

Research and Education for Nonviolence and Peace – the Gandhi Information Center (Society for Peace Education)

by Christian Bartolf, Dominique Miething (board members, Gandhi Information Center)

*Message for Mahatma Gandhi's Birth Anniversary Celebration, October 2nd, 2020,
Virtual Celebration, organized by the Nataraj Youth Culture Organization
with the support of Consulate General of India, Toronto*

Warm greetings to you all,

Established in 1990, the Gandhi Information Center has been freely available for Education. It has more than a hundred members at home and abroad, amongst them well-known scientists, artists and authors such as Dr. Arun Gandhi (* 1934, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi), Count Serge Tolstoy (1911-1995, one grandson of Count Leo Tolstoy) and Dr. Sushila Nayar (1914-2000, personal physician and secretary of Mahatma Gandhi).

The Gandhi Information Center became well-known all over the world on account of the distribution of the Manifesto against Conscription and the Military System. This Manifesto revives attention to two manifestoes signed by Gandhi, Einstein, Buber, and Freud against the military training of youth. In the meantime, this Manifesto has been translated into 25 languages and has been signed by more than 200 outstanding personalities from over thirty different countries. Among them are, for instance, Ela Gandhi (* 1940, a granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi), Count Serge Tolstoy, the artists Pete Seeger (1919-2014), Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007) and Ravi Shankar (1920-2012).

Our main project between 2008 and 2020 has been the creation of twenty-one exhibitions on the history of the nonviolent resistance concept, for example:

*Leo Tolstoy and the Doukhobors: Conscientious Objection
– commemorating the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy's death centenary (2010/2011)*

You are invited to visit the digitized exhibition online:

<https://www.nonviolent-resistance.info/exhibitions/eng/doukhobors/>

We created this exhibition for the occasion of Leo Tolstoy's death centenary (20 November 2010). The panels are neither ordered chronologically according to Tolstoy's biography nor are they re-telling the Doukhobors' history. A timeline of their history, however, has been included at the end of the exhibition to contextualize their journey. The selected quotes by Leo Tolstoy and the Doukhor Peter Verigin clearly show the fundamental importance of activism against military and war as well as a plea for conscientious objection by the late Leo Tolstoy.

During the creation of this exhibition, we collaborated with the eminent Doukhor historians Larry A. Ewashen (Doukhor Discovery Center, Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada), Koozma J. Tarasoff (Ottawa, Canada), Andrei Conovaloff (Arizona, USA), and Jonathan J. Kalmakoff (Doukhor Genealogy Website).

The profound significance of the Doukhobors for Mahatma Gandhi can be seen in the three following passages from his writings:

“The Dukhobours of Russia offered non-co-operation, and a handful though they were, their grievances so deeply moved the civilized world that Canada offered them a home where they form a prosperous community. In India instances can be given by the dozen, in which in little principalities the *raiya*s [tenants] when deeply grieved by their chiefs have cut off all connection with them and bent them to their will. I know of no instance in history where well managed non-co-operation has failed.”¹

“Non-co-operation which involves violence may succeed or fail, but that non-co-operation which requires nothing but self-sacrifice can end only in success. It simply passes my understanding how anyone can oppose such non-co-operation, for the man who resorts to non-co-operation of the divine type will not resume co-operation till he gets justice. The Germans employed the non-co-operation of armed conflict and so, when defeated, they surrendered. The Dukhobors, in Russia employed unarmed non-co-operation and, therefore, met with no defeat. When it became impossible for them to continue to live in Russia, they left the country rather than submit to its oppressive rulers. Today, they live as a highly respected community in Canada. When an individual employs non-co-operation, the individual wins; when a community employs it, the community wins.”²

Finally, and owing to his reading of Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi highlighted the significance of the Doukhobors in his first 1928 autobiography entitled *Satyagraha in South Africa*:

“Jesus Christ indeed has been acclaimed as the prince of passive resisters but I submit in that case passive resistance must mean satyagraha and satyagraha alone. There are not many cases in history of passive resistance in that sense. One of these is that of the Doukhobors of Russia cited by Tolstoy. The phrase ‘passive resistance’ was not employed to denote the patient suffering of oppression by thousands of devout Christians in the early days of Christianity. I would therefore class them as Satyagrahis. And if their conduct be described as passive resistance, passive resistance becomes synonymous with satyagraha.”³

For more than a century, Toronto has related to the tradition of Tolstoy and Gandhi. It all started with publisher William Bryce, who in 1890 published the first edition of the ground-breaking work on Bread Labour. Under the title “Labor: The Divine Command”, Count Leo Tolstoy made known, augmented and edited the suppressed book of the peasant writer Timofey Bondareff, translated by Mary Cruger. This book, until then, had been interdicted by the Czar of Russia and the young student Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi might have read it during his student days in London. Nowadays, Toronto is the place of the

¹ Mohandas K. Gandhi: “Crusade against Non-Co-Operation”, *Young India*, 4-8-1920. Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Vol 18, p. 116.

² Mohandas K. Gandhi: “What the Scriptures Say”, *Navajivan*, 8-8-1920. CWMG, Vol 18, p. 126.

³ Mohandas K. Gandhi: *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 1928. Chapter 13: “Satyagraha v. Passive Resistance”. CWMG, Vol. 26, p. 96.

Tolstoy Studies Journal, published by the Tolstoy Society of North America, linked with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Toronto.

The greatest supporter of the Doukhobors was an honoured citizen of Toronto: James Mavor (8 December 1854 – 31 October 1925), a Scottish-Canadian economist, who served as a Professor of Political Economy of the University of Toronto from 1892 to 1923. He played a key role in resettling Doukhobor religious dissidents from the Russian Empire to Canada. He corresponded with notable Russian scientist, former Prince, and anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin, who at that time lived in London, and who proposed that Doukhobor peasantry, numbering several thousand people, be settled in Canada.

We wish you great joy during your vegetarian commemoration event for Mahatma Gandhi's birthday and we are looking forward to fruitful future cooperation and friendship.

Together with Mr. Christian Bartolf, President of the Gandhi Information Center, I have written this text on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary in the year 2020. I have been a board member of the Gandhi Information Center for years and I am a political scientist for peace education and the history of pacifism at the Free University Berlin.