NON-VIOLENT PROTEST AND THE RUSSIAN STATE: THE DOUKHOBORS IN 1895 AND 1937

IN THE GRAND SCHEME of the historiography of Russia, the Doukhobor arms-burning of 1895 appears as a wan, brief, and anomalous firing of discontent. At first glance, it seems so out of sync with the major events and social movements of fin-de-siècle Russia that it is in danger of being viewed as one of the many fascinating but ultimately irrelevant epiphenomena of history. The Doukhobors continue to face the supreme test of posterity: be relevant or get edited out.

The experience of the Doukhobors in Russia after the emigration of the Large-Party Doukhobors to Canada in 1899 has been even less studied by historians. In part this is because most scholars interested in the Doukhobors followed the trials and travails of the Large Party in Canada rather than the Small Party in Russia. Radical religious groups that make accommodation with the state tend to lose a certain amount of their scholarly appeal. Thus the history of the Small-Party Doukhobors who stayed in Russia is even less well known than that of the Large-Party Doukhobors. In part, too, the Doukhobors are missing from history books because their appearance on the 'screen' of contemporary observers and later historians was so brief and because they never reappeared on the public stage. Historical one-time wonders are held in even scantier regard than their musical counterparts.

But the larger reason for the omission of the Doukhobors from Russian history is simply that they have not fit into any of the grand narratives that have dominated the historical profession over the last century. They had virtually nothing to do with workers, with the October Revolution, with the two world wars or with the Cold War. With the re-examination of Russian history that has been proceeding apace since 1991, the question of where the Doukhobors might fit in is now a pressing one. Nicholas Breyfogle’s recent dissertation links the history of the Doukhobors with one grand narrative: Russian imperialism and colonisation.1

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I would like to suggest in this paper that the Doukhobors fit in with at least one other major narrative thread of modern Russian history: the development of a strong link between violence and political belonging. By comparing the arms-burning of 1895 with the heretofore unknown mass demonstration of Doukhobors near Rostov-na-Donu in 1937, I hope to show not only the striking similarities between the tsarist and Soviet states in their response to the Doukhobors but also some subtle differences. In this reading, the communist revolution will be viewed not as a fundamental break in the grand narrative of violence and politics, but as the deepening of a trend already visible in Transcaucasia in 1895–1899.

The Doukhobors and the state in the 1890s

Though early sources are spotty, the Doukhobor sect apparently first arose in Ukraine in the 1720s and had strained relations with the Russian state from the beginning. The Doukhobors, like most sectarian groups, were regarded with suspicion by state and church authorities and were intermittently persecuted. For most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, there was room on the frontier for groups who wanted to organise their own social order. The ancien régime had neither the resources nor the inclination to enforce their norms among marginal groups on the fringes of the empire. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the Doukhobors had run out of space and were living flush against the Ottoman border in Transcaucasia.2

The years of limited tolerance for Doukhobor spiritual and social autonomy came to a close at the end of the nineteenth century. On 1 January 1874 Alexander II proclaimed the end of the state’s acceptance of social heterogeneity with the introduction of universal male conscription. The manifesto declared that, in principle at least, all men in the Russian empire, regardless of ethnic, religious or social background, were liable for service in the army. The state had officially declared its intention to make all its male subjects commit violence as a prerequisite not only for citizenship in the Russian nation, but also for residency within the borders of the empire.

The pressure of state intervention split open a community that had become increasingly stratified in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This split turned into an open schism as the result of the succession crisis in 1887, when the majority of the Doukhobor community supported a young radical leader named Petr Verigin while a much smaller group continued to support the continued rule of the old oligarchy. Verigin

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was arrested by tsarist officials immediately after his acclamation, and was sent into exile soon thereafter. The split between the radicalised “Large” party and the accommodationist “Small” party did not disappear, however, and Verigin finally decided to press his followers into adopting fundamentalist religious practices and to demand that the intrusive state “leave them in peace”.

In November 1894 Verigin orally transmitted a message to two of his disciples that called on his followers to challenge the authority of the state. Since Christ had forbidden oaths, no Doukhobor was to swear allegiance to any secular power. Since it was forbidden to kill, no Doukhobor was to take part, directly or indirectly, in war. Those in service would turn in their uniform and arms; those unconscripted would refuse to be drafted. Finally, the remainder of the community was to show its defiance by gathering all the weapons that they had acquired over the years of lapsed religiosity and setting them on fire on St-Peter’s Day, 29 June 1895 (Petr Verigin’s name-day). These acts, he explained, would symbolise their break with the spiritual compromises that had stained the community.

Verigin’s plan was a calculated assault on the very foundation of the Russian government’s authority. These were blatant acts of civil disobedience that would be sure to provoke persecution, and they were a direct response to recent state intervention in their lives. They were intended to symbolise — and were correctly perceived by government officials as symbolising — the rejection of the tsar’s authority. Further, by focusing on the rejection of military service and weaponry, they particularly rejected the fact that this authority was based upon the rule of violence. By rejecting the tsar’s right to demand violence and unconditional obedience from all his subjects, the Doukhobors were challenging the foundation of the post-reform Russian social order.

The first action in the Doukhobor rebellion was taken by a young man named Matvej Lebedev on Easter Day, 2 April 1895. Lebedev had told the other Doukhobors in the battalion about Verigin’s instructions

3 A.K. Borozdin, Russkoe religioznoe raznomyslie (St-Petersburg: Prometej, 1907), 173–223.


5 At the outset of the conflict, Shervashidze “considered it his moral duty” to ask the rebelling Doukhobors whether they still considered themselves Russian subjects, to which the protesters replied: “No, we do not consider ourselves Russian subjects, we will not submit to disgraceful laws, we will never submit to injustice, we would all sooner die.” Borozdin, 200–01.
and told them that they should all stay in the barracks rather than participate in the Easter celebrations. The absence of the Doukhobors was soon noted by the battalion commander, who sent a soldier to fetch them. The soldier returned with the news that the Doukhobors did not want to participate in the parade. A sergeant-major soon followed, swearing and threatening Lebedev with punishment for his insubordination.

Lebedev responded that they were not in the parade because they had decided to stop serving in the military. They had recognised, he said, that military service was contrary to the will of God. The sergeant-major responded in a most unchristian way, filling the air with more curses and more threats. Lebedev responded by handing the man his rifle. Apparently the soldier was a bit taken aback; changing his tactics, he asked Lebedev’s pardon for his swearing and pleaded with him to reconsider. Lebedev did not, and the case was soon brought to the attention of the commander, and eventually to attention of the tsar himself.6

Before the case reached St-Petersburg, however, the local commanders had decided to handle it in their own way, beating the Doukhobor soldiers with birch rods and thorny sticks until they were covered in each other’s blood. Nine of the Doukhobors perished from the beating, though Lebedev himself survived to be sentenced to three years in a disciplinary battalion. Other Doukhobor survivors received two years each.7

Meanwhile, Doukhobor conscripts in Kars, Akhalkalak and other Caucasian garrison towns also laid down their arms during this period.8 Though the total number of Large-Party Doukhobor conscripts refusing military service was not large,9 the situation was clearly troublesome

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7V. Chertkov and A. Chertkov, eds., Dukhobortsy v distsiplinarnom batal’one, (Christchurch, England: Svobodnoe slovo, 1902), 10: 44–46; Klibanov, 133. Russian State Military History Archive in Moscow (RGVIA), f. 1308, op. 1, d. 1134. There is remarkable agreement between government and Doukhobor sources on how the rebellion proceeded. The Doukhobors were accused of doing exactly what they claimed to have done, to have told their superiors that “they did not want to serve, since they would not kill anyone in war or during peace, even if they were shot for this, and that they served only God and not the Tsar”. RGVIA f. 1308, op. 1, d. 1134, l. 11-12.
8Woodcock & Avakumovic, 98.
9According to one Doukhobor, the number of conscripts totalled sixty, all of whom refused further service in the army. Peter Brock, “Vasya Pozdnyakov’s Doukhobor narrative”, Slavonic and East European Review, vol. 43, n° 100 (1964): 168.
and embarrassing to military authorities, who were increasingly concerned about possible discipline problems in the army stemming from the Doukhobors' action. The only weapons the military commanders had at their disposal to stem the insubordination had been rendered useless. Persuasion had failed outright and brutal violence was not working. Though weak and isolated, most of the Doukhobors were holding firm.

Worse, the Doukhobors were apparently starting to convince others of the rectitude of their position. Though the Doukhobor literature on this theme is perhaps at its most suspect in the sections where they describe their prosyletisation efforts, some conversion seems to have been occurring. Virtually every Doukhobor account of a meeting with a state official ended with the claim that the official had been convinced that bearing arms was a sin against God.10

It is difficult to determine how much actual prosyletisation was going on, though it is likely that at least some attempts were being made to convert soldiers to pacifism. Lebedev for one was telling anyone who would listen why he had put down his arms, as his official indictment attests.11 Though there is no record of any Orthodox soldier joining the Doukhobors in their refusal to serve,12 there is a hint that the Doukhobor protest may have been stirring up the passions of other sectarians in the army to join their pacifist brethren in acts of civil disobedience.

The Caucasus and Transcaucasus regions, like most frontier regions of the empire, were home to the marginal groups of society. Included among these were other pacifist sectarians, most notably the Molokans, some of whom lived near the Doukhobors and probably served in the same regiments. Some of these sectarians, according to a secret memorandum sent by the Ministers of War and Internal Affairs to Tsar Nicholas II, were also beginning to refuse to serve.13

The war ministry was thus in a very uncomfortable situation regarding this handful of protesters. The level of discomfort was about to in-

10 Cited in Vladimir Chertkov, Christian martyrdom in Russia: persecution of the Spirit-Wrestlers (or Doukobortsy [sic!]) in the Caucasus (London: Brotherhood, 1897), 54–55. See also Chertkov & Chertkov, 8, 13, 20–21, 23.
11 Chertkov & Chertkov, 45.
12 Woodcock and Avakumovic do state that "some Russian Orthodox soldiers followed the example of the Doukhobors in refusing to bear arms," but do not provide any evidence. Woodcock & Avakumovic, 104.
13 Chertkov & Chertkov, 53. In addition, Shervashidze was growing increasingly nervous about the disruptive effect that the Doukhobors, who had previously "held high the Russian banner" in Transcaucasia, were having upon the neighbouring Georgians and Armenians. Borozdin, 175, 203–04.
crease significantly, for the heretofore quiet Doukhobor villages in the Caucasus had just exploded, quite literally, in paroxysms of protest.

The second stage of Verigin’s assault on the governmental order — namely, the burning of arms — took place on schedule on 29 June 1895. It was a genuinely spectacular event, one that drew attention even to the most remote Doukhobor villages. At Spasskoe, for instance, the Doukhobors gathered fifteen wagonloads of firewood, gallons and gallons of kerosene and all their weapons together and set them ablaze at midnight. The enormous jet of fire that lit up the sky and the sound of weapons exploding throughout the night roused neighbouring Georgians and Armenians, and by dawn the police had come.

The results of the police arrival were disappointing, however, as the officers simply gathered some of the molten metal as evidence and left. Determined to be martyrs, the Spasskoe Doukhobors pressed the issue, sending all the young men of the village who had not been called up to hand in their military reserve papers defiantly. Again they were disappointed, as the official in charge accepted their papers and sent them home unarrested. It was not until the news of the burning reached the governor of Kars that punishment finally came in the form of the arrest of fifteen Doukhobors who had organised the burning of weapons.14

The would-be martyrs in Orlovka were also disappointed, glumly noting that they “were very perturbed by the fact that the authorities had not disturbed our affair, for it meant that they had not all been told of our intention. And indeed, we succeeded in doing it without any hindrance at all.”15 The Doukhobors, ever hopeful, gathered up the charred remnants of their bonfires and tried again the following evening.

The second time proved to be the charm for the Doukhobors, as the authorities, who had missed the first night’s activities because they had been in the village of Goreloe guarding the frightened members of the Small Party, now sprang into action. The official in charge, Governor Shervashidze, learnt that the main demonstration had in fact taken place in Orlovka and sent a detachment of Cossacks to round up the heads of the Doukhobor households and bring them to Bogdanovka for a meeting to find out what the Doukhobors were up to. Upon issuing his order to the praying mass of Doukhobors, Commander [Esaul] Praga, the head of the Cossack detachment, was told that the Doukhobors did not recognise anyone but God as their ruler and that they would not leave their prayers to obey the Governor’s command. This “impudent reply” enraged Praga, who ordered his Cossacks to whip the Doukhobors.

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14Woodcock & Avakumovic, 100.
15Cited in Birjukov, 42–44.
bors until they obeyed. Noticing women in the crowd, Praga ordered his Cossacks to cease, then separated the men from the women and ordered the Doukhobors to fall into line to march to Bogdanovka. Receiving yet more "cheekiness" from the Doukhobors in reply, Praga ordered the Cossacks back into the crowd, whips in hand, until some fled into a gully while others begged for mercy.¹⁶

The Doukhobors were now lined up to go to Bogdanovka, but their spirit was not broken. First the women refused to move; then, once on the way, some of the women began singing psalms and "defaming the tsar". After another attempt at persuasion failed, Praga turned to the whip again, beating one woman until she ceased talking, an example which apparently led to a sullen silence for the rest of the march.

The impatient Shervashidze, meanwhile, had set out himself from town. The two processions met about a kilometre outside of Bogdanovka, prompting Praga to order all the Doukhobors to bare their heads in respect. One of the elders replied: "If the governor greets us, then we will greet him in our own Christian manner."¹⁷ Infuriated, Shervashidze ordered Praga and his men to attack again, which they did, trampling one old man to death and ripping another's eye out with a whip. The Doukhobors closed into a circle, protecting their wounded comrades in the middle. Shervashidze then repeated his desire to talk rationally with the heads of the Doukhobor households, but the response was not what he desired. The Doukhobors had saved their most significant action until the end. One member of the group stepped forward and threw his military reserve card at Shervashidze, saying "Take it!" Praga himself whipped the man back, but fifteen more Doukhobors quickly followed suit.

What happened next is unclear. Doukhobor sources claim that Shervashidze told Praga to prepare to fire into the crowd but was stopped by an aristocratic officer in his own entourage.¹⁸ Shervashidze's account of this incident is somewhat different. He claims that after the Doukhobors threw down their reserve cards, "only the force of the Cossack horses was able to press them back into the crowd of their fellow protesters... suddenly they all fell to the ground, then got on their knees, and, while bowing low to the ground, loudly thanked God for his help. ... It became clear that the Doukhobors had seen Petr Verigin... on one of the clouds overhead."¹⁹

¹⁶See Commander Praga's report on the incident in the Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library in Moscow (OR RGB) f. 369, k. 44, d. 1, ll. 27–38. I thank Nicholas Breyfogle for notifying me of this file.
¹⁷Woodcock & Avakumovic, 102.
¹⁸Ibid.
¹⁹Borozdin, 200–01.
Praga, for his part, mentioned neither of these occurrences. Instead he focused on the problem of gathering enough Cossacks to subdue the crowd of nearly 2,000 Doukhobors, since some of his men had continued on to Bogdanovka escorting arrested Doukhobors. Fearing a mass conflict, Praga sounded the alarm and Cossacks rushed in from around the settlement to aid their colleagues. His account ends with a crescendo of violence and model military organisation. After crushing another Doukhobor to death underneath their horses, the Cossacks were ordered to break up the crowd so thoroughly that no two Doukhobors would be left standing together. This was simple brute force. According to Praga, the standoff ended not with Verigin’s apparition in the clouds but with this forced dispersal and with a clearly frustrated and angry Shervashidze ordering him to instil such order that “every Doukhobor without exception will bare his head and bow not only to state officials, but also to every single Cossack... Above all, the impudent outbursts against the government must be stopped.”

The trajectory of the Orlovka conflict is clear in the above narratives, despite the radically different end to the conflict recorded in the extant sources. At first, Shervashidze tried to solve the problem without resorting to force, through discussions with the Doukhobors. When this failed, he threatened force. When the threat was disregarded, he applied force. Thus far, both sides are in agreement. We have generally consonant reports up to the point where the young men tear up their draft papers. Then, two of the three accounts maintain that an extra-conflictual event intervened to defuse the standoff.

The question of whether a government official broke ranks to get Shervashidze and the Cossacks to back down or whether a supernatural occurrence prompted the Doukhobors to cool their protest is not the important one. More interesting is the evident loss of bearing that occurred after the normal course of conflict resolution had failed to bring a conclusion to the event. Even Praga’s account has a sense of desperation at the very end, as he is forced to turn to his trumpeter to call for emergency reinforcements to protect him from a non-violent, unarmed crowd.

This combination of an inclination to violence and a bewilderment that violence was not working was replicated all the way up the ladder of officialdom, as the action of state officials in the following months would demonstrate. In Orlovka, Praga’s Cossacks were billeted with the Doukhobors, where they engaged in the raping and pillaging common in such situations. Elsewhere, ringleaders were arrested, and the men who had surrendered their papers were sent to military prison and subsequent exile.

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20Brock, 170. See also Woodcock & Avakumovic, 103; Klibanov, 133.
21See the official indictment of these men in Chertkov & Chertkov, 46–48.
Finally, the government decided to deal with the rebellious sectarians in an even more drastic fashion. On 8 July 1895 they dispersed most of the remainder of Verigin’s followers into the malaria-ridden valleys of Georgia, where they were forced to try to live without land or employment. Over the next year 350 Doukhobors died of disease and hunger.22 The Doukhobors had found the martyrdom that Verigin had encouraged them to seek.

But martyrdom was not the end of the story. Indeed, it was just a step along the way toward the realisation of the Large Party’s ultimate goal of being “left alone” by the Russian state. The key figure who allowed the Large-Party Doukhobors to achieve their ultimate goal was famous novelist and pacifist Lev Tolstoy, who, upon learning about the Doukhobor plight from one of his friends in Transcaucasia, immediately launched an international campaign to bring attention to the Doukhobors’ plight.

Tolstoy’s pleas were published in The Times of London on 10 September 1895 and a succession of articles in major journals like the Contemporary Review soon followed.23 Three of Tolstoy’s most ardent admirers — Pavel Birjukov, Vladimir Chertkov and Ivan Tregubov — soon joined the cause by illegally publishing a pamphlet entitled Pomogite! [Help!] in St-Petersburg, while Tolstoy turned to direct lobbying, writing the commander of the penal battalion where the Doukhobors were sent, urging mercy.24 Birjukov, Chertkov and Tregubov were all immediately exiled from Russia, but Tolstoy, due to his tremendous prestige at home and abroad, was left unmolested.

The situation, in the government’s eyes, was quickly worsening. Their brutal persecutions had turned the civil disobedience of sixty men into a disciplinary dilemma for the army and the passive resistance of a few thousand sectarians into an international scandal. The Minister of War (Vannovskij) and the Minister of Interior Affairs (Goremykin) moved to rectify the situation in the army on 4 August 1896. They admitted in their report to the tsar that punitive measures were not working, since the Doukhobors disobeyed orders in their disciplinary battalion, “and if they obey a certain order, it is only while yielding to force, and not of their own conviction”. Their constant recalcitrance was beginning to damage discipline throughout these units, and military commanders were pleading with their superiors to solve the Doukhobor problem.

22Ibid.
23See Sanborn for more on this campaign.
The easiest alternative — discharging the Doukhobors from the army — was rejected for fear that others would follow their lead simply to evade military service. The ultimate solution to the problem of Doukhobors in the army was to remove them — along with all other conscientious objectors — from the disciplinary battalions and send them into administrative exile in Yakutia. This model of extracting the Doukhobors from Russian society was soon applied to the civilian Doukhobors as well, whose request to emigrate from Russia was approved, one suspects with relief, in 1898.

The Doukhobors and the state in 1930s

The root of the problem in the 1930s, as it had been in the 1890s, was the attempt to impose state violence-based norms on the Doukhobor community. In 1895 the focal point of the revolt was military conscription and military service. In 1937, when the most dramatic Doukhobor rebellion of the 1930s occurred, the problems were more numerous. As the Soviet state strengthened its ability to make an impact on local communities and dictate the forms of organisation and the values that would be observed in these communities, it increasingly raised the ire of the Doukhobors.

Three issues were paramount. First was the old 1895 question — military service. Second was the question of the upbringing and schooling of Doukhobor children. Finally, the major precipitant of the rebellion was the problem of collectivisation.

The battle between the Doukhobors and the state over military service in the 20th century is still only partially known to historians. Suffice it to say that, regardless of the law regarding conscientious objection in force at any particular time (and this law changed several times in the 1920s alone), the Doukhobors were often forced to bear arms against their will by local military authorities.

The Doukhobors dealt with this in many different ways. When the law was on their side, they tried to gain relief by petitioning the central authorities. When this did not work, or when conscientious objection was not recognised, they often acceded to state demands and joined the service, telling their elders (and themselves) that they would fire over the heads of their enemies if they ever engaged in battle. Whatever the response, the issue remained troublesome and was raised whenever tensions came to a head. It was no different in 1937. As the Ros-

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26All the material on the 1937 revolt cited here is from a recently declassified file in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF): f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25.
27For a more general description of conscientious objection in the period, see Joshua Alexander Sanborn, “Drafting the nation: military conscription and the
tov oblast procurator Andreev noted to his superior, Rychkov, the procurator of the RSFSR, in his official report of the uprising, "all the Doukhobor communitarians stress that military service contradicts their own codes and that they cannot perform it, since they burned their weapons in 1895 precisely for that reason."29

Violence was also present, claimed the Doukhobors, in the Soviet school system. Again, as they proudly stated, they had a psalm on this topic that declared:

...the state school teaches hostility and hatred among peoples. This is why one of the Doukhobor children responded to the question of why he doesn't attend school: "Because your school excommunicates us from the law of God. Your school teaches hostility and hatred among peoples. Your school teaches murder in war. All your literate children don't live with their parents and don't honour them, but we try to study in the school of God."30

Again, the resistance to state schools, like the resistance to military service, was not a product of peasant ignorance and stupidity, as the Soviet officials dealing with this case claimed it was, but a conscious, well-articulated rejection of an increasingly intrusive social order.

As if military conscription and mandatory state schooling were not enough, the Doukhobors were distraught by the rapid and brutal collectivisation effort of the Soviet state. In the midst of the initial assault in 1929–1930, several groups of sectarians from the North Caucasus region, including Doukhobors, clamoured to leave Russia. Their first request was sent in December 1929, and when no response was obtained they followed it up with a second request in March 1930.31 They were

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28 Andreev's initials are not printed on his report, and his signature is illegible. I assume that the Rychkov he is writing to is N.M. Rychkov, who was named head of the Soviet Ministry of Justice the following year.

29 Report from Andreev to Rychkov, 1 November 1937. GARF f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25, l. 22.

30 Ibid., l. 23. This statement about schools is clearly part of a much older Doukhobor catechism. Canadian Doukhobors were teaching their children the exact same sentiments in the exact same words in 1912. For a text of the Canadian catechism, see Peter N. Malov, Dukhobortsy, ikh istorija, zhizn' i bor'ba (Thrum's, British Columbia: By the author, 1948), 214.

31 GARF f. 1235 (fond of the All-Union Central Executive Committee (VTsIK)), op. 141, d. 2177, l. 9 (Declaration from Doukhobors of the Gigant raion to I.V. Stalin and the Politburo VKP, to T. Solts at the Central Control Commission and to P.G. Smidovich and VTsIK, 25 January 1931). I thank Terry Martin for sharing his notes on this document with me.
rather perplexed, they claimed, at the assault by local officials, since they were already, in fact, working collectively.

Further, noticing that their beliefs and unwillingness to serve in the army bothered the Soviet state, they requested permission to leave, claiming that the North American Doukhobors would pay for their transport and that they would leave all their property to the Soviet state without asking for compensation.32 The request was denied, and the persecution continued. In February 1931, the state sent one hundred infantrymen, fifty of whom had machine guns, into a Doukhobor settlement and arrested and deported many of the Doukhobors. After billeting themselves with the local inhabitants, the soldiers forced the men of the village to kneel with their faces to the wind for three hours until they were covered with snow. When the attack ceased, ninety-four people had been arrested and taken away.33 Even though similar complaints were voiced by other Doukhobor communities and other sectarian groups, they were nevertheless forced onto collective farms.

One group of Doukhobors living in the Tselina district of Rostov Province found life on the collective farm difficult to reconcile with their spiritual life. Their neighbours considered them 'wreckers', and they were compelled to work "not when they wished but when they were forced to". More distressingly, they were sent into the fields even on religious holidays and discovered that it was "very difficult to pray on the kolkhoz [collective farm]".34 Clearly, the Doukhobors were unsuited to communal life with their neighbours, and they left the kolkhoz at their first opportunity, apparently in 1935.

This did not resolve the tension between the Doukhobors, the neighbouring kolkhoz and the state, however. The kolkhoz continued to demand more and more land from the newly constituted Doukhobor allotments. Claiming that the Doukhobors did not utilise all the land at their disposal and left far too much unsowed, the kolkhoz asked for and received land for pasture from Doukhobor plots early in 1937. The loss of land proved to be an economic disaster for the Doukhobors, and they appealed to officials at all levels of government for restitution. Meeting no response at the local level, they decided to appeal to the central authorities and wrote a letter to Kalinin.35 When this approach failed to garner a response, they despatched envoys to Moscow to explain their "ruined and disastrous position".36

32Ibid., l. 8.
33Ibid., l. 52–55. Declaration of the Doukhobors, 7 March 1931.
34Report from Andreev to Rychkov, 1 Nov. 1937. GARF f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25, l. 22.
35Letter to Kalinin from the Tselina Doukhobors, 22 October 1937, l. 14.
36Ibid.
The political skill that had served the Doukhobors so well in the 1890s had apparently deserted them. Sending envoys to Moscow to complain about the infringement upon a religious community by a kolkhoz in 1937 turned out to be a tremendous mistake, as the Doukhobor communities soon learnt. The envoys, upon arrival in Moscow, were immediately arrested as counter-revolutionaries. It was the arrest of these Doukhobor leaders that finally convinced the Doukhobors that co-existence with the Soviet state was impossible. They immediately relinquished their request to be given their land back and insisted instead that the prisoners be released so that the entire community be allowed to relocate “where we would not be disturbed by you”.

This request, like the previous ones, was ignored, and so the Doukhobors prepared to repeat their 1895 protest in the hope that a similar result would be obtained. They announced, both to local state officials and to Kalinin, that they would abandon all their property, gather their children, and march to Rostov on 14 October 1937 and demand the release of their “brothers and sisters in spirit”. They expected either success or martyrdom for their efforts, telling Kalinin that “if you do not free our fathers and brothers, then lock us up together with them and deal the final blow to our innocent flesh”.

As nervous local officials waited with NKVD troops close at hand, 14 October dawned with poor weather, apparently prompting the two major Doukhobor communities involved (Uspenie and Trudovaja) to postpone their demonstration until a time when it would have more of an effect. They waited until 20 October and then began their march.

About a kilometre from their village the 150 Doukhobors from Uspenie were met by twenty-one local party activists. The Doukhobors had indeed planned to leave for good, bringing with them only a small reserve of food. When approached by the commission, the Doukhobors immediately broke into song, which the party members managed to put a halt to only by agreeing to negotiate with the Doukhobors.

1937 was a year in which not only political tensions were inflamed, but religious tensions as well. Soviet officials noted a rise in the expression of religious beliefs, in particular sectarian beliefs, and looked very darkly upon it. Local officials began a new wave of persecution and arrests, which in turn led to an increasing number of petitioners to the central organs, many of whom suffered the same fate as the Doukhobor envoys. See: Merle Fainsod, Smolensk under Soviet rule (Cambridge, Mass. USA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 437–39; William Fletcher, The Russian Orthodox Church underground, 1917–1970 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 101–02; Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s peasants: resistance and survival in the Russian village after collectivization (Oxford & London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 206, 212–13.

GARF f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25, l. 14. All subsequent information on the revolt comes from this file, esp. ll. 20–25.
Upon being questioned as to the goal of their march, the group replied in unison that they were going to be united with their arrested brothers and sisters. The commission immediately tried to defuse the situation, suggesting the Doukhobors should submit their complaints by official channels. But the Doukhobors, in no mood to be defused, responded that they had already brought their problems to the attention of the organs of power and that nothing had happened. Further, they complained that they had no land or farm implements and that the kolkhoz had recently removed all their fuel as well. As a result of their mistreatment, they announced, the decision had been made to leave the region and to request that they be allotted “a corner of land anywhere in the Soviet Union and, together with their freed brothers and sisters, be allowed to conduct their own communal economy on the basis of their Doukhobor Code”.

The commission offered to meet with fifteen members of the commune and discuss the demands more concretely, but again their attempts at reconciliation were rebuffed. The Doukhobors announced that they were marching on Rostov (about sixty kilometres away) and expressed the hope that the march itself would show the “organs of power” which had previously ignored their demands that they were serious. At this point, upon being informed that another group of a hundred people had just departed from the Trudovaja commune en route to Rostov, the commission quickly went off to meet the Trudovaja group, having decided that further negotiations with Uspenie would be fruitless. The goal was to prevent the two communes from joining together and proceeding to Rostov.

When the commission encountered the Trudovaja group, they were met once again with psalms and to their unpleasant surprise, this commune proved to be even “more aggressively inclined” than Uspenie. Efforts of the commission to reason with them were repeatedly interrupted by the Doukhobors’ breaking into song. Then the Doukhobors, intoxicated by their resistance, “broke free of the covering force of activists and headed at a run to join the Doukhobors who had left the neighbouring village”.

The situation was rapidly deteriorating and the commission saw itself running out of options as the Doukhobors headed down the road. The authorities then resorted to violence, physically restraining the Doukhobors with a contingent of dedicated party men. Andreev later explained that since the demonstration “had taken on a protracted character, ... operational measures were taken to remove the more active religious fanatics, who had impelled the gathered people to insubordination to local organs of power, from the group”. Following these arrests, the local police dispersed the remaining Doukhobors and sent them home. Thinking that they had hit upon the solution, the commission hurried back to the Uspenie group and took “operational
measures” against the ringleaders there as well. But Uspenie refused to disperse, and protracted negotiations only came to an end at nightfall, when the Doukhobor children began to complain and asked to go home.

The revolt was far from over, though, and the commission spent the night in the Doukhobor communal homes, trying to persuade the Doukhobors to give up their goal of marching on Rostov. While the Trudovaja commune agreed to postpone the march while negotiations proceeded, the Uspenie group persisted in trying to march to Rostov. On 21 October, one hundred Uspenie members gathered once again to march, only to be detained now by a column of police. Once again, negotiations did not lead anywhere, and the frustrated local officials once again resorted to removing the “young religious fanatics” who were thought to be inspiring the demonstrations. Once again the Doukhobors went home.

But the removal of the “fanatics” from the group did not end the problem, and the Doukhobors from Uspenie tried again on 22 October and 23 October to march. They finally relented and agreed to discuss their problems with local officials. Over the course of these negotiations, the demands of the Doukhobors were reduced to three, according to Andreev:

(1) To free their arrested brothers and sisters, (2) To apportion a special parcel of land for the Doukhobors on which they could live and work, together with the freed prisoners, on the basis of their own rules, since the rules of the kolkhoz could not be accepted by the communitarians for religious reasons, since they were founded on violence (according to them), and (3) If it was impossible to do this in this district then allot them such a corner, anywhere in the territory of the Soviet Union, where they could live in accordance with their rules, or allow them to emigrate.

The results of these demands were not recorded in the archival account of this incident, but there were signs that Andreev, at least, was favouring a widespread destruction of what little autonomy the Doukhobors had retained by framing the problem in terms of counter-revolution and backwardness.

This construction of the rebellion as a combination of backwardness and counter-revolution seems to have informed the actions of the government officials throughout the uprising. At first, the commission apparently considered all the Doukhobors backward, and thus attempted to enlighten them by reasoning with them, informing them of the proper actions they should take when aggrieved. In many ways the initial response of the local officials was quite moderate, and they appeared genuinely eager to settle the dispute without resorting to violence. The immediate and dismissive response of the Doukhobors did not allow for such a negotiated peace, however. The perceived intransigence on the part of the Doukhobors changed the local leaders’ per-
ception of the rebellion. By 1 November, when Andreev wrote his report, counter-revolution had emerged as a major theme of the revolt.

Indeed, there can be little doubt that the Doukhobors were counter-revolutionaries of the most profound type. They rejected the very order upon which the Soviet state was built, in the same way that the Doukhobors in 1895 had rejected the order upon which the tsarist state rested (the connection between the two uprisings was explicitly stated by the Doukhobors, who during the 1937 events referred several times to the 1895 revolt). The reason for the rejection was explicit and the same for both revolts — the social order that the state tried to impose upon them was based upon violence.

But Andreev missed the true counter-revolutionary implications of the revolt and focused upon the more usual understanding of counter-revolution — hidden ‘wreckers’ lying in wait to sabotage the proletarian state. The Doukhobor psalms, he claimed, were

...suffused with counter-revolutionary content, and undoubtedly in present conditions this Doukhobor commune is a clear counter-revolutionary nest, in which other counter-revolutionary elements can freely conduct their work, shielded by a religious form, and in addition it is very easy to be sheltered by this commune, since the Doukhobors themselves declare that they accept anyone, without asking who he is and what he represents, following the principle that all are loving brothers.

The obvious implication of this belief was that the Doukhobor revolt itself was led by hidden counter-revolutionaries, and that once those elements were weeded out, the Doukhobors would be reformable.

This analysis of the situation was ominous for those against whom “operational measures” were taken. It is highly unlikely that any of the Doukhobors were released after the negotiations took place, if only because Andreev had now officially marked them as “counter-revolutionary” in the midst of the Great Terror of 1937. This boded ill not only for the men and women in jail, but for those who remained as well, for, as it turned out, the majority (but clearly not all) of the arrested Doukhobors were men. Near the end of the revolt, the Doukhobor negotiators complained that “most of our men have been arrested and that it will be very difficult for the remaining women and children to farm”.

Thus, according to Andreev, the arrested Doukhobors were either counter-revolutionaries or religious fanatics, or both. As a result, the resolution of the Doukhobor problem had to be two-pronged: arrest the counter-revolutionaries and enlighten the backward. By the same token, the blame for revolt had to be laid in two places. If agents of coun-

no violent protest and the Russian state

ter-revolution hiding in the Doukhobor 'nest' were partially to blame, so too were insufficiently attentive 'cultural' agents of the state, as Andreev made clear: "On the part of the regional leadership there flourishes a clear underestimation of the sectarian movement and a lack of work among sectarians."

In summary, Andreev charged local leaders with too much reliance on police measures and too little on "mass-party, cultural-enlightening anti-religious work or political work". State institutions had to focus their attentions upon young people, children, and others who fell "under the influence of the obscurantism ... of the commune".

Andreev's solutions, then, would only have exacerbated the conflict between the Doukhobors and the state. Andreev hoped to intensify state influence over the children, to strengthen the outposts of Soviet power in the communes by unleashing the Komsomol and other "cultural-enlightenment organs" on the Doukhobors. This solution was in complete opposition to the most basic demand of the Doukhobors — "to not be disturbed by you". The resolution of the affair was not recorded.

Conclusion

The comparison of these two non-violent rebellions tells us much about the role of violence in the state order. As the events narrated above show, this role remained fairly stable despite the radical change of régime in 1917. Three of these continuities are particularly striking.

First, the role of violence in the process of conflict resolution between state actors and non-state actors remained the same. In both cases the trajectory of the confrontation was as follows: (1) the state attempted to readjust the social order within the local community; (2) the community reacted with a performative act intended either to embarrass the state into withdrawing from their affairs or to react violently toward them; (3) the state tried to resolve the conflict without resorting to violence; (4) the community refused the state attempts at compromise; (5) the state first threatened force and then (6) used it to try to compel the community to bend to its wishes. In both cases, the state tried to solve the problem without resorting to violence first (for reasons I will soon address) but turned to violence rather than give up its aim of intervening in the community.

More interesting was what happened in those instances where force still did not change the behaviour of the local communities: in both cases (at Orlovka/Bogdanovka in 1895 and with the Uspenie commune in 1937), officials were in a quandary as to what to do next. The failure of violence to resolve the conflict left the state actors without a guide for further action and forced them into ad hoc and disjointed action at the most crucial stage of the conflict-resolution process. Though this pattern is induced from conflicts between the state and non-violent pro-
testers, it may also be worth considering how generally prevalent this trajectory is, not only in light of more recent events in the North Caucasus, but also in view of historical events, particularly the trajectory from grain requisitioning to collectivisation to the partial state retreat from collectivisation between 1928 and 1930.

The second point has to do with the last stage of conflict, after violence has failed to influence behaviour. The inefficacy of force when dealing with dedicated non-violent protest frequently befuddles state actors. It is equally important, however, to point out that protest does not instantly empower the protesters themselves. Resisting the state’s attempt to adjust behaviour does not at all mean that the state will accede to one’s demands.

Our comparison, nevertheless, does show at least one way that power can shift to the side of the protesters. In the 1890s, Verigin’s followers achieved what they were looking for — autonomy from the Russian state. Even though the move to Canada was not all they expected it to be (in the subsequent words of one Canadian Doukhobor, “it seems we left the den of the wolf to find refuge in the den of the bear”), the Large Party did force a significant concession from the state.

In the 1930s, however, the Doukhobors did not receive their wish “to be left alone”. What then is the major difference between the two revolts? A comparison reveals little change in the basic issues of the conflict or in the way that each side dealt with the crisis, despite the fact that the personnel on both sides were quite different. Rather, the difference lies in the publicity each received.

Publicity is problematic for states, because a violent response to non-violence calls into question the legitimacy of state violence itself, in large part because states nearly always frame their violence in defensive terms. Most states have discovered that the ideology of violence places greater moral worth upon defensive than offensive violence. If acts can be portrayed as threatening, states are more likely to find support for violent action in response. Non-violent protest, however, is exceedingly difficult to portray as a threat to the established state order, which makes state violence almost impossible to justify in terms of normal ideology.

The justification of state violence as a defensive measure was perhaps even more pronounced in tsarist and Soviet Russia than elsewhere, making the resulting embarrassment more acute. Just as the tsarist state tried to keep the 1895 events covered up, so too did the Soviet state try to conceal the 1937 revolt.

The Soviets were far more successful, for two reasons. First, they responded more quickly, and secondly, in Soviet Russia there was no “untouchable” non-government figure like Tolstoy able to publicise events as they occurred. Thus the Doukhobors in the 1930s were unable to achieve their stated objectives in the way that the Doukhobors in the 1890s had done.

The final point has to do with the changing nature of the social order that the state supported, and more specifically with the role violence played in that order. We address this point by asking why a perhaps more logical response to the dilemma posed by the Doukhobors — the acceptance of Doukhobor autonomy within their community — was never seriously considered by any of the state actors involved.

The answer may lie in the fact that the relationship between the state and the individuals living within its borders had undergone a dramatic change with the proclamation of the universal-service manifesto in 1874. The principle that all able-bodied men had a duty individually to the state was at once liberating (for neither caste nor village now theoretically mediated this relationship) and confining, because this relationship was involuntary and coerced. This new credo of state-sponsored individualism, grounded in state coercion, proved incompatible with the communal and traditional desires of the Doukhobors. The simple act of requesting the level of communal autonomy enjoyed by the Doukhobors for most of their history was transformed from ‘business as usual’ to ‘dangerous fanaticism’ in the eyes of state officials.41 The irony noticed by the Doukhobors in 1929 — that a communist state was actively destroying communes — was completely lost on Soviet party functionaries.

It may, however, have been the world as a whole, rather than just the Russian or Soviet empire, that no longer had room for communities autonomous from the state and its social order. At the same time that the Tselina Doukhobors were protesting the interference of the Soviet state, a group of Doukhobors who had left Russia as a result of the 1895 revolt was petitioning the Soviet state to be readmitted to Soviet territory.42 Writing in a Marxist language intended to impress Soviet leaders, these Canadian Doukhobors sent missives to Izvestija, to the “Anti-military Bureau of Holland” at The Hague and to their old friend Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, complaining of mistreatment by Canadian

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41 The word fanaticism to describe the Doukhobor actions was used by St-Petersburg journalists in 1895 and by Andreev in 1937. Bonch-Bruevich, ed., 82; Andreev to Rychkov, GARF f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25, l. 21.

42 The material on the Canadian Doukhobor petition is found in GARF f. 5263, op. 1s, d. 25, l. 1–12.
authorities. The “bourgeois Canadian authorities”, they claimed, were not only persecuting them day and night but lacked basic human morality. The Doukhobors wanted to return to a place where communism was respected and expressed the great desire to take the “young generation away from the Canadian bourgeoisie” and return “to our people, and to our native Russian fields”. This letter, dated 20 September 1937, was forwarded to Kalinin by the editor of Izvestija on 11 November 1937, three days before the decimated and desperate Tselina Doukhobors sent him their final appeal to be able to leave Russia. In a world increasingly parcelled into militarised nations, the Doukhobor utopia was nowhere at all.