

# Toil and a Peaceful Life: Peter V. Verigin and Doukhobor Education

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ON OCTOBER 29, 1924, a passenger car on the Canadian Pacific Railway train between Brilliant and Grand Forks, British Columbia, suddenly exploded. Nine people died, including Peter Vasilivich Verigin, the spiritual leader of the Doukhobors, a Russian sect which had immigrated to Canada a quarter-century earlier. His death ended the first chapter in a continuing Canadian saga. This article focuses on one aspect of this story, Verigin's attempts to walk a narrow line on the role of schooling, one of the issues which separated his followers from the larger Canadian society.

In 1898, with the aid of Count Leo Tolstoy and a number of British and American Quakers, some 7,500 Doukhobors fled Russia to escape persecutions resulting from their refusal to bear arms for the Czar. They found refuge on the Canadian prairies, at that time being opened up for settlement. They brought with them high recommendations for their farming ability and a world-wide reputation for pacifism. Little more was known about them because, as a result of generations of persecution, they had evolved a system of dissimulation to protect themselves from the larger society.

Unable to locate suitable land in one location, they settled on some 750,000 acres in three widely separated colonies in what is now the province of Saskatchewan. Although the land had been surveyed, the territories had not yet been divided into provinces; municipalities and services such as roads and schools were still things of the future.

Not only were there few civil authorities to provide them with guidance, the Doukhobors had arrived in Canada without their leader, Verigin, who remained in Siberia. His exile, in fact, seems not only to have been responsible for the wave of persecution which forced the Doukhobors to leave Russia, but also gave rise to many of

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the problems which were to occur in Canada. Although, as heir apparent to the sect's previous leader, he had received some schooling to prepare him for the task, his real education appears to have taken place during his exile.

Verigin had been imprisoned in 1887, while still a young man. He spent much of the next fifteen years in daily contact with others who, like himself, had incurred the displeasure of the Czarist authorities. Social democrats, socialists, communists, anarchists, and nihilists put him in touch with the latest and most radical political theories, while Stundists, Baptists, Adventists, and Tolstoyans challenged his religious views. Since he was not an incarcerated criminal and had a steady stream of funds coming from his supporters in the Caucasus Mountains, Verigin had time to ponder these new ideas and to incorporate some of them into his own thinking.

Although the Doukhobors were theoretically leaderless, Verigin did exercise considerable influence. The sect appears to have emerged out of the Russian *raskol* in the seventeenth century. Believing that each individual should be directed by the inner voice of God which resides in all believers, they advocated equality, communalism, and pacifism. Like all faiths, however, the sect experienced periods of decline and renewal. Verigin's contact with Tolstoyans convinced him of the need for change; his directives to his followers soon began to reflect some of these influences.

He began to call on them to eschew government and to lead simpler lives. In 1893, he directed them to re-establish Christian communalism. The following year, he banned the use of tobacco and alcohol and the eating of meat. He also called on the faithful to abstain from sexual relations until the time of troubles was over. The troubles, however, were just beginning. It was on Verigin's instructions that in June, 1895, the Doukhobors refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the new Czar and destroyed all of their weapons in a series of spectacular fires. The ensuing repression led to the immigration to Canada. Verigin approved of the move and, from his Siberian exile, he recommended that life in Canada be carried on according to his teachings, so that private ownership would not impede full spiritual development of his followers.

Had his influence stopped here, some of the ensuing problems might have been avoided. His followers were not the only recipients of letters from him. Over the years in Siberia, he had made the acquaintance of many fellow exiles who had, on their release, moved to England to escape further repression. Verigin corresponded with a number of these refugees, oftentimes continuing to carry on with

them by letter the debates which had served to while away the long Siberian nights.

In 1901, an exiled Tolstoyan published a collection of these letters. Unlike the cautious epistles which he addressed to his followers, these letters contained ideas garnered from many sources, woven into logical and illogical extensions of Tolstoy's ideas. Not only did these letters praise vegetarianism and the simple life, they condemned, among other things, private ownership of land, mass manufacturing of goods, the mining of metal, the wearing of clothing, the use of animal labor, and even the cultivation of the soil.<sup>1</sup> Within a short time, copies of the book had reached Verigin's untutored followers in Canada, and although the letters had not originally been written as a guide to action, some saw them as just that.

Even this might not have caused a problem had it not come on the heels of two other occurrences. The first was a letter addressed to the sect by Tolstoy himself, who commended them on remaining aloof from governments, condemned the seeking and accumulation of private property, praised their abstinence from meat, tobacco, and intoxicants, and advised them to "hold fast to the life style you have commenced or you will not find what you seek."<sup>2</sup> Such advice was warmly received both by the poorer villages and by most of the women, who, unlike the men, had little contact with the larger Canadian society and, hence, were not as open to suggestions for change.

Secondly, a would-be prophet appeared on the scene. From the time of their arrival in Canada, the Doukhobors never lacked for advisors: Exiled Russians of various religions and political stripes appeared in Canada to observe and assist them. One of these, Alexander Bodyansky, had not only been banished by the Czar but had also been expelled from a Tolstoyan colony in England. He arrived among the Doukhobors, preaching a radical form of Tolstoy's ideas and promising that he would lead them to a land where life was much easier than on the Canadian prairies. Before finally leaving Canada,<sup>3</sup> he did persuade a small number of sect members to establish a Doukhobor colony in California.

Just at this time, the government decided to put pressure on the sect to file individual homestead claims on their land rather than

1. V. Tchertkoff, *Christian Martyrdom in Russia* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1899).

2. Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors* (Philadelphia: Ferris and Leach Publishers, 1903), pp. 78-79.

3. The Canadian officials provided him with a ticket to Switzerland. Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Mir Publication Society, 1982), p. 72.

allowing them to settle in communes as originally promised. The cumulative effect of all of these influences led to a religious revival among some members of the sect. This revival used Verigin's published letters as a gospel, one which appealed especially to the poorer colonists. This resulted in a decision by nearly two thousand of the more zealous members to adhere completely to what they believed to be Verigin's teachings. In October, 1902, after abandoning their leather clothing and metal objects and freeing their "enslaved" domestic livestock, they set off to find the promised land. They had gone less than three hundred miles before the Mounted Police loaded them on a train and sent them back to their colonies.

When Verigin was finally allowed to emigrate to Canada the following spring, he found the sect split into three distinct groups: Independents, who were largely drawn from the more prosperous villages, had broken with the colony, and had begun to integrate into Canadian society; Community members who were willing to continue to follow Verigin and live a communalistic life of simplicity and sharing; and zealots, the self-styled Sons of Freedom, who relied only on their own inner voices for leadership.

Although in true Doukhobor fashion the Freedomites rejected all leaders, they insisted on viewing Verigin's letters from his Siberian exile as a guide for living. Rather than settling down after Verigin's arrival, they became even more zealous. They refused to believe that Verigin was serious in his attempts to reach an accord with Canadian authorities and attempted to curb what they saw as the drift into materialism by him and the Community. They hoped that by going on more pilgrimages, staging nude demonstrations, and even by resorting to arson they would be able to return the Community members to a simpler life.

Education was one issue which divided the sect. In Russia, the Doukhobors had traditionally avoided schools, because they were under the control of the Orthodox Church. Although the most promising Doukhobor children had often been provided with some schooling within the community to ensure a crop of future leaders, most sect members remained illiterate. Education for them was learning from parents or other elders the crafts and skills important to a peasant economy and the psalms which comprised their creed. The migration changed this.

In 1899 Verigin had written:

I am told that education is absolutely compulsory in North America. That is for the best, because simple literacy is necessary as an aid to life; for example, that one should know how to read and write. One must not understand that

literacy will positively enlighten a man, yet again I repeat it can only be an aid, and a person reading books may gather information; and in such manner his mind may become developed. In general, I think if God wishes that our people should establish themselves in America, then simple literacy (reading, writing and arithmetic) is absolutely essential.<sup>4</sup>

He was not consistent in his calls for schooling, however. In one of the letters published in 1901, he stated:

. . . literacy, acts as a hindrance and a brake to man's development; that is, the development of knowledge of truth . . . Thus, after carefully examining the question fully, I consider it would be better if there were no literacy.<sup>5</sup>

Yet in another letter in the same collection, he said ". . . there where a school could be established that is free of state church interference, there education is not only desirable but essential."<sup>6</sup>

Organized formal schooling, however, was not part of the Doukhobor tradition. Parents were responsible for the proper upbringing of their own children. Moreover, individual village members believed that they were responsible to teach something useful to each child in the village. The psalms, which were transmitted orally from generation to generation, were normally taught in the winter when there was little outdoor work to be done.

The Doukhobors considered the learning of these psalms to be of vital importance. No single person was the repository for the entire "Living Book," as these psalms were called. Every Doukhobor had a responsibility to learn as many of them as possible. The failure of any member to do this diminished ever so slightly the totality of the faith. Anything which interfered with this learning, therefore, was viewed as a threat to the whole sect.

Doukhobors did not at first see early volunteer attempts to provide schooling to Doukhobor children as a threat to learning either a trade or the Living Book. Such schools were voluntary, and parents could send their children or keep them home as the "inner voice" directed. Teachers, supported by Canadian and English Quakers, successfully operated schools in all three colonies for a number of years.

Similar efforts by American Friends encountered problems, however. The Quakers were opposed to communal land ownership and took it upon themselves to attempt to show the Doukhobors the error

4. J.F.C. Wright, *Slava Bohu* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1940), p. 132.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

6. Eli A. Popoff, "Historical Exposition on Doukhobor Beliefs" (mimeographed) (Grand Forks, B.C., 1964), p. 21.

of their ways.<sup>7</sup> Concerned about the spiritual well-being of these people that they saw as "Russian Quakers," they also attempted to provide them with religious assistance such as Russian Bibles and translations of Quaker tracts. Their experiences in Russia had taught the Doukhobors a caution that a few years' residence in Canada could not overcome, and they grew increasingly suspicious that the Quakers were out to convert them. When, in 1903, the American Friends took three young Doukhobor couples and six children to the United States to live with Quaker families and learn American agricultural and domestic methods, Verigin began closing down all Quaker schools, claiming that the Doukhobors were going to operate their own educational system.

Verigin did attempt to create a system of Doukhobor schools, but it was doomed from the outset. One Doukhobor wrote in 1908:

Almost all the Doukhobor children were learning then, but they were getting very little knowledge, however. Verigin was of the opinion that a true Christian should have only Christ for teacher; he would not admit strangers and ordered each village to choose a teacher among themselves. But, as there are no Doukhobors enough educated to be teachers, sometimes a teacher had to be appointed who could hardly write his own name; and thus the children were often, in a few months, already as advanced as the teacher himself.<sup>8</sup>

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the Doukhobors soon lost interest in such schooling, and most of the village schools closed.

There is no reason why schooling had to interfere with their faith, however. The Council of Public Instruction for the Northwest Territories had encouraged the development of a decentralized school system in which school districts were formed on the initiative of local residents. When formed, the school board then exercised a considerable power over the employment and qualifications of teachers, the dates of opening and closing of schools, taxation, and attendance. For this reason, the immigration authorities had not been concerned, in 1898, to find that the Doukhobors "... wish their children to be educated, but wish to be consulted as to the mode

... of education."<sup>9</sup> Three years later, the Minister of the Interior was

7. Society of Friends, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, "Reports of the Committee to Aid the Doukhobortsi," *Extracts From the Minutes*, 1902, p. 28.

8. Peter Brock, "Vasya Pozdnyakov's Doukhobor Narrative", *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, 40 (June 1965), p. 407.

9. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereinafter PABC), Canada, Department of the Interior, Correspondence and Papers re: Doukhobors in Canada, 1898-1927,

Maude to Smart, 8 September 1898.

still able to inform the sect that "in the case of a school district on your Reserve, all the officers of the school district . . . would be Doukhobors . . ." <sup>10</sup> In theory, at least, the public schools need not have been a threat to the sect; potentially, the schools could have even been used to teach the Living Book.

Despite these promises, educational officials in Canada, like their Russian counterparts, saw the schools as agencies of assimilation. The territorial superintendent of education expressed concerns about the policy of the immigration authorities which allowed the establishment of ethnic block settlements. <sup>11</sup> The 1901 School Ordinance, in fact, made provision for the appointment of an official trustee to establish school districts in immigrant settlements.

When the Doukhobors' children did attempt to attend public schools, they often encountered a hostility which alienated them from any desire to co-operate with authorities. When one Doukhobor settlement fell within the boundaries of a school district, the local board inquired of the attorney general:

. . . we should like to know if we shall have to provide accommodation for the Doukhobor children, of whom there are a large number (over 60, I believe). We are not anxious to have them at our school, as they are not, in our opinion, a desirable class for our children to come in contact with. <sup>12</sup>

There were more pressing problems than schooling facing the community at that time. In 1904, the Department of the Interior repossessed the unsettled portion of the Doukhobor reserves. The following year a new minister took over the department and set out to reinterpret the regulations under which the Doukhobors had settled their lands. Doukhobor religious beliefs prevented them from filing individual homestead claims and swearing an oath of allegiance to the King. Although Canadian laws included a "hamlet clause" which permitted communal settlements, and although it also allowed conscientious objectors to solemnly "affirm" rather than "swear" an oath, in 1907, the government took advantage of the scruples of the Doukhobors and used the lack of an oath as an excuse to seize the bulk of the land that they had homesteaded eight years earlier. <sup>13</sup>

10. PABC, Canada, Laurier Papers, Microfilmed entries concerning Doukhobors, Sifton to Doukhobors of Thunderhill, 15 February 1902.

11. Northwest Territories, *Report of the Council of Public Instruction 1898*, Report of the Superintendent of Education, D. J. Goggin, p. 11.

12. Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereinafter SAB), Education, Devil's Lake S.D. No. 514, H. W. Peel to Attorney General of the Northwest Territories, 16 January 1900.

13. James E. Mavor, "Doukhobor Claims for Compensation," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 1 (1956), pp. 1-15.



Even before the loss of these lands, however, Verigin had decided that there was merit in purchasing freehold land rather than being dependent upon government largesse. Pooling all of his followers' funds, he purchased some Saskatchewan farmland, which required no oaths of allegiance. In 1908, the commune branched out and purchased nearly 15,000 acres of land in British Columbia. Over the next four years, Verigin moved over 6,000 of his followers to the Pacific province.

The climate there was, undoubtedly, more suitable to a vegetarian way of life. Fruits, nuts, and vegetables could be produced in abundance, and within a few years, boxcars of Doukhobor fruit from British Columbia were being exchanged for Doukhobor grain from the prairies. Unfortunately, as on the prairies, sufficient land could not be purchased in one place. Separation and isolation resulted in a factionalism that was exacerbated by soil infertility and the resulting poverty of some of the villages. Although Verigin took only his loyalists to British Columbia, within a few years, Independents and Freedomites were beginning to emerge in the British Columbia settlements as well.

Such an occurrence was to be expected. A central tenet of the Doukhobor faith was a belief in the "inner voice." God is not a remote being in heaven but exists within every adult Doukhobor in this form. To heed external voices would be to disobey God. The formation of a tightly-knit Doukhobor front, therefore, was impossible since the faith rejected authority.

Part of the problem Doukhobors had with schooling was linked to the potential interference with learning the Living Book. Just as important, though, was the structure of schools. Schools placed one person in authority; a teacher could require students to learn things contrary to their inner voices. This problem became even worse when the curriculum glorified war, imperialism, government, and worldly living.

In Saskatchewan, this had not been much of a problem. Despite concerns about some of the early schools, a number of young Doukhobors (including Verigin's nephew) did attend public school. There, however, attendance was voluntary, and no coercion was used, because truancy was controlled by the local Doukhobor trustees.

In British Columbia, however, the Doukhobors faced a totally different situation. There was a well-established public school system with no provision for any linguistic or religious deviation; it had the most highly centralized public school system in Canada: In 1876, five years after it entered confederation, the province instituted compul-

sory school laws. The government in Victoria established school districts, regulated the hiring and firing of teachers, kept a rein on finances, legislated and enforced school attendance, and kept a tight control over curriculum. Whereas popular initiative was important in Saskatchewan, in British Columbia it counted for little. Unlike Saskatchewan, where over half of the population was not of British origin, the population of British Columbia was overwhelmingly British. Unused to dealing with non-British immigrants and lacking the patience, tolerance, and tact necessary to ease such people into co-operation, British Columbia set off on a collision course with the Doukhobors.

The application of Verigin's motto, "Toil and a peaceful life," soon began to show results in the British Columbia settlements. Lands were cleared, irrigation systems laid out, and orchards began to produce. The Doukhobors added commercial interests such as saw mills, brick plants, and even a jam factory to their holdings. Within their new properties, they constructed roads, bridges, ferries, and a dam and hydroelectric plant.

In spite of the vital role that the Doukhobor children played in the economic life of the new settlements, some were attending nearby schools in the Kootenays as early as 1910. The following year, the government began establishing schools in the Doukhobor colonies, and in one instance at Brilliant, an all-Doukhobor school board was in charge of the school.

In spite of their hard work and general integration into society (and to some extent because of their increasing prosperity), trouble again began to brew. Businessmen began to resent the community because of its bulk purchases, its new economic enterprises, and because of the generally frugal lifestyle. Moreover, the sect refused to co-operate with census takers, fearing that this was an enumeration of young men in preparation for general conscription.

In this they had just cause. The newspapers were full of stories of an impending war between England and Germany. Moreover, the British Columbia Department of Education had recently accepted funding from the Strathcona Trust, an organization dedicated to the promotion of physical training and

. . . the fostering of a spirit of patriotism in the boys, leading them to realize the first duty of a free citizen is to be prepared to defend his country to which end all boys should, so far as possible, be given an opportunity of acquiring a fair acquaintance, while at school, with military drill and rifle shooting.<sup>14</sup>

14. British Columbia, Department of Education, *Public School Report*, 1910, p. A58.

In order to take advantage of the funds from the Trust, the province had to include methods of teaching physical education in the training of teachers. Non-commissioned officers from the Department of the Militia acted as instructors in these courses, one of which was offered in the summer of 1912 near the Doukhobors' new home on the shores of Kootenay Lake. To the Doukhobors, this proved that they had been right to suspect the motives of the public schools. Although a government official claimed that military drill with wooden guns was only to strengthen muscles, the Doukhobors argued that this could best be done cultivating the soil.<sup>15</sup>

It was not an educational matter, however, which brought matters to a head. In the summer of 1912, when the federal government was repossessing more Doukhobor land in Saskatchewan, the British Columbia provincial government sentenced four men to jail for failing to register a death. To the Doukhobors, events such as birth and death are a matter concerning only the individual and God, and fearing the increasing attempts by the government to exercise power over their lives, the Doukhobor children were withdrawn from British Columbia's public schools. The anti-government ideas of the Freedomites began to look less fanatical to some community members who were beginning to think that Verigin's policy of co-operation with the authorities was wrong.

The provincial government reacted in typical Canadian fashion: It appointed a Royal Commission to study the matter. After a one-year study, the commissioner, William Blakemore, outlined why the sect objected to public schooling:

. . . they take the ground that education unfits the young for the pursuits of the peasant, that this has become a problem already in nearly all countries: that their children are being educated in the best sense of the word, in their homes and on the soil, by being held down to the simple beliefs and traditions of their forefathers. They also fear that education will inoculate their children with the ideas of their educators, which they claim are alien to Doukhobor belief . . . that the children would imbibe the same harsh, unjust, and cruel ideas.<sup>16</sup>

The Doukhobors who addressed the Commission pointed out that schooling drew people into commercial pursuits, where they lost appreciation for honest toil. Learning, they claimed, was only needed

15. Koozma J. Tarasoff, "In Search of Brotherhood: The History of the Doukhobors" 1963, p. 442 (mimeographed manuscript).

16. Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912, *Report . . .* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1913), p. T54.

## COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

by those who wished to acquire money—in order to count their accumulated wealth. Blakemore found some admirable aspects about their stand: "It is not a little to the credit of their parents to find that the chief objection they entertain to education is the fear that secular teaching may undermine the religious spirit."<sup>17</sup>

As the leader of the "leaderless sect" Verigin agreed that he would make available the information required by census officials and those in charge of registering births, marriages, and deaths so that other Doukhobors would not face this problem. Despite this cooperative attitude, Blakemore declared that Peter Verigin was the real problem, not his followers. The commissioner concluded that Verigin had misled his followers, that he had often "... modified his plans in order to strengthen his hold on the Community. . . ,"<sup>18</sup> and that he had the power to bring about full compliance with the laws. Accordingly, the Commission recommended that the government use fines rather than imprisonment, a policy which would strike directly at Verigin's well-being without fanning the flames of fanaticism. Although Blakemore's report contained many moderate and conciliatory aspects, this one the government acted upon to ensure Doukhobor compliance with the laws of the land.

In March, 1914, the government of British Columbia passed the Community Regulation Act. Under this statute, any adult living under "communal or tribal conditions" became responsible for the registration of any births and deaths in that community, for the regular school attendance of all children, and for everyone's compliance with the Health Act. Conviction was to result in a fine "... to be levied upon the goods and chattels of the defendant by the distress and sale thereof."<sup>19</sup> The act's arbitrary nature was most blatantly evident in the clauses dealing with proof of membership:

It shall be sufficient proof that a person is a member of a community if it be shown on the oath of one witness that such person has been found in, upon, or about lands in the Province which are occupied by two or more persons under tribal or communal conditions of family life and residence in this Province.<sup>20</sup>

The Doukhobors were outraged. The government, it appeared, was pandering to their detractors by passing a law which would

17. *Ibid.*, p. T23.

18. *Ibid.*, p. T62.

19. British Columbia, *Community Regulation Act*, Statutes of British Columbia, 1914, 4 Geo. V., C. 11, pp. 65-99.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

allow the government to seize all of their property. Community members protested the Act's passage:

There are 6,000 people in the Doukhobor Community, who will take off their clothes—these being all that is left after the robbery committed by the Government in Saskatchewan—and will deliver them up to your officials in Nelson and Grand Forks, and will remain naked in the streets . . . Do you want people to wander about naked?<sup>21</sup>

The government's actions were contravening Verigin's attempts to moderate the religious fervor of his followers.

Although his moderate stance did not make much of an impression on the government, some other things did. First, legal technicalities made both the Community Regulation Act and the truancy regulations unenforceable. Second, the war in Europe diverted the attention of Canadians away from minor domestic problems. As a result, in 1915, the government agreed to drop all vestiges of militarism and religious instruction in Doukhobor schools, and Verigin agreed to send enough children to fill the schools on Doukhobor lands. Verigin went beyond this and even made contributions of jam from the new factory to the Canadian troops.

He could well afford to. The Doukhobors prospered during the war. Agricultural prices rose, and the Doukhobors, protected because of their pacificism, were able to turn their toil into prosperity. Verigin enlarged the community by purchasing more land in Saskatchewan and British Columbia and expanding their holdings into the provinces of Alberta and Manitoba as well. The community was even put on a more businesslike basis by legally incorporating and transferring the title of all property to this new body.

The end of the war in Europe, however, was the signal for fresh skirmishes with the Doukhobors. Patriotic fervor led Canadians to turn on their pacifist fellow countrymen, and the Doukhobors, who had prospered during the war, were a prime target. Although the Community was providing buildings for government schools and the bulk of the children were enrolled,<sup>22</sup> the government was not prepared to leave well enough alone. In 1919, the province amended the Elections Act so as to disenfranchise the sect. In the following year, the Public Schools Act was amended, abolishing elected school boards completely in Doukhobor areas and vesting full powers in an official trustee appointed by Victoria.

21. *Trail Creek News*, March 21, 1914.

22. "Doukhobors and Education," *British Columbia Public Service Bulletin*, I: I (June 1925), p. 5-7.

Verigin's more zealous supporters reacted by adopting tactics such as not allowing children to attend school. They not only accepted Verigin's teaching against materialism and in favor of frugality, but used this teaching to attack any accommodation that Verigin attempted to make with the modern world. The orders which had led to the burning of weapons in 1895 became the model for attacks on other things threatening the sect's purity.

As the government began to apply pressure, Doukhobor resistance continued to grow. The new official trustee started to use his powers to seize community property, and school attendance began to decline. Moreover, the schools in Doukhobor areas began to go up in flames in 1923.

These school burnings were a new and unexpected tactic. Although both in Russia and Canada, zealous Doukhobors had been involved in civil disobedience and the destruction of Community property, they had never before engaged in serious criminal activities. Such behavior was inimical to their views on pacifism, individual directedness, and disengagement from the outside world. If these activities were carried out by Doukhobors, they would appear to have been directed as much at Verigin's leadership as at the encroaching government.

The Doukhobors in Russia had come to look to their leader to provide a barrier between the government and the sect. In Canada, Verigin had seen that this was no longer possible and had attempted to effect a slow integration of his followers into Canadian society. Although he was moving much too slowly for the liking of the British Columbia government, he was moving much too rapidly for many Doukhobors. The Sons of Freedom, who had dwindled to a few dozen immediately following Verigin's arrival in Canada, began to increase in numbers, both on the prairies and in British Columbia.

Verigin was entwined in a web of his own spinning. His most zealous followers so readily accepted his insistence on a purified lifestyle and the maintenance of distance from government that it became difficult for him to back away from these ideals. When government officials used patience and tact, Verigin was able to temporize and move the sect cautiously towards an integration with the larger society. These very moves became for the zealots, however, proof that Verigin was not following his own teachings.

The explosion which caused Verigin's death in October, 1924, occurred while the controversy over school attendance was raging. Despite the rules prohibiting the transportation of dynamite on passenger trains, explosions were not uncommon in mining com-

munities at that time. Both sides jumped to their own conclusions about the cause of this one. Community members and Freedomites alike blamed "the government" for it; non-Doukhorbor extremists, on the other hand, tended to blame the Sons of Freedom.<sup>23</sup> Authorities were never able to determine whether it was accidental or intentional.

If the explosion was intentional, it served no purpose. Verigin's death hardened the lines of all parties. The Independents continued to integrate into Canadian society, the Freedomites continued to resist any accommodation with that society, and British Columbian officials continued their pressure on the sect. This resulted in increasing numbers of Freedomites, leading inexorably to nude parades, arson, and mass imprisonments in the 1930's.

Peter V. Verigin remains an enigma. It is unlikely that he ever completely comprehended the Canadian society in which he found himself. His experience in Russia had taught him to distrust government and to dissemble to hide his intentions. He continued, with less success, to hold to his beliefs and practices even though they created difficulties for both his followers and his adopted land.

Verigin's suspicions of government and his less than forthright dealings with them provided a measure of support for his more zealous followers. Although it is unlikely that he wanted to encourage the excesses of the Sons of Freedom, some of his teachings did provide these extremists with inspiration. Even though the self-educated Verigin did not hold learning in contempt, his rhetoric led some to reject schooling completely.

Although he tolerated and even encouraged education for at least some of his followers, Verigin had no qualms about using school children as pawns in his disputes with authorities. Non-Doukhorbor Canadians, who had come to see schooling as a right of all children, turned against Verigin and his followers. Meanwhile, the positive comments that Verigin made about schooling led the more independent minded of his followers to abandon his leadership and to integrate themselves into the larger society.

Verigin was an intelligent, charismatic leader caught up in a world that he understood only imperfectly. His "off-again," "on-again" approach to schooling was a contributing factor to the divisions which rent the sect, confusing some Community members and

23. Cooler heads were generally of the opinion that the explosion was caused by dynamite being illegally transported, *The Friend (Philadelphia)*, 101 (September 1927), p. 163.

alienating the Freedomites. Under his leadership, the basis of schooling was laid among some Community members and among the Independent Doukhobors. It was this group of educated young Doukhobors who were to provide the basis of moderate leadership for succeeding generations of the sect.