

## A WESTERN MEMBER TELLS PARLIAMENT OF THE ACTIONS OF DOUKHOBOR FANATICS

(From Hansard)

Hon. Hugh Guthrie (Minister of Justice) moved the second reading of Bill No. 113, to amend the criminal code.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the house went into committee thereon, Mr. LaVergne in the chair.

On section 2—Parading while nude. Mr. Esling: I am confident that all hon. members will be in accord with this amendment, the primary purpose of which is to provide more fitting punishment for a fanatical class of Doukhobors who defy our Canadian laws by gathering on public highways and in close proximity to the highways in an absolute nude condition. I want to give members of this committee what might be called a close-up view.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Esling: I hope the chairman will understand that I am speaking metaphorically when I say I want to give hon. members a close-up view of this fanatical class. While hon. members may get some amusement from it I should like them to understand that this is a very serious situation.

These people were brought to Canada as far back as 1898. They were broused to come here; a huge acreage of land was set aside for them in Saskatchewan and the government to considerable expense in placing them upon that land and getting them started. Shortly after 1900 a large number came to the district of West Kootenay and settled in that beautiful valley along the Kootenay river between the city of Nelson and the Columbia river. Today in that district there are some three thousand of these people, who are divided into three groups. First there is the community group, living in one section and directed by their leader, Peter Veregin. And then there is an independent group composed of Doukhobors who have purchased land of their own and withdrawn from the community. Then there is a third or fanatical group who are usually known as the sons of freedom. They lead the procession in these nude parades and exhibitions.

The three peculiarities of Doukhobors and particularly of the fanatics are these. First of all, there is arson, they do not hesitate for one moment to burn anything. Their second peculiarity is nude parading. And the third is defiance of the law. They have absolutely no regard for Canadian law. First of all they burn schools; they burn churches; they dynamite public halls. The department of the Postmaster General has before it now a claim for damage done to a federal post office which was dynamited only a short time ago. Then they show their

defiance of the law by refusing to register births, death or marriages. Nobody knows who is who among these fanatics. They proceed in this country on the assumption that the land is God's land and they know no laws but God's law. They do not intend, therefore, to subject themselves to the laws of any province or of the Dominion. When I say they refuse to pay taxes I mean that they refuse to contribute to the community treasury for the payment of taxes on community-owned land.

### Serious Situation

To bring to the house the seriousness of the situation I may point out that the party represented by hon. gentlemen opposite are responsible for the coming to Canada of these Doukhobors. They brought them here; do not let them forget that. They have a lot to answer for. These people were brought in in 1908, when they were given land and a cash bonus. In 1912, after the Conservative government had come into power, they said, "We want no more Doukhobors." They are invading our fields of labour. They know no hours of work, and no rates of wages. In 1912 the Conservative government put up the bars. They said they would have no more of it. And that prohibition continued until 1926, when the right hon. gentleman opposite (Mr. Mackenzie King), anticipating an election and thinking they might be of great help to his party, took down the bars again. But immediately this government came into power they stopped the further entry of Doukhobors.

We realize that the provincial government is responsible for the enforcement of law. But there are circumstances beyond which it is impossible for a provincial government to go. The costs are too great, and if the truth must be told—and I say this advisedly—these people are numerically too strong for this government or the provincial government to keep them within bounds. I have always contended and still contend that the federal government, having brought them here, must share the responsibility for their conduct and the cost of their maintenance while here.

The Hon. Gentlemen think it trifling for me to refer to fires, but it is not occasional fire that takes place. I have just received from the Minister of Education in British Columbia a list of schools which have been burned, and the information will be almost appalling to the house. I will mention only those fires that have occurred from June 1929 to the end of the year. In that time they burned seven schools valued at \$14,700. They were small country schools. In April 1930 they burned a community hall valued at \$2,500. On July 1—it will be

seen that these fires are close together—they burned another school valued at \$2,200, and at the same night they dynamited a brick school which cost \$7,700. And then we come to Christmas of 1930. At a place called Thrums they were preparing the Christmas tree. A boy got out of a car with a basket of toys and tree trimmings, and just as he was proceeding to the hall the place blew up. It was only his lucky detention for a few minutes that saved his life. Now we come to March 1931—that is since we have been here. In that month three schools were burned. On June 2 they destroyed one and attempted to burn another, and they burned the Presbyterian church. These fires all took place at about the same hour, eleven o'clock at night. They cut the telephone wires and took particular care to avoid discovery.

I have another letter from the Minister of Education which gives a good idea of the situation. He states that by reason of these fires it is necessary for all schools to be guarded. In his letter of June 1, he says:

"I am quite sure that if the guards were taken away the schools would all very shortly be burned."

He cites this particular school at Crestova in the district adjoining mine, where he says the fire started while two Canadian teachers were asleep in the building.

As for the statement that the cost of the provincial government is too great. I would point out that the loss by fire in this district in the past two years amounts to a total of \$50,000. These fanatics have destroyed schools, churches and community halls to that value. And in the rampage of 1929, to arrest the Doukhobors and keep them in goal six months cost the provincial government \$35,000. There you have \$85,000 of actual expenditure to govern a community of some 4,000. Hon. gentlemen who live in places with a population of about 3,500 know that the policing of such places does not cost more than \$5,000 per annum.

I want to come now to the matter of community parades, and I am sure I shall have the most rapt attention.

Mr. Chaplin: What do you mean, "rapt"?

Mr. Euler: "Unwrapped," I should say.

Mr. Esling: Let me explain. This does not mean one person here or there disrobing for the benefit of passersby; the fact is that these people gather in groups of fifty and seventy-five, marching along the highways and through the fields. And in other instances they make special exhibitions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Esling: This is not a laughing matter. I want the committee to appreciate the seriousness of it. During a recent convention of the farmers institute, one whole morning was spent discussing the seriousness of this situation. It might come home more closely to hon. members if they had their life savings tied up in a ten-acre plot of ground and a Doukhobor came along and bought the land alongside. Only one thing can be done—move out.

There was the great rampage of 1929 and then another only a few weeks ago. The last letter I received from this district states that the Doukhobors are again on the rampage. One lady writes me that her children were coming home from school they were confronted with a number of naked Doukhobor men and women. She tells me of two little girls who were on their way to her house and who came rushing in frantic and shocked by the fact that two naked Doukhobor men had accosted them on a public highway. The committee will remember the recent rampage into Nelson when 108 of these naked Doukhobors were placed in goal. They had started a trek of some ten miles and as they approached Nelson the fire trucks and all other kinds of trucks and wagons were used to barricade their way.

An hon. member: Carried.

Mr. Esling: It will not be carried for a while. Twenty-four special constables were sworn in to assist the provincial police. One of these constables had a naked Doukhobor woman on each arm, and they just picked him up as if he were matchwood, laid him down on the road, and sat on him, one on his head, and one on his body.

An hon. member: Carried.

Mr. Esling: If we could take some of the long, thin hon. members opposite or some of the short, thick ones and put them in the middle of the road on a hot August day with two

naked women weighing 300 pounds sitting on them, then they would probably realize that these people are beyond control of the law.

Some hon. members: Oh, Oh.

### Burned Churches

Mr. Esling: I am glad to hear hon. members laugh because such laughter reflects that attitude of indifference taken during the last six years by both the provincial and federal governments. These Doukhobors have burned churches, school houses and buildings; they have torn the uniforms from inspectors, the tunics from police officers and the clothing from federal enumerators. They have used sticks of cordwood on the provincial police; they defy the law by refusing to contribute to the provincial treasury. They refuse to register births, marriages, and deaths, and they practice and preach open defiance to Canadian Law.

This is the description of a situation almost inconceivable in Canada, and yet these are the people by whose votes the right hon. gentleman opposite (Mr. Mackenzie King) hoped to defeat the Conservative candidate in West Kootenay. Some of these people enjoy the franchise because they were born in Canada, and I ask the committee if it can conceive of the great Liberal party being reduced to the extremity of encouraging such a class of people to vote. The Liberal workers went out into the hills and valleys to bring these people to the polls to vote at the last federal general election. On the morning of election day the Conservative candidate published a statement that he did not want a single Doukhobore vote, and I am proud to say that he did not get one. When the right hon. gentleman publishes his memoirs I hope he will include a picture of this memorable happening on July 28 last. Just imagine a milling mass of men and women who could not speak English with the Liberal workers showing them how to mark their "X" after the name of the Liberal candidate. These Doukhobors were receiving their orders from one man, Peter Veregin, so the votes of 1,500 people were really cast by one man. They were challenged, but challenging did not do much good because it was impossible to know who was who. The scrutineers did not know what their names were or where they came from. All oaths had to be taken through an interpreter and when the polls were closed there were 600 Doukhobors on the outside trying to get in. The Conservative agents saw that the polls were closed on time, and that oaths were administered to all who applied for ballots. The Conservative candidate polled too votes from returned men who happened to be agents there. The Labour man got one vote, and—

The chairman: Order.

Mr. Esling:—The Liberal candidate got the other 248 votes.

Some hon. members: Order.

Mr. Gott: The chairman must call order.

An hon. member: He did, but not very loudly.

An hon. member: He did.

The chairman: Order.

Mr. Esling: I want the committee to realize the debauchery of the great Liberal party in the last federal election.

Some hon. members: Order.

The Chairman: I think the hon. member should confine his remarks to the section before the committee.

Mr. Lapointe: This is the hon. member's speech of the session.

### Voted Liberal

Mr. Esling: I am referring to the amendment to the criminal code which provides for a three year term in the penitentiary in place of the six months' imprisonment which is now the penalty for Doukhobors who go naked. If this amendment had been in force two years ago, these naked fanatics would not have been able to vote for the Liberal candidate.

The provincial government has amended its elections act to disqualify from voting any Doukhobors or others, male or female, born in the province or elsewhere, who claim exemption from military service. These Doukhobors were admitted to Canada unconditionally exempt from military service. I look to the government to bring in a similar amendment before another election is held. Those who are not willing to fight for their country, should not be permitted to run it. If this amendment is not effective, I would suggest that in so far as the men are concerned, other means should be taken to restrain their exhibitions. Perhaps the most effective



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