suicide.

In the Freedomite community, a minority of devout peaceful families did not even play a passive part in the violence but were trapped by their historical and familial position. For most Doukhobors, being born into a Freedomite family was the prime factor by which the larger community viewed them. Escaping this category was difficult. Many such families, so victimized by other Freedomites and unable to endure violence, intimidation and embarrassment, moved far away. Even that did not guarantee safety as hard core Freedomites were known to track down former members and threaten them with violence unless they came back to the fold.³⁷

³⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 5 October 1958.

³⁶ *Nelson Daily News*, 21 February 1962.

³⁷ *Edmonton Journal*, 22 December 1978.

Many Freedomite families undertook extraordinary steps to protect themselves and thus avoid the prejudice of the general public by shedding all trappings of their cultural roots including anglicizing their names. This happened in a significant way when Freedomites made a trek to Vancouver in 1962 to support their brethren serving prison terms at the specially built fire-proof Mountain Prison in Agassiz. This trek exposed many Freedomites to majoritarian society. Many families and individuals, who grew up in the shanty towns established in Agassiz, did not return to the Kootenays in 1971 when a large contingent of Freedomites established the New Settlement in the Crescent Valley. Those who remained in the Lower Mainland carved out lives for themselves and married non-Doukhobors de-coupling themselves from the Freedomite community altogether.

The Beginning of the end for the Freedomites: The Trial of J.J. Verigin

If any one family suffered more than others in the over 60 year Freedomite reign of violence and intimidation it was the Verigins who played an important leadership role in Canada for over 100 years. Their harassment took many forms. The family tomb on the mountainside in Brilliant was bombed six times: once in 1931, twice in 1944, once in 1947 and once more in 1949; the steps were blasted in 1961 (This does not count the attempted bombings and at least one shooting). J.J. Verigin suffered far worse harassment and violence than his father and grandfather. Freedomites burned his homes in Brilliant in 1944 and 1950 and in Grand Forks in 1962, and 1970. Once, Freedomite women attempted to burn his home in Grand Forks despite the fact that the family (without the father) was at home. One of the children took a hose and sprayed them with water to stop them from burning the home until police could arrive.

The Freedomites also engaged in an almost uncountable number of nude demonstrations outside the Verigin residences including, most notoriously, a mass camp out in 1972 when a group sang and paraded nude. In my own recollection as a young child, J.J. Verigin's speeches at the Brilliant Cultural centre were always a favourite time for Freedomites (usually the same ones) to engage in nude protests. Perhaps the worst attack on the Verigins and the Orthodox community occurred in 1978 when the Crown charged J.J. Verigin with a number of offences.

- Conspiracy to burn down the Sunshine Valley Co-op on July 31, 1975.
(Freedomites involved in the attack were Andrew Markin, Walter Lebedoff who

- perpetrated the attacks, and Peter P. Slastukin Sr. who helped plan the attacks)
- Conspiracy to burn down the Orthodox (USCC) Community Centre in Grand Forks on January 1, 1976. (Peter P. Slastukin Sr., Peter Savinkoff, perpetrators John Savinkoff, William P. Evdokimoff, Peter P. Astaforoff)
 - Conspiracy to burn down the old Grand Forks Post office on or about January 1, 1976 and July 28, 1978. (Peter Savinkoff, Fred Hoodicoff perpetrators Peter Slastukin Jr.)
 - Conspiracy to willfully set fire to the residence of Stephan Sorokin at Krestova, BC on January 1, 1978 and May 17, 1978. (Mary Braun, Marilyn Stoochnoff, Olga Hoodicoff, Naida Stoochnoff, Pauline Berikoff, John Savinkoff.)³⁸

This court case was one of the most important events in Canadian Doukhobor history because it challenged the very integrity of the Orthodox branch. Rather than attacking the Orthodox branch with gunpowder, kerosene, dynamite or gasoline, Freedomites chose a tool they knew well, the legal system, in an attempt to subvert the leadership of the USCC in the hope that it would collapse. The trial shook the Orthodox community of approximately 5,000 at the time to its core.

The charges were worse than any fire bomb attack: a building could be re-built, but a reputation was in danger of being destroyed forever. Some Orthodox argued that even the laying of charges had caused irreparable damage. If Verigin had been convicted, it would have completely undermined the Orthodox community in the eyes of the public. Orthodox Doukhobors had always maintained their innocence, complained of their serial victimization at the hands of the Freedomites, and pleaded with the press, politicians and public to differentiate between the factions. If Verigin were convicted how could the Orthodox plausibly argue that there was a difference between the communities? Or, that one branch deserved the moral high ground?³⁹

The trial presented a series of bizarre contradictions: a group of Freedomites, who had dedicated their lives to fighting government and to preventing Orthodox Doukhobors from compromising with government, were now siding with government. Witnesses enthusiastically

³⁸ *Grand Forks Gazette*, 20 December 1978.

³⁹ "Freedomites Break Tradition, Testify," *Nelson Daily News*, 21 March 1979; "Letter to the Editor Freedomites Different from Doukhobors," *North Shore News*, 14 February 1979; "The Verigin Trial; Time for Perspective," *Nelson Daily News*, 10 September 1979. One of the most convoluted notions of many Freedomites and Reformed Doukhobors was that hostility between Sorokin and Verigin was contrived and a front for the government while the two worked together secretly. Only people from the Freedomite faction believed this. A variation on this was that many Freedomites believed that Verigin was their material leader while Sorokin was their "Spiritual Pastor."

testified against Verigin, and afterwards decried his persecution. The Crown had no physical evidence connecting Verigin to the crimes – no matches, no fingerprints, no taped *mea culpa* – nothing tied him to the burnings of property belonging to the organization he helped lead.⁴⁰ The Crown could not even point to a financial motive for arson because the insurance on the buildings did not pay out anywhere near enough to cover the cost of re-building. Decades of serial Freedomite firebombings had raised the deductible for Orthodox buildings to such obscenely high levels that few insurance companies would take the risk and only did so by charging inflated premiums. Furthermore, to believe Verigin was guilty of the crimes meant accepting the notion that he sided with people who terrorized his wife and children and wanted to destroy the USCC organization he helped lead.

Given the lack of hard evidence, the Crown's case was precariously constructed. Investigators had not interviewed any Orthodox Doukhobors – not even Verigin himself. Both the senior RCMP officer in charge of the investigation and the police chief of Grand Forks admitted in court that “who was charged and who was not appeared to depend largely on whether they had quickly volunteered statements to police about the burnings.”⁴¹

The most eager witnesses against Verigin were Freedomites - many of whom were well known serial arsonists and some of whom had spent years in prison. At the time Verigin's lawyer and virtually every Orthodox Doukhobor believed that the Crown had granted the self-confessed perpetrators of the arson immunity from prosecution in return for their testimony because each witness confessed to the crimes but was not charged. At least two witnesses or “unindicted co-conspirators” were a father and son team who were among the most prolific and destructive arsonists in Canadian history. Revealing the strangeness of Freedomite behaviour during the trial, in a Doukhobor first, one witness invented an oath ceremony (Doukhobors historically did not take oaths) with no historical precedent, whereby he swore to tell the truth on the Slavic symbols of hospitality the Doukhobors used: bread, salt and water.

After taking their inventive oaths, the pair of serial arsonists gave some of the most

⁴⁰ “Two Testify Arson Committed under Verigin Threat of Curse,” *Castlegar News*, 12 September 1975.

⁴¹ *Trail Daily Times*, 13 September 1979.

colourful testimony of the entire trial – perhaps any trial - stating that Verigin was secretly their leader and that through coded language that was passed on second-hand, Verigin had instructed them to burn down several USCC properties and warned that if they did not, he would hex them with a “seven generation curse that would cause their arms and legs to fall off.” The testimony would have been laughable if the potential consequences of the trial were not so serious.

All the key Doukhobor witnesses for the Crown were either from Sorokin's organization, were part of his family, or had a friendly personal relationship with him. Sorokin's wife was a witness and his step-daughter testified that Verigin had told her to set fire to Sorokin's trailer which, according to a journalist observing the trial, resembled more of a “mock arson.”⁴² A key witness statement used in Verigin's prosecution was made in “Sorokin's residence at Krestova and was delivered to the RCMP by Sorokin's followers.”⁴³ Another witness testified that after he helped burn the USCC hall, he went to Stephan Sorokin's residence and “made a detailed statement about his crimes to officers of that sect.”⁴⁴ The nature of the evidence was so dubious that the police chief agreed with Verigin's lawyer's observation about how “a fair amount of...information emanate[d] from Krestova and Mr. Sorokin's assistants.”⁴⁵ Conversely, no witness had anything but a strained relationship – if a relationship at all - with Verigin. If the witnesses' credibility were not problematic enough, the attitude of police made the case even more dubious: a police chief admitted in court that he had told Freedomites early on in the investigation that with respect to the arsons, he had felt “only one person was responsible – Verigin.”⁴⁶

The decision to charge Verigin appeared to be the outcome of three dynamics. The first was a desire on the part of Freedomites and Sorokin in particular to do whatever it took to help the Crown build a case against Verigin. The information that they provided found sympathetic ears among authorities who were genuinely frustrated with the seemingly endless violence. Police, firefighters, politicians, Orthodox Doukhobor and non-Doukhobor residents in the region

⁴² “Verigin Acquittal Vindicates USCC,” *Pacific Tribune*, 21 September 1979.

⁴³ *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1979.

⁴⁴ “First Testimony Heard in Doukhobor Leader's Trial: Verigin is a Freedomite, Witness says,” *Nelson Daily News*, 11 September 1979.

⁴⁵ “The RCMP Admit Verigin Was Never Interviewed Before Being Charged,” *Nelson Daily News*, 13 September 1979; “Witnesses Take Stand in Court at Nelson,” *Grand Forks Gazette*, 25 April 1979.

⁴⁶ “Verigin Maintains His Stoic Composure,” *Trail Daily Times*, 13 September 1979.

were exasperated by the lack of law and order. In indicting Verigin, the police seemed to be "rolling the dice" hoping that a high profile conviction of the most prominent Doukhor in Canada would demonstrate that the authorities were acting decisively to quell the violence. This new prosecutorial strategy was likely a partial product of the embarrassing failed court action against the Fraternal Council (See page 102). In that trial, Freedomites had promised to testify then declined to do so en masse. In the case of Verigin, the witnesses testified against the USCC Honorary Chairmen with alacrity.

The last factor showed the authorities' demonstrable lack of understanding of Doukhor sectarianism. The police chief admitted that in his experience, USCC (Orthodox) Doukhobors "hadn't been involved in arsons or bombings" yet the Orthodox leader was charged on the word of Freedomites with notorious credibility problems who claimed that Verigin was "one of them."⁴⁷ In charging Verigin, the police and Crown asserted that nefarious secret ties bound the Orthodox leadership to the Freedomites. The police also seemed to believe that burning one's dwelling was as integral a part of the Doukhor culture as denial of responsibility for it.

An important clue revealing this latter point and the profound confusion of the Crown was the attempted fire bombing of Verigin's mother Anna Markova's house the previous year. After her death in 1978, Verigin took possession of her home in Brilliant. The next day, 12 Freedomites came to the house. Two men broke into the home and dragged out a woman who was inside while others began attempting to burn it. The attack resulted in \$15,000 damage.⁴⁸ The attackers were arrested but said that Verigin had ordered that the house be burned - a claim which Verigin vehemently denied.⁴⁹ In a baffling legal move, Crown counsel chose to believe the 12 alleged arsonists over Verigin and ordered a stay of proceedings. His reasoning for doing so is particularly illuminating. He stated that "it is not a criminal offense to burn down your own building when there is no fraudulent intent." In a peculiar course of events, the Crown had believed the word of individuals committing the crime over the victim without the benefit of court

⁴⁷ "RCMP Admit Verigin Was Never Interviewed Before Being Charged," *Nelson Daily News*, 13 September 1979.

⁴⁸ *Nelson Daily News*, 13 September 1979.

⁴⁹ He was quoted as saying: "that's the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard in my life... anyone who can even think such a thing is an idiot."

word of individuals committing the crime over the victim without the benefit of court proceedings.⁵⁰

The Verigin trial was a veritable circus. Freedomites disrobed inside and outside the courts, shouted and sang hysterically. Several men from the Orthodox community working with Verigin's defence counsel met regularly to go over files and information and assist the lawyer, Harry Rankin, with the complexities of Doukhobor culture so that he could vigorously cross-examine Crown witnesses and pick apart the inconsistencies and fallacies in their claims. These meetings were dangerous events. A group of Freedomite men, using large pick-up trucks, aggressively chased the men working with Rankin to and from the residence and many times events became deadly serious. Freedomites would lurk at night around the home where the Orthodox group met and several times chased the men at high speeds, tailgating them, and attempting to run them off the road. More than once the Freedomites sent written threats to the men working on Verigin's trial. In downtown Grand Forks, Freedomites belonging to the Reformed wing of the branch often demonstrated outside USCC buildings during the trial and openly threatened physical violence – something, the *Nelson Daily News* stated that Sorokin's men "were notorious for doing."⁵¹

After one Crown witness mysteriously "vanished," the charge against Verigin of conspiring to burn down the USCC Sunshine Valley Co-op was dropped.⁵² A jury eventually acquitted Verigin of all charges due to a paucity of evidence and the fact that the evidence implicating him was based on hearsay. According to people involved in the defence, Rankin effectively challenged Freedomite testimony and because of the background knowledge of Doukhobor culture provided by the USCC volunteers, ^{made him} was infinitely better informed than the prosecutors. As well as providing knowledge of Doukhobor cultural mores, these volunteers, above all, gathered detailed background information on Freedomites including their associations and criminal records. These people contributed their acute understandings of how individual

⁵⁰ *Nelson Daily News*, 1 December 1978; *Grand Forks Gazette*, 4 October 1978. The alleged arsonists were Katie Lebedoff, Fred Hadikin Sr., Fred Hadikin Jr, Alex Datchkoff, Polly Datchkoff, Tina Jmaiff, Vera Kinakin, Nellie Koodrin, Helen Kinakin, Pauline Hadikin, George Kinakin Sr. George Kinakin Jr. all of Krestova.

⁵¹ "First Testimony Heard in Doukhobor Leader's Trial," *Nelson Daily News*, 11 September 1979; "The Aftermath of the Verigin Trial," *Nelson Daily News*, 19 September 1979.

⁵² This was Andrew Markin. See "Witness Disappears in Doukhobor Trial," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 September 1979.

people fit together to form the Doukhobor community puzzle – the interconnected relationships and reputations that formed the substance of the culture. This provided Rankin with perspective, context and grounding for understanding and challenging the witnesses he faced.

After the trial, the USCC sought to repair the considerable damage done to Verigin and to its reputation by asking the government to launch a Royal Commission on Doukhobor issues. The Orthodox Doukhobors eventually persuaded the government to establish the Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (KCIR) in November 1979. Its work, however, was undermined by the refusal of Freedomite Reformed Doukhobors under Stephan Sorokin to participate because they believed Orthodox Doukhobors would dominate it. In 1982, Robin Bourne, assistant deputy minister for police services in BC and a well known "cold warrior" who had actively monitored Soviet activities in Canada for many years, agreed to chair an Expanded Kootenay Committee for Intergroup Relations (EK CIR) in 1982. People from all Doukhobor factions participated.

From 1982 to 1985 the Committee reviewed evidence and listened to testimony about intra-Doukhobor tensions and Doukhobor/government relations.⁵³ The committee produced thousands of pages of data which is beyond the scope of this study to assess. Following this process, however, burnings and bombings in the Kootenays ceased. Was the EK CIR responsible for ending the hostility between the Orthodox and Freedomite Doukhobors and the related violence?

Dialogue played an important part in bringing peace. Many of the Orthodox Doukhobors involved believe it provided a forum for the discussion that had not previously occurred: Doukhobors from all branches, business interests such as the CPR, and the government came face-to-face to discuss their grievances. The defining moment of the EK CIR was the signing of the Interim Accord which bound all parties to renounce violence. The Reformed Doukhobors had hesitated to sign the Accord for many years even though their internal registry (to which only Reformed Freedomites were privy) announced in its preamble that everyone who signed, agreed

⁵³ For an overview of this committee's activities see Gregory Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy and Conflict Resolution*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2006).

not to bomb, burn, or possess firearms.⁵⁴ The group obfuscated and resisted, according to one prominent Orthodox Doukhor involved in the EK CIR process. Not until Stephan Sorokin died, far away on his estate in Uruguay was it signed. Sorokin had had an exceedingly antagonistic feeling towards the USCC and Verigin specifically. Only a few hard core Freedomites from Gilpen refused to participate, but the Reformed wing of Freedomites agreed to monitor them and even warned the USCC when people who might threaten the USCC were freed from jail.

The agreement required Orthodox Doukhobors led by Verigin to sign a statement conceding that Chistiakov had made "statements that could have been misinterpreted" and that he "should have been aware that they could have been misinterpreted, and therefore... held partly responsible for allowing statements that could have [been] misinterpreted to go out to the people."⁵⁵ This issue had required the Orthodox to do an about-face because they denied this earlier. Furthermore, Verigin pledged, as Freedomites had requested, not to "curse" or put a hex on Reformed Doukhobors. Aside from a few women who spent the remainder of their lives in and out of penal institutions for public nudity—the last of whom has since died—Freedomites of all affiliations have ceased to engage in violence.⁵⁶

If the Verigin trial had a silver lining, it was that it almost completely discredited the Freedomite branch. Both Reformed Freedomites and those Freedomites outside the organization had testified on behalf of the government against an Orthodox leader. Their idiosyncratic, contradictory and erratic behaviour was closely covered by the provincial press. Those who followed the events in their totality received possibly the most informative insight into the intricacies of Doukhor sectarianism in Canadian history.

⁵⁴ See Internal Registrar of the Christian Community & Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, January 1, 1975. Copyright Steve Lapshinoff, Crescent Valley, BC. January 1, 1975 The Registry preamble reads: "Each individual, undersigned on this register of membership of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, one must consciously accept and submit and not to violate given by our Spiritual Pastor – Stephan S. Sorokin Commandments: Under no circumstances and under no pretense commit or take part in criminal acts: In Arson, Bombings and Possession of Firearms. Each member is obliged fully to uphold his society, in order to remain and be its member. Therefore anyone refusing to uphold these stipulations automatically excludes oneself from the Society of C.C. & B.R.D."

⁵⁵ D.E. (Jim) Popoff quoted in Gregory Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 112.

⁵⁶ Freedomites are suspected of setting fire to the Doukhor Museum in Ootechenia (Castlegar) in 1982.

This chapter argued that Freedomite violence and the scale of destruction it caused was awesome in magnitude. It also shows that this terrorism occurred in two main phases. Burnings and bombings originated in and were the costliest and most dangerous in Saskatchewan from about 1918 until the mid 1930's. While violence in Saskatchewan largely ceased after 1936, an evolutionary process occurred during the mid 1930's whereby the most hard core Freedomite elements migrated to BC exacerbating the growing radicalization of the Freedomite communities there. This migration occurred for several reasons. Horrific acts such as the attack against Former Named Doukhobor Secretary John G. Bondoreff inflamed passions among Independents and government authorities who worked together closely and put tremendous pressure on Freedomites. In 1931 the CCUB moved its administrative centre to the Kootenays and its population and power was overwhelmingly in BC. By the late 1930's many Freedomites may have regarded the Independents as a lost cause. With the collapse of the CCUB, the creation of the USCC and the death of Chistiakov, Freedomites saw the opportunity to exert their influence on Doukhoborism in the province. The Freedomites' determination to avoid conscription and alternate service laws being enforced in Saskatchewan and to take advantage of employment opportunities during the war were important corollary factors luring Freedomites west.

Violence in BC reached epic proportions from the late 1930's lasting until roughly 1980. During this time Freedomites tallied a staggering record of destruction that included almost every enterprise that the CCUB and USCC built as well as countless private and government targets. The Freedomite campaign of violence engendered terrific fear in Orthodox Doukhobors, affected their branch's culture and caused great hardships on families and their relationships not only with each other but with majoritarian culture.

Non-Doukhobors had problems differentiating between branches and suspected that they were colluding with one another. The Orthodox community's limited integration in society seemed to weigh heavy on police efforts to stop the violence. Authorities in BC did not fully understand Doukhobor sectarianism and the unique asymmetrical nature of the violence. The Freedomites relentlessly attacked the Orthodox branch for over sixty years without one recorded instance of the Orthodox retaliating. During this process police proved hopelessly impotent.

Within the Freedomite community, the arsonists and bombers were supported by people who donated money; helped organize the acts for others to commit; loaned vehicles to the arsonists, drove them to targets, or transported equipment and explosives. Others showed solidarity with violence by stripping nude and admitting to crimes they did not commit to cover up for others. Some people believed that violence was necessary for the Freedomite cause and supported it vocally even if they did not burn, bomb or strip themselves. A significant number of Freedomites were victims of their community's violent excesses and sought a way out by marrying into other branches or leaving Doukhoborism altogether. The majority, however, stayed closely affiliated with Freedomite communities and played a part in the networks feeding and enabling violence. Freedomites demonstrated considerable agency in their struggles with authorities, provoking them, misleading them and manipulating them into settling personal scores and factional grievances.

Ultimately, Freedomite violence ended for three main reasons. First, the high profile trial of Orthodox leader J.J. Verigin illuminated key aspects of Doukhobor sectarianism for the public and authorities; concomitantly, the bizarre behaviour of Freedomites discredited them personally and their cause generally. Secondly, the KCIR and the EKCI, created at the behest of the USCC which sought a public forum to salvage the reputation of the organization and its Honorary Chairman J.J. Verigin after his acquittal, represented forums for dialogue where political, historical, and religious grievances could be aired and a process of reconciliation could begin. Finally, the death of Stephan Sorokin, "spiritual pastor" of the Union of Reformed Doukhobors whose unrelenting hostility toward the Orthodox branch had precluded any opportunity for a peace process to take hold, opened the way to a change in Freedomite attitudes. The commitment of various factions of the Freedomite community to monitor and restrain the most extreme elements among them ensured peace could be maintained.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Doukhorism developed in the historical margins and peripheries of Russia. It also grew out of a context of power that alienated and exploited the peasant class. As a religion/movement/philosophy and culture, it was the heir of ancient Christian and Slavic traditions even as it offered a new alternative to the status quo. It straddled political and religious spheres. And while it sought to function outside the nation-state system, it could never completely separate itself from it. Political pressures arising from the expectations of state authorities with regard to concepts of "citizenship" forced Doukhobors to adapt in order to survive. In this context, however, competing internal views about how to balance religious beliefs with state expectations resulted in differences that were an important factor in promoting sectarian division, especially in Canada. With such differences, leadership played an important stabilizing role unifying competing interests; however, the role of *voszhd* was so multi-faceted and its legitimacy rested on such a complex set of variables that it often became a source of division.

The watershed date for the origins of Canadian Doukhor sectarianism was the death of venerable Doukhor leader Lukeria Kalmakova in 1886 which caused Doukhor society to split into two main mutually hostile camps: the Large Party and the Small Party. Support within the Large Party for Peter Vasilievich Verigin's leadership and the Russian state's campaign of persecution muted regional, economic, philosophical and familial divisions in the Large party. After approximately 7500 Large Party Doukhobors migrated to Canada in 1899, these divisions starkly revealed themselves as Doukhobors established themselves and searched for a common thread that could bind them into a single cohesive community.

Government pressure to abide by land ownership laws exacerbated divisions. This chaotic situation caused many Doukhobors to question why they had suffered for their cause in Russia. The instability and confusion of the settlement process in Canada caused many people, particularly from Tiflis, to find their bearing or stable reference point in an abstract embrace of the most rigid principles of the New Doukhorism introduced in the Caucasus. The publication of Peter Vasilievich Verigin's letter to Leo Tolstoy containing philosophical musings and the activism

of Tolstoyan anarchist A.M. Bodianskii incited extreme behaviours among those Doukhobors who harboured the most fundamentalist views. Verigin's arrival in Canada from exile in Russia had a temporary unifying effect; however, the Canadian government's massive land expropriation in 1907 ultimately shattered the Doukhobor community.

In the wake of this event, Doukhorism splintered into three main branches: the Sons of Freedom or Freedomites who were inclined to follow the most extreme interpretations and applications of Doukhorism; the community Doukhobors who pragmatically followed Verigin's guidance and pursued guarded adaptation collectively; and finally, Independents who desired a relationship with the Doukhobor community in Canada but possessed an individualistic bent and wanted to adapt as much as possible to their new home in Canada and enjoy opportunities that had never been possible in Russia.

In the move of Community/Orthodox Doukhobors to BC a myriad of factors affected sectarian relations. The Freedomite community's descent into more and more extreme behaviours ultimately culminated in violence. In BC, a hostile general public distrusted the insular CCUB community that began to flourish. The BC government's relentless enforcement of school attendance and vital statistics laws and the subsequent imprisonment and collective punishment in the form of massive fines and seizure of property caused bitterness in the Doukhobor community. The Blakemore Commission's recommendation that exemption from military service be withdrawn and asserting that Peter V. Verigin was a "problem" before his suspicious death in a train bombing demoralized the community, angered many, and churned sectarian tendencies. These forces coupled with the CCUB's compromises with the BC government and the instability of the community during a leadership vacuum impelled many CCUB members at the extreme end of the philosophical spectrum to find an outlet for their anger and frustration by turning to the Freedomite branch whose most extreme members expressed their zeal in violence.

Efforts by Peter Petrovich Chistiakov Verigin, the son of Peter Vasilievich Lordly Verigin, who assumed the leadership mantle and came to Canada in 1927, to manage the Freedomite's extremist tendencies and control, if not harness it, had the unintended consequence of making it grow in size and intensity. Beginning in 1929-1930, economic and social dislocation alienated

many CCUB Doukhobors who joined the Freedomite branch. Violence and disruptive behaviour led to greater estrangement between the branches. Coercive government policies such as the Piers Island prison camp and the physical concentration of Freedomites in their own enclaves created the social infrastructure that fuelled violence for decades.

Freedomite communities became zones of cultural insularity bound together by tight knit kinship networks. They collectively and pridefully viewed themselves as the outcasts, the underdogs, the workhorses who did the "necessary" work of saving Doukhobor culture by resisting such things as public schooling, materialism and the influence of government, often through violence. Their view of themselves as martyrs was tragically flawed because it was based on an re-interpretation of the role of martyrdom in Doukhobor culture and history that was based on non-violence. Freedomites sought to induce their own suffering by way of the government punishing their members for breaking the law while they ignored the plight of their victims. Violence became such an ingrained part of the Freedomite community that it was normalized; language emerged as an important trigger of violence as Freedomite proclivities for violence interacted with leaders' use of parables to convey deep meanings.

The Freedomite arsons and bombings that occurred almost unabated for over 60 years was rural in nature and undergirded by a desire (often inlaid with various social and personal dynamics) to bring about political, religious and social changes through intimidation and violence. The majority of the Freedomite community organized, sustained and supported this terrorism in various ways. It played either a supporting or overt role in destroying government and private property and caused monumental destruction and terror in Independent communities until the 1930's and did the same in the Orthodox community until about 1980. The cost of Freedomite violence to Orthodox, Independents, Freedomites, and the taxpayers of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Canada was significant. Property loss, policing, special jails, increased insurance rates, government commissions and studies and protective measures may total in excess of \$100 million dollars. Even so, the cultural losses suffered by Doukhoborism were even greater.

The embarrassment and shame caused by Freedomite behaviour impelled many

Doukhobors to leave the culture altogether: to change their names, move away, never again attend cultural events and, most importantly to raise their children without any cultural exposure. Inter-marriage with non-Doukhobors accelerated the processes of assimilation as the Doukhobor parent saw nothing they wanted to embrace, maintain or pass on to their children. In this light, the effects of Freedomite terrorism are clear: in their attempts to save Doukhoborism, they almost destroyed it. In their zeal, Freedomites failed to recognize that they were not only contradicting basic Doukhobor tenets, but were themselves engaged in a process of evolution and cultural change when they engaged in activities with no historical precedent such as clandestine attacks against fellow Doukhobors and mass nude demonstrations. In doing so, Freedomites exhibited elastic interpretations of Doukhoborism that they themselves denied the other branches.

Tough law and order measures such as seizing children for forced education programs, the paradigm for dealing with contraventions of the law, proved to be costly failures in material and social terms. For the Freedomites, however, these measures were invested with far different meaning. Their religious conviction was so strong and their belief in their cause so steadfast that imprisonment represented martyrdom – a badge of honour in the community and a necessary component of the overall motives underlying their struggle. In this context every penal measure exacerbated the anger that was expressed through violence and concomitantly justified and empowered members of the group to provoke the government through nudity and violence. It was a vicious cycle where the government enforced laws meant to stop illegal behaviours but ended up providing Freedomites with what they wanted and needed leading to more violence. But law enforcement was often lazily done based on false confessions. Had the government actually arrested the true guilty parties involved in the violence, perhaps it would have brought about a successful end to violence. When it cast the net wide and conducted mass arrests and imprisonments as it did for its Piers Island prison programme violence ceased in the short term. But it alienated and angered many and in the long-term proved counter productive.

The legal system became a powerful tool for the Freedomites who became adept at using it against itself. Freedomites routinely confessed to crimes they did not commit, regularly implicated each other either to cover up for the true perpetrators or to settle internal disputes.

They used the courts both to attack the other branches by implicating their members in crimes, and as stages to achieve publicity for their cause. Furthermore, they regularly brought the administration of justice into disrepute, making mockeries of police, prosecutors and judges by delivering not just false but often outlandish testimonies, regularly changing their stories, or making agreements to testify only to refuse once court proceedings began. The authorities' misunderstandings of Doukhobor cultural dynamics and especially of the Freedomite community gave them a role as veritable stagehands in the Freedomites' various dramas.

For sixty years, authorities failed the Orthodox community which endured serial victimization in a profoundly asymmetrical conflict. Not only were the Orthodox or Independent communities not involved in the violence, they never retaliated against the Freedomites, yet this reality was lost to authorities as late as the 1970's when the Crown made a regrettable decision to charge USCC leader J.J. Verigin. For all the harm this trial caused to the reputation of the USCC, it had the unintentional silver lining of beginning a process leading to reconciliation and ultimately an end to violence. The high profile trial of Verigin exposed the intricacies of Doukhobor sectarianism in the media as never before, discrediting the Freedomites and their various causes. After Verigin's acquittal, the Orthodox community sought a royal commission to clear its name. The provincial government settled on the less official Kootenay Committee for Intergroup Relations and then the Extended Kootenay Committee for Intergroup Relations – both of which opened a forum for dialogue among Orthodox Doukhobors, Independents, Freedomites of all persuasions and government. The subsequent agreement to halt the violence was only possible because of the providential death of Freedomite leader Stephan Sorokin who had been an obstacle to peace for many years. The Orthodox USCC's willingness to compromise on the role of Peter P. Chistiakov Verigin's words in inciting violence was also an important factor.

This study has revealed the ways mechanisms of power have historically functioned in an ethnically diverse country such as Canada. As Michel Foucault has observed, power works in complex ways and operates at a variety of political, social and economic levels. In Canada, when confronted by a defiant culture such as the Doukhobors, levers of power – media, social organizations, government and all the complex elements that make up these groups – worked

organically in subtle ways through language and overt ways such as the law, to assimilate this group. Dominant society as a whole did not understand the differences between the various Doukhobor branches and, more importantly, demonstrated little motivation in taking up the task of trying to appreciate the nuances because, collectively Canadians harboured a more powerful desire to see all Doukhobors, irrespective of their subtle differences and internal disagreements, assimilate. Ironically, in Russia, Doukhoborism flowered under the most intense persecution. In Canada far less violent state coercion proved successful in assimilating the Doukhobors when an important element was added: the phenomenon of social stigmatization – the popularized image and discourse of Doukhobors as burners, bombers, nudists, cultists, crazies and fanatics – just as they began to do what society wanted them to do which was, namely, let their guard down and integrate into society.

This study has also attempted to use the history of Doukhobors to uncover the complexities at play in cultural contexts where sectarianism and terrorism exist. It has shown the types of issues that fuel and perpetuate violence. It has highlighted the importance of appreciating the complex nuances of a culture racked by violence and has also attempted to demonstrate the way “thick description” and “dialogism” can be used to de-mystify culture. It has revealed the range of relationships people have to violence in various contexts, and finally, what policy approaches employed by authorities to deal with violence are more or less successful.

Several lessons can be learned from this study that may be applied to other sectarian conflicts. The most important is that without an approach to dealing with violence that is informed by a forensic understanding of community differences, policy is doomed to failure. Policy must not only be informed by a multi-layered appreciation of the cultural, religious and historical complexities of a group, but an equal consideration of how familial and kinship networks operate. Without taking this approach, inevitably authorities become vulnerable to relying on coercion that can victimize the wrong people – the moderates.

Arguably the single worst thing a government can do is to alienate moderates because they are the only segment that can help provide accurate and detailed data about who is related to whom, how these relations work and generally where people fit in the puzzle that is a given

culture. When governments alienate moderates a vicious cycle is born: authorities hamstrung by an information gap must rely on "get tough approaches" to send a message to terrorists. This in turn leads to more actions that may victimize or alienate moderates and the pattern repeats itself endlessly. Furthermore, policy makers need complex data about familial connections in order to identify instances when authorities are being used as tools in rivalries and personal disputes.

The key for authorities is to "get it right" from the beginning and adopt a vigorous information seeking, flexible approach that reaches out to all segments of a community affected by terrorism. This is the process by which the right people are arrested. The court case of J.J. Verigin revealed how effective moderates can be. Lawyer Harry Rankin had an army of personal volunteers from the Orthodox community that worked tirelessly to provide the information he needed to mount a successful defence. These people knew everything about their culture short of the planning and carrying out of violent acts by Freedomites which, while being undeniably important, were only one small part of the overall conflict. With all the resources at the government's disposal, Rankin knew and understood the Freedomites and the Orthodox better than any other non-Doukhor.

Government has a duty and obligation to defend and protect those people who are not involved in carrying out terrorism; in the case of the Doukhobors this was the vast majority. Law enforcement or military organizations must look carefully at community dynamics and not mistake silence borne of fear and distrust as "collaboration." When a culture racked by violence sees that a government is investing significant human and economic resources for protection over the long term, the chances of winning the trust of members of its various communities becomes greater.

There is no substitute for dialogue and negotiation. Gathering stakeholders together is the only way to air and acknowledge grievances. As the EKCIR demonstrated, this is the path to reaching an agreement that secures a meaningful and long term peace based on cooperation, trust and negotiated compromise. Demonstrative of how slowly peace processes can take, over twenty five years after the signing of the Interim Accord, the Doukhor community as a whole is still in a process of reconciliation. While slow, the results have been remarkable especially given the levels of animosity and difference that once gripped the community.

This case study suggests a need to re-examine how western societies have approached terrorism. In the case of the Doukhobors, generalizations and simplistic explanatory frameworks coupled with a lack of dialogue between stakeholders and inflexible, often haphazard legal approaches by authorities led to failure and cultural harm. Ironically, and paradoxically it may be the Doukhobors' history of sectarian violence which provides the intensely pacifistic group's best lesson to the world about the way to make peace.

Epilogue

Sectarianism Today, Attitudes about the Past and the Legacy of Violence

Outside observers of Freedomite violence often described the lives of Freedomites in unflattering terms. Woodcock and Avakumovic called Krestova a collection of "wretched shacks" on a "bleak upland."¹ Theo Karpoff, who worked on the Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs assisting the BC government with Doukhobor policy in the 1960's, used even more vivid language, describing Krestova as:

A Ghost town with no streets, roads, running water, sewage, parks or playgrounds. Shacks scrambled together out of apple crating and card-board boxes, some out of logs, turf and mud – scattered pell-mell without plan or direction. Families with children own no land, are squatters, pay no rental or tax dues, there were no schools, stores or any business enterprise – private or otherwise: there was manhood and womanhood with human energies that could have been a real asset to the industrial centres of the Kootenays, that was plain wasted. It was no home town for children to grow and to develop into useful citizens of the land.

Hardly anyone knew or cared where Krestova was. Thousands of cars went by on the highway three miles of Krestova (sic); local people, tourists, merchants, candidates soliciting votes at elections, parliament members, business people, sightseers – all whizzed by without a visit or giving a look at a peculiar phenomena, self-inflicted exile, Krestova which for all intents and purposes could have been in Timbuctu, on the edge of Sahara Desert, than in the beautiful plateau in the Kootenays.²

This "ramshackle" image was made worse when dwellings were razed and families were forced to live in make-shift sheds and tents, or wander from community to community living in parks, feeding themselves through the charity of the public. According to Orthodox and Independent Doukhobor standards and generally Canadian ideas about a safe secure environment, this lifestyle was dysfunctional.

Many Freedomites, however, reflect on their childhood and remember a time that was simple, yet loving and culturally rich where singing and interactions with their neighbours and family members were a positive everyday occurrence. They remember a community where neighbours helped in the raising of children. They remember fondly positive activities such as constant singing, tending gardens, doing household chores, learning practical household skills such as carpentry and cooking, spending time with grandparents, listening to interesting stories

¹ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 316.

² University of Victoria Special Collections. Theo Karpoff, *Doukhobors and Freedomites*, Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs, 2.

about the past and participating in local community *moleniye* and *sobranie*. These memories were positive and they felt loved – the nudity and fires notwithstanding. Freedomite communities immersed their children in a rich array of Doukhobor cultural activities to create a community grounded in such things as *stikhhi*, *pasalmi* and *pesni*. It is not surprising that Freedomites become some of the most important leaders of multi-branch choirs.

Today, there is peace and cooperation between Doukhobors from Freedomite backgrounds and those from the Orthodox and Independent backgrounds in a way that had not previously occurred in the Kootenays.³ Freedomites tend not to refer to themselves as such anymore but refer to themselves geographically as the “Krestova community” the largest most organized Freedomite group in Canada. They have the third largest Doukhobor Community Centre in BC where funerals, weddings, *moleniye*, Sunday schools and other events such as Mothers’ Day festivals and Thanksgiving events take place; the USCC has taken part in many of these events regularly for the past few years. Conversely, Krestova people attend such USCC functions as Talent Nights and Festivals.⁴ The veritable flagship of this growing unity between the two branches is the Men’s Tri-Choir, created in 1999, bringing together men from the Grand Forks, Castlegar (and surrounding areas) and Krestova communities as one. This development would have been unthinkable 15 years ago.

While few, if any, USCC Doukhobors have joined the Krestova group, many people from Freedomite backgrounds have joined the USCC and play important parts in its leadership, helping to positively shape its direction. In fact, Krestova represents the only real growth potential for membership in the USCC. With assimilation taking such a toll on both groups and rapidly improving relations, for the first time it is possible to conceive of Krestova and the USCC merging into one organization. As the USCC begins a process of *perestroika* – re-building and

³ Created in the 1960’s, the Union of Young Doukhobors organization in Vancouver represents one of the most successful historical efforts at bridging the differences between the factions. Started by Orthodox Doukhobor D.E. (Jim) Popoff and Independent Doukhobor Gordon J. Bondoreff, the organization accepted people from any branch openly and equally. It was very controversial among Doukhobors living in the Kootenays and was closely monitored by the RCMP from its inception and through the 1970’s. In the early 1990’s a minority of Doukhobors from the various branches united to plan a return to Russia. A migration committee formulated a feasibility study but the effort eventually lost momentum.

⁴ Thanks to D.E. (Jim) Popoff for information regarding cultural relations between the USCC and Krestova community. S.E. (Jim) Popoff. E-mail to author, 19 December 2007.

restructuring itself – to reflect the growing membership in Krestova the area will likely receive official recognition and have its own constituency (*otdel*) with its own administrative representative in the USCC.

The USCC magazine *Iskra* is the best lens on how the USCC and Freedomites have evolved. Historical articles no longer draw distinctions between the various Doukhobor branches – a significant development given past Orthodox appeals to the press, politicians and academics to make clear distinctions between the branches.

For all their struggles and problems, Orthodox and Freedomite cultural preservation strategies have weathered assimilative process far better than their Independent brethren. The Independents have almost disappeared as a coherent, structured and viable branch in Canada. Their approach to Doukhoborism which adopted virtually all the trappings of dominant Canadian culture while attempting to keep such things as Doukhobor choral and prayer traditions alive, in the absence of a united organization headed by a strong central leadership has, unfortunately, proved a miserable failure and brought the branch to a cultural precipice. This community once so strong and dynamic in Saskatchewan, contributed the earliest professionals and leaders for such organizations as the Named Doukhobors of Canada, but is now on the verge of extinction.

In the Blaine Lake area the proud brick *dom*, once a symbol of the area's cultural strength, goes almost totally unused except for sporadic gatherings by elderly Doukhobors on St. Peter's Day. In the south of Saskatchewan, the state of the Independents seems equally dire as Doukhobor associations have dissolved for lack of interest. At the 2005 Saskatchewan centennial, Doukhobors in the Kamsack-Verigin-Canora area, once the heartland of Doukhoborism, held a celebration. The demographics of the attendees spoke volumes. Few participants were less than 70 years old. To run the *Molenyie* in the traditional way, a gentleman from Krestova was tasked with the job. Without pursuing a course that inculcates their children with Doukhobor culture and creates a cohesive and meaningful organizational structure, the Independents appear to have reached their last generation. Many Independents realize this and as a result, have put their historical baggage aside and joined the USCC.

In BC, lone independent Doukhobors join various choirs in Vancouver and Victoria in

particular, but all are oriented toward the USCC, have choir leaders who are USCC members or come from Krestova, and rely on USCC infrastructure such as *Iskra* magazine to communicate and engage in dialogue with the larger Doukhobor community. A significant number of the younger generation, under age 30, have increasingly shown a keen interest in their Doukhobor roots and participate in choirs. They remain officially outside the USCC system, but point to USCC events such as the Youth Festival every May as the marquee Doukhobor event in Canada.

Orthodox Doukhobors' attitudes about Freedomite violence are mixed. Among the older generation there is a wide spectrum of opinion. Many USCC members have forgiven people from Freedomite backgrounds and given them the chance to play a constructive role in promoting Doukhoborism so long as they contribute in a pragmatic and consultative manner respectful of the organization, its long term members and what they have been through. Freedomites who have joined the Orthodox organization and have attempted to impose their will have raised hackles. Although opinions differ, most long-time USCC members interviewed want to proceed cautiously and seek a gradual integration, over time, allowing the former Freedomites to build bonds of trust. Little gives the older generation more pleasure than to see young people –any young people - actively involved in Doukhobor culture. This older generation desperately wants to see their culture survive and view the growing synthesis of the two groups as the way to accomplish this. Still, for many among the older generation, the pain of the destruction and terror that the Freedomites wrought hangs heavy. For this cohort, traumatized by the violence and embarrassment Freedomites caused, reconciliation is a long way off.

A particular point of contention for many USCC members who were interviewed was the issue of New Denver students pursuing compensation from the province of British Columbia for their institutionalization. At the time of the lawsuit, many Orthodox Doukhobors were dumbfounded and wondered if they could seek redress for the material destruction and years of fear they suffered as a result of the behaviour of many of the parents of the New Denver children and some of the New Denver children themselves.

The generation which experienced the last vestiges of Freedomite violence and the social prejudice that it engendered in the 1970's represents a sort of "lost generation" of Orthodox; the

stigma of being a Doukhobor was so great that many people now in their 40's have only recently begun to admit publicly that they are Doukhobors and take an active part in the culture. Those under 30 have limited knowledge about the full extent of the sectarian violence suffered by their parents and grandparents. Free of the shackles of history, they not only bear no ill will towards their Freedomite peers but many have forged very strong friendships with them.

Among Freedomites (or those with Freedomite family backgrounds), attitudes about their branch's past are mixed. A significant strain of thought among the older generation who lived through the arson and bombings plays down the level of destruction and the number of people killed or injured in the campaign of fire that raged for decades.⁵ Many Freedomites argue that casualties were few because they were always careful when they perpetrated violent acts and believed that God sanctioned their behaviour. This attitude is, regrettably, incongruent with the historical record.

A Crown prosecutor once observed that the Freedomite community was "conspiracy ridden."⁶ The notion of "conspiracy" is the lens through which many people in the Freedomite community today regard their past. A familiar refrain among them is that the government had agent provocateurs who stimulated the burnings.⁷ Aside from the total lack of personal responsibility this attitude demonstrates, their assertions are not backed by any facts. They harbour a contradictory view: taking pride in their branch's struggle for independence, yet, abandoning this posture and assuming the role of dutiful soldiers if not "robots" when expedience dictates. They cannot have it both ways.

While police have resorted to agent provocateurs, no evidence has ever come to light revealing that the government did so with the Freedomites and helped lead attacks on Orthodox and Independents. In fact, as this study has demonstrated more often than not the Freedomites made the authorities look foolish. It is necessary to confront the fact that nowhere else in Canada were bombings, burnings and attempted bombings and burnings happening with such frequency. To accept the theory that the government had a dark hand in the "black work" is to elevate the

⁵ "Spiritual Leader Visits Community," *Grand Forks Gazette*, 1 September 1976.

⁶ "Doukhobor Trouble Far From Over," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 March 1979.

⁷ Notorious polygamist and convicted criminal John Lebedoff is cited as one example.

Doukhobors to the highest level of prominence in its concern. To accomplish this sinister plot, the government (it is not always clear whether it is federal or provincial) would have had to have created the most secretive organ possessing the most efficient and ruthless agents whose skills were applied, not against Communist threats during the height of the Cold War, but against a small ethnic group which was torn by strife in rural BC over the course of almost an entire century. The notion is absurd.

The fact is that only a handful of non-Doukhobors were ever convicted of burning Doukhobor property. The theory of a government conspiracy is irreconcilable with the fact that when significant evidence was left at the scene of crimes, it always led investigators to Freedomite individuals or communities that readily claimed responsibility for it. Freedomites have been caught numerous times in possession of explosives, they have, as was the case with a 17 year old boy, been blown up by dynamite in the process of committing a violent act; Freedomites openly confessed and preached that burning is an integral part of Doukhobor culture no matter how much it conflicts with the historical record.

Many of the worst perpetrators of violence in the past are now very old or have died. Among those who are still alive, some feel obvious shame and have spent their older years aloof from Doukhobor affairs, facing what they did in relative solitude. A very small minority have apologized for their actions. Many, however, make no apologies and show no remorse. In the letters page of *Iskra*, one ailing elderly gentleman responsible for countless acts of terror wrote, "during my lifetime, we lived through some struggles and turmoil in our attempts to fulfill our Doukhobor mission and improve worldly conditions. I have no regrets for the difficult times for the improvement of my soul and am satisfied that, by faith, I did whatever I could."⁸

Among those from Freedomite backgrounds who have chosen a path integrated in various ways with the USCC, many do not want to talk about violence and are so sensitive about raising the issue that they take offense whenever it is raised as though it did not occur. An increasingly common rhetorical position of many people from Freedomite communities is that while a few Freedomites may have been involved in violence, "my family had nothing to do with it"

⁸ See *Iskra*, 2 July 2007.

and take offense at any linkages implied or asserted. These people also assert that the person raising the issue is "living in the past" but are usually unaware of the nature, breadth and scope of community participation in violence. Some youth who grew up after the worst violence was over, have been raised with little if any knowledge of their family's branch background. Among them, some even take pride in their group's rebellious past, and have been prone to romanticizing it – even flaunting it. They do not understand the powerfully pejorative meaning that the term "Freedomite" or "Sons of Freedom" carries with the vast majority of Doukhobors.

Some very elderly Independents, particularly from Saskatchewan, remember the violence and harbour particularly negative if not outright hostile attitudes towards the Freedomites as a group. They cannot forgive them for "sullyng the name 'Doukhobor'" as one elderly person stated. In the years since the violence, many of these people have had little or no exposure to venues where they might mix with people from Freedomite backgrounds and thus their opinions have ossified. Since the violence ended in the late 1930's, there are Independents that never experienced any of the violence and harbour a relatively neutral attitude towards Freedomites.

It is fitting to conclude this work by returning to where it began, the Brilliant Cultural Centre in Castlegar. It was constructed as a symbol of difference, defiance and cultural strength by the Orthodox branch, and served its purpose. In the late 1970's Freedomite terrorists clandestinely visited the structure, walking around its perimeter, examining it for weaknesses that they could exploit in order to destroy it. They found that that it was built so strongly that only a heavy hit of dynamite could do the job. In the end, the terrorists abandoned their idea and turned to Grand Forks where they destroyed the community hall. Since then, the *dom's* meaning has evolved along with the idea of what it means to be a Doukhobor. The *dom* is no longer guarded by community members wielding sticks and dogs. Today, Doukhobors from all branches freely attend events there and add their personal contributions to the organic whole of Canada's Doukhobor community. In this way, the building as a cultural legacy of the past expressing difference survives into the future as a symbol of the growing unity and most importantly peace.

Appendix

Glossary of Russian Terms

<i>Molenyie</i>	–	Prayer meetings
<i>Pasalom</i>	--	Prayer
<i>Pesni</i>	--	Folk Songs
<i>Pohorini</i>	–	Funerals
<i>Sini Svobodi</i>	--	Sons of Freedom
<i>Sirotzke dom</i>	--	Orphan's home from which traditionally community wealth is used in a social services role.
<i>Sobranie</i>	–	General Meetings
<i>Stihkh</i>	--	Doukhobor hymn
<i>Svadba</i>	--	Wedding
<i>Voszhed</i>	--	Spiritual leader

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