Negotiating Buck Naked

Gregory J. Cran

Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution

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Acknowledgments

This is a project that started twenty-five years ago when I first began working with the Doukhobor communities in the West Kootenay and Boundary regions, which are located in the south-central part of British Columbia. The genesis of my encounter with the Doukhobor people goes back even further, to when I was twelve years old and living in the town of Hope, British Columbia. This is where I first encountered the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors who had arrived at our school after having trekked some 485 kilometres. This was where I met Alex Zaitsoff (now deceased), who shared a locker with me up until the day, about three months later, when he, his family, and the rest of their community left to continue their trek.

Over these past many years there are some whom I wish to thank for having challenged and inspired my thinking. These include Hugh Herbison and Tom McGauley, who introduced me to Kootenay life and Doukhobor lore thirty-four years ago; Dr. Joseph Schaeffer, whose work in community and communication is truly insightful and cutting edge; and Dr. Marie Hoskins, who helped me realize that the postmodern view of the world isn't as scary as some make it out to be.

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alone; my wife Katherine, whose endless support helped me realize that tall mountains are climbable once you have them in your sights; and the angel that sat on my shoulder and kept reminding me that I needed to finish what I was doing before moving on. It is memories such as these that shape who we are in the stories we become.

Organizations and Acronyms

Agassiz Mountain Prison Opened in July 1962 to house approximately seventy Sons of Freedom sentenced for bombing and arson.

CCBRD Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors. These were former Sons of Freedom who, starting in the 1950s, chose to follow Stephan Sorokin.

CCUB Ltd. Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Limited. This organization was incorporated in 1917 and continued to operate until 1938, when it went into receivership.

Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Affairs The committee was chaired by Dr. Geoff Andrew of the University of British Columbia. It consisted of representatives from the Doukhobor communities, both the federal and the provincial governments, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Doukhobor Research Committee This committee was formed in 1950 after the collapse of the Sullivan Commission in 1948. It was chaired by Dr. Harry Hawthorn of the University of British Columbia.

EKCIR Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations. This committee was launched in October 1982.

KCIR Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations. This committee was established in November 1979.

Piers Island Commissioned as a federal penitentiary from 1932 to 1935 in order to house the 570 Sons of Freedom who were sentenced to three years for public nudity. Off the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

Society Rodina Formerly the Committee for Cultural Relations with Russian Descendants Abroad.

USCC Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ. This organization was made up of Orthodox Doukhobors and was registered as a society in 1957.

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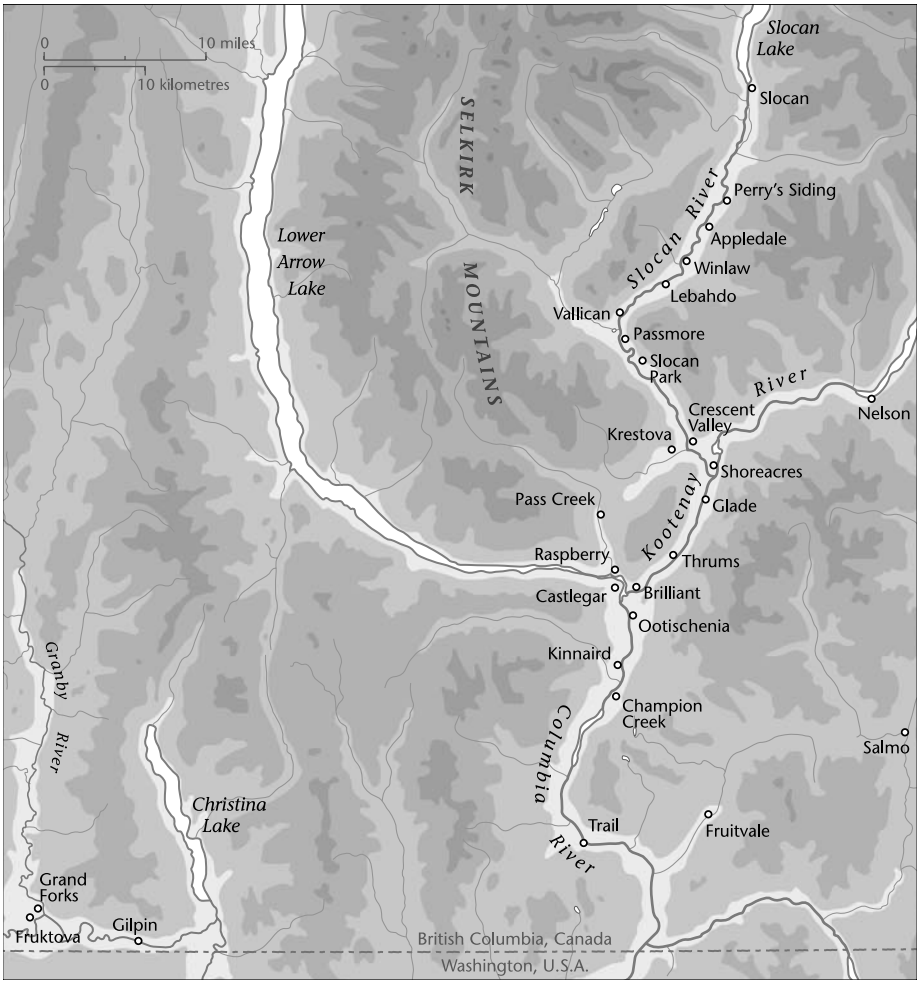

British Columbia Doukhobor settlements, Boundary and West Kootenay districts, 1908 to present. *Map by Eric Leinberger, adapted from map by J. Kalmakoff*

1
Introduction

> While I pondered what he said, he leaned toward me as if to speak in confidence. "Let me give you one piece of advice ... you can't apply rational thinking to an irrational situation."[1]

In 1899 a group of Russian peasants referred to as the Doukhobors immigrated to Canada after having suffered centuries of persecution in Russia. Soon after their arrival conflict emerged between these new immigrants and the state over such issues as land ownership, the registration of births and deaths, and school attendance. As positions hardened, a splinter group known as the Sons of Freedom emerged, and it used public nudity, arson, and bombings as a means of both protest and retaliation. These practices continued for the better part of a century.

Throughout the time the Doukhobors spent in Canada, numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to address the conflict between them and the state. These ranged from increased sanctions and long prison terms to the apprehension of Sons of Freedom children and their six-year confinement in a residential school setting. Over this long, tortuous history, three commissions of inquiry were held (in 1912, 1947, and 1956); a group of scholars studied the situation (1949); and, with 400 Sons of Freedom jailed, the University of British Columbia (UBC) brought the Orthodox Doukhobor (also known as Community Doukhobor) leadership and Sons of Freedom together with the provincial government in search of a solution (1950). All of this was to no avail. Then, in 1979, a different type of intervention was tried (see below) and, six years later, resulted in an accord. The question is, why did this intervention work when others failed? What were the factors that led to change?

This is a story that examines the events that, in 1979, brought together a skilled group of dedicated local non-Doukhobor people – the Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (KCIR) – with the Doukhobor factions and a group of government officials and police. This group heard witnesses describe how bombing and arson came to be used as a means of protest and retaliation and how, over a period of sixty years, this was sometimes encouraged and sometimes discouraged by the Doukhobor leadership.

In examining the factors that led to change, my analysis draws upon interviews with key spokespersons for the Doukhobors, who played strategic roles in helping their groups bring an end to bombing and arson. The interviews explore these people's pasts and the stories they told about other groups and the government. They also explore how meaning was constructed and how the epiphanies that were experienced during the KCIR sessions reshaped people's perceptions and views of each other. The lessons resulting from this study challenge conventional conflict theory and conflict intervention practices.

My role dates back to 1978, when I was asked by the Ministry of the Attorney General of British Columbia to design an intervention process that, so I reasoned at the time, would focus attention away from provincial government. I was in my late twenties and I had to face an elderly group of extremely determined, very religious people who, at least with regard to the Sons of Freedom, had spent a good part of their lives in prison for standing up for what they believed. Notwithstanding our age difference and my role with the provincial government (which they viewed as the "devil"), we reached an accord. For the next twenty years I watched from a distance to see whether this agreement would hold, periodically wondering why the process had enabled the occurrence of such a dramatic change. Finally, I found my excuse to return to the region, this time as a doctoral student, eager to look for answers.

Outline of the Book

My purpose in telling this story is twofold: first, to fill a gap in the history of the Doukhobors regarding how, after many years of turmoil, competing narratives were eventually negotiated into a new story structure that laid the foundation for bringing an end to violence; second, to inform those interested in conflict intervention and peace building – whether they are government policy makers, police officers, conflict practitioners, or members of the general public – about the lessons that were learned in addressing a particularly complex ethno-political conflict. In short, I examine prevailing assumptions about conflict and conflict reso-

lution models and look at how these unravel when confronted by a non-linear ethno-political conflict situation.

In Chapter 1, I provide a brief history of the Doukhobors and the conflicts that emerged when they came to Canada. I describe the various failed attempts on the part of the government and the community to address the ongoing tension between state policies and religious beliefs.

In Chapter 2, I explore what has been written about the Doukhobors and about conflict and culture. I do this in order to highlight not only where these theories diverge but also where their limitations come into play. In Chapter 3, I describe my role as a young provincial government representative who came face-to-face with a myriad of situations, ranging from hunger fasts and blockades to efforts to get all the groups in the same room together. In Chapter 4, I set out the conflicting narratives and events that unfolded in the period during which the KCIR was meeting.

In Chapter 5, I continue with the narrative exchange but note what happened when pressure was brought to bear on the Union of Communities of Christ, the Sons of Freedom, and the Fraternal Council of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors (also known as the "Reformed Sons of Freedom,") to make a choice between abandoning the process altogether and constructing a common narrative. I detail key parts of the exchange, the situations that emerged between sessions, and the dilemmas the groups faced in negotiating their storied pasts.

In Chapter 6, I return to the Kootenays after nearly twenty years to interview three people who played a significant role in helping the Orthodox Doukhobors and the Reformed Doukhobors reach an accord. I explore the meanings each group created about the other during their earlier years and then what happened when they participated in the KCIR sessions. In Chapter 7, those interviewed describe their experiences throughout the KCIR sessions and tell how these experiences helped them to reshape their views and perspectives.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I examine the transcripts and interviews to educe lessons that may be useful to conflict theorists and practitioners, public policy makers, and others addressing difficult and challenging conflict situations, such as that presented by the Doukhobors.

Historical Overview

The word "Doukhobor" is derived from the Russian term *Doukho-borets,* meaning "spirit wrestler" – a term applied in 1785 by Ambrosius, the

Archbishop of Ekaterinoslav, to a group of Russian peasants who left the Russian Orthodox Church. Although there are no written records to describe their origin, Tarasoff (1982) believes that the Doukhobors emanated from a schism that occurred as a result of changes in the liturgy introduced by the Patriarch Nikon in 1652. Those who left the church were known as the "Old Believers," and the Doukhobors were among them. However, it was not until the mid-1700s, when Sylvan Kolesnikoff, from the Ekaterinoslav province, denounced icon worship and opposed other church reforms that Doukhoborism took shape. It was at this time that many Doukhobors were exiled as the Tsarist government attempted to destroy the movement.

The Doukhobors became communally minded,[2] sharing all their possessions and working for the good of the community as a whole. By 1895 they were practising vegetarians and their pacifist tenets had led them to a complete break with the military. By burning all their firearms they dramatically demonstrated their refusal to kill. Their refusal to obey Russian conscription laws alienated them from the Tsarist government, which tried to destroy the sect through imprisonment, torture, and exile. By the end of the nineteenth century the Doukhobors sustained themselves with hopes and dreams of a "Promised Land," a place where they could live peacefully and practise their beliefs.

Peter Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist living in England, suggested that Canada would be a safe haven. Contacts were made with the Canadian government, which appeared sympathetic. A group headed by Aylmer Maude,[3] Prince Khilkov, and Doukhobor representatives Makhortoff and Ivin was delegated to find a suitable locality for resettlement.

The Doukhobor plight had become known in Britain through Leo Tolstoy, who garnered public support, particularly among the English Quakers, who empathized with the Doukhobors' situation. Enough funds were raised through the sale of Tolstoy's book, *Resurrection,* and other sources to enable the Doukhobors to immigrate to Canada in 1899. Initially 7,427 arrived, to be followed by an additional 417 between 1900 and 1920 (Hawthorn 1952, 8). The Canadian government granted the Doukhobors military exemption, just as it had done for the Mennonites.

The first contingent of Doukhobors to arrive settled on blocks of land in Saskatchewan (prior to 1905 the land upon which they settled was part of the Northwest Territories). Soon after their arrival, confusion arose when the federal government made it known that granting land title required individuals to sign a document and to swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown. Negotiations took place between the federal

government and Doukhobor intermediaries, such as Aylmer Maude and James Mavor, which led to further confusion. The Doukhobors' communal lifestyle discouraged private ownership, thus most refused to sign for their land. This was the beginning of dissent within the ranks of the community.

In 1902 Peter Vasilievich Verigin,[4] known as Peter the Lordly, arrived in Canada anxious to cooperate with the government; he convinced all but a small number of families to sign for their land – a decision that caused discontent among those families who did not sign.[5] Although the majority believed their leader to be divinely inspired, many began to withdraw from the community to become "Independents." As well, a small group, made up in part of discontented families who called themselves *svobodniki* (Sons of Freedom), began to show their dissent by protesting in the nude. In 1903 this group of *svobodniki* marched in the nude to show their fellow Doukhobors and the authorities that they believed in *real* freedom; however, the authorities were not impressed and all the marchers were arrested and sentenced to three months in jail. After their release a number of the men set fire to a thrashing machine as a symbolic attack on materialism and science. They were promptly convicted of arson and sentenced to three years in jail (Tarasoff 1982).

Further land conflicts in Saskatchewan arose over the Doukhobors' rejection of "patenting," or buying, the land because this required them to swear an oath of allegiance. This resulted in their being divested of much of the land upon which they had settled. This led Peter Verigin to purchase land privately in south-central British Columbia. This private purchase allowed him to hold land on behalf of his members and to do so without having to swear an oath of allegiance or to comply with the rigorous terms set out in the Homestead Act.

Starting in 1908 many Saskatchewan Doukhobors made their move to British Columbia. Soon after they arrived, new conflicts emerged, this time with the BC government, when families refused to register births and deaths with the Department of Vital Statistics and also refused to send their children to school. Parents who were fined refused to remit; as a counter measure the province passed the Community Regulation Act, 1914, which placed the onus of responsibility on every Doukhobor member to register births and deaths, to send each child to school, and to comply with the provisions of the Health Act. Those who violated the Community Regulation Act were to be fined, and if fines were not paid, then community assets could be seized (Tarasoff 1963).[6] To avert enforcement of this new legislation, Verigin made an

agreement with the government whereby children would attend schools in their area (Tarasoff 1963). However, in 1920 amendments to the Public Schools Act created rural school districts, and this adversely affected the arrangements with the Doukhobors. If these new administrative arrangements were not adhered to, then not only could the community be forced to pay the full cost of the school and teachers' salaries but its assets could also be seized. By 1922 there were eleven schools established under this new arrangement, the government having built two and the others having been built by the Doukhobor community. The enrolment of Doukhobor children was 414, which represented approximately 82 percent of those children who would be considered school-age (Reid 1932). However, a steady drop in enrolment occurred as a result of this government-sponsored schools initiative. And in 1923 many schools were destroyed by fire.[7]

There were many other issues and events that led to unrest among the Doukhobors. In 1923 the Bolshevik government,[8] through its Technical Aid Society in New York, had persuaded a large group of Saskatchewan Doukhobors (approximately 2,000) to sell their property to two American companies whose principals would then assist them in their return to Russia, where they would help to implement a collective farming program. Lenin had long hoped for such a program, but so far it had not been successfully implemented. Sometime during this period Peter Verigin, upon hearing what was being planned, was able to divert attention away from this initiative to other migration plans. On 29 October 1924, between Castlegar and Grand Forks, a Canadian Pacific Railway passenger train was destroyed by an explosion that killed Verigin, along with eight other passengers, including a newly elected member of the provincial legislature.

There were many theories about what had caused the explosion, the three main ones being: (1) exploding pinch gas (the gas used in suspended pinch lamps for lighting the coaches), (2) unstable dynamite secretly brought aboard by a miner who was excavating in the area, and (3) a bomb planted by someone familiar with where the leader of the Doukhobors was sitting. The exploding pinch gas theory was ruled out due to the nature and extent of the damage, though some people still thought the railway company was concealing an accidental cause. The unstable dynamite theory was also ruled out given where the brunt of the damage occurred; that is, where Peter Verigin was sitting. The telling piece of evidence was a pocket watch found near the coach, with a copper connection soldered to one of the hands. Although this device

had not been seen before, what became apparent later on was that similar technology was being used by the Sons of Freedom for detonating bombs. This is not to say that the Sons of Freedom were responsible for the train explosion but only that the bomb-making technology had been introduced by someone from outside the Doukhobor community.

The question that many would ask for generations to come is why would anyone want to assassinate Verigin? The Sons of Freedom believed the government had had him killed in order to end its troubles with the Doukhobors. Although there were many suspects, including an itinerant watchmaker who had arrived from the Soviet Union via Japan some months before, no one was ever convicted. This left the Sons of Freedom to suspect that Verigin's death was the result of a government conspiracy. This event marked the beginning of a long history of bombings, mainly directed at rail lines, bridges, and other rail and government facilities throughout the Kootenay and Boundary area.

In 1927 Peter Verigin's son, Peter Petrovich Verigin,[9] whom the Doukhobors referred to as *Chistiakov*, arrived from the Soviet Union to assume leadership of the Doukhobors. His leadership style and his untoward behaviour led many to wonder about him. Upon his arrival in Brilliant (a small town across the river from Castlegar) on 11 October 1927 he addressed those who had gathered to greet him. He referred to the Sons of Freedom as "the ringing bells" and praised them for not being "slaves of corruption." He described the Orthodox Doukhobors as being at a lesser spiritual level and criticized those who had left the Doukhobor community, calling them "Pharisees" and "materialists" who had been corrupted by the non-Doukhobor society. During his time in Canada (from 1927 to 1939)[10] the number of Sons of Freedom grew substantially, while the number of Orthodox Doukhobors decreased.[11] Also during his time here there was a significant decline in sawmill production and other revenue sources of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Limited (CCUB Ltd.).[12] By 1938 sawmills fell into disuse as timber resources were exhausted and the last remaining productive mills in the Slocan Valley and Champion Creek were destroyed by fire.

In 1931 Peter Petrovich was convicted of perjury and sentenced to three years in prison in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Just prior to his conviction the federal government amended the offence provisions for public nudity under the Criminal Code, increasing the penalty from six months to three years in prison. Within the year over 600 Sons of Freedom were arrested in Nelson for nudity and were sentenced to three

years in a makeshift penitentiary on Piers Island, located off the coast of Vancouver Island, across from Victoria. Their children, 365 in all, were placed in a variety of institutions and care facilities during their imprisonment.[13]

After Peter Petrovich completed only nine months of his sentence the federal government attempted to secretly deport him to the Soviet Union, presumably to rid itself of him. However, this attempt failed when a reporter for the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* newspaper got wind of Peter Petrovich's release and informed his lawyer, Peter Makaroff (who was also a Doukhobor but who was independent of the community). The federal government's deportation attempts came to a halt when the matter appeared before Justice Mellish, who ruled that Peter Petrovich was to be set free (Tarasoff 1982).

No sooner did Peter Petrovich get out of one scrape than he found himself in another. He sued his lawyer for overcharging him in the perjury case and condemned his other lawyer, Peter Makaroff, for overcharging him for his work during the perjury trial. In February 1934 Peter Petrovich was involved in a brawl in Nelson, then later that year he was involved in yet another brawl, this one in Winnipeg, where he was sentenced to two months in jail. After a number of years of self-abuse he was admitted to hospital for pains in his chest. Soon after entering hospital in Saskatoon, where he had infected ribs removed, he died of cancer on 11 February 1939 (Tarasoff 1982).

It was also in 1939 that the CCUB Ltd. went into receivership. Here the provincial government, in an effort to avert a mass eviction, purchased the debt owing to the mortgage holders, thus transferring the former CCUB Ltd. lands to the Crown. The newly acquired Crown lands were administered by the Provincial Land Settlement Board, which charged those continuing to live on the lands a nominal rental fee.

Following Peter Petrovich's death John J. Verigin, the grandson of Peter V. Verigin, assumed the mantle of leadership for the Orthodox Doukhobors, even though he was still in his late teens. This was to be an interim arrangement as the community waited for the arrival of Peter Verigin III, whom they referred to as *Yastrebov* (hawk), who was living somewhere in the Soviet Union. This was a particularly difficult time for young John J. as the community had just lost ownership of all of its lands, along with its main revenue source, and the social fabric that had held the community together for the past thirty years was quickly unravelling. This was the prelude to a period of rampant destruction, which began in 1940 when two community buildings were destroyed by fire.

During the 1940s efforts to enforce military service led to protests on the part of the Sons of Freedom. On 12 December 1943 a mass meeting was held between Doukhobors and representatives of the National Selective Service. By early next morning the jam factory, the general store, a packing shed, six boxcars, the gas station, and a garage in Brilliant had been destroyed by fire.[14] In January 1944 an unsuccessful attempt was made by twenty-two Doukhobors to burn John J. Verigin's residence in Brilliant, presumably because he was reported to be conferring with the National Selective Service in Vancouver.[15] Also during this period on four different occasions Peter V. Verigin's tomb was damaged by dynamite; eleven Doukhobor halls were destroyed by fire; and numerous Doukhobor villages, along with schools, Canadian Pacific Railway stations, homes, and other buildings, were set ablaze.[16]

In August 1947 there were a series of blazes throughout the Kootenay area, beginning with the burning of the home of John Lebedoff, who was a self-proclaimed leader of the Sons of Freedom. One hundred Sons of Freedom participated in its destruction. With the start of the Cold War, large numbers of people burned their own homes in protest over the possibility of a third world war. Tarasoff (1963) noted that many of these fires may have been "sacrificial fires," part of an initiation process associated with being inducted into the Sons of Freedom.

In addition to burning their own property, the Sons of Freedom burned two schools and eleven unoccupied houses in a former Japanese internment camp, and attempted to burn a community hall. In August of the same year, a number of Sons of Freedom made their way to Shoreacres, a Doukhobor and Sons of Freedom community located between Castlegar and Nelson on the north side of the Kootenay River, where they asked residents to remove all their furniture and belongings and join the cause. Again, numerous buildings and homes were destroyed by fire.

Similar actions were taken by those living in Gilpin, a small Sons of Freedom community located approximately thirteen kilometres east of Grand Forks on the Kettle River. The number of buildings destroyed by fire and explosives numbered in the several hundreds (Tarasoff 1963), and they included schools, several churches, many community homes, barns, factories, and public works. Throughout this period one person died in a fire in Krestova, and one man, who was guarding Peter V. Verigin's tomb, was shot in the hand, allegedly by Mike Bayoff, who later became a witness for the Crown and helped solve the many bombings that occurred throughout this period.

Numerous appeals were made to authorities to intervene, and in September 1947 Harry J. Sullivan, Judge of the County of New Westminster,

was appointed commissioner of inquiry. At his first sitting in South Slocan on 14 October 1947 he said: "Canadian people are now determined to have a final show-down on this problem ... We must ascertain, if possible, the cause of this unrest and unhappiness; the causes of this disrespect of their neighbours' rights and laws by some of the Doukhobor people, and with its resulting terrorism and fear of injury to their fellow Christian neighbours."[17]

On 7 January 1948, after three short months, Judge Sullivan decided that he had had enough. He noted that a number of schools had been damaged by fire during the time of his appointment and concluded his inquiry by calling for "drastic action" to remedy a situation that he described as "a desperate one." He noted that to proceed further was "useless and silly" and that it was not advisable "until the crazy people are put in the mental asylum and criminals locked up in the penitentiary" (Sullivan 1948, 24).[18]

The beginning of the 1950s was a time when bombings and burnings were again on the rise and approximately 450 Sons of Freedom Doukhobors were in prison. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) became the new provincial police force in September 1950, replacing the former British Columbia Provincial Police. The province was entering an election year and talk about the "Doukhobor problem" was on everybody's agenda. In the spring of 1950 Attorney General Wismer requested that the president of the University of British Columbia, Norman MacKenzie, appoint a Doukhobor Research Committee that would carry out research aimed at understanding the Doukhobor situation and make recommendations for its improvement (Hawthorn 1952). Dr. Harry Hawthorn was appointed director of the research project and was the editor of the final report, in which he describes how the historical relationship between the Doukhobor groups and the government developed: "Peasant hostility to government found expression in a doctrine denying the right of governments to exist. Their sole purpose, it was held, is dominance for the purposes of exploitation, their sole basis of operations is brute force" (38).

Hawthorn goes on to describe how, over the years, the Doukhobors had adjusted to the government:

> There is still some ambivalence. Even the Sons of Freedom demand all sorts of welfare and governmental care while denying that government can serve any useful purpose and refusing the registration that could enable welfare to be given equitably. (It might be pointed out that they avoid recognizing this contradiction by the claim that they have been

> cheated out of the results of their toil by the government.) The communities have long sought state protection from the arsonists, even while failing until recently to produce information against them that must have been available. (38)

The effect of the government's use of force, Hawthorn suggests, should not be underestimated. He observes that many Sons of Freedom regard prison as a virtuous place: "Instead of bringing social condemnation down on the head of the convict, punishment meted out by the government now brings social approval in its train" (Hawthorn 1952, 39). He goes on to suggest that government should devise a "specially suited system of detention for those whose psychological compulsion will force them to continue on the violent path they have been following" (ibid.).

During the time of the Doukhobor Research Committee's work, the bombing and arson continued. Geoff Andrew, from the University of British Columbia, proposed that a consultative committee be formed and that it include representatives from the Orthodox Doukhobors, the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, and the Independent Doukhobors;[19] the provincial and federal governments; and law enforcement agencies. An unintended development was the appearance, at the first meeting of this committee, of a non-Doukhobor named Stephan Sorokin, who had arrived from Germany via the Ukraine. Mr. Sorokin was a Baptist preacher who initially appeared among the Doukhobors in Saskatchewan and then made his way to British Columbia in the spring of 1950. Immediately upon his arrival he was introduced to the Sons of Freedom community by John Lebedoff, a self-proclaimed leader (who was beginning to lose favour among the Sons of Freedom), as the long lost Doukhobor leader Peter Yastrebov. Although Stephan Sorokin denied being Peter *Yastrebov*, he was considered by many to be heaven-sent, and he remained the leader of the "Reformed" Sons of Freedom[20] until his death in 1984. The Orthodox Doukhobors, along with the Independents, saw him as an opportunist who was simply taking advantage of the Sons of Freedom. Some went so far as to suggest that he was a government "social experiment," presumably a "Pied Piper" who would lead the Sons of Freedom out of the country (Tarasoff 1982, 174).

From the minutes of the Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Affairs, it appears that the members were keen to look for any possible way to end the bombings and burnings: the key issue was the transmigration of the Sons of Freedom. According to Hawthorn's analysis, moving the Sons of Freedom, who were mainly living in Gilpin and Krestova, to a distant location was a reasonable solution to all of the problems:

> This is called for in part by the fact that at Krestova and Gilpin at present there is insufficient watered land even for garden use. A place of resettlement would need to have sources of support other than farming, and there would be some advantage for the members of the USCC and the Independents if it were distant from their localities ...
>
> Migration or change of locality is not ordinarily an advantage in itself in cases of social or individual problem; instead, it is often an attempted flight which makes a solution even more difficult of attaining. In this case, however, it is held that some move, voluntary and perhaps partial, would be justified by the ... breaking of the painful and guilty associations which their home localities now have for some Sons of Freedom. Furthermore, it is hoped that the challenge and excitement of the rebuilding and pioneering associated with a move would occupy minds and energies constructively for a time at least, giving opportunity for other influences to work. (Hawthorn 1952, 46-7)

Underlying this hope was the assumption that the Sons of Freedom would be willing to move to another location and that their move would bring peace to the Kootenays. Why the committee would assume this is perplexing, given that many Doukhobor people and others knew that the problems would continue until answers were found.

In June 1952 the Social Credit Party was elected in British Columbia under the leadership of W.A.C. Bennett. This government took what it saw as a no-nonsense approach to the Sons of Freedom. On 16 April 1953 Attorney General Robert Bonner announced his three-point program for solving the "Doukhobor problem": (1) those Sons of Freedom who were willing were to be permanently relocated outside of Canada; (2) those who wished to stay in Canada were to be subject to an active program of rehabilitation; and, (3) a firm attitude was to be maintained towards taxation and school attendance. Numerous places were explored for relocation, including Costa Rica, Mexico, and Adams Lake (east of Kamloops). The Sons of Freedom made it clear that they were not interested in leaving the country, and although the Adams Lake area looked promising, it too eventually collapsed, as the City of Kamloops lobbied against such a move.

On 18 September 1953 Premier Bennett gave what was referred to as a policy speech in the legislature, providing a historical perspective of the Doukhobor sect and referring both to its persecution in Russia and to its early years in Canada. Premier Bennett described the numerous events that had transpired, including the previous appointment of Judge

Sullivan's commission of inquiry and the research and consultative committees. "In this entire picture I cannot, of course, take accurately into account the anxiety, inconvenience, and suffering of the people in the Kootenay Boundary area, who must live with this problem" (Bennett 1953, 5).[21] The premier went on to say that many of the recommendations in the Doukhobor Research Committee's report were being implemented, with the exception of appointing a continuing commission on Doukhobors. The premier felt that this would be best handled internally by a group of deputy ministers.

In September 1953, 148 Sons of Freedom Doukhobor adults were arrested for nudity (they were once again protesting compulsory education), leaving behind 104 children who were made wards of the superintendent of child welfare and were placed in a residential school setting in a former New Denver sanatorium. Those who were of school age, along with other Sons of Freedom children who were later apprehended by police, were required to attend school in New Denver until their parents or guardians signed an undertaking promising to send them to school. The stand-off lasted until 1959.

Prior to the children's being taken to New Denver, one of those hired by the province to assist the Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Affairs was a young educator named Hugh Herbison, who had taught some of the Sons of Freedom children during his time in Krestova. He recalled that, after the announcement was made by the attorney general regarding the government's "get tough" policy of enforced schooling, none of the children showed up again for class.[22] Finally, when he heard that the province had taken the children to New Denver, he quit his job with the consultative committee and made public his opposition to such a move.

In the early 1960s fifty-seven members of the Fraternal Council of the Christian Community and Brotherhood of Reformed Doukhobors were charged with conspiracy to intimidate the Parliament of Canada and the Legislature of British Columbia. A preliminary hearing was held in New Westminster to determine whether there was enough evidence to go to trial. The public reaction, particularly on the part of civil liberty groups, led to protests and letter-writing campaigns, the purpose of which was to get the Crown to drop the case because of the far-reaching implications such charges would have for the civil rights of dissident groups in general (Woodcock and Avakumovic 1968). The conflicting evidence presented by the Crown led Magistrate Evans to conclude that there was not sufficient evidence to proceed to trial.

During this same period another trial was held in which sixty-nine Sons of Freedom members were convicted of bombings and arson, bringing a brief end to the "reign of terror."[23] In 1962, shortly after their sentencing, the Sons of Freedom began their trek to Vancouver. The first winter they made it as far as Hope, a small town at the eastern end of the Fraser Valley, where they camped alongside the Coquihalla River. They later relocated to the Seventh Day Adventist Camp after the river overran its banks during an early spring thaw. After a few months they picked up their belongings and continued on to Vancouver, where much attention was given to their plight. Shortly after spending time in Vancouver many of them joined others who had camped outside Agassiz Mountain Prison, a new prison that had been built especially for the Sons of Freedom recently convicted of bombings. Here they spent the next ten years living in a tent village next to the prison, until the last of the Sons of Freedom were released.

All remained relatively "quiet" in the Kootenays, at least until the early 1970s when the last of the Sons of Freedom were released. Once again, fire ravaged the communities, and this led to a number of Sons of Freedom trials. The most notable occurred when the Crown charged the Orthodox Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin, along with a number of Sons of Freedom, with four counts of conspiracy to commit arson. Unlike the other indicted co-conspirators, Verigin was acquitted of two of the four charges with a stay of proceedings entered on the remaining two. Throughout the 1970s, and especially following his trial, John Verigin and other members of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC) made numerous attempts to get the attorney general to appoint a commission of inquiry.

In April 1979 I was hired by the Ministry of the Attorney General to prepare a report on how government might address the Doukhobor situation. Given John J. Verigin's trial and the numerous Sons of Freedom arson cases before the courts, this was a challenging time to be working for the provincial government. The credibility of the Crown was questioned not only by the Orthodox Doukhobors, who saw the trial as a "travesty," but also by the Sons of Freedom, who had testified on the Crown's behalf.

In May 1979 I submitted our report – *A Proposal for Community and Government Involvement in Doukhobor Affairs* (Herbison and Cran 1979) – to the Attorney General. In it we concluded that

> at present the only mechanism government has for dealing with Doukhobor affairs is the criminal justice system. With responsibility

> for applying and administering the law according to due process, it cannot be expected to deal adequately with a religious-ethnic minority in all the complexity of its emotionally charged relationships. By its very terms of reference, it deals with conflict only after it erupts into illegal acts. It has no mandate to develop an improved social climate in which protest and depredation would not flourish. (2)

Meanwhile, the calls from the Orthodox Doukhobors for a commission of inquiry continued, and, shortly after the report was submitted, I was asked to develop a plan for implementing its recommendations. On 13 November 1979, at a press conference held in Cranbrook, British Columbia, the attorney general announced the formation of what became known as the Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relations (KCIR).

Crux of the Debate

The crux of the debate both prior to and during the eight years (1979-87) of the KCIR was the Sons of Freedom claim that their mission was to save Doukhoborism. They insisted that the Orthodox leadership, in particular that of Peter Petrovich Verigin, had first nurtured them and then instructed them (albeit covertly, through the use of oblique messages), to burn and bomb, actions that they believed were essential to saving Doukhoborism.

These allegations were, for the most part, difficult to understand and accept because the Orthodox Doukhobors, particularly their leadership, had denounced bombings and arson from the very beginning and had made numerous efforts to differentiate themselves from those whom they described as "terrorists." They believed that the Sons of Freedom were using this conspiracy narrative as an excuse to confuse the public in order to elevate their own status.

The Sons of Freedom, on the other hand, have been steadfast in their beliefs and unusually strident in their actions. This has resulted, throughout most of the twentieth century, in their being publicly chastised and physically ostracized by the Orthodox Doukhobors and their leaders. Their persistence in pursuing the "truth" leaves one to ask what they expected to gain from their efforts and their many spent years in prison, on hunger fasts, while sacrificing their health and families for "the cause."

There was another group, known as the "Reformed Doukhobors"[24] or "Reformed Sons of Freedom," which was started by Stephan Sorokin soon after his arrival in 1950. The Reformed Doukhobors represented Sons of Freedom who were no longer interested in going to jail for the "cause." Many had already spent time in prison, with some having lost

their health or their loved ones. All were resentful of the Orthodox leadership, whom they believed was responsible for disrupting their lives. Their actions were no less strident than were those of the Sons of Freedom. They published their own communiqués, which they circulated far and wide and in which they accused different people, be they Orthodox or Independent, of conspiring with the Sons of Freedom and/or taunting them to burn or bomb, all of which they saw as cultural hypocrisy in the name of Doukhoborism. Although he was not always present as he spent a considerable amount of time in Montevideo, Uruguay, Stephan Sorokin at times seemed to smooth the rough edges of the debate; however, at other times he seemed to do the opposite, as, for example, when he saw the Soviets becoming more active, throughout the 1970s, with the Orthodox leadership.

The Orthodox members were caught in this vitriolic cultural tangle. They methodically rebuilt their community centres, which had been destroyed not once but many times over the years, and they spent part of their livelihood guarding not only their own properties but also the Verigin residences, the community centres, and other community property.

The non-Doukhobor public, especially those living in the Kootenay and Boundary region, never knew what to make of the idiosyncratic nature of the Doukhobor people. This was not an easy time for them either as their lives were disrupted by, among other things, police roadblocks; people protesting in the nude; blazing buildings; twisted rail; destroyed bridges; a dynamited transmission pole that trapped 200 miners; and reports of dynamite found under an Anglican Church, on a BC ferry, and in bus stations. This left the weary members of the public demanding that either the provincial government do something or they would do something themselves. As time went on, the pitch of desperation reached the level of a scream.