MENNONITE LIFE

MARCH 1981

In this Issue

Hochfeld has been a common Mennonite village name in South Russia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mexico, and Paraguay. The Hochfeld described by Peter U. Schmidt is one three miles to the north of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church in Marion County, Kansas, where the author grew up as a child. Here he experienced the brief but unique experiment of the transplantation of Russian Mennonite land and community patterns to the Kansas prairie. He recalls the long immigrant house where the congregation first worshipped. We are grateful to Peter U. Schmidt's son, Richard, for translating and editing the paper his father read in 1957.

Harvey Dyck, who described in the September 1979 issue of *Mennonite Life* the dramatic 1929 story of the Mennonite mass movement to Moscow, recaptures for us the "last hurrah" of Russian Mennonitism—the Mennonite colonies in Russia in 1911. We see a Mennonite society midway between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, a society full of pride but here and there premonitions of pathological forces. Those who have read Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*, a portrait of Europe on the eve of World War I, will sense a parallel story.

Mennonites from Chortitza settled in 1894-97 on 67,500 acres in Orenburg province on the Ural River in Eastern European Russia. In 1895 they were joined by Mennonites from the Molotschna. Dr. Cornelius Krahn has brought to our attention this article by a Russian scholar. He observes that "the number of Russian scholars devoting themselves to the study of religion in general and the Reformation and Anabaptism in particular is increasing both in Russia as well as East Germany." He points out that the Orenburg settlement "was not evacuated during World War II as was the case of the Mennonite colonies in the Ukraine. Consequently the Orenberg communities preserved more of the traditional characteristics of the Mennonites than those who were dispersed over the southeastern parts of Asiatic Russia." This appears to be an objective picture of Russian Mennonitism by an atheist scholar. One senses the limitations and frustrations of "evangelical" Marxist materialism in coping with this intractable community of Mennonites.

We are grateful to Diether Goetz Lichdi for sharing with us an account which is painful to tell: the Mennonite experience in Nazi Germany. He and Hans-Juergen Goertz have made a significant contribution in handling with sensitivity and honesty information which many would prefer to forget. This may be an instructive case study for Mennonites in other times and places who have been confronted with complex and difficult ethical decisions and have not always chosen the narrow road.

—The Editor

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Robert Kreider

Front and Back Cover

Advertisements from *Friedenstimme*, Russian Mennonite periodical from pre-World War I.

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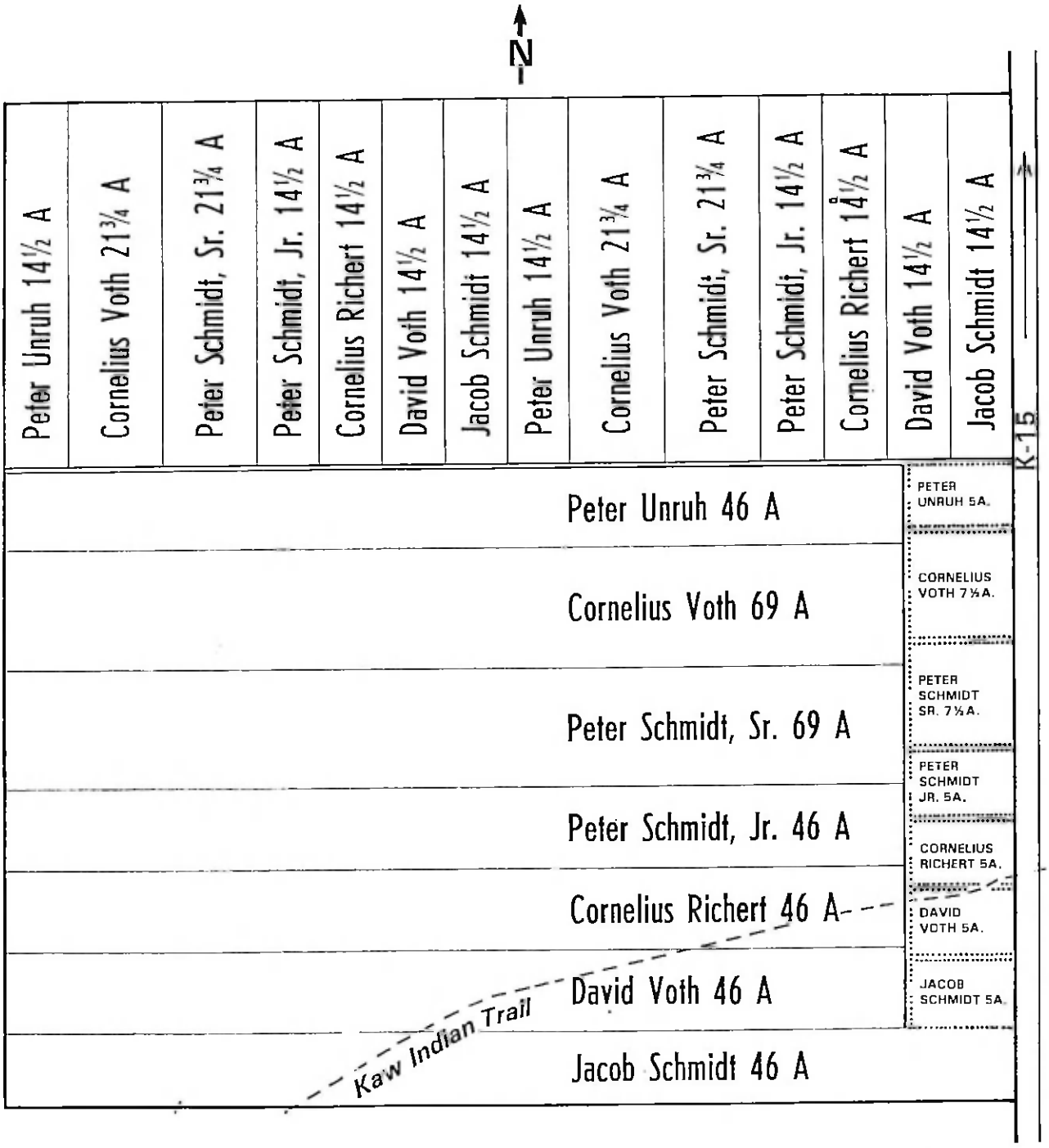
The Hochfeld Village

1874
Section 20, Menno Township
Marion County, Kansas



The Beginning of Hochfeld Village and the Alexanderwohl Church

by Peter U. Schmidt

A paper read by Peter U. Schmidt at the first Altenfest *(senior citizen gathering) in the Alexanderwohl Church, May 19, 1957. Translated from the German by P. U. Schmidt's son, Richard.*

I was born in the Alexanderwohl Village of the Molotschna colony in South Russia on December 30, 1873, Julian calendar (January 10, 1874, Gregorian calendar). My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter H. Schmidt, still not having their own household, lived in the summer room of my grandparents, Peter Schmidt. In planning the emigration, the big question was, "How to get little Peter to America." Since the journey had been long in planning, a certain Hildebrand family had had a small willow-basket cradle custom-made for their infant. When the child died, father's sister, wife of minister Heinrich Richert, bought the cradle for her little David. When that child also died and my parents considered buying the cradle, the women of the village protested, saying, "Don't lay your child into that cradle. He will also die!" Mother must not have been superstitious. At any rate, she bought the cradle and her child didn't die. At age 83, this child is still living. But eventually the women will be right. In time I will die.

As the time for departure came, my parents laid little Peter into the cradle. Father told me how with a shoulder strap fastened to each end of the cradle he carried me to America. The detachable rockers were placed under the bedding at the bottom of the cradle. The cradle is today in a glass case in the Kauffman Museum of Bethel College, North Newton. The grandparents had an adopted daughter only a few years older than I who told me she always carefully watched over me.

Left, map platted by J. A. Duerksen from information by Peter U. Schmidt. Kaw Indian trail by James Misner, Marion Co. Engineer, 1930 1969, and confirmed by Orlando Richert, grandson of Cornelius Richert.

The Hochfeld Village

The Hochfeld village on Section 20, Menno Township, Marion County, Kansas, was settled by the following families. As one drives north on Highway 15 and comes to where the hedge begins, the first building site or farmyard, was Jacob Schmidt, then David Voth, then Cornelius Richert. Then on the hill was our place, next to the grandparents, Peter Schmidt, then Cornelius Voth and last Peter Unruh. Each had 160 acres except Grandfather and Cornelius Voth who each had an extra 80 acres. The cows were communally pastured on Section 21 by a herd-boy—on foot, not horseback. The boy made the round in the village, each family keeping him in board as many days as they had cows.

Why the village acquired the name Hochfeld I do not know. It is told that when driving to Marion and coming to the hill, two and a half miles west of the town, one could easily see the seven houses. Section 20 was divided according to the Russian pattern. Each family had a five acre farmyard except Grandfather and Cornelius Voth who had 7½ acres each. Between each farmyard were two mulberry hedges and on the west side—one hedge the full length of the village. West of this hedge was a road from the south to the north end of the village, then a road west through the entire section. Joining the north-south village road each had 46 acres, except Grandfather and Cornelius Voth who each had 69 acres. Each field was a strip running east-west through the entire section. Then to the north of the east-west road at the north end of the village each had two north-south strips of 14½ acres, except Grandfather and Cornelius Voth who had 21¾ acre strips. First each had one strip, then a second time each one strip, so arranged that all had the same distance to their land.

Each had a deed to a quarter section of land (except Peter Schmidt Sr. and Cornelius Voth who each had an extra 80), but he didn't live on his quarter. This resulted in complications when paying taxes. America simply isn't Russia. Then in the year 1880 or 1881 the land was redistributed. Some houses had to be moved around. David Voth

and Peter Unruh moved over the line in Section 21, and my parents moved to the north end. Jacob Schmidt sold to Cornelius Richert and Cornelius Voth moved his house some miles north to a half section.[1] Those who had to move around each received $200 and five year use-rights to the orchards they had planted. I have never heard that there ever was any contention over the re-distribution of the land, even when one person asked for 5 2/3 acres, that is 2 5/6 acres each from two, because his land was not as good as theirs.

Farming Methods—Harvesting and Threshing

My father told how the first spring he bought five acres of green wheat in the field from one of the Old Mennonites in Spring Valley.[2] Many others bought green wheat in the field from English homesteaders. Some even rented land the second year because they still did not have plowed fields.

My first recollection is how when I was three years old Mother sowed vegetables in her garden and said to me, "This row of carrots is for Grandpa Unrau who will come from Russia." I also recall how after Grandpa had arrived I helped pull carrots and got dirt into my eyes and ran out of the garden crying.

I have only vague memory of how the first harvesting machines worked. Ours stood in back of Grandpa's hedge.[3] It resembled the reaper in the Kauffman Museum. After the wire-tying self-binders came in, things began to go a lot better than with the first ones where all bundles had to be tied by hand.

When cutting oats, intended for chopped fodder instead of threshing, the binder apparatus was taken off and a platform attachment put on for two men to stand on at a table and bind the straw by hand, then the bundles were dropped to the ground.

I clearly remember threshing with the threshing-stone. The threshing floor was prepared near the bundle stacks by removing all weeds and packing the soil hard. Then a double row of bundles, with heads overlapping in the middle was arranged in a circle. Two horses were hitched to the threshing stone and a boy placed on one horse. The men stood by with forks to pitch the straw to the side as soon as the grain was threshed out, then swept the grain to the middle. New bundles were placed on the floor and the process repeated. One wonders how many bushels per day they may have been able to thresh.[4] If a horse started lifting its tail then a hurried halt was made and a pail or shovel held under to catch the dung so it would not fall into the wheat.

The coming of the small horsepower driven threshing machines improved matters a great deal. Villages or groups of neighbors owned such machines together. They also helped each other out. I'm wondering how much such an outfit may have cost.[5] I remember that Grandpa Unrau had a shed thatched with slough grass in back of the orchard in which he kept the threshing machine.

In time small steam-driven threshing machines came in. A man from Marion threshed in Hochfeld and nearby areas with an upright-boiler engine. The engine was self-propelled and could pull the machine, but it had no steering system; horses were hitched to a tongue to guide it. In case the water-man was not handy with his horses when the machine needed to be placed differently, then a couple of harvest hands would take hold of the tongue and guide. Later bigger engines and bigger machines came into use.

On the side where the grain came out of the machine, a depression was dug into the ground so the tally box with a bushel would have room. On one side of the box was a contrivance that counted each bushel as it was slid by. The grain was all put in sacks, always three bushels per sack.[6]

Before we had granaries the grain was carried in these sacks to the second floor of the barn or house and if more room was needed then into the living room.

I may have been fourteen years old when I began holding the sack when threshing at our place, Grandfather's and Uncle David's. Sack-holding was really as one says, "a man's job," if it was hot and dusty while threshing oats and sacks filled rapidly. The empty sack had to be held just right as soon as the full sack had been taken away. As a thresherman I then could eat with the hired men and I felt quite important.

Our first horses had been bought in Topeka. They were an unmatched team; one was a small fox, the other a big brown one. I do not know that we ever had draft oxen. How soon we had our two cows or where they were from I don't know.

Father's first farm implements were a hand plow and a wooden harrow which he probably made himself. It was perhaps sixteen feet wide. I recall that Father and Grandpa did much farmwork together and I imagine they owned implements, such as their first grain drill and binder together. Whether they sowed wheat by hand during the first years I don't know. I recall that oats was sowed by hand and then harrowed under.

School and Christmas

My first school memories are from the year 1881.[7] Whether there was a Christmas tree in our school before that I cannot say. But that was my first school year and the first Christmas tree I ever saw. I gazed at that tree with highest respect. It was home-made, with branches fastened to a tinfoil-wrapped stem. Pictures and stick candy were hung in the branches. We were permitted to walk by the tree and say which picture we'd like to have, plus something else and our *Wunsch-heft* (Christmas recitation pamphlet). In those days we learned Christmas and New Year recitations which we recited to parents and grandparents on Christmas morning. The older school pupils had to copy these recitations in pamphlets called *Wunsch-heft* in German. I still have all eight of mine, also those of my wife from the Greenfield School. I preserve these pamphlets carefully.

In my time it was still customary for children to set plates on the table on Christmas Eve before go-

ing to bed. At night while we slept Santa Claus ("Christmas-Man" in Plattdeutsch) would place presents on the plates. Today children no longer believe in Santa Claus.

Church

My first church memories are of a long building and a drive through a deep creek to get there.[8] In those days we did not yet have Sunday School; children were seldom taken to church. At first we stayed at the grandparents where usually someone stayed at home. Later as we grew older we also stayed at home alone.

Which year the immigrant houses were moved to the corner where the church now stands I don't know. One was placed in a north-south direction and half of the other was attached as a east-west wing to the middle on the east side.[9] Of the other half they made a house for the *Kirchen-Vater* as the janitor was then called.

The interior arrangement was extremely simple. In the southeast corner of the east-west wing was the *Ohm-stübchen* (minister's room). In the northeast corner was the room for the mothers with infants. The remainder of the east-west wing had benches like the north-south part. The pulpit was in the middle by the west wall.[10] I cannot describe how the pulpit looked. North of the pulpit was a north-south bench for the ministers and to the south was a bench for the song leaders. The inside walls were lined with upright floor boards and the outside was covered with unpainted twelve-inch boards. There was a door at the north and another at the south end and an aisle along the middle. The outer ends of the benches were fastened down on 2 x 4's nailed to the wall. At the aisle they rested on short upright boards nailed to 2 x 4's running along the side of the aisle. This is how all church pews were—simple plank benches without backs. Early comers and certain others seated themselves at the wall so as to enjoy a back rest. Consequently one would see people seated one per bench clear to the far back. Women sat on the north and men on the south end.

A General Explanatory Report

The Santa Fe Railroad Company offered Elder Jacob Buller two sections of land as an award for settling his congregation on their land. He wanted to decline the gift but Minister Heinrich Richert said, "Take it, we have so many poor people in the congregation to whom we can divide the land." And so Elder Buller accepted Section 7, of West Branch W ½ of Section 33 and S½ of Section 35 of Menno Township from the Santa Fe Railroad Co.[11] The following families settled on Section 7: Beginning from the north, David Balzer, Heinrich Sommerfeld, Heinrich Goertz, Johann Thiessen, Johann Klassen, Jacob Schulz, Peter Wedel, Franz Goertz, Widow David Buller and Widow David Goertz. On Section 35: Cornelius Koehn. These were of the first group of 1874. Later others were given land by the congregation. Each received a 40 acre tract and we may assume that they bought additional land.

Church Building

In 1888 the immigrant house church was razed and a new church built. In 1928 the church was extensively remodeled and added to as it now stands.[12] The immigrant house lumber was built into this church wherever usable as roughboard and sheathing as we observed during the remodeling. And the church as it now stands has much of the immigrant house lumber in its structure.

Church Practices

As long as Jacob Buller was Elder all the brotherhood meetings were conducted in *Plattdeutsch*.[13] Here is how the Elder election of Peter Balzer was conducted. Elder Buller, the older ministers, and the deacons sat in the ministers' room. One at a time we all went through the room and said whom we wanted as Elder. The door was always closed behind each one until he had voiced his vote.

On May 18, 1924, we celebrated the 50th Jubilee of our immigration and on October 9, 1949, the 75th anniversary festival. The October 1949 *Mennonite Life* has a map of the farmsteads and a list of all 90 family names of the 1874 immigrants. In the next three years many more came, but after that only a few.

The church cemetery was opened in 1887. The first grave marker shows the year 1887 and the third shows February, 1888.[14]

Villages had their cemetery at one end of the row of farmsteads. Farmers who didn't live in villages had their private burial place whereever suitable, at the edge of the garden by the hedge or in the corner of the farm. The farms came into strange hands, gardens and hedges are no more. Even burial places at the ends of villages have been plowed up. Many farmers don't know at all that someone is buried on their place. When I drew the map for the October 1949 *Mennonite Life* I discovered some 35 such burial places. There may be more.

The reason why the church didn't have a cemetery from the start probably is because funerals in those days were not public in the church; they were conducted privately in the homes. Relatives whom one wanted to attend were invited by letter. Presumably this is how the custom was in Russia. It has happened that a person wanted very much to attend the funeral of a friend of his youth but couldn't go because he wasn't invited. It has also happened that a name was written so indistinctly that the letter arrived at the wrong house and the family went to the funeral. Then the host lady would say, "We haven't invited you."

With this I have described my recollections of incidents that I experienced and circumstances that occurred in Hochfeld and in our congregation. Others may have had other experiences.

NOTES

Richard H. Schmidt

[1] At this point memory played a trick on Daddy. Cornelius Voth stayed in his place until he turned the farm over to his son-in-law, Peter P. Schmidt. Voth then moved into a small retirement house directly across the road to the east. After Voth's death this small house was sold to C. C. Franz and moved two miles north. (Correction by Marie (Schmidt) Schroeder who grew up in the next house south.)

[2] I recall Father saying that the purchase was from the minister of the Spring Valley Church. Charles Diener, retired minister, said Bishop Daniel Brundage

was the minister in 1874.

3 Step-grandfather Peter Schmidt Sr.

4 By flail, a man could thresh 7 bushels a day, by stone about 23.

5 The cost is unknown. It is assumed by one authority that a horsepower machine could thresh about 150 to 200 bushels per day. Another authority places the figure at 25 to 35 bushels per hour.

6 I have a two-bushel sack of that time, inscribed in old German Gothic letters "Abraham Schmidt Hochfeld." I'll cheerfully forgive Daddy if at age 14, towards evening, that sack appeared to him as holding three bushels.

7 The Hochfeld School stood on the south side of the road, ¾ mile west of the southeast corner of the Hochfeld Village.

8 The Immigrant Houses originally stood 150 feet east and 300 feet (more or less) north of the middle of Sec. 33, Menno Township, Marion County, by the Chisholm Trail (Texas Road as our people called it). This information is from Ben Wedel Jr. who plowed around the well-opening for a number of years before it finally was filled in.

9 I can find no recorded date *when* the Immigrant House of worship was relocated to the corner. So I state 1880 as the approximate, or hypothetical date, midway between the arrival of the immigrants and the building of the church in 1886. Interestingly, in my search, I found the following four examples of *how* the building was brought to the corner.

EXAMPLE 1. Cornelius Frey published in *Der Bethesda* Herald, Nov. 15, 1941: The Alexanderwohl meeting place was the old Immigrant House, two of which were built northeast of where the church now stands and brought to the present church location after the temporary residents had moved to their land. As a house of worship the Immigrant House had a wing to the east.

EXAMPLE 2. Minister C. C. Wedel, published in *Der Herald*, April 3, 1941: The two Immigrant Houses were torn down at the original site and a more conveniently located T-shaped structure was erected at the corner where the church now stands.

EXAMPLE 3. Retired Elder Heinrich Banman: The Santa Fe Railroad gave the Immigrant Houses to the congregation and later they were used up (verbaut) in one building for the purpose of worship.

EXAMPLE 4. Father P. U. Schmidt's oral statement: One of the Immigrant Houses was sawed in half and moved to the corner. One section was placed in a north-south direction as the main building, and the other was placed as an east-west wing to the center on the east side, making a T-shaped structure at the location where the church now stands.

I am more inclined to believe father's oral statement that the north-south part was half of one building, that is 100 feet, instead of one whole 200-foot building, as the written statement implies.

One day while I was helping Ted Nikkel Sr. re-shingle his hen house, I remarked that the thickness of the rafters and sheathing boards was over-size. Ted answered that this was Immigrant House lumber that his father had bought when he built up the place. Presumably this was from the second Immigrant House in which some poor and latecomers lived for four years before they built their own homes. Some of the 1874 immigrants, on the other hand, lived only three weeks in the barrack-like Immigrant House. Did they erect some sort of primitive temporary shelter on their newly bought land or did Contractor C. B. Ruth of Halstead have their houses far enough under construction so soon?

10 Today the pulpit stands on the spot where the old pulpit stood in the 1886 structure, and to the best of our knowledge where the pulpit stood in the Immigrant House of Worship. God grant that we may also stand on the rock of the faith of our forefathers.

11 It is a well-known and commonly believed oral tradition that Elder Buller was persuaded to accept two sections of land from the Santa Fe R. R. Company, and hold it in trust for the church. Yet the Marion County Register of Deeds book, No. 12 page 592, names Heinrich Unruh and wife Anna and Heinrich Richert and wife Helena as co-recipients of all of Section 33 and all of Section 35 of Menno Township from the Santa Fe R. R. Company. Why doesn't Elder Buller's name appear here? I assume that our modest Elder said, "Brethren, since you insist upon it, go ahead and accept the land but leave me out of it!" At this time Alexanderwohl was not incorporated and no one had the authority to sign legal papers in the name of the church. So the Unruh and Minister Richert couples cosigned the Deed and faithfully held the land in trust for the church.

In 1926, our retired Elder H. Banman wrote in the *Bundesbote Kalendar* concerning this church land. "Certain quarters were sold and the money used for church purposes. And so, we have been able to finance in part building the Boarding Hall (in 1907) at the Goessel Preparatory School with money received from the sale of one of the last 40's."

I cannot ask the old settlers, they are all gone and I am unable to answer for the discrepancy between the records of the Register of Deeds that the two sections were all of 33 and all of 35, Menno, and Father P. U. Schimdt's statement that it was all of Sec. 7 West Branch and the W½ of 33 and S½ of 35, Menno. I assume that all over the settlement many lived on land to which they didn't hold the Deed and that much land was swapped around like it was in the Hochfeld Village.

I wonder how long the "Poor Village," with 40 acres per household, as stated by H. Banman, lasted on Sec. 7 W.B. before these families could move onto their own larger farms. The records of the Register of Deeds are unclear to me on this. I wonder how many held a valid deed to their 40. Again, I'd like to ask the old settlers a lot of questions.

12 Building the church in 1886 cost the congregation $6,000, and it was paid for before dedication. The remodeling cost in 1928 was $30,431.56 with an indebtedness of $12,264.16 at dedication.

13 Father P. U. Schmidt said Brotherhood meetings were conducted in an informal manner with no regard for parliamentary rules and no keeping of records. Elder Buller would simply say, "The Ohms (ministers and deacons bore the affectionate title 'Ohms'; 'Uncles' in Deutsch) and I have decided we would do thus-and-so. Brethren what do you say to this?" The silence that followed was accepted as consent. Elder Buller would then go on to the next point of consideration, and say, "The Ohms and I have decided — — —." No doubt, Elder Peter Balzer was elected by voice-vote because at that time many men in Alexanderwohl were illiterate.

14 The first grave in the Alexanderwohl Cemetery is that of Heinrich Sommerfeld, father of the great Mennonite inventor. The inscription on his marker is "Heinrich Sommerfeld 1815-1887." The church cemetery record book states the death date as 25 January 1888.

Interestingly, the first grave in the Goessel Cemetery is that of the son, Heinrich Sommerfeld, who invented the automatic train coupler and the foot-lift for the John Deere plow, and held many other patents.

The second grave is unmarked. The cemetery record states, "Elizabeth Regehr Wedel, died 31 January 1888." The third grave is that of my wife Katharina Bergen's grandmother, Anna (Voth) Goertz, died 1 February 1888, and the fourth is that of my grandmother, Anna (Schmidt) Unruh, died 11 March 1888. Our grandmothers rest side-by-side.

1911

- End of Mexican Civil War
- Coronation of King George V
- Kaiser asserts Germany's "Place in the Sun"
- Stolypin, Russian Premier, assassinated.
- Turkish-Italian War; Italy acquires Libya
- Manchu dynasty falls in China; Chinese Republic proclaimed; Sun Yat-sen elected president.
- Winston Churchill appointed First Lord of the Admiralty
- Ty Cobb batting champion with .422
- First transcontinental U.S. air flight, 82 hours
- Raol Amundsen reaches South Pole
- Parliament Act reduces power of House of Lords
- Richard Strauss: "Der Rosenkavalier"
- Irving Berlin: "Alexander's Ragtime Band"
- Nobel Prize for Chemistry: Marie Curie
- Rutherford formulates theory of atomic structure
- Charles F. Kettering develops first electric self-starter.
- Bobby Jones wins his first golf title
- German gunboat Panther arrives Agadir, Morocco; creates international tension.

Mid Point between Revolutions: the Russian Mennonite World of 1911

by Harvey L. Dyck

Harvey L. Dyck is a native of Clearbrook, British Columbia. He is Professor of History at the University of Toronto and a member of the Toronto United Mennonite Church.

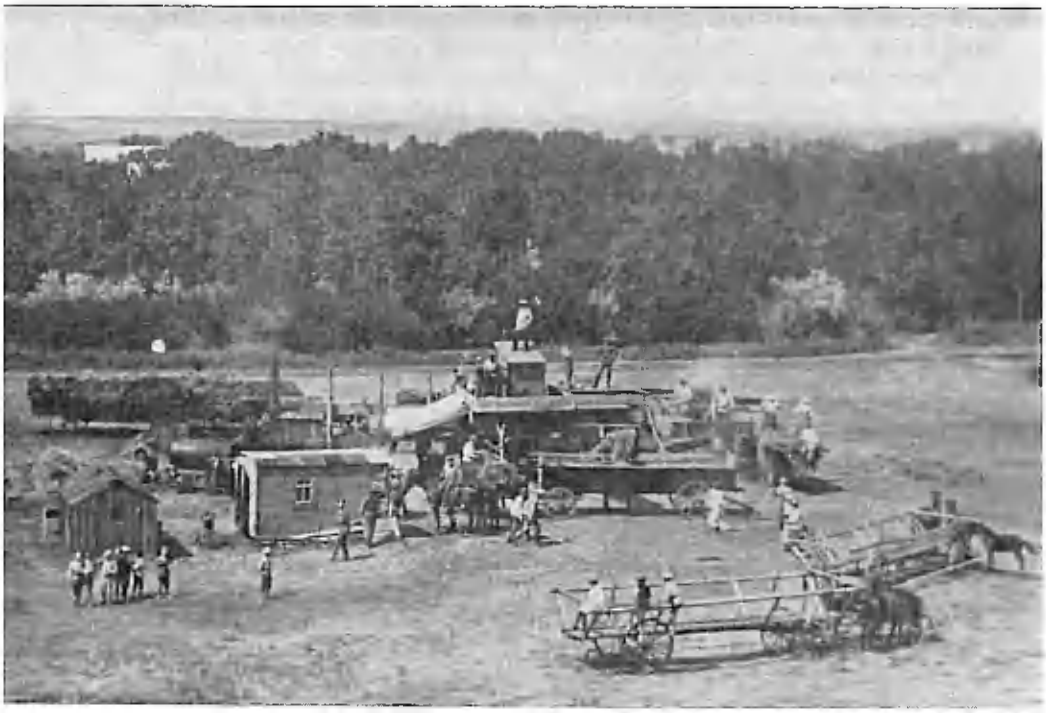
The contemporary English-language reader encounters great barriers of time and culture in trying to comprehend the complex world of Russian Mennonitism in the years immediately preceding World War I. Coffee-table photographic albums of the Russian Mennonite experience, such as those edited by Walter Quiring or Gerhard Lohrenz, offer tantalizing glimpses into this world. The modern reader sees stylized family groupings, symetrical, treed steppe villages with well-worked fields, stately orchards and woodlots, trim homesteads, substantial churches, schools and other public buildings, prosperous landed estates and expanding farm implement factories. All, however, bear mute witness to the parts of a stubbornly elusive reality. The thoughtful reader must ask, is this portrait of unruffled well-being and contentment accurate and complete? What was the relationship of the Russian Mennonites to the natural environment? What of their communal life, social and confessional divisions, poverty, or relations with the fractious, changing and unstable Imperial Russian World? What anxieties, self-images, or hopes for the future, he might ask, animated members of this society in the flush of their communal and material success and on the threshold of a sweeping revolution that would end for them in emigration, exile or death? Finally he may well wonder, is pre-revolutionary Russian Mennonitism merely a picture album "legacy to be remembered" by its biological and confessional kin, or is it deserving of more serious historical and theological reflection?

A person with such questions who turns to P. M. Friesen's recently translated *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* is unlikely to be satisfied. Friesen's study, originally published in 1911, is an historiographical landmark and has enduring value as a source of Russian Mennonite religious dissent and thought. It is also, alas, time-bound in its perceptions and appeal and seriously deficient as a general history. Although scattered through its 1065 pages of text and sources are references to most facets of Mennonite life, they are not unified in a well-defined picture.

The chief problem is Friesen's organizing concept. His pious assumption that historic change stemmed mainly from conflict between forces of moral decay and moral renewal within Russian Mennonitism itself, led him to downplay or ignore other potent internal and external forces. He thus gave little prominence to the very foundations of Mennonite community and prosperity—economics, politics and administration—and was almost silent about the larger regional and imperial contexts; these omissions leave many developments, including Friesen's exaggerated monarchism, largely unexplained. Moreover, because Mennonite religious proselytism among the Orthodox threatened to provoke the hostility of Russian nationalists, Friesen simply deleted references to the catalysing role which Mennonite example and evangelism had played in the origins and growth of Russian and Ukrainian Stundism and Baptism.

Friesen's readers in 1911 were able to fill many of these lacunae themselves, something, however, not possible for their present-day counterparts. Regrettably, the editors of the English translation, in failing to provide an informative introduction to P. M. Friesen's physical and moral worlds, are likely to have their "fervent hope" dashed that the project would "stimulate and sustain a sense of historical awareness of the 'acts and monuments' which have shaped" the lives of Russian Mennonites. One fears, on the contrary, that the general reader may well conclude in frustration, that the subject is best left to the antiquarian.

The year 1911 saw the Russian Empire awash with peaceful change and is a convenient point at which to take the measure of pre-revolutionary Russian Mennonitism. The community for which Friesen wrote was a tiny ethnic and religious minority of some 100,000 persons in a vast multinational empire of 134 million. In 1911 that Empire celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the freeing of the serfs, and remembered poignantly the assassination of Tsar Alexander II exactly three decades earlier. The year 1911 stood equidistant between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and was a time of relative tranquility. The new parliament, the Duma, after stormy beginnings had settled into uneasy routine; agriculture was in the throes of reform; illiteracy was systematically being eradicated; population pressures were being relieved through colonization of the West Siberian frontier; industry had entered a period of rapid and sustained growth; and the Empire



abroad and along its distant borders was at peace.

Yet the overall prognosis remained unclear. Historians have studied this era in detail and remain uncertain whether pre-war Russia was moving toward political and social stability or revolution. Signs of promise were matched by those of peril. Industrial upsurge was starting to provoke unrest among raw factory recruits from the villages who were coming under the influence of seasoned revolutionaries; the state's intervention in peasant institutions and land-holding was halting and provocative; and a wave of student strikes and the dismissal of hundreds of university faculty in Moscow foreshadowed trouble. At the same time, religious and ethnic minorities, which constituted fully half of Russia's population, were nettled by the sharp Russian nationalist and Orthodox bias of much legislation. The international situation as it affected Russia's vital interests was unsettled, and in the Duma, relations between government and bureaucracy, on one side, and liberal and moderate conservative constitutionalist groups, on the other, seemed headed for deadlock. Dramatizing the uncertainties in 1911, and aggravating them was the death by assassination in September of Russia's only distinguished statesman in the pre-war decade, the man who had orchestrated Russia's recovery from the 1905 disaster, and guided its advance since, Prime Minister P. A. Stolypin.

Within this setting of a bouyant economy and terrible uncertainties, much of Russian Mennonite life revolved about three central tasks: wresting a living from the often dry prairie loam while adapting to changing markets and agricultural techniques; sustaining and consolidating a range of established internal religious and communal institutions under conditions of widespread modernization; and generating effective strategies which would

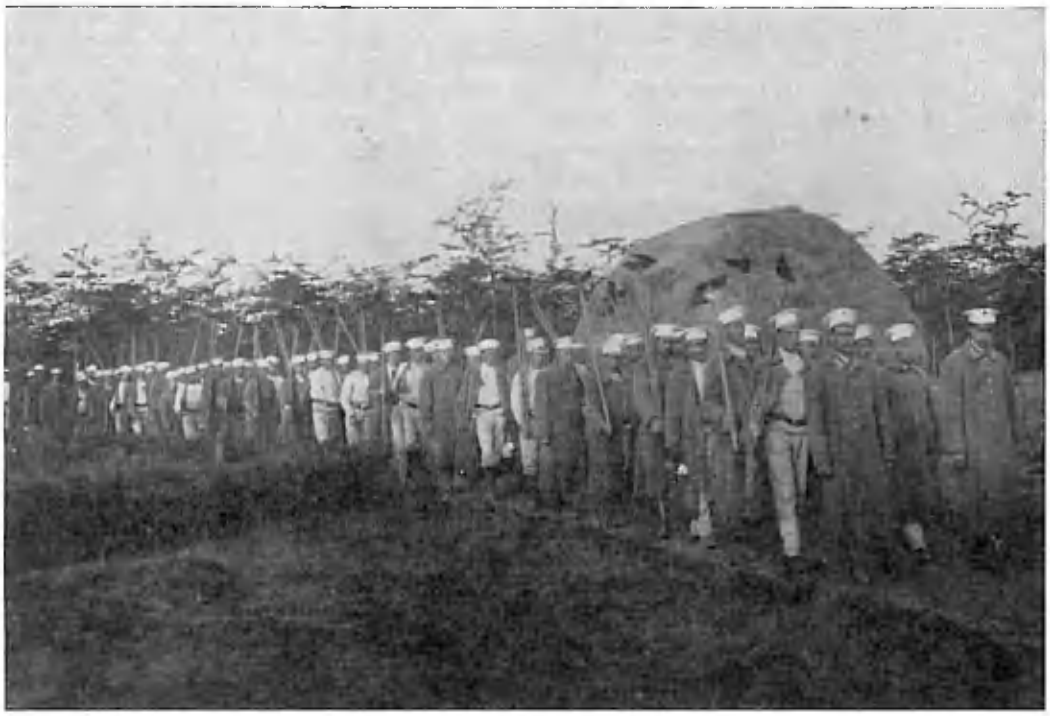
Left, scenes from South Russian Mennonite communities, circa 1911. The threshing scene is from the village of Blumenort.

command wide community support and meet the daunting challenges of rapid external political and social change.

By 1911 Mennonites were scattered over about ten European and Siberian steppe provinces. Small congregations were to be found in several smaller provincial and regional cities in the south, such as Ekaterinoslav, Alexandrovsk and Berdiansk. Numerous Mennonite families had established themselves on individual homesteads and large landed estates. In a handful of villages Mennonites, under the impact of growing large-scale milling and farm implement industries, were becoming urbanites in jobs and spirit. But the bulk of Russian Mennonites lived in 350 to 400 rural villages grouped in consolidated settlements ranging in size from several to more than 50 villages each.

Older settlements of the Black Sea plain, where Mennonite leadership and industry still centered, were linked to one another and to newer settlements in the Caucusus footlands and on the Trans-Volgan and Siberian steppes by a network of intensive communications. A common pattern of labour, schooling, local administration, alternative service and worship was its basis. Mennonite society was fully literate and so a stream of letters among kin and friends, family visits, yearbooks of community life, religious publications and an informed and well-edited press knitted together this universe of common roots, accomplishments and fears.

Mennonite leaders monitored outside developments through the reading of national and regional Russian papers and persons in many villages subscribed either to the national German daily, *Die St. Petersburger Zeitung*, or the important regional *Die Odessaer Zeitung*. Both reported from the colonies, often citing Mennonite economic, mutual aid, or educational initiatives as worthy examples for other Germans



Upper right, the town council of Halbstadt, c. 1910; the photographs, middle and lower right, are scenes from the forestry alternative service camps, Wladimirow, c. 1913.

to follow. Yet the twice-weekly Mennonite newspapers—unlike their North American ethnic press counterparts—were Russian Mennonitism's chief window on the world and Empire and, equally, were mirrors of its communal life. The brisk and sober *Der Botschafter* and more pietistical *Die Friedenstimme,* with circulation of from 3,000 to 5,000, faithfully recorded the debate and resolution of most national and communal matters of public concern. Developments in the scattered settlements, entertainingly described by lay correspondents, were central items in a press brimming with weather and market reports and features on agriculture, business, health, religion and current social issues. Stimulating letters and inquiry sections, book review columns and literary and agricultural feuilletons rounded off a solid diet of reports and commentary, set, it should be noted, within the strict limits allowed by Mennonite morality and religious orthodoxy.

The core of Russian Mennonite life in 1911 was still the agricultural economy and the stern demands of the crop cycle—plowing, harrowing, seeding and harvesting—set much of its rhythm. As mentioned, Mennonites were spread over an immense area, from Central Ukraine in the West to virgin Siberian lands in the East and from the transition zone between prairie and forest in the North to the Black Sea coastlands and Caucusus footlands in the South. But all Mennonites—villagers, farmsteaders, estate owners and those engaged in grain milling or farm machinery manufacturing—were equally dependent on the largesse of the steppe environment. Their past corporate success in mastering dry steppe cultivation through the innovations of deep plowing, summer fallowing and the introduction of various field systems had won them accolades as Russia's premier agriculturalists. For them successful tillage was thus a source of livelihood as well as a status, self-worth and self-confidence. Agriculture's imperious demands also helped shape Mennonite village layouts, community institutions and habits of cooperation. The latter was visible in communal granaries, which existed in every village as cushions against crop failures.

Granaries stood also as mute witness to a natural climate of extreme continentality with low and uncertain precipitation, extremes in temperature and unpredictable and damaging winds. In 1911, the elements of climate conspired to produce a fairly cheerless crop year. Harvest ranged from middling in the core Black Sea and the new Siberian settlements to total failure in the Caucusus and the trans-Volgan settlements of UFA, Samara, New Samara and Orenburg. At season's end the *Friedensstimme* was moved to reiterate a hard truth. Technology, it editorialized, could offset only minimally the vagaries of climate: "Despite the artifices and sciences of the century it is not yet possible for people to alter wind and weather, rain and sunshine, frost and heat. And on such, after all, do the blessings of a good crop principally depend. Crop yields, in turn, determine the weal of the merchant and the factory owner, of the artisan and the factory worker."

Unprecedented extremes of cold and heat marked the year 1911 throughout Russia and occasioned an atmosphere of gloom. In the South, in the Black Sea area, Christmas 1910 had been quite mild, with scarcely enough snow for sledding. Mid-January, however, had turned bitterly cold. Heavy snows blanketed the region to its extreme Crimean coast and temperatures had slid to record lows of minus 35 de-

Below, letterhead of the Mennonite-owned farm machinery factory in Alexandrovsk, on the Dnieper River between the Molotschna and Chortitz settlements.

grees celsius. The unexampled deep freeze had lasted almost a month. In the Crimean foothills and mountains large numbers of sheep, goats, birds and other wildlife froze to death; prices of fuel doubled in the towns and in some Tatar villages fruit trees were felled and fences broken down for fuel. But in the Mennonite villages on the southern steppe the hard winter was less taxing. The deep snows protected the winter grain from serious damage and even made possible visiting from village to village on sleighs that were able, as a village scribe wrote, "merrily to race across the steppelands." And in February the melting of the deep snows filled ponds and provided ample moisture for the fields.

But the promises of early spring were not to be realized. March was overcast and cool and seeding in the South was not finished until mid-April. A dry period in April and early May led to spotty germination, but soft soaking rains toward the end of that month sent villagers' hopes rising again, only to be deflated in June by extreme drought accompanied by dessicating winds from the southeast. Crop yields tallied in August showed only a bit more than half of what the previous good year had brought. Yet such disappointing results, it bears mentioning, where not calamitous for Mennonites in the Black Sea region given their solid economy and large reserves of grain and capital accumulated in more bountiful years. These reserves, moreover, enabled them to help their less fortunate co-religionists in the Trans-Volgan and Caucusus steppe settlements, where the year ended on a critical note.

Since 1901, when landless Mennonites from the Black Sea had settled in seventeen villages along the Terek River, they had experienced only misfortune, a pattern which continued unbroken into 1911. A harsh and snowless winter, damaging to the winter grain, was followed by a dry spring with poor germination and an attack of rust. Job-like trials continued in early summer with heavy infestations of the dreaded Hessian flies, then drought and, finally, a second bout with the rust fungi. A harvest of ten bushels, remarkable under the conditions, provided the Terekers at least with subsistance and seed.

A simpler scenario of unrelieved tropical heat from May until well into July was the common experience of the settlements of Ufa, Samara, New Samara and Orenburg. It resulted in total crop failure, the worst ever recorded in the colonies. The narrative is a familiar one. Hopes kindled by favorable spring rains had been short-lived. After Pentecost the virtual absence of precipitation and intense heat coupled with scorching winds had plunged villages into despair. Several villages had gathered to pray for rain in June. From wishing for a middling crop expectations had sunk. Perhaps a poor crop could still be salvaged, or at least bread and seed. In the end, there was no grain harvest at all save the pitiful pickings from the rethreshing of year-old straw. As the intense June heat shrivelled grain stocks, local prices for wheat and hay inched up and then soared while meat prices fell to ruinous levels. Villagers, driven to trimming their herds, shipped caravan loads of cattle to distant markets in the Black Sea area. Rains when they finally descended in August brought only marginal relief: green feed, sparse pasture, half-mature potatoes and a few vegetables. The consequence for the settlements varied. The prosperous settlements of Samara, New Samara and Ufa tightened belts and planned for the next year. But the struggling colony of Orenburg, with its eleven year history of marginal yields, faced a critical future. "According to human understanding," a news report from an Orenburg village concluded in mid-June, "there is no way to escape ruin." During the succeeding half year this crisis would put Mennonite mutual aid to a hard test.

On turning the pages of the 1911 press the reader observes a society, despite the poor crop, enjoying the benefits of technology and celebrating its triumphs, though not unreservedly. Modernity penetrated the Mennonite world in varied guises. In most settlements, it came as improved rail communications which speeded their valuable agricultural and industrial products to markets and facilitated business trips and family visits across the empire. In the Molochna, for example, Mennonites appeared as principals in the founding of the Tokmak Railroad, a regional rail company with a concession to link their area to the Azov ports in the South. Simultaneously, Mennonite business interests in Khortitsa were instrumental in improving rail communications among their own villages and implement factories and between them and the main Crimea-Ekaterinoslav-St. Petersburg line. They cheerfully noted that only 31 hours now separated Khortitsa officials and businessmen from the Imperial Residence: "The old disappears, times change and new life blossoms on our tracks. Let us now exploit these connections and travel opportunities to a degree that the rails glow as witness to the fact that we deserve a modern communications system."

A similarly bouyant psychology underlay other technological advances: the installation of new post offices and phone systems in several settlements; the paving of Khortitsa's main street leading to the county hospital; the expansion and rationalization of money services through the founding of several credit unions and banks; and the appearance in some villages of eye-catching and dust-raising German-built motor cars. A prosaic notice proclaimed the arrival of the motorized age: "Found, Sunday 5 November. An axle nut of a Opel car. Owner may claim." Johann Cornies' parental village, Orlov, Molochna, which styled itself somewhat of a pace-setter of modernity, announced the purchase of an x-ray machine for the local hospital with a typical flourish: "We proceed under the sun of progress.... How would the heart of our old Cornies leap for joy were he able to witness such enormous cultural progress in his beloved Orlow."

In keeping with Cornies' legacy as modernizing pioneer of the South Ukrainian steppe, agriculture was

clearly the main Mennonite arena in which secular progress was visible. Advertisements by prominent Mennonite implement manufacturers such as Heinrich D. Neufeld, K. Hildebrand's Sons and Priess, Lepp and Wallman and others captured the upbeat mood, offering customers a wide range of advanced plows, cultivators, seed drills, mowers, binders, threshers, fanning mills and oil presses, often in stiff competition against local dealers for international giants like Elworty or International Harvester. The electrical firm of Heinrich Epp, Ekaterinoslav, and H. H. Hamm's Halbstadt dealership for the German Otto-Deutzer motors trumpetted the electric motor as the technology of the future. Moreover, pure-bred poultry and cattle-breeding stock "of the best foreign derivation" were available from local producers and Mennonite prowess in horse breeding was annually recognized in regional competitions. As for new crops and innovative tillage methods, they were widely popularized through feature articles and agricultural supplements in the Mennonites press as well as in a new German language journal, *Der Landwirt*, which was distributed throughout the Russian-German community and contributed to regularly by Mennonites.

The sensation of the year, however, was undoubtedly the introduction of four electric motor-driven threshers in the Molochna area. Their compactness and astonishing efficiency promoted anonymous reflections entitled "Never Before" in the *Friedensstimme*, which have symptomatic worth in the picture they provide of the mingling of wonderment and uneasiness evoked by great change. The spurt-like development of harvesting technology provided benchmarks of progress. A scant half century earlier, Russian Mennonites had gaped at the productivity of the newly invented threshing stone, a "mighty epoch-making, step forward." "The stone will long continue to roll in Russia," the article predicted. "But I know of only one that is still in use in our village. The machines have supplanted them." And now the elec-thresher: "If only our ancestors knew."

Electric threshers were symbols, the article indicated, of a rural Mennonite context being transformed beyond recognition by electric lights, running water, sewing machines, centrifuges and a panoply of widely used field implements. "Were grandfather (or greatgrandfather) to rise from his grave and

Bezugsbedingungen: durch die Dorfpost: 1 Exemplar Rbl. 2.75, 2—9 Exemplare à Rbl. 2.50, 10—25 Exemplare à Rbl. 2.35. Durch die Kronspost: 1 Exemplar Rbl. 3.—, 2—9 Exemplare à Rbl. 2,75, 10—25 Exemplare à Rbl. 2.50.

Anzeigen für die dreimal gespaltene Petitzeile das 1. Mal 15 Kop., jedes weitere Mal 10 Kop. Bei größern Aufträgen Rabatt.

compare such cultural progress with that old world of less than a century ago, in which he had laboured as best he could, he too would be stupified with wonder." But before departing for heaven, the author fantasized, the envoy of time past might well pose an anxious query (while recognizing that all villages from the Crimea to Siberia were not at the same high technical level):

> You have become very clever and are rich in possessions, understanding and needs. But tell me, are all landowners and their families bound for the Golden City? Do all of you in the village love one another with unfeigned love? How do you conduct yourselves at village assemblies? Or has culture and progress made you only clever without making you better?

Modernity, with its shrinking of distances, administrative centralization, population rise, social disorganization, mobility and urban growth, also had a underside, which evoked more than general disquiet, however. In 1911, the saga of the incorporation of the village of Schönwiese into the Dnieper city of Alexandrovsk (Zaporozhe today) let Russian Mennonites experience the hurt of lost identity that accompanies urbanization. Schönwiese was located hard on Alexandrovsk's southern edge and directly across the Dnieper river from the rest of the Khortitsa settlement. As a booming centre of Mennonite milling and farm implement industries, it was a natural extension of Alexandrovsk and had, in 1905, shared its tumultuous fate as revolutionary demonstrations spilled into its streets and factories spreading fear and disruption.

For six years Alexandrovsk city fathers eyed Schönwiese's strategic location and great wealth. It stood, they said, in the path of their natural development, enjoyed benefits without sharing costs and would itself reap advantages from amalgamation such as electric lighting, water, paved streets and improved policing services. The Schönwiese elite spurned such advances through disciplined rear-guard action. Uncompromising village assembly resolutions were passed and the prominent village industrialists Johann Lepp and Jacob Niebuhr sent to St. Petersburg to lobby members of the Council of Ministers, a task also undertaken by Hermann Bergmann, a wealthy Mennonite estate owner and Duma representative. Faced finally with the inevitable and amidst noisy dispute in the Alexandrovsk and Mennonite press, Schönwiese negotiated the best terms it could and mourned its fate. An Imperial decree of August 7 confirmed Schönwiese's absorption. *Der Botschafter* lamented: "The beautiful meadow, which for 114 years lay picturesquely along the route of the southern rail line is lost now and for evermore. And although it is located at the same spot it does in reality no longer exist."

The sense of growing vulnerability, and diminished intimacy and control contained in these words was likewise reflected in modern forms which accidents and crimes were beginning to assume a part, too, of the worrisome underside of the new age. To be sure, misfortunes, such as fires, and accidents and petty thefts, still took traditional form. They were unfortunate, even tragic, but familiar and hence reassuring. Farm buildings rather than homes tended to feature in stories of fires. Thus in a Molochna village a widow Friesen watched helplessly as a summer wind-driven fire swept through her machine shed and barn and destroyed her threshing machine, at a loss of 5,000 rubles. Similarly, a certain aged Jacob Unrau's shed, barn and hay and straw stacks as well as his beef cow were the victims of fire while he was away on a family visit.

Somewhat mysteriously, a fire which consumed the flour mill of A. P. Rogalsky in the Russian village of Svobadnoie was reported to have been set by N. Koselskaia, his cook. Arson of a more worrisome kind was also suspected in a spectacular fire on the Island of Khortitsa. "It was frightening to see," a witness from the island reported. "It was as though we were encircled by fire ... as if the whole village were burning." Flames had first appeared in a windmill dominating one end of the village, then in Abraham Klassen's straw pile at the other. Finally, strawstacks along a low overlooking hilltop flickered and burst into flame. The night was windless and the fires were extinguished with minimal loss, but uneasiness remained. The unanswered question was, were the arsonists Mennonite vandals or Ukrainians from nearby villages and how secure was property for the future?

A population of 100,000 has its share of accidental deaths. Most accidents reported in 1911 still triggered ritualized community grief and stereotyped warnings against carelessness. Typical were the cases of two young Froese boys who broke through the spring ice of a creek while skating and drowned, of a young high school student who accidentally killed himself while cleaning his rifle, of a factory worker, A. Goosen, who fatally wounded his wife, a mother of young children, under like circumstances, and of a miller who was crushed to death between a belt and a pulley. Especially sorrowful was the death in a newly founded Siberian village of Suse Wiens, an infant of two, who tripped into a vat of boiling water within sight of her horrified mother.

Mennonites in 1911 were, however, less certain of how to respond to incidents of violence and crime. In the villages, to be sure, cattle and horse rustling and petty thievery was rare and easily controlled by the almost universally instituted paid night watchman. Furthermore, peer pressure, publicly applied, set close limits to much Mennonite wrong-doing. For example, when two Mennonites ran off without paying a Russian peasant for driving them from the train station to their village an anonymous letter appeared in the *Botschafter*. Their names would be published, it warned, if they refused to make restitu-

Left, masthead of the Friedenstimme, *South Russian Mennonite periodical, 1910.*

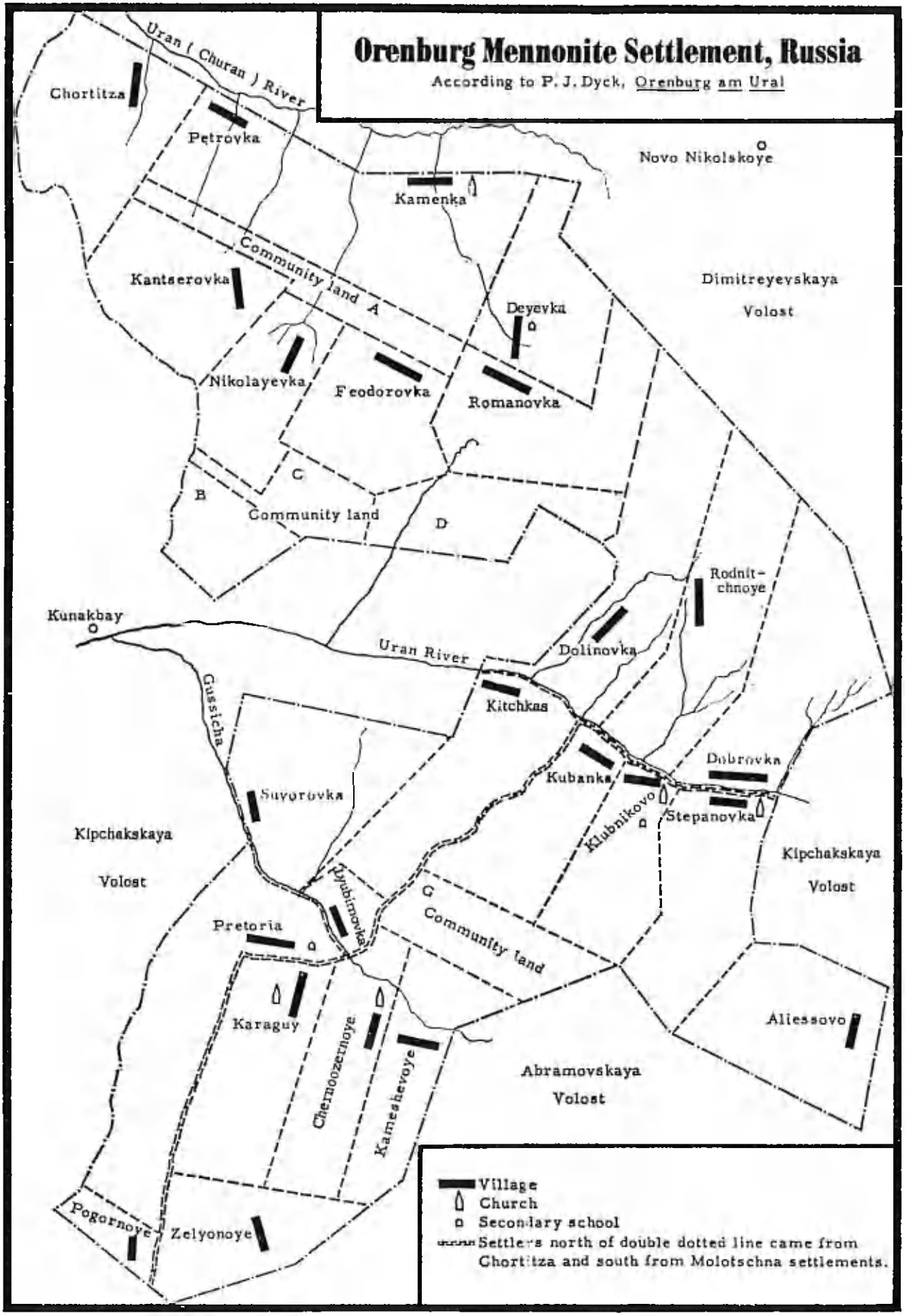
tion. Several village brawls ended in the courts. One that had drawn blood aroused editorial comment: "For Shame! Our youth is now involved in affairs with knives. Brutality assumes ever more crasser forms to the point... where it is necessary to ask, what can we offer our youth after they have left school to keep them off the streets and to prevent such brutalization?"

Lawlessness and violence from outside the community was, naturally, less amenable to such remedies and hence more disquieting. Yet to contemporaries the trends here were not quite clear. On the one hand, mass revolutionary violence was continuing to ebb from its crest of 1905-1906, to judge by the barometer of May Day peace. A story datelined Schönwiese noted that the industrializing city of Alexandrovsk had spent that day in church for picnicking under a clear sky. For the first time in a decade May Day had thus passed without becoming a feared spectre of only "murder, arson, and Jew-baiting." At the same time, however, crime and banditry seemed on the rise. In 1911, Ekaterinoslav recorded increases over the preceding year in the number of break ins, robberies, arsons, murders and attempted murders and Berdiansk and Alexandrovsk showed similar trends.

Armed holdups of the greatest variety were common, did not spare Mennonites and bred an atmosphere of uneasiness. In Berdiansk, for instance, thieves broke into the home of a Dr. A. Pankratz, who had only recently moved his practice from the villages into the city, and stole

clothes, linens, an alarm clock and cash. J. Niebuhr, a wealthy industrialist, was the object of an unsuccessful armed robbery in his home. Four men cut telephone wires, overwhelmed his coachmen and then with drawn guns forced their way into his dining room where they found him and his family at table. The terrified screams of his children frightened them away. More successful was a daring train robbery on the tracks just outside of Alexandrovsk. On a November afternoon armed bandits occupied a coach in which P. Hamm, the business manager of the Heinrich D. Neufeld farm implement enterprise, was riding, seized his strongbox with 5,930 rubles, pulled the emergency brake and fled.. Nor were villages immune to outside depredations. There were cases reported of Mennonites on buggies or with loads of grain being robbed enroute to market. But the crime which sent a shudder of cold fear through all of the settlements involved a settler in the struggling colony of the Terek river, close to the Caucasus. A certain Heinrich Peters, a poor settler who did cartage work to supplement his field income, was found dead between two Mennonite villages, his shirt collar and throat slashed cleanly and his horses and wagon gone. (To be continued)

Below, advertisements from the pages of Friedenstimme *and* Christlicher Familien Kalender, *South Russian annual almanac, 1911.*


Orenburg Mennonite Settlement, Russia
According to P. J. Dyck, Orenburg am Ural
Uran (Churan) River
Chortitza
Petrovka
Novo Nikolskoye
Kamenka
Community land A
Kantserovka
Dimitreyevskaya Volost
Deyevka
Nikolayevka
Feodorovka
Romanovka
B
C
Community land
D
Rodnit-chnoye
Kunakbay
Uran River
Dolinovka
Gusicha
Kitchkas
Dobrovka
Kubanka
Suvorovka
Klubnikovo
Stepanovka
Kipchakskaya Volost
Kipchakskaya Volost
Pretoria
Community land
Karaguy
Chernoozernoye
Kameshevoye
Alessovo
Abramovskaya Volost
Pogornoye
Zelyonoye
Village
Church
Secondary school
Settlers north of double dotted line came from Chortitza and south from Molotschna settlements.

The Orenburg Mennonites, 1972: A Soviet Description

by N. I. Il'inykh

N. I. Il'inykh, a member of the Department of History and Theory of Atheism of Moscow University, based on a 1972 field study. The English title of the article which appeared in the Fall 1972 issue of Soviet Sociology *was "Peculiarities of the Organization and Activity of Mennonite Congregations."*

Among the religious groups whose ideology and activity have been inadequately dealt with in our literature is the Mennonite sect, which is widespread among the German population in a number of regions [*oblast*] in our country (Kazakh SSR, Altai Krai, Orenburg, Tomsk, and other oblasts).

The present article is written on the basis of data obtained by an expedition sent by the Department of History and Theory of Atheism of Moscow University to Orenburg Oblast, and also as the result of investigations of Mennonite congregations by the author in Kemerovo Oblast, Altai Krai, and the Kazakh SSR. Orenburg Oblast is of particular interest to a scientific expedition of atheists not only because it contains many widespread religious currents (Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Baptists, the Old Believers) but also because dying religious groups such as the Khlysty, Dukhobors, Molokans, and the like are still strong there. The Mennonites hold a special place in the conglomeration of religious organizations in the oblast. The field party paid special attention to the organization, ideology, and functioning of the sect. The sociological studies conducted in the Mennonite congregations permitted the field party to make concrete recommendations for improving atheist work among Mennonite sectarians.

The weakening of atheist activity during the war and early postwar years made it possible for the leaders of the Mennonite sect to direct the perfectly natural striving for national unity of the Germans in the USSR into the channel of religion. During that period, the Mennonite sect became a special form of expression of the nationalism that was aroused among a part of the German population. It is therefore no accident that certain nonreligious Germans began to call themselves Mennonites. For them "Mennonite" and "German" became identical concepts.

The large number of Mennonite congregations in Orenburg Oblast is also to be explained by the traditional geographical distribution of the Mennonites. The first Mennonite colonies (settlements) appeared there in the second half of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century there were already about forty German villages in Orenburg,[1] whose population confessed the Mennonite faith. The Mennonite settlements lived self-contained lives with their own form of social order, daily routine, and traditions. This distinctive feature of the German villages of Orenburg persists in some measure to this day. In order for atheist training to be effective, it is necessary to choose forms and methods of work that take into consideration the material conditions of life, the ethnic background, age, sex, and other features of members of religious communities.

There is a certain correlation among the material status, daily life, and religious beliefs of the population, but this correlation is not direct. It is mediated by ideological attitudes and views that have established themselves in the immediate environment of the individual. Therefore, in the German villages, although the economic position of the collective farms is good, and the daily needs of the collective farmers are relatively well taken care of, we encounter cases of high levels of religious belief. Thus, investigations by the Central Statistical Bureau in Orenburg Oblast in 1961 and 1962 show that income per family member at the Karl Marx Collective Farm of the then Sorochinsk Raion of Orenburg Oblast was 119.6 rubles in the first half of 1961, and 138.1 in the first half of 1962. At the "Frunze" Collective Farm of Novo-Sergievskii Raion it

was 194.4 in the first half of 1961, and 207.0 in the first half of 1962. The Zhdanov Collective Farm of Aleksandrovskii Raion, Orenburg Oblast, is also a highly developed enterprise. In 1960, the collective farm provided the government with 500,000 poods of grain, 16,000 centners of milk, and 4,500 of meat. The collective farm's income was 1,300,000 rubles. All of its villages had electricity and wired radio service. (a)

Despite the high material level of the collective farmers on these farms, the Mennonites were quite active there. This is to be explained by the lack of properly conducted atheist activity in the German villages.

Sociological surveys conducted in Orenburg Oblast show that, unlike other religious currents and sectarian groups in the USSR, a majority in the Mennonite congregations are young and middle-aged people. A survey of the age composition of the members of the sect showed that approximately 70 percent of the members of the congregations consisted of believers under 50 years of age. Thus, in the congregation in Suzanovo village there are 145 members. They include:

45 persons under 30 years of age,
59 between 30 and 40,
14 between 40 and 50,
12 between 50 and 60, and
15 over 60.

Thus, sectarians under 50 years of age are 88.1 percent of the total in Suzanovo village.

Of 145 surveyed members of the Pretoria congregation there are:

12 under 30 years of age,
59 between 30 and 40,
21 between 40 and 50, and
53 over 50.

So, in the Pretoria congregation as well, 63.4 percent of the sect are persons under 50.

In the congregation of Kichkassy village, 42 of the 72 members of the sect were surveyed. The survey showed the congregation to contain:

4 persons under 30,
12 between 30 and 40,
12 between 40 and 50, and
14 over 50.

i.e., 66.6 percent are people under 50.

In Stepanovka village, 65 of the 81 members of the congregation were surveyed. The survey showed the sect to contain:

16 persons between 20 and 30 years of age,
19 between 3 0and 40, and
14 between 40 and 50.

In the congregation in Stepanovka village, people under 50 comprised 75.4 percent of the total number of members.[2]

The sociological studies conducted in Mennonite congregations show that the opinion prevalent in atheist circles in our country that people of advanced years predominate among the religious is not applicable to the Mennonite sect. Here a majority of the members are young and middle-aged.

The leaders of the Mennonite congregations, taking into consideration the age composition of the faithful, have recently reexamined the makeup of their preaching staff. In addition to old and experienced preachers, they are involving more and more young people in the leadership of the sect. Today they make up not less than one half the leadership of the Mennonite congregations. Thus, of 19 preachers in Novo-Sergievskii Raion there are:

4 under 30,
8 under 40,
2 between 40 and 50, and
5 over 50.

In atheist work with Mennonites, it must be borne in mind that each age group has its distinctive features. True, the degree of religiosity is not always related to age; but, nonetheless, the believers of the older generation, born before the October Revolution, are entirely unlike those who received their upbringing in the years of Soviet power.

The entire Mennonite community may be divided into three groups by age and degree of religiosity. The first group consists of the elderly (over 60) who were born and raised under Tsarism. As a rule, they regularly attend prayer meetings. If there is no functioning Mennonite congregation where they live, they travel periodically to other communities for the satisfaction of their religious needs. Many of them correspond with relatives in the United States, Canada, West Germany, and other capitalist countries. They all have Bibles and religious songbooks, and a good understanding of the teachings of the sect. The older generation of Mennonites are intolerant of atheists and are inclined to idealize Mennonite life under Tsarism. All Mennonites are literate (the majority have had three or four years of schooling). Despite the small numbers of this age group, it is the backbone of the sect and enjoys great influence among the faithful. Its fanaticism, reinforced by the traditional unconditional obedience to the eldest within the family, presents a great danger to young people brought up in the families of Mennonites of the older generation.

Believers of the middle generation (up to 50) are the most numerous category. All of them were drawn into the sect during the Soviet years. Most of them accept the ideology of our society as their own, and are therefore inclined to make compromises between their religious convictions and the communist worldview. Their level of education is low compared to that of the surrounding population (fourth to sixth grades).

Young people constitute a considerable portion of the Mennonite congregations. Their religious views consist of fragmentary ideas obtained from the older generation. The entry of young people into the sect can be explained by established traditions according to which each individual, upon attaining the age of 18, was required to accept Mennonite baptism, and by the active influence of the older, religious members of the family and of the Mennonite preachers. In addition, entry of young people into the sect has been facilitated by the poor atheist propaganda and the unsatisfactory work of mass cultural and educational institutions in the Mennonite settlements. The field party conducting the sociological study among Mennonites in Orenburg Oblast tried to determine the percentage relationship between men and women in the congregations.

The investigation showed that in

this regard the Mennonite sect differs from all other religious groups. Here the notion that women predominate within the sects is not applicable. True, here too women outnumber men. But although in other religious bodies women are 75 to 85 percent of the total, in the Mennonite congregations they come to little more than 50 percent. Thus in the Pretoria congregation, the total membership of 145 contains 77 women and 68 men, women thus amounting to 53.1 percent. In Kubanka village, women number 58.3 percent. In the congregation in Rodnichnoe village, women make up only 42.9 percent.

The large percentage of men in the Mennonite congregations can be explained fundamentally by the same factors as the presence of a large number of young people. It is also worth recalling the fact that many men, upon completing their service in the labor army and returning to their permanent places of residence, join the religious sect under the influence of religious propaganda.

The policy of the Mennonite leadership according to which religious Mennonites should be isolated from the cultural life of Soviet society has made the level of development of the bulk of the believers lower than that of unbelievers. An investigation of the 145 member Mennonite congregation in Pretoria village, Orenburg Oblast, showed that it included:

illiterates—1,
with 4 years or less of schooling—76,
with 5 years—26,
with 6 and 7 years—36, and
with 8 and 9 years—7.

Thus, there are 102 persons (over 70 percent) of the congregation who have no more than 5 years of schooling, and not one member with secondary education.

In Petrovka village (a "Brotherly Congregation"—Mennonite Brethren) (*b*), not one of the 17 members has more than 4 years of schooling. In Kantserovka village, of 9 persons there are 2 functional illiterates and 7 with four years of schooling. In Zhdanovka village (a "Brotherly Congregation"), of 20 persons, 13 have primary education, and 7 have seven years of schooling. In that same village, not one of the seven members of the church congregation has more than four years of schooling. In the congregation of Zelenovka hamlet, 10 of the 13 members of the sect, or 77 percent, have four years of school. In the congregation of Karagui settlement, 32 persons of 40 (80 percent) have four years of schooling. The congregation in Suvorovka village has 67 members. Of them, 50 persons (74.3 percent) have less than six years of schooling. Of the 110 members of the Mennonite congregation in the town of Iurga, Kemerovo Oblast, 22 are functional illiterates, 46 have had 2 to 4 years of school, and 42 have had 5 to 8—i.e., here, too, 68 percent of the members of the sect have no more than four years of schooling. No Mennonite has a higher or a specialized secondary education. Among them there is not a single engineer, agronomist, economist, or animal-husbandry specialist. As a rule, they work as general laborers and rarely as farm machinery operators. The Mennonites camouflage their backwardness, in the cultural and political sense, by the illusion of religious exclusiveness and an invented superiority over unbelievers and those of other faiths.

Although there is no central Mennonite headquarters in the USSR, the leaders of the sect nonetheless try to provide some central direction for the activity of the Mennonite congregations. The congregations of Mennonites in some raions or groups of raions are headed by a senior presbyter, whose duties include supervision of the presbyters of other congregations, their training, and consecration. Thus in Orenburg Oblast, there were senior presbyters in Sorochinskii, Novo-Sergievskii, and Aleksandrovskii raions, in each of which approximately ten Mennonite congregations were functioning. To exchange experience in their activity, the preachers visit back and forth at prayer meetings in other congregations. In some parts of the country, Mennonite congregations have not only mutual relations but close contacts with Baptist congregations. The erasing of ideological and organizational differences is a characteristic of the development of religious sects in our country. This tendency led to the unification of the Evangelicals, Baptists, and some Pentecostals in the years 1944-1945. In October 1963, a congress of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists [ECB] took place in Moscow, at which one of the sects of the Mennonites—the Brotherly Congregation — formally joined the ECB and abandoned certain postulates of their faith.

In Kazakhstan, joint Baptist-Mennonite congregations have been functioning on a de facto basis since 1947-1950. In Altai Krai, many Mennonites of the Brotherly Congregation began to refer to themselves as Baptists long before formal adherence to the ECB alliance took place; but they retained their Mennonite teachings. In Orenburg Oblast, the attempt to bring about unification began in the first postwar years.

The reasons for unification must be sought in the conditions of our life. Unification is promoted, above all, by the moods of the faithful themselves, and by changes in their ideology which have occurred in recent years as the result of improvement in economic conditions and ideological work in the German villages. The believers are no longer content with certain provisions of their faith which conflict with their own interests (refusal of military service, prohibitions against participation in public life, and use of the achievements of modern science and culture).

The formal affiliation of the Brotherly Congregation of Mennonites with the ECB was facilitated by the similarity of beliefs, rituals, and preaching. Thus, the Mennonite Brotherly Congregations have a baptism ritual identical to that of the Baptists — total immersion — while the Mennonites [sometimes called "Church Mennonites"] are baptized by sprinkling or dousing in prayer houses. The breaking of bread takes place among Mennonites of the Brotherly Congregation, as among Baptists, on the first Sunday of each month; while among

the Mennonites, it occurs twice a year. The German Baptists exercised a major influence on the development of the Brotherly Congregation in Russia. German Baptists took an active part, for example, in the organization of the Einlage Brotherly Congregation. The Brotherly Congregation adopted the Baptist form of organization and took over techniques of practical and missionary activity. From its earliest origins it was in the very closest relations with the Baptists, accepted baptism from Baptist preachers, conducted baptism in Baptist congregations, and participated jointly with the Baptists in prayer meetings.

In 1873-1876, the Brotherly Congregation of Mennonites in Russia obtained its first statement of belief from the Baptists, which was introduced in final form in 1901. It is a virtually literal transcription of the teachings of the German Baptists.

The Brotherly Mennonites have more in common with the Baptists than with the ... Mennonites. In commentaries on the profession of faith of the Brotherly Congregation we read: "We consider the Baptist congregation to be 'living,' i.e., an assembly of children of God ... their differences from our beliefs do not prevent us from having sincere communion, or even assembling with them to break bread, and having teachers from them among us sometimes to bring order into the affairs of the congregation. And this is because they:

"a) profess the same faith as we;

"b) baptize only ... by immersion;

"c) expel from the society for an indeterminate period, until real changes and correction take place in them, members who engage in disorderly behavior;

"d) the entire organization of their congregation (or church) is identical with that of our society."[3]

The bases of the sect's beliefs have undergone no serious changes during the period of its existence. However, recently two tendencies have been observable in the Mennonite movement in the USSR. On the one hand, a considerable part of the Mennonite leadership is trying to maintain the old, traditional dogmas and methods of work. On the other hand, there is a notable attempt to adapt themselves to the new conditions of our life. The adaptive tendencies affect all aspects of the religious life of the Mennonite congregations. Without changing the essence of their belief, the Mennonite leadership is seeking a means of ironing out its most absurd aspects, and providing a new and more "rational" interpretation of certain provisions in the Bible, and so forth.

In recent years, the Mennonite leadership has fundamentally taken the course of loyalty toward the Soviet government, and no longer categorically insists (as was previously the case) on refusal of military service.

In atheist activity among Mennonite sectarians, it is necessary to consider the distinctive features of this group and the special aspects of their faith, rituals, and practical activity.

In developing techniques and forms of atheist activity suitable for overcoming vestiges of Mennonite belief, the following circumstances must be borne in mind:

1) German nationalism among a certain portion of the Mennonite sect;

2) the connections between the Mennonites living in the USSR and Mennonite organizations abroad;[4]

3) the great strength and vitality of Mennonite traditions among the German population.

The difficulty of atheist activity among Mennonite sectarians is increased by the lack of qualified propagandists of atheism of German nationality.

Local teachers of atheism usually have little familiarity with the history of the sect, with the trends in it, with its world view, and with the tactic of adaptation to life in our country. They often number considerably fewer than religious preachers. Thus in the years 1961-66, several Mennonite congregations, with a total of over 400 members, functioned in the former Perevolotskii Raion of Orenburg Oblast. There were 35 preachers in these congregations. Each preacher engaged in active religious propaganda in his place of residence not only among members of the sect but also with the non-believing population. Until 1962, there were virtually no competent experts in those raions capable of conducting active atheist work among Mennonites.

The tasks of improving atheist propaganda rest, above all, on personnel. Without training qualified specialists of German nationality, it is impossible to organize a concrete, purposeful atheist offensive among Mennonites. An atheist lecturer of German nationality is regarded by the people as "one of their own." Many questions are put to him, people argue with him, willingly engage in conversations with him, and so forth. It appears to us that it would be desirable to establish month-long or six-week courses to train lecturers and propagandists for work among Mennonites in places where they are most numerous (Orenburg and Perm Oblasts, Altai Krai, the Kazakh SSR, etc.). It would be desirable to enroll in such courses the best prepared atheists — people familiar with the activity of other sectarian groups, who have a perfect knowledge of German (specifically, the Plattdeutsch dialect). The initiative taken by the Altai Krai Committee of the CPSU, which has in recent years conducted seminars with propagandists of atheism working among the German population, deserves approval. These seminars are useful in helping to uncover interoblast and interrepublic ties between the Mennonite leadership and their missionary and propagandist activity. Familiarity with the connections and methods of missionary and propagandist activity among the leaders of the Mennonite communities will help in planning concrete means for overcoming vestiges of religion among one of the most fanatical religious sects in our country—the Mennonite.

In atheist work among Mennonites, it is important to remember that many of them correspond regularly with relatives abroad. Thus, of 49 of these sectarians in Kubanka village, 15 or 30.6 percent, corres-

pond with Mennonite relatives living abroad. The letters from abroad are quite diverse. Some of them are written at the dictation of certain agencies to propagandize "the foreign heaven," while others contain truthful descriptions of the catastrophic situation of plain people abroad. In the hands of an able propagandist, these letters can become splendid material for exposing the falsity of imperialist propaganda. Many of these letters are more persuasive than any lecture, and can dispel the idea of a "heaven abroad" which is current among many Mennonites.

The pro-emigration and nationalistic propaganda of Mennonite leaders must be countered with propaganda about the advantages of socialist society over capitalist, and a presentation of the real picture of economic and political life in the United States, West Germany, and other capitalist countries.

In educational work with the Mennonite faithful, special attention must be given to questions of socialist internationalism and Soviet patriotism, and a profound explanation of the essence of the Leninist nationality policy. It is necessary to use concrete examples to demonstrate the reactionary nature of the nationalist propaganda of certain Mennonite leaders.

The high percentage of young people in the Mennonite sect makes it obligatory that atheists direct special attention to educational work among the young people. Here a special role must be played by our Soviet schools in cultivating industriousness, collectivism, internationalism, love of country, and a striving for knowledge, in an effort to make them active, conscious builders of communism.

Mennonite believers generally have a good knowledge of the Bible, and this cannot be left out of consideration in work with them. A propagandist of atheism must himself be well equipped with knowledge of the Bible. Only thus will he be able to help the believer find the contradictions in the Bible and understand their essence.

In atheist work with Mennonites, it is necessary to deal with the fact that there are two principal currents in the sect: the . . . New Mennonites and Old Mennonites. The formal adherence of the Brotherly Congregation of Mennonites [New or Mennonite Brethren] to the sect of Evangelical Christians and Baptists does not mean that all members of the Brotherly congregation have completely abandoned the distinguished features of their [Mennonite] faith.

Religious Mennonites do not attend non-Mennonite public gatherings. In addition, certain categories of believers (watchmen, railroad siding switchmen, trackwalkers) are unable, because of the nature of their jobs, to attend gatherings for atheist purposes. As a consequence, work with people on an individual basis may prove to be the most effective form of education in atheism. It is important that atheists who have authority among the population, and who live and work alongside believers, be involved in this activity. With this object, one might use the experience of assigning village propagandists to groups of ten homes during election campaigns. Individual work with believers cannot be left to the personal initiative of propagandists of atheism. This is a pressing concern for Party, trade union, mass cultural and enlightenment organizations, educational institutions, branches of the "Znanie" lecture society, and the like. Party organizations must direct this work. A decisive condition for successful individual work with believers is that it be properly organized and, above all, that personnel be correctly chosen and assigned.

Explanatory work alone is not enough if the religious traditions of the Mennonites are to be overcome in the life of the German population. Necessary conditions toward that end are extensive involvement of believers in the productive work and civic functioning of the personnel of collective and state farms and of enterprises, and general improvement in all ideological, cultural, and educational work. A special place in this regard must be occupied by the shaping of new Soviet socialist traditions among the German population. Such customs as ceremonial celebration of maturity, Soviet wedding ceremonies, baby naming ceremonies, new Soviet local holidays, Livestock Workers' Day, Farm Equipment Operator's Day, Harvest Day, the Day of Labor, and so forth, which have become traditions in many places, could play a useful role in winning German youth in the USSR to atheism. The wedding ceremony that has become part of the life of a number of communities in various oblasts deserves attention. This ritual counters the traditional wedding rituals of the Mennonites, an integral component of which are speeches by the heads of Mennonite congregations, who preach unity with God and the sinfulness of life on earth.

The Mennonite ideology will be completely overcome if the general public of the cities, villages, and settlements with German populations participate in the struggle against it, and if the diverse and effective forms of individual and mass atheist activity developed by propagandists of atheism in our country are ably employed.

Editor's Notes

a) The village is provided with one radio receiver, and programs are piped into the individual houses.

b) The "Brotherly Congregations" or simple "Brethren" [Mennonite Brethren] are the less conservative of the two main bodies of Mennonites in the Soviet Union: they tend toward the Baptist movement in theology and organization.

Notes

[1] Three raions of Orenburg Oblast contain 36 villages of purely German population. These are old German colonies, founded in the 1890s.

[2] It is suggestive that sociological investigations of the age composition of the Mennonite sect conducted by the author in other oblasts of the USSR yield approximately the same results. Thus in the Mennonite congregation of Iurga in Kemerovo Oblast, 60 percent of the members are less than fifty years of age. In the Mennonite community in Karaganda, over 52 percent of the members are under fifty.

[3] S. D. Bondar', *Sekta menonitov v Rossii*, St. Petersburg, 1916, p. 155.

[4] In many foreign countries with Mennonite populations, there are central committees of the sect, subordinate to the World Conference of Mennonites: the Mennonite Central Committee . . . in the United States, the Vereinigung Deutscher Mennonitengemeinden in West Germany, the European Evangelism Committee in West Germany, and so forth. According to H. Bender, President of the World Conference of Mennonites, there are presently over 400,000 Mennonites in various European, African, and American countries. See Bender, "Mennoniten," *Weltkirchenlexicon, Handbuch der Okumene, Stuttgart*, 1960, p. 905.

The Story of Nazism and its Reception by German Mennonites

by Diether Goetz Lichdi

Diether Goetz Lichdi is a Mennonite pastor and historian living in Heilbronn, Germany. He is the author of Mennoniten im Dritten Reich, Dokumentation und Deutung.

The question for the Mennonite attitude towards the Third Reich is not incidental. The evaluation of those deplorable circumstances is to be seen on a greater scene, in which historians, writers and journalists occupied themselves during the seventies with the details of the Hitler story, the Holocaust and World War II. At no time since 1945 has the subject been dealt with on such a large scale. Even the numerous trials of Nazi crimes in the fifties and sixties connected with the revealing of incredible atrocities had not caused as much public attention and discussion. It looked as if the generation that experienced both the rise of Fascism and its end in disaster did not like to be bothered with this recent history. After the bombing, the hunger, the escape and the denazification they just did not want to be any longer confronted. Not because they felt guilty about what happened in the German name, but they desired to forget and to start a normal life; they did not want to be disturbed any more with the nightmare of the past. This generation which cheered

Left, Nazi war poster: "For Liberty and life—the Volkstrum" *(Home Guard).*

Nazism and suffered the defeat has built up democracy in the Federal Republic and created what was known as a *Wirtschaftswunder* (an economic wonder).

This situation of superficial silence and partial complacency crumbled in the seventies. The older generation that had witnessed Nazism was replaced by people born shortly before or after the war and had no personal memory of it. It became usual to ask parents and grandparents "how did you feel about Hitler, how did you offer resistance?" It can not be concealed that this dealing with the past and searching for the truth was not always for pure historical purposes. Quite often this kind of coping with the past occasioned accusations of the parents' generation. The conflict of the generations tended to be moralized under the Nazi label. Of course, the parents should have prevented Nazism; they should have resisted the evil. We experienced suspicion, disclosures, and fruitless and inadequate defenses. Historic facts tended to be judged under the impact and impression of present times. The debates were sometimes difficult and proved useless. The old generation felt misunderstood, unjustly sentenced and hurt.

It is evident that in a situation like this the Mennonites in the Federal Republic of Germany questioned their fathers' attitudes and conduct before and after 1933. These questions were aroused when after 1970, many brethren who had experienced Nazism and were leaders in the congregations and conferences during that time had died or retired. Today there are only six Mennonite elders / preachers who came into office in the thirties still living; only two of them are still active. The same is true with those brethren elected into office right after World War II; most of them are retired. The elders/preachers of today were elected during the last ten years and this concerns especially the university trained pastors.

The debate was started by Dr. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, former pastor of the Hamburg congregation, today professor for social history, with an article *"Nationale Erhebung und religiöser Niedergang—Missglückte Anegnung des täuferischen Leitbildes im Dritten Reich"* (National rise and religious decline —failed adaption of the Anabaptist vision during the Third Reich), published in the *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 1974 and in H. J. Goertz (ed.), *Umstrittenes Täufertum 1525-1975* (Anabaptism in controversy 1525-1975), Göttingen, 1975, 1978. Goertz' essay is based mainly on articles from the periodicals *Mennonitische Blätter* and *Mennonitische Jugendwarte* and on minutes of some meetings of two conferences. In his preliminary remarks he requests continued research, collection of new materials, especially eye-witness reports. His goal was "to bring a little light into the complexity of decision in which the Mennonites were placed immediately after Hitler's *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power). Goertz states that the attitude of the *Vereinigung* (Conference of Westprussian, northwestern and Palatinate Mennonites) was too compliant with the newly established Nazi regime. He compared it with the Anabaptist concept of the state and characterized the conduct of the 1933 Mennonites as "religious decline": "Basic Anabaptist convictions were emptied of their theological content and refilled with politically opportune contents.... Loyalty towards the state who granted the denominational status and the maintenance of denominational identity were adjusted to each other." It is understandable that this thesis was not applauded by all contemporaries of the Third Reich, but a direct response was never published. In 1977, my book was published under the title: *Mennoniten im Dritten Reich, Dokumentation und Deutung* (Mennonites during the Third Reich, documentation and interpretation). It was based on about 5000 printed pages from various sources and about 30 reports from eye-witnesses. In many points I agreed with Goertz, in others I disagreed. I also found the leaders of the *Vereinigung* were too enthusiastic about the Nazis, but I stated that on the other hand the attitude of the various Mennonite groups were so different that you can hardly make an evaluation of the Mennonites as a whole. Another point demonstrated the change in their attitude as the regime grew older; parts of the Anabaptist vision still were to be recognized in the attitude and conduct of some Mennonites.

The book is the first publication of any extensive study which deals with the conduct of a Free Church during the Third Reich. As for the other Free Churches, there are two theses which have not yet been published. As far as the Catholic and Protestant Churches are concerned there are many minor and major publications. The most comprehensive study is by K. Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* (The Churches and the Third Reich) which discusses the period from 1918 to 1934. A sequel to the present is expected.

The Findings of Mennoniten im Dritten Reich.

It has been a long but straight way to Nazism. The German Mennonites stepped out of their isolation during the 19th century and began to feel like citizens of the German Reich. The march, starting with the initial conviction of separation in the 16th century through persecution and in tolerance, was tough and troublesome. The privileges acquired during the 17th and 18th centuries (such as conscientious objection to military service and to oaths) came into contradiction with the equality of all men in a society. All Mennonite groups integrated quickly into the new German Reich (since 1871), they became good patriots like most of their fellow citizens. The ecclesiological reservation of the 16th century Anabaptists toward the state, against which the freedom of the gospel had to be defended, was gradually substituted by the recognition of the state and adaption to society. The Swiss Brethren expected the state to grant them a life as Christians not to be disturbed. This meant in the course of time separation from society and the refusal of various compulsory duties. After three centuries the Mennonites were ready to stand up for this illustrious

Mennonitische Blätter

Unter Mitwirkung von D. theol. Chr. Neff-Weierhof, Pastor Erich Goeltner-Danzig u. a.
herausgegeben von
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Damaschkestraße 4, Fernruf 2155

ese Blätter erscheinen monatlich. Bezugspreis jährlich 3 RM., für
e Freistaat Danzig 5 Gulden; für das Ausland entsprechend dem
ischen Kurswert. Die Mennonitischen Blätter können auch bei der
st bestellt werden und kosten vierteljährlich 75 Reichspfennige.

Beiträge, Zusendungen und Nachrichten sind spätestens bis zum 20. jeden Monats an den Herausgeber erbeten. Geldzahlungen erfolgen am einfachsten durch dessen Postscheckkonto Königsberg Pr. Nr. 135 10 oder dessen Bankkonto bei der Kreissparkasse zu Elbing.

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Zum 50. Geburtstag unseres Führers.

Du gibst mir den Schild deines Heils, und deine Rechte stärkt mich; und wenn du mich demütigst, machst du mich groß. Psalm 18, 36.

Noch stehen wir alle unter dem gewaltigen Eindruck des rossen nationalen Festtages, den das großdeutsche Reich m 20. April 1939 aus Anlaß des 50. Geburtstages neres Führers und Reichskanzlers Adolf Hitler begehen urfte.

In allen Kundgebungen offenbarte sich die Liebe und Dankbarkeit unseres Volkes, das von seinem Führer zu euer Lebens- und Schaffensfreude, zu innerer Einheit nd äußerer Weltgeltung emporgeführt worden ist.

Bei all den verdienten Ehrungen, die ihm dargebracht urden, ergriff immer wieder die ernste Schlichtheit, die nern Führer auszeichnet, auch wenn ihn der Jubel nes Millionenvolkes umbrandet.

In den sechs Jahren, die Adolf Hitler nun an der Spitze neres Volkes steht, ist ein Umbruch erfolgt, der einzig- tig dasteht. Eine Umwandlung hat sich vollzogen, die e aus abgründiger Tiefe empor zum Licht geführt.

Große Erlebnisse machen den Menschen ehrfürchtig und emütig vor Gott. Ein Frontsoldat hat aus Anlaß des 0. Geburtstages des Führers gesagt: „Hält man alle orte, in denen Adolf Hitler vom Allmächtigen oder von ottes Vorsehung gesprochen hat, nebeneinander, dann rkennt man, wie maßvoll er von sich denkt; er kennt den bstand der Menschen zu Gott, unter dessen Gnade er ch weiß, für dessen Segen er dankt".

Der Ruf, der an seinem Geburtstag aus tausenden von utschen Herzen ihm entgegenklang: „Wir danken unserm ührer!", ist auch Ausdruck unserer innigsten Empfin- ungen. Wie aber beim großen Zapfenstreich an die ehrhaften Mannschaften das Kommando ergeht: „Helm b zum Gebet!", so mahnt uns vor allem der Führer bst durch seine demutsvolle Einstellung zu Gott:

Vor jenem droben steht gebückt,
Der helfen lehrt und Hilfe schickt!

Darum beugen auch wir uns in Ehrfurcht und Dank or Gottes Thron mit der Bitte, daß er ihn auch ferner- in segnen wolle mit Kraft aus der Höhe, zum Heil unseres utschen Volkes und zur Förderung des Friedens in der elt!

Lic. E. Händiges.

Above, the Mennonitische Blätter, *German Mennonite periodical, for May 1939 with a tribute to Adolf Hitler on his 50th birthday.*

Reich and to participate in it as equals among equals. The old privileges became obsolete. The Mennonites were not any more conscious of a special Anabaptist identity. They differed only in the congregational structure from the state churches but regarding theology they joined the Protestant stream of thinking. This openmindedness was strengthened by the introduction of university-trained professional pastors and the increase in the number of mixed marriages. Like their fellow citizens the Mennonites were seized by the patriotic enthusiasm ruling 19th century Europe. Since this nationalism was connected with militarism it was understandable that only a decreasing number of Mennonites used the privilege of noncombatant service. The majority of Mennonites wanted to serve together with their comrades and playmates at the place where everybody else served and this was the fighting army. They did not want to be "cowards in a safe hiding" they wanted to serve on duty for *Volk und Vaterland* (people and native country). This attitude was quite common among Mennonites except some pietistic congregations in West Prussia and Southwest Germany. The *Vereinigung* reported proudly that in World War I, 2000 Mennonites or 10 percent of their number fought in the army and that 400 Mennonites died as heroes for their country. An increasing number of Mennonites accepted electoral offices and/or became civil servants and participated in the political issues. Generally they sided with conservative or liberal parties. In the beginning it may have looked strange but with the passing of time the Mennonites were proud of their fellow believers who succeeded as civil servants or became publicly reknowned.

The Background.

The defeat in 1918 and the inner upheaval did not create a new orientation. The Versailles treaty was generally considered ripe for revision. Mennonite patriotism was reinforced by the tripartition of West Prussia into the Free City of Danzig, Poland and the smallest part remaining with the Reich. Most Mennonites and many other Germans felt sorrow for the retired Kaiser and did not like the democratic Weimar Republic. They were strongly impressed by the persecution of the Brethren in Bolshevist Russia since 1920 and their basic political attitude became anti-Communist. The denial of the defeat remained a strong factor in German politics and in the feeling of the citizens. When the Nazi Stormtroopers started to clean the streets of Communists at the end of the Weimar Republic, it was observed with satisfaction and relief. The *Machtergreifung* in 1933 was comprehended as a liberation from the Communist threat and Western decadance.

Political Thought is a Resudt of Theology.

An analysis of political thought displayed during the Twenties and Thirties in Mennonite periodicals, shows a great deal about the political thinking of Christians in general. The Mennonites were tempted to welcome the Nazi regime or any

other strong authoritarian govenment rather than insist on a point of view which did not conform to the general public opinion. On the contrary they followed—consciously or not—the nationally common theological thought. The Alliance of Peoples' *völkische Begeisterung* (people's enthusiasm) and the common Christian attitude towards the state were seductive. The Protestant tradition of theology, adopted by most Mennonites during the last century despite the historical representation of the Anabaptist beginning, supported quite logically the awakening of the people. This can be demonstrated with an analysis of the exegesis of Romans 13 in Mennonite publications around 1933. Here the state was interpreted as God's creational order (*Schöpfungsordung*) and so transcended. This state was always a constitutional state which "executes wrath upon him that doeth evil" and keeps the public order which is conceived as God's order "to thee for good." In 1933 the goals of the Nazis were compared with the statements of the New Testament and found to be more or less identical. The belief in the essence and power of the state made a neutral or unimpressed attitude towards the Nazis difficult. In all consideration the Bible was cited and employed for defining the Mennonite position. They tried to base their thinking on the gospel as the sole guide, but they hardly succeeded in a time of confusion and revaluation. The Mennonites in Germany were tempted to read the Bible in such a way that its meaning became compatible with the "challenge of our time." They did not withdraw at first from the atmosphere of political awakening in Germany. To be sure, they cited the right New Testament texts, but their understanding was stamped by the general Protestant and political *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age). The theological thinking coming from the Protestant universities formed a Lutheran and conservative mind. Generally it reflected the dogma of the two realms which had not much in common with the Anabaptist vision. This dogma ignored Karl Barth's commentary on Romans and later the Barmen Declaration of the Bekennende Kirche (The Confessional Church), an opposition group in the Protestant church.

Nevertheless, it has been recognized and stated that the Nazi *Weltanschauungsstaat* (state of ideology), transgressed the limitations of its "God given" assignment. However, this realization was quite general and caused no consequences at all. The *Rundbrief-Gemeinschaft* (a group of educated and interested young people from several countries which corresponded in German with the help of circular letters), worried about this transgression. Facing the introduction of universal conscription which came in 1935, they reacted with alarm. They pointed out that the ideological pretensions of the Third Reich disregarded the first commandment; the deification of human being was conceived as the exchange of creator and creation. The *Führerprinzip* (leader's principal), which was supposed to be introduced into churches and congregations, contradicted the congregational concept based on the equality of members and the priesthood of all believers. Here and there it aroused doubts about laws being respected, but no specific cases of failure to comply were mentioned. The perversion of justice seemed possible to some. The critical and nonconforming attitude of some Mennonites has to be mentioned, but it created no real resistance. They faced the brutality of a regime in which form of opposition was to be crushed and thus they retreated again into privacy. They again became the *Stillen im Lande (the quiet in the land)*.

Welcome is Extended to Hitler.

On January 30, 1933, the Nazis celebrated Hitler's nomination to the Chancellery by Reichspräsident von Hindenburg. The so-called Third Reich seized quickly all executive positions in the Reich and the *Länder* (confederated countries). The *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (law of authorization) of March 23, 1933, dissolved all parties and unions. The *Gleichschaltungsgesetz* (law of coordination) of March 31, 1933, abolished the federal structure and installed a centrally governed state absolutely in contradiction to the German heritage and tradition. The elected bodies in countries, counties and cities were purified and occupied by Nazis. The *Gesetz zur Reinerhaltung von Volk und Staat* (law for purification of people and state) of April 15, 1933, arranged for the dismissal of Jewish citizens from state and other public offices. The exodus of Jewish and other artists and scholars began. The *Reichstagsbrand* (burning of Parliament), February 28, 1933, created a pretext to persecute and to arrest dissidents. First communists, then Social Democrats, trade unionists, Catholic youth workers and other alleged opponents were put into concentration camps. This procedure was supported by the general consent, even enthusiasm, of the people. They conceived Hitler almost as a savior, a savior who stopped national humiliation, stopped the fruitless squabble of the parties, who set an end to the unpopular, even despised "system of Weimar." He was a leader whose tough speeches were followed by strong deeds, who appealed to the good and decent in human beings, who employed the positive powers of history and who placed the common benefit ahead of private profit. *Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz* (community needs over private needs). He was the genius who rescued Germany from Russian Bolshevism and from Western Libertinism, who delivered the people from misery and unemployment. He was a great man who piled success upon success, who made Germany independent from the world market with the production of *Ersatz* (substitute) products, who constructed *autobahns* and had armaments produced. Even skeptics were convinced by Hitler's results and by the sincerity in which he led the way out of crisis and disaster.

The Mennonites did not want to separate themselves from this wave of general support and sympathy. As was customary upon the Emperor's accession to throne, the conference of the Westprussian Mennonites sent a telegram to Hitler, greeting him from the Tiegenhagen convention on September 10, 1933,

citing I Corinthians 3:11 and affirming: "The conference realizes with deep gratitude the tremendous upheaval, which God gave to our people with your energy" and vowed on their part "cheerful cooperation for the reconstruction of our Fatherland out of the strengths of the gospel." Hitler in return thanked them for their "true spirit and readiness to cooperate." This official attitude of the Westprussian Conference corresponded at least in the beginning with the opinion of most Mennonites; however, the conservative Mennonites in South Germany were more reluctant to react and remained silent. In the *Mennonitische Blätter* one could find several articles which relentlessly supported the regime, but none in the *Gemeindeblatt* of the South German *Verband*.

The 1929 depression also had some impact on the Mennonites. As farmers (German Mennonites being 84% farmers) they were not unemployed, but the economic developments had led to indebtedness. Due to increasing industrialization, the significance of farming decreased. The public influence of farmers was more and more neglected. This changed immediately when the Nazis came to power; the importation of farm products stopped, debts were cancelled. The farmers became in many respects a privileged group.

The Mennonites took steps to unite the *Vereinigung* and the *Verband*. The reason was the coordination of the 29 Protestant state churches into one church: *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) and the introduction of the *Führerprinzip* (principle of leadership whereby all functions were centrally structured under the leadership of a Reichsbischof). There were rumors of an impending coordination of all Free Churches with the DEK. The negotiations between the *Vereinigung* and the *Verband* failed since both parts could not agree on a common confession of faith. However, this did not endanger the Mennonite existence, because the Nazis soon lost interest in the matter after the coordination of the Protestant churches and a Concordat with the Vatican.

Regarding the issues of rearmament and compulsory military service, the *Vereinigung* made up its mind as early as March, 1933, "not to claim any more special privileges." Rather, conduct in this matter was left to each one's discretion. Most Mennonites saw no conflict with the gospel but only the execution of a normal development after they became real citizens and German patriots. "For the German circumstances it should be stated also, that the connection of fate with the German Fatherland ... gives no possibility to maintain as a congregation our fathers' point of view ... The New Testament gives us this freedom. In supporting our people and Fatherland with life and limb we have to prove the

Left, Nazi war poster quoting Paul Goebbels: "Farmers and soldiers stand together hand in hand to give the people their daily bread and to safeguard the freedom of the Reich."

great love which we have for our people." However, there were opposing opinions which were expressed in letters to editors and in the circular letters (RB). The opponents held as reasons, the fifth commandment and the example of Jesus. It was soon recognized that Nazism was on the way to an authoritarian state, but this seemed no reason to withdraw the original consent. Nobody could imagine that it was ready to start World War II and the Holocaust.

Distance and Inner Emigration Into Privacy.

The early enthusiasm of 1933-34 faded away. Some enthusiasts showed increasing reserve, others just calmed down. The distance can be detected in letters and sermons—they felt that the "total" ideological state removed the limitations between God and men, that Hitler placed himself on God's Throne. The Nazi ideology began to be conceived as competitive with the Gospel. Bible study especially among young people seemed to increase. A preoccupation with apocalyptical texts in South Germany is evident. There were 46 articles on that subject from 1934-1940. D. Christian Neff, founder of the World Conference, conducted a series of interpretation of the Book of Revelation for the preachers' meetings in the Palatinate.

One pastor in a sermon has this to say about aggressive Nazi-propaganda: " 'Love your enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to them that hate you!' No nation on earth will escape the punishment which does not keep this in mind.... In the teachings of Jesus hate is among the most blamable things ... things which might and must lead to the death of a nation as a whole. There are many positive things being achieved in our nation ... but do we not hear the same about the people of Israel?"

Despite the disintegrating attitude of Nazism toward religion, and its later propaganda against churches and Christianity, the congregations remained almost undisturbed and worked until the end. Only a few left their congregations due to Nazi summons. Only one preacher out of about 200 servants left office. On the contrary, new servants were elected and ordained. The adolescents were instructed and baptized, despite the indoctrination of the youth in the Hitler youth organization. The Lord's Supper seems to have been attended by an increasing number of people. The youth were gathered by appointed youth workers to bible groups and vacation camps, obviously in competition to the educational activities of the Nazis. The number of membership did not decrease; on the contrary there seems to have been a little increase, for example, in Heubuden. Missionary efforts were still within the scene of the congregation. In 1934, two missionaries were sent out to Indonesia. Numerous mission conferences collected good offerings. New mission groups were established, for example, in Berlin, 1937. In an atmosphere hostile to aliens the interest in mission grew unexpectedly.

The Mennonites could maintain the traditionally congregational structure, but they did not sacrifice individual nonconformism for the idols of people and fatherland in the very end. They were not coordinated and did not introduce the *Führerprinzip*. The responsibility for the world is spiritualized in a nonpolitical manner. Numerous acts of assistance for Jews, the bombed refugees and the hungry are known. Those events which occurred in distress may have been signs of charity. The objections and hesitations mentioned in the circular letters and in some sermons qualified not only as signs of retreat but also as inner resistance.

The Reception of the Findings.

My findings incited a broad discussion among German Mennonites. I heard both praise and reproach with the instances of reproach prevailing. Moreover, the praise was mostly from older and more conservative people, from those who experienced the Nazis personally. The reproaches came often from young intellectuals and moralists. No historical book in my memory has raised so many responses among Mennonites. One objection mentioned several times, also in letters to the writer, said the time was not ready for the evaluation of the Nazi regime. As justified as this argument might be there are but few eye-witnesses left and we should not miss, as we did up until now, to collect their testimonies and experiences, Nazis or not. I might suspect that these critics are not as much interested in an adequate representation as that they do not want to be reminded of the old wound. There may be reputations to be protected.

During the writing of the book I received criticisms and presumed corrections. One asserted I would purify old Nazis of the accusation of Nazism. In my research I met resistance and rejection. One brother whose story I planned to tell forced me to delete the material before printing. In another case I had to agree to an expensive settlement when one felt insulted by another witness, both close relatives. Nazism is still a sensitive issue.

One Mennonite critic challenged the congregations to repent publicly of their attitude and conduct during the Third Reich—a challenge which raises a fundamental question: Is there collective guilt? Can there be collective repentance and will there be a collective atonement? Another reason for a rejection of such a repentance might be the feeling that Mennonites, especially from West Prussia, had suffered a great deal as refugees, with heavy personal and material losses. ... Some allotted guilt and judged without considering the temptations of today (Matthew 7:1).

One result of the book was that after publication a lot of further details were revealed to me. Besides this, I received some more material from private persons. Several discussion groups talked about the subject, primarily the aspect of a Christian's conduct towards the state. This subject seems to be connected with the Mennonite identity and it is still occupying the Christian mind. Outside Mennonite circles the book was also read and, of course, reviewed. There the opinions were surprisingly positive. One critic calls the documentation "a confession ... which is given publicly in

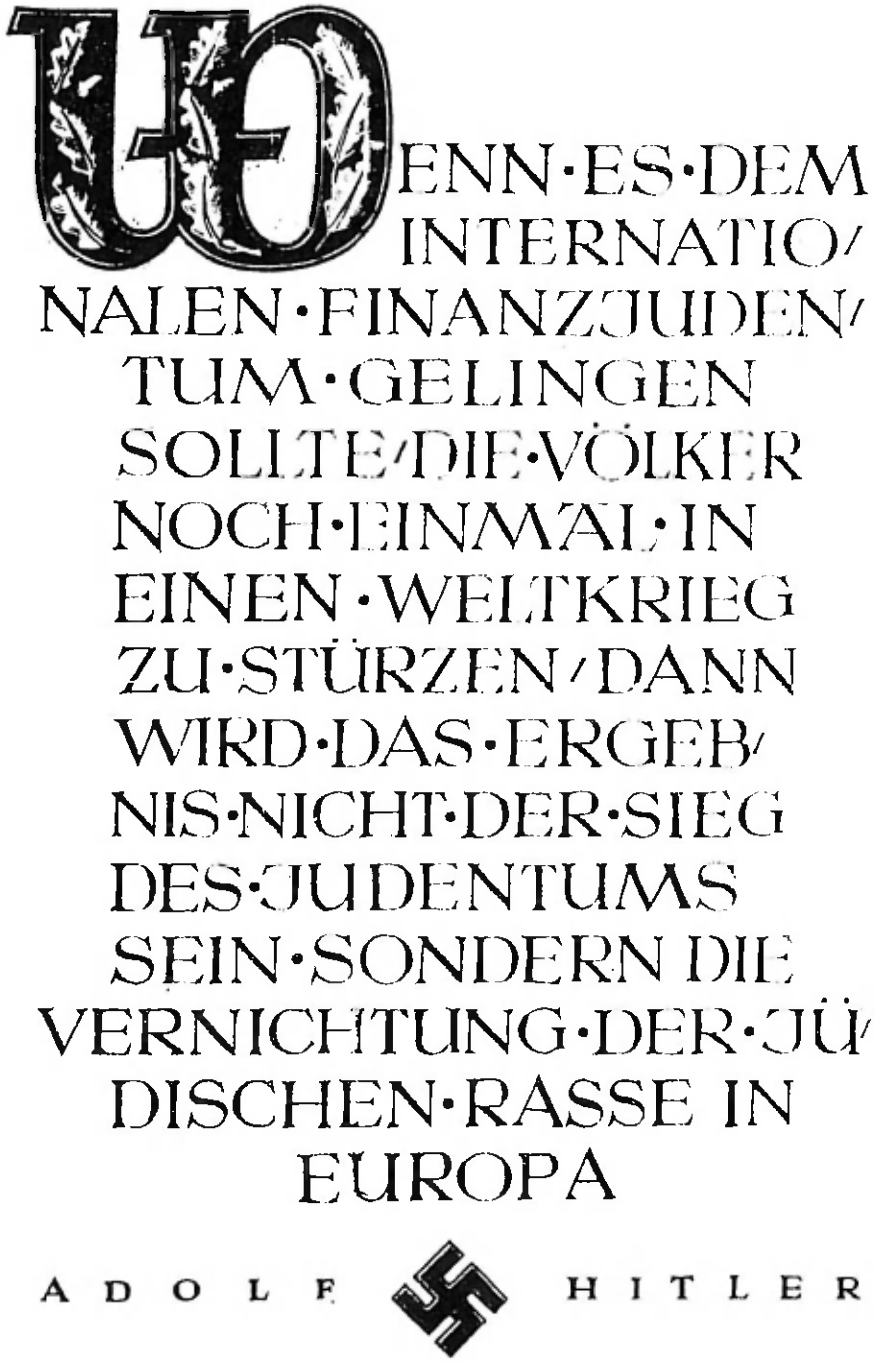
the original Christian way, the readers conceived of as a confessional congregation." And a critic of a leading newspaper wrote, "This book is a sign and example of a possible Christian research of conscience. . . ."

Reconciliation

Besides the public debate there was a nonpublic dispute among brethren especially involved in the subject. This was in some respects a personal battle; suspicions were mentioned at the expense of brotherhood; old sores were opened and new ones hit. In a particular case, a grievous and complex situation, five brethren concerned stopped and repented. They "deplored" in a "common declaration . . . the words and deeds which made the other feel hurt and offended." The brethren affirmed that we "will continue our debate in a brotherly spirit in order to clear up the facts."

The public debate came to a culmination when H. J. Goertz reviewed my book and reaffirmed his thesis of the religious decline. In his critique he demonstrated the methodological difficulties in working with the material from Nazi sources and criticized my use of eyewitness reports as unreflective. He identified contradictions in my story and doubted if the official support of Nazi policy and the declaration of cooperation of the administrative bodies of the *Vereinigung* could be conceived of as a shield behind which some reservations and nonconformisms could be exercised. Goertz did not accept the soundness of some of my findings and claimed that the more important "pillars of the presentation have crumbled." He stated, "I see no reason to revise my classification of the religious decline." He called attention to the fact that the goal of discussion is "the Mennonite today." . . . The greater part of my simultaneously-published response emphasized the aspect of the present. I pointed out that today we also have to face the fight against ideologies as did our fathers 50 years ago: "Together with our fathers we share the belief in the ability of men to form structures . . . ; together with our fathers we are fascinated by moral pretension and ideal aims." With this confrontation in August, 1978, it was evident that besides all differences in opinion and judgment there was a consensus concerning the impact of the Nazi story on our time. The attitude and conduct of Mennonites during the rise of the Third Reich are not to be concealed. Collective guilt and collective repentance are not evangelical. The gospel must be the guiding rule for our congregations.

This resulted in a common declaration of Goertz and myself in both periodicals (*Mennonitische Blätter* and *Gemeinde Unterwegs*): "To the readers we are grateful for both



Left, Nazi poster quoting Adolf Hitler: "Should the international Jewish financiers succeed again in plunging the nations into a World War, the results will be not the victory of the Jews but the annihilation of the whole Jewish race in Europe."

affirmation and critique. However, we know that some readers felt offended or misunderstood by the formulations, arguments and conclusions. We are not interested in a combat situation. We are interested in promoting from the controversy a common discussion fruitful for the life of our congregations. To encourage this we agreed: (a) In the future there will be no further mention of the religious decline of the Mennonites and no statements that the Mennonites preserved their peculiarity.... It will be correct to describe the Mennonite way through the Third Reich as a serious crisis of identity. . . . (b) We agreed regarding the spiritual aims of this historic questioning. . . . Our goal is to advise the congregations of their political dependencies, intended or not . . . adopted or still to be adopted, which leads to the question whether the confession that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church is limited by those dependencies. (c) It might be a first step to common repentance and forgiveness that our congregations are able today to talk about the relation of our congregations to the Nazi regime in a committed . . . and understanding way without charging each other with malicious intentions." Although this declaration was aimed to give way to more profound discussion it has not yet succeeded. Nobody has taken the risk of dealing with this theme in the present or past. Notwithstanding, there will be two additional relevant articles by us in the *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*.

Generalizations: The Imitation of Christ Excludes Ideologies

The Mennonite openmindedness towards the Third Reich was possible when Mennonites left the early separation and integrated into a Protestant society. This pattern has not changed since 1945. The Anabaptist approach to the Church of Christ and the community of citizens does not correspond at all (I Cor. 12). The Church has to be the congregation of visible saints in a Godless world. This is no more in the Mennonite conscience after persecutions, discriminations and wanderings. The road out of social segregation has raised the question of Anabaptist Mennonite identity. It seems to me that the discussion about "Mennoniten im Dritten Reich" reveals a certain uneasiness among ourselves. The isolated call for repentance may be conceived as the call for a new beginning. The failure of the fathers was caused by their unreflective joining in the spirit of the age.... What they learned from the Gospel they conceived as support of their prejudiced political opinions. Many read the Gospels with the intention that they confirm their daily political life. Their ideas were shaped by the general Christian convictions of the time, romantic nationalism and moral legality (*Gesetzlichkeit*). The popular ideologies were stronger than the Anabaptist heritage.

The matter of Mennonite identity is connected with the confession to the Lord Jesus Christ that he is the sole Lord in our life and not just during worship. It is linked to our trust that His deeds are right and that He does not need any help. The problem of Mennonite identity has broken open at the old Anabaptist border: the Christian's attitude toward the state and conduct toward society.

We know how our fathers should have reacted in 1933 but today it remains open how we should react to pollution, computerization, unemployment and industrial growth, increased state control, decrease of liberty, bureaucracy, and vanishing personal rights. . . . In a society of tolerance and indifference there has to be a response other than Schleitheim to the questions of a Christian life in responsiveness to Christ. The German Mennonites demonstrated during the Third Reich that these dangers cannot be met by adopting the *Zeitgeist* or by adjusting the Gospels to political suitability. The discussion today reaffirms these problems of striving for one goal—the succession of Jesus Christ.

Right, cemetery in Heilbronn where thousands lie buried, the result of an allied fire bombing on December 4, 1944.