

Writing For The Revolution

Novels, Nihilism, Nudity

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28 May 2019

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NIHILIST, n. *A Russian who denies the existence of anything but Tolstoi. The leader of the school is Tolstoi.*

-Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 1906

This story is about so-called Canada, although it begins deep in Imperial Russia over one hundred years ago. This is a story about the prairies and mountains of so-called Canada, but before that part can be told, it will be necessary to tell of Russian rebels and their long struggle against the Czar. This story involves anarchists, pacifists, christians, nihilists, imperialists, the indigenous, but above all, this story centers on writing as an act of direct resistance, a dangerous practice with unexpected results.

The Kingdom of God is Within You

In the 1700s, a religious sect appeared within the Russian Empire known as the Doukhobors, a group of un-orthodox christians who renounced the church, its icons, its dogma, and believed that god found his expression within each individual, not according to the whims of the priests. Orthodox Christianity was the official state religion of the Russian Empire, pitting the Doukhobors against the Czar and his priests. Beyond this, the Doukhobors were ardent pacifists and refused to fight in the Imperial Army, an offense for which they suffered greatly. While they lived peacefully in their own communes and held their land in common, the successive Czars were determined to make their lives hell.

Throughout the 1800s, the Doukhobors were heavily repressed, with thousands forced into military service, imprisoned, or resettled in remote parts of Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Siberia. In 1894, as the Imperial Army was beginning its expansion into Asia, the Czar forced every subject in the Empire to swear an oath of allegiance, an act the Doukhobors refused. One year later, nearly seven thousand Doukhobors forced into the Imperial Army publicly burned their weapons and suffered immediate repression as a result.

By 1897, the cause of the Doukhobors had become well known outside Russia, forcing the Czar to allow them to leave the Empire if they paid for their own transportation and agreed to never return. It was at this point that two infamous anarchists came to their aid. One was the anarcho-pacifist and novelist Lev Tolstoi. The other was Pyotr Kropotkin, the anarcho-communist famous not only for his works on agriculture, but for advocating propaganda-of-the-deed, or targeted assassinations of people in power.

Tolstoi was the first outsider to help the Doukhobors and enlisted his comrades to find them a new home. These unorthodox christians embodied Tolstoi's conception of spiritual anarcho-pacifism, laid out in his work *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and he began writing letters to the Canadian state in 1897, asking if the Doukhobors might find asylum across the Pacific Ocean. He was soon joined in this effort by Kropotkin, although the anarcho-communist had specific demands for the Canadian state: the Doukhobors be exempt from military service, they be allowed to organize themselves, and their land be held in common. For a variety of reasons (which will be discussed later), the Canadian state agreed, even though it went against its colonial policy.

Between January and June of 1899, the Doukhobors crossed the ocean and settled in southern Saskatchewan on land recently ceded to the Crown by beleaguered indigenous leaders. While

the Canadian state provided the funds to transport the Doukhobors inland, the bulk of their money came directly from Lev Tolstoi. This considerable sum had been generated by the profits from a single novel, his first in over twenty years: *Resurrection*, an anti-prison masterpiece filled with nihilists, corrupt judges, guilty liberals, and brutal guards. In short, it was one of the most revolutionary novels of its day, but before this claim can be justified, we have to tell the story of nihilism, and its demise.

Going to the People

Like his comrade Pyotr Kropotkin, Lev Tolstoi had been born into the Russian nobility in 1828. After several years of aimless privilege, he joined the Imperial Army and fought in the Crimean War of 1853-1856, an experience that revealed the carnage of modern warfare. Having begun writing novels in his twenties, Tolstoi soon devoted his life to writing and secluded himself from the rest of Russian society. Living with his wife and children on their commune in Yasnaya Polyana (near Moscow), Tolstoi composed his famous novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* and opened several schools for the peasants in his region. The serfs had just been freed from slavery in 1861 and Tolstoi devoted much of his wealth and resources to helping these dispossessed and non-literate people who'd once enriched his family. In this regard, he presaged an effort of another group of educated Russians: the nihilists.

With the full publication of *War and Peace* in 1869, Tolstoi became one of the most respected writers across Europe. A massive chronicle of the Napoleonic battle between France and Russia, this anti-war novel dissected the hierarchy of the two Empires and revealed the parasites who caused the bloodshed. Rather than bask in this new literary fame or fall back into Russian society, Tolstoi remained on his commune and penned *Anna Karenina*, his most widely-beloved novel. Released in book form in 1878, *Anna Karenina* proved itself to be an even fiercer criticism of the Russian Empire, although instead of revealing this through warfare, the novel exposes the social hypocrisies of class society by centering on the journey of a woman named Anna.

Despite being harshly critical of the Russian bourgeois, it was widely praised among that class and cemented Tolstoi's literary fame. As fate would have it, *Anna Karenina* would be his last novel for over twenty years, a decision Tolstoi made to focus on his commune. He'd write only short stories and theory during this time period, putting him on the opposite end of the social turbulence that had engulfed the Empire since the 1860s. While he tilled the land by day and wrote by night, thousands of young people were risking their lives to educate the exploited Russian peasants and violently overthrow the Czar. As was mentioned above, these people were called the nihilists.

Taking their name from the 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev, the nihilists emerged from the schism between the older liberals who fought to emancipate the serfs, and their children who could clearly see that little had changed since then. While the designation of nihilist had been used before *Fathers and Sons*, it became widely popular once the novel was published, inspiring thousands of youth to rebel against the hypocrisy of their parents. 1863 saw the publication of an entirely different novel, *What Is To Be Done?* by Nikolai Chernyshevsky, written in direct response to *Fathers and Sons*. Although it popularized the character of the young nihilist, Turgenev meant to criticize this growing tendency, while Chernyshevsky meant only to fuel it.

Written while in prison, the book depicts the struggle of young Vera, destined to be married off by her bourgeois family, who instead runs off to live in an urban commune. One of the male characters is a committed revolutionary who sleeps on a bed of nails and eats only bread to remain hard, while another male marries Vera so she can be legally free. Within a few years of its publication, the nihilist movement exploded across Russian cities, with young people engaging in fake marriages and forming their own versions of the fictional commune. Between the twin poles of *Fathers and Sons* and *What Is To Be Done?*, the nihilist movement had found its bearings.

The late 1860s saw the first nihilist upsurge, mainly focused in Russian universities, and it was met with extreme repression by the Empire. The censors of the Czar had initially allowed *What Is To Be Done?* to be published because it was so badly written, a fact they hoped would discredit the young rebels. The authorities never imagined these youth would try and emulate the character Rakhmetov who mysteriously disappears from his bed of nails to organize an unnamed event. When their attempt to discredit this movement backfired, the Imperial authorities began deporting nihilists for the slightest acts of rebellion, especially after the attempted assassination of the Czar in 1866.

This incident was coordinated by two young nihilists born into Russian nobility (like Tolstoy and Kropotkin) who formed a group called The Organization. A secret cell of this group called Hell was composed of volunteer assassins who agreed to sacrifice their lives to remove enemies of the people. After young Dmitry Karakozov failed to shoot Czar Alexander II and was quickly hung, his fellow-noble Nikolai Ishutin was arrested along with ten comrades and exiled to Siberia. Following this attempt, the Empire banned the formation of student groups, a law that dramatically escalated the nihilist struggle.

One young lecturer at Saint Petersburg University soon came to emulate the character Rakhmetov from *What Is To Be Done?*, a non-noble named Sergei Nechayev who took to sleeping on wooden planks and subsisting on bread. Using his non-aristocratic past to his advantage, Nechayev came to be a respected figure in the local nihilist movement and played with the guilt of the noble-born students. Believing he could radicalize these privileged students, Nechayev had them form an illegal student group in 1869 and then turned the membership list over to the authorities. While he hid in the safety of Switzerland, dozens of students were imprisoned or exiled to penal colonies, a fate he hoped would act as the bed of nails to harden them. A committed sociopath, Nechayev went on to kill one of his friends during a brief return to Russia and penned the *Catechism of the Revolutionist*, a text that encouraged the nihilist movement to show no mercy to anyone, not even one's self.

Nechayev was eventually arrested in 1872 for the murder of his friend and spent the rest of his life in a dungeon, although his acts had already left their mark on Russian society. With the nihilist movement now seen as a conspiracy of sociopaths like Nechayev, the movement began an exodus to the rural countryside in the year 1874, with over two thousand people taking jobs among the peasants. By then they called themselves *Narodniks* (roughly translated as *populists*), with one of their main slogans being *going to the people*. Despite the peaceful nature of this work, over half of them were arrested within a year, leading the survivors to return to the cities and form highly secretive groups to withstand the unrelenting Czarist repression. Despite their failure in the countryside, the movement never gave up its faith in the peasants, nor the desire to educate them.

One group remained committed to its rural vision, an organization called *Land and Liberty*, and in 1876 they spread out among the countryside under strict secrecy. While they kept a pres-

ence in the urban centers, the group remained committed to its belief that the Russian peasants were the revolutionary agents of history, waiting only to become aware of their strength. In 1877, as *Anna Karenina* scandalized and enraptured the Russian bourgeois, the nihilists had little time for the production of novels, although they certainly enjoyed Tolstoi's merciless depiction of a corrupt society. While he wouldn't reveal this for another decade, Tolstoi considered himself a nihilist during this time period, in "the sense of being without faith."

As he tilled away on his land "without faith," another nihilist named Vera Zasulich shot the governor of Saint Petersburg in January 1878, seriously wounding him, and she became so popular in the public imaginary she was acquitted of all charges. The same public that loved *Anna Karenina* also fell in love with brave Vera, nihilist defender of the exploited, and once she'd disappeared from the lime-light, another nihilist took her place. Sergei Stepniak, member of *Land and Liberty*, sunk a dagger into the heart of the Czar's chief of secret police, killing him on the streets of Saint Petersburg in August 1878. After safely escaping Russia, this nihilist wrote a book in 1882 called *Underground Russia*, a text that gave the full history of the movement over the past two decades. By then, the Czar had finally been assassinated.

In 1879, the *Land and Liberty* group split in half, with the smaller faction now against political killings, while the larger half remained committed to these tactics. This faction, the *People's Will*, placed a bomb under railroad tracks in an attempt to destroy the Czar's personal train in December 1879, although this action failed. Undeterred, the group placed a bomb in the Winter Palace in February 1880. Had the Czar not been late for dinner, this assassination would have been successful. Still committed to their mission, the *People's Will* finally succeeded in March 1881 when three of their bombers surrounded the Imperial carriage and shredded Czar Alexander II into pieces. His successor, Alexander III, would soon institute a wave of terror against all social movements.

After the *People's Will* failed to assassinate the new Czar's minister of public order, two members of the organization were captured and hung in Kiev for distributing leaflets. The organization curtailed its activities soon after, but the repression that followed them swelled into pogroms. In 1881, nearly all of the Jews in Moscow were deported (around 20,000), and in 1882 the dreaded May Laws were enacted, heavily restricting the movements and rights of all Russian Jews. This was accompanied by a wave of pogroms that swept through the villages and cities of the Empire. While these new measures were given various justifications by the authorities, the real reason was simple: roughly one-fifth of the *People's Will* had been Jewish.

People's Will continued to be active through the 1880s, but mostly through secret meetings and the publication of clandestine propaganda. Hundreds were arrested and exiled to Siberia for associating with this group, and the organization eventually vanished. It was in this dark time that Lev Tolstoi suddenly renounced his previous nihilism and found his faith. As he would write in 1886: *I only passed from 'Nihilism' to the Church because I felt the impossibility of living without faith – without a knowledge of what is good and evil, resting on something more than my animal instincts...I turned to the Church for obligatory precepts of life, but the Church gave me only such as did not draw me nearer to the Christian state of mind I longed for, but rather alienated me from it. I turned away from the Church.*

Over the next fifteen years, he would develop these same ideas into his doctrine of anarcho-pacifism, writing in 1894 that, *in our days every profession of true Christianity, by any individual man, strikes at the most essential power of the state, and inevitably leads the way for the emancipation of all.....what are governments to do against men who show the uselessness, superfluousness,*

and perniciousness of all governments, and who do not contend against them, but simply do not need them and do without them, and therefore are unwilling to take any part in them? Revolutionary enemies attack the government from without. Christianity does not attack it at all, but, from within, it destroys all the foundations on which government rests.

In the darkness of the 1890s, when the light of revolution dimmed across Russia, the example of the Doukhobors suddenly energized Tolstoi and confirmed his recently acquired beliefs. Without the violent tactics of the nihilists, the Doukhobors were defying a ruthless Czar while living a simple existence of connection to the land, respect for all life, and a distrust of every institution that attempted to force its order on the world. When an exasperated Alexander III finally allowed this religious sect to leave the Empire, it was Tolstoi who immediately jumped to their assistance. In order to do so, the famous author would write another novel, his first in over twenty years: *Resurrection*.

Against the Army of the Antichrist

The Doukhobors first came to Tolstoi's attention in 1895 after famously burning their weapons rather than serve in the Imperial army. As was mentioned above, Tolstoi and Kropotkin quickly came to their aid, but when Alexander III allowed them leave Russia in 1897, there was little money for their resettlement. As a world-famous author, Tolstoi was in a position to use this fame to generate money, so he quickly set to work writing *Resurrection*. Over the next three years, he created a main character named Prince Dmitri Ivanovich Nekhludov, a dissolute former soldier who idled away his life in vain pursuits. In this regard, Nekhludov is nothing less than a picture of the young Tolstoi.

In the novel, which takes place in the mid-1880s, Nekhludov is called away from his privileged life to serve on a jury in a Moscow courthouse. While in his seat, a woman accused of murder is brought to the stand and he eventually recognizes her as Katerina Maslova, a peasant woman he seduced in his youth who'd then given birth to a child. Despite his feeble efforts to alter the jury's verdict, Maslova is sentenced to four years of hard labor in Siberia, and the prince is thrown into a spiritual crisis. Just like Nekhludov, Tolstoi had seduced a peasant woman who bore his child, and as the novel progresses, the young prince is thrown into a seemingly impossible quest to not only save Maslova, but redeem himself. After his predatory seduction of the young woman, Maslova became a prostitute and fell into the criminal underworld, eventually poisoning a john who wouldn't leave her alone.

Once she receives her sentence to Siberia, Prince Nekhludov begins to visit her in prison until her exile, an act he repeats for the next two hundred pages of the novel. During his visits he comes to know the prisoners and begins to act in their defense, just as he attempts to have Maslova's sentence overturned. Using his inherited privilege, Nekhludov takes the reader through literally every level of the Russian penal system, revealing it to be a corrupt hierarchy filled with vicious functionaries who care only for receiving their high wages. It's this hierarchy that Tolstoi later identifies as the forces of Antichrist, an unthinking parasite latched onto humanity that includes both the Empire and the Church. As he tries to redeem himself after a life profiting from this same hierarchy, Nekhludov promises to follow Maslova to Siberia if she's deported, promises to marry her if she'll have him, and gives away his family land to the peasants in preparation for the journey.

It isn't long before Nekhludov comes to despise the society that created him and he eventually follows Maslova on her journey to Siberia. When she's continuously harassed by male prisoners on the way, Nekhludov uses his privilege to transfer her to the political section, a place where men treat women with equality. It's with them that Nekhludov comes to know the nihilist struggle against the Czar and it's in this final section of the book that Tolstoi reveals his favorable opinion of the crushed movement. After they reach Siberia, the newly political Maslova tells Nekhludov she'll never marry him and is going to marry a nihilist, leaving the Prince alone in the east with no more land, no more privileges, and a chance to truly redeem his life.

While the novel *Resurrection* is the least known of Tolstoi's three great novels, it sold more copies than either *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* when it was published in 1899, tearing into the heart of a newly liberalized Empire and revealing its internal corruption to the world. Once it was released to wide praise and the money started pouring in, Tolstoi created a fund for the Doukhobors and gave it to them for their journey to so-called Canada in January 1900. By the middle of that year, seven thousand Doukhobors had reached southern Saskatchewan, only to find it had already been conquered by the forces of the Antichrist.

The Indigenous and the Dominion

Long before the Doukhobors arrived, the prairies of contemporary Saskatchewan used to team with herds of buffalo, the majestic creature central to indigenous life. In addition to subsisting off buffalo meat, dozens of tribes fished the endless lakes, harvested wild prairie rice, and lived a nomadic lifestyle in accordance with the seasons. There was no money, private property, or centralized authority, and a mystic like Lev Tolstoi might have been tempted to call this *the kingdom of heaven on earth*, although it certainly went by many other names spoken in ancient languages. This world existed for millennia until the arrival of French and British colonizers on the Atlantic coastline, an event that triggered the westward migration of the indigenous who wished to preserve their *kingdom of heaven*.

By the late-1700s, various tribes had been pitted against each other through the expanding fur-trade and the various wars between the French, the British, and the newly established United States. Amid the carnage and exploitation, tribes from the east flooded into the prairies along the Saskatchewan River, creating new alliances and mixtures amid the dwindling wild-lands. The once mighty buffalo herds were rapidly slaughtered by the encroaching colonizers, a genocide meant to deprive the indigenous of their primary subsistence. This colonial strategy was so successful that it eventually forced various tribal leaders to sign treaties with the Canadian state rather than let their people starve.

In 1870, the main organizer of the fur-trade, the Hudson's Bay Company, surrendered its land holdings to the Crown, creating the North-Western Territory and the Province of Manitoba, an area that included contemporary Saskatchewan. Excluded from this transaction, the various tribal leaders demanded compensation and guarantees from the colonial government, leading to the signing of Treaty Four in 1874, one of many signed during this desperate time period. In exchange for becoming "loyal subjects of the Crown" and opening up the land to "immigration and settlement," the tribes of Saskatchewan were allotted reserves across the prairies with boundaries drawn symmetrically according to the Dominion Land Survey.

Shortly after the signing of Treaty One in 1871, the Canadian state passed the Dominion Lands Act in 1872 which required all future colonists to register their plots of land individually, thereby outlawing the holding of land in common, the ancient practice of the indigenous. While this was being enshrined into law, the Dominion Land Survey had already begun its journey westward, dividing the prairies into a grid of *townships*, each one a 6×6 mile square containing thirty six square mile *sections* that were all honeycombed with *road allowances*, the future site of the incoming railroad.

In the same year that the Dominion Land Survey began, the Canadian state ordered the construction of a railway to link the two coasts, thereby cementing their control over the land. In 1873, the state created the North-West Mounted Police to enforce these laws, and by the 1874 an armed force of almost three hundred police traveled through southern Saskatchewan and arrived in southern Alberta shortly after the signing of Treaty Four. Between 1874 and 1879, the Dominion Land Survey had finally reached southern Saskatchewan, bringing with it the grid of *townships* and its lines of *road allowances*. After a brief pause, the survey pressed onward into Saskatchewan, rapidly dividing the land in preparation for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The iron road arrived in the prairies in 1882, allowing for the swift transportation of soldiers, police, and colonists, an event that soon triggered rebellion among the indigenous. In 1885, the population of Saskatchewan was just over ten thousand people, most of them indigenous, and the arrival of the railroad was the final straw. After the signing of Treaty Four, the poverty stricken tribes of the Saskatchewan prairies had watched hundreds of colonists arrive and be given land, a legal situation enforced by a weak government with only five hundred police. Enraged by this situation, the Cree chief Big Bear and his war-chief Wandering Spirit initiated the great North-West Rebellion.

Between March and May of 1885, the Cree and various other tribes attacked colonial outposts. After surviving the brutal winter in squalid conditions, these tribes stole everything from the colonies they seized, executed North-West Mounted Police officers, killed the invaders, and burned their houses to the ground. In response, the Canadian state dispatched almost two thousand soldiers to quell the uprising, a movement facilitated by the newly constructed railroads. Although greatly outnumbered, the united tribes were able to repeatedly defeat this colonial army between May and June, but the tide soon turned as more government soldiers continued to arrive by rail. On July 2, chief Big Bear finally surrendered the North-West Mounted Police, thereby ending the rebellion in Saskatchewan.

Less than two years after the uprising, the first train crossed the newly completed Canadian Pacific Railway between Montreal and Vancouver in the spring of 1887, finishing the journey within one week. From this moment onward, the colonization of Saskatchewan rapidly increased, with non-indigenous colonizers becoming the vast majority by the 1890s. In the aftermath of the rebellion, all indigenous were required to be issued passes in order to leave their reserves, a law enforced by the North-West Mounted Police who now numbered over one thousand men. Twenty years after the signing of the treaties, the indigenous found themselves trapped in what remained of their land.

When Treaty Four was signed in 1874, two indigenous reserves were created in southern Saskatchewan by the Canadian state. One was for the Keeseekoose Ojibwe, while the other was for the Cote Ojibwe, both displaced eastern tribes. It remains unclear if they participated in the North-West Rebellion, but in the aftermath they were confined in their reserves like other tribes. In addition to this, the government built residential schools on the Keeseekoose and Cote reserves,

forcing the indigenous children to attend. In these infernal institutions, the children were made to wear Canadian clothes, learn Canadian ways, become addicted to Canadian vices, and were subjected to both physical and sexual abuse at the hands of priests and school teachers. This period of great misery had just descended on the Cote and Keeseekoose when the Canadian state allowed the Doukhobors to settle just south of their reserves.

Unlike the indigenous, the Doukhobors were allowed to hold their land in common, although the state had no intention of fulfilling this commitment. According to the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, all applicants had to not only file for individual plots (like the indigenous), they had to swear allegiance to the Crown (like the indigenous), acts the Doukhobors were promised they didn't have to complete. Despite this legal contradiction, the state allowed over seven thousand Doukhobors to settle under their own conditions in southern Saskatchewan in 1900, the bulk residing near the Cote and Keeseekoose.

The winter of 1901 was extremely rough on the Doukhobors, but by spring they'd formed resilient villages along communal lines. Hoping they'd change, the government found the Doukhobors committed to collective living, and in response one of their ministers wrote: *It will be necessary for the Doukhobors to make individual homestead entries, in accordance with the Dominion Lands regulation.* This development caused massive anger among the Doukhobors, who spent the next year debating what to do. To them, individual property would cause their community to disintegrate and they were encouraged in this belief by Tolstoi who wrote to them: *property means that which I consider my own, I will not give to anybody who wishes to take this thing of mine, but moreover, I will defend it against him. But to defend against another that which I regard as my own cannot be done except by violence, that is, if need be, by struggle, fighting, even killing. The teachings of Christianity cannot be taken piecemeal: it is all or nothing.*

I Bring Not Peace, But The Sword

In the spring of 1901, the Canadian state posted notices that if the Doukhobors didn't register individual plots by May 1, 1902, their land would be opened up to other colonists. When the deadline came and went, only a few Doukhobors had registered and the government postponed this requirement, hoping to appear less brutal than the Czar. In response, the Doukhobors abandoned their villages and marched with their children, and without their possessions, on a spiritual pilgrimage to enlighten so-called Canada. This roving band of over three thousand Doukhobors embarrassed the Canadian state as they drifted from town to town, some even being arrested, but eventually the Doukhobors returned when one of their elders was released from Siberia and joined them in Saskatchewan.

Under his encouragement, over two thousand of the Doukhobors filed for individual plots, although they continued to treat the land as a commons. While the situation became less volatile, a faction of the Doukhobors began another pilgrimage, this time singing psalms in the nude, believing their skin to be their true garments. After the North-West Mounted Police began to arrest these nudists, the tactic only increased in popularity. When a police officer was photographed standing beside several nude Doukhobor women, this scandal was enough to finally sour the Canadian state.

In 1905, the North-West Territories were divided into the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, with the new colonial economy rapidly expanding. When the Doukhobors first arrived, the

prairies were still sparsely populated, but with the recent boom, these religious fanatics were no longer needed to fill the colonial grid. The state declared that all land not registered to an individual (around half of the Doukhobor allotment) would be immediately opened up, and repression quickly increased as the Doukhobors protested this new assault, with dozens arrested for charges of public nudity and vagrancy. One batch of prisoners went on hunger strike and, despite efforts to force-feed them, a Doukhobor died in a jail cell. The tipping point came in 1907 when the state demand all Doukhobors pledge allegiance to the Crown or lose the rights to almost all of their land. The demand was refused.

Protests continued through 1908 when most of the Doukhobors decided to leave Saskatchewan for the south-western corner of so-called British Columbia. Here they cultivated massive orchards around Grand Forks, the Slocan Valley, and the Kootenays, built a brick factory, a cannery, a wood-mill, and became completely self-sufficient, although they rapidly fell into modern ways. Despite the success of this community, the Canadian authorities were committed to treating them no differently than the local Ktunaxa indigenous. In order to ensure this, the Province of British Columbia passed the Community Regulation Act of 1914, a law which stated that all “living under communal or tribal conditions” must not only register every marriage, birth, and death, but send all of their children to state-approved schools. If this law was not complied with, the communities could be fined, and if the fines were not paid, their land and property could be seized. While the state allowed the Doukhobors to be exempt from serving in WWI, sending their children to school was now required.

In resistance to this law, the Doukhobors began an arson wave targeting these schools, burning eleven of them between 1921 and 1923. It was in the midst of this that the spiritual elder of the Doukhobors, Peter Vasilyevich Verigin, became a target of the arsonists, having built a small empire of brick buildings and modern comforts. Believing him to have succumbed to their version of the Antichrist with his embrace of technology, money, property, and commerce, these hardliners torched his private home before placing a bomb under his train seat in October 1924, killing him, his wife, and seven others. While some claimed it had been agents of the USSR (Verigin had refused a Bolshevik invitation to help rebuild Russia), most people knew it was the spiritualist Sons of Freedom faction of the Doukhobors. Twenty five years after leaving Russia, the movement had come to share the tactics of the nihilists.

After the train explosion, the community created a unified wall of silence when the Canadian police showed up to investigate, refusing to testify about anything. Shortly after, the Doukhobors contacted Verigin’s son in the USSR and invited him to live with them. Peter Petrovich Verigin arrived in 1927 and quickly united the divided group, although his efforts were challenged when the Great Depression threw the community into economic crisis. When some members couldn’t contribute to paying the land debt, others threatened to evict them, thereby fueling the previous conflict between the materialists and spiritualists. In the end, the non-paying Sons of Freedom were given a piece of land called Krestova, although many refused to go, while others resumed their arson attacks against the materialists. After a series of nude marches, over nine-hundred non-paying Doukhobors were arrested by the Canadian state and exiled to Vancouver Island for three years with their children being placed in foster homes. In these alien houses, several children died from neglect.

When they were finally released and returned to Krestova, the Sons of Freedom began to torch the property of those who paid taxes and debts, believing them to have betrayed their movement. By the end of the 1930s, Peter Petrovich Verigin had died, their organization was bankrupt, all

their property was lost to the economic crisis, and by the 1940s the majority was once again united in their hatred of private property and money. After the community failed to register their names in 1943 during WWII, the state seized what remained of their property. Shortly after this, nearly all of these now government-owned structures were burned to the ground, followed by another wave of arson between 1947 and 1953 meant to purge the remaining materialist tendencies in the movement.

As the Cold War spread across the world and into Canada, the state became even more determined to force the Russian-speaking Doukhobor children into its schools. In 1953, the state began to raid the Sons of Freedom community and shipped their children off to a residential school called New Denver where they were psychologically, sexually, and physically abused. In typical Doukhobor fashion, the parents engaged in nude protests outside these schools with hundreds arrested over the coming years and a massive fence erected outside the school/prison. Nearly two hundred children were held in New Denver through the 1950s, with the last being released in 1959. In a final act of retaliation, the Canadian state offered to sell the Doukhobors back their seized land, instantly reigniting the conflict between spiritualists and materialists.

As the buy-back was being debated in the community, the Sons of Freedom engaged in one last arson and bombing campaign between 1959 and 1962. In addition to torching the houses of materialists, they bombed an empty Greyhound station, attempted to burn the Nelson courthouse, blasted multiple electrical towers, bombed an RCMP station, bombed two department stores, bombed multiple sections of the Canadian Pacific Railway, shot at RCMP officers, bombed the New Denver residential school, bombed gas pipelines, and killed nobody except themselves when a few bombs exploded prematurely. After this wave of attacks, nearly all of the Sons of Freedom had been arrested, leaving the materialists in control of the remains of their community, now privately owned by the Doukhobors.

The spiritualists were taken to a newly-constructed, fire-proof prison in Agassiz (near Vancouver) and surrounded by armed officers. In 1963, a woman named Fanny Storgeoff organized over a thousand Doukhobors who willingly torched their homes in the Kootenays and marched across the province to the Agassiz prison. They surrounded the facility with a shanty town and remained there for ten years until the Sons of Freedom were released. By then, their practice of arson had come to an end, only now the Canadian state had bigger problems. The same year the Agassiz prison was surrounded also saw the birth of the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ). As the Sons of Freedom languished in prison, Marxist-Leninist guerrillas began an armed campaign against the state. Many consider the FLQ to be the first of its kind in so-called Canada, but this is incorrect. The first such group was the Doukhobors.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the remaining Doukhobors in the Kootenays experienced a moment of peace and settled back into their traditional ways. Across the province near Vancouver, those who'd surrounded the Agassiz prison eventually drifted off, either back east or into the metropolis, a place where they became involved in peace activities during the Vietnam War. As a trickle of Doukhobors defected to the city, they brought their belief in pacifism, nudity, and resistance to all government authority. Long before Vancouver BC's famous "Summer of Love" along 4th Avenue, the Doukhobors were already practicing the "hippy" lifestyle, and its possible their spirit rubbed off within the crowds of Russian Hall, the main counter-cultural space of the era. The only bombs going off in the early 1960s were planted by Doukhobors, just as the only mainstream nudity was practiced by them. Coincidentally or not, it was after the Doukhobors had entered the anti-war movement of Vancouver that local "hippies" began to practice their

form of anti-materialist nudity on the shoreline of Wreck Beach, staging their first “nude-in” against modern capitalist society. Even today, the beach is constantly threatened by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The last incident of Doukhobor arson took place in 2001 when an 81-year old woman named Mary Braun burned down a college library once used to house Doukhobor children. After a two-day trial in which she sat naked, Braun was convicted and sentenced to six years in prison, although this wouldn't be her first time behind bars. Since 1971, she'd served over seventeen years in jail for various arsons, and was in the middle of a hunger strike when she was sentenced in 2001. During her trial, she condemned Canada's involvement in the Afghanistan invasion and stated, *I am concerned about the world and the condition it's in.*

Since then, the Doukhobors have lived peacefully in their Kootenay communities, although most of the young have left for the cities. Out of the 65,000 people descended from the Doukhobors in so-called Canada, less than 3,000 still identify with the religion. Most have lost the ability to speak Russian, while few of the young still wear the traditional garb or attend religious ceremonies. At the end of the day, these are material trappings from the 19th century, while the spirit of Doukhobors has always aimed at creating *the kingdom of heaven on earth.* Although their traditional ways might be fading, even the oldest Doukhobor would be quick to remind their youth, *the kingdom of god is within you.*

This long, complicated tale might never have been told were it not for two anarchists: Lev Tolstoi and Pyotr Kropotkin. Without their efforts, the Doukhobors would never have arrived in Saskatchewan, but the chain of causality doesn't begin there. Had the novels *Fathers and Sons* and *What Is To Be Done?* never been written, there never would have been a nihilist movement in Russia, and if there was never a nihilist movement, Tolstoi wouldn't have had a spiritual conversion after the movement was crushed. If this spiritual conversion had never occurred, Tolstoi would've never cared about the Doukhobors, and if he hadn't cared about the Doukhobors, he would've never asked his friend Pyotr Kropotkin to help relocate the Doukhobors across the Pacific.

This article is about more than just writing, but it is the act of writing that set all of these stories into motion, whether the words were in form of novels or letters to the Canadian state. There is no clear conclusion to draw from this history, nor is there a clear lesson to draw from the rebellions of either the nihilists, the indigenous, or the Doukhobors. All that can be said at the end of these 6,666 words is that those who resist the dominant empires of the earth are like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's description of Mephistopheles: *that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good.*

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28 May 2019

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