

Spirit Wrestling
Identity Conflict and the Canadian “Doukhobor Problem,” 1899-1999

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, Graduate Department of History, in the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the nineteenth century, Canada sought “desirable” immigrants to “settle” the Northwest. At the same time, nearly eight thousand members of the *Dukhobori* (commonly transliterated as “Doukhobors” and translated as “Spirit Wrestlers”) sought refuge from escalating religious persecution perpetrated by Russian church and state authorities.

Initially, the Doukhobors’ immigration to Canada in 1899 seemed to satisfy the needs of host and newcomer alike. Both parties soon realized, however, that the Doukhobors’ transition would prove more difficult than anticipated. The Doukhobors’ collective memory of persecution negatively influenced their perception of state interventions in their private affairs. In addition, their expectation that they would be able to preserve their ethno-religious identity on their own terms clashed with Canadian expectations that they would soon integrate into the Canadian mainstream.

This study focuses on the historical evolution of the “Doukhobor problem” in Russia and in Canada. It argues that the “problem,” commonly misunderstood by political and legal authorities as a law-and-order issue, was actually an extended identity struggle, both among Doukhobors of opposed factions, and between Doukhobors and state authorities in Russia and in Canada who insisted on conformity to social, economic, legal, and political “norms.” It uses the Doukhobors’ historical experience in Canada to showcase a wide spectrum of possible “newcomer” responses to the Canadian “host” society, drawing attention to

subtleties which may be missed in the study of less extreme cases. Using orally articulated collective memory narratives and print journalism sources to access Doukhobor and Canadian identity perceptions, this study argues that newcomers' impact on Canadian identity definitions predated the multicultural shift of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By pointing out the way in which immigrants such as the Doukhobors did, or did not, conform to (Anglo-) Canadian "norms" in public discourse, Canadians articulated their national identity perceptions in the early decades of the twentieth century. This study concludes that the "Doukhobor problem" could only be solved when the contested identity narratives and collective memories which were at the root of the Doukhobors' discontent were publicly addressed in "truth and reconciliation" style symposia called in the 1970s and 1980s.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCBRD	Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors
CCUB	Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood
DRC	Doukhobor Research Committee
EKCIR	Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations
KCIR	Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations
UBC DRC	University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee
USCC	Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ

VERIGINITE LEADERSHIP GENEALOGY

Chart:

Peter Vasilevich Verigin (“*Gospodnii/Lordly*”) [1859-1924]

Leader: 1885-1924

Married: Evdokia Grigorevna (Kotelnikova) Verigina

Peter Petrovich Verigin (“*Chistiakov/Cleanser*”) [1881-1939]

Leader: 1925-1939

Married: Anna Federovna (Chernenkova) Verigina

Peter Petrovich Verigin II (“*Iastrobov/Hawk*”) [1904-1942]

Leader: recognized in 1939, never located

Anna Petrovna (Verigina) Markova [1902-1978]

Married: John Voykin

John J. Verigin¹ Sr. [1921-2008]

Leader: *de facto* since 1939, *de jure* 1962-2008

Married: Laura Petrovna (Relkoff) Verigin

John J. Verigin Jr.

Leader: 2008-present

Explanation:

Peter Vasilevich Verigin (“*Gospodnii/Lordly*”) married Evdokia Grigorevna (Kotelnikova) Verigina. Peter and Evdokia produced a son: **Peter Petrovich Verigin** (“*Chistiakov/Cleanser*”), who married Anna Federovna (Chernenkova) Verigina. Peter and Anna produced a son and a daughter. Canadian Orthodox/Community and Freedomite Doukhobors recognized their son **Peter Petrovich Verigin II** (“*Iastrobov/Hawk*”) as their leader after Peter Petrovich Verigin (“*Chistiakov/Cleanser*”)’s death, but he could not be located and was later confirmed dead. Peter and Anna’s daughter, also named Anna, married John Voykin.² Anna and John had a son, Ivan Ivanovich Voykin, known in Canada as John J. Verigin, later **John J. Verigin Sr.** John J. Verigin Sr. married Laura Petrovna (Relkoff) Verigin. They had three children, including **John J. Verigin Jr.** (also known as “J. J.” Verigin).

¹ Born Ivan Ivanovich Voykin in Russia, known as John J. Verigin in Canada.

² She later remarried into the Markov family, which explains her last name.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the nineteenth century, Canada sought settlers who could put the Northwest to plow. The Doukhobors seemed to be a good fit at first. They were experienced agriculturalists, reputed to be resourceful and hard-working. Their religious non-conformity had troubled the Russian Orthodox Church as well as Russian state authorities, but the peculiarities of the Doukhobors' Christian beliefs seemed less problematic to Canadians, who were accustomed to accommodating Christian pluralism. By the end of the nineteenth century, religious persecution of the Doukhobors had become so severe in Russia that Leo Tolstoy and his associates made international appeals on their behalf. The Doukhobors sought to resettle in a country that would offer them religious freedom and good farmland. Canada seemed to be a good fit at first. In addition to religious tolerance and free agricultural land, the Canadian government could accommodate the Doukhobors' preference for "bloc settlement," provide some financial assistance, and guarantee exemption from military service.

Thus, the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada seemed to offer a solution to two problems in 1899. The Canadians needed settlers and the Doukhobors needed refuge. Unfortunately for both parties, unexpected challenges arose shortly after the Doukhobors' immigration, and it was not long before the so-called "Doukhobor problem" was born in Canada.

There were multiple facets to the "Doukhobor problem." Canadian authorities disagreed with the Doukhobors over a wide range of issues, including land tenure, the swearing of oaths, the registration of vital statistics, school attendance, and military service. Canadian authorities perceived these to be exclusively political and procedural matters. The Doukhobors, however, interpreted these political and procedural matters as having religious implications. Having endured religious oppression in Russia, and believing that they had

been promised freedom from religious oppression in Canada, the Doukhobors were unwilling to compromise on what they viewed as religious issues in their new home. Beginning soon after their arrival and continuing throughout the twentieth century, they used passive resistance or outright protest to express their discontent. A minority faction of the Doukhobors (members of the Sons of Freedom subset) used nudity, arson, and explosives to attract public attention to their cause in an effort to bring about a “solution” to their “problem.” In doing so, they further complicated and exacerbated it, making it even more difficult to resolve.

Several solutions to the “Doukhobor problem” were proposed over the course of the twentieth century. The problem could not be solved, however, until all parties recognized what the “problem” really was. The “Doukhobor problem” was often mistakenly conflated with the challenges associated with Freedomite activism, which made solving the “problem” more difficult. In fact, the “problem” was not about law enforcement or civil disobedience. As such, law-and-order responses were ineffective.

The “Doukhobor problem” was actually an identity struggle. Canadian authorities admitted the Doukhobors to the country aware that their beliefs and practices differed from Canadian “norms.” They expected, however, that within a generation or two, the Doukhobors would adjust and integrate, if not assimilate, into a “Canadian” way-of-life. Most Doukhobors came to Canada with very different expectations. Some expected new social and economic opportunities, and were open to adjusting to a “Canadian” way-of-life, but these were the minority. Most of the Doukhobors did not intend to integrate with their Canadian neighbours. They had suffered extensively in Russia for their religious convictions, and had immigrated to Canada in order to establish their communities on the prairie and live in Canada *as Doukhobors*. The more pressure put on the Doukhobors to assimilate, the worse the “problem” got. It was not until the authorities and the Doukhobors

began to discuss the “problem” in terms of contested identity narratives and collective memories in the 1980s that a solution to the problem could be found.

The Doukhobors were a relatively small group (fewer than eight thousand immigrated in 1899) whose impact was limited to relatively small geographic areas in rural Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Yet something about the Doukhobors attracted significant public attention throughout the twentieth century, well beyond what their small numbers and limited impact would suggest at first glance.¹ Their appearance, beliefs, and practices seemed unusual and extreme to the Canadian public. Among Canada’s religious and ethnic immigrant minority groups, the Doukhobors stood out. It is for this reason that a study of the Doukhobors is so useful. Extreme cases amplify subtle trends that are difficult to read elsewhere. Because the Doukhobors stood out as unusual and extreme, they were often publicly scrutinized and discussed. An examination of this public discourse reveals much about Canadians’ perceptions of the Doukhobors in particular, but it also sheds light on Canadians’ perceptions of non-conformist newcomers more generally. Canadians’ tolerance (or lack thereof) of culturally diverse groups can be inferred from public expressions of sympathy for or frustration with the Doukhobors. This provides insight into which aspects of cultural diversity Canadians were prepared to accept, and which pushed the limits of tolerance too far. The long duration of the “Doukhobor problem” renders it even more useful as a case study, as it exposes changes in Canadian approaches to non-conformity over time. At the same time as Canadian authorities were addressing the “Doukhobor problem,” Canadians were engaged in a “search for identity.” As this study makes clear, Canadians may have been hard-pressed to define a “national” identity at any given point in the twentieth century, but they seemed to be able to identify those people, values, or practices that did not

¹ Ashleigh Androsoff, “A Larger Frame: ‘Redressing’ the Image of Doukhobor-Canadian Women in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 18, no. 1 (2007): 82.

fit the Canadian ideal. As such, an examination of the “Doukhobor problem” goes beyond explaining the specifics of the relationship between Doukhobors and Canadians. Using “national” and “subnational” ethnic identities as foils of one another in this study contributes to our understanding of how collective identities – national, regional, and ethnic – evolve over time.

The “Doukhobor problem” itself has received little historiographical attention. Of the books published about the Doukhobors, few have been “scholarly,” and fewer still have been written by authors who identify as historians. As such, much of Doukhobor-Canadian history is written in an expository narrative or anecdotal format, rather than in a primary-source based, systematically critical way.

A few studies stand out as being particularly important. J. F. C. Wright’s *Slava Bohu* (1940) offers a narrative-style account of the Doukhobors’ early Canadian experiences. It was awarded a Governor General’s Award for Literary Merit, which suggests that the book was considered to be both well written and of interest to the Canadian public. Motivated by her conviction that Freedomite Doukhobor children were being raised in an “amoral, violent world” created by their zealous parents,” Simma Holt published *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (1964).² Holt’s frustration with the Freedomite Doukhobors is so loudly articulated throughout the book that it is impossible to categorize it as objective or scholarly. It is critical, both of the Doukhobors and of Canadians who failed to take aggressive action to “solve” the “Doukhobor problem.”³ Its main value to this project is as an example of the negative press the Doukhobors faced in the middle of the twentieth century.

² Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), introduction.

³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 295-296.

The Doukhobors (originally 1968, with a revised edition in 1977) remains the most comprehensive history of Canadian Doukhobors written to date. George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic point out that though “no ethnic group outside the two founding races of Canada has attracted so much attention as the Doukhobors,” their situation was still poorly understood. They offered their study as a corrective.⁴ The publication of Woodcock and Avakumovic’s book coincides both with the findings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which formally recognized the existence and contribution of Canada’s ethnic minorities, and with the burgeoning interest in “ethnicity” as a category of analysis in Canadian social history. Their study is not overly critical; its main contribution is its exposition of Doukhobor history without delving into anecdotal sensationalism.

A few studies since *The Doukhobors* warrant special note here. William Janzen’s *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (1990) is important first because it offers a comparative perspective, and second, because it examines governmental response to the groups in question. Julie Rak explores Doukhobor self-identification in *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (2004). In *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution* (2006), Gregory J. Cran reflects on his personal experience as a negotiator on the Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations and examines the proceedings as a case study for conflict resolution, concluding that accepting and “co-managing” differences in Doukhobor identity narratives was key to resolving intergroup tension in the 1980s.

In addition to these monographical projects, two important collections of articles appeared in 1995 and 2000. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* devoted an issue to the Doukhobors in 1995 to mark the centenary of the Doukhobors’ “Burning of Arms” event, and *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada* (2000) commemorated the Doukhobors’ immigration to

⁴ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Ottawa: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 14.

Canada in 1899. The articles in both volumes cover a range of topics, some historical, others ethnographical or sociological. The authors represented in both volumes are both Doukhobor and non-Doukhobor, lay and academic. These efforts are noteworthy for two reasons: first, because they are, by design, commemorative; and second, because the collected articles fill selected gaps in the historiography.

Doukhobor authors have published a number of historical studies reflecting on their group's history. In addition to producing a number of pamphlets and granting multiple interviews concerning the Doukhobors' history, Eli Popoff has published historical fiction, such as *Tanya* (1975), and folklore, such as *Stories from Doukhobor History* (1992). Koozma Tarasoff presents *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (1969), *Plakun Trava* (1982), and an edited work, *Spirit Wrestlers' Voices: Honouring Doukhobors on the Centenary of their Migration to Canada in 1899* (1998), which contains articles by a number of contributors, many of them Doukhobors. Sam George Stupnikoff wrote *Historical Saga of the Doukhobor Faith, 1750-1990s* (1992). Though largely filiopietistic, these Doukhobor-authored works provide important insider-perspective insight into Doukhobor historical issues, and a corrective to some of the "bad press" the Doukhobors endured throughout the majority of the twentieth century.

While the Doukhobors were paid significant public attention, their "problem(s)" and the "problem(s)" with them were dimly understood by the public, outside observers, expert scholars, the authorities, and the Doukhobors themselves. A comprehensive, up-to-date study of what the "Doukhobor problem" was, how it developed, and why it proved so difficult to resolve is missing from Doukhobor-Canadian historiography. A study that combines cultural sensitivity with a scholarly, historical approach would help reconcile the Doukhobors' understanding of their own experiences, as expressed in the oral tradition and in the Doukhobors' collective memory; popular non-Doukhobor perception of their peculiar

situation, as expressed and/or reflected in the public record; and critical analysis of available primary source evidence and secondary source evaluations.

Both the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University have special collections of material related to the Doukhobors' history. This material includes Peter Maloff's and Eli Popoff's papers, as well as the papers of a number of consultative committees commissioned to study the Doukhobors' challenges.⁵ It also includes Doukhobor-authored material (especially pamphlets), addressed to fellow Doukhobors and to the Canadian public. The University of Toronto holds the James Mavor papers, which shed light on the negotiations between the Doukhobors, their representatives, and Canadian immigration officials, prior to the Doukhobors' arrival.⁶ This project draws heavily on the resources found in these repositories, which contextualize the Doukhobors' historical experience in Canada.

In order to evaluate the role "identity" issues played in the development and perpetuation of the "Doukhobor problem," however, it was necessary to tap into two different primary source materials, which have been largely neglected in other studies of the Doukhobors' historical experience in Canada. This study draws heavily on print journalism in Canada. Newspaper and magazine reports concerning the Doukhobors shed light on the way in which the Doukhobors were portrayed to the Canadian public. It also suggests, albeit indirectly, public opinion about them. A year-by-year search of the *Canadian Periodical Index* yielded nearly fifty magazine articles. In addition, this study considers over 2500 newspaper articles published in the *Globe* and *Globe and Mail*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Province*, *Columbian*, *Star* (Saskatoon), *Phoenix* (Saskatoon), *Regina Standard*, *Morning*

⁵ Eli Popoff and Peter Maloff undertook studies of the Doukhobors and their problems. Both men identify as Doukhobors themselves, and both interacted with Doukhobors of all factions. Their analyses are both sympathetic and critical of their Doukhobor counterparts.

⁶ James Mavor was a Professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. Along with Peter Kropotkin and Aylmer Maude, he facilitated the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada in 1899.

Leader and Leader-Post (Regina), Edmonton Journal, Nelson Daily News, Grand Forks Gazette, Medicine Hat News, Qu'Appelle Vidette, Qu'Appelle Progress, Drumheller Mail, Le Manitoba, Macleod Gazette, Saint John Daily Sun, Digby Courier, Bracebridge Gazette, Galt Evening Reporter, Temiskaming Speaker, Toronto Star, Montreal Gazette, and Ottawa Citizen. A consideration of how to “read” print journalism records, considering both their inter-relationship with public opinion and their utility in historical study, can be found in chapter seven of this study, which addresses “public opinion” about the Doukhobors in the middle of the twentieth century, as well as in “A Larger Frame: ‘Redressing’ the Image of Doukhobor-Canadian Women in the Twentieth Century.”⁷

The Doukhobors have a rich oral tradition, built over several centuries. The Doukhobors’ oral culture developed out of their theological understanding that a person ought to be guided by the “book of life” written on one’s heart, and the political concern about producing written records which could be misused by public officials in their efforts to persecute the group. A consideration of the Doukhobors’ oral culture puts Doukhobor perceptions of their historical “problem(s)” and self-identification into context. This study draws on several oral resources. One such source is the transcription of the proceedings of the Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Symposium Meetings, which were held in various locations in the interior of British Columbia between 1975 and 1982. The Doukhobor Research Committee (DRC) invited Doukhobors across generations and factional lines to draw on personal and collective memory to address a series of questions aimed at elucidating various historical and identificational issues. Another source is the proceedings of the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (EK CIR). The EK CIR met between 1982 and 1987, and involved representatives from all Doukhobor factions (but primarily those identifying as Orthodox, Sons of Freedom, and Christian Community and Brotherhood

⁷ Androsoff, “A Larger Frame,” 84-86.

of Reformed Doukhobors), as well as representatives from local, provincial, and federal governments, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the press, and committee members who had an academic or professional interest in the Doukhobors' case. Transcriptions of the proceedings of both the DRC and the EKCIR are held in the University of British Columbia's Doukhobor Collection.

This study also draws on over ninety interviews with Doukhobors from the three main Doukhobor factions. Half of these interviews were conducted by Jim Hamm for his documentary, *The Spirit Wrestlers* (2002). Though the documentary itself is problematic, the raw data – the interviews themselves, which are held in the University of British Columbia's Doukhobor Collection – yield rich insight into the Doukhobors' perceptions.⁸

The other half of the interviews were conducted in British Columbia and Saskatchewan by the author in the summer of 2005. Some of the interviewees were recognized community leaders, including the Honorary Chairman of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (representing Orthodox Doukhobors), the late John J. Verigin Sr.. Some were what might be called “rank-and-file” members of their respective Doukhobor organizations, representing Freedomite, Orthodox, and Independent perspectives. Others were Doukhobors who did not affiliate with any particular Doukhobor faction. The youngest interviewee was in his twenties; the eldest was in his eighties. Interviews were designed to access the Doukhobors' collective memory and identity narratives through the exercise of “history-telling.”⁹ Given the Doukhobors' rich oral tradition, little encouragement on the interviewer's part was required. A few interviewees were willing to share their stories with the author, but were unwilling to have them recorded or credited. Their discussions

⁸ The main strength of the documentary is its attention to the perspective of Sons of Freedom Doukhobors. Some Doukhobors were concerned that film was likely to create a negative impression of the Doukhobors in the public eye, because of its repetition of images of nudity and arson, and because it failed to clarify the division between the Freedomite and non-Freedomite interpretation of Doukhoborism.

⁹ Ashleigh Androssoff, “Tell Us A History: Doukhobor-Canadian Narrated Identity” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2008).

nonetheless contributed to the author's understanding of the Doukhobors' historical experience in Canada.

The "Doukhorbor problem" was deeply rooted in competing definitions of ethnic and national identity both for the Doukhorbor immigrants and for their Canadian hosts. In constructing and defining a Doukhorbor "identity," Doukhobors of all factions relied heavily on orally narrated collective memories of past events. As such, a brief consideration of "identity," "ethnicity," and "nation" constructs, "assimilation" and "integration" processes, and "collective memory" concepts will help contextualize the framework for this study.

"Remembering" is not merely revisiting the past. "Remembering" plays a significant role in constructing meaning in the present. As James Wertsch explains in *Voices of Collective Remembering*, memory "functions to provide a usable past for the creation of coherent individual and group identities."¹⁰ If this is true, then it is important to consider the process by which "usable pasts" are constructed.

The way in which memories are perceived, recalled, and constructed yields important clues about self-identification. "Memory" is the product of a constructive or reconstructive process we engage in, whether consciously or unconsciously, to filter, order, and make meaning out of past events.¹¹ When we remember, we weave a narrative about the past together out of recollected images and emotions.¹² Thus, one has much interpretive work to do when one "remembers," and the process of "remembering" is highly dependent on one's *present* self-identification and perception.

¹⁰ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹² David C. Rubin, *Remember our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4.

“Autobiographical” or “personal” memory refers to memory one has of one’s own experiences.¹³ “Collective memory” refers to memories shared among members of a particular group.¹⁴ The two types of memory can be discussed separately, and often are, as psychologists dominate theorization about personal memory, and sociologists dominate theorization about collective memory. The separation is artificial, however, as individual and collective memory tend to complement and reinforce one another: individuals remember the events of their own lives in a social context; groups remember the events of their past as individuals within the groups recall and recount them. In his foundational study, *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs explains that though individuals remember independently, memory is strengthened when those who shared in a personal experience reminisce together.¹⁵ Yet Halbwachs reminds his readers that “*it is individuals as group members who remember.*”¹⁶ When one speaks of group memory, one understands that the group does not and in fact cannot “remember”; rather, members of a group share similar memories and perceive or interpret these memories in a similar way.

The practice of “collective remembering” differs from the practice of “history.” As Peter Novick explains:

to understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists’ motives and behavior. Collective

¹³ John A. Robinson, “Autobiographical Memory: A Historical Prologue,” in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24.

¹⁴ Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), a French sociologist, is credited with first proposing the “collective memory” concept in the 1930s. Scholars have suggested alternate ways to express Halbwach’s “collective memory” concept: “social memory,” “public memory,” “public discourses,” “collective ‘discourses,’” “collected memory,” and “collective remembrance” for example. Though scholars have suggested other terms for the phenomenon in question, “collective memory” remains the most salient term, and the term most appropriate for the study of the development of Doukhobor group identity.

¹⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48. Italics are mine.

memory simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes.¹⁷

As such, “filiopietistic” group “history” written by group insiders – “uncritical celebration[s] of heroic homesteaders, saintly missionaries and visionary community leaders struggling against overwhelming odds to preserve their language and culture or to climb the ladder of economic success”¹⁸ – must be considered extensions of a group’s collective memory. Some members of the Doukhobor community have published histories of this sort, with the express purpose of preserving the stories of the past for the benefit of future generations.¹⁹ In the introduction to his *Stories from Doukhobor History*, which draws heavily on Doukhobor “history-telling,” Eli Popoff explains that the stories have cultural value whether or not they are “true,” because they articulate the “aspirations or hopes of a people.” He dedicates his book to Doukhobor youth, hoping that they would derive the “worthy ideals and aspirations of our forefathers and resurrect them within their own selves.”²⁰

As Popoff points out, these stories are didactic tools, meant to inspire and educate young Doukhobors. The exact “facts” of the stories are peripheral to Popoff’s purpose. Scholarly historians might be tempted to dismiss such “filiopietistic” representations as false, inferior, and useless. “Outsider” historians interested in the function of collective memory and narrative in identity development, however, would be wise to pay attention to the form and content of the history produced from the “inside,” noting the themes which are emphasized, the way in which the past is shaped from the “insider” perspective, and the possible ellipses in content.

¹⁷ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1999), 3-4.

¹⁸ Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1991), xxv.

¹⁹ See Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1992), for example.

²⁰ Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 5-6.

How (hi)story is narrated in the relation of collective memory is important. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka defines collective memory as “a socially articulated and socially maintained ‘reality of the past’” which is shared by talking about it.²¹ As such, “story-telling” is an important component of collective memory.²² Repeatedly talking and thinking about events which have affected the group allows group members the opportunity to work out discrepancies in the interest of formulating an over-arching understanding about the past. Through narration, group members negotiate the contours of the memory, fill in gaps, resolve differences, and ascribe meaning.²³ Narration provides groups with a “master frame,” a “collective story, which locates [an] individual and his or her biography within it.”²⁴

A few insider-authored histories notwithstanding, the Doukhobors participate to a large degree in an oral culture, and it is largely through orally communicated narratives that the Doukhobors’ collective memory has been constructed and maintained. The repeated oral narration of the past allows group members to share their perceptions of the past with each other. In sharing their memories, members of a group can compare accounts and correct perceived inaccuracies. Repeated oral narration of the past permits group members the opportunity to negotiate the terms of group identity and membership. This has played a role in uniting the Doukhobor and solidifying their group identity.

This raises important questions. What happens when group members “remember” the past differently, and variations in the narrative framework cannot be resolved? What do distortions in the collective memory mean? As Gregory Cran argues in *Negotiating Buck*

²¹ Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 54-55.

²² Timothy B. Gongaware, “Collective Memories and Collective Identities: Maintaining Unity in Native American Educational Social Movements,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 32, no. 5 (October 2003): 489.

²³ *Ibid.*, and James W. Pennebaker and Becky L. Banasik, “On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories: History as Social Psychology” in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, eds. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 4.

²⁴ Ron Eyerman, “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory,” *Acta Sociologica*, 47, no. 2 (June 2004): 161-162.

Naked, irreconcilable differences between the Orthodox and the Freedomite Doukhobor factions played a major part in their impasse. Until those differences could be acknowledged and either resolved or accepted, the Doukhobors of opposed factions would remain divided, largely because of different identity-shaping collective memories and narratives. As such, the Doukhobors offer a useful case study because a) they have heavily relied on collective memory and oral narrative to reinforce their group identity and b) because distortions in “memory” (perception and narrative) had dramatic consequences on their group and their neighbours alike throughout the twentieth century.

Distortions in collective memory yield important information about a group’s self-perception. As certain stories are retold, they can become “selectively distorted.”²⁵ Some distortions are accidental, some unconscious, and others deliberate. Deliberate distortions are particularly significant. In order to create a “usable past,” a group may “downplay” or “sacrifice” accuracy altogether.²⁶ Most groups seek to maintain a “positive self image.”²⁷ In the interest of promoting a positive self image, groups may exaggerate memories which reflect well on their membership. This is reflected in the tendency to commemorate ancestors as “larger-than-life, almost superhuman figures,”²⁸ or to inflate the group’s significance to or superiority over other groups.²⁹ Once created and embedded in collective memory, myth can prove to be quite stubborn, even when challenged by incontrovertible

²⁵ Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 201.

²⁶ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 32-33.

²⁷ Roy F. Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, “Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 279.

²⁸ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 17.

²⁹ David Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage, and History,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 46.

evidence.³⁰ A group might cling tenaciously to myth which it perceives as being central to its definition of its identity, even when the myth is shown to be inaccurate.

Thus, collective memory can be shaped, because it is *communicated* as perception and narrative rather than *transferred* as memory. While it is true that a group member cannot personally remember an event he or she has not directly experienced, the *perception* of that experience can be communicated, and thus shared.³¹ To the extent that collective memory “involves the ongoing talking and thinking about the event,”³² those exposed to the conversation on an ongoing basis, who identify themselves as being part of the same group may come to adopt the group’s memory as their own. As Eviatar Zerubavel argues, “acquiring a group’s memories and thereby identifying with its collective past is part of the process of acquiring any social identity, and familiarizing members with that past is a major part of communities’ efforts to assimilate them.”³³

As elders convey memory to youth, members of the younger generation are informed about elements of the groups’ past which were distinctive or identity-shaping, and are equipped with a “narrative frame, a collective story,” within which an individual may locate him or herself, and which, therefore, “unifies the group through time and over space.”³⁴ The youth exposed to the collective memory narrative are meant to understand not only “this is what has happened to us,” but also: “this is who we are.”³⁵ Since it is only transmitted to “insiders,” “memory” becomes part of what “*distinguishes* us from others.”³⁶

³⁰ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 163.

³¹ Jull A. Edy, “Journalistic Uses of Collective Memory,” *Journal of Communication* (Spring 1999):72.

³² Pennebaker and Banasik, “Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories,” 4.

³³ Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 3.

³⁴ Eyerman, “The Past in the Present,” 161, 162; see also Katherine Nelson, “The Origins of Autobiographical Memory” in *Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts*, eds. Ulric Neisser and Ira E. Hyman (New York: Worth Publishers, 2000), 315 and Emily West, “Selling Canada to Canadians: Collective Memory, National Identity, and Popular Culture,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 19, no. 2 (June 2002): 216.

³⁵ Dario Paez, Nakane Basabe, and Jose Luis Gonzalez, “Social Processes and Collective Memory: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Remembering Political Events,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 169.

³⁶ Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage, and History,” 47.

“Identity” is such a popular term that, on the surface, its meaning might seem self-evident. Psychologist Erik Erikson popularized the term in mid twentieth century as a way to refer to one’s concept of oneself.³⁷ His definition emphasized the “continuity” and “sameness” of the self, both in one’s own view and in the view of others.³⁸ His “identity” concept was quickly adopted by social scientists, who, in Erikson’s own view, misinterpreted and misapplied the term.³⁹ Recent scholarship acknowledges the utility of the concept, while problematizing the term. In “Beyond ‘Identity’,” Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue that “identity” is overused and often misunderstood or misconstrued. In their view, “identity” is ambiguous. It has been called on to do too much: what we call “identity” is better explained using a range of more specific terms. They propose “identification” as one useful replacement. “Identification” implies a “process” rather than a “condition.” Because “identification” highlights the dynamic quality of the answer to the question “who am I?” while “identity” implies that the answer is static – “the same” – at all times, using “identification” is a convenient way to overcome the limitations of the term “identity.” Brubaker and Cooper also suggest “self-understanding,” “self-representation,” and “self-identification” as means to overcome “identity’s” limitations, since these allow for a “variable” dynamic or a “stable” condition.⁴⁰ Both “identity” and “identification” will be used in this study. “Identity” will be used to describe one’s self perception at a given time. “Identification” will be used to describe the process of identity construction, and to emphasize change over time.

³⁷ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

³⁸ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968), 19.

³⁹ Philip Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,” *Journal of American History* 69 no. 4 (March 1983): 914-915.

⁴⁰ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” *Theory and Society*, 29, no. 1 (February 2000): 2, 14, 18.

One's personal "identity" is shaped by a number of interrelated factors which create individuality. This study focuses on perceptions and definitions of two possible identificational categories: ethnic and national identity. Group identifications rest, of necessity, on generalizations and focus on the "rule" rather than the exceptions – the overall trend rather than the specific nuances. These generalizations are useful, to the extent that they help create models that allow for analysis of broad social and historical trends. It must be understood, however, that there are, in reality, several variations and subtleties in individual lived experiences and self-identification which are not addressed in a study such as this one.

Identification as part of a social group rests on several key components. English nationalism theorist Anthony D. Smith proposes four prerequisites for the development of "collective" identity: "a sense of stability, and rootedness, of the particular cultural unit of population; a sense of difference, of distinctiveness and separateness, of that cultural unit; a sense of continuity with previous generations of the cultural unit, through memories, myths, and traditions; and a sense of destiny and mission, of shared hopes and aspirations, of that culture-community."⁴¹ German historian Mary Fulbrook suggests that those who share a collective identity have "a notion of shared history: common 'collective memory'; common myths, traditions; a common historical picture and historical consciousness" as well as "shared positive values; shared view of the other, the enemy; common experiences in the present" and "a sense of a common fate or perceived future."⁴²

"Identity" is a sensitive subject in a Canadian context. Canadians suffer from what appears to be a "permanent 'identity crisis',"⁴³ which has been the subject of much discussion and analysis. Some are inclined to question whether Canada has a distinctive national

⁴¹ Anthony D. Smith, "The Formation of National Identity," in *Identity: Essays Based on Herbert Spencer Lectures Given in the University of Oxford*, ed. Henry Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 131.

⁴² Fulbrook, *German National Identity*, 17.

⁴³ Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 61.

identity; some grant that Canada does have a distinctive national identity but are hard-pressed to define exactly what it is. Some recommend abandoning the quest for “Canadian identity,” preferring to consider subnational (regional, provincial, ethnic) identities instead. To enter a discussion about perceptions and definitions of Canadian identity is to embrace challenge.

Immigrating to Canada exposed the Doukhobors to significant identity-shaping forces on both on a national and a subnational level. While it was the federal government which had accorded the Doukhobors immigration privileges in the first place, it was the citizens of the Northwest (later Saskatchewan) and British Columbia, and to a limited extent Alberta and Manitoba, who had to live with the Doukhobors and deal with their peculiarities. While the federal government took a theoretical interest in Doukhobors’ integration, the provincial governments had to deal with the practical problems implicit in the Doukhobors’ refusal to cooperate.

Though the local cultures of British Columbia and Saskatchewan differed, it was nonetheless a nominally (Anglo-)“Canadian” identity which the Doukhobors were expected to adopt, not a “British Columbian” or “Saskatchewanian” one. The fact that residents of Saskatchewan and British Columbia expected immigrants to adopt a “Canadian” identity even as, in practical terms, they imposed provincial laws and cultural expectations on their immigrant residents, is a subtle but important point: this suggests that residents of British Columbia and Saskatchewan felt as though, despite distinctive local and provincial characteristics, they still shared in a “Canadian” way-of-life and a “Canadian” identity. For their part, the Doukhobors did not distinguish between Saskatchewan-Canadian or British Columbian-Canadian values: they viewed Canadians as a somewhat monolithic “other.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Doukhobors referred to non-Doukhobor Canadians not as “*kanadetsi / канадецы*” (Canadians) but as “*angliki*” (which is a distortion of “*anglichanye / англичане*” or English). This identification suggests two principles: one, that the Doukhobors’ contact with Canadians was largely restricted to Anglophones; by extension this implies that the “Canadian” identity to which the Doukhobors were exposed (and which the Doukhobors were expected to adopt) was an Anglophone one. Second, identifying Canadians as

Since the Doukhobors were exposed to significant assimilative pressure in Canada, it follows that those attempting to assimilate the Doukhobors must have had some idea of what Canadian identity was in order to attempt to impose it on others. In attempting to Canadianize others, Canadians had to work out the parameters of their own identity. Canadians might not have known what a “Canadian identity” was, but they knew the ways in which the Doukhobors contradicted it.

Nations might organize around common language, culture, tradition, ethnicity; common perceptions of historical experiences and future outlook; or geographical, political, or economic expediency. At Confederation, one could not say that Canadians shared common language, culture, tradition, or ethnicity; nor could one say that Canadians shared common perceptions of their historical experiences or future outlook. Canadian Confederation was motivated by geographical, political, and economic imperatives. Francophones entering Confederation were assured that they could remain *Canadiens* and become “Canadian”: in fact, assuring Francophone Canadians of this fact was the only way in which Confederation could be achieved. Confederation was not intended to weld together North Americans who shared a common national feeling: it was intended to unite northern North America in light of an increasingly expansive United States and a increasingly disinterested British Empire. As W. L. Morton summarizes in his mid-century exploration of the subject, Canada “is the product of treaty and statute, the dry legal instruments of the diplomat and the legislator.”⁴⁵ There is, in fact, “no Canadian way of life, no hundred per cent Canadian, no ancestral figures corresponding to Washington or Franklin or Jefferson, no

“*angliki*” rather than “*kanadetsi*” suggests that the Doukhobors were less interested in the nuances of Canadian identity, and categorized their Canadian neighbours as “other” more than as “Canadian.”

⁴⁵ W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 85.

eighteenth-century self-evident certainties about human rights, no symmetrically laid out country.”⁴⁶

It has proved difficult to inspire strong national feeling out of the history of Canadian unification. The most romantic aspect of Canadian identity, and the one feature Canadians seem to agree upon, is the expanse, beauty, and challenge of Canada’s geography.⁴⁷ Canada’s enormous range of climate and landscape, however, dictates that even geography provides little basis for the perception of a common Canadian experience. Nations whose citizens share, to a greater extent than Canadians do, ethnic heritage, cultural traditions, and language have better ingredients from which to fashion a national feeling – a national “identity” – because members of these nations already identify with each other. Nations which are older than Canada have much more historical experience and cultural mythology to draw upon and, as explained above, shared experience and shared collective memory of that experience constitutes a powerful identity-shaping force. For members of other nations, shared ethnicity, culture, language, heritage, historical experience, memory and perception of that experience, and sense of longevity may become more important national characteristics than shared legal or political tradition. In Canada, those who do share ethnicity, culture, language, and heritage form sub-national identities. These sub-national identities take precedence over national identity because they are based on more emotive, and thus more compelling, identity characteristics than shared trade interests, common geographical experience, or legal and political tradition.

For citizens of a nation to have a sense of their “common identity in the present” and of their “common, collective past,”⁴⁸ they must be exposed to a sustained national identity narrative: this narrative must be communicated to and adopted by the majority of a nation’s

⁴⁶ Northrop Frye, “National Consciousness in Canadian Culture,” in *Northrup Frye on Canada*, eds. Jean O’Grady and David Staines (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 500.

⁴⁷ Morton, *The Canadian Identity*, 112.

⁴⁸ Fulbrook, *German National Identity*, 233.

citizens in order for it to gain currency. Like other group identities, national identity is negotiated “*discursively*, by means of language and other semiotic systems, *produced, reproduced, transformed, and deconstructed*.”⁴⁹ In other words, national identity is a concept which can be imagined, constructed, communicated, taught, learned, adopted, promoted, broadcasted, and remembered; it can be adjusted in light of new information or attitudes; it can also be rejected by newcomers who do not wish to assimilate, or by minority groups who dispute the national narrative and refuse to adopt the majority identity as their own.⁵⁰

Respect for cultural difference in the interest of maintaining political union has meant that Canada has de-emphasized grand national identity narratives. Canada’s “permanent ‘identity crisis’,” Iwona-Zarecka reflects, results from English and French Canada’s “struggle politically as well as symbolically to maintain a unified front.”⁵¹ Immigration posed an additional challenge: immigrants “appeared to have precisely what those who would administer and assimilate them lacked - an identity,” as Canadian political philosopher and sociologist Richard J. F. Day explains.⁵² Immigrants like the Doukhobors, whose identity was readily identified, posed a challenge to Canadians whose identity was more ambiguous, or at least, more complex.

When the Doukhobors arrived in 1899, Canadians noticed their peculiarities, but anticipated that within a generation or two they would shed their Doukhobor identity in exchange for a Canadian – or at least Anglo-Canadian – one. This did not happen as quickly or as completely as immigration authorities anticipated. The immigrants’ retention of their

⁴⁹ Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities,” *Discourse and Society*, 10, no. 2 (1999): 153.

⁵⁰ As Michael Bliss argues in “Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, The Sundering of Canada,” Canadian historians have played a significant role in the failure to communicate a grand national narrative, and thus in Canada’s failure to construct a national identity. *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 no. 4 (December 1991): 5-17.

⁵¹ Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 61.

⁵² Richard J. F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 144-145.

distinctive identities was problematic: as Day argues, “the unassimilable Other appeared to be succeeding where the British and French were failing, in being possessed of distinctive characteristics, in being part of an ongoing and lively culture which could give rise to strange churches, evil-smelling punk sticks, and outlandish clothing.”⁵³

The Doukhobors can be classed as a religious group, a cultural group, or a “social movement”⁵⁴ but they are best viewed as an ethnic group. Derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “people” or “nation,” the tag “ethnic” can be applied to any group “with a shared feeling of peoplehood.”⁵⁵ In his foundational study, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (1964), Milton Gordon defines an ethnic group as “any group which is defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin, or some combination of these categories.”⁵⁶ Ethnicity is part of the answer to the question “who are you,” where the answer is “I am a [member of such-and-such a group] – these are my people – the people – so-and-so is my mother and thus-and-so is my mother’s brother and this is our land, which is the world.”⁵⁷ Ethnicity, in Gordon’s definition, has a critical genetic component, as those who identify as part of the same ethnic group identify common ancestors, and descendants are automatic insiders. As Gordon explains: “with members of other groups I may share political participation, occupational relationships, common civic enterprise, perhaps even an occasional warm friendship. But in a very special way which

⁵³ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 144.

⁵⁴ Koozma Tarasoff, interviewed by Jim Hamm, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” tapes 103-108, Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia Library. Tarasoff classifies the Doukhobors as a social movement because “their mission was to get rid of militarism and war.”

⁵⁵ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27. Gordon clarifies that “race, technically, refers to differential concentrations of gene frequencies responsible for traits which, so far as we know, are confined to physical manifestations such as skin color or hair form; it has no intrinsic connection with cultural patterns and institutions. Religion and national origins, while both cultural phenomena, are distinctly different institutions which do not necessarily vary concomitantly. However, all of these categories have a common social-psychological referent, in that all of them serve to create, through historical circumstances, a sense of peoplehood for groups within the United States, and this common referent of peoplehood is recognized in the American public’s usage of these three terms, frequently in interchangeable fashion” [28].

⁵⁷ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 19.

history has decreed, I share a sense of indissoluble and intimate identity with *this group* and *not that one* within the larger society and the world.”⁵⁸

Anthony D. Smith defines “ethnie” as “a definite historic culture-community, some of whose members share a sense of solidarity,” including:

1. a collective name, which symbolizes the uniqueness of the community and demarcates it from others;
2. a myth of common origins, which relates all the members to a common ancestor, birthplace, and foundation;
3. a shared ethno-history, that is, the shared memories of successive generations of a culture-community;
4. one or more common cultural characteristics which can serve to demarcate members from non-members, such as colour, language, customs, religion, and institutions;
5. an association with a historic territory, or homeland, even where most of the community no longer resides in it;
6. a sense of solidarity on the part of at least a significant segment of the culture-community.⁵⁹

The Doukhobors fit each of Smith’s characteristics of ethnicity. Their name, “Spirit Wrestlers,” is unique to them and reflects their identity (1); origin narratives circulate among all members of the group (2); oral tradition and collective memory thrive within the group (3); Doukhobors share Russian language (distinctly Doukhobor in character) as well as uniquely Doukhobor religion and institutions (4); albeit to varying degrees, Doukhobors share nostalgia for their Russian homeland (5); and Doukhobors speak of their fellows in fraternal terms (6).⁶⁰

Yet, “ethnicity” shares some of “identity’s” complications. “Ethnicity,” or “ethnic identity,” is neither solid nor static – it is created and modified in response to a variety of internal and external factors. It incorporates historical narrative, cultural attributes, and

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” 133.

⁶⁰ Though the Doukhobors have, over the course of the twentieth century, separated into at least three organized groups, each identifies with the title “Doukhobor.”

genetic relationship to engender a sense of belonging among insiders, vis-à-vis outsiders. These categories of definition lend continuity to ethnic identity, but ethnic groups may choose to reinterpret their identity by redefining the boundaries of inclusion or choosing to emphasize certain symbols or traditions over others.⁶¹ Changing conditions both within the ethnic group and outside of it may prompt change. Competing agendas among insiders creates pressure from within, while discrimination, or demands for cultural conformity, creates pressure from without. It is the fluidity of ethnic identification that makes it worth studying over time. Changes in ethnic identification are indicative of changing priorities of group members, and may reflect changes in the relationships between group “insiders” and “outsiders,” especially members of the host society.

This study refers to “isolation,” “integration,” and “assimilation” in its analysis of changing definitions and perceptions of group identity. It is both convenient and relevant that “assimilation” emerged as a subject of theoretical inquiry during the twentieth century. Early twentieth-century definitions of “assimilation” are useful in a study that considers historical attitudes towards “newcomers” in North America. In their initial assessment of assimilation processes, Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess define assimilation as the “process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons and groups, and by sharing their experience and history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.”⁶² Assimilation is complete when the newcomer is culturally indistinguishable from the host. In Park’s estimation, an immigrant is:

⁶¹ Kathleen Neils Conzen et al, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U. S. A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 no. 1 (Fall 1992): 5.

⁶² Park and Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 735 as cited in Milton Stanley Orris, “Social Control and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of the Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities” (MA Diss., University of Saskatchewan, 1975) 26 and Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 62.

ordinarily considered assimilated as soon as he has acquired the language and the social ritual of the native community and can participate, without encountering prejudice, in the common life, economic and political...an immigrant is assimilated as soon as he has shown that he can 'get on in the country'.⁶³

Building on Park and Burgess' definition, Milton Gordon proposes seven "subprocesses" of assimilation in *Assimilation in American Life*. Milton labels these cultural or behavioural assimilation (adopting the cultural patterns of the host society, also called acculturation); structural assimilation (membership in clubs and institutions popular among the host society's citizens); marital assimilation (also called amalgamation; intermarriage with partners outside of the group, in this case non-Doukhobors); identificational assimilation ("development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society"; in this context, self-identification as Canadians rather than Doukhobors); attitude receptional assimilation (or the "absence of prejudice"); behavior receptional assimilation ("absence of discrimination"); and civic assimilation (integration into mainstream political/structural dynamic, or "absence of value and power conflict").⁶⁴

In this study, "isolation" (or "insulation") will refer to an ethnic group's efforts to create firm social, cultural, political, and economic boundaries between the group and the host society. In "isolation," interrelationship between ethnic group and host society members is limited. "Integration" will refer to an ethnic group's effort to remain distinct while engaging in social, cultural, political, and economic relationships with members of the host society. "Assimilation" will refer to the erasure of boundaries and distinctions between ethnic group members and members of the host society. This study examines the Doukhobors' gradual transition from "isolation," to "integration," to "assimilation,"

⁶³ Park, *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* as cited in Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 63.

⁶⁴ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 77.

acknowledging that for some Doukhobors, full “assimilation” has not yet transpired. It argues that the process was much slower, and much more arduous, than Canadians expected. It also argues that the process was complicated in part by the way in which Canadian hosts handled (or mishandled) the Doukhobors’ immigration and settlement. The “Doukhobor problem” was also a function, in large part, of competing agendas within the Doukhobor group.

Canadians touted a “mosaic” model of multiculturalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially vis-à-vis the American “melting pot” model of assimilation. Canadian multiculturalism is, however, a fairly recent national narrative. Throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century, assimilation was perceived to be the most expedient way to manage immigrant newcomers, whose traditions and cultural practices differed from, contradicted, or even threatened mainstream (Anglo-) Canadian or American culture: Anglo-conformity was thus expected of immigrant newcomers. Some advocates of Anglo-conformity believed that assimilation of immigrant newcomers was the best way to promote social stability: as soon as an immigrant assimilated to the nation’s mainstream culture, he or she would no longer be the object of discrimination and prejudice; he or she could participate fully in American or Canadian life. So long as immigrant newcomers assimilated, or at least promised to assimilate within a reasonable period, their presence could be tolerated.

Gordon points out that minority groups who were made to feel inferior because of assimilation efforts or discrimination suffered as a result. Gordon also argues that a more accommodating approach towards minorities might be less psychologically damaging. Gordon notes that “ethnic ‘self-hatred’ with its debilitating psychological consequences, family disorganization, and juvenile delinquency were not unusual results” of aggressive

Americanization pressure.⁶⁵ Gordon emphasizes that the frustration, pain, and discomfort of assimilation could be mitigated if a newcomer's ethnic heritage was respected and built *on* instead of *over*.⁶⁶ This analysis resonates strongly with the Doukhobor case in Canada. Since the upheaval created by the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors was especially virulent between 1947 and 1962, the publication of Gordon's study in 1964 seems timely.

Considering Gordon's seven subprocesses of assimilation in the Doukhobors' case proves very useful as a way to understand the Doukhobors' assimilation arc over the twentieth century, especially when one considers each Doukhobor subgroup in turn. As a group, the Doukhobors were slow to assimilate culturally to Canadian society; structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behaviour receptional, and civic assimilation followed slower still and in fact, among some Doukhobors, these later assimilation stages have not yet taken place, more than eleven decades after the Doukhobors' arrival in Canada.

In *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition*, John W. Friesen and Michael M. Verigin propose six categories for Canadian cultural minorities' attempts to protect and maintain their cultural identity, with special reference to the Doukhobors' case. These six categories include geographic isolation, education, endogamy, institutional socialization, language maintenance, and informal socialization.⁶⁷ Friesen and Verigin argue that the Doukhobors have employed strategies within each of these six categories over the course of the twentieth century.

The Doukhobors divided into three main groups (Sons of Freedom, Community/Orthodox, Independents) shortly after immigrating to Canada.⁶⁸ Each of these

⁶⁵ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁷ John W. Friesen and Michael M. Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 30.

⁶⁸ Freedomites subdivided later in the twentieth century. Notable Freedomite factions include the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (or "Reformed Doukhobors") and the group which

groups had a different response to, and strategy for addressing, assimilation pressure. The Sons of Freedom were slow to assimilate in any of Milton's seven categories: throughout the majority of the twentieth century they remained to the greatest extent possible separate from Canadian society, and fiercely opposed attempts to assimilate them to Canadian life. Most spoke Russian exclusively in the home and in their community; refused to participate in local organizations (for many families, this included schools); practiced endogamy not only within the Doukhobor group but also within the Freedomite group; maintained a nominal Russian or Doukhobor identity; maintained a strong opposition to "*angliki*" (Anglo-Canadian) cultural identity; remained distinct from the Canadian population and suffered extensive discrimination when they encountered mainstream Canadians; and refused to participate in political exercises including voting and census recording.

Independent Doukhobors assimilated, or at least fully integrated, much more readily into Canadian culture than members of either the Freedomite or Community/Orthodox groups. Within a few decades of their arrival, most Independent Doukhobors spoke English fluently (though may have spoken Russian at home); participated in local organizations (most Independent Doukhobors attained at least a high school if not also post-secondary level of education); intermarried with non-Doukhobors; identified as Canadians or as Doukhobor-Canadians; integrated into local society without prejudice or experiencing notable discrimination; and participated fully in political life, including standing for public office. While many Independent Doukhobors maintain cultural markers of their identity, most if not all integrate smoothly into Canada's multicultural society.

followed Michael "the Archangel" Verigin to Hilliers, B.C. These subdivisions will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. The analysis concerned "Sons of Freedom" here applies to all Freedomite factions.

Less isolated than the Sons of Freedom but more insular than the Independents, the Community/Orthodox⁶⁹ Doukhobors' integration into Canadian society was limited in the first half of the twentieth century, and increased gradually over the second half, as more Community/Orthodox Doukhobors pursued education and career opportunities outside of their local communities. Community/Orthodox Doukhobors did not integrate readily into Canadian society, and often experienced discrimination as a result. The experience of discrimination perpetuated their sense of being an oppressed – and separate – people. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Community Doukhobors remained suspicious of “*angliki*” outsiders, especially public figures who, in attempting to enforce Canadian law, interfered with Doukhobor religious and cultural practices. They resisted assimilation, but cooperated with authorities where cooperation did not contravene Doukhobor principles. As their insularity decreased and their exposure to Canadian way-of-life increased, the Orthodox Doukhobors started to integrate and in some cases assimilate, especially throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

This study will examine the history of the “Doukhobor problem” in Canada, and will argue that the “problem” was, at the core, an extended identity struggle.

The first part of this study (chapters 1-4) will consider the Doukhobors' foundational experiences in Russia, their immigration and settlement in Canada, their communal organization, and their leaders. The second part of this study (chapters 5-8) will focus on the “Doukhobor problem” in the middle of the twentieth century: sectarian identity, motivations

⁶⁹ Up until 1938, “Community” Doukhobors lived communally. When the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood filed for bankruptcy in 1938, “Community” Doukhobors transitioned towards greater economic and social independence. The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood was succeeded by the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, and those who identified as “Community” Doukhobors came to be known as “Orthodox” under this organizational umbrella.

for Freedomite depredations activity, public opinion about the Doukhobors, and the authorities' response to the "Doukhobor problem." The third part of this study (chapter 9) will focus on the resolution period in the latter third of the twentieth century. A review of the Doukhobors' first hundred years in Canada will reveal that the "Doukhobor problem" took root prior to their immigration, and continued to grow throughout the middle of the twentieth century as miscommunication and misunderstanding fanned the flames of discontent, both among the Doukhobors, and between the Doukhobors and Canadian authorities. Only when all parties understood that the "problem" had to do with contested identities, both between Doukhobor factions, and between Doukhobor "newcomers" and Canadian "hosts," could the problem be solved effectively.

CHAPTER 1

The “Doukhobor Problem” in Russia

Some analysts of the so-called “Doukhobor problem” in Canada have suggested that the Doukhobors’ “problem” was rooted in a “persecution” or “martyr” complex arising out of their negative experiences in Russia.¹ This pre-condition rendered them more suspicious of state authority and resistant to any perceived encroachment on their religious freedom in Canada. In fact, the Doukhobors’ perception of their past experiences in Russia did play an important identity-shaping role among them, both before and after their immigration to Canada. Their collective memories, articulated in stories, hymns, and prayers, commemorate their own and their ancestors’ courage and conviction in the face of persecution and hardship resulting out of conflict with church and state authorities in Russia.

While it is fair to say that the Doukhobors’ negative experiences in Russia affected their perception of authority in Canada, this explanation is insufficient, as it fails to acknowledge Canadian authorities’ role in exacerbating the “Doukhobor problem” after their immigration and throughout much of the twentieth century. The Russians treated the Doukhobors more severely than the Canadians did; however, there are clear parallels between Russia’s approach to the Doukhobors and Canada’s. Studying the Doukhobors’ experiences in Russia prior to emigration puts the Canadian “Doukhobor problem” into context. This chapter will highlight comparisons between Russia’s approach to the

¹ Amy Leigh, “Can the Doukhobor Problem be Solved?” *Canadian Welfare* 26 (1 December 1950): 4; “Says John Verigin: Violence Not Part of Doukhobor Faith,” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1958; Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs of the Kootenay Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, “A Brief Containing Suggestions for the Solution of the Freedomite Problem,” January 1963, p. 7, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, University of British Columbia Library; Allan Dixon, “The Doukhobor,” Dixon Collection, in the author’s possession; Koozma Tarasoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 106, page 622, Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia Library; William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 127; John McLaren with Tom Christensen and Catherine Parker, “Truancy and ‘Child Snatching’: Law, Social Control and Doukhobor Education in British Columbia, 1911-1935,” Paper presented at B. C. Studies Conference ‘94, Okanagan University College, Kelowna, B.C., October 7th-10th, 1994, 37.

Doukhobors and Canada's, and will draw attention to key incidents in the Doukhobors' collective memory.

It is difficult to pinpoint the Doukhobors' origins, or to enumerate them accurately at any given point in their Russian history.² Fearing persecution, many sectarians withheld information about their origins, beliefs, and membership. The Doukhobors did not produce written records of their own, so information about their early history draws from their oral tradition and outsiders' reports. Estimates of the size of their group range from a few thousand to tens of thousands; the upper limit of the Doukhobors' numbers in Russia at any time prior to 1899 is estimated to be 30,000.³ It is likely that the Doukhobors emerged along with similar sectarian groups in the aftermath of the *raskol* (schism) of 1652. The *raskol* resulted after Patriarch Nikon initiated a number of reforms to Russian Orthodox Church liturgy in order to bring it into better alignment with the practices of the Greek Orthodox Church.⁴ The *raskolniki* who rejected the reforms were relegated to sectarian status, and were subjected to church and state oppression. They were arrested, interrogated, and tortured for information about their cohorts.⁵ In extreme cases, *raskolniki* were sentenced to death by burning.

While the group's origins predate 1785, it was in this year that the group received a distinct name: *dukhoborets*, which is a conjunction of "*dukh*" (spirit) and "*borets*," (fighter or wrestler). The Doukhobors claim that Archbishop Ambrosius of Ekaterinoslav province

² See Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhor History* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1992), 7-13 for an account of the Doukhobors' origins, based on Doukhor collective memory and oral narration.

³ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, e-mail message to author, 15 April 2010. See also Nicholas B. Breyfogle, "Building Doukhorii: Religious Culture, Social Identity and Russian Colonization in Transcaucasia, 1845-1895," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 25 and Koozma Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Mir Publication Society, 1982): 10.

⁴ Though some suggest that Doukhor ideology developed prior to, and independent of, the *raskol*. See Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 2.

⁵ J. F. C. Wright, *Slava Bohu: The Story of the Dukhobors* (Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940), 11 and Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 95.

suggested the name; Svetlana Inikova argues, however, that it was actually Nikifor, Archbishop of Slovenia, who first labeled them Spirit Wrestlers.⁶ The name was originally applied derisively, to indicate that the Doukhobors were wrestling *against* the Spirit of God. However, the Doukhobors adopted the name, arguing that they were wrestling with the power of the Spirit, that the Spirit of God resided within each individual, and that it was up to each individual to respond to the calling of the Spirit of God articulated from within.⁷

The Doukhobors' theological beliefs are similar to those of the Society of Friends (Quakers).⁸ The Doukhobors believe that the Spirit of God is alive in each person, and manifests as an "inner voice" or spiritual "spark." The belief that the Spirit of God resides in each individual engendered an intense respect for human life and thus, the belief that war and violence are sinful.⁹ It also suggested the spiritual equality of all people.¹⁰ As such, the Doukhobors favoured cooperation over competition, and communalism over materialism. The Doukhobors rejected government authority, though they were willing to comply with government regulations where compliance did not force them to contravene their Doukhobor principles against war and against swearing oaths.¹¹ The Doukhobors rejected clerical

⁶ Svetlana A. Inikova, "Spiritual Origins and the Beginnings of Doukhobor History," in *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on their Unity and Diversity*, ed. Andrew Donskov, John Woodsworth, and Chad Gaffield (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa and the Institute of Canadian Studies at the University of Ottawa, 2000), 2.

⁷ Koozma Tarasoff, "Doukhobor Survival through the Centuries," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 no. 3 (1995): 5.

⁸ The Quaker group also originated in the mid seventeenth century. Though the theologies espoused by both groups overlap in key ways, there is no evidence to suggest that either one inspired the other. Recognizing the correspondence between their beliefs, however, the Quakers took a keen interest in the Doukhobors' welfare at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Quaker representatives studied the Doukhobors, interacted with them, and provided both material and moral support to help alleviate the Doukhobors' suffering prior to and immediately following their immigration to Canada.

⁹ John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952), 7.

¹⁰ Breyfogle, "Building Doukhoboriia," 31. This included to a large extent equality between men and women, though socially speaking amongst Doukhobors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there remained division of labour between men and women and men retained a dominant social position. It is interesting to note that the sole female Doukhobor leader, Lukeria Kalmykova (leader 1864-1887) is the best loved and mostly fondly remembered of the Doukhobor leaders.

¹¹ "Teachings of the Sect: Doukhobors' answers in a discussion with Archimandrite Evgenij and their statements during interrogation" (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in John Woodsworth, comp., and trans., *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhobor Emigration to Canada*, with a foreword by Vladimir Tolstoy (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 1999), 27.

authority as well as material forms of worship, especially iconography, the symbol of the cross, rituals associated with the sacraments, and relics. These the Doukhobors viewed as superfluous, believing that one could approach God personally and directly through reflection and prayer.¹² Though often compared to Anabaptists such as the Mennonites, the Doukhobors' theology departs from Anabaptism in two main respects: the Doukhobors do not privilege the Bible as a spiritual text, and do not practice baptism or recognize it as sacramental.

The Doukhobors' belief in the principle of equality rendered them critical of class divisions as well as external political, legal, or clerical authority. Internally, however, they deferred to a single leader who governed the group's religious and political affairs. In the earliest years of the Doukhobors' existence, leaders were charismatic, philosophically-minded men who appeared among the Doukhobors promoting new theological approaches. At the end of the 1700s, however, the Doukhobors began to view leadership as hereditary, and divinely inspired.¹³ This contradiction was problematic. The combination of "religious anarchism and theocratic autocracy"¹⁴ offended Russian government and religious officials alike,¹⁵ and had important implications in the later manifestation of the "Doukhobor problem" in Canada, as will be highlighted in chapter 4.

The Doukhobors were often severely persecuted by Russian political, legal, and clerical authorities. The Russian Orthodox Church objected to the Doukhobors' alternative religious beliefs. The reigning Tsars or Tsarinas and their representatives objected to the

¹² Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1905):120; Inikova, "Spiritual Origins and the Beginnings of Doukhobor History," 6; Sam George Stupnikoff, *Historical Saga of the Doukhobor Faith, 1750-1990s* (Saskatoon: Apex Graphics, 1992), 1; Joseph E. Podovnikoff, in Eli Popoff, ed., "Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, Symposium Meetings, 1974-1982," ([Grand Forks, B. C.]: 1997), 225.

¹³ Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 2-3.

¹⁴ Peter Brock, "Vasya Pozdnyakov's Dukhobor Narrative," *Slavonic and East European Review* 43, no. 100 (1964): 153.

¹⁵ James Mavor, introduction to *Christian Martyrdom in Russia: An Account of the Members of the Universal Brotherhood of Doukhoborts now Migrating from the Caucasus to Canada*, ed. by Vladimir Tchertkoff (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1899), 5; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 5.

Doukhobors' challenge to state authority and refusal to perform military service. Religious and political non-conformity posed a problem for Russian church and state authorities, and *raskolniki* – both Old Believers who refused to accept the Nikonian Reforms and sectarians such as the Doukhobors – were oppressed in order to stem their growth.

Imperial Russia faced a number of challenges. Chief among them was the challenge of governing a large, culturally diverse state. By the time Peter the Great (1682-1725) ascended to the throne, the Tsardom of Russia had become the largest state in the world. Through successive military and political conquests, Russia had acquired significant landmass and incorporated an ethnically diverse population, especially at the borderlands. Russia's increasing size and increasing cultural diversity put a strain on its existing political and administrative structures.

Peter the Great is generally recognized for “modernizing” Russia by bringing it into closer alignment with Europe culturally, materially, and politically. Peter's primary strategy for establishing and maintaining law and order was to consolidate leadership under one regent and one church. In fact, Peter formally incorporated the church as part of Russia's official administration. This intertwined the Russian Orthodox church with the tsarist political rule to the extent that they reinforced one another. As such, any challenge to the Tsar's rule was a challenge to the tenets of the Orthodox Church, and *vice versa*: one could not reject one without confronting the other.¹⁶ This had an identity-defining function, such that belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church was considered by many to be a marker of “Russian” identity.¹⁷ Thus, in the eyes of church and state authority, rejecting Orthodoxy was akin to rejecting Russian ethnicity.¹⁸ Dissenters were perceived as a threat to the

¹⁶ Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, xiii.

¹⁷ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 20; Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia, Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris and Leach, 1903), 288.

¹⁸ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 20; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 5.

hegemony of both church and state, as well as to emerging “ethno-confessional” definitions of Russian identity.¹⁹ Church and state authorities expected cultural conformity, especially from those who had Russian ethnic origins. Those who failed to cooperate were subject to punishment.²⁰

To hold peculiar religious beliefs was enough to render a group suspicious; the fact that the Doukhobors were perceived to be actively spreading their anti-church and anti-state beliefs was, in the church’s and in the state’s view, intolerable. Some church and state authorities feared that the Doukhobors were proselytizing amongst the masses, fuelling peasant dissent, challenging the authority of the law, and causing public disturbances. The Doukhobors’ doctrine, which proposed the equality of all people and suggested that each individual could have an unmediated, direct relationship with God, appealed to peasants who resented their social position and were tired of the church’s demands.²¹ The Doukhobors posed a problem because, not only did they persist in their own beliefs, but they were also converting their neighbours.²²

The Doukhobors’ pacifism was problematic as well. Challenging the Tsar’s right to require military service undermined Russia’s “social order.”²³ Authorities feared that the Doukhobors’ non-violent doctrine could appeal to non-Doukhobor Russians and discourage

¹⁹ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 21.

²⁰ John LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700-1825* (New York: Oxford University press, 1991), 202, 298; Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983) 6-8; Robert O. Crummey, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State, 1694-1855* (Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 40; Peter Waldron, “Religious Toleration in Late Imperial Russia” in *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 105. See also George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 58-59; “Brief outline of the subsequent history of the Doukhobor sect” (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 5; Stepniak, *The Russian Peasantry* (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1977), 320; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 10.

²¹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 31. Also Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 8.

²² Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 31. Also Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 8.

²³ Joshua A. Sanborn, “Non-Violent Protest and the Russian State: The Doukhobors in 1895 and 1937” in *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada*, 85; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 22.

citizens from enlisting or cooperating with military command.²⁴ The state was not well equipped to respond to pacifistic challenges to state authority.²⁵ Non-violent action is difficult to characterize as a threat to social order. As such, any punitive state response could appear excessive. Violent action against a non-violent group could arouse public opprobrium both nationally and internationally, and there is some evidence to suggest that Russian authorities attempted to prevent news of any violence against the pacifist Doukhobors from “leaking out.”²⁶

In short, Russia’s “Doukhobor problem” was that these non-conformists challenged state and church authority, which in turn, it was feared, would threaten Russia’s social order. The church and state sought to contain the problem. As will be discussed in more detail below, state authorities had two general responses to challenges posed by the Doukhobors. The first was to isolate the Doukhobors from their neighbours to prevent the spread of Doukhobor ideals, either by providing the Doukhobors with land incentives to encourage them to self-segregate, or by exiling the Doukhobors as a punishment for non-conformity. The second was to punish them directly, imposing economic sanctions or physical punishment. Both isolation and direct punishment were used to limit their growth or to eliminate them outright, either by forcing them to convert or by exterminating them.

The Doukhobors’ experience of persecution in Russia had a significant impact on their group identity. First, the shared experience of trauma strengthened the bonds of unity among those most severely treated, and created a sense of separate ethnicity among them. Second, the conduct of church and state authorities confirmed the Doukhobors’ suspicions of both organizations. Third, withstanding religious persecution led the Doukhobors to perceive

²⁴ Sanborn, “Non-Violent Protest,” 87.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁶ Michael J. de K. Holman, “British Tolstoyans, *The New Order* and the Doukhobor in the Later 1890s: Solidarity in Word and Deed,” in *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada*, 133; Josh Sanborn, “Pacifist Politics and Peasant Politics: Tolstoy and the Doukhobors, 1895-1899,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 63. Also Sanborn, “Non-Violent Protest,” 100.

themselves as Christian martyrs. To suffer for God's sake was valued and respected among Doukhobor adherents. Those who suffered and remained faithful to their beliefs were commemorated among the Doukhobors as heroes. This martyr motif would come to play a significant part in Canada's "Doukhobor problem," which is why it is useful to get a sense of what the Doukhobors experienced before their emigration. It is also useful to consider Russia's perception of and strategy for solving the "Doukhobor problem," because despite different political and social structures, there are comparisons to be drawn between the Russians' and the Canadians' approach to the challenges posed by the Doukhobors, which will be highlighted below.

Though the personality of local officials mattered significantly,²⁷ centralized governmental and church administration meant that the Doukhobors' experience in Russia was highly dependent on the personal character and political priorities of the reigning regent. When the Tsar or Tsarina was preoccupied with more pressing issues, the Doukhobors were left in peace. When the Doukhobors could be useful as a buffer between Orthodox Russia and the peoples of the Russian borderlands, or as settlers on undeveloped land, the authorities treated them tolerantly. When the Doukhobors created administrative problems, or when the national priority was ensuring citizens' conformity, the Doukhobors were subjected to harsher treatment, including corporal punishment, imprisonment, and exile. In order to understand the Doukhobors' historical experience, it is useful to examine successive eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian tsarist administrations, as their policies significantly shaped the Doukhobors' experiences.

Not much is known about the Doukhobors' specific experience prior to their naming in 1795. However, social and political instability in the Empire in the mid 1700s meant that

²⁷ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 219.

regents preoccupied with maintaining their rule were less concerned about sectarian non-conformity. During the reigns of Anne (1730-40) and Elizabeth (1741-62),²⁸ it is likely that the Doukhobors were, like other sectarians in Russia, more or less ignored.²⁹

It is somewhat ironic that the persecution of the Doukhobors escalated during the reign of “enlightened” monarch, Catherine II (1762-1796). Catherine’s claim to the crown was broadly endorsed after she deposed her husband, and she was at liberty during her years as regent to pursue a number of progressive policies intended to improve Russia’s status and the welfare of Russian citizens. In general, Catherine advocated religious toleration, believing that persecution would further push sectarians into extremism.³⁰ Catherine took a hard line with the Doukhobors, however, recognizing first that their beliefs extended beyond strictly religious non-conformity, and second, that their beliefs appeared to attract converts.³¹ The Doukhobors’ quest for converts resulted in greater scrutiny of their activities, as did Doukhor leader Illarion Pobirokhin’s public criticism of Russian authority during his leadership term between 1775 and 1785.³²

The first major government investigation of the Doukhobors in 1779 resulted in sentences of exile and corporal punishment, which included whippings, the removal of noses and tongues, manacled in irons, and confinement to wooden stocks.³³ The children of parents suspected of being revolutionaries were taken into state custody and raised in the

²⁸ Date ranges refer to terms as regents.

²⁹ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 13. Also, Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 24.

³⁰ “Brief outline of the subsequent history of the Doukhor sect” (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29 and Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 10.

³¹ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 10 and Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29.

³² “Brief outline of the subsequent history of the Doukhor sect” (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29; Eli A. Popoff, *Historical Exposition on Doukhor Beliefs* (Grand Forks, B.C.: POP offset inc., 1982), 7. As an example, Pobirokhin reportedly entered the city of Tambov with a group of followers, proclaiming that he had “come to judge the world.” For his efforts, he and his family were sentenced to Siberian exile. Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 31.

³³ According to Woodcock and Avakumovic, corporal punishment was exercised at the behest of the Russian Orthodox Church, who recognized that mere exile was not sufficient to quash this pernicious sect. *The Doukhobors*, 32. See also Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 3; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 14; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 332; V. Tolstoy in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, xi.

Orthodox tradition.³⁴ Thirty-one Doukhobors who had been preaching in the streets received life sentences of hard labour in the Ekaterinburg mines. Thirty-four other Doukhobors were to be whipped, dispossessed, and exiled to Siberia. This sentence was subsequently commuted to hard labour in the Ekaterinburg mines. The prisoners' children were to be placed in the custody of guardians who would raise them in the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church.³⁵ Notably, the government of British Columbia also chose to separate Doukhor (Sons of Freedom) children from their parents in an effort to deal with the "Doukhor problem" over 150 years later, as will be discussed in chapter 8.

Catherine the Great's son, Paul (1796-1801), advocated religious toleration at first. His benevolence was retracted, however, upon learning in 1799 that some Doukhobors were preaching that rulers were unnecessary.³⁶ Fearing a challenge to his authority, Paul authorized a campaign against the Doukhor dissidents. At the end of the eighteenth century, Doukhor prisoners who remained committed to their ideals were sentenced to corporal punishment, exile to Siberia, or hard labor so as to prevent further converts and punish those who preached heresy and treason.³⁷

Alexander I (1801-1825) granted the Doukhobors a reprieve. Alexander did not want to persecute the group for what he deemed "religious error."³⁸ As Alexander explained in a letter to the Military Governor of Cherson on 9 December 1816, oppressive approaches designed to crush the sect taken in the thirty years prior to 1801 actually "increased the

³⁴ Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 3; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 14; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 332; V. Tolstoy in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, xi.

³⁵ As cited in Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 32. Children were released to the guardianship of "the mayor of the town or of the parish, together with the priests." Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 245.

³⁶ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 10.

³⁷ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 244-245; Stepniak, *The Russian Peasantry*, 320.

³⁸ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 122. See also Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 14-15.

number of its adherents.” Alexander hoped the Doukhobors would become more deferential to state authority if shown benevolence.³⁹

Though Alexander was prepared to tolerate the Doukhobors’ religious difference, he was not interested in seeing the Doukhobor movement spread to other constituents. To minimize the Doukhobors’ contact with other Russians, Alexander issued an edict in 1802 allowing the Doukhobors to resettle in the Taurida Province in the Crimea, in an area colloquially known as *Molochnye Vody*, or Milky Waters.⁴⁰ This was not an exile *per se*. The move was conducted on “exceptionally favourable terms,” and was aimed, in part, at providing the Doukhobors with some level of security.⁴¹ Close to four thousand Doukhobors received almost forty acres of land, in addition to an interest-free loan of one hundred rubles per family.⁴² The Doukhobors were also granted five years of tax exemption and a conditional exemption from military service.⁴³ Clergy were discouraged from approaching the Doukhobors at Milky Waters and state authorities were not to bother them unless they demonstrated flagrant disobedience to state authority.⁴⁴ Police were instructed to let the Doukhobors settle together. The Doukhobors were not permitted to intermix with other settlers, provide asylum to fugitives, or attract converts. The police were to protect them

³⁹ As cited in Robert Pinkerton, *Russia: Miscellaneous Observations on the Past and Present State of That Country and Its Inhabitants* (London: Seeley and Sons, 1833), 171-174; Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 26.

⁴⁰ Eli A. Popoff, “The Doukhobors: The ‘Enigma’ and the Reality,” in *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada*, 26. See also Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 11 and 122.

⁴¹ A Representative of the Department of Police, “Brief Outline of the Subsequent History of the Doukhobor Sect” (n.d.) as cited in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29.

⁴² Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 5; Breyfogle, “Building Doukhoboriia,” 27. Breyfogle notes an alternate estimate of closer to 8000 Doukhobors (45 n. 21).

⁴³ Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29; Popoff, “The Doukhobors: The ‘Enigma’ and the Reality,” 26; and Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 37.

⁴⁴ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 245.

from attack, but otherwise leave them alone.⁴⁵ The Doukhobors flourished at Milky Waters, and their settlement there is recalled fondly in their collective memory narratives.⁴⁶

Alexander personally visited the Doukhobors at the Milky Waters settlement in 1818. He attended a religious service, was housed in the Doukhobors' "Orphan's Home," received and responded to a petition presented to him, and was reportedly impressed by those he had met during his stay.⁴⁷ That the circumstances for Alexander I's death were somewhat unclear gave rise to speculation that he actually abdicated his crown in favour of a quiet life among religious sectarians. Some have even suggested that he chose to live among the Doukhobors, though this seems unlikely.⁴⁸

While Alexander I's tolerant approach to the Doukhobors did provide respite from religious persecution, the break was neither total nor universal during his reign. Despite his benevolent attitude towards the Doukhobors, local authorities continued to harass them on occasion.⁴⁹ Some of this treatment was arbitrary, and some was in response to Doukhor provocation. In 1807, some Siberian Doukhobors were found guilty of committing "seditious acts by openly declaring their beliefs" and were sentenced to military service.⁵⁰ In the same year, Doukhobors who had been enlisted to military service during the First Turkish War demonstrated for the first time their refusal to bear arms, and authorities responded harshly.⁵¹

Alexander favoured sectarians who demonstrated agricultural ability: in 1816, Alexander improved the Doukhobors' status by labeling them "colonists," who would thus be subject to the Minister of the Interior's authority, instead of "heretical" sectarians, who

⁴⁵ A Representative of the Department of Police, "Brief Outline of the Subsequent History of the Doukhor Sect" (n.d.) as cited in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 29.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Popoff, *Stories From Doukhor History*, 53.

⁴⁷ Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 31 and Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 51.

⁴⁸ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 51; Popoff, *Stories from Doukhor History*, 45.

⁴⁹ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 123.

⁵⁰ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 246.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

fell under the Minister of Police's purview.⁵² Yet in 1817, the emperor apparently prevented other Doukhobors from joining those already settled at Milky Waters. In 1822, authorities ordered that Doukhor land holdings, which had increased throughout the Doukhobors' tenure in the Milky Waters area, be reduced to the forty acres originally allotted them in 1802.⁵³ A Ministerial Committee decided in 1819 that Doukhobors and Molokans should not be permitted to run for public office and that those who had already been elected be released from their duties.⁵⁴ Thus, though Alexander I is considered the Doukhobors' "great benefactor" for the kindness he showed them,⁵⁵ the Doukhobors continued to face difficulty under his administration.

Alexander's successor, Nicholas I (1825-1855), was hard on rebels, dissenters, and sectarians.⁵⁶ The Decembrist uprising in 1825 and the Polish rebellion in 1830-31 convinced Nicholas, a former soldier, that non-conformity or any threat to Russia's "Cossack military tradition" was intolerable.⁵⁷ Nicholas issued his first decree concerning the Doukhobors on 6 February 1826, which forbade both the preaching of Doukhorism in public and the conduct of Doukhor religious services. In addition, Doukhobors located in the Milky Waters area were prohibited from carrying passports.⁵⁸ In the 1830s, Nicholas changed the terms of the Milky Waters Doukhobors' military service exemption. In 1834, the Doukhobors were permitted to find replacement soldiers in the local Muslim Tartar population. By 1839 they were restricted to finding a replacement within the Doukhor or Molokan pacifist sects.⁵⁹

⁵² Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 17 and Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 50.

⁵³ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 53. Tarasoff points out that the Doukhobors were working one hundred acres of land on average, more than double the amount originally allotted them in 1802. Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 7.

⁵⁴ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 53.

⁵⁵ Popoff, *Stories from Doukhor History*, 44.

⁵⁶ Stepniak, *The Russian Peasantry*, 320.

⁵⁷ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-55. See also Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 258, 260 and Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 10.

⁵⁹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 55.

Pacifists who refused to perform their military duties were flogged, and ordered to the front lines where they would be among the first killed in battle.⁶⁰

Beginning in 1830 and continuing into the 1840s, Doukhobors who continued to reject Orthodox religious doctrine were banished to the Wet Mountains district of the Transcaucasus.⁶¹ Tsarist authorities expected that the area's harsh climate and hostile residents would challenge the Doukhobors.⁶² In theory, the Doukhobors would either have to kill or be killed.⁶³ Apparently, Nicholas hoped that the Doukhobors would give up on their pacifism and religious non-conformity or else be eliminated altogether.⁶⁴ In fact, the stress of the relocation, economic hardship, agricultural failure, and hunger resulted in a significant death rate, especially in the first year of their resettlement in the Transcaucasus: over the course of one month, twenty-two out of 265 migrating Doukhobors died; within another six months, another thirty-six succumbed.⁶⁵

The conditions in the Transcaucasus were harsh, and the exile was intended as a punishment. Russian authorities had additional motivations for forcing the Doukhobors to relocate, however. When the Doukhobors first settled at Milky Waters in 1801, the area was unimproved. Their labour rendered it attractive to other farmers, and non-Doukhobor demand for the land increased. Part of Alexander I's motivation for isolating the Doukhobors was to prevent them from converting their Orthodox neighbours. As Orthodox Russians moved into the region, made attractive through the efforts of sectarian colonists such as the Doukhobors, administrators feared that the Orthodox living in close proximity to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 50-52. Doukhobors living outside of the Milky Waters area had already been subject to relocation to the Transcaucasus as of 1826. The Milky Waters Doukhobors were subject to other policies aimed at limiting their wealth and mobility, but were not subject to relocation until the 1840s.

⁶² Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 11 and Popoff, "The Doukhobors: The 'Enigma' and the Reality," 27.

⁶³ Popoff, "The Doukhobors: The 'Enigma' and the Reality," 27.

⁶⁴ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 55.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

the Doukhobor might begin to adopt their dissident beliefs.⁶⁶ This situation was undesirable.⁶⁷ Furthermore, demand for land exceeded availability. The Doukhobors' land, improved after thirty years of their agricultural efforts, was now valuable.

Forcing the Doukhobors to relinquish their assets in Milky Waters and exiling them to the Transcaucasus thus served two purposes. First, it opened the Milky Waters land to Orthodox settlers, and eliminated the chance that they would be exposed to Doukhobor heresy.⁶⁸ Second, it brought skilled agriculturalists – the Doukhobors – to the undeveloped borderland of the Transcaucasus. It is possible that part of the motivation for relocating the Doukhobors to the Transcaucasus was to see whether they could render that land as productive as the Milky Waters settlement.⁶⁹ This is similar to the situation the Doukhobors encountered in Western Canada in the early 1900s, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. The Doukhobors were welcome to inhabit undeveloped and unpopulated areas of the Canadian Northwest in 1899. So long as they were productive, their cultural differences were tolerated. Once Canadian settlers became interested in the land, however, the legal exceptions and cultural tolerance extended to the Doukhobors were withdrawn, and their land was redistributed to Canadian farmers.

The Transcaucasian exile is remembered among the Doukhobors as a hardship and an example of their continued persecution in Imperial Russia, yet it offered the Doukhobors a few advantages. On the borderlands, they were more or less left alone by the Russian Orthodox Church and the state, preoccupied with foreign affairs in the lead-up to the Crimean War, took less interest in policing them. As their settlements were considered penal colonies, the Doukhobors were not subject to military conscription, which was not an issue in

⁶⁶ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 55.

⁶⁷ William Blakemore, "R. C. on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912," T11; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 60.

⁶⁸ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 57.

⁶⁹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 60.

any case in the Caucasus until 1874.⁷⁰ In fact, some Doukhobors volunteered to move to the Transcaucasus, hoping greater isolation would provide respite from surveillance and persecution.⁷¹ As poor as conditions were in the Transcaucasus, they were an improvement for some who experienced egregious abuse at the hands of local officials elsewhere.⁷²

In fact, the migration to the Transcaucasus constitutes a pivotal, identity-defining moment for the Doukhobors. Those who found the conditions overwhelming could choose to “convert” to Orthodoxy. Those who persisted tended to be the most committed to the tenets of the Doukhobor faith.⁷³ In fact, in some respects the Transcaucasian relocation marks the emergence of a separate Doukhobor ethnic identity.⁷⁴ The concentration of those committed to the faith, and the isolation from Russian church and state authorities meant that the Doukhobors could establish a virtual “state within a state” or “Doukhororia.”⁷⁵ Their success in the face of hardship impressed local authorities, and they were perceived as having a stabilizing, and Russifying, effect on the newly incorporated borderland. In recognition of the colonial role they were playing, local authorities permitted them exceptional administrative liberties. Thus, the Doukhobors’ isolation, intended to punish them for their religious difference, resulted in their ethnicization.

Alexander II (1855-1881), who liberated the Russian serfs, showed the Doukhobors benevolence during the early years of his reign.⁷⁶ This tone changed with the passing of the Universal Military Service requirement in 1874, which declared that irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or social position, all men residing within the borders of the Russian Empire would

⁷⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 66.

⁷¹ Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 55, 59, 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 82, 91, 98. Estimates of the number of Doukhobors settled or exiled in Transcaucasia vary widely, from five thousand to fifteen thousand. Breyfogle, “Building Doukhororia,” 43 n. 5.

⁷⁴ Breyfogle, “Building Doukhororia,” 41; Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 166-167.

⁷⁵ Breyfogle, “Building Doukhororia,” 26, 40; Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 231; Ethel Dunn, “Spiritual and Economic Renewal Among Molokans and Doukhobors,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 no. 3 (1995): 165.

⁷⁶ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 66 and Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 12.

be subject to compulsory military service.⁷⁷ While this manifesto did not immediately affect those Doukhobors living in the Caucasus, it did forecast a change in their situation.

The Doukhobors' welfare was again jeopardized under Alexander III (1881-1894). On the advice of the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Constantine Pobedonostsev, Alexander began to dismantle the liberalized atmosphere Alexander II had built mid-century, and adopted a policy of sectarian repression.⁷⁸ Alexander III dismissed his predecessor's liberal-minded advisors, choosing to surround himself instead with military and church representatives, each of which sought harsher repression of sectarian and pacifist minorities.⁷⁹ Particularly problematic for the Doukhobors, universal military service was introduced into the Caucasus in 1887. Though previous policies calling for conscription had been applied inconsistently, Russia's political situation in the late nineteenth century prompted authorities to follow conscription regulations more closely.⁸⁰ Again, it was clear that the Doukhobors would soon have to choose between their pacifist beliefs and cooperation with the state.

Though Alexanders II and III adopted increasingly aggressive policies regarding religious minorities and political dissenters, the Doukhobors managed to live in relative security during their leadership terms. This was partially due to the adept internal leadership of Lukeria Vasilevna Kalmykova (1864-1886). According to Doukhobor tradition, they lived "peacefully and contentedly" throughout the twenty years of Kalmykova's reign, and the Doukhobors commemorate her sagacious and compassionate management of their community with a great deal of love and respect.⁸¹ She often played the role of judge amongst her followers, who perceived her as fair-minded.⁸² Kalmykova's relationship with tsarist authorities was positive, largely due to her willingness to cooperate whenever possible

⁷⁷ Sanborn, "Non-Violent Protest," 84.

⁷⁸ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 75.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁰ James Mavor, introduction to *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 6. Also Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 27

⁸¹ Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 64. Also Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 13.

⁸² Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 71.

with government officials. When Alexander II's brother, Grand Duke Michael, requested Doukhobor assistance with the transportation of ammunition to Russian troops fighting in Kars during the military campaign against Turkey of 1877-78, Kalmykova advised her followers to cooperate even if doing so would be a compromise of their pacifist sensibilities. Kalmykova's willingness to negotiate a compromise between tsarist officials and her people on this occasion and others may well have saved the Doukhobors a large measure of difficulty and persecution in the mid-nineteenth century. A representative of the Department of Police acknowledged that Kalmykova was a capable leader, whose firm rule ensured social and economic stability for the group. The Doukhobors' affairs ran smoothly under her supervision, and the police had had no need to interfere.⁸³

Kalmykova's death in December of 1886 marked a turning point in Doukhobor affairs. The mourning community was immediately divided over two issues: leadership and money. One faction of Doukhobors believed that the widowed and childless Kalmykova had selected Peter Vasilevich Verigin as her successor. When he turned twenty, she had him move in with her at the *Sirotskii Dom*,⁸⁴ where she supervised his education in Doukhobor history, philosophy, and theology in preparation for the leadership role. However, Kalmykova's brother, Michael Gubanov, and her assistant, Alesha Zubkov, felt that they should be the new leaders. By the time of Kalmykova's *pominki*,⁸⁵ her followers had already divided into two camps. The majority, to be known henceforth as the Large Party, supported Verigin. The minority, to be known as the Small Party, supported Gubanov.⁸⁶ Verigin presented himself at Kalmykova's *pominki* as the leader of the Doukhobors.⁸⁷

⁸³ "Event of 1886 and Subsequent Years," in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 34.

⁸⁴ Orphan's Home, the administrative center for the Doukhobor community.

⁸⁵ Commemorative service held six weeks after the burial service.

⁸⁶ The Large Party represented about 70% of the Doukhobors, while the Small Party represented about 30% of the group. Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 46 n. 9.

⁸⁷ The Large Party was sometimes referred to as the "mad" Doukhobors; the Small Party, the "bad" Doukhobors.

Immediately after the *pominki* service, government officials arrested Verigin for being in Gorelovka without a permit. This arrest was likely facilitated by members of the Small Party who had anticipated difficulty at Kalmykova's funeral proceedings.⁸⁸ If this was the case, it represented a departure from traditional Doukhobor practice. The Doukhobors had long resisted state interference in their private matters, with good reason. If the Small Party Doukhobors did invite the police to intervene, then they must have had considerable motivation for doing so.

Part of their motivation may have been the assets Kalmykova managed on the Doukhobors' behalf. Gubanov argued that the Orphan's Home and the assets held there in Kalmykova's name rightfully belonged to him as the next of kin. Verigin and the Large Party adherents argued that the money, which had been contributed by the Doukhobors at large and held in trust for their use, belonged to all Doukhobors.⁸⁹ In an effort to secure Gubanov's claim, Zubkov solicited the aid of Tsarist authorities. Again, inviting outsiders to arbitrate in Doukhobor financial and political affairs was a risky maneuver, considering the low level of trust many Doukhobors had for state authorities. The Small Party's move heightened the Large Party's indignation, and deepened the divide between the two groups.⁹⁰ This divide and the animosity it bred amongst the Doukhobors in the late nineteenth century would have serious consequences for the Doukhobor population in Russia and would precipitate the events leading to their emigration.

Tsarist authorities and Small Party advocates hoped that arresting and exiling Verigin would put an end to the Large Party's ambitions for control of the Doukhobors' interests.⁹¹

⁸⁸ "Events of 1886 and subsequent years" (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 37; Nicholas B. Breyfogle, "Rethinking the Origins of the Doukhobor Arms-Burning: 1886-1893," in *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada*, 67.

⁸⁹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 45, 78-83. Also Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 228.

⁹⁰ Breyfogle, "Rethinking the Origins of the Doukhobor Arms-Burning" 64-77.

⁹¹ Representative of the Department of Police, "Events of the 1886 and Subsequent Years," in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 39.

Verigin supporters, galvanized by what they perceived as unjust meddling in their affairs and unwarranted punishment of the man they viewed as their leader, became even more committed to Verigin and more determined to subscribe to his advice.⁹² Despite the authorities' intentions, Verigin continued to attempt communication with his followers, urging them to disobey the authorities and claim Kalmykova's assets.⁹³ Verigin's communications caused, in the authorities' estimation, several disturbances between his followers and the Small Party.⁹⁴ The authorities considered Verigin to be responsible for discord among the Doukhobors and deemed his advice detrimental to his followers' welfare.⁹⁵ The authorities' concerns prompted them to monitor the Veriginites closely, and to transfer Verigin to an even more isolated location.⁹⁶

Verigin continued to influence his followers, however, by covert correspondence or through his representatives still living among the Doukhobors who claimed to know what Verigin's intentions were. Ivan Konkin, Verigin's brother-in-law, began to exert his influence over the Large Party Doukhobors. He advised his followers to change their marriage and burial customs, to refrain from consuming alcohol, tobacco, and meat, and to conduct prayer services nightly.⁹⁷ Authorities reported that Verigin was encouraging Large Party Doukhobors to challenge state authority more rigorously, and to follow his lead exclusively.⁹⁸

Thus, Verigin's Large Party distinguished themselves from their Small Party counterparts. While Small Party Doukhobors were prepared to "relax" some of the rules of

⁹² Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 20 and Popoff, "Doukhobors: The 'Enigma'," 28. Also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 86-87.

⁹³ Representative of the Department of Police, "Events of the 1886 and Subsequent Years," in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 38.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

Doukhorism, Verigin called for increased commitment to, and development of, Doukhor ideals. The Large Party Doukhobors were called on to practice abstinence and thrift.⁹⁹ Consequently, the Small Party labeled Large Party Doukhobors “mad” for their religious fervor. In turn, Large Party adherents called members of the Small Party “bad” or “no” Doukhobors for refusing to adopt a stricter, more conservative lifestyle.¹⁰⁰ This dichotomy between “mad” Doukhobors who took the group’s ideology to its extremes, and “bad” Doukhobors who failed to live up to the group’s ideals would be repeated in Canada and constitute a major component of the “Doukhor problem,” as will be discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 9.

Verigin’s leadership strategy left the Doukhobors vulnerable to increased state intervention and oppression in three ways. First, fissures in Doukhor solidarity weakened the group. Second, animosity between the factions led members of each group to involve state officials and law-enforcement officers in internal Doukhor matters. Third, viewing the Doukhobors’ disorganization as a threat to public order and confused by false accusations, state officials responded with increasingly severe punishments. This increased the Veriginite Doukhobors’ fear of the authorities, especially as those they perceived as innocent were punished harshly.¹⁰¹ Harsh punishment further radicalized the Large Party Doukhobors. As a result, when Verigin sent directives to his followers calling for resistance and protest in the early 1890s, his followers were primed for action. The more Verigin incited his followers, the more government officials saw him as a troublemaker, which

⁹⁹ Blakemore, *R. C. on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912*,” T14.

¹⁰⁰ Breyfogle, “Rethinking the Origins of the Doukhor Arms-Burning,” 74.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

prompted them to restrict him and his accomplices even further.¹⁰² Thus, the situation escalated during the last years of Alexander III's reign.¹⁰³

By the time Nicholas II came to power in 1894, the radicalized Large Party Doukhobors were prepared to publicly defend their beliefs. In the first year of Nicholas' reign, the Tsar ordered all Russian citizens to pledge an oath of allegiance. Verigin, who refused to swear the oath himself, sent a message via two of his followers prohibiting any Doukhor from swearing oaths to any secular power, as Christ had forbidden oaths.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Verigin advised his followers not to participate directly or indirectly in military violence: those already enlisted were to withdraw from the army, while those called to service were to refuse to cooperate. In the same message, Verigin laid out plans for a mass demonstration of the Doukhobors' pacifism and rejection of state authority. The Doukhobors were to gather what weaponry they had and set fire to it on 29 June 1895, which was Verigin's name-day.¹⁰⁵ These acts would demonstrate the renewal of the Doukhobors' commitment to their religious ideals. The time for Kalmykova's compromises had passed. According to Verigin, the time had come to challenge state authority and accept the consequences.¹⁰⁶

Following Verigin's instructions, a dozen Doukhor prisoners of the Ekaterinograd penal battalion defied their supervisors. The prisoners had been incarcerated for failure to perform military service. When prison authorities asked them to obey military orders, march, and carry weapons they refused, and were punished harshly. Vasya Pozdnyakov reported

¹⁰² See for example, Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 39-51.

¹⁰³ See Breyfogle, "Rethinking the Origins of the Doukhor Arms-Burning," 67-81; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 83-84; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 20; and Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 35-51.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 5: 33-38.

¹⁰⁵ Sanborn, "Non-Violent Protest and the Russian State," 85.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

that they were repeatedly flogged, isolated in a cold cell, and denied food.¹⁰⁷ Unable to withstand the pain, some yielded to the demands of their oppressors, while others remained steadfastly against compulsory military service. Some of the men died resisting.¹⁰⁸ The men are commemorated in Doukhobor collective memory as heroes and martyrs.¹⁰⁹ Their example inspired some members of the Doukhobor group (the Sons of Freedom) to seek imprisonment in Canada as a means of expressing their Doukhobor identity in the middle of the twentieth century, as will be explained in chapter 6.

In 1895, Verigin called upon his followers to gather their weapons and burn them to demonstrate their pacifist beliefs. The fires were meant to attract the attention of government officials, and were intended as a declaration of the Doukhobors' rejection of Tsarist authority and of militarism.¹¹⁰ The event and its aftermath looms large in Doukhobor collective memory. It was this event, more than any other, which precipitated the Large Party Doukhobors' emigration and shaped their identity as pious Christians unjustly persecuted for their beliefs. The effects of this event would continue to impact the Doukhobors' psychology and behaviour long after their immigration to Canada.

In most districts, the arms burning proceeded with minimal harassment. This might have disappointed Doukhobors who wanted to demonstrate their willingness to suffer for their cause.¹¹¹ At Spasovka, for example, law-enforcement officers merely collected some charred material as evidence and left the scene. Some of the Doukhobors presented their military reserve papers to the officers in charge, which again resulted in only minimal

¹⁰⁷ As cited in Brock, "Vasya Pozdnyakov's Dukhobor Narrative," 169. See also Spirit Wrestler(s) from Gory to Tchertkoff, 4 March 1896, as cited in Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 52.

¹⁰⁸ See Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 29; Sanborn, "Non-Violent Protest and the Russian State," 86; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 98-99; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 93; Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 81-110; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 25-26; Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 75-77.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, "Part IV – Episodes During Persecution in the Penal Battalion," in Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 78-92.

¹¹⁰ Breyfogle, "From Colonial Settlers to Pacifist Insurgents," 217.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

response.¹¹² The Doukhobors' actions received slightly more attention at Slavanka. The officer in charge arrived after the bonfire had already been lit. He tried to prevent those who had not yet put their arms in the fire from doing so. The Doukhobors were not deterred despite verbal commands and lashes from the Cossacks' whips. When the Doukhobors at Slavanka presented the Colonel with their reserve papers, he began to throw punches and insults and order their arrest.¹¹³

At Orlovka the Doukhobors did not need to press the issue: they immediately became subject to Cossack commander Captain Esaul Praga's wrath. When the Doukhobors refused to interrupt their meeting at a Governor's request, Praga ordered the Cossacks to charge on them, flailing their lead-tipped whips. The unarmed Doukhobors refused to budge. One elder was trampled to death and another man lost his eye. The assault was so extreme that, as one of the Doukhobors reported, some of Praga's own men "were ashamed to strike."¹¹⁴

Yet Praga was not appeased. According to a report prepared by a representative of the Department of Police in Russia, Praga ordered his men to remain in Bogdanovka to "restore order." Praga permitted the Cossacks to whip anyone they met during their occupation of the village who refused to show appropriate deference. Also, over a forty-eight hour period, several Doukhobor women were raped in attacks apparently authorized by Praga.¹¹⁵ Male friends and relatives of the women who were attacked were restrained or severely beaten.¹¹⁶ When one of the abused women approached the Chief of Police, she was

¹¹² Sanborn, "Non-Violent Protest and the Russian State," 88.

¹¹³ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 155. Accounts of the Burning of Arms event are widely available. See, for example, Breyfogle, "Rethinking the Origins of the Doukhobor Arms-Burning," 63; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 26, 101-102; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 155; Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 22-24; Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 49-50.

¹¹⁵ "III. Events of 1895" (undated, prepared by a representative of the Department of Police) in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 49-50.

¹¹⁶ Helen Nakashidsy of Tiflis to Tchertkoff, July 1895, quoting Nastasia Tchernenkova and Anna Posniakoff, in Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 59.

informed that her complaints would not be heard, because the Doukhobors had disobeyed the government.¹¹⁷

Praga's superiors (Major-General Surovtsov and Colonel Grebenshchikov) later condemned his conduct. In their view, Praga exceeded the limits of his authority in the Bogdanovka situation.¹¹⁸ They feared his overreaction would provoke insurgency among the Large Party Doukhobors. They noted that unscrupulous conduct on the part of the Cossacks under Praga's command was unwise, especially given the Doukhobors' mistrust of government officials.¹¹⁹ They suspected, correctly, that Praga's actions had significantly damaged the Doukhobors' relations with the authorities.¹²⁰ In fact, Praga's campaign against the Doukhobors, though brief, had a long-term impact on their identity and collective memory as a persecuted people.

In addition to physical abuse, the Doukhobors were again sentenced to exile following the Burning of Arms event.¹²¹ They were given three days to settle their affairs before their exile. Their possessions were sold at a loss or simply abandoned as over four hundred families prepared to travel to the "malaria-ridden valleys" of Georgia.¹²² The Doukhobors were not permitted to purchase land there, nor were the Georgians permitted to rent land to them.¹²³ The Doukhobors were thus rendered homeless in an inhospitable region of the Empire.¹²⁴ To make matters worse, the stress of their journey and the climate of their new home made them vulnerable to hen-blindness, dysentery, fever, and malnutrition.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁸ In Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 61, 57.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹²¹ Sanborn, "Non-Violent Protest and the Russian State," 91.

¹²² Ibid. See also Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 157-158; Blakemore, *R. C. on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912*, T15; Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 10; Letter from Chief of Police Operations for Tiflis Province Major-General Jankovskij to the Department of Police," in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 72.

¹²³ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 89.

¹²⁴ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 34.

¹²⁵ Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 79-87.

Their predicament was very serious. Three hundred and fifty Doukhobors perished within the first year of their move, and many more followed.¹²⁶ Eli Popoff reports that out of nine thousand Doukhobors, a thousand perished in the aftermath of the Burning of Arms episode.¹²⁷ It appeared that the government wanted to create a “state of material uncertainty” in order to force the Doukhobors to cooperate with the authorities. This was misguided, as Doukhobor sympathizer and Tolstoyan Vladimir Tchertkoff noted, because the Doukhobors were known to staunchly adhere to their beliefs even in the face of extreme privation.¹²⁸

Fortunately for the Doukhobors, their situation attracted sympathizers’ attention, and several advocates came to their rescue. The Quakers took a special interest in their case. They reported that the Doukhobors were “pious, intelligent people, well [regarded] by all around them.”¹²⁹ They noted that the Doukhobors avoided intoxication and sloth, were cleanly, cooperative, patient, and “simplehearted.”¹³⁰ Inspired by the Doukhobors’ piety and motivated by their hardship, the Quakers began to raise funds to assist them.

Leo Tolstoy also took up the Doukhobors’ cause. He corresponded with and advised Peter V. Verigin.¹³¹ He reported the Doukhobors’ predicament in *The Times* and *The Contemporary Review* in 1895, and solicited sympathizers’ aid.¹³² When Tolstoy was notified that he was a contender for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1897, he used the opportunity to publish an open letter in the *Stokholm Tagblat* requesting that the prize be awarded to the Doukhobors in his stead. His request was denied.¹³³

¹²⁶ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 105.

¹²⁷ Popoff, *Historical Exposition on Doukhobor Beliefs*, 19.

¹²⁸ Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 87.

¹²⁹ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 267.

¹³⁰ John Bellows, *Letters and Memoir* [1904?], University of British Columbia Library, 323; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 187.

¹³¹ For insight into the relationship between Leo Tolstoy and Peter V. Verigin, see Sanborn “Pacifist Politics and Peasant Politics” and Lidia Gromova-Opul’skaya with Andrew Donskov, ed., and John Woodsworth, trans. *Leo Tolstoy - Peter Verigin Correspondence* (Toronto: Legas, 1995).

¹³² See Tolstoy, *The Times*, 23 October 1894, 4.

¹³³ Gromova-Opul’skaya, introduction to *Leo Tolstoy - Peter Verigin*, 2-3.

Advocates sought to attract public attention to the Doukhobors' plight in an effort to shame Russian authorities into treating them with greater benevolence, believing as Tolstoy did that bringing the matter to the public's attention would deter authorities from continued oppression, while comforting and encouraging the Doukhobors.¹³⁴ Tchertkoff wrote passionately in 1899 that the Doukhobors "die without uttering a single cry for help, knowing why and for what they suffer...but we, who see these sufferings, and know about them, cannot remain unmoved."¹³⁵

Publicizing the Doukhobors' hardships did not improve their situation, however, and their advocates began to see emigration as the best solution to their problems. Peter V. Verigin wrote to Empress Alexandra, requesting permission for the Doukhobors' emigration. Verigin appealed to Alexandra as a "sister in Christ," begging her to "spare the Christians in Caucasia."¹³⁶ Verigin explained that the Doukhobor women and children were suffering the most under their present conditions in exile. He requested that the Doukhobors be moved to a place where they could "live and labour in peace." They would happily pay their taxes but they would continue to refuse to perform military service. If this arrangement was unacceptable, then Verigin requested permission for the Doukhobors' departure.¹³⁷ Ultimately, this permission was granted, subject to certain conditions: the Doukhobors had to pay their own way, they could not return (if they did they would be subject to exile), and those who had not yet fulfilled their military obligations could not leave until they did so.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Tolstoy, *The Times*, 23 October 1895, 4.

¹³⁵ Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 13.

¹³⁶ As cited in Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 104-105; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 167-9; Blakemore, *R. C. on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912*," T15.

¹³⁷ As cited in Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 104-105; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 167-9; Blakemore, *R. C. on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912*," T15.

¹³⁸ Gromova-Opul'skaya, *Leo Tolstoy - Peter Verigin Correspondence*, 36-37, n. 2; Letter from Head of Civil Affairs in the Caucasus Senator Adjutant-Gen. Prince Golitsyn to Minister of Internal Affairs [I.L. Goremykin], 1 [13] August 1898 in Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 98.

Once permission to emigrate had been granted, the Doukhobors and their supporters felt pressure to move as quickly as possible. There were many reasons for this sense of urgency. First and foremost, the Doukhobors' situation was poor and it was clear that they needed relief soon. Second, the Russian authorities could rescind the offer, and it was important to move before they did. Third, conscription calls were expected for the 1st of January, and young male Doukhobors who had come of age would then be called up.¹³⁹

Anarchist sympathizer Prince Peter Kropotkin compared the Doukhobors to the Mennonites, who seemed to be doing well in Canada.¹⁴⁰ He wondered whether Canada would prove an appropriate home for the Doukhobors as well, and contacted a Canadian acquaintance of his, James Mavor, a professor at the University of Toronto, to inquire. Kropotkin conveyed "the sad story of the Doukhoborts in Caucasia. They are a religious brotherhood of nearly 20,000 people, who keep to the gospels and refuse military service and state interference, similar to the Mennonites." Kropotkin asked Mavor whether he thought the Canadian government might accept the Doukhobors and if so, whether it would "allow them to settle also in a block and have their own institutions," as well as provide financial aid and assistance with their transatlantic transportation.¹⁴¹ Mavor took up the Doukhobors' cause and approached Canadian immigration authorities on their behalf.

As it happened, Liberal Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton was looking for able farmers of good character to settle Canada's Northwest. The Doukhobors seemed to be a match. The government offered them free homesteading land in blocks, and the same exemption from military service that covered Canadian Mennonites, Quakers, and Tunkers. Leo Tolstoy donated the proceeds from the sale of his book, *Resurrection*, as well as \$17,000 he had raised among wealthy Russian friends and colleagues. The Quakers also committed

¹³⁹ Mavor, introduction to *Christian Martyrdom in Russia*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ "Prince" here is an honorary title but not an indication of royal lineage.

¹⁴¹ Kropotkin to Mavor, 10 July 1898, Mavor Papers, University of Toronto Library.

to providing material and financial assistance upon their resettlement and the Canadian government offered up the sum it usually paid immigration agents for recruitment, \$4.85 a head.¹⁴² The *Lake Huron* and the *Lake Superior*, two Canadian freighter ships, were hired and fitted by the Doukhobors themselves to carry passengers across the Atlantic. Their emigration plans were set.

Though life in Russia was difficult for the Doukhobors, it was still hard to leave home. The Large Party Doukhobors who were emigrating were doing so without their leader, who remained subject to Siberian exile. The schisms which had divided the Small Party Doukhobors and the Large Party Doukhobors had divided families, and many Large Party Doukhobors who emigrated left loved ones behind. Anticipating this separation raised tension between the groups, as the departing Doukhobors attempted to convince friends and family to join them. Though it was hoped that life in North America would prove easier than life in Russia had been, the future was uncertain for both the Doukhobors who were leaving and those who were staying behind.¹⁴³

The *Lake Huron* and *Lake Superior* carried nearly eight thousand Doukhobors to Halifax, Nova Scotia and St. John, New Brunswick. The Doukhobors brought few material comforts with them: clothing, food, and a few tools. Yet the Doukhobors carried a heavy burden: a collective memory of a long struggle with church and state authorities, of physical abuse which had scarred their bodies and minds, and of repeated exile, all incurred for their refusal to conform to Russia's social, cultural, political, and religious conventions. This collective memory of religious oppression and assimilative pressure strengthened the Doukhobors' spiritual resolve. It also made them sensitive to, and wary of, any governmental action that seemed assimilative or oppressive. This combination of factors

¹⁴² Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 138; Lally Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women: A Visit to the Homes of the New Settlers in the Northwest," *Globe*, 30 September 1899, 5.

¹⁴³ Woodsworth, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings*, 112.

made the Doukhobors predisposed to defensiveness, and it would not take much provocation from Canadian authorities to elicit a strong response from the Doukhobors. While they hoped for respite in Canada, their experiences had rendered them hypersensitive to even the threat of continued oppression. It was not long before the Doukhobors' fears were confirmed.

Many of the problems the Doukhobors had with the Russian authorities also arose in Canada over the course of the twentieth century. In Canada, as in Russia, the Doukhobors were dispossessed of their property, exiled from their homes, and forced into military service. They were pressured into conforming to national "norms." Their leaders were maligned and abused. As in Russia, the Doukhobors used covert organization to pre-empt authorities' investigations, but also conducted public demonstrations to express their religious beliefs. As in Russia, the authorities in Canada responded to the Doukhobors inconsistently, sometimes showing benevolence, sometimes indifference, and sometimes intolerance.

The difference was a matter of degree. For the most part, the Russian authorities had reacted more harshly to their "Doukhobor problem" than the Canadian authorities would. By the time of their emigration, however, the Doukhobors were unwilling to accept any encroachment on their religious freedom. That they had survived harsher treatment in Russia made them all the more brazen in the Canadian context. This was a dangerous combination. The Canadian response to the Doukhobors over the course of the twentieth century was severe enough to alarm them, but soft enough to embolden them.

The Doukhobors had fought so long and so intensely for the sake of their religious beliefs. These beliefs, *as well as the fight to protect them*, had come to define the Doukhobors' ethnic identity. This is key. They needed to preserve *both* the beliefs, *and* the struggle, to preserve their Doukhobor identity as Christian martyrs. This double-bind created a sticky situation in Canada. It was this paradoxical character of the "Doukhobors' problem" that made it so difficult to solve.

CHAPTER 2

“Desirable” Doukhobors

Canada expected nearly eight thousand Doukhobor immigrants in 1899.¹ At this number, their impact in the Northwest could be significant, especially since a “Canadian” identity had not been well established on the prairies. The ratio of citizens to newcomers was relatively low, and it would be difficult for Canadians to absorb immigrants whose culture differed significantly.² If the Doukhobors proved to be “undesirable” in any way, they could jeopardize Canada’s ambitious economic and cultural plans for the Northwest Territory.

As such, the Doukhobors were subjected to intense public scrutiny upon arrival. Their merits and shortcomings were discussed in the press and in parliament, as journalists and politicians debated whether the Doukhobors were “desirable” settlers. Discourse about the Doukhobors reflects the public’s view about them in particular, but it also reveals common assumptions about what it meant to be “Canadian” at the turn of the century. In assessing the ways in which the Doukhobors did and did not measure up to Canadian ideals, commentators were – both directly and indirectly – articulating the terms of Canadian identity as they perceived them at the time. The turn-of-the-century definition insisted on respect for Canadian (and by extension, British) law and institutions, as well as for the liberal and individualist spirit behind them. It favoured Christian beliefs and ethics. It privileged those who were hard-working, hearty, resourceful, and self-sufficient. It preferred the nuclear, male-headed family model as the basic unit of social organization. The

¹ William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 12; Carl J. Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*”: *Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 3; and Julie Rak, “Doukhobor Autobiography as Witness Narrative,” *Biography* 24, no.1 (Winter 2001): 227.

² Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 149; Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1974): 1.

Doukhobors' commitment to Christianity and their agricultural skill were admired.

However, critics were concerned about the Doukhobors' protracted conflict with the Russian authorities. The causes of the conflict, and the effects on the immigrating Doukhobors, were unclear to Canadian audiences. Though sympathizers framed the Doukhobors as "desirable" settlers, critics worried that their "foreign" culture, religion, and way-of-life could prove problematic.

The Dominion of Canada was only thirty-two years old in 1899, and what "Canadian" identity was or could be was still up for discussion. The marriage of French- and English-Canadian interests under the terms of Confederation offered, at best, a weak platform for "national" identity. Incidents such as the Louis Riel affair and the Manitoba Schools Question had already threatened the balance between the two ethnic factions. Some observers, most notably Goldwin Smith, suggested that union with the United States was Canada's best option. Yet Smith's solution did not have broad appeal at the turn of the century. Most Canadians still favoured imperialism over continentalism.³ Imperialists felt that Canada should maintain economic, cultural, and political ties with Britain. They envisioned this relationship not as a perpetuation of colonial dependency, but as a means to assert Canada's developing sense of nationhood.⁴

The perception that Canada had the potential to play an important role in the Empire as Britain's partner influenced Canada's policies concerning immigration and expansion into the Northwestern Territory (formerly Rupert's Land), which Canada purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869. In order to reach its potential as an imperial player, and to prevent American territorial, cultural, economic, and political encroachment, Canada needed

³ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 5, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, 64, 82, and 108-109.

to “settle”⁵ its Northwestern acquisition and render it agriculturally productive. Parallel to this, Canada needed to dramatically increase its population. These two objectives were seen as integral to the realization of Canada’s national dreams.⁶

Promoting immigration was the most expedient way to increase Canada’s population and settle the Northwest. Though agricultural skill was an obvious asset, the most “desirable” settlers were those who would reflect, or indeed establish, “Canadian” identity on the prairies.⁷ In the view of nineteenth-century imperialists and expansionists, this identity had a distinctively “British” character.⁸ The “Anglo-Saxon race” was perceived as having a special mission and a superior character to other “races” and cultures.⁹ Second to the Anglo-Saxon races were “northerners.” “Northerners” were perceived as stronger and heartier than other races, and Canada was perceived as a “Northern” country that, because of the harshness of its climate and geography, demanded fortitude of would-be settlers.¹⁰

Imperialists and expansionists alike were forced to re-examine their priorities when, by the end of the nineteenth century, few Canadians, Britons, Americans, or immigrants from northern Europe sought settlement on Canada’s prairie. Though British immigrants made up the majority of newcomers to Canada, they did not gravitate to the prairies or experience much success as farmers.¹¹ As such, population growth in the Northwest was

⁵ “Settle” and “settler” are sensitive terms, since much of the land in question had been taken from indigenous peoples, who had already “settled” the land on their own terms.

⁶ Doug Owrarn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 3, 5, 219; Berger, *Sense of Power*, 52; Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 49; Jean R. Burnet with Howard Palmer, “*Coming Canadians*”: *An Introduction to a History of Canada’s Peoples* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988): 25.

⁷ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 150; Owrarn, *Promise of Eden*, 4-5.

⁸ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 66-68; Owrarn, *Promise of Eden*, 221, 224; Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 72; Goldwin Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 43.

⁹ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 80, 115-118; Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 26.

¹⁰ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 53, 62-63, 128-131, 149; W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 86-89.

¹¹ Between 1867 and 1890, British immigrants represented about sixty per cent of total arrivals; by 1911, this number fell slightly to fifty-five per cent. Only eighteen per cent of these newcomers homesteaded between 1897 and 1913. In comparison, thirty-three per cent of American immigrants and twenty-nine per cent of immigrants from Continental Europe took up farming upon arrival. Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock,

underwhelming. Given the perceived importance of “settling” the territory to Canada’s national identity and future prospects, as well as the sunk cost of building railways, negotiating treaties with displaced Aboriginal peoples, and soliciting immigrants, this failure was unacceptable. Anxious to secure Northwestern settlement, immigration officials increasingly accepted eastern European immigrants. In this sense, the Doukhobors’ timing was good. When they sought immigration in 1898, immigration officials were eager to attract capable farmers, and had relaxed their expectations for ethnic conformity.¹²

Though Canadians were forced to expand the definition of “desirable” immigrants in order to ensure successful settlement of the Northwest, they did not relax their expectation that the Northwest would ultimately have an (Anglo-) Canadian identity. Newcomers were expected to adopt an (Anglo-) Canadian identity within a generation or two of their arrival.¹³ This expectation had significant implications for the Doukhobors, who immigrated to Canada anticipating that their cultural and religious differences would be accommodated. Immigration officials and the Doukhobors alike viewed their immigration to Canada with a great deal of optimism. In fact, the Canadians were less tolerant of socio-cultural difference than the Doukhobors anticipated and, in turn, the Doukhobors’ cultural identity proved more resistant to assimilation pressure than Canadian authorities anticipated. Ultimately, the Doukhobors’ resistance and the Canadians’ inflexibility over identity issues gave rise to the “Doukhobor problem” in Canada very shortly after their arrival.

The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998): 113, 120-123.

¹² Brown and Cook, in *A Nation Transformed*, suggest that welcoming the Doukhobors was the “most striking example” of Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton’s “willingness to open Canada’s doors to a variety of immigrant groups.” (63).

¹³ “The Doukhobors,” *Qu'Appelle Progress*, 26 January 1899, 4; “The Immigration Question Discussed at Length; Chinese and Japanese; Mr. Sifton Defends his Department's Policy in the Northwest,” *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25; “Immigration Estimates....The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 27 July 1899, 4; “The Doukhobors,” *Montreal Gazette*, 16 December 1899, 24.

The Doukhobors attracted considerable public attention upon their arrival.

Explaining that the Doukhobors were “being watched with great interest” by Canadians as well as “many others,” the *St. John Daily Sun* committed half of its front page and four subsequent pages – a total of ten full columns – to a detailed description and analysis of the Doukhobors’ arrival, appearance, history, and prospects.¹⁴ Other papers published similar, though often shorter, accounts.

At first, the Doukhobors were well received. Curious Canadians flocked by the hundreds to the docks and train station platforms to meet and greet the Doukhobor newcomers in 1899.¹⁵ They formed enthusiastic crowds: they “waved...with their hands and their caps, and roared and exclaimed at the top of their voices.”¹⁶ The Canadians’ “naïve, uncivilized amazement” at meeting the Doukhobors shocked Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky,¹⁷ who perceived it as rudeness at first. The Canadians seemed awestruck, as if they were seeing aliens or angels.¹⁸ Fortunately, this intense gaze did not embarrass the Doukhobors. In fact, the Doukhobors welcomed the Canadians to “look and see what we are like.”¹⁹

The Canadians who greeted the Doukhobors in Halifax and St. John in January of 1899 and at the whistle-stops on the Doukhobors’ journey to the prairies seemed impressed by the quality of the people they saw.²⁰ John Thomas Bulmer, a Nova Scotian lawyer, librarian, and social activist, spoke on the crowd’s behalf in Halifax. He commended the Doukhobors for their commitment to their “principles,” and deemed them immigrants “of a

¹⁴ “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1, 5, 6, 7, 8.

¹⁵ “Doukhobors go West: A Globe Correspondent’s Trip with the Russian Immigrants,” *Globe*, 28 January 1899, 22; “Doukhobors at St. John: Landing from the Vessel and Embarking the Trains for the West” *Globe*, 24 January 1899, 1-2.

¹⁶ L[eonold] A[ntonovich] Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, trans. Michael Kalmakoff (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1982): 87.

¹⁷ A Tolstoyan who accompanied the Doukhobors on their transatlantic journey and diarized his experiences and observations.

¹⁸ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 95.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

most desirable class.” At first glance, he declared, it appeared that the Canadian government had done well to bring the Doukhobors to Canada.²¹

The Doukhobors were praised for their cleanliness and good health. Their bodies were described as “handsome,” “strong,” “large,” and “powerfully-built.”²² They had “stalwart frames” and “massive physique.”²³ They managed their baggage with ease, and were “evidently able for work.”²⁴ Dr. Frederick Montizambert, who examined the Doukhobors upon their arrival, reported that he had expected to find them in far worse condition, given the challenges of their trans-Atlantic trip. Instead, he found “a set of robust, well-nourished, rosy-cheeked, healthy-looking people, with a much more than average appearance of healthiness and cleanliness.” Even their ship was much cleaner and in better shape than one would expect, given the high density of travelers and the length of their voyage.²⁵ In fact, in the *St. John Daily Sun*’s assessment, the exceptional condition of their boat was clear evidence that the Doukhobors were “a desirable lot of settlers.”²⁶ Captain G. C. Evans of the *SS Lake Huron* seconded this opinion.²⁷ The Doukhobors maintained this high standard of conduct on their train trip to the prairies, and officials supervising their train ride reported “they had never experienced such an orderly and cleanly party before.”²⁸

Canadians who met the Doukhobors personally were also impressed with what they saw of the Doukhobors’ character and disposition. The *St. John Daily Sun* indicated that “the

²¹ John Philip Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors as they Are* ([Penticton, B.C.: n.p.], 1961), 68 and Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia, Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), 192.

²² “Doukhobors at St. John,” *Globe*, 24 January 1899, 1-2; Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 40.

²³ “Clean Bill of Health,” *Globe*, 23 January 1899, 1; “The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 28 January 1899, 1; “Doukhobors Welcomed: By Montreal Ladies on their Way to the Northwest,” *Montreal Gazette*, 11 May 1899, 5; as cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 190; Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors as they Are*, 67; and Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 25-26.

²⁴ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 40; “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1; “Doukhobors go West,” *Globe*, 28 January 1899, 22; Captain G. C. Evans, as cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 205-206.

²⁵ “Clean Bill of Health: The Doukhobors on the Lake Huron Leave Halifax for St. John,” *Globe*, 23 January 1899, 1; “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

²⁶ “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

²⁷ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 192; “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

²⁸ “Doukhobors go West,” *Globe*, 28 January 1899, 22.

verdict of everybody who has seen the Doukhobors is that they are the cleanest, the best behaved and the most moral people ever brought into Canada.”²⁹ Captain Evans had seen “no evidence of unhappiness or of impatience” among the Doukhobors on his ship.³⁰ They seemed to be “self-reliant, kindly, polite, and neighbourly,”³¹ “pleasant” and apparently “very tractable,”³² “temperate, hardworking, and thrifty.”³³ Even Doukhobor children were notably polite, obedient, cooperative, quiet, and clean.³⁴ James Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior, praised them for these qualities, and reported feeling that, in these respects, the Doukhobors could “set a good example to other residents of Canada.”³⁵

The Doukhobors’ religious habits also made a positive impression. Some Canadians speculated that the Doukhobors would prove unfit for Canadian life because of their religious peculiarity.³⁶ However, several Canadian audiences were deeply moved upon hearing the Doukhobors singing hymns.³⁷ Witnesses from the Montreal Women’s Council who traveled with the Doukhobors admired their apparent “spiritual wisdom.”³⁸ Their religious beliefs and practices seemed to influence every aspect of their daily life.³⁹ This, a reporter for the *Globe* suggested, was an attractive quality that would render them among “the best class of settlers” for the Canadian prairies.⁴⁰

The warm welcome extended to the Doukhobors, and the favourable first impression Canadians had of them, made some observers hopeful that the Doukhobors would make a

²⁹ “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

³⁰ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 205-206.

³¹ “Doukhobors at St. John,” *Globe*, 24 January 1899, 1-2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “The Doukhobors,” *Qu’Appelle Progress*, 26 January 1899, 4.

³⁴ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 205-206; “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

³⁵ As cited in Sam Stupnikoff, *Historical Saga of the Doukhobor Faith, 1750-1990s* (Saskatoon: Apex Graphics, 1992), 18.

³⁶ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 89; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 215.

³⁷ “2,000 Doukhobors Reach Halifax,” *Daily Mail and Empire*, 21 January 1899, 2;

“Doukhobors at St. John,” *Globe*, 24 January 1899, 1-2; “At Quarantine: No Fresh Cases of Smallpox Among the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 30 January 1899, 10; Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 198, 39, and 97.

³⁸ As cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 215.

³⁹ “Doukhobors go West,” *Globe*, 28 January 1899, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

smooth transition in Canada. Herbert P. Archer, a British champion of the Doukhobors' cause, noted in February of 1899 that "the critics of the Doukhobors have been few" since their arrival in January. In light of this and of his own observations, Archer felt that "the suitability of the Doukhobors as settlers [was] beyond dispute."⁴¹ He was confident that the Doukhobors' work ethic would hold them in good stead.⁴²

Likewise, Joseph Elkinton, a Quaker who had taken an interest in the Doukhobors' case and witnessed their arrival in Canada, was impressed by the newcomers. Elkinton complimented Department of the Interior officials for their foresight in supporting the Doukhobors' immigration.⁴³ The Doukhobors "will make good citizens," Elkinton predicted, if given a little time and space to adjust to their new home.⁴⁴ "Let them get at the land," Elkinton urged, "and with their tools and machinery they will give a good account of themselves."⁴⁵

Various Canadian journalists also assured their readership that they could "safely welcome all the Doukhobors that can be induced to come to Canada," as they would make good settlers and would eventually become good Canadians.⁴⁶ *Globe* correspondent Bleasdel Cameron argued that though the Doukhobors were not necessarily "desirable neighbours," their "industriousness" rendered them likely to become "good settlers, who will help to develop the country and show what it is capable of."⁴⁷ The *Qu'Appelle Progress* compared the Doukhobors favourably to the Mennonites, who had "proved a valuable acquisition" and were "fast becoming assimilated to Canadian customs and manners."⁴⁸

⁴¹ "Testimony for the Doukhobors," *Globe*, 10 February 1899, 8.

⁴² "The Doukhobors: Mr. Archer Says they are Getting Along Finely," *Montreal Gazette*, 9 December 1899, 4.

⁴³ "Second Shipload of Doukhobors" and "Notes," *Globe*, Toronto, 10 February 1899, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ "Western Settlers," *Globe*, 28 June 1899, 6.

⁴⁷ Bleasdel Cameron, "Mennonites and Doukhobors," *Globe*, 14 July 1900, 12.

⁴⁸ "The Doukhobors," *Qu'Appelle Progress*, 26 January 1899, 4.

“There is room for all” in Canada, the *Qu’Appelle Progress* reminded its readership, and “some of our best citizens are of foreign birth or descent.”⁴⁹

In fact, the Doukhobors had already shown signs of adapting to Canadian way-of-life, in the opinion of a few sympathetic reporters.⁵⁰ Doukhobor men had accepted waged labour outside of the Doukhobor villages. This had exposed them to Canadian farming practices as well as “something of the language and of the people among whom they [had] come to live.”⁵¹ These men had returned to their villages for the winter, and were expected to share what they had learned with their families.⁵² Some of the Doukhobors had already started to eat meat (most Doukhobors had adopted vegetarianism at the end of the nineteenth century as an expression of their pacifistic beliefs), and *Globe* correspondent Lally Bernard predicted that the rest would soon follow suit.⁵³ This “acceptable progress in the west” was confirmed by the *Edmonton Bulletin*.⁵⁴

Bernard also reported that the Doukhobors were adopting a Canadian style of dress.⁵⁵ The Doukhobors were trading their “sheepskin” coats for tweed Canadian ones.⁵⁶ When the Doukhobors arrived in January of 1899, their “goatskin coats” and “skirts of bright red and blue” were their most identifiable feature.⁵⁷ The fact that the Doukhobors were shedding their distinctive coats in favour of Canadian dress was portrayed in the press as being an indication of their assimilation.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Globe*, 12 August 1899, 18.

⁵¹ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6. See also “The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 5 December 1899, 7.

⁵² “The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 5 December 1899, 7.

⁵³ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors: Further Glimpses of the New Northwestern Settlement,” *Globe*, 4 November 1899, 10; Lally Bernard, “Doukhobors at Home: A Trip through their Settlements in the Northwest,” *Globe*, 7 October 1899, 8. Lally Bernard was a pen name. She was otherwise known as Mary Fitzgibbon.

⁵⁴ “Telegraphic,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 21 August 1899, 1.

⁵⁵ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 4 November 1899, 10.

⁵⁶ “The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 5 December 1899, 7.

⁵⁷ “Clean Bill of Health,” *Globe*, 23 January 1899, 1; “Doukhobors,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 24 January 1899, 1.

The Doukhobors' sympathizers anticipated their full assimilation in other areas as well. The *Qu'Appelle Progress* indicated that the Doukhobors were "willing and anxious to learn," and would quickly acquire fluent English-language skills once exposed to schooling in Canada.⁵⁸ The *Globe* anticipated that the marriage question had been satisfactorily resolved, since government officials had explained to the Doukhobors that though existing marriages would be recognized, the Doukhobors would be expected to solemnize their future marriages according to Canadian customs.⁵⁹ Even the Doukhobors' objection to military service was framed in the press as a "drawback" that might be "in time eliminated."⁶⁰ In the meantime, their refusal to perform military service on the basis of their religious convictions was not a huge problem, the *Globe* argued, since "the paramount task of statesmanship is the filling up of our vacant lands," a function the Doukhobors were ably fulfilling.⁶¹ Liberal Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton confirmed this assessment. He suggested that "so long as [the Doukhobors] are prepared to raise wheat and pay taxes I think we can pay men to go out and do the fighting."⁶² In settling the Canadian Northwest, the Doukhobors were building up "trade in a section of the country given over to lawless hordes," Lally Bernard argued. By doing what they were best suited for, farming, the Doukhobors were actually promoting law and order without the use of force.⁶³ The Doukhobors' primary duty as Canadian settlers was to develop the land of the Northwest and, in 1899 at least, this duty was seen to supersede any other citizenship duty they might be expected to perform.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ "The Doukhobors," *Qu'Appelle Progress*, 26 January 1899, 4; "The Doukhobors," *Montreal Gazette*, 16 December 1899, 24.

⁵⁹ "Doukhobors go West," *Globe*, Toronto, 28 January 1899, 22; "Defends the Doukhobors," *Montreal Gazette*, 21 May 1901, 1.

⁶⁰ "The Doukhobors," *Qu'Appelle Progress*, 26 January 1899, 4.

⁶¹ "Western Settlers," *Globe*, 28 June 1899, 6.

⁶² "The Immigration Question Discussed at Length; Chinese and Japanese; Mr. Sifton Defends his Department's Policy in the Northwest," *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25.

⁶³ Lally Bernard, "Doukhobor Colonies: Where the New Settlers in the West are Located; Some Phases of Doukhobor History," *Globe*, 25 November 1899, 6.

⁶⁴ "Immigration Questions," *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4.

The Doukhobors' sympathizers predicted that the Doukhobors would soon change their clothing styles and eating habits, learn to read, register their marriages, and enlist in Canada's militia. In fact, many of the Doukhobors would *refuse* to register their marriages, attend schools, or perform military service for several decades. Many remained committed to vegetarianism and even dressed in a distinctively Russian way well into the twentieth century. Sympathizers' optimism that these issues would soon be resolved reflects two aspects of the "Doukhobor problem" in the early twentieth century: many Canadians expected that the Doukhobors would quickly assimilate to Canadian way-of-life, and underestimated the Doukhobors' commitment to their ideals.

Not all Canadians were so optimistic, however, and this constitutes a third aspect of the early twentieth-century "Doukhobor problem." Some parties clearly resented the favourable attention paid to the Doukhobor newcomers. A critic writing for *Le Manitoba* mocked the immigration department's rush to greet the Doukhobors "comme s'il se fût agi de faire honneur à quelque nouveau messie." Immigration department officials went out of their way to accommodate the newcomers and were granting them exceptional privileges regular settlers were refused.⁶⁵ The fact that government authorities were prepared to go to such lengths to appease these newcomers frustrated the *Le Manitoba* author. Out of respect for the Doukhobors' beliefs, the government had offered concessions concerning military service. In the meantime, the federal government had failed to protect the religious and cultural identity of "les pionniers de la civilization dans ce pays" on the Manitoba Schools Question.⁶⁶ Franco-Manitobans were frustrated that their rights as Canadian citizens were denied, while the Doukhobors, who would "tiennent à leurs coutumes et ne montrent nul désir d'adopter les

⁶⁵ "Encore les Doukhobors," *Le Manitoba*, 1 February 1899, 2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

idées canadiennes,” were accommodated.⁶⁷ Among the “Canadian ideas” that the Doukhobors rejected was individual ownership of land, and *Le Manitoba* argued that “une population entachée de socialisme n’est pas une bonne acquisition.”⁶⁸ Instead of welcoming such settlers, *Le Manitoba* reasoned, “il faudrait plutôt leur interdire par une loi l’entrée du Canada.”⁶⁹ Instead, Franco-Manitobans suggested that the government attract French-Canadian ex-pats living in the United States. “Ce serait plus désirable, pour l’avenir du pays, que tous les Doukhobors qui nous arrivent,” *Le Manitoba* posited.⁷⁰ This reflects a broader French-Canadian concern that Canada’s immigration policy, which favoured English-speaking Americans and Europeans and accepted large-scale foreign immigration, would overwhelm Franco-Canadian interests entirely.⁷¹

Whether or not the Doukhobors qualified as “desirable” immigrants was also hotly debated in parliament. Though Edward Gawler Prior, a Conservative MP from Victoria, British Columbia, admitted he had not personally seen a Doukhobor, he had received “poor reports from men who had lived with and among them.”⁷² Prior had learned from various sources that the Doukhobors were not “desirable immigrants.” Prior suggested that men “who have been brought up to respect and obey the laws of their own country” would be preferable to such as the Doukhobors.⁷³ The Doukhobors were unacceptable because were disloyal, unpatriotic, unclean, and lacked any of the necessary “principles of good citizenship.”⁷⁴

The government had been required to provide the Doukhobors with significant financial and material assistance upon their arrival, which irritated some members of the

⁶⁷ “Chez nous et autours de nous,” *Le Manitoba*, 24 May 1899, 3.

⁶⁸ “Les Doukhobors,” *Le Manitoba*, 18 January 1899, 2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “Projet Important,” *Le Manitoba*, 25 January 1899, 2.

⁷¹ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 14, 20.

⁷² “The Immigration Question Discussed at Length,” *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* See also “Parliament,” *St. John Daily Sun*, 8 July 1899, 1.

general public who felt that the Doukhobors were not worth the expense.⁷⁵ Immigrants from England, Ireland, or Scotland would be, in some Canadians' view, more "desirable" than immigrants such as the Doukhobors, because their culture would overlap more with Canadian culture than foreigners from eastern Europe. When asked whether the Government was prepared to offer comparable "inducements" to immigrants from England, Ireland, or Scotland,⁷⁶ Sifton replied that the government would assist anyone who could bring "a large body of desirable agricultural immigrants from Britain."⁷⁷

Whatever cultural preferences Canadians espoused, the fact was that hard-working immigrants were needed to develop Canada's prairie land, and immigrants whose ethnic background was more "desirable" had not demonstrated much interest in Canada. As such, the Liberal government had been forced to sacrifice on identity-compatibility in the interest of securing immigrant farmers. Clifford Sifton argued that the Northwest would not be settled if the government stood "on the boundary line with a club and turning a microscope on every immigrant."⁷⁸ The Doukhobors had settled in areas that neither Anglophone nor Francophone immigrants found attractive. Rather than standing empty, the Doukhobors' land would be "among the most prosperous in Manitoba" within ten years' time.⁷⁹ Laurier pointed out that there was plenty of land available in the Northwest at the turn of the century. "What do you want to do with [it]?" he challenged his critics.⁸⁰

In general, Clifford Sifton and his Liberal party affiliates supported the Doukhobors' immigration, and were pleased with the newcomers at first.⁸¹ They were relieved to see that the Doukhobors seemed to be as humble and strong as their advocates had said. They felt

⁷⁵ "Doukhobors and the North-West Gov't," *Qu'Appelle Vidette*, 6 September 1899, 1.

⁷⁶ *Globe*, 16 May 1899, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ "The Immigration Question Discussed at Length," *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The notable exception is Frank Oliver, who would succeed Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior in 1905. Oliver's approach to the Doukhobors will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

that, once settled, the Doukhobors would adapt quickly to Canadian way-of-life.⁸² Deputy Minister of the Interior James Smart reported that all who met the Doukhobors on their arrival were “favourably impressed.” The Doukhobors seemed “in every way fitted to successfully undertake farm life on our western prairies” and had proved themselves “skilled agriculturalists” and “thrifty and moral in character.”⁸³ As such, Smart argued, those responsible for the Doukhobors’ immigration deserved credit for their work. Liberal MP John Valentine Ellis of St. John, New Brunswick, confirmed Smart’s assessment. He had met the Doukhobors upon arrival and was impressed with them. He assured his colleagues that he was confident that “under our free institutions...they would readily adapt themselves” and “become desirable Canadian citizens.”⁸⁴

Some journalists supported the Liberal government’s approach to immigration policy in general, and their accommodation of the Doukhobor newcomers in particular. Regardless of the Doukhobors’ culture, the *Stratford Herald* reminded its readers that Canada’s greatest need was population. As such, the *Herald* argued, it was not appropriate to be “over-particular and dainty, and to insist that all new settlers must wear gloves and part their hair in the middle and be experts as to when it is good table manners to use a knife, a fork or a spoon.” The *Herald* indicated that the newcomers’ ability to “coax into activity some of our millions of acres of idle lands and make them multiply business for our factories, our railways and merchants, and thus to feed others besides themselves” should be Canadians’ top concern.⁸⁵ The Doukhobors’ foreign customs should not be held against them. After all,

⁸² “The Immigration Question Discussed at Length,” *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25.

⁸³ “Coming Our Way: Tide of European Emigration Turns to Canada: Two Thousand Galicians on Their Way Here at Present - May Get Too many Immigrants,” *Globe*, 16 May 1899, 1-2.

⁸⁴ “The Immigration Question Discussed at Length,” *Globe*, 8 July 1899, 25.

⁸⁵ As cited in “Western Settlers,” *Globe*, 28 June 1899, 6.

as the *Herald* pointed out, those who did not feel comfortable around the Doukhobors need not live next to them.⁸⁶

The *Globe* argued that “a certain amount of prejudice is to be expected” when Canadians are asked to accommodate a large group of foreign immigrants. After all, “our first impression is apt to be that ways which are not our ways must be wrong or ridiculous.”⁸⁷ The *Globe* acknowledged the popular concern that newcomers such as the Doukhobors were unfamiliar with Canada’s “civilization” and “free institutions,” that they had been “serfs” and were thus accustomed to a lower “standard of living” and would “depress wages.”⁸⁸ However, the *Globe* urged Canadians to open their minds about the Doukhobors, regardless of differences of “race or religion.” Whether “they [are] likely to be good farmers, good neighbours, good citizens is, it appears to us, the main question for the people of this country,” the *Globe* concluded.⁸⁹

In contrast, Norman Patterson argued in the *Canadian Magazine* that “this is a day when citizens are required – citizens with a broad, understanding knowledge of what Canada was, is, and might be; citizens who will inquire as to what Canada requires of her sons; citizens who will study their history, the institutions, the literature, the political conditions of their native land.” Patterson argued: “if we have not a patriotic citizenship we shall not last.”⁹⁰ Patterson’s arguments reflect growing concern among Anglophone Canadians for the nation’s cultural identity.

The *Globe* argued that citizenship could be taught. “If the country loses by the Doukhobors not knowing English, teach them English,” the *Globe* argued, “if they are

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Immigration Questions,” *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4.

⁸⁸ *Globe*, 15 December 1899, 6.

⁸⁹ “Immigration Questions,” *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4.

⁹⁰ Norman Patterson, “The Canadian People: A Criticism of Some of their Social Peculiarities,” *Canadian Magazine*, 13 (1899): 138.

ignorant of free institutions, explain to them the nature of those institutions.”⁹¹ By educating newcomers about Canadian culture, the *Globe* argued, “we may make these people a source of permanent strength to Canada.”⁹² Though the *Globe* argued that new immigrants could be made into patriotic Canadians through the influence of education, the *Globe* also suggested that if the nation already had a “thoroughly Canadian spirit,” assimilation of newcomers could occur more naturally.⁹³ In the meantime, Canadian identity could be learned.

This was the crux of the “Doukhobor problem.” Canadian authorities, even those sympathetic to the Doukhobors, expected the Doukhobors to adopt a “Canadian identity.” Unfortunately, the Doukhobors had little interest in giving theirs up. They had, after all, immigrated to Canada to escape religious persecution in Russia, expecting that Canada would allow them to establish themselves as Doukhobors in the Northwest.⁹⁴ This created significant tension, as Canadians applied assimilation pressure and Doukhobors resisted it. This tension would play out at the very beginning of the twentieth century, as the Doukhobors set themselves up on the prairie.

The Doukhobors’ approach to settlement aroused much public interest. Public interest revolved around two main themes. The first was the Doukhobors’ fitness for prairie settlement. Commentators focused on the Doukhobors’ physical strength and work ethic. To be deemed “good settlers,” the Doukhobors had to successfully establish themselves on the land and in the economy. The second theme was the Doukhobors’ “fit” with Canadian sociocultural expectations. During the Doukhobors’ initial settlement period, a few issues arose which got Canadians’ attention. The Doukhobors’ communalism and their refusal to register vital statistics struck Canadian audiences as peculiar and potentially problematic. The

⁹¹ *Globe*, 15 December 1899, 6.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 67.

Doukhobors' unusual solutions to some of their settlement challenges also attracted public attention, and raised concern that the Doukhobors would prove difficult to absorb into Canadian cultural identity.

The Doukhobors' communalism became a major issue at the beginning of the twentieth century, and disagreements about the terms of the Doukhobors' agreement with the federal government resulted in many Doukhobors losing title to their land in Saskatchewan within a decade of their arrival. As such, it is important to examine the understanding the Doukhobors had with the Canadian government before their immigration, as well as the misunderstandings that unfolded shortly after their settlement.

The government of Canada granted the Doukhobors permission to settle communally prior to their immigration. Correspondence between those who advocated for the Doukhobors indicates that the Canadian government was well aware of the Doukhobors' preference for group settlement. Prince Peter Kropotkin, a Russian socio-anarchist who took an interest in the Doukhobors' welfare, contacted James Mavor, a professor of political economy at the University of Toronto, to discuss the possibility of the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada in 1898. Kropotkin indicated that the Doukhobors would manage well on even "modest land," but required "land in a block; they cannot live on isolated farms."⁹⁵ Mavor conveyed this message to James Smart, Deputy to the Minister of the Interior, in a letter on 8 September 1898. Mavor explained that the Doukhobors wanted "land in a block or reserve, similar to the Mennonite Reserve."⁹⁶

The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 made 160-acre quarter sections available to qualifying homesteaders. Homesteaders, that is, "any person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of twenty-one years," could apply for a quarter section of Dominion

⁹⁵ Prince Kropotkin to James Mavor, 31 August 1898, James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto Library.

⁹⁶ James Mavor to James A. Smart, 8 September 1898, James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto Library.

lands for a ten-dollar fee. Homesteads were to be entered for by individuals for their “exclusive use and benefit, and for the purpose of actual settlement” though for “entries of contiguous lands...actual residence on the contiguous land entered [was] not required but *bona fide* improvement and cultivation of it” had to be demonstrated. Patents for the land could only be granted “three years from the time of entering into possession” of the land. Patents would be granted, provided the claimant was “then a subject of Her Majesty by birth or naturalization.”⁹⁷

The Dominion Lands Act outlined homesteading privileges and responsibilities for *independent* farmers; however, adaptations had already been made to accommodate group settlement in the Mennonites’ case. An order-in-council granted Mennonites permission to “obtain contiguous lots of land, so as to enable them to form their own communities” in 1872.⁹⁸ Other concessions granted to the Mennonites included an 1877 order-in-council which clarified that taking the Oath of Allegiance (necessary to retain homesteading privileges) would not cancel the Mennonites’ military service exemption.⁹⁹

In 1898, the federal government amended the Dominion Lands Act to include a clause concerning cooperative farming associations. The amendment allowed the government to redesignate any available Dominion lands “for associations of settlers who desire to engage in co-operative farming” [37.2]. In place of the ordinary residence and cultivation requirements for individual homesteaders, cooperative farmers were required to live in the “hamlet or village” and to cultivate the same proportion of land held in common as individual farmers were required to cultivate working independently.

Some Canadians did not favour granting exceptions to minority groups or to cooperative farming associations. However, the Mennonites were widely perceived as

⁹⁷*Statutes of Canada* 1872, sec. 33.7, pg. 66; sec. 33.9, pg. 67; sec 33.10, pg. 67; sec. 33.11, pg. 67; Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 56.

⁹⁸ As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 20.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

honourable people and excellent farmers. Northwestern settlers of this quality were stable and productive, and thus “desirable” in the Liberal government’s eyes.¹⁰⁰ The fact that the Doukhobors were compared favourably to the Mennonites in the correspondence exchanged between the Doukhobors’ advocates and Canadian government officials prior to the Doukhobors’ immigration to Canada worked to the Doukhobors’ advantage. The Mennonites’ good reputation had afforded them unique accommodation from the federal government of Canada. Thus, when the Doukhobors sought exceptions from the federal government on issues like land tenure and exemption from military service requirements, the federal government could follow the precedent set over the previous twenty-seven years in the Mennonites’ case.¹⁰¹

In the interest of maximizing Northwestern settlement, the Department of the Interior was prepared to exercise some flexibility.¹⁰² In this respect, the exceptions granted such settlers as the Mennonites and the Doukhobors were consistent with the Department’s overall settlement agenda. This said, there were limits to the Department’s flexibility. Women who applied for homesteads as heads of their families were routinely roadblocked, for example.¹⁰³

Frustrated female applicants declared:

we Canadian women...want to occupy some of these still vacant prairies, but our Canadian men say to us, ‘Stand back, oh, woman; we are saving this land for the Galician, the Doukhobor, any and every foreign man who will come and live upon it; we have saved it for him for generations, and we will continue to save it for him for

¹⁰⁰ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 141-142.

¹⁰² Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 118, 121; David Hall, “Clifford Sifton’s Vision of the Prairie West” in *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, 97.

¹⁰³ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 39-40, 58-59, 75-79, 96, 99.

generations yet to come. We would much rather have these lands unoccupied and barren than that you, our own women, should have it'.¹⁰⁴

Exceptions granted to Doukhobors and Mennonites and denied to Canadian women indicate the Department of the Interior's preference for male-headed families over female-headed families as Northwestern homesteaders, which suggests that preserving perceived gender norms took precedence over cultural or economic concerns in the Department's settlement agenda. This is consistent with the popular expectation that foreigners – even those as apparently distinctive as the Mennonites and Doukhobors – were readily assimilable. Their present cultural non-conformity was thus of little concern. Women homesteaders' gender could not be as easily erased. As such, their challenge to normative gender roles was not easily accommodated.

The expectation of quick cultural conversion notwithstanding, it is important to note that, at the outset, there was no misunderstanding of the terms of the Doukhobors' immigration. The Canadian government was well aware of their preference for communal life, and was prepared to accommodate it. They were willing to do so because they needed strong, capable settlers of good character to occupy and develop Northwestern land. Newcomers comparable to the Mennonites would prove a good fit. Their religious and cultural peculiarities could be endured so long as they worked hard and put the soil to good use.

The Doukhobors quickly proved that they were hard workers and adept farmers. Though the Doukhobors relied on charity to get established, they were not interested in being dependent permanently.¹⁰⁵ To raise capital as quickly as possible, many Doukhobor men sought employment as manual labourers off of the land. The Doukhobors' temporary move

¹⁰⁴ "Homesteads for Women" *The Temiskaming Speaker*, 22 March 1912, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 99; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 183.

off the farms and into industry was consistent with Sifton's vision that agricultural settlers would seek to supplement their incomes by hiring out. It was this belief that led Sifton to favour agricultural settlers over industrial workers in his immigration policies.¹⁰⁶

In reality, labourers were in demand. If the Doukhobors refused to work, employers would face a labour shortage.¹⁰⁷ Though some Canadians may have discriminated against the Doukhobors as foreigners, the fact was that their labour was valuable. Sulerzhitsky noted that the Doukhobors "were considered excellent workers and were much prized" by Canadian employers.¹⁰⁸ As evidence of the value placed on their labour, Sulerzhitsky pointed out that one railway company who employed them "prepared separate food for them without meat" and even "bought new pewter dishes so as not to give them those where meat had been" out of respect for the Doukhobors' vegetarianism.¹⁰⁹

Eager to work and unable to communicate easily in English, the Doukhobors naively accepted low rates of pay. This upset other labourers, who feared that the Doukhobors' willingness to work for less would depress wages as well as the standard of living.¹¹⁰ Displaced Canadian workers complained that "the government had made a mistake in accepting the Doukhobors."¹¹¹ However, the high value of their labour to employers meant that the Doukhobors were actually well positioned to negotiate wage increases, which they did once labourers' concerns were brought to their attention. Through their advocacy the Doukhobors were able to raise their own wages and were able to secure higher rates of pay for their Canadian counterparts as well.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 112, 118.

¹⁰⁷ As cited in "Immigration Questions," *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4; "In Manitoba," *Globe*, 25 September 1899, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 203.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ "Immigration Questions," *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4; Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 104.

¹¹¹ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 104.

¹¹² "Immigration Questions," *Globe*, 22 August 1899, 4. Also in "Immigration Discussed: The Doukhobors, Are They and Galicians Good Settlers?" *Globe*, 13 April 1901, 18.

As Doukhobor men went out in search of waged labour, Doukhobor women, children, and elders remained on the land.¹¹³ The men who were hired out would often be away for weeks or even months, and the Doukhobor women were left to take responsibility for a number of homemaking and homebuilding tasks.¹¹⁴ The women were especially gifted “spinners, weavers, dyers, embroiderers, tailoresses, and even milliners.”¹¹⁵ The Doukhobor women’s creativity and skill were admired by many who saw their work first hand, and *Globe* correspondent Lally Bernard often described the women’s handiwork to those who could not see it for themselves.¹¹⁶ The women were able to provide their male counterparts with “good suits of dark blue serge” that exceeded the quality worn by “any other men of their class” settled in the west.¹¹⁷ Their handiwork was economically meaningful. They were able to produce all of the linens and clothing their families required themselves, which reduced their household costs and any surplus goods they produced could be sold. In addition, Doukhobor women could hire out locally as seamstresses.¹¹⁸

The Doukhobor women also earned a reputation as adept “homemakers.” In addition to regular domestic chores (cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and sewing), they are credited for the construction of over ninety separate villages to house their families.¹¹⁹ This was no small task. As Elkinton pointed out, the Doukhobors “were located on the bare prairie,

¹¹³ This was the case for other newcomers as well. Jaroslav Petryshyn discusses this phenomenon with respect to Ukrainian settlers at the turn of the century in *Peasants in the Promised Land: Canada and the Ukrainians, 1891-1914* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1985): 76, 115.

¹¹⁴ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6.

¹¹⁵ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 102-103.

¹¹⁶ Lally Bernard, “With The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6; Lally Bernard, “Doukhobor Men and Women: A Visit to the Homes of the New Settlers in the Northwest,” *Globe*, 30 September 1899, 5; Lally Bernard, “Work for Doukhobors: National Council of Women to Find Employment for Them, the Means of Enabling the Doukhobor Immigrants to Assist Themselves During Winter Months,” *Globe*, 22 November 1899, 5; Lally Bernard, “Story of the Doukhoborts: How and Why they Came to Settle in Canada,” *Globe*, 6 July 1901, 14; Lally Bernard, “Doukhobor Men and Women: A Visit to the Homes of the New Settlers in the Northwest,” *Globe*, 30 September 1899, 5. Also “Women’s Art Exhibition” *Globe*, 13 October 1903, 5 and “Doukhobor Embroidery” *Globe*, 3 September 1906, 5.

¹¹⁷ “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 4 November 1899, 10.

¹¹⁸ Lally Bernard, “Work for Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 22 November 1899, 5.

¹¹⁹ Carl Tracie, interview by Jim Hamm, transcript 85-97 (tapes 13-14), Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia Library; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 180-81; Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 217.

almost without tools or building materials, distant from sources of supplies, without money, harassed by sickness, subject to the rigor of a strange climate, with winter fast approaching.”¹²⁰ The women persevered and, in Elkinton’s opinion, produced homes that were “a marvel of ingenuity.”¹²¹

Doukhobor advocates drew attention to the women’s superior domestic skills to illustrate their worthiness as Canadian newcomers. Their work on and inside their homes demonstrated that they were, in Bernard’s words, “especially adapted to act as pioneers of civilization in our far western country.”¹²² They were to be admired for their “innate dignity” and “uncomplaining, untiring patience” which, combined with their “magnificent physique” gave them strength to overcome any obstacles they encountered.¹²³

With the men away at work, the Doukhobor women had to take care of the land as well as the home. They had to find a way to break the soil in order to plant a crop. There was one major obstacle in their way. Each Doukhobor village, home to about a hundred people, only had one team of oxen or horses. These animals were required for transportation, and could not be spared for plowing. Without animals to pull the plows, the Doukhobors would be unable to prepare the land for planting.

Some of the senior women remembered a tradition whereby young Russian women hitched themselves to plows to start the first furrows in a new field as a gesture of respect to the earth, in the hopes that the land would prove fruitful. The women suggested that they could reenact this tradition as a means of getting their gardens started.¹²⁴ Rather than starve or be forced to rely on charity through the coming winter, they decided to give it a try.

¹²⁰ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 99.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Lally Bernard, “Work for Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 22 November 1899, 5.

¹²³ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6.

¹²⁴ Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1992), 136.

The women's effort was remarkable and the result was noteworthy. As Elkinton explained, within a few weeks' time, nearly one hundred acres were prepared for seeding. The work was hard, but the women were spiritually and physically equipped to do it.¹²⁵ Their "remarkable strength" and cooperative approach allowed them to complete the task without injuring themselves.¹²⁶

Homesteading was a huge challenge, and the success or failure of a homesteading operation often hinged on the labour performed by homesteader's wives.¹²⁷ Many prairie women took on "men's work" in addition to their domestic chores to ensure their families' welfare.¹²⁸ Though performing "men's work" might have been acceptable under exceptional circumstances, many Canadians were surprised to see women taking the place of horses. The women's plow-pulling attracted significant public attention.¹²⁹ As Elkinton noted, "the pictures of this novel scene were widely disseminated, and elicited much unfair comment from the uninformed on the supposed cruelty of the Doukhobor men."¹³⁰ Lally Bernard was amused by "the horrified expression of many Canadian women" when they learned about hard physical labour undertaken so "cheerfully" by these "stalwart young damsels."¹³¹ Some Canadians feared that this was the Doukhobors' preferred method of plowing. Bernard explained that it was not. The hardship of the Doukhobors' first year in Canada moved the women to perform this exceptional sacrificial act, because they "knew that the lives of their children and husbands depended on the effort they were willing to make."¹³²

¹²⁵ Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 154.

¹²⁶ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 216.

¹²⁷ "Homesteaders" were, by definition, men, as women were not permitted to take up homesteads except under special circumstances. Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 115.

¹²⁸ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 114.

¹²⁹ "The Doukhobors," *Montreal Gazette*, 16 December 1899, 24.

¹³⁰ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 101; "Yorkton Enterprise," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 15 May 1899, 1; *Le Manitoba*, 24 May 1899, 3; *Qu'Appelle Progress*, 22 June 1899, 1. See also Lally Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women," *Globe*, 30 September 1899, 5.

¹³¹ Lally Bernard, "Progress of Doukhobors...Doukhobors Spreading their Money Freely," *Globe*, 24 November 1900, 5, 9.

¹³² Lally Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women," *Globe*, 30 September 1899, 5.

The Doukhobors take pride in the women's achievement. It is often commemorated, and has been reenacted on occasion.¹³³ It demonstrated the Doukhobors' legendary spiritual and physical strength. It also demonstrated the power of cooperation. Working together, the women could overcome material hardship and physical limitations to feed their community. This reinforced the Doukhobors' identification as a people who could survive tough conditions with hard work and determination.

This also had an important economic impact on the community. While the men earned money off the land, the women set up their communities and fed their families. Because the women were able to provide for the home, the money the men earned that year could be applied to other needs. This allowed them to get ahead financially. At the end of their first year in Canada, 7,300 Doukhobors were working 1,114 acres on 2,336 homesteads using 336 horses, 205 cows, 180 oxen, 129 plows, and 150 wagons.¹³⁴ The *Globe* commended the Doukhobors for their "prosperous condition, considering the short time they have been in the Dominion."¹³⁵ They earned enough to repay their creditors within a few years of their settlement in Canada.¹³⁶

The Doukhobors' supporters framed this achievement in a positive light. Maude pointed to their "honesty" and "industry."¹³⁷ Bernard estimated that no other class of settler "could show as good a record for industry and thrift as the Doukhobors." Their hard work

¹³³ Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life," 61. Images of the original event were reproduced in Koozma J. Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Modern Press, 1969), 78, and Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, BC: Mir Publication Society, 1982), 53. Popoff relates the story in "Turning the Sod by Woman Power," *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 135-7. In 1955 eighteen women from Verigin, Sask., re-enacted this event in traditional costume. "Doukhobors Take Part in Pion-Era Festival," *Inquirer* 2, no. 8 (19 September 1955), 21-2. An image of this re-enactment is featured in Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History*, 241. The event was portrayed in Anne J. Plotnikoff, "Historical Pageant: The Story of the Doukhobors" (Grand Forks, B.C.: Iskra Publications, 1987), 27, a play performed in 1987. Women's plow-pulling was made into a contest in the annual Doukhobor Sports Day sponsored by the Doukhobor Cultural Association (a photo of the 1975 contest can be found in Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 188). The event is also depicted in "Doukhoborets Tot," an image designed by John Kalmakov to commemorate the Burning of Arms centenary in 1995.

¹³⁴ "At the Capital: Doukhobor Settlers Making Good Progress," *Globe*, 2 December 1899, 12.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 182.

and speedy loan repayments proved that “these are no paupers who claim the right to enroll themselves as Canadians.”¹³⁸ By organizing themselves collectively, the Doukhobors could pool their meager financial resources and their labour, and work cooperatively to establish themselves on the Canadian prairie as efficiently as possible. Their hard work and resourcefulness proved that they were good settlers. Whether they were “desirable” Canadians or not was another question entirely.

Sharing labour and resources rendered Doukhobor farms very productive and self-sufficient.¹³⁹ One of the major objections to the Doukhobors’ settlement in Canada was the concern that the Doukhobors would become an economic burden. That the Doukhobors’ communalism provided them an economic advantage should have been a stroke in their favour. However, the Doukhobors’ exceptional self-sufficiency was viewed as problematic.¹⁴⁰ It meant that they did not conduct regular trade with local merchants. As such, the economic benefit of having them as neighbours was low.¹⁴¹ In addition, bloc settlement prevented the Doukhobors from integrating into Canadian society.¹⁴² Liberal MP for Selkirk, Manitoba, William McCreary, understood the Doukhobors’ desire to settle in communities, given their immigration to a foreign land and need to “depend upon one another for assistance and support.”¹⁴³ He deemed it a “healthy sign,” however, that many Doukhobors were applying for individual homesteads and “were desirous of settling among the English-speaking people.”¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Lally Bernard, “With the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 5-6. See also “The Doukhobors: Mrs. FitzGibbon Sets Right Some Wrong Impressions,” *Montreal Gazette*, 16 December 1899, 25.

¹³⁹ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 35.

¹⁴⁰ As was the self-sufficiency of other communally-organized groups, such as the Hutterites. Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Canadian Mosaic*, 126.

¹⁴¹ “The Doukhobors: Misgivings Regarding them being Fulfilled - the Country would be better without them,” *Macleod Gazette*, 19 September 1902, 1.

¹⁴² “Immigration Policy: Mr. Alfred Owen on Galicians and Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 8 September 1900, 6.

¹⁴³ “Immigration Discussed: The Doukhobors, Are They and Galicians Good Settlers?” *Globe*, 13 April 1901, 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Homesteaders were often forced to cooperate with one another in order to survive the enormous challenges of setting up on the prairie.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, communal settlement was seen to be foreign and inferior to individual settlement.¹⁴⁶ The fact that the community arrangement was seen to be negative despite its economic advantages strongly suggests two principles. First, at least in principle if not always in practice, Canadians preferred an individualistic (competitive, capitalistic) system over a communalistic (cooperative, communistic) system despite the obvious economic advantages of the latter approach. Second, the Canadians perceived bloc settlement as an impediment to the integration of newcomers into the mainstream.¹⁴⁷ Canadians' wish to see the Doukhobors abandon their communalistic approach reflects their desire for the integration and full assimilation of Canadian newcomers.

By 1900 the Doukhobors and the Canadian government realized that they had a problem. The two parties had different expectations concerning religious freedom and compliance with Canadian law, which came to light at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Canadians had been relatively accommodating in 1899. They welcomed the Doukhobors to Canada and assisted their bloc settlement on the prairie. The Canadian government also provided exemption from military service and financial aid. The government justified these exceptional terms for the Doukhobors' settlement in light of their similarity to the Mennonites, whose enterprises had been very successful in Canada.

As the Canadians and Doukhobors settled into their new arrangement, however, certain difficulties came to light, especially as the terms of their land tenure and the requirement to register vital statistics arose as issues. Delegates of the Society of Universal

¹⁴⁵ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 111.

¹⁴⁶ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 246; Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 111.

¹⁴⁷ "Immigration Policy: Mr. Alfred Owen on Galicians and Doukhobors" *The Globe*, 8 September 1900, 6; W. A. Carrothers, "The Immigration Problem in Canada" *Queen's Quarterly* (Summer 1929), 517-531; J. B. Wignall of Hamilton, ON to the Editor "Doukhobor Problem," *Toronto Star*, 16 May 1957, 6.

Brotherhood (representing the Doukhobors) petitioned the Canadian government in June 1900. They asked the government to bend the rules concerning individual claims on homestead land.¹⁴⁸ “We...cannot record homesteads in our individual names, cannot make them our private property, for we believe in so doing we should directly break God’s Truth” the Doukhobors explained. They proposed that the government consider them as “Indians” rather than new immigrants, so that the land could be held collectively. They did not care whether the land was considered community or federal property, and they were willing to pay rent if that is what it took to avoid individual ownership of the land.¹⁴⁹

The Doukhobors also took issue with Canadian demands concerning the registration of vital statistics. They did not view marriage as legitimized “because it is recorded in a police register and a fee of two dollars paid for it; on the contrary, we believe that such recording and payment annuls marriage,” the Doukhobors explained. Involving the government in the marriage bonds between two loving individuals “breaks the law of God,” delegates from the Society of the Universal Brotherhood stated in March of 1901. The delegates stated further that they would gladly tell anyone who asked how many people had been born and who had died in their communities, but they would not report it on their own initiative.¹⁵⁰

The registration of vital statistics worried the Doukhobors on two levels: on a religious level, the Doukhobors had rejected state authority, which they viewed as corrupt or at least corruptible, preferring instead to take authority from God. As the spirit of God was seen to reside within each individual, individuals (or the community of individuals) had authority to preside over earthly concerns when guided by the spirit of God from within. On a practical level, the Doukhobors feared that the registration of vital statistics would allow

¹⁴⁸ As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 40-41.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ As cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 117-120.

the government too much influence over their affairs. With increased government supervision over day-to-day administrative details came the risk, in the Doukhobors' perception, of increased government interference in the Doukhobors' religious autonomy. The Doukhobors also feared that the registration of vital statistics would lead to the enlistment of their men for military service. Though it is unlikely that the registration of such statistics in Canada would have led to military enlistment, this had been the case in Russia, and the Doukhobors were reluctant to allow the Canadian government to have similar power over them.¹⁵¹

The government was unwilling to accommodate the Doukhobors' requests. John Gillanders Turiff, commissioner of Dominion Lands, replied to the Doukhobors' petition on 7 January 1901: "in reference to the question of taking up land it can only be done in the ordinary way," he explained, "we have only one system of granting free homesteads to settlers, and the same rules apply to every settler...irrespective of his nationality or religious belief." However, he reminded the Doukhobors that once they had completed the requirements the government had of homesteaders, they would own the land free and clear, and could use it communally if they so desired without fearing government interference.¹⁵² Turiff warned the Doukhobors that "there is one law for all the people of Canada, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and it applies to everyone, and the question of making any changes in respect to the Doukhobors will not be considered for a moment." This included laws

¹⁵¹ "The Poor, Downtrodden Doukhobor" *Edmonton Bulletin*, 25 March 1901, 3; "The Doukhobors," *The Globe*, 6 April 1901, 21; Lally Bernard, "Story of the Doukhoborts: How and Why they Came to Settle in Canada" *Globe*, 6 July 1901, 14; Geo. W. Grant, "Saskatoon of Today," (Saskatoon) *Phoenix*, 21 November 1902, 1, 8; J. A. Aikin, "A New Autocrat has Risen Up: Peter Verigin, Doukhobor, and his Methods," *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 201; Lidia Gromova-Opul'skaya with Andrew Donskov, ed., and John Woodsworth, trans, *Leo Tolstoy - Peter Verigin Correspondence* (Toronto: Legas, 1995), 40; John Woodworth, trans., *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhobor Emigration to Canada* (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 1999), 156; Stuart Jamieson, "The Doukhobors of B.C.," *Canadian Forum*, 31 (April 1951), 7-8; "Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia," 23, 34, 51, 54; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 2-3; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 127, 202.

¹⁵² As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 42.

pertaining to the registration of vital statistics. Turiff affirmed that “a complete public record must be kept of every person married, with names and dates, and every child born, and of every person who dies. This is the usual system, as you are aware, and has never been objected to by anybody, and good, law-abiding people have no reason to fear compliance with this part of the Canadian law.”¹⁵³ Turiff assured the Doukhobors that

the people of Canada were pleased to have you come to their country. They are prepared to treat you liberally and well; to put you on an exact equality with themselves; to give you the benefit and protection of their laws; but...no special laws will be made for your people nor will they be treated in a different manner from any other class of settlers in the country, or who may come into the country.

Turiff concluded: “the laws of the country must prevail absolutely, and you will find as you become better acquainted with the laws of Canada that it is only the wicked and vicious who have any reason to fear them.”¹⁵⁴

The interaction between the Doukhobors and the Commissioner of Dominion Lands is very important, as it signals the start of the “Doukhobor problem” in Canada. The Doukhobors and the federal government clearly disagreed on the vital statistics and land tenure issues. The Doukhobors were convinced that they could not accommodate the government’s terms without violating their religious principles. The government was convinced that they had to enforce these terms to preserve social and legal order. Neither side was prepared to give ground.

Prior to their immigration, the government had seemed flexible. The Doukhobors had been led to believe, before their immigration and afterwards, that they were valuable enough to warrant special consideration. They were also led to believe that Canada understood the

¹⁵³ As cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 129.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Doukhobors' religious concerns, and would accommodate them. In the interest of attracting "desirable settlers" to the Northwest, the government was prepared to accommodate the Doukhobors' special requests. However, the concessions the government offered them on land tenure and military service were no different than the concessions already granted the Canadian Mennonites. The funding the government offered the Doukhobors to assist with their immigration and settlement was no more than what the government already paid immigration agents to attract newcomers.¹⁵⁵ From the government's perspective, any accommodation offered the Doukhobors was consistent with existing policies, and no exceptions had actually been granted the Doukhobors in particular. Given growing criticism of the Doukhobors and of the government's approach to them, the government was not in a position in 1900 to make exceptions in their favour.

Quaker sympathizers tried to persuade the Doukhobors to cooperate with the government. They urged the Doukhobors to "comply with the reasonable laws" pertaining to homesteading requirements.¹⁵⁶ This was to no avail. The Doukhobors were not prepared to yield on, what was for them, a religious principle, so soon after immigrating to Canada.

The Doukhobors' refusal to comply with Canadian legal requirements brought them under intense public scrutiny. "The laws of this free and enlightened Canada of ours are proving too tyrannical and oppressive for the saint-like and God-fearing Doukhobor who emigrated to this country," the *Edmonton Bulletin* reported in March of 1901.¹⁵⁷ Since the Doukhobors' arrival, "nothing has seemed to suit them."¹⁵⁸ In contrast to the glowing reports typical of 1899, the news media of 1900 was rife with "grave exaggerations...showing a total

¹⁵⁵ "Coming Our Way," *Globe*, 16 May 1899, 1-2.

¹⁵⁶ As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ "The Poor, Downtrodden Doukhobor," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 25 March 1901, 3.

¹⁵⁸ "The Doukhobors," *Globe*, 6 April 1901, 21. An amusing error, "marital" was misprinted as "martial."

misapprehension of the character of these people and of the circumstances bringing about their settlement in Canada.”¹⁵⁹

The Doukhobors’ stance on the homesteading and vital statistics issues gave Frank Oliver, Liberal Member of Parliament and future Minister of the Interior, an opportunity to argue passionately against them. Oliver complained that the government had given the false impression that the development of the Northwest depended on immigrants such as the Doukhobors. He countered that it was not the Doukhobors, or similar foreigners, who had rendered the Northwest productive, but British and Canadian settlers. In fact, Oliver argued that the massive immigration of Galicians and Doukhobors into the Northwest was impeding progress. Without them, there would be more room for settlers of “a superior class.”¹⁶⁰ Any immigrants who perceived themselves “too good to conform to the laws of the country” were not desirable settlers.¹⁶¹ Oliver concluded that “however worthy they may be, however capable they may be as agriculturalists” the Doukhobors “are not, and cannot be of this country.”¹⁶²

It is to Clifford Sifton’s credit that, despite pressure to renege on promises made to the Doukhobors in 1898 and 1899, he continued to negotiate compromise with the Doukhobors. He suggested that they could be exempted from individual cultivation requirements so long as they registered their land individually. Sifton explained that it was to the Doukhobors’ advantage to do so. He warned them that failing to register the land individually would make them vulnerable to “outsiders” who had their eyes on the Doukhobors’ property. After three years, if the Doukhobors had satisfied homesteading

¹⁵⁹ Lally Bernard, “Story of the Doukhoborts,” *Globe*, 6 July 1901, 14.

¹⁶⁰ “Immigration Discussed,” *Globe*, 13 April 1901, 24.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² “Immigration,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 3 May 1901, 4.

requirements, they would hold title to their land free and clear, and could arrange to live and farm on it in whatever arrangement they preferred.¹⁶³

Much of Sifton's political reputation hinged on his role in settling the Canadian Northwest through the immigration of such groups as the Doukhobors. As such, he had an interest in ensuring that their settlement in Canada was successful, and that their role as productive agriculturalists was fulfilled. Frank Oliver, on the other hand, disliked the Doukhobors and resented the concessions granted them to facilitate their Northwestern settlement. When he took over as Minister of the Interior, Oliver refused to continue Sifton's conciliatory policy. As a result, many Doukhobors lost title to their land in Saskatchewan, and the "Doukhobor problem" moved to British Columbia.

Within a few years of the Doukhobors' arrival in Canada, many Canadians decided that the Doukhobors were, in fact, "undesirable." The *Macleod Gazette* complained, for example, that the Liberal government had "flooded the country with Galicians and Doukhobors" who were "a class of people in many respects considerably below the standard of the Indians." The Liberal government had "given the best of our farming lands" to such settlers as these. As such, the government had "incurred the enmity of people all over Canada, but the people of the Northwest in particular have mighty little to thank them for."¹⁶⁴ Lally Bernard wrote at the end of 1900 that "one's face burn[ed] at the thought of what had been published in some of the western papers in regard to these gentle charitable people."¹⁶⁵

Realizing that Canada might not be quite the paradise they had in mind, the Doukhobors considered moving elsewhere. When they learned that the Doukhobors were considering picking up and moving to California, some Canadians considered it "something

¹⁶³ Hon. Clifford Sifton, 15 February 1902, as cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 42-43.

¹⁶⁴ "Where is the Benefit?" *Macleod Gazette*, 12 October 1900, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Lally Bernard, "Among the Doukhobors: Doukhobors have some Idea of Cooking," *Globe*, 1 December 1900, 5.

of a misfortune, or a slap in the face to immigration to Canada.”¹⁶⁶ *Le Manitoba*, for example, remarked bitterly: “soit, en trois ans, \$644,510 dépensées pour amener des immigrants qui s’en vont ensuite travailler aux Etats-Unis.”¹⁶⁷

The *Edmonton Bulletin* took a different approach. The Doukhobors were “entirely undesirable as settlers in the Canadian Northwest” anyway.¹⁶⁸ Those who had welcomed the Doukhobors so heartily had not investigated their situation carefully enough, the *Bulletin* argued.¹⁶⁹ “Peculiarities” about the Doukhobors’ beliefs had become apparent, and made it seem that they had been “exiled from Russia for...good and sufficient reasons.”¹⁷⁰ It was “a mistake to allow, much more to encourage the establishment of such people as the Doukhobors in the Northwest Territories,” the *Bulletin* concluded, and “the sooner [the mistake] is rectified by [the Doukhobors] moving out, the better for everybody.” The *Bulletin* hoped that either all the Doukhobors would choose to leave, or that those who remained would “be compelled to accept the duties and responsibility of Canadian citizenship.”¹⁷¹

The Doukhobors did not leave, nor did they readily “accept the duties and responsibility of Canadian citizenship.” Within their first year in Canada, they proved that they were adequate settlers. They were adept farmers, hard workers, and had many admirable character traits. They were, however, stubbornly committed to their religious principles, and determined to live in Canada as Doukhobors, not as Canadians. Many of them were unwilling to compromise on communal ownership of land, and the registration of vital statistics. Had they compromised with the government, or had the government compromised

¹⁶⁶ “The Doukhobors,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 20 April 1900, 4.

¹⁶⁷ “Notes Politiques,” *Le Manitoba*, 18 April 1900, 4.

¹⁶⁸ “The Doukhobors,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 20 April 1900, 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* The Doukhobors were not “exiled,” rather, they requested permission to leave, considering the difficulties they faced in Russia.

¹⁷¹ “The Doukhobors,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 20 April 1900, 4.

with them, the “Doukhor problem” might not have taken root so firmly, and so early. Both parties were so optimistic in January of 1899. Within a very short time of their immigration, however, both parties were disappointed. The Canadians were less accommodating than the Doukhobors had expected, and the Doukhobors were less “desirable” than the Canadians had hoped.

CHAPTER 3

Settled, Resettled, Unsettled

The Doukhobors faced several challenges in the first quarter of the twentieth century, both from within their group and from without. The Doukhobors' efforts to live as Doukhobors in a Canadian context frustrated government officials and members of the public who felt that the Doukhobors should be forced to follow the letter of the law on the registration of their land and of their vital statistics. Many Doukhobors resisted pressure to inhabit, work, and register their land individually, swear oaths of allegiance to the King, report vital statistics data to the authorities, send their children to public school, or contribute to the war effort. The Doukhobors' refusal to cooperate on these "citizenship" issues frustrated public officials and many of their constituents, and the Doukhobors faced serious consequences for their recalcitrance.

The Doukhobors also faced internal challenges shortly after their settlement in Canada's Northwest. These challenges divided the group into three factions less than a decade after their arrival. Each faction had a different approach to living as Doukhobors in a Canadian context. The Independents were prepared to comply with Canadian laws. They ultimately registered their land and retained their homesteading privileges in Saskatchewan. The Community Doukhobors resisted registering land and vital statistics on religious principles, and ultimately lost their homesteading rights in Saskatchewan, choosing to move onto land they purchased collectively in British Columbia and Alberta. The Sons of Freedom wanted the Doukhobors to apply their religious principles even more rigorously, and were frustrated with the Canadian government's efforts to force registration on them. They engaged in several protest and mission marches, to express their discontent with the

Canadian government, and to convince their Doukhobor peers to hold fast to their religious convictions.

Thus, there were two main roots to the “Doukhobor problem” in twentieth-century Canada. The first was an identity conflict between the Doukhobors and Canadian authorities. The second was an identity conflict between Doukhobors of opposed factions. These identity conflicts developed very shortly after their immigration, and continued to grow as they settled in the Northwest, and resettled in British Columbia.

The Doukhobors immigrated to Canada without their leader, Peter Vasilevich Verigin.¹ This challenged those of his followers who had come to depend on his vision and guidance. Communalism was actually a relatively new practice among the Doukhobors who immigrated to Canada in 1899. Poverty and oppression had promoted cooperation within tight-knit familial communities in Russia, but full economic communism was not practiced until Verigin encouraged it, along with vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, and refusal to swear oaths or to perform military service, in 1893.² Verigin envisioned a village settlement system that combined limited individual ownership with collective labour and wealth management, whereby each family had “a separate house, a pair of horses, and cow,” but would work in the fields communally. Each family would receive an “allowance” for their own needs and for their animals, but any surplus was to be held in common.³ Correspondence with exiled Russian prisoners was irregular, and in any case Verigin was not in a position to comment on the particulars of the new opportunities the Doukhobors were

¹ Who was serving an exile sentence in Russia and was not permitted to leave.

² William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 36-37; Koozma Tarasoff, “Doukhobor Survival through the Centuries,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 no. 3 (1995): 7.

³ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 37. Verigin reiterated this vision in his correspondence with Leo Tolstoy in February of 1899. Lidia Gromova-Opul'skaya, Andrew Donskov, and John Woodsworth, *Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence* (Toronto: Legas, 1995), 42-43.

facing in Canada between their immigration in 1899 and his own in 1902. As such, the Doukhobors who immigrated to Canada had to depend on their past experience, their understanding of Doukhoborism, and their interpretation of Verigin's intentions as they set themselves up on Canada's prairie.

The Doukhobors' accomplishment was impressive. They arrived in winter, the spring thaw was late, they had few agricultural tools, and they had to divide their attention between settlement and wage earning. Nonetheless, the Doukhobors managed to establish fifty-seven villages housing between forty and 250 souls apiece, spanning over 750,000 acres of Canada's Northwest.⁴ Cooperation had allowed the Doukhobors to overcome difficulty, and by pooling their assets and labour, they were able to establish themselves quickly on the land.

Even at this very early stage, however, the Doukhobors were not entirely unified. While they generally applied communalistic principles to their settlement and labour decisions, not all villages applied these principles in the same way or to the same degree.⁵ Though the immigrating Doukhobors were homogenous in theory, in fact some of the Doukhobors were richer, better educated, and less burdened by the experience of trauma than others, and fissures between factions were evident before their arrival. Those who were poorer, less educated, or who had experienced more trauma in Russia had the most to gain from collectivizing their limited resources and depending on the comfort and security of communal life. They put considerable faith in Verigin's vision for their future, and in their Doukhobor beliefs. In contrast, Doukhobors who were better off financially, and who had experienced less trauma in Russia, were less dependent on the communal system and more

⁴ Carl J. Tracie, *"Toil and Peaceful Life": Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 62 and 94.

⁵ Tracie, *"Toil and Peaceful Life,"* 79; Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1905), 193; John W. Friesen and Michael M. Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 47.

inclined to consider alternatives.⁶ Some of these began to break away from the communal system and work their land individualistically soon after their arrival.⁷ This posed a problem for those Doukhobors who remained committed to the communalistic approach. If the more prosperous members of the group left the communal system, there were fewer resources for remaining group members to share.

Prosperity and individualism ran contrary to Doukhobor ideology, at least as it was defined by Verigin. Thus, a strong attachment to material wealth and independence implied a weak attachment to (Veriginite-) Doukhobor values. The outward drift of wealthier, more individualistic Doukhobors left a concentration of poorer, more communalistic Doukhobors in the mainstream. Among these was a faction that decided that something should be done to demonstrate the Doukhobors' commitment to their religious beliefs and ethnic identity. This was the start of the Freedomite sect, which would be responsible for (or at least blamed for) much of the "Doukhobor problem" throughout the twentieth century.

There were a number of issues troubling this faction at the beginning of the century. The Doukhobors were torn between meeting the government's demands, and their desire to put Doukhoborism into practice. They were accustomed to strong, centralized leadership, and had relied heavily on Verigin's advice in Russia. In Canada, however, their contact with Verigin was sporadic at best, and his written advice, when it was received, was confusing.⁸ He seemed to suggest that the Doukhobors should avoid working the soil or animals, using metal or leather implements, or retaining material possessions.⁹ The Freedomite faction

⁶ Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 47; Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life," 67, 80-81, 151; Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living* (Toronto: Legas, 2002), 23.

⁷ Jeremy Adelman, "Early Doukhobor Experience on the Canadian Prairies" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25 no. 4 (Winter, 1991): 121-122.

⁸ J. F. C. Wright, *Slava Bohu: The Story of the Dukhobors* (Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1940), 21, 144, and 192.

⁹ John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 246; Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 30.

feared that their fellow Doukhobors, especially those “Independents” drifting away from the group, were losing their faith as they adjusted to life in North America.¹⁰ These stressors, in addition to the stresses of their experience in Russia, their immigration, and their resettlement in Canada overwhelmed some of the Doukhobor group.

Though their immigration and settlement had been stressful, and the Canadian government had disappointed Doukhobor expectations concerning land tenure and vital statistics registration, the Doukhobors encountered far less oppression and persecution in Canada than they had in Russia. This was problematic, because the Doukhobors’ experience of hardship in Russia had worked to define the group in two key ways. First, the threat of abuse had motivated the Doukhobors to stick together, since they could better support one another in hard times and resist assimilative pressure if they were united. Second, the experience of trauma had become an essential part of the Doukhobors’ identity. The Doukhobors were “Christian martyrs,” prepared to sacrifice material and physical comfort for the sake of their religious beliefs. If Russian hardships had held them together, then Canadian “comfort and abundance” might destroy them.¹¹

A minority faction of approximately 1700 Doukhobors broke away from the main group and decided to take action. They called themselves “Sons of God,” “free men,” “wanderers,” “pilgrims,” or “preachers.”¹² They came to be known as the “Freedomites” (*svobodniki*),¹³ because they set their animals free,¹⁴ and sought freedom from work.¹⁵ They

¹⁰ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 23, 201; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 222-223, 237; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 34; “Outbreak of Fanaticism” *Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16; Victor Ross, “Pilgrimage of Lovell’s Ferry,” *Globe*, 11 May 1903, 7.

¹¹ John Riddington, “The Doukhobor Pilgrimage,” *Canadian Magazine*, 20 (January 1903), 212. Also Milton Orris, “Social Control and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of the Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities” (MA diss., University of Saskatchewan, 1975), 118.

¹² Department of the Interior, “Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and Disposition of Same,” 14 October 1907, 10; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 49.

¹³ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 193; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 52

¹⁴ Peter Maloff, “Letters, 1924-26,” page 259, Peter Maloff Papers, University of British Columbia Library.

put their whole faith in God (and in the charity of others) to provide for their physical needs. They claimed to be seeking Jesus, a warmer climate, and freedom from government control.¹⁶ They also sought to demonstrate their own commitment to Doukhoborism, and inspire their compatriots to renew theirs as well.¹⁷ In October of 1902, they embarked on a missionary march across the Canadian prairie, headed towards Yorkton. They wanted to persuade fellow Doukhobors to join them, and they wanted to demonstrate the strength of their convictions to non-Doukhobor Canadians.¹⁸

The Freedomites claimed that their beliefs and behaviour were a natural extension of Doukhobor beliefs. Other Doukhobors disagreed. They refused to join the Freedomites, and were impatient with their preaching.¹⁹ Some Doukhobors showed charity and concern for their Freedomite fellows.²⁰ Many Doukhobors refused to help the marchers, however, and urged others to refuse assistance also, so as to discourage the Freedomites from continuing their mission.²¹ In some cases, Doukhobors treated Freedomite visitors roughly, escorting them away from their homes, and even physically assaulting them, according to some reports.²²

The authorities responded to the Freedomites' demonstrations with considerable restraint. They rounded up the freed animals, sold them, and held the revenue in trust for the

¹⁵ Department of the Interior, "Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and Disposition of Same," 14 October 1907, 10.

¹⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 30; Julie Rak, *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 40; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 43; "A Queer Pilgrimage," *Phoenix*, 7 November 1902, 7; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 216.

¹⁷ "Not a Hostile Army," *Globe*, 28 October 1902, 4; "The Doukhobors Still Marching" *Globe*, 31 October 1902, 1; John Woodsworth, comp., trans., annotator, *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhobor Emigration to Canada* (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 1999), 218; Ross, "Pilgrimage of Lovell's Ferry," *Globe*, 11 May 1903, 7.

¹⁸ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 43; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 49.

¹⁹ "The Doukhobors Still Marching," *Globe*, 31 October 1902, 1; Ross, "Pilgrimage of Lovell's Ferry," *Globe* 11 May 1903, 7; Peter Veregin, "The Truth About the Doukhobors," *The Independent*, 75 (3 July 1913), 21-5.

²⁰ "Outbreak of Fanaticism," *Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16.

²¹ "The Doukhobors' Pilgrimage," *Globe*, 30 October 1902, 1-2; "The Doukhobors Still Marching," *Globe*, 31 October 1902, 1; Department of the Interior, "Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and Disposition of Same," 14 October 1907, 10.

²² Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 214, 220; "Doukhobors Arrested," *Globe*, 22 May 1903, 1.

Doukhobors.²³ They attempted to convince the wanderers to return to their homes.²⁴ Charles Wesley Speers, General Colonization Agent, met with the Freedomites at the end of October 1902 to advise them that they would not be permitted to continue their march.²⁵ Unable to persuade them to disperse, Speers reported that, to his regret, the Freedomites might require forceful intervention in order to prevent greater “disaster” if their wandering were to continue into the winter months.²⁶ Speers was concerned for their health and welfare, especially where the women and children were concerned. He sought refuge for them in an Immigration Hall in Yorkton at the beginning of November.²⁷ The authorities again asked the marchers to return home. When this failed, they made arrests.²⁸ They avoided direct physical confrontation where possible, but some interactions did come to blows.²⁹

This conflict reestablished the Doukhobors’ – and especially the Freedomites’ – self-definition as Christian martyrs vis-à-vis an oppressive political state. The Freedomites who were sent to prison claimed to have been mistreated there. The veracity of the Freedomites’ claims is unclear; however, the Freedomites either believed, or wanted others to believe, that they had been abused by Canadian authorities.³⁰ Given the historical connection between Doukhorism and Christian martyrdom, the Freedomites may have perceived that they

²³ “Outbreak of Fanaticism,” *Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16; “About the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 27 March 1903, 5.

²⁴ “Agent Speers Counsels Force,” *Globe*, 1 November 1902, 8.

²⁵ “The Doukhobors’ Pilgrimage,” *Globe*, 30 October 1902, 1-2.

²⁶ “Agent Speers Counsels Force,” *Globe*, 1 November 1902, 8.

²⁷ “A Queer Pilgrimage,” *Phoenix*, 7 November 1902, 7; “Restrain Doukhor Trek to Saskatoon” *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 8 May 1903, 7.

²⁸ “Doukhobors Arrested,” *Globe*, 22 May 1903, 1; “In Nature’s Garb,” *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 5 June 1903, 2; “Doukhobors Come to Saskatoon,” *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 30 September 1904, 1; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 249; Riddington, “The Doukhor Pilgrimage,” 218-219; Joseph C. Thomas, “An Unsolved Social Problem,” [1964?], 4, Doukhor Manuscript Collection, University of British Columbia Library.

²⁹ “Doukhobors Marching,” *Globe*, 4 May 1903, 9; “Back to Yorkton,” *Phoenix*, 21 November 1902, 3.

³⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 195; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 242; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 67; J. C. Yerbury, “The ‘Sons of Freedom’ Doukhobors and the Canadian State,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16, no. 2 (1984), 55. There is evidence that the Freedomites, who were concerned about being forced to eat meat, refused to eat while in prison and authorities, with the support of medical professionals, force fed the prisoners. “Forced to Eat 3 Times a Day: Food Being Pumped into Refractory Doukhobors,” *Saint John Daily Sun*, 8 September 1906, 9.

would earn the respect of their fellow Doukhobors if they could show that they had suffered for the sake of Doukhoborism.

Non-Doukhobors had a mixed response to the Freedomite pilgrimages. Some commentators took a sympathetic approach, highlighting the Doukhobors' achievements, and downplaying the marchers' activities as an unfortunate aberration brought about by outside influences or the stresses of immigration and resettlement.³¹ Sympathizers such as Deputy Minister of the Interior James Smart pointed out that only a minority of the Doukhobors were involved in the Freedomite marches, and called it "absurd" to "condemn" all Doukhobors for the actions of a faction representing less than twenty percent of their numbers.³² Many sympathizers suggested that the Doukhobors – even those who had participated in the marches – still had the potential to become good Canadian citizens in time.³³

These sympathetic responses notwithstanding, the Freedomite marches did considerable damage to public opinion about the Doukhobors.³⁴ The Freedomites' activities disappointed those who had invested in the Doukhobors' welfare with their moral and material support. The animals the Freedomites freed and the tools they had destroyed had been provided for them by the Quakers and the Canadian government. The Freedomites' apparent ingratitude was disheartening and "awkward."³⁵

³¹ Ross, "Pilgrimage of Lovell's Ferry," *Globe*, 11 May 1903, 7; C. B. Sissons, "What Can We Do With the Doukhobors?" *Canadian Forum*, 4 (July 1924), 298-300; "Outbreak of Fanaticism," *Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16; "Transplanted Tribes," *Bracebridge Gazette*, 10 June 1909, 6; "The Doukhobors," *Globe*, 30 October 1902, 6; "Doukhobors Must Pay Cost of Pilgrimage," *Globe*, 11 November 1902, 1.

³² "Doukhobors Must Pay Cost of Pilgrimage," *Globe*, 11 November 1902, 1. See also Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia, Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), 17-18.

³³ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 8-9, 27, 50-51; "Outbreak of Fanaticism," *The Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16.

³⁴ Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life," 107, 109; Peter Maloff, "Letters, 1924-26," 262, 266, Peter Maloff Papers, University of British Columbia Library; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 58; Carl Tracie, interviewed by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 14, page 93, Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia Library; "He Leads a Queer People," *The Bracebridge Gazette*, 3 April 1913, 11; Veregin, "The Truth About the Doukhobors," 21; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 72; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 197; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 209.

³⁵ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 175, 219; "Spirit Wrestlers" (Book Review), *Time* 36 (11 November 1940), 84; Elina Thorsteinson, "The Doukhobors in Canada," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 4, no. 1 (June 1917), 41; "Doukhobors Costly Citizens," *Macleod Gazette*, 7 November 1902, 4.

The *Edmonton Bulletin* wrote on 14 November 1902 that “the secret is out”: the Doukhobors “are not by any means the people they were represented to be.” That the Doukhobors “wash themselves” (referring to many sympathizers’ emphasis on the Doukhobors’ cleanliness) was positive, but the fact that they had behaved as a “horde of tramps and beggars” undermined their “industrial value.” They had proved themselves to be “nuisances personally, socially and politically” and, the *Bulletin* argued, “this country has no room or use for” immigrants such as these.³⁶ Furthermore, the *Bulletin* asserted, “the difference between those who went on the insane pilgrimage and those who did not is only a difference of degree not of kind.”³⁷ Though the Freedomites were in the minority, enough Doukhobors had been involved to prove to some Canadians that there was indeed already a “Doukhobor problem.”

Verigin’s absence was perceived as part of the “Doukhobor problem.” The Doukhobors might have adjusted more easily to life in Canada if a trusted central leader could advise them on how best to handle unexpected challenges in Canada while remaining faithful to Doukhobor ideals. Following the Freedomites’ 1902 march, Verigin was released from Russian exile and given permission to immigrate to Canada, possibly at the behest of Canadian authorities.³⁸ Government officials hoped that Verigin would solve the “Doukhobor problem” by taking control of the Doukhobor population.³⁹ As the *Globe* reported, Verigin “has great influence with his fellow country-men, and it is understood will give them some saintly advice tending to make them more contented with their lot.”⁴⁰

Like the Doukhobors who immigrated before him, Verigin was publicly scrutinized upon arrival. As had happened with his followers three years earlier, much first-impression

³⁶ “The Doukhobors,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 14 November 1902, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 43.

³⁹ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 213.

⁴⁰ “The Doukhobor Leader,” *Globe*, 9 December 1902, 8. Also “Outbreak of Fanaticism,” *Globe*, 18 October 1902, 16.

commentary focused on his physical appearance. He was described as a “fine-looking, well-preserved man” with a “kindly face” and a “somewhat refined...general appearance and manner.”⁴¹ He was “tall and strongly built, and of erect and graceful carriage, [and] would attract attention among hundreds of good-looking men.” In short, he was a “splendid type of his race.”⁴²

Journalists also commented on aspects of Verigin’s character. Verigin came across as someone whose “courage and confidence” had enabled him to overcome great adversity.⁴³ He seemed to have “a bright, keen, active mind, fully competent to deal with the problems of his people.” He spoke “frankly” but with “discretion.” He was “well read, masterful without being arrogant, and most important of all, tactful.” One could not avoid “being impressed by the man’s capabilities and the conviction that he is a remarkable character.”⁴⁴ He seemed to be a “practical politician”⁴⁵ who had a “genius” for governing.⁴⁶ Most of those who met him were “convinced of his power and his influence among the Doukhobors.”⁴⁷

Verigin’s unusual physical appearance and apparent strength of character set him apart from his peers in the eyes of insiders and outsiders alike. As the Doukhobors’ “political”⁴⁸ and spiritual leader, Verigin occupied a privileged position among the Doukhobors. Some of his followers believed that Verigin reflected, represented, or emulated God, and this deification elevated his status further.⁴⁹ His appearance, personality, and position prompted his followers to give him considerable authority over their affairs. This

⁴¹ Aikin, “A New Autocrat has Risen Up,” *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1.

⁴² Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 72.

⁴³ “He Leads a Queer People,” *Bracebridge Gazette*, 3 April 1913, 11.

⁴⁴ Katherine Louise Smith, “The Doukhobors of Canada - A Community of Siberian Exiles Which is Being Brought to Great Financial Prosperity by a Russian Captain of Industry,” *Craftsman*, 12 (April 1907), 73.

⁴⁵ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 245.

⁴⁶ “He Leads a Queer People,” *Bracebridge Gazette*, 3 April 1913, 11; Mure Robertson, “The Dukhobors’ Search for Utopia,” *Empire Review*, 63 (February 1936), 111.

⁴⁷ Smith, “The Doukhobors of Canada,” 73.

⁴⁸ Formally, the Doukhobors were decidedly apolitical. Verigin managed the Doukhobors’ public affairs.

⁴⁹ Thomas, “An Unsolved Social Problem,” 3; Rev. Edmund H. Oliver, “Peter Veregin,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 26 Series 3, Section 2 (May 1932), 97; “Spirit Wrestlers” (Book Review), *Time* 36 (11 November 1940), 82; Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 113.

privilege notwithstanding, his arrival did not have the stabilizing influence Canadian authorities and Doukhobor sympathizers expected. In fact, the Freedomite marchers decided to continue their mission after his arrival and actually escalated their efforts, adding nudity and arson to their protest repertoire.⁵⁰

Verigin had little patience for the Freedomite dissidents who were challenging his authority, disrupting Community life, and drawing negative public attention to the group.⁵¹ Verigin chose to handle the Freedomite problem in two ways. Internally, Verigin attempted to persuade the Sons of Freedom to fall in line with their Doukhobor peers.⁵² When this failed, Verigin apparently authorized those loyal to him to punish the Freedomites.⁵³ Verigin also requested external assistance. When some of the Freedomites set fire to a threshing machine and trampled Community crops to protest the Doukhobors' dependence on "science,"⁵⁴ Verigin called on Canadian authorities to punish those responsible.⁵⁵ The Northwest Mounted Police were not keen to intervene in what they viewed as an internal matter. However, Verigin insisted that the perpetrators had broken a Canadian law and should be punished as any other Canadian would be.⁵⁶

Handling the Freedomite problem in this way had serious implications. Verigin knew that his followers were sensitive to abuse, and resistant to outsider authority. He could have decided to show the Sons of Freedom more lenience given their past history and their

⁵⁰ *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 16 January 1903, 4; *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 2 January 1903, 2; Legebokoff from "The First Years of Life of the Doukhobors in Canada and the Appearance of the Sons of Freedom," as cited in Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., "Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, Symposium Meetings, 1974-1982," Symposium 20 (5 December 1976), 288, University of British Columbia Library; John Lyons, "The (Almost) Quiet Evolution: Doukhobor Schooling in Saskatchewan," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 8, no. 1 (1976), 25; Yerbury, "The 'Sons of Freedom' Doukhobors," 53; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 45; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 193; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 52

⁵¹ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 45.

⁵² Peter Maloff, "Letters, 1924-26," 272, 276, Peter Maloff Papers, UBC.

⁵³ "Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage," *Life*, 28 (8 May 1950) 30.

⁵⁴ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 243; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 44; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 197; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 68-69.

⁵⁵ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 45; Yerbury, "The 'Sons of Freedom' Doukhobors," 53

⁵⁶ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 221.

vulnerability. His decision to pursue the matter more aggressively, however, suggests three possible motivations. First, it is possible that he wanted the Sons of Freedom to suffer for standing up for their religious beliefs. Perhaps Verigin felt that this would renew the Doukhobors' commitment to their faith. Second, it is possible that Verigin wanted to demonstrate that the Doukhobors intended to obey Canadian laws. This position would have been inconsistent with Doukhobor beliefs and historical practice, which legitimized challenges to worldly authority on religious grounds. However, Verigin may have wanted to improve public relations between the Doukhobors and their Canadian hosts in the aftermath of the Freedomites' march, using this incident as an opportunity to present the Doukhobors as law-abiding. Third, it is possible that Verigin felt that his authority was being challenged, and perceived that firmly pulling on the reins of leadership would demonstrate that deviation from the Doukhobor mainstream – and his instructions – would not be tolerated. Of these possibilities, the third is most likely.

Though some outsiders believed that the Doukhobors' problems were related to their leader's absence and hoped that his arrival in 1902 would stabilize the Doukhobor population, some non-Doukhobors were concerned that his control of the Community was too absolute to be healthy. Some felt he was manipulating his followers. Reverend John McDougall, who was commissioned to inquire into the Doukhobors' affairs in 1906, reported that "all influences traditional and sectarian have been brought to bear on this people for the purpose of securing an abject communism under and subject to an absolute one man power." McDougall was concerned that the Doukhobors' low level of education, high level of "superstition," and commitment to their faith led them to lean heavily on Verigin's leadership.⁵⁷ Immigration Agent Charles Wesley Speers was concerned that Verigin was exercising too much control over his followers, acting as an intermediary between his people

⁵⁷ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 49.

and the Canadian authorities on land rights issues. Speers was concerned that the Doukhobors were not being properly informed about their options.⁵⁸ Journalists were concerned as well. The *Globe* labeled Verigin an “autocrat” and accused him of taking “advantage of the simple faith of the people” in his dealings with them.⁵⁹ The *Bracebridge Gazette* described him as a “benevolent despot absolutely devoted to the interests of the Doukhobors, at all times plotting, planning and scheming to advance their cause, not enriching himself; ruling with a rod of iron; exacting implicit obedience and exercising rigid discipline.”⁶⁰

Even some of the Doukhobors’ Russian supporters were concerned about Verigin’s authoritarian leadership style. In 1901, Leo Tolstoy advised Verigin to discourage his followers from “ascribing a supernatural significance to your personality,” even if there was an “advantage which might ensue from such a superstition, [such as] exercising a beneficial influence on the weaker ones.”⁶¹ Anna Tchertkova, a Tolstoyan and Doukhobor sympathizer, wrote to Peter Maloff⁶² in 1923, indicating that neither she nor her husband Vladimir supported Verigin’s “monarchical ways.” They did not condone “blind obedience to one man, even if this man would be a genius with a brain equal to the strength of seven human brains.”⁶³

Verigin’s claim to leadership of the Canadian Doukhobors was strongly reinforced by his personal magnetism, his superior education, his “total” approach to leadership over all aspects of the Doukhobors’ political, economic, and spiritual affairs, and the possibility (not

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁹ Aikin, “A New Autocrat has Risen Up,” *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1.

⁶⁰ “He Leads a Queer People,” *Bracebridge Gazette*, 3 April 1913, 11.

⁶¹ Gromova-Opul’skaya, Donskov, and Woodsworth, *Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence*, 46.

⁶² A Doukhobor, Peter Maloff was born into an Independent family, but sympathized with and lived among the Sons of Freedom, though he did not identify himself as one personally. A well-read intellectual, he offered his own criticism of the Doukhobors’ situation in the mid 1950s, entitled *In Quest of a Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* (n.p: Hall Printers, 1957).

⁶³ Peter Maloff, “Letters, 1924-26,” 390-391, Peter Maloff Papers, UBC.

formally confirmed or denied) of his supernatural essence. Yet, Verigin still struggled to keep his followers unified behind him. If he made concessions to the Canadian government, Doukhobors on one end of the spectrum feared he had forgotten his Doukhobor commitments and acted out. If he held too steadfastly to Doukhobor principles, he risked alienating those Doukhobors on the other end of the spectrum who saw benefits to the Canadian approach to landownership, and threatened to withdraw from the Community. Though he did have a considerable amount of influence over his followers, his lead was not as absolute as it might have appeared from the outside. If it had been, the Doukhobor group would not have subdivided.

Much of the early “Doukhobor problem” had to do with citizenship issues. The Doukhobors considered themselves a polity outside of nationalism.⁶⁴ This had been the case even in Russia, where the Doukhobors did share cultural and linguistic traits with their neighbours. In Canada, settled more or less insularly on the Northwestern prairie, the Doukhobors did not identify as Canadians or even future Canadians. They identified as Doukhobors, and if “Doukhoboria” – a Doukhobor nation within Canada – could have been officially founded, it is likely that they would have done so. They chose to respect Canadian rule-of-law only where it did not conflict with Doukhobor beliefs. They chose to exclude Canadian influences as much as possible.

His followers were not interested in Canadian citizenship, Verigin explained to his friend and mentor Leo Tolstoy in 1904. From the Doukhobors’ point of view, all who signed individually for their homesteads would have to pledge a “full allegiance to ‘Edward’, to defend his honour and so forth and to live in Canada forever.” This, the Doukhobors were

⁶⁴ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, “Building Doukhoboriia: Religious Culture, Social Identity and Russian Colonization in Transcaucasia, 1845-1895,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 27 no. 3 (1995): 40-41.

not prepared to do, because it violated their belief in equality, and implied that they would be obliged to perform military service if the King requested it. Verigin explained that the Doukhobors were not yet confident that the land could provide sufficient yield for their needs. If it proved unequal to the Doukhobors' demands, Verigin argued, "then it stands to reason we can't keep on living here forever, and so the question of citizenship I would say is rather premature."⁶⁵

The Doukhobors also continued to resist the Canadian government on the issues of vital statistics registration and marriage regulation. The Doukhobors feared registering their vital statistics with the government, because they feared that the government would use the information they collected to compel the Doukhobors to perform military service at a later date. They also resented government interference on issues that they viewed as spiritual domain. God knew who was born, dead, and married, they asserted, so the government need not concern itself with these affairs.⁶⁶

Their stance on these technicalities confused outsiders, who could not understand why the Doukhobors were so inflexible. As Quaker Doukhor sympathizer Joseph Elkinton remarked, "no phase of the Doukhor problem has done more to perplex the government which extended them hospitality, and to embarrass their friends and well-wishers, than the attitude which the Doukhobors have maintained toward the civil government." The Doukhobors' stance indicated a "complete denial of the authority and righteousness of any

⁶⁵ Gromova-Opul'skaya, Donskov, and Woodsworth, *Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence*, 64.

⁶⁶ "The Poor, Downtrodden Doukhor" *Edmonton Bulletin*, 25 March 1901, 3; "The Doukhobors," *The Globe*, 6 April 1901, 21; Lally Bernard, "Story of the Doukhoborts: How and Why they Came to Settle in Canada" *Globe*, 6 July 1901, 14; Geo. W. Grant, "Saskatoon of Today," (Saskatoon) *Phoenix*, 21 November 1902, 1, 8; J. A. Aikin, "A New Autocrat has Risen Up: Peter Verigin, Doukhor, and his Methods," *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 201; Gromova-Opul'skaya, Donskov, and Woodsworth, *Leo Tolstoy - Peter Verigin Correspondence*, 40; John Woodworth, trans., *Russian Roots and Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhor Emigration to Canada* (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 1999), 156; Stuart Jamieson, "The Doukhobors of B.C.," *Canadian Forum*, 31 (April 1951), 7-8; "Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia," 23, 34, 51, 54; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 2-3; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 127, 202.

government control over the individual, and a persistent distrust of the kindest and most well-intentioned efforts of the Canadian government to help them.”⁶⁷

The Doukhobors’ position on the land tenure issue was difficult for non-Doukhobors to understand. As became clear within a few years of the Doukhobors’ settlement, the Canadian government and the Doukhobors had different expectations concerning the technical details of the Doukhobors’ land tenure. In the Doukhobors’ haste to escape difficult conditions in Russia, and in the Canadians’ haste to welcome them, both parties overlooked important aspects of land settlement policy in Canada.

The federal government’s homesteading policies reflected their settlement objectives. The goal was not “settlement” at any cost, though Clifford Sifton’s approach was sometimes criticized as privileging “quantity” over “quality.”⁶⁸ The homestead program was intended to attract settlers who could render the land agriculturally productive *and* stake a “Canadian” claim in the Northwest. Northwestern settlement was designed to fulfill the terms of Sir John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, to protect against competing Aboriginal and American interests, and to establish an identifiably “Canadian” character on the prairies. Originally, the federal government hoped eastern Canadians – especially Anglo-Ontarians – would take to homesteading. Failing this, the federal government sought foreign homesteaders who were culturally similar to Canadians: preferably Britons or Americans. When these sources also proved limited, the federal government accepted foreign immigrants from other European countries. So long as these were excellent farmers, their cultural difference could be overlooked in the short term. In the long term, however, these immigrants were expected to lose their cultural distinction and embrace a Canadian way-of-life. In part, their European

⁶⁷ Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 111.

⁶⁸ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 131.

(white) ancestry made their complete assimilation seem feasible. Once they lost their cultural peculiarity, there would be no barrier to their passing as “Canadian.”⁶⁹

The federal government had shown the Doukhobors initially that it was prepared to offer them accommodation of their religious beliefs and social practices. The Doukhobors thus believed they were especially valued as settlers, and that their special needs were recognized and would be respected. Having already assured the Doukhobors of exemption from military service requirements, accommodations on communal farming of the land and on the swearing of an oath of allegiance did not seem, from the Doukhobor perspective, to be too much more to ask.⁷⁰ The federal government was not interested, however, in making exceptions for the Doukhobors in perpetuity, since the Doukhobors were expected not to need them once they had acclimatized to a “Canadian” way-of-life.

The government and the Doukhobors went back and forth between 1902 and 1907 on the land issue. When pressured on the matter in 1903, the Doukhobors agreed to sign for their homesteads formally as per the government’s request, but requested permission not to do so personally. In this manner, the Doukhobors hoped to satisfy the government’s homestead requirements without compromising their religious beliefs. Permission was granted, and a committee of three Doukhobor representatives was appointed and given power of attorney to complete the entries. By the end of 1904, the Doukhobors had successfully claimed 2,640 homesteads in this way. The remainder, 244,000 acres of land originally allotted to the Doukhobors, was opened to the public on 15 December 1904.⁷¹

⁶⁹ David Hall, “Clifford Sifton’s Vision of the Prairie West,” in *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, ed. R.D. Frances and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007): 92-93; Brown and Cook, *A Nation Transformed*, 49, 57, 60, 72-73; Jean R. Burnet and Howard Palmer, “*Coming Canadians: An Introduction to a History of Canada’s Peoples*” (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 25, 223; Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 66; Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 219.

⁷⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 221

⁷¹ Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 110.

At the end of 1904, the Doukhobors perceived that they had compromised with the government and the government with them, such that they now were formally registered for individual homesteads, but were permitted to settle and work the land collectively as originally understood. However, the problem was not resolved. In 1905, Frank Oliver replaced Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior. His priorities differed from those of his predecessor. He opposed the compromises that had been extended to the Doukhobors, and set about reversing them while in office.⁷²

Oliver commissioned the Rev. John McDougall to investigate the Doukhobors' attitudes towards land tenure and provide the government with recommendations on how best to proceed. McDougall had been a consultant on treaty and reservation issues concerning Canada's Aboriginal population. His appointment was therefore appropriate, since the Doukhobors had asked the government to reconsider their status, such that they would no longer be "homesteaders." Instead, the Doukhobors wanted the government to allow them to use the land "for settlement and agricultural purposes" in a similar manner to the "conditions given to your Indians – that is, the land to be held by the community and not by the individual members." The Doukhobors did not care whether the land would be "considered our community property, or the property of your country; but we would like it to be considered as given to us for an indefinite period of time, and if you wish us to pay rent we are willing to do so, provided we shall be able."⁷³

In light of the Doukhobors' resistance to swearing allegiance, McDougall suggested that the "citizenship" question be eliminated altogether by cancelling the Doukhobors' homesteads. With the homesteads cancelled, the government could rework the terms of the Doukhobors' settlement into a reserve plan. The Doukhobors would not be given title to the

⁷² Ibid., 103.

⁷³ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 40-41.

land, but would be able to work it “during the government’s pleasure.” All homesteads would be cancelled except those where all regular conditions of the homestead laws had been met. The Doukhobors were to be given a three-month “grace period” to consider their options. Oliver accepted MacDougall’s proposal, and set about putting it in place.⁷⁴

Oliver announced that all homesteaders would be required to follow the letter of the homesteading law: no exceptions. When challenged by the Doukhobors who cited the exceptions Sifton had made for them, Oliver suggested that they had misunderstood him. The Doukhobors felt that Oliver, as a representative of “the government” had the power to be flexible whether there was a misunderstanding or not, but was opting not to be. They perceived his approach as an attack on their religious principles. Oliver indicated that it was the government’s intention to continue to “protect” the Doukhobors “as it has hitherto done in their religious beliefs, but it can no longer give them privileges in regard to land which it does not give to other people.”⁷⁵

James Mavor, who had been involved in negotiating the Doukhobors’ terms of settlement in the first place and had been in direct contact with Sifton and his deputy, James Smart, throughout the Doukhobors’ immigration proceedings, challenged Oliver’s explanation that the Doukhobors had misunderstood Sifton’s exceptions. Mavor argued that Oliver’s excuses implied that Sifton had intentionally misled the Doukhobors in order to allow for the “expropriation of their lands by himself or his successor, by affording a technical pretext.” This had not been Mavor’s impression, nor does the evidence support this explanation. Mavor argued that Oliver either neglected to learn about the specifics of the

⁷⁴ “Make an Appeal for Christian Charity: Doukhobors Refuse to Take Oath, Point to Teaching of Christ,” *Daily Phoenix*, 14 March 1907, 1; Department of the Interior, “Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and the Disposition of Same,” 14 October 1907, 8.

⁷⁵ As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 54.

Doukhobors' arrangements, was listening to bad advice, or else had decided to ignore his predecessor's agreements.⁷⁶

In a "Memorandum Upon Doukhobor Affairs" composed on 15 April 1907, Mavor explained the arrangements and concessions the federal government made for the Doukhobors prior to their immigration. Mavor cited Sifton's "dispatch" of 15 February 1902, which stated:

I have decided that those who will take their homesteads and accept of free land from the government may live together in one or more villages, and instead of being compelled to cultivate each quarter section held by each Doukhobor, that the land around the village itself may be cultivated and the work which would otherwise be required on each individual homestead may be done altogether around the village.⁷⁷

Mavor acknowledged that Sifton "may or may not have been entitled to give this permission but he was at all events the responsible Minister of the Crown at the time and the honor and faith of the government is unquestionably involved in carrying out the undertaking which he gave."⁷⁸ Mavor charged that the government was guilty of a "very serious breach of faith" in denying Sifton's exceptions and implementing Oliver's plan.⁷⁹ In a letter to Mavor, Sifton admitted: "no one knows better than I do myself what an amount of patience and tact is necessary in dealing with the Doukhobors. I shall be extremely sorry if any difficulty arises now after the amount of time and trouble that has been taken in the past to avoid it."⁸⁰

Advocates such as Mavor, though vocal, were few. Many non-Doukhobor settlers resented the exemptions granted to the Doukhobors. Land reserved for the Doukhobors was

⁷⁶ James Mavor, "A Defense of the Doukhobors," [1907], James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto.

⁷⁷ James Mavor, "Memorandum Upon Doukhobor Affairs," 15 April 1907, 4-5, James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁹ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 56.

⁸⁰ Sifton to Mavor, 3 June 1907, James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto.

preferable to other unclaimed lots located further away from railway facilities.⁸¹ Living in villages and working collectively, the Doukhobors appeared to use only a fraction of the land reserved for them. Non-Doukhobors who were interested in taking up uncultivated land within the Doukhobor reserves were not permitted to do so. Would-be settlers could not understand why they could not apply to homestead land the Doukhobors seemed to neglect.⁸² They were also frustrated that the Doukhobors were not held to the same rules non-Doukhobor homesteaders were subject to.⁸³ This was especially an issue because the settlers who were interested in Doukhobor land were, or were prepared to become, “British subjects,” while many of the Doukhobors refused to swear allegiance to the British crown or to accept the duties of Canadian citizenship.⁸⁴

The government had been prepared to offer the Doukhobors settlement in Canada on favourable and exceptional terms because there was abundant agricultural land in the Northwest and few settlers interested in taking it up. However, increased settlement around the Doukhobor reserves drew attention to the “great, empty, untilled areas” on the Doukhobor reserves.⁸⁵ As public interest in the land increased, the federal government’s will to offer the Doukhobors further concessions weakened, and its commitment to previous concessions wavered.⁸⁶ Public pressure to open untilled Doukhobor land to non-Doukhobor settlers motivated Frank Oliver to insist on strict conformity to the letter of the homesteading regulations after 1905.⁸⁷

⁸¹ “The Rights of Squatters,” *Regina Standard*, 29 August 1906, 4.

⁸² Geo. W. Grant, “Saskatoon of Today,” *Phoenix*, 21 November 1902, 1, 8; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 40; Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 95.

⁸³ H. A. Livingston, “The New Babel on the Plains,” *Globe*, 2 July 1904, 67; “The Doukhobor Question” *Phoenix*, 15 February 1906, 8.

⁸⁴ Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 152.

⁸⁵ “The Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 4 March 1907, 6.

⁸⁶ Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 111, 152.

⁸⁷ “Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia,” 25.

Prevailing public opinion held that Sifton's effort to settle the Northwest with "any kind of human livestock, ha[d] proved a terrible failure in the case of the Doukhobors."⁸⁸ The Doukhobors were "the least valuable element of all immigration that has come to these shores" and were nonetheless "fortified by exceptional concessions."⁸⁹ The editor of Saskatoon's *Phoenix* urged his readers to be fair-minded, however. The government should uphold its promises to the Doukhobors, he argued.⁹⁰ Several desirable sections of land remained outside of Doukhobor reserves, he pointed out, and little would be gained by upsetting and alienating the Doukhobors for the sake of a few homesteads. The editor recommended a policy of "patient forbearance" towards the Doukhobors, and urged the federal government to unequivocally declare its intention to protect the Doukhobors' land rights, "even at the risk of a little unpopularity."⁹¹ The *Phoenix* sagaciously cautioned that "it is easier to do a wrong than to right it after the seeds of distrust and bitterness have been sown."⁹² The Doukhobor "has a claim in Anglo-Saxon fair play and for God's sake let him have it."⁹³ The reference to "Anglo-Saxon fair play" is noteworthy. Under Tsarist authority in Imperial Russia, the Doukhobors had lost their land through dispossession or exile on several occasions prior to 1899. Now, it seemed, they were to endure a similar experience in Canada, "Anglo-Saxon" principles of justice notwithstanding.

Would-be settlers were already planting their own seeds on the Doukhobors' unimproved land.⁹⁴ When the Doukhobors threatened to reap the harvest of the squatters' efforts, the squatters wielded firearms in defense of their claim.⁹⁵ The authorities upheld the Doukhobors' exclusive rights to their land in these instances. At the end of August 1906, the

⁸⁸ "Cannot Cancel the Doukhobors," *Regina Standard*, 30 May 1906, 11.

⁸⁹ "The Rights of Squatters," *Regina Standard*, 29 August 1906, 4.

⁹⁰ "Be Patient and Fair," *Phoenix*, 22 February 1906, 6.

⁹¹ "Go Carefully," *Phoenix*, 1 March 1906, 1.

⁹² "Fair Play to the Doukhobor," *Daily Phoenix*, 2 March 1907, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ "Doukhobors May Cause More Trouble," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 18 July 1906, 3.

⁹⁵ "Trouble Among Settlers," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 26 July 1906, 9; *Phoenix*, 25 July 1906, 2.

Northwest Mounted Police pursued those squatting on Doukhobor land as trespassers. In October of the same year, R. E. A. Leach of the Dominion Lands office announced that “the squatters on the Doukhobor lands have no right and are, in the eyes of the law, guilty of trespassing.”⁹⁶ While this was a victory from the Doukhobor perspective, it was met with public opposition.⁹⁷ The *Regina Standard* predicted, correctly, that public opinion would force the government to adjust its approach to the Doukhobors, ultimately yielding to the squatters who were ready and willing to take up the Doukhobors’ untilled land.⁹⁸

In light of growing public and governmental pressure, the Doukhobors were forced to make a difficult decision. They could compromise their beliefs to appease the government, they could accept “token plots of government land to be held ‘at the pleasure of the government’,” or they could leave altogether.⁹⁹ Community-minded Doukhobors, with a collective memory of persecution and repeated exile, were more committed to each other and to their principles than to any specific plot of land.¹⁰⁰ If complying with government regulations would mean holding title to their land individually instead of in common, working the land on individual plots instead of collectively, and swearing an undesirable oath of allegiance to the King, the community-minded Doukhobors were opposed.¹⁰¹ Verigin informed Tolstoy that the Doukhobors were prepared to face the consequences of this decision, “probably because the majority of them already decided the question of Citizenship about three or four years back – in the negative.”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ “Have No Rights,” *Phoenix*, 10 October 1906, 4.

⁹⁷ “Cannot Cancel the Doukhobors,” *Regina Standard*, 30 May 1906, 11. See also “The Doukhobors Forsake their Land,” *Phoenix*, 4 July 1906, 3.

⁹⁸ “Squatters Rights and Doukhobors,” *Regina Standard*, 29 August 1906, 3.

⁹⁹ Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*,” 152.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰² P. V. Verigin to L. N. Tolstoy, 9 March 1907, Otradnoe, (Gromova-Opul’skaya, Donskov, and Woodsworth, *Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence*, 83.)

The communal Doukhobors who refused to meet the government's requirements lost a significant parcel of land in 1907. Their original holdings of 406,000 acres were reduced to about 123,000, which is about a sixty per cent decline.¹⁰³ The communal Doukhobors were permitted to use reserve land, calculated at fifteen acres per person, at the government's "pleasure."¹⁰⁴ The Doukhobors were allowed to select which of their holdings to retain, but this was tricky. In some cases, the Doukhobors had cultivated land close to their village settlements, which made the decision easier. In other cases, the best agricultural land was located at some distance from the village settlement. In order to protect their villages, some Doukhobors had to let go of improved land, which meant they lost their land as well as their invested labour.¹⁰⁵ The Doukhobors' losses were calculated in the millions of dollars.¹⁰⁶ However, as Carl Tracie points out in *Toil and Peaceful Life*, "no matter what the actual figure was, it represented to the Doukhobors a huge loss in the investment of capital and labour; of more fundamental importance, it represented broken promises and rekindled long-held fears of governments which could not be trusted."¹⁰⁷

Approximately 258,880 acres of land were made available for non-Doukhobor settlers, who rushed to stake their claims.¹⁰⁸ Would-be homesteaders camped out overnight to secure a good position in line at the registration office, and the NWMP were hard-pressed to control the crowds.¹⁰⁹ In fact, mob violence was narrowly avoided.¹¹⁰ Clearly, those who suggested that non-Doukhobor settlers were eager to get at the land were correct.

¹⁰³ Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 158.

¹⁰⁴ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 158.

¹⁰⁶ \$11,400,000 according to Jeremy Adelman, "Early Doukhobor Experience on the Canadian Prairies," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 25, no. 4 (Winter, 1991).

¹⁰⁷ Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 210.

¹⁰⁸ Department of the Interior, "Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and Disposition of Same," 14 October 1907, 8; "The Doukhobor Land and its Lessons," *Daily Phoenix*, 4 June 1907, 2; "Getting Better Order," *Daily Phoenix*, 8 June 1907, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Department of the Interior, "Reports and Maps Relating to Lands Held Under Homestead Entry by Doukhobors and Disposition of Same," 14 October 1907, 9.

Had the government agreed to calculate cultivation requirements according to the Doukhobors' understanding of it – as a percentage of the whole village allotment instead of the individual holding – the Doukhobors would have had a better chance of retaining their property. Had the government recognized the Doukhobor holdings as collectively owned instead of individually, the community-minded Doukhobors would have been more likely to register their land. Had the government clarified that the Doukhobors could make an “affirmation” instead of the “oath of allegiance,” the Doukhobors might have been more inclined to take this step.¹¹¹ If it had been the government's “pleasure” to permit the Doukhobors to retain their land, the government could have allowed Sifton's original arrangement – and the spirit of limited compromise which underpinned it – to stand. Clearly, it was the government's “pleasure” to apply pressure to the Doukhobor Community in 1907, to force it to realign, conform, and possibly dissolve altogether.

The government's pressure on the Doukhobor Community had two significant immediate results. The first was that many Doukhobors lost their land. The second was that the Doukhobor group divided. Most Doukhobors (8175 of them) refused to register their homesteads and lost their land. These were reallocated to fifteen-acres-per-person reserves. Some Doukhobors, however, were dissatisfied with the communal approach to settlement in Canada and decided to go their own way. These registered for 236 homesteads, and set about farming as Independents.¹¹² They were prepared to provide the Canadian authorities with the vital statistics data they requested, and did not feel a moral conflict between their personal beliefs and registering for their homesteads. They did not wish to be subject to Verigin's

¹¹⁰ Adelman, “Early Doukhobor Experience,” 125; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 54; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 56

¹¹¹ Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 6.

¹¹² Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 92. Tarasoff notes that both the numbers of Independents, and the numbers of Sons of Freedom, increased steadily during this land-loss period.

rule. Nor did they wish to contribute their earnings to Community coffers.¹¹³ As one farmer put it: “I want to belong to Government and be Canadian. My children too, they must be Canadian.”¹¹⁴ Independent Doukhobors exercised the vote, ran for politics, sought formal education and higher education opportunities, adopted professions, and generally integrated into Canadian public life far sooner, and far more readily, than their other Doukhobor counterparts.

Canadians supported the Doukhobors who went Independent, and anticipated that others would follow suit. J. A. Aiken of the *Globe* suggested that it was unnecessary to do anything to “break up the community.” Rather, concerned citizens should “safeguard the independence and rights of each individual Doukhobor and make it so that he could follow the example of the few who have already come out.”¹¹⁵ The individual Doukhobors received the respect of their Canadian neighbours and “the best of feeling exists between them,” Aiken reported. The Independent farmers did not have Verigin’s support, however. He instructed his followers to avoid their Independent kin,¹¹⁶ and when the issue of military conscription first arose in 1917, Verigin urged the government to enlist the dissidents.¹¹⁷ In Verigin’s view, true Doukhobors remained vegetarians, eschewed materialism, and lived communally. Most importantly, they followed his lead.

The Community Doukhobors lost a considerable portion of their land in 1907. To compensate for the land loss and to increase the Doukhobors’ autonomy, Verigin purchased land in British Columbia in 1908 and in Alberta in 1915 on behalf of the “Christian

¹¹³ “A Summer Among the Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 30 August 1913, 12.

¹¹⁴ C. I. S. “A Day Among the Doukhobors,” *Canadian Magazine*, 26 (January 1906), 282.

¹¹⁵ Aikin, “A New Autocrat has Risen Up,” *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1.

¹¹⁶ Peter Maloff, “Letters, 1924-26,” 311, Peter Maloff Papers, University of British Columbia Library.

¹¹⁷ Victoria Hayward, “The Doukhobors: A Community Race in Canada,” *Canadian Magazine*, 51 (October 1918), 468.

Community of Universal Brotherhood” (CCUB), using Community funds.¹¹⁸ He continued to purchase land on the Community’s behalf until his death in 1924, at which time the Community owned 21,648 acres in British Columbia.¹¹⁹ More than half of the Community Doukhobors decided to leave Saskatchewan to take up Community land in British Columbia.¹²⁰ By 1913, 5,700 Doukhobors had moved to British Columbia and more were expected to follow shortly.¹²¹

The move to Community-owned land in British Columbia and Alberta allowed the Doukhobors to renegotiate the terms of their communal lifestyle. Holding clear title to the land as a community removed the Canadian government from the land ownership equation, and increased the Community’s autonomy. Living in British Columbia and Alberta allowed the Doukhobors to engage in a new, more highly integrated form of communal life. In addition to residences and farms, the Doukhobors built industry and infrastructure on the land they purchased.¹²² They established businesses that would provide materials for the Community’s use and for outside sale.¹²³ Under Verigin’s direction, the Community prospered.¹²⁴ The organization’s costs were low, and (in theory, at least) every member’s needs were provided for out of the central coffers.¹²⁵ Community members worked hard, long, and steadily, but had the benefit of daily close contact with friends and family. No one in the Community struggled alone.

¹¹⁸ Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 7. In 1917, Verigin transferred the land purchased in his name to Community title.

¹¹⁹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 228. In 1915, Verigin had purchased 12,000 acres in the Cowley-Lundbreck area of Alberta. John W. Friesen, “Pacifism and Anastasia’s Doukhobor Village” *Alberta History* 41 no. 1 (1993): 16.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹²¹ Verigin, “The Truth About the Doukhobors,” 22.

¹²² William M. Rozinkin as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 49 (2 March 1980), 509.

¹²³ Peter Maloff, “Letters, 1924-26,” 305, Peter Maloff Papers, University of British Columbia Library.

¹²⁴ “He Leads a Queer People,” *Bracebridge Gazette*, 3 April 1913, 11.

¹²⁵ Orris, “Social Control and Assimilation,” 122; Verigin, “The Truth About the Doukhobors,” 24; Hayward, “The Doukhobors,” 468; Aikin, “A New Autocrat has Risen Up,” *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1; Livingston, “The New Babel on the Plains,” *Globe*, 2 July 1904, 67; Smith, “The Doukhobors of Canada,” 77.

The Community's business success attracted both positive and negative public attention. The Doukhobors' communal project was deemed "one of the most remarkable economic and social experiments now proceeding within the confines of the British Empire."¹²⁶ Outsiders recognized that Community Doukhobors worked very hard, but noted that they had several economic advantages individuals did not. "Their low labor costs, their pooling of receipts and their wholesale buying" certainly helped them get ahead.¹²⁷ Their low overhead meant that Doukhobor businesses had a clear market advantage.

Many commentators held the Doukhobors' industry in high regard, but were critical of "their lower standard of living, their opposition to education, and their peculiar beliefs as to ownership of property."¹²⁸ Their economic insularity posed similar difficulties in British Columbia as it had in Saskatchewan. The Doukhobors did not support local businesses, except in wholesale trade. They did not promote development outside of their own Community. As such, Samuel Maber of the Department of the Interior explained, though their patronage was of some value to Canadian wholesalers, the Doukhobors "were not regarded by the towns, villages, and districts in which they were located as being a desirable addition to settlement."¹²⁹

Some outsiders were concerned about the legal rights and responsibilities of the village residents as individuals, and wondered what would happen should an individual decide to leave the Community.¹³⁰ The Community's official stance was that, should any of its members wish to leave the commune, they could contact the central office and withdraw a share.¹³¹ In reality, the process was more difficult and some problems did indeed arise.

¹²⁶ Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 268; see also Smith, "The Doukhobors of Canada," 75.

¹²⁷ "Some Kootenay Fruit Growers Cry Protection" *Globe*, 2 October 1920, 29.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ [S. Maber?] to Mr. R. F. Green, 8 April 1914, McBride Papers (selections 1913-1915), University of British Columbia Library.

¹³⁰ Livingston, "The New Babel on the Plains," *Globe*, 2 July 1904, 67.

¹³¹ Hayward, "The Doukhobors," 468.

Communal living offered the Doukhobors cultural advantages as well as economic ones. So long as the Doukhobors remained economically and socially self sufficient, their interaction with non-Doukhobor Canadians was limited. This allowed them to retain their language, religious, and cultural traditions far longer than the Canadian authorities anticipated.¹³² This was of concern to those who felt that the Doukhobors should assimilate to Canadian way-of-life.

Though the move to British Columbia allowed the Doukhobors to revise their communal plan according to Verigin's vision, it also brought new hardships the Doukhobors had not foreseen. British Columbians were generally "more colonial in outlook" and "nativist" than their prairie counterparts.¹³³ They were even less inclined to accept cultural difference, or to tolerate refusal to assimilate, than Saskatchewanians had been.¹³⁴ In addition, British Columbia was quicker to make school attendance compulsory and to enforce this position than Saskatchewan was, which posed a major issue for the Doukhobor newcomers who did not wish to have their children exposed to Canadian education.

In British Columbia, the Doukhobors continued to resist government pressure to register their vital statistics data.¹³⁵ They buried their dead under cover of darkness and instructed their children to hold their tongues.¹³⁶ It was difficult for the province to hold the

¹³² Lally Bernard, "With the Doukhobors," *Globe*, 9 September 1899, 6; "A Great Wave of Settlement," *Globe*, 9 October 1902, 8; "Immigration Policy," *Globe*, 8 September 1900, 6; Peter N. Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* ([Thrums, B.C.: n.p.], 1957), 7; Dorothy K. Burnham, *Unlike the Lilies: Doukhobor Textile Traditions in Canada* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1986), vii; Orris, "Social Control and Assimilation," 120; Sam George Stupnikoff, *Historical Saga of the Doukhobor Faith, 1750-1990s* (Saskatoon: Apex Graphics, 1992), 77; James Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World* (Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1923), 5.

¹³³ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 366.

¹³⁴ Rak, *Negotiated Memory*, 49 and John McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits: The Strange Case of Peter Verigin II," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1995), 98.

¹³⁵ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 124.

¹³⁶ A. V. Pineo, Departmental Solicitor, to the Hon. the Attorney-General, "Report of Investigation of Doukhobor situation at Grand Forks, B. C., October 23-29, 1913," 8 November 1913, 8.

Doukhobors accountable for these transgressions.¹³⁷ Where it was discovered that the Doukhobors failed to register vital statistics, especially deaths, the authorities began to arrest those thought to be responsible.¹³⁸ The Doukhobors' community organization often made it difficult for authorities to determine which *individual* members were responsible for failures to register vital statistics, however. British Columbian authorities and the citizens who supported them were determined to force the issue, and were prepared to revise legal interpretations of "criminal responsibility" to do it. Authorities began to consider ways to hold the Doukhobors responsible *as a community*.¹³⁹

The dispute over vital statistics collection is meaningful. The Doukhobors' refusal to cooperate reflected their mistrust of government, their belief in God's rule over human authority, their fear of conscription, and their hesitation to put roots down on Canadian soil. The Canadians' (in this case, British Columbians') insistence on the registration of these data reflected their commitment to law and order, their dependence on public cooperation (rather than on physical compulsion), their desire that newcomers commit to their new home, and their frustration with foreigner non-conformity. Disagreements about vital statistics thus represented a larger identity struggle between Doukhobors and non-Doukhobors.

Given the strength of the new Community and the problems the province was already having with it, the Conservative premier Richard McBride felt it necessary to investigate the Doukhobor society via a Royal Commission. He appointed William Blakemore, an English mining engineer and editor of Nelson, B.C.'s *The Week* to the task in 1912. Blakemore had offered commentary on the Doukhobors in his paper, and was a "pillar" of the local Conservative Party organization, both of which made him an attractive candidate for the

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7, 12.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁹ John McLaren with Tom Christensen and Catherine Parker, "Truancy and 'Child Snatching': Law, Social Control and Doukhobor Education in British Columbia, 1911-1935," paper presented at B. C. Studies Conference '94, Okanagan University College, Kelowna, B.C., 7-10 October 1994, 20.

job.¹⁴⁰ He was to examine the Doukhobors' "organization, habits, customs, and practices," with special attention to the Doukhobors' attitudes towards internal leadership, property ownership, marital practices and familial relationships, Canadian law and citizenship, as well as the Community's "social, intellectual, moral, and religious life."¹⁴¹

Given Blakemore's Conservative party interests, his favourable assessment of the Doukhobors is noteworthy. He found them to be cooperative and felt they showed him the "utmost personal kindness" throughout his study.¹⁴² The Doukhobors embodied "the very essence of kindness, courtesy, and hospitality," Blakemore reported, and their "habits are good."¹⁴³ They were peaceful, honourable, and sober. They dressed modestly.¹⁴⁴ They were perceived by outsiders as cheerful and could often be found singing.¹⁴⁵ Their commercial reputation had rendered them "the most-sought-after and probably the most-trusted trading company" in British Columbia.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Blakemore felt that "it is doubtful if any community of like numbers can point to a finer record for the simple, religious, Christ-like life."¹⁴⁷

In general, Blakemore found that the Doukhobors were "desirable settlers" as far as their character and productivity were concerned. There was no reason to be concerned about their conduct in their homes and with one another. In his view, the only reasonable objection the public might have about them concerned their refusal to register their vital statistics and to send their children to school consistently. The Doukhobors' position on these issues was "based upon their religious beliefs and conscientious scruples" Blakemore noted, and "their

¹⁴⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 245.

¹⁴¹ "Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia," 1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

attitude is genuine.” In other words, Blakemore wished to clarify that the Doukhobors were not interested in creating problems for the sake of being difficult. He felt that they would soften their position as their familiarity with Canadian way-of-life increased. He also felt that Verigin would be able to persuade his followers to cooperate, if not immediately, then in due course. In the meantime, however, he felt that the Doukhobors had been poorly informed about their legal responsibilities, and were under the misconception that so long as they were not “naturalized British subjects” and owned their property outright (rather than “at the government’s pleasure” as in Saskatchewan) they would not be required to follow the laws in question.¹⁴⁸

In light of these observations, Blakemore advocated a patient approach. He felt that the Doukhobor leader could be convinced that cooperation with the authorities was preferable to resistance. Considering the Doukhobors’ “strong religious views, their honesty of purpose, and their ingrained obstinacy,” he recommended that the government avoid using extreme measures to force compliance on the legal matters in question, at least in the short term. Where prosecution was necessary, Blakemore recommended that the penalty be financial rather than imprisonment. Financial penalties would pressure Doukhobor leaders to advocate compliance among their followers more effectively than imprisonment would, Blakemore suspected. He did urge the government to insist that the Doukhobors comply with the terms of the Public Schools Act. However, he advised that the government strive to inspire the Doukhobors’ “confidence” and “sympathy” by hiring Russian teachers alongside Canadian ones, and by modifying the curriculum to “include only elementary subjects.” In addition, Blakemore suggested that the government employ a Doukhobor Agent, similar to the Indian Agents responsible for Native Canadians’ affairs.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

Blakemore's observations are fair-minded and sensitive, and his recommendations reflect a fairly good understanding of the Doukhobors' strengths and challenges, as well as their early twentieth-century concerns. Blakemore undid much of the good of his goodwill, however, by also recommending that the government withdraw the Doukhobors' exemption from military service. This suggestion shows a surprising lack of understanding of the Doukhobors' core beliefs and primary concerns. Blakemore's motivation for this recommendation is unclear: though there was some imperial anxiety concerning naval preparedness, the country was not yet at war, the Doukhobors' military exemption was not a point of contention among government authorities in 1912, and was not necessarily even on the public radar. Other issues had taken precedence. Perhaps Blakemore felt that requiring the Doukhobors to perform military service might increase their commitment to the nation's welfare. Nothing could be further from the truth. Challenging this fundamental tenet of Doukhor belief damaged his credibility among them.¹⁴⁹ He indicated in the report that while respecting others' beliefs, rights, and freedoms was important in principle, he was not in favour of granting the "privileges of citizenship" to those who were unwilling to accept "all the responsibilities of citizenship and to take their full share of whatever sacrifice may be involved in defending the country of their adoption."¹⁵⁰

Blakemore interviewed the Doukhobors' neighbours to get a sense of public opinions about them. Some indicated that they had benefitted economically because of the Doukhobors' close proximity. In Saskatchewan, for example, the Doukhobors built grain elevators and invited their neighbours to share access to them, which reduced costs and increased profits for the Doukhobors and their neighbours alike.¹⁵¹ Yet some members of the public felt that the Doukhobors were bad for business. They did not buy from local

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 57-58.

businesses. Furthermore, their low overhead allowed them to sell their produce at a lower price than their competitors.

The “committee of citizens” Blakemore interviewed also complained that the Doukhobors’ large numbers would overwhelm the local culture, and it could become “impossible for them to be assimilated with the resident population.” The presence of so many Doukhobors prevented the immigration of settlers who would be more “desirable” and thus “retard[ed] the development of the country.”¹⁵² Citizens were also concerned that the Doukhobors defied provincial laws. Laws concerning the registration of vital statistics, and the proper conduct of marriage ceremony were in place to ensure moral conduct, and the Doukhobors’ defiance of these laws made some suspicious of their activities.

Blakemore reported that, from the Doukhobors’ perspective, there was no need to register as citizens of Canada or Great Britain as they were merely “citizens of the world.” They had been registered in God’s “Book of Life” and that was good enough for them. The Doukhobors promised to live “peacefully and quietly” if the police would leave them alone.¹⁵³

They preferred to be left alone on the education issue as well. In their view, state education was linked to militarism, capitalism, exploitation, and usury. They perceived themselves “Children of the Soil,” and feared that education would draw the younger generation away from their agricultural calling.¹⁵⁴ Blakemore noted that very few of the Doukhobors were literate in 1912, and that fewer still could speak English.¹⁵⁵ This had resulted on the one hand in “stunted” intellectual development, and a “narrow and bigoted” outlook among many Doukhobors.¹⁵⁶ Yet, Blakemore reported that one of the teachers who

¹⁵² Ibid., 64.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 33-34, 45.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

had worked with Doukhobor children declared that they were good students, and “on the whole quicker to learn than the average Canadian child.”¹⁵⁷ Even without formal education, the Doukhobors had at least an “average” level of intelligence and capacity for logical thinking.¹⁵⁸ Their home-schooling taught them “obedience, reverence, industry, and thrift” as well as the tenets of their religion.¹⁵⁹

School attendance had been voluntary in Saskatchewan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most Independent Doukhobor families living there were interested in sending their children to school. In some cases, they met with resistance as their neighbours sought to exclude their children as “undesirable.”¹⁶⁰ In contrast, British Columbians wanted Doukhobor children to attend public school in order to expedite their integration into Canadian way-of-life. In British Columbia, education was compulsory for children between seven and twelve years of age “if they lived within three miles of a school accessible by public roads.”¹⁶¹

Despite their reservations concerning formal education, the Doukhobors did make an effort to comply with British Columbia’s education requirements. Shortly after their arrival, schoolhouses were constructed near Doukhobor settlements to accommodate Doukhobor children, and the Doukhobors themselves constructed a school in Brilliant to provide for their children’s needs.¹⁶² However, when the provincial government increased its pressure on the Doukhobors to register vital statistics, even digging up recently buried bodies in order to enforce death registration regulations, the Doukhobors responded by withdrawing their

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 23, 32.

¹⁶⁰ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 119; McLaren, Christensen, and Parker, “Truancy and ‘Child Snatching’,” 8.

¹⁶¹ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 123.

¹⁶² Ibid.; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 121; F. Henry Johnson, “The Doukhobor of British Columbia: The History of a Sectarian Problem in Education,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, 70, no. 4 (1964), 532.

children from public school.¹⁶³ The Doukhobors were protesting this indignity, but they were also concerned about militarism embedded in the school curriculum. Their concerns were well-founded: the Lord Strathcona Trust, established in 1909, funded military drilling and “the fostering of a spirit of patriotism” in provincial public school systems. As such, Doukhor children were indeed exposed to undesirable military influences in British Columbia’s school system.¹⁶⁴

In response to the Doukhobors’ defiance of school attendance regulations as well as those pertaining to vital statistics registration, the government of British Columbia passed the “Community Regulation Act” in 1914. The Act allowed the government to hold the entire Doukhor Community responsible for legal infractions committed by any individual members. This allowed the government to levy fines against the Community’s considerable coffers, rather than against the modest assets held by any individual member of the CCUB, which it did in incidents of truancy between 1922 and 1925. When fines were not voluntarily paid, police began confiscating Community property. Ostensibly, this was done to cover the fine; however, this might have been intended to harass and intimidate them. This seemed to be the case in April of 1925, for example, when ten police officers, a police inspector, and a hundred non-Doukhor locals raided \$20,000-worth of Community-owned assets.¹⁶⁵

The Act provided the authorities with recourse if the Doukhobors failed to register vital statistics or send their youngsters to school. However, the Act was problematic on a number of levels. For one thing, the law recognized as a member of the Community any person whom one witness identified as a member of the Community. This left the

¹⁶³ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 129, n. 55, 56; Yerbury, “The ‘Sons of Freedom’ Doukhobors,” 55; Johnson, “The Doukhor of British Columbia,” 532.

¹⁶⁴ McLaren, Christensen, and Parker, “Truancy and ‘Child Snatching’,” 16; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 128.

¹⁶⁵ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 132; Nick D. Arishenkoff, Symposium 52 (8 June 1982), Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., *Summarized Report: Joint Doukhor Research Committee Meeting*, ([Grand Forks, British Columbia]: Partially funded by the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Centre for Russian and North American Studies; and the President’s Office, Selkirk College, 1997), p. 537, Doukhor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU).

Community Doukhobors vulnerable to the actions of any of their members, and vulnerable to the misunderstanding, or misinformation, of others who might mistakenly identify someone as a Community Doukhobor.¹⁶⁶ When created in 1914, the Act could not be enforced due to technicalities which authorities had overlooked. Until 1917, the Community's holdings were registered in Verigin's name and not in the name of the Community, so most of the Doukhobors' holdings were not actually subject to the terms of the Act. In many cases Doukhobor children did not live within three miles of a school accessible by public roads, as many of the roads linking Doukhobor villages were private. This meant that under the terms of the Public School Act, many Doukhobor children not attending public school were not actually truant.¹⁶⁷ In light of these oversights, British Columbia's Attorney General attempted to induce the Doukhobors to send their children to school voluntarily, by promising in 1915 to exempt the Doukhobor children from military drilling if they agreed to attend school. Over the next few years, school construction on, or in close proximity to Doukhobor lands resumed, and most Doukhobor children were enrolled, even if their attendance was spotty.¹⁶⁸

The struggle to get Doukhobor children into British Columbian schools took place while Canada was at war. This is significant because, as Jonathan Vance explains, Canadians experienced an "awakening of a national consciousness" during the Great War.¹⁶⁹ The War prompted Anglo-Canadians to rally together in the pursuit of a common goal. Those who refused to join in the war effort were conspicuous for their failure to contribute to the nation's welfare. In addition, the combination of patriotism and propaganda provided nationalists with the ingredients for a grand national narrative, which could be communicated

¹⁶⁶ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 128.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶⁹ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 228.

to those groups “especially needy of guidance,” including “immigrants who required ‘Canadianization’.”¹⁷⁰ Educating young members of non-conformist minority groups such as the Doukhobors was therefore linked to the growth and development of a “national identity,” which newcomers were expected to adopt.

The war thus had a twofold impact on the Doukhobors. They had to contend with increased public scrutiny and pressure to assimilate to Canadian culture. They also had to wonder whether the government would recognize the Doukhobors’ exemption from military service requirements, having failed to honour its promises concerning land settlement in the previous decade. To its credit, the Canadian government did. However, the government still required the Doukhobors and others subject to the same exemption to register with the authorities. Surprisingly, the Doukhobors agreed to sign their registration cards, and offered to pay twice as much tax in compensation for their exemption.¹⁷¹ This cooperation is surprising because their resistance to registering their vital statistics throughout the previous years was due, in part, to their fear that registering was required for military purposes. It may be that the Doukhobors calculated that cooperation during wartime was a better strategy than drawing attention to their unpopular stance.

The government protected the Doukhobors’ right to military service exemption during World War One, but enacted policies that made it clear that pacifists were not favoured. The Military Service Act of 1917 protected the “peace churches”’ military service exceptions; however, those who refused to perform military service were disenfranchised. Any Doukhobors claiming the right to a service exemption had to prove that they personally believed in pacifism, and produce a certificate of membership in a Doukhobor organization.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 234, 241.

¹⁷¹ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 172

Both the CCUB and the Society of Independent Doukhobors produced such certificates for their membership.¹⁷²

This raised an issue between the Community and Independent Doukhobors. Verigin sought to have the Independent Doukhobors' exemption rescinded, on the grounds that they were not Doukhobors, having diverged from the Community on faith issues such as private ownership.¹⁷³ He noted that the Independent Doukhobors "accepted the home-steads and became British subjects and...have firearms in their houses, and shoot wild animals, and fowl, also kill domestic stock and eat meat, drink whiskey, smoke and chew tobacco." He declared that as the head of the Doukhobors, he did not view the Independents as Doukhobors, and felt that the Independents should be "conscripted for military service on the same basis as other citizens of Canada."¹⁷⁴ It is to the Canadian government's credit that it elected to uphold its promise to the Independent Doukhobors in this instance, despite Verigin's protests. As Department of the Interior representative Samuel Maber explained, the Independent Doukhobors had been repeatedly assured that signing on to their homesteads would not negate their military exemption.¹⁷⁵

Verigin instructed his followers to live especially modestly during the War years, so as to avoid offending their neighbours whose relatives were overseas, or who experienced privation as a result of the hardships of wartime. As an expression of goodwill, the Doukhobors donated large amounts of their factory-produced jam to convalescing soldiers hospitalized in western Canada, which did receive favourable public attention in Canadian newspapers.¹⁷⁶ In addition, the Doukhobors donated heavily to the Red Cross.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Ibid., 173-174.

¹⁷³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 40;

¹⁷⁴ As cited in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 174-175.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 175.

¹⁷⁶ "Twelve Tons of Doukhobor Jam," *Globe*, 15 January 1917, 4; "Doukhobors Send Jam," *Temiskaming Speaker*, 11 April 1918, 7; "Doukhobors Send Ten Tons of Jam to Vets," *Drumheller Mail*, 14 February 1918, 7. The Kootenay-Columbia (K-C) Preserving Works Jam Factory, located near Nelson, B.C., was one of the

These efforts notwithstanding, many Canadians were critical of the Doukhobors' evasion of military duty. Some felt that the Doukhobors had gained an economic advantage by staying at home while other Canadian men were overseas. Others questioned whether the government should be bound to honour its commitment to the Doukhobors on the military service exemption question.¹⁷⁸ Still others felt that the Doukhobors should be penalized for their failure to serve, by giving up their land and allowing returning soldiers to settle on it.¹⁷⁹ Initially, the Doukhobors agreed to "cheerfully give up the lands they occupy in Canada for resettlement to the veterans who suffered four years of World War."¹⁸⁰ This might have been done as a way of appeasing public opinion, or to prevent the authorities from taking it outright, or to demonstrate their detachment from materialism and land ownership, or to revitalize the martyr spirit. In any case they quickly changed their position. Afraid that they would indeed again lose their land, they turned to their advocates for assistance. James Mavor and Rev. Dr. Salem Bland, a Methodist advocate of Social Gospel philosophy, both wrote compelling "Open Letters" on the Doukhobors' behalf.¹⁸¹

Though the Doukhobors did not, in the end, lose their land in the aftermath of the Great War, they were nonetheless subjected to discriminatory legislation that made clear that the governments of Canada and British Columbia did not favour them. In 1919, the federal government passed an order-in-council prohibiting further immigration of Doukhobors,

Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood's core enterprises. Community members worked in the factory, processing fruit grown in Community orchards into canned goods for public sale.

¹⁷⁷ "Doukhobor Answer to the Veterans' Resolution of Feb. 13th 1919," (17 February 1919, Brilliant, British Columbia), 4, Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Papers, 1919-34, University of British Columbia Library.

¹⁷⁸ "Western Canada is Alarmed by Invasion of Pacifist Sect from United States," *The Markham Economist & Sun*, 26 September 1918, 9.

¹⁷⁹ C. B. Sissons, "What Can we do with the Doukhobors?" *Canadian Forum*, 4 (July 1924): 299; McLaren, Christensen, and Parker, "Truancy and 'Child Snatching'," 13; J. Murray Gibbon, "The Foreign Born" *Queen's Quarterly*, 27 (April-June 1920), 331; Michael Verigin, "Doukhobors of Alberta – an Insider's View," in Koozma J. Tarasoff, comp. and ed., *Spirit-Wrestlers' Voices: Honouring Doukhobors on the Centenary of their Migration to Canada in 1899* (Toronto: Legas, 1998), 239.

¹⁸⁰ "Doukhobor Answer to the Veterans' Resolution of Feb. 13th 1919," (17 Feb. 1919, Brilliant, British Columbia), Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Papers, 1919-34, UBC.

¹⁸¹ John Philip Stuchnoff, *Doukhobors as They Are* ([Penticton, B.C.: n.p.], 1961), 90-93; "In Defense of the Doukhobors: A Letter from Rev. Dr. Salem Bland," *Globe*, 7 May 1919, 6.

Hutterites, and Mennonites and the government of British Columbia formally disenfranchised Doukhobor residents, making it clear that their disenfranchisement was intended as a consequence of their military exemption.¹⁸²

In addition, returning veterans and their supporters, charged with patriotic spirit, expressed increased frustration with the Doukhobors' lack of cooperation on the registration of vital statistics and school attendance. In response, the government of British Columbia began to pursue cases of truancy more rigorously, using the terms of the Community Regulation Act as leverage.¹⁸³ When the Community failed to pay the fines in question, the authorities seized Community property, which frustrated and frightened Community members.¹⁸⁴ In 1923, at least nine schools were torched in and around Doukhobor inhabited areas. The perpetrators seemed to be reacting to authorities' attempts to confiscate Doukhobor property. Consequently, the authorities held the Doukhobor Community financially responsible for the damages, as per the Community Regulation Act.¹⁸⁵ This set off a cycle of perpetration and prosecution that continued to play out throughout the next seventy years.

In addition to conflict with the authorities, the Doukhobors continued to struggle with internal conflicts. Some Independents resented Verigin, especially after he had tried to convince Canadian authorities to force military service on them because he did not identify them as Doukhobors. They tried to draw Community members away from his flock, and Verigin had to try to appease Community members to avoid losing them.¹⁸⁶ In the

¹⁸² McLaren, Christensen, and Parker, "Truancy and 'Child Snatching'," 22-23; Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 14-15; "Bar Doukhobors, Hutterites and Mennonites" *The Drumheller Mail*, 12 June 1919, 3.

¹⁸³ Fulfilling an earlier promise to his followers, Peter V. Verigin had transferred title to the Doukhobor lands from his own name to that of the CCUB in 1917. This move, intended to underline the Doukhobors' communal ownership of their British Columbian holdings, made them subject to the terms of the Community Regulation Act.

¹⁸⁴ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 130.

¹⁸⁵ Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 131; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 312; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 274.

¹⁸⁶ Peter Maloff, "Letters, 1924-26," 337, Peter Maloff Papers, UBC.

meantime, Verigin attempted to discredit the Independents, characterizing them as potential “socialists” in an open letter to British Columbian premier John Oliver, for example.¹⁸⁷

At the other end of the spectrum, Verigin had to contend with the Freedomites, or “nudes” as Verigin called them in correspondence with Premier Oliver. Verigin was concerned that the “nudes” would escalate their efforts to damage Community property as well as local schools. Verigin urged the authorities to intervene. He claimed he could allow neither the children from his settlements nor the teachers hired to instruct them into the schools while the “nudes” remained at large, for fear that they might target the school buildings and injure anyone inside of them.¹⁸⁸ On the one hand, Verigin was requesting external assistance with the Freedomite problem; on the other hand, the “nudes” activities provided a convenient excuse for keeping the children out of school longer. It is unclear whether the “nudes” were acting independently, or were being directed by someone – perhaps Verigin himself – behind the scenes.¹⁸⁹ If Verigin truly desired to keep his youngest followers out of British Columbian schools, then the nudges’ appearances, and their destruction of the schools, helped him meet his objective, at least in the short term.

By 1924, the Doukhobors had been in Canada for twenty-five years. In that quarter-century, they had established two highly successful communal experiments based in Saskatchewan and then in British Columbia. They had proved themselves hard workers, capable farmers, and enterprising industrialists. They had also navigated a number of misunderstandings with public officials and with their neighbours.

¹⁸⁷ Sissons, “What Can we do with the Doukhobors?” 299. See also John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 53-55.

¹⁸⁸ Sissons, “What Can we do with the Doukhobors?” 300.

¹⁸⁹ N. Nevokshonoff, F. Makortoff, and M. Bayoff, Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 31, 45, 66, 75; John J. Verigin Sr. produced evidence at the EKCIR proceedings disputing Freedomite claims that Peter V. Verigin or the CCUB endorsed school-burning in the 1920s. Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 53-55.

From the government's perspective, it had become clear that the Doukhobors were not easily dealt with. They held steadfastly to their religious convictions, broadly interpreted. Their leader was dynamic and influential. Their strength-in-numbers meant that it was difficult for authorities to impose rule-of-law, or punish infractions. This pushed authorities to experiment with special policies aimed at forcing the Doukhobors to comply, or at least punishing them for failure to comply. Their presence and principles irritated enough people to make public pressure on authorities to "do something" formidable. At the same time, their finer qualities inspired enough public sympathy from high-profile members of the community to preclude careless handling of the "Doukhobor problem."

From the Doukhobors' perspective, it had become clear that the government could not be trusted. The dispossession of land in Saskatchewan had left many Community Doukhobors suspicious of the government's sense of fair play, and of the value of promises made by government officials. The government proved that it was willing to attack the Community if its members continued to flout regulations concerning the registration of vital statistic and compulsory school attendance. These challenges had given the Doukhobors a chance to prove their resilience in the face of adversity.

Yet not all of the Doukhobors' challenges were external. Verigin struggled to maintain unity among his followers, as some shifted towards greater independence, and some shifted towards militant protection of Doukhobor ideals. If unity was the Doukhobors' strength in the face of adversity, disunity threatened to be their undoing. Both the Independent and the Freedomite Doukhobors threatened the integrity of the Community Doukhobors' organization by attracting members away from the mainstream, further decentralizing the organization, and by affecting public perception of the Doukhobors, thus increasing public pressure on them.

The most painful, and significant, of all the challenges the Doukhobors faced in their first twenty-five years in Canada, however, was the sudden death of Peter V. Verigin in October of 1924. An explosion on the train he was riding between Doukhobor settlements brought his life to a violent end. Since Verigin was the genius behind the Doukhobors' success, his death threatened their welfare. The hows and whys of the explosion remain, to date, unsolved. The Doukhobors' conclusion was that the government must have killed him, in order to solve the "Doukhobor problem." This conclusion had dangerous implications, which would unfold over the next six decades.

CHAPTER 4

Trains, Planes, and Autocrats

Leadership has played an important role in shaping the Canadian Doukhobors' identity. The leader was responsible for representing the Doukhobors' public interests. He liaised with Canadian authorities on the Doukhobors' behalf, and as the public face of Doukhorism, his personal image reflected on that of the entire group. The leader was also responsible for directing the Doukhobors' private affairs. Given the Doukhobors' highly integrated and insulated lifestyle in the early twentieth century, the Doukhor leader held significant sway over the group's social, cultural, religious, economic, and political interests. His instructions, influence, and impact have played a considerable role in the Doukhobors' understanding of their own ethno-religious identity, and in the way in which that identity was presented to the public. Given the centrality of identity construction and conflict to the development of the "Doukhor problem" in Canada, an examination of the Doukhor leaders' role in defining and representing Doukhorism is crucial.

The majority of the Doukhobors who immigrated to Canada did so because of their faith in Peter Vasilevich Verigin's leadership. It was his vision which inspired them to burn their armaments in 1895. This escalated tension with Russian authorities and ultimately resulted in the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada. Under Verigin's authority, the Doukhobors built successful farms and businesses on a collective model. They resolutely resisted government intervention in what they perceived as religious matters – especially concerning land tenure, the registration of vital statistics, and compulsory school attendance. During his tenure, the Canadian Doukhobors flourished; however, fault-lines between Doukhor factions appeared and expanded during his leadership term. Verigin's successor, his son Peter Petrovich Verigin, struggled as the Doukhobors' leader. Under his

administration, the Doukhobors' collective enterprise failed. His personal character and conduct were unpredictable and unsavoury, and he seemed to encourage (whether intentionally or not) the growth of the Sons of Freedom movement, thus exacerbating Canada's "Doukhobor problem."

Peter Petrovich Verigin's successor, his son Peter Petrovich Verigin Jr., was never located. This created a leadership vacuum which John J. Verigin Sr., grandson of Peter Petrovich Verigin Sr. and nephew of Peter Petrovich Verigin Jr., filled.¹ John J. Verigin led the Community (later Orthodox) Doukhobors, as well as some of the Sons of Freedom, for nearly seventy years. Under his administration, the Doukhobors transitioned from insularity to integration. In addition to John J. Verigin Sr., the Sons of Freedom sought their own leadership candidate, ultimately settling on Stefan Sorokin, a Russian non-Doukhobor. While Sorokin publicly presented the Sons of Freedom as devout Christian pacifists, under his administration the Freedomites' involvement in public demonstrations and depredations increased dramatically.

Peter Vasilevich Verigin and his son Peter Petrovich loom large in Doukhobor collective memory. Doukhobors of opposed factions have used their recollection and interpretation of the Peters' legacies to justify their own approach to Doukhoborism. Sons of Freedom Doukhobors have argued that their activities were endorsed by Peter Vasilevich and encouraged by Peter Petrovich. In contrast, Community (later Orthodox) Doukhobors have argued that both Peters vehemently condemned Freedomite demonstrations. Independent Doukhobors viewed faith in Veriginite leadership as a serious contradiction of Doukhobor principles and religious beliefs. They were nonetheless indirectly affected by both Peters' administration.

¹ Peter Petrovich Verigin Sr. had a son, Peter, and a daughter, Anna. John J. Verigin Sr. was Anna's son. John J. Verigin Sr.'s son, John J. Verigin Jr., currently leads the Orthodox Doukhobors.

As will become clear in chapters 6 and 9, differing interpretations of the Peters' activities and directions played a large part in the escalation, and ultimately in the resolution, of the "Doukhobor problem" in Canada. Chapter 3 examined Peter Vasilevich's leadership term. This chapter will begin by describing the impact of his death on the Doukhobors, and explain how his son came to succeed him. It will evaluate Peter Petrovich's leadership term between 1925 and 1939, and explain how his actions (or his negligence) resulted in serious problems for the Doukhobors. This chapter will conclude by explaining how John J. Verigin and Stefan Sorokin, who figure prominently in subsequent chapters, became Doukhobor leaders after Peter Petrovich's death, and explain why their ascendancy was problematic.

As the westbound No. 11 Nelson-Vancouver Express left Farron, British Columbia in the early hours of the morning on 29 October 1924, one of its cars exploded.² The force of the explosion blew the roof and sides off of the car and threw passengers as far as a hundred feet away, leaving "a gruesome spectacle of mutilated humanity and wreckage."³ Every passenger aboard the car was injured, and five passengers were killed instantly. One passenger, Harry Bishop⁴, succumbed to his injuries a few hours later; within two days, three more passengers had died.⁵ Among those found dead at the scene were John McKie, newly elected Conservative MLA for Grand Forks-Greenwood, and Peter Vasilevich Verigin, leader of the Canadian Doukhobors.⁶

² Farron is located approximately sixty kilometres (thirty-eight miles) northeast of Grand Forks, British Columbia. "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

³ "Infernal Machine," *Globe*, 31 October 1924, 1, 5.

⁴ Described as "Nelson sportsman and traveler for the local branch of the Swift Canadian Company" in "Terrific Explosion in Passenger Car Causes Six Deaths," *Globe*, 30 October 1924, 1. His full name is recorded as Henry (Harry) J. Bishop (<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/context/castofcharacters/indexen.html>, accessed 24 January 2010).

⁵ "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1; "Terrific Explosion in Passenger car Causes Six Deaths," *Globe*, 30 October 1924, 1-2; and "Infernal Machine," *Globe*, 31 October 1924, 1, 5.

⁶ "Terrific Explosion in Passenger Car Causes Six Deaths," *Globe*, 30 October 1924, 1-2. Peter Verigin's body was badly damaged in the explosion.

It is important to consider Verigin's untimely death in some detail as it had a significant impact on the Doukhobors themselves, and on their relations with governmental authority. Verigin's death constituted another trauma to the Doukhobor group. His death was sudden and violent, which deeply disturbed those who loved him. Many Doukhobors believed that Verigin was killed for his faith and for his position as head of their group, and believed that "the government" was behind it somehow. This belief affected the Doukhobors' perception of the government throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

No one has been able to solve the mystery of who killed Verigin and why, though multiple theories abound. Local authorities and representatives of the railway company considered two theories. The first theory was that the explosion originated in the gas tanks located beneath the day coach.⁷ This theory was later dismissed, as both tanks were found to be intact.⁸ That the metal framing, the truck, and the wheels of the car were also intact strongly suggested that the explosion originated inside the car and not beneath it.⁹

Confident that mechanical error was not to blame for the accident, representatives for the Canadian Pacific Railway claimed that the explosion was the result of "some human agency."¹⁰ Charles Murphy, General Manager of the CPR Western Lines, reported that the CPR had found an alarm clock, wiring, and part of a dry battery.¹¹ This led the railway to believe that a bomb had been detonated inside the car.¹² Nelson city police were similarly convinced.¹³

⁷ The gas was used to fuel the car's lamps. "Train Blast Killing Eight is Baffling," *Morning Leader [Regina]*, 30 October 1924, 1, 12 and "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

⁸ "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1; "Train Blast Killing Eight is Baffling," *Morning Leader [Regina]*, 30 October 1924, 1, 12; and "Infernal Machine," *Globe*, 31 October 1924, 1, 5.

⁹ "Terrific Explosion in Passenger Car Causes Six Deaths," *Globe*, 30 October 1924, 2; "Bomb Was Placed in Verigin's Grip," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1924, 1.

¹⁰ D. C. Coleman, vice president of Western Lines for the CPR, as cited in "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

¹¹ "Infernal Machine," *Globe*, 31 October 1924, 1, 5.

¹² "Bomb was Placed in Verigin's Grip," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1924, 1.

¹³ "Bomb Explosion Kills Six," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

Verigin's high public profile combined with recent turmoil within the Doukhobor community gave rise to speculation that the explosion of car 1586 was intentionally perpetrated in an effort to assassinate the Doukhobor leader. Neither of the two other public men aboard car 1586 were likely to be the subject of an assassination attempt, one being a relatively low profile, recently elected provincial politician, the other a local athlete and businessman. The CPR itself was also an unlikely target.¹⁴

The *Vancouver Sun* advised its readers that "Verigin for many months past has been living in fear of just some such tragedy" and had apparently "mentioned to several members of the Doukhobor colony that he feared attempts to kill him."¹⁵ Just a few months prior to his death, Verigin's residence in Brilliant, British Columbia, was badly damaged by arson.¹⁶ Murphy noted that Verigin had been keeping "his sleeping place a secret" throughout the past several months, rarely sleeping at home.¹⁷

Outsiders speculated that disaffected Doukhobors had targeted the group's leader. Verigin reportedly had "many enemies among fanatics who wanted him to discard modern appliances"¹⁸; he had also "been having trouble keeping the younger community members in the colony."¹⁹ Some Doukhobors felt that Verigin was allowing his followers to stray from Doukhobor principles. Others resented Verigin's heavy-handed control of the community. The *Vancouver Sun* reported that "so great has unrest grown in the B.C. community that the courts of Nelson have within the past year or two heard many cases of assault, theft, and

¹⁴ "Investigators Declare They are Convinced an Infernal Machine Cause of Tragedy," *Morning Leader [Regina]*, 31 October 1924, 1.

¹⁵ "Verigin Feared Attack," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 October 1924, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Arson, attributed to Doukhobors who resented governmental attempts to force compulsory education on their children, had been used to destroy local public schools.

¹⁷ Murphy, as cited in "Verigin's 'Return' Demanded," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 November 1924, 4.

¹⁸ "Terrific Explosion in Passenger Car Causes Six Deaths," *Globe*, 30 October 1924, 1, 2.

¹⁹ "Train Blast Killing Eight is Baffling," *Morning Leader [Regina]*, 30 October 1924, 1, 12.

disputes, all arising through the growing desire of the members of the community to shake off the rules and regulations imposed upon them by Verigin.”²⁰

It was difficult for Doukhobors to believe that any of their own had murdered him.²¹ Of all tenets of Doukhoborism, pacifism was paramount. The Doukhobors had suffered considerable hardship in defense of this principle. It is unlikely that an Independent Doukhobor would seek to take Verigin’s life. Doukhobors who wished to secede from Verigin’s community were apparently permitted to do so freely, and were offered some compensation upon their departure.²² Many Doukhobors who became Independents for social or economic reasons still retained Doukhobor religious beliefs and practices and remained committed to pacifism.²³ Similarly, it is unlikely that a Freedomite Doukhobor would compromise the pacifist principle to take Verigin’s life. Even at the height of Freedomite protest in the middle of the twentieth century, those engaged in so-called “black work” directed their violence at infrastructure and not on live targets.

Simma Holt, author of the controversial *Terror in the Name of God*, promoted the theory that Verigin’s son, Peter Petrovich Verigin, was behind the explosion.²⁴ Holt implied that Peter Petrovich was motivated by his “hatred” of his father and by greed. The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood’s holdings were substantial in 1924, and the younger Verigin might have been interested in getting his hands on them, Holt suggests. She notes that CCUB managers sent substantial sums of money from the organization’s coffers to the

²⁰ “Verigin, Last Czar of Douks: Colony May Disintegrate Following the Death of Leader,” *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

²¹ “Accident Solution Advance,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1924, 1.

²² “Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia,” 1912, 39.

²³ This was demonstrated when Independent Doukhobors claimed exemption from military service in both World Wars, despite their disaffection from the mainstream Doukhobor Community.

²⁴ Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 60. Holt concedes that, at publication, the Verigin’s murder had not been solved. She indicates that the RCMP reopened their investigation into the case as a result of the evidence she had uncovered in the research for her book (60 n. 2).

younger Verigin following his father's death.²⁵ Though there was no love lost between the younger and the older Peter Verigin, it seems unlikely that the son would plot to kill his father, especially considering how reticent he was to take on the leadership mantle after his demise.

Many Doukhobors believed the Canadian government was to blame for Verigin's death. Some viewed Peter "Lordly" Verigin's death as analogous to Christ's own death, and suspected that Canadian authorities feared and resented Verigin's leadership just as Christ's opponents feared and resented him.²⁶ In 1912, Royal Commissioner William Blakemore had concluded that "the real problem before the Government of British Columbia is not the Doukhobors, but their leader – Peter Verigin."²⁷ Other means of tackling the "Doukhobor problem" had proved unsuccessful. In fact, in 1924, the "Doukhobor problem" seemed to be escalating. The Doukhobors wondered whether the government viewed killing Verigin as a sort of final solution. The Doukhobors' previous experience with government authority had convinced them that the government could not be trusted. They were aware that their communalism and resistance to legal authority had long irritated government officials in Canada, and some Doukhobors wondered whether one of them would go so far as to kill Verigin to bring about the collapse of the CCUB, and forcibly solve the "Doukhobor problem."

The idea that the Canadian government would have authorized anyone to place a bomb in car 1586 to attack Verigin while risking the lives of the passengers traveling with him seems unlikely. It is doubtful that the Canadian government would use assassination as

²⁵ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 60, 62.

²⁶ John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg suggest that "the faithful believed that the Canadian government had killed Petushka even as two thousand years ago the Roman government had crucified Christ." *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 106. See also Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 61. This motif, comparing their suffering and experience of persecution to that of the Israelites of the Old Testament or the Christians of the New, is repeated in subsequent years, especially among the Sons of Freedom.

²⁷ "Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia," 63.

a means to deal with residents it considered troublesome. Even enemies of the state were handled through regular political or judicial means in twentieth-century Canada: if Verigin was truly objectionable to the state for a legitimate reason, it seems likely that the Canadian government would seek to prosecute him through the legal system or deport him if possible. Even assuming for a moment that the government would consider killing Verigin, it is doubtful that the government would risk innocent lives – including that of an MLA – to do so.

It is possible that a non-Doukhobor vigilante perpetrated the crime. The Doukhobor Community had irritated some of their neighbours. The Doukhobors' resistance to assimilation and in particular to compulsory education had frustrated those who believed that immigrants should be classed New Canadians and not remain citizens of the Old World. Some had speculated that Verigin ruled the community too firmly and that he personally stood in the way of the Doukhobors' integration into the mainstream of Canadian society.

The CCUB's economic success threatened some outsiders, and it is possible that someone perceived that ending Verigin's life would force the CCUB out of business. Some outsiders speculated that Verigin's firm grip on the affairs of the CCUB was crucial to its welfare.²⁸ Upon his death, the *Vancouver Sun* predicted that the "breakup of one of the greatest communistic organizations in the world" was imminent.²⁹ Police and government officials suspected that "when Verigin passed there would never be another absolute ruler of the community." Even the Doukhobors wondered how long the community would survive without Verigin's "personality, which had preserved it."³⁰ If the community's welfare was perceived as being dependent on Verigin's leadership, it is possible that whoever killed

²⁸ "Will the system hold together without his [Verigin's] personal strength?" the *Globe* asked ("Notes and Comments," 30 October 1924, 4).

²⁹ "Verigin, Last Czar of Douks: Colony May Disintegrate Following the Death of Leader," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 October 1924, 1.

³⁰ Nikolai Sheyerman to Peter Maloff, 12 September 1926 in "Letters, 1924-26," Peter Maloff Papers, UBC.

Verigin did so in order to destroy the CCUB. With neither the CCUB nor Verigin directing the Doukhobors' affairs, the Doukhobors might be free at last to integrate into the mainstream of Canadian society.

Though some might have welcomed the CCUB's collapse, it seems a stretch to suggest that Verigin was murdered in order to achieve this outcome. The fact is that there is no clear explanation for the explosion on car 1586 and it is possible that researchers will never learn the true circumstances of Verigin's death. RCMP bomb specialists, the Provincial Police, and members of the CPR Investigation Department who sifted through the evidence immediately following the explosion were unable to come up with a satisfactory answer to the mystery,³¹ which might mean that they were unable to solve it, or might mean that they were unwilling to publicize their findings. The only conclusion authorities were able to come up with was that "powerful explosives placed within Canadian Pacific Railway car No. 1586 by some person or persons unknown, either with intent or through ignorance" had caused the destruction of the car and the death and injury of its passengers.³² In the final analysis, it was not clear whether the incident could be deemed an accident or the result of foul play. Who caused the deaths of Peter V. Verigin and his fellow passengers, for what purpose, and by what means, remains a mystery.³³

It might prove impossible to determine whether Verigin was, in fact, murdered much less who was responsible and what his, her, or their motivations were. It is nonetheless significant that most Doukhobors and members of the general public *believed* that he was murdered, and believed that he was murdered because he was the Doukhobors' leader. The Doukhobors believe that the failure of police and government authorities to come up with a

³¹ "Infernal Machine," *Globe*, 31 October 1924, 1, 5.

³² "Jury Requests Police Probe of Explosion: Nelson Inquest in Train Tragedy Produces an Open Verdict," *Vancouver Sun*, 6 November 1924, 2.

³³ For an excellent resource on the unsolved mystery of Peter V. Verigin's death, refer to "Explosion on the Kettle Valley Line: The Death of Peter Verigin" at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/home/indexen.html>.

conclusive explanation of what actually happened proves that both parties had something to hide. The belief that Verigin was murdered, and especially the Doukhobors' belief that the Canadian government might have had something to do with it, profoundly shaped the Doukhobors' understanding of their own identity as a people persecuted by outside authority, and overshadowed their future dealings with the government and its representatives.

Verigin's death created several major problems for the Doukhobors. Verigin had led them through difficult times in Canada, and had managed their economic, social, political, and religious affairs. His death left a major gap in their operations. The welfare of the CCUB was indeed threatened, and the Doukhobors were not well organized to manage without Verigin at the helm. The violent and mysterious circumstances of his death were upsetting enough. To make matters worse, the anger and resentment his death engendered in some of the more vulnerable members of the Doukhobor sect would motivate them to create problems for the Doukhobors and the Canadian authorities alike. The repercussions of Verigin's death would reverberate throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. If anyone did kill Verigin thinking that doing so would solve the "Doukhobor problem," they were sorely mistaken.

Most Canadian Doukhobors relied heavily on strong, centralized leadership to govern their spiritual and temporal affairs in the early twentieth century. Verigin had fulfilled this role admirably. With his leadership, the Doukhobor mainstream had established a successful communal enterprise that provided for their needs and allowed them to live according to their religious principles. His strong business sense and personal integrity had allowed them to weather several storms. It would be a challenge to find someone who could lead the Doukhobors with as much skill, patience, and conviction as Peter V. Verigin.

The Doukhobors' dependence on a strong central leader is inconsistent with their belief. The Doukhobors identify equality as one of their primary religious tenets, reasoning that if the spirit of God resides within each person, then each person must therefore be equal to one another. This rationale inspired the Doukhobors' resistance to church and Tsarist authority in Russia, and to the authority of the federal and provincial governments in Canada.³⁴ By Doukhobor reasoning, all humans are equal and none has authority over any other: the only true authority is God.

One might expect, then, that the Doukhobors would choose to organize themselves along a collective leadership model, or else democratically elect someone they felt represented their best interests. The death of their leader provided them with an opportunity to change their leadership strategy. Indeed, some Doukhobors questioned the need for a central leader, noting that this practice seemed incongruent with the Doukhobors' beliefs. Doukhobor intellectual Peter Maloff, for example, sought advice from his network of contacts both in the Doukhobor community and outside of it.³⁵ Some of his contacts affirmed that personal leadership was incongruent with Doukhobor principles. Other contacts argued that though it was a compromise of Doukhobor principles, the Doukhobors needed a leader to guide them, unify them, and help them organize in order to prevent assimilation with their non-Doukhobor neighbours.³⁶ Threatened in 1924 by increasing factionalism, the

³⁴ The Doukhobors did not defer automatically to the authority of the head of state or the clergy. When the Doukhobors agreed to cooperate with authority voluntarily, it was because the authority's dictates did not, in the Doukhobors' opinion, violate their religious principles. The Doukhobors did not, in other words, believe that they had an obligation to submit to the direction of the clergy, the Tsar, or in Canada, elected representatives, simply because any of these had been invested with authority over them. See George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 22.

³⁵ Peter Maloff took a keen interest in the affairs of his people, and wrote extensively reflecting on his own life and on the events unfolding around him. He was born to Independent parents, but began to question their position and sought to better understand the Orthodox and Sons of Freedom Doukhobors' beliefs and practices ("Letters, 1924-26," Peter Maloff Papers, UBC)

³⁶ Anna Chertkova to Peter Maloff, 2 March 1923; A. and V. G. Chertkov to Peter Maloff, 14 November 1924; Ilya Tolstoy to Peter Maloff, 19 June 1924; E. Popoff to Peter Maloff, 17 January 1925; all reproduced in P. N. Malov, "Doukhobors, Their History, Life and Struggle" (1948) ["Letters, 1924-26," Peter Maloff Papers, UBC].

Doukhor community was at great risk of breaking up, as some newspaper reporters had predicted. A strong leader was needed to unify the group.

A few candidates were seen as possible contenders for the leadership position: men who had demonstrated keen ability as managers of the Doukhobors' business interests, and a woman named Anastasia Holubova who had been a favoured companion of Verigin's since his arrival in Canada.³⁷ Holubova had functioned as an interim leader following Verigin's death, and had officiated at Verigin's funeral.³⁸ Her proximity to Verigin and familiarity with the Canadian Doukhobors' situation made her an obvious choice.

However, the Doukhobors selected Verigin's son, Peter Petrovich Verigin, as their new leader instead of Holubova. The election of Peter P. Verigin is curious. Unlike Holubova, Peter P. Verigin had little contact with the Canadian Doukhobors. His visits to Canada had been brief and unpleasant.³⁹ Holubova was Peter Vasilevich's close companion; in contrast, Peter Petrovich barely knew his father and did not like him much. The Canadian Doukhobors could not easily assess Peter Petrovich's leadership qualities while he lived in Russia, and he had scant experience with the specifics of the Doukhobors' situation in Canada. Thus, it is unlikely that the Doukhobors elected the younger Verigin based on proven record or obvious merit. Rather, Peter P. Verigin was selected as the Doukhobors' leader merely because he was their previous leader's son.

This was an incredible decision for a group that claimed to espouse equality to make. It was inconsistent with their religious beliefs and was in many respects an illogical choice.

³⁷ John W. Friesen and Michael M. Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 51. Friesen and Verigin claim that Holubova was viewed by some as Verigin's wife. See also Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., "Summarized Report: Joint Doukhor Research Committee, Symposium Meetings, 1974-1982" ([Grand Forks, B.C.]: Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and the Centre for Russian and North American Studies and the President's Office, Selkirk College, 1997), 615.

³⁸ "Weird Ceremonies Mark Burial of Slain Leader," *Globe*, 3 November 1924, 1, 2 and "Gets Turndown," *Vancouver Sun*, 15 December 1924, 1.

³⁹ Anna Petrovna Markova, Peter P. Verigin's daughter, recalled that her father had not been warmly received by her grandfather (Popoff, "Summarized Report," 256). Ninety percent of Doukhobors were said to have favoured Peter P. Verigin's candidacy for leadership ("Doukhor 'King' Perplexes Subjects," *Globe*, 12 December 1924, 3).

It was, however, consistent with the Doukhobors' experience. The Doukhobors' leadership mantle had passed to the leader's next of kin on most previous occasions.⁴⁰ This was consistent, also, with the form of governance the Doukhobors had been exposed to in Russia: authoritarian, and hereditary. Though the Doukhobors disputed the "divine right of kings" on principle, the majority of Canadian Doukhobors could not come up with an alternate solution to their governance problem.

Peter Petrovich Verigin was rumoured to "resemble" his father,⁴¹ and it was probably in expectation of this similarity that the Doukhobors elected the younger Verigin in the first place. Peter Petrovich was not raised by his father, however, and he did not know him well. In 1882, the year Peter Petrovich was born, Lukeria Kalmakova asked Peter Vasilevich to join her in residence at the Orphan's Home.⁴² Peter Vasilevich complied, abandoning his infant son and virtually divorcing his wife. Peter Vasilevich's departure embarrassed and infuriated his in-laws and his son grew to resent him.

Even the limited contact Peter Petrovich had with his father was strained. Peter Petrovich failed to meet his father in Moscow in 1902 because his mother's family, the Kotelnikoffs, withheld the letter inviting him to come. Unaware, Peter Vasilevich sent a second letter, berating his son for neglecting to turn up. This incident damaged their relationship.⁴³ Peter Petrovich attempted to join his father in Canada in 1905. This visit went poorly. Peter Petrovich publicly embarrassed his father, accusing him of being a crook and

⁴⁰ Lukeria Kalmakova took over as leader after the death of her husband. Having no children of her own, she selected Peter V. Verigin as her successor (though her brother and his supporters opposed him, believing that her brother, as next of kin, should be appointed leader).

⁴¹ E. Popov to Peter Maloff, 17 January 1924, reproduced in P. N. Malov, "Doukhobors, Their History, Life and Struggle" (1948) ["Letters, 1924-26," Peter Maloff Papers, UBC].

⁴² Lukeria Kalmykova was the leader of the Doukhobors at the time. She was chosen leader after her husband died. She had no children of her own to succeed her. Her request that Verigin join her at the Orphan's Home was unusual. Veriginite Doukhobors believe that she took him in order to prepare him to take over as leader after her.

⁴³ Anna Petrovna Markova provided much insight into her father's (Peter Petrovich's) character in an oral presentation made at the 7 November 1976 Symposium of the Joint Doukhobor Research Committee (Popoff, "Summarized Report," 253-265).

criticizing his lifestyle, which appeared opulent. Peter Vasilevich's estranged wife Evdokia, who had accompanied her son on this occasion, disapproved of Peter Vasilevich's close relationship with Holubova. For his part, Peter Vasilevich was angered by his son's accusations and appalled by his behaviour, as Peter Petrovich engaged in activities which were at best inappropriate and at worst outright prohibited among Doukhobor Community members.⁴⁴ A subsequent visit in 1909 was equally discouraging.

Peter P. Verigin had demonstrated little love or respect for his father. He had not spent much time with him. When they did meet up, their differences of opinion were evident. If Peter P. Verigin "resembled" his father, the resemblance was genetic only. There was no evidence to suggest that Verigin shared the same characteristics or qualities as his father. Nor was there evidence to suggest that Verigin shared the same care for or commitment to the Canadian Doukhobors. His leadership term was rife with problems caused by his insensitivity to the Doukhobors' needs, poor-decision making, and distraction from his duties. As a result, during his administration, the Sons of Freedom grew in strength, the CCUB fell into bankruptcy, and Verigin himself was plagued by poor health and legal trouble. Choosing Peter P. Verigin to succeed his father was a costly decision for the Doukhobors, and the "Doukhobor problem" became increasingly complex during his reign.

Trouble had erupted in April 1925 among the Doukhobors in British Columbia. Some Doukhobor families were continuing to resist the enforcement of compulsory school attendance and the provincial authorities, not keen to indulge their non-compliance, were imposing penalties on the whole community. Canadian authorities hoped that the new leader

⁴⁴ Woodcock and Avakumovic suggest that Peter Petrovich was "a rather opinionated young man and quickly showed himself intent on exposing the human weaknesses of Peter the Lordly. He flaunted his independence, talking bawdily, smoking, and gathering around him an admiring circle of young men who were tempted by the ways of the world outside the Community" (*The Doukhobors*, 205).

would be a good influence on his followers.⁴⁵ At British Columbia Minister of Education Hon. John Duncan Maclean's request, officials of the Dominion's Immigration department planned to intercept Verigin upon his arrival, explain the problems the government had had with the Doukhobors in British Columbia, and ask whether he planned to support the Doukhobors' defiance of provincial laws or urge them to comply. If Verigin refused to support the government's position, he was to be refused admission to the country and sent back to Russia.⁴⁶ In other words, Department of Immigration officials were to assess whether Peter Petrovich was likely to solve or exacerbate the nation's "Doukhor problem," by gauging whether he was planning to obey Canadian laws or defy them. If he was unwilling to cooperate with authorities, he was to be turned away.

In fact, Verigin contacted Maclean before this plan could be enacted, indicating that he intended to encourage his followers to follow Canadian laws. Shortly thereafter, a mass meeting of Doukhobors in Brilliant, British Columbia, declared their intention to "respect Canadian institutions in future."⁴⁷ This served to diffuse tension somewhat, clearing the way for government officials to welcome the second Peter Verigin to Canada. When Verigin arrived at the end of September of 1927, he announced his intention to consolidate the Doukhobors into one colony, and informed the press that he wanted the Doukhobors to take advantage of the educational opportunities available in Canada, so long as doing so would not threaten their religious beliefs. "We are willing to give the Government our brains and our energies," Verigin announced, "but not our souls."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "Verigin May become Doukhor Hostage," *Globe*, 20 April 1925, 1.

⁴⁶ "Douk Leader May Be Barred" *Vancouver Sun*, 18 April 1925, 5 and "Verigin May Become Doukhor Hostage: Plan Under Way to Make Entry Condition on Restoring Discipline," *Globe*, 20 April 1925, 1.

⁴⁷ "Doukhobors Decide to Observe Laws," *Globe*, 7 July 1925, 3.

⁴⁸ "Plan of Doukhobors for Single Colony Outlined by Chief," *Globe*, 24 September 1927, 2.

It soon became clear to Doukhobors and outsiders alike that the younger Verigin and his father had very different leadership strategies. He was “a temperamental person”⁴⁹ who constituted “a thousand characters in one.”⁵⁰ He often used strong language, strong drink, and strong-arm tactics.⁵¹ Hazel O’Neil, who was employed as a teacher among the Doukhobors in the 1930s, remarked that she and her colleagues had often seen Peter Petrovich on the streets, “disgustingly intoxicated, and shouting obscenities of the vilest kind.”⁵² O’Neil concluded that “in morals, ideals, and appearance” Peter Petrovich was “the antithesis to his father.”⁵³

Peter Vasilevich had urged his followers to obey all Canadian laws that did not offend their religious sensibilities and attempted to personally model exemplary Doukhor behaviour for his followers. Peter Petrovich took a very different approach. While Peter Petrovich advised his followers to live virtuously, he himself modeled immoral and even criminal behaviour. His conduct was hard to explain, and posed a significant problem for the Doukhobors as well as for the Canadian authorities.⁵⁴

Verigin’s illegal conduct attracted significant media attention. In July of 1930, he was arrested because the authorities felt he was abusing his devotees. Witnesses observed Verigin “running with a club like a fencepost,” chasing and beating some of his followers in the streets.⁵⁵ In March of 1935, Verigin was sentenced to two months in jail for assaulting his former interpreter, Fritz Ammeter, whom he had knocked unconscious.⁵⁶ Verigin was

⁴⁹ Walter J. Lebedoff, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979), as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 430.

⁵⁰ Cecil Maloff, Symposium 38 (7 January 1979), as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 424.

⁵¹ Clyde Gilmour, “Mike’s Paradise,” *Maclean’s Magazine* 60 (1 September 1947), 67. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 313; Koozma Tarasoff, interviewed by Jim Hamm, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” *Transcripts of Interviews*, page 609, Jim Hamm Fonds, UBC; J. C. Yerbury, “The ‘Sons of Freedom’ Doukhobors and the Canadian State,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16, no. 2 (1984): 57.

⁵² Hazel O’Neil, *Doukhor Daze* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray’s Publishing Ltd., 1962), 42.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Though the Doukhobors tried to defend him suggesting that he played the “Purger” or “Cleanser” [“*chistiakov*”] leadership role, as will be discussed in further detail below.

⁵⁵ “Verigin’s Methods Too Rough,” *Globe*, 26 July 1930, 17.

⁵⁶ “Verigin in Jail,” *Globe*, 16 March 1935, 5 and “Verigin’s Release Demanded,” *Globe*, 19 March 1935, 1.

charged with vagrancy and sentenced to three months of imprisonment with hard labour and a fifty dollar fine in June 1937, following an incident on the highway between Rossland and Castlegar, British Columbia. Alfred Erickson of Rossland complained that Verigin had interfered with him multiple times as he drove the highway, “shouting at him in Russian and swearing in English.”⁵⁷

None of these incidents reflected well on Verigin. They were, however, the least of his legal trouble. Verigin’s largest and by far most publicly scrutinized legal trouble arose out of charges of witness-tampering and, subsequently, of perjury between 1932 and 1933. Verigin had taken George Chutskoff to court, claiming that he had not received \$1000 payment for land Chutskoff had bought from the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood. Chutskoff disputed Verigin’s claim and won. Upon leaving the courthouse in late January, Verigin was arrested on charges of witness-tampering. Wasyl F. Konkin, the complainant, claimed Verigin had threatened and intimidated him against providing his report as a witness in a civil case.⁵⁸ Verigin was again arrested at the beginning of March 1932, on charges of perjury.⁵⁹ The perjury charges related to evidence given at the Chutskoff hearing.⁶⁰ Verigin’s lawyer argued that the evidence for at least two of the charges was thin and inconsequential, and recommended that these charges be dropped. His request was denied.⁶¹

Mr. Justice Donald MacLean found Verigin guilty of perjury, claiming Verigin lied under oath with the intent of securing Chutskoff’s conviction. MacLean noted that Verigin was a well-educated man who had attended two Russian universities prior to his immigration and who, as leader of “a large group of people here” should have known better. Verigin had

⁵⁷ “Verigin Appeal is Dismissed,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 June 1937, 3.

⁵⁸ “Witness-Tampering Charged to Leader of Doukhobor Sect,” *Globe*, 1 February 1932, 2, “Verigin Trial May Arouse Doukhobors,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 15 February 1932, 1, 10.

⁵⁹ “Verigin Faces Three Counts,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 30 March 1932, 1, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, and “Verigin on Trial, School Set Afire,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 4 May 1932, 1.

⁶¹ “Verigin Faces Three Counts,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 30 March 1932, 1, 8.

made a big show of asking authorities “to punish severely” any of his followers who “commits a breach of Canadian laws, particularly the law which prohibits the taking of a false oath, and to mislead a court of justice.”⁶² MacLean concluded from this evidence that Verigin was well aware of the gravity of his offence. Verigin was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment at Prince Albert penitentiary.⁶³

Verigin’s counsel made several appeals on Verigin’s behalf. His lawyer argued that, as leader of a large group of people, Verigin deserved some special consideration, as his leadership was essential to their welfare.⁶⁴ Verigin’s lawyer claimed that MacLean had misconstrued the evidence in his address to the jury, that the jury’s decision did not reflect the evidence before them, and that the court-appointed interpreter had failed to provide accurate services at the Chutskoff trial, meaning that what had been portrayed as perjury on Verigin’s part had actually been the result of faulty interpretation.⁶⁵ Verigin had reportedly complained that he was having difficulty understanding his interpreter, and vice versa, at several points during the Chutskoff trial. Verigin’s counsel argued that MacLean had been negligent by failing to advise the jury of the possibility that Verigin’s testimony at the Chutskoff hearing had been misinterpreted.⁶⁶

Though the court upheld the guilty verdict, one appellate judge did favour reducing Verigin’s sentence from three years to eighteen months. Mr. Justice W. M. Martin argued that this was Verigin’s first offence and that he had already suffered severe consequences for his transgression. Martin also noted that Verigin was the president of the CCUB, which held “a large interest” in British Columbia and in Saskatchewan. The members of the CCUB relied heavily on Verigin’s leadership and, Martin implied, would endure hardship in his

⁶² “Peter Verigin Given Three Years in Penitentiary,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 6 May 1932, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; “Three-Year Term Given to Verigin,” *Globe*, 7 May 1932, 24.

⁶⁴ “Three-Year Term Given to Verigin,” *Globe*, 7 May 1932, 24.

⁶⁵ “Verigin Cites 12 Points in Appealing Conviction,” *Globe*, 12 May 1932, 5.

⁶⁶ “Verigin Loses Plea for Bail,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 20 May 1932, 1.

absence. In Martin's judgment, however, Verigin had indeed deliberately committed perjury, "a very grave offence" in the eyes of the court. Thus, Martin concluded, Verigin must be made to pay for his transgression, but some measure of leniency was warranted considering Verigin's special circumstances.⁶⁷

It does seem that Verigin intended to mislead court authorities in the interest of winning his case against Chutskoff. Verigin's conduct outside the courtroom suggests a pattern of recklessness, indifference, immorality, and poor decision-making. It seems clear that, in this case, Verigin was in the wrong.

It also seems, however, that much was made of a relatively minor matter. Verigin's lawyer pointed out that the discrepancies in Verigin's testimony could add up to mere forgetfulness. As the head of a large corporation, Verigin's responsibilities were broad and diverse; he may have forgotten the details of his interaction with a farmer in amongst the myriad other, more significant matters under his jurisdiction.⁶⁸ That Verigin was prosecuted to the full extent of the law for what might be construed as relatively minor incidences of perjury – or in fact, for what might have been the errors of his translator – may strike some critics as suspicious enough. That the government subsequently moved to deport Verigin raises further questions as to whether Verigin's prosecution was just, or was part of a plan to unseat Verigin from his position as head of the CCUB, with the intention to weaken and ultimately destroy the Doukhobors' organization.

Verigin's deportation had been proposed as a solution to the "Doukhobor problem" prior to 1932,⁶⁹ and Verigin's followers had feared that the charges laid against Verigin in early 1932 could provoke authorities to take this action. In April of 1931, Saskatchewan

⁶⁷ "Peter Verigin Perjury Sentence Reduced from 3 Years to 18 Months," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 11 June 1932, 1.

⁶⁸ "'Big Row' Divides Doukhobor Sects," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 5 May 1932, 1, 2

⁶⁹ John McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits: The Strange Case of Peter Verigin II," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 27, no. 3: 101-102.

premier James T. M. Anderson publicly stated that he felt that if Verigin were deported, “there would be no more trouble with the Doukhobors.”⁷⁰ Regina’s *Leader-Post* reported on 15 February 1932 that the charges Verigin faced arose “from a civil action of minor nature but may lead to something more serious,” and speculated that “should the Doukhobor leader be found guilty by a higher court it is believed steps will be taken to make application for his deportation.” The *Leader-Post* acknowledged that “some have advanced the theory that with Verigin out of the country...peace and harmony will exist among the Doukhobor people.” However, the *Leader-Post* reported that “the government denied being ‘behind’ the arrest of Peter Verigin.”⁷¹

The government was certainly behind the move to deport Verigin, however. The Department of Immigration announced its intention to deport Verigin on 6 November 1932.⁷² Peter G. Makaroff, Verigin’s legal representative, attempted to appeal the Department of Immigration’s decision but was advised by the Hon. Wesley A. Gordon, Minister of Immigration, in December of 1932 that that deportation had been “properly ordered” and that “the circumstances are such as would not justify any interference with the process of the law...and it is proper to proceed with deportation to Russia as soon as he is available for that purpose.”⁷³

Neither Verigin nor his followers wished for his departure from Canada. They feared that he would face certain death if he returned to Russia. Verigin had testified in court that he had only escaped the death penalty in Russia on condition that he leave the country.⁷⁴ Verigin and his representatives petitioned for the right to select an alternate deportation

⁷⁰ “Drastic Treatment Favored for Reds; Pelting them with Rotten Eggs Commended by Prairie Premier,” *Globe*, 18 April 1931, 1.

⁷¹ “Verigin Trial May Arouse Doukhobors,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 15 February 1932, 1, 10.

⁷² As cited in “Deported Verigin May Go To Mexico,” *Globe*, 7 November 1932, 5.

⁷³ W. A. Gordon to Peter G. Makaroff, as cited in “Verigin Must Go, Minister Decides,” *Globe*, 19 December 1932, 2.

⁷⁴ “Doukhobor Paraders Go To Penitentiary; Verigin Convicted” *Globe*, 6 May 1932, 1 and “Death for Verigin Waits Him in Russia, Doukhobors Believe,” *Globe*, 3 February 1933, 1.

destination.⁷⁵ This request was flatly denied. Prison employees reported that Verigin had behaved respectably in prison. Yet, repeated requests for his parole were rejected.⁷⁶

Instead, Verigin was “quietly” escorted from his prison cell in Prince Albert jail and hustled onto a train destined for Montreal. A dramatic cross-country race ensued, as Verigin’s advisors (S. F. Reibin, Verigin’s secretary and J. P. Shukin, Vice President of the CCUB) and legal counsel (Independent Doukhobor lawyer Peter G. Makaroff) embarked on an overnight “flight against time,” boarding a series of airplanes in Canada and in the United States in an effort to reach Halifax before Verigin’s transfer onto a Europe-bound ship.⁷⁷ Makaroff complained that they had not been properly informed of plans for Verigin’s removal. “Even twenty-four hours’ notice would have been sufficient to enable us to settle our business and so prevent the necessity of three of us making this air journey across the continent,” Makaroff argued, pointing out that the Doukhobors already suspected that Verigin was being “wronged,” and that “this may have a disturbing effect on them.”⁷⁸ Representatives of the Department of Justice defended their action, explaining that the law allowed for the deportation of any foreigner who had served at least half of his sentence in a penal institution. Verigin had served half of his sentence and, as such, was subject to deportation.⁷⁹

Upon arrival in Halifax, Verigin was “whisked” from the train into a waiting car by RCMP officers, who claimed to fear harassment from Doukhobor supporters. Reporters “storming” Immigration Agent H. M. Grant’s office in Halifax were denied access and Grant

⁷⁵ “To Russia,” *Globe*, 3 February 1933, 1 and “Death for Verigin Waits Him in Russia, Doukhobors Believe,” *Globe*, 3 February 1933, 1.

⁷⁶ “Verigin Plans to Break Up Doukhobor Community Life: Sect’s Leader Quits Office” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 23 August 1932, 1.

⁷⁷ McLaren, “Wrestling Spirits,” 105.

⁷⁸ “Death for Verigin Waits Him in Russia, Doukhobors Believe,” *Globe*, 3 February 1933, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

himself refused to talk. Halifax barrister L. A. Ryan, hired by the CCUB to represent Verigin in any interactions with Immigration authorities, was also refused an audience with Grant.

When Shukin, Reibin, and Makaroff arrived in Halifax, they immediately moved to delay and prevent Verigin's deportation. Shukin stated publicly that the government's attempt to deport Verigin and their oppression of his Doukhobor followers was merely an expression of "personal enmity" due to "selfish political reasons" on the part of certain representatives of the Dominion and provincial governments. Shukin argued that "there is less freedom in Canada than there was in Russia in the days of the Czars."⁸⁰ This may have reflected Shukin's true beliefs, or it may have been an attempt to inspire public support for the Doukhobors' cause.

If Verigin had committed perjury, then he deserved to face legal consequences. However, the government's rush to deport him was not viewed favourably in the press. In an editorial entitled "Deportations – Prussianized Policy," for example, the *Drumheller Mail* argued that "while we have little or so sympathy with Verigin, we have less sympathy with the spiriting away of individuals in the manner practiced by the Dept. of Immigration." Handling Verigin's case in this manner was especially ill-advised, the *Mail* argued prophetically, as it was likely to provoke a reaction from the Doukhobor population, which had already proved sensitive to "government persecution."⁸¹ If Dominion government officials had hoped to deport Verigin "quietly," newspaper reporters were not prepared to cooperate. Perhaps they had been made suspicious by the rush and secrecy surrounding the authorities' move to deport Verigin, or perhaps they were moved by the excitement of Shukin, Reibin, and Makaroff's race to the eastern coast. In any case, the government's attempt to deport Verigin proved less than quiet.

⁸⁰ "Verigin Aides Move to Prevent Exiling of Doukhobor Chief," *Globe*, 6 February 1933, 1.

⁸¹ "Deportations - Prussianized Policy," *Drumheller Mail*, Thursday, 9 February 1933, 3.

In a surprise move, Verigin's counsel produced an order authorized by the Governor General commuting Verigin's perjury sentence to nine months from eighteen. Verigin's counsel argued that the commutation left the Immigration Department no grounds for deportation, as the commutation had the same connotation as a full pardon.⁸² Mr. Justice Humphrey Mellish ordered a hearing to review the matter, demanding that the Immigration Department justify their detention of Verigin.⁸³ Mellish deemed the government's conduct out-of-order, and thwarted their deportation proceedings.

Upon his return to western Canada in March 1933, Verigin attempted to rehabilitate his public image, publicly advising his followers to obey the law, pay their taxes, and send their children to public school. Verigin also repeated his request for a Royal Commission to investigate the Doukhobors' situation. In May of the same year, the *Globe* reported that Verigin had, in a meeting with Saskatchewan premier Anderson, declared his intention to promote respect for the law among his followers. Verigin expressed his enthusiasm for the education of Doukhobor youth, and his commitment to support efforts to apprehend errant Sons of Freedom. Verigin emphatically communicated his disappointment in, and distance from the Sons of Freedom population. Verigin also expressed his desire to remain in Canada.⁸⁴

Unfortunately for Verigin, his troubles were not yet over. The Ministry of Immigration brought Verigin's case to the Supreme Court of Canada for review. The Supreme Court overruled Mellish's judgment, which had liberated Verigin on a writ of *habeas corpus*, and Verigin was rearrested on 10 June 1933.⁸⁵ He was held at the

⁸² "Exiling of Verigin Warmly Contested," *Globe*, 18 February 1933, 3.

⁸³ "Verigin Aides Move to Prevent Exiling of Doukhobor Chief," *Globe*, 6 February 1933, 1; "Exiling of Verigin Warmly Contested," *Globe*, 18 February 1933, 3; "Doukhobor Saved From Deportation By Halifax Court," *Globe*, 27 February 1933, 3.

⁸⁴ "Verigin Prepared to Help Anderson: Doukhobor Chief Wants to Stay in Canada and Keep Sect Law-Abiding" *Globe*, 6 May 1933, 3.

⁸⁵ "Peter Verigin Held for Deportation," *Globe*, 10 June 1933, 1.

Immigration Hall in Winnipeg awaiting further judgment. Fortunately, Mr. Justice Robson of Winnipeg ultimately decided in his favour. Robson cited concerns about the Ministry of Immigration's methods. He condemned the government's efforts to rush Verigin's deportation as "bad, slipshod and rash" at best, and, at worst, "not consonant with British justice."⁸⁶ Though Verigin's legal troubles did not end with Robson's decision, the government made no further attempts to deport him.

That the government went to such an effort to deport Verigin with only shaky legal justification is important. Though perjury is a serious offence, it seems unlikely that the government would stretch the limits of the law to deport a man for lying in court. It is worth noting that Verigin was suspected of Bolshevism and was under federal surveillance. His case coincides with a broader federal deportation strategy applied against political agitators and other "undesirables."⁸⁷ Saskatchewanian Premier James Anderson was no fan of ethnic minorities or Communists.⁸⁸

The fact that the government's deportation proceedings against Verigin coincided with trouble among Sons of Freedom Doukhobors living in British Columbia is also relevant. At the beginning of the 1930s, the government of British Columbia was pleading for federal assistance in managing the Sons of Freedom problem.⁸⁹ After significant delay, the federal government agreed to change laws concerning public nudity, increasing the penalty for indecent exposure from a six month to a three-year term, thus shifting jurisdiction over such offenders from provincial to federal. The governments collaborated to redesignate Piers

⁸⁶ "Verigin Free Again; Ottawa's Methods 'Rash' and 'Unjust': Warmly Criticized by Judge, Department Still Works for Deportation; \$1,000,000 Suit Started; Doukhobor Colony and Leader Now Defendants in Civil Action" *Globe*, 14 June 1933, 1.

⁸⁷ McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits," 101-102.

⁸⁸ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd, 2005), 310.

⁸⁹ McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits," 102.

Island⁹⁰ as a penal colony specifically for Freedomite offenders arrested under the changed regulations. By 1933, Piers Island was in full operation.⁹¹

The Freedomites' activities had drawn attention to the "Doukhobor problem" in the early 1930s, and the governments of British Columbia and Saskatchewan were eager to identify solutions. As had been proved on numerous prior occasions, it was very difficult to deal with the Doukhobors. They often acted collectively, and while authorities knew that "the Doukhobors" had participated in illegal activity, they were often hard-pressed to identify which individuals were directly responsible for the wrong-doing. This made it difficult to respond legally to transgressions perpetrated by Doukhobors, because the group could not be held responsible for the illegal acts of a few of its members. British Columbia had tried to hold the Doukhobors responsible as a Community in the 1910s and 1920s, and this approach had proved unsuccessful. It was easier to take action against their leader, who stuck out as an individual. Peter P. Verigin was especially conspicuous, given his repeated failure to live up to Doukhobor principles, much less obey Canadian laws.

There is a small possibility that some of the charges brought against Verigin were unfounded, unfair, or blown out of proportion. Certainly, this was the public position of his followers, who responded to one of his arrests with the statement that their leader "has been persecuted continually and hardly without any reason being imprisoned, where he is subject to merciless and undeserved punishment."⁹² Even after the conclusion of the government's deportation effort, the *Globe* predicted "some new method will be found of facilitating Verigin's departure from Canada" because "the Government is convinced that he is a

⁹⁰ Located less than a kilometer northwest of the Swartz Bay Ferry Terminal on Vancouver Island (Gunter Schaarschmidt, "Day-Trip to Piers Island: Reminiscing About the Penitentiary, 1932-1935," <http://www.doukhobor.org/Schaarschmidt.htm>, accessed 24 January 2010).

⁹¹ McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits," 103.

⁹² "Verigin's Release Demanded," *Globe*, 19 March 1935, 1. See also J. F. C. Wright, *Slava Bohu: The Story of the Dukhobors* (Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1940), 364, 336, and Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 301.

trouble-maker, with an unsettling influence on thousands of Doukhobors who cannot be assimilated while Verigin remains in the Dominion.”⁹³

There is evidence to suggest that either through opportunism or design, Canadian authorities sought to dispatch Peter P. Verigin as a means of dealing with the nation’s “Doukhobor problem.” This is significant, and invites reconsideration of the mysterious circumstances of his father’s death. Though many Doukhobors suspect that “the government” was behind Peter V. Verigin’s death, government involvement has never been proved and seems unimaginable to most non-Doukhobors. However, less than a decade after the senior Verigin’s death, the Canadian government was slapped by its own judiciary for behaving in a manner “not consonant with British justice,” using questionable methods to facilitate a smooth and speedy deportation for the junior Verigin.⁹⁴ If the federal government had the capacity to depart from the dictates of “British justice” in Peter Petrovich’s case, then one wonders whether the federal government saw fit to suspend the limits of “British justice” in Peter Vasilevich’s case as well.

Verigin’s conduct had gotten him into trouble with Canadian authorities, but not with his followers. He cursed profusely, drank heavily, and was at times violent. This behaviour clearly contravened core Doukhobor tenets. His brushes with the law reflected badly on the Doukhobor population as a whole, and proved costly for the CCUB. It is thus difficult to understand why Verigin’s leadership was tolerated by his Doukhobor followers, who might otherwise have attempted to replace him or at least accepted his offer to resign, which was

⁹³ “Verigin Free Again; Ottawa’s Methods ‘Rash’ and ‘Unjust,’” *Globe*, 14 June 1933, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

extended in August of 1932 while he was serving time in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.⁹⁵

Most Doukhobors, however, resolutely upheld Verigin's right to lead.⁹⁶

Many Community Doukhobors justified the liberties Verigin took as part of his role as "*Chistiakov*," sometimes translated as "Purger" but more appropriately translated as "Cleanser."⁹⁷ They saw Verigin's behaviour as an effort to "cleanse them of all their hypocrisy and their unfair or unjust tendencies."⁹⁸ By this line of thinking, if Verigin treated them harshly, it was because they needed correction. Some Doukhobors viewed Verigin's transgressions as necessary to deceive the government. The authorities observed Verigin living chastely, they might mistake him for Christ and execute him. This was consistent with the Doukhobors' belief that the authorities had executed Peter "*Chistiakov's*" father, Peter "Lordly" Verigin.⁹⁹

Peter Petrovich's followers credit him for his excellent oratorical skills and philosophical depth. He delivered several passionate speeches which inspired Doukhobors to renew their dedication to Doukhobor concepts and way-of-life.¹⁰⁰ He "kept up a continual spiritual torrent in our midst with his fiery words and with his sincere tears on our behalf...exert[ing] his utmost efforts to make out of us genuine spiritual wrestlers," as Joseph E. Podovnikoff explained.¹⁰¹ He urged the Doukhobors to advance intellectually, calling on them to update their approach to and understanding of Doukhoborism, and urging them to

⁹⁵ "Verigin Still Head of Sect," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 27 August 1932, 1 and "Doukhobor Heads in Secret Session," *Globe*, 27 August 1932, 3.

⁹⁶ "Verigin Still Head of Sect," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 27 August 1932, 1; "Doukhobor Heads in Secret Session," *Globe*, 27 August 1932, 3; "Verigin Free Again; Ottawa's Methods 'Rash' and 'Unjust'," *Globe*, 14 June 1933, 1.

⁹⁷ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 286.

⁹⁸ John J. Verigin Sr., Symposium 32 (2 April 1978), as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," 385.

⁹⁹ This explanation is more easily understood in the context of the Doukhobors' martyrdom complex, and the perception that Peter V. "Lordly" Verigin was killed by government authorities. Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 70; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 366; McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits," 100.

¹⁰⁰ Peter J. Popoff, Symposium 20 (5 December 1976), as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," 281. See also Joseph E. Podovnikoff, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979) and Eli Popoff, Symposium 21 (9 January 1977).

¹⁰¹ Joseph E. Podovnikoff, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979) as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," 441.

apply rational thought to important decisions.¹⁰² Verigin sought to “cleanse the Doukhobors of superstition and fanaticism” and promote unity among all Doukhobor factions.¹⁰³

Indeed, unification of the Doukhobors was one of Verigin’s primary concerns.¹⁰⁴ Verigin saw strengths and weaknesses in each of the three main Doukhobor factions. He sought to overcome the extremes of fanaticism and apathy by forming “The Society of the Named Doukhobors of Canada,” which was to unite “all truly faithful Doukhobor on the basis of love and brotherhood into one fraternal society within which there would be no room for group antagonism.”¹⁰⁵ In addition to inter-group unity, Verigin aimed to achieve inter-generational unity, and focused especially on keeping youth involved in the organization. Verigin wanted all Doukhobors, and especially Doukhobor youth, to be familiar with their heritage and the principles of belief.¹⁰⁶ To achieve this end, Verigin formed the “Union of Youth” organization, and sought opportunities to further educate and inspire young Doukhobors about their culture and history.¹⁰⁷

Verigin’s efforts to unite all Doukhobor factions may have been well-intentioned, but in his attempt to highlight the positive contribution each faction made to the Doukhobor movement, Verigin actually deepened the divisions. He commended the Independents for adhering to the principle of “toil and peaceful life,” and recognized the Community Doukhobors for their efforts to live communally according to Christ’s principles. Verigin praised the Sons of Freedom for being the “ringing bells”: those who reminded their fellow

¹⁰² Eli Popoff, Symposium 21 (9 January 1979) as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 296.

¹⁰³ Symposium 18 (3 October 1976) as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 246.

¹⁰⁴ Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 62-63. Also Eli Popoff, Symposium 21 (9 January 1979) as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 291.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Lebedoff, Symposium 20 (5 December 1976) as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 279. See also Symposium 45 (4 November 1979) and Eli Popoff, Symposium 21 (9 January 1977).

¹⁰⁶ Walter Lebedoff, Symposium 20 (5 December 1976) as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 279.

¹⁰⁷ Walter J. Lebedoff, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979) and Walter Lebedoff, Symposium 20 (5 December 1976), as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 431 and 279. Also Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors as they Are*, 12 and Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 63.

Doukhobors to stay true to the cause.¹⁰⁸ Verigin affirmed the Freedomites' purpose, declaring: "Sons of Freedom cannot be slaves of corruption." Following this, Verigin proclaimed that the Doukhobors must be prepared to "burn [their] conscience" and prophesied that the Sons of Freedom would "lead the way," clearing the path for other Doukhobors.¹⁰⁹ This word choice was either very careless or very deliberate; in any case, it had a significant impact on the Freedomites' identification, and on the definition of their group's mission.

Some have argued that Verigin made such statements diplomatically and metaphorically, to foster peace and respect between factions. References to "ringing bells" and instructions to "burn their conscience" were merely flowery illustrations to make his point. It was only natural that a man as well-versed in a Russian literary tradition as Verigin was should speak metaphorically to explain complicated philosophical points.¹¹⁰ By this explanation, it is suggested that if some members of Verigin's audience believed Verigin was speaking literally, they had misunderstood him.

This explanation is consistent with Verigin's repeated public denunciation of the Freedomites' destructive, lawless behaviour. The *Globe* ran an article on 16 September 1929 describing a three-hour lecture he gave to CCUB membership, personally disassociating himself from the Sons of Freedom and declaring that the Freedomites had neither the sympathy nor the endorsement of the CCUB membership.¹¹¹ Verigin claimed that the Sons of Freedom were inspired by "the advice of an unscrupulous leader" who would, when discovered, be held accountable for his or her role in inciting the Freedomites to behave as

¹⁰⁸ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 63-64. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 291 and Gregory J. Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 67-68; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 294, 306, 314; McLaren, "Wrestling Spirits," 100; Peter J. Popoff, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979) as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," 436; and Koozma Tarasoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, page 610, Jim Hamm Fonds, UBC.

¹⁰⁹ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 63. Also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 313.

¹¹⁰ Eli Popoff, interview by author, 24 May 2005.

¹¹¹ "Verigin Disavows 'Sons of Freedom'," *Globe*, 16 September 1929, 2.

they did.¹¹² In contrast, Verigin highlighted the effort made by the vast majority of Doukhobors who were minding their own affairs and not causing trouble to others. These, Verigin argued, “were the real Doukhobors.”¹¹³ On subsequent occasions, Verigin tearfully “denounced actions of certain Sons of Freedom and expressed deep regret at actions of some of his people” to the press, indicating that he hoped that those responsible for damaging public property would be apprehended and held accountable.¹¹⁴

However Verigin also showed the Sons of Freedom considerable favour. He offered them Doukhobor land in the Slocan Valley in 1931, provided they would agree to settle there in peace. The offer included over two thousand acres of land, along with extant buildings. Verigin offered to pay off the debt owed on the land, and resettle the non-Freedomite Doukhobors living there on land owned by the Community elsewhere. This was, in part, an offer of peace. It was also, however, an attempt to reify the delineation between the “law-breaking” Freedomites and the “peaceful” Community Doukhobors, who were willing to pay taxes and obey Canadian laws.¹¹⁵

While Verigin publicly denounced the Sons of Freedom, the Sons of Freedom themselves as well as some outsiders have suggested that it was none other than Verigin himself who was instructing the Freedomites to cause trouble.¹¹⁶ In a “tell-all” style document written in 1961 and addressed to members of the Orthodox community, Freedomite representatives argued that Peter Petrovich Verigin, by way of reasoning, pleas,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ “Verigin Plans to Break Up Doukhobor Community Life,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 23 August 1932, 1. See also “Verigin Prepared to Help Anderson,” *Globe*, 6 May 1933, 3; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 306, 313-314; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 313-314; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 66

¹¹⁵ “Doukhobors are Told They Must Stop Defying Law,” *Galt Evening Reporter*, 16 May 1931, 3. See also Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 357.

¹¹⁶ McLaren, “Wrestling Spirits,” 100-101.

threats, verbal abuse, and prophecies, compelled the Freedomites to disrobe.¹¹⁷ The same document charges that it was at Peter Petrovich's request that his father's tomb was detonated.

At times, it appeared to outsiders that Verigin invited the Sons of Freedom to demonstrate and then punished them for doing so. This seemed to be the case at a Community meeting Verigin called on 31 March 1930 to discuss the possibility of moving the Doukhobors to Mexico. Verigin had sent a Doukhobor delegation along with a few non-Doukhobor consultants to Mexico to investigate the situation, and they were prepared to make their report. As Verigin addressed the meeting, three Sons of Freedom women appeared, naked, behind him. Other nudes quickly joined them. Verigin turned on them, shouting "So! This is what you do! Disrupt our peaceful meeting in the Spirit of Christ – Oh, why do you follow me everywhere to torment me...you vile reptiles, you snakes in the grass, you sons of bitches!" As he shouted, the nudes were joined by others, "standing there with half-vacuous, half-interested looks on their stolid faces and a gleam of triumph in their eyes." Verigin turned to the audience, dismissed it, and "with the air of a fabulous ringmaster who has just brought the closing act of his circus to an abortive conclusion, stalked from the platform and out of the hall."¹¹⁸ When questioned by the consultants attending the meeting about his conduct, Verigin admitted that he had suspected that the Freedomites would be in attendance, and allowed them to demonstrate as a reminder to the Doukhobor of other factions of what the fanatics were like.¹¹⁹

A few days later, while attending a second meeting set up to present the move-to-Mexico proposal, Verigin leaned over and whispered to one of the Community men who

¹¹⁷ Fraternal Council of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, "Our Reply to the Yelping Howls of the Jackals and Hyenas of 'Iskra' Against our Society, Committee & Our Spiritual Brother & Adviser – S. S. Sorokin," 1961, 3, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University.

¹¹⁸ Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 322-323.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 323-324.

arose and left the hall. Within a few minutes, a dozen known Sons of Freedom entered the hall, clothed, and stood facing Verigin. An unusual exchange unfolded between the Freedomite visitors and Verigin, in which the two parties discussed the ownership of land and the purpose of nudity. Apparently provoked by the Freedomites' response, Verigin proceeded to swear and, "dancing like an enraged genie, swung his fists, flailing the sons left and right."¹²⁰ With the help of a few Community members, the Sons of Freedom were abused, thrown out of the hall, and dismissed. Verigin explained that the Freedomites would not bother them again, and that they would not be joining the rest of the Doukhobors in their proposed move to Mexico. Simma Holt reports that Verigin followed up with yet another meeting with Sons of Freedom and Orthodox Doukhobors. At this meeting, Verigin admitted that he had to behave, at times, in a way that was distasteful to him. This was necessary to deceive the government. Holt strongly implies that Verigin's meaning was that in order to conceal the Doukhobors' true organization and agenda, Verigin had to appear to be exasperated by the Freedomites' actions.

His theatrics for journalists and government representatives notwithstanding, Holt argues, Verigin supported the Sons of Freedom. Holt quotes Verigin:

I hereby declare to you today – for all time, no matter what I do – that it is you, the *Svobodniki*, who are going to lead us out of this country to Russia where we belong. I want you to all know that the Sons of Freedom are necessary, that they are to us like a good shock troop is to a good general in war, that they are volunteers to take abuse from the government.¹²¹

The Freedomites were to lead the Doukhobors out of Canada "through the jails." As Holt explains, Verigin led his followers to believe that "if we bomb, burn, fill the jails, the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 326.

¹²¹ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 70.

government will be so anxious to get rid of us that they will not only provide transportation for us and our baggage, they will even load on our outhouses for us.”¹²² It was this “prophesy” that led Sons of Freedom to put themselves in a position to invite arrest, either by committing indictable offenses, or by accepting blame for these offenses. According to this theory, Freedomites behaved as they did in order to get to jail, in order to get out of Canada. This misunderstanding motivated the Sons of Freedom to create considerable trouble for the Doukhobors and for the Canadian authorities in the middle of the twentieth century, and contributed significantly to the complexity of the “Doukhobor problem.”

Peter P. Verigin’s personality and conduct created turbulence in his own life and in the lives of his followers. It is not surprising that, in the midst of his own legal troubles and the Doukhobors’ interfactional discord, something should fall through the cracks. Unfortunately for the Community Doukhobors, the thing that slipped was the CCUB itself. The Doukhobors had invested forty years of labour into the welfare of the CCUB. Its wealth was their wealth. It provided for their basic needs: it fed, clothed, housed, employed, organized, and unified them. At the beginning of Peter P. Verigin’s term in leadership, the Community owned close to 68,000 acres of land in British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, and its holdings were valued at between six and seven million dollars.¹²³ At the end of Verigin’s leadership term, the CCUB was in bankruptcy, and the Community and Freedomite Doukhobors were legally homeless. While many factors led to the CCUB’s demise, Verigin certainly holds a large portion of the responsibility for its ultimate failure.

During Peter Vasilevich Verigin’s leadership the CCUB became one of the most successful economic enterprises in Western Canada. The Doukhobors’ produce and earnings were judiciously reinvested into the community. Their shelter, food, and clothing were

¹²² Ibid., 66, 67. Also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 312-313.

¹²³ J. Passmore Elkinton, “The Doukhobors in Canada Up to Date,” *The Friend* 29 September 1927, 163; “Doukhobors See Premier,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 16 May 1932, 2 and “Verigin Loses Plea for Bail,” *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 20 May 1932, 1; “Verigin Negotiates for \$660,000 Loan,” *Globe*, 12 May 1934

furnished in-house, and their expenses were low. Profit was used to provide for and sustain the people directly, to improve the efficiency of community operations, to purchase land, and to create new wealth-generating industry. Outsiders might have questioned the culture of communalism, but they did not question the economic success of the model. Nor did they question Verigin's capacity to manage the CCUB's economic affairs.

Some, both from within the community and from without, speculated that the death of Peter Vasilevich Verigin would result in the collapse of the Doukhobors' community way-of-life and of their organization, the CCUB. Though this was not the immediate result of his death, the community did ultimately fail. A number of factors contributed to the fall of the CCUB, but mismanagement played a major part. Peter V. Verigin had both the business acumen and the moral fiber to guide the CCUB toward success; his son did not.

At the beginning of Peter P. Verigin's term in leadership, he announced his plan to "expand and modernize" Doukhobor industry. His plan included investing in power operations which would provide energy to Doukhobors-owned mills, grain elevators, brick yards, and jam factories. He proposed joining other Canadian co-operative efforts such as the Wheat Pool.¹²⁴ He laid plans to construct a jam factory, power plant, and flour mill in Verigin, Saskatchewan.¹²⁵ On the surface, it appeared that the CCUB was operating on a business-as-usual basis, continuing to grow under Verigin's management. In 1931 Verigin claimed that the Community was doing just fine. Though the Community was "feeling the effects of the depression" they were getting by "without any recourse to outside aid." They were not in debt and did not owe taxes, Verigin reported.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ "Doukhobors Propose Expansion Schemes," *Globe*, 2 January 1928, 5.

¹²⁵ "Doukhobors to Erect Factory, Power Plant," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 29 January 1932, 13.

¹²⁶ "Doukhobors Not Welcome in Province," *Regina Leader-Post*, 6 August 1931, 1.

The *Globe* painted a different picture, however. “All is not well in the ranks of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood,” the *Globe* noted in 1929.¹²⁷ “Steps are being taken to secure an accounting of all Doukhobor properties and moneys,” the *Globe* reported, “and official protection for all books has been sought to prevent their disappearance or destruction.”¹²⁸ Though Verigin was putting a good face on the CCUB’s financial picture, some were concerned that the picture was not as rosy as it seemed.

Embroided in legal troubles, Verigin could not focus on his management responsibilities. Furthermore, his reputation soured as his personal integrity was called into question. To his credit, he offered to resign as head of the CCUB while imprisoned in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. However, the CCUB membership begged him to reconsider his decision. They were concerned that “the commune will not be able to survive” without Verigin’s leadership. Many non-Doukhobors had “long been looking forward to the collapse of the Doukhobor commune,” and members of the CCUB were concerned that Canadians would “gloat and rejoice at this momentous, historical crash of this great commune and laugh at the organizers of it.”¹²⁹ The authors of a letter begging Verigin to stay explained: “perhaps we did not abide by the exact details of the rules and regulations that you set out for us. This we have done and are doing, and we consciously admit that this has come about by our human weaknesses and lack of faith.”¹³⁰ This plea reads like a confession (in the religious sense) or as a child’s plea to a father. Considering Verigin’s own record of mistakes, one might have expected his followers to be angry and embarrassed. Rather than expressing fury, however, the members accepted responsibility, apologized for *their* transgressions, and pleaded for Verigin’s forgiveness for the sake of the community’s welfare.

¹²⁷ “Arson and Rioting Bring Strife to Head Among Doukhobors,” *Globe*, 30 July 1929, 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood to Peter Petrovich Verigin, 26 June 1932, as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 560.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 561.

That Verigin's leadership was deemed so valuable to the success of the communal enterprise by the CCUB membership is interesting. In fact, the Community Doukhobors, so accustomed to following instructions dictated by a strong central leader, were ill-prepared to manage their own affairs without a figurehead. Many of the Community Doukhobors had little education, and little experience beyond the agricultural or industrial work they did for the CCUB. They had neither the organizational structure, nor the skill set, to move suddenly to a decentralized form of governance. Even if a few exceptional managers had the capacity to lead, many among the rank-and-file were so convinced of Peter P. Verigin's spiritual supremacy that they could not see any way of managing without him at the helm.

Despite the CCUB's request that Verigin reconsider, he declared his resignation in August of 1932. Regina's *Leader-Post* reported that "Verigin plans to break up Doukhobor community life." Verigin apparently realized that the Doukhobors "no longer wanted to be held in subjection." Thus, he intended to repay all debts and divide the land among community members "as he saw fit."¹³¹ Clearly, Verigin's faith in and commitment to the CCUB was failing. It is possible that Verigin saw that his personal involvement was harming the community. It is also possible that Verigin knew that the CCUB's fate was already sealed, and that it was only a matter of time before it failed completely. He may have wished to disassociate with the CCUB in order to avoid taking responsibility for its financial ruin.

The Community was already suffering. Between 1928 and 1931 farm production on Community farms was fifty per cent that of Independent farms and Community orchards were showing signs of neglect. The *Leader-Post* reported that "Community land has been deteriorating for the last few years at an alarming rate. The fields are infested with weeds."¹³²

¹³¹ "Verigin Plans to Break Up Doukhobor Community Life," *Leader-Post [Regina]*, 23 August 1932, 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*

The farmers did not consider it worthwhile to put in the extra labour required to maintain it, as they got paid the same whether they worked harder or not. In addition, some of the infrastructure projects Verigin spearheaded proved expensive and wasteful, which was as bad for morale as it was for the budget.¹³³

In January of 1933, it was revealed that the organization owed creditors over a million dollars, and that land taxes had not been paid for two years in each of the three western provinces. In addition, it was discovered that “for the year 1932, no accruing interest had been paid on any outstanding loan, nor was any principal reduced.” This news shocked members of the CCUB who had trusted that these matters were being managed by the administrative staff. Funds were needed immediately to meet “pressing loan commitments” and cover “unpaid taxes and the piling up of interest, which threatens to bankrupt our whole operation.”¹³⁴

Despite considerable effort to raise the outstanding funds, the Community was ultimately deemed insolvent in 1938. Sun Life and National Trust foreclosed on the CCUB, in spite of the fact that, at the time, the organization’s “debt load was only four percent of their total worth of about twelve million dollars.”¹³⁵ The federal government purchased the Doukhobors’ British Columbian holdings collectively for \$296,500 - a fraction of their worth. The land was ultimately held in trust for Doukhobor Community members to be redistributed by the Land Settlement Board. In the meantime, Community members residing on the land were permitted to continue to do so as tenants (though they no longer had the Community’s material and physical resources to draw on in order to use the land effectively).

¹³³ Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers’ Strategies for Living* (Legas: Toronto, 2002), 24.

¹³⁴ Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood to William Andreyevitch Soukeroff, 11 January 1933, as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” 563.

¹³⁵ Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 7.

Doukhobor farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan were given the option of buying the land they inhabited directly.¹³⁶

The Doukhobors perceive that the government conspired with the loan companies to bring about the bankruptcy – and ultimately, the collapse – of the CCUB.¹³⁷ If the outstanding loan owed on the land was \$360,000 and the government of British Columbia purchased British Columbian holdings for \$296,500, it seems possible that, had the government been willing to do so, they might have invested in the CCUB in order to prevent the foreclosure. Inflexible interpretations of government regulations also played a part: in 1938, the B. C. Supreme Court ruled that the Farmers' Land Protection Act was not applicable to corporations. As the CCUB was registered as a private company, it could not qualify for foreclosure protection under the terms of the FLPA.¹³⁸ Though the government did little to help the CCUB recover its position, the government is not solely responsible for the CCUB's demise. It is perhaps easier for Community Doukhobors to perceive that it was "the government" that had betrayed them than to place the blame with their own leader. The government had already lost credibility in the eyes of Community members, who recalled the incidents that led to the dispossession of land in Saskatchewan in 1907.

Verigin's role in the Community's economic failure is unclear: some blame him for ultimately mismanaging the CCUB's assets; others defend him. The Doukhobors argue that Verigin's reputation had been "marred" by irresponsible news reporters, who too readily pinned the blame for the CCUB's bankruptcy on the head of the organization, without considering the many other factors that contributed to the organization's demise.¹³⁹ His supporters credited him for leading the Doukhobors to "pay off about 60% of this debt along

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Cecil C. Maloff, as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," Symposium 47 (6 January 1980), 503; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 8.

¹³⁸ Cecil C. Maloff, as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," Symposium 47 (6 January 1980), 502; Friesen and Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors*, 64.

¹³⁹ Eli Popoff as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," Symposium 21 (9 January 1977) 299.

with more than half a million dollars in interest and \$300,000 in taxes.”¹⁴⁰ Given the limited time frame and the economic climate of the mid 1930s, this was quite an accomplishment.

Some members of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (the successor to the CCUB) later suggested that the CCUB had been weakened during Peter V. Verigin’s leadership. Nick D. Arishenkoff explained that it was the senior Peter Verigin who had created the CCUB’s financial woes by taking on debt worth over a million dollars. Other Doukhobors argued that it was members of the senior administration of the CCUB who made poor financial decisions, taking on high interest loans using community property as collateral, for example.¹⁴¹ Arishenkoff proposed that it was Michael Kazakoff, vice president of the CCUB, and Nick M. Plotnikoff who were responsible for bungling the CCUB’s finances.¹⁴² Peter Petrovich Verigin’s financial strategies, which included recovering money owed to the CCUB and selling land that was not essential to the CCUB’s operations, helped stabilize the CCUB’s financial situation, his defenders argue.¹⁴³ Rather than villainize Verigin for the CCUB’s failure, some Doukhobors claim that his efforts to shore up the CCUB should be viewed as heroic.

Certainly, external factors impacted the CCUB’s welfare. It should be noted that the collapse of the CCUB occurred during the “dirty thirties.” Canada suffered as a result of the Great Depression and prairie farmers suffered more than most. A significant portion of CCUB economy depended on prairie farm products, and failure of prairie crops impeded CCUB trade.

Internal factors had a role to play as well. Membership of the CCUB declined in the 1930s, and attrition increased the financial pressure on the organization. As membership of the CCUB declined, the CCUB had less available labour to draw on and thus had a reduced

¹⁴⁰ Fred Petroff, “Doukhobors in Canadian Agriculture,” in Tarasoff, *Spirit-Wrestlers’ Voices*, 134.

¹⁴¹ Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 54 (16 October 1980), 569.

¹⁴² As cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 56 (7 December 1980), 579.

¹⁴³ Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 56 (7 December 1980), 579.

production capacity. Furthermore, they had a smaller pool from which to collect revenue in the form of “dues.” As the CCUB’s numbers declined, the financial and labour burden on the remaining Doukhobors increased. Peter P. Verigin increased each family’s dues to cover the difference. Some Doukhobor families were unable to meet this new obligation; other families were unwilling to do so, suspicious of Verigin’s motives. Verigin’s lifestyle undermined his credibility in some of his followers’ eyes. Fearing that their contributions would be used to finance “*Chistiakov’s*” bad habits rather than provide for the welfare of the community, some families began to view the communal system as dysfunctional. Families that could not meet the new financial obligations or refused to do so left, either voluntarily, or at Verigin’s demand. These families went Independent, or joined the Sons of Freedom.

The families which went Independent did so for a variety of reasons. In some cases, families were attracted to employment and social opportunities available outside of the Community. Some families felt that they could achieve a better standard of living if they were not bound by the Community’s restrictions, and felt that they should be able to use their earnings to provide for themselves. Some left for religious reasons, finding that they no longer held Doukhobor beliefs. Most, however, retained their religious beliefs; it was Verigin himself they doubted.¹⁴⁴ Without faith in his capacity to lead, remaining in the Communal organization made little sense, as members were vulnerable to his erratic behaviour and changing moods.

Those families which joined the Sons of Freedom were also motivated by multiple factors. In some of these cases, economy played a major role, as some families had neither the wealth nor the earning power to make it on their own. Social need motivated some who were unable to stay amongst Community Doukhobors, but who were not ready or willing to live amongst non-Doukhobor Canadians. Family ties played a role in attracting some former

¹⁴⁴ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 288.

Community members to the Sons of Freedom group. Religious motivations drew many families to the Sons of Freedom, who had long represented themselves as the “true” Doukhobors and called those who strayed to return to Doukhobor principles and way-of-life.

The Sons of Freedom group was more vulnerable to bad influence and extremism than the other two Doukhobor groups. Many of those who were ejected from the Community joined the Sons of Freedom because they felt that they had been wronged. They felt that they had been treated unfairly by their Community brethren, and sought out others who shared their sentiments.¹⁴⁵ As disaffected Community Doukhobors swelled the ranks of the Sons of Freedom, they evolved from a group of zealous Doukhobors into a “small scale mass movement” bearing a grudge.¹⁴⁶ This would have serious implications over the next several decades.

Peter P. Verigin’s leadership term contributed to the growth of the “Doukhobor problem” in several important ways. His personality quirks and ongoing legal troubles brought negative attention to the Doukhobors, and left them without an effective leader. Without a responsible manager at the helm, the CCUB faltered. Many Doukhobors experienced a crisis of faith. This drove several Doukhobors away from the Community mainstream. Those remaining within the Community seemed to have less enthusiasm for the communal project than they had under Peter V. Verigin’s supervision. In the meantime, the Sons of Freedom movement gained momentum. Whether Peter P. Verigin was actually encouraging them or not, his words and actions were inspiring them to take a more public role. Ultimately, the costs of Verigin’s irresponsible actions were borne by the Community Doukhobors, who lost their property in the dissolution of the CCUB, and subsequently suffered the consequences of the Freedomites’ growing zealotry.

¹⁴⁵ “Doukhobors on Parade,” *Literary Digest* 113 (4 June 1932), 17; Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 413; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 301.

¹⁴⁶ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 297.

Peter Petrovich Verigin left a legacy of confusion and disorder upon his death in February of 1939. The CCUB had fallen apart. Already struggling to discern Verigin's meaning while he was alive, it proved impossible for the Doukhobors to reach any consensus on Verigin's intentions for their community after his death. The Sons of Freedom assumed that "*Chistiakov*" intended for them to continue as the community's "ringing bells," calling their counterparts to return to pure Doukhobor ideals and to reject materialism, militarism, and "Canadianization" using extreme tactics, if necessary, to get the Doukhobors' and Canadians' attention. The Community Doukhobors, left without the corporate organization implicit in the now bankrupted CCUB, were at risk of losing all that they had built. Some Community Doukhobors were tempted to join the more conservative Sons of Freedom or the more liberated Independents. The Doukhobors' public image had been severely damaged by the Freedomites' activities and by Verigin's questionable conduct. And though it is doubtful that the Doukhobors realized it at the time, all Doukhobors were about to face a test of their own pacifist commitments as well as Canada's commitment to protect the rights of conscientious objectors and members of "peace churches" as Canada stood on the brink of entering the second World War.

During the first forty years of the Doukhobors' residency in Canada, much of the "Doukhobor problem" from the Canadian perspective had to do with the existence of a large, successful, residential and economic cooperative community. The Community's economic success and cultural insularity were perceived as drawbacks. Independent farmers and business owners had difficulty competing with the CCUB's high productivity and low overhead. Many Canadians felt it important for newcomers to assimilate quickly to Canadian culture. The Doukhobors, living in isolated communities and highly committed to their cultural and faith practices, were slow to adopt a Canadian way-of-life. When the

Doukhobors refused to obey the law, it was difficult for the authorities to enforce conformity, because the community was difficult to infiltrate.

Peter V. Verigin and Peter P. Verigin guided the Doukhobors through the rise and fall of the CCUB. They heavily influenced the Doukhobors' decisions, and were the public face of the Doukhobors in the early decades of the twentieth century. To some outsiders, it appeared that these powerful Peters *were* the "Doukhorbor problem." Some outsiders perceived that if these leaders were dealt with directly, the "Doukhorbor problem" could be solved. This was not the case. In fact, the "Doukhorbor problem" would only become more complicated, and more serious, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Part of the complication had to do with identifying a successor to Peter P. Verigin.

Following Verigin's death in 1939, the Doukhobors needed to identify a strong leader who could help restore the Doukhobors' public image, foster internal unity, and negotiate a reasonable pathway between assimilation and honouring Doukhobors' traditions. Rather than electing a qualified candidate from among their group, the Doukhobors again allowed heredity to dictate their choice. They elected Verigin's son, Peter Petrovich Verigin Jr. (also known as "*Iastrobov*," or "the hawk"), as his successor. The Canadian Doukhobors had no contact with "*Iastrobov*," and his exact whereabouts were unknown (he was thought to be in exile in Siberia). In any case, he was not immediately available to take his father's place as the Canadian Doukhobors' leader. In his stead, Verigin's grandson ("*Chistiakov's*" daughter and "*Iastrobov's*" sister Anna P. Markova's son), John J. Verigin, stepped up to manage the Doukhobors' affairs until "*Iastrobov*" could be located.¹⁴⁷

Verigin was merely seventeen years old when he accepted this responsibility, and remained the leader of the Community (later considered "Orthodox") Doukhobors until his

¹⁴⁷ "Grandson May Succeed to Mantle of Verigin" *Globe and Mail*, 13 February 1939, 11 and "Doukhobors Name Chief New Exiled in Siberia" *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 1939, 2.

death nearly seventy years later. John J. Verigin Sr. had a much longer term in leadership than both Peter Verigins combined. No Doukhobor bore the burden of the “Doukhobor problem” more heavily, nor more personally, than he did. As the Community/Orthodox Doukhobors’ leader, he was the public face of the largest body of Doukhobors. As such, he was subjected to intense scrutiny throughout his adult life as his own followers, Doukhobors of other factions, Canadian authorities, and interested Canadian citizens alike searched him for answers to the Doukhobors’ various problems including, most notably, the repeated outbreaks of violence perpetrated by members of the Freedomite faction. Verigin was targeted personally in many of the Freedomites’ demonstrations in the latter half of the twentieth century. His personal integrity was called into question, his reputation was smeared, and his health suffered due to stress and a struggle with alcoholism.

John J. Verigin had held a privileged position within Doukhobor society as a youngster, garnering the community’s respect by virtue of his descendancy from the Verigin family line. Nonetheless, John J. Verigin’s ascendancy to leadership was difficult. Many Doukhobors believed that the rightful heir to the leadership mantle was his uncle, Peter P. Verigin Jr. (“*Iastrobov*”) who could not be located (it was later confirmed that he had died). While many mainstream Doukhobors accepted and even expected John J. Verigin’s leadership in his uncle’s absence, his right to the position was disputed. The Sons of Freedom had begun to consider other potential leaders arising from within their ranks, and the Independents rejected the Verigin leadership altogether. Verigin was very young at the time of his grandfather’s death, and his youth may well have caused some to wonder whether he had the maturity to take on the enormous responsibility implicit in leading the Canadian Doukhobors. Verigin had performed as a liaison and translator for his grandfather on previous occasions, and knew first hand that the leader role was a demanding one. He

personally questioned his readiness; however, he felt called to the role, and compelled to perform it to the best of his ability, according to “what God’s will [would] inspire.”¹⁴⁸

There were a number of complicated, urgent issues facing the Doukhobors at the beginning of John J. Verigin’s term of leadership. The CCUB was bankrupt, the membership was weary and restless, fanatical elements within the Doukhobor ranks posed a constant threat to the community’s welfare and public image, and the start of a second World War forced the Doukhobors into a defensive position, as they wondered whether their rights as pacifists would be upheld by the Canadian government. The Community Doukhobors needed to redefine their organizational identity quickly in preparation to deal with these imminent challenges.

Verigin promoted structural changes to the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, the successor to the now defunct CCUB. Under his administration, the USCC was held to a higher standard of accountability than the CCUB had been. The organization hosted yearly conventions, produced regular financial reports and statements, and recorded meeting minutes. Members’ roles and administrators’ duties were clarified. Verigin accepted the title “Honorary Chairman” of the USCC, “with the specific stipulation that at every yearly Convention of our organization, the accredited delegates have the right to replace me if they so choose.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, Verigin was annually “elected” to leadership, though the election was more symbolic than democratic. New meeting facilities were constructed to accommodate the Community/Orthodox Doukhobors’ needs, and improvements were made to existing structures. The CCUB had focused on meeting the Doukhobors’ residential and economic needs. As the Community Doukhobors began to live and work “independently,” the USCC shifted to meet the Doukhobors’ cultural and spiritual needs.

¹⁴⁸ John J. Verigin Sr., interview with author, Grand Forks, B.C., 20 July 2005.

¹⁴⁹ John J. Verigin Sr., as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 37 (3 December 1978), 415. Verigin has been repeatedly “elected” to leadership of the Orthodox Doukhobors. I am not aware of any other “candidates” having formally contended for the position.

To provide for the Community's cultural and spiritual needs, Verigin sought to increase the membership's involvement in USCC activities. The USCC sponsored Russian language and Sunday schools for child members, and promoted special opportunities for youth and women.¹⁵⁰ The USCC heavily promoted the Doukhobors' choral tradition. Its choirs served a dual function of improving the Doukhobors' own sense of cultural heritage and, through public performance, promoting a positive image of the Doukhobors as a musically gifted and religiously devout group of people.

Verigin's capacity to lead the Orthodox Doukhobors was supported significantly by his mother, Anna Petrovna Markova, who immigrated to Canada in 1960. Markova played an important role in legitimizing Verigin's leadership. Without her help, Verigin claimed he would have been lost.¹⁵¹ She constituted a key link to Russia and provided a generational link between her father, Peter Petrovich "*Chistiakov*" Verigin and her son, John J. Verigin Sr., in the absence of her brother, Peter Petrovich "*Iastrobov*" Verigin. She was a choir leader, both because of the musicality of her voice and her impressive repertoire of memorized Doukhobor songs. She played a huge part in the establishment of a Sunday School curriculum for Doukhobor children, and in organizing Doukhobor women's voluntary associations at the USCC.¹⁵²

Once "*Iastrobov's*" death was confirmed, the Orthodox Doukhobors fully supported John J. Verigin's claim to leadership; the Sons of Freedom did not. John J. Verigin seemed "much too colourless a figure for [their] tastes."¹⁵³ In the middle of the twentieth century they began to identify other potential leaders. Among the potential candidates for leadership were John L. Lebedoff and Michael "The Archangel" Verigin. Lebedoff appealed to the

¹⁵⁰ Dmitri Ilyitch (Jim) Popoff as cited in Popoff, "Summarized Report," Symposium 66 (4 April 1982), 655.

¹⁵¹ John J. Verigin Sr., interview with author, Grand Forks, B.C., 20 July 2005.

¹⁵² Peacock, *Songs of the Doukhobors*, 77 and Popoff, "Summarized Report," Symposium 52 (8 June 1980), 527.

¹⁵³ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 323; 327-329.

Sons of Freedom as a descendant of Matvei Lebedoff, a Doukhobor hero credited for being the first to follow Peter Vasilevich Verigin's instruction to refuse military service who was persecuted for his pacifistic protest.¹⁵⁴ Michael Orekoff, a relative of Peter Vasilevich "Lordly" Verigin through the maternal line of descendancy, claimed to have been visited by Michael the Archangel who was now incarnate in him. Michael "the Archangel" felt husbands and wives should not have an "ownership" claim on one another; thus, he discouraged marital monogamy. Michael "the Archangel" only attracted a few followers. These resettled as a community at Hilliers, British Columbia, where they lived in relative peace with their Canadian neighbours, and with each other.¹⁵⁵

The majority of Sons of Freedom decided to follow Stefan Sorokin, a Russian emigrant who had sought out the Doukhobors, having read about them and become interested in their beliefs and way of life. He arrived in Grand Forks, British Columbia, on 7 April 1949. Moved by his enigmatic charm, the Sons of Freedom claimed he was in fact "Iastrobov": the missing Peter P. Verigin Jr.¹⁵⁶ They quickly adopted him as their "spiritual leader," and begged him to accept the "Iastrobov" title.¹⁵⁷

The exact nature of Sorokin's influence over the Sons of Freedom is unclear. Some believe he was behind the violence which erupted mid-century; others claim he discouraged Freedomite protest activity. In any case, the Sons of Freedom regarded him as the "only man holding key to Doukhobor problem."¹⁵⁸ Though identified as "Iastrobov," the Freedomites acknowledged in 1961 that he was not "an ancestral leader according to blood lineage, but

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 323.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 323-325.

¹⁵⁶ It is unclear whether this was perceived as real or symbolic by the Sons of Freedom. It is further unclear whether Sorokin represented himself as *Iastrobov* in his private communications with the Sons of Freedom. Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 329.

¹⁵⁷ Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors to Rev. S. S. Sorokin, 9 April 1953, Stefan S. Sorokin Papers (1951-1984), Douk Collection, University of British Columbia.

¹⁵⁸ J. J. Perepelkin, *Doukhobor Problem in Canada: A Prototype Copy of the Hebrew People in Egypt*, J. E. Podovnikov, trans., 1959, 24, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University.

simply a Christian missionary” whom they viewed as “a spiritual pastor and an intelligent spiritual brother according to our faith.”¹⁵⁹

Like the Doukhobor leaders of the Verigin descendancy, Sorokin was an attractive figure who had the power both to consolidate and divide. Sorokin is credited by some as having giving “a semblance of organization to the Sons of Freedom movement” and for “preaching an end to the [Freedomites’] ‘black work’.”¹⁶⁰ Sorokin seemed to have “a calming influence on the Sons of Freedom’s erratic, zealot-like fervour.”¹⁶¹ Yet some of the most egregious faceoffs between the Sons of Freedom and the governments responsible for them occurred during his leadership term. He attempted to delineate between his followers and the Freedomites engaged in the “black work” by creating the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors. Members of the CCBRD claimed to renounce violent protest activity; however, many outsiders suspected that the CCBRD members were not as innocent as they claimed to be. Sorokin stonewalled efforts to negotiate peace between the USCC Doukhobors and his own followers, which raised suspicion of his motives. In 1952, he left Canada for a seventeen-year stint in Uruguay. He advised his followers from afar, and accepted the generous cash gifts they sent. It seemed to some that he was taking advantage of the Freedomites’ vulnerabilities, and benefitting at their expense.¹⁶² There is evidence to suggest that Sorokin may have taken advantage of the Sons of Freedom in other ways when he returned to Canada: some Freedomite men have claimed that Sorokin molested them as teenagers.¹⁶³

The Doukhobors had four main leaders in the twentieth century: Peter V. Verigin, Peter P. Verigin, John J. Verigin, and Stefan Sorokin. Each of these leaders had a significant

¹⁵⁹ Fraternal Council of the CCBRD, “Our Reply to the Yelping Howls of the Jackals and Hyenas,” 19.

¹⁶⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 328, 330.

¹⁶¹ Eli Popoff as cited in Popoff, “Summarized Report,” Symposium 21 (9 January 1977), 304.

¹⁶² Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 152; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 331.

¹⁶³ George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, interviewed by Jim Hamm, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 120, page 702, Jim Hamm Fonds, UBC.

impact on Canada's "Doukhobor problem." Their decisions determined the Doukhobors' direction. Their attempts to unify or, alternatively, to divide the Doukhobor population have played a key role in defining the Doukhobor identity to insiders and outsiders alike. Their efforts to organize the Doukhobors, whether under the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood, the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, or the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, served to delineate between members and non-members. As the public faces of the Doukhobors, they were charged with solving the "Doukhobor problem," both for the Doukhobors and for the Canadian authorities. In all four cases, they were also charged with *being* the "Doukhobor problem." All four men paid heavily for this association; however, in all four cases, there is significant ambiguity concerning the nature of their contribution, as will become clear in the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 5

Defining Doukhorism

In the middle of the twentieth century, the “Doukhor problem” was largely associated in public discourse with depredations activity perpetrated by Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, which escalated in frequency and severity between 1947 and 1962. Their nudity, as well as their fire- and bomb-setting, posed at best a public nuisance and at worst a public threat throughout this mid-century period. Given the wide range of explanations outsiders, non-Freedomite Doukhobors, and the Freedomites themselves offered to account for their protest activity, a clear understanding of the complexity of the Freedomites’ motives was beyond most people’s reach.

In fact, mid-century Freedomite protest activity was motivated by their perception that many of their peers were losing their “Doukhor” identity as they increasingly integrated into a Canadian way-of-life. An examination of the way in which Doukhor identity was perceived in the middle of the twentieth century, both by non-Doukhor outsiders, and by Doukhobors of opposed factions, helps contextualize the identificational concerns which drove the Sons of Freedom to violent extremes. The next four chapters will address the Freedomites’ motives, public perception of the mid-century “Doukhor problem,” public response, and finally, the resolution of the “Doukhor problem” through intergroup negotiation. This chapter will focus on evolving definitions of Doukhorism in the middle of the twentieth century, following the bankruptcy of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood and the death of Peter P. Verigin in the late 1930s, and the conclusion of the Second World War in the mid 1940s. Reduced economic and social insularity, and increasing integration into Canadian – especially British Columbian – way-of-life created new opportunities and challenges for the Doukhor population, and Freedomite, Orthodox,

and Independent Doukhobors exhibited divergent responses to these changes. While Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors sought a greater degree of integration, Freedomite Doukhobors protested the “assimilation” of their peers. As will be demonstrated in this chapter and the four that follow, this tension underpinned the mid-century “Doukhobor problem.”

The province of British Columbia legally identified, and continues to identify, a Doukhobor as anyone who is “exempted or entitled to claim exemption or who on production of any certificate might have become or would now be entitled to claim exemption from military service by reasons of the Order of the Governor in Council of the sixth day of December 1898, and every descendant of any such person, whether born in the Province or elsewhere.”¹ The province’s definition references the federal government’s guarantee of military exemption for members of Canada’s resident pacifist religious groups, including the Quakers, Mennonites, and Tunkers, but fails to explain how the Doukhobors differ from these sects. Besides pacifism, none of the cultural markers of the Doukhobors’ identity are acknowledged in the province’s definition.

In fact, “Doukhobor” identity has proved difficult to define. Shortly after their settlement in Canada and continuing throughout the twentieth century, the Doukhobors debated the specifics of their own identity amongst themselves. Internal disagreements over such issues as land tenure, education, and leadership divided the Doukhobor group into Freedomite, Orthodox (formerly Community), and Independent factions. Each faction promoted its own definition of Doukhobor identity, and its own approach to living as Doukhobors in a Canadian context. These definitions took on critical importance in the middle of the twentieth century. While the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors sought

¹ *Marriage Act of British Columbia, RSBC 1996, c. 282, s. 1.*

increased public integration, the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors remained staunchly isolationist. The more “compromises” the Orthodox and Independents made, the more the Sons of Freedom protested what they perceived as their peers’ “backsliding.” Tension between the groups escalated as members of the Freedomite group increasingly turned to deprecations activity to express and assert their interpretation of Doukhoborism, often at the expense of their Doukhobor counterparts. By the middle of the century, the Doukhobors had a major identity problem.

As contact between Doukhobors and “outsiders” increased, it became more difficult to define a distinctive “Doukhobor” identity. Insularity had offered the Doukhobors some protection from assimilation. The village system, which had operated throughout the first forty years of the Doukhobors’ settlement in Canada, had ensured that many Doukhobors lived, worked, worshipped, and studied at or very close to home, with immediate or extended family members. As such, the Doukhobors’ contact with non-Doukhobor neighbours was limited. Though the communal or village economic system had collapsed by the middle of the twentieth century, many Doukhobors still lived and worked on Community property. Of those who moved out of the Communities onto privately-owned land, most remained within a few kilometres of their home village.

In addition to geographical insularity, the Doukhobors practiced cultural insularity. They remained, in the middle of the century, culturally distant from their Canadian counterparts, “set off from their neighbours by real distinctions of religion, language, economy, food, dress, social life, recreation, and a number of intensely held beliefs.”² They differentiated between “insiders” and “outsiders,” in an effort to reinforce their socio-cultural insularity. Non-Doukhobors were called *angliki* (a distortion of “*angliiski*” or “English”),

² Harry B. Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Harry B. Hawthorn (Vancouver: University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955), 9.

which carried a somewhat pejorative connotation. They were “*ne nashe*”: “not ours,” or “not one of us.” The question “who are you?” – or “one of us?” (“*nashe?*”) – carried (and continues to carry, in some circles) some weight. This corresponds strongly with Milton Gordon’s definition of ethnicity: the answer to the question “who are you,” which follows the pattern of “I am a [member of such-and-such a group] - these are my people - *the* people - so-and-so is my mother and thus-and-so is my mother’s brother and this is our land, which is the world” is significant to insiders.³ The answer was meaningful for two reasons: first, to distinguish between Doukhobors and non-Doukhobors, and second, to distinguish between Doukhobors of different subsects. Outsiders – both “*angliki*” and Doukhobors of opposed factions – posed a potential threat to the Doukhobors’ physical, cultural, or social welfare. In some instances, this prejudice against outsiders was clearly unfair; in other cases, the Doukhobors had good reasons to be suspicious of outsider encroachment.

In many cases, Doukhobor elders viewed “outsiders” as undesirable marriage partners for Doukhobor youth, because they feared that “outsiders” would be unable to promote Doukhobor values, convey Doukhobor collective memories, or encourage the proliferation of Doukhobor identity in the family home. Outsider spouses were not easily integrated into ultra-insular Doukhobor circles and, as a result, children of mixed marriages often occupied an ambiguous role as insiders not fully invested with a Doukhobor ethnic identity: first, because they did not share a full genetic bond with their Doukhobor peers and second, because their opportunity for assimilation into Doukhobor culture was often limited since only one parent was invested with the Doukhobor identity.⁴ According to Gordon’s theory,

³ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19.

⁴ This is reflected in Bill and Pauline Fofonoff, interview with author, 14 July 2005, for example.

preference for endogamous marriage is an indication of the Doukhobors' resistance to assimilation pressure.⁵

There is a strong correlation between the degree of geographic insularity, the occurrence of “othering,” and the resistance to assimilation among each of the three main Doukhor factions. The Sons of Freedom demonstrated high geographic and psychological insularity, a high frequency and degree of “othering” non-Freedomite outsiders, a low receptivity to assimilation attempts, and a high degree of resistance to assimilation. Independent Doukhobors, on the other hand, experienced a lower degree of geographic insularity, a lower propensity for “othering,” and a greater receptivity to integration with their Canadian neighbours. The Orthodox occupied a middle position, between their Independent and Freedomite counterparts.

The Doukhobors “othered” the *angliki*, but they also “othered” each other. They used “grouping” as an identification strategy. Identifying with one group or another allowed Doukhobors who had similar approaches to and understandings of Doukhorism to collaborate and support one another. By declaring oneself a Sons of Freedom, Orthodox, or Independent, a Doukhor could short-cut on an explanation of his or her personal identity and approach to Doukhorism. “Grouping” was also a way to distance oneself from the objectionable philosophies or behaviours of the other groups.

These labels, and the boundaries between the groups to which they refer, are artificial designations. In reality, the borders between the factions were porous, and the definition of the boundaries themselves somewhat subjective.⁶ Despite this limitation, the “group” construct is useful when considering the historical development of variations of Doukhor

⁵ The third subprocess/condition in Gordon's “Assimilation Variables” rubric is “Large-scale intermarriage” (Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 71).

⁶ Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” 10; see also Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 194), 9 n. 1.

identity in Canada, especially since interfactional identify conflict contributed significantly to the “Doukhobor problem.”

Outsiders and insiders alike identified the Independents as the most assimilated of the three groups. University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee (hereafter UBC DRC)⁷ member Stuart Jamieson claimed that “while they still pay lip-service to the Doukhobor religious philosophy, they have severed most formal ties with exclusively Doukhobor organizations and left the distinct Doukhobor communities to live in their own separate residences on farms or in cities.”⁸ The Independents were prepared to “adapt themselves to the ways and customs of the Dominion,” Doukhobor sympathizer Rev. Allan Dixon pointed out. They had left the Orthodox community, purchased their own land and pursued their own professions, and were accountable only to themselves and their families.⁹

The Independents were the first Doukhobors to own their own land. When the federal government demanded that the Doukhobors conform to homesteading requirements in the early 1900s, the Independent Doukhobors decided to cooperate and were granted title to their land; in contrast, the Community and Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, believing that private and individual ownership of land was incompatible with Doukhobor belief, refused to cooperate and thus lost title to their land in 1907. Following 1907, Community and Sons of Freedom Doukhobors inhabited land owned by the community or held in reserve for them at the government’s pleasure.¹⁰ In contrast, the Independents retained homestead land or else purchased land for their own use. These distinctions in land ownership patterns persisted

⁷ The government of British Columbia commissioned the University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee to investigate the “Doukhobor problem” in 1950. The interdisciplinary Committee was composed of academics and lay analysts, and was chaired by Dr. Harry B. Hawthorn, an anthropologist. Their findings were presented to the government in 1952 and published in 1955. By the time the Committee publicized its findings, the Social Credit party had come to power, replacing the Liberal - Progressive Conservative Coalition government which had commissioned the Committee’s work. Harry B. Hawthorn, ed., *The Doukhobors of British Columbia* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955).

⁸ Stuart Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.” *Canadian Forum* 31 (April 1951): 7-8.

⁹ Allan Dixon, “The Doukhobors,” [n.d.], Dixon Collection, in the author’s possession.

¹⁰ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 7-8.

until the Orthodox (formerly the Community) Doukhobors purchased land privately upon the settlement of the Land Allotment Inquiry in the late 1950s.

Doukhorbor insiders highlighted the land distinction, referring to the “Independents” as “*Farmali*,” or “Farmers.” The “Farmer” label drew attention to the Independents’ private ownership of their farms (most Doukhobors were “farmers” by occupation, but worked on land they owned collectively or else squatted on). The “Independent” label emphasized the “independent-mindedness” of group members. Both labels relate to the perception that the Independent/Farmer Doukhobors were further assimilated to Canadian way-of-life than their compatriots because they had rejected the communal lifestyle and adopted “materialism” to a greater degree than their Doukhorbor counterparts.

In mid-century press, Independents were often held up as an example of successful integration into Canadian life.¹¹ Orthodox Doukhobors, on the other hand, were seen to exemplify Doukhorborism in its pure, positive manifestation, in contradistinction to the Sons of Freedom, who were portrayed as projecting a distorted vision of the ideal. Sympathizer Rev. Allan Dixon characterized the Orthodox as “the real Doukhobors[,] living in their own communities, keeping up their own customs, their elaborate clothes, their vegetarian diet, their simple, industrious way of life.”¹² Similarly, Stuart Jamieson argued that the Orthodox “represent the core of the Doukhorbor movement, a group of people who seek to retain their traditional language, culture, and system of religious beliefs while making a peaceful adjustment to the Canadian way of life.”¹³ Orthodox Doukhobors’ “adjustment” was demonstrated by their regular payment of taxes, registration of marriages, and interaction

¹¹ J. A. Aikin, “A New Autocrat has Risen Up: Peter Verigin, Doukhorbor, and his Methods” *Globe*, 14 September 1905, 1; C. I. S., “A Day Among the Doukhobors,” *Canadian Magazine*, 26 (January 1906), 282-284; “Doukhorbor Branches Scattered Throughout West Form Industrious Centres: Small and Erratic Group in British Columbia Have Extreme Views, but Others are Devoted to Farming and Commercial Pursuits; Are Well Liked By Missionary” *Globe*, 18 August 1922, 13; “The Doukhorbor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6.

¹² Dixon, “The Doukhobors” (pt. 1) [n. d.], Dixon Collection, in the author’s possession.

¹³ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 7.

with non-Doukhobors. By the middle of the twentieth century, Orthodox Doukhobor children attended not only elementary but also high school and were beginning to follow the Independents' example by seeking post-secondary education.¹⁴

This was not the case with the Sons of Freedom, some of whom continued to resist paying taxes, registering their marriages, and interacting with their non-Doukhobor neighbours. Up to 1959, many Freedomite families refused to send their children to public school at all. The major distinction Doukhobor sympathizers drew between the Sons of Freedom and the Orthodox Doukhobors, however, was the Orthodox Doukhobors' commitment to pacifism and rejection of the Freedomites' depredations activity. The *Medicine Hat News* declared that the "Orthodox Doukhobors do not subscribe to the fanatical religious beliefs of the Freedomites and deplore their fire raids, dynamitings, and parades in the nude."¹⁵ In fact, William Guy Carr proclaimed that "the Orthodox Doukhobor is so pacifistic in belief that he will not own a gun or permit even a knife with a sharp pointed blade in his home [and] refuses to eat meat, fish, or fowl."¹⁶ The *Globe and Mail* reported that the Orthodox Doukhobors "cling to their original beliefs and customs" but were "peaceful and law-abiding" in doing so.¹⁷

For their part, the Sons of Freedom were convinced that they were the true Doukhobors. This legitimized, in their view, their efforts to impose their approach to Doukhoborism on their counterparts. In reality, they were in many respects "outsiders" to the Doukhobor group – on the fringes of the Community or indeed ejected from it. Though they were thus "counted as being the black sheep of the Doukhobor faith," the Sons of Freedom claimed they were "living closer to the true Doukhobor tenets than the complacent

¹⁴ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Ottawa: McClelland and Stewart Ltd.: 1977), 348-349.

¹⁵ "Douk Leader Tells People Ignore Sons," *Medicine Hat News*, 16 Sept 1953.

¹⁶ William Guy Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?" *Liberty* (June 1954): 56.

¹⁷ "The Doukhobor Terror," *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6.

Community Doukhobors.”¹⁸ This had been, they claimed, their motivation for breaking away from the Community Doukhobors in the first place: the Community Doukhobors had compromised on key Doukhobor issues.¹⁹

This view was contested by the Doukhobor majority and most outsiders who sympathized with them. The *Columbian* ran an article entitled “Sons of Freedom Not True Douks” in the middle of the twentieth century, pointing out that “Freedomite conduct is contrary to the Doukhobors’ principle of faith” and that the “splinter group of about 10 percent” had actually been “disowned by the main Doukhobor association.”²⁰ The Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs’ declared that the Sons of Freedom were “a criminal problem and to call these people Doukhobors is a misnomer. ‘Doukhobor’ is not a racial category, it is a way of life - a way which the Freedomites ceased to follow some time ago.”²¹

Like their Orthodox and Independent counterparts, the Sons of Freedom presented themselves as pacifists. They claimed to recognize “the necessity of living in peace with our fellow Canadian citizens.”²² Even while on trial for having destroyed a store valued at \$12,000, John Sherstobitoff announced: “we want to live in peace like everyone else....we are not criminals at heart...we want to live in peace.”²³ Non-Doukhobors identified the Sons

¹⁸ “B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2; also “British Columbia: Trouble in Kootenay,” *Time*, 50 (8 September 1947), 14.

¹⁹ “British Columbia: Violent Anti-Violence,” *Time*, 55 (1 May 1950) 29-30.

²⁰ “Sons of Freedom Not True Douks,” *Columbian*, n.d. Note that “Douk” has a pejorative connotation, similar to “Jap.”

²¹ The Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs of the Kootenay Presbytery of the United Church of Canada in consultation with The Conference Committees On Home Missions, and Evangelism and Social Service, of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada, “A Brief Containing Suggestions for the Solution of the Freedomite Problem,” Trail, British Columbia: June, 1963, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, 1957-63, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC).

²² “Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia,” 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

²³ “Convict 10 Sons In Seven Trials: Verdicts in Five to 20 Minutes as Supreme Court Hears Trial-an-House; ‘We Were Mere Tools’ – Markin,” *Nelson Daily News*, 27 June 1950.

of Freedom as rebellious conflict-seekers.²⁴ The Sons of Freedom resisted this identification, however, arguing “we are not trouble-makers, any more than you are – at heart.” They felt “unnatural,” and acted “unnaturally” (violently) because of the specifics of their situation, which was, to their point of view, “unnatural.”²⁵

The sect’s economic status was poor. Some of the Doukhobors who struggled financially drifted towards the Sons of Freedom, who provided social and material support. Conveniently, the Sons of Freedom favoured thriftiness, viewing poverty as a virtue instead of a disadvantage.²⁶ Unable to sustain their families by working the small plots of land they occupied as squatters, Sons of Freedom worked labour jobs off of their land, earning modest incomes in unskilled or semi-skilled positions.²⁷

The Sons of Freedom were divided into smaller factions. These subjects emerged as Freedomites decided between leadership candidates, philosophies, and approaches to Doukhoborism. Though the majority followed Sorokin’s leadership and considered John J. Verigin Sr. their “spiritual leader,” a small group broke away to follow Michael “The Archangel” “Verigin.”²⁸ These moved to Hilliers on Vancouver Island to establish a “utopic” community based on their interpretation of Doukhobor religious beliefs.

The Hilliers group equated the rejection of materialism with the rejection of ownership, and extended this principle to the realm of personal relationships. The Hilliers group believed, therefore, that “no person must have rights over another, either parental or marital.” They believed that “women must be liberated, sexual relations must be free,

²⁴ Hawthorn, *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 1; “Uneasy Hush in Douk Country: After Violent Week-end of Arson, Nude Parades; Orthodox Douks Join In,” *The Medicine Hat News*, 14 Sept 1953.

²⁵ “Disclosure on Doukhobor Affairs,” Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC.

²⁶ W. W. Bride, “The Spirit Wrestlers” *British Columbia Digest* 1 no. 11 (October 1946): 34; Stuart Jamieson, “Economic and Social Life” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 50.

²⁷ Douglas Sagi, “Sons of Freedom Rebuild Krestova Without Tarpaper” *Globe and Mail*, 20 July 1970, 10.

²⁸ As explained in the leadership chapter, “Verigin” was a pseudonym.

families must wither away.”²⁹ The group endorsed open sexual relationships according to free will. All children born into the community were to be considered children of the community at large, and all members were expected to participate in the rearing of all children.

Initially, sexual relations were proscribed in order to “conserve energies for the great task of spiritual regeneration”³⁰ (which mirrored the proscription on sexual relations prior to and during the Doukhobors’ *en masse* emigration to Canada), and to ensure that the community had ample opportunity to set itself up economically before bringing youngsters into the situation.³¹ When the first child was born to Florence Berikoff, she “renounced her maternal ties” and gave her son over to the parenthood of the community at large.³²

Surprisingly, *Maclean’s Magazine* reported in 1947 that the Hilliers group’s neighbours were relatively unconcerned by the goings-on next door. Reporter Clyde Gilmour indicated that the Hilliers group was “respected,” that their “sincerity and integrity” went unquestioned, and that “no one seems worried about the possibility of sexual promiscuity and a constant carnival of lust.” Gilmour added that “no one who spends even a few hours with them could suspect them of evil-mindedness.”³³ As Michael D. Turyk reported in *Canadian Welfare*, so long as the Hilliers Doukhobors abided by the law, there would not be any “reason for the government to take anything but a friendly interest in their welfare.”³⁴

This comment is worth underlining, given the government’s reaction to the mainline Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, and confusion, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding of the meanings behind the government’s intervention. The Hilliers group espoused viewpoints,

²⁹ George Woodcock, “Encounter with an Archangel,” *Tamarack Review* 26 (Winter 1963): 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ “Little Gabriel,” *Time* 54 (26 September 1949), 22.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Clyde Gilmour, “Mike’s Paradise,” *Maclean’s Magazine* 60 (1 September 1947): 67.

³⁴ Michael D. Turyk, “Hilliers’ Doukhobors,” *Canadian Welfare* 25 (1 March 1950): 18-20.

and encouraged a lifestyle among its members, that differed considerably from the “Presbyterian imagination” of their neighbours.³⁵ The group was nonetheless tolerated by their neighbours and left alone by the authorities. This makes the issue of the authorities’ intervention vis-à-vis the Sons of Freedom group clearer, as it strongly suggests that it was illegal activity, rather than cultural difference, that prompted the authorities’ responses.

While the Hilliers Doukhobors followed Michael Verigin’s leadership, the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (CCBRD) followed Stefan Sorokin beginning in 1952. CCBRD members claimed to be focused on religious and spiritual pursuits exclusively. They denied association with the Freedomites’ depredations activities, and asked the public to distinguish between their organization and Freedomites engaged in illicit “black work” activities.³⁶ Outsiders had difficulty discerning which Freedomites were CCBRD members and which were not, however, and the extent of the CCBRD’s involvement in depredations activity is unclear.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors began to seek new economic, political, and social opportunities in Canadian public life. They took up pacifist causes in the public sphere, working with other pacifistic Canadians to protest militarism domestically and abroad. The Doukhobors co-hosted a conference on “Peace Through Non-Violence” with Quakers and Molokans³⁷ at the University of British Columbia in 1958, for example.³⁸ They also participated in a three-day demonstration in Suffield, Alberta in July of 1964. This “Manifestation for Peace,” conducted on the site of a military

³⁵ Woodcock, “Encounter with an Archangel,” 28-39.

³⁶ “Reformed Sons Reject Specialists, Back Sorokin and Relocation,” *Nelson Daily News*, 3 March 1954; Telegram, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (John J. Perepelkin, N.K. Nevakshonoff) to Canadian Press, 3 April 1953, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC.

³⁷ Meaning “Milk Drinkers,” a Russian sect whose beliefs and origins closely related to the Doukhobors. Like the Doukhobors, they resisted the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. They demonstrated their resistance, in part, by consuming milk on “fast days,” in defiance of church instructions.

³⁸ John J. Semenoff, “Doukhobor Peace Manifestations in Canada,” in *Spirit-Wrestlers’ Voices: Honouring Doukhobors on the Centenary of their Migration to Canada in 1899*, comp. and ed. Koozma J. Tarasoff (Toronto: Legas, 1998), 171.

research facility devoted to experimentation with methods of chemical and biological warfare, was attended by Doukhobors, Quakers, Mennonites, and representatives of other groups interested in strategizing and advocating for peace. They gathered again at the Orcadia Radar Base in Saskatchewan in November of the same year. The following year, they demonstrated near the R.C.A.F. Radar Base in Dana, Saskatchewan.³⁹

While the Sons of Freedom used nudity, arson, or bombs to draw attention to their own grievances, the Doukhobors who participated in the peace movement alongside Quakers, Molokans, Mennonites, and other concerned Canadians, did so without using nudity, arson, or explosives. The *Edmonton Journal* noted in 1964 that doing so might have attracted more public attention, but it would have undermined their message.⁴⁰

The Doukhobors' "quiet" participation in these non-violent peace demonstrations reflects a shift in Independent and Orthodox identity strategy from insularity to greater integration with non-Doukhobors who shared similar goals or interests. It also reflects a growing concern for issues of national or international importance. The Doukhobors who participated in these efforts demonstrated their commitment to pacifism, and their sense that their participation could have an impact beyond their own membership.

In addition to participation in (small-"p") political activity, Independent and Orthodox Doukhobors living in British Columbia sought greater involvement in local economic activity. As an expression of the Doukhobors' communal and cooperative heritage, several Doukhobors set up, or became involved in cooperative business projects in their hometowns. The Kootenay Columbia Co-operative, the Slocan Valley Cooperative, and

³⁹ Ibid., 171; Rita Moir, "Allied with Operation Dismantle: Doukhobors Join in Peace Drive" *Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1985, 5; Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., *Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Meeting*, Symposium 60, 3 May 1981 ([Grand Forks, British Columbia]: Partially funded by the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Centre for Russian and North American Studies; and the President's Office, Selkirk College, 1997), 601, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; "Manifestations for Peace: Experiences at Suffield, July 5, 1964; Orcadia, November 28, 1964" (Grand Forks, BC: Iskra Publication, 21 June 1965), 1.

⁴⁰ *Edmonton Journal*, 11 August 1964, as cited in "Manifestations for Peace," 39.

the Grand Forks Milling Co-operative Association are examples of cooperative ventures that were initiated, owned, operated, or frequented by Doukhobors.⁴¹ By the mid 1950s, Doukhobors occupied most positions on the Board of Directors of the Grand Forks Co-operative Society.⁴² The Doukhobors were also engaged in the credit union movement, and held majority memberships in the credit unions they helped establish.⁴³

The Doukhobors' Sunshine Valley Co-operative Society started in 1946 with four hundred members and \$485-worth of stock in store.⁴⁴ At first, membership was available to members of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ only (the USCC represented Orthodox Doukhobor interests). Since the Sons of Freedom were not permitted to join the USCC, they were excluded from membership of the Co-op.⁴⁵ Though the Co-op ultimately opened membership to non-Doukhobors in order to remain viable, the Sunshine Valley continued to refuse to sell meat, tobacco, alcohol, or hunting equipment in keeping with the tenets of Doukhoborism.⁴⁶

The Co-op faced a number of challenges throughout its existence. Its establishment was nearly thwarted by antagonistic local government representatives and business owners, who felt that the Doukhobors would gain an unfair business advantage by building the Co-op.⁴⁷ Co-op organizers overcame this obstacle and opened for business, only to be thwarted by a Freedomite arsonist and bomb-setter who destroyed the building and merchandise on New Year's Eve of 1946. When Co-op managers prepared to reopen the store, the city once again intervened by withholding a trade license, arguing that the Co-op would only continue

⁴¹ Peter P. Podovnikoff, "Doukhobor Credit Unions and Co-operatives 1940s-1990s," in *Spirit-Wrestlers' Voices*, 157.

⁴² Milton Stanley Orris, "Social Control and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of the Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities," (master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1975), 156.

⁴³ Orris, "Social Control and Assimilation," 163.

⁴⁴ Podovnikoff, "Doukhobor Credit Unions," 158.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Orris, "Social Control and Assimilation," 161; Podovnikoff, "Doukhobor Credit Unions," 158.

⁴⁷ Podovnikoff, "Doukhobor Credit Unions," 156.

to be targeted by troublemakers. The Co-op management hired legal counsel, and pursued their case through the Supreme Court of British Columbia, which decided in favour of the Co-op. The city council protested, and the decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal. The Co-op management hired the services of famed Doukhobor lawyer Peter G. Makaroff, who had been instrumental in saving Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin from deportation in the 1930s. Makaroff was set to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, but the city council relented before the case could be heard and granted the license after all. Though this was a victory, it came at significant cost to the Doukhobors in lost revenue and legal expenses, and created resentment between Doukhobors and non-Doukhobors in Grand Forks, British Columbia.

These political and economic moves into public space might have seemed like progress to Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors, but not to Sons of Freedom, who repeatedly attacked the Co-op and other Doukhobor owned and operated business ventures with arson and bombs. Peter Maloff, a Doukhobor commentator, suspected that the Orthodox’s flexible and ambiguous stance on “Doukhobor ideology” was having a negative impact on the Sons of Freedom. The Orthodox seemed to “occupy a peculiar position, by being neither a loyal Canadian nor a true Doukhobor, forgetting the fact that no one can serve two masters at the same time.”⁴⁸ Maloff argued that the Orthodox’ “shifting back and forth” tended to drive the Sons of Freedom “to the extremes.”⁴⁹ The Orthodox were balancing on a fine line on certain key issues in the middle of the twentieth century, to do with land ownership, commercial interests, and public life.⁵⁰

The Freedomites’ depredations activity posed a serious threat to the Doukhobors’ material and psychological welfare. Though the Sons of Freedom perpetrated much of their

⁴⁸ Peter Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* [Canada: Hall Printers], 1957), 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

activity with the intention of consolidating Doukhobor identity, their actions often had an unintended negative impact. Rather than drawing all Doukhobors together, the Freedomites' depredation activity drove a wedge between opposed factions, thus dividing the Doukhobors and leaving them all the more vulnerable to assimilation pressure. The more trouble the Sons of Freedom caused, the more cause authorities had to intervene, imposing greater restrictions on the Doukhobors as a strategy to end Freedomite lawlessness. Though the Sons of Freedom took pride in their "mission," most Doukhobors were angered by it. Some Doukhobors drifted from Doukhoborism altogether, alienated by the Freedomites' activities.⁵¹ Non-Freedomite Doukhobors struggled to maintain a positive self-image, and to project a positive group identity, in light of the voluminous bad press the Freedomites' activities were generating.

The Orthodox Doukhobors, out of concern for their personal welfare as well as for their reputation, sought to create distance between themselves and the Sons of Freedom who were causing them problems.⁵² In 1953, the Orthodox Doukhobors, who were again subjected to suspicion for transgressions allegedly committed by Doukhobors in the Kootenay region, asserted: "we have signed a pledge that we would have nothing to do with Sons of Freedom" and claimed "Sons don't come to our meetings and we don't go to theirs."⁵³ On this occasion, members of the public pointed out to representatives of the Orthodox faction that it was difficult for outsiders to "distinguish the Sons of Freedom from the Orthodox" and that the Orthodox should make more of an effort to make the "distinctions clear." It was further pointed out that Orthodox Doukhobors who "sympathized" with the

⁵¹ Koozma Tarasoff, interviewed by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 105, page 618, Jim Hamm Fonds, UBC.

⁵² This was done formally in 1947 by a declaration of the U.S.C.C., Orris, "Social Control and Assimilation," 152; "Doukhobor Land Allotment Inquiry Act: Interim Reports of Justice A. E. Lord, 1955-1959," 25 August 1955, 2, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; Alex Reibin, "Statement of Alex Reibin to Attorney-General Robert Bonner," 19 October 1962, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁵³ "Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List," *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953.

Sons of Freedom were a “weak link.” The Orthodox vowed to “weed” these out, but were advised that it would be better for them to “‘completely shun’ the Sons of Freedom and trouble-makers and show the valley that you are acting in good faith.”⁵⁴

This was attempted on multiple occasions. In one instance, Mary and Peter Astafooroff were asked to move, upon discovery that they were hosting a meeting of a Freedomite Women’s Committee in their home on Community property. They refused at first, but ultimately agreed to cooperate with the request. Upon confirmation of their decision at a meeting of the Sion group of Orthodox Doukhobors in Grand Forks, British Columbia, Orthodox men attending the meeting expressed their gratitude and offered to help them with the move. They declared: “our Society is united in the struggle against [Freedomite] evil and violence.” The Astafooroffs were asked to “leave us in peace, so that we the same as you would have the opportunity to live the way our conscience dictates to us.” The Astafooroffs agreed to convey this message to their Freedomite peers, and committed to move immediately to Gilpin, British Columbia, a Freedomite-settled area on the outskirts of Grand Forks. This they did, but not before they set fire to their neighbour’s home on 1 January 1961.

This provoked a mass meeting of USCC members at the Sion *dom*⁵⁵ later the same day. The meeting “voiced a general indignation against the acts of terrorism, violence, arson, bombings and destruction of property which was earned by the people through hard work, which were being committed under the cover of the name of God and the Doukhobor teaching, for the last several decades, by the so-called Sons of Freedom (at present calling themselves Reformed).” The meeting “resolved to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, in

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Literally “house,” a meeting hall used for business meetings and religious services.

the struggle against terrorism to the victorious end, so as to put an end to this mockery and blasphemy.”⁵⁶

In September of 1962, ten of John J. Verigin Sr.’s supporters stood shoulder to shoulder with him in the face of nearly seven hundred Freedomites who amassed before his family home in Grand Forks, prior to marching towards Mountain Prison outside of Agassiz, British Columbia. Verigin offered the Freedomites food and water but denied them the right to camp on his property. He declared: “In the name of God, we wish to tell you that we have nothing to do with you. Keep away.”⁵⁷ Verigin’s reception disappointed the Freedomite visitors, who felt their welcome should have been warmer. Verigin’s chilly reception was likely motivated both by the desire to protect his family and his property from harm (having been threatened with arson on previous occasions), and by the desire to send a clear message that he did not want to be associated with the Sons of Freedom or their cause in the public’s view.

The geographical separation between the Freedomite and Orthodox Doukhobors was intended to reify the philosophical separation between the two groups, and to increase the security of the Orthodox who wished to live in peace. The Sons of Freedom argued that the cultural separation was not as firm, and the Orthodox record not as clean, as the Orthodox would have others believe. In 1953, representatives of the CCBRD claimed that the Sons of Freedom “are actually the servants of all Doukhobors combined.”⁵⁸ In a damning indictment, the Sons of Freedom argued that the Orthodox were in fact “the actual originators of the crimes of which you accuse and reproach us.” The authors question how over fourteen million dollars worth of damage could be perpetrated under the nose of the Orthodox without

⁵⁶ Peter P. Legebokoff, “Women’s Committee of Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Threatens with Burnings,” translated from *Iskra* # 811, 6 January 1961, John G. Bondoreff Papers, 1950-54, UBC.

⁵⁷ “Keep Away, Orthodox Leader Says” *Globe and Mail*, 7 September 1962, 1.

⁵⁸ CCBR Doukhobors (John J. Perepelkin, N. K. Nevokshonoff, Fred N. Maloff, Wm. A. Osachoff, A.P. Makortoff, Tom Shlakoff, S. J. Faminoff) to Miss Walsh, *Nelson Daily News*, 30 April 1953, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC.

their “knowledge and participation.” The Freedomites accused Orthodox Doukhobors in leadership positions of perpetrating – or at least inciting – the incidents the Freedomites were accused of masterminding.⁵⁹ Freedomite Fred Davidoff claimed: “we Doukhobors are basically all one undividable group,” differing “only as children according to ages.”⁶⁰ Journalist Simma Holt reported that “many whispered to me and to the police: ‘this whole conspiracy is bigger than anyone outside our faith realizes. If the truth were known it would horrify the people of Canada’.”⁶¹

It is very difficult to discern to what extent these intimations were true, believed to be true, rumour, conjecture, misinformation, libel, or defamation. Certainly, non-Freedomite Doukhobors vehemently rejected these accusations, and lambasted the press for repeatedly conveying the impression that all Doukhobors were involved in transgressions actually perpetrated by a recalcitrant minority.⁶² The Union of Doukhobors of Canada complained about “the press and certain people in authority” using the general “Doukhor” label instead of the more specific (and appropriate) “Freedomite” one, thereby “by inference and association lump[ing] us together as one.”⁶³ *Iskra* editor Legebokoff explained that grouping the Doukhobors together in the press had the effect of “blackening, muddying and discrediting, in the eyes of the wider public, the Doukhor faith, so as to bring chaos and disorganization in the midst of the followers of this faith, to subvert them from the way of

⁵⁹ “Our Reply to the Yelping Howls of the Jackals and Hyenas of ‘Iskra’ Against our Society, Committee & Our Spiritual Brother & Adviser – S. S. Sorokin” (Krestova, British Columbia: Fraternal Council, Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, 1961), 1-2, Doukhor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU). See also “Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror,” *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 1962.

⁶⁰ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 227.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² See for example “Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List” *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953; Paul Markoff to editor, “Gives Doukhor View on Statements by Valley People” *Nelson Daily News*, 15 May; Minutes of the fifth meeting, Trail City Club, 4 September 1958, Kootenay and Boundary Citizens’ Committee on Doukhor-Canadian Affairs, Briefs, 1958-64, UBC.

⁶³ Peter S. Bludoff (Secretary) for the Union of Doukhobors of Canada (Blaine Lake) to Right Honourable D. Fulton, Minister of Justice (Ottawa), 29 August 1958, Union of Doukhobors of Canada Papers, 1938-59, UBC.

truth to the way of falsehood and violence.”⁶⁴ John J. Verigin Sr. argued that the linking of “violence” with the Doukhobor name “is a great injustice to the Doukhobor faith.”⁶⁵

“Contrary to a popular misconception,” Verigin declared, “90 per cent of the Doukhobors are law-abiding, send their children to school, pay taxes and definitely do not burn, bomb or parade in the nude.”⁶⁶

Though many attempts were made to broaden the divide between Doukhobor factions, a few attempts were made in the middle of the twentieth century, formally and informally, to reunite the Doukhobors under one broad umbrella organization. The All-Doukhobor Unity Convention, held in Brilliant, British Columbia on 9 December 1945 claimed to have as its prime objective “the amalgamation of all Doukhobors on the basis of Doukhobor principles,” for example.⁶⁷ The challenge, of course, was the task of defining and agreeing upon “Doukhobor” principles, given the variety of definitions held on a personal and factional level.

One definition most Doukhobors could agree on was Christian belief. In 1953, Orthodox Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin Sr. presented Doukhoborism as a faith that, when “put into practice...reaches closest to Christ’s teachings.”⁶⁸ In 1945, the “All-Doukhobor Unity Convention” explained Doukhoborism as the “aspiration to attain supreme blessings in fraternity, equality and love according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.” Doukhobors were expected to believe in God, love their neighbours, refrain from killing, treat others with kindness and consideration, and “adhere to vegetarianism, temperance and

⁶⁴ W. N. Papove, trans., “Concerning Several Recent Events: Translation of an Article by P.P. Legebokoff in ‘Iskra’, no. 694, Sept. 19, 1958,” 3, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁶⁵ “Says John Verigin: Violence Not Part of Doukhobor Faith,” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1958.

⁶⁶ “God Only Authority: 90 p.c. of Doukhobors Obey Law, Leader Says,” *Globe and Mail*, 21 February 1963, 5.

⁶⁷ “Resolutions of All-Doukhobor Unity Convention, held at Brilliant, B.C. on the 9th of December, 1945, attended by 51 Delegates with the right of vote, representing various Doukhobor groups” in Union of Doukhobors of Canada Papers, 1938-59, UBC.

⁶⁸ “300 Yards from Store: Youth Find Dynamite By Track, Power Pole” *Nelson Daily News*, 28 September 1953.

avoid the use of all stupefying elements” such as alcohol and tobacco.⁶⁹ These dictates were confirmed by Society of Doukhobors of Canada in 1967.⁷⁰

The Sons of Freedom often referenced their Christian beliefs in identifying themselves or their moral position, and were frustrated when outsiders failed to identify them as a religious group. Freedomite leader Stefan Sorokin identified his “as a spiritual group belonging to the Christian faith,” which “believe[s] and adhere[s] to the basic laws of Christianity.”⁷¹ He complained to Col. F. J. Mead of the RCMP: “you are tackling a religious problem but you are refusing to treat the Doukhobors as a religious group and give due respect to its representatives and heads.”⁷² This was also Freedomite J. J. Perepelkin’s concern. “It is essential that the approach toward them [the Sons of Freedom] must be as a religious group,” Perepelkin claimed, “for only then can relations be normalized and blessed of God.” According to Perepelkin, this had not taken place in Canada, where the Sons of Freedom experienced instead “persecution and deprivation.”⁷³ However, as the *Nelson Daily News* pointed out, “there is very little in the acts of the Sons of Freedom that would lead to the belief that they are really Christians.”⁷⁴

Emphasizing the Doukhobors’ Christian beliefs allowed those involved in unification efforts to draw attention to commonalities between Doukhobors of all factions. It also allowed the Doukhobors to highlight correspondence between Doukhobor identity and

⁶⁹ Union of Doukhobors of Canada, “Resolutions of All -Doukhobor Unity Convention, held at Brilliant, B.C. on the 9th of December, 1945,” Union of Doukhobors of Canada Papers, 1938-59, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC). Interestingly enough, by the middle of the twentieth century, many Independent Doukhobors openly indulged in meat and intoxicants, and some Orthodox and Freedomite Doukhobors did as well, though it remained taboo in these groups.

⁷⁰ From “Constitution of the Society of Doukhobors of Canada,” as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 40, 4 March 1979, 444.

⁷¹ “Disclosure on Doukhobor Affairs,” Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC.

⁷² S. S. Sorokin, “Doukhobor Affairs Inside Out: A Letter to Col. F. J. Mead,” ([Crescent Valley, British Columbia]: Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, [1957]), 5, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

⁷³ J. J. Perepelkin, *Doukhobor Problem in Canada: A Prototype Copy of the Hebrew People in Egypt*, trans. J. E. Podovnikov ([Krestova, British Columbia]: Fraternal Council of the Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, 1959), 13, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

⁷⁴ “The Sons of Freedom,” *Nelson Daily News*, 3 May 1956.

mainstream (Christian-) Canadian identity, thus “legitimizing” the Doukhobor faith in the public’s view. Emphasizing the commonalities between Doukhobor beliefs and (Christian-) Canadian identity may have been an effort to foster understanding, compassion, and sympathy for the Doukhobors.⁷⁵ This might also have been used – consciously or unconsciously – as a strategy to counterbalance the negative impression of Doukhoborism the public gleaned from press reports of nudity and the destruction of property, which struck many Canadians as far removed from mainstream Canadian philosophy, belief, or practice.

The reunification process was long and difficult. A letter published in *Iskra*, authored by Sons of Freedom in August of 1950, seemed promising. The authors wished to “express our sincere gratitude for your efforts in convincing us to confess to all our acts of burning and dynamiting-blasting for which we are now imprisoned...our sincere desire is to ask you...to forgive us for all the suffering caused you from time to time in the course of our turbulent life.”⁷⁶ Any peace secured by this letter was short-lived, as the Freedomites soon launched several aggressive arson campaigns. These escalated in 1953 as British Columbia’s Social Credit government attempted to “crack down” on the “Doukhobor problem” shortly after reelection.

Despite this setback, Doukhobors and their advocates attempted to renegotiate a peaceful understanding. In 1954, a meeting chaired by Rev. Allan Dixon between representatives of all three main Doukhobor factions in Nelson, British Columbia, seemed to make some progress, as the Freedomites acknowledged that “all violence was contrary to Christianity and basic Doukhobor tenets” and that all children were expected to attend

⁷⁵ This worked both ways. Church ministers living in Doukhobor-inhabited areas of British Columbia encouraged their congregations to recognize the Doukhobors as fellow Christians. They invited Doukhobor choirs to sing during Sunday worship, for example, and set up conferences between members of their congregations and their Doukhobor neighbours, in an effort to promote cross-cultural understanding. See, for example, “Choir Ends 15-Day Canada, U.S. Tour: Doukhobors Not Barred from Singing in Capital Building at Olympia” and Allan Dixon, “The Doukhobors,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁷⁶ From *Iskra* 293 Dec 8 1950 (August 17 1950) as cited in “Our Reply to the Yelping Howls,” 10.

school, and that “from the government’s view there were no reservations in this stand.”⁷⁷

Though these meetings and others like them left some Doukhobors and outsiders hopeful that the end of the “Doukhobor problem” was in sight, it was not until the late 1970s and the 1980s that a meaningful rapprochement could be achieved between the Sons of Freedom and their fellow Doukhobors. In the meantime, too many Doukhobors remained committed to their faction’s definition of Doukhobor identity to compromise.

Freedomite depredations activity was the main, but not the only, cause of the Doukhobors’ mid-century identity crisis. Doukhobor way-of-life was traditional and restrictive. In contrast, Canadian way-of-life offered broader opportunities and many Doukhobors, especially among the Independent and Orthodox factions, were increasingly seeking out these opportunities. Peter Maloff noted in 1948 that the temptation to do so “divert[s] us from the path our ancestors so heroically trod, and tend[s] to enslave us in their malicious clutches.”⁷⁸ Nearly a decade later, Maloff explained that the vast majority of Doukhobors of all factions had “lost sight of their historical mission” and suffered a “decaying” morality. Fifty years in Canada had caused the Doukhobors to lose “much of their spiritual prowess.”⁷⁹ As an example, Maloff pointed out that eighty per cent of the Doukhobors “eat meat, use tobacco and intoxicating liquors, perhaps more than those plain Canadian citizens who make no pretense of avoiding these things.”⁸⁰ Maloff was also concerned about the Doukhobors’ drift to materialism. The “craving of material possessions,” Maloff explained, “drives us to commit all sorts of crimes and injustices.”⁸¹ In earlier times private land ownership was sufficient grounds for dismissal from the Doukhobor community. As of 1957, however, Maloff claimed that “half of the members of

⁷⁷ “Three Groups Talk Differences... Sons Admit Violence Unchristian, Learn School Stand Unchanging,” 5 March 1954, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁷⁸ P. N. Malov, “Doukhobors, Their History, Life and Struggle,” Peter Maloff Papers, 1924-26, UBC.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

the Spiritual Communities of Christ are private land-owners, businessmen, and speculators.” This was undesirable, Maloff argued, because private ownership “breeds hate and dissention among different groups.”⁸²

This “moral degeneration”⁸³ had a dangerous impact on Doukhobor identity. Much of traditional Doukhobor identity had been defined by their commitment to spiritual ideals. Straying from those ideals in a Canadian context constituted a major compromise, and a threat to their ideals-defined identity. This problem was acknowledged by Claudia Lewis of the UBC DRC, who noted that “the breaking of his moral and religious code can constitute one of the most common conflicts for the Doukhobor.”⁸⁴ A Doukhobor who abandoned his or her ideals, Peter Maloff argued, should “abandon all pretense of being a Doukhobor, accept openly a Canadian way of life and its responsibilities, including military service.”⁸⁵ In other words, failure to espouse Doukhobor ideals was, in Maloff’s view, a failure to embrace a Doukhobor identity, and an indication of assimilation to Canadian way-of-life.

The actual progress of assimilation among the Doukhobors is difficult to measure quantitatively for any given point in the twentieth century, but there is qualitative data to show the extent to which the Doukhobors were *perceived* to be resistant to, in the process of, or speeding towards assimilation. On the one hand, outsiders perceived frustratingly little evidence of assimilation in the middle of the twentieth century. One commentator observed that there seemed to be “more traditional Russian apparel in Grand Forks or Nelson than on the streets in Russia.”⁸⁶ Indeed, Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC noted that many Doukhobors remained culturally, socially, economically, and theologically distinct from their

⁸² Ibid., 16.

⁸³ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 8.

⁸⁴ Claudia Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 109.

⁸⁵ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 16.

⁸⁶ W. A. Soukereff, “Doukhobors in Russia Seek Degrees; J. J. Verigin’s Mother is Located,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

non-Doukhobor neighbours.⁸⁷ Stuart Jamieson noted in 1951 that “only a few dozen Doukhobors all told are members of trade unions, business and professional organizations, or service clubs in the industries and communities in which they are employed.”⁸⁸ Comparing these observations with Milton Gordon’s “Assimilation Variables,” it is clear that many Doukhobors were not “passing” as Canadians, and were not demonstrating “change of cultural patterns to those of host society.” Nor were they entering “cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level.”⁸⁹ In many respects, the mainline Doukhobors were not rapidly assimilating to mainstream Canadian culture.

The Orthodox Doukhobors were increasingly open-minded about integrating with their Canadian neighbours, however. John J. Verigin Sr., for his part, advocated a policy of accommodation in the mid twentieth century. Verigin declared: “if assimilation means being swallowed and losing one’s identity and traditions, we don’t want it.”⁹⁰ Verigin was interested, however, in “integration of various cultures for the purposes of having unity in diversity,” which was an approach gaining currency in Canada in the early 1960s.

There was significant evidence to show that the Orthodox Doukhobors were integrating with their Canadian peers in the mid-twentieth century. Certain “moderates” who “realize the necessity of conformity to Canadian laws and Canadian education standards” had taken positions in politics, academics, engineering, and business.⁹¹ Many non-Freedomite Doukhobors were showing, by the mid 1950s, “an increasing acceptance of the idea that government is an organization made for and responsive to the general welfare.”⁹² Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC suggested that “the Doukhobors have rapidly adopted and

⁸⁷ Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” 9.

⁸⁸ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 7.

⁸⁹ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 71.

⁹⁰ “God Only Authority: 90 p.c. of Doukhobors Obey Law, Leader Says” *Globe*, 21 February 1963, 5.

⁹¹ W. W. Bride, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” 34.

⁹² Harry B. Hawthorn, “Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 29.

adjusted to Canadian ways” and that “economic independence, new occupations, dual language, increased literacy, heightened standard and altered manner of living, are all indices of the amount of acculturation which has occurred in Canada.”⁹³ In fact, Hawthorn explained: “the rapidity of this change, and the social and psychological disturbance it inevitably brings, has been a main cause of the reaction of the Sons of Freedom, whose most intense effort is directed toward opposing it.”⁹⁴

Canadian-born Freedomites viewed Canadian “traditions and culture” as corruptive. Believing that their ideals were “undermined by assimilation,” they felt obliged to remain faithful to their ancestral creed.⁹⁵ Freedomite leader Stefan Sorokin asserted his conviction that his followers had the right under “Christian [and] democratic laws” to preserve their “natural heritage” without adopting “the Canadian pattern of life” or assimilating to “English or Canadian culture.”⁹⁶ Attempts to force assimilation would lead, the Freedomites asserted, “to further misery of those concerned.”⁹⁷

Despite the Freedomites’ resistance to even the idea of assimilation, and the Orthodox Doukhobors’ slow progress in this area, the government believed that “assimilation” was the solution to the so-called “Doukhobor problem.” Moreover, the government of British Columbia clearly believed that the short-term consequences of forcing the issue were worthwhile. In fact, as will become clear in the next three chapters, the government’s approach aggravated the problem, and in some respects delayed a solution. Some would

⁹³ Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Doukhobor Mothers of Kootenay and Grand Forks District [Sons of Freedom]: Mrs. Polly Lawrenoff, Mrs. Polly Koodrin, Mrs. Anne Davidoff, “Appeal of Doukhobor Mothers to all their Canadian Sisters and to All Mothers in Christ,” 11 February 1955, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC.

⁹⁶ “Disclosure on Doukhobor Affairs,” Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC.

⁹⁷ It is unclear, from the context, whether the misery would descend on the Freedomites forced to assimilate or on those who forced the assimilation. “Reformed Sons Reject Specialists, Back Sorokin and Relocation” *Nelson Daily News*, 3 March 1954.

argue that the ends justified the means; others – especially the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors – would vehemently protest.

CHAPTER 6

“The Cause”

By the middle of the twentieth century, much of the “Doukhobor problem” centred around the Freedomites’ grievances and their protest activities. The Sons of Freedom had many ways of expressing their discontent. They conducted meetings and marches. They wrote letters and posted signs. They removed their clothing, and they set fires and bombs. They targeted their friends and neighbours as well as their enemies. They demonstrated in front of fellow Freedomites, non-Freedomite Doukhobors, Doukhobor leaders, police officers, judges, government officials, researchers, journalists, meddlers, and “innocent bystanders.” They destroyed their own homes, others’ homes, community property, corporate property, and government property. Their demonstrations were, at best, a nuisance; at worst, they were publicly perceived as “terrorist” acts.¹ They wanted to draw attention to their “problem,” but in doing so, they became the problem.

The mid-century “Doukhobor problem” proved difficult to solve because it was extremely complicated. Concerned citizens, journalists, police officers, judges, politicians, Royal Commissioners, Quakers, clergymen, social workers, psychologists, and social scientists attempted to explain the Freedomites’ motivations from the outsiders’ perspective in the middle of the twentieth century. Non-Freedomite Doukhobors offered a Doukhobor perspective on the “problem,” while Freedomite Doukhobors offered self-reflective “insider” insight. Freedomites’ own explanations of their behaviour are useful, but they cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Their logic was hard to follow, and their explanations incorporated truth and lies, understanding and misunderstanding. Biases implicit in non-Freedomite Doukhobor and “outsider” assessments must also be taken into account when

¹ Public perception will be examined in greater detail in chapter 7.

constructing a comprehensive answer to the “problem.” Taking multiple perspectives into account yields a fuller understanding of the Freedomites’ motivations. This chapter will assess the various explanations analysts offered for Freedomite conduct, aware that some explanations bear more weight than others.

The wide range of explanations, strategies, and targets involved in the Freedomites’ activism made it difficult to see a pattern. Yet, there was a pattern. Ultimately the Freedomites’ protest activities constituted their response to assimilative pressure, their expression of their religious beliefs, and their mission to preserve their interpretation of “Doukhorism” in twentieth-century Canada. In short, Freedomite activism was an effort to define, assert, and protect their conceptualization of Doukhor identity in a Canadian context. Understanding the Freedomites’ demonstrations as an expression of deeply rooted identity concerns is essential to understanding why British Columbia’s “law-and-order” and “identity assimilation” responses to the “Doukhor problem” (addressed in chapters 7 and 8) failed to achieve a resolution in the 1950s and 1960s, and why “truth and reconciliation” meetings in the 1970s and 1980s (addressed in chapter 9) were ultimately successful.

The Freedomite conceptualization of Doukhor identity was multifaceted. In their view, Doukhor “religion” prompted them to oppose “government,” “law,” and “authority” of any kind. They suffered for this opposition, both in Russia and in Canada. The experience of opposition, as well as the experience of suffering – of self-sacrifice for the cause, and of “Christian martyrdom” – was, in their view, an essential marker of Doukhor identity. The absence of the experiences of opposition and suffering may well have threatened the Freedomites’ sense of Doukhor identity. Opposition to external authority notwithstanding, Freedomites believed in, and followed, their own leaders, including Peter V. “Lordly” Verigin, Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin, John J. Verigin Sr., Stefan Sorokin, and (to

a limited extent) John Lebedoff and Michael “Archangel” Verigin. So great was their faith in their leaders that they often followed their instructions blindly. The Sons of Freedom felt that their conduct was justified because they believed what they were doing was for the salvation of all Doukhobors, and was endorsed by Doukhobor leaders. Essentially, the Sons of Freedom perceived themselves as having been commissioned, both by the Doukhobor leadership and by the spirit of God, to lead the Doukhobors to resist assimilation and to continue to live as Doukhobors in a Canadian context.

Doukhobors, and especially Freedomite Doukhobors, viewed “the government” as an all-powerful and threatening entity. They feared and resented the authority it had over their lives and did not understand its form or function well – often failing to distinguish between provincial or federal governments, or between Canada’s democratic model and Russia’s autocratic one, for example.² This vague perception of government comes across clearly in some of the Freedomites’ rationalizations. Nastia Barisoff explained, for example, that though she had set a fire, she was “not to blame” because “the government made [her] do it.”³ Similarly, Mary Malakoff claimed: “I don’t blame the police. It is the government. It is the law. Oh, I don’t know what it is.”⁴ A large part of the Doukhobors’ opposition to government, the Freedomites explained to Royal Commissioner Harry J. Sullivan in 1948, was that governments “have always disregarded God’s commandment, ‘Thou shall not kill’.”⁵ The Freedomites claimed that the “pharaohs, Caesars, emperors, kings, and other mighty rulers” had “always endeavored to hold the people in darkness and subjection.”⁶ Sons of Freedom believed that all “government,” irrespective of time, place, or format, was

² Stuart Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” *Canadian Forum* 31 (April 1951): 8.

³ Simma Holt, “Freedomites Explain: Fires a ‘Telegram to God’,” *Vancouver Sun*, 9 June 1962.

⁴ Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 154.

⁵ “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

corrupt, oppressive, and inherently violent, since “wars, persecutions, prisons and the gallows always served and continue to serve as the stronghold of the state.”⁷

Isolated from Canadianizing influences (especially state education)⁸, Sons of Freedom Doukhobors had few opportunities to learn alternate ways of viewing the government in the first half of the twentieth century. Without outside influence, there was little hope that the Freedomites’ perception of government would change. It was difficult for individuals raised within the Freedomite community to resist the dominant ideology espoused by the group, especially since resisting the dominant ideology could mean challenging one’s leaders, elders, and family members. This was one of journalist Simma Holt’s⁹ concerns. The Sons of Freedom children were brought up to believe “that every true Doukhobor must fight for the ‘cause’ to solve ‘the Doukhobor problem’.” The children had only a vague sense of what the “problem” was, exactly, but were convinced that the government was responsible. As a result, the Freedomite child “hated” the government, and “was certain it was persecuting him and depriving him of freedom of religion.”¹⁰

“Protesting government” was a fundamental component of the Doukhobors’ (and especially the Freedomites’) collective memory. As University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee (UBC DRC) consultant Claudia Lewis explained in the early 1950s, most Doukhobors felt the urge to protest “the government” because protesting authority had been a fundamental component of Doukhobor experience in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ Much of the reflex to protest against government in

⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ Many Freedomite families refused to comply with British Columbia’s compulsory school attendance regulations until 1953, when the government of British Columbia forced the issue by apprehending truant Sons of Freedom children. Freedomite families formally agreed to send their children to public school in 1959. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

⁹ Simma Holt was a reporter for the *Vancouver Sun* and author of the controversial polemic *Terror in the Name of God* (1964).

¹⁰ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 276.

¹¹ Claudia Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Harry B. Hawthorn (Vancouver: University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955), 109.

Canada was a reverberation of their past experience in Russia. However, it was also a means of expressing Doukhobor identity in a Canadian context. If resisting government authority was perceived to be an essential marker of Doukhobor identity, then to be a Doukhobor, one had to continue to resist.¹² Understanding this logic is key to understanding the Freedomites' actions as part of a larger mission to preserve and assert Doukhobor identity in Canada.

The Freedomites' struggle against "Government" was sometimes interpreted more broadly as a protest against imposed authority of any kind.¹³ This included the authority of "the Law." They protested "the Law" and those responsible for enforcing it, in addition to protesting "the Government" responsible for drafting it. The Sons of Freedom protested specific laws as well as "the Law" in general, in much the same way as they protested against "the Government" in general. They opposed taxation, registration, and laws concerning compulsory school attendance,¹⁴ and they claimed the right to protest any laws they perceived as contradictory to Doukhobor religious belief and cultural practice.¹⁵ Their objection to law extended beyond the principle of religious freedom, however. As their

¹² "Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom," in "Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs," 1948, p. 25-26.

¹³ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Ottawa: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1977), 327-328; "Nude Doukhobors Agitating Against Summons to Army," *Globe and Mail*, 15 February 1944, 14; "British Columbia: Violent Anti-Violence," *Time* 55 (1 May 1950) 29-30; Stuart Jamieson, "The Doukhobors of B.C.," *Canadian Forum* 31 (April 1951), 7-8; "People Who 'Speak in Opposites,'" editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 May 1953, 38; "Doukhobors Burn Five Homes in Protest of Mass Arrest," *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 September 1953, 3; "Women Strip as Doukhobors Consider Move" *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1958, 14; Stephen Franklin, "Doukhobor Joan of Arc," *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 22 November 1958, 18, 20, 21, 30; "Taming the Wild Doukhobors!" *Buckingham [Quebec] Post*, 1 January 1960; "The Doukhobor Terror," *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; Simma Holt, "After Their Years of Terror, Freedomites Face a 'Vengeance' Threat... The Fury of the Miners," *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1962, 7; "Senate Urged to Study Doukhobor Problem" *Globe and Mail*, 11 October 1962, 27; "God Only Authority: 90 p.c. of Doukhobors Obey Law, Leader Says" *Globe and Mail*, 21 February 1963, 5; "Old Differences Among Factions Paralyze Co-Operative Project: Arson, Smear Campaign and Fear Scuttle Big to Heal Doukhobor Rift" *Globe and Mail*, 28 February 1977, 10; Toil and Troubled Life: Flesh, Fire and Freedom Among the Doukhobors" *Canadian Heritage* (August 1980), 35-36; Wallace Immen, "Vestiges of the Spirit Wrestlers," *Globe and Mail*, 28 March 1987, F06.

¹⁴ "The Sons of Freedom," *Globe and Mail*, 6 August 1958, 6.

¹⁵ "Offer Doukhobors Aid in Emigration," *Globe and Mail*, 16 August 1958, 1, 2. Also Joe MacSween, "Sons Mourn Jailed Members," Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "Sect Disrobes in Protest" *GF Herald*, Dixon Collection, in author's possession; Bruce Larsen, "Big Problem: Tent-Town Broken Up," *Province*, Dixon Collection, in author's possession; Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 24, Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC).

representatives revealed to Royal Commissioner Justice Harry Sullivan, the Sons of Freedom viewed “law” as the “chains” governments used to keep their citizens in subjugation.¹⁶

Non-Freedomite Doukhobors had shared this position to a certain extent at the beginning of the twentieth century. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, most Doukhobors accepted Canadian rule of law. The Sons of Freedom, who were the most resistant to assimilation and the most hesitant to give up what they perceived as “their mission” remained opposed to Canadian laws on principle.¹⁷ By the mid twentieth century, the Freedomites’ general “disdain for property and man-made laws” was seen to be a distinguishing factor separating them from their fellow Doukhobors.¹⁸

The Sons of Freedom offered two primary justifications for their campaign against Canadian authority. First, they believed that the Canadian government had promised the Doukhobors “absolute freedom to live their lives in accordance with their religious beliefs - freedom from government control and freedom from taxes - for 99 years.”¹⁹ They argued that they had decided to come to Canada based on the government’s assurance of religious freedom.²⁰ In their view, the government had failed to honour this commitment.²¹ As Fred Davidoff explained, “all we did ask was freedom of religion in order to live according to our

¹⁶ “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 25.

¹⁷ “Violent Anti-Violence,” 29. Also David Rowntree, “Quaker’s Difficult Job: Seeks Doukhobor Peace” *North Bay Nugget*, 28 January 1957; “Sons of Freedom Sect may Return to Russ Homeland,” *The Daily Nugget*, 7 May 1957, 14; “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; “The Doukhobor Civil War” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

¹⁸ “Violent Anti-Violence,” 29.

¹⁹ William Guy Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?” *Liberty* (June 1954): 53.

²⁰ Interview with Grace Burnett, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 25, page 171; “Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia,” 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

²¹ Fraternal Council and Members of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, (Sons of Freedom), *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin, Secretary of the Orthodox Doukhobors, For His Deliberate Distortion of the Basic Principles of the Doukhobor Faith* (Krestova B.C.: n.p., 1954); “Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia,” 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; “From the Imprisoned Doukhobors of Oakalla Prison,” 2 Oct 1953, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; David Rowntree, “Forced to Go to School in B.C.,” 27 Aug 1957, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “Sons of Freedom Sect may Return to Russ Homeland” *The Daily Nugget*, 7 May 1957, 14.

principles but we were never allowed to.”²² Their perception that they were promised religious freedom in Canada, and that this promise had been broken, inspired much of their angst. Second, the Sons of Freedom believed that the Canadian government had killed Doukhobor leader Peter Vasilevich Verigin in 1924, who died in an unexplained train-car explosion. Many Freedomites perceived that the government’s inability to solve the mystery of his death proved its culpability, or at the very least, its complicity.²³ Some of the Freedomites’ attacks on public property were intended to protest his murder.²⁴

Sons of Freedom Doukhobors perceived Verigin’s death as evidence of government persecution. This fit into their identity narrative, which held that being Doukhobor involved suffering, martyrdom, and struggle.²⁵ Suffering, martyrdom, and struggle had defined Doukhobor experience in Russia; the absence of the same pressures put Doukhobor unity and identity in jeopardy in Canada. Stuart Jamieson of the UBC DRC explained in the early 1950s: “Doukhobor society has lacked sufficient inner cohesion to hold together without external pressure in the form of persecution from the state.” In Canada, “long-established traditions of democracy, of individual and group liberties and of freedom from tyrannical

²² As cited in Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 211.

²³ Interview with Eli Popoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 55, page 361; Interview with Sam Konkin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 37, page 246; Interview with Fred Makortoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 54, page 347; Interview with Steve Lapshinoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 70, page 443; Interview with Tom McGauley, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 101, page 583; Interview with George Kinakin Jr., “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 111, page 657; Mr. Koochin and Mrs. Fenya Konkin, as cited in Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., *Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Meeting*, Symposium 10 and 48 (7 December 1975 and 3 February 1980), ([Grand Forks, British Columbia]: Partially funded by the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Centre for Russian and North American Studies; and the President’s Office, Selkirk College, 1997), pages 138 and 505, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU).

²⁴ Interview with George Kinakin Sr., “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 111, page 657; Koochin and Konkin as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 10 and 48 (7 December 1975 and 3 February 1980), 138 and 505.

²⁵ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 46 (9 December 1979), 486; Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 4, page 25; Interview with Mark Mealing, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 30, page 200; Interview with Koozma Tarasoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 106, page 623; P’Nina L. Shames, “Assessing Cultural Change in Doukhobor Clients: Recommendations for Social Work Practice” (master’s thesis, UBC, August 1981), 23, 39-40.

oppression” meant that there was significantly less “external pressure” put on the Doukhobors in Canada than there had been in Russia. Jamieson suggested that the Doukhobors felt a need to create issues with governments in order to provoke conflict and force them into the oppressive role they played in Doukhobor tradition.²⁶

The Sons of Freedom themselves often cited the Doukhobors’ historical experience as justification for their twentieth-century activities.²⁷ Representatives of the Fraternal Council and Members of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (CCBRD) noted that the “ancestors in Russia suffered extensively for this cause” and indicated their commitment to doing the same if necessary.²⁸ Freedomite activist Pete Swetlishoff explained that his actions sprung from feeling the need “to do something. I do not know whether to burn or what destruction, something to repeat the same things as our ancestors had done in past history of Doukhobors.”²⁹

Other Freedomites identified burning as a part of the Doukhobors’ tradition. Peter P. Slastookhin explained that the idea for using arson to discourage materialism arose out of the burning of arms event in Russia, which was a demonstration of the Doukhobors’ rejection of militarism.³⁰ Timothy Savinkoff suggested that the use of arson was endorsed in some of the Doukhobors’ psalms.³¹ Anuta Kootnikoff believed that the Doukhobors had burned “churches and guns” for two hundred years.³² Fred Davidoff believed that “the act to burn is three hundred years old.”³³ The Freedomites’ reference to fire as part of a centuries-long Doukhobor legacy is interesting. The use of arson to make a political point was not a regular

²⁶ Stuart Jamieson, “Economic and Social Life,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Hawthorne, 48-49.

²⁷ See for example Interview with Nat Voykin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcript of Interviews, tape 45, page 288; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603-604.

²⁸ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 11.

²⁹ As cited in Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 78.

³⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 26 (9 October 1977), 342 and Symposium 27 (6 November 1977), 342.

³¹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 42, (6 May 1979), 464.

³² Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 227.

feature of Doukhobor life in Russia: in fact, it was only really used in the Burning of Arms demonstration of 1895.³⁴

The Burning of Arms event constitutes a significant identity-defining moment in Doukhobor history. The demonstration was initiated on Peter V. “Lordly” Verigin’s instruction. Those who participated distinguished themselves as followers of Verigin. During and immediately following the event, they suffered severe punishment for their defiance. Both of these factors had a collectivizing influence on the Doukhobors involved, as the acceptance of Verigin’s leadership and the experience of trauma drew like-minded Doukhobors together.

The Burning of Arms event involved public demonstration, arson, confrontation with authority, and the subsequent experience of oppression and suffering. It resulted in the definition of a collective “Doukhobor” identity, unification of Doukhobor factions, attraction of international sympathy, and ultimately, emigration. To understand the logic behind Freedomite activity in the twentieth century, it is essential to understand the very strong link between these components and results in the Freedomites’ historical memory. It is possible that the Sons of Freedom paraded, confronted public officials, removed their clothing, burned, and bombed in Canada, knowing that doing so would result in persecution and oppression, because they believed these acts would ultimately consolidate Doukhobor identity, unify Doukhobor factions, attract international sympathy, and lead to migration, because this is how it happened before.³⁵

³⁴ On Easter Day in 1895, Doukhobor villages gathered any armaments they owned, and, if applicable, their draft notices, and burned them in large bonfires. When state authorities arrived to investigate the matter, verbal confrontations ensued. Some military draft notices were defiantly “returned” to the authorities. In some locations, this confrontation turned violent when authorities turned on the crowd using whips, their horses, and their weapons to intimidate the demonstrators.

³⁵ See for example Interview with Sam Konkin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcript of Interviews, tape 38, page 250; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcript of Interviews, tape 58, page 380; Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcript of Interviews, tapes 49-50, pages 318 and 323; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603; and Nick K. Novokshonoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 11 (4 January 1976), 142.

The connection between protest activity and identity was clearer to the Sons of Freedom than to Doukhobors of other factions. Doukhobor historian Eli Popoff provides a compelling explanation for this phenomenon.³⁶ When conducting research to prepare for a commemoration of the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada in the 1970s, Popoff learned that many of the elders who identified as Sons of Freedom emigrated from villages that had suffered the most egregious levels of oppression following the Burning of Arms episode. In a presentation to his peers in 1977, Popoff explained that it was not surprising that "these particular Doukhobors were among those that could not regain a rational equilibrium in Canada." Exceptionally harsh treatment in Russia had damaged their faith in authority, and they communicated this perspective to their descendents. It therefore came "to be indelibly imprinted on their inner consciousness that their forbearers stood up to the authorities for what they believed was a righteous cause, and they had suffered inhuman suffering for their stand, so they must also do the same. They must stand up to the authorities and they must also suffer like their forbearers did."³⁷ This explanation offers a more sympathetic and insightful read of the Freedomites' behaviour than was commonly available in the middle of the twentieth century. It frames the Freedomites' extremism as a function of their collective memory of persecution, and explains why the Freedomites were more vigilant about potential persecution in Canada than other Doukhobors, by correlating their heightened vigilance in twentieth-century Canada with their collective memory of harsher treatment in nineteenth-century Russia.

The Sons of Freedom perceived that they were best qualified to comment on what is required of a "true Doukhobor" because they, or their direct ancestors, had suffered so much for the cause in Russia. They also felt they had more at stake, because if Doukhoborism

³⁶ Eli Popoff, though raised among Independent Doukhobors and in contact with Freedomite family members, identifies primarily as an Orthodox Doukhobor.

³⁷ Eli Popoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 21 (9 January 1977), 296.

were to diminish in a Canadian context, then the suffering that they had endured for the cause would become meaningless.³⁸ To prevent this outcome, the Sons of Freedom set out to be as “Doukhobor” as possible, publicly proclaiming their commitment to their spiritual and cultural beliefs. They also circulated amongst non-Freedomite Doukhobor communities promoting their vision of Doukhoborism, using coercion to convince those who might stray to return to their roots.³⁹

The Orthodox Doukhobors were frequent targets of Freedomite protest. While many of the Independents lived further away, either in Saskatchewan or dispersed among non-Doukhobor Canadians, most Orthodox Doukhobors still lived in concentrated pockets in close proximity to the Sons of Freedom in the interior and boundary regions of British Columbia in the middle of the twentieth century. As such, their property was more accessible to Freedomites seeking opportunities to demonstrate their discontent. In addition, the Orthodox Doukhobors were more vocal and assertive about their “Doukhobor” identity than their Independent counterparts. Thus, when the Orthodox strayed from Doukhobor principles (in the Freedomites’ view), they appeared to be hypocritical.⁴⁰ At the same time, the Orthodox were deemed more “redeemable” than some of the Independent Doukhobors, who had strayed further from the “true faith” as defined by the Sons of Freedom.⁴¹

Freedomite attacks on Doukhobor property and the tension created between Freedomite and non-Freedomite Doukhobors as a result had important roots in and effects on Doukhobor identity. Though some non-Freedomite Doukhobors were sympathetic to the

³⁸ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 4, page 25; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603; Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 11.

³⁹ “B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 380; Interview with Hazel Samorodin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 52, page 334.

⁴⁰ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 380; “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 38-39.

⁴¹ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 380; “The Doukhobor Civil War” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

Freedomites' cause or showed compassion towards the Sons of Freedom who were obviously struggling on a deep level, most non-Freedomite Doukhobors resented the Freedomites' actions and were frustrated by the entire situation.⁴²

Considering the effect that Freedomite depredations had on non-Freedomite Doukhobors, one might expect that the Sons of Freedom intended to harass, intimidate, and aggravate their peers, in order to deepen divisions between their group and the other factions.⁴³ One might expect that the desire to cause harm motivated the Sons of Freedom to treat their neighbours and relatives as they did. In fact, the Sons of Freedom believed that their actions would *save* their fellow Doukhobors.⁴⁴ They believed their activities would remind all Doukhobors of the true tenets of Doukhoborism, and that the pressure they applied would solidify Doukhobor identity in the face of assimilative influences. They were motivated by the desire to unify the fractionalized group.⁴⁵

The Sons of Freedom believed in the importance of preserving Doukhoborism and resisting Canadian assimilation. They further believed that they knew what true Doukhoborism was; that they put Doukhobor principles into practice correctly; and that their

⁴² Interview with Edna Sapriken, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 43, page 274; Interview with Hazel Samorodin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 52, page 333; Interview with Larry Ewashen, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 89, page 510; John J. Verigin Sr., as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43, 53, and 62 (16 September 1979, 14 September 1980, and 4 October 1981), 470, 475, 552, 624; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 60 (3 May 1981), 609. This comes across very clearly in the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations Proceedings (hereafter EKCIR), vols. 1-100, 1982-1987, UBC.

⁴³ British Columbian authorities classified Freedomite incidents involving arson or detonation as "depredations." The "D" Squad, a special division of RCMP officers based in the Kootenays, was commissioned to investigate Freedomite Doukhobor depredations activity. The "D," often misinterpreted as referring to "Doukhobor," actually stood for "Depredations."

⁴⁴ William Stupnikoff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume A, 28 October 1982, p. 91; John S. Savinkoff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume B, 29 October 1982, 52; Olga Hoodicoff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume 4, 9 December 1982, 11.

⁴⁵ Nick K. Novokshonoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 11 (4 January 1976), 142; Interview with Sam Konkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 38, page 249-250; Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 49, page 318; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 58 and 60, pages 380 and 390-391; Joseph E. Podovnikoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 25 (1 May 1977), 334; Novokshonoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 468; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 44 (7 October 1979), 476; Nick D. Arishenkoff, as cited in *Summarized Report*, Symposium 52 (8 June 1980), 534; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 55 (2 November 1980), 575; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 604-605.

fellow Doukhobors had failed on both these counts. These premises underpinned all of their interactions with their fellow non-Freedomite Doukhobors.⁴⁶

The Freedomites' depredations were largely an effort to bring other Doukhobors "back to the true faith." The Sons of Freedom claimed they targeted schools because "education leads to war and communication with Satan"; private property because the "accumulation of wealth leads to corruption and sin"; gravesites and monuments in order to "stop the Doukhobors from bowing down before ornaments of stone."⁴⁷ Peter V. Verigin's historic home was "condemned to destruction by fire" by Freedomite women, who claimed to be moved by God himself in January of 1962. The women justified their action by explaining that the Doukhobors had "succumbed to worldly temptations - are accepting pensions, family allowances." They were motivated, in other words, by the sense that the Doukhobors had lost their way. By burning down the leader's home, the Doukhobors could reconnect with their purpose.⁴⁸ The Sons of Freedom thus protested what they deemed to be "backsliding" in their non-Freedomite counterparts.⁴⁹ If any particular Doukhobor or if the Doukhobor community at large was perceived as "compromising" with Canadian authorities, or on their Doukhobor values, the Sons of Freedom were moved to intervene.⁵⁰

There are a number of explanations for the Freedomites' concern for their fellow Doukhobors' "salvation." The Sons of Freedom were often motivated by love: they felt they

⁴⁶ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 318; Nikolai Koozmitch Novokshonoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 7 (24 August 1975), 110; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposiums 25 (1 May 1977), 56 (7 December 1980), 59 (5 April 1981), 336, 580, and 601; "Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia," 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; "Disclosure on Doukhobor Affairs," 40, Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC; Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 5.

⁴⁷ "B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2. See also "Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom," in "Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs," 1948, p. 36-37.

⁴⁸ Peter P. Legebokoff, "Women's Committee of Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Threatens with Burnings" typescript, trans., *Iskra* 811, 6 January 1961, John G. Bondoreff Papers, 1950-54, UBC.

⁴⁹ Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?" 53; "Sect May Return to Russia: Reds 'Sympathetic' to Doukhobors" *North Bay Daily Nugget*, 18 Jan 1958; "The Doukhobor Terror," *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6.

⁵⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 347.

were saving their fellows from corruption and destruction.⁵¹ It is important to remember that divisions between Doukhobor factions crossed family bloodlines, and fraternal as well as familial affection prompted some Freedomites to act in their “brothers’” interests. A Sons of Freedom who feared his “brother” was turning his back on his community, legacy, and belief might have felt an emotional imperative to show his “brother” the way. In a historically tight-knit community group such as the Doukhobors who profess social equality, the principle of being a “brother’s keeper”⁵² has great relevance. This principle was reinforced by an oft-cited speech of Peter P. Verigin’s, which taught: “if an unknowing person was raising to his mouth a glass of liquid which was spiked with poison, it was the duty of a knowing person to immediately use force to knock it out of his hand.”⁵³

Love was not the only motivation, however. To a certain extent, the Sons of Freedom resented the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors’ divergence from what they perceived to be true Doukhoborism. They perceived the Doukhobor “backsliders” as “traitors to the true faith.”⁵⁴ They felt their fellows’ assimilation as a “betrayal” worthy of retaliation.⁵⁵ The threat of assimilation created considerable stress for the Sons of Freedom, who were so committed to resisting it.⁵⁶ Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC suggested that the “rapidity” of the Doukhobors’ acculturation mid-century, and the “social and psychological disturbance it inevitably brings, has been a main cause of the reaction of the Sons of Freedom, whose

⁵¹ Interview with Sam Konkin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 38, page 250; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 391; Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 24.

⁵² From the Bible, Gen. 4:8.

⁵³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 44 (7 October 1979), 476.

⁵⁴ “The Doukhobor Civil War” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

⁵⁵ “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 38-39. See also Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 9.

⁵⁶ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 24; Interview with Dora Kanigan, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 74, page 467-468; Interview with Laura Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 81, page 497; Interview with Larry Ewashen, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 91, page 520; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 606.

most intense effort is directed toward opposing it.”⁵⁷ Thus, Hawthorn concluded, the Freedomites’ demonstrations resulted “from the stress acting on the individual and his culture.”⁵⁸ In his mid-century examination of the “Doukhobor problem,” Peter Maloff, a Doukhobor from an Independent family who sympathized with the Sons of Freedom, suggested that the struggle against assimilation had prompted the Freedomites to react violently to perceived threats to Doukhobor religious and cultural identity.⁵⁹ Forced assimilation attempts were “one of the chief causes of Doukhobor unrest,” he argued.⁶⁰

The Freedomites’ desire to live out a Doukhobor identity prompted them to live in greater isolation than their Doukhobor peers. Limited exposure to Canadian neighbours and education opportunities limited the Freedomites’ ability to acquire English language skills, and prevented them from qualifying for any but entry-level labour jobs. This had disadvantageous economic implications, but was advantageous from the perspective of preserving a Doukhobor identity. In contrast, many of the non-Freedomite Doukhobors had, following the collapse of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood, moved away from “traditional” Doukhobor lifestyle and adopted a Canadian way-of-life, integrating culturally and economically with their Canadian neighbours. Exposed to state education, their English language fluency improved and they became qualified to do more than entry-level labour work. Though many Doukhobors continued to perform agricultural or industrial labour to support their families, some took on jobs in business, administration, politics, “skilled” trades, and the professions (law, medicine, teaching). By the 1950s the majority of the Doukhobors living in Canada had “adopted and adjusted to Canadian ways.”⁶¹ They were

⁵⁷ Harry B. Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Hawthorn, 11.

⁵⁸ Harry B. Hawthorn, “Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Hawthorn, 39.

⁵⁹ Peter P. Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* (Canada: Hall Printers, 1957), 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶¹ Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” 11.

not fully assimilated, but they were no longer living communally or in complete isolation from their Canadian neighbours. Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC suggested in the early 1950s that “economic independence, new occupations, dual language, increased literacy, heightened standard and altered manner of living” were indicative of the Doukhobors’ increasing “acculturation” in Canada.⁶²

The Sons of Freedom who refused to assimilate economically or culturally viewed themselves as superior to other Doukhobors.⁶³ They needed their fellow Doukhobors to acknowledge this superiority to legitimize the economic and personal sacrifices they were making. Forcing the “backsliding” Doukhobors to realize the error of their ways was thus key to the Freedomites’ sense of identity as “good,” faithful Doukhobors. When other Doukhobors failed to cooperate, the Sons of Freedom felt betrayed.⁶⁴

Far from cooperation, the Orthodox Doukhobors publicly rejected the Sons of Freedom and condemned their depredations activities as a way to distance themselves from the stigmas generated by association with British Columbian “terrorists.” Honorary Chairman of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC), Orthodox leader John J. Verigin Sr., ejected the Sons of Freedom from the organization, denied them subscriptions to *Iskra*,⁶⁵ and excluded them from Orthodox Doukhobors’ meetings.⁶⁶ The Sons of Freedom were not surprised by this rejection. The Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD

⁶² Hawthorn, “Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations,” 39.

⁶³ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 381; Nikolai Koozmitch Novokshonoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 7 (24 August 1975), 110; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 25 (1 May 1977), Symposium 56 (7 December 1980), Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 336, 580, 601; “Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia,” 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC; Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 5.

⁶⁴ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 8, 10-11; Fraternal Council of the Union of the CCBRD, *Our Reply to the Yelping Howls of the Jackals and Hyenas of ‘Iskra’ Against Our Society, Committee & Our Spiritual Brother and Adviser, S. S. Sorokin* (Krestova, B.C.: Fraternal Council, Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, 1961), Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

⁶⁵ The Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ’s circular.

⁶⁶ Milton Stanley Orris, “Social Control and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of the Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities” (Master’s thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1975), 140-143.

cited former leader Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin’s prophesy that they would be “despised, driven, beaten, and jailed, by [their] own brethren.”⁶⁷ Rejection thus failed to deter them; if anything, it *reinforced* the Freedomites’ sense of mission. *Chistiakov*’s prophesy had come to pass. This confirmed his authority and confirmed the Freedomites’ commitment to their cause. The experience of hardship, even if it was at the hands of fellow Doukhobors, also reinforced the Freedomites’ “Doukhobor” identity.

The stress of oppression, persecution, and trauma had served a key role in consolidating Doukhobor identity in Russia. Based on their collective memory of these experiences, the Sons of Freedom internalized, more than members of other Doukhobor sects, the idea that “Doukhobors” could only be “spirit wrestlers” if they remained in a state of perpetual opposition.⁶⁸ As Freedomite Fred Davidoff explained, “through friction I was made a Doukhobor and in spirit to become a Sons of Freedom.”⁶⁹ As such, the absence of opposition created an identity problem for the Sons of Freedom (as well as for other Doukhobors). Even the slightest hint of government oppression was enough to provoke the Freedomites into action. However, there was relatively little evidence of religious persecution in Canada. In the absence of real opposition, the Sons of Freedom *created* an oppositional force by becoming the opposition themselves. Part of their “sacrifice” for the cause was to play the role of oppressor in order to promote unity and steadfastness among Doukhobors living in Canada.

Related to the perception that “perpetual opposition” was essential to the identity of a “spirit wrestler” was the idea that risking one’s own welfare in the face of opposition for the sake of the Doukhobor cause was honourable and heroic. In place of war stories, pacifistic

⁶⁷ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 4, 10.

⁶⁸ See for example Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 22; “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 211.

Doukhobors related tales of the risks that ancestors took and punishments they suffered for them.⁷⁰ This legacy had a strong impact on Doukhobors of all groups, but affected the Freedomites to a disproportionately large degree, because of their descendancy from Doukhor martyr-heroes. In fact, some Freedomites felt that martyrdom was integral to Doukhor identity, and that one could not be a good Doukhor unless one was willing to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the cause. This was illustrated in the CCBRD Fraternal Council's statement that "our ancestors in Russia suffered extensively for this cause and we here are ready to dedicate ourselves to the same cause."⁷¹

This concept played out among the Sons of Freedom in a number of ways. In many respects, the act of removing one's clothing, or of burning one's own home down, was an expression of the desire to demonstrate dedication to Doukhor principles specifically (the rejection of materialism), and to demonstrate commitment to Doukhorism in general (being prepared to suffer emotional hardship and economic privation for the sake of the cause). Though the consequences of these activities were unpleasant and undesirable for many of the Sons of Freedom activists, they were, nonetheless, accepted and even welcomed in some cases.

One of the consequences Freedomites often faced when their protest activity was unlawful was incarceration. The Sons of Freedom had a complicated view of imprisonment. They feared that they would be abused during their prison terms.⁷² They often protested their own or their peers' incarceration.⁷³ These protests notwithstanding, the Sons of Freedom

⁷⁰ See for example "Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom," in "Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhor Affairs," 1948, p. 26-27. Many examples of such stories can be found in Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhor History* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1992). See also Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 56 (7 December 1980), 580.

⁷¹ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 11.

⁷² "Doukhor Women Stage Protest at RCMP Office," *Globe and Mail*, 30 August 1952, 2; "Factional Quarrels Split Doukhobors: Leadership of Sons Disputed as 144 Face Vancouver Trial," *Medicine Hat News*, 21 Sept 1953; Joe MacSween, "Sons Mourn Jailed Members," Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁷³ See, for example "Fire, Bomb Raze Five B.C. Schools: Two Community Halls Also Are Destroyed in West Doukhor Country," *Globe and Mail*, 5 April 1937, 1; "Grandson May Succeed to Mantle of Verigin" *Globe*

frequently sought and embraced imprisonment.⁷⁴ In some cases, they broke laws just to get sent to jail.⁷⁵ On occasion, they also lied about their own or others' involvement in depredations incidents, claiming they had participated when they had not, in order to get sent to jail.⁷⁶

Incarceration offered Freedomite inmates multiple payoffs. Being viewed by peers as martyrs was one desirable end. As journalist Bruce Levett argued, "it is a form of martyrdom to go to prison for what they profess are their religious beliefs. They go proudly and - since they claim they have broken none of God's laws which alone rule them - they go silently, refusing to recognize man-made laws."⁷⁷ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic explain in *The Doukhobors* that the Sons of Freedom were not regular criminals: they were "religious fanatics thirsting for martyrdom."⁷⁸ In fact, as these authors point out, much of the Freedomites' activity was "carried on openly and provocatively, to court arrest and martyrdom."⁷⁹ Jail terms did little to deter the Sons of Freedom, who accepted their sentences "with aplomb, even approval,"⁸⁰ and, "as smiling martyrs, served their time, then came out to terrorize the countryside with new raids."⁸¹ A prison record was not a mark of shame, but rather a mark of prestige within the Freedomite community.⁸² This posed a major problem

and Mail, 13 February 1939, 11; "Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage," *Life* 28 (8 May 1950): 31; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, np.; "Kootenay Blasts Rip Power Tower," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July 1962; "The Doukhobor Civil War" *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; "Doukhobors Freed in Conspiracy Case," *Globe and Mail*, 8 August 1962, 1; Edwin Bolwell, "Doukhobors Encamp Outside B.C. Prison" *Globe and Mail*, 21 August 1963, 1; Bruce Levett, "Freedomites Find Contentment at Agassiz," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 March 1964; "Doukhobors Threatening Jail Attack" *Globe and Mail*, 13 September 1962, 1.

⁷⁴ Interview with Laura Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 82, page 500C.

⁷⁵ Interview with Alex Chernoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 47, page 301; Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezanoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 122, page 719.

⁷⁶ Interview with Paul Perepolkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 41, page 266.

⁷⁷ Bruce Levett, "'Sons Won't Forget': Acquitted Douks," Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁷⁸ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 317.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁸⁰ "B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2.

⁸¹ "Violent Anti-Violence," 29-30.

⁸² John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 246; Interview with Laura Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 82, page 500.

for those who wished to punish the Sons of Freedom for their anti-social conduct, and deter future Freedomite activism.

In fact, Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC strongly recommended that British Columbian and Canadian authorities scale back their law-and-order approach vis-à-vis the Sons of Freedom. Hawthorn explained that the penalty for public nudity,⁸³ for example, was “unduly punitive,” “out of line with the gravity of the offence,” and problematic since, with this population, “martyrdom is sometimes courted.”⁸⁴ Hawthorn wisely noted that

the effectiveness of force depends on the existence of a wish to avoid suffering, and it is ineffective if there is a strong drive to martyrdom and strong belief in the virtue of resistance and in the ennobling effect of punishment. Many Sons of Freedom and a few others now regard prison as a place for the virtuous.⁸⁵

The Freedomites’ conflicted attitude towards imprisonment in Canada reflects their historical experiences of imprisonment in Russia. Stories concerning the Doukhobors’ frequent incarceration in Russia had been passed down through the generations.⁸⁶ These stories illustrate the extremes and excesses of prison life in Russia, where prisoners were often mistreated and miserable. Collective memory of this aspect of imprisonment in Russia may have influenced their negative impression of Canada’s penal system.

Conversely, many Doukhobor “heroes” suffered imprisonment and corporal punishment at the hands of Russian authorities. The intertwined relationship between church and state in imperial Russia meant that Doukhobors suffering punishment through Russia’s legal system were often suffering for their non-conformist religious beliefs.⁸⁷ Equating the consequences of breaking the law with religious martyrdom thus has a strong historical

⁸³ Which the government of Canada increased to a 3-year incarceration in 1932 in response to provincial requests for help with the problems posed by the Sons of Freedom.

⁸⁴ Hawthorn, “Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations,” 40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

precedent among the Doukhobors, and stories conveying these themes continued to have currency among Canadian Doukhobors into the late twentieth century.⁸⁸ The Freedomites' willingness to serve prison time relates strongly to their cultural understanding of the broader spiritual implications of imprisonment. By seeking imprisonment in Canada, the Sons of Freedom sought to live out their collective memory and establish their identity as "Doukhobors" – as religious devotees prepared to suffer for their faith – in a Canadian context.⁸⁹

The Sons of Freedom also welcomed jail terms because they believed that they would "migrate through the jails."⁹⁰ By exasperating the Canadian authorities, the Freedomites hoped to be deported to their Russian homeland. Former Doukhobor leader Peter P. "Chistiakov" Verigin predicted that the Sons of Freedom would lead the Doukhobors back to Russia. The "Chistiakov prophecy" held that "if we bomb, burn, fill the jails, the government will be so anxious to get rid of us that they will not only provide transportation for us and our baggage, they will even load on our outhouses for us."⁹¹ On multiple occasions, Sons of Freedom detainees claimed that they were motivated to commit crime in the belief that each depredation, and each resulting jail sentence, brought them closer to the day of emigration.⁹²

⁸⁸ See *ibid.* for examples of Doukhobor folklore focused on these themes. This collection merely reflects a sampling of stories which have circulated among the Doukhobors since their arrival in Canada; most Doukhobor families can recite similar stories relating to their own ancestry.

⁸⁹ Interview with Laura Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 82, page 500.

⁹⁰ Interview with Alex Chernoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 47, page 301; Interview with Paul Perepolkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 41, page 266; Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 49, page 318; Interview with Sam Konkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 38, page 249-251; Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 122, page 719; Interview with Mike Chernenkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 33, page 230.

⁹¹ As cited in Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 67.

⁹² Interview with Alex Chernoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 47, page 301; "2 Doukhobors Found Guilty of Terrorism," *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 1962, 10; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 228, 230-231, 236, 246; Simma Holt, "Terrorists 'Depressingly Insane': Judge Ruttan Imprisons 20 Sons Three to 20 Years" *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1962; Ralph Allen, "The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.'s Holy Terrorists," *Maclean's Magazine* 75 (10 March 1962): 14-15, 46-50; "22 Freedomites Jailed for Arson; Help Requested in Purguing Sect" *Globe and Mail*, 14 April 1962, 46.

As most of the Freedomites were born in Canada, they could not technically be “deported” to Russia. However, they could arrange to emigrate through regular channels. As British Columbian Attorney General Gordon Wismer noted in 1950, if the Sons of Freedom wished to return to Russia, “the Canadian government would certainly not put barriers in their way.”⁹³ In fact, the governments of British Columbia and Canada helped the Sons of Freedom make emigration arrangements and even agreed to finance their transportation to and resettlement in Russia in 1958.⁹⁴ However, the arrangements fell through, partially because the Freedomites failed to comply, and partially because the USSR, familiar with the Freedomites’ reputation and conduct, rejected their application.⁹⁵

The Freedomites’ part in the failure of the emigration plan is significant, because it suggests that though the Sons of Freedom claimed they sought imprisonment in order to secure their emigration, emigration was not actually the desired outcome. One of the Freedomites’ primary concerns was that they would not be permitted to take the 196 Freedomite children held in state custody in New Denver, British Columbia⁹⁶ but the government assured them that the children in question would be permitted to leave with their

⁹³ “Violent Anti-Violence,” 29-30.

⁹⁴ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 345; “People Who ‘Speak in Opposites,’” editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 May 1953, 38; “Russia Handed Propaganda Gift By ‘Persecuted’ Sect in Canada,” *Miami News*, 21 January 1958, 6A; “B. C. Lays Down Strict Conditions for Doukhobors” *Globe and Mail*, 17 April 1958, 8; “Offer Doukhobors Aid in Emigration” *Globe and Mail*, 16 August 1958, 1, 2; “Doukhobor Alternative” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1958, 6; “‘Stop Killing our Young Men’: Naked Douks Protest,” 25 Aug 1958, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; A Correspondent, “‘Spirit-Wrestlers’ of Canada: British Columbia’s Settler Problem,” *Glasgow Herald*, 13 December 1958, 4. The Canadian government offered to pay for the Freedomites’ transportation, and the British Columbia government offered to match the Canadian government’s expenditure to assist with the Freedomites’ settlement in Siberia. “Children of Douks Still Canadian,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1958, 24; “Freedomites Assured Aid for Exodus,” *Montreal Gazette*, 16 August 1958, 4; “Douks’ Helped on Way,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 August 1958, 1.

⁹⁵ Douglas Collins, “Will They Go?: B. C. Residents Think Doukhobors Bluffing,” *Globe and Mail*, 25 October 1958, 7; “Children of Douks Still Canadian,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1958, 24; “Russia Bars Freedomites,” *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 3 September 1959, 16. A previous emigration plan to Costa Rica fell through because of the Freedomites’ criminal records. “Prison Records May Stop Douks’ Plan for Costa Rica Emigration,” *Montreal Gazette*, 9 March 1953, 15

⁹⁶ Between 1953 and 1959, the British Columbia government took custody of Freedomite children who were habitually truant from school. These children were housed and educated in a former tuberculosis sanitarium in New Denver, British Columbia. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

parents.⁹⁷ Perhaps, as one Freedomite spokesman reported, the Sons of Freedom preferred to be forcibly exiled than be given a choice.⁹⁸ If the Freedomites chose to leave, they would not be able to use their emigration as an example of state persecution. If the Freedomites were “exiled,” however, they could present themselves as religious “martyrs.” The Doukhobors had, on more than one occasion, been “exiled” to the remote regions of the Russian empire, and the experience of exile was part of Doukhobor collective memory as a persecuted people. By seeking “exile,” the Sons of Freedom were seeking to recreate a “Doukhobor” experience.

Some analysts characterized the Sons of Freedom as having “persecution and martyr complexes.”⁹⁹ The Freedomites’ willingness to (in some cases, their desire to) experience persecution and martyrdom can be explained, in part, by their interpretation of their Christian beliefs.¹⁰⁰ Accepting punishment for their activities – activities they perceived as supporting their religious beliefs – allowed the Sons of Freedom to “identify more closely with the crucified Christ,”¹⁰¹ or with the troubled Israelites of the Old Testament.¹⁰²

Though the perception that martyrdom was important to Christian lifestyle motivated the Freedomites’ desire to experience persecution and martyrdom to some extent, it was

⁹⁷ Blames False Reports on Sect’s Foes,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 July 1957; “Canadian Cult to take Trip,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, 16 August 1958, 5.

⁹⁸ Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Problems (Office of the President), “Minutes: Fifth Meeting; Held at the Canadian Legion Hall, Nelson, B.C., on May 7th and May 8th, 1952” (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 6), Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁹⁹ Amy Leigh, “Can the Doukhobor Problem be Solved?” *Canadian Welfare*, 26 (1 December 1950), 4; also Dr. C. H. Wright, as cited in “Says John Verigin: Violence not part of Doukhobor Faith,” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1958; “forceful dispersion would only deepen the guilt, the hatred, and the martyr complex upon which Freedomism thrives,” The Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs of the Kootenay Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, “A brief containing Suggestions for the Solution of the Freedomite Problem,” January 1963, 7, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, 1957-63, UBC; Allan Dixon, “The Doukhobors,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 4, page 29; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 62, page 410; “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 206.

¹⁰² J. J. Perepelkin, *Doukhobor Problem in Canada: A Prototype Copy of the Hebrew People in Egypt*, J. E. Podovnikov, trans. ([Krestova, B.C.]: Fraternal Council of the Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, 1959), Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

belief that martyrdom was essential to Doukhobor identity that really drove the Freedomites to accept, and occasionally to invite, consequences for protest activity. Fred Davidoff explained that the Freedomite activist:

with no personal gains out of it for himself [,] when he steps out to perform such an act he is ready to sacrifice his life and he prays and does it without the least fear knowing that sooner or later he is destined to be faced with a jail term. If death should meet him, he believes his soul will live forever and he will be remembered and go down in history as a hero upon whom others will look with admiration of his courage and have courage to sacrifice themselves for the Doukhobor cause.¹⁰³

Religious conviction motivated much of the Freedomites' activity. Testifying in court on charges related to arson, Peter Zarubin explained: "all that we had been doing and done was not of anger and hatred towards our spiritual brethren, the Canadian people or Canada in particular. No, we have been doing this out of *deep faith*."¹⁰⁴ Katy Saprikin explained in 1962: "It is our *religion*, we must do it."¹⁰⁵ Evidently, this was the "official" understanding of the Freedomites' motives: in 1962, authorities revealed that psychiatrists and sociologists would not be hired to serve Mountain Prison inmates, "because the Sons of Freedom associate their terrorist activities with their *religious* beliefs."¹⁰⁶

Like "Government" and "Law," "Religion" took larger-than-life status in Freedomite discourse. Freedomite references to "Religion" rarely delve into specific theological concerns; rather, "Religion" encompasses all spiritual feeling in a vaguely defined way. The specific concerns – the specific ways in which their religious freedom was compromised, the specific ways in which their protest activity related to their religious beliefs – were often

¹⁰³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 227-228.

¹⁰⁴ As cited in *ibid.*, 245. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁵ Holt, "Protest by Fire," *Canada Month*, September 1962, 21. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁶ "More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists," *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1. Italics mine.

overshadowed by the overarching principle driving their activity.¹⁰⁷ Thus, “Religion” drove the Sons of Freedom to protest “Government” and “Law.”

The Freedomites’ protest activities had a religious underpinning. Undressing or setting fire to their possessions was a way to demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of their beliefs, and their commitment to putting their spiritual priorities above material ones. The Sons of Freedom often threw clothing and even money into fires they set to underline their freedom from ownership.¹⁰⁸ In removing their clothing or destroying their belongings, they liberated themselves of the burden of materialism and demonstrated, in the process, their intention to trust God to provide. Nudity was also a way for the Freedomites to express humility and purity.¹⁰⁹ Nudity proved that they “had nothing to hide” and that, at a basic level, all people are equal.¹¹⁰ Nudity, to the Sons of Freedom, was “no sin but a virtue, for to appear nude is to appear in the form in which he was put on earth by God.”¹¹¹ They removed their clothing in order to emulate the innocence of Adam and Eve before the fall.¹¹² The Sons of Freedom often prayed while appearing nude or while watching their property burn.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 1-4, pages 14, 15, 18, 22, 26; Interview with Grace Worrall, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 6, page 42; Interview with Naida Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 49, page 317.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 24; Interview with Alex Chernoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 45, page 292; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 26 (9 October 1977), Symposium 27 (6 November 1977), Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), Symposium 60 (3 May 1981), 342, 347, 600, 609; “Clothing, Money Tossed to Flames: Destruction of Sorokin Banners Touches Off 20-Minute Riot of Sons of Freedom at Shoreacres,” 5 April 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers,” *Time* 87 (11 February 1966): 32.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 4, page 26; Interview with Alex Chernoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 47, page 302-303; Polly Chernoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 3 (2 March 1975), 65-66.

¹¹⁰ “Clothing, Money Tossed to Flames,” 5 April 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; David Rowntree, “Quaker’s Difficult Job: Seeks Doukhobor Peace” *North Bay Nugget*, 28 January 1957; “Take Food Through Tube in Nose: Two Doukhobor Women Begin Second Year of Fasting” *Globe and Mail*, 4 April 1967, 11.

¹¹¹ “79 Down, 58 To Go Doukhobor Trials,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹¹² “Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage,” *Life* 28 (8 May 1950) 29-33.

¹¹³ Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?” 21.

To many outsiders the Freedomites' actions appeared "insane."¹¹⁴ The Sons of Freedom were described as a "poor, misguided and obviously psychologically unbalanced people,"¹¹⁵ as well as "illogical," "unreasoning," and "irrational."¹¹⁶ Even Freedomite sympathizer Peter Maloff acknowledged that "no sane person can call it noble, Christian or logical such deeds as setting fire to houses and bombing railroads."¹¹⁷ Many of the judges presiding over Freedomite cases concluded that insanity was at play. Speaking to Freedomite Fred Davidoff, Justice Harry Sullivan stated: "it is my opinion that yours may be a medical problem because your performance here yesterday indicated to me the urgent need for some kind of psycho-therapy." Sullivan recommended that Davidoff be given a full work up while in prison to determine the nature of his problem.¹¹⁸ Justice Harold McInnes concluded his hearing with: "if you or any of you actually believe what you have told me...you are obviously very deluded people and are acting under a serious misconception."¹¹⁹ The Sons of Freedom whom Justice J. G. Ruttan tried in his courtroom seemed to him to be "resolutely and depressingly insane."¹²⁰

There is some evidence to suggest that some Freedomites did in fact suffer psychological disorder, though the cause and effect between the depredations activity and mental illness is unclear.¹²¹ It is possible that the Freedomite group attracted members who were mentally unstable. In the early 1950s, Alfred Shulman, a psychologist and UBC DRC

¹¹⁴ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 105.

¹¹⁵ British Columbia CCF MLA Colin Cameron, as cited in "Sons Sentences Anger MLA," Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

¹¹⁶ Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?" 53 and Hawthorn, "Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations," 32.

¹¹⁷ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 16.

¹¹⁸ As cited in Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 215.

¹¹⁹ As cited in *ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁰ As cited in Holt, "Terrorists 'Depressingly Insane': Judge Ruttan Imprisons 20 Sons Three to 10 Years," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1962.

¹²¹ Some Freedomites spent time at Essondale Hospital of the Mind in Coquitlam, British Columbia. Interview with Fred Bodnaruk, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 20, page 141; Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 50, page 323; Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Problems, "Minutes: Fifth Meeting," 9.

consultant, explained that the loose structure of the group made it easy for “pathological individuals” to join the Freedomites. “Some of these individuals seem to be suffering from schizophrenic illnesses, and they use the group to try to work out their own problems,” Shulman explained.¹²² Shulman’s colleague, Claudia Lewis, speculated that “it seems likely that the Sons of Freedom may exert a strong appeal for those Doukhobors whose lives have held too little opportunity for emotional expression, recreation, relaxation”¹²³ or who were unable “to adjust to the direction of the main stream in Canada.”¹²⁴ The Sons of Freedom provided “an institutionalized way for a Doukhobor to build up a sense of self-esteem, or moral superiority and righteousness.”¹²⁵ In other words, the group’s radical beliefs and practices may have attracted newcomers – Doukhobors, as well as a few non-Doukhobors – who had trouble fitting in elsewhere.

Journalist Simma Holt speculated that the Sons of Freedom were compelled to engage in protest activity, irrespective of motives: that protest activity had become an “end” itself, rather than a means to an end.¹²⁶ By the 1960s, Holt argued, the Freedomites were no longer motivated by religious conviction. Rising poverty and “demands for the ‘work’ to go on” drove the Sons of Freedom until they suffered “mental breakdowns.” The more confused and frustrated they became, Holt argued, the “more desperate, more indiscreet, more vicious and, incongruously, more sophisticated” their crimes became.¹²⁷

Addressing the Freedomites in his report on the “Doukhobor problem,” Maloff exclaimed: “your indiscriminate resort to nudity on every occasion and at slightest pretext,

¹²² Alfred Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Hawthorn, 143.

¹²³ Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” 111.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

convinces me that you yourselves do not understand its real meaning.”¹²⁸ Though some Freedomite activism may be read as an expression of social or political criticism, it must be acknowledged that, for some, the thrill of nudity, arson, and explosives did have an addictive power. Thus, some Sons of Freedom were infected by a “compulsion to strike out blindly,” habituated by years of working for the sake of the Freedomite “mission.”¹²⁹ For the men accustomed to doing the “black work” of the sect, “violence had become...as for other men who acquire the habit of guerilla warfare, a vocation in itself,” consequences be damned.¹³⁰

Some aspects of Freedomite social culture and family life raised experts’ concern, because they seemed likely to reduce individual will and promote collective action.¹³¹ Claudia Lewis of the UBC DRC noted, for example, that the “authoritarian way” of raising children could produce unhealthy levels of “submissiveness, emotional repression, and constriction of the manipulative and adaptive powers.” Worse, this style of familial organization could result in “the fomenting of underling hostile drives that may break out in indirect ways, throughout life, particularly if crisis situations arise to threaten what balance the individual may have achieved with his social environment.”¹³² The authoritarian model was surprisingly consistent throughout all levels of the Sons of Freedom community, in the family home, and in the group’s relationship with its leadership.

Living a Doukhobor lifestyle required considerable emotional restraint. Doukhobors were expected to live in peace and harmony with one another in the spirit of fraternity.

Though they were free to disagree with one another in open discussion, there were very few

¹²⁸ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 3. See also 8-9 and 16.

¹²⁹ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 8.

¹³⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 347.

¹³¹ As Mona Gleason argues in *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), family life was subjected to increased scrutiny in the middle of the twentieth century. The “Anglo/Celtic” family model was favoured over other (“ethnic”) arrangements (4). Attention to Freedomite family structure in the UBC DRC’s analysis is consistent with this broader trend.

¹³² Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” 101.

formal mechanisms for dealing with conflict among group members, or between group members and outsiders. Without community-sanctioned means of managing these emotions, they were bound to fester and come out in inappropriate ways. As such, UBC DRC committee member Stuart Jamieson theorized that “attitudes of deep frustration and latent hostility” were translated into “acts of aggression against their environment.”¹³³

It is possible that the effort to live up to Doukhobor ideals made the Freedomites more vulnerable to a build up of negative emotions than their fellow Doukhobors. The more the Sons of Freedom sought to achieve Doukhobor-style utopia, the more difficult it was for them to give voice to negative emotion.¹³⁴ Yet, as Shulman noted, “the repression of hostility does not abolish it; it merely directs it into devious channels.”¹³⁵ Freedomite protest activity constituted the outlet for the negative emotions that some felt unable or unwilling to communicate effectively otherwise.

The Sons of Freedom preferred to use nudity in their protest activity, especially since “arson and dynamiting, with their obvious hostile implications” upset those most committed to the principle of pacifism. Yet nudity also had a hostile implication, Shulman argued, because the desired outcome was often to shock and shame the audience.¹³⁶ Nudity was “a remarkably effective device for making other people uncomfortable and angry.”¹³⁷ It did not have the same “emotional loading” in Russia as it had in Canada, so the Sons of Freedom, who were not ashamed of their nakedness, felt free to expose themselves when moved to do so.¹³⁸ Without inflicting physical harm or incurring much personal cost, Freedomites could

¹³³ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 8.

¹³⁴ Interview with Laura Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 82, page 500-501.

¹³⁵ Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” 143.

¹³⁶ Though these were not the only motivations for nudity, as discussed elsewhere.

¹³⁷ Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” 138.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 145. Though many Sons of Freedom were very comfortable with public nudity, some were not. This was especially the case with converts. Peer pressure and a desire to identify with the group motivated these Freedomites to undress. See William Stupnikoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, p. 108 and Joe Podovnikoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings, Volume 6, 10 December 1982, p. 71.

easily “demoralize” their Canadian opponent simply by removing a few articles of clothing.¹³⁹

If pressured, the “more hostile” would “find relief in arson and dynamiting” and “compel their more passive brethren to participate,” Shulman argued.¹⁴⁰ While these violent acts appear to contradict the Freedomites’ pacifistic beliefs, it must be noted that the Sons of Freedom never intended to directly endanger human or animal lives. As Freedomite Nadia Stoochnoff explains, the Sons of Freedom believed that “God protects work like that,” ensuring that no one was physically hurt by their acts.¹⁴¹ By striking out at “inanimate objects” the Sons of Freedom could express the “destructive feelings that they can give vent to in no other way,” Shulman explained.¹⁴² If a pacifist must express hostility, it is best to target “inanimate objects.”¹⁴³

There is some evidence to suggest that Freedomites were motivated by the desire to get “action” in periods of relative calm. Freedomite activism was exciting and dramatic and gave participants a sense of purpose and direction. Some outsiders suggested that the desire to create a thrill and alleviate boredom attracted some to the Freedomite fold, and provoked them, once there, to act out.¹⁴⁴ Psychologists John Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg noted that Freedomite activism seemed to escalate in the spring, as though “the long, dull, boring winter accumulated tensions that were liberated by the first warm rays of spring sunshine and conducted along the too familiar channels of deliberate destruction.”¹⁴⁵ Simma Holt implied

¹³⁹ Ibid., 146; “Women Strip as Doukhobors Consider Move” *Globe*, 10 March 1958, 14; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors At War*, 5; Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” 16.

¹⁴⁰ Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” 145.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 4, page 28-29. Unfortunately, a few people were seriously injured – some of them fatally – because of Freedomite fires or bombs. The number is, however, surprisingly low (less than a dozen) given the frequency of incidents (several hundreds).

¹⁴² Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” 137-138.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 207 and W. W. Bride, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” *British Columbia Digest* 1 no. 11 (October 1946): 34.

¹⁴⁵ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 223.

a link between the arsonists' activities and their sexuality. The arsonist, Holt argued, "admits he gets a 'great thrill'" from the fires he sets. While most arsonists flee the scene of their crime to avoid detection, Holt observed that the Freedomite sets his fire, "races from the building, stripping naked as he (or she) watches, tantalized and enervated." As the arsonists' excitement climaxes, he or she prays or sings to maintain the feeling. Some, Holt claimed, "openly let sexual pleasure run its gamut" which rendered her as well as other observers "self-conscious to see so deeply into the emotion involved."¹⁴⁶ While there is evidence to support Zubek and Solberg's assertion, there is little support for Holt's.

One explanation for the sudden escalation in Freedomite protest activity in the late 1940s relates to shame related to a rising standard of living amongst the Doukhobor community.¹⁴⁷ Members of the UBC DRC felt that guilt weighed heavily on the Doukhobor population at mid-century, weighing heaviest on the Sons of Freedom who most wanted to live according to "true Doukhobor" tradition and belief.¹⁴⁸ Stuart Jamieson of the UBC DRC explained that improved living standards mid-century led to an identity problem for the Doukhobors, who rejected materialism. The Doukhobors were aware of their material comfort and "ashamed" of it. Jamieson explained that in some cases, this "inner conflict creates a need for self-punishment, shown in a compulsion to bring hardship and economic ruin upon themselves by going to jail, by burning their houses and belongings (or allowing others to do it), by donating large sums of money for dubious causes, by suffering physical violence at the hands of others, and by stripping."¹⁴⁹ The Doukhobors had been, by definition, a group that rejected materialism. The more affluent they became, the less they fit

¹⁴⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 159-161. Given Holt's predilection for the sensational in her coverage of Doukhobor (Freedomite) news, it is highly likely that this report is exaggerated for dramatic effect.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 322. Between 1940 and 1944, UBC DRC researchers counted 31 depredations (including destruction of their own and public property). Between 1945 and 1949, the number of Freedomite depredations increased more than fivefold to 173. Hawthorne, *Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Hawthorn, "The Contemporary Picture," 13.

¹⁴⁹ Jamieson, "Economic and Social Life," 49.

the definition. By personally rejecting materialism, protesting materialism, or imposing impoverishment by destroying material things, the Sons of Freedom sought to assert a Doukhobor identity.¹⁵⁰

Given the Doukhobors' and especially the Freedomites' convictions concerning warfare, it is surprising that the Freedomites were relatively inactive during the Second World War.¹⁵¹ According to UBC DRC calculations, there were only fifty-four depredations between 1939 and 1945 (compared to eighty-two in the seven years before the outbreak of war, and 265 in the seven years after armistice). While there were thirty-three, twelve, and ten depredations counted in 1937, 1938, and 1939 respectively, there were only two in 1940, two in 1941, five in 1942, and nine in 1943.¹⁵²

There are many reasons why the threat of war may have unexpectedly limited Freedomite protest activity. First, the Sons of Freedom may have feared that any misstep might provoke the government into forcing military conscription upon them, especially after the National Resources Mobilization Act was passed in 1940. Second, the atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and privation created by the threat of war might have convinced the Freedomites that they did not need to create these conditions themselves. Third, if the war forced the British Columbian Doukhobors to unify under the banner of pacifism, there was less impetus for the Sons of Freedom to issue "reminders" to their Doukhobor counterparts in an effort to unify the group. The depression, followed by the economic hardship of wartime,

¹⁵⁰ "395 'Co-Operative' Doukhobors to be Released from BC Prison," *Ottawa Citizen (Evening)*, 19 September 1950, 1, 16; "People Who 'Speak in Opposites,'" editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 May 1953, 38; A Correspondent, "'Spirit-Wrestlers' of Canada: British Columbia's Settler Problem," *Glasgow Herald*, 13 December 1958, 4; Simma Holt, "After Their Years of Terror, Freedomites Face a 'Vengeance' Threat... The Fury of the Miners," *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1962, 7; Douglas Sagi, "Sons of Freedom Rebuild Krestova Without Tarpaper," *Globe and Mail*, 20 July 1970, 10

¹⁵¹ J. C. Yerbury points out that there were only forty-four Freedomite incidents recorded during the six years of the war. "The 'Sons of Freedom' Doukhobors and the Canadian State," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XVI, no. 2 (1984): 57. It is difficult to enumerate Freedomite incidents; however, conservative estimates put the number of incidents between 1925 and 1947 in the several hundreds. "Appendix A: Opening Remarks of Commissioner and Counsel at First Public Hearing, South Slocan, 14th October 1947," in "Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs," 1948, p. 13.

¹⁵² Hawthorn, *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 255.

may have assured the Sons of Freedom that they and their fellows were not in great danger of succumbing to materialism. Lastly, if Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin was indeed promoting Freedomite protest activity as some suspected, then his death in 1939 might have slowed them down.

Though the Sons of Freedom were surprisingly quiet during the Second World War, they returned to their protest against “War” and “Violence” shortly after armistice. Anista Arishnikoff set fire to her home and “knelt in front of it, full of joy” in summer of 1947, crying “look...I protest the coming of World War III.”¹⁵³ Fred Davidoff explained that Freedomite protests – including fire and bombs – were “a means to avert war.” Davidoff reasoned that since “all wars are fought for material possessions,” destroying material possessions would leave “nothing to fight for.”¹⁵⁴ This provides useful insight into the Freedomites’ rationale. Doukhobors rejected materialism because they were pacifists, and believed that attachment to material things inspired jealousy, rage, and ultimately violence. The Sons of Freedom, who considered themselves “advanced” Doukhobors, reasoned that to prevent violence, they should destroy material things.¹⁵⁵

Land tenure had been a contentious issue for the Doukhobors from the time of their arrival. The Doukhobors had viewed communal settlement as an important cultural and religious practice. Over the first forty years of the Doukhobors’ life in Canada, the Community (later, the Orthodox) Doukhobors had invested considerable energy into building

¹⁵³ “British Columbia: Trouble in Kootenay,” *Time* 50 (8 September 1947), 14; “B.C. Will Crack Down on Doukhor Terror” *Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1947, 1-2. As indicated in “Appendix C: Official Brief of Sons of Freedom,” Freedomite perception that World War III was imminent connected to the climate of the Cold War and to the threat of the atom bomb. “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhor Affairs,” 1948, p. 35.

¹⁵⁴ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 231.

¹⁵⁵ However, Freedomite activists later admitted that John Lebedoff (informal leader of the Freedomites after Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin’s death and before Sorokin’s arrival) had encouraged them to cite the prevention of a third World War as their motive for setting fires, instead of referencing their desire to migrate. It is not clear why Lebedoff would have advised his followers to use the World War III explanation instead of the migration explanation. John S. Savinkoff, Statement to EK CIR, “EK CIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, p. 58.

and protecting their communal property. The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB) collapsed in 1938. The death of Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin and the start of the Second World War in 1939 delayed resolution of any cultural or practical issues resulting out of the CCUB's bankruptcy. In the short term, the Doukhobors had been permitted to continue to use the land they inhabited as tenants. After the conclusion of the War, the land question resurfaced, and the Doukhobors were offered the opportunity to buy their land back from the government. Transitioning from communal to private ownership created significant tension between the Orthodox Doukhobors who had held an interest in the CCUB, and the Freedomites who policed Doukhobor identity and behaviour. The Sons of Freedom questioned the morality of private ownership of land, given the Doukhobors’ religious beliefs concerning materialism.¹⁵⁶

The government of British Columbia commissioned Arthur Lord, a judge, to launch a Doukhobor Land Inquiry, beginning in 1955. Lord was to suggest a solution to the land problem, preferably a plan to facilitate the Doukhobors’ purchase of the former CCUB land on which they were currently living. The Sons of Freedom refused to participate in the land inquiry, arguing that doing so was against their beliefs.¹⁵⁷ They explained in a telegram to Commissioner Lord that they had inhabited their land for forty years “having acquired [it] through heavy toil and having had [it] taken away from us by the loan company unlawfully.” They would never agree to purchase the land because “we consider this to be one of the reasons for the beginning of war.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Hazel Samorodin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 52, page 333; Peter P. Swetlishoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 605; Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 22.

¹⁵⁷ “Freedomites Refuse to Take Part in Hearings; Say Appealing to UN,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁵⁸ Copy, “Telegram to Judge Arthur Lord,” from M. W. Hadikin, N. K. Nevokshonoff; Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Kootenay and Grand Forks BC [Sons of Freedom], Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers on the Land Question, 1954-56, UBC.

The Sons of Freedom felt that the Orthodox Doukhobors should refuse to purchase their land as well. They argued that the government “intentionally” allowed the loan companies to “seize” the land from the Community Doukhobors in order to divide the Community and force them into private ownership.¹⁵⁹ Comparing the land inquiry proceedings to “the casting of lots for Christ’s Robe,” the Sons of Freedom were convinced that the “the said lands were purposely stolen from the Doukhobors – once in Saskatchewan in 1907, and the second time in British Columbia in 1938 – in order to break up the Doukhorbor Community and stay the work of Christ in establishing His kingdom on earth.”¹⁶⁰ The Sons of Freedom argued that as Canadians they could buy the land, “but as Doukhobors...you know you have not the right.”¹⁶¹

From the Freedomite perspective, land tenure was a key, identity-defining issue. “The fate of all Doukhorborism rests upon the decision of this question,” the Sons of Freedom asserted.¹⁶² Their convictions were likely to be reinforced by protest action, which was enough to give the Orthodox Doukhobors pause. “As long as the Sons of Freedom threaten the USCC element,” Stuart Jamieson argued in 1955, “the latter will be reluctant to buy land and invest in houses and other improvements.”¹⁶³ The Orthodox Doukhobors claimed to fear that any homes they built on land they purchased privately would only be destroyed by

¹⁵⁹ “Pre-admonition to the Orthodox [sic] Community Against their Decision to Buy Lands Belonging to the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood, Limited,” Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, Papers on the Land Question 1954-56, UBC.

¹⁶⁰ “Resolution of the Members of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors in respect of the proceedings of the Doukhorbor Lands Allotment Inquiry held at the Court House at Nelson, B.C. starting May 16, 1955 and adjourned at noon of May 17,” 17 May 1955, Krestova British Columbia, Members of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, Papers on the Land Question, 1954-56, UBC.

¹⁶¹ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 22.

¹⁶² “Pre-admonition,” Papers on the Land Question 1954-56, UBC.

¹⁶³ Jamieson, “Economic and Social Life,” 89. This was how John J. Verigin explained the Orthodox Doukhobors’ slow movement on the land settlement issue. Bob Porter, “‘Step Toward Unity’: Freedomite Leader Hopes Pact Will End Bombings” 10 July 1961, “Doukhorbor” Clippings, New Westminster Public Library, BC. See also “Orthodox Doukhobors’ Co-Operation Offered in Settling Land Problem,” Dixon Collection, in author’s collection.

Freedomite arsonists.¹⁶⁴ The Sons of Freedom Doukhobors suspected, however, that this was a smokescreen the Orthodox Doukhobors were using to conceal their own reservations about the morality of private land ownership. Rather than taking a courageous religious stand, the Sons of Freedom suspected that the Orthodox were hiding behind the threat of Freedomite repercussions.¹⁶⁵

The Orthodox had good reason to suspect that the Freedomites would protest if they purchased land individually. The Sons of Freedom had attacked Orthodox property on many occasions in the past, destroying what they viewed as symbols of the Orthodox Doukhobors' false pride and materialism. In 1950, John Sherstobitoff explained that he destroyed a \$12,000 store owned and operated by the Doukhobor community because private ownership was contrary to the basic precepts of Doukhobor belief. "The so-called Orthodox betrayed us, taking up private ownership," Sherstobitoff explained, adding: "I am of the group that sincerely believes the Doukhobor mission cannot be fulfilled until private ownership is abolished."¹⁶⁶ Freedomite leader Stefan Sorokin acknowledged that the land question had created tension between the two groups. Though he did not implicate his own followers, he still took the precaution of having them pledge a non-violence pact.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, shortly after the Community Doukhobors agreed to repurchase their land individually, a bomb was detonated at the Verigins' tomb, two Community halls were torched, and Ooteshenie village was destroyed.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ "Pre-admonition," Papers on the Land Question 1954-56, UBC.

¹⁶⁵ Fraternal Council and Members of the CCBRD, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*"; "Pre-admonition," Papers on the Land Question 1954-56, UBC.

¹⁶⁶ "Convict 10 Sons In Seven Trials: Verdicts in Five to 20 Minutes as Supreme Court Hears Trial-an-House," *Nelson Daily News*, 27 June 1950.

¹⁶⁷ Porter, "'Step Toward Unity'," 10 July 1961.

¹⁶⁸ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 346. The link between the depredations escalation of July and August 1961 and the land purchase was also made by John J. Verigin Sr. See "Bombs Rock Doukhobor Settlements," *Globe and Mail*, 31 July 1961, 1.

The Freedomites' personal and group psychology, as well as the Doukhobors' cultural and material situation in the middle of the twentieth century, certainly played a significant part in motivating the Freedomites' protest activity. The role of leadership in motivating the Freedomites' actions is unclear. It is difficult to get a clear answer to the question: "who told you to do this?"¹⁶⁹ Some Freedomites suggested that they were guided by an "inner voice" which called them to action.¹⁷⁰ Some suggested that this "inner voice" was the same *iskra*¹⁷¹ or "spirit of God" which Doukhobors believe resided within each individual. Thus, some implied that it was God himself who urged the Freedomites to behave as they did. Some claimed, however, that "others" forced them to do it. Some suggested that the government, the authorities, or the Canadian public at large were to blame.¹⁷²

It is very difficult to determine with any certainty whether Peter V. Verigin, Peter P. Verigin, John J. Verigin Sr., or Stefan Sorokin had any direct influence on the Freedomites' activities or not. The Sons of Freedom vacillated between "protecting" these leaders from defamation and "crediting" these leaders for masterminding and commanding Freedomite action.

Of all Doukhobors, the Sons of Freedom seemed to be especially dependent on charismatic leadership.¹⁷³ Harry Hawthorn noted in his report for the UBC DRC that the Sons of Freedom had been especially "vulnerable to control and extortion by any individual manipulating the symbols of their belief."¹⁷⁴ Freedomite sympathizer Peter Maloff criticized

¹⁶⁹ Outsiders and non-Freedomite Doukhobors have repeatedly asked this question of their Sons of Freedom friends, relatives, neighbours, and opponents in an effort to better understand the logic behind Freedomite activism. These efforts to get a clear answer rarely yield results.

¹⁷⁰ Ralph Allen, "The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.'s Holy Terrorists," *Maclean's Magazine* 75 (10 March 1962), 15. 46.

¹⁷¹ Spark.

¹⁷² "The Doukhobor Civil War" *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

¹⁷³ Frank H. Partridge to the Editor, "End Communal Way," 22 September 1953, Dixon Collection, in author's possession; Hawthorn, "Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations," 38.

¹⁷⁴ Hawthorn, "The Contemporary Picture," 21.

the group for allowing themselves to become “unduly dependent on leaders, even asking the authorities to give them a leader,” an unprecedented move clearly inconsistent with the Freedomites’ other beliefs. Maloff noted that this pointed to the Freedomites’ “spiritual underdevelopment” and, worse still, permitted “any adventurer to penetrate into their midst, mislead them, and create dissention and chaos in their life.”¹⁷⁵ Some of these leaders, the UBC DRC noted, abused their followers by threatening them, beating them, misappropriating their money, and otherwise taking advantage of them.¹⁷⁶

The first “Freedomite” group, which engaged in two marches across the prairies in 1902 and 1903 respectively, claimed to have been motivated by their interpretation of instructions relayed in a letter from Peter V. “Lordly” Verigin. It is likely that while Verigin was still in exile in Russia, he was unaware that his words would be twisted in such a way as to provoke mid-winter marches, nudity, and the destruction of communal property. Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin, however, may be held to greater accountability than his father, especially later in his tenure as leader of the Canadian Doukhobors. The Sons of Freedom claimed that it was *Chistiakov* who had organized them into a “nude army.” *Chistiakov* compelled the Freedomites to obey, advising them “you must burn your conscience and sentiment of shame or else you cannot be the sons of the free spirit of Christ.”¹⁷⁷ *Chistiakov* also praised the Freedomites, calling them the “head” of the Doukhobor movement.¹⁷⁸ The Freedomites argued throughout the mid to late twentieth century that in bombing, setting fires, and removing their clothing, they were merely following *Chistiakov’s* instructions,

¹⁷⁵ Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution*, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” 142.

¹⁷⁷ Fraternal Council, Union of CCBRD, *Our Reply to the Yelping Howls*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ Nick Nevokshonoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, p. 31, 133; Peter J. Popoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979), 436; Cecil C. Maloff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 41 (1 April 1979), 451.

repenting for the Doukhobors' transgressions and forging a path for the Doukhobors' future.¹⁷⁹

Much of the evidence for *Chistiakov's* involvement with Sons of Freedom depredations is the Freedomites' word. With all due respect to the value of the oral-historical record, it is difficult to know to what extent Freedomite recollection of past events is based on objective reality, on understanding based on misinformation, or on outright fantasy. These witnesses had something to gain from deferring responsibility for their actions to the Doukhobors' leader. The Sons of Freedom often used "*Chistiakov's*" instructions to rationalize and legitimize their "mission."¹⁸⁰

The Sons of Freedom often applied the "upside-down" approach to interpretation, taking the *opposite* of what a leader stated as his true message.¹⁸¹ The Sons of Freedom believed that a leader's instruction was given in code so as to confuse state authorities. Thus, if a leader stated unequivocally: "do not burn," the Freedomites took this as an indication that they had better start setting fire to something. This complicated John J. Verigin Sr.'s repeated public appeals for an end to Freedomite depredations activity. Fearing that "fanatics" would "twist" Sorokin's instructions to "obey the law," an *Ottawa Citizen* editorial joked that Sorokin should advise his followers to stay in Canada so "they might plainly see that they should leave."¹⁸² Some Sons of Freedom looked for signs and symbols, such as the colour red, which they read as a call for them to commit arson.¹⁸³ As Freedomite Mike

¹⁷⁹ Fraternal Council, Union of CCBRD, *Our Reply to the Yelping Howls*, 15. Also "Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 1962. This topic will be revisited in the conclusion chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Fraternal Council, Union of CCBRD, *Our Reply to the Yelping Howls*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 291; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 392; Interview with Laura Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 81, pages 495-496; Interview with Phil Rankin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 103, page 600; Walter J. Lebedoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 6 (1 June 1975), 91.

¹⁸² "People Who 'Speak in Opposites,'" editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 May 1953, 38.

¹⁸³ "EK CIR Proceedings," Volume B, 29 October 1982, p. 15-19; Volume 3, 8 and 9 December 1982, p. 62, 70-71; Volume 5, 10 December 1982, p. 13; Volume 6, 10 December 1982, p. 5-6, 20-21.

Chernenkoff explained, Sons of Freedom learned to search for a leader's hidden meaning. "Never accept everything that the leaders say because most of it is just straw, a cover up. Pick out just the grain," his elders had instructed him.¹⁸⁴

Perhaps private conversations between the Sons of Freedom and their leaders led them to understand that they were meant to reverse or read hidden messages in whatever instruction was publicly given. If this is the case, then outsiders can only speculate as to the leaders' probable intentions. In considering Peter P. "*Chistiakov*" Verigin's legacy, for example, George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic argue that "*Chistiakov's*" erratic behaviour and propensity for violence suggest that he had the capacity to lead the Sons of Freedom astray. They conclude, however: "in the lack of clearer evidence, we must be content to accept Peter Chistiakov's public attitude."¹⁸⁵ This leaves the question of whether *Chistiakov* was actually masterminding the Freedomites' "mission" or not unresolved. In any case, the Sons of Freedom *believed* he was behind it, or at least claimed to believe it when some advantage could be gained from doing so.¹⁸⁶ This point is crucial to understanding tension between Sons of Freedom and Orthodox Doukhobors in the middle of the twentieth century: the Orthodox felt that the Sons of Freedom were misinterpreting their leader's instructions; the Sons of Freedom felt they were only fulfilling the destiny he had assigned them.

The same tension played out concerning John J. Verigin Sr., Peter P. Verigin's successor. The Sons of Freedom claimed that John J. Verigin Sr. was playing a double role: covertly urging the Sons of Freedom to act while publicly wringing his hands and claiming

¹⁸⁴ Mike Chernenkoff, Statement to EK CIR, "EK CIR Proceedings," Volume 2, 8 December 1982, p. 44.

¹⁸⁵ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 313.

¹⁸⁶ Gregory J. Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 79-80, 88; [Sons of Freedom], "The Inaugural Symposium of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, Re: The False Symposium of S. D. O. H.," 30 September 1976, p. 8, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

victim status for himself and his Orthodox followers.¹⁸⁷ The Sons of Freedom searched the content of his speeches for signs that he wished them to take action.¹⁸⁸ The more emphatically he implored them to desist, the more motivated they were to persist. Verigin quickly found himself in a no-win situation: even the colour (red) and placement (twisted) of his necktie could be read as a sign that the Freedomites should set fires and bombs in the Kootenays.¹⁸⁹

Determining whether or not Verigin's, or his followers', use of red symbols was done intentionally or not is difficult. Dr. Mark Mealing pointed out in a 1982 meeting of the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations that Orthodox Doukhobors had been aware of the Freedomites' interpretation of the colour red for several decades. "If you know that Sons of Freedom have a certain feeling about a red pen or a red shirt, why for heaven's sake wear it when you go to meet them?" Mealing asked. Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ representative Alex Gritchen defended his clothing choice arguing that he had received a red shirt as a gift and was within his rights to wear it.¹⁹⁰ *Iskra*, the USCC's circular, and USCC letterhead were occasionally run in red ink and sent to Freedomites, who interpreted the red ink as a direction to start burning.¹⁹¹ Walter Lebedoff, editor of *Iskra*, explained that he and Verigin had debated the relative merits of red, versus blue or green ink.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 22; Interview with Sam Konkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 38, page 249; Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 49 and 50, pages 318 and 323; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 380; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, pages 390, 392-393, 395; Fenya Konkin, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 41 (1 April 1979), 450; "Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 1962.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 392.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 392; Interview with Laura Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 81, page 495-496; Interview with Phil Rankin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 103, page 600; Walter J. Lebedoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 6 (1 June 1975), 91; Holt, "Pacifist Days Over: Orthodox Doukhobors Prepared to Go to War," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 December 1961, 10; "Sons Told to Make 'Music'," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 February 1962; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 159, 280.

¹⁹⁰ Alex Gritchen, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume B, 29 October 1982, p. 15-16.

¹⁹¹ Olga Hoodikoff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume B, 29 October 1982, 18; Sons of Freedom to John J. Verigin, 2 November 1971, as read into "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume 3, 8 and 9 December 1982, p. 62.

Lebedoff claimed his preference for red was based on aesthetics, as well as on the meaning of *Iskra* (literally, “spark,” but in Doukhobor understanding refers to the spirit of God). He “never thought that anybody would be stupid enough” to view red ink as a message to burn. Those who “consider red as an order to do anything, I think they are mentally ill,” he informed the EKCIR.¹⁹²

Some, including Freedomite insiders, suspected that Stefan Sorokin was behind the Freedomites’ activities. George Kinakin Jr. declared: “everybody in Krestova knows that Sorokin was the man who instigated all of this stuff,” and anyone who believed differently was “just fooling themselves.”¹⁹³ Mary Malakoff claimed that Sorokin “entices people to commit burnings, and then presents charges against them for some form of benefit to himself.”¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, some Freedomites swore Sorokin had no part to play in inciting depredations activity, pointing out that Freedomites burned and stripped well before Sorokin joined them in 1950. In fact, William Babakoeff from Krestova claimed Sorokin’s “wise counsel” had persuaded members of the CCBRD to avoid arson and other “acts of destruction.”¹⁹⁵ For his part, Sorokin publicly declared he was working to dissuade Freedomites from performing depredations.¹⁹⁶ In a letter to Bruce Larsen, a reporter for the *Vancouver Province*, Sorokin stated: “my people, ‘the Reformed Doukhobors’, will not participate in any burnings and other forms of violence, as they have repeatedly pledged themselves and stated their stand in the press.”¹⁹⁷ If Sorokin was culpable in any of the depredations activity, the RCMP were unable to prove it. This stated, his involvement may

¹⁹² Walter Lebedoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 6, 10 December 1982, p. 6, 9-10.

¹⁹³ Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 122, page 719.

¹⁹⁴ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 42 (6 May 1979), 464.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 390, 392-394; Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 122, page 719; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 42 (6 May 1979), 464; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 229; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 331.

¹⁹⁷ [Stefan S.] Sorokin to Bruce Larsen, *Vancouver Province*, 18 April 1953, Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC.

have been difficult to detect since he moved to Uruguay shortly after accepting the Freedomites' leadership post, and remained there for several years.

The CCBRD emerged in support of Stefan Sorokin in 1952. They disassociated themselves from Freedomites involved in “black work.”¹⁹⁸ They claimed to have their focus on spiritual renewal, Christian conduct, and peaceful coexistence with their Canadian and Doukhobor neighbours. Members of the CCBRD announced repeatedly that they had “nothing in common with the terror in the Kootenays – arson and dynamiting – in which we are frequently accused by the people and the authorities.”¹⁹⁹ They claimed to “oppose all sorts of violent acts and believe that our members have not taken any part in the work of provocation either directly or indirectly.”²⁰⁰ Stefan Sorokin himself asserted that his followers were not involved in depredations activity, as they “have repeatedly pledged themselves and stated their stand in the press.”²⁰¹

The CCBRD's actual involvement in depredations activity is unclear. Their public statements notwithstanding, association with the CCBRD was somewhat fluid, and it is unclear whether individuals identifying with the CCBRD were troublemakers or not. Sam Konkin, for example, indicated in his statement to the EK CIR that Joe Perepolkin encouraged him to get involved in “black work” while he was a member of the Fraternal Council of the CCBRD, so long as he did not reveal his activities to Sorokin.²⁰² The private discussions and activities of the CCBRD and its Fraternal Council cannot be scrutinized, and their public statements were apparently easily reversed when convenient.²⁰³ Yet there is evidence to suggest that the Fraternal Council, which directed the CCBRD in Sorokin's

¹⁹⁸ “Reformed Sons Reject Specialists, Back Sorokin and Relocation,” *Nelson Daily News*, 3 March 1954.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Telegram, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (John J. Perepelkin, N.K. Nevakshonoff) to Canadian Press, 3 April 1953, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC.

²⁰¹ Sorokin to Larsen (*Vancouver Province*), 18 April 1953, Stefan S. Sorokin Papers, 1951-1984, UBC.

²⁰² Sam Konkin, Statement to EK CIR, “EK CIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, p. 84-85.

²⁰³ See discussion on out-migration above, for example.

absence, was encouraging some of the Freedomites' law-breaking activities. Those who committed "black work" activities claimed that the Fraternal Council would say: "something should be done. We are too quiet."²⁰⁴

The Fraternal Council seemed to be propagating the rumour that migration would be accomplished "through the jails," and certainly was instrumental in negotiating migration proceedings with the Canadian government in the late 1950s.²⁰⁵ Fred Davidoff reflected that though he was led to believe that "in order to migrate we must burn and bomb, not leave a sliver behind," he wondered whether the Fraternal Council sincerely wished to facilitate migration, or whether "it was just propaganda to stimulate the bombings, burnings, collections, and get us into jails or some other reason."²⁰⁶ Davidoff claimed that the Fraternal Council knew that he would follow any command they issued, "just like a soldier in the army will obey his officers."²⁰⁷ Those who were reticent to obey were threatened and intimidated into cooperating.²⁰⁸ The theory that the Fraternal Council was behind the Freedomites' illicit activities was certainly a favourite of journalist Simma Holt's, and also of certain officers of the RCMP. Former officer Fred Bodnaruk told interviewers: "if you ask me: was there a conspiracy, was the group guided by the Fraternal Council? I would say: absolutely."²⁰⁹ While this explanation is convenient, the Freedomites' habit of placing blame on innocent peers out of a misguided attempt to "save" them throws a shadow of doubt on the Fraternal Council theory. The Sons of Freedom certainly had an advantage to gain by framing themselves as the vulnerable "lost sheep" of the group, who witless themselves, could not

²⁰⁴ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 162.

²⁰⁵ Holt, "Terrorists 'Depressingly Insane': Judge Ruttan Imprisons 20 Sons Three to 10 Years," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1962.

²⁰⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 236.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁰⁸ Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 119, page 698; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 61, page 399.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Fred Bodnaruk, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 21, page 147.

discern between the wisdom or foolishness of others, and were thus vulnerable to being led astray.

Among the Sons of Freedom, social pressure from peers and family members could be at least as compelling as the pressure coming from the leadership tier. Activists from within the Freedomite group spread rumours, conveyed instructions, and otherwise incited their peers to act.²¹⁰ Commissioner Sullivan concluded that Freedomite depredations were largely inspired by “certain agitators who prey upon their simple, credulous countrymen for power or money, or perhaps both.”²¹¹ Sorokin claimed that there were “many conspirators in the Doukhobor midst” who were never brought to justice.²¹² Convicted Freedomite activists claimed that “top people” persuaded the rank-and-file to participate in illicit activity or, in the words of “confessed terrorist” Mike Bayoff, “gather money and have a good time while the poor bomb and burn.”²¹³ These “gang leaders” circulated among the people and gave “wordless signals” indicating that it was time to act.²¹⁴ Both Nastia Barisoff and Fanny Storgeoff claimed that they were instructed to cause trouble. Barisoff claimed that William (Bill) Moojelsky (who was working with the Canadian government to negotiate terms for the Freedomites’ migration) instructed her to go to Victoria and harass Superintendent of Child Welfare Ruby McKay and demand the release of the Freedomite children from the New Denver school.²¹⁵ Storgeoff claimed that the Freedomite rank-and-file was coerced into action. “We had threats,” she explained: “we were told our homes would be burned with our children in them. So we burned them to save the children.” Storgeoff was also urged to

²¹⁰ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 382.

²¹¹ “Appendix B: Commissioner’s Statement Prior to Peremptory Adjournment of Inquiry, South Slokan, 7 January 1948,” in “Interim Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Doukhobor Affairs,” 1948, p. 22.

²¹² S[tefan] S. Sorokin, *Doukhobor Affairs Inside Out...: A letter to Col. F. J. Mead* ([Crescent Valley, B.C.]: Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, [1957]), p.18, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

²¹³ “British Columbia” *Globe and Mail*, 11 November 1961, 8; “Top People Force Poor Into Violence” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

²¹⁴ “Top People Force Poor Into Violence” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

²¹⁵ Nastia Barisoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 8, 18 February 1983, 33.

accept responsibility for deeds she had not committed; in other words, she was urged to “become a martyr.” She responded: “pardon me for saying it – ‘to hell with you’. I do not lie.”²¹⁶

John Lebedeff applied considerable pressure of this type, many Freedomites claimed.²¹⁷ Sorokin insisted that Lebedeff was behind many of the “terrorist” actions. The police saw Lebedeff urging fanatical members of the group to set fire to their own homes, Sorokin claimed. The police merely “looked on, smiled and did nothing, insisting that the laws of the land may not interfere if one’s own personal property was burned. They merely smiled and photographed.”²¹⁸ This theory was presented again in J. J. Perepelkin’s *Doukhobor Problem in Canada: A Prototype of the Hebrew People in Egypt*. Perepelkin claimed that “from a distance it indeed appeared that the conflict was between two antagonistic Doukhobor groups - attacking and destroying one another. Actually the whole thing was the work of police agents, in the nature of J. Lebedeff, and others like him - who were the ringleaders.”²¹⁹

Shuffling responsibility for the Freedomite unrest onto leaders and agitators was popular among the Sons of Freedom, who benefitted from claiming that they had been manipulated and mistreated by their superiors. It was also a popular theory among police officers. Their work would be easier if they could focus their efforts on a few kingpins rather than on the community at large. To journalists such as Simma Holt, who both sympathized with the Sons of Freedom rank-and-file and condemned them for their actions, the idea of a “conspiracy” of leaders made for racy, marketable copy.

²¹⁶ “Search for Peace: Doukhobors Listen to Fanny” *Globe and Mail*, 31 August 1963, 15.

²¹⁷ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 60, page 390; Fenya Konkin, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 41 (1 April 1979), 450; Sorokin, *Doukhobor Affairs*, 17-18.

²¹⁸ Sorokin, *Doukhobor Affairs*, 17-18.

²¹⁹ Perepelkin, *Doukhobor Problem in Canada*, 19, 31.

It is likely that leaders' instructions sometimes resulted – regardless of their original intent – in depredations activity. Woodcock and Avakumovic remind their readers, however, that though Freedomite leaders might have had the ability to “cultivate certain climates of feeling within their group,” there is no substantial evidence that they were “responsible for every action of every follower.” It is also likely that some depredations were directly provoked by agitators who had their own motives for creating unrest. In fact, many Freedomite activities were “plotted and carried out by small groups, or even by individuals, acting autonomously.” In Woodcock and Avakumovic’s estimation, “the theory of an organized and enduring terrorist conspiracy, lasting over many years and involving all the 2,500 people who by the 1950’s formed the Sons of Freedom movement, stems from the attempts by police officers and lawyers to impose a convenient logical structure on an illogical situation.”²²⁰ So while some credence must be given to the theory that community leaders dictated Freedomite activity, this is not a conclusive answer to our question.

Much of the confusion for the origin of depredations instructions arises from the message delivery system. Freedomites received “messages” from their peers and from Lebedoff, who claimed that they had heard from John J. Verigin Sr. directly.²²¹ Devout Sons of Freedom, who already believed (or assumed) that Verigin was directing their mission, accepted the messengers’ explanations, often without questioning them further. The Freedomites’ blind devotion to Veriginite leadership meant that “because Verigin said so” was sufficient motivation and explanation for depredations activity. Anyone who wished to stir the Freedomites into action knew that invoking Verigin’s name was an effective catalyst. It is possible that certain messengers used Verigin’s name to ensure complicity, even if Verigin himself was not personally involved. As Mike Chernoff explained to the EKCIR, the

²²⁰ Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 328.

²²¹ See, for example, Florence Konkin, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 4, 8 December 1982, p. 74.

Freedomites relied heavily on “hearsay”: messages and speeches that may well have been distributed merely to “create problems.”²²²

The Sons of Freedom were vulnerable to messages delivered by their peers. Many Freedomites lived in social isolation from other Canadians and were thus more dependent on and trusting of relationships with other Freedomites. Furthermore, many Sons of Freedom were undereducated, meaning that their exposure to alternate points of view was limited. Prior to 1953, many Sons of Freedom, fearful that state education would corrupt their youth, held their children back from school.²²³ As such, Freedomite education was often limited to lessons learned from elders and peers. Justice A. M. Manson suggested in 1950 that it was “want of schooling” which made a “foundation for misunderstanding, warped views, prejudice and fanaticism.” In his view, the fact that Freedomite children “were taught from childhood to defy the law in the matter of those things you deemed would be in contravention of religion as you saw it, explains your conduct.”²²⁴

The Freedomites’ decision to keep their children away from state schools allowed them significant opportunity to mould their perception, reasoning, and behaviour. It also ensured that the children would grow to see Freedomite way-of-life as “normal” and appropriate. The children watched their parents set fire to their homes, or knew that their parents were in jail, but it was okay because their friends’ parents were all doing the same.²²⁵ Mike Bayoff, whose parents had both done time, as had he himself on three occasions, explained: “I wasn’t trained this was wrong...It was just something people at Krestova did

²²² Mike Chernoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 100, 17 September 1987, p. 62.

²²³ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 1, page 3; Interview with Grace Worrall, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 5, page 32; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 56, page 370.

²²⁴ “No More Violence, Six Doukhobors Promise Court” *Globe and Mail*, 11 Feb 1950.

²²⁵ Interview with Grace Burnett, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 23 and 25, pages 157 and 170; Interview with Nat Voykin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 45, page 286; Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 381; “Top People Force Poor Into Violence” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

and still do.” “It seems natural,” Bayoff said. “If you were a kid among these people you’d have the same understanding. When you live among dull-minded people and they all live one way, you get the same way and get into the same kind of trouble.”²²⁶

Katy Saprikin explained to Simma Holt: “I feel that way to take off my clothes. My parents did it the same away. I can’t stop myself. It is something that comes over me.” Holt responded, “you learned from your parents and now it is right that your little Lorraine should see you strip and burn, and learn from you?” to which Saprikin responded, “it is our religion, we must do it.”²²⁷ Exposing their youngsters to the turmoil and violence typical of Freedomite demonstrations was not viewed as “wrong” by the Sons of Freedom community. Their behaviour was a natural extension of their identity, an identity that the children were expected to adopt.

When everyone around you – parents, elders, and your friends – hold the same set of convictions, it barely matters whether they are “logical” or “moral” from any outsider perspective: they conform to the same logic and morals held by everyone with whom you have daily contact. It would take a very independent and critical thinker to break out of such a circle. When independence and critical thought are actively discouraged and community action are encouraged, it is unlikely that such a thinker would emerge. The Sons of Freedom were taught not to ask questions.²²⁸ “I was always aware that you don’t ask why,” Nadia Stoochnoff reflected. “You are just a worker and you do what’s needed to be done; you sacrifice yourself for the cause, for the bigger picture. So out of just a strong belief, you

²²⁶ “Top People Force Poor Into Violence” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

²²⁷ Holt, “Protest by Fire,” *Canada Month*, September 1962, 21.

²²⁸ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58 and 60, pages 380 and 390; Interview with Grace Burnett, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 25, page 171; Fred Makortoff, Statement to EK CIR, “EK CIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, p. 15; Sam Konkin, Statement to EK CIR, “EK CIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, p. 86; Mike Chernenkoff, Statement to EK CIR, “EK CIR Proceedings,” Volume 2, 8 December 1982, p. 62, 66.

went and then you were ready to give everything up for the cause,” Stoochnoff explained.²²⁹ Pete Savinkoff recalled: “there was no such thing as logic.” If a peer came and gave instructions to take action, “I don’t ask questions because I believe the same as him.”²³⁰ When Laura Savinkoff did “question or bring up issues” she was discouraged from asking. “You shouldn’t ask; you are not supposed to ask. We just have to do and listen, and the rest will fall into place,” she was told.²³¹

There are many explanations for a culture which discouraged questions. Laura Savinkoff explained that “it’s a defense mechanism because they really couldn’t explain.”²³² She knew, for example, that her husband could not see that what he was doing for the Freedomite cause was irrational, “that it was not going to bring the salvation that they were seeking, that the Sons of Freedom were seeking. It was not going to fight assimilation,” but she felt unable to question him because it “would just cause more heartache and more pain and more of a sense of betrayal on his part and more of a problem within the home.”²³³ Asking questions brought trouble. If the Freedomites’ actions were not legitimate (according to Freedomite or Doukhobor belief), then the suffering they endured was for naught. Questioning the legitimacy of the cause, or the actions necessary to defend the cause, upset the balance necessary to perpetuate the actions. It is very possible that if the activists stopped to question their conduct, and evaluate its logic according to Doukhobor beliefs, they would see the inconsistencies which were clear to outsiders. Not questioning allowed the activities to continue. This suggests that committing the depredations in fact took precedence over other very important considerations, and the narrative of “we have to do it for the cause” took priority over the needs of individuals and families.

²²⁹ Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 3, page 22.

²³⁰ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 58, page 380.

²³¹ Interview with Laura Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 81, page 495.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., tape 59, page 387.

A “spirit wrestler” is supposed to engage in a personal examination of his or her view of God and perception of God’s will, and to adjust his or her lifestyle in accordance with this awareness. The Sons of Freedom did not do this: rather, they allowed others to direct their activities, and held back their criticism. The Sons of Freedom were especially vulnerable in this respect. Their suspicion of state education had prevented many from receiving schooling. Isolated in remote areas of British Columbia, the Sons of Freedom had few opportunities to engage with outsiders. As such, they were more dependent on their interior community for their economic and social welfare. The opprobrium of their peers was especially painful in this case, and there was extra pressure to please one’s relatives and neighbours.

There are many political, social, religious, and mental conditions which drove the Sons of Freedom to engage in troublesome, anti-social, destructive activity in the mid twentieth century. The Sons of Freedom themselves had multiple ways to rationalize and justify their protest activities. They pointed to grievances with state authorities and with their fellow Doukhobors. They referred to their historical legacy, their beliefs, their loyalty to their leaders, and their mission. They referred to their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

Despite the complexity of the specifics involved in explaining why the Sons of Freedom behaved as they did, the answer is ultimately quite simple. For the most part, the Freedomites were motivated by an overwhelming desire to define and defend Doukhobor identity in a twentieth-century Canadian context. Their understanding of what that identity was, and of how best to preserve it, differed significantly from that of their Doukhobor peers and of non-Doukhobor Canadians. These parties claimed – with justification – that the Freedomite view was, in many respects, terribly distorted. Until these distortions could be examined and reconciled, the “Doukhobor problem” would persist.

CHAPTER 7

Mediating Public Opinion

The newspaper plays a role in informing, reflecting, and shaping public opinions on a daily basis. As such, a careful reader may derive insight into the socially-mediated “general consensus” about a particular topic at a particular time. An evaluation of the way in which ethnic minorities were portrayed in the daily press sheds light on public opinions about them. A review of English-language Canadian press reports from the 1950s and 1960s demonstrates that, for the most part, the Doukhobors were poorly understood and negatively perceived by the Canadian public. The form and content of news articles, editorials, and letters to the editor indicate the extent to which the Doukhobors’ beliefs and activities were both portrayed and interpreted as contrary to Anglo-Canadian social norms and values.

The news media interprets, organizes, and summarizes current events, generating daily digests of social, political, and economic activity. These digests inform community members, and, in theory, prepare them for public participation. At its basic level, the purpose of the news media is to inform its audience.¹ But this purpose must be heavily qualified: quest for objectivity notwithstanding, the news is *never* neutral. The selection of news stories, and the way in which they are presented, are meaningful. The news “defines and shapes” an event as it reports it,² and directs the audience’s gaze in one direction or another.³ Though the media may avoid telling us “what to think,” it often influences “what to think about.”⁴

¹ Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 184.

³ “Crafting Cultural Resonance: Imaginative Power in Everyday Journalism,” *Journalism* 6 no. 2 (2005): 141-142; Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 65-66.

⁴ Maxwell McCombs and Sheldon Gilbert, “News Influence on Our Pictures of the World,” in *Perspectives on Media Effects*, eds. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), 4.

Access to information about current events, and political response to those events, is essential to the function of a democratic society. Reading the newspaper allows voters to evaluate and respond to their government's performance. Conversely, reading the newspaper may allow politicians to better gauge voters' priorities and adjust their decisions in the pursuit of higher approval ratings.⁵ A critical reading of the content and tone of news reports thus yields an indication of political concerns.

Politics and newspapers were strongly interconnected in the mid to late nineteenth century, when many Canadian politicians were also newspaper owners and editors, and newspapers were directly partisan.⁶ This relationship became less direct in the early twentieth century, as newspaper ownership, editing, reporting, and political work became increasingly specialized, distinctive enterprises. No longer megaphones for partisan interest, by the 1920s and continuing on throughout the twentieth century, Canadian journalists strove for "objectivity," modeled on the call for "just the facts."⁷ Journalists were called more to "witness" than to "interpret" current events, and editors tended more towards contextualization of current events, rather than the promotion of particular opinions or agendas.⁸

This shift in focus has much to do with the politics of newspaper ownership and distribution. Whereas Canadian newspapers of the mid to late nineteenth century were frequently small, local- and party-interest operations run by the intellectual and political elite, Canadian newspapers of the twentieth century grew in scope and circulation, and became

⁵ Tuchman, *Making News*, x; Mary Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 2000), 133.

⁶ Paul Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1978), 20, 27, 31.

⁷ Dominique Marquis, "The Catholic Press: A Challenge to the 'Journalism of Information' Paradigm," trans. Patricia Smart, in *Communicating in Canada's Past: Essays in Media History*, eds. Gene Allen and Daniel J. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 30, 32; Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media*, 57; W. H. Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1967), 128.

⁸ Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media*, 57; Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, 132, 138.

increasingly expensive operations.⁹ As such, newspaper ownership transferred from the political entrepreneur to wealthy investors.¹⁰ In this business model of newspaper publishing, still in operation today, the cost of newspaper production and distribution is largely borne by advertisers, who are attracted by the size of the newspaper's reading audience.¹¹ The larger the subscription base, the more advertising the newspaper can sell. Thus, though newspaper subscribers bear relatively little of the cost of newspaper production, their subscription is the *raison d'être* for the newspaper as they are both the "target audience" and "consumers" of newspaper content and product advertising alike. This has important implications for the way in which the news is presented to the reading public. The broader the appeal of newspaper content, the more subscribers a newspaper can attract, and the more advertising it can sell. As such, editors are motivated to deliver a newspaper product likely to appeal to as many, and offend as few, readers as possible.¹²

Newspapers were able to reach a broad audience in the twentieth century. Literacy was widespread at the turn of the twentieth century and increased in the decades following. Ninety per cent of Canadians were considered literate in 1900, which increased to ninety-five in 1921.¹³ Newspapers were widely distributed throughout the twentieth century. Mary Vipond points out that by 1900, the number of newspapers sold on a daily basis in Canada exceeded the number of Canadian families.¹⁴ In the period under consideration here, newspaper circulation amounted to 3.6 million in 1951, 3.9 million in 1956, and 4.2 million in 1961.¹⁵ To put this in perspective, the population of Canada in 1961 was 18,239,000.

⁹ Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 21.

¹⁰ Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, 80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹² Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 324; Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, 82.

¹³ Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, 69-70.

The widespread distribution and the “broad appeal” of the newspaper in twentieth-century Canada renders it an important resource for those interested in gauging public opinion, or at least public awareness, about particular subjects. The private thoughts of newspaper subscribers are not easily accessed, but the news they were exposed to can be read by researchers as an indication, albeit a limited one, of what “general consensus” or public opinions may have prevailed at any given time. In order to better understand public perceptions of the Doukhobors, it is important to contextualize the relationship between the newspaper and the public.

Though a relationship between public opinion and news media is presumed to exist, the exact nature of that relationship is difficult to ascertain. Through story selection, framing, and tone, the newspaper is well positioned to influence public opinion.¹⁶ However, the fact that the paper is intended to appeal to a broad audience suggests that journalists and editors are biased towards providing material that will be consistent with the preexisting value, ideal, and contextual frames they imagine the audience to have.¹⁷ By extension, the journalists and editors must also be wary of exceeding the audience’s tolerance for deviation from, or challenge to, the standard frames of reference to which they are accustomed.¹⁸ As such, the content and form of newspaper reporting both reflects and amplifies what newsmakers perceive as dominant public opinions.¹⁹

Twentieth-century Canadian newsmakers’ quest for greater “objectivity” and “broad appeal” did not liberate the news from “values” discourse. While the values promoted in nineteenth-century newspapers were explicit and strongly connected to political identity, the

¹⁶ Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media*, 125; Robert K. Goidel, Todd G. Shields, and Mark Peffley, “Priming Theory and RAS Models: Toward an Integrated Perspective of Media Influence,” *American Politics Research* (1997): 290; Tuchman, *Making News*, 2, 184.

¹⁷ Marquis, “The Catholic Press,” 30; Tuchman, *Making News*, 2; Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution*, 7.

¹⁸ “Crafting Cultural Resonance,” 132; Goidel et al, “Priming Theory and Ras Models,” 287; Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, 83; Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 18.

¹⁹ Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 90-92.

values embedded in twentieth-century newspaper reporting were “between the lines,” inserted subtextually through story selection and framing, and strongly connected to mainstream social identity.²⁰ Much of what is reported in the news concerns the “violation of values” assumed to be shared amongst the majority of audience members.²¹ In contrast, “virtue” receives press attention only when it deviates far enough from the norm to be worthy of comment.²² As such, reports of crime and virtue are important because they highlight the extent to which particular people or events are perceived as deviant from assumed or imagined social norms on both ends of the spectrum.

That the Doukhobors (and in particular, the Sons of Freedom) received such extensive media attention in the middle of the twentieth century is indicative of their perceived social deviance. It is also consistent with broader mid-century North American journalistic trends. In an American context, protestors, victims, law-breakers, and “participants in usual activities” were considered newsworthy, as were “crimes, scandals, and investigations.”²³ Since much of the “Doukhobor problem” concerned conflict with the government, criminal activity, and participation in “unusual activities,” the media attention paid them in the 1950s and 1960s is not surprising.

Given the character of Doukhobor-related content, one might suggest that journalists were eager to cover sensational material that would sell more copy. Though journalists were conscious of the need to attract and hold their audience’s attention, they generally eschewed “yellow journalism”: sensational sexual or criminal content that might attract readers’

²⁰ “Crafting Cultural Resonance,” 143; Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBC Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 39-40.

²¹ Gans, *Deciding What’s News*, 40. Gans lists “ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership...the desirability of economic prosperity; the undesirability of war *sui generis* (which does not always extend to specific wars); the virtues of family, love, and friendship; and the ugliness of hate and prejudice” as assumed values in the mid-century American context (42).

²² Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 345.

²³ Gans, *Deciding What’s News*, 14-15, 17.

interest at the expense of good taste.²⁴ Most journalists considered “nudity, profanity, sacrilege, and the depiction of bloodshed” to be taboo.²⁵ In the late 1960s, images of nude women were sometimes printed in magazines, but showing full frontal male nudity remained unacceptable.²⁶

This is important to consider when evaluating Canadian journalists’ decisions to run stories concerning the Doukhobors. One might hastily explain journalists’ use of Doukhobor stories and images (especially images of nudity) as being motivated by a desire to sell papers by appealing to readers’ baser tastes. Though this might have come into play sometimes, the motivations for running stories on the Doukhobors may have been more sophisticated and nuanced. That journalists selected these stories and images about the Doukhobors despite predilection to avoid the sensational or titillating suggests that they considered these stories to be of relative import and interest to their readership. If the news media allocated significant space and attention to the “Doukhobor problem,” this suggests that in the journalists’ view, at least, the public needed, or wanted, to know more about them.

Press coverage of the Doukhobors and their “problem” was extensive in the middle of the twentieth century.²⁷ As *Life* magazine noted in 1950, “a Doukhobor upheaval is always front-page news.”²⁸ Despite the prevalence of news reports about the Doukhobors, however, Canadians remained “befogged” about the link between Freedomite activity and Doukhobor belief.²⁹ Part of the responsibility for any misunderstanding surely rests with the reporters themselves. The professional ambition for “objectivity” notwithstanding, psychologist Alfred Shulman pointed out that much of what passed for journalism about Doukhobor-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁷ John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 1; William Guy Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?” *Liberty* (June 1954): 55.

²⁸ “Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage,” *Life* 28 (8 May 1950), 30.

²⁹ Cecil Clark, “60-Year-Old Headache for British Columbians,” n.p., in author’s possession.

related content was as “illogical as the paranoid beliefs of the most die-hard Sons of Freedom and are similarly based on personal motives and private fantasy rather than on the facts.”³⁰

Shulman’s colleague, Harry Hawthorn, concurred. Press reports about the Doukhobors seemed to reinforce public perception that the Doukhobors were “immoral, clannish, unreliable, hypocritical and antagonistic.”³¹ Leo Nimsick, CCF MLA for Cranbrook, British Columbia, argued that newspapers had damaged the Doukhobors’ reputation by “inflaming the emotions of the people.”³²

The Doukhobors themselves objected to unfair reporting. Reporter Bruce Larsen was cornered by a group of Freedomite women who pelted him with onions and demanded that he present himself at a community meeting to explain why he had misrepresented the confrontation between police and Sons of Freedom at the tent village at Perry Siding in 1953.³³ Doukhobor commentator Peter Maloff claimed that the press had perpetrated “widespread misunderstanding of the Doukhobors by the outside world.” Many of the articles he had seen were “one-sided, shallow, and inaccurate.” In many cases, Maloff noted, “the facts were consciously perverted.”³⁴ Freedomite representatives John Perepelkin and Nick Novokshonoff claimed that “through radio and press, public is misinformed by authorities...false radio and press statements agitate and provoke the public against us, and acts of violence take place, which make the problem more acute and complex.”³⁵

Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors were also frustrated with irresponsible reporting. The *Iskra*, a periodical produced by and for Orthodox Doukhobors, reported in

³⁰ Alfred Shulman, “Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Harry B. Hawthorn (Vancouver: University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955), 155.

³¹ Harry B. Hawthorn, “The Contemporary Picture,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 14.

³² “M. L. A. Says Doukhobors Not so Bad” *The Drumheller Mail*, 7 October 1953, 7.

³³ Bruce Larsen, “Douks Want Story Told: Fanatics Grill Reporter,” *Vancouver Province*, 14 Sept 1953.

³⁴ Peter Maloff Papers, 1924-26, University of British Columbia (UBC).

³⁵ As cited in S[tefan] S. Sorokin, “Facts about ‘Operation Snatch’: Personal Recordings of Doukhobor Mothers Whose Children were Taken Away and Results of ‘Successful’ Police Raids in the Kootenays,” n.p., 1955, p. 2, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU).

1958 that many recent news reports yielded “a distorted understanding of the Doukhobor faith, linking it with the acts of terrorism and the activities of the Sons of Freedom, with whom true Doukhoborism and Doukhobors have nothing in common, since the ways of violence, terrorism and lying are completely foreign to, diametrically opposed to and have no place in the tenets of the Doukhobor faith.”³⁶ Orthodox Doukhobor Eli Popoff wrote a letter to the editor of the *Nelson Daily News*, complaining that the paper had been irresponsible in printing an “Open Letter” authored by the Sons of Freedom. Popoff’s concern was twofold. First, he cautioned the paper about giving column space to a group known for “publicizing a variety of falsehoods,” of which the paper should already have been aware. Popoff’s second concern was that his own as well as others’ names had been “smeared” in the Freedomites’ document. These oversights called the paper’s credibility and integrity into question, Popoff noted.³⁷ Independent Doukhobor Koozma Tarasoff complained in 1958 that “widespread inaccuracy” in the way in which Doukhobor content was reported in the news had increased public “prejudice and discrimination” against both the Doukhobors and the Freedomite minority group.³⁸

Doukhobors and their sympathizers were also concerned about the way in which their group was labeled in the press. Labeling can have a significant impact on the way in which a particular group or activity is viewed. A group can be viewed as deviant – whether or not they actually are – if they are labeled as being deviant.³⁹ An analysis of articles produced in the mid twentieth century yields some important, and troubling, data concerning the way in which Doukhobors were labeled in the press.

³⁶ W. N. Papove, trans. “Concerning Several Recent Events: Translation of an Article by P.P. Legebokoff in ‘Iskra’, no. 694, Sept. 19, 1958,” Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

³⁷ Eli A. Popoff to Editor, “News Criticized for Publishing Freedomites’ ‘Open Letter’” *Nelson Daily News* [n.d.], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

³⁸ As cited in Larry A. Ewashen, “Doukhobors and the Media” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 no. 3 (1995): 152.

³⁹ Pamela J. Shoemaker, “Media Treatment of Deviant Political Groups,” *Journalism Quarterly* 61 no. 1 (Spring 1984): 66-67.

Six problematic labels recur in reports about the Doukhobors published in the mid twentieth century: “terrorist,” “radical,” “fanatical,” “children,” “Doukhobor,”⁴⁰ and “Douk.” References to “terror” appeared frequently in press reports concerning the Sons of Freedom in particular, and the Doukhobors in general. Many journalists labeled Freedomite depredation activity as “terrorism,”⁴¹ and the Sons of Freedom as “terrorists.”⁴² The Sons of Freedom were said to “terrorize” their fellow Doukhobors, as well as their neighbours.⁴³ The word “terror” often appeared in headlines, highlighting its importance to the gist of the story.⁴⁴ The term “reign of terror” was used repeatedly in reports about the escalation of

⁴⁰ The significance of this and “Douk” will be revealed below.

⁴¹ See appendix A.

⁴² See appendix B.

⁴³ “British Columbia: Violent Anti-Violence,” *Time* 55 (1 May 1950): 29-30; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 209; “Rule by Fanatical Majority,” *Nelson Daily News*, 1 June 1956; “2 Doukhobors Charged in B. C. As Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 28 December 1961, 2; “2 Doukhobors Found Guilty of Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 1962, 10; “9 Doukhobors Jailed For Terror Acts in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15; Edwin Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism: Doukhobors’ Bomb-a-Week Campaign Stirs British Columbians’ Wrath,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1; “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1; Ralph Allen, “The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.’s Holy Terrorists,” *Maclean's Magazine* 75 (10 March 1962): 14-15, 46-50; “They May Take the Law in their Own Hands,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962; “Terrorism in the Kootenays of British Columbia,” *Drumheller Mail*, 21 March 1962, 7; “A Law to Fit the Case,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1962, 6; “Rights of the Majority,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6; Simma Holt, “With Painstaking Police Work, Bomb Terrorists Caught on Fish Hook,” in author’s possession, “Last Sons of Freedom Terrorist is Released from Agassiz Prison,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 October 1970, 2

⁴⁴ “Night Raiders Spread Terror; Set Doukhobor Homes Aflame,” *Globe and Mail*, 21 August 1947, 1; “B.C. Will Crack Down on Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1947, 1-2; “Call Army if Necessary to Curb Douk Terrors,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 January 1948, 1-2; Walter W. Wait, “Doukhobor Terrorist: Admits Setting Fires, Hunted by B.C. Police,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1949, 12; “Doukhobor Terrors: Railmen Ask Protection Form Explosions in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1949, 112; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*; “More Homes Blaze, Nudists Sing Hymns in Outbreak of Doukhobor Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail* 24 April 1950, 17; “Terrorist Plagued Lower Slocan Guards Its Homes, Schools,” April 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; Joe MacSween, “More Doukhobor Terrorism Awaited,” *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 12 September 1953, 1; “Homes Terrorist Targets,” *Nelson Daily News*, 14 Sept 1953; “Terrorism Police Matter - Boards: Committee Workings Set Up During Castlegar Meet,” *Nelson Daily News*, 9 July 1958; Tom Ford, “Terrorism: A New, Nasty Word in Canadian Mining,” *Toronto Star*, 10 March 1960, 10; “‘Screwballs’ Bomb Tomb, Two Halls: New Wave of Terrorism Hits Kootenay Doukhobor Country,” *Vancouver Sun*, 31 July 1961; “Doukhobors Start Anti-Terror Vigil,” *Vancouver Sun*, 23 August 1961; “Army Could Hunt Down our Mau Mau...Mop Up Kootenay Terrorists,” *Columbian*, 9 March 1962; Simma Holt, “After Their Years of Terror, Freedomites Face a ‘Vengeance’ Threat... The Fury of the Miners,” *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1962, 7; Simma Holt, “Terrorists ‘Depressingly Insane’: Judge Ruttan Imprisons 20 Sons Three to 10 Years,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1962; “Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror,” *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 1962; Simma Holt, “With Painstaking Police Work, Bomb Terrorists Caught on Fish Hook,” in author’s possession; Tom Hazlitt, “How Canada’s First Terrorists Were Crushed,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1970, 15.

depredations activity in the Kootenays,⁴⁵ and the Freedomites' neighbours were said to be terrified.⁴⁶ "Terror is everywhere in Doukhoborland," Simma Holt claimed "as Freedomite gangs prowl through villages and residential areas of towns in the dark of night planting potential death."⁴⁷

In many cases, journalists carelessly juxtaposed "terror" with "Doukhobor," failing to distinguish between a minority of Sons of Freedom who were involved with depredations activity and the majority of the Doukhobors who were not.⁴⁸ The Kootenay and Boundary Citizens' Committee on Doukhobor-Canadian Affairs complained, for example, that the newspapers had a "tendency to implicate all Doukhobors when reporting terrorist activities."⁴⁹ This juxtaposition often occurred in headlines and was only occasionally clarified in the story that followed.⁵⁰ Non-Freedomite Doukhobors were frustrated by the

⁴⁵ "Proschai," *Time* 53 (23 May 1949): 26; "Arrest of 3 Top Doukhobor Leaders Including 'Archangel' Is Ordered," *Montreal Gazette*, 25 January 1950, 1; "Girl, 19, Leads Parade as Young Douks Strip One Burns Dad's Auto," *Toronto Star*, 25 April 1950, 1, 2; "13 Homes Set Afire By Douks," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 April 1953, 1; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 3, 219, 225, 230; "Three Years Jail Given to Doukhobors" 'Wish it Were More' Says B. C. Magistrate," *Medicine Hat News*, n.d., Dixon Collection, in author's collection, 25; William Guy Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?" *Liberty* (June 1954), 21, 54, 55; "Ill Treated? - Children Were Never So Happy," Dixon Collection, in author's possession; John Green, "Delusion of Superiority Vanishing: Is This the 'Sons' Last Stand?" *Columbian*, 7 November 1963.

⁴⁶ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 2; "In Doukhobor Area: Night Raiders Hurl Gasoline," *Vancouver Province*, 13 April 1953; Simma Holt, "Pacifist Days Over: Orthodox Doukhobors Prepared to Go to War," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 December 1961, 10; "They May Take the Law in their Own Hands," *Columbian*, 13 March 1962; "The Doukhobor Civil War," *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

⁴⁷ Simma Holt, "Pacifist Days Over: Orthodox Doukhobors Prepared to Go to War," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 December 1961.

⁴⁸ "395 'Co-Operative' Doukhobors to be Released from BC Prison," *Ottawa Citizen (Evening)*, 19 September 1950, 1, 16; "Doukhobor Peace Seen in Release of 395 Nudists," *Globe and Mail*, 21 Sept 1950, 3; "Railmen Rap Curfew Lift Strike if Douks Attack," *Toronto Star*, 12 February 1953, 29; "Floodlight Rail Bridges," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 April 1953, 19; "Special B.C. Police Ready for 'Douks'," *Montreal Gazette*, 5 August 1953, 2; Joe MacSween, "More Doukhobor Terrorism Awaited," *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 12 September 1953, 1; "B.C. Railwaymen May Quit if Doukhobors Uncurbed: Govt. Action Demanded After 3 Years, 20 Dynamite Blasts," *Medicine Hat News*, 17 Sept 1953; "Three Years Jail Given to Doukhobors; 'Wish it Were More' Says B. C. Magistrate," *The Medicine Hat News*, n.d., Dixon Collection, in author's possession, 25; "Fear Douk Plot Against Margaret" Small headline: "Will Round Up Douks For Visit of Margaret," *Toronto Star*, 30 June 1958, 1; Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?," 54, 55; Bolwell, "A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism," *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1; Allen, "The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.'s Holy Terrorists," 46; Cecil Clark, "A Problem People: The Unhappy Doukhobor," *The Daily Colonist*, 25 March 1962, 8; "The Doukhobor Civil War" *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6.

⁴⁹ Kootenay and Boundary Citizens' Committee on Doukhobor-Canadian Affairs, Minutes of the sixth meeting, Trail City Club, 9 October 1958, Briefs, 1958-64, UBC.

⁵⁰ "Night Raiders Spread Terror; Set Doukhobor Homes Aflame" *Globe and Mail*, 21 August 1947, 1; "B.C. Will Crack Down on Doukhobor Terror" *Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1947, 1-2; "Sentence Doukhobors For

conflation of Doukhobor and Freedomite (“terrorist”) identity in the press.⁵¹ Orthodox Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin Sr. quoted from a letter drafted by the Doukhobor Advisory Committee of the Kootenay Presbytery:

Canadian society and its leaders must cease speaking of the ‘Doukhobor problem’ and the ‘Terrorist problem’ as if they are one and the same thing. Doukhoborism is not a race into which a man is born, it is a WAY OF LIFE which a man chooses to follow. One of its prime tenets is COMPLETE PACIFISM and NON-VIOLENCE. The 90% of the group commonly called ‘Doukhobors’ who make up the Independent and Orthodox Doukhobors, adhere strictly to this principle. It is only because of this article of faith that they have refrained from retaliation against the Freedomites over the years, in the face of such extreme provocation as few of us would have put up with....ARSON, NUDISM, and TERRORISM ARE NOT Doukhobor TECHNIQUES! They are the activities of a criminal group who call themselves ‘Sons of Freedom’ but who are better named ‘Sons of License’.⁵²

It is worth noting that the majority of sources cited which mistakenly juxtapose “Doukhobor” with “terror” are not local or even provincially based papers. This is consistent with the observation that papers further removed from the story’s origin are more likely to

Terrorist Acts,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 August 1947, “Call Army if Necessary to Curb Douk Terrors” *Globe and Mail*, 8 January 1948, 1-2; Walter W. Wait, “Doukhobor Terrorist: Admits Setting Fires, Hunted by B.C. Police,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1949, 12; . “Doukhobor Terrors: Railmen Ask Protection Form Explosions in B.C.” *Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1949, 112; “More Homes Blaze, Nudists Sing Hymns in Outbreak of Doukhobor Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail* 24 April 1950, 17; Joe MacSween, “More Doukhobor Terrorism Awaited,” *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 12 September 1953, 1; “2 Doukhobors Charged in B. C. As Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 28 December 1961, 2; “2 Doukhobors Found Guilty of Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 1962, 10; “9 Doukhobors Jailed For Terror Acts in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15; Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” 1; “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1; “Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror,” *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 1962

⁵¹ W. N. Papove, trans. “Concerning Several Recent Events: Translation of an Article by P.P. Legebokoff in ‘Iskra’, no. 694, Sept. 19, 1958,” UBC.

⁵² Paul A. Verigin, “A Doukhobor History,” (based on a speech delivered by John J. Verigin, Honorary Chairman of the U.S.C.C., in Toronto in February 1963, in connection with Brotherhood Week), Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

restrict their reports to the most sensational aspects of the story.⁵³ If it is also true that those who have the least personal experience with the people, places, or events reported are more likely to be influenced by the report, or to take it at face value,⁵⁴ then it is possible that people living outside of the Kootenay area of British Columbia were more likely to believe that all Doukhobors were involved in “terrorist” activity, especially if the papers they had access to were misrepresenting the situation in this manner.

The use of “terror” in describing the Sons of Freedom (or indeed, the Doukhobors) is ironic considering their official stance promoting pacifism. Though the Sons of Freedom and their activities were most often labeled as “terrorists” or “terrorism,” journalists also frequently used “civil war” to describe the situation in the interior of British Columbia.⁵⁵ Sometimes, the “war” was characterized as being “Doukhobors” versus society. Trail’s Mayor, Leslie Read, proclaimed: “civil war has been declared. They, the Doukhobors, have been attacking us for 50 years. We are the pacifists.”⁵⁶ In other instances, reporters characterized the civil war as being between Doukhobor factions. This was portrayed as a “one-sided civil war between the terrorists and the Community Doukhobors,”⁵⁷ though journalist Simma Holt suggested that, in turn, “British Columbia’s pacifist Doukhobors have taken up arms and are prepared to go to war against Sons of Freedom hoodlums.”⁵⁸ Framing the situation as “civil war” dramatized the situation, which made it more sensational.

Labeling the problem as “civil war” was also politically expedient: it obligated the federal

⁵³ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 2.

⁵⁴ Tuchman, *Making News*, 2.

⁵⁵ “Ask Martial Law In B.C. Bombing,” *Toronto Star*, 9 March 1960, 2; Val Sears, “Can’t Send Troops to B.C., Fulton Says,” *Toronto Star*, 9 March 1960, 2; “The Doukhobor Civil War,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; “A Law to Fit the Case,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1962, 6; “Rights of the Majority,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 275-276, 187; Simma Holt, “With Painstaking Police Work, Bomb Terrorists Caught on Fish Hook,” in author’s possession.

⁵⁶ “Trail Plan Voted Down: Kootenay Leaders Reject ‘Apartheid’ for Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 May 1961. See also “Top People Force Poor Into Violence: Doukhobor,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

⁵⁷ “‘Screwballs’ Bomb Tomb, Two Halls: New Wave of Terrorism Hits Kootenay Doukhobor Country,” *Vancouver Sun*, 31 July 1961.

⁵⁸ Simma Holt, “Pacifist Days Over: Orthodox Doukhobors Prepared to Go to War,” *Vancouver Sun*, 13 December 1961, 10.

government to pay greater attention to the problem, an objective that the British Columbian provincial government had held for some time.⁵⁹

The press often pointed out contradictions between the Doukhobors' professed beliefs and their practices.⁶⁰ This included the contradiction implicit in the Freedomites' depredations activity and their commitment to Doukhobor non-violence.⁶¹ The press also pointed out the Freedomites' use of the social welfare system despite their supposed rejection of governmental authority;⁶² their departure from Christian conduct despite their supposed Christianity;⁶³ their dependence on a leader despite their claims of universal equality;⁶⁴ their wild efforts to save their possessions from the flames of their own fires despite profession of anti-materialism;⁶⁵ and their indulgence in meat and intoxicants despite claims of abstinence.⁶⁶ Simma Holt claimed that "the countless contradictions between religious claims and the actual facts revealed by their actions, left me at times stunned, shocked and slightly sick."⁶⁷

⁵⁹ "Nude Paraders: Ten Doukhobor Women Get Penitentiary Terms," *Globe and Mail*, 28 April 1950, 2; "Leads Swamp RCMP After Reward Offer," *Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1962, 2; "More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists," *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1; "Kootenay Blasts Rip Power Tower," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July 1962; "Banish the Freedomites to Some Canadian Siberia," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1962, 5;

⁶⁰ Stephen Franklin, "Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War," *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 15 November 1958, 2.

⁶¹ "B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2; "Clean It Up," *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1950, 6; "Violent Anti-Violence," *Time* 55 (1 May 1950), 29-30; Franklin, "Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War," *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 November 1958, 38; "Doukhobor Woman Jailed After Attack," *Globe and Mail*, 13 April 1959, 2; J. W. Bacque, letter to ed. "Are They Guilty?" *Toronto Star*, 27 March 1962, 6; "The Doukhobor Civil War" *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; "Letters to the Editor: Why Do We Tolerate Defiance," A fed-Up Citizen, Riondel, British Columbia, Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁶² Stephen Franklin, "Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War," *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 15 November 1958, 4; "Welfare Probe Urged," *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15; John Green, "Delusion of Superiority Vanishing: Is this the 'Sons' Last Stand?" *Columbian*, 7 November 1963; F. Henry Johnson, "The Doukhobor of British Columbia: The History of a Sectarian Problem in Education," *Queen's Quarterly* 70 no. 4 (1964): 535; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 275; Judith Timson, "Defiant Doukhobors are Still Going to Jail," *Toronto Star*, 10 May 1975, F06.

⁶³ "Violent Anti-Violence" *Time* 55 (1 May 1950): 29.

⁶⁴ "Understanding and Patience Suggested Doukhobor Policy," *Globe and Mail* 29 November 1952, 13; Johnson, "The Doukhobor of British Columbia," 529.

⁶⁵ Simma Holt, "Protest by Fire," *Canada Month*, September 1962.

⁶⁶ George Woodcock, "Encounter with an Archangel," *Tamarack Review* 26 (Winter, 1963): 36.

⁶⁷ Holt, "Protest by Fire," 20.

Inconsistencies between the Doukhobors' (especially the Freedomites') beliefs and their conduct were relevant to discussion of the "Doukhobor problem" and its possible solutions. The Sons of Freedom were claiming to act on their beliefs in the middle of the twentieth century, and were claiming "religious persecution." Yet they failed to live up to their own high standards. Pointing out contradiction between their conduct and beliefs had the potential to discredit the Freedomites' efforts, rendering them less the actions of a politically or religiously oppressed group, and more the actions of a group of irrational, unrestrained troublemakers in the public eye.

Journalists used other strategies to reduce the import and impact of the Freedomites' activities in the press by highlighting their extremism and their social deviance. Journalism specialist Pamela Shoemaker has suggested a strong correlation between perceived deviance and public ridicule in the press.⁶⁸ In a few instances, the Doukhobors in general, and the Sons of Freedom in particular, were infantilized.⁶⁹ Social worker Amy Leigh noted that "our approach to the Doukhobor...has grown to be that of the kind but firm parent to difficult children."⁷⁰ The *Nelson Daily News* described the Freedomites as "childlike," explaining that "they seek the respect and approval of others and, failing to gain attention, resort to terrorism in an effort to impress."⁷¹ The parent-child descriptor was also used by Claudia Lewis and Alfred Shulman of the University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee.⁷²

The Sons of Freedom were often referred to in mid-century press reports as "radical"⁷³ or "fanatical,"⁷⁴ and these descriptors were frequently magnified in headlines.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Shoemaker, "Media Treatment of Deviant Political Groups," 66.

⁶⁹ "Rule by Fanatical Majority," *Nelson Daily News*, 1 June 1956; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 159.

⁷⁰ Amy Leigh, "Can the Doukhobor Problem be Solved?" *Canadian Welfare* 26 (1 December 1950): 5.

⁷¹ "The Sons of Freedom," *Nelson Daily News*, 3 May 1956.

⁷² Lewis, "Childhood and Family Life," 100 and Shulman, "Personality Characteristics and Psychological Problems," 141.

⁷³ See appendix C.

⁷⁴ See appendix D.

⁷⁵ Walter Wait, "Quote Bible Loudly; Every Douk 'Potential Fanatic'," *Globe and Mail*, 23 May 1944, 15; Walter W. Wait, "Arrest 10 Doukhobors in Drive on Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 25 August 1947, 1-2; "New

Highlighting these labels in headlines increased their visual impact, and may have elicited, or reinforced, negative public perceptions of the Freedomites' activities. Most often these adjectives appeared as an embellishment just before "Sons of Freedom," giving the reader the impression that *all* Sons of Freedom were "radical" or "fanatical." In some cases, "radical" or "fanatical" were used to distinguish the Sons of Freedom (who were "radical" or "fanatical") from the other Doukhobors (who presumably were not). The *Globe and Mail*, for example, explained that the Sons of Freedom, "the radicals of the strange religious sect" were to be "blamed for 50 years of terrorism in the Kootenays."⁷⁶ The *Drumheller Mail* wrote: "say 'Doukhobor' and most people think of an eccentric sect of firebugs, train-wreckers and nude paraders. But those are just the Sons of Freedom radicals. There are 18,000 Orthodox peaceful Doukhobors in British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan."⁷⁷ Explaining that it was only the "radical" or "fanatical" Sons of Freedom who participated in nude parades, arsons, or bombings helped to clarify the division between the Sons of Freedom and their Orthodox and Independent counterparts.

This division was not always made apparent. This was especially the case in headlines and photo captions, which served to highlight a false connection between Doukhorism and the Freedomites' extreme activities.⁷⁸ Thus, "Doukhobors" were associated with nakedness, fire, and explosives; with protests, violence, and other "tiresome

Wave of Incendiarism Laid to Radical Doukhobors," *Globe and Mail*, 29 July 1947, 13; "B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2; "Doukhobor Radicals Put Torch To Homes in B.C.," *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 June 1953, 8; Joe MacSween, "Country's Strangest Puzzle: Queer Religious Theme Underlies Fanaticism of Defiant Doukhobors in Canada," *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 October 1953, 25; "Douk Tent Town Grows: Fanatics Won't Listen to Costa Rica Visitor," *Province*, 4 Sept 1953; Bruce Larsen, "Douks Want Story Told: Fanatics Grill Reporter," *Vancouver Province*, 14 Sept 1953; Bruce Larsen, "Mass Arrests Are Expected: Women Scream As Fanatics Are Held by RCMP," Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "Doukhobors Jailed For Three Years: 'Maximum' For Fanatics," *Vancouver Province*, 25 Sept 1953, 1; "Fanatics Refuse to Eat," Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "Rule by Fanatical Majority," *Nelson Daily News*, 1 June 1956; Rod Mickleburgh, "Radical Doukhobors' Flame Dying Out," *Globe and Mail*, 31 August 2001, A3; Kirsten Stolee, "81-year-old Doukhobor arsonist sentenced to six years in jail: The member of radical Sons of Freedom sect has a long history of setting fires," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 October 2001, C73.

⁷⁶ "Doukhobor Leader Fails to Find Promised Land," *Globe and Mail*, 22 July 1952, 2.

⁷⁷ "Orthodox Doukhobors Form Peaceful Group," *Drumheller Mail*, 5 May 1954, 13.

⁷⁸ See appendix E.

antics”; with guilt, sentencing, and prison time. This created significant frustration for Doukhobors who had taken no part in these activities, as well as for their sympathizers, who begged the press to “identify the breakaway sect clearly as Sons of Freedom or Freedomites, and not as Doukhobors.”⁷⁹

Some journalists adopted the practice of shortening “Doukhobor” to “Douk.”⁸⁰ “Douk” was almost always used derisively.⁸¹ Paul Markoff wrote a letter to the editor of the *Nelson Daily News*, rebutting claims that Doukhobors were unwilling to socialize with their neighbours. Markoff argued that “our Doukhobor boys have tried...to attend social activities with very embarrassing results, as the phrase ‘dirty Douk’ is too commonly and too often used. You cannot call people names and expect them to turn around and co-operate in your activities.”⁸² Use of the word “Douk” in the press offended the Doukhobors who were tired of being associated with the troubles caused by their Freedomite counterparts, both in press reports and in the public eye.

Unfortunately for Doukhobors tired of being associated with trouble, the so-called “Doukhobor problem” was receiving significant press attention in the middle of the twentieth century.⁸³ The *Drumheller Mail* noted in 1947 that the “Doukhobor Question, since the

⁷⁹ “Sons of Freedom Not True Douks,” *Columbian*, n.d., in author’s possession. See also Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, vii; “Doukhobor Sect Poses Problem: Violence by ‘Sons of Freedom’ Gives Bad Name to Other Law-Abiding Members of Communities,” *Christian Century* 67 (14 June 1950): 737; Peter S. Bludoff (Secretary) for the Union of Doukhobors of Canada (Blaine Lake) to Right Honourable D. Fulton, Minister of Justice (Ottawa), 29 August 1958, Union of Doukhobors of Canada Papers, 1938-59, UBC; The Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs of the Kootenay Presbytery of the United Church of Canada in consultation with The Conference Committees On Home Missions, and Evangelism and Social Service, of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada, “A Brief Containing Suggestions for the Solution of the Freedomite Problem,” Trail, B.C. (June 1963), p. 11, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, 1957-63, UBC.

⁸⁰ See appendix F.

⁸¹ Larry A. Ewashen, “Doukhobors and the Media,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 no. 3 (1995): 150. Analogous to “Jap.”

⁸² Paul Markoff to editor, “Gives Doukhobor View on Statements by Valley People,” *Nelson Daily News*, 15 May 1953.

⁸³ “Just One Group Concerned,” *Toronto Star*, 5 May 1950, 6; “395 ‘Co-Operative’ Doukhobors to be Released from BC Prison,” *Ottawa Citizen (Evening)*, 19 September 1950, 1, 16; “Optimistic Over Release of Doukhobors,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 September 1950, 17; “Will Free 395 Doukhobors, Say We’ll Be Good,” *Toronto Star* 20 September 1950, 1; “C. P. Lines in B.C. Blasted as ‘Douks’ [sic] Break Out Again,” *Montreal*

arrival of the sect, has been the darkest possible blotch on the Canadian way of life and a poor example of citizenship to the rest of the world.”⁸⁴ In 1951, Stuart Jamieson explained in *Canadian Forum* that “few immigrant groups have presented so difficult, and in some ways spectacular, a problem in Canada as have the Doukhobors.”⁸⁵ “What to do with the radical sect has been one of B.C.’s stickiest problems,” the *Vancouver Province* observed in 1953.⁸⁶

In a sense, most mid-twentieth-century press releases concerned the many facets of the “Doukhobor problem,” which involved all three main factions of the Doukhobor group, as well as the authorities who interacted with them, and the Canadian public who struggled to understand them. Specifically, however, the “Doukhobor problem” was “identified in the public mind almost entirely with the activities of the Sons of Freedom – their refusal to register for vital statistics, to pay taxes, or send their children to school; their nude parades, their bombings and burnings of their own and other people’s property; and so on.”⁸⁷

The problem went beyond the Freedomites’ illicit activity, however. As Harry Hawthorn of the UBC DRC observed, “the briefest glance shows the possibility of a sympathetic spread of their movement to include other Doukhobors, and the unpalatable likelihood of the rise of vigilantism among the incensed people of the West Kootenay.”⁸⁸

The “Doukhobor problem” frustrated the Doukhobors’ neighbours, who reported:

Gazette, 29 May 1951, 1; “Reds Reported Trying to Bar Douk Solution,” *Montreal Gazette*, 17 July 1951, 12; “‘Sons of Freedom’ Said B.C. Problem,” *Montreal Gazette*, 29 March 1952, 12; “Bitter B. C. Campaign Now Drawing Near Close,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 June 1953, 32; “Again Rejects Bid to Talk on Doukhobors,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 June 1953, 12; “Special B.C. Police Ready for ‘Douks’,” *Montreal Gazette*, 5 August 1953, 2; Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?” 54; Mel James, “A Problem Appraised,” *Montreal Gazette*, 27 August 1955, 21; J. B. Wignall of Hamilton, ON to the Editor “Doukhobor Problem,” *Toronto Star*, 16 May 1957, 6; “Doukhobor Problem,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 July 1958, 11; Stephen Franklin, “Doukhobor Joan of Arc,” *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 22 November 1958, 18, 20, 21, 30; Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1; “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; Simma Holt, “Will Law Deny Them Right to Enter B.C. Town,” *Toronto Star*, 6 November 1962, 7; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 10, 354.

⁸⁴ “Those Tiresome Antics of the Doukhobors,” *Drumheller Mail*, 21 September 1949, 3.

⁸⁵ Stuart Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.” *Canadian Forum* 31 (April 1951) 7.

⁸⁶ “Whither the Doukhobors?” *Vancouver Province*, 11 Sept 1953

⁸⁷ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 7. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 3.

⁸⁸ Hawthorn, *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 1.

We have put up with their (Doukhobor) nonsense for 50 years, and we have reached the limit of our patience. We cannot buy insurance at reasonable rates to protect our property. When we go to bed, we don't know what will happen before daylight comes again. It is costing the taxpayers 300 thousand dollars a year to provide extra police and guards for this district. A few radicals can't be permitted any longer to stand in the path of progress. Either they obey our laws and accept our way of life, or we will force the government to put them in prison.⁸⁹

Apparently, “50 years” seemed too long to wait for a resolution of the “Doukhobor problem.” “Fifty years” or “half-century” comes up frequently in mid-twentieth century press reports about the Doukhobors.⁹⁰ William Guy Carr framed it as a “sorry, half-century-old story of conflict between the Doukhobors and Canada.”⁹¹ Mayor Leslie Read of Trail, British Columbia, admitted in the *Vancouver Sun* that he was “disgusted with the government treating this in a light-hearted manner. Bonner is asking us to reflect. We have reflected too long – 50 years. Now is the time for definite action in clearing up once and for all a situation which wouldn't be tolerated anywhere else in Canada.”⁹² Even the Sons of Freedom used the “50 years” descriptor to highlight the length of their troubles.⁹³ Using “50 years” or “half-

⁸⁹ Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?,” 54.

⁹⁰ Bruce Larsen, “Big Problem: Tent-Town Broken Up,” *Province*, Dixon Collection, in author's possession; “Clean It Up,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1950, 6; “Understanding and Patience Suggested Doukhobor Policy,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 November 1952, 13; “Panama is Willing to Accept B.C. Doukhobors,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 April 1953, 28; “Must Jail All 2,500 Douks [sic] Before One Enters School,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 September 1953, 3; “Firmer Doukhobor Policy Indicated,” *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 26 July 1955, 4; “Fear Douk Plot Against Margaret,” *Toronto Star*, 30 June 1958, 1; Bruce Levett, “Freedomites Find Contentment at Agassiz,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 March 1962; E. L. Homewood in *United Church Observer*, “Only A Tenth of Canada's Doukhobors are Freedomites and Terrorists,” *Toronto Star*, 26 May 1962, 6; Ross, “The West,” 1-2; Bruce Levett, “Freedomites Find Contentment at Agassiz,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 March 1964. Some papers used “40 years” instead of “50 years” for similar effect: “The Doukhobor Civil War,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; “Rights of the Majority,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6; “Banish the Freedomites to Some Canadian Siberia,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1962; “Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers,” *Time* 87 (11 February 1966) 32.

⁹¹ Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?”

⁹² “Trail Plan Voted Down: Kootenay Leaders Reject ‘Apartheid’ for Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 May 1961.

⁹³ “Freedomite Stand: ‘They Can Kill Us, We Wont’ Give In’,” *Vancouver Province*, Dixon Collection, in author's possession

century” is significant, because it emphasizes the frustration many Doukhobors and non-Doukhobors felt about the “Doukhobor problem.” Highlighting the fifty years’ duration of the “Doukhobor problem” called attention to the inefficacy of previous “solutions,” and was likely intended to mobilize public support for more rigorous legal and political interventions than had been attempted in the past.

In addition to being a “problem” in the press, the Doukhobors were also comic relief. They were, for better or for worse, colourful. In the mid 1950s, when nude Freedomite demonstrations were especially frequent, some journalists highlighted its comedic impact and its appeal to sightseers.⁹⁴ While “nude matrons glowered,” “two carloads of tourists” from British Columbia and Washington “took snapshots to their hearts’ content.”⁹⁵ The “steady stream of sightseers,” some bearing binoculars,⁹⁶ maneuvering the Slocan Valley Highway on a weekends’ drive by ‘Polatka’ (tent) village troubled the RCMP who struggled to maintain order.⁹⁷ The interest that tourists and amateur photographers showed the nude Sons of Freedom raised some reporters’ ire. They argued that “so long as non-Doukhobors will stand around and watch, or look embarrassed, or pretend to look embarrassed, the radical Doukhobors will continue to undress themselves.”⁹⁸ However, Bruce West argued that “if there were just some way in which we could obtain early and reliable information about when and where our Doukhobor strip-parades were taking place, it would undoubtedly be a boon to the tourist industry.”⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Larsen, “Douks Want Story Told: Fanatics Grill Reporter”; “Homes Terrorist Targets” *Nelson Daily News*, 14 Sept 1953; “Factional Quarrels Split Doukhobors: Leadership of Sons Disputed as 144 Face Vancouver Trial,” *Medicine Hat News*, 21 Sept 1953

⁹⁵ “Nude Freedomites Parade After Krestova Meeting: Leadership Battle Apparently Fails to Materialize,” *Vancouver Province*, 1 June 1953.

⁹⁶ “148 Sons Arrested,” *Nelson Daily News*, 10 Sept 1953

⁹⁷ “RCMP Ask Sons to Stop Nudism,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “Dynamite Found on Tracks,” 26 Sept 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁹⁸ “The Doukhobors: ‘Top Tourist Attraction’,” *Calgary Herald*, 10 Sept 1953

⁹⁹ Bruce West, “Birthday Buffs,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 June 1966, 35.

It is important to note that some of the media attention granted the Doukhobors in the middle of the twentieth century was positive. Journalists commented on the degree to which most (non-Freedomite) Doukhobors were “accepted” by fellow Canadians “with tolerance and good humour.”¹⁰⁰ Their fitness for citizenship, and their contribution to the welfare of the nation were noted as well.¹⁰¹ The *Albertan* reported that most Doukhobors “are now worthy Canadian citizens,” though it admitted that “Canada would be well rid of the Freedomites.”¹⁰² The *Globe and Mail* observed that “the great majority of them are law-abiding and hard-working.”¹⁰³ They could even “bring new glory to our nation” if their focus could be shifted to pursue objectives that would be compatible with both their faith and the national interest.¹⁰⁴

Some of the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors’ projects received good press. The Doukhobors’ choirs were highlighted, for example, and their music was presented as charming even to those who did not understand the Russian-language lyrics.¹⁰⁵ The choirs embarked on several goodwill tours and performed in public on occasion. Special attention was given to choral exchanges between the Doukhobors and members of other local churches, which was said to be “building up a finer sense of fellowship, and a degree of understanding that augurs well for the future of Doukhobor relationships in the Kootenays and in Canada.”¹⁰⁶ A fifteen-day Canada-U.S. tour was celebrated as having moved several audience members. Emmett Gulley, a Quaker and Doukhobor advocate, explained that “people everywhere expressed great delight in seeing and hearing the Doukhobors and their favourable impression tended to clear up the misunderstandings and misgivings which even

¹⁰⁰ Leigh, “Can the Doukhobor Problem be Solved?,” 7.

¹⁰¹ “Editorial: Isn’t it Time to Being Treating Doukhobors as Canadians?” *Maclean’s Magazine* 75 (24 March 1962): 2.

¹⁰² “The Wrong Issue,” *Albertan*, 11 Sept 1953.

¹⁰³ J. V. McAree(?), “Doukhobor Story,” *Globe and Mail*, 13 October 1953, 6.

¹⁰⁴ John Toyne, “Doukhobor Problem,” *Globe and Mail*, 21 December 1962, 6.

¹⁰⁵ “Music Soothes: Doukhobor Singers Explain,” *Globe and Mail* 10 May 1951, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Allan Dixon, “The Doukhobors” pt. 2, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession

good people had. British Columbia received a lot of very favorable publicity as a result of the tour.”¹⁰⁷ One minister stepped up to give his sermon, announced that he could “feel the spirit of worship in their singing,” and yielded the pulpit so that they could continue to sing.¹⁰⁸ Another minister was quoted as saying “never again will I say that a different language is necessarily a barrier to understanding and worship together. While this Doukhobor choir was singing, I found it very easy to worship God.”¹⁰⁹

Efforts to generate goodwill between the Doukhobors and other local religious groups extended beyond choral exchange: Doukhobor leaders and representatives of neighbouring churches organized meetings where members of diverse groups could pray and open discussion together, which was highlighted in local press.¹¹⁰ A meeting intended to “stimulate mutual understanding” between Canadians and members of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ reportedly “surpassed all expectations,” as three hundred attendees “joined in prayers and singing of hymns, heard brief talks by representatives of both groups, then sat down together to refreshments.”¹¹¹ Some of the Doukhobors’ keenest advocates were religious leaders who shared the Doukhobors’ frustration that the positive aspects of their identity were overshadowed by the negative activities of the few. These religious leaders worked closely with Doukhobor leadership to strategize means of promoting a more positive image for the non-Freedomite Doukhobors.

Unfortunately, these efforts could do little to counterbalance the negative press accorded the Doukhobors mid century, which was voluminous. Public frustration was

¹⁰⁷ “Choir Ends 15-Day Canada, U.S. Tour: Doukhobors Not Barred from Singing in Capital Building at Olympia,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Ministers, Doukhobors Plan Goodwill Meeting,” *Nelson Daily News*, 21 November 1951; “Name Discussion Leaders... Nelson-Doukhobor Meeting Group Moves to Clear Public Conception,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “‘Wall of Misunderstanding’ Being Broken Down, Gulley Tells 1000,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹¹¹ “Nelson Church Groups and Doukhobors Jam Hall in First Social,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

evident in the press, and expressed by local government officials;¹¹² representatives of local Chambers of Commerce, trade unions, and business owners;¹¹³ and by the journalists themselves.¹¹⁴ Members of the public expressed their frustration with the violence proliferating in their neighbourhoods.¹¹⁵ As the *Drumheller Mail* expressed it, “each outbreak of the ‘Dukes’ brings one thing to the mind of right-thinking Canadians, ‘How long can this sort of lawlessness go on?’”¹¹⁶ The Mayor of Nelson, British Columbia, Thomas Shorthouse, was quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as saying that residents of his town were “fed up to the teeth.” He also expressed the fear that frustrated non-Doukhobors may initiate a “vigilante movement” if tensions bubbled over.¹¹⁷

Frustration over the Doukhobors’ (especially the Freedomites’) refusal to assimilate is also evident in the mid-century press. The Sons of Freedom had “never shown any intention of fulfilling the obligations implicit in Canadian citizenship,” had “never made any effort to understand the Canadian outlook, and a meeting of minds – even a glimmer of understanding – has been impossible.” Some felt that if the Freedomites continued to reject “the responsibilities of citizenship, they cannot expect to remain among, and go on annoying, people who do.”¹¹⁸ A “fed-up citizen” of Riondel, British Columbia, complained about the Freedomites’ refusal to register vital statistics and swear allegiance to their country of adoption. “Must we accept a down right defiance of our national code?” the citizen asked, adding: “should any one of us dare to make identical statement, we would, no doubt, receive a polite notice to remove ourselves from the country at our earliest convenience.” “We’ve

¹¹² “Sons Take to Wheels to Ease Their Journey on Mountain Highway,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 September 1962, 1.

¹¹³ Ibid. and Hugh Herbison, “Central Body to Unite District For Doukhobor Program Advanced,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession

¹¹⁴ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 285 n. 8.

¹¹⁵ “Those Tiresome Antics of the Doukhobors,” *Drumheller Mail*, 21 September 1949, 3; “Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage,” *Life* 28 (8 May 1950): 29-33; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 223.

¹¹⁶ “Doukhobors!” *Drumheller Mail*, 4 September 1947, 3.

¹¹⁷ Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1.

¹¹⁸ “Doukhobor Alternative,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1958, 6.

had nothing but a constant 'pain in the neck' from these so-called Freedomites who seem to be all out against war yet think nothing of blasting out rail lines," the citizen concluded.¹¹⁹

Some of the Freedomites' neighbours were prepared to act on their frustration, which made headlines. In 1953, for example, rail workers threatened to go on strike if they did not see the provincial government act decisively to prevent further Freedomite attacks on the railways.¹²⁰ The rail lines were, for some reason, favourite targets of troublemakers during the height of Freedomite activism.¹²¹ This often created dangerous working conditions for those responsible for running the trains and maintaining the tracks. William Towhey, Nelson chair of the "joint running trades," indicated that the "blasts were an 'extremely serious hazard' to the passengers and railroad men on the winding line through the Kootenay country."¹²² It must be noted again here that the actual culpability for many of the attacks on the rail line is not known; however, many Sons of Freedom were convicted for blowing up sections of track, and their involvement was suspected in the unsolved cases.

Strikes threatened to impair the local economy, but of greater concern to authorities were threats of vigilante action.¹²³ Outraged citizens had, in the past, harassed Doukhobors

¹¹⁹ "Letters to the Editor: Why Do We Tolerate Defiance" A fed-Up Citizen, Riondel British Columbia, Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

¹²⁰ "Railmen Will Strike If Douks Uncurbed," *Medicine Hat News*, 3 Aug 1953.

¹²¹ It is possible that railway tracks appealed to Freedomite activists as a target because they were "public" as well as "corporate" and therefore could be used to protest "government" as well as "materialism," there was no direct risk to human life (though there was indirect risk to train operators and passengers if damage to the track was undetected), tracks were easily accessed in rural or uninhabited areas under cover of darkness, and they were difficult for authorities to police.

¹²² "B.C. Railwaymen May Quit if Doukhobors Uncurbed," *Medicine Hat News*, 17 Sept 1953.

¹²³ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 224, 229; "RCMP Warns of New Douk [sic] Raids," *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 June 1953, 7; "Special B.C. Police Ready for 'Douks'," *Montreal Gazette*, 5 August 1953, 2; "CPR Track Blasted Near Nelson: Doukhobor Sect Blamed," *Vancouver Province*, 17 August 1953; Harry B. Hawthorn, "Foreword to the 1952 Reports of the Doukhobor Research Committee," in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Hawthorn, 1; "Doukhobor Leaders Disagree on Proposal," *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 1958, 5; Stephen Franklin, "Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War," *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 15 November 1958, 2-4, 38; "Ask Martial Law In B.C. Bombing," *Toronto Star*, 9 March 1960, 2; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 8; Simma Holt, "After Their Years of terror, Freedomites Face a 'Vengeance' Threat... The Fury of the Miners," *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1962, 7; Clark, "A Problem People," *The Daily Colonist*, 25 March 1962, 8; Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?"; Tom Hazlitt, "How Canada's First Terrorists Were Crushed," *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1970, 15.

and invaded Doukhobor settlements.¹²⁴ As the Sons of Freedom escalated their protest activity in 1953, a “citizens’ vigilante committee...was threatening to take the law into its own hands.” Fear of outright civil insurrection was so high that “the provincial government had been asked to send in the militia.” In the meantime, locals guarded their business and residential properties, railways stopped rail traffic between certain late-night hours, and bridges and schools were lit and guarded.¹²⁵

When troublemakers’ explosives felled a power pylon at Kootenay Lake in March 1962, causing \$500,000 worth of damage, putting workers’ lives at risk, and throwing a thousand Kootenay residents out of work, the *Columbian* reported that discussion of vigilante action was becoming more frequent and serious.¹²⁶ Journalist Simma Holt claimed that “only the increased police patrols, and the fact that the Unemployment Insurance Commission quickly set up emergency services to handle claims quickly for the unemployed, prevented the miners from marching on Krestova with guns to settle their problems their own way.”¹²⁷ Nonetheless, in March of 1962, the *Columbian* reported that “the Interior papers are crammed with accounts of seething indignation meetings, demands for martial law, vigilantes, fights on the street, [and] talk of lynchings.”¹²⁸

Fear of the threat of vigilante action was expressed by both Mayor Joseph Palyga of Trail and Mayor Thomas Shorthouse of Nelson, British Columbia . No doubt, both mayors received notification from frustrated citizens that tempers were rising. It is worth noting, however, that while both mayors are quoted as fearing that vigilante action might happen,

¹²⁴ “Reply to the Minister of Justice-Ottawa From Members of the Spiritual Community of Christ of British Columbia,” 31 August 1944, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

¹²⁵ Stanley Handman, “The Fiery Faith,” *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 15 August 1953, 3; “Douk Guards Boosted A Wild Rumors Spread: Slocan Folk Fear Violence During Memorial Rites,” 1 Aug 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹²⁶ Frank Ablett, “Vigilante Action, Flooding Feared, Feeling Runs High Among Jobless, Bomb Leaves Pall of Misery Over Kootenays,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962. See also “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

¹²⁷ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 164. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 352.

¹²⁸ “A-G Bonner Gets Blame in Kootenays,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

neither is quoted as discouraging it.¹²⁹ This is not to suggest that either mayor advocated vigilante responses; rather, it appears that they sought to highlight the seriousness of the situation in the public press in hopes of securing more effective interventions from federal or provincial authorities. Palyga announced: “we need protection in greater score and if it is not forthcoming it is conceivable that terror-stricken citizens may take law into their own hands.”¹³⁰ Edwin Bolwell of the *Globe and Mail* surmised:

some are talking about vigilante raids on radical Doukhobor villages. The talk so far is hesitant, barely serious. The general attitude is one of extreme exasperation, tempered for the present by the hope that the Federal and Provincial Governments will finally take drastic steps to end the violence. However, there is real fear among responsible citizens here that some non-Doukhobors will take the law into their own hands if terrorism continues and someone is killed.¹³¹

Though full-fledged vigilante action never came to pass, the threat alone caused Doukhobors to fear for their safety when in public. The *Columbian* reported: “law-abiding Doukhobors are so scared they leave off their kerchiefs or other clothing identification to avoid attack on the streets.”¹³² Simma Holt noted that the Freedomites avoided their favourite cafés in town. “Even the Orthodox Doukhobors stayed away,” Holt wrote, or, if they remained in Nelson after dark, they “removed babushkas” (head coverings worn by the women). A “law-abiding” Doukhobor was, in fact, beat up by angry laid-off workers in Trail, who lost their jobs as a result of damage done to their mine after a bomb, allegedly set by a Freedomite, exploded.¹³³

¹²⁹ Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1; “They May Take the Law in Their Own Hands,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹³⁰ “They May Take the Law in Their Own Hands,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹³¹ Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1.

¹³² “A-G Bonner Gets Blame in Kootenays,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹³³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 240.

There is a connection between the threats of vigilante action and the way in which the “Doukhobor problem” was portrayed in the press. For their part, the Sons of Freedom argued that it was “false radio and press statements” which “agitate and provoke the public against us,” rendering “the problem more acute and complex.”¹³⁴ Though some members of the Sons of Freedom group were convicted for committing depredations activity in the mid-twentieth century, many of the crimes perpetrated mid-century remain unsolved; even in some cases where Sons of Freedom suspects were brought to trial, their culpability could not be conclusively proved in every case. In fact, as Independent Doukhobor Koozma Tarasoff pointed out in 1958, no charge of “terrorism” had actually been laid against a member of any Doukhobor group, and even if it had, it would be inappropriate to implicate one’s entire family or community for one’s own indiscretions.¹³⁵ It is important to remember here that the point *is not* that the Sons of Freedom *actually* performed the depredations in question; rather, the point here is that the public *believed* that the Freedomites were responsible, and were so convinced that this was the case that they were discussing retribution. The understanding (or misunderstanding) that the Sons of Freedom were to blame for all of the trouble in the Kootenays was communicated in the news media in the middle of the twentieth century. Though it is unclear whether journalists generated ill-feeling towards the Sons of Freedom or merely reflected it, it is useful to study the way in which the media framed the Sons of Freedom and their activities in the press.

Not surprisingly, the public’s attitude towards the Sons of Freedom was poor.¹³⁶

Psychologists John Zubek and Patricia Solberg reported that the Freedomites’ “misdemeanours drew down upon them the wrath of their leaders of the government, and the

¹³⁴ S[tefan] S. Sorokin, “Facts about ‘Operation Snatch’: Personal Recordings of Doukhobor Mothers Whose Children were Taken Away and Results of ‘Successful’ Police Raids in the Kootenays” [n.p., 1955?], p. 2, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

¹³⁵ “Doukhobor Criticizes B. C. Press,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 October 1958, 19.

¹³⁶ P. N. Malov, “Doukhobors, Their History, Life and Struggle,” in Peter Maloff Papers, 1924-26, UBC.

public.”¹³⁷ M. J. Koochin noted in *Peacemaker* that “any eccentricity, and originality, and deviation from the prevailing customs is usually regarded with suspicion and distrust” and that “an aura of mystery and peculiarity about the Doukhobors” seemed to breed “antagonism and friction” among the Doukhobors’ neighbours.¹³⁸ The *Nelson Daily News* suggested that British Columbians were “inclined to look down their noses” at the Sons of Freedom as people who were “illiterate, crude and somewhat dangerous.”¹³⁹ A decade later, Alexander Ross of *Maclean’s Magazine* reported that “decades of arson and terrorism in the Kootenays have frozen public attitudes into a state of permanent hostility.”¹⁴⁰ In short, analysts reported that the public’s view of the Sons of Freedom was unfavourable.

The Doukhobors (and in particular, the Sons of Freedom) were characterized as “difficult”¹⁴¹ and “troublesome.”¹⁴² Their disregard for the law was labeled “preposterous and wholly unwarranted”¹⁴³; the “fact that sect members are free to break laws other people must obey still rankles deeply,” the *Columbian* reported in 1963.¹⁴⁴ They were labeled as “insane”¹⁴⁵ and as “mis-fits.”¹⁴⁶ Their naked bodies were portrayed as “ugly” and “fat” and their parades described as “contributing to chastity.”¹⁴⁷ Their apparent sneakiness and

¹³⁷ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 208.

¹³⁸ M. J. Koochin, “Mission and Message of Doukhobors,” *Peacemaker* 12 no. 6 (25 April 1959): 2.

¹³⁹ “Tent Village Strategy Puts Onus on Victoria; Permanent Bureau Needed,” *Nelson Daily News*, 8 September 1953.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Ross, “The West: The Freedomites’ Cardboard Krestova at the Gates to Mountain Prison,” *Maclean’s Magazine* 76 (2 November 1963): 3.

¹⁴¹ Jamieson, “The Doukhobors of B.C.,” 7-8.

¹⁴² “Just One Group Concerned,” *Toronto Star*, 5 May 1950, 6; “Reds Reported Trying to Bar Douk Solution,” *Montreal Gazette*, 17 July 1951, 12; J. V. McAree, “Troublesome Sons of Freedom” *Globe and Mail*, 5 July 1957, 6; “How Inhuman Can Canadians Be?” *Toronto Star*, 27 July 1957, 6; “Lead Our Hutterites Into the Community,” *Toronto Star*, 21 June 1958, 6; “Libel Suit Recalled Sorokin,” *Montreal Gazette*, 19 August 1960, 7.

¹⁴³ “Time to Treat Freedomites Like Ordinary Canadians,” *Vancouver Sun*, 19 March 1962, 5.

¹⁴⁴ John Green, “Delusion of Superiority Vanishing: Is this the ‘Sons’ Last Stand?” *Columbian*, 7 November 1963.

¹⁴⁵ “Doukhobors!” *Drumheller Mail*, 4 September 1947, 3; Arie De Ruiter, “Open letter,” Reprint from the *Aldergrove News*, 16 January 1963, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

¹⁴⁶ “Doukhobor Topic at Fifth Avenue,” *Medicine Hat News*, 26 Sept 1953, 5.

¹⁴⁷ “Doukhobors!” *Drumheller Mail*, 4 September 1947, 3; “M. L. A. Says Doukhobors Not So Bad,” *Drumheller Mail*, 7 October 1953, 7.

secrecy was highlighted by some members of the press as well as public analysts.¹⁴⁸ Surely the Freedomites' conduct in court served to reinforce these public perceptions of the Doukhobors, as they apparently, "with no twinge of conscience," said "one thing today and another tomorrow," oath to tell the truth notwithstanding.¹⁴⁹

Some reporters drew attention to the Doukhobors' refusal to participate in the war effort.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps it was the Doukhobors' pacifism which made the Russians "glad to be rid of them," the *Globe and Mail* speculated.¹⁵¹ Though the Doukhobors refused to defend Canada militarily, they were receiving a better land settlement package than veterans, the *Vancouver Sun* pointed out resentfully.¹⁵² Stuart Jamieson of the UBC DRC surmised in the early 1950s that "widespread resentment, prejudice, and discrimination against Doukhobors in Nelson and other communities arising out of the wartime situation" persisted.¹⁵³

Public frustration over the Doukhobors' failure to contribute to Canada's effort in the Second World War is not surprising. The Doukhobors were not, however, publicly connected with the Cold War, or Red Scare, as much as one might expect. There are surprisingly few references to the Doukhobors and the Cold War or the communists in the public press of the mid twentieth century.¹⁵⁴ This may be because the public was preoccupied with the apparent "civil war" and could not worry about any connections to the "Cold War." Or perhaps the public viewed the Sons of Freedom as a truly Canadian problem, recognizing that they had been on Canadian soil for over half a century.

¹⁴⁸ "B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 9, 167.

¹⁴⁹ The Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs, the Kootenay Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, "Press Release - Immediate: An Open Statement on Freedomite Terrorism," Trail, B.C., 15 August 1962, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, 1957-63, UBC.

¹⁵⁰ "Doukhobors!" *Drumheller Mail*, 4 September 1947, 3; "Those Tiresome Antics of the Doukhobors," *Drumheller Mail*, 21 September 1949, 3.

¹⁵¹ "Clean It Up," *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1950, 6.

¹⁵² Mossey, "Fair Play Group Needed for the Non-Doukhobors," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 November 1962, 5.

¹⁵³ Jamieson, "Economic and Social Life," 61.

¹⁵⁴ A few references are made, such as: Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 247; Peter Maloff, *In Quest of A Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* ([Canada: Hall Printers], 1957), 2; Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living* (Toronto: Legas, 2002), 27.

Governmental authorities, and their management (or mismanagement) of the “Doukhobor problem,” were also subjected to criticism in the press. Frustrated commentators clearly felt that too much leniency had been shown the Doukhobors. In an article entitled “Clean it Up,” the *Globe and Mail* argued that “ever since the Doukhobors came to Canada, half a century ago, this country has been tolerant in the extreme and has gone far to meet their peculiar religious scruples.”¹⁵⁵ The *Vancouver Sun*, in “Send Them Up with the Eskimos,” asked rhetorically whether any other country would “tolerate such nonsense.” The *Sun* pointed out that if it were “a gang of anarchists” working in the Kootenays, “we would have the army, navy, air force out after them” and “every policeman and every able bodied man would be enlisted to hunt them down.” However, the Doukhobors seemed to have some sort of “strange immunity from laws that apply to every other British Columbian.” The *Sun* added that “the ‘Sons’ think they can get away with it. And who can blame them for thinking so? They are getting away with it.”¹⁵⁶ This sentiment was echoed in the *Columbian* which, quoting Cominco Vice President R. D. Perry, said: “an outside enemy couldn’t get away with these depredations but a fanatical group, pampered over the years as a quaint, religious sect, can terrorize Canadians and destroy their property because of a lack of protection.”¹⁵⁷

The provincial government was also criticized for failing to respond appropriately to the situation. The local railwaymen’s union protested the government’s inaction, and called for government officials to show good faith in enforcing its policies towards the Sons of Freedom in 1953.¹⁵⁸ In 1954, the *Nelson Daily News* argued in “Fuller Doukhobor Plan

¹⁵⁵ “Clean It Up,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1950, 6.

¹⁵⁶ “Send Them Up With The Eskimos,” *Vancouver Province*, 9 September 1953.

¹⁵⁷ “They May Take the Law in their Own Hands,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹⁵⁸ “Railroaders Urge Public Protests Gov’t Lack of Freedomite Program,” [31 August 1953], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “Douk Tent Town Grows: Fanatics Won’t Listen to Costa Rica Visitor,” *Province*, 4 Sept. 1953; “Public Demand for Gov’t Policy on Freedomites Urged,” [*Nelson Daily News*] W. H. Towhey to editor [1953], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

Needed” that “the cut in the province’s Doukhobor affairs budget by \$135,000 does not indicate that activities are to be stepped up.” The Nelson paper complained that instead, “the problem...is practically untouched from a year ago except for somewhat more decisive action on the government’s policy toward education of Freedomite children.”¹⁵⁹ At a meeting of the Association of Kootenay Municipalities, British Columbia Attorney-General Robert Bonner was criticized for “lack of action against terrorists and not attending the meeting,” according to the *Vancouver Sun*.¹⁶⁰ In 1962, the *Columbian* ran a story noting that the *Trail Daily Times* and the *Nelson Daily News* as well as other local papers from the interior of British Columbia “blast government inaction.”¹⁶¹

The federal government was criticized for failing to come to British Columbia’s aid. The *Vancouver Province* mused in 1953 that it would be helpful if Ottawa were required to take on the cost of constructing prison facilities for the Doukhobors. “It might make the senior government wake up to its responsibilities” if the Sons of Freedom were to “cause Ottawa some trouble and expense the government may be a little more anxious to help B.C. evolve some permanent solution to the problem,” the *Province* suggested.¹⁶² Mayor Joseph Palyga of Trail, British Columbia, was quoted in the *Columbian* as suggesting: “if the bombings, which have rocked British Columbia’s Kootenay district, occurred in Toronto or any other Canadian center, government and police authorities would swarm over the area to prevent additional bombings until the culprits had been apprehended.”¹⁶³ The *Vancouver Sun* pointed out that “if, instead of being confined to a section of British Columbia and endangering only a few thousand people, the activities of the Sons of Freedom were extended across Canada, there would be no question about the action that would be taken”: namely,

¹⁵⁹ “Fuller Doukhobor Plan Needed; Land Sales Should Have Attention,” *Nelson Daily News*, 1 April 1954.

¹⁶⁰ “Trail Plan Voted Down: Kootenay Leaders Reject ‘Apartheid’ for Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 May 1961.

¹⁶¹ “A-G Bonner Gets Blame in Kootenays,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹⁶² “The ‘Sons’ Are Ottawa’s Responsibility,” *Vancouver Province*, 30 Sept 1953

¹⁶³ “They May Take the Law in their Own Hands,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

that the “Freedomites would be viewed as insurrectionists, their acts would be declared the acts of civil war, and extraordinary measures would be taken to suppress them.”¹⁶⁴ The press – in particular, the papers with province-wide circulation – was articulating a strong call for greater attention to the Doukhobor problem from the federal government.

The British Columbian press called for political intervention. The *Nelson Daily News* argued: “much can be done by the provincial government to improve the situation of confusion applying to the Sons of Freedom if it will move with a program of concrete proposals – now.”¹⁶⁵ The *Vancouver Province* called for “action out of the authorities before there is a tragedy.”¹⁶⁶ W. H. Towhey wrote to the editor of the *Nelson Daily News* following another attack on the CPR track, suggesting that “the adoption of a positive policy on the Doukhobor question is long overdue.” “We have two cabinet ministers in the government who represent districts with large Doukhobor populations,” Towhey noted, “why have they not insisted that a definite policy be adopted by the Government?”¹⁶⁷

But identifying a “definite policy” was no easy task. Zubek and Solberg indicate that government officials “knew that the public would not tolerate injustice even though the scapegoats might be non-voters and aliens.”¹⁶⁸ “Drastic action” was deemed “repugnant to British and Canadian traditions of justice”; however, as the *Globe and Mail* pointed out in 1962, the situation in British Columbia was becoming serious enough to prompt people to consider exceptions.¹⁶⁹ This stated, the *Columbian* ran an article in 1962 advocating removal of “B.C.’s Mau Mau terrorists” using “all the law forces at our command – and that may

¹⁶⁴ “Banish the Freedomites to Some Canadian Siberia,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1962.

¹⁶⁵ “Tent Village Strategy Puts Onus on Victoria; Permanent Bureau Needed,” *Nelson Daily News*, 8 September 1953.

¹⁶⁶ “Send Them Up With The Eskimos,” *Vancouver Province*, 9 September 1953.

¹⁶⁷ “Public Demand for Gov’t Policy on Freedomites Urged,” [*Nelson Daily News*] W. H. Towhey to editor, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁶⁸ Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 153.

¹⁶⁹ “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6.

include the army.”¹⁷⁰ One local bartender stated: “it’s time these Doukhobors were jumped on hard.”¹⁷¹ W. H. Towhey of the CPR suggested that the militia round up the Doukhobors, “Sons of Freedom or not, make them swear allegiance and sign a paper to abide by their laws.” If they refused to comply, Towhey argued, “they can stay in jail until they die out.”¹⁷²

Many other hard-line approaches were advocated in the public press. Despite reticence to punish entire groups for the transgressions of a few members,¹⁷³ “wholesale cleanup” was advocated by some.¹⁷⁴ The *Globe and Mail* argued that even identifying with a sect known to “be one of lawlessness and violence” rendered Sons of Freedom guilty of “criminal conspiracy against their neighbours,” which justified “collective punishment.”¹⁷⁵ The *Vancouver Sun* called for “specific legislation to deal with the Sons of Freedom” which would “make membership in the sect an offence” punishable by exile to remote areas of Canada. The *Sun* granted that “such legislation would be viewed askance in a democratic nation at peace” but reminded its readers that “we are not at peace...they [the Sons of Freedom] have forfeited their rights to Canadian liberties by making war for 40 years on their neighbours.”¹⁷⁶

The idea of relocating the Sons of Freedom to a remote area of Canada where they would be isolated from their neighbours appealed to some members of the public.¹⁷⁷ W. S. Jones, a Winlaw, British Columbia businessman, advocated a reservation plan in the *Nelson*

¹⁷⁰ “Army Could Hunt Down our Mau Mau...Mop up Kootenay Terrorists,” *Columbian*, 9 March 1962.

¹⁷¹ Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1.

¹⁷² Stanley Hardman, “The Fiery Faith,” *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 15 August 1953, 3.

¹⁷³ “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; “The Doukhobor Civil War,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; “Rights of the Majority,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6.

¹⁷⁴ “Vandalistic Treatment,” *Drumheller Mail*, Thursday, 4 May 1949, 3.

¹⁷⁵ “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6.

¹⁷⁶ “Banish the Freedomites to Some Canadian Siberia,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1962.

¹⁷⁷ “Punishment Alone Futile: Move on Sons Should be Starting Point,” *Nelson Daily News*, 17 Sept 1953; Frank H. Partridge to the Editor, “End Communal Way,” 22 September 1953; “Doukhobor Alternative,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1958, 6; “Trail Plan Voted Down: Kootenay Leaders Reject ‘Apartheid’ for Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 May 1961; “The Doukhobor Civil War,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; “A Law to Fit the Case,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1962, 6; “Ottawa’s Responsibility,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 December 1962, 6; Arie De Ruiter, “Open letter.”

Daily News, reasoning that “we found a peaceful solution for the Indians that way.”¹⁷⁸ A “long-time resident” of the interior of British Columbia argued: “it’s time they bundled all the Sons of Freedom into one village and put barbed wire around it.”¹⁷⁹ In “Send Them Up With the Eskimos,” the *Vancouver Province* suggested the Freedomites:

be moved, bag and baggage, to some isolated northern wilderness, accessible only by air, where there is a minimum of shelter, where they will have to work hard to keep body and soul together and where the prevailing temperatures rule to nude parades. If they burned down any buildings they would run the risk of freezing. If they didn’t work hard they would starve. They wouldn’t have time for any burning or parading. And they would be too far away from other human beings to be terrors to anybody but themselves.¹⁸⁰

Attorney-General Robert Bonner did, in fact, entertain a relocation and isolation plan.

Bonner felt such a move might be appropriate “until such time as they shall cease to be either a menace or a worry to non-Doukhobor citizens.”¹⁸¹

Some members of the public and of the press advocated that the Sons of Freedom should be ejected from the country altogether, if possible. Perhaps money held in trust for the Doukhobors following the sale of their land in 1939 could be put towards the cost of passage on a boat destined for some “far-away land that might make all the concessions the Doukhobors want,” Pete Mossey wrote in the *Vancouver Sun*.¹⁸² Unfortunately, most Doukhobors were Canadian-born, which meant “whether we like it or not, the Sons of Freedom are our problem, which we must solve somehow within Canada. We cannot fob it

¹⁷⁸ “Lower Slocan Without Future Unless,” *Nelson Daily News*, 23 April 1952.

¹⁷⁹ Bolwell, “A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1.

¹⁸⁰ “Send Them Up With The Eskimos,” *Vancouver Province*, 9 September 1953

¹⁸¹ “B.C. To Propose Isolation Plan for Doukhobors,” *Globe and Mail*, 28 May 1953, 3.

¹⁸² Mossey, “Fair Play Group Needed for the Non-Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 28 November 1962. See also J. V. McAree, “Troublesome Sons of Freedom” *Globe and Mail*, 5 July 1957, 6.

off on some other nation,” the *Globe and Mail* later explained.¹⁸³ Though deportation was proposed,¹⁸⁴ by the mid twentieth century it could not be implemented, as the Freedomites’ home nation was Canada itself.

Failing relocation, some suggested (forced) integration as the answer to the “Doukhobor problem.” The *Nelson Daily News* reported that some Canadians felt that solving the problem would not be possible unless the communal way of living was broken up.¹⁸⁵ This idea was pursued by Frank H. Partridge of Victoria, British Columbia, who in a letter to the editor noted that “the only apparent solution to the vexatious Doukhobor problem was to get them away from their communal way of living.” He suggested separating each family, forcing them to fend for themselves while integrating with their Canadian neighbours.¹⁸⁶

Some of the Doukhobors’ neighbours proposed a curfew be enacted in an effort to stem the Freedomites’ illicit activity.¹⁸⁷ This suggestion was problematic for many reasons. In 1953, Liberal Federal Minister of Justice G. Stuart Garson was reticent to encroach on provincial jurisdiction over policing, and did not feel it was prudent to use the War Measures Act to impose federal authority in this case.”¹⁸⁸ When the proposal resurfaced with the surge in depredations activity in 1962, British Columbian Attorney-General Robert Bonner was not prepared to commit provincial resources to enacting and enforcing a curfew in Doukhobor-

¹⁸³ “No Easy Way Out,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 April 1962, 6.

¹⁸⁴ “Vandalistic Treatment,” *Drumheller Mail*, Thursday, 4 May 1949, 3; “Those Tiresome Antics of the Doukhobors,” *Drumheller Mail*, Wednesday, 21 September 1949, 3; “Legion Opposes Army Exemptions: Demand No More Land Be Granted Hutterite and Doukhobor Sects,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1954, 12.

¹⁸⁵ “Lower Slocan Without Future Unless,” *Nelson Daily News*, 23 April 1952

¹⁸⁶ Frank H. Partridge to the Editor, “End Communal Way” 22 September 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁸⁷ *Nelson Daily News*, 28 April 1953; “To See Premier... Slocan Asks Job Ban on Freedomites,” *Nelson Daily News*, 4 May 1953; “Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List,” *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953.

¹⁸⁸ “Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List,” *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953.

inhabited areas. The curfew “would be a great inconvenience to the people in the area, only a small fraction of whom are Sons of Freedom Doukhobors,” Bonner explained.¹⁸⁹

Many suggested that authorities pay greater attention to enforcing the law. If existing laws proved ineffective in managing the Sons of Freedom problem, some suggested that new laws “designed specifically to deal with the outlaw sect” should be created.¹⁹⁰ Extra police staff was requested¹⁹¹; calling in military support in managing the problem was suggested as well.¹⁹²

While some members of the public focused on hardline, law-and-order means to improve the situation in the Kootenays, others proposed softer approaches to the problem. *Canadian Forum* ran an article in 1953, pointing out that neither the law, nor the threat of imprisonment were proving effective in preventing criminal behaviour or alleviating recidivism. The article argued that the Freedomites should be regarded “as people who are culturally ill rather than willfully criminal.” As such, any solutions to the “Doukhorbor problem” should err on the side of “cure” rather than “coercion.”¹⁹³

Though one might speak of “public opinion” writ large, it must be acknowledged that no such thing really exists. There are at any given time several public opinions, formulated on the basis of a variety of social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic conditions. This was certainly the case in polarized British Columbia, where even in Doukhorbor-inhabited locales, residents divided their votes between right wing Social Credit and left wing Co-operative Commonwealth Federation candidates in the middle of the

¹⁸⁹ “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhorbor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

¹⁹⁰ “Ottawa’s Responsibility,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 December 1962, 6; “A Law to Fit the Case,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1962, 6; “Banish the Freedomites to Some Canadian Siberia,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1962; 5.

¹⁹¹ *Nelson Daily News*, 28 April 1953

¹⁹² Stanley Handman, “The Fiery Faith,” *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 15 August 1953, 3, 4; “Time to Call for Federal Help on Bombings, Says Shorthouse,” 26 March 1958; “Army could hunt down our Mau Mau...Mop up Kootenay terrorists,” *Columbian*, 9 March 1962; “A-G Bonner gets blame in Kootenays,” *Columbian*, 13 March 1962.

¹⁹³ “The Sons of Freedom,” *Canadian Forum* 33 (October 1953): 145.

twentieth century. Thus it is important to explore the range of public opinions as expressed in the press to get a sense of the public pressure pressed on government officials during the height of Freedomite activism.

A review of mid-century Canadian press reveals that the Canadian public was aware that there was a “Doukhobor problem,” and that the public was anxious to see it solved. Calls for decisive action that would put an end to the Freedomites’ activities became increasingly assertive throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and the Canadian government, the British Columbian government, the judicial system, and the RCMP¹⁹⁴ were under considerable pressure to generate conclusive solutions. Though some sympathetic public voices called for compassionate approaches to the “Doukhobor problem,” most public voices were critical of the Sons of Freedom in particular, the Doukhobors in general, and of the authorities who repeatedly failed to solve the problem. These voices called the government to consider a comprehensive strategy that would solve the “Doukhobor problem” once and for all. Social Credit Premier W. A. C. Bennett and his Attorney General Robert Bonner answered that call, beginning in 1952. Between 1953 and 1959, the Socreds attempted to solve the problem using a “carrot” and “stick” approach that would reward conformity and punish transgression. They also attempted to force assimilation and prevent regeneration of the Freedomite movement in a plan aimed at reshaping the identity of Sons of Freedom children, which will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁹⁴ British Columbia had its own Provincial Police force until it switched to RCMP forces in 1950.

CHAPTER 8

“The Days of Fooling Around with the Unlawful Doukhobors are Over”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Doukhobors (especially Sons of Freedom Doukhobors) received considerable public attention at the height of their depredations activity in the middle of the twentieth century. The volume, tone, and spread of press coverage across the nation and internationally is indicative of public interest in the “Doukhobor problem.” Residents of the Kootenay and Boundary regions of British Columbia, who lived in closest proximity to the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, were especially concerned. Some residents feared that Freedomite depredations would escalate in frequency and severity, unless something was done to stop them. Frustrated residents of the southern interior of British Columbia, and those who sympathized with their situation, repeatedly called for an effective legal and political response.

As the Sons of Freedom were concentrated in British Columbia, it was incumbent on British Columbian authorities to generate conclusive solutions to the “Doukhobor problem.”¹ Dealing with the “Doukhobor problem” became a major political issue in British Columbia in the early 1950s, and continued to challenge government authorities into the 1960s. Examining the provincial government’s proposed solutions to the “Doukhobor problem,” as well as public response to these solutions, provides some indication of what the Canadian, and more specifically the British Columbian, public was willing to do to deal with social non-conformists. Since the provincial government’s strategies were largely focused on facilitating Doukhobor integration (or indeed, their complete assimilation) into the British

¹ Which was largely associated with the Freedomites’ depredations activity by the middle of the twentieth century. Though the Freedomites had some impact outside of British Columbia, their demonstrations tended to be milder, less frequent, and of less concern to the general public in other locales.

Columbian mainstream, political response to the “Doukhobor problem” also had significant implications for Doukhobor ethno-religious identity in the middle of the twentieth century.

The Social Credit Party of British Columbia won a minority government in 1952; in 1953, the Socreds returned to legislature with a majority government under Premier W. A. C. Bennett’s leadership. One of the major planks in the Socreds’ platform in the lead up to the 1953 election was a commitment to address the “Doukhobor problem.” The Socreds proposed a law-and-order approach, emphasizing the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship. To law-abiding Doukhobors, the government extended improved civil rights. To law-breaking Doukhobors, the government imposed increased sanctions. Those who stripped off their clothing, and who damaged public property would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Proclaiming: “the days of fooling around with the unlawful Doukhobors are over,” Bennett revealed what he felt was a “just but firm” eight-point policy in May 1953. They were willing to right some of the wrongs done to the Doukhobors, but expected the Doukhobors to cooperate on points the province viewed as non-negotiable.² The “carrots” Bennett offered included speedy restoration of the franchise, resolution of the land question in the aftermath of the bankruptcy of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood in the late 1930s, legitimization of Doukhobor marriages and of the Doukhobor marriage ceremony, and the formation of a commission on Doukhobor affairs. Bennett declared that his government would insist on compliance with school attendance regulations and on the

² William Guy Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?” *Liberty* (June 1954): 57.

registration of vital statistics. Bennett also called for federal financial support in all “extraordinary expenditures” related to solving the “Doukhobor problem.”³

Bennett threatened to cancel the drivers’ licenses of Doukhobors who failed to comply with provincial regulations under the terms of the License Forfeiture Act, and hinted that he would also rely on the Child Protection Act and Public Schools Act to ensure that all Doukhobor children received a provincially-approved education. He claimed that the threat of losing their driving permits would deter those Freedomites who “don’t mind serving a little time in jail to give the martyr impression” but who would consider losing the right to drive a hardship. Bennett also promised to keep close watch on the Sons of Freedom “until such time as the security of the non-Doukhobor population is assured.” In addition, Bennett’s Attorney-General Robert Bonner sought the federal government’s endorsement of an emigration plan to be offered to Freedomite Doukhobors who wished to leave the country altogether. Bonner was also considering relocating non-compliant Doukhobors to remote locations within Canada until they ceased to cause problems for their neighbours. When asked whether the government had the “authority” to follow through with these measures, Bennett responded: “if we haven’t got it, we’ll get it.”⁴ Returning to legislature with a majority, the Socreds had license to pursue a solution to the “Doukhobor problem” and were prepared to roll out their plan at the beginning of September 1953.

Addressing the Doukhobor problem in a comprehensive way would prove costly, but the Socreds clearly viewed the cost as worthwhile, if their strategy proved effective. In September of 1953, the Socreds passed a “special warrant to provide \$150,000 to deal with the Doukhobor problem.”⁵ They also established substantial cash rewards – between \$10,000

³ “Bennett Announces 8-Point Policy to Deal with Sons: Cancellation of Drivers’ License to be Punishment for Lawbreakers” *Nelson Daily News*, 23 May 1953.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Joe MacSween, “Sons of Freedom Said Intimidating Orthodox: Squabble in Vancouver Bennett Appropriation,” [September 1953] Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

and \$25,000 - for any information yielding conviction of those responsible for depredations activity in British Columbia.⁶ In addition, the province had to earmark funds for extra policing, judicial services, and the costs of incarceration.

The Socreds also sought financial and legal support from the federal government. From the province's perspective, the federal government had permitted the Doukhobors' immigration in the first place. As such, the federal government should be required to take responsibility for the consequences of bringing the Doukhobors to Canada. The federal government also had jurisdiction over the Criminal Code, and could use its authority to enact laws to better support the province in its campaign against the Freedomite troublemakers.⁷

The provincial government's requests for Ottawa's assistance were often frustrated in the 1950s and 1960s. The province was rebuffed when it sought federal support for a curfew on Doukhobor residents of the Kootenays under the terms of the War Measures Act. The federal government resisted, claiming it was out of federal jurisdiction (policing was provincially regulated).⁸ Frustrated by the province's inability to solve the problem, Doukhobor-inhabited cities appealed to the Canadian government for assistance. The Nelson Chamber of Commerce supported its City Council in its appeal to the provincial government, asking that the provincial government seek improved federal support "to suppress the violence which has gone unchecked in the district for so many years and which the provincial government has been unable to handle."⁹ Trail's mayor, Joe Palyga, demanded that the

⁶ "CPR Track Blasted Near Nelson: Doukhobor Sect Blamed," *Vancouver Province*, 17 August 1953; "Sorokin Letter Asks End to Home Burning," [n.d.] Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "Doukhobor Leaders Disagree on Proposal," *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 1958, 5; "Leads Swamp RCMP After Reward Offer" *Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1962, 2; "More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists" *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

⁷ "Bennett Announces 8-Point Policy to Deal with Sons: Cancellation of Drivers' License to be Punishment for Lawbreakers," *Nelson Daily News*, 23 May 1953.

⁸ "Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List," *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953.

⁹ "Chamber Endorses Bombing Appeal, Asks for Federal Aid," 28 March 1958, Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

government intervene to halt what he labeled “act[s] of wartime sabotage.”¹⁰ Though the federal government did agree to assist by constructing a special prison for Doukhobor inmates in 1962, for the most part, the province was left to its own devices.¹¹

The provincial government’s plan involved both law-and-order and compassionate approaches. This two-prong approach allowed the government to yield where possible, recognize progress where applicable, and reward “positive” steps towards integration at its discretion. On the other hand, it also allowed them to come down heavily on those Doukhobors who continued to create problems. In his throne speech of September 1953, W. A. C. Bennett acknowledged that most Doukhobors were “law-abiding people who are making distinctive and valuable contributions to the development and culture of this country and province.” Bennett added: “I wish to place great emphasis upon the fact that we must distinguish between the troublesome Sons of Freedom sect and the Doukhobor community at large.” Bennett acknowledged the “great injustice to the Doukhobors of this Province that discussions of this general question rarely make this distinction, and I want it clearly to be understood that in dealing with this problem, this Government has this distinction in mind.”¹² That the government was prepared to make this distinction – especially when the distinction was often neglected in the press and misunderstood by the public – is to their credit.

As an expression of goodwill, the Socreds sought to improve the Doukhobors’ legal position in the province. As of 1952, the Doukhobors were the only ethnic group in British Columbia that did not have the right to vote, having been denied the franchise since 1931

¹⁰ “Kootenay Blasts Rip Power Tower,” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July 1962.

¹¹ “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

¹² “Excerpt from Premier W.A.C. Bennett’s policy speech given in Legislature, Sept. 18th, 1953,” p. 3, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU).

provincially and since 1934 federally.¹³ The Socreds restored the Doukhobors' right to the franchise in 1956. Doukhobor marriages conducted in British Columbia were not legally recognized in British Columbia before the Socreds came into power. The Socred government sought to legalize the Doukhobor ceremony in the 1950s, which would render future unions "legitimate." Those already married would have to "remarry" to legitimize their unions.¹⁴

Restoring the franchise and recognizing Doukhobor marriages had interesting identity implications. In the eyes of the province, bestowing these civil rights was a step towards solving the "Doukhobor problem."¹⁵ Recognizing the Doukhobors as citizens with equal rights was a way of demonstrating their inclusion as British Columbians and, by extension, as Canadians. The Doukhobors were disenfranchised in 1931 because of the public perception that their culture and their conduct rendered them unfit for the responsibilities of full citizenship. Restoring the vote, then, may be read as recognition that, so long as Doukhobors obeyed the law, their ethnic identity was not a justification for exclusion. What is interesting about the enfranchisement issue is that, in the 1950s, few British Columbian Doukhobors were keen to cast their ballots, as doing so was contrary to Peter Petrovich "*Chistiakov*" Verigin's instructions, as conveyed in the Declaration of 1934.¹⁶ With the right to vote restored, whether eligible Doukhobors voted or not became a matter of personal conscience, rather than political exclusion.

Similarly, the Doukhobors already viewed their marriages as legitimate in the community's and in God's eyes. It is thus somewhat surprising that they participated in the

¹³ William G. Dixon, "Public Administration and the Community," in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Harry B. Hawthorn, ed. (University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955), 209; John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 155.

¹⁴ "Douks Convicted in Three Minutes in Nudity Trial," *Globe and Mail*, 23 September 1953, 8; William Guy Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?" *Liberty* (June 1954).

¹⁵ Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?"

¹⁶ "Declaration of the 'Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ of Canada'," August 1934, copy in author's possession. This document clarified the Doukhobors' core beliefs, and their position on political involvement.

province's plan to legally legitimize their unions, as legal legitimization had no impact on the way in which couples interacted with one another or on how they were perceived in the community. Indeed, most non-Doukhobors were unaware that their married Doukhobor neighbours were technically "common law" partners. However, many British Columbian Doukhobors did ultimately choose to legitimize their marriages by registering them when the option became available in the mid 1950s. The movement to legitimize Doukhobor marriages was led by Orthodox leader John J. Verigin Sr., who registered his own marriage, and provided facilities for Magistrate William Evans to conduct his business with willing Doukhobor couples. Even some Freedomite couples decided to register their unions, with Freedomite leader Stefan Sorokin's encouragement.¹⁷

Since the Doukhobors already viewed their unions as marriages, the move to register and legitimize their unions according to provincial regulations may be read as a gesture of the Doukhobors' increasing stake in public life. They may have had legal or financial incentives for legitimizing their marriages, and there is some evidence to suggest that some Doukhobors feared that non-Doukhobors would perceive their unions as scandalous if not legitimized.¹⁸ It may have been calculated by Doukhobor leadership as a way to publicly respond to the government's gesture of inclusion, especially in light of the fact that the government was recognizing the Doukhobor form of marriage, which is still protected by British Columbia's Marriage Act today.

One of the sticking points preventing some British Columbian Doukhobors from embracing greater involvement in public life, however, was identification as a Canadian citizen. Canadian citizenship was objectionable because the Doukhobors felt that their allegiance was owed to God, and not to worldly authority. In the mid 1950s, British

¹⁷ Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 170.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Columbian authorities sought ways to compromise on this point, so as to make the Doukhobors' position clear in public declarations. Magistrate Evans made this accommodation by recording the Doukhobors' citizenship as "Canadian, subject to the law of God and Jesus Christ."¹⁹ In 1957, an accommodation was made in Grand Forks, allowing candidates running for local office to "affirm" (rather than swear) their commitment to serve in office. This permitted Orthodox Doukhobor Eli Popoff to take a position on the school board, for example.

One of the largest "soft" approaches to solving the "Doukhobor problem" the provincial government offered was resolution of the land issue. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Orthodox (formerly Community) and Freedomite Doukhobors' land situation remained ambiguous. Since the bankruptcy of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood, Orthodox Doukhobors resided on what was technically government-owned land, paying nominal rental rates (which the Sons of Freedom refused to pay).

This had serious implications for Doukhobor welfare as well as for Doukhobor identity. Without clear title to the land they inhabited and worked, Doukhobors hesitated to make improvements on it.²⁰ Some Orthodox Doukhobors and many Sons of Freedom still believed that private ownership of land contravened Doukhobor principles.²¹ While many of the Orthodox Doukhobors were prepared to negotiate on this point, the Sons of Freedom were not. In fact, some Sons of Freedom were prepared to prevent their Orthodox counterparts from cooperating with the government on settlement of the land question, using the threat of depredations reprisals to reinforce their position.

¹⁹ Ibid., 169.

²⁰ "Fuller Doukhobor Plan Needed; Land Sales Should Have Attention," *Nelson Daily News*, 1 April 1954; "Brief Presented to the Royal Commission on 'Doukhobor Lands Allotment', Nelson, Sept. 11, 1959," p. 1, Kootenay and Boundary Citizens' Committee on Doukhobor-Canadian Affairs Briefs, 1958-64, Doukhobor Collection, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC).

²¹ Harry B. Hawthorn, "Backgrounds of the Problems and Recommendations," in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 76.

The government of British Columbia appointed Judge Arthur E. Lord to study the land question and propose a workable solution to the problem. Boyd C. Affleck, a civil engineer and land surveyor from Nelson, B.C., who had served on other Doukhobor consultative committees, suggested that settling the land question in a manner favourable to the Doukhobors would result in securing “better citizenship” from them, which was, from his perspective, worth the investment. Affleck suggested that the land be offered for public sale on a priority basis, such that Doukhobors already living on the land in question be granted first option, any British Columbian Doukhobor granted second option, veterans third, and all others fourth.²² Affleck pointed out that the Doukhobors could use purchased land to “form groups or co-operatives later if desired.”²³ Lord ultimately decided to offer the Doukhobors first option to purchase the land on which they were living at sixty percent of the appraised value.²⁴

Settling the land question was by no means easy to accomplish. Orthodox Doukhobors were hesitant to purchase the land, both because of the stigma concerning private ownership of land, and because of the fear of Freedomite retribution. Those who did apply to purchase the land were censured by some of their fellows.²⁵ This, Lord perceived as an indication that the Doukhobors were not willing to cooperate with efforts to solve the problem.²⁶

The Orthodox Doukhobors claimed that the major barrier to resolution of the land settlement issue was the threat of Freedomite reprisals. The Freedomites were warning the Orthodox not to cooperate with the authorities and had demonstrated that they were prepared

²² “Affleck Suggests to Commission... Money from Sale of Doukhobor Lands Should be ‘Plowed Back’,” *Nelson Daily News*, 21 May 1955.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “Land Peace Seen for Doukhobors,” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 July 1961; “Terrorism Police Matter - Boards: Committee Workings Set Up During Castlegar Meet,” *Nelson Daily News*, 9 July 1958.

²⁵ “Doukhobor Land Allotment Inquiry Act: Interim Reports of Justice A. E. Lord, 1955-1959,” 5th report, 16 November 1959, p. 12, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

to take action if their warnings were ignored. Indeed, as Simma Holt reported, “the worst outbreak of bombings and burnings in the Kootenay history” erupted shortly after the Orthodox began purchasing their land.²⁷

Ultimately, many Orthodox Doukhobors accepted the government’s land settlement offers, while the Sons of Freedom living in Gilpin and Krestova remained squatters. Getting to this resolution proved to be a complicated and frustrating process. Lord felt that there was “no reasonable justification on the part of the Doukhobors for their continued failure to make application for the purchase of the land” especially given the government’s “generous[ity] and toleran[ce]” concerning the subject. In Lord’s assessment, then, there was a considerable “feeling approaching antagonism towards a solution of the [Doukhobor] problem” on the Doukhobors’ part.²⁸ Actually, what the land settlement process shows is that the “Doukhobor problem” was a complicated one. Though the government could offer favourable terms and a forum for negotiation, it was in many respects internal conflict that prevented a speedy resolution. The problem was an ethno-religious identity one: the Doukhobors were hesitant to settle the land question, because it was unclear to some whether one could remain “Doukhobor” while compromising on the private ownership of land.

A primary feature of the British Columbian and Canadian governments’ “soft approach” to the Sons of Freedom was their support of Freedomite out-migration proposals. Both the provincial and the federal governments committed to provide financial aid to an emigration plan provided that the Freedomites completely renounced their Canadian citizenship, and provided proof of passage and of Russia’s commitment to accept them as immigrants.²⁹ Any Freedomites who declined the emigration package would be expected to

²⁷ Simma Holt, “Long Stalemate Ended: Freedomites Buy Land in Old Capital, Krestova,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 February 1966.

²⁸ “Doukhobor Land Allotment Inquiry Act: Interim Reports of Justice A. E. Lord, 1955-1959,” 5th report, 16 November 1959, p. 11-12, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

²⁹ “B. C. Lays Down Strict Conditions for Doukhobors,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 April 1958, 8.

“remain in Canada subject to all laws, Municipal, Provincial or Federal, governing Canadian citizens and privileged as heretofore to enjoy the rights and liberties of such citizenship.”³⁰

Though government assistance was “more than they have a right to expect from Governments which they have openly defied,” allowing the Sons of Freedom to depart was the most expedient means of solving the complicated “Doukhobor problem.” If this offer fell through, some speculated that the government would have no choice but to resort to heavier-handed solutions, which might include exile to “Canada’s Far North, where there are no railways and bridges for them to blow up, no schools to set afire, no people to harass.”³¹

Despite the governments’ show of goodwill on the emigration plan, it soon became clear that the Sons of Freedom were not prepared to follow through, and that the USSR was not prepared to accept them in any case. The plan ultimately failed. On the Freedomites’ part, the plan may have fallen through due to concerns over the emigration terms, failure of the Freedomite leadership to attract sufficient interest in their followers, or this may have been a complex game of chicken all along.³² The Sons of Freedom often expressed their frustration with life in Canada, and their desire to return to their Russian homeland, or else to emigrate to a place which would allow them to live according to their beliefs. At no point in the twentieth century were the Sons of Freedom closer to achieving their goal – if their goal was out-migration – than in the late 1950s when Bill Moojelsky negotiated favourable terms on their behalf with the provincial and federal governments. The Freedomites’ hesitation suggests that despite all of their talk about returning to Russia, there were strong ties for them in Canada. This is understandable. After all, many of the Sons of Freedom were born in Canada and had never seen Russia. Over the course of a half-century, they had become somewhat comfortable in the interior of British Columbia, their protests to the contrary

³⁰ Fulton as cited in “Offer Doukhobors Aid in Emigration,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 August 1958, 1,2.

³¹ “Doukhobor Alternative,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1958, 6.

³² Douglas Collins, “Will They Go?: B. C. Residents Think Doukhobors Bluffing,” *Globe and Mail*, 25 October 1958, 7.

notwithstanding. The Sons of Freedom had justified their depredations activity as a means to secure emigration. The Freedomites' ultimate failure to take up the emigration plan strongly suggests that the desire to leave was *not* the underlying cause of their depredation activity: something else was at work.

The Socreds' "soft approaches" helped to reconcile the relationship between Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors and the government. The Socreds' efforts to enfranchise these Doukhobors, restoring and confirming their civil rights as law abiding citizens of British Columbia and Canada, helped them transition from "outsider" to "participant"; from "foreigner" to "ethnic minority" in British Columbia. This action reflected evolving attitudes on both the government's and on the Doukhobors' part. Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors were no longer totally isolated from their non-Doukhobor neighbours. They were increasingly taking part in broader social, economic, and even political processes on at least a local level in the 1950s and 1960s. Evidence of this greater level of integration into the British Columbia mainstream included the growth of Doukhobor-owned or managed small business, election of Doukhobors to local school boards and city councils, and increased frequency of intermarriage between Doukhobors and non-Doukhobor partners. This trend coincided with a growing awareness of Canada's identity as a multi-ethnic nation. Where once Canadians viewed themselves as the product of Anglo (and to a lesser extent, Franco) influences, Canadians were increasingly recognizing other minority identities as part of the Canadian "identity," though this realization would not translate into federal government policy changes until the early 1970s.

The "soft approaches" made little impact on the Sons of Freedom, however, who were not interested in creating stronger ties with their Canadian neighbours or with the governments that had authority over them. Though Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors were satisfied with those measures that benefitted them directly, they were eager for a

solution to the problem the activist Sons of Freedom were causing. Though these Doukhobors would not sanction abuse of their Freedomite counterparts, they certainly favoured firm action that would put a stop to the depredation activity and viewed failure to intervene as an affront to their own rights.

The Socreds had run on a platform which proposed a multifaceted solution to the “Doukhobor problem” and they intended to deliver. The counterpart to the “soft measure” approach was the “law and order” approach which fell under British Columbia Attorney General Robert Bonner’s purview. His plan was comprehensive and firm. He put residents of the Kootenay and Boundary areas of British Columbia on notice: those who broke the law would be found out, prosecuted, and punished accordingly.³³ He intended to use existing laws to full advantage. Provincial laws concerning vehicle licensing, children’s protection, and school attendance could be used in combination to push the Socred’s agenda forward. Federal laws concerning public nudity had been designed specifically to help British Columbia attend to its Freedomite problem in 1932, and Bonner intended to make use of them in the 1950s.

The largest component of the government’s law-and-order plan involved the Freedomite children. The Socreds felt that the Freedomite children were the key to solving the “Doukhobor problem.” Perhaps the Freedomites would be more cooperative if their children’s fate hung in the balance. The government of British Columbia thus designed what appeared to be a fail-safe plan. Truancy would no longer be tolerated: the Sons of Freedom would either obey school attendance laws as per the terms of the Public Schools Act, or would lose custody of their children. The children who were apprehended for truancy, and were thus in the state’s custody, would be forced to attend school while wards of the state. In other words, whether the Freedomites complied or not, Freedomite children would be forced

³³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 170.

to attend school, where they would be exposed to “Canadian” ways of thinking and dissuaded from following in their parents’ footsteps. Ultimately, the government’s plan was designed to challenge Freedomite identity, belief, and practice: Freedomite adults were pressured to cooperate, and Freedomite children were pressured to assimilate.

The Public Schools Act required all children between seven and fifteen years of age to attend public school regularly, and imposed a ten dollar fine on parents who failed to send their children to school.³⁴ The Protection of Children Act allowed the authorities to apprehend, without warrant, children who were found in “any disorderly house, or in company of people reputed to be criminal, immoral, or disorderly” or who were “likely to develop criminal tendencies if not removed from [their] surroundings... whose only parent or whose parents are undergoing imprisonment”; or “who, by reason of the action of his parents or otherwise, is habitually truant from school and is liable to grow up without proper education.”³⁵ Many Sons of Freedom children potentially fell under one or more of these categorizations.

Though education had been a contentious issue in the first half of the twentieth century, most Doukhobor children living in British Columbia attended school regularly by the 1950s. A few Sons of Freedom families kept their children out of school, however, claiming that Canadian schools encouraged competition, materialism, nationalism, and militarism, all of which were contrary to Doukhobor belief.³⁶ The Fraternal Council and Members of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (CCBRD),

³⁴ RSBC, 1948, c. 297, s. 2

³⁵ RSBC, 1948, c. 47, 7, especially s. c, d, g, j, and m.

³⁶ Fraternal Council of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin, Secretary of the Orthodox Doukhobors, For His Deliberate Distortion of the Basic Principles of the Doukhobor Faith*, Krestova, British Columbia, n.p., 1954, p. 9-10, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

representing the Sons of Freedom, explained that Sons of Freedom preferred to teach their children “by oral explanations, avoiding the expense of paper and printed books.”³⁷

Sectarian education never received broad public support in British Columbia. Section XIII of the Free School Act of 1865 dictated: “all schools established under the provisions of this Act shall be conducted strictly upon non-sectarian principles.”³⁸ Newspaper magnate John Robson, who would later serve as British Columbia’s premier (1871-1873 and 1882-1892), advised his *British Columbian* readership that in so much as British Columbia “embraces representatives of every important nation of the earth” and hosts “adherents of almost every variety of religious faith under heaven,” it “would be manifestly impossible to induce all these to place their children in schools where the religious creeds and formularies of any denomination are obtruded, or the tests of any particular sect are made the basis of instruction.”³⁹

If the province had a stronger tradition of supporting sectarian schools, perhaps the Freedomites’ rejection of British Columbia’s public schools would have been easier to understand, and their demands easier to accommodate. If keeping their children home from school was the Freedomites’ only transgression, British Columbians might have been content to leave well enough alone. As one reporter for the *Albertan* pointed out, keeping their children from school “doesn’t harm anyone but the children, and if that’s the way the [Sons of Freedom] parents want to bring them up nobody else should object.”⁴⁰

Not only were the Sons of Freedom keeping their children home from school, however: they were also suspected of burning British Columbia’s schools down. By 1950, the *Globe and Mail* reported that nearly 150 schools had been bombed or burned, presumably

³⁷ Fraternal Council, *A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin*, 9.

³⁸ F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1964), 31.

³⁹ 13 April 1864, as cited in Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*, 34.

⁴⁰ “The Wrong Issue,” *Albertan*, 11 September 1953.

by Freedomites.⁴¹ Armed guards were posted in flood-lit school yards in the Kootenay and Boundary regions of British Columbia in an effort to prevent further destruction of British Columbian schools at the hands of zealous Sons of Freedom.⁴²

Pete Switlishoff, confessed Sons of Freedom arsonist, claimed that Freedomites targeted schools because “we think they are teaching militarism, nationalism, [and] egoism.”⁴³ Freedomite Florence Lebedoff explained that “schools forced upon the Doukhobors by the government were destroyed because schools are propagators of a false concept of civilization, patronizing the beast, militarism. We need no specific evidence to prove this for a glance at the school and its results clearly shows that every important weapon of destruction, including the atom bomb, could be traced to the school doorstep and the teacher’s desk.”⁴⁴

The Sons of Freedom believed that state schools promoted violence and militarism. Yet in their effort to protect their children from exposure to these evils, Freedomites engaged in violent activity. Granted, their targets were material and not human, but the same Sons of Freedom children who were held back from school in an effort to keep them away from militaristic influences were nonetheless raised in a culture of violence where their own parents were the perpetrators. This was problematic. Without intervention, Freedomite children were likely to follow their parents’ leads. “There’s no hope of changing them,” mused John Murphy, Slocan School District Board of Trustees representative, “if you can’t educate the children.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ “B.C. Doukhobor Raiders Put Torch to Homes: Arrest 36 Chanting Fanatics,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1950, 1, 2.

⁴² “Terrorist Plagued Lower Slocan Guards Its Homes, Schools,” April 1953, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁴³ As cited in Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 104.

⁴⁴ As cited in F. Henry Johnson, “The Doukhobor of British Columbia: The History of a Sectarian Problem in Education,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 70 no. 4 (1964): 536.

⁴⁵ “Lower Slocan Without Future Unless,” *Nelson Daily News*, 23 April 1952.

Freedomite children were well looked after at home: they were obedient, disciplined, healthy, and well loved.⁴⁶ Living in a tight-knit community ensured that they were subject to their elders' supervision. Freedomite parents, especially mothers, taught their children orally. In many cases, they taught Russian-language literacy, and in some cases, English-language literacy as well. Yet Freedomite children were also exposed to their communities' radical activities and ideology. Nudity, arson, and detonation seemed normal to young Sons of Freedom. Mike Bayoff explained that "everyone around is involved in bombings, burnings and nude parading, so it seems natural."⁴⁷ His daughter admitted to having seen her family home burned four times by Freedomite arsonists and by her parents, but claimed not to be bothered by it, "because it was also happening to other Freedomite children."⁴⁸

Polemicist Simma Holt, concerned for the welfare of Freedomite children and anxious for a resolution to the "Doukhobor problem," was concerned about the fate of young Sons of Freedom who lived alongside their radical family members. "These youngsters find themselves trapped in the frustration, boredom and hate of the dark Sons of Freedom world," she explained, and "unless they have the strength and courage to break out of the trap of unquestioning obedience to parents and avaricious leaders, they will never see the light outside their stormy unhappy settlements."⁴⁹ So long as they only learned what their elders told them, they would undoubtedly become the "terrorists of tomorrow."⁵⁰

Members of the inter-disciplinary University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee (UBC DRC), established in 1950, proposed a number of solutions to British Columbia's "Doukhobor problem." Claudia Lewis strongly recommended that Sons of Freedom children be educated. "Education for Sons of Freedom children," Lewis noted,

⁴⁶ Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?"

⁴⁷ "Top People Force Poor Into Violence: Doukhobor," *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1961, 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, preface.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

“if only through the elementary grades, would help greatly to break down the feelings of difference and inferiority that must accrue to them now through their ignorance, illiteracy, and language handicap when in contact with the ‘outside world.’”⁵¹ “The problem, of course,” Lewis added, “is to find a way to make schooling acceptable to them.”⁵²

Lewis recommended a number of ways to adjust the local public school curriculum to make state education more acceptable to Freedomite parents. The Freedomites would benefit from “superior teachers” who could be creative and flexible in the classroom. She advised a dispensation of all “flag-saluting,” “the singing of patriotic songs,” as well as “marching and any kind of regimentation.” She felt that adopting a “special reading programme,” avoiding the conventional curriculum for material that Doukhobors were likely to view as “a source of spiritual sustenance for their children” (such as material by Leo Tolstoy, whom the Doukhobors favoured) would be helpful. Freedomite parents were likely to appreciate Russian-language instruction for their children, she argued. She recommended a “vital social studies curriculum, which would take the children away from textbooks and the four walls of school” because the Sons of Freedom “have a fear of books, [but] a respect for learning in the practical areas of life.” She also advised musical programming which would harness the “Doukhor child’s astonishing fund of Russian songs and his ability to sing.”⁵³

Notably, Lewis opposed state apprehension of Freedomite children. Lewis was mildly concerned about the “authoritarian” structure of the Sons of Freedom’s parent-child relationship, which could lead to “submissiveness, emotional repression, and constriction of the manipulative and adaptive powers, with the fomenting of underlying hostile drives that may break out in indirect ways, throughout life, particularly if crisis situations arise to

⁵¹ Claudia Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, 118.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

threaten what balance the individual may have achieved with his social environment.”⁵⁴ She made it clear, however, that she would not support removing the children from their homes. “The uprooting of child from home, or mother from child, is one way to start disaster in terms of personality warping. Such a policy of removal would but add grievance to grievance, protest to protest,” she argued.⁵⁵ She felt that the children were better served remaining at home, even if their parents were incarcerated. “Doukhobor children do not suffer serious material neglect when one or both parents are away in jail” she noted, because “the sense of responsibility toward care of children among the Doukhobors is high.”⁵⁶

Lewis’ recommendations reflect keen understanding of Doukhobor culture, and answer many of the Freedomite parents’ specific concerns regarding British Columbia’s public education system; her recommendations also acknowledge the need to educate Freedomite youth. The changes Lewis called for constituted, in some cases, a significant departure from the normal public school curriculum. Most of what Lewis called for involved higher standards for excellence among school staff, and higher standards for morality in the curriculum taught, both of which ought to have been broadly palatable to mid-century British Columbia school officials and Sons of Freedom alike.

What *might* have happened if the recommendations were implemented is open to speculation. In fact, the Commission’s recommendations were ignored. Considering the volatility of the Sons of Freedom problem in Canada, the urgent need to get Freedomite youngsters into the classroom, the authorities’ desperation to effect a change in the situation,

⁵⁴ Ibid. Mona Gleason has argued that experts, especially psychologists, took an increased interest in advising parents on how to raise their children following the conclusion of World War II. Gleason suggests that one “important aspect of postwar parenting involves the place of the family in a larger, more public context and the ways in which the public school and the public health systems incorporated psychological thinking into their dealings with the family and children. Efforts to ensure the psychological stability of young Canadians, quite apart from their physical well-being, shaped the impact public institutions made upon the family and the interactions between institutions and the home” [Gleason, “Disciplining Children, Disciplining Parents: The Nature and Meaning of Advice to Canadian Parents, 1945-1955,” *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 29 (57), 189].

⁵⁵ Lewis, “Childhood and Family Life,” 118.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and the fact that the Commission Lewis served on had been appointed to find solutions to the Sons of Freedom problem, Lewis' recommendations should have appealed to public officials. However, the UBC DRC was commissioned by the Socreds' predecessor, a Progressive Conservative – Liberal coalition government. By the time the UBC DRC's report was made public in 1952, the Socreds were already in power. The Social Credit government was not interested in compromise in 1953: instead, they drew a hard line and declared their intention to enforce school attendance laws over the summer of 1953.

In response to the Socreds' declaration, Freedomite Doukhobors stepped up their protest activities prior to the start of the school year. They were suspected of dynamiting railway tracks. Many burned down their homes and participated in nude parades.⁵⁷ At the end of August 1953, Sons of Freedom who had burned down their own homes established a tent village (*Polatka*) at Perry Siding.⁵⁸ *Polatka* was located within five hundred yards of a small Perry Siding schoolhouse serving five non-Doukhobor and ten Independent Doukhobor children. At the beginning of the school year, the *Polatka* Freedomites told reporters that they had "no intention" of enrolling their children at the school.⁵⁹ In the meantime, the Chair of the South Slocan School Board, Bert Marshall, announced that the board would "stand behind its decision of May 28 to 'prosecute parents of Doukhobor children who fail to attend school'"⁶⁰; a sentiment which Attorney General Robert Bonner echoed on behalf of the provincial authorities.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Bruce Larsen, "Big Problem: Tent-Town Broken Up," *Province* [September 1953]. Sons of Freedom burned down their own homes and removed their clothing both as a demonstration of their rejection of materialism, and as a demonstration of their political or social discontent: thus, Freedomite incidents of nudity and arson may be viewed as political and as religious events. Setting their own homes aflame attracted media attention to their cause, and some fires may have been set to ensure that the Freedomite message would reach the public.

⁵⁸ "Homeless Sons of Freedom Set Up Tent Village at Perry's Siding," 31 Aug 1953, Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "Group Stages Nude Parade: Railway Line Blown Up By Freedomites," [9 September 1953], Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁶¹ "Bonner to Stand By Order," [9 September 1953], Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

British Columbians anticipated a “showdown battle” between authorities and Freedomite Doukhobors on the first day of the school year.⁶² A few hours before the schools opened on 9 September 1953 an explosion damaged a section of the CPR’s Kettle Valley line near Grand Forks, British Columbia.⁶³ Approximately 450 Freedomite children who had been on the truancy list throughout the previous school year, as well as a few who had attended school between 1952 and 1953, failed to show up for school on the first day,⁶⁴ and approximately seventy-five Freedomite adults paraded in the nude at directly across from the school in Perry Siding, just as the school teacher dismissed the children for lunch.⁶⁵

Whatever the Sons of Freedom intended by parading in the nude across from the school – whether it was a religious demonstration, a political statement concerning their opinion of British Columbian schools, an attempt to embarrass and provoke the British Columbia government, or a catalyst for persecution – the effect of the parade was to raise the ire of local citizens and to give the RCMP and the government cause to intervene. Bonner had instructed RCMP not to interfere with Freedomite demonstrations unless the Sons of Freedom left the site and disrobed in public, which they did.⁶⁶

The police entered the *Polatka* encampment and arrested seventy-seven men and seventy-one women. Charged with causing juvenile delinquency because of their parade in front of the school earlier that day, they were immediately taken to Oakalla Prison in Burnaby, British Columbia.⁶⁷ Their 103 children were loaded onto buses and transported

⁶² “Sons of Freedom React With Violence to Compulsory Attendance,” *Medicine Hat News*, 9 Sept 1953.

⁶³ “Group Stages Nude Parade: Railway Line Blown Up By Freedomites,” [9 September 1953], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Carr, “Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?,” 57.

⁶⁷ Under section 33.1.b of the Juvenile Delinquents Act (RSC, 1952), anyone who did “any act producing, promoting, or contributing to a child’s being or becoming a juvenile delinquent or likely to make any child a juvenile delinquent” was guilty of an offence. Section 33.4 qualified that “it is not a valid defence to a prosecution under this section either that the child is of too tender years to understand or appreciate the nature or effect of the conduct of the accused, or that notwithstanding the conduct of the accused the child did not in fact become a juvenile delinquent.”

northwards to New Denver, where they would be housed in a former tuberculosis sanitarium building that had been set aside for this purpose. Sixteen Freedomite women traveled with them.⁶⁸ Under the terms of the Protection of Children Act the children became wards of the provincial superintendent of Child Welfare. Attorney General Robert Bonner announced: “we have said we will maintain law and order in the Kootenays and this...is evidence of our intentions.”⁶⁹

Critics were concerned. Colin Cameron, CCF MLA for Nanaimo, argued that the three-year sentences given to Freedomites for their nude demonstration were too severe. Cameron noted that charging them with causing juvenile delinquency for parading in the nude was a “grave distortion” of the law.⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that the Freedomite parents were only charged with causing juvenile delinquency when they exposed themselves to the five non-Doukhobor children attending the Perry Siding school. This charge was not applied when they exposed themselves to the children of their own community, as they had been doing for several years, nor was this charge applied as they taught their children, implicitly or explicitly, “the technique of their war on government,”⁷¹ arson and dynamiting. It is also interesting to note that the parents were not charged with indecent exposure on this occasion, as they had been in the past. Charging the Freedomites with causing juvenile delinquency might have been a strategy to connect the Freedomites’ “crime” (causing “juvenile delinquency,” rather than “public nudity”) with the “sentence” (in effect, losing custody of their children) in the public’s view.

⁶⁸ “148 Sons Arrested; Polatka Closed: 103 Children Taken into Welfare Care; Freedomites board Coaches Quietly; All Face Charge of Contributing,” *Nelson Daily News*, 10 Sept 1953, 1. It is unclear whether these women requested to accompany the children, or were asked to join them.

⁶⁹ Ivers Kelly, “148 on Special Train: Doukhobors Facing 3-Year Terms,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1953, 1.

⁷⁰ “Sons Sentences Anger MLA” [n.p.] [1954?], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

⁷¹ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 160.

In fact, as William Guy Carr reported in 1954, many non-Doukhobors supported the government's decision to apprehend the Freedomite children. They felt that there was "only one solution to the problem...and that is to remove all Doukhobor children from their parents and raise them in a non-Doukhobor atmosphere. Then, having done this, the government should jail all Doukhobor adults who refuse to be assimilated into our society."⁷² In "Doukhobor Solution," former police officer Bruce Kidd explained that his colleagues felt that the only solution to the Freedomite problem was to: "take every last child of the Sons of Freedom and keep them in provincial welfare care until they come of age." In fact, since the Freedomites' "protest characteristic is instilled from the cradle," Kidd suggested that authorities "take the children as they are born."⁷³

The authorities did not act on Kidd's suggestion to remove Sons of Freedom children indiscriminately, but they did act on their May 1953 proposal to ensure that all school-aged Doukhobor children attended school. The Perry Siding incident of September 1953 catalyzed the government's plan to educate – forcibly, if necessary – the Sons of Freedom children. Beginning in 1953 and lasting until 1959, truant Freedomite children were apprehended by provincial authorities and held at the New Denver sanatorium with those who had been apprehended following the *Polatka* incident on 9 September 1953. In many cases, parents whose children were truant were warned, and were given a choice to either send their children to public school, or to have them taken away.⁷⁴ As it became clear that Freedomite parents would refuse to cooperate, RCMP officers were deployed into Sons of Freedom villages to collect children who had been habitually truant. Parents taunted the RCMP and welfare officers, shouting "try and find them." The authorities were unable to

⁷² Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?"

⁷³ Bruce Larsen, "Doukhobor Solution: 'Take Away Their Children'" [*Province*], [1953?], Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

⁷⁴ "Two Sons' Children Committed to School," 19 October 1957, Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

locate the children, and it was suspected that some youngsters had been sent to stay with friends and relatives.⁷⁵ Others were in hiding.

Finding that warnings were counterproductive in the toughest truancy cases, the RCMP began to conduct surprise raids. The Freedomites were on their guard, and warned each other when the police approached. “You would hear one of the Russian women shouting and it would pass from house to house that the police are coming, and then all us children were, wherever we were, at home, we would run and hide,” Nadia Stoochnoff explains.⁷⁶ In an attempt to catch the Sons of Freedom off-guard, RCMP began to conduct their raids early in the morning. The police came to Stoochnoff’s home at two in the morning: “Mom was shaking us, waking us up and saying that you have to get dressed because the police are here to take you away.”⁷⁷

Many Freedomites felt that the police behaved inappropriately during the raids, aggressively pursuing the children in question and violently restraining their agonized parents. The police pursued the children “like wild animals in the forests, from behind haystacks, in cupboards, wherever their terrified parents had vainly hid them.”⁷⁸ Pete Savinkoff remembered the police “stomping all over the house...breaking everything” while he hid beneath the floorboards; he saw the police push his father to the ground. “One was kicking him and while he started to get up, one was hitting him with a fist and I started kind of crying and they started poking long sticks at me – like beanpoles and stuff,” Savinkoff reported.⁷⁹ In “Facts About ‘Operation Snatch’,” G. N Barisoff reported that “four policemen,

⁷⁵ “Sons’ Young Spirited Away: Roundup of Truants Fails as Children Moved Out of Gilpin,” *Nelson Daily News*, 17 June 1954.

⁷⁶ Stoochnoff was one of the New Denver children. Interview with Nadia Stoochnoff (Slastukin), “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 1, page 3, Jim Hamm Fonds, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, page 4.

⁷⁸ Beatrice Russell-Lightbody, “The Cry of the Children,” Comox, British Columbia, 1959, released by the Fraternal Council of the Union of Christian Communities and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, pamphlet, James Mavor papers, University of Toronto.

⁷⁹ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, page 373.

armed with riding crops and guns, forced their way into the house. They all looked mad, as if they were not in normal condition...the police bothered the children in bed and scared them, even more, with loud shouts...[they] hit an elderly grandma upon her hand with a riding crop.”⁸⁰ Assault charges were laid against offending police officers in a few cases.⁸¹

Given how delicate the situation with the Sons of Freedom was in the 1950s, it seems unlikely that police or governmental authorities would have wanted to give the Freedomites any additional cause for grievance, as the Freedomites’ method of airing their grievances with public protest, arson, and dynamite was well known. These raids were conducted as a way to locate children who had been habitually truant and who were being hidden by parents who refused to comply with school attendance laws: the parents whose children were targeted by these raids were likely more radical and more stubborn than their peers. There are many possible explanations for these accounts. It is possible that these raids were as violent as the Sons of Freedom reported them as being. It is possible that the police had to operate forcefully in order to locate the children in question and separate them from their parents. Or, it is possible that some police officers used the opportunity to intimidate Freedomite families as a show of police power over them, as retribution for past offences, or in an effort to prevent further outbreaks. It is also possible that some of the Freedomites’ reports were distorted. Portraying the raids as brutal might have attracted more public attention and sympathy. The Freedomites’ perception of police authority as a force to be feared and mistrusted, combined with the obvious trauma of being separated from one’s parents or children, might have caused some Freedomites to recall the situation as being

⁸⁰ S. S. Sorokin, “Facts about ‘Operation Snatch’: Personal Recordings of Doukhobor Mothers Whose Children were Taken Away and Results of ‘Successful’ Police Raids in the Kootenays,” n.p., 1955, p. 9, Doukhobor Collection, SFU.

⁸¹ “Sons Claimed Preparing Assault Charge Against RCMP Officer,” [n.p.] 26 October 1956; “Charges Laid in Connection With Child’s Removal” [n.p.] 27 Feb 1957, Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

worse than it was. Or, it is possible that retelling the incidents in a dramatic way reinforces the collective memory of them.

Whether or not the raids *were* as violent as some Freedomites claim is less important than the fact that the raids are *remembered* by the Sons of Freedom as being violent, and that the effect was traumatic for parents and children alike. Fred Makortoff remembers it as “a fairly upsetting, traumatizing kind of time...[everyone] crying and it was a very emotional situation when you are nine years old and you’re getting yanked from your family.”⁸² He still fears police, and suffers flashbacks if surprised by the sight of a man in uniform, an experience many of the New Denver children share. Fred Hoodicoff asks, “can you imagine a kid being chased by the police? I still have a complex - every time I see an officer my heart drops to my stomach.”⁸³ Perhaps the authorities had little choice but to raid Sons of Freedom villages in their campaign to ensure that all Freedomite children received a formal education, but if the campaign was designed to protect the children from harm, the methods the government had to use to ensure the success of the campaign may well have done more harm than good.

Some reports suggested that the children adjusted quickly to their new situation in New Denver. Robert Ross, Welfare Superintendent, suggested that the children were “reasonably happy” though, “like normal children away from home, they miss their parents.”⁸⁴ Other reports suggest, however, that the students created some havoc during their term at New Denver: removing their clothing, breaking windows, damaging school property,

⁸² Interview with Fred Makortoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, p. 341.

⁸³ Ethan Baran, “Fenced Away from Mom’s Love: Interned as Kids, Doukhobors Look for Justice,” *Province*, 16 November 1997, A16-17.

⁸⁴ As cited in Fern Pickering, “Freedomite Children Now Finding New Interest” [n.p.] [195?], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

and refusing to cooperate.⁸⁵ Superintendent of Schools Nelson Allen claimed that the children were

rebellious, suspicious and hostile. They plugged toilets with salt and pepper shakers and other refuse, then flushed them, leaving the dormitories flooded. They would let bath tubs run over, they tipped over buckets of cleaning water and smashed windows. They peeled tintex off the walls in large hunks; they smashed locks and hinges, leaving the doors hanging crazily on one loose screw. The cooks were terrified of them. The older children kicked them, threw food in their faces. They hurled eggs and tomatoes at the walls, ceilings and through broken windows.⁸⁶

John Clarkson, principal of the New Denver School, noted that “the children did little but stand in groups, naked, praying and bawling.”⁸⁷ Fred Konkin admitted: “we found little ways of doing things and just sort of letting the authorities know that we haven’t been broken.”⁸⁸ It quickly became clear to authorities that they would have to find some way to subdue the Freedomite children before any progress could be made on educating or assimilating them.

Initially, the dormitory fell under the auspices of the province’s welfare department, which apparently “believed in what is known as the ‘permissive’ technique of child rearing, that is, in letting the child develop his own personality - all love and affection, no correction.” It appeared to some that the children were “in danger of being spoiled with kindness.”⁸⁹ One reporter noted that while the children “carried on like brats” in the dormitory, the children “were model - and perfectly happy - students” at the school. This was because the school held the students to a higher standard of behaviour than the Department of Welfare personnel did. In an attempt to bring order and discipline to the

⁸⁵ Ibid.; also Oli Daum, “Teatime Topics,” *The Drumheller Mail*, Wednesday, 7 March, 1955, 9.

⁸⁶ “An Unhappy People, the Doukhobor,” *The Daily Colonist*, 1 April 1962.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interview with Fred Makortoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews,.

⁸⁹ “Ill Treated? - Children Were Never So Happy” [n.p.] [195?], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

dormitory, authority over the residence was transferred from the Welfare Department to the Department of Education.⁹⁰ Thus the children's school principal, John Clarkson, became their dormitory master as well.

The children's behaviour improved as Clarkson brought more structure and discipline to the dormitory. The children and parents reported, however, that conditions at New Denver were poor: that the children were being abused, emotionally neglected, made to eat meat, and prevented from communicating in Russian. Upon questioning, Clarkson reported that "the children are allowed to speak Russian -- in fact it is hard to stop them when they are together" though he admitted that "there is no special desire on the part of the staff to encourage the use of the Russian language." Clarkson admitted he felt that it would be best if the children forgotten Russian altogether.⁹¹

Pete Savinkoff remembers that "speaking Russian would be punished by a strap and in a lot of cases visits with our parents would be denied," which was troublesome for those children whose English was not strong, and who were homesick.⁹² Freedomite requests to have Russian taught in the dormitory after school and to conduct Sunday School on the weekend were refused. As the Ombudsperson of British Columbia later reflected: "the children after all had been removed because of the results of their Sects' beliefs and to continue the teachings while still keeping the children apart from their parents seemed contradictory to the point of absurdity."⁹³ As Clarkson explained, "if the Doukhobors want to do so [encourage use of the Russian language] they can take their children home any time they wish, provided of course, they send their children to the local government school five

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Questionnaire presented to the principal John Clarkson and to his staff," 1, Kootenay Advisory Committee on Doukhobor Affairs Papers, 1957-63, UBC. The Committee notes that "the answer was given without realizing in the least the role of the Russian language in the Doukhobor religion."

⁹² Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews.

⁹³ Office of the Ombudsman, British Columbia, "Righting the Wrongs: The Confinement of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor Children," Public Report no. 38, April 1999, 62.

days of the week.”⁹⁴ Refusing the children religious services could be perceived as a contravention of both sections 16 and 41 of the Protection of Children Act, which held that every effort should be made to place children with guardians who share their faith, or to provide children with access to religious services according to their denomination.⁹⁵

It was unlawful for any person who had custody of children under the Protection of Children Act to “ill-treat, neglect, desert, or abandon or expose” their wards.⁹⁶ It seems unlikely, given public scrutiny of the New Denver dormitory and the volatility of members of the Sons of Freedom sect, that school administrators would intentionally mistreat the children in their care. Yet some New Denver children reported physical and sexual abuse incidents.⁹⁷ Clarkson admitted to “administer[ing] punishment, as we do in any other school, with an aim not to inflict pain but to correct wrong motives and, depending on the disposition of the child, we deprive some of special privileges and [discipline] some with the strap.”⁹⁸ Naida Zaytsoff recalls that

We couldn't talk to one another and...if they see us bunching together, right away they will come, real mean and they tell us not to sit together. Always you have to be by yourself. No talking, no nothing....We were just --- we didn't know what's happening, what's going on, where our parents are. And we were just ignored completely, no kind of affection or feelings or anything. Nothing.⁹⁹

One might predict that forcibly removing children from their parents and their community would be at least extremely upsetting for those affected, and probably psychologically damaging in extreme cases. The fact that neither the school nor the

⁹⁴ “Questionnaire,” 1.

⁹⁵ RSBC, 1948, c. 47.

⁹⁶ RSBC, 1948, c. 47, s. 31.

⁹⁷ Interview with Naida Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 56-59; interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 47-49.

⁹⁸ “Questionnaire,” 2.

⁹⁹ Interview with Naida Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 47-49.

dormitory employed a Russian-language interpreter or a counselor suggests that the provincial authorities were ill-prepared to meet the challenges of their experiment with the children, or that they were insensitive to the children's emotional needs, or that they were sorely naïve concerning the impact their actions would have on the young Freedomites. Robert Ross, who supervised the children in the 1950s later admitted that though he had written to the Superintendent of Child Welfare Ruby McKay to say that he "didn't think that this experience would scar the children emotionally" he admitted he changed his mind afterwards.¹⁰⁰

The New Denver school program was adjusted to meet the unique needs of the Sons of Freedom pupils, many of whom had not been inside a school room before. The children were instructed in the dormitory itself, at first, as they refused to attend the local school. The "improvised" classroom was "one of interest to them with its blackboards and chalk, pictures and activities." The teacher was "a soft-voiced woman who likes children and has enough patience with different nationalities to appreciate their beliefs."¹⁰¹ The children's "intelligence varies as it does in any school and they need a bit of watching like all youngsters do."¹⁰² Schools Inspector J. J. McKenzie modified the regular curriculum for the Sons of Freedom pupils, in an effort "to avoid any violation of their religion, particularly militarism." The children were taught "English, printing, spelling and arithmetic, same as in any school." Each pupil was "allowed to progress at his own rate of learning and much individual attention is given by the teacher."¹⁰³ At first, the children were not divided into grades, as even some of the teen-aged Sons of Freedom were unable to read or write when they arrived in New Denver. Clarkson reported in 1957, however, that most of the students

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Robert Ross, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 99-100.

¹⁰¹ Pickering, "Freedomite Children Now Finding New Interest" [n.p.] [195?], Dixon Collection, in author's possession.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

were “smart and keen to learn,” and two of the older children were “doing very well” in high school. “Often we get children,” Clarkson said, “who say ‘I’d always wondered why my father wouldn’t let me go to school’.”¹⁰⁴

Between the New Denver School and the New Denver dormitory, the government of British Columbia had nearly total control over their Sons of Freedom wards. The children went from a family-dominated social environment to an environment devoid of family, except for siblings and cousins also held at New Denver.¹⁰⁵ The children’s parents and families were permitted to visit every other Sunday: a privilege which could be rescinded at a moment’s notice if a child misbehaved during the week. Parents who drove over one hundred miles to visit their children were not always warned of the cancellation in advance. Even the bimonthly visits were considered a nuisance by some school and dormitory administrators, who felt that the visits excited too much emotion in the children. Truant school-aged siblings who had not yet been caught by the RCMP could not freely visit their sisters and brothers in New Denver for fear of being caught.

The New Denver dormitory property was limited on all four sides by the lake and by a wire fence. Sons of Freedom parents could obtain passes to enter the dormitory property, but only six passes could be permitted in at any time, and the parents did not make use of the passes in any case.¹⁰⁶ It is possible that the Sons of Freedom parents were not made aware of the passes, or that they declined to use them because they did not wish to be seen to be complicit with the dormitory program.¹⁰⁷ In any case, Sons of Freedom parents and children spent Sunday visits divided by a chainlink fence. Parents passed picnic baskets and blankets to their children over the fence, and thus the family ate together, on separate sides of the

¹⁰⁴ Rowntree, “‘Firm, Fair’ Policy on Sons’ Schooling May Solve Problem,” *Nelson Daily News*, 16 January 1957, 3.

¹⁰⁵ B.C., Office of the Ombudsman, “Righting the Wrongs,” 2.

¹⁰⁶ “Questionnaire,” 2. Rowntree, “Forced to Go to School in B.C.,” 27 Aug 1957.

¹⁰⁷ William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 138.

fence. John Clarkson labeled the fence “the Freedomite’s propaganda prop.”¹⁰⁸ Certainly, the RCMP patrols and the fence served to create the impression that the school was a sort of prison camp.¹⁰⁹ In fact, this was not far from the truth: the children were not permitted to leave the New Denver dormitory for summer or religious holidays, and would only be allowed to return home “to see their dying parent, but not any other relative or friend,”¹¹⁰ a severe hardship considering how close-knit the Sons of Freedom community was, and how interwoven their social and religious practices were.¹¹¹

The Freedomites did not receive much public sympathy. Press reports emphasized how “happy” the New Denver school situation was for the children.¹¹² A recreation instructor was being provided “to supervise the children’s spare time, and a new building is in course of construction which will be fitted up as a play room for use during the winter months.” In the summer, the children (who were unable to return home) were occupied “quite happily with outdoor games and swimming.”¹¹³ Though J. V. McAree of the *Globe and Mail* admitted that it was “a cruel thing to separate children from their parents...it would obviously be against the public interest to permit these children to grow up like young savages.” “Since their parents refuse to educate the children, it is obviously the duty of the state to intervene,” McAree continued.¹¹⁴

So long as the children were treated kindly, many citizens seemed to believe that the New Denver experiment would be successful. “It is a misfortune when any child has to be taken from its natural parents,” the *Nelson Daily News* reported in 1956, though “there are

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, “The Doukhobor of British Columbia,” 539.

¹⁰⁹ J. V. McAree, “Troublesome Sons of Freedom,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 July 1957, 6; B.C. Office of the Ombudsman, “Righting the Wrongs,” 51.

¹¹⁰ “Questionnaire,” 2.

¹¹¹ Russell-Lightbody, “The Cry of the Children,” 2.

¹¹² “New Denver School a Happy Experiment,” *Nelson Daily News*, 15 June 1956.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ McAree, “Troublesome Sons of Freedom,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 July 1957, 6.

many cases when in the child's interest it is better that he be removed from their custody."¹¹⁵ "The guiding principle of those in charge [of the children] should be to make their lives as happy as possible, to show that there is love...in Canadian hearts and that the Canadian way of life gives a fuller opportunity for happiness than the narrow bigoted existence of their parents," the *Daily News* reported; "if the future should bring a better life for these unfortunate children the money will have been well spent."¹¹⁶

Not everyone shared this opinion, however. Shortly after the apprehension of the first Freedomite children in 1953, the President of the Canadian Association of Social Workers declared that "for the best care of the children they should remain in their own home, in the home of a relative, or in an environment as nearly consistent with their own cultural background as possible."¹¹⁷ The President added:

experience has amply shown that an individual cannot be brought into being a good citizen by force. Good citizenship comes from good parent-child relationship. Where the problem is not with one individual but with a group, successful work can only be brought about by work with the group as a whole. This means non-separation of children and parents.¹¹⁸

Welfare officials also admitted that "though it has co-operated in the programme to date it is only fair to say that the Department of Welfare is not happy about being used for this purpose and would prefer some other final penalty for parents than that of losing custody of their children."¹¹⁹

Other reporters sounded the alarm early in September of 1953. The *Nelson Daily News* recalled that separating children and parents had been attempted in the early 1930s, and

¹¹⁵ "The Sons of Freedom," *Nelson Daily News*, 3 May 1956.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Office of the Ombudsman (B.C.), "Righting the Wrong," 25.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

the effects were problematic.¹²⁰ The *News* wondered how many of the Freedomites arrested in the *Polatka* incident had parents who had served time at Piers Island two decades previously.¹²¹ If the apprehension of the Freedomite children was “merely designed to be a punishment for non-conformity” then, the *News* argued, it was “certainly open to vigorous criticism.” If the New Denver experiment was “the starting point of a fair and considered program with the future of the children in mind,” however, “then, and only then, is it acceptable.” Though “the Social Credit Government w[ould] be making British Columbia history if it carried through a program of sensible, consistent action,” the *News* added.¹²²

At the end of the 1953, the *Nelson Daily News* cautioned: “so little is known of the present plan.”¹²³ The authorities’ objectives, and the potential of the residential school program to meet those objectives, were unclear. The lack of information about what plan was being followed frustrated opposition members of the provincial legislative assembly as well, who criticized the Social Credit government “for its lack of a ‘clear and bold, sane and positive’ Doukhobor policy.”¹²⁴

Hugh Herbison, who had served as an advisor and liaison between the troubled Sons of Freedom and the government, resigned his position on the Doukhobor Consultative Committee in disgust. In a letter to the editor of the *Nelson Daily News*, Herbison explained:

it is commonly assumed that reasonable, constructive methods of attacking ‘the Doukhobor problem’ have been tried, and have failed. This is not so. Such measures, backed by scientific investigation, have never been applied consistently to the situation...no consistent program of reform and rehabilitation has ever been

¹²⁰ When Freedomites convicted of public nudity were sent to Piers Island penal colony to serve their 3-year terms, they were not permitted to bring their children.

¹²¹ “Punishment Alone Futile: Move on Sons Should be Starting Point,” *Nelson Daily News*, 17 Sept 1953.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ “About What is Not Known,” *Nelson Daily News*, 31 December 1953.

¹²⁴ Citing CCF Opposition Leader Arnold Webster, “Gov’t Douk ‘Remedies’ Under Fire,” *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Sept [1953].

applied by any provincial or federal government...some people think that other methods have been tried. They are confusing occasional leniency after mass arrests, with a program of intelligent kindness.¹²⁵

Herbison warned that the plan to forcibly assimilate the Freedomite children was likely to backfire.¹²⁶ He asked: “how do you ‘change’ ideas, and children, in a democracy? Is it the Canadian way to break up family life and hold children of a minority group in an institution of the state? Are Canadian social scientists and educationalists and administrators so barren of skill and imagination, that they must resort to such methods? Have they tried anything else?”¹²⁷

Representing left-leaning eastern Canadian public opinion, the *Toronto Star* editorialized in “How Inhuman Can Canadians Be?”: “what kind of inhuman practice is this? It is unbelievable that it has been going on now for four years without Canadians across the country protesting.” The *Star* noted that there had been “little outcry against this...cruel and flagrant violation of basic human rights.” The *Star* deemed the Socred’s social engineering plan “foolish,” arguing that separating children from the “normal human relations of a loving family” was a sure way to promote delinquency. “This is a brutal and mistaken policy,” the *Star* concluded, asserting that “some other solution must be found.”¹²⁸

The *Star*’s editorial provoked a spate of letters to the editor. W. J. O’Conner of Toronto wrote to support the *Star*’s position, deeming the school a “shameful and outrageous concentration camp” and urging the editor to “continue until the consciences of enough people are aroused to do something about it.”¹²⁹ Geoff R. Mitchum defended the British

¹²⁵ Hugh Herbison to Editor, “Sound Alternatives to Freedomite Program,” *Nelson Daily News*, [195?], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ “How Inhuman Can Canadians Be?” *Toronto Star*, 27 July 1957, 6.

¹²⁹ Voice of the People: Camps for ‘Douk’ Children ‘Shameful’: W. J. O’Connor of Toronto to Editor, “Calls it Shameful,” *Toronto Star*, 31 July 1957, 6.

Columbian government's actions, arguing that there was little difference between New Denver and "the Children's Aid in Toronto."¹³⁰ Sylvia Easton of Muskoka, Ontario responded:

What is wrong with the Canadian people when they can sit back and ignore this shameful treatment of innocent children? Here in Canada we are punishing children who have done no wrong, depriving them of the most precious treasure a growing child can have – parental love. If the province of British Columbia stole money from the children, everyone would be up in arms, but we sit back and complacently allow a far greater theft. It looks like an ideal set-up for the production of mentally disturbed children...Wake up, Canadians! Let us demand justice for these little children.¹³¹

R. Haldenby argued that the British Columbian government's New Denver program had a "strong totalitarian taint," and asked "it if could happen to the Doukhobors – provoking as the Sons of Freedom have been – what is to prevent similar moves against other minority groups?"¹³²

In 1959, the *Star* ran an editorial commenting on Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's proposed Bill of Rights. The editorial noted that the federal Bill of Rights seemed ironic and inadequate in light of action taken against minority groups in the provinces, citing British Columbia's apprehension of Doukhobor [Freedomite] children in particular. The editorial quoted McGill law professor Frank R. Scott, who speculated that if Canadians heard that "the Russians were taking children from their homes and putting them into state schools we would be very shocked."¹³³

When the New Denver School program ended in August of 1959, the *Star* celebrated the children's release from "prison school." The school should be closed permanently, the

¹³⁰ Geoff R. Mitchum, letter to ed., "Not Concentration Camp," *Toronto Star*, 12 August 1957, 6.

¹³¹ Sylvia Easton of Muskoka, ON, letter to ed., "Shame of Canada," *Toronto Star*, 14 August 1957, 6.

¹³² R. Haldenby, letter to ed., "Totalitarian Taint," *Toronto Star*, 17 August 1957, 6.

¹³³ Ben Rose "Dief's Bill of Rights Judged Inadequate," *Toronto Star*, 8 May 1959, 7

Star argued. “Never, never again should squads of RCMP be sent raiding Krestova, citadel of the Sons, with tiny boys and girls their quarry,” the *Star* declared. Canadians should “realize that imprisoning children behind barbed wire for years at a time is not an education in democracy, freedom, the rights of the individual, and other beliefs we hold dear,” the *Star* pointed out, “nor is it good advertisement for the Canadian way of life.”¹³⁴

Simma Holt, who had personally witnessed Freedomite demonstrations and interviewed Freedomite protesters, objected to sympathizers’ criticism. Sympathizers, especially those from far away, were “not aware of the real destruction that awaited the lives of children returned to the training of their parents.” Holt argued that society “owe[d] these youngsters the same chance as they would give non-Doukhobor children whose start in life was as cruel and hazardous.”¹³⁵

The Sons of Freedom, of course, were completely opposed to the government’s effort to force education on them, and made their displeasure known through their words and their actions. They already had a negative view of state-sponsored education, and were even more suspicious of the New Denver school situation. They were outraged that the children, who were the parents’ “sacred property,” had been turned into “Sacred property.”¹³⁶ The Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, representing the Sons of Freedom, argued that the government’s aim was “not to educate, but to mould the mind, the heart and the soul of our children according to their bloodthirsty image and forever seal them with patriotism and loyalty to their commands. They want our children to blindly obey them and give their life for their wealth, their power and their fame.”¹³⁷ The Sons of Freedom

¹³⁴ “End School Behind Barbed Wire,” *Toronto Star*, 5 August 1959, 6.

¹³⁵ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 296.

¹³⁶ Mothers, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, “A Mother’s Lament,” 17 March 1954, Quaker Papers, 1954-58, UBC.

¹³⁷ Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, “Remain Silent? ‘Never!’,” Gilpin, B.C. (10 July 1954), pgs. 1, 4, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC.

argued that their children were subjected to “school indoctrination” in order to become “thoroughly assimilated and forced to adopt the Canadian way of life.”¹³⁸ They protested the government’s efforts to “scientifically and systematically” mould the children to “become what you [W. A. C. Bennett] and your ‘experts’ consider to be ‘good’ Canadian citizens.”¹³⁹

Fred Makortoff speculated that the children at New Denver were “the focal point in the battle for assimilation that the Doukhobors were fighting...[and] the Doukhobors themselves were using the children...as a point to try and avoid that assimilation, to try and put their ideas into the kids’ heads and as well as their religious upbringing and their whole lifestyle.”¹⁴⁰ This point is key. The Freedomite parents’ primary fear was that formal education would assimilate their children to Canadian way-of-life; in the meantime, much of the Freedomites’ activity was aimed at preventing assimilation. The “Doukhor Mother of Kootenay and Grand Forks District” indicated that they wanted their children “to be intelligent and wise just the same as you want your children to be,” but they could not consent to state education, because of the risk of acculturation and assimilation.¹⁴¹ In a letter to Sorokin published in the local press, the Sons of Freedom cried: “look what happened to the Orthodox [Doukhobors] who compromised! Look what happened to their children; they are participating in everything!”¹⁴²

Fearing that education would lead to the assimilation of their children to Canadian culture, the Sons of Freedom refused to cooperate with provincial authorities. John Perepelkin warned Canadian authorities that they would have to “jail the entire 2500-member

¹³⁸ Fraternal Council, “A Public Indictment of J. J. Verigin,” 3.

¹³⁹ Joseph E. Podovnikov on behalf of the Mothers and Children and Fellow Members of the Union of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors of British Columbia to W. A. C. Bennett, Premier of British Columbia, 12 January 1959, Copies to PM John Diefenbaker and HRH Queen Elizabeth, Doukhor Collection, UBC.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Fred Makortoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 52-55, page 352.

¹⁴¹ Doukhor Mother of Kootenay and Grand Forks District [Sons of Freedom]: Mrs. Polly Lawrenooff, Mrs. Polly Koodrin, Mrs. Anne Davidoff, “Appeal of Doukhor Mothers to all their Canadian Sisters and to All Mothers in Christ,” 11 February 1955, Doukhor Collection, UBC.

¹⁴² “Letter to the Editor...: Sons Want Sorokin to Return to Negotiate Proposed Schooling Plan,” [n.p.] [195?], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

[Sons of Freedom] sect” because Sons of Freedom “would rather die than see the children go to school.”¹⁴³ “If he [Bonner] wants our children in schools, police must pull them away from us,” Perepelkin said, but he warned that “they can arrest 3000 Sons of Freedom and then they’ll have to arrest maybe 3000 more, because others will come to take their place - we grow through persecution.”¹⁴⁴

Those who felt that apprehending the children would bring peace to the Kootenay and Boundary regions of British Columbia were mistaken: Sons of Freedom depredations continued unabated. Indignant Sons of Freedom shamed the government with their remarks, characterizing the province’s actions as undemocratic, illogical, and unduly brutal. Referring to the government as a group of “despots,” “Doukhobor Mothers of the Kidnapped Children” claimed: “statistics reveal that in Canada one in every twelve persons is a mental case. Judging by the policy of the B.C. government to innocent children it is apparent that the entire government cabinet is composed of mental cases.”¹⁴⁵ Removal of the Freedomite children was compared to “Herod in the most heinous crime of modern spiritual Genocide”¹⁴⁶; the Freedomite leader Stefan Sorokin accused Attorney General Bonner of “repeating the same barbarous acts of KING HEROD who had killed 40,000 infants in his attempt to stop the coming of Jesus Christ to this world.”¹⁴⁷ Sons of Freedom labeled the New Denver dormitory a “Canadian Buchenwald,”¹⁴⁸ and appealed to Dag Hammarsjold, Secretary General of the United Nations, arguing that the article of the United Nations Genocide Convention, which dictates that a government must not forcibly separate parents

¹⁴³ Bruce Larsen, “Freedomite Stand: ‘They Can Kill Us, We Wont’ Give In’,” *Vancouver Province* [1953]; “Sons Would Die Rather Than Send Kids to School,” [1953], Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Doukhobor Mothers of the Kidnapped Children, “Appeal to Organized Labour of Canada” (Trail, B.C.: Hall Printing Co. Ltd., 195-?), p. 1, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph E. Podovnikov...to W. A. C. Bennett, Premier of British Columbia, p. 2, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

¹⁴⁷ Sorokin, “Facts about ‘Operation Snatch’,” 3.

¹⁴⁸ Sorokin, *Doukhobor Affairs Inside Out...: A letter to Col. F. J. Mead* (The Union of Christian Communities and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, 1957?), p. 15 and Doukhobor Mothers, “Appeal to Organized Labour of Canada,” p. 1, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

and children of minority ethnic and religious groups had been contravened: the Sons of Freedom parents further complained that their children, thus separated, were “being subjected to systematized brain-washings.”¹⁴⁹ “And this is supposed to be a civilized country!” the Sons of Freedom exclaimed.¹⁵⁰

The Sons of Freedom presented themselves as victims of ethnic and religious persecution, and characterized the British Columbian and Canadian governments and the RCMP as oppressive. By framing federal and provincial authorities in a totalitarian light, the Sons of Freedom attempted to engage public sympathy and shame the government into changing its policies concerning the Doukhobors in general, and the Sons of Freedom in particular. If aimed at swaying public opinion, the Freedomites’ campaign was somewhat successful. If aimed at changing the government’s policy, the letter writing and protest activities were ineffective. The only way for the children to be released from the New Denver dormitory was for the parents to swear that they would comply with the government’s school attendance policy.

As it became clear that the government meant to persist with its school ultimatum, the Sons of Freedom modified their position. By 1957, the *Nelson Daily News* announced that “a number of Freedomite parents have braved the threats of intimidation and voluntarily sent their children to public schools rather than have them taken away” since the government announced its “get-tough” policy.¹⁵¹ Finally, on 12 April 1959, angry female Freedomites confronted the male members of the Fraternal Council of the CCBRD. The women complained that the Fraternal Council’s plans had failed. They were fed up. One woman reportedly screamed: “You men have been playing with the government long enough. We’re

¹⁴⁹ “CBC Radio Newscast, May 10, 1955, Vancouver, B. C.,” *Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79*, UBC.

¹⁵⁰ Russell-Lightbody, “The Cry of the Children,” 4; Joseph E. Podovnikov...to W. A. C. Bennett, Premier of British Columbia, 2; “Remain Silent? ‘Never!’,” 3.

¹⁵¹ Rowntree, “Forced to Go to School in B.C.” *Nelson Daily News*, 27 Aug 1957.

going to take over.”¹⁵² This evidence strongly suggests that the decision to resist compulsory education and compel the authorities to force the school attendance issue was made collectively by the male representatives of the CCBRD's Fraternal Council rather than at the discretion of each family. It also suggests that the Fraternal Council's strategy could only work so long as the children's mothers endorsed the plan.

Six years of separation from their children proved too high a price to pay for the “cause,” however. The government had made it clear that they were not going to yield, so the Freedomite mothers did. One woman admitted that “five years was too much.”¹⁵³ In August 1959, the *Globe and Mail* reported: “shawled Sons of Freedom Doukhobor mothers sat in grim silence today, as a magistrate announced the release of 77 Freedomite children who had been in Provincial Government custody.”¹⁵⁴ Magistrate Evans wished the parents sitting in silence in his courtroom “good luck and happiness” in the future.¹⁵⁵

Though this was good news for the children and their parents alike, reintegration into Freedomite home life was not necessarily easy for the youngsters who had spent six years away from their community. The government's objective in forcing education on the children was to ensure that they would not follow in their parents' footsteps. In some cases, Sons of Freedom children rejected the teachings of their parents and of their community, and grew up feeling alienated from family and culture alike.

In many cases, survivors of New Denver were left emotionally and psychologically damaged, whether traumatized, depressed, infuriated, or numbed by the experience. Naida Zaytsoff remembers that she felt “no feelings of any kind... I just couldn't show any emotion -- nothing.”¹⁵⁶ Pete Savinkoff explains: “can you imagine just touching fingers with your

¹⁵² “Women Assume Rule of Doukhobor Group,” *Globe*, 14 April 1959, 1.

¹⁵³ “Free Children of Doukhobors After 5 Years,” *Globe*, 1 August 1959, 38.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Naida Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 47-49, page 313.

parents...that's all. No Hugs. Kisses through the little squares" of the fence between the New Denver children and their visitors. "What kind of education did we get by kissing through a fence?"¹⁵⁷ Many survivors of New Denver suffered psychological difficulty, and struggled with substance abuse, depression, and relationship issues, all of which they relate back to their experience of detachment and forced assimilation in New Denver. "They seem well adjusted until you start talking about New Denver," Fred Makortoff explains, and then "there's a whole range of emotions starts to well up. And you know that stuff hasn't been dealt with."¹⁵⁸

Pete Savinkoff admitted to being "really angry at the RCMP, the government and anybody that had anything to do with the government" following his release from the New Denver dormitory.¹⁵⁹ This outcome had been predicted by critics of the Social Credit's New Denver experiment. As one critic explained, the government expected that graduates of New Denver would be "Canadians" rather than "rebellious young Doukhobors." But this seemed "unduly optimistic."¹⁶⁰ The Sons of Freedom agreed. The New Denver experience engendered "a solid crystallization for a generation at least - of a rigid antagonism and repulsion, in both the children and the parents - toward everything THAT YOU AND CANADA STAND FOR," Joseph E. Podovnikov argued on behalf of the Sons of Freedom.¹⁶¹

In fact, once the children were released, Freedomite depredations activities escalated. Sons of Freedom were implicated in incidents including an explosion at the New Denver dormitory, and the damage or destruction of "a railway bridge, railway tracks, power transmission poles, a school, an Anglican church, a department store, a public hall, the Trail

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Joe Sherstobitoff and Fred Konkin, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 115-116, page 689.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Fred Makortoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 52-55.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 59-62, 410.

¹⁶⁰ McAree, "Troublesome Sons of Freedom," *Globe*, 5 July 1957, 6.

¹⁶¹ Joseph E. Podovnikov...to W. A. C. Bennett, Premier of British Columbia, 2. Capitals in original.

Post Office, the Nelson courthouse, and two entire Orthodox Doukhobor settlements” in 1962 alone.¹⁶² It is possible that while their children were controlled by the state, the Sons of Freedom were hesitant to cause too much trouble; having their children at home again might have made the Sons of Freedom radicals more fearless. It is possible that the increased depredations over the 1960s were a response to the changes parents observed in their own children.

In a public report to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia entitled “Righting the Wrongs: The Confinement of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor Children,” investigators argued that though some of the New Denver children were left with “fond memories...such as life-long friendships made, sporting and other recreational activities provided, outings, such as a field trip”¹⁶³ many of the children suffered “significant harm” being “forced to live in an institutional setting, being removed from their communities,” and being “treated as if they were criminals,” and were ultimately “scarred, in the long term, by their institutional experiences in New Denver.”¹⁶⁴ Investigators concluded that the Sons of Freedom children were “entitled to an explanation, an apology and compensation for their confinement.”¹⁶⁵ Dulcie McCallum, provincial Ombudsman, declared that the 150 children who endured the New Denver experiment experienced “a loss of love, nurturing, guidance and childhood; physical and psychological maltreatment; loss of privacy, dignity, self-respect and individuality and loss of civil liberties.”¹⁶⁶

Despite McCallum’s findings, the Sons of Freedom have yet to hear an apology from the government for their incarceration of the children at the New Denver dormitory.

¹⁶² “Blast Damages Building Used by Doukhobors,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 January 1962, 3, and “The Doukhobor Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6

¹⁶³ Office of the Ombudsman (B.C.), “Righting the Wrong,” 24.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 and 69.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶⁶ As cited in Rod Mickleburgh, “Doukhobor Children Wronged, B.C. Told: Ombudsman Urges Clear, Public Apology,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 April 1999.

Attorney General Geoff Plant issued a statement of regret in legislature in October of 2004, but explained that the government did not intend to make a formal apology, much less offer compensation, to the New Denver children.¹⁶⁷ The Sons of Freedom were dissatisfied with this response, especially considering both Japanese Canadians, interned in British Columbia during World War II, and First Nations Canadians, who also suffered residential schools, have both been offered apologies and compensation packages.

The government faced a very difficult problem in the 1950s. Sons of Freedom Doukhobors were responsible for, or at least were thought to be responsible for a great deal of upset and destruction in the interior of British Columbia. Their neighbours and provincial authorities were growing increasingly alarmed by and frustrated with the Freedomites' depredations, and many considered it a mere matter of luck that the number of injuries and fatalities had been low. Public pressure on the government and on law enforcement officers to do something to solve the so-called "Doukhobor problem" was mounting in the Kootenay and Boundary regions of British Columbia in the early 1950s. The usual prosecutions and punishments had failed to do more than reinforce the Freedomites' sense of their own martyrdom and fan the flames of their discontent. The mood for understanding, compassion, and compromise was waning: many non-Doukhobors and even Doukhobors from other groups felt that the time for negotiations had concluded, and that the time for decisive action had arrived. Something had to be done. The public – especially residents of the southern interior of British Columbia – were prepared for a radical resolution to the Sons of Freedom problem.

Many felt the problem could be resolved through education. The fact that some Sons of Freedom parents refused to send their children to public schools thus constituted a major

¹⁶⁷ Amy O'Brian, "Doukhobors Protest Government's Reluctance to Apologize," *Vancouver Sun*, 10 November 2004, B3.

obstacle: if Sons of Freedom parents retained total control over their children, the children were likely to grow up to be as backwards, sheltered, fanatical, and dangerous as their parents. Preventing this outcome was seen to be of paramount importance by those who evaluated the Sons of Freedom problem.

Not all aspects of the New Denver experience were negative. The children were kept together with their brothers, sisters, and cousins, and as such, were not totally isolated: the government could have elected to divide all the children among foster families in British Columbia instead, which would have offered different and perhaps more serious challenges. The children who attended school did learn literacy and numeracy, and many children discovered that they enjoyed learning. On reflection, some Sons of Freedom who received an education will admit that learning to read and write was positive, and will admit that their parents' objection to public school may have been overzealous.

The Sons of Freedom parents did have a choice in the matter, and in refusing to send their children to the local public school for six hours a day, five days a week, the parents knew (at least after 1953) that the government would seek to remove the children to a remote location, where they would be under the government's control twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year for several years. Had the Sons of Freedom sent their children to school voluntarily, the children might have been slowly assimilated by British Columbia's education system, but they would have had the psychological benefit of living in their home community, with the love and supervision of their own parents and family members, and with the cultural influence of their fellow Sons of Freedom. By allowing the government to remove their children, the Sons of Freedom parents allowed the very outcome they feared in the first place: without any parental or community support, the children were totally vulnerable to the assimilative factors of British Columbia's education system as wards of the state.

The Sons of Freedom cited militarism and the glorification of violence as being one of the most offensive, irreconcilable aspects of British Columbia's public education system. Ironically, Sons of Freedom children who lived at home were exposed much more than the average Canadian child to the effects of militarism and violence just in observing the activities of the elder members of their communities. Most Sons of Freedom children had seen and even participated in nude demonstrations. Most had observed their own homes or the homes of their friends burnt to the ground. Certainly, the Sons of Freedom children lived in a climate of fear and victimization, and their experience might be compared to that of children living in areas of the world actually affected by war. In their effort to prevent the apprehension of their children by concealing them in haystacks, gardens, beneath floorboards, in cupboards, and under beds, Sons of Freedom parents exposed the children to the experience of being hunted and captured, and in some cases, injured at the hands of the RCMP. It could be argued that the Sons of Freedom parents unwittingly exposed their children to greater militarism and violence at home than the children ever would have experienced as pupils at the local public school.

Freedomite parents believed that, by refusing to cooperate with the government, they were standing up for their religious beliefs. The Doukhobors, and particularly the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, had a tradition of standing up for their religious beliefs in the face of certain death or torture, and the stories of martyrs who had stood strong in the face of oppositions were retold among the Doukhobors with great pride. Many Sons of Freedom, in fact, were direct descendants of popular Doukhobor martyr-heroes. To crumble in the face of opposition was seen to be weak, a contravention of Doukhobor beliefs, and a betrayal of the ancestors who had suffered for the cause.

The Sons of Freedom perceived themselves to be the pious vanguard – the protectorate – of true Doukhobor faith. It was their responsibility to be the last defense

against not only persecution, but assimilation as well. If the Sons of Freedom acquiesced to the government's demands, and permitted the assimilation of their children, they would not be fulfilling their perceived mission as the defenders of the faith.

Furthermore, Sons of Freedom identity was very much founded on the experience of trauma and persecution. In their frame of understanding, government and police authorities, both in Russia and in Canada, were oppressors. Having their children removed by police officers at the request of the provincial government fit the Freedomites' understanding of their relationship with state authority. By permitting the children to suffer at the hands of the state authority, the Sons of Freedom parents were exposing their children to a "Doukhobor" experience. The pain of separation, oppression, and compulsion that the children experienced as wards of the state at New Denver was synonymous with the separation, oppression, and compulsion that their parents experienced as prison inmates and exiles. Synonymous as it was with Freedomite identity, the New Denver experience would make the children worthy of the Son of Freedom title, and would enable them to share in the responsibility and challenge of being a Freedomite Doukhobor.

Having their children interned at the New Denver dormitory also heightened the Freedomite adults' sense of being a harassed and oppressed people, and afforded them multiple opportunities to publicize their discontent and to sway public opinion in their favour, as they labeled the British Columbian government as despotic, and characterized the government's actions as genocide. Having to give up their children for the cause made the cause all the more important.

This is not to suggest that the Freedomite parents wanted their children to suffer, or that the Sons of Freedom consciously chose to put their children through such trauma to serve their vague political ends. The fact that the Sons of Freedom parents had the option to bring their children home and did not take it does, however, require explanation. Ultimately,

the Sons of Freedom must have felt that they were doing what was best for their children and for their cause. It is tragically ironic that in their fight to prevent the assimilation and suffering of their children, the Sons of Freedom parents themselves bear at least some of the blame for their children's plight in the 1950s. The Freedomites' attempt to resist the assimilation of their children actually accelerated it.

Though the government hoped that forcing education on Sons of Freedom Doukhobors would solve the "Doukhobor problem" once and for all, the problem persisted after the termination of the New Denver school program in 1959. Sacred Attorney General Robert Bonner called for increased law enforcement in response to escalating depredations in the early 1960s. This involved increased policing, more rigorous application of the law, and firmer sentencing practices. Bonner planned to use one of Canada's oldest laws to deal with Freedomites who were engaged in the so-called "black work." The law in question provided that:

Whenever two or more persons confederate, combine, or conspire to do any act of violence in order to intimidate or to put any force of constraint upon any legislative council, legislative assembly, or house of assembly in any one of the provinces within Canada, each of such persons shall be guilty of a felony.

Breaking this law incurred a penalty of up to fourteen years' imprisonment.¹⁶⁸ Applying this law implies that the public perceived Freedomite activism as a threat to Canadian government. It is worth noting, as Crown Prosecutor Theobald G. Bowen-Colthurst did in 1962, that charges of intimidating parliament had never before been laid in Canada's 95-year history.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ "Early Law is Basis for B.C. Prosecution," *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 1962, 29.

¹⁶⁹ "Doukhobors Pack Jails After Raid," *Globe and Mail*, 26 March 1962, 1.

Increased vigilance and expanded use of law to pursue those responsible for committing depredations activity created another problem: where to put the Sons of Freedom once apprehended. Jail space in British Columbia was at a premium, and the Sons of Freedom required special consideration given their unique spectrum of issues: desire for vegetarian menu, proclivity towards arson, mental health concerns, and low likelihood of rehabilitation. In 1962 the government of Canada committed to constructing a maximum-security prison specifically for Sons of Freedom inmates. The prison was to be constructed of “low-cost, fireproof, prefabricated steel...enclosed by a high wire fence.” No provision of mental health professionals was planned, because the authorities considered the Freedomites’ issues to be “religious” rather than mental, and expected efforts at “rehabilitation” to be “futile.”¹⁷⁰ The federal authorities sought to separate Freedomite inmates from others, because, as Justice Minister Davie Fulton explained, maximum-security institutions throughout the country were already “overcrowded and the introduction of these people, who refuse to accept training or treatment facilities and who will not accept institutional routine, would greatly hamper the existing penal reform program.”¹⁷¹

As part of their law-and-order strategy, the Socreds bolstered the police force in British Columbia, and at times considered calling in the military to deal with Freedomite unrest. Of a British Columbian RCMP force of seven hundred, two hundred were posted to locations in the Kootenays. When the situation in the interior heated up, additional officers were sent in to help manage the situation.¹⁷² During the height of Freedomite unrest in 1962, British Columbia welcomed RCMP reinforcements from Alberta in an effort to improve

¹⁷⁰ “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

¹⁷¹ “Doukhobor Jail Site is Shifted,” *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 1962, 29.

¹⁷² Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 8; “Doukhobor Leaders Disagree on Proposal,” *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 1958, 5; Simma Holt, “After Their Years of Terror, Freedomites Face a ‘Vengeance’ Threat... The Fury of the Miners,” *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1962, 7

security in the Kootenay region.¹⁷³ Government-issued threats to call in the militia, and public pleas for the government to do so, recurred throughout the Socreds' term in office.¹⁷⁴

In fact, the “Doukhobor problem” prompted the creation of a special police task force in the early 1960s, the so-called “D” squad (the “D” stood for “depredation”).¹⁷⁵ This special detachment of a dozen or so officers, some of which spoke Russian, was assembled to focus on the unique challenges of policing the Sons of Freedom.¹⁷⁶ Despite their efforts to monitor the situation and collect evidence against the perpetrators, they were hard-pressed to make headway, partially because the Sons of Freedom in question were cunning and able to operate below the radar.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the “D” Squad was able to identify some of the perpetrators and negotiate an uneasy peace in Freedomite-inhabited areas.

The police employed a number of strategies to get control of the situation. At times, they hung back and allowed events to unfold within the bounds of the law, keeping a close watch in case the tone of the event should change. When the Sons of Freedom embarked on their march to Agassiz in 1962, for example, the police responded by agreeing to stand back so long as the marchers did not create a traffic hazard. The Freedomites, who expected police intervention (and might even have courted it as a means of attracting public sympathy)

¹⁷³ “More Mounties Moving In: Ottawa Plans Special Prison for Doukhobor Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1962, 1.

¹⁷⁴ “Threatens to Fly in Army if Doukhobors Turbulent,” *Toronto Star*, 4 June 1953, 30; “Railmen Will Strike [sic] If Douks Uncurbed: Fear More Dynamited CPR Tracks,” *Medicine Hat News*, 3 Aug 1953; “Special B.C. Police Ready for ‘Douks,’” *Montreal Gazette*, 5 August 1953, 2; “CPR Track Blasted Near Nelson: Doukhobor Sect Blamed; Another Home Also Burns in Latest Violence,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 August 1953; “From the Imprisoned Doukhobors of Oakalla Prison” from Oakalla Prison Far, 2 Oct 1953 (women signatories), Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; Stephen Franklin, “Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War,” *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 15 November 1958, 2-4, 38; Val Sears, “Can’t Send Troops to B.C., Fulton Says,” *Toronto Star*, 9 March 1960, 2; Tom Hazlitt, “How Canada’s First Terrorists Were Crushed,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1970, 15

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Fred Bodnaruk, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 19, page 131; “Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers,” *Time* 87 (11 February 1966) 32; J. C. Yerbury, “The ‘Sons of Freedom’ Doukhobors and the Canadian State,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16 no. 2 (1984): 62; and Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 173-174, 258.

¹⁷⁶ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 174.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Fred Bodnaruk, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 19, page 131.

were caught off guard by the RCMP's surprising complacency.¹⁷⁸ In fact, the RCMP even assisted the marchers by preventing traffic issues and supervising their progress.¹⁷⁹

For the most part, however, the police played a different role vis-à-vis the Sons of Freedom. Police were at the front line of a comprehensive law-enforcement plan, and were responsible for making arrests. This was exhausting work, especially as they were required to intervene in protests conducted *en masse*. This strategy had been applied against nude protestors in the early 1950s. Not only was it impractical, it also proved ineffective as a deterrent. As *Life* magazine noted in 1950, "when police arrested one band of arsonists, others would disrobe in protest and demand that they be arrested too." The police did their best to keep up, but available jail space filled up quickly and they were forced to "stand helplessly by, taking down the names of undressed Doukhobors for future arrest and hoping that the embarrassing wave of arson and nudity would soon run its course."¹⁸⁰ In a spring 1950 raid, over four hundred Freedomites were arrested by provincial police.¹⁸¹

Charges laid against Sons of Freedom for public nudity or destruction of property were fairly simple to prosecute. Government authorities were concerned, however, that laying charges of this nature did not get to the heart of the problem concerning Freedomite activism. Punishing Freedomites for depredations or public nudity dealt with the consequences without really addressing the root cause of their discontent. Government authorities perceived that the rank-and-file Sons of Freedom population was being manipulated by Freedomite leaders. If this were the case, then the authorities had a chance to prevent these disturbances altogether if they could target those who were responsible for planning and promoting Freedomite activism.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Jack Randle (RCMP), "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 10, page 66.

¹⁷⁹ Edwin Bolwell, "'We're Going to Agassiz...That's All that Matters': Doukhobors Look Like Refugees, but There's No Air of Grimness," *Globe and Mail*, 7 September 1962, 1.

¹⁸⁰ "Naked Doukhobors Go on Rampage," *Life* 28 (8 May 1950) 29-33; "British Columbia: Violent Anti-Violence" *Time* 55 (1 May 1950) 29-30.

¹⁸¹ "41 Doukhobors Get 3-Year Sentences," *Globe and Mail*, 12 June 1950, 11.

Thus, in an effort to apprehend individuals thought responsible for instigating mass protest, authorities turned to charges such as “seditious conspiracy...to create ill will, discontent, disaffection, hatred or contempt between His Majesty’s subjects by encouraging them...to disobey, defy and subvert His Majesty’s laws,”¹⁸² or “to commit an indictable offence; to wit, to do acts of violence in order to intimidate the Parliament of Canada, contrary to the form of statute in such case made and provided” in the early 1960s.¹⁸³ These charges were more difficult to make “stick.” It was hard enough to pinpoint was responsible for committing the crimes in question. It was harder still to determine who was responsible for inciting these depredations. In 1962, for example, Nelson Magistrate William Evans ruled after sorting through massive documentary evidence assembled by the Crown that though it certainly demonstrated criticism of the Canadian and British Columbian governments, it did not prove conspiracy.¹⁸⁴

By the middle of the twentieth century, the rank-and-file members of the Sons of Freedom were actually very vulnerable. Disproportionate media attention to their activities had rendered them suspicious to many residents of the Boundary and Kootenay regions of British Columbia, and the police force, judiciary, and government officials were not necessarily immune to these biases. It is likely that some Freedomites suffered penalty who were innocent of wrongdoing, and it is likely that others escaped punishment who deserved it. That it took “only three minutes” to convict a Freedomite for public nudity in police court in 1953 strongly suggests that due process might have been compromised for expediency’s sake when the situation was particularly hot.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 109 n. 2.

¹⁸³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 250; Yerbury, “The ‘Sons of Freedom’ Doukhobors and the Canadian State,” 62-62; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 352.

¹⁸⁴ “Doukhobors Freed in Conspiracy Case,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 August 1962, 1.

¹⁸⁵ “Douks Convicted in Three Minutes in Nudity Trial” *Globe and Mail*, 23 September 1953, 8.

The government defined the public agenda concerning the solution of the “Doukhobor problem,” but it was law enforcement officers who were responsible for following through. Police work among the Sons of Freedom population was challenging. The Sons of Freedom were a “sensitive” population. Their “crimes” were largely motivated by religious conviction. Many of those who participated in “criminal” activities were pressured to do so by their peers. The Freedomites were usually unarmed, and physically and emotionally vulnerable. In many incidents, police confronted women and even children. Policing the Sons of Freedom offered other challenges as well. Many Doukhobors of both sexes were difficult to restrain when agitated, being in general stronger and larger than average Canadians. RCMP Officer Jack Randle recalled that many of the women weighed more than 250 pounds, and were “used to hard work.” If they refused to move, or “started to push and shove, “it became a major job to get them out of the way.”¹⁸⁶ The police officers – especially those of the “D” Squad who worked so directly with the Sons of Freedom population mid-century – had to balance the sensitivities of the Freedomite population with public demands to solve the problem conclusively. As former D-Squad officer Fred Bodnaruk recalled, “it was spelled out to us that something had to be done.”¹⁸⁷

The pressure to solve crime and the inability to do so easily weighed heavily on the officers, who worked long hours for little reward. Fred Bodnaruk admitted that he was “demoralized for about four years” because of the stress of working among the Sons of Freedom. The public, and the politicians who represented them, were anxious for answers to the “Doukhobor problem,” and the police were hard-pressed to provide them.¹⁸⁸ While the

¹⁸⁶ “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, interview with Jack Randle (RCMP), tape 7, page 48.

¹⁸⁷ “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, interview with Fred Bodnaruk, tape 19, page 131.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., tape 21, page 143.

RCMP's struggle was "a joke all over the rest of Canada" it did not amuse the officers on the ground, who feared that the situation would escalate.¹⁸⁹

The public was critical of the officers' apparent failure to manage the "Doukhobor problem" in the 1950s and 1960s. William Guy Carr noted in *Liberty* magazine in 1954 that it struck him as "odd, and perhaps significant, that while I was in the district there were some 100 mounted police on duty and yet they found no evidence that would justify arresting any of the Sons of Freedom for acts of terrorism."¹⁹⁰ The *Vancouver Sun* complained: "every day hundreds of Freedomites are breaking the nation's law, before the law's open view, without the slightest penalty or even the slightest threat of penalty."¹⁹¹ The *Sun* also noted that the "D Squad" had utterly failed to solve the "Doukhobor problem"; if anything, in the summer of 1962, the problem appeared to be getting worse.¹⁹² The officers relegated to this "most despised assignment" faced "perpetual embarrassment, humiliation and inevitable failure," Simma Holt noted. They were labeled "failures, privately and in the press, with a certain amount of justification, for they rarely solved Doukhobor crimes of violence."¹⁹³

Simma Holt felt that the police were limited in two ways. First, they were often hampered by government and judicial authorities, who feared "trouble" or "reprisal" should they levy harsh legal penalties against the Sons of Freedom.¹⁹⁴ Second, they were hampered by the Sons of Freedom themselves, who evaded the police on multiple occasions. Holt pointed out that the Freedomites had a "highly organized counter-intelligence." They posted "lookouts" in key positions, who alerted the community if strangers entered Freedomite-settled areas. While the police were recording the license plate numbers of Freedomite-

¹⁸⁹ Ralph Allen, "The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.'s Holy Terrorists," *Maclean's Magazine* 75 (10 March 1962), 50.

¹⁹⁰ Carr, "Why Do Doukhobors Act That Way?," 55.

¹⁹¹ "Time to Treat Freedomites Like Ordinary Canadians," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 June 1962, 5.

¹⁹² "Freedomite Document Blames Orthodox Leaders for Terror," *Vancouver Sun*, 9 June 1962.

¹⁹³ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 166.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

owned vehicles, the Freedomites were doing at least as much. Holt claimed that they “knew the license of every police vehicle in the area, including the ghost cars, the special D Squad vehicles, and their private family cars.”¹⁹⁵ Lack of education and mental instability notwithstanding, they demonstrated a skill for outmaneuvering the police on many occasions.

The judges who heard cases involving Sons of Freedom Doukhobors in the middle of the twentieth century had a challenging task as well. They had to weigh the vulnerabilities of the population in question against the need to restore and preserve law-and-order in Freedomite-settled areas. Realizing that many of the plaintiffs were unrepentant and likely to reoffend if liberated, some judges privileged protection of society in their sentencing. British Columbia Supreme Court Justice and former Attorney General Alexander Malcolm Manson concluded that his sentence was imposed “to prevent rather than to avenge crime.”¹⁹⁶ Justice Norman Whittaker noted that “leniency” had failed to persuade the Sons of Freedom to desist; as such, “the time has come that an attempt must be made to protect the public.”¹⁹⁷ Justice Jack G. Ruttan noted that though the Doukhobor problem surely “must be solved,” his top priority was “to protect society from such fiends as the Konkins” (Freedomite brothers who were heavily involved in “black work”).¹⁹⁸ In his report to the National Parole Board, Ruttan emphasized his interest in protecting the Freedomites’ would-be victims, “in particular, the Orthodox Doukhobors [who] needed protection, and still do.”¹⁹⁹

Despite government, police, and judiciary efforts, the “Doukhobor problem” remained unsolved in the early 1960s. The strategies that “worked” only did so in a limited manner, temporarily or superficially treating the symptoms without actually curing the disease. The Sacred government of British Columbia could offer its carrots and its sticks: the

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹⁶ “No More Violence, Six Doukhobors Promise Court,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 Feb 1950.

¹⁹⁷ “9 Doukhobors Jailed For Terror Acts in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15.

¹⁹⁸ Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 247.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 2. See also Holt, “Terrorists ‘Depressingly Insane’: Judge Ruttan Imprisons 20 Sons to 10 Years,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 March 1962.

Doukhobors of British Columbia cared little for the incentives the Soviets offered, and were not intimidated by their threats. Those who demonstrated and participated in “black work” events continued to overwhelm or elude the police too often for comfort. The judiciary could only lock up those they were able to convict, with little hope of actually deterring further depredations. Incarceration did not even serve a “punitive” function among Sons of Freedom who valued martyrdom and sought imprisonment as a means to emigrate. Even removing Freedomite children from their homes did little to force the Sons of Freedom to change their course.

The wave pattern of Sons of Freedom activity made it impossible for the government to keep pace with the situation. As the *Globe and Mail* put it in 1962, “by the time the violence amounted to such proportions as to suggest action, the quiet arrived to excuse delay.”²⁰⁰ Soft measures were inadequate when the situation was hot, while harsh measures only stirred up trouble during moments of relative calm. The sensitive nature of the people involved and of the situation required a speedier, more precise response than the democratic governments of British Columbia and of Canada could provide. Leniency had proved ineffective against the stubborn hard-core religious fanatics, while punitive approaches only fed the Doukhobors’ (especially the Freedomites’) martyrdom complex.²⁰¹ As British Columbia Attorney General Gordon Wismer noted in 1953, the Doukhobors had been punished for their beliefs long before their immigration to Canada, and “by those means their problem has never been successfully solved.” In fact, punishment seemed to strengthen the Doukhobors’ resolve, and make the “problem” worse.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ “Rights of the Majority,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6.

²⁰¹ “9 Doukhobors Jailed For Terror Acts in B.C.,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15; “The Doukhobor Civil War,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1962, 6; “From the Imprisoned Doukhobors of Oakalla Prison” from Oakalla Prison Far, 2 Oct 1953 (women signatories), Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

²⁰² “From the Imprisoned Doukhobors of Oakalla Prison” from Oakalla Prison Far, 2 Oct 1953 (women signatories), Dixon Collection, in author’s possession.

W. A. C. Bennett's Social Credit government failed to resolve the "Doukhobor problem." Its law-and-order approach proved that the Socreds took the "Doukhobor problem" seriously: they had vowed that "the days of fooling around with the unlawful Doukhobors are over," and their actions in the 1950s and 1960s proved that they meant business. Yet the provincial government's persistent attempts to "subjugate the Doukhobors under its control" led to further hard feelings which exacerbated the "Doukhobor problem."²⁰³ The Socreds' solution failed to solve the "Doukhobor problem," because it focused on the illegal activity without addressing the reasons behind it. The "Doukhobor problem" would not be "solved" until the Doukhobors and those who worked closely with them faced the deep-seated social identity issues which were the foundation of the Doukhobors' discontent, which they did over the next two decades.

²⁰³ Peter Maloff, *In Quest of a Solution: Three Reports on Doukhobor Problem* (Hall Printers, 1957), 10.

CHAPTER 9

Truth and Story Telling

The Doukhobors faced several challenges in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Assimilation pressure continued to weigh heavily on the population, and the drift away from the principles and practices of Doukhorism threatened the group's survival. The Sons of Freedom continued to act out in various ways to express their discontent. The Freedomite and Orthodox leaders, Stefan S. Sorokin and John J. Verigin Sr. respectively, both struggled to govern their followers and to manage their personal vices in the face of external and internal pressures. The "Doukhor problem" had not yet been solved.

Multiple efforts were made in the middle of the twentieth century to study the Doukhobors and their "problem." Investigators included legal experts, religious leaders, academics, and journalists. These "specialists" and members of the general public scrutinized the "Doukhor problem" from various angles, and proposed a wide variety of potential solutions to it. It was not until the Doukhobors themselves conducted, and participated in, formal investigations into the problem that real headway could be made, however, because the problem was rooted in cultural identity issues. Until the Doukhobors' perceptions of their cultural identity could be explored in depth, and negotiated, the Doukhobors' problems could not be solved.

After years of conflict in the 1950s and 1960s, the Doukhobors were prepared to discuss their issues with one another and with outsiders, in the hope of negotiating a solution to their problems in the 1970s and 1980s. Identity questions – and the search for answers to those questions – dominated in the Doukhobors' discourse. This became evident in a series of symposia set up by the Doukhor Research Committee (DRC) in the late 1970s, and the

meetings of the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (EKCIR) in the 1980s.¹

Continued intergroup conflict, the threat of assimilation, and the approach of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Doukhobors' immigration to Canada inspired the creation of a Doukhobor Research Committee (DRC) in 1974.² The DRC hosted monthly symposia to discuss several aspects of Doukhobor identity and history.³ There were sixty-eight meetings in total between January 1975 and November 1982. Attendees included members of the Society of Doukhobors of Canada (Independents), the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (Orthodox), the Reformed Doukhobors (formerly Sons of Freedom), and some Freedomites who were not members of the Reformed Doukhobors.⁴

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, meetings between Freedomite and non-Freedomite Doukhobors were difficult to arrange. Calls for greater separation between the two groups meant that they were often formally excluded from each other's meetings. When mixed meetings were permitted, political expediency and tension between the Freedomite and non-Freedomite Doukhobors made open communication difficult. The DRC meetings are

¹ The DRC proceedings were summarized and translated by Eli A. Popoff. Popoff was born into an Independent family in Saskatchewan, and moved to British Columbia to join the Orthodox Doukhobors during World War II. Throughout much of his adult life, he served on the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ's executive. Some of his close relatives are Sons of Freedom, and he has attempted to represent the strengths and weaknesses of their ideology and practice in several oral and written presentations on Doukhobor history. Though relying on Popoff's summary and translation is not ideal, it does strike the reader as fair-minded in its tone, and his personal identification, as well as his lifelong commitment to exposing all aspects of Doukhoborism, speak to his fit as a reporter for the DRC proceedings. Possible limitations of the text, as well as of the proceedings, are discussed further below. Copies of Popoff's *Summarized Report* are available in the Doukhobor Collections at the University of British Columbia and at Simon Fraser University. The EKCIR proceedings were typescripted by court reporters, and translated from Russian into English, where necessary, in-house by EKCIR-appointed translators (whose translations were simultaneously evaluated and corrected or clarified if necessary by bilingual members of the EKCIR). The "EKCIR Proceedings" are available at the University of British Columbia. Gregory J. Cran, member of the EKCIR as a representative of the Special Projects Branch of the Ministry of the Attorney General, published his analysis of the proceedings and their aftermath in *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

² Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., *Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Meeting*, ([Grand Forks, British Columbia]: Partially funded by the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Centre for Russian and North American Studies; and the President's Office, Selkirk College, 1997), p. 1, Doukhobor Collection, Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

significant because they were open to Doukhobors of any affiliation and because they encouraged presenters of all factions to speak openly for the first time since the intensive depredations of the mid-century.

Efforts to open dialogue notwithstanding, a number of limitations were placed on participants. The DRC meetings were carefully controlled. Trust between Doukhobors of differing factions was low. The risk of disorder in the meetings was high. Though Sons of Freedom were welcome to attend meetings, their participation was restricted, and speakers were discouraged from creating disruptions. Any attendee wishing to rebut a speaker's points had to request permission to do so, and was given time to speak at the next meeting.⁵ Attendees were expected to conform to certain basic social expectations. Outbursts, demonstrations, and other sorts of interruptions which might have been viewed as appropriate by some Freedomite attendees were discouraged by the organizers. The meetings were not held on neutral territory (they were held in Orthodox meeting halls), and were not neutral in character (they were initiated by Independent Doukhobors, and dominated by Orthodox attendees).⁶ There was no neutral moderator to urge both sides to listen to one another, and as a result, some points of view (especially from among the Sons of Freedom and Reformed groups) could not be explored, either because they got severely rebutted or because they were not approved for presentation in the first place.⁷ On the flip side, fear of Freedomite retribution may have prevented Orthodox and Independent participants from opening up completely.

Organizers expected that recounting narratives about the past would allow the Doukhobors to recall it, reassess its meaning, and correct any variations. DRC Chair Peter J. Popoff indicated that meetings were intended to reveal "the essence of Doukhoborism" and

⁵ Ibid., 7. 9.

⁶ Ken Konkin, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume A, 28 October 1982, 65.

⁷ Bill Babakaeff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume 100, 17 September 1987, 109; Harry Voykin, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume 5, 10 December 1982, 32.

clear up “misunderstandings” which had been divisive and publicly embarrassing.⁸ The DRC also wanted to address decreasing youth participation in Doukhobor affairs. The DRC’s main goals, then, were to clarify the Doukhobors’ historical narrative and identity in order to dispel misconception, promote unity, prevent further membership attrition, and improve the Doukhobors’ reputation.

The symposia tested the Doukhobors’ oral culture. John J. Verigin Sr. noted that the symposia’s goals could only be met “if we honestly examine the past and clear away the fogged up and hazy misconceptions that have accumulated through time because of the unclear oral recollections that remain among us.”⁹ Oral narratives differed considerably on certain points, and these differences required explanation. The organizers required “substantial, factual confirmation or several live witnesses” to support contradictory narratives.¹⁰ Listeners were invited to “add to, or clarify what has been presented” or “correct presented information if they have factual knowledge that such information was false.”¹¹ In many cases, it was the Freedomites’ narratives which were questioned most vigorously.¹²

As a result of this careful monitoring, some participants felt that their views were not fairly presented. Nearly a year after the symposia began, John Shustov of Salmo, British Columbia complained that the summaries of his presentations were truncated. He was also frustrated that the symposia attendees did not adequately reflect the broad spectrum of Doukhobor parties. Therefore, Shustov argued, any consensus achieved at the meetings could not, or should not, be read as reflective of the opinion of the entire Doukhobor group.¹³

⁸ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, 6, 9.

⁹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 13 (14 March 1976), 167.

¹⁰ Harry N. Voykin, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 34 (10 September 1978), 398. s

¹¹ Peter J. Popoff, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 65 (7 March 1982), 646.

¹² Harry N. Voykin, as cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 34 (10 September 1978), 398; Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 41 (1 April 1979), 449.

¹³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 10 (7 December 1975), 136.

His comments were vigorously refuted by many audience members, which may mean that Shustov's analysis was wrong (because the audience disagreed), or could indicate that he was right (because the audience was composed of a particular faction of Doukhobors who were predisposed to defend the DRC's agenda).

The issue of limited participation arose a few times. Walter J. Lebedoff noted that "only 15 to 20 people, and basically always the same people, took active part in the work of the Symposiums," and these tended to be the senior members of each Doukhobor community.¹⁴ On 12 September 1976, Chair Peter J. Popoff acknowledged that "not all groups of Doukhobors" were participating in the meetings. He speculated that some were uninterested in the subject of the discussions; others may have objected to the format and rules; others might have feared that the discussion might reveal information that would "place them in a bad light."¹⁵

Notably, Sorokin was absent from the proceedings. In fact, he requested that the symposia be stopped. The DRC invited him to present his concerns in person, at a meeting also opened to members of the press.¹⁶ Sorokin, or his representatives, claimed he had not been formally invited. The DRC showed proof, however, that official invitations had been sent via registered mail.¹⁷

Despite these limitations, the DRC organizers framed the symposia results positively. The symposia allowed representatives of all major Doukhobor groups to work together on a common project.¹⁸ The discussions had clarified many of the misunderstandings of Doukhobors and Doukhorism.¹⁹ Though the "Doukhobor problem" had not been resolved

¹⁴ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 67 (3 October 1982), 662.

¹⁵ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 17 (12 September 1976), 229.

¹⁶ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 22 (6 February 1977), 310.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 67 (3 October 1982), 665, 660 and Symposium 68 (7 November 1982), 669.

¹⁹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 34 (10 September 1978), 397.

by the time the DRC decided to stop meeting, the Freedomite and non-Freedomite Doukhobors had come to a better understanding of one another.²⁰ The DRC was able to show that discussion was possible, and could lead to improved relationship between the groups. However, Popoff expressed his regret that though the meetings had been productive, they had not elucidated the “true essence of Doukhoborism.”²¹

The DRC’s work was challenging. Their mission was expansive, and it was difficult to give all subjects sufficient attention.²² The Committee drafted questions addressing the Doukhobors’ religious beliefs, and social organization. They prompted Doukhobors to consider the role of leadership, communalism, and migration. They questioned the merits and effects of state education, democracy, and military exemption. These questions reflect the organizers’ desire to examine the Doukhobors’ historical experience, evaluate their present condition, and explore possibilities for their future. The questions consider the Doukhobors’ religious understanding, ethnic identity, political organization, and lifestyle.

Peter J. Popoff noted that less attention was paid to the Doukhobors’ religious concepts than he expected.²³ This might reflect the degree to which the Doukhobors’ religious beliefs and practices are intertwined with other aspects of their lifestyle, culture, and experience. Or, it might suggest that religious identity was not at the top of the Doukhobors’ list of priorities between 1975 and 1982: other issues took precedence, whether because of urgency or importance.

Much of the DRC proceedings addressed discrepancies in the Doukhobors’ collective memories. The Doukhobors’ stance on education was one such issue. In Session 34, one speaker bragged that the DRC had successfully “clarified the fact that the Doukhobors and

²⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 60 (3 May 1981), 609.

²¹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 65 (7 March 1982), 650.

²² Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 40 (4 March 1979), 443.

²³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 65 (7 March 1982), 647; See Joseph E. Podovnikoff’s and Cecil C. Maloff’s comments for example. Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 42, 6 May 1979, and Symposium 43, 16 September 1979, pgs. 465-466 and 471.

their leaders were never against education and enlightenment through schools and other learning institutions, as some sources have tried to insinuate.”²⁴ This is historically untrue: the Doukhobors (at least the British Columbian Doukhobors) *did* actively resist compulsory education on several occasions before acquiescing to the government’s demands; the Sons of Freedom continued to resist state education throughout the 1950s. That the DRC could claim to have “clarified” an issue in a historically inaccurate way is an example of one of the problems with the DRC symposia. The structure of the symposia allowed for the imposition of a dominant narrative. The dominant frame was that the Sons of Freedom were misinformed about, or else had misunderstood, the Doukhobors’ mission while the Orthodox (and to a lesser extent, the Independents) had it right. By implication, if only the Sons of Freedom could be persuaded to adopt the mainstream point of view, many of the Doukhobors’ problems would end.

The leaders’ role in Doukhorism was discussed at some length during the symposia. Leadership was a divisive issue. Some Doukhobors (mainly the Orthodox) followed John J. Verigin Sr.’s leadership, and thought it legitimate because of his own merits as well as his lineage. Sons of Freedom followed Stefan Sorokin, who had presented himself as a spiritual leader. Still others remained independent of formal leadership, believing it to be inconsistent with Doukhor belief, or else frustrated by the personalities in question.

The DRC attendees discussed the incidence and value of leader deification.²⁵ The leaders were portrayed by some as especially invested with God-given wisdom and spiritual insight, and some DRC attendees compared Doukhor leaders to Christ, or to his apostles.²⁶ Peter Petrovich Legebokoff noted that some Doukhobors had come to believe “that true salvation of the soul could only be attained by unquestioned belief in the Doukhor

²⁴ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 34 (10 September 1978), 398.

²⁵ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 2 (2 February 1975), 26 and Symposium 3 (2 March 1975), 52.

²⁶ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 1 (4 January 1975), 19; Symposium 3 (2 March 1975), 52; Symposium 6 (1 June 1975), 93; Symposium 7 (24 August 1975), 103; Symposium 32 (2 April 1978), 375.

leaders.”²⁷ This was both a deviation from mainstream Christian belief, and a contradiction of Doukhobor belief, which promoted equality of all human life. Legebokoff pointed out that deifying leaders, and relying so heavily on their guidance had prevented the Doukhobors from “thinking for themselves.”²⁸ Walter J. Lebedoff concurred. He noted that many Doukhobors seemed to believe that “having a devout faith in leaders and believing that our leader is a veritable ‘god-deity’ on earth is already fulfilling the primary requirement of being a Doukhobor. The matter of having a clear understanding of the principles and the aims and aspirations of a Doukhobor, we somehow place into a secondary category.”²⁹

Much attention was given to Verigin’s role in the Freedomites’ activities. Verigin swore he opposed the Freedomites’ depredations. “There is not a single person in the world that can state before God, or before the blessed rays of the sun, or before the faces of assembled people, that he has ever received any manner of instructions from me to burn or to bomb or in any way to destroy property,” he declared.³⁰ Verigin pointed out that the Freedomites lost credibility when they made false accusations. Since he knew their claims against him were false, he felt it likely that their claims against former leaders were false as well.³¹ Verigin pointed out that “there has not been, at any time, a presentation where a person would openly state that this and... this was an instruction given to me, and it was done at such and such a place, and witnessed by such and such a person. These kind of presentations were not made because there had never been such manner of instructions ever given.”³² There was very little the Sons of Freedom could do to prove that Verigin had instructed them to engage in protest activity. On the flip side, there was very little Verigin

²⁷ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 2 (2 February 1975), 29-30.

²⁸ As cited in *Ibid.*, 30. Also Popoff, *Summarized Report*, 9.

²⁹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 58 (15 February 1981), 598.

³⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 37 (3 December 1978), 416; see also Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 475.

³¹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 53 (14 September 1980), 553 and Symposium 60 (3 May 1981), 611.

³² As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 23 (6 March 1977), 323.

could do to prove his innocence save declare repeatedly and emphatically that he had not been involved. At the sixty-sixth session, Verigin asked whether those in attendance agreed with and supported him. Orthodox Doukhobors gave him a standing ovation. Reformed and Sons of Freedom attendees remained quietly in their seats.

In addition to these specific identificational topics, the Doukhobors devoted some time to considering the meaning of Doukhorism, and the identity of true Doukhobors, more generally. Verigin called DRC attendees to clear up misunderstandings about their faith and culture, “so that our children can see it in its proper, worthy light” and live up to Doukhor ideals.³³ Verigin was concerned that the Doukhor identity was being increasingly associated in the press and in the public eye with the activities of the Sons of Freedom, which reflected negatively on the entire group. As a consequence of this, Verigin felt that the youth were too ashamed to be associated with the Doukhobors, and were turning away from the organization.

There was some optimism that the DRC proceedings would be of interest to Doukhor youth.³⁴ Unfortunately, Doukhor youth played very little attention to the DRC proceedings. Peter J. Popoff observed by the seventeenth session that “only a few of our middle aged and younger members of our overall Doukhor Society are taking part in our work and in our sessions.”³⁵ The younger generation’s apparent lack of interest in the DRC’s work and, by connection, in the group’s history and identity was cause for concern and frustration.³⁶ DRC attendees were aware that they needed to clarify the meaning of

³³ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 22 (6 February 1977).

³⁴ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 1 (4 January 1975), 14-15.

³⁵ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 17 (12 September 1976), 237-238.

³⁶ See Walter J. Lebedoff’s remarks, Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 67 (3 October 1982), 659 and 662.

Doukhorism both to address confusion, and to provide the younger generation with a useful cultural narrative.³⁷

DRC participants were concerned about the progress of assimilation among the Doukhobors.³⁸ As of 1979, about 5,750 people were registered as members of Doukhor organizations.³⁹ A membership of 5,750 in 1979, given an initial immigration eighty years previously of almost eight thousand people, suggests considerable attrition. One could be a Doukhor without registering as a member of any of these formal organizations. However, John J. Verigin Sr. speculated that the majority of Doukhor descendants were “scattered” across the country and “assimilated with the rest of the population.”⁴⁰ Verigin announced: “we do not wish to be thus assimilated...we are willing to integrate with all other within this nation, but we wish to retain our individual identity, which we feel enriches the country of Canada with its variety of cultures. We do not feel that it is necessary for all to look exactly alike.”⁴¹

Walter J. Lebedoff delivered a stirring address at the fifty-eighth session, in February of 1981, concerning the discouragement Doukhobors felt about increasing assimilation. Perhaps some believed that “Doukhor-Christian principles and ideals have outlived their usefulness, and are no longer needed,” and that therefore the time for assimilation had arrived. Indeed, many Doukhor youth were well on the path to assimilation. “Physically, as descendants of Doukhobors, they are still alive, but as carriers of the true Doukhor spirit, they are dead,” he declared. In fact, some “have actually joined other religious

³⁷ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 9 (2 November 1975), 130. Popoff, “*Summarized Report*”: John J. Verigin Sr. blamed the Freedomites [Symposium 37 (3 December 1978), 418]; Cecil C. Maloff blamed the loss of the communes [Symposium 45 (4 November 1979), 482]. Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 1 (4 January 1975), 14; Symposium 65 (7 March 1982), 647.

³⁸ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 54 (16 October 1980), 572.

³⁹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43 (16 September 1979).

⁴⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 469-470.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 470.

denominations or non-religious groups and openly profess that they are not Doukhobors.”⁴² Rather than dwell on the depressing trend towards assimilation, however, Lebedoff called attention to the fact that the Doukhobors might still have something to *offer* the world, indicating that “one may say that there is a great advantage to all of humanity to have in their midst people like the Doukhobors.” Lebedoff suggested that “in this turbulent ocean of life, people following true Doukhobor life-concepts are like a beacon showing the direction which gives hope for humanity and points out the ways to attain harmony, peace and good fortune, both in material as well as in moral and spiritual spheres.”⁴³

DRC presenters suggested that the Doukhobors’ historical legacy could inspire them in the present day.⁴⁴ Paul A. Semenoff suggested, for example, that though the Doukhobors might have become “somewhat weak in our spiritual and moral stamina...our people always have an immense reserve of spiritual strength which is continued within our true Doukhobor faith.”⁴⁵ Reflection on the ancestors’ suffering for the cause might have inspired the DRC participants in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as indeed reflection on this legacy had inspired and empowered many generations of Doukhobors.⁴⁶ It had certainly inspired the Sons of Freedom, with problematic results.⁴⁷

Leaning too heavily on the Doukhobors’ ancestral legacy was unwise, some DRC participants argued. Nick D. Arishenkoff suggested that it was inappropriate “to continue to be horrified, or to continue to sorrow, about the inhuman persecutions that we have gone through. What we must do is to remember with thankfulness and jubilation and give our

⁴² As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 58 (15 February 1981), 596.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 1 (4 January 1975), 18.

⁴⁵ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 68 (7 November 1982), 673.

⁴⁶ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 56 (7 December 1980), 580.

⁴⁷ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603-604 and Symposium 50 (13 April 1980), 518.

praise to God that He Himself was together with us in all of our suffering.”⁴⁸ Eli Popoff suggested that the belief that since Doukhobor ancestors suffered for their faith in the past “we also must continue to suffer if we wish to remain true Doukhobors” was “absurd.”⁴⁹ The DRC concluded in the sixty-first session that there was no reason to believe that present-day Doukhobors deserved credit for the trials their ancestors endured.⁵⁰ As much as the DRC was about sorting through the Doukhobors’ past to achieve a better understanding of it, some participants were calling the Doukhobors to stop living in or reliving that past, and to consider the crises of the moment and the direction the Doukhobors might take in future.

Discussing the “Doukhobor problem” and, more specifically, the “Freedomite problem” was not the DRC’s primary objective. Yet it appears that opening the discussion on this matter between opposed factions was the DRC’s primary accomplishment. The Freedomites’ activity and perspective preoccupied the symposia proceedings. This reflects the sense of urgency and frustration that DRC attendees felt. While assimilation was certainly on attendees’ minds, ongoing difficulties concerning the Sons of Freedom took precedence.

DRC participants tried to understand how and why the Sons of Freedom emerged as a distinct group. Eli A. Popoff explained his theory that the Freedomites were, of all Doukhobors, most likely to be the direct descendants of Doukhobors who had experienced the harshest physical abuses in Russia.⁵¹ The DRC participants reflected on Peter P. Verigin (*Chistiakov*)’s influence on the Freedomites.⁵² A few Freedomite elders denied hearing

⁴⁸ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 52 (8 June 1980), 530.

⁴⁹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 32 (2 April 1978), 384.

⁵⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 61 (7 June 1981), 619.

⁵¹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 21 (9 January 1977), 295 and Symposium 21 (9 January 1977), 294, 296.

⁵² Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 38 (7 January 1979), 421.

Chistiakov advocate “terrorist” activity, or else indicated that he had actively discouraged it.⁵³ Mike M. Chernoff reported, for example, that *Chistiakov* envisioned the Freedomites as “perfect models of virtue, modeled along the lines of our illustrious ancestors” who lived out Doukhobor principles with integrity.⁵⁴

Nikolai Koozmitch Novokshonoff explained that the Sons of Freedom perceived themselves to be the “Elder Brethren” of the Doukhobors, spiritually speaking. They thus perceived it as their mission to ensure the “spiritual integrity of the Doukhobors as a whole.”⁵⁵ The original Freedomites, Novokshonoff continued, never had “any evil or any ill feeling toward anyone in their hearts.” Rather, their “impulsive actions were motivated by a desire to have their brethren be more aware of the dangers of falling into the worship of materialism, the danger of dependence on mechanization and fast advances in material gains.”⁵⁶ Novokshonoff claimed that the “current occurrences that have flared up into very erratic categories” were a deviation from the original Freedomite mission.⁵⁷

Peter J. Popoff, speaking on behalf of the DRC, indicated that the Committee “tend[s] to feel that what the original Sons of Freedom did was motivated by deep feelings of faith because facts show that for their actions they endured a lot of persecution, privation and suffering...but the question remains, was their faith based on true Doukhobor life-concepts?”⁵⁸ Joseph E. Podovinkoff admitted later that Freedomites had “come to be a total antithesis to what Doukhobor Life-Concepts stood for” because “instead of saving people and helping to enlighten them toward seeing the true pathway of life, their actions helped

⁵³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 23 (6 March 1977), 319; Symposium 25 (1 May 1977), 335; Symposium 44 (7 October 1979), 477.

⁵⁴ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 23 (6 March 1977), 319

⁵⁵ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 7 (24 August 1975), 110.

⁵⁶ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 11 (4 January 1976), 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 17 (12 September 1976), 233.

sink unenlightened people into a further quagmire of ignorance.”⁵⁹ Cecil C. Maloff argued emphatically that only those who have “freed themselves completely from fanatical inclinations” could consider themselves Sons of Freedom. This, Maloff argued, “concerned not only being free from private ownership, or being free from luxurious material possessions,” but also freedom from “the desire of committing any act of evil whatsoever, any act that may hurt a fellow human.”⁶⁰

The DRC urged Freedomite attendees to explain what had motivated the depredations activity.⁶¹ Those who obliged explained that they or their predecessors had acted out to prevent the Doukhobors from succumbing to materialism and militarism. The disturbances the Freedomites created were designed to warn about, and prevent, a larger upset later.⁶² They were motivated by a desire to help their fellow Doukhobors.⁶³

There were several calls for an immediate end to the depredations activity.⁶⁴ Continued acts of violence and misinterpretation of the faith brought shame on the group and distracted the Doukhobors from pursuing other culturally important activities.⁶⁵ John J. Verigin Sr. noted that if the depredations activity did not stop, the problem would endure into the next generation, and, “under these conditions, it is possible that Doukhorism can completely cease to exist.”⁶⁶ Verigin declared his intention to forgive anyone who showed “sincere repentance” and committed to cease depredations activity.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 25 (1 May 1977), 334.

⁶⁰ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 27 (6 November 1977), 348.

⁶¹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 30 (5 February 1978), 362.

⁶² Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 7 (24 August 1975), 110; Symposium 25 (1 May 1977), 336; Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 468; Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 605.

⁶³ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 603.

⁶⁴ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 475; Symposium 45 (4 November 1979), 482, 484; Symposium 50 (13 April 1980), 516; Symposium 62 (4 October 1981), 624; Symposium 68 (7 November 1982), 671.

⁶⁵ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 53 (14 September 1980), 555.

⁶⁶ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 43 (16 September 1979), 469.

⁶⁷ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 53 (14 September 1980), 556.

Though the symposia represented an opportunity for Doukhobors of all factions to come together to discuss their perceptions of Doukhoborism, the dominant party clearly wished to have its narrative prevail. Any Freedomite efforts to defend the use of nudity or fire as consistent with Doukhobor beliefs were “totally counteracted by the main body of those Doukhobors who were present, and who, staunchly keeping to basic Doukhobor principles, very clearly explained that the use of violence was not permissible under any circumstances whatsoever according to the true Doukhobor Life-Concepts.”⁶⁸ In Session 34, attendees “learned that the Doukhobors had never in their history resorted to any form of violence for the preservation of their true faith.”⁶⁹ The Sons of Freedom who claimed to be “Doukhobors” had “subverted” Doukhoborism for their own ends, misunderstanding its essence and led astray by “unprincipled and spiritually unevolved characters who often harbor sinister intentions.”⁷⁰

The symposium project was started as a means to define Doukhobor identity on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of their arrival in Canada. The organizers hoped that discussion would allow Doukhobors themselves to redefine, clarify, and redeem Doukhobor identity for their own benefit as well as to promote a more positive public image. Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors wanted to promote their interpretation of Doukhoborism. Their version of Doukhoborism had been, for so many years, completely overshadowed by the version promoted by the Sons of Freedom who participated in depredations activity. The DRC proceedings were an opportunity for them to “set the record straight” and it is not surprising that they sought to deemphasize Freedomite identity narratives in favour of Orthodox (and to a lesser extent, Independent) identity narratives. In the mid to late 1970s, Doukhobors from these factions were seeking greater integration with

⁶⁸ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 41 (1 April 1979), 449.

⁶⁹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 34 (10 September 1978), 398.

⁷⁰ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 42 (6 May 1979), 463.

Canadian society and protection for their Doukhobor identity. The Sons of Freedom activities limited the Doukhobors on both fronts, and non-Freedomite Doukhobors were fed up with it.

Relations were smoothed with those Freedomite representatives who publicly admitted their transgressions, and accepted the mainstream narrative of Doukhobor identity. Peter P. Swetlishoff, for example, “one of the more notorious and extreme activists of the Sons of Freedom,” repeatedly expressed regret for his actions and Verigin publicly forgave and embraced him.⁷¹ Many Sons of Freedom rejected the work of the DRC, however, and resented the tone taken by its organizers. This created a backlash, which had a direct impact on the DRC proceedings.

Serious problems arose at the fifth session of the DRC proceedings. John P. Ostrikkoff, chair of the afternoon session, read a lengthy document co-authored by him and another member of the Freedomite group. The document criticized the DRC. It “ridiculed its work, its aims, and all those who were putting their trust into it.”⁷² At the same meeting, Mike F. Bayoff presented himself as the missing Peter P. Verigin Jr. “Iastrobov,” and claimed that he could prove that the Sons of Freedom had killed Peter V. Verigin “Lordly” in 1924.⁷³ To top this off, Mary Astafooroff, Mary Malakoff, and Annie Kootnekoff removed their clothing to request the symposium’s support in assisting the Freedomite women charged with destroying the Brilliant Cultural Centre.⁷⁴ These events so upset the majority of DRC attendees that the head of the committee had to cease proceedings for the day. The flagrant disrespect for the “rules of procedure” by some who were themselves members of the

⁷¹ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 67 (3 October 1982), 661; Symposium 59 (5 April 1981), 607.

⁷² Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 5 (4 May 1975), 83.

⁷³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 6 (1 June 1975), 86.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

committee, who had previously agreed to “abide by the rules of procedure established by mutual consent” was “painful to witness.”⁷⁵

The DRC tried to prevent similar disorder from erupting at subsequent meetings; however, it proved impossible to avoid interruption in every case. At the twenty-fifth meeting, a group of Freedomites from Krestova and Gilpin demanded to be recognized by the assembly. The Chair of the DRC agreed to hear from them so long as they would take turns speaking. A similar event unfolded at the thirty-seventh meeting, which was “rudely interrupted by a substantial number of Sons of Freedom stripping naked and taking up all of the front end of the room.” They “kept repeating that ‘God’s Judgment Day’ has arrived and that all Doukhobors must beg for forgiveness. They insisted that they have repented and that all others must also repent.”⁷⁶ The DRC was also asked to consider various Freedomite-authored documents. These documents were difficult to decipher, and the Committee gave up trying.⁷⁷ At the thirty-ninth meeting, many of the Freedomite women became hysterical, and one of the men had to be escorted out because he threatened to become violent.⁷⁸ At the sixty-second session, Verigin was verbally and physically assaulted by some of the Freedomite women present. Verigin assured his supporters: “we will overcome them.” “We are the vast majority and the fanatical element is a mere fractional minority,” he added.⁷⁹ The DRC organizers admitted that it was challenging to balance the desire to fairly consider reasonable presentations with the interruptions posed by such disregard for rules and procedure.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 5 (4 May 1975), 84.

⁷⁶ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 37 (3 December 1978), 415.

⁷⁷ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 44 (7 October 1979), 477.

⁷⁸ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 45 (4 November 1979), 481.

⁷⁹ As cited in Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 62 (4 October 1981), 624.

⁸⁰ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 45 (4 November 1979), 481.

In addition to these in-house outbursts, members of the Sons of Freedom also attacked DRC and the Orthodox Doukhobors in the press and in pamphlets.⁸¹ They claimed that the Orthodox Doukhobors were using the symposia to conceal “the truth” and were abusing their Freedomite counterparts in the meetings.⁸² Some Freedomites also targeted Community property for destruction. On 7 December 1975, the library, *Iskra* office, and Central Office administrative space, all belonging to the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, were destroyed by arson. The Sunshine Valley Co-operative Society building was also burned.⁸³ Peter M. Bloudoff noted on 9 January 1977 that the Passmore meeting house had been threatened by fire, but that police were able to intervene in time.⁸⁴ Nick W. Bondaroff felt he had to resign his DRC post out of consideration for his job in a public school setting, and the DRC was unable to use the Salmo Community Centre because of the perceived risk of doing so.⁸⁵ At the twenty-sixth meeting, Peter J. Soloveoff lamented the loss of buildings which were used to promote Doukhobor culture, educate Doukhobor youth, and provide space for Doukhobor religious services.⁸⁶ The USCC Community Centre had been torched only a few days previously, on 21 September 1977.

The DRC regretted that some participants would choose to “sabotage a worthy project that was launched by a united effort of dedicated representatives who had the worthy aim of clarification of the true and positive ideals of Doukhoborism, through objective and sincere

⁸¹ “Old Differences Among Factions Paralyze Co-Operative Project: Arson, Smear Campaign and Fear Scuttle Bid to Heal Doukhobor Rift,” *Globe and Mail*, 28 February 1977, 10; “Symposium of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors,” Krestova, B.C. (16 December 1976), Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁸² Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, “Notice to U.S.C.C. It’s Editorialship of ‘Iskra’ and to the Joint Doukhobor Research Committee,” 29 May 1979, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors Papers, 1952-79, UBC; [Sons of Freedom], “The Inaugural Symposium of Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, Re: The False Symposium of S.D.O.H. [USCC]” Krestova, B.C. (30 September 1976), Doukhobor Collection, UBC; [Sons of Freedom], “Orthodox Symposium Wins More Than Expected,” 16 February 1977, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁸³ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 11 (4 January 1976), 141.

⁸⁴ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 21 (9 January 1977), 291.

⁸⁵ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 23 (6 March 1977), 318.

⁸⁶ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 26 (9 October 1977), 343-345.

research and study,” a project which “would have helped to remove the barriers and help erase the animosity held between various groups within the society, leading to peaceful, harmonious living.”⁸⁷

Sorokin blamed the DRC for the flare up of Freedomite protest activity. Sorokin explained: “you acknowledge only the kinds of opinions you like and desire, and the speaker must speak accordingly, because if the speaker leaves the framework of your plans, rules and purpose, then you immediately make it taboo for him.”⁸⁸ Sorokin implied that this provoked Freedomite Doukhobors, and warned that the situation could easily escalate. Sorokin declared that the DRC symposia “will not yield anything worthwhile amid the Doukhobor society.”⁸⁹

In many respects, the DRC failed to achieve its goals. Too few Doukhobors participated in the discussions; too many of the meetings were disrupted; too little attention was paid to the overall research questions the organizers perceived as being important. Divisions between opposed factions remained, with new insults and injuries to add to the list of damages. Far from redeeming the Doukhobors’ public image, the DRC proceedings were yielding further negative publicity.

Yet the DRC symposia constituted an important turning point for the Doukhobors. Attendees were allowed to hope, albeit briefly, that even among the most committed Freedomite zealots “a repentant conscience is beginning to stir.”⁹⁰ Though the DRC drove some Freedomites to further protest, the DRC also paved the way for forgiveness and friendship between some of the most committed Freedomite activists and their Orthodox

⁸⁷ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 5 (4 May 1975), 84.

⁸⁸ Stefan Sorokin, “Important and Beneficial Advice to the Heads of the Symposium,” 8 January 1977, Doukhobor Collection, UBC.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Popoff, *Summarized Report*, Symposium 39 (4 February 1979), 428.

counterparts. The DRC symposia showed that despite the challenges, discussion was productive.

Meanwhile, the government of British Columbia was researching alternate approaches to the “Doukhobor problem” at the end of the 1970s. Hugh Herbison and Gregory Cran published *A Proposal for Community and Government Involvement in Doukhobor Affairs* in 1979. Herbison, a Quaker, had been a long-time Doukhobor advocate, and a member of the University of British Columbia Doukhobor Research Committee in the early 1950s. Cran represented the Special Projects Branch of the Ministry of the Attorney General. In their report, Herbison and Cran noted that the criminal justice system was ill-suited to the demands of dealing with a “religious-ethnic minority in all the complexity of its emotionally charged relationships.”⁹¹ Use of the system to deal with the problem meant that interactions between Doukhobors and the authorities began once a crime had already been committed. Thus, the relationship depended on the continuation of the very behaviour that the authorities wished to prevent. Cran and Herbison argued that the criminal justice system was “neither suited to addressing the complexity of the issues nor to providing an adequate forum for responding to the questions that many Sons of Freedom and other Doukhobors were asking.”⁹²

In order to provide a forum to address the “complexity of issues” implicit in the “Doukhobor problem,” British Columbia’s Attorney General Garde Gardom announced the creation of the Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (KCIR) on 13 November 1979.⁹³ The interdisciplinary Committee was drawn together a cultural anthropologist, a historian, a psychologist, a school board representative, a United Church minister, a court

⁹¹ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 16-17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17 and 40.

translator who was familiar with the Doukhobors' language and culture, and a member of the UBC DRC of the 1950s (Hugh Herbison).⁹⁴ The Chair of the Committee was Robin Bourne, Assistant Deputy Minister of Police Services for British Columbia.

The last meeting of the DRC was held 7 November 1982; the first meeting of the EKCIR (Expanded KCIR) was held on 28 October 1982, and subsequent meetings were held three to four times annually for five years. In addition to six of the originally proposed committee members, attendees included RCMP and CPR Police officers, local mayors, federal and provincial government representatives, and representatives from the Sons of Freedom, Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors, and the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ Doukhobor factions, including John J. Verigin Sr., leader of the USCC and “material leader” of the Sons of Freedom.⁹⁵ As Mark Mealing explained in the first meeting of the EKCIR, the Committee was commissioned to help the Doukhobors “towards a peaceful resolution of historic troubles” and put an end to depredations activity. The EKCIR was designed to facilitate mutual “consultation” between interested parties, with communications and research support offered by non-Doukhobor consultants.⁹⁶

Doukhobor participants identified a need to share information, so as to achieve a better understanding of the “Doukhobor problem” and seek solutions to it. As Fred Makortoff, representing the Reformed group, explained: “we hope we may clear up some common misconceptions each of us may still have of each other” in order to “diminish if not dissipate what appear to be almost irreconcilable differences” among Doukhobor groups and

⁹⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁵ The Sons of Freedom identified John J. Verigin Sr. as their “material leader,” who directed their worldly activities, and Stefan Sorokin as their “spiritual leader,” who advised them on religious affairs. Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” John Savinkoff, Volume B, 29 October 1982, 52; Sam Konkin, Volume B, 29 October 1982, 84-84; Peter Zarubin, Volume 1, 8 December 1982, 53; Mike Chernenkoff, Volume 2, 8 December 1982, 67-68, 79, 90; Lucy Savinkoff, Volume 2, 8 December 1982, 6; Mary Malakoff, Volume 4, 9 December 1982, 31.

⁹⁶ Mark Mealing, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 22.

between the Doukhobors and the government.⁹⁷ The meetings of the EKCIR were designed to provide everyone who wished to speak the sense that they had “had an adequate venting” of their concerns.⁹⁸ This had not been allowed to transpire at the DRC symposia of the late 1970s.⁹⁹ Primarily, all Doukhobor parties identified a need to find an end to the turmoil of the previous decades. As Freedomite Olga Hoodicoff put it in her succinct introductory remarks: “I just want the problem of fires resolved once and for all. We’re tired and that’s all.”¹⁰⁰

The need for discussion and the need for resolution were often in conflict at the EKCIR meetings. On the one hand, committee members wanted to consider as much oral and written evidence as possible, in the interest of achieving a better understanding of the background of the “Doukhobor problem.” On the other hand, committee members were concerned about getting lost in the issues of the past at the cost of identifying a workable solution in the present, given limited time and resources.¹⁰¹ Fred Makortoff acknowledged that it was impractical, as well as insensitive, to attempt to rush elderly witnesses who had a wealth of information to share; however, he also acknowledged that his party was not interested in having “this meeting deteriorate into infinite arguments about endless pasts.”¹⁰² John J. Verigin Sr., however, strongly urged all present to move directly to drafting a brief and clearly stated resolution, arguing “no matter who was responsible in the past for these fires...we recognize that it is wrong and...we pledge ourselves not...to commit arson” in the

⁹⁷ Fred Makortoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 14.

⁹⁸ Fred Makortoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 6, 10 December 1982, 101.

⁹⁹ Bill Babakaeff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 100, 17 September 1987, 109.

¹⁰⁰ Olga Hoodicoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 21.

¹⁰¹ Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” John J. Verigin Sr., Volume A, 28 October 1982, 13, 70; Robin Bourne, Volume A, 28 October 1982, 23; Mark Mealing, Volume A, 28 October 1982, 146.

¹⁰² Fred Makortoff, Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 18 and 114; Volume 1, 8 December 1982, 14.

future.¹⁰³ Verigin had participated fully in the DRC meetings of 1974 to 1982, and his hesitation to embark in an equally lengthy and taxing discursive experience is understandable. However, Robin Bourne discouraged Verigin from pushing the Committee to “move too fast.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the EKCIR embarked on a series of meetings which would take place over five years and generate over six thousand pages of transcript.

Verigin’s participation in the EKCIR meetings was problematic. He attended regularly, representing the USCC's point of view and responding to allegations made against him by fellow Doukhobors. As Freedomite Olga Hoodicoff put it in the first session, she was grateful that he “didn’t chicken out.” She commended him for “tak[ing] the shit,”¹⁰⁵ facing those that would accuse him of everything from masterminding Freedomite terrorism to fathering illegitimate Freedomite children. He repeatedly called for an end to burning and bombings, and pledged the USCC's full cooperation in identifying, and carrying out, a resolution.¹⁰⁶ Yet, Cran reports that he and his colleagues were irritated by Verigin’s conduct at the meetings. Verigin had tried to police who was and was not welcome at the EKCIR discussions. Verigin also questioned the issues put on the first meeting’s agenda by the Freedomite participants. Verigin worried that the meeting would become a “circus performance where the criminals and culprits, fanatical zealots will have a ‘hey day’ with opportunity for the mass media to exploit and further enhance the misconception that fires, arson and terrorism” were part of Doukhoborism.¹⁰⁷ Verigin’s behaviour prompted Cran to wonder whether Verigin was “having second thoughts about getting to the bottom of the

¹⁰³ John J. Verigin Sr., Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 70-71, 73, 151-152; Volume B, 29 October 1982, 32; Volume 6, 10 December 1982, 96; Volume 100, 17 September 1987, 23-24, 29.

¹⁰⁴ Robin Bourne, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Olga Hoodicoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, 109.

¹⁰⁶ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 12, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 43.

problem that he had been pushing the government to resolve.”¹⁰⁸ Cran claims that much of the committee’s energy was put towards “ward[ing] off verbal attacks from John Verigin,” who seemed dissatisfied with the EKCIR’s work. Verigin, who struggled with alcoholism, showed up for some of the meetings intoxicated, which surely damaged his credibility and limited his ability to express himself.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, Verigin accused Cran of urging a particular witness, Mary Malakoff, to “make a statement” against Verigin. This damaged Verigin’s trust in Cran’s integrity and motivations.¹¹⁰

The role Doukhobor leaders played in inspiring, requesting, or provoking depredations activity was a persistent theme in the EKCIR discussions, with Reformed and Sons of Freedom participants arguing that Peter P. “*Chistiakov*” Verigin, John Lebedoff, John J. Verigin Sr., or messengers sent by them had directed their campaigns, and Verigin categorically denying his own or his grandfather’s involvement. Committee Chair Robin Bourne identified the leadership question as key to resolving the “Doukhobor problem.” “If [we] can find out who the leader is and eliminate the leader, then we eliminate terrorism,” he surmised. Bourne was advised during a break in the proceedings that suggesting that the leader be “eliminated” was an unfortunate choice of words, in light of the fates of past Doukhobor leaders. Bourne revised his phrasing to: “if you somehow take away the leader’s power, it would probably end the terrorism.”¹¹¹

The committee subsequently pressured Verigin to admit that he – or at least his predecessors – had played a role in provoking Freedomite depredations. This approach favoured the Freedomite perspective. A confession from Verigin would appease the Sons of Freedom, and, from some points of view, would therefore neatly resolve the “Doukhobor problem.” According to Cran, Verigin was called on “to decide how far he would go to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁰ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 6, 10 December 1982, 81.

¹¹¹ Robin Bourne, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 1, 8 December 1982, 92-93.

construct a new narrative that would include, rather than exclude, the Sons of Freedom.”¹¹² Accepting the blame for the Freedomite depredations would be a very bitter pill for Verigin and the members of the USCC to swallow, having suffered Freedomite attacks and publicly denied the Freedomites’ accusations for so many years. This admission might have resolved the issue (even constituted a victory) for the Sons of Freedom, but it would be quite a hit for the Orthodox, and Cran’s report does not reflect much sensitivity to this point.

Verigin refused to yield. He emphatically denied any implication that he directed Freedomite depredations activity.¹¹³ He declared: “I swear to you as before God, never have I given any instructions to anybody.”¹¹⁴ Robin Bourne, as EKCIR chair, revisited the question from another angle. Was it possible, he asked Verigin, that he or his grandfather said anything that could have been misconstrued in such a way as to authorize or legitimize the Freedomites’ activities? Verigin responded, saying:

I would like to know exactly what statement and where could there be possibly a misrepresentation, because the basic issue, burnings and bombings, I have always stated – they are not compatible with the Doukhobor principles of faith. I have always stated openly that, I don’t believe anyone that says that he’s got instructions from me to do this. And I challenge anyone to prove otherwise.¹¹⁵

If Verigin was innocent of wrongdoing, his pride and his sense of integrity would not permit him to make any other statements than these; if he was guilty, he could not admit it without damaging his own reputation and that of his group. However, by refusing to take responsibility for the Freedomites’ actions, Verigin appeared to be stalling a solution to the

¹¹² Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 77.

¹¹³ John J. Verigin Sr., Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 150-151, Volume 3, 8 and 9 December 1982, 132-133, Volume 6, 10 December 1982, 84-85.

¹¹⁴ “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 50, 2 May 1984, 51; Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 78.

¹¹⁵ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 58, 9 October 1984, 18-19; Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 81.

problem, which threw his credibility, and his commitment to solving the problem, into question.

To Doukhobor insiders so accustomed to promoting and defending their own (or their group's) point of view, it was difficult to yield ground on long-held narratives used to justify certain actions or beliefs. The primary justification for the Freedomites' activities was that they were playing a role that would save the Doukhobors from assimilation, that had been endorsed by Veriginite leaders, and that had even been directed at times by the leader's own words or deeds. The Orthodox publicly and repeatedly rejected the Freedomites' actions and even the Freedomites themselves, claiming to be the innocent victims of Freedomite troublemakers. Verigin's refusal to claim responsibility for the Freedomites' mission left them without endorsement for their activities. If Verigin admitted involvement in their mission, however, then all of his efforts to build a more positive image for the Doukhobors would have been wasted. This is the stalemate the Doukhobors could not, on their own, overcome. One or both parties would have to give ground to secure a resolution.

The committee persisted in its effort to find some middle ground on which all parties could agree. Mel Strangeland and Mark Mealing proposed wording for an interim resolution that suggested that Peter P. "*Chistiakov*" Verigin's public statements confused some members of the Doukhobor population, leading them to believe that he was encouraging them to commit depredations.¹¹⁶ At first, Verigin was adamant that neither he nor his predecessors had said or done anything to provoke the Sons of Freedom. However, when written evidence of *Chistiakov's* speeches was presented, Verigin changed his story, and admitted that *Chistiakov* might have provoked the Freedomites to act as they did.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 83.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

The Doukhobors, who had such an orally-based culture, were unaccustomed to being checked by written documentation. The existence of written documentation that *contradicted* the oral narrative suggests two important possibilities. The first is that the oral record was *incorrect*. The second is that the oral record was subject to *manipulation* or even *falsification* to suit the needs of the group. Both possibilities are upsetting, if one considers “the truth” to be the main function of an oral narrative. However, to those interested in identity history, the oral record is very useful, even if it is objectively “incorrect.” For some reason, Verigin and his followers wished to believe, and wished outsiders to believe, that they were the innocent victims of renegade Doukhobors who had lost their equilibrium. This may be because this was the truth, or it may be because this version of the story supported another purpose.

Verigin persistently denied involvement in the Freedomites’ activities. Yet Cran and his colleagues continued to be suspicious. Mark Mealing noted his concern that executive members of the USCC, “knowing that anything may be misinterpreted, put themselves in a position privately as well as publicly where such interpretations may be made.” He was especially concerned about the USCC's persistent use of “red” materials despite awareness that the Sons of Freedom perceived this colour as a message to set fires.¹¹⁸ Verigin responded by challenging Mealing to live among the Doukhobors and live in such a way as to avoid inadvertently using one of the Freedomites’ signs. “You’d have to be flying like an angel up in the clouds somewhere... Goodness gracious, Mr. Mealing, what do we have to do in this world, do we have to cater to these fanatical irresponsible people.”¹¹⁹

Verigin admitted that he interacted with known Freedomite activists, despite publicly declaring he wished to have nothing to do with them. He explained these meetings as an effort, on his part, to “arrange a reconciliation, to forgive and forget the wrongdoings and to

¹¹⁸ Mark Mealing, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, 16-17.

¹¹⁹ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume B, 29 October 1982, 18-19.

refrain from committing them in the future.”¹²⁰ Cran proposed an alternate theory. He suggested that Verigin and the Freedomites he met with satisfied each other’s needs. The Freedomites needed a leader, and Verigin could fulfill that role in a way that Sorokin could not. In turn, Cran theorized, Verigin was afraid that his followers were rapidly assimilating to Canadian way-of-life, and needed the Sons of Freedom to frighten the Doukhobors back to their cultural roots.¹²¹ In addition, Cran suspected that Verigin’s alcoholism was an important part of the equation. It was possible, Cran concluded, that Verigin was drinking when he interacted with Freedomite individuals who went on to commit depredations assuming that they had Verigin’s endorsement.¹²²

Opening discussion of the leaders’ role in Doukhobor history was not easy for Verigin, or for his supporters, especially when the discussion was critical and even condemnatory. It was not easy for Verigin’s accusers either.¹²³ Fred Makortoff of the Reformed group later reflected that speaking openly on the topic, especially in front of government officials, provoked a “sense of betrayal.” He explained:

You’re going to say that your leader’s an asshole, what the hell does that make you? This is your brightest and your best? That takes a lot of courage. And to break with a tradition of closed-mouthedness where you don’t divulge these secrets with your family, with your friends or even with them at the USCC, particularly with them at the USCC, then why do you need to tell this to government. What good does that bring to either the USCC or us?¹²⁴

¹²⁰ John J. Verigin Sr., Statements to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 1, 8 December 1982, 48; Volume 2, 8 December 1982, 19; Volume 5, 10 December 1982, 59.

¹²¹ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 128.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ See for example Sam Konkin, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 3, 8-9 December 1982, 31.

¹²⁴ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 109-110.

Narratives concerning the leaders' role in Freedomite activity were difficult for the Doukhobors to address at the EKCIR. It was also difficult for USCC membership to accept scrutiny of their motives and history. Cran perceived the USCC as overly sanctimonious. From the first meeting, John J. Verigin Sr. asked those in attendance to trust him and his organization, suggesting that the USCC's "record would show that we are deserving of your trust."¹²⁵ The USCC, Verigin reminded his listeners, was the largest Doukhobor organization and had suffered most at the hands of the Sons of Freedom.¹²⁶ The USCC published *The Thorny Pathway* before the first meeting of the EKCIR. This document reiterated the Orthodox narrative of victimization, drawing attention to the Freedomites' activities, and complaining about the way Verigin was treated during his trial. The brief concluded that the Orthodox Doukhobors were poorly understood and poorly treated by the authorities.¹²⁷

Cran summarized the Orthodox Doukhobors' "underlying concern" as finding a way to reduce the insurance and guarding costs incurred as a result of the Freedomites' activities.¹²⁸ The Sons of Freedom were also seeking an end to their trials. Many from the Reformed group were tired of spending time in jail for the sake of the cause. They felt that they had sacrificed themselves, and believed that the Orthodox Doukhobor leadership was responsible for putting them through what they had endured throughout their time in Canada.¹²⁹ According to Cran, this had been the "crux of the debate" before and during the EKCIR proceedings: the Sons of Freedom believed they were acting on a mission to save the Doukhobors.¹³⁰ Fred Makortoff, a representative of the Reformed group, indicated that he

¹²⁵ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume A, 28 October 1982, 10-11; Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 48.

¹²⁶ John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to the EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume A, 28 October 1982, 10-11; Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 60.

¹²⁷ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 48.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* This comes across in Gerry Seminoff, Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume B, 29 October 1982, 8; John J. Verigin Sr., Statement to EKCIR, "EKCIR Proceedings," Volume 99, 16 September 1987, 4.

¹²⁹ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 17-18

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

and his peers believed that the blame for the depredations activity should be shared between those who had perpetrated the events and those who encouraged them from among the Community Doukhobors.¹³¹ He reminded his peers: “we are not here to crucify anyone nor to manufacture heroes. If, in our commonly held view, any group or individual appears in the relative terms of good or bad, then so be it.”¹³²

In effect, Makortoff was asking fellow Doukhobors at the EKCIR meetings to stop telling stories, and start telling the truth. It was variations in the Doukhobors’ narratives that were causing them trouble and impeding their progress. By paying attention to the language they were using, investigating their assumptions, and negotiating the nuances behind their narratives, with the support of “outsider” mediators, the Doukhobors were able to overcome the obstacles to unification.¹³³

In their reflections on the importance of the EKCIR, Jim Popoff, Fred Makortoff, and Steve Lapshinoff (identifying as Orthodox, Reformed, and Sons of Freedom respectively) all indicated that the EKCIR meetings “played an important role in bringing about a change in the patterns of communication between the Sons of Freedom, the Reformed, and the Orthodox communities – a change that made it possible to bring an end to the bombings and burnings.”¹³⁴ The EKCIR structure allowed for open discussion, in which members of each group were given an opportunity to present their point of view on sensitive subject matter.

This differed from the DRC experience. At the DRC, the Orthodox narrative, upheld by the majority of participants, was expected to predominate. Without outsider observers, or moderators, it was left to the Doukhobors to self-regulate. For a people so resistant to outside authority, this model should have been ideal; for a people so enmeshed in intergroup conflict,

¹³¹ Ibid., 49.

¹³² Fred Makortoff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume A, 28 October 1982, 18.

¹³³ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 138. Cran offers a useful discussion on the nature of story-telling in conflict-ridden situations such as that of the Doukhobors throughout his study, especially on pages 23-24, 27-31, 35-37, 39, 89, 95-96, 111, 119, 131-132, 138.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 108.

however, this model did not work.¹³⁵ The participants tried to understand the conflict without getting their hands too dirty and in so doing created even more conflict. The EKCIR allowed participants to spend a little more time sifting through the dirt, which in the end was necessary to bring certain misunderstandings and truths to the surface. They needed “outsiders” to question the stories they were telling themselves and each other.

In *Negotiating Buck Naked*, Greg Cran focuses on the importance of story-telling to the resolution of the Doukhobors’ conflicts. It is true that the telling of stories is intrinsic to Doukhobor identity and culture. It is important to study the structure and content of these narratives for clues as to the Doukhobors personal and group identification. The telling of these stories led ultimately to a resolution of the “Doukhobor problem.”

Part of the success of the EKCIR format was that it allowed Doukhobor participants to translate the “oral” record into something more permanent. Doukhobor participants told their stories, which were recorded. This made them less “malleable,” and prompted story-tellers to take more care as they were speaking, Makortoff argued.¹³⁶ This was important. The story-telling aspect of the Doukhobors’ oral culture had proved problematic. Variations in the oral narrative, split largely along fault lines between opposed factions, made story-telling a divisive activity.

The EKCIR’s success lay not so much in the telling of stories, however, which the Doukhobors already did without encouragement. As it turned out, it was *listening* that was the sticking point. The EKCIR was a controlled safe space for the sharing of stories, supervised by fellow Doukhobors and outsiders, with each party encouraged not only to talk, but also to *listen* to one another. The Doukhobors needed outsider support to help them to hear one another, even if they disagreed, as a first step to negotiating common ground. They

¹³⁵ Bill Babakaeff, Statement to EKCIR, “EKCIR Proceedings,” Volume 100, 17 September 1987, 110.

¹³⁶ Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 109.

needed encouragement to accept deviations which could not be reconciled. They also needed guidance to keep them focused on their shared goal: the end to all types of depredations activity and the pain and suffering it caused all parties. Though the details of who, what, when, where, why, and how were important, the top priority was coming to some sort of agreement that would result in peace.

Though competing oral narratives had divided them, another aspect of the Doukhobors' oral culture could be drawn upon to promote unity: the Doukhobors' musical tradition. When the EKCIR discussion became particularly heated, one of the Doukhobors suggested they sing a hymn together. This calmed the participants and reminded them of what they had in common. They repeated this exercise thereafter to promote a "sense of harmony on various occasions when discussions went awry."¹³⁷ In fact, it was an invitation to sing together that set in motion a series of goodwill and outreach opportunities: the Krestova (Freedomite) Men's Choir invited the Kootenay (Non-Freedomite) Men's Choir and their partners for an evening at the Krestova Meeting Hall. Fred Makortoff hosted the gathering "with humour, singing, and baked pies being the recipe for change." In turn, the Kootenay Men's Choir invited the Krestova Men's Choir for a repeat performance in Brilliant.¹³⁸

Stories could change according to the narrator; Doukhobor hymns and psalms, however, are memorized and reproduced according to the collective memory of their tune and lyrics. If anyone forgets or mistakes so much as a single word during a religious service, his or her neighbours will jump in to set it right. The Doukhobors' musical tradition was an identificational narrative that all Doukhobors could agree on. As such, the Doukhobors' music was a potent means to promote unity. Singing the same words at the same time, in

¹³⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 139.

harmony, could serve to draw the Doukhobors together physically. The spiritual and cultural messages embedded in the songs could serve to remind the Doukhobors of their unique identity, purpose, and their calling to live up to a particular set of ideals.

Following the EKCIR, the “official narrative” Doukhobors of different factions shared with the public was much more general and yet more carefully nuanced, more neutral, and more forgiving than it had been in the middle fifty years of the twentieth century. There was mutual forgiveness and generosity shown one another. Though some individuals continued to demonstrate in the nude or commit arson, the incidents were fewer and less serious than before. Though the Sons of Freedom still felt marginalized in some instances, much more effort was made to forge friendly relations. Progress had clearly been made.

Ultimately, discussing their collective memory (or more properly, memories) narrative(s), and identity(y/ies) promoted healing between the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors and their counterparts, and quelled the Freedomites’ perceived need to strip, burn, and bomb. This constituted, from a public point of view, a solution to the “Doukhobor problem.” However, from a Doukhobor perspective, the “problem” persisted. Despite their efforts to preserve their unique identity, they were, more than ever before, in serious danger of assimilating, as Doukhobors integrated with, and increasingly identified themselves as “Canadians.”¹³⁹

¹³⁹ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 350, 355-356; Milton Stanley Orris, “Social Control and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of the Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities” (MA diss, University of Saskatchewan, 1975), 175.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the Doukhobors' century in Canada, current head of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ John J. Verigin Jr. speculated: "the greatest achievement of Doukhoborism after living in Canada for one hundred years is the idea that we as a people have survived."¹ The Doukhobor cultural identity did prove to be "particularly resilient" against the "twentieth-century forces of secularization, modernization, and professionalization."² These forces, however, put considerable pressure on the Doukhobor group, and resisting these influences exacted a tremendous cost.

A study of the "Doukhobor problem" reveals that it was really about contested social identities. Throughout the twentieth century, Doukhobor factions struggled to assert their interpretation of "Doukhoborism" as the ideal while navigating the pressures associated with immigration, settlement, integration, and assimilation. In the meantime, Doukhobor social identity (and indirectly, Canadian social identity) was being defined and redefined in the public realm by journalists, academic "experts," government officials, and law enforcement officers who evaluated the Doukhobors' beliefs and practices in comparison to those of mainstream (Anglo-) Canadians.

Privately, the Doukhobors viewed their "problem" as "the battle for the preservation of the essence of the Doukhobor way of life" and the "survival of the Doukhobor Society as a meaningful entity."³ However, much of the "Doukhobor problem" was associated with the

¹ Interview with J.J. Verigin Jr., "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tapes 74-78, tape 77, page 482, Jim Hamm Fonds, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC). John J. Verigin Jr. was elected head of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ Doukhobors in February 2009, following the death of his father, John J. Verigin Sr. in October of 2008. John J. Verigin Sr. had served as "Honourary Chairman" of the USCC for seventy years.

² Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living* (Legas: Toronto, 2002), 16. Also Michael Byron Davis, "Freedom of Religion," *Canada and the World* 42 (October 1976), 20.

³ Joseph E. Podovnikoff, as cited in Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., *Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee Meeting*, ([Grand Forks, British Columbia]: Partially funded by the Department of

Sons of Freedom and their protest activities in public (non-Doukhobor) discourse. In many respects, the Sons of Freedom caused the public “Doukhobor problem” in an effort to solve the private one. Their protest activity, which was intended to “save” the Doukhobors from assimilation, created a major problem for other Doukhobors, for Canadian authorities, and ultimately, for themselves.

In retrospect, (former) Sons of Freedom regret some things and not others. Naida Zaystovff regretted “believing so strongly in the religion. Religion is good, but you can’t go hundred percent...your children, your life should come first, [you shouldn’t] put yourself into suffering like that.”⁴ “I don’t regret anything that I have had in the past and I think my parents did a very good job in bringing me up with the religion and I still believe in God. It’s just that I don’t practice the Doukhobor ways anymore,” Grace Worrall declared.⁵

The Freedomites’ sacrifices have exacted a significant cost on the former activists, their families, and their communities. Once a tight, inter-generational community, many (former) Sons of Freedom struggle with inter-generational disconnect in the aftermath of the depredations period. Pete Stoochnoff reflected on lost opportunities with his parents, who were preoccupied with the Freedomite business. They were “always in jail, or we were always in some sort of conflict with the government or on the trek. We never had a time to settle down and really live together.” As a consequence, Stoochnoff never really learned how to parent and he felt his children suffered as a result.⁶ Harry Rezansoff recalled “poor communication between parents and children, a lot of dysfunctional, disjointed families.”⁷ Paul Perepolkin noted that “the hardship was bad; it was bad and it was bad on my family

Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Centre for Russian and North American Studies; and the President’s Office, Selkirk College, 1997), Symposium 17 (12 September 1976), 226-227, UBC.

⁴ Interview with Naida Zaystovff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 49, page 317.

⁵ Interview with Grace Worrall, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 6, page 42.

⁶ Interview with Pete Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 59, page 383.

⁷ Interview with George Kinakin Jr. and Harry Rezansoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 121, page 709.

because I left my child too. Thinking back it was the same way as my mother had left me, and I left that child too.”⁸

Many Freedomites experienced mental illness and substance abuse problems as a result of their experiences, which led in turn to hardship for their families. In her research, social worker P’Nina L. Shames identified the experience of separation between parents and children to be a prime factor in incidence of mental illness among the Freedomite population.⁹ In addition, the pain of “feeling that you weren’t accepted and the pressures of fighting assimilation”¹⁰ and the challenge of living up to Doukhobor ideals contributed to many Freedomites’ troubles after the depredations period ended.¹¹

The New Denver experience was a significant contributing factor to many Freedomites’ ongoing mental health challenges.¹² Larry Zaytsoff reported feeling intense emotional disconnect and confusion. His experiences had rendered him “an empty shell.” He “did not have loving feelings anymore,” and had difficulty trusting people, having been so often lied to.¹³ He identified feeling “bitter” and “angry” with the system, his peers, and himself. He was “bitter” because his elders had told him that his actions would bring a solution to the “Doukhobor problem.” He had spent time at Essondale (a mental hospital in British Columbia), and had secured the help of doctors, psychiatrists, and counselors. However, he reported that he often found himself crying and unable to stop. In these moments he retreated to the mountains, hoping that his children would not be affected by his pain.¹⁴

⁸ Interview with Paul Perepolkin, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 41, page 269.

⁹ P’Nina L. Shames, “Assessing Cultural Change in Doukhobor Clients: Recommendations for Social Work Practice” (M. Social Work, UBC, August 1981), 57.

¹⁰ Interview with Laura Savinkoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 82, page 495-499.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, page 498-500.

¹² *Ibid.*, tape 81, page 495.

¹³ Joe Sherstobitoff also identified trust as an issue in his interview with the author, 21 June 2005.

¹⁴ Interview with Larry Zaytsoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 50, page 322-323.

Former Freedomites have trouble disclosing their personal experiences with their children and grandchildren. New Denver experiences, in particular, seem to be protected from the survivors' descendants. For a community which had previously been so centrally defined by oral articulation of the experience of suffering for the sake of the cause, and by the need to perpetuate, preserve, and bestow on youth the collective memory of the group, the hesitation to discuss these personal issues constitutes a large shift in focus. Very few Doukhobors of any faction, if any at all, would like to see a return to the hardships of the mid twentieth century, and it is possible that omitting stories of these hardships is a way to break with the past, and protect Doukhobor youth from the pain and suffering experienced by their predecessors.

The Sons of Freedom had been motivated, primarily, by a desire to protect Doukhobor identity, and to stem the tide of assimilation, especially for the sake of future generations. Unfortunately, the Freedomites' activities accelerated assimilation in some respects, as younger generations sought to distance themselves – and older generations sought to protect youth from – stigmas associated with Freedomite depredations activities in the post-depredations period. Grace Burnett noted that she was a Doukhobor and always would be, but her children were not. “My children don’t speak Russian. My oldest daughter – I don’t think she even realizes anything about New Denver and I never spoke to them about it,” Burnett reflects. In some respects, Burnett considered this a loss. “I think not being a community-living, sharing, loving kind of Doukhobor right now, myself, I think I am a loser, and I think my kids are losers in that respect,” she admitted.¹⁵ However, Burnett acknowledged that she chose that future for them. She remembered seeing her sister’s house

¹⁵ Interview with Grace Burnett, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 25, page 172.

burn, and the expression on her nieces' and nephews' faces, and decided: "no, my kids will never, ever see that. Not by my own hand! Not if I have anything to do with it."¹⁶

Youth growing up in the latter years of the twentieth century were caught between two shifting tides: that of increased integration and assimilation into Canadian life, and that of the ancestral call to bear the torch of Doukhoborism. Most – if not all – Doukhobor descendants of the younger generations are seamlessly integrated into the Canadian way of life. All Doukhobor youth comply with school attendance regulations as a matter of course; many have sought post-secondary education opportunities. Education, as well as improved access to mainstream entertainment, accelerated the assimilation of Doukhobor youth.¹⁷ Except, perhaps, for attending the funerals of their elders, most have little exposure to Doukhobor religious or cultural activities. However, some have shown interest in learning more about their ancestral roots.¹⁸ Elders have expressed concern that their offspring are not embracing their Doukhobor heritage or learning Russian, and some are nostalgic for the communal lifestyle of the first half of the twentieth century, when intergenerational communication of Doukhobor ideals was easier.¹⁹ USCC Chair John J. Verigin Jr. remains optimistic about the spirit of Doukhobor youth, and indicated in an interview that he felt "confident" that the youth would "recognize the value of their birthright," though what their "search" for their Doukhobor identity would look like, he could not determine.²⁰

By the end of the twentieth century, the public aspects of the "Doukhobor problem" had been resolved: there was peace in Doukhobor-settled areas of British Columbia, and

¹⁶ Ibid., page 170.

¹⁷ Jeff Sallot and Robert Matas, "Doukhobor Consider Siberia to Preserve Language, Culture" *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1989, A12.

¹⁸ Robert Minden, *Separate from the World: Meetings With Doukhobor-Canadians in British Columbia* (Vancouver: National Film Board of Canada, July 1979); Kenneth Peacock, *Songs of the Doukhobors*, National Museums of Canada, Bulletin No. 2313, Folklore Series No. 7, 14; John W. Friesen and Michael M. Verigin, *The Community Doukhobors: A People in Transition* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 151, 172; Tarasoff, *Spirit Wrestlers*, xi.

¹⁹ Friesen and Verigin, *Community Doukhobors*, 155-156.

²⁰ Interview with J.J. Verigin Jr., "The Spirit Wrestlers," Transcripts of Interviews, tape 76, page 479.

many Doukhobor-Canadians were participating as an ethnic minority within a multicultural Canadian society.²¹ But the private aspects of the “Doukhobor problem” – the threat of assimilation, and the fear that the Doukhobor ethno-religious identity would be lost in twentieth-century Canada – loomed larger than ever before. By the end of the twentieth century, however, many Doukhobors (especially of the younger generations) had become so disillusioned with the whole identity that their interest in preserving it was dim at best.

As for the value of the depredations activity, the suffering it created for Freedomite individuals, their families, their factional community, the larger Doukhobor community, and for their Canadian neighbours looms large in the memory of those responsible for perpetrating the destruction. Peter Elasoff’s comment summarizes prevailing Freedomite and former Freedomite sentiment aptly. Regarding the messages he had received instructing him to go somewhere and do something for the cause, he stated: “if the same message came to me today, I would say: ‘Go to hell!’ . I don’t care who it is. I don’t care, [even] if it is God himself!”²² Elasoff, like many of his peers, had gotten past the point of caring who was sending these directives, or what their motives were. He no longer cared about the “mission” or the “religion” that inspired it. Exhausted by years of personal and community turmoil, he just wanted to retire, in peace.

The Doukhobors survived their first century in Canada, but only barely. Many Doukhobors continue to identify as Doukhobors; some of these continue to participate in Doukhobor cultural and religious events; a few of these continue to invest in the welfare of Doukhobor organizational groups. Some are optimistic that Doukhoborism will revive in the twenty-first century – that somehow, the *iskra* will stir in the souls of Doukhobor

²¹ Especially after the publication of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism’s findings.

²² Interview with Peter Elasoff, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” Transcripts of Interviews, tape 68, page 440.

descendants and potential converts. In fact, Doukhoborism may yet survive the twenty-first century, if a way forward can be envisioned. So much focus on the Doukhobors' past – the ancestors' contribution, historical injustice and suffering, and traditional practices – has served to reinforce group identity, but has also stymied growth. To be alive as a culture and as a religion, Doukhobors must turn their attention to the exciting possibilities that may yet lie ahead of them if they shift gears from “survive” to “thrive.” Letting go of some of the negative memories of the past may free the Doukhobors to move forward.

With the commemoration of important centennials – the Burning of Arms in 1995, the immigration to Canada in 1999, and the move to British Columbia in 2008 – behind them, perhaps the Doukhobors can plan for future growth. The Doukhobor Research Committee and the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations were focused on sorting through the loose ends of the past. Perhaps the time has come for a Doukhobor “Visioning” Committee, involving all those interested in exploring exciting directions for a revitalized Doukhobor future. Perhaps, free from suffering and from assimilative pressure, the Doukhobors could yet flourish in a twenty-first century Canadian context.

APPENDIX A: "Terrorism"

"More Homes Blaze, Nudists Sing Hymns in Outbreak of Doukhobor Terrorism," *Globe and Mail*, 24 April 1950, 17; "395 'Co-Operative' Doukhobors to be Released from BC Prison," *Ottawa Citizen (Evening)*, 19 September 1950, 1, 16; "Doukhobor Peace Seen in Release of 395 Nudists," *Globe and Mail*, 21 Sept 1950, 3; Zubek and Solberg, *Doukhobors at War*, 222-223; "Doukhobor Leader Fails to Find Promised Land," *Globe and Mail*, 22 July 1952, 2; Bruce Larsen, "Doukhobor Children Hold Key to Settlement of Disorders," *Province*, n.d., Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "13 Homes Set Afire By Douks," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 April 1953, 1; "Sons Parade in Nelson; Orthodox Set Suspect List," *Nelson Daily News*, 9 May 1953; "Ottawa Asked to Help Deal with Douks," *Montreal Gazette*, 17 June 1953, 1; "Doukhobor Radicals Put Torch To Homes in B.C." *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 June 1953, 8; "Douk Guards Boosted A Wild Rumors Spread: Slocan Folk fear Violence During Memorial Rites," 1 Aug 1953, Dixon Collection, in author's possession; "Railmen Will Strike If Douks Uncurbed: Fear More Dynamited CPR Tracks," *Medicine Hat News*, 3 Aug 1953; Joe MacSween, "More Doukhobor Terrorism Awaited," *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 12 September 1953, 1; "The Sons of Freedom," *Nelson Daily News*, 3 May 1956; David Rowntree, "Quaker's Difficult Job: Seeks Doukhobor Peace," *North Bay Nugget*, 28 January 1957; "Fear Douk Plot Against Margaret," *Toronto Star*, 30 June 1958, 1; "Police Keep Close Watch on Douks," *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 July 1958, 5; "Clean Up For Margaret: Arrest 5 Douks After Explosions," *Toronto Star*, 12 July 1958, 1; "Douks Collect Forms to Give Up on Citizenship," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 September 1958, 5; Stephen Franklin, "Freedomites Wage a Lunatic War," *Ottawa Citizen [Weekend Magazine]*, 15 November 1958, 2-4, 38; Tom Ford, "Terrorism: A New, Nasty Word in Canadian Mining," *Toronto Star*, 10 March 1960, 10; "'Screwballs' Bomb Tomb, Two Halls: New Wave of Terrorism Hits Kootenay Doukhobor Country," *Vancouver Sun*, 31 July 1961; "Bombs Rock Doukhobor Settlements," *Globe and Mail*, 31 July 1961, 1; "4 Doukhobor Villages in B.C. Damaged in Fire Bomb Attacks," *Edmonton Journal*, 21 August 1961; "2 Doukhobors Charged in B. C. As Terrorists," *Globe and Mail*, 28 December 1961, 2; Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 350; "2 Doukhobors Found Guilty of Terrorism," *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 1962, 10; "Welfare Probe Urged," *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1962, 15; Edwin Bolwell. "A Death is Awaited for Counter-Terrorism: Doukhobors' Bomb-a-Week Campaign Stirs British Columbians' Wrath," *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1962, 1; "The Doukhobor Terror," *Globe and Mail*, 12 February 1962, 6; "Leads Swamp RCMP After Reward Offer," *Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1962, 2; Ralph Allen, "The Hidden Kingdom of B.C.'s Holy Terrorists," *Maclean's Magazine* 75 (10 March 1962), 15, 46; "Terrorism in the Kootenays of British Columbia," *Drumheller Mail*, 21 March 1962, 7; "'Don't Come Back,' Sons Warn Sorokin: Jailed Freedomite Council Fears Arrest of Leader if He Returns," *Vancouver Sun* 8 May 1962; *Globe and Mail*, 18 July 1962, 13; "A Law to Fit the Case" *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1962, 6; "On Guard Duty," *Drumheller Mail*, 10 October 1962, 1; "Rights of the Majority" *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1962, 6; "23 'Sons' Force-Fed: 95 End Prison Fast," *Toronto Star*, 19 August 1963, 1; Alexander Ross, "The West: The Freedomites' Cardboard Krestova at the Gates to Mountain Prison," *Maclean's Magazine* 76 (2 November 1963): 3; "Will Agassiz move them out? Freedomite Test Comes Tomorrow," *Columbian*, 14 July 1964; Lorne Mallin, "'Print One Word and I'll Get You', But Doukhobors Happy Lot," *Columbian*, 10 July 1965; Hal Leiren, "Have the Douks Been Won Over – by a Book?" *Toronto Star*, 12 February 1966, 7; "Take Food Through Tube in Nose: Two Doukhobor Women Begin Second Year of Fasting," *Globe and Mail*, 4 April 1967, 11; Jack Morris, "A 'New' Krestova: After the Great Trek," *Columbian*, 13 November 1967; "New Fire Outbreak

by Douks,” Dixon Collection, in author’s possession; “3 Blasts Wreck Power Tower,” n.p., in author’s collection.

APPENDIX B: “Terrorists”

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