

# THE DOUKHOBORS IN CANADA CONFLICT AND SOCIAL CHANGE, 1900-1976

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The present study will document the number of acts of violence carried out by the Doukhobors in Canada during the period 1900-1976 as well as assess the influence of two potentially important causal factors: (i) leadership style and (ii) stress and strain on the incidence of violence. While a great deal has been written on the Doukhobors, much of the material is of a "sensational" variety and lacks any serious analytical framework. Few researchers have tried to systematically document the actual number of conflicts engaged in by Doukhobors or relate these periodic episodes of conflict to potential causes.

## The Doukhobors

When the Doukhobors first entered Canada in 1898-99, the federal government provided them with land grants in Saskatchewan so as to achieve orderly settlement. Approximately 7,500 eventually settled in Saskatchewan during this initial migration period. However, after the turn of the century (1908-12) about five thousand Doukhobors moved out of Saskatchewan to British Columbia where new property was purchased. It should be noted that many of the immigrant Doukhobors, like other recent immigrants, lacked financial resources to develop their land and as a result men worked on the railroad or as farm hands for more established and prosperous farmers. However, there were some wealthy Doukhobors and this has led to a class division within the overall Doukhobor community. For example, the colony at Prince Albert was extremely successful economically while the more northerly colonies were quite poor.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, it is estimated that there are about 20,000 Doukhobors in Canada. The majority (7,000) reside in the Kootenay district (south-central) of British Columbia, with another 3,000 dispersed throughout other areas of B.C. The Doukhobors in British Columbia are predominately Orthodox and Sons of Freedom. Palmer (1972) estimates that an additional 2,000 reside in Alberta -- mostly Orthodox and Independents and 3,000 in Saskatchewan, most of whom are Independents. The remaining Doukhobors seem to be evenly distributed among the other provinces. With regard to the ideological perspectives held by Doukhobors, it has been estimated that 50 percent are Independents, 37 percent Orthodox and the remainder Sons of Freedom (Svobodniki).

### Stress and Strain:

Early studies of conflict utilized a modified structuralist approach in attempting to explain its emergence and decline. This approach argues that when people interact with each other and their environment, they develop explanations and solutions to problems that arise and must be handled. These solutions create explanations for the failures in terms of elaborate ritual and ideologies and by developing rules which reinforce the traditional way of doing things. Their way of perceiving the world and their subsequent explanations through the years constitute the cultural tradition of the group. However, because no cultural tradition is a true representation of reality and some of the solutions developed for solving problems are not completely satisfactory, these inconsistencies create tensions (strain) within the community which must be alleviated. Thus, each cultural system has strains inherent within it. These strains can be considered "fault lines" in the system. Beals and Siegel (1966) define strain as a potential conflict within the organization. It grows out of the inevitably imperfect solutions to problems encountered in life. Strain consists of those recurrent situations in which culturally endorsed predictions fail, in situations in which a person sees his expectations defeated and in situations of ambiguity where there is a lack of clarity with regard to appropriate behavior.<sup>2</sup>

However, as long as these points of potential conflict can be controlled by traditional means, the system remains fairly well integrated. But, when outside pressures (stress) impinge upon the group in such a way that the discrepancies in the system are highlighted and the traditional "safety valves" become inoperative, factions and/or splits will occur and conflicts will result.

Beals and Siegel (1966) define stress as any change or alteration in external contacts or environment that a group experiences. Events which contradict or render useless traditional social controls may highlight inconsistencies in the group or demonstrate that the ideal is not being achieved.

While the early structuralist approaches studying this phenomenon placed a great emphasis on strain, external stress impinging upon an organization plays an equally important role in the development of conflict. When there is a high degree of strain in the system, little stress will be needed to generate conflict.

### Leadership:

The relationship between stress and strain and the engagement of conflict is not, however, completely unaffected by other factors. The nature of group leadership, with which this study will also be concerned in unravelling the causes of conflict, will also be assessed.

Three types of leadership have been identified: (i) charismatic-authority residing in the person of the leader, (ii) traditional-authority gaining its legitimacy from custom and, (iii) rational-authority based on a legally established bureaucratic order. This

typology originated with Max Weber but has been utilized by a number of researchers since then with some modification (Turner and Killian, 1956; Nyomarkay, 1967; Johnson, 1964).

Since the present research focus (Doukhobors) does not include the third type of leadership (rational), we will focus on the impact of changes in leadership from a charismatic to traditional with regard to the emergence of conflict. This position is similar to that taken by Lang and Lang, 1961; Talmon, 1965; Nelson, 1969; and Nyomarkay, 1967.

#### METHODOLOGY

As the present research is a diachronic study, tracing through time the conflict in which Doukhobors have engaged, an historical perspective is utilized. Over the years, a great deal of writing has been devoted to the Doukhobors. However, as of late they have become one of the more "unfashionable" ethnic groups studied by social scientists. The Government of Canada was (for the first half century), of necessity, very interested in understanding the Doukhobors and, in many cases, changing certain aspects of their behavior. Numerous publications are available concerning government investigations into the adjustment of Doukhobors to Canadian life and recommendations for settling the conflict between Doukhobors and Canadian authorities. These articles span the years from the turn of the century to the mid-60's.

That the disputes were of vital concern to the authorities is advantageous for the researcher who wishes to know precisely what events were occurring at a given time. The annual reports of the Commissioner of Provincial Police of British Columbia and the Reports of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) list such matters as school attendance, depredations by the Sons of Freedom, and policies instituted by the authorities. Activities of the Doukhobors were rather startling to other Canadians and thus made good news copy. As such, there is extensive periodical literature pertaining to the Doukhobors and the majority of this material is concerned with the sensationalist aspect of the group rather than their more mundane and quiet affairs. Being a "colorful" group brought them to the attention of historians and number of substantial works exist in this area.

As so much writing by outsiders was taking place, the Doukhobors eventually began to contribute their own versions. Hence, there are brochures, pamphlets and, more recently, books and journals (MIR) about Doukhobors authored by Doukhobors. Most of the data for the present research was obtained from the Special Collections Department at the University of British Columbia although additional information was collected from the MIR Publication Society bookshop in Grand Forks, B.C. and the Glenbow Archives in Calgary. The archival data was supplemented with unstructured interviews with Doukhobors in both Vancouver and Grand Forks.

As the purpose of this investigation was to discern the factors or conditions which stimulate or hinder conflict, a trend analysis was utilized: the following of a small number of variables through time in an effort to interpret their relationship (Lazarsfeld, 1955). Concern with the interaction over time of two sets of variables, external stresses and internal group strains, necessitated the use of historical data.

In order to interpret this historical material, we employed a modified version of content analysis which is defined by Costner (1965) as "a quantitative process in which the frequency of occurrence of a specified characteristic or unit enables the investigator to describe or make inferences about the subject being studied" (p.1).

This study, however, also utilized qualitative, non-frequency analyses (George, 1959) which rely on the presence or absence of certain content characteristics for purposes of inference.

Events both internal and external to the group as well as ideology and the nature of group leadership were the units of analysis in this study. The collective behavior exhibited by Doukhobors (depredations and protests) were tabulated on a yearly basis.

The indicators of the independent variables in this study were chosen to correspond with the previously cited theoretical definitions. The indicators of stress and strain are based to some extent on similar indicators utilized by Beals and Siegel (1960, 1966) and outlined by Levine and Campbell (1972).<sup>3</sup> The measurement of ideological and charismatic authority evolved from Wilson (1973) and Nyomarkay's (1967) work.

## RESULTS

### Leadership:

In Nyomarkay's view (1967), the reign of a charismatic leader should be less fraught with conflict (both internal and external) than that of a traditional leader. When authority resides in a charismatic leader, presumably there should be fewer disputes than would be so under traditional authority. The reasoning for this position stems from the fact that the charismatic type leader becomes the source of group cohesion or authority. The charismatic leader embodies goals in his person. As Nyomarkay (1967) points out, "A charismatic leader attracts adherents to the extent that he succeeds in incorporating the utopian goal in his person" (p.21). Three leadership eras have been identified: Verigin I (1900-1924), Verigin II (1924-1939) and the era of disputed leadership (1940-present).

FIGURE 1

## LEADERSHIP ERAS (1900-1976) AND NUMBER OF CONFLICTUAL EPISODES

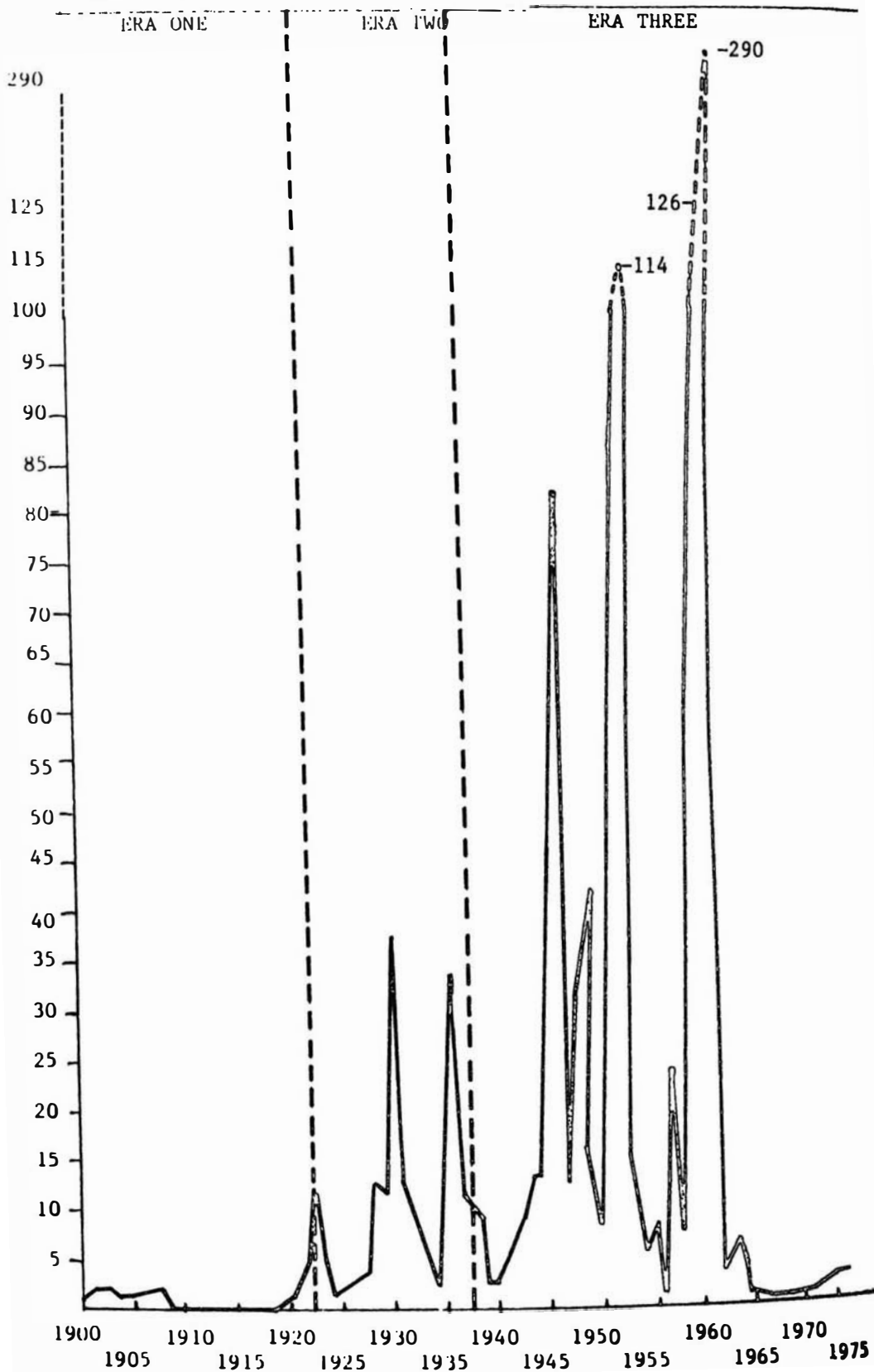


Figure 1 reveals the extent of conflict (as measured by the number of events taking place for that year) exhibited by Doukhobors during the three leadership eras delineated above. The data indicates that conflict which emerged shortly after 1900 quickly receded until 1923. At this time conflict was once again in evidence and continued until 1940. From 1945 until 1962 the amount of conflict accelerated and continued (peaking in 1961-62) at a rate unprecedented in Canadian history. During these seventeen years Doukhobors engaged in nearly a thousand acts of violence.

The more militant actions taken by Doukhobors during that time period have diminished during the past decade. Only a few sensational acts of arson have been perpetrated in the past ten years. For example, in 1970 John J. Verigin's house was burned as well as the destruction of the Krestova Community Hall. In later 1978 several Sons of Freedom Doukhobors were charged with conspiracy to commit arson or attempted arson. As of today, eight were found guilty although a similar number were found not guilty. Other less spectacular acts such as demonstrations, temporary withdrawal of children from school, exhibitions of nudity and hunger strikes have occurred but on a much smaller scale (Woodcock and Avakumovic, 1977).

Because the first two eras are considered to be dominated by charismatic leaders (while the latter era dominated by traditional leaders), our hypothesis is partially supported. However, it does not show a total absence of conflict during Era II dominated by a charismatic leader. One possible explanation may be that while Verigin II did have some charismatic aspects, a great deal of his control over Doukhobors was limited to the fact that he was Verigin's son and thus people were responding to that symbolic aspect rather than he as a person having charismatic qualities.

The difference between Era I (Verigin I) and Era II (Verigin II) in terms of leadership style is very evident. Verigin I combined in varying degrees coercive, referent and legitimate powers and judiciously exercised these powers. For example, in 1917 he relinquished direct control of the community's finances and democratized the system. The result was that one section of the Doukhobors was thus incorporated as the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Limited. Other actions taken by Verigin I also demonstrate his ability to understand changing social conditions and thus alter his leadership style. However, not all changes were as structurally important as the previous example, but through the use of symbolic changes (abolishing the custom of bowing to the ground before him) and the delegation of responsibilities, he was able to gain greater credibility. The result was that he was able to control the strains and stresses impinging upon the community.

Verigin II, on the other hand, did not acquit himself creditably in the eyes of the community. His sole reliance upon coercive power brought the use of legitimate power into question and as a result, his referent power decreased considerably. In addition, his stance on the unity of the Doukhobors, the opposition to his father's philosophy and the seemingly nonrational bases of his decision

making left both the Independents and the Sons of Freedom bewildered. In short, his leadership style did not allow him to adequately control the strains and stresses facing the community.

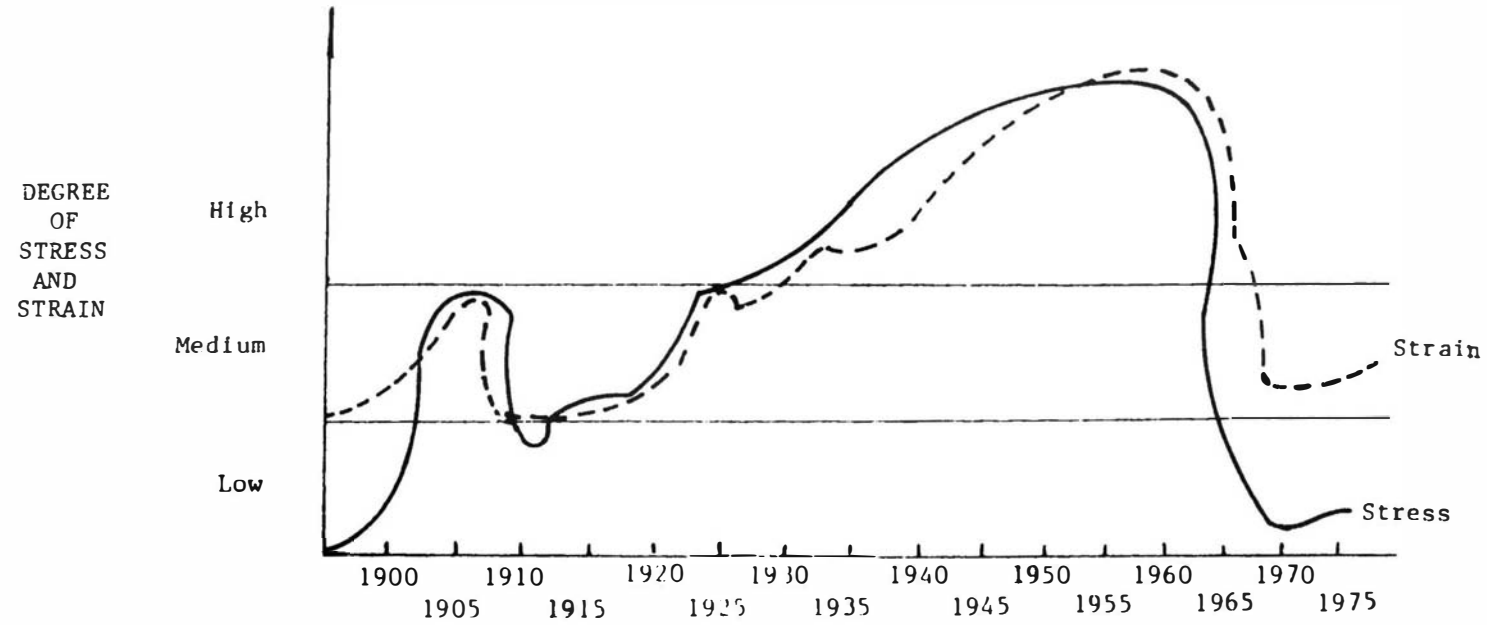
### Stress and Strain:

Strain has previously been defined as internal inconsistencies in the organization. Inherent within the Doukhobor system are inconsistencies which are of this nature. Frantz (1958, 1961) notes that because the Doukhobor system legitimized both horizontal (egalitarian) and vertical (authoritarian) conceptions of authority, confusion existed over the locus of authority -- whether it was centered in the hereditary leader or the village assembly. Social controls or sanctions are usually weak when the source of authority is unclear. If both horizontal and vertical conceptions of authority are legitimized, the resulting social controls may vacillate between one form and the other. Sanctions, whether positive or negative, which do not serve their purpose or are inoperative make integration of the group less likely. Although the authoritarian norms granted the leader more sanctioning power, the egalitarian emphasis in the ideology favored individual interpretation. Because the Doukhobor ideology granted equality to all, each person presumably had similar access to the gift of grace or charisma. Hawthorn (1955) and Newell and Popoff (1971) agree that it is this free-flowing or diffused charisma and an individual's access to it which contributed to the rise of conflict within the group. Newell and Popoff (1971:45) argue that if some kind of balance between the authority of the individual and the authority of the collectivity is not met, conflict will result. The original leader and his successors, however, were believed to possess more of this holiness or charisma than others. Frantz (1958), in keeping with Nyomarkay's view, argues that:

...as long as there was a strong charismatic leader the discrepancies within the system would remain in balance. Where no such leader was available the egalitarian principle would lead to many who could justifiably claim direction from the higher source, resulting in multiple interpretations of the ideology and disputes with others who did not share the same interpretation (p. 63).

That conflict did occur during Verigin II's reign indicates that charismatic leader cannot totally eradicate conflict. The inconsistency between the egalitarian and authoritarian norms created a strain on the system which undermined the effectiveness of the leader's control. The times when his stabilizing influence was low would be those times when external stresses bombarded the system and highlighted the various internal inconsistencies.

FIGURE 2  
INTENSITY OF STRESS AND STRAIN FOR THE TIME PERIOD 1900-1976



Aside from the distinction that has been made between the patterns of leadership between Era I, II and III, there are also certain differences to be noted in the degree of stress and strain between the three eras. The measure for stress and strain revealed that over the time period studied fluctuations did occur. Figure 2 illustrates these fluctuations. Because of the qualitative nature of the data, it was impossible to assign precise numerical values to each dimension of the measurement instrument. However, we have assigned values of low, medium, and high in an attempt to illustrate the various levels of stress and strain. It should be noted that there is always a low degree of strain within a group but this is normally kept in bounds by efficient leadership and its attendant social controls. Theoretically, if strains cannot be controlled, mainly as a result of stresses impinging upon the system, conflict will result.

In Era I there was a medium amount of strain during the early years, 1900 to 1908, stemming from frustrated expectations, discrepancies in wealth which were not in keeping with the belief in equality, and ambiguity regarding the appropriate behavior required of the members. This strain was effected by the stress of migration and later by pressures from the external society. The leader, being absent during part of the time, was not able to exert a stabilizing influence. Between 1908 and 1923, stress was low and the controlling efficiency of the leader high so that endemic strains were not activated. For example, one of the mechanisms of maintaining control is the threat of expulsion from the group. This punishment or the threat of such was most effective during the early years because the Doukhobors did not speak English and were also not familiar with the particular culture of the dominant society; therefore, expulsion was an ominous and foreboding threat to most of the members. As these members were for the most part uneducated in Western ways and economically dependent upon the others in the group, the thought of functioning in the outside society without the moral and economic support of other Doukhobors was probably a sufficient deterrent to most would-be protestors. During the war years, 1914-1918, Verigin's hold on the people was further enhanced by his threats of conscription for any who would leave the Community (Tarasoff, 1963). Hawthorn (1955) notes that some Independents returned to the Community because of the fear of conscription. Added to this was the successful operation of the Doukhobor community in British Columbia. By 1920, however, the stresses were increasing (the education issue was becoming a major concern of the provincial government) and there was also a rise in the degree of strain, especially that stemming from economic instability. Not only could the ideology not account for the bad times (the members had been living as they believed they should), but the leader did not seem to be able to divert the wrath of the external authorities. Woodcock and Avakamovic (1968) point out that the members began to focus their discontent upon Verigin, for while they did not have enough food they believed that Verigin was living in comfort.

In Era II the strains were higher than previously due to the inconsistent policies of Verigin II who succeeded in raising the level of ambiguity experienced by the members. Pressures from the outside society were increasing while the efficiency of social

controls was decreasing. Expulsion was not as formidable a threat because those ostracized could find sympathetic Independents who would take them in and, being more familiar with the external society, they could also adjust more easily to it. By referring to the "upside down philosophy" originally perfected by Kolesnikov,<sup>4</sup> those ostracized could believe that this measure was only a ploy on the part of Verigin II to fool the authorities, especially so since Verigin praised them one minute and denounced them in the next. The solidification of the Sons of Freedom into a distinct sub-grouping, hastened by their shared experiences in jail and outside, lessened peer group control as well. When segments feel that others are not living in the proper way, there is less reason to take their admonitions to heart.

Era III begins after Verigin II's death in 1939. By this time the strains had reached a high level due to the problems related to the succession of leadership. As Verigin III was still in Russia and could not be contacted, John J. Verigin (grandson of Verigin II) was chosen as their leader. The legitimate successor (Verigin III) died in 1942 although it was not until Verigin III's sister arrived in 1969 that the death was formally recognized. Besides Verigin III, three other individuals were competing for leadership of the Doukhobor community: John Lebedoff, Michael the Archangel and Stefan Sorokin. Later, other individuals such as Florence Storgeoff (Big Fanny) became interim leaders of one factor or another. For the above reason there were also few controls (high strain) operative while the degree of stress in this period ranged from medium to high.

The stress factor can be illustrated by the fact that in 1950 the Attorney General was forced to ask for research on how to handle the Doukhobor "problem". A specific example would be the attempted settlement of a group of Sons of Freedom in the remote Adams Lake area in British Columbia. The proposal became an election issue and eventually was dropped. In 1953 (after the provincial election) the Social Credit became an absolute majority and began to discuss various programs directed toward Doukhobors which were defined by many as anti-Doukhobor. One final illustration of the high stress would be the refusal of the Soviet government (in 1958) to allow Canadian Doukhobors to emigrate into the Soviet Union after they had made plans to do so.

Table 1 shows the relationship of stress and strain to the number of overt conflictual acts from 1900 to 1976. The above analysis would seem to support the relationship between stress and strain and the emergence of conflict. When the controlling influence of a leader was high, as in Era I, the tendency for conflict was lessened but when leadership did not pose such effective restraints, the internal strains were subject to disruption by external stresses and conflict accelerated.

TABLE 1

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS/STRAIN AND  
INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE BY DOUKHOBORS (1900-1976)

	Level of Stress/Strain <sup>a</sup>					
	Low		Medium		High	
	<u>Stress</u>	<u>Strain</u>	<u>Stress</u>	<u>Strain</u>	<u>Stress</u>	<u>Strain</u>
Average Number of Incidents per Year	.60	N/A	2.1	1.3	29	27

- <sup>a</sup>. Years identified by level of stress and strain. For stress, low (1900-1903, 1911-1914, 1966-1975); medium (1904-1910, 1915-1929, 1964-1965); high (1929-1963). For strain the corresponding years were: low (N/A); medium (1900-1929, 1968-1975); high (1929-1967).

Since the mid 1960's, stresses and strains have decreased. Prejudice towards Doukhobors has decreased and barriers preventing them from participating in the Canadian way of life have decreased. The outsiders have ceased to be defined as a threat and thus the stresses have also declined, e.g., the British Columbia Provincial Government has created a special procedure for the registration of Doukhobor marriages.

In addition, the acculturative processes have continued to take place. Doukhobors have moved into urban areas, married non-Doukhobors and accepted English as the language as well as accepted Canadian education. The result has been a steady erosion of the traditional Doukhobor's way of life and the institutional completeness that characterized their way of life only a decade ago has diminished.

In 1963, the federal government appointed a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. It was charged with inquiring into and reporting on bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada. It was to recommend what steps should be taken to maintain a nation state with two official languages but many different cultures. Then, in 1971 the government proclaimed a national multiculturalism policy. This policy outlines activities that the Multiculturalism Directorate will pursue with the aim of directly assisting many cultural groups and communities in their effort to maintain and develop their culture in the Canadian context. During this time, Russia also declined as the main threat to the Western Democracies. The 1950's fear of the "reds" was replaced with a somewhat friendlier political relationship between the USA, Canada and Russia. The late 1960's also brought with it a reaction against the Vietnam War, the prevalence of draft dodgers to Canada, student demonstrations and a new-found interest in the nonviolent resistance expounded by Gandhi. The rise of "Hippie" philosophy with its emphasis on pacificism, communal living, and Eastern mysticism also occurred during this time. The general atmosphere of this period can be seen to be more congenial to the views held by the Doukhobors. For example, in 1967 the Doukhobor choir took part in the celebrations at Expo in Montreal. For the Orthodox and Independent Doukhobors this was a turning point in their relations with the Canadian society. The time was opportune for building a more positive image of themselves in terms of the larger society.

Between 1970 and 1972 the Sons of Freedom moved back to Kretova from the shanty town built near the prison of Agassiz. They were once again in closer proximity to the other Doukhobors than they had been since the mass arrests and pilgrimage of 1962. The closer in distance people are to each other, the greater is the chance of renewing past dissension and differences. As well, Sorokin visited the Kootenays in the summer of 1973 and 1974 and presumably was in contact with some of his still faithful followers. This contact may have renewed old alliances and increased the remembrance of past conflicts with other Doukhobors. From the early 1970's to the present there have been only a few sporadic acts by the Sons of Freedom and these have been mainly confined to displays against the Orthodox Doukhobors. The protestors in the recent displays have

mainly been under thirty.<sup>5</sup> They are not the protestors who were released from Agassiz in the early 1970's, but presumably are younger relations or acquaintances of these people. Their displays do not meet with the same consternation and reprisals as did those of the 1950's. The society, now used to such events as the streaking fad of the early 1970's, looks on with indifference. But the idea of protest is very much alive in the external environment. Other groups are banding together to make demands on the larger society, for example, the Native Indian Movement, and this activity may well have struck a responsive chord among the younger members of the Sons of Freedom.

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FOOTNOTES

\*I would like to thank the reviewers for providing us with a careful reading of the manuscript and providing information which helped us considerably in the revision. We are very appreciative of that effort and expertise.

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion as to settlement patterns of Doukhobors (both in Russia and Canada) see D. Gale and P. Koroscil "Doukhobor Settlements: Experiments in Idealism."

<sup>2</sup> Beals and Siegel develop a typology of strain that is three types: (i) Technological - occurring in relationships between organizations and their external conditions, (ii) Social - occurring from inadequacies in the specification of rights and duties and control of members and, (iii) Ideological - occurring from inconsistent beliefs.

<sup>3</sup> Stress is measured by the following indicators:

- a) migration to different areas and subsequent adaptations to these areas (e.g., new means of livelihood, introduction of alien values and goals, etc.).
- b) impersonal events in the larger society (e.g., World War I, World War II, the Depression, etc.).
- c) events peculiar to Canada (e.g., change of Ministers of Interior, Oliver replacing Sifton, with resulting policy change toward immigrant groups; the shift from Anglo-Conformity to a more pluralistic approach by early 1960's, etc.).
- d) events impinging directly on the group (e.g., government policy toward Doukhobors; pressure to conform to the larger society; punitive sanctions against the group; introduction of laws inconsistent with laws of the group; death of leader in train explosion of 1924, etc.).
- e) times of economic instability (rising or falling economic situations; crop failures; inadequacy of resources to support group; expanding economy; early years in British Columbia, etc.).

**Strain** is measured by the following indicators:

- a) inconsistencies in beliefs which make different interpretations possible.
- b) inconsistencies between beliefs and practices; actual behavior does not meet the expected ideal.
- c) ambiguity in obligations, obedience lines and duties; "proper" standards of behavior become difficult to assess and hence to achieve.
- d) uneven distribution of rewards; economic disparities between succession.

<sup>4</sup> Kolesnikov is thought to have introduced the tactic of the "soft answer" or survival by evasion. His philosophy was that it was permissible to outwardly conform and out of necessity profess any religion as only a person's inner beliefs were of importance. As long as one remained true within him/herself to these beliefs and led a good life he/she would be following the Doukhobor way.

<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, protestors have mainly been female and individuals over fifty years of age.

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