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Freedomites Doukhobor protest march; and good times in the Kootenay counter-culture.

The Indians called it “Kutenai,” a coming together of many different waters. The people of the Kootenays are like that, too; some were born and grew up on the land, and others came

from halfway around the world. Together, they form a large, stronger organism.

The Kootenays of British Columbia is the name for a triangular region hidden in the corner of the province, slashed by three mountain ranges, dotted with lakes, and home to many powerful waterways. It is fenced in on one side by the 49th parallel between Canada and the U.S. and on its third side by the Okanagan Valley.

Kootenays folk say the hard-to-penetrate natural barriers have given the area an autonomy and identity all its own, providing a base for self-determined lifestyles and freedom from authority.

A rich, and potent, mixture of people have made the Kootenays their stronghold—the Kootenay Indians, plus the dissident Doukhobors who fled oppressive militaristic Russia to preserve their communal, pacifistic life, Japanese interned by a paranoid Canadian government during the war, and settlers of every race who formed the backbone of an exceptionally militant labor movement.

In the 1960's and 70's, the Kootenays became home to a new generation of dissidents and militants, young people fleeing Amerika and its south-east Asian war, and those who saw the region as a base for building the non-hierarchical new age society.

The spirit of resistance has forged a unity that breaks down barriers between groups, races and societies and gives the Kootenays an allegiance to lawlessness. Doukhobors who fought for communalism and pacifism can learn to respect the new generation of freeks who want to build their own society outside the control of the government. And the hippies now fight for the issues the Doukhobors see as important, uniting on education, anti-pollution and agriculture.

A Kootenays bar, like the Arrow in Castlegar or the acre-wide beer parlors in Trail, is hippies and working men and women, Doukhobor sons and daughters and Kootenays old-

timers all drinking, fighting and laughing together. And if it comes to shooting out transformers on one of the hydroelectric projects that destroyed the Kootenay Lakes and the Columbia River, everyone goes and it's no questions asked.

"Out here, it's not whether you're a Doukhobor, a freek or a hardhat; what it comes down to is whether or not you talk to cops," says a Kootenays woman. "And whether or not you smoke dope, though that's easier—everyone does."

The provincial government has attempted to flush the freeks out of the woods by cutting off welfare to the West Kootenays, terming it a chronically high unemployment area. The hippies have dug in their heels, many choosing to bypass the system entirely, surviving on seasonal work, cottage industries and co-operatively buying and growing their own food.

"The co-op is a way of life up here—we've got co-ops like other people have unions, or families, or organizations with a board of directors," says a Slocan Valley woman. "That's the way we operate."

The communalism practised by the Doukhobors was an early form of mutual aid among whites in the Kootenays, and the cooperative attitude has since caught on in a big way. For many people in the Kootenay valleys and towns, the co-op is the key to their survival, operating in all aspects of their life, including buying land, building houses, having babies, growing gardens and distributing food.

The co-op has become even more crucial in the hard-time 70's, with the drying-up of federal government handouts such as Local Initiatives Program (LIP) and Opportunities for Youth (OFY). Many a people-run project, including the militant newspaper *Arrow,* got off the ground in the '60's with government bucks, enabling most freeks to lead an easy life alternating between grants, unemployment and welfare. Today things are tougher. Many Kootenay folk count on the co-op, interspersed with back-breaking seasonal work such

as tree-planting, almost universally done by freeks who take their couple of thousand dollars back to the family pool to buy durables and goods they can't get through the co-op.,

The influx of younger people into the Kootenays in the 60's was mainly squatters, who got together to build shelters and hack out gardens. Others found that by pooling their resources they were able to purchase small plots of land and construct communal houses. "We had to work together just to survive," recalls one back-to-the-lander. "Then we just found it was a lot nicer way to live and that we could aid each other in all different areas."

One family group in the Slocan Valley is typical: their "family" is two women, three men and a child. The baby, Tierra, was born at home with the help of friends and midwives in a Kootenays birth collective. They belong to the food co-op, share a garden with neighbours, and get dairy foods from a nearby collective which raises goats and chickens. "Nobody's trying to get more than anyone else," says Jen, one of the women. "Every time someone gets another trip together, like the goats, or spinning wool or something, we all benefit."

The Kootenays are divided into several autonomous food co-ops, scattered throughout the valleys and the urban centres. Food is ordered from Fed-Up Co-operative Wholesalers in Vancouver, the nucleus for a web of food co-ops throughout B.C. It's then trucked up to the Kootenay centres and distributed to members.

"We're able to get just about all the dried goods, such as nuts, seeds, grains and flours, that we want," says a Pass Creek man. "Cheese and canned goods are the problem, it costs too much to refrigerate and ship them."

In the Slocan Valley, co-opers have made their first move toward autonomy from capitalist food-suppliers. With pooled funds, they've bought a truck which they send on runs to the nearby Okanagan Valley for fruit and over the Rockies to Al-

was a sharing of land, food and agricultural know-how, as the Doukhobors saw in their new neighbors a new expression of pacifist, communalist values.

But a certain disenchantment set in when the Doukhobors saw some of the newcomers return to the city in the back seat of Daddy's car. However, genuine respect and solidarity continues to prevail between the Doukhobors and the here-for-good hippies.

and public school education. But as their farmland grew to be more valuable, the Canadian government took a new interest in them and passed a law requiring them to take an oath of allegiance to the British Crown or give up their land.

Many Doukhobors refused, and were promptly dispossessed. So they had to move on, in 1905, to a less fertile, but more remote land—the Kootenays.

As George Woodcock notes in his book *The Doukhobors,* the Canadian government "used the issue of the oath to seize land for which there was public demand."

The acts of the Canadian government, designed to split the Doukhobor community, in part succeeded. Some Doukhobors remained in a Kootenays commune to which the government retained the title and others chose to farm as independents, after signing an oath of allegiance.

A sect of the Doukhobors known as the Sons of Freedom, or Freedomites, launched a series of protests against the assimilation of their people. Freedomites removed their clothes in public, refused to send their children to school and burned material possessions such as buildings and machinery. The Freedomite struggle was harshly repressed in an attempt to break the spirits of the Doukhobor people; Freedomite men, women and children were imprisoned for long periods in specially-created jails.

The Freedomite struggles—especially where they disrupted public services—were deeply resented by the non-Doukhobor population, but most Doukhobors have become completely assimilated and live at peace with their neighbors.

When freeks began to pour into the Kootenays and attempted to homestead, the pacifist Doukhobors were fascinated and supportive of their efforts. (As well, they saw a chance to boost themselves out of a subsistence lifestyle by selling their heretofore low-value land to the relatively-well-heeled Americans; in 1970–71, for instance, they sold off more than $1 million in real estate in the Slocan Valley alone.)There

berta for organic grains. A co-op member then mills the grain into flours which are offered on the co-op list.

Prices for food, despite freight costs, usually wind up being lower than the local rip-off Safeway or IGA, but that's not the only motivation for co-op members. As one man put it, "Co-ops are not just cheaper peanut butter."

Food co-op members tend to be fairly homogeneous in the Kootenays—most are young, rural freeks living in a collective situation. But the lifestyle is beginning to spread: millworkers, single parents and some 2nd-generation Doukhobors have begun to join, and in Castelgar, the mainstay of one collective is asingle mother with six kids.

Women's groups in the Kootenays thrive on collective practice and at various times have run birth collectives, theatre groups, health-care centres and even house-building co-ops. "It's helped us to build our confidence as women, and increase our survival skills, to get together and share the work and information—though we share a lot of good times, too," says Anne, a Slocan Valley resident.

It's a Thanksgiving party in Robson, B.C., across the river from the smoking, festering Cancel pulp mill, its sirens warning of chlorine gas leakage every few shifts. The party is a cross-section of Kootenays people —the three people who live in a dome at Pass Creek, several collective members of the counter-culture/labor/anarchist newspaper *The Arrow,* local community college professors and a daycare worker. A young guy with long, red hair, says you don't make real friends in the city like you do in the country. How does he survive economically? He says he's a hardhat—a laborer inside the giant Comineo zinc-lead smelter at Trail.

Comineo is the monster that ate up a town and spat out ruined bodies of workers; the. corporate citizen that dumps nitrates, phosphates, mercury, lead and other noxious substances into the rivers and lakes of the once-clean West Kootenays. Workers at Comineo once had the life ex-

pectancy of 18th-century underground coalminers, and were represented by a big American union < that took their dues but had no interest in their health and safety— the United Steel-workers of America [7]n 1972, they almost managed to kick Steel out in favor of the independent militant Canadian Workers Union, but were shafted on a technicality by the then-reigning social democratic (read class collaborationist) provincial regime, which preferred the devil it knew to the one it didn't know. Another battle was lost the following year in a similar manner, but the Comineo workers haven't given up yet; they're just biding their time.

"We're not going to die like the workers used to in the last 20 years,'' Jeff, the Comineo worker, says. "We finally figured out how to get some control over our lives.

In smelter and pulp mill, where workers are now largely represented by the Canadian union PPWC (Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada) health and safety have been key bargaining issues.

Pressuring the large multi-national corporate employers for "benefits'' taken for granted elsewhere has become easier for workers who now know their union won't give up on them.

Independent unionism has also eased the economic pressure on workers, a cause of racism and bigotry against workers who came from outside the Kootenays to work in the mills, dams and smelters. "There's a lot of Doukhobors, many older Italian men who have been in Trail for years, some Indian guys and a lot of freeks like me,'' says Jeff. "They're my buddies, you know, I don't get any hassle for having long hair because the oldtimers have seen us come in there and work just like them."

Younger workers spread new attitudes inside the workplace—they are adamant about safety conditions and don't have the old company loyalty once demanded of workers. Rather than cause friction, the "laid-back about work, but dead serious abopt my lungs" attitude has caught on: older workers who gave years ofitheir lives to the company are now

demanding comprehensive health plans, injury compensation and early retirement.

The struggle began with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) who were active in the battle for miners' rights in the early 1900's—when the mortality for workers in B.C. mines was the highest in the world (5 per 1000). In the Kootenays, an IWW organizer named Ginger Goodwin who was shot by a special constable in 1918, still has the stature of hero for young workers. Most know his story: after taking an active role in the bitter miners' strike in Trail in 1913–14, Goodwin was reclassified as "A" by the Canadian draft board, whereupon he split to Vancouver Island, 600 miles west of the Kootenays, and holed up in the hills near the mining town of Cumberland. He was only following his own conscience and the IWW constitution which called for workers to refuse to participate in the "plundersquabbles of the parasite class."

Goodwin was shot in the back with a soft-nosed dum-dum bullet by a special constable who managed to track him down. The constable was exonerated by a "special inquiry," but he did suffer one punishment: he went hungry in Cumberland—a town with as militant a history as any in the Kootenays— because no waitress would serve him.

Doukhobor means spirit-wrestler. It's a name that fits the Kootenays because of the long history of struggle by people of all stripes in the region for the right to live in dignity, autonomy and self-determination.

The Doukhobors came as religious dissidents from Russia to Canada in the late 19th century. Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer, was instrumental in arranging with Queen Victoria for the Doukhobors to be granted land in common, allowed to live as a community and guaranteed exemption from military service.

The Doukhobors first settled on the Prairies and for a number of years lived out their ideal of "toil and a peaceful life," prospering without private property, militarism, nationalism