

Rationale for Re-enactment of Arms Burning June 27, 2009 at the Doukhobor Dugout House

by Koozma J. Tarasoff, August 26, 2008

This is a response to Brenda Cheveldayoff's planned intent to schedule a [re-enactment of the Doukhobor arms burning](#) at the opening of the new season of the Doukhobor Dugout House in Saskatchewan on June 27, 2009. This scheduling is required by early September 2008 in order to get this information to the Saskatchewan Tourism Office in time for the printing of their brochure of Tourism events for 2009.

The [original Arms Burning](#) took place in the Russian Caucasus at midnight of June 28-29 (July 11-12 New Style Calendar), 1895 in three areas of Georgia, Elizavetpol (now Azerbaïdzhan) and Kars (now Turkey). Some 7,000 Doukhobors participated in what was a mass public demonstration to the world that the institution of militarism and war has outlived its usefulness. Because most of the rifles were government issue and the destruction of guns was perceived as a threat to the public order, the Doukhobors were severely persecuted and one-third (7,500) of the group was exiled to Canada in 1899.

It was the international Russian writer and philosopher Lev N. Tolstoy who saved the day by publicizing the plight of the Doukhobors and their cause. Tolstoy spoke about the group and their acts as being the seeds that Jesus Christ had sown centuries back and which are now taking root in our world. It was Tolstoy who articulated the rationale for a world without war.

From Biblical times there has been a hope of transforming swords into ploughshares. The Preamble to the formation of the United Nations in 1945 confirmed this with the hope 'of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.

In the village of Verigin, Saskatchewan, Canada, in June 29, 1922 there was an re-enactment with a symbolic arms burning reenactment during the Annual Doukhobor Peace Day known locally as Petrov Dien. Several people threw old guns into the fire as a reminder that the way to a world without war is through disarmament and nonviolence. (Photo from Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*, 1969: 143).

At the 87th Annual Doukhobor Peace Day held in Castlegar, British Columbia, June 28, 1980 during the historic gathering of Doukhobors, Molokans, Mennonites, Quakers, and Tolstoyans from Canada, the United States, and the Soviet Union, the eminent Mennonite scholar and activist Frank H. Epp challenged the gathering to hold a huge Festival of Peace in June 1985 in which the people would bring 50,000 paper bombs for a mass burning. This would be a kind of 'dress rehearsal' for the real thing ten years hence, when hopefully the world would celebrate the destruction of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. While that event did not take place, the hope has remained.

While living without weapons is unthinkable for many, Dr. Epp stated:

'I am always glad to discover among the Quakers, the Doukhobors, the idea of the millennium which wants to avoid a catastrophe, and which believes in Utopia before catastrophe.... For you the kingdom of God was always here on earth in your time. And it is that for me too. And that's why we must all work together from here on so that history and the memory becomes prophecy in our time. I think it can....' (Symposium Proceedings. International Doukhobor Intergroup Symposium: Doukhobors, Molokans, Mennonites and Quakers, Castlegar, BC, June 25-28, 1982: 99. Published by Symposium Planning Committee, Grand Forks, BC, 1983).

The rationale for the re-enactment of the Arms Burning in 2009 is several fold:

1. With trillions of dollars being spent annually on the brutal ritual of state-sanctioned killing (nay, murders!) on earth, any effort to persuade the masses to look at alternatives to violence is a noble effort. The Doukhobor peace metaphor of burning of guns is one of these efforts that ordinary citizens can contribute. In spite of the looming arms race, the Doukhobors need to be given credit for keeping alive the notion of creating a nonkilling society.
2. Lev N. Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. were all driven by conscience in their passion to see that things such as war were wrong and had to be put right. The re-enactment is a persuasive device which is driven by conscience.
3. We need to point out the failure of our society and political institutions in dealing with the issues of inequality, poverty, disease and violence. Abolition of war would go a long ways to addressing these ills. The Arms Burning reenactment is a reminder of what an ideal world could be.
4. The re-enactment is a timely call to our churches and our parliaments to recognize our moral base: 'Thou shalt not kill.' That is our universal call to all peoples of the world.
5. The military institution may not be happy with an alternative vision of society, but the reality is that we as human beings are responsible for violence and state killings that contribute to the demise of our civilization. We need to stand up and be counted.
6. As with Tolstoy, Gandhi and King, we need to invoke the prophetic role of speaking truth to power. The Arms Burning metaphor is one of the reminders to us of how we can speak truth to power.

Finally, a word about the logistics for the re-enactment of the arms burning. School children could be invited to make papier mâché and/or wooden guns as well as paper bombs. Moreover, why not invite the

military to bring some of their old guns to the fire? And have the local Fire Department on hand to ensure that the burning is done safely. In this way, we can all win!

P.S. The DDH proposal was approved and [announced for 2009](#):

Doukhobor Peace Movement Day

June 27

Program starts at 11 A.M.

Re-enactment of Doukhobor soldiers laying down their arms, Easter 1895, and burning their arms, June 1895. Guest speakers include J.J. Verigin Jr, MC Norm Rebin. Tour to follow.

News of this event was [published in 3 newspapers](#), 2 included photos.

[Historic 1895 Burning of Guns Descriptions](#)
[Spirit-Wrestlers.com](#)