THE MIGRATION OF THE SONS OF FREEDOM INTO
THE LOWER MAINLAND OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Vancouver Experience (1963).

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is primarily concerned with a description of the events that occurred in Vancouver in the year 1963, when a group of Sons of Freedom left the town of Hope and arrived in the city of Vancouver. While the Sons of Freedom have had a long history of migration their trek into a large western city such as Vancouver was a unique phenomenon.

The purpose of this document was to record the activities of the Sons of Freedom and the response of lay and voluntary groups as well as the reactions of civic and provincial governments in connection with the Freedomites. Such a recording was seen to have historic value and would also serve as another frame of reference on Sons of Freedom's affairs.

The method used was primarily individual and group interviews. The writer attempted to ignore previous issues and problems of this group, and focussed mainly on the collection of factual information from people who had come into contact with this group during their stay in Vancouver. Several Sons of Freedom were interviewed - youths and elderly people, male and female. The writer also conducted an attitude survey of a random sample of people (75) in Vancouver.

The study revealed that while in Vancouver, the Freedomites encountered a range of attitudes (including curiosity, hostility, and indifference) from the Vancouver public. The Sons of Freedom had to face several problems in Vancouver and they dealt with most of these very well.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was that the group seemed to respond fairly well to the work of the Committee for the Welfare of Sons of Freedom Children. The committee was able to exhort the Freedomites to attend school. The role and consequence of the Committee's work in dealing with some of the concerns of the Sons of Freedom in Vancouver, may very well suggest that a bridge of this nature is the answer to an understanding and an amelioration of some of the cold conditions that now prevail between this group and the government of British Columbia.
I am indebted to many people who took time from busy schedules to share with me their experiences during the Sons of Freedom's stay in Vancouver. A few cannot be identified either because of their positions or because of the nature of their contributions. A complete listing of the people to whom I became indebted in the course of this exploration would therefore be impossible. I do wish however to express my gratitude to all of them.

Among the Sons of Freedom themselves many that were interviewed, especially the younger members of the sect, preferred to remain unnamed. To Mrs. Fanny Storogoff (now deceased) I shall be forever indebted for the attitude and willingness with which she offered information. Mr. J.E. Podovinikoff was also of assistance in the gathering of information.

My gratitude extends perhaps very specially to Mrs. E. Ostapchuk, Mr. M. Audain, Mrs. M. Erickson, and Reverend Dr. Ross of First United Church in Vancouver. Also, to my many friends, who in the final stages of this document offered their criticisms, I convey my deepest thanks.

ROOPCHAND B. SEEBARAN.

Vancouver, British Columbia.
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INTRODUCTION

The year 1963 will probably be remembered most of all by the majority of historians as the year when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated by one of his own countrymen. Perhaps few but the Sons of Freedom themselves, will reminisce upon it as the year when they made an historic entry into the city of Vancouver.

For the whole range of people who feel propitiously towards the Sons of Freedom as well as those who abominate and abhor them, this incident will probably receive no more than a perfunctory glance. To others however, who are students of psychology, sociology, and human relations, and who have an abiding allegiance either overtly or covertly to the study of the behavior of human beings, this unusual trek will be consigned more than just casual importance. It is well known that to rely on one's memory for facts is not always the best source of accurate information, since recollections often suffer from distortion and prejudices. If we are not prepared at the present time to analyze this dramatic migration of a tremendously large group of people; if we are not stimulated to seek out solutions to the dilemmas and conundrums ramified therein; then the least we can do is to record the incident itself, so that it may serve in part as a historic documentation, as well as a source of information to future researchers who may be disquieted enough not to leave it buried in oblivion.

The task attempted in this paper is addressed precisely to this end, and encompasses in the main, some of the facts surrounding the march of the Sons of Freedom into Vancouver, a description of their arrival into the city, a review of some of the major incidents that occurred during their stay in
Vancouver, and some remarks regarding their departure to the town of Agassiz.

To understand the reason for the exodus from the Kootenay area, and for the purpose of lending some continuity to this document, it would be helpful to at least adumbrate some of the final incidents at Hope. Before coming to Vancouver the Sons of Freedom numbering about 1,300, were encamped at the village of Hope in a Seventh Day Adventist's Summer Camp. It was here that the determination to go to Vancouver was born. The events and circumstances that occasioned this intention were numerous and varied. The reasons were perhaps too latent to visualize. But there was the inclement weather and unfavourable camping conditions (sanitation) during the winter of 1963, and it was evident that there was a state of discomfort and unrest among the Freedomites themselves. Attempts by sympathetic individuals and those who entertained feelings of propinquity to this group (such as Magistrate Williams Evans of Nelson to find a country for them) had failed - no one wanted them. The Freedomites were concerned about their "imprisoned brothers" at Agassiz Mountain Prison and the government had failed to pay attention to the protests and allegations of this group. Because of all this the Sons of Freedom held several "sobranyas" and it was decided that they would go to Vancouver and head for Victoria to make public their protest against the mass "arrests of their innocent and prejudged brothers in the Agassiz Mountain Prison." 2

Before this decision was reached the Sons of Freedom had originally planned to go to Agassiz and storm the Prison Gates, since they believed in the covenant made to them by John Lebedoff that they "would gain their freedom through the Prison Gates." 3

1. The Vancouver Sun January 14, 1963
2. Interview with Mrs. Storogoff October 1963 at Agassiz
3. Interview with Mrs. Storogoff October 1963 at Agassiz
who were working with the leaders of the Freedomites attempted to reason with them and to provide some proposals and solutions to the riddles and enigmas facing them. Among such people was Mrs. Emily Ostapchuck (of the Civic Unity Association) who felt that their storming of the Prison Gates at Agassiz would be of no avail. She held several meetings with the Freedomites attempting to encourage them to move to an area on the fringe of Vancouver where it would be more convenient for them as far as accommodation. It would also be more accessible for such groups as the Civic Unity Association to work towards an amelioration of some of the issues confronting them. The Sons of Freedom at first acquiesced to this offer, but latter eschewed the matter and eventually rejected the proposal.

What then was the aftermath of the Freedomites' decision to go to Vancouver and/or Victoria? In Vancouver the newspapers and the radio stations carried reports of the Freedomites' intention to break camp at Hope. Many groups in Vancouver were aroused in protest. The Royal Canadian Legion presented a brief to City Council on January 15, 1963, stating that Victory Square Cenotaph is "hallowed ground," and its use for purposes of demonstration by any group would be equivalent to desecration and sacrilege. The Mayor of Vancouver, Mr. William Rathie, at this point exhorted the City Council to take no specific action on the matter. On January 15, 1963, steps were immediately taken in Victoria to prohibit demonstrations at Parliament Buildings. The B.C. Cabinet issued regulations to forbid and render unlawful any loitering on grounds or areas near Public Buildings. The regulations provided a fine of $25.00 per person for each day an offence occurred. These then

1. The Vancouver Province January 13, 1963
2. Ibid
3. The Vancouver Sun January 15, 1963
were some of the responses and the climate of feeling as the Freedomites broke camp at Hope and packed for their trip.

Let us now take a look at some of the more important considerations inherent and implicit in this proposed trek. Where exactly were the Freedomites proposing to go? Was it Vancouver or Victoria or both? What arrangements had they made in the department of housing accommodations for the members of their group? What were they hoping to achieve? When newspaper reporters attempted to discover the answers to some of these questions, the apparent leader of this sect, Mrs. Storogoff said, "Just say we are moving west." Mr. Joe Podivinikoff, the spokesman of the group, said that their purpose in coming to Vancouver was to publicize their story among local churches and labour and political groups. "We want their support to press Victoria for a full scale investigation into the sect's problems." The move to Anglo-Saxon eyes seemed to lack focus.

1. The Vancouver Province January 15, 1963
2. The Vancouver Sun January 17, 1963
ARRIVAL IN VANCOUVER

On January 16, 1963, approximately 600 Sons of Freedom arrived in Vancouver from Hope. The Freedomites arrived in the city in the afternoon using two buses and ninety cars. Pete Slastukin, the bearded elder who led the original march from the Kootenays in September 1962 said that they "intend to move to Vancouver Island when the rest of the group gets to Vancouver." It was hinted at this time that the Sons were contemplating going to Hilliers near Parksville on the Island where Doukhobors used to own some property. Slastukin said that the two buses and ninety cars that brought the first group would return to bring the remainder of the Sect 1 from Hope.

Shortly after their arrival in Vancouver, the Freedomites, who had disembarked at the Bus Depot near Queen Elizabeth Theatre, went to Victory Square, where they gathered together to sing hymns and display their banners. The group at Victory Square consisted mainly of elderly men and women with very few children. As the Freedomites sang, spectators, mainly workers on their lunch hour, began surrounding the Square and in no time there was a crowd of about 400 spectators. Reporters ventured to elicit from Slastukin where the group would spend their first night, but they were unable to get a specific reply.

As the afternoon grew into night more and more spectators arrived. Some simply watched the Freedomites while others argued about different methods of disposing of the Sons. The atmosphere around Victory Square remained relatively calm until the beer parlors were closed. At this time the less

1. The Vancouver Sun - January 16, 1963
2. Interview with Mr. Michael Audain
peaceful and more volatile groups descended on the Sons of Freedom. There was still a dearth of police vigilance in the area. The singing of the Doukhobours and their conspicuous banners were enough to justify the more hostile elements in the crowd to become vituperative and vociferous. The Doukhobours not being in vogue, were in a very vulnerable situation open to any amount of reproof from the section of the crowd filled with libation. In such moments it is interesting to observe how rapidly and facile people feel problems can and should be solved.

Fortunately for the Sons of Freedom some of the more sober and solemn spectators became solicitous and anxious regarding what might happen in the absence of police surveillance, if the Freedomites stayed at Victory Square all night. The majority of the Doukhobours, including Mrs. Fanny Storogoff and Mr. Joe Podovinikoff had made no preparations nor arrangements for sleeping accommodation. Joe Podovinikoff, stated that he had planned to stay at Victory Square and keep the Freedomites there in order to make the protest more conspicuous and forceful.

As the cold penetrated their bodies, the women in the group began to complain. Mr. Michael Audain and Mrs. Margaret Erickson tried to persuade Mrs. Storogoff and Mr. Podovinikoff to move the group from Victory Square to some warmer quarters, at least for the night. After some convincing and cogent reasons and the observation that the spirit was mounting in certain segments of the onlookers, Mr. Podovinikoff and Mrs. Storogoff agreed to the suggestions of Mr. Audain and Mrs. Erickson.

While this was a big step forward, the more important task remained ahead — to find a place to accommodate the Sons of Freedom. If the reaction

1. Interview with Mr. Michael Audain (U.B.C. Student, School of Social Work).
2. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Erickson
the Sons received from their first deluge of visitors was any indication of
total public reaction, then hope of finding accommodation seemed frightfully
grim. It was around midnight that Mrs. Erickson and Mr. Audain started to
make a series of telephone calls to Churches, Missions, Halls, private homes,
and labour temples. It was impossible at this time to convince people of the
urgency of the situation. As a last resort Mr. Audain and Mrs. Erickson were
forced to use a small hall on Robson Street. (This hall belonged to the
Stanley Park Club of the N.D.P.) The majority of the older people stayed in
this hall. Some stayed in hotels, and others in private homes. Not more
than 100 people spent the first night in the N.P.D. Hall.

The Sons of Freedom travelled to the hall by bus. They were followed
in cars by large groups of spectators who continued to abuse them with lewd
and slanderous remarks. Again because of the absence of any police escort,
there were a few fights mainly among the spectators themselves. Mr. Audain
felt that the presence of police in the area would mitigate these conditions.
He therefore went to call the police while Mrs. Audain and Mrs. Erickson
stood outside the Hall attempting to quell the belligerent mob, who laughed
contemptuously and fired scornful and pejorative remarks at the Sons of
Freedom. Some of the observers threw stones but fortunately no one was
severely injured.

When the police arrived in the area, most of the "riff-raff" disappeared
and the Sons bedded down probably not to sleep but to surmise what the follow­
ing day had in store for them. The next day the Freedomites gathered at
Victory Square. Mr. Podovinikoff told the reporters that the sect wanted to

1. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Erickson
demonstrate and prove to the people of Vancouver that Doukhobours are really a nice, peaceful people; the sect wanted a provincial investigation. Ultimately he said, "We want land in a decent climate where we can farm, educate our children, practice our religious beliefs and not be bothered by others."

On this day a second cavalcade of buses and cars brought the rest of the Sons from Hope. Numbering from 400 to 500, they joined the first group in Victory Square. Characteristic of this second group was the amount of children both of elementary and secondary school age. As more Freedomites and more spectators began to arrive at Victory Square, the Mayor's Office was deluged with telephone calls from irate groups and angry citizens. Callers protested against the Freedomites occupying Victory Square. They said that it was an insult to the memory of men who had fought for their country, to permit Doukhobours who refuse to bear arms, to gather at the foot of the Cenotaph.

What were some of the echoes of this in Vancouver? A pool of ideas, opinions, and recommendations from civic, church, and political leaders, gathered by the Vancouver Sun revealed the following:

"I have nothing to say to them. I am not interested in talking to tramps. The sooner they leave the better."

"Kick them out of the Square. It honours the war dead and these people are there only for the publicity value."

"The Doukhobours are just a nuisance creating an arson danger."

"They ought to be sent back to the Kootenays."

"Keep off the Grass."

1. Interview with Mr. Joe Podovinikoff
2. The Vancouver Sun January 17, 1963
3. Ibid
4. The Vancouver Sun - January 18, 1963
Liberal Leader Ray Perrault, said that they should be put in an unused army camp. He told a meeting at South Vancouver that the latest episode in the saga of the wandering Sons of Freedom - some of whom are squatting at Victory Square - demonstrates an utter collapse of the government's machinery to deal with the situation. Perrault said he would propose a commission at the forthcoming legislature session. The commission would employ permanent personnel with advisors in many fields to find paths for a solution to the costly Sons of Freedom's problems. There will be no magic solution overnight. The Premier and his Cabinet, he said, act as if they would like the Freedomites to evaporate like a bad dream.

1. The Vancouver Sun - January 17, 1963
Quest for Accommodation

After the Sons of Freedom arrived in Vancouver it was quite obvious that although a lot of thought was invested in the planning of the trek from Hope to Vancouver, a number of practical items and human factors were overlooked. As a result of this a number of problems emerged. One such problem was that of accommodation.

First of all, a large part of the Sons were ignorant of the reason for their coming to Vancouver. The majority of the group including the apparent leaders of the sect, Mrs. Storogoff and Mr. Podovinikoff, did not know where they were going to spend their first night nor the subsequent days. They did not know how long they would be staying in Vancouver. Mrs. Storogoff and Mr. Podovinikoff felt it would be most effective as far as their purpose, for the group to remain at Victory Square indefinitely. It is perhaps astonishing to perceive of any group of people who will allow themselves to be led and who will follow so unquestioningly in this day and age. The enigma becomes less abstruse when one understands their history, their religious beliefs, and their faith in "spiritual" leaders. Many Freedomites interviewed by Mrs. Audain in Russian stated that "they did not know where they were going when they got on the bus at Hope." "They suspected it was to Victoria. There is every reason to believe that the move into Vancouver was not a group decision."  

As has been mentioned earlier, the first group of Freedomites that arrived in Vancouver were persuaded to stay in the N.D.P. Hall on Robson Street. This hall was obviously too small to accommodate such a large number of people, but crowded or not, most of them slept on the floor of this hall.
on this first night. Others who were more fortunate stayed in hotels and a few in private homes. Residents living near the Hall, while not causing any conspicuous disturbances, objected vehemently to the Freedomites occupying these premises. Ultimately the landlord of the Hall asked the N.D.P. Executive to get rid of the Freedomites, and stated that, if the request was not complied with, the N.D.P. would be denied further use of the Hall. Added to this a visit from the Health Inspector of Vancouver found that the floor of the building was caving in because of overcrowding. The building was unsuitable for safety reasons. He also found that there was an insufficiency of toilet facilities and so for sanitary reasons, the building could not be used.

The next morning, January 17, 1963, the Freedomites left their belongings in the Hall and went for walks in Stanley Park. Realizing that they had to vacate the N.D.P. Hall on this day, and cognizant of the fact also that more Freedomites would be arriving in the city today, preparations were being made to secure accommodation for the group. A number of people in Vancouver were concerned at this point about the children in the group. Concern centered mainly around accommodation for the children as well as the possibility of their being apprehended if they had no place of abode. The result of these concerns was the formation of an ad hoc committee called the "Committee for the Welfare of Sons of Freedom Children." This Committee headed by Professor Dixon of the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, comprised of representatives from public and private agencies. The committee dealt with the immediate problem of accommodation and shelter as well as others which will be mentioned later.

On January 16, 1963 upon the suggestion of Professor Dixon, an emergency

1. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Erickson
meeting in the matter of the Sons of Freedom was called in the Community Chest Auditorium. The purpose was to discuss emergency shelter for the Freedomites. It was felt that too many people were evading the responsibility and that if they (the members at the meeting) did not take any interest, no one would.

It was unanimously agreed that the interest of this committee "is humanitarian and the purpose is to meet the emergency situation by supplying shelter for a limited time. There was unanimous agreement among the community members that the lawlessness of the Sons of Freedom was not condoned, but at the same time it was agreed that the very young and the very old were victims of this situation and that these were the people with whom we must be concerned."

At this meeting it was also arranged to meet with Mayor William Rathie and to explore with him what accommodation was available. At the meeting eleven delegates from the committee were present. One proposal to Mayor Rathie was that buildings at the Pacific National Exhibition be made available. Mayor Rathie stated that if the city provided accommodation, the Freedomites would in all probability stay indefinitely. The Committee also discussed the health condition of the Freedomites and wondered to what extent City Council would be prepared to co-ordinate the services of voluntary agencies to meet these needs. The Mayor stated that Council had already discussed the matter and was not prepared to do anything. He added that he was meeting with Attorney General Robert Bonner to discuss the matter. Later the same day the Mayor called Professor Dixon and reported that City Council was not going to commit themselves to any action on the matter. For the

1. Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for the Welfare of Sons of Freedom Children - January 16, 1963 - Civic Unity Association Vancouver
membership list and details of the minutes of this meeting see Appendix A.

The arrival of the second group of Freedomites only augmented the problem of accommodation and again witnessed the astigmatic planning of the trek. Luckily at this point the Pender Auditorium was obtained largely through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Audain. Many people in the group had not eaten for days. In this hall they were at least warm during the day. Again the hall was not large enough, so mostly the women and children occupied these premises while most of the men stayed outside. The staff in the restaurant at the hall were very considerate and helpful to the Freedomites. They allowed the children, some of whom had small pox, to stay upstairs and they also permitted the use of hot water bottles so that they could keep warm.

But the Pender Auditorium was only available for the afternoon. The management said that it had to be cleared. The challenge was taken up by a few volunteers of the local committee. Members were dispatched to search the downtown area for any kind of accommodation. They found sleeping space at the First United Church Hall, blankets from Harbour Lights, a number of small missions that at least provided sleeping space on the floor, and one sizeable mission hall that provided accommodation for the elderly people. The younger boys and men, about 100 in number, were taken care of by the Catholic Hostel. By midnight of that day, Professor Dixon, Michael Audain and other committee members walked through Victory Square and there was not one member of the Sons of Freedom sitting outdoors.

On this day and for the weeks that followed, every attempt was made to secure more accommodation. To this end, various churches, halls, missions, and ethnic groups were approached. In addition, appeals were carried on the
radio stations for families to provide accommodation in their homes. The theme was "mothers with children" and "old people." Most of this work however, was given leadership by people who were not Freedomites. They were individuals and groups who were understanding of the Freedomite problem and who were human enough to want to help. Despite occasional resistances and prejudice that was encountered in the quest for accommodation for this group these people struggled. One would think at a time like this other ethnic groups would come to the front and offer their services willingly but there were several groups in Vancouver who refused to open their doors and in fact wanted nothing to do with the Freedomites. As the situation grew more tense and critical, more accommodation was obtained, but not without diligent work on the part of the searchers and the understanding nature of the people approached. Because of the confusion and complexities that existed at the time that accommodation was sought and received, and because very few records except mental notes were kept by those involved, it is difficult to present in any chronological order the sequence in which accommodation was received. Investigation revealed that a number of agencies, groups, and individuals in Vancouver assisted the Freedomites and their sympathizers in the provision of accommodation.

The Russian People’s Home was one agency that offered the use of its facilities to the Freedomites. This hall was not opened to the Freedomites until five days after they had been in the city. Mostly women and children were accommodated in this building, which was used as a base from which to filter out the Doukhobours into private homes. Some of the men abandoned their rooms in hotels and came to stay in this building. Again the Hall

1. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Erickson
became overcrowded and the men were asked to leave.

Another agency was the First United Church in Vancouver. Reverend Dr. Ross said he accommodated the Sons on two separate occasions. The first period was approximately a week long. Again accommodation was mainly for the women and children. They slept on the floor and were kept warm by blankets provided by the Salvation Army. Dr. Ross said that on the first occasion the Freedomites used the facilities mainly as a restroom.

The Freedomites returned again for a second time only a few days after their first departure. Dr. Ross found them "neat and well behaved." The children in the group were "immaculately clean." The Freedomites on this occasion volunteered their services to the Church. They had nothing to do and wanted to help. They were given fragments of clothing and a sewing machine. The Freedomites made beautiful quilts out of these materials. Before they left for Agassiz Dr. Ross said that they returned the sewing machine and other articles they had borrowed.

Other people and agencies that provided assistance and accommodation for the Freedomites were Father Hanley of Catholic Charities, Reverend Ikuta of the Vancouver Buddhist Temple, the Boiler Maker's Hall, various Missions on Skid Road, the Salvation Army of Vancouver, hotels, and a number of private people. Undoubtedly there are a number of people who helped the Freedomites, whose names have not been mentioned for two reasons. Firstly, it is impossible to know all the individuals who contributed, and secondly, it is not the purpose of this document to list all names. Nevertheless this paper would like to acknowledge and recognize all the people named and unnamed who in some measure assisted the Freedomites during their stay in Vancouver.

1. Interview with Dr. Ross and Miss Rollins of First United Church
The quest for mass accommodation of this kind was one problem. Perhaps a more important task was that of trying to convince the Freedomites that they should search themselves for private accommodation. The Freedomites did not entertain this suggestion with any degree of enthusiasm. This was perhaps the result of their being accustomed to life of a communal nature, probably to fear of insecurity, and also fear that segregation of this type may eventually lead to disintegration of their group. Also these people were unfamiliar with the mechanics of obtaining lodging in the city—(coming from a rural area.) In addition they lacked furniture and thus were limited to the kind of housing they could use. Many also lacked money for a first down payment of rent.

The Committee for the Welfare of the Sons of Freedom Children faced this problem together with the Freedomites. Several individuals both within and without the committee began to assist the Freedomites in their search for private accommodation. While there were several reports concerning alleged discrimination regarding rental of housing to Freedomites, homeowners began to make their buildings available and in some cases capitalized on the situation by requesting high rental.

A number of individuals borrowed money to assist the Freedomites in the payment of rent. Others collected charitable donations to provide food for the group. As time passed, more and more Freedomites were housed in private homes but there were still other problems to overcome.

Application for Social Assistance

When the Freedomites arrived in Vancouver early in January it was estimated that they had spent approximately $225,000.00 on the trek from Hope to Vancouver. The expense included items such as food, clothing, camping equipment, fuel, motel reservations, and rentals for buses and trucks.

1. The Vancouver Province - January 21, 1963.
To the businessmen of Vancouver in the Victory Square area, the arrival of the Freedomites was a blessing. The Sons spent large sums of money here on hotels, restaurants, and parking lots.

Where did the Freedomites get all this money? It is believed that most of the money came from their own pockets. Other sources of money were friends, Old Age Pensions, donations, Salvation Army vouchers, and allowances from some of the Orthodox Doukhobours. In time these funds were exhausted. The Freedomites now faced a financial problem. Again the Committee for the Welfare of the Sons of Freedom Children came on the scene. This voluntary group made a statement to Mayor Rathie and the City Council on behalf of the Freedomites, indicating that the halls in which the Freedomites had been housed since their arrival in the city were being closed off and that the number of private homes were not equal to the task. The Committee stated that the granting of Social Assistance to mothers with children was the best way of resolving the dilemma. In referring to the Social Assistance Act of British Columbia the Committee pointed out that Vancouver shared in the local cost of Social Assistance no matter where the Sons of Freedom may happen to get it. The Committee stated that a moral issue was involved when mothers and children face the likelihood of hunger and lack of shelter. The letter submitted to Mayor Rathie and the City Council members appears in Appendix B.

Following this statement several Freedomites began to apply for Social Assistance. On January 28, 1963, a letter was sent to the Honourable Wesley D. Black, Minister for Social Welfare, by the Committee for the Welfare of Sons of Freedom Children which suggested administrative aid for the City of
Vancouver if Social Assistance was granted. It is shown in Appendix C.

Before the Sons of Freedom applied for Social Assistance and while their applications were pending a few agencies were supporting those Freedomites who were in need. Salvation Army Officer, Brigadier Purdy, issued food vouchers in the sum of $19.00 per week for a family of 4. Assistance was first based in the form of food vouchers and rental allowances were granted later. By January 26, several Sons of Freedom had applied for Social Assistance in the Vancouver Welfare Department. City officials confirmed that Freedomites had applied for assistance and were refused. They were told "no policy decision has been reached." The Mayor said that the policy at present was not to accept responsibility for the Freedomites while they were in Vancouver but that they would keep the policy under review.

On February 5, Mayor William Rathie indicated that more than 80 had applied for Social Assistance but that no children were registered at school. The Mayor indicated that he expected the matter to be debated in City Council. It was reported that the deluge of applications had caused the City Social Service Department to hire extra workers to process the applications. On February 6, City Council announced that it would pay social welfare benefits to those Sons of Freedom who qualified. By April the system of food vouchers were dropped and a special day was designated for the issuance of Social Assistance to the Sons of Freedom.

Thus most of the Sons of Freedom who had applied were granted Social Assistance. In some cases Assistance was withdrawn. One such instance was when a group of Freedomite men refused to go to work for the Forestry Department. The Freedomites reacted to this by congregating in front of the

2. The Vancouver Province - January 26, 1963
3. The Vancouver Sun - February 5, 1963
4. The Vancouver Province - February 6, 1963
Social Service Office to conduct sit-down strikes. In another instance a woman was denied assistance on the grounds that she was married and that her support should come from her husband. Correspondence with the Director of Social Assistance (copy of letter appears in Appendix D) was immediately able to rectify the matter. In summary the letter stated that the applicant with a child of thirteen had no means of support. The applicant had been given support by the Salvation Army in the form of food vouchers and later received Social Assistance for half a month. After this, assistance was denied on the grounds that her husband should support her. The matter went before a Family Court Judge in Vancouver and it was established that her husband was in a foreign country and further that the marriage was a "common-law" one.
The Freedomites attend School

It was estimated that the Freedomite children in the city numbered approximately 160. Of these, 50 were of secondary school age. For some time the Freedomite children stayed out of school. As this fact made the news in Vancouver, mothers of the Freedomite children became very concerned about the possibility of their children being apprehended.

These women took their concerns to the Committee for the Welfare of the Sons of Freedom Children. They wondered whether anything could be done about getting their children in school. Following this request Dr. Black and Reverend Southcott arranged a meeting with Dr. Sharp of the Vancouver School Board.

The Freedomite women who gave leadership at this time were Mrs. Florence Podovinikoff and Mrs. Marie Shlakoff. They made a special request for segregated classes for their children. The Committee explained that it would be in keeping with their cause if they consented to integrated classes. The women also wondered whether their children would be required to sing "O Canada" and salute the flag. They were told that no children in Canada were compelled to do this.

Under these conditions the Freedomites agreed to send their children to school. They informed Mrs. Ostapchuk (of the Committee) of the various schools their children would be attending. Mrs. Ostapchuk passed this information to the Vancouver School Board who eventually notified the respective schools.

At last count 90 children were enrolled in schools in the city. As might be expected, some children teased and jibed the Freedomite children. The vast majority reacted to them in a friendly manner and shared lunches with them.

1. Interview with Mrs. Ostapchuk (Civic Unity Assn.)
While there were a few minor squabbles in the schools no real incidents were reported. The schools co-operated remarkably well and in general did an excellent job.

Public and Private Response

The Freedomites' entry and stay in Vancouver resulted in political repercussions both in City Council and in the B.C. Legislature. Mayor Rathie indicated in no uncertain terms that "the sooner they leave Vancouver the better." Mr. Bonner was "happy that the Doukhobours are in the city." He felt that if they were to integrate into society this would very likely happen in Vancouver. Whereas the Freedomites were dominant in the Kootenays, Bonner indicated that they could not be the same in the city. The Veterans of the Army, Navy, and the Airforce passed a resolution to ask Prime Minister Deifenbaker to ban the Freedomites from using Victory Square for demonstration purposes.

Mrs. Lois Haggen, N.D.P. member for the Grand Forks Greenwood area, chastised Attorney General Bonner's policy regarding the Freedomites. She said that the policy "whatever it is, has perpetuated the problem." Whereas the march to Vancouver was the best thing that happened to the problem, Mrs. Haggen did not consider this the end of the problem. She felt that if the Freedomites assimilated in Vancouver it would be all to the good.

In the B.C. Legislature, Patrick McGeer proposed that a group of scientists should study the behaviour of the Sons of Freedom as a guide for long range government policy. He said that the government had no long range plan for the problem. Bonner accused him of shallow and condescending behaviour, saying that the Hawthorn Report made 12 years ago was the most complete sociological report on the Freedomites. Bonner said that many of the recommendations made

1. The Vancouver Sun - January 18, 1963
2. The Vancouver Sun - January 19, 1963
3. The Vancouver Province - January 28, 1963
4. The Vancouver Province - February 2, 1963
in that report have been carried out.

At this time Mr. Carson, of the Human Rights Association, circulated a flyer in which he said that, "asking Bonner and Bennett to deal with the situation is like asking Hitler and Eichmann to take care of the Jews." Carson said that the Freedomites wanted an investigation into the government's action in incriminating them. He felt that the government was ignoring the problem because an investigation "would prove highly embarrassing to the government."

On May 15, Professor Dixon, Chairman of the Committee for the Welfare of the Sons of Freedom Children appealed to Mr. Bonner for some government action to bridge the gap in understanding between the Freedomites and the government. In the letter which appears in Appendix E, Professor Dixon proposed the formation of some kind of administrative machinery to deal with the Sons of Freedom and which might be called "The Coordinating Commission for Sons of Freedom Affairs." Professor Dixon admitted that sufficient formal study had been given to the issue through the Hawthorne Report, but felt that what is now needed is an organization which will serve as a bridge between the provincial government and the group. It was felt that the "opportunity of expression of opinion will have a settling effect on the group which seems to have some need for frequent airing of its views with some organization with at least some form of semi-official status."

On May 29, the Attorney General replied to Professor Dixon stating that the policy to date is to use the existing agencies of government to deal with Sons of Freedom as individuals when individual problems arise. Mr. Bonner reported that a continuing committee of Deputy Minister has been in existence

1. The Vancouver Province - March 7, 1963 "Call Inquiry Into Sons"
2. Carson William "They Die While Bonner Scoffs" September 1963
   Vancouver; Human Rights Association
since 1953 and that they meet as frequently as required. Because the group is comprised of people with statutory and actual day to day authority and responsibility to discharge (including co-operation with local levels of government) Mr. Bonner found it difficult to visualize what function a Commission might serve "unless it would become a sounding-board for Sons of Freedom propagandists, from whose activities we have been happily free in recent months." Mr. Bonner offered to place the suggestion before the Continuing Committee for their consideration. (Letter and list of Committee members appear in Appendix F.)

The Story the Freedomites tried to tell

The Freedomites arrived in Vancouver and stayed until August 20, 1963. During this period they tried to tell a story. While they congregated in Victory Square, they also looked for private accommodation, and for jobs. Some did volunteer work while others took some vocational training in the hope of finding jobs. Those who found jobs through the help of friends or their own initiative did very well for themselves. They also received Social Assistance, and the majority of the children went to school.

Like any other group of people some of them broke the law. Verna Zaytsoff, a 35 year old woman, was spared a jail term on January 29, by Magistrate Douglas Hume for shoplifting. She was fined $75.00. Fred William Storogoff, the husband of "Fanny" was fined $50.00 for shoplifting. He admitted taking seven chocolate bars and a large package of gum.

But the Freedomites really did not present a crime problem. The First United Church proved they were a very amiable and friendly group. The children were interested in books at the Church Library but took them only when they were told that they could do so. When Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands visited

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1. The Vancouver Province - January 29, 1963
Vancouver in May 1963, he inspected members of the Seaforth Highlanders at Victory Square. The Doukhobours were singing hymns at the time at Victory Square, but upon the request of the police they stopped.

In attempting to publicize their case the Freedomites visited a number of agencies and appeared on both radio and television. Mrs. Marie Shlakoff told students at the University of British Columbia that the Sons of Freedom wanted a neutral commission to investigate their problem. She was greeted with shouts, boos, and cat calls when she wouldn't explain further what the problem was "because this might lead to further misunderstanding."

On May 30, Mr. Joe Podovinikoff, the self appointed spokesman of the group, presented his interpretation of the Doukhobour problem. The text of his speech appears in Appendix G, and in summary these points were made: Doukhobours for over sixty years had to put up with discrimination, internal oppression and eternal threat of starvation. While they are not angels they are not the low-down creatures that some paint them. They are struggling for rights which cannot be denied anyone who considers himself a human being. Last September (1962) because of threats and intimidation against life and property, the Sons of Freedom fled from the Kootenay area. They trekked through heat, rain, storms, and the snow across the Rocky Mountains until they reached Vancouver. So far the government has done everything to intimidate the trekkers. Sons of Freedom have been blacklisted as terrorists and arsonists, although it has been discovered that the main terrorists are the ones pointing their fingers and engineering the hoax. Time and again the Doukhobours have asked that an investigation into their affairs be made but the government ignores the issue... It must be remembered that this description of the situation is one man's opinion and is not representative of the ideas and opinions of the entire group.

1. The Vancouver Province - January 23, 1963
The Departure from Vancouver

Around July 23, 1963, Sons of Freedom in the Federal Prison at Agassiz began fasting. By August 19, 118 of the 130 men imprisoned there were on a hunger strike. Although the authorities tried every means of persuading these men to eat, the Freedomites continued to fast. Letter writing privileges were denied, visiting privileges were cancelled, but of no avail.

The Freedomite group in Vancouver, headed by Mrs. Florence Storogoff, called on all wandering members of the sect to return from the Kootenays and the Okanagan. A mass meeting was held in Victory Square at which approximately 560 Freedomites were present. The meeting was arranged at the same time as the P.N.E. Parade but was later postponed to the evening. Here the decision was reached that the Freedomites in Vancouver would resume the trek to Agassiz. Mrs. Storogoff said that she would ask Mayor Rathie to clear the streets for the Freedomites' exodus just as he did for the P.N.E. Parade.

On August 20, 1963, the Freedomites packed their bags and thanked the city for their hospitality. Mrs. Storogoff indicated that in some mysterious way the presence of several hundred Freedomites at Agassiz would help the imprisoned brothers and sisters in their hunger strike in the prison. Mrs. Storogoff headed a delegation to City Hall to thank Mayor Rathie for the city's hospitality and asked him for a police escort out of the city. Mayor Rathie indicated that they would get the same police protection as anyone else.

On August 21, 1963, 560 Sons of Freedom arrived at Agassiz. They built tents and camps outside the Prison Gates. Because it was raining the Freedomites used 8 chartered buses and approximately 50 cars to transport their food and tents. Having arrived at the Prison Gates the Freedomites planned to go on a hunger strike too. The decision was that all over 14 years of age would participate.

1. The Vancouver Province - August 19, 1963 "Sons Work Again"
2. The Vancouver Province - August 20, 1963 "Bags Packed Freedomites Thank City for Hospitality"
3. The Vancouver Province - August 21, 1963 "Trekkers Start Hunger Strike Too"
But the Freedomites did not all leave Vancouver. A large number of the older men who came to Vancouver have stayed perhaps because of their age, and because here they receive health benefits. Some mothers with children are finding it a more secure situation to be in Vancouver and remain on Social Assistance so they have stayed. Even those who did leave are coming back for visits into the city. Some of the women return to the friends they made while in the city; others, mainly the high school children, find city life, especially the social aspect of it, very pleasant and so they are returning, particularly on the weekends. A few of the girls who found jobs while they were in the city have stayed.

Those people who have returned to Vancouver have stated that life at Agassiz is too rough. While this may be the reason the younger ones are returning, there is a much more profound one for the seniors in the group. Most of them have become simply disgusted with sitting and having nothing to do.

The Attitude of the Vancouver People to the Freedomite Invasion

After the Sons of Freedom left Vancouver and began camping at Agassiz, the writer conducted a survey of some 75 people in Vancouver. The method used was a combination of interviews and questionnaires. The sample was chosen at random and included high school students as well as adults. In the sample, the writer attempted to involve business, professional and lay people. The object of the survey was to determine whether the Vancouver public was:

1. aware of the purpose of the Sons coming to Vancouver.

2. what was their attitude towards the Sons.

The survey showed that the people interviewed and questioned fell readily into three distinct categories.

One group consisted mainly of individuals who actually assisted the Sons of
Freedom while they were in Vancouver. To these people the purpose of the Sons' visit to Vancouver was quite evident. They knew that the Freedomites had come to the city in an attempt to get public support to press Victoria for an investigation. This group of people had either previously worked with the Sons of Freedom or seemed to understand much more about the group than their immediate problem. Most of them regarded the Sons of Freedom as a very amiable and hospitable group. They felt that the group were at times very unrealistic but nevertheless were convinced that they had been neglected by the government. The people in this group felt that Vancouver had an obligation to pay Social Assistance to the Sons and felt that they should have been treated as ordinary citizens in their quest for private accommodation. It was the feeling of this group that the government had treated the Sons of Freedom indifferently, inconsistently, and unfairly. They also felt that the Sons of Freedom left Vancouver because of the city's indifference towards them plus the fact that most of them were being absorbed and integrated in the city. This group of individuals not only assisted the Freedomites with some of the mechanical problems that they faced while in the city, but also made representations on their behalf to city and provincial officials.

A second category of people seemed to be those who had come into contact with the Freedomites at one time or another in the Kootenays and the Okanagan. This group seemed to have a very hostile feeling for the Sons. The Sons were seen as a group of trouble makers, a lazy group, and a fanatic and parasitic collection of individuals. They felt that the Sons had been treated very fairly and with special privileges from the government. They objected very strongly to the Freedomites being allowed to stay in Vancouver. They felt that the government should not have granted Social Assistance to them, nor should they have
been given food and shelter. This group became more hostile towards the Sons while they were in Vancouver. They felt that the Sons came to Vancouver because of nuisance motivations and a desire to be martyrs. They regarded the trek as a "publicity stunt" and one that was made for the explicit purpose of arousing an emotional appeal. Some felt that it was simply a case of the blind leading the blind. This group felt that the Sons left Vancouver for a variety of reasons. These included frustration, inability to secure an image of martyrdom, being made a spectacle of in Victory Square, public pressure, loss of control by the apparent leaders, fighting a losing cause, and the indifference of the city towards them.

The third category included those individuals who, though they had previously heard of the Freedonites, had now for the first time seen and met them. This group while not eager to help the Sons, sympathized with their cause. They felt that the Sons were hard-working people, fairly law-abiding, clean, and very friendly. They felt that the government had treated the Sons with indifference and even some injustice. In spite of this they did not think that private citizens should have given the Sons accommodation nor should they have been granted Social Assistance. They seemed to be aware of the purpose behind the trek and regarded the departure from Vancouver as an occasion stimulated by a lack of financial support, a potential loss of the younger members of the sect, and poor leadership. The opinion of this group was that the government should either take steps to rehabilitate the Sons of Freedom or simply leave them alone.
CONCLUSIONS

If the success of the trek to Vancouver is to be measured in terms of the materialization of an investigation in the Sons of Freedom's affairs, then at least for the moment the Freedomites did not accomplish their purpose and the trek was a failure. But there can be no cut and dried yardstick to measure the accomplishment of the trek. An investigation may still arise and what the trek may have done for or against the group is still speculative.

The citizens of Vancouver displayed an initial curiosity towards the Sons of Freedom, but later reacted with indifference. As a result the Freedomites did not receive the support of the Vancouver people. Perhaps a few reasons for this insouciant attitude stemmed from an inability on the part of the Freedomites to present a cogent case. While they claimed that they wanted the people of Vancouver to know the truth about the crimes they were accused of, the Sons never did clearly present to the public any tangible evidence that they were unjustly treated. Several times they made claims that they were in possession of such evidence but never really offered it. In addition to this they stated that they wanted an investigation into the "Doukhobour problem." People found it difficult to understand what the problem really was. Their claims appeared exaggerated, mysterious, and rebellious. Doukhobours, in asserting that they had evidence, tended to be secretive about it and this clandestine nature of their approach only aroused suspicion on the part of their audience, that their problem was non-existent and quite probably a figment of their imagination.

Another factor that played an important role in the frustration the Freedomites experienced, is that of the leadership structure. It seemed that there was a struggle for power and popularity among the apparent leaders -
Fanny Storogoff, Joe Podovinikoff, and Marie Shlakoff. When Stefan Sorokin left for South America, and John Lebedoff appeared ostracized by the group, Fanny became at least the "organizer" of the group. The Freedomites still identify very much with Sorokin and so Fanny was regarded mainly as a temporary substitute. The same thing holds true for Joe Podovinikoff, the self-appointed spokesman of the group. While he is regarded by many members of the Freedomites themselves with disdain, they tolerate him because of his glib tongue. With the apparent leaders being unable to agree, the Freedomites were unable to effect a liaison between them and the government, if indeed such could be developed at all. Basically the Sons of Freedom seem to a group capable of dealing in some way with most of their own problems. It is quite evident however, that there are a few agitators and publicity-hungry individuals who attach more importance to the satisfaction of their own neurotic needs than the solving of problems confronting the group.

Regardless of public opinion, and the inescapable internal problems in the group, there were some very fascinating features about this whole incident. The migration of this group to a large western city and the nomadic features of the trek, was in itself a remarkable and astonishing phenomenon. The fear of the unknown of the future, and the ignorance of their purpose did not seem to deter nor halt them, and this is fascinating in an age where desire for security and concentrated planning for the future is a predominant element of our society.

The Sons of Freedom were able to act fairly well in securing food and accommodation but the role of the Committee was important in obtaining a roof over their heads particularly in the first few days.
The attitude of the City Council in trying to avoid the situation and then refusing to grant Social Assistance was to be expected, as it was characteristic of government dealings with the Sons of Freedom. The failure to grant Social Assistance immediately to the Sons of Freedom was indefensible. Mayor Rathie refused to give leadership to the situation.

The Committee worked without publicity and did not wish to run the risk of stimulating a backlash of hostility to the Sons of Freedom in Vancouver. The Committee played an integral part in securing accommodation and probably had a role in the final granting of Social Assistance. The government however did not respond to their appeal to establish some sort of administrative organization on the Sons of Freedom Affairs. The present structure of Deputy ministers and department heads is non-operative and futile. A title in the civil service is no indication of interest in Doukhobour affairs and may even reflect hostility. A Commission on Doukhobour Affairs still seems necessary.

The Vancouver School Board was exemplary in its dealing with the Sons of Freedom in regard to school attendance of Freedomite children. While trying to be firm and stating that, if the Freedomites stayed in Vancouver their children should be enrolled in school, the Vancouver School Board did everything to facilitate and encourage the children to attend school. Most of the children got along well in school.

The pull of the "big city" on the Sons of Freedom was also very conspicuous. It was difficult for the writer to ascertain the number of teenagers and seniors who have remained in the city, but interviews with the Sons of Freedom revealed that of the group at Agassiz, quite a few are still engaged in constant travel back and forth between Agassiz and Vancouver.

What meaning does the Vancouver experience hold for the future of the
Sons of Freedom? It is certainly obvious that in Vancouver there was a degree of spatial or geographic disintegration of the group. This however may not be indicative of dissolution of the Sect. It may even mean (in combination with the Vancouver and Agassiz experience) greater integration. Much depends on the attitude of the men when released from prison. Much depends on whether the men are released in groups or individually over a period of time. Where will they want to go? Settled as they are in Agassiz most of the girls and some of the men have found jobs and are working on farms near the surrounding towns and the immediate neighbourhood. At the moment there is a period of calm. Release of the men from prison may quite likely give birth to another trek.
On the suggestion of Professor Dixon, an Emergency Meeting in the matter of the Sons of Freedom was called at 3:00 p.m., in the Community Chest Auditorium on Tuesday, January 16, 1963.

PRESENT: Dr. Katx (Chairman) Vancouver Civic Unity Association
Professor Dixon, School of Social Work
Dr. Black, Citizenship Branch
Dave Barrett, M.L.A., Dewdney
Mrs. Theresa Galloway, Civic Unity Association
Mrs. Margaret Erickson, citizen
Mr. Clive Lytle, B.C. Federation of Labour
The Rev. Norman J. Southcott, Social Service, Anglican Church
Father Hanley, Catholic Charities
Mr. Svend Johansen, Canadian Folk Society
Mr. Michael Audain, U.B.C. student (B.C. Civil Liberties)
Mr. Howard Naphthali, Ex. Dir., Community Chest
Mr. Ernie Hill, Director of Social Planning
Mrs. Emily Ostapchuk, Ex. Dir., Civic Unity

PURPOSE:

To discuss emergency shelter for Sons of Freedom who arrived in Vancouver. Professor Dixon stated that as Civic Unity Association is "guardian of ethnic groups", it is logical that they take the initiative in calling this meeting of interested individuals and representatives of community and church organizations.

Mr. Audain, who the previous night witnessed an ugly situation at the N.D.P. hall, where some Sons of Freedom spent the night, said hostile elements were abusing those who took an interest in the sect and it was felt that something must be done to avoid re-occurrence of hoodlum attacks.

It was felt that too many people evade responsibility and if we don't take interest no one will.

All members expressed themselves and it was a unanimous decision that the interest of this committee is humanitarian and the purpose is to meet the emergency situation by supplying
shelter for a limited time. There was a unanimous agreement among the community members that the lawlessness of the Sons of Freedom was not condoned, but at the same time it was agreed that the very young and the very old were victims of this situation and that these are the people with whom we must be concerned.

It was also understood that this committee is not concerning itself with the policy or politics, nor with any legal aspects.

There was a discussion on the facilities available at the P.N.E. and emergency shelter. Fishermen's Union Hall was being made available tonight as well as the N.D.P. Hall. Pender Auditorium was offered the first night. It was suggested and agreed that there be a Release from the Authorities asking for calmness, acceptance and patience on the part of the community at large.

A meeting with Mayor Rathie was arranged for 5:00 p.m., and a delegation comprised of 11 people met with his Worship to offer him and his department this committee's assistance and to explore with him under city leadership what accommodation is available.

The Mayor said that they had to be practical in this situation and that if they provided the Sons of Freedom with accommodation they would stay indefinitely.

The committee pointed out it was concerned also with avoiding undue health problems. The committee asked to what extent would Council be prepared to act and to co-ordinate the services of voluntary organizations to deal with this situation.

His Worship said the Council had discussed this matter and they are not going to do anything at this time. He also stated that at 6:00 p.m., he was meeting with Attorney General Bonner to discuss the Sons of Freedom.

The committee asked the Mayor to notify this committee of their decision.

The meeting adjourned.

People in the delegation: Meeting with the Mayor included:-
Dr. J. Katz, Professor Dixon, Mr. Michael Audain, The Rev Southcott, Father Hanley, Mrs. Margaret Erickson, Mr. Lytle, Mr. Johansen, Miss Phyllis Dale (representing Dr. Black) Mrs. Emily Ostapchuk.

(Emily Ostapchuk)
Secretary
APPENDIX B

Vancouver 9, B.C.

Mayor William G. Rathie,
City of Vancouver,
City Hall,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mayor Rathie:

I am writing on behalf of a group which has been taking an interest in the welfare of the Sons of Freedom children in the City.

It is evident that the majority of the Sons of Freedom group have secured some kind of minimal housing accommodation. However, there is a group of about 50 children and their mothers who are leading a precarious, day-to-day existence because they are destitute. In our view, these mothers and children should receive the benefit of the Social Assistance Act.

This Act is one of the most outstanding pieces of social legislation in Canada. Among other things, it provides for any form of aid necessary to relieve destitution and suffering.

The Act states that there shall be no discrimination based on race, colour, creed or political affiliation. The regulations state that the need of the applicant shall be the determining factor in granting assistance and assessing the amount to be given.

Residence qualifications are no longer a factor in determining eligibility for Social Assistance in British Columbia. The Residence and Responsibility Act has become inoperative since the Provincial Government increased its share of Social Assistance to 90 per cent of the cost.

If Vancouver grants Social Assistance to Sons of Freedom mothers and children, it will not pay any more of the 10 per cent share than any other local area on a proportionate basis. The reason is that all local costs of Social Assistance are put into a pooled fund and then allocated to local cities and municipalities on the basis of their population. In short, Vancouver shares in the local cost of Social Assistance no matter if the Sons of Freedom get it here or in such places as Nelson, Nanaimo, Penticton, etc.

You may be inclined to the view that the Sons of Freedom should not be given Social Assistance because they do not possess the potential for good citizenship. But this would not be a valid reason for rejection. Social Assistance is not simply provided to the
worthy; it is designed for all people who are destitute simply because they are human beings, even though many of them are the victims of their own folly.

Our group hopes that your administration will see its way clear to grant assistance to any destitute mother of young children. We believe that it is the right thing to do in what we all acknowledge to be a most complex situation.

May I add that our group recognizes that if assistance is to be granted that the processing of applicants may pose an issue to the personnel resources of the City Social Service Department. If this is so, our organization would be prepared to give the lead to recruiting volunteer social workers to assist in the initial establishment of eligibility.

I have forwarded copies of this letter to other members of the City Council.

Yours sincerely,

W.G. Dixon,
Chairman,
The Committee for the Welfare of Sons of Freedom Children.
APPENDIX B (cont'd)

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE WELFARE OF SONS OF

FREEDOM CHILDREN

Since the arrival of the Sons of Freedom in Vancouver, we
have endeavored to obtain housing for the children. Various halls
in the downtown area have been used and a number of children and
mothers have been placed in private homes. The halls are now being
closed off and the number of private homes is not equal to the task.
We believe that the granting of Social Assistance to mothers with
children is the best way of resolving this dilemma.

The Social Assistance Act of British Columbia is one of
the most outstanding pieces of social legislation in Canada. It
provides for "... any form of aid necessary to relieve destitution
and suffering."

The Act also states that there shall be no discrimination
based on race, color, creed or political affiliation. The Regulations
of the Act state that the need of the applicant shall be the
determining factor in granting assistance and the amount to be given.

Residence qualifications are no longer a factor in determi­
ing eligibility for Social Assistance in British Columbia. The
Residence and Responsibility Act has become inoperative since the
provincial government increased its share of Social Assistance to
90 per cent of the cost. No community has the right to become a
hostile fortress under the guise of maintaining out-dated residence
laws.

It may be surprising to know that if Vancouver grants Soc­
ial Assistance to Sons of Freedom mothers and children, it will not
pay any more of the bill than any other organized area in British
Columbia on a proportionate basis. The reason is that all local
costs of Social Assistance are put into a pooled fund and then alloca­
ted to local cities and municipalities on the basis of their pop­
ulation. In short, Vancouver shares in the local cost of Social
Assistance no matter where the Sons of Freedom may happen to get it.

We believe that there is no legal or administrative bar to
Vancouver granting Social Assistance immediately to destitute mothers
and children of the Sons of Freedom group. We also believe that a
moral issue is involved when mothers and children face the likelihood
of hunger and lack of shelter.
Hon. Wesley D. Black,
Minister of Social Welfare,
Province of British Columbia,
Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Mr. Black:

I am writing on behalf of a group which is taking an interest in the welfare of the Sons of Freedom children now in Vancouver. We have to-day, written to Mayor William G. Rathie, urging his administration to grant social assistance to destitute mothers of young children. We believe that the Social Assistance Act is one of the most enlightened pieces of social legislation in Canada and that it should be applied in this situation.

It may be that the City of Vancouver will be hesitant to act in what it regards as a very complex situation. Our reason in writing to you is to urge you to give Mayor Rathie and his colleagues every kind of support in assuring them the backing of the Department of Social Welfare in any actions they may take in meeting the plight of destitute mothers and children of the Sons of Freedom group.

If a decision is made to grant assistance, we believe there may be some concern that the processing of applications may prove to be an administrative problem to the existing resources of the City Social Service Department. If any such an emergency exists, your department might consider seconding social workers from other areas or providing funds to obtain additional personnel.

Our group was encouraged by the statement of the Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Robert Bonner, that the City of Vancouver holds the best prospects yet of integrating Sons of Freedom into the Canadian community. If social assistance is granted, it will not only relieve destitution but also contribute to this objective.

Yours very truly,

Mrs. Emily Ostapchuk,
Secretary,
Committee for the Welfare
of Sons of Freedom Children.
Mr. J.A. Sadler,
Director of Social Assistance,
Victoria, B.C.

RE: Refusal of Social Assistance.

Dear Sir:

I am a Doukhobour mother living in Vancouver and have a child of thirteen attending school.

I have no means of support and applied for Social Assistance here in Vancouver following support given me by the Salvation Army in the form of food vouchers. I received Social Assistance for the latter half of the month of February and then I was told no more assistance will be given me on the grounds I was married and that my support must come from my husband. The matter went before a Family Court Judge here in Vancouver where I was interrogated and the fact that my husband was absent in a foreign country and had not been supporting me for over a year was established. Further, that ours was only a "common-law" marriage which gave no grounds for legal action in the case. The Judge submitted a report to that effect to the local Welfare Office. I still get no Assistance.

I live only on charitable support and I have to provide the needs for myself and a grown-up child in a city, buy groceries, clothes, pay rent and other innumerable expenses. Is this Assistance not given out on the basis of need, and not because of social record? My need is as great, if not greater, than that of any other woman whose husband is present with her. I fail to see the Justice of this attitude of your office and therefore am writing for a review and an explanation to which I feel I am entitled.

Yours very truly,

Mrs. Molly Moojelsky.
Honourable W. Robert Bonner, Q.C.,
Attorney General,
Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Mr. Bonner:

As you may know an informal, voluntary group has maintained contact with the Sons of Freedom group which recently migrated to Vancouver. Through cooperative effort some things were accomplished in locating emergency housing in various halls, placing some families in homes interested in offering facilities, undertaking some special measures for the children, and giving encouragement to school attendance. I suppose that one of the things that impressed us most is that we seemed to provide opportunity for discussion of some of the leaders of the group and this appeared to give them a better view of matters of public policy.

As a result of our experience, we would like to advance a proposal that we know has been made before but which, to us, has some validity. I am referring of course, to some form of administrative machinery to deal with the Sons of Freedom and which might be called The Coordinating Commission for Sons of Freedom Affairs.

We are in agreement that sufficient formal study has been given to the issue, notably through the Hawthorne Report. What appears to be now needed is an administrative body which acts as a bridge between the provincial government and the group. It is our feeling that the very existence of such an organization, with its opportunity of expression of opinion will have a settling effect on the group which seems to have some need for frequent airing of its views with some organization with at least some form of semi-official status.

I know that you are concerned with what will constitute a programme if an organization is established. It seems to us that the only realistic view is to deal constructively with the problems of the group and its arrivals in the hope that the demonstration of interest and action will have an impact on a good number of the individuals concerned.

For instance, we can see some value in review of counselling services in schools where there are large numbers of Sons of Freedom children. There would also be some virtue in assessing the recreational facilities of communities where there are a preponderance of Sons of Freedom families. In short, a programme should examine every facet of Sons of Freedom life in the hope that reduction of problems and tensions will lead to a reduction of resistance.
While the problems are not similar, there is some precedent for a province setting up a programme for a group that poses problems. We believe that Manitoba has a community development programme that is devoted to the rehabilitation of the Metis group. We also believe that the Provincial government of Saskatchewan has a more modest programme.

We would like to make it clear that we do not envisage a bureaucratic structure surrounding the proposed creation of a Commission on Sons of Freedom Affairs. Most particularly, the historic Indian Affairs Administrative formula involving centralization of services should be avoided. We envisage the regular departments of government providing service to the Sons of Freedom, but having regular consultation with the proposed Commission on the Sons of Freedom affairs.

The creation of a Commission may be very timely at the present. We believe that you share the view that the movement of the group to Vancouver offers the most promising opportunity in years for some solution of the problem. The adjustment to city life is not an easy task for an essentially rural group and one of the first assignments of a Commission would be to work with the group and others who may wish to join them.

Yours sincerely,

W.G. Dixon,
Chairman,
The Committee on the Welfare of the Sons of Freedom Children.
APPENDIX F

Attorney-General
Province of British Columbia

Victoria
May 29th
1963

P 291 - 17

W.G. Dixon Esq.,
Chairman,
The Committee on Sons of Freedom Affairs,

Dear Mr. Dixon:

I acknowledge and thank you for your letter of May 15th, in connection with the Sons of Freedom.

Our policy to date has been to use existing agencies of government to deal with Sons of Freedom as individuals when individual problems arise. This function appears to have been usefully discharged within the normal co-ordinating agencies of government, both at the provincial and municipal level.

I note that you envisage "the regular departments of government providing service to the Sons of Freedom but having regular consultation with the proposed Commission on Sons of Freedom Affairs." This suggestion appears to overlook the fact that a continuing committee of Deputy Minister has been in existence since 1953.

This committee, which meets as frequently as required, presently comprises eighteen persons. A list of those normally in attendance, including those called in from time to time for special advice, is annexed. Because this group is comprised of people with statutory and actual day to day authority and responsibility to discharge, including co-operation with local levels of government, it would be difficult to know what a Commission might provide, unless it would become sounding-board for Sons of Freedom propagandists, from whose activities we have been happily free in recent months.

However, I will be happy to place your suggestion before the continuing Committee for their consideration.

Yours very truly,

R.W. Bonner,
Attorney - General.

Encl.
Dr. G.D. Kennedy, Q.C. Deputy Attorney-General.
Dr. J.F.K. English, Deputy Minister of Education.
Mr. E.R. Rickinson, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare.
Mr. A.E. Webb, Deputy Minister of Public Works.
Mr. W. MacGillivray, Deputy Minister of Agriculture.
Mr. E.W. Bassett, Deputy Minister of Lands.
Mr. G.S. Eryson, Deputy Minister of Finance.
Mr. H.T. Miard, Deputy Minister of Highways.
Dr. J.A. Taylor, Deputy Minister of Health.
Miss Mary King, Superintendent of Child Welfare
Mr. W.C. Higgins, Departmental Comptroller, Department of the Attorney-General.
Dr. D.O. Forrest, Assistant Commissioner, R.C.M.P.
Superintendent C.B. Macdonell, C.I.B., R.C.M.P.
Inspector S.E. Raybone, R.C.M.P., Chilliwack.
Staff Sgt. Lambert, R.C.M.P., Nelson, Subdivision.
Mr. N.H. Erewster, School Trustee, School District No. 8, Slocan, B.C.
Mr. C. Cuthbert, District Superintendent of Schools, Nelson, B.C.
Mr. R.H. McIntosh, School Attendance Officer, Nelson, B.C.
Dr. Plenderleith, Co-ordinator of Special Services, Department of Education.
Mr. Espley, Departmental Comptroller, Department of Education.
TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR - CJOR, VANCOUVER, B.C. MAY 30/63.

Panel Speakers: J.E. Podovinikoff, Russel M. Verigin, Jack Sawarsky and Prof. Ray Herbert (UBC).

First speaker: Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen of Town Meeting of the Air:-

In the matter of what happened to the Doukhobour Question, I would like to say, as a Doukhobour, that a gross miscarriage of Justice, or a total lack of justice-conscious or unconscious - is being evidenced in practice on Canadian soil, a blatant violation of human rights in a land that boasts of freedom and democracy. True, there is freedom, but not freedom from injustice. True there is democracy, but only for a few, and particularly for the ones in power.

From what one can see and know of in the so-called "Doukhobour Question", there is no way to describe the hidden cruelty and beastly craftiness by which the modern system of law here metes out social justice, grinding out mechanically decrees and rules and regulations by the hour but fails to attend to the basic needs of its equally worthy citizens, the toilers with the calloused hands - the Common Man.

Doukhobours are embittered by the farce that is called justice in the hands of arbitrary politicians who can starve people, betray their needs and put them in jails - and then laugh behind their backs and say: You are an unwanted people. Go back to where you came from. You are not our breed. You don't belong here. You are an inferior race. You are stupid; you don't want to conform like the rest. So don't expect mercy from us.

For over sixty years Doukhobours had to put up with this sort of thing because, as Christians and strangers who believed in the Teachings of Christ, there was no other choice. They toiled and they suffered. And as soon as one wave of discrimination left them penniless and homeless, they started up again, weary in the body but staunch in the faith that some day a new light will illuminate the horizon, that a change will come about giving the eternal respite from eternal oppression and eternal threat of starvation that faced them if they stopped the arduous climb to freedom without degradation...

These people as I know them, are not angels nor purport themselves so to be. But neither are Doukhobors the low-down creatures that some wish to paint them. They have a remarkable historical background of some 300 years duration reflecting integrity, endurance and perseverance for the ideal of peace and universal brotherhood, which in no way can be excluded from the brighter angels of man's eternal quest of Progression toward a better life; and their culture nurtured in suffering and humility is beneficial indeed to the social and spiritual evolution of mankind which is floundering sorely in its failures in these fields. They are struggling for rights which cannot be denied to anyone who considers himself a human being and who does not want to be forever grovelling in the dust. And no worthwhile culture ever emerged that did not have to disagree and cast off some of the chains of conformity in order to assert itself...
Last September, some 1000 of these people, commonly called the Sons of Freedom rose up in a mass and fled as refugees from an area where it was the only deliverance from mass extermination that had shaped up through the years with the help of mercenaries, provocateurs and traditional Doukhobour haters to whom the very idea of Doukhobours maintaining a religious status of group living was so obnoxious in the midst of a highly industrialized empire of vested interests in the Kootenays that they had to sink to the means of open threats and intimidation against life and property in order to drive these people out into the streets...These people thus driven out - young and old - trekked for five months through the heat, the rains, the storms and the snow, across the Rocky Mountains till they reached this fair City of Vancouver. During that time the Canadian world watched and waited. Special police squads hounded them, as they hound them to this day. Every step made was reported to headquarters and standing orders were to arrest the leaders and segregate the children if the least grounds for provocation could be found for the law to apply. Dogs had been used, in numbers, to intimidate the trekkers not to move from a site about half-way down where the Government suddenly decided to entrap them - far enough from home, and not quite close enough to any other point of communication where people may begin to know too much of the truth behind this strange phenomena...

And now they are here in Vancouver, 500 miles from home, or what had been a home. And after their last means of sustenance had given out, as a last resort they applied for Social Assistance according to the law of the land and the Government most grudgingly, and very unwillingly, coupled with much discrimination, gave in to social pressure following its established policy of pressurization by starvation, ignoring the fact that these people were twice robbed of millions of dollars worth of toil while in Canada and are now being deprived most shamefully of their own rights to live in peace by their own traditions which were never dependant upon outside sources for their material or moral upkeep. Doukhobour communities, when not disrupted, looked after their own welfare cases and considered it below their dignity to accept things from the Government which they knew lived off the working people. And they had no criminal problem before the Government started tampering and destroying their religious order of life ...  

So today: "What happened to the Doukhobour Question?"... As is evident - it is there where the die-hard and ambitious Doukhobour-haters have more or less wished it to be: in cold storage on Victory Square. They want to say "There is no Doukhobour Question because, Doukhobours as Doukhobours - are non-existent, and therefore there is no Doukhobour Question." And this is as much as to say "There is no depression or unemployment in the country," or "there is no danger in Canada acquiring nuclear warheads," or "there is no discrimination amongst the classes or toward minority groups," which indeed abound in every direction and threaten to disintegrate the
country from internal pressure because conditions have been brought to an intolerable stage. Witness the negro question across the line. It has similar connotations. But Canadianism is more subtle and hidden...

The whole thing would be called comical if it wasn't so tragic. After sixty years of incessant toil the Doukhobours have a buchenwald built for them so they will know who is master of the household and as a reminder to others that this will happen to you too, if you don't conform. We have been blacklisted as terrorists and arsonists though it has been discovered that the main terrorists are the ones pointing their fingers and engineering the hoax by which the whole question, today, is being compromised. Time and time again Doukhobours have asked that an investigation into their affairs be made and the government knows there are a lot of things that do need investigation, but it ignores the issue and it could well be asked "WHY"... Could it not possibly be that it itself is responsible for much that constitutes the tragedy of the Doukhobour question? Why, if it truly was anxious to resolve the matter, did it make no response to the constant pleas of the women and children begging attention to the matter? Is an investigation so difficult, or is this a relic of the days of colonialism where one was master, and the other a slave?....

The Government arrested dozens of innocent people, the breadwinners of the families and then released them again after lengthy and expensive court proceedings. It caused disruption of homes and social life that could not be computed in thousands and perhaps millions of dollars - considering the untold miseries and loss that the wave of provocation cost the people initiated by Lebedoff and Bayoff as tools of the master hoax of which the Attorney - General himself referred to as quoted by the PROVINCE of Sept. 15, last. I have the references here and could read them out if requested. But that is only one facet that reflects the conditions of today: the cold, inhuman attitude of official indifference which is as much as to say: "Starve you miserable creatures, for all we care. Take your dose and stop crying. We wash our hands from your affairs"... Lebedoff, of course, gets a reward for having done a good "job." And the "D" Squad can pat themselves on the back for having helped in a disruption of a defenceless people whose main crime was that they believed in Sorokin and refused stubbornly to accept what Lebedoff prescribed for them....

Certainly, Mr. Moderator, these are strong words, but they are true words as far as our experiences show. And because they are true, I am free, along with the rest of the people affected, to challenge whomever may wish to deny them. We have evidence here to confirm what we say and are prepared to use it. Whoever thinks that the Doukhobour problem is swept under the carpet and will be churned into nothingness underfoot may find that there is no carpet
big enough in Canada to hide our questions; for it is a universal one and, as one with the Common Man of the world whose day has arrived, we stand up to claim our rights as human beings, as worthy of the dignity of the working man who has built this country as he has built other countries and has the inherent God-given right to live according to the dictates of conscience and reason, and not as perpetual slaves to the industrial, political and military lords of the day...

As Christians and as Doukhobours, we say this to all of Canada because we are also Canadians and have the right to criticize even as we are being criticized - in the spirit of Freedom, and of Truth. Our ideal has been and will remain to be: TOIL AND PEACEFUL LIFE; - SONS OF THE FREE SPIRIT OF CHRIST CAN NEVER BE SLAVES OF CORRUPTION; ..

I thank you Mr. Moderator, for this memorable occasion."
APPENDIX H

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