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# Separation Or Integration? The Russian Mennonite Immigrant Community In Ontario, 1924-45

Henry Paetkau

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SEPARATION OR INTEGRATION?  
THE RUSSIAN MENNONITE IMMIGRANT  
COMMUNITY IN ONTARIO, 1924-45

by

Henry Paetkau

Department of History

Submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario  
August 1986

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• ABSTRACT

How do ethnic groups survive and maintain their identity when transplanted into an alien cultural environment? That question is one of the major issues in the study of ethnicity. Both historians and sociologists have, in recent years, attempted to understand more clearly and explain more fully the nature and dynamics of ethnic group cohesion and survival. While there is general agreement on the strength and persistence of ethnic peculiarities, there is considerable debate over whether this is due primarily to factors and forces internal or external to the group. What current models and theories designed to understand and explain this phenomenon disregard, moreover, are the religious beliefs and values which are a central component in the identity of some ethnoreligious groups like the Mennonites.

The traditional Russian Mennonite ethnoreligious identity consisted primarily of three elements: 1) a separatist, pacifist religious faith, 2) the German language and culture which came to embody it, and 3) a predominantly agrarian lifestyle. These values came into direct conflict with an increasingly urbanized and predominantly Anglo-Canadian society which expected conformity to its socio-economic, cultural, and political, if not religious, values. This thesis investigates some of the dimensions of that conflict as reflected in the settlement of Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario after World War I. It sets out to test a number of presently-held theories regarding ethnic group survival. It also challenges some of the generalizations and assumptions about Russian Mennonites which have characterized the historical and sociological literature to date.

The study concludes that although the Russian Mennonites in Ontario behaved much like other immigrants, their survival as an ethnic group cannot be understood apart from the persistence of their peculiar religious beliefs and practices. The New World environment challenged the traditional coalescence of cultural and religious values, however, prompting the search for a redefinition of that Old World identity. Still, the Russian Mennonites have survived as a distinct ethnoreligious group in Canada.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been written or completed without the counsel, encouragement, and support of many valued friends. I am grateful for the assistance of the archivists at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, the Mennonite Heritage Centre, both in Winnipeg, and the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa. Sam Steiner, archivist at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, deserves special mention. Thanks also to all the Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s who have shared their experiences so that other generations might learn and be enriched.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Frank H. Epp (1929-1986), scholar, churchman, and friend, whose encouragement set me on this course of study and gave me confidence to carry on. David Fransen, long-time friend and fellow student of history, provided helpful comments on the manuscript. Don Avery, my advisor, supported me patiently from the outset and gave invaluable advice and direction which greatly strengthened the thesis. I wish to thank also the many typists who assisted me through numerous drafts, Irene Driedger and Debbie Willsie in particular, as well as Dorothy Versluis for her artistic contribution. Errors of fact or interpretation are mine alone. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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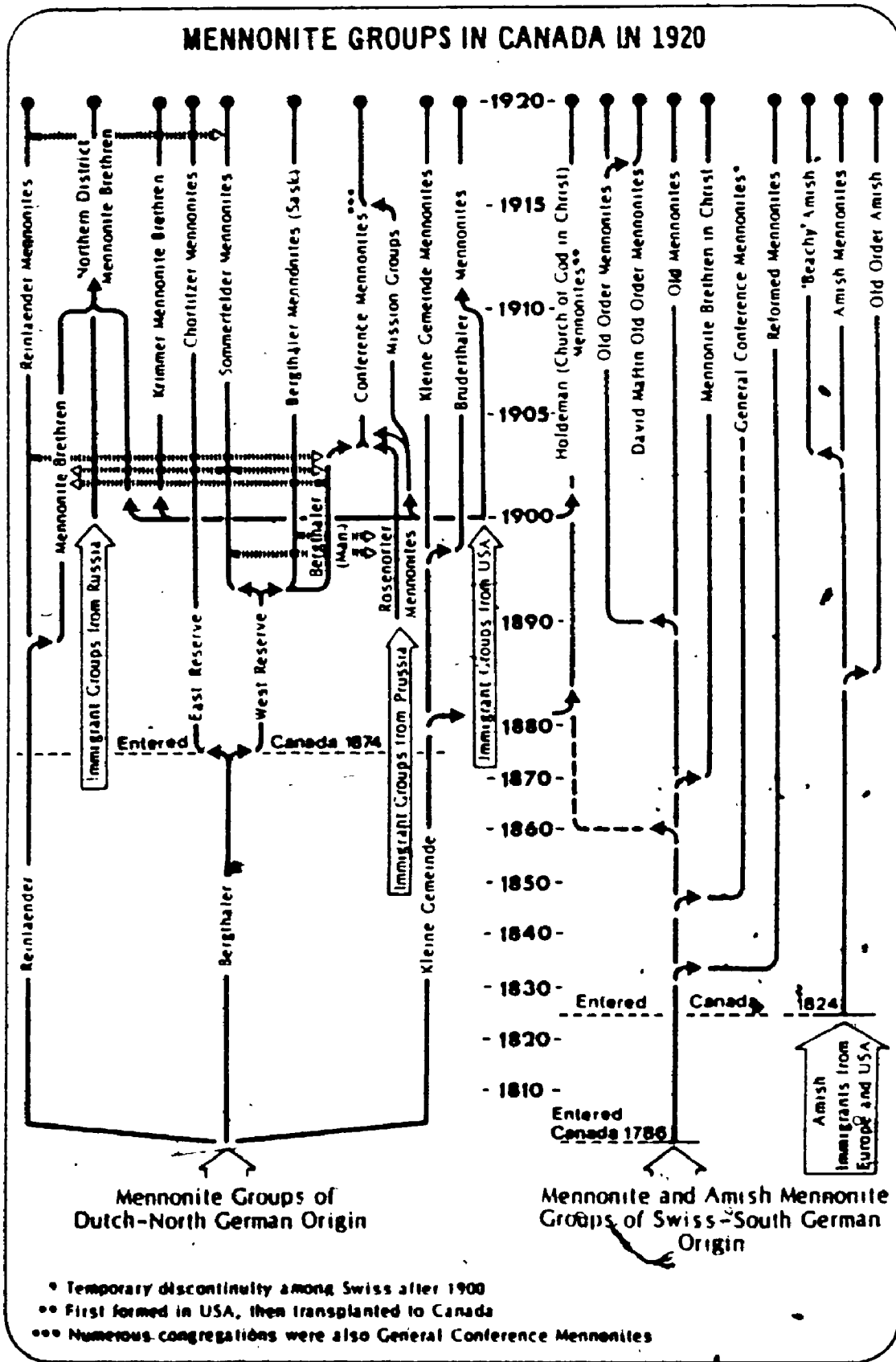
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# CHART 1

## MENNONITE GROUPS IN CANADA IN 1920



Source: Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 22.

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## Introduction

Defining their peculiar identity has preoccupied Mennonites throughout their 450 year history almost as much as preserving it. As heirs of the Protestant Reformation, their origins, and their unique identity as a people, are firmly rooted in the spiritual ferment of the sixteenth century. The first Mennonites were clearly a people of faith, a religious group essentially united by nothing more than their commonly held beliefs and the firm resolve to translate these into a style of living. An inevitable corollary of the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church, however, was "the insistence on the separation of the church from the world, that is nonconformity of the Christian to the worldly way of life."<sup>1</sup> In the words of Menno Simons, from whom Mennonites derive their name, "The entire evangelical Scriptures teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life and worship, a people separated from the world."<sup>2</sup>

It is precisely this endeavour to become and remain "a people separated from the world" which has precipitated an ongoing identity crisis among Mennonites. Sociologist Calvin Redekop focuses the dilemma in a provocative article entitled "Anabaptism and the Ethnic Ghost." By way of illustrations from Mennonite history he demonstrates that the result of this endeavour to become the people of God on earth "is in one sense precisely the formation of an ethnic group...."<sup>3</sup> What came to distinguish, and separate, the Mennonites from the rest of society, therefore, was not only a peculiar understanding of the

Christian faith but also a clearly identifiable ethno-cultural embodiment of that faith.<sup>4</sup> In other words, a visible differentiation, and even withdrawal, from the "world" was seen as evidence of obedience to the scriptural call for nonconformity. Since that separateness came to be expressed most clearly in cultural terms, the Mennonites became not only a religious but also an ethnic group.<sup>5</sup> Redekop goes on to suggest, moreover, that the degree of separation evident among Mennonite groups is directly related to the degree of ethnicity which characterizes them.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Mennonite separateness has often come to be understood in and measured by social and cultural terms.

That seemingly inescapable tension has created an identity crisis which persists to this day. A recent article in the Mennonite Brethren Herald illustrates the point. "Just what is a Mennonite?" the writer asks.<sup>7</sup> The ambiguity arises, the article suggests, from a confusion of the spiritual and cultural heritages of the Mennonite people. A church leader argues in the same issue that it is time to redefine "what it means to be separated people. The separation at issue," he maintains, "is not geographical or ethnic but biblical."<sup>8</sup> This argument begs the question, however, because it fails to define how that biblical mandate is to be lived out, that is, its cultural manifestations. And so the argument has come full circle, it would appear, among Mennonites themselves. Whether Mennonites continue to survive, and grow, as an identifiable group in Canada in spite of, or because of this debate, is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, the

Canadian Mennonite experience provides an interesting case study of ethnic religious and social history.

The writing of Canadian ethnic history has itself gone through a number of phases, reflecting in part the dynamic nature of ethnic identity.<sup>9</sup> The early writers were Anglo-Canadians concerned primarily with the impact of non-English speaking immigrants, particularly Eastern Europeans, on the "distinctive national character" of Canada.<sup>10</sup> They often viewed immigrants as a "social problem" and warned that too large and diverse an influx prevented effective Canadianization and threatened the country's predominant Anglo-Canadian identity.<sup>11</sup> Not even the existence, much less the desirability of a French-speaking minority was acknowledged by most of these authors. Their sole concern was to preserve and perpetuate an Anglo-Canadian identity throughout the rest of Canada. The school and, to a lesser extent, the church became the primary instruments in that effort.<sup>12</sup>

Once the strength and persistence of ethnic distinctives was recognized, however, immigrant communities themselves became the subjects of study, particularly by sociologists. While acknowledging the diversity within Canadian society, these researchers continued to assume nonetheless that each group would in the future be assimilated into the predominant Anglo-Canadian culture.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, ethnic groups were beginning to present their own story, equally conscious of the pressure to conform. In defense of their

distinctives, therefore, they chronicled the settlement and achievements of their particular groups.<sup>14</sup> They generally failed, however, to place these developments within the broader context of Canadian history. That kind of analysis awaited more scholarly research and a more tolerant attitude within Canadian society.

By the 1970s those conditions were largely being met. The federal government's multiculturalism program, inaugurated in 1971, legitimated the existence and continuation of ethno-cultural diversity in Canada and, with the help of government funds, prompted a flurry of research and writing in the field. Through its sponsorship of the Generations Series, for example, the government hoped to provide Canadians with the histories of most major ethnic groups in Canada. Many of these ethnic biographies centred on the community as the focus of analysis.<sup>15</sup>

This approach was strengthened by the contributions of sociologists, who had begun to employ survey techniques in order to gather quantitative data on ethnicity, and anthropologists utilizing participant-observer techniques.<sup>16</sup> A significant amount of useful descriptive data continues to be garnered in this way, providing an instructive portrait of ethnic community life at various times and in various places. This data has helped to broaden the scope of more recent ethnic histories.

The so-called "new ethnic history"<sup>17</sup> is being written from several perspectives. Instead of the social problem approach, which presumes and promotes assimilation, the authors of recent ethnic histories of such groups as the Doukhobors, the Blacks, the Japanese,

the Mennonites, and the Ukrainians have attempted to be both sympathetic and objective.<sup>18</sup> Their studies are generally based on considerable historical research and, in the case of several of them, an insider's understanding of the complexity and diversity which characterize most ethnic groups. What will strengthen and broaden such studies even more in the future is the increasing amount of research on the ethnic factor in such fields as labour history, political history, urbanization, and women's history, among others.<sup>19</sup> Adding a personal perspective to these historical and sociological facts are the immigrant diaries and memoirs being increasingly published. Because the new ethnic history reflects this awareness of broader currents in Canadian history, Howard Palmer concludes, "it is more likely to have an impact on the larger Canadian historical profession and result in some re-thinking of the main contours of Canadian social history in the twentieth century."<sup>20</sup>

One of the key ingredients in a fuller understanding of some ethnic groups is a recognition of the vital role of religion in the life of the community. Far from being simply an observable and measurable pattern of behaviour, or a unique cultural characteristic, religious beliefs and practices may be at the very core of community life. The highly subjective and often sensitive nature of such beliefs and practices may render them as one of the primary factors in ethnic interaction, both internally and with the rest of society. Stephen Speisman's history of the Jews in Toronto illustrates that dynamic.<sup>21</sup> The strength and significance of the religious dimension in the



formation and maintenance of group identity becomes even more evident in the experience of such groups as the Doukhobors, the Hutterites, and the Amish Mennonites.<sup>22</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that the writing of ethnic history continue to develop in both directions, on the one hand broadening the perspective on Canadian society into which these groups came while on the other hand also deepening the understanding of the complexity of the groups themselves.

## II

The study of Canadian Mennonites reflects many of these characteristics and trends. Most of the writing in the past has been in the areas of theology, history, and sociology. Donovan Smucker's 1977 annotated bibliography of the sociological literature alone devotes some 140 pages to Mennonites, an indication of how extensive the literature is.<sup>23</sup> Part of the reason for this volume lies in the diversity among Mennonites themselves. It seems necessary, therefore, to outline the basic distinctions before focusing more narrowly on the so-called Russian Mennonites.

The popular public image of the "horse and buggy" Mennonite is the result of a stereotype based on the most visible, clearly identifiable group in Canada, the Amish. It is representative, however, of only a small segment of the total Mennonite population.<sup>24</sup> Amish distinctiveness arises out of a late seventeenth century dispute in Europe regarding the extent of cultural conformity appropriate to a "separated" people. This visible differentiation was retained by the

group when it migrated to North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Even during this movement, it constituted only a portion of a larger Mennonite migration from various European countries, most notably Switzerland and South Germany. New England, and primarily Pennsylvania, was the destination of the earliest arrivals. Some, however, moved north into Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century where they were joined by others coming directly from Europe. The German dialect of these immigrants in Pennsylvania earned them the designation of "Pennsylvania Deutsch," later transliterated as Pennsylvania Dutch. Since their origins, and their language, are more properly Swiss, they will be referred to as Swiss Mennonites throughout this study. They are located almost exclusively in Ontario.

The Russian Mennonites, meanwhile, find their origins among the Dutch and North German Mennonites of the sixteenth century. A variety of factors prompted many of these people to move eastward into Prussia and, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, on into southern Russia. Their sojourn here resulted in the descriptive name and, more importantly, formalized the cultural, social, religious, and economic traditions which would distinguish them from their Swiss coreligionists. The Russian Mennonites were not, however, a homogeneous group. Like the Swiss, they divided into a number of religious groupings, or denominations, resulting in substantial internal differences.

Another significant differentiation arose out of that very experience of migration. For reasons which will be explained later,

some 8,000 Russian Mennonites, comprising a number of denominations, moved to Canada in the 1870s. Here they settled in blocs on the Manitoba prairies, and later in Saskatchewan, as a part of the federal government's scheme to populate the West. After World War I they were joined by some 20,000 coreligionists fleeing the Soviet Union. Because of cultural, historical, and religious differences, however, these postwar Mennonite immigrants retained an identity of their own. By way of differentiation, the 1870s immigrants were called Kanadier because of their longer residence in Canada. The newcomers were simply referred to as Russlaender (Russians). These distinctions remained even after another wave of Mennonites from Russia entered Canada after World War II. That group, however, was largely absorbed by the Russlaender who had come in the 1920s. It is this Russian Mennonite community which is the subject of this thesis with particular emphasis on the years 1924-1945.

Each of these Mennonite groups, and the variations within them, has been the subject of scholarly study. For example, denominational and group histories have been written about the Kanadier,<sup>26</sup> the Amish,<sup>27</sup> and the Mennonite Brethren Russlaender.<sup>28</sup> Many of the groups have been studied and surveyed by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, both in their historical context and in the contemporary period.<sup>29</sup> While the earlier studies reflected the mood of the times in that they attempted to measure the extent of assimilation,<sup>30</sup> those of the past two decades have been more concerned about Mennonite distinctiveness and how it is being maintained.<sup>31</sup> At the same time,

MENNONITE GROUPS IN CANADA IN 1920

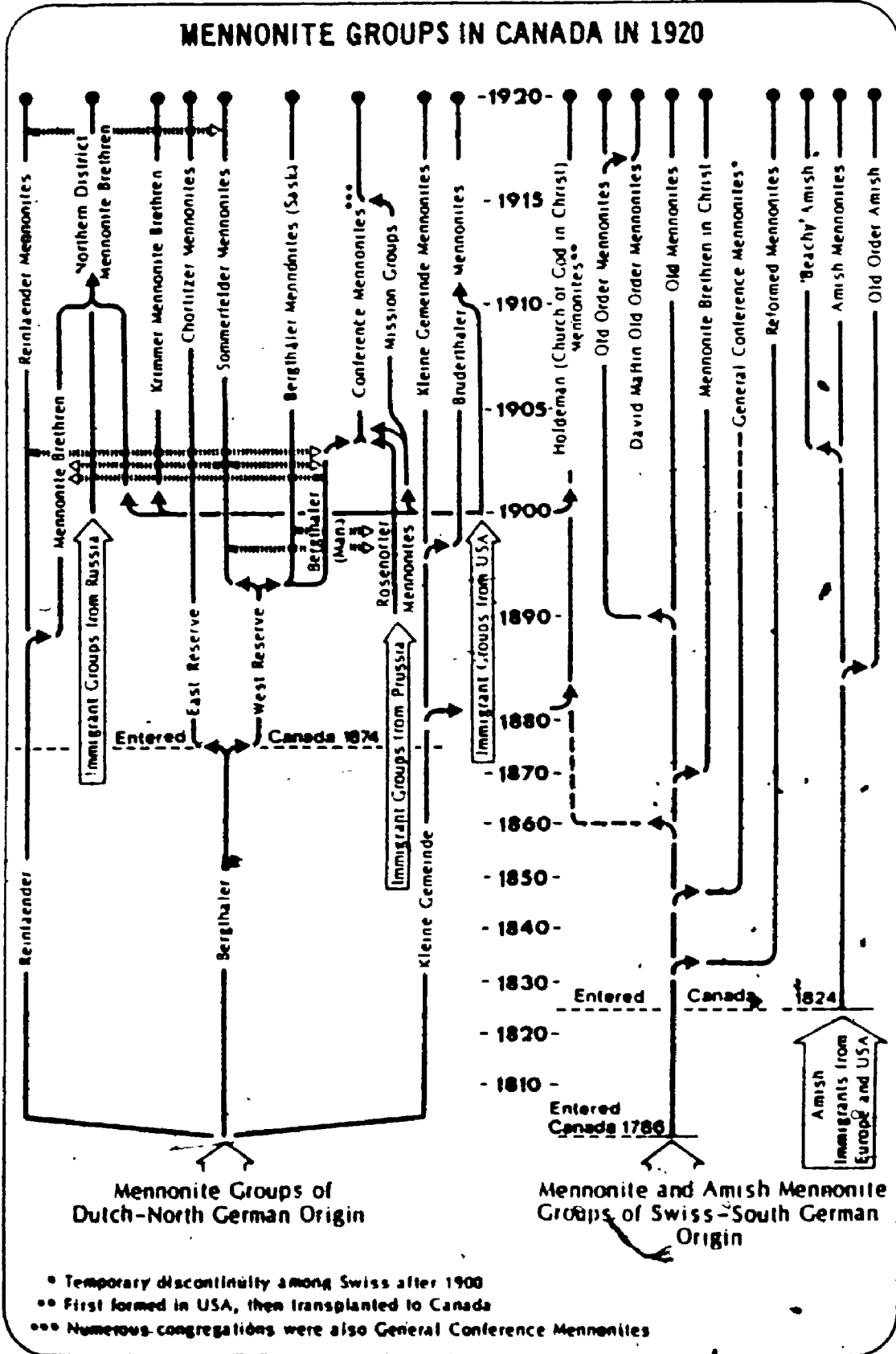


TABLE 1  
MENNONITE CONGREGATIONAL FAMILIES IN CANADA

NO.	NAME	DATE <sup>1</sup>	PROVINCE	TYPE <sup>2</sup>	ORIGIN <sup>3</sup>	UNITS OR CENTRES <sup>4</sup>	MEMBER-SHIP <sup>5</sup>
1.	Old Mennonite Church						
	Mennonite Conference of Ontario	1820	Ontario	C	SSG	25	1638
	Alta., Sask. Mennonite Conference	1907	Alta., Sask.	C	SSG	6	273
2.	Amish Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>	1824	Ontario	B	SSG	5	1379
3.	Reformed Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>	1825	Ontario	B	SSG	6	300
4.	Kleine Gemeinden <sup>6</sup>	1873	Manitoba	B	DNG	6	629
5.	Mennonite Brethren in Christ						
	Ontario District	1874	Ontario	C	SSG	25	1435
	Northwest District	1908	Alta., Sask.	C	SSG	21	149
6.	Chortitzer Mennonite Church	1874	Manitoba	B	DNG	12	955
7.	Reinlaender Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>						
	West Reserve Area	1875	Manitoba	B	DNG	8	1891
	Hague-Osler Area	1895	Saskatchewan	B	DNG	4	1135
	Swift Current Area	1905	Saskatchewan	B	DNG	4	880
8.	Church of God in Christ, Mennonite	1881	Man., Alta.	C	DNG, SSG	4	146
9.	Old Order Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>						
	Waterloo Area	1889	Ontario	B	SSG	5	370
	Markham Area	1889	Ontario	B	SSG	4	95
	Niagara Area	1889	Ontario	B	SSG	4	38
10.	Old Order Amish Churches <sup>6</sup>	1891	Ontario	B	SSG	2	124
11.	Sommerfelder Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>						
	West Reserve Area	1892	Manitoba	B	DNG	11	2692
	Herbert Area	1900	Saskatchewan	B	DNG	3	481
12.	Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Churches <sup>6</sup>	1899	Sask., Alta.	C	DNG	3	115
13.	Bruderthaler Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>	1897	Man., Sask.	C	DNG	3	250
14.	Beachy Amish Churches <sup>6, 7</sup>	1903	Ontario	B	SSG	2	313
15.	Bergthaler(S) Mennonite Churches <sup>6</sup>						
	Hague-Osler Area	1902	Saskatchewan	B	DNG	3	483
	Carrot River Area	1908	Saskatchewan	B	DNG	1	65
16.	Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada	1903	Man., Sask., Alta.	C	DNG	21	2022
17.	Mennonite Brethren Churches, Northern Dist.	1910	Man., Sask.	C	DNG	20	1553
18.	David Martin Old Order Mennonite Church	1917	Ontario	B	SSG	1	50

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> First date of the body in question is used, in some cases individual congregations precede this date, as in the case of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario, whose first congregation was formally established in 1801, the Mennonite Brethren, whose first Canadian congregation appeared in 1888, or the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, whose Bergthaler Church was established in 1874. See Table 2<sup>9</sup> for founding dates of congregations.

C — Conference-oriented; B — Bishop-oriented.

SSG — Swiss-South German, DNG — Dutch-North German.

<sup>4</sup> Meeting places and/or congregational groups or congregations.

<sup>5</sup> Baptized persons only. Figure given is the one available closest to 1920.

<sup>6</sup> Use of plurals indicates more than one congregation, each with a bishop or leading minister.

<sup>7</sup> Beachy was a name that came into use in the late 1920s.

<sup>8</sup> Bergthaler(S) meaning Bergthaler(Saskatchewan), is distinct from the Bergthaler in Manitoba and the Bergthaler in Alberta, the latter groups both members of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada.

Source: Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, pp. 20-21.

an increasing number of congregational and community histories, as well as personal memoirs, are being published.<sup>32</sup> With the benefit of this growing list of resources, distinguished Mennonite historian Frank H. Epp wrote the first two volumes of a comprehensive history of Canadian Mennonites which appeared in 1974 and 1982.<sup>33</sup>

Still, a great deal of research, and analysis, remains to be done on the local and regional level. This is particularly necessary for the Russian Mennonites in Ontario, a long-neglected and misrepresented part of the post-World War I influx. George Thielman's 1955 dissertation on "The Canadian Mennonites" mentions them only in passing. Thielman, typically, focuses on the Mennonite "colonies" in western Canada with an eye on their presumed assimilation and he quickly dismisses Ontario Russian Mennonites as "farmers or fruit growers."<sup>34</sup> More recently, a study of urbanization among Mennonites in Canada completely ignored the Russlaender in Ontario.<sup>35</sup>

Nor have Ontario Russian Mennonites fared better in the "official" accounts. John A. Toews devotes less than three pages to them in his History of the Mennonite Brethren Church<sup>36</sup> despite the presence of eight congregations with over 1,100 adult members here by 1945. They are allotted about a dozen pages in Frank Epp's massive second volume of Mennonites in Canada, which covers the period from 1920-1940, and little consideration is given to the uniqueness of the Ontario situation.<sup>37</sup> This omission is even more characteristic of Epp's earlier book, Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution.<sup>38</sup> Much research remains to be done on the local and regional levels.

## III

As noted earlier, the survival of the Mennonites, as a unique religious group appears to be integrally related to their survival as an ethnic group. The survival of ethno-religious groups is not widely studied or clearly understood. In his study of ethnicity in Canada entitled The Survival of Ethnic Groups, Jeffrey Reitz proposes two reasons why ethnic groups survive: economic and cultural.<sup>39</sup> The survival of religious groups, he concedes, "is problematic to a degree."<sup>40</sup> Yet Reitz nowhere attempts to address that problem, choosing instead to ignore the function of religion in ethnic group maintenance. The conflict model of ethnic change and survival proposed by Alan Anderson reflects the same weakness. In Anderson's discussion religion is little more than an expression of cultural distinctives.<sup>41</sup> Roberto Perin, in a recent CHR article, offers some additional insights with his observation that the North American environment altered the way in which churches could operate. In this context, he notes, "they became voluntary institutions deprived of the coercive power of the state."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, he continues, "the phenomenon of religion as a bond between the individual and the local community no longer existed."<sup>43</sup> Perin calls into question, therefore, the function of religion in the life of immigrant communities.

Perhaps what these models and theories overlook is the possibility that, not only might religion be an expression of cultural distinctions, but culture may in fact become an expression of religious distinctions.

The preservation of the faith, then, becomes equivalent to ethnic survival. That, in effect, is the argument made by Calvin Redekop above. If this is so, then Reitz's definition of an ethnic group would need to be expanded to include religious faith in addition to "common national, cultural or ethnic ancestry."<sup>44</sup> Harry S. Stout has made a similar suggestion on the basis of his study of American religious life. Ethnicity and religion, Stout maintains, are "two identical expressions of the same phenomenon such that one's ethnicity becomes, in fact, his religion... The church service," he continues, "became a symbolic rite of affirmation to one's ethnic association and a vehicle for preserving the ethnic language."<sup>45</sup> This convergence of ethno-cultural and religious values and institutions, Stout calls "ethnoreligion."

The role of religious beliefs and practices has often been overlooked in the discussion of ethnic group survival. Jeffrey Reitz has argued that the survival of ethnic groups can be analyzed "as a problem of group formation and group cohesion."<sup>46</sup> There are both "instrumental" and "expressive" factors in this process, according to Reitz. By "instrumental" he means the practical and material needs of daily life, primarily the economic. "Expressive," on the other hand, refers to the subjective social and cultural interests of the individual or the community. These, Reitz believes, are rooted in the socio-cultural institutions of family, community, and church.<sup>47</sup> But the church, in this scenario, is simply one institution among many which define and sustain an ethnic group, and a comparatively insignificant one at that.



This thesis seeks to analyze and understand more fully the survival of one ethnoreligious group in [redacted], the Mennonites. The first Chapter will focus on the historical process whereby the Mennonites developed their distinctive ethnoreligious character. The succeeding chapters will illustrate how that identity was tested and refined in the immigrant experience of one segment of the Mennonite people, the Russian Mennonite community in Ontario. It will seek to demonstrate, moreover, that in the case of the Russian Mennonites, the church was more than a cultural institution. It was, in fact, the central identifying and unifying (and sometimes divisive) factor in community life. The church, for these Mennonites, both symbolized and sustained their distinctive identity. Their survival as a people, they believed, depended entirely on the survival of their unique religious faith and the specific cultural expressions which had come to characterize it.

This particular Mennonite experience illustrates, moreover, the ongoing struggle against the prevailing cultural and religious environment which has come to dominate Mennonite faith and life. Sociologist E.K. Francis, after an extensive study of Mennonite communities in Manitoba, concluded that this struggle

is perhaps the one principal theme or leitmotif which can be discovered in the history of the Mennonites as a whole. The driving power behind their migrations and repeated flights to remote parts of the world, where they hoped to find an opportunity to live the Christian life as they understood it, was always a heroic desire to preserve the sacred traditions<sup>48</sup>... against the allurements of a larger society.

Mennonite historian John Lapp agrees. "Our primary concern," he observes, "has been the development of our identity and boundary maintenance ...."<sup>49</sup> Frank Epp explains how this came about.

The theological separation and sociological ostracism [of the sixteenth century], involuntary for the most part, were followed in due course by a voluntary geographic isolation and by a rather willing cultural separation. As time went on, the separated Mennonite way of life acquired a separatist psychology as well as separate institutions for its constant undergirding. These in turn required a philosophical justification, which a latter-day theology of withdrawal from the world could provide. Thus the cycle of separation<sup>50</sup> was completed as cause and effect followed each other.

As a result, a high degree of ethnocentrism, supported by almost total institutional completeness, came to mark the Mennonite colonies in Russia. Here Mennonite settlers lived in virtual isolation between 1789 and 1914 in what James Urry, a student of this period, calls "the claustrophobic social world of the colonies."<sup>51</sup> Here, too, the Mennonites came to consider their very way of life as sacred. According to Urry,

they changed from being an inward looking religious society dedicated to following a narrow path in opposition to the world, to an open culture which was above the world in its advancement, knowledge, and way of life. The sense of "being different" thus shifted from one of a religiously oriented life style to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker but merely one amongst many.<sup>52</sup>

In the words of E.K. Francis, "the Mennonites eventually came to consider as sacred all their institutions, whether they were concerned

directly with religion or with matters which were themselves secular."<sup>53</sup>

This confusion, together with the proliferation of sub-groups and denominations, complicated the search for purity of faith and life and the struggle for survival as an ethnoreligious group. That dilemma prompted Mennonite historian Rodney Sawatsky to ask, in an illuminating article entitled "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity and Unity," "What finally is the unity which defines 'Mennonite' amidst the diversity?"<sup>54</sup> Equally important, how is this unity, or any unity for that matter, to be maintained? These questions, as much as the physical and the economic, defined the Russian Mennonite struggle for survival in Ontario. Interestingly, that struggle did not occupy the Russian Mennonite immigrants alone. Their coreligionists, both the Swiss in Ontario and the Kanadier in the West, faced the same question on various fronts, as already noted. So, too, did the American Mennonites who had come to the United States in the 1870s. In 1926 one of their leaders asked the national convention,

How shall we maintain and cultivate that reverence for spiritual values, for the Christian home, the school, and the Church <sup>55</sup> which will stamp us indelibly as a 'peculiar people'?

The postwar era raised that question in seemingly new and challenging ways throughout North America.

Sawatsky points out that Mennonites have most often relied on the establishment of some form of authority to maintain unity. He

describes at least six forms of authority utilized at various times and in various ways. The first, and what he calls the "classical Anabaptist-Mennonite counterpoint to pluralism," is "the formulation of right theology or orthodoxy."<sup>56</sup> A second form of authority is found in a common group experience, what Sawatsky calls "ortho-experience." Third is ortho-praxis, "well known as a mechanism of social control and boundary maintenance in distinguishing true, authoritative Mennonitism ...."<sup>57</sup> Ortho-praxis "focuses primarily on correct ethics and only secondarily on correct theology," according to Sawatsky. Authoritative leaders provide a fourth form of authority; institutions and organizations, such as churches and conferences, a fifth. The sixth form is that of orthodox history, the authority of the collective memory. "Besides these more formal considerations," Sawatsky concludes, "familial, ethnic and social dynamics have played and continue to play strong unifying functions."<sup>58</sup>

The experience of the Russian Mennonite immigrant community in Ontario will be used to illustrate and test these observations and theories. It will be demonstrated that, as Epp has argued, the Mennonite story of this era is indeed a struggle for survival. The various approaches to maintaining group unity outlined by Sawatsky are all evident in that experience. The present study argues, however, that significant regional and denominational differences emerged in this struggle, differences heretofore neglected or ignored. More specifically, this thesis will test Reitz's model of ethnic group survival, investigating whether it may require some modification when

applied to ethnoreligious groups. In addition, it will attempt to answer Roberto Perin's question about the role of the church in immigrant life, one which he argues is strictly circumscribed in the New World.<sup>59</sup> Harry Stout's theory of ethnoreligious development may be more applicable to the Russian Mennonite experience in North America.

While investigating the strong internal drive for religious and cultural separation from the "world," this thesis also seeks to place the Russian Mennonites more completely into the context of the larger society. It expands Epp's study of Mennonite immigration, for example, by considering more fully the broader pattern of immigration to Canada. It also seeks to explain more fully the conflict of Mennonite loyalties when confronted by nationalism and the demands of the state. All of these interrelationships had been clearly defined for the Mennonites in Russia. When war and immigration destroyed that comfortable arrangement, the Mennonites were forced to reevaluate all of those relationships. Could they reestablish themselves and retain their identity despite that upheaval? If so, how faithfully and by what means? How, in short, were they to survive as a separate people?

#### IV

Survival became the operative term for the Russian Mennonites in the twentieth century. Socio-economic and political upheaval in Russia during and immediately following the First World War erupted with particular fury over the Ukraine where most of the Mennonites lived.

Here the Red and White armies marched back and forth repeatedly in their seesaw battle for military superiority, leaving destruction and death in their wake. Roving bandits added their own brand of terror to this devastation. Once a semblance of order had been restored, famine and disease continued to decimate the population. Changes in the economic and political system did little to alleviate the suffering. Those changes ensured, however, that the old order would not return.

Although the Mennonites suffered no more, and no less, than others during the civil war, they believed that their survival as a people was threatened on all fronts. Their land had been razed, property requisitioned, homes and businesses pillaged or destroyed. Economically they were ruined. What was more, their relatively independent and self-contained communities had been invaded by the very "world" they had sought to escape. Under the new economic and political order, there was no prospect for a return to that isolated existence. Their sacrosanct communal life was irretrievably destroyed. In addition, the German language and culture, which had become the only acceptable expression of their communal and spiritual values, was no longer tolerated by the Soviet authorities. Finally, the practice and proclamation of their religious faith was itself no longer permitted. As a result, the very essence of their identity was in danger of being lost. Many looked to Canada, therefore, to rescue them from this destruction.

Postwar Canada was not, however, the haven numerous dislocated or indigent European immigrants had hoped it would be. As this thesis

points out, the Russian Mennonites faced some similar, though less intense, threats to their survival as an ethnoreligious group in their new homeland. On the one hand was the pressure to conform to the predominant Anglo-Canadian culture. World War I had aroused a latent xenophobia which ensuing socio-economic crises would not permit to dissipate. In addition to the understandable trauma of being "foreigners" in an unfamiliar culture, however, was the unexpected tension between the newcomers and their indigenous coreligionists. All of these circumstances required more adjustments than they had expected to make.

The greatest challenges, however, came just as the initial accommodation had been completed. First came the Depression, threatening to eradicate any hard-won economic gains and injecting another dose of instability into the tenuous new communal bonds and institutions recently created. But if these material circumstances tested the faith of the Mennonites, both in God and in each other, then the rise of Naziism and the advent of another war seriously challenged it. The resurgent Germanism of the 1930s promised to revitalize the cultural identity of this people. But that very revitalization rendered them even more suspect in the minds of patriotic Anglo-Canadians. The war would test their loyalty, therefore, and provide an opportunity to demonstrate it publicly. It became necessary, however, to reconcile their patriotic duty to Canada with their pacifist religious principles. Ironically, this was the same dilemma they had faced in Russia after 1870 and one they had sought to escape by emigrating.

A period of introspection and reevaluation followed World War II. It was, of necessity, a brief period, however, because a new wave of Russian Mennonite refugees sought admission to Canada. By assisting them, the Russlaender communities in Ontario had the opportunity to repay a debt of gratitude for their own relocation little more than twenty years earlier. A full analysis of the impact of the postwar influx on existing communities is, however, beyond the scope of the present study.

The Ontario immigrant community is uniquely suited for study for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is easily identifiable. It was and remained distinct from the Swiss Mennonites throughout this period. Secondly, these newcomers faced the challenge of cultural conformity more directly and intensely in this rapidly changing and relatively urbanized environment than did their coreligionists in western Canada. Their separatist impulse was, therefore, tested most severely here. Finally, these immigrants left behind them a substantial historical record which permits an intensive study. The official minutes of congregations, conferences, and organizations is supplemented by extensive collections of personal accounts and correspondence in the immigrant press. A series of oral history interviews conducted with the immigrants themselves provides additional first-person evidence. Taken together, these sources provide a more detailed picture of a postwar Canadian Mennonite immigrant community in transition than has been provided elsewhere. The findings, however, should have a broader application. The Russian Mennonites in Ontario



are, in many ways, a microcosm of the larger immigrant experience of adjustment. At bottom, it becomes for all ethnic groups an ongoing question of redrawing the boundaries, a question of separation or integration. For the Mennonites, that struggle began when they emerged as a distinct group in the sixteenth century.

Footnotes

- 1 Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1957), p. 48.
- 2 The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. J.C. Wenger (Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1956), p. 679.
- 3 Calvin Redekop, "Anabaptism and the Ethnic Ghost," The Mennonite Quarterly Review (hereafter MQR), LVIII (April, 1984), p. 144.
- 4 Indeed, a variety of ethno-cultural manifestations, as Frank H. Epp amply illustrates in Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920. The History of a Separate People and Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival (2 vols.; Toronto: Macmillan, 1974-82).
- 5 Milton Gordon has defined an ethnic group as "any group defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin, or some combination of these categories." Such a group has, he adds, acquired a "sense of peoplehood." Milton R. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life. The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 27. Dashefsky adds that group identification is "a generalized attitude indicative of a personal attachment to the group and a positive orientation toward being a member of the group. Therefore, ethnic identification takes place when the group in question is one with whom the individual believes he has a common ancestry based on shared individual characteristics and/or shared sociocultural experiences." Quoted in Leo Driedger, ed., The Canadian Ethnic Mosaic. A Quest for Identity (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978) p. 9.
- 6 Redekop, "Ethnic Ghost," p. 145.
- 7 Jim Coggins, "Since you are Mennonite . . .," Mennonite Brethren Herald, May 16, 1986, p. 3. Coggins himself is a Mennonite of non-ethnic Mennonite background.
- 8 John Redekop, "Opinion," ibid., p. 12.
- 9 For recent historiographical overviews see Alan B. Anderson, "Canadian Ethnic Studies: Traditional Preoccupations and New Directions," Journal of Canadian Studies, 17 (Spring, 1982), pp. 5-15; Howard Palmer, "Canadian Immigration and Ethnic History in the 1970s and 1980s," Journal of Canadian Studies, 17 (Spring, 1982), pp. 35-50; and Roberto Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic: The Third Force in Canadian Historiography," Canadian Historical Review, LXIV (Dec., 1983), pp. 441-67.

- 10 See Carl Berger, The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 128-31.
- 11 Palmer, "Canadian Immigration," p. 37; Anderson, "Canadian Ethnic Studies," p. 11.
- 12 Donald H. Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Alien Question, 1896-1914: The Anglo-Canadian Perspective" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1973), ch. 6; Marilyn J. Barber, "The Assimilation of Immigrants in the Canadian Prairie Provinces, 1896-1918: Canadian Perception and Canadian Policies" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1975), Chapters III-V.
- 13 Norman Buchignani, "Canadian Ethnic Research and Multi-culturalism," Journal of Canadian Studies, 17 (Spring, 1982), p. 19.
- 14 Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (1951; 2nd ed. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973). See for example Vera Lysenko, Men in Sheepskin Coats. A Study in Assimilation (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947) on Ukrainians in Canada, and Louis Rosenberg, Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada (Montreal: Bureau of Social and Economic Research, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939).
- 15 For a critical review of those published to date see Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic," pp. 445-50.
- 16 See, for example, such classic studies as John A. Hostetler, Amish Society (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1968), and Hutterite Society (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1974); John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic. An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). For analysis and bibliography see Driedger, Canadian Ethnic Mosaic, esp. Part I.
- 17 Palmer, "Canadian Immigration," p. 38.
- 18 George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, The Doukhobors (1968; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada. A History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1971); Ken Adachi, The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Epp, Mennonites in Canada; Myrna Kostash, All of Baba's Children (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1977); Helen Potrebenco, No Streets of Gold: a social history of Ukrainians in Alberta (Vancouver: New Star, 1977).
- 19 Palmer, "Canadian Immigration," pp. 42-45, provides an overview.
- 20 Ibid., p. 38.
- 21 Stephen A. Speisman, The Jews of Toronto. A History to 1937 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

- 22 Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Doukhobors; Hostetler, Amish Society; Hostetler, Hutterite Society.
- 23 Donavon E. Smucker, ed., The Sociology of Canadian Mennonites, Hutterites and Amish: A Bibliography with Annotations (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977).
- 24 For a brief survey of the 24 identifiable groups in Canada see Margaret Loewen Reimer, One Quilt, Many Pieces (Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Publishing Service, 1983).
- 25 For a comprehensive history see Orland Gingerich, The Amish in Canada (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1972).
- 26 E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1955); Henry J. Gerbrandt, Adventure in Faith (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1970); Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969).
- 27 Gingerich, The Amish in Canada.
- 28 John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno, Cal.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975).
- 29 In addition to historical works already cited, see also John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland. The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-27 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1967); Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962). The anthropological and sociological studies are noted in Smucker, Bibliography.
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- 31 Ellen Baar, "Patterns of Selective Accentuation Among Niagara Mennonites," Canadian Ethnic Studies, vol. XV, no. 2 (1983), pp. 77-91; Leo Brifedger and Jacob Peters, "Ethnic Identity: A Comparison of Mennonite and Other German Students," MQR, XLVIII (July, 1973), pp. 225-244; J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, Anabaptists Four Centuries Later (Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1975).
- 32 The most comprehensive bibliography to date is in Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II.
- 33 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, Volume III, covering the period from 1940-1965, was in progress at the time of Epp's death in January, 1986.

- 34 Thielman, "Canadian Mennonites," pp. 92-93.
- 35 Leo Driedger and J. Howard Kauffman, "Urbanization of Mennonites: Canadian and American Comparisons," MQR, LVI (July, 1982), pp. 269-90.
- 36 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History.
- 37 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II.
- 38 Epp, Mennonite Exodus.
- 39 Jeffrey G. Reitz, The Survival of Ethnic Groups (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980), p. 1.
- 40 Ibid., p. 3.
- 41 Anderson, "Canadian Ethnic Studies," p. 7.
- 42 Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic," p. 457.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Reitz, Survival, p. 95.
- 45 Harry S. Stout, "Ethnicity: The Vital Center of Religion in America," Ethnicity, 2 (June, 1975), p. 207.
- 46 Reitz, Survival, p. xi.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 17-19.
- 48 E.K. Francis, "Tradition and Progress Among the Mennonites in Manitoba," MQR, XXIV (Oct., 1950), p. 312.
- 49 John A. Lapp, "Mennonite Studies: Preparing for the Next Agenda," Journal of Mennonite Studies (hereafter JMSt), 1 (1983), p. 203.
- 50 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 20.
- 51 James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," JMSt, 3 (1985), p. 20.
- 52 Cited in Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 170.
- 53 E.K. Francis, "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group," The American Journal of Sociology, LIV (Sept., 1948), p. 105.
- 54 Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity and Unity," MQR, LVII (July, 1983), p. 283.

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- 55 H.P. Krehbiel, The History of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, vol. 2 (Newton, Kan.: by the author, 1938), p. 255.
- 56 Sawatsky, "Diversity and Unity", p. 286.
- 57 Ibid., p. 287.
- 58 Ibid., p. 288.
- 59 Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic," p. 457.

## CHAPTER I

### The Emergence of a Separated People

The origin of the Mennonites as a distinct group is deeply rooted in the socio-economic, political, and religious context within which they emerged. The process by which they became a separated people was equally historically conditioned. And, as the adherents to this group soon discovered, their survival as a separate people would remain a constant struggle against the world which had birthed them and which now nurtured them. How could they, consistently and with integrity, be fully in the world but not of it, as Scripture commanded?<sup>1</sup> The Mennonite Story is the story of the perpetual search for an escape from this inescapable symbiotic relationship, the search, in the words of one observer, for utopia.<sup>2</sup>

Early sixteenth-century Europe was a continent in turmoil. The once-mighty Holy Roman Empire teetered on the brink of total collapse, buffeted by the Turks on the east and the French on the west. Princes and nobles fought incessantly for local and regional sovereignty. The peasants, whose taxes supported these exploits, often grumbled and sometimes rebelled. What united them all, however, was the Roman Catholic Church. By the early sixteenth century most of the laity, nobility, and, indeed, clergy were also united in their call for reform in the church. Some deplored the immorality of the priesthood, others

the oppressive burden of taxation imposed by Rome, still others the often unbridled power of the pope. Martin Luther's 95 Theses, posted in Wittenberg in 1517 to protest these and other excesses, focused much of this resentment and unleashed the indomitable forces of reform.<sup>3</sup>

So intertwined were the church and the state, however, that both the authority of the emperor and the universality of the Roman Catholic Church were irreversibly eroded by the fragmentation engendered by the Protestant Reformation. Out of this turbulent milieu emerged the Anabaptists, the spiritual forerunners of the Mennonites.

Although the specific historical antecedents and the precise religious definition of early Anabaptism continue to be debated, a number of key elements characterized the majority of these dissenters, setting them apart from other reformers.<sup>4</sup> Most obvious was their rejection of the validity of infant baptism for membership in the true church of Christ. Their practice of a second baptism for adults earned them the disparaging designation of 'anabaptists' or 're-baptizers'. At the root of their protest, however, lay not so much a difference in the understanding of the form of baptism as "a bitter and irreducible struggle between two mutually exclusive concepts of the church."<sup>5</sup>

The Anabaptists denied the authority of the ecclesiastical structure and the normative traditions of the Catholic Church. They also rejected the coercive coalescence of religious and political authority in the Reform movements. They accepted as their sole authority the Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures and interpreted by the fellowship of believers. They demanded of each other, moreover, visible evidence of



a personal faith as demonstrated by a life of nonconformity to the 'world.' That biblically mandated purity of the faith and life, they agreed, had been lost in the Catholic Church. Hence the demand for reform.

For a time, they participated in the various renewal efforts of the mainline Reformers. In Zurich, for example, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz numbered among those pursuing the Zwinglian reform. By 1524, however, they had lost patience with the pace of magisterial reform and in January, 1525 Grebel, Manz, and George Blaurock baptized each other as adult believers. This action marked their official break with the Protestant reformation and, in the words of Blaurock, their "separation from the world and its evil works."<sup>6</sup>

In February, 1527 a group of Swiss Anabaptists met in Schleitheim in order to clarify the issues on which they agreed and which separated them from both Catholics and Protestants. Of the seven articles contained in the Schleitheim Confession,<sup>7</sup> four bear noting for the purposes of this study. The Anabaptists agreed, first of all, that the church must be a voluntary association of adult believers. They rejected thereby both the state church and infant baptism. Moreover, by proclaiming the separation of church and state, they also rejected the coercive power of the state in regulating religious life and faith, replacing it with the social pressure of the ban (excommunication). Secondly, in order to foster and maintain disciplined obedience, the Schleitheim gathering prescribed a system of authoritative but elective church leadership. It established thereby the autonomy of

congregational units as the accepted form of church polity, clearly rejecting the hierarchical structure of the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Considerable space was devoted to clarifying their position on the "sword." These Anabaptists rejected the use of force or violence as a means of settling religious differences. Moreover, they renounced the use of the sword by Christians even against the "wicked" as, for example, in warfare. They took literally the command to love all people, even one's enemies.<sup>8</sup> They were concerned, first and foremost, with the purification of the Christian witness, "separating the True Church from power and political interest. Their attitude was not 'pacifism', but rather 'defenselessness' or 'nonresistance' or 'passive obedience'."<sup>9</sup> For this reason, they forbade the magistracy to any of their number because it meant "pass[ing] sentence in worldly disputes" and perhaps even enforcing the death penalty. While never denying the need for the sword in the restraint of evil, they restricted its use to those "outside the perfection of Christ," that is, those outside the true church.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, they forbade the swearing of civil oaths for, as they explained, "we cannot fulfill that which we promise when we swear...."<sup>11</sup> They were prepared, instead, to make a simple affirmation. "Since the ancient loyalties and traditions of the community found their symbolic center in the civic oath, this rejection... was deeply disturbing and puzzling to the authorities."<sup>12</sup> For many Anabaptists, this meant living without the rights of citizenship, or even outright exile.

This persecution, however, merely served to reinforce the belief in a separation between the follower of Christ and the 'world'. "As different as [these] kingdoms are;" wrote Menno Simons, the Dutch Anabaptist after whom the Mennonites are named, "so different are also their regimen [Lebensordnungen]." <sup>13</sup> This clear distinction in lifestyles and values demanded nothing else, according to Menno, than a separation (Absonderung) of Christians from the 'world', meaning the rest of society which he believed was evil by definition. <sup>14</sup> The inevitable consequences of a separated life for the faithful, therefore, were persecution and suffering, self-evident to Menno and his followers from their daily plight.

While religious strife and persecution raged in the lands of the emperor, dissenters increasingly looked to the territories beyond his control for refuge. Countless Anabaptist refugees from Switzerland, the Tyrol, and South Germany found toleration in Moravia, along with many other Protestants. <sup>15</sup> Some 200 of these later moved northward into the duchy of East Prussia where a number of Anabaptists attained some influence as advisors to the Lutheran Duke. The Lutheran clergy, however, precipitated their expulsion from here in 1543. Although a number continued to live in East Prussia, especially in Koenigsberg, most resettled in the Polish territory of West Prussia and the free cities of Elbing and Danzig. <sup>16</sup>

These two centres, like Koenigsberg, maintained active mercantile relations with the port cities of the Netherlands. When a new wave of persecutions against the Anabaptists in the Netherlands arose in the

mid-1530s, "almost every boat arriving on the coast of Prussia, particularly in the Polish portion, brought persecuted Anabaptists from Holland."<sup>17</sup> The greatest impact, however, accrued from the Catholic Counter-Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century which virtually eliminated the Protestants from the southern provinces of the Netherlands and induced many in the north to look elsewhere for their safety. At this same time West Prussian authorities undertook a massive drainage project in the Vistula delta. By soliciting Dutch experts and settlers for that purpose, the economic opportunity they offered facilitated the resolution of the religious conflict encountered by the religious dissenters in the Low Countries.<sup>18</sup> Many Anabaptists remained in the northern provinces of the Netherlands in spite of the edict against them. A substantial number, however, who either feared for their lives or who had not established a permanent home following their flight from the south, emigrated to the Vistula region where they ensured the permanence of Mennonite settlement.

In the Prussian environment, the rudiments of Mennonite communal life gradually evolved. Its religious, cultural, economic, and political elements assumed the form later to be transmitted to Russia. But the Dutch roots of the Mennonites here showed clearly until well into the eighteenth century. Differences in religious practice and principle, brought here from their former homes, remained intact, "sometimes more emphatically than in the mother country."<sup>19</sup> Religious ties to the homeland, therefore, helped delay Mennonite adjustment to the new environment.

Other factors helped reinforce this distinction from their Polish Catholic and German Lutheran neighbours. Except by special permission, the state denied membership in the Mennonite church to non-Mennonites.<sup>20</sup> The Mennonites themselves strongly resisted the admission of non-Mennonites into their churches, even by intermarriage, fearing contamination of their religious purity and cultural identity.<sup>21</sup> One student of this period has noted the shift in emphasis from the Anabaptist concern of transforming the individual and the world to a concern with "maintenance and continuance."

The efforts were now directed towards imbuing existing members' children with the traditions of the past, teaching them the principles of faith and guiding them on the narrow path of separation and the pure life. The whole idea was to hold onto those already born in the system and not to admit outsiders... That this in fact contradicted one of the basic precepts of Anabaptism, voluntary choice, did not seem to worry these later Mennonites as they considered their children as having chosen [upon the receipt of adult baptism] ... and thus Mennonitism had become a total way of life from birth to death....<sup>22</sup>

By the second generation, therefore, Anabaptist-Mennonitism had been transformed from a radical adult faith and its incumbent lifestyle to a total way of life from birth to death.

Cultural values and practices soon formed a vital part of that ethnoreligious social system and the determination with which they were perpetuated reflected the Mennonite concern for maintenance and continuity. For two centuries, Dutch remained the primary language of communication. Only after the mid-eighteenth century did they begin to

adopt the Low-German dialects in their daily life and the High German in worship and literature.<sup>23</sup> By and large, the predominantly rural settlement and relative isolation and independence of Mennonite communities reinforced both the impression and the reality of distinction from the 'world' around them. E.K. Francis has noted that "The self-sufficiency of village life in those days, as well as ethnic-cultural and linguistic segregation from most of their neighbours, permitted a high degree of isolation."<sup>24</sup> Here a rudimentary Mennonite communal system evolved.

Institutional development also reflected and underscored the tendency toward maintenance and self-sufficiency. The Anabaptist forbearers of the Mennonites, while differing on the degree of mutuality, had all considered mutual aid "a necessary and natural concomitant of spiritual fellowship."<sup>25</sup> In Prussia, the rudiments of organized aid to the needy and institutional care for the sick and elderly began to emerge.<sup>26</sup> By the eighteenth century, moreover, authorities guaranteed the Mennonites the right to educate their children with their own teachers. In sociological terms, then, institutional completeness began to mark the group, strengthening its separatist tendencies. In a society oriented toward religious values, however, these ethnic traits were connected, in "their [the Mennonites'] own minds, as well as in that of the out-groups ... with their Mennonite religion rather than with their Dutch-Frisian social heritage."<sup>27</sup> As a result, the cultural form and the religious content of Mennonitism became increasingly convergent.

For over 200 years the Mennonites lived in Prussia, surrounded by an increasingly intolerant and hostile society. Within that context of limited economic, political, and religious freedom they relied increasingly on their separate, largely isolated settlements to protect their beliefs and lifestyle. By the late eighteenth century these restrictions on land ownership, occupations, and military exemption combined to threaten the viability and integrity of both their way of life and their historic faith.<sup>28</sup> James Urry writes,

It was clear that the system of life as well as the continuance of both the communities and the faith were threatened. The usual patterns of expansion were no longer open; the young men could no longer find land and follow the traditions of the past. It would mean that [they] would have to take up crafts and compete for a market already overcrowded. They would have to leave home for work often in the growing urban centres. This would mean them leaving the protection and control of the congregations and the community. Prussia<sup>29</sup> seemed to offer little future for the Mennonites.

Demographic pressures, therefore, together with unease about Prussian militarism favourably disposed the growing number of landless Mennonites to a Russian invitation in the 1780s.

Expansion of the Russian Empire westward into Poland and south to the shores of the Black Sea during the reign of Catherine II (1762-96) opened new frontiers which the government was anxious to settle. The Polish territories partitioned to Russia contained a sizeable and divergent population, comprising largely a Prussian nobility, a Polish peasantry, and Jewish townspeople. The vast southern steppes, however, supported only small bands of Cossacks, runaway serfs, some military

colonies, and a larger number of nomadic tribes of Nogais. These regions Catherine organized into an administrative division called New Russia. She established Gregory Potemkin as viceroy here, charging him with the task of colonizing and developing this part of the empire. The Tsarina, in turn, offered generous incentives to foreigners interested in possessing their own land and regulating their own affairs under her suzerainty.

Potemkin pursued his task with determination, building cities and ports, promoting business and trade, and inducing extensive settlement. Among his colonization agents was one Georg von Trappe, a former resident of Danzig, well acquainted with the Prussian Mennonites and their conflicts with the governing authorities.<sup>30</sup> In 1786 he persuaded the Danzig Mennonites to send Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch to view the land in New Russia, choose a potential site for settlement, and negotiate favourable terms with the viceroy and his St. Petersburg superiors. After touring the territory, the two men submitted, on April 22, 1787, a petition with twenty requests and proposals to Potemkin.<sup>31</sup> Anxious to secure the relocation of the Mennonites, whose reputation as prosperous farmers and skilled craftsmen was carried into Russia by troops occupying the Vistula region during the Seven Years' War, the prince assented to most of their demands. On September 7, 1787, upon the insistence of the distrustful Hoepfner and Bartsch, Catherine issued a special decree sanctioning this agreement.



Many of the points in the "Mennonite Petition" merely reiterated privileges and grants offered other foreign colonists. Of particular concern to the two delegates and the people they represented, however, were articles 1, 7 and 8 which guaranteed complete freedom of religious belief and practice, the swearing of allegiance through simple affirmation instead of an oath, and permanent exemption from military service for themselves and their descendants.<sup>32</sup> Recognizing that not all Mennonites would be farmers, and recalling their Prussian experience, article 5 requested the right to establish shops and factories throughout New Russia and the Crimea, to engage in commerce and free trade without discriminatory duties, and to join association and craft guilds. The other articles dealt with the location and conditions of settlement, providing for generous government assistance and tax concessions. In late 1787 Hoepfner and Bartsch, along with von Trappe, returned to Danzig, agreement in hand, to lead the anticipated exodus.

Danzig Mennonites responded to the reports of their delegates with ardent enthusiasm. City officials, however, regarded these activities as subversive, delaying the impending movement with every possible legal and administrative barrier. Prussian authorities, in fact, placed an outright prohibition upon emigration of land or property owners.<sup>33</sup> These restrictions affected, in part at least, the size and composition of the departing group. Nonetheless, in 1788 over 1,000 Mennonites, along with some 400 Lutherans, left Prussia and Danzig (a free state until 1793). Among the Mennonites were few

farmers, however, the majority being impoverished or unemployed trades- and craftsmen from the Flemish church.<sup>34</sup> These settled in eight villages along the Dnieper river in the southern Ukraine, forming the basis of the Chortitza colony.<sup>35</sup> In the late 1890s another 118 families, this time consisting primarily of better-off farmers of Frisian persuasion,<sup>36</sup> joined the earlier pioneers. Their arrival both solidified the denominational division transported from Prussia and underscored the socio-economic differences which characterized the groups in their former homeland.<sup>37</sup>

Conditions surrounding the Napoleonic wars aroused a second wave of "emigration fever." In 1803 a group of 342 Prussian Mennonite families journeyed to New Russia, establishing the Molotschna colony along the Molochnaya River<sup>38</sup> to the south and east of Chortitza (which then became known as the 'Old Colony'). Five years later 99 additional families joined these settlers and in 1820 another 215 families completed the bulk of relocation. During the course of thirty years, therefore, almost one half of the Mennonite population of Prussia had chosen to abandon their ancestral home and resettle in the Russian Empire, hoping to find there the freedom and prosperity no longer sufficiently available to them in Prussia.

The relative importance of economic as opposed to religious and cultural factors in this emigration is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, not even a particular community or congregation moved en masse. E.K. Francis has suggested that

the equalizing tendencies of the eighteenth century tended to break down these autonomous units, and the Mennonites...were more<sup>39</sup> and more assimilated to the uniform German culture.

That the change from Dutch to High German occurred just before and during the period of emigration appears to have been coincidence rather than cause and effect. Economic and religious reasons for relocating remained intimately related, however, because of the restrictions placed on occupations and land ownership among Mennonites as a religious group. Many of the poor and landless struggled simply to survive. They lacked entirely the wherewithal to purchase their military exemption from the state. Consequently they were also being forced to compromise their nonresistant faith. As a result, they chose to emigrate.<sup>40</sup> Initially at least, their coreligionists regarded them as deserters and opportunists, Mennonite historian P.M. Friesen has concluded that the absence of a single minister among the first group was "an indication that those better economically situated, from whom the spiritual leaders were usually chosen, viewed the emigration with suspicion."<sup>41</sup> Those who chose to remain, however, became more and more integrated into the larger German society. By the 1870s (when some of the Russian Mennonites migrated once again), this remnant had made its final choice of allegiance. The imposition of alternative service caused small groups to emigrate to Russia in the 1850s and 60s, forming the basis for two new colonies. In the 1870s, some joined their coreligionists from Russia who were moving to America. As for the rest, "Their separation from the world and therefore their peculiar character as Mennonites was in [large] part eliminated."<sup>42</sup>

"Their brethren in Russia, however," E.K. Francis maintains, "developed into a separate people, socially independent and clearly distinct from both the larger Russian society and other German-speaking colonies in that country."<sup>43</sup> Once again, both internal and external factors contributed to this process. The religious and moral imperative to separate from the 'world' remained strong, so strong, in fact, that it would shortly engender renewed internal division. Culturally, and linguistically, the Mennonites had, during their last years in Prussia, become substantially Germanized. Native Russians regarded them, therefore, as Germans. The proximity of other German settlements, both Lutheran and Catholic, in this region and extending to the Volga reinforced this perception. Russian officials, however, distinguished between the mennonisty and other German kolonisty, possibly because Catherine's legislation required colonists of differing faiths to be settled apart to avoid potential conflict.<sup>44</sup> David G. Rempel suggests that

this practice of "religious Apartheid" reinforced the feeling of separateness between the Mennonites and the others,...and thus contributed materially to the Mennonites regarding themselves as a distinctive "folk," ethnically as<sup>45</sup> well as religiously different from the "colonists."

The transfer of Prussian village names underscored their foreign origins and demonstrated a resolve to maintain an historical continuity with the 250-year old Mennonite homeland of Prussia.

Administrative reforms in 1801 guaranteed the settlers virtual autonomy in local affairs, providing them thereby with the legal and political sanctions required to ensure such continuity by enforcing adherence to communal religious and cultural traditions. A village assembly, comprising all landowners who alone received the franchise, made communal decisions and elected the Schulze (mayor): He and his assistants governed their village, giving proper deference in broader issues to the Oberschulze, whose jurisdiction included the entire colony.<sup>46</sup> Such matters as education, health care, welfare, and insurance fell under this larger umbrella: The authority of the Oberschulze in civic matters was parallel to that of the bishop in spiritual matters. As a result of this autonomy, the Mennonites established and maintained their own educational, economic, welfare, and religious institutions. For these reasons, writes David G. Rempel, and because of their historic tradition of cohesiveness and Absonderung (separation), "the Mennonite settlements in Russia constituted, to all intents and purposes, a state within a state, or a Mennonite Commonwealth."<sup>47</sup>

What characterized this emerging Mennonite Volk (people)?<sup>48</sup> How did their beliefs and practices compare with the principles espoused by their Anabaptist forerunners? Where and how clearly was the line of separation from the 'world' being drawn in succeeding generations in Russia?

Ironically, some of the first, the most persistent, and the most problematic of internal conflicts arose out of the very independence of

the Mennonite colonies. In Prussia most Mennonites had adhered, as much by reason of their citizenless status as by conviction, perhaps, to the strict separation of church and state. By virtue of their settlement in the relatively isolated, autonomous colonies of south Russia, the responsibility for both institutions fell to the Mennonites. They now assumed the tasks of local civil administration, including justice and taxation, duties strictly avoided by their Anabaptist forebearers. In time this arrangement created "a serious confusion of the sacred and the secular,"<sup>49</sup> a confusion which ~~the~~ threatened the very essence of the 'commonwealth.'

Membership in the Mennonite colonies was predicated on membership in the Mennonite Church to which the guarantees of religious, economic, and political freedom had been granted. Exclusion from the established, officially sanctioned church by way of the ban created serious difficulties, therefore, because this ban now excluded the offender not only from the church but also from its privileges. As a result, the use of this tactic was restricted to the most severe moral or religious offenses. It became customary instead to punish or reprimand religious offenders through the civil administration.<sup>50</sup> In effect, then, the 'state' had become an arm of the church, the very arrangement rejected by the Anabaptists. More significantly, perhaps, both religious and civil authorities now possessed a powerful weapon for social control: separation from the people of privilege.

What provoked the ire of some otherwise devout colonists was the "highly functional marriage of church and state" which emerged as the

guardian of the status quo.<sup>51</sup> This collaboration resulted from several clearly definable religious and socio-economic factors. On the one hand were the spiritual leaders of the colonies whose authority was recognized and respected in matters of faith. To speak against this authority was "a grave misdemeanor."<sup>52</sup> By the 1840s these spiritual leaders had formalized their position by organizing a Council of Elders as the highest authority in religious matters. While, in theory, their decisions remained subject to the approval of the congregations, in practice their recommendations were usually accepted without discussion or debate.<sup>53</sup> Since these ministers were usually elected from among the wealthy landowners, those who could afford a higher education and the time to serve the community in this way, the interests of the spiritual leaders converged with those of the propertied and wealthier segment of society which was permitted the franchise<sup>54</sup> and which, therefore, controlled the civil administration. These two groups, then, "collaborated to use coercion to advance what they thought were the best interests of the colony and the church."<sup>55</sup>

These factors, in combination with charges of laxity in doctrinal matters, worldliness in moral standards, and excessive education, caused Klaas Reimer, a Flemish minister who arrived in Molotschna from Danzig in 1805, to challenge "the very nature of the commonwealth."<sup>56</sup> When the church officials attempted to silence Reimer by political means, he and his followers separated from the larger church in 1814 to form the Kleine Gemeinde, or the "Little Church."<sup>57</sup> P.M. Friesen

later cited that event as another case of the "evil, apparently incurable 'Anabaptist illness,' the passion to divide...."<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps Reimer and his group, which claimed adherents in both colonies, reflected the mood of the Reformation in other ways as well. They displayed a passion for moral purity, religious nonconformity, rigorous church discipline, and strict nonresistance. This severe conservatism kept the movement small, however, and ultimately also led to its own fragmentation. Nevertheless, this same mood, conveyed by its spiritual leader, contributed to the emergence of another small faction in the Crimea in 1869. This group called itself the Bruedergemeinde (Brethren Church) but was soon called the Krimmer Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde (to distinguish it from the Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde founded in the Molotschna in 1860 with which it had no connection).<sup>59</sup> Both of these small dissident groups (the Krimmer numbered only twenty families) emigrated to North America, virtually in their entirety, in the 1870s.

That this essentially sectarian form of protest should arise, and persist, within the Mennonite 'commonwealth' revealed something of the nature of that community as it emerged in the Russian environment. First, although it appeared to be and was regarded as a homogeneous unit from the outside, based on a cursory glance at its social, economic, educational and welfare institutions, the Mennonite community displayed substantial heterogeneity. Individual colonies and different denominations assumed or were ascribed unique identifying characteristics. A narrow-minded person, for example might be labelled



as Kleengemeindsch (Low German for Kleine Gemeinde).<sup>60</sup> An even more permanent differentiation developed between the Molotschna and the Old Colony. The former prided itself in its "Kultur" while characterizing the latter as uncouth and backward.<sup>61</sup>

Mennonite church polity contributed to the perpetual internal differentiation. Being congregationally oriented, the settlers "founded independent congregational units from the start [in Russia], either by villages or groups of villages."<sup>62</sup> Despite the hopes and efforts of Flemish and Frisian leaders in Prussia, the first Mennonites in Chortitza proved unable to overcome their age-old differences and suspicions and resorted to settlement in separate villages according to their former affiliation. The Molotschna colony followed the same pattern. Here, however, a progressive Flemish congregation soon emerged which throughout the ensuing years provided some of the most aggressive and capable leadership in economic, educational, and governmental affairs. This group found its antithesis, however, in a conservative "Old" Flemish congregations established by a number of newcomers in the 1820s. By the middle of that decade, therefore, some seven separate and distinct congregations claimed a varying number of adherents within the two colonies. Each congregation formed an independent ecclesiastical unit headed by an Aeltester (elder or bishop) elected by the Bruderschaft (brotherhood or church assembly). Over a period of time,

the village type of settlement, the dominant religious concern, and the prestige of the elder tended to the development of a type of hierarchial

[sic] theocracy in which at times the elders practically controlled both the civil<sup>63</sup> and the ecclesiastical life of the community.

Thus, not only the Flemish-Frisian distinctions remained, but constant variations within these emerged as congregations divided over differences in opinion and practice. Organized cooperation by the religious leaders of all Russian Mennonites began only in the 1880s, at which time the common threat of conscription prompted their gathering at an annual conference.<sup>64</sup> This form of national association elicited little formal cooperation at the local level, however, save in times of crisis or disaster.

Secondly, the nature and character of the Mennonite church underwent a transition. Although he avoids the "church" and "sect" terminology, Robert Kreider has argued that the Russian Mennonite church abandoned its sectarian characteristics, which he describes with the concept of "brotherhood," and "moved in the direction and exhibited many of the characteristics of the Volkskirche or what the English call the 'parish pattern of church.'<sup>65</sup> While it excluded the 'world' beyond, it included all Mennonites, forming thereby a world within the world. This inclusiveness contradicted a basic element in its formation in the sixteenth century. Dissenting movements only gave evidence of that struggle for the maintenance or redefinition of a church "without spot or wrinkle."<sup>66</sup>

A third significant feature of the Mennonite community in Russia was its critical lack of "competent and far-sighted leadership"

throughout the nineteenth century, but particularly in its formative stages.<sup>67</sup> Johann Cornies (1789-1848), a member of the progressive Flemish, laid the groundwork for the agricultural and educational development of the colonies.<sup>68</sup> His passing, however, left an immense vacuum. Such innovators as the former Lutheran, Heinrich Heese (1787-1868), and Tobias Voth (1791-?) discovered that as educators they "must remain subservient to traditional values," values strictly limited, guarded, and enforced by a predominantly conservative, isolated agrarian community leadership.<sup>69</sup>

Fourth, and even more problematic, was the growing socio-economic rift within Mennonite society, a contrast which the enormously wealthy Cornies epitomized. Part of the difficulty lay in the fact that the Privilegium (Charter of Privileges) limited expansion of the colonies while Russian law forbade the division of property through inheritance. Consequently, a substantial class of Landlose (landless), a virtual voiceless proletariat since it possessed no franchise, emerged by the second generation of settlement. By the 1860s, for example, almost two-thirds of the families in the Molotschna remained landless, relatively unchanged from the ratio twenty years earlier.<sup>70</sup> In their efforts to improve their desperate plight, however, these Mennonites faced the determined opposition not only of the landowners but also of their church leaders, who for the most part were well-to-do farmers. The church historian P.M. Friesen observed that this conflict degenerated into "a kind of 'class war.'"<sup>71</sup>

A direct consequence of all the foregoing was a faith very much in ferment. The internal conflicts cited earlier demonstrated this fact. That these protest movements arose particularly among the lower classes revealed something of the social tension within the commonwealth. Religious and social dissatisfaction combined in the 1850s to produce the most significant division among Russian Mennonites to date. The social and economic turmoil of the 1850s, intensified by the Crimean War (1854-56) which, due to the proximity of battle, affected and involved the Mennonites directly, exacerbated tensions already extant within the colonies.<sup>72</sup> Secondly, a mood of revivalism swept the region, kindled and nurtured by such "outsiders" as the Lutheran pietist, Eduard Wuest (1818-59) and the German Baptist, Johann Onken (1800-84).<sup>73</sup> Thirdly, a deep-seated dissatisfaction with moral laxity and degeneration within the Mennonite colonies compelled a group in the Molotschna to protest, in a scathing letter to their church elders, that the Anabaptist concepts of spiritual rebirth and separation from worldliness had been seriously compromised. The spiritual leadership, with its vested interests, was, however, not prepared to hear, much less act on, these challenges to the status quo.

In a move reminiscent of the first Anabaptists, these dissenters chose to secede from the established church to form their own, more faithful version. The Council of Elders, in response, turned the matter over to the civil authorities for disciplinary action. Some of the leaders of the new movement were harassed and imprisoned. They were also put under the ban by church elders and, as a result their

right to own property, to perform baptisms and marriages, and to function as full members of the colonies were revoked. Only as a result of numerous direct appeals to Russian authorities in Moscow was this group officially recognized as a Mennonite church, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. The outcome was the Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde (Mennonite Brethren Church), born in 1860 but not fully sanctioned until four years later.<sup>74</sup> For several decades the movement grew very slowly but by the mid-1920s it counted 22.5 per cent of the Mennonites in Russia among its members.<sup>75</sup> As for the commonwealth by the year 1870, James Urry has observed that "The separation of the People of God from the evil 'world' was forgotten: colony was divided from colony, village from village and Mennonite from fellow Mennonite."<sup>76</sup>

Despite these repeated reactions by traditional elements within the Mennonite community until 1870, however, separations led by religious leaders "who still hoped for the old order to be reaffirmed, that the closed order with strong authority be reasserted,"<sup>77</sup> the progressive tide of change sweeping the empire did not spare this group of colonists. The land reforms of the sixties forced a more equitable distribution of property and, more important for the masses of landless, permitted the establishment of numerous daughter colonies.<sup>78</sup> This development, along with the emigration to North America which followed a decade later, offered those most dissatisfied with economic and religious conditions in the older colonies the

opportunity to find land and freedom of religious dissension elsewhere, thereby largely diffusing a complex and contentious issue.

The 1871 reorganization of local government into the volost system generally left existing administrative structures within the Mennonite colonies intact. But other regulations, issued at the same time and designed to integrate the privileged colonists into the larger Russian society, cut to the core of Mennonite life and faith. These included educational reforms and other Russification policies synonymous with the reign of Alexander II (1855-81) as well as a bill to impose universal military conscription. "The realization that they were not just Mennonites, or colonists any more, but Russian citizens, subject to wider laws and a broader identity was not a fact many Mennonites liked to face."<sup>79</sup>

Both this insular attitude and the nature of the 'commonwealth' militated against a speedy or complete Russification of the Mennonites, however. Firstly, the relative isolation of the self-contained communities immersed Mennonite children in the traditional values and practices of their people while at the same time controlling the extent of external contact. In the words of Fränk Epp "Deutsch und Religion (German and Religion) [had become] twin educational concepts in the Russian Mennonite mind."<sup>80</sup> Secondly, the wide range of Mennonite institutions "not only shielded the Mennonites from their host society but allowed a systematic expansion of the Mennonite intellect without subverting its traditional identity."<sup>81</sup> Thirdly, the Mennonites communicated among themselves with their own languages, the Low German

for everyday use and High German at school and in church. The former especially was able to absorb a large number of Russian words and expressions, thereby being adjusted to the environment instead of falling into disuse. Moreover, the foreign exposure and education of a significant number of young men who travelled to Germany or Switzerland for a university education after 1870 served to confirm and deepen the German identity of the Mennonites.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Mennonite attitude toward the Slavic people and their culture, a culture which, in the words of one contemporary, "barely reached to our ankles," prohibited significant contacts which might foster integration or assimilation.<sup>83</sup> Russian servants imparted something of their language and culinary skills to their Mennonite employers, but little else. Even where a substantial number of Russians lived and worked in a Mennonite village formal contact remained limited, partly because the government required special factory schools and Orthodox churches to be built in order to prevent the infection of their people by an "alien" religion.<sup>84</sup>

Russian Mennonite leaders perceived immediately that the reforms of Alexander II seriously challenged their separate existence and their cultural and religious life. Between 1871 and 1875, for example, they dispatched six delegations to St. Petersburg in a futile effort to retain their complete military exemption.<sup>85</sup> Although they were never able to meet directly with the Tsar as they hoped to do, Mennonite leaders continued to lobby various state officials. These contacts were facilitated by the large number of German bureaucrats within the Russian

government. Conversely, the lack of proficiency in the Russian language demonstrated by the Mennonites aroused the nationalistic ire of other authorities.<sup>86</sup> The Mennonites, for their part, misunderstood and distrusted the government, some believing that their loyalty to the Tsar was in question, others that their religious principles were under direct assault.

As a result, the question of emigration arose almost immediately among the Mennonites. By the spring of 1873 they had appointed several delegations to investigate the prospects of resettlement in North America.<sup>87</sup> Russian authorities viewed this eventuality with alarm, finally dispatching the German Lutheran Adjutant-General von Tottleben, who had become acquainted with the Mennonites during the Crimean War, to interpret the government's position and persuade the Mennonites to remain. Tottleben assured the Mennonites, in April 1874, that the service required of them would be nonmilitary and in separate units under their own supervision, concessions offered as early as 1872 but not until now appreciated by the Mennonites.<sup>88</sup> After a little more than a week's consultation, according to David G. Rempel, about two-thirds of the Mennonites agreed to accept an alternative type of service and remain in Russia.<sup>89</sup> By 1880 the details of the Forsteidienst (forestry service) selected by the Mennonites had been arranged and a year later this service commenced. By that time, however, almost 18,000 Russian Mennonites, representing about one third of the total, had chosen to migrate once again.<sup>90</sup>



The emigration question engendered considerable controversy within the 'commonwealth.' That the religious issue of nonresistance provided the primary motivation for many cannot be denied. But this group constituted also the most conservative and traditional element in other respects. Its members feared the potential consequences of increasing Russification. According to one opponent of the exodus, displaying his own bias, those leaving were "the most extreme element, incapable of a God-willed and God-permitted closer association with Russian society...."<sup>91</sup> For many of these, "there seemed a close connection between their distinctive Mennonitism and their Deutschtum [Germanism],"<sup>92</sup> a connection they were determined to retain in a new environment.

But factors more complex than religious principle prompted the 1870s exodus. Neither persecution nor oppression faced the Mennonites, although some may have come to view Alexander's Russification policies in such dramatic terms. The strong and conservative leadership of the Kleine Gemeinde and the Krimmer Gemeinde led virtually all of its adherents to the promise of freedom in North America. The larger body of Old Flemish in Alexanderwohl followed suit. The prospect of more or better land provided an additional incentive to the colonies of Bergthal and Fuerstenland, both offshoots of the Old Colony. Almost all residents of these settlements relocated in Manitoba. Other families and individuals, motivated, quite simply, by an adventurous or enterprising spirit, joined a migration which included thousands of other Russian colonists encountering similar circumstances.<sup>93</sup>

It should be recognized, however, that not all or only the most conservative fled to America. Some of these remained equally, or even more, sceptical of retaining the closed order under a republican or democratic government elsewhere, preferring to trust in the sympathy of an autocratic tsar.<sup>94</sup> Equally mixed were the motives of those who chose to remain. They were willing to attempt some accommodation to the changing world about them, as long as they retained strict control of that process. "Those who remained," James Urry notes,

in contrast to their forefathers who had first settled in Russia, were less concerned with the continuance of a fixed and withdrawn way of life separated from the 'world', than with the continuance of a developing life style without surrendering to<sup>95</sup> the Russian culture which surrounded them.

The nature and quality of life within the Mennonite colonies underwent a progressive transformation after the mid-nineteenth century. During the last fifty years prior to World War I, and in the last quarter century in particular, the pace of development here, in industry, education, and the arts for example, easily matched and often outdistanced the rest of the empire. In the process, the barrier separating Mennonite and Slav not only remained but grew, clearly constructed of much more than religious beliefs and practices. The rising tide of Russian nationalism perceived this gulf, and the feeling of superiority maintaining it. By the 1890s the German colonists in general, and the Mennonites in particular, encountered threats and attacks for their lack of patriotism.<sup>96</sup> Despite the full-length

portraits of the Tsar and Tsarina in their homes,<sup>97</sup> the anti-German hostilities intensified by the outbreak of the First World War posed a grave danger to the future survival of a German Mennonite 'commonwealth' in Russia. Whether the Russian Mennonites would withstand or adapt to these pressures and still remain faithful to their Anabaptist heritage became an issue inseparably intertwined with the uncertain fate of their adopted homeland, upon whose fortunes they had become increasingly dependent. Whether the North American environment would prove more amicable and tolerant was equally uncertain. In the words of one observer in 1874,

Those who advise too much to emigrate positively do not know the world, neither the character of this present time, otherwise they must know that that from which they propose to escape will overtake them wherever in this wide world they choose to settle.<sup>98</sup>

Footnotes

- 1 John 17:15,16.
- 2 E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia.
- 3 Hans J. Hillerbrand provides helpful background and analysis in The World of the Reformation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973).
- 4 For a detailed historical account see George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962). Walter Klaassen highlights their uniqueness in Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1973).
- 5 Franklin H. Littell, The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism (2nd ed. 1952; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1964), p.14.
- 6 "The Beginnings of the Anabaptist Reformation. Reminiscences of George Blaurock" in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, vol. XXV of The Library of Christian Classics, Edited by John Baillie, et. al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 44.
- 7 For the complete text of The Schleithelm Confession, originally called "The Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles," see Clyde L. Manschreck, ed., A History of Christianity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp.79-82.
- 8 Matthew 5:44.
- 9 Littell, Origins, p. 103. Cf. James M. Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronada Press, 1972).
- 10 Manschreck, p. 81.
- 11 Ibid., p. 82.
- 12 Kreider, "The Anabaptists and the State," pp. 192-93.
- 13 Cited in N. Van der Zijp, "The Early Dutch Anabaptists," in Hershberger, Anabaptist Vision, p. 80n.
- 14 Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in Hershberger, Anabaptist Vision, p. 48.
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- 29 Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 61.
- 30 David G. Rempel, "From Danzig to Russia: The First Mennonite Migration," ML, XXIV (Jan., 1969), p. 9.
- 31 David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," MQR, XLVII (Oct., 1973), pp. 282-86.
- 32 Ibid., p. 283.
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- 36 Neff and Zijpp, "Frisian Mennonites," ME, II, pp. 413-14.
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- 38 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Molotschna," ME, III, p. 732.
- 39 Francis, "Russian Mennonites," p. 104.
- 40 Penner, "West Prussian Mennonites," pp. 242-43.
- 41 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 91.
- 42 Penner, "West Prussian Mennonites," p. 242.
- 43 Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 174.
- 44 According to an historian of the Volga Germans, Russian authorities did not apply the term "German" to the Mennonite colonists at this time. In their view, they constituted "an entirely separate category of settlers." See Fred C. Koch, The Volga Germans In Russia and the Americas From 1863 to the Present (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 86.
- 45 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 295.
- 46 Ibid., (Jan., 1974), pp. 13-15; C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Government of Mennonites in Russia," ME, I, pp. 556-67.
- 47 Ibid., MQR, XLVIII (Jan., 1974), p. 10. Forty years before Rempel made this observation, Jacob H. Janzen, one of the immigrant leaders in Ontario, had drawn a similar conclusion on the basis of his experience and his study of Mennonite history. The Mennonites in Russia, according to Janzen, "literally became a state within a state, and we learned to think of ourselves not only as a religious community but [also] as people of a particular race and with a particular culture and language." J.H. Janzen in "Kirche und Staat," Der Bote, XI (June 6, 1934), p. 1. Sociologist E.K. Francis first used that terminology in his 1951 MQR article, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, 1789-1914: A Sociological Interpretation."
- 48 On the uses of this term see Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 174n.

- 49 Redekop, "Ethnic Ghost," p. 143.
- 50 Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Environment, 1789-1870," MQR, XXV (Jan., 1951), p. 24. To satisfy their nonresistant conscience, the Mennonites often appointed a non-Mennonite as police officer.
- 51 John B. Toews, "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects of the Mennonite Experience in Russia," MQR, LIII (April, 1979), p. 143.
- 52 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, p. 21.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Only those who owned land were eligible to vote in colony affairs until the 1860s when the protests of the growing number of landless colonists prompted the Russian authorities to enforce a change in that practice.
- 55 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, p. 38; "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects," pp. 140-41.
- 56 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 164.
- 57 H.S. B[ender], "Kleine Gemeinde," ME, III, pp. 196-99.
- 58 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 108.
- 59 H.S. B[ender], "Krimmer Mennonite Brethren," ME, III, pp. 242-45.
- 60 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 93.
- 61 Urry, "Closed and Open," pp. 395-97.
- 62 C. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), p. 42.
- 63 Smith, Russian Mennonites, p. 11.
- 64 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz," ME, I, 57-58; A. B[raun], "Conferences in Russia," ME, I, 678-79.
- 65 Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception of Church," p. 18.
- 66 C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 2nd ed. (1941; rpt. Newton, Kan.: Mennonite Publication Office, 1945), p. 115.
- 67 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, p. 18.
- 68 C[ornelius] J. D[lyck], "Cornies, Johann," ME, I, pp. 716-18; Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 177-78.

- 69 See Toews, "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects," p. 143. Cf. D[avid] H. E[pp], "Heese, Heinrich," ME, II, p. 686; C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Voth, Tobias," ME, IV, p. 859; Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, pp. 96-97, 689-709; Cornelius Krahn, trans., "Heinrich Heese (1787-1868)," ML, XXIV (April, 1969), pp. 66-72.
- 70 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Anwöhner," ME, I, 135-36; Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 619.
- 71 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 123. Cf. Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception of Church," pp. 25-26. Urry, "Closed and Open," pp. 609-46 discusses this conflict in detail.
- 72 See Urry, "Closed and Open," pp. 415-26; Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 26-30.
- 73 See Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, pp. 205-27, 461-67.
- 74 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, ch. 4; Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, pp. 230-59.
- 75 For a statistical summary see C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Russia," ME, IV, p. 390.
- 76 Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 648.
- 77 Ibid., pp. 645-46.
- 78 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," (Jan., 1974), pp. 27-33.
- 79 Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 649.
- 80 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 25.
- 81 Toews, "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects," p. 155.
- 82 Toews notes that "By 1900 the Mennonite school spoke Russian but the community frame of reference was more Germanic and Mennonite than ever." Ibid., p. 154.
- 83 Jacob H. Janzen, Wanderndes Volk, I (1945; rpt. Waterloo, Ont.: by the author, 1949), p. 86. Another immigrant leader elaborates on this "social antipathy." "On the one side was Russian jealousy; on the other side the excessive self-evaluation of colonists. The Russians looked upon the colonists as intruders, and the latter saw in the Russians often a dangerous criminal type..." Benjamin H. Unruh, "The Background and Causes of the Flight of the Mennonites From Russia in 1929." MQR, IV (Oct., 1930), p. 273.
- 84 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," (Jan., 1974), p. 48.



- 85 Jacob Sudermann describes these lobbying efforts in "The Origin of Mennonite State Service in Russia, 1870-1880," MQR, XVII (Jan., 1943), pp. 23-46.
- 86 Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 661.
- 87 Francis, Utopia, pp. 51-52.
- 88 Sudermann, "Mennonite State Service," pp. 35-37.
- 89 Rempe), "Mennonite Commonwealth," (Jan., 1974), p. 36. Cornelius Krahn presents some aspects of the debate in "Mennonite Migrations as an Act of Protest," ML, XXV (Jan., 1970), pp. 25-26.
- 90 Smith, Russian Mennonites.
- 91 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 592.
- 92 Smith, Russian Mennonites, p. 97.
- 93 For a discussion of some of the factors motivating these migrants see Adam Giesinger, From Catherine to Khrushchev. The Story of Russia's Germans (Winnipeg: by the author, 1974), pp. 193-96, 342-43.
- 94 Urry, "Closed and Open," pp. 683-84.
- 95 Ibid., p. 714.
- 96 Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, p. 575.
- 97 Harry Loewen concludes that the Mennonite's "love for the Tsars often combined with their devotion to God." See his "The Anabaptist View of the World: The Beginning of a Mennonite Continuum?" in Harry Loewen, ed., Mennonite Images. Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing With Mennonite Issues (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), p. 93. Barbara Claassen Smucker, Days of Terror (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1979), p. 18. P.M. Friesen's history of Mennonites in Russia, published in 1911, included pictures of both the Tsar and the Tsarina as frontispieces.
- 98 Heinrich Dirks, a Russian Mennonite missionary in Sumatra (now Indonesia); quoted by Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 197.

## CHAPTER II

### War and Immigration

In both Europe and North America the predominant issue facing the Mennonites during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries was the question of allegiance. Conscription, war, and revolution tested and threatened both their religious and cultural identity as it had not been tested since the sixteenth century. How could they remain faithful to an historic, nonresistant faith, which forbade them to take up arms in defence of person, property, or nation, while at the same time demonstrating their loyalty to the country and the people which had offered them privilege and prosperity? Canadian Mennonites, many of whom had come here in the 1870s precisely to escape this dilemma, found themselves facing military conscription by 1917. They discovered, moreover, that language could become as much a test of loyalty as active service. This was no less true for the Mennonites who remained in Russia. But whereas they had struggled with both issues for forty years prior to World War I, and had reached a certain accommodation, the forces of domestic revolution and anarchy unleashed by that larger conflict subjected them to a fiery, bloody trial by ordeal. In the end, the common bond which still united them with their Canadian coreligionists would serve as a life-line, rescuing many from a 'commonwealth' in ruins.

Those Mennonites who remained in Russia despite the imposition of compulsory military service in the 1870s eventually reached a compromise with the government.<sup>1</sup> Under this agreement all Mennonite youths were subject to the draft as other Russians were. The Mennonites, however, would not be asked to bear arms. Instead, they were assigned to one of the forestry camps which the government established as an alternative form of service for the Mennonites.<sup>2</sup> The colonies assumed most of the cost of these camps and were granted complete control over their day-to-day operation. This autonomy permitted them to provide pastoral care for the young men and keep them separate from other Russians. An average of 1,000 men served under this program at an annual cost of some 200,000 rubles to the Mennonite colonies. This sum was raised by a special levy called the "barracks tax."<sup>3</sup> All the Mennonite groups cooperated in supporting and administering the forestry service.

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1902 a second form of alternative service came into being. Russian civilians organized a hospital service similar to the Red Cross to care for wounded soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Few Mennonites served under this organization at that time but more than half of those in the service would do so during World War I. Like the forestry service, this program was nonmilitary, that is, it was operated independently of the military although it worked for and together with them. As such, it was a form of service the Russian Mennonites could accept.

The outbreak of the First World War quickly shattered this peaceful coexistence. Hostilities toward Germany rekindled the flames of Russian nationalism and revitalized the campaign against foreigners within the country. Especially suspect was the large concentration of German-speaking colonists who had settled on the steppes of the Ukraine and along the Volga River. This included the larger Mennonite colonies. The rising tide of anti-German sentiment prompted a November, 1914 decree prohibiting the use of the German language in a public assembly or in the press.<sup>5</sup> The Liquidation Laws of February and December, 1915 required that all descendants of German colonists dispose of their land within eight months and be relocated in the interior of the country.<sup>6</sup> According to one observer, all German-speaking residents faced

The prohibition of the German language, of German preaching, the closing of the German press, of German clubs, the closing or russification of German schools and other centres of German culture,...,7 evacuations, deportations and arrests....

Not even the relative isolation and autonomy of the Mennonite colonies protected them from this assault on their identity and independence:

Wartime conditions and an inefficient bureaucracy prevented the full-scale implementation of these laws, sparing the Mennonites of their impact. At the same time, the Mennonites sought to reaffirm their loyalty to their native homeland without compromising their nonresistant faith. Over 12,000 men were inducted into the forestry

service or as hospital workers at a cost to their churches of up to three million rubles a year.<sup>8</sup> On the question of language they displayed more flexibility. Some seemed prepared to sacrifice this cultural characteristic, for the time being at least, if it meant continued peace and security. In December, 1916 several church leaders went to St. Petersburg in an effort to convince Russian officials that their people's ancestry was really Dutch, not German. While the majority were probably of Dutch origin, the insistence at the time of property confiscation that "in our veins is not a drop of German blood" was, in the words of one historian, "certainly extreme."<sup>9</sup> None of these actions helped to alleviate the open hostility, however. The Mennonites remained suspect both "as Germans and as a still privileged religious group...."<sup>10</sup>

How deep-seated the German language and heritage had become among the Mennonites became apparent in the spring of 1918. Under the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, German troops occupied the Ukraine. The Mennonites welcomed the occupation forces as 'liberators.'

For the first time, [they] were confronted with authorities who spoke their own language, who favored them, who entrusted them with important offices, in whom they had confidence. For the first time, too, a new feeling of "belongingness" to the great and powerful German nation arose among the Russian Mennonites.<sup>11</sup>

This jubilation, witnessed by envious and angry Russian peasants, bore bitter fruit after the German retreat only seven months later. With the tacit consent of the Bolshevik regime, land-hungry peasants and

unscrupulous administrators confiscated what crops and land the shifting tide of battle in this region had spared. In addition, the infamous anarchist and bandit, Nestor Makhno, led his ruthless hordes back and forth through the coveted German and Mennonite colonies, looting, raping, murdering, and spreading terror and disease.<sup>12</sup> With Makhno's reign of terror came the full impact of the Revolution of 1917 and the internal chaos it occasioned. The bitter experiences during the civil war of 1917-21 tested both the Mennonite's nonresistance and their loyalty. It was a test not all would pass.

The German interlude of April to November, 1918 brought a welcome end to the reckless, often greedy, sometimes ruthless administration of the local soviets introduced by the Bolsheviks after the November, 1917 revolution. But with the departure of the German army in November, 1918 the Mennonites were left to fend for themselves once again. Makhno and his bandits returned with a vengeance. This time, however, some of the German-speaking colonists joined forces to protect themselves. With the rudimentary training and some weapons provided by the German soldiers before they departed, several hundred zealous and angry young Mennonites forsook their profession of nonresistance to join other German colonists in a loosely knit, semi-military organization called the Selbstschutz (self-defense corps).<sup>13</sup> Some within the Mennonite 'state' in Russia, frightened by the collapse of law and order around them undertook the ultimate act of statehood, military self-preservation. While it prevented or delayed, at times, the entry of Makhno's bandits, the Selbstschutz also prompted the

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bitterest retaliation and destruction. Mennonite leaders had been powerless, it seems, to prevent this aberration from the faith.

Although they later condemned the Selbstschutz as "a tactical blunder as well as a violation of biblical peace principles...",<sup>14</sup> its very occurrence dramatically demonstrated the breakdown of community consensus and control. The sacred principle of nonresistance had been compromised, threatening the very integrity of their peoplehood. At the same time, it became clear that their separate existence, always tenuous at best, was a shattered dream. The Mennonite 'commonwealth' lay in ruins, utterly and irrevocably destroyed.

The traditional Russian attitude toward its minorities, the ethnic origin of the Mennonites, their prewar economic well-being, their geographic location directly in the path of the civil war, the German occupation, the formation of the Selbstschutz - all of these issues contributed<sup>15</sup> to the destruction of Ukrainian Mennonitism.

How could they rebuild their communities and recover their peoplehood? Would an atheistic Soviet government permit it? Those were the challenges facing Russian Mennonitism in the early 1920s.

A semblance of stability and security returned slowly under the Soviet regime. Despite this, the thoughts of many Mennonites turned once again to resettlement, reevaluating their decision to remain in Russia some forty years earlier. One beleaguered soul wrote in his diary in March, 1920:

We Mennonites are aliens in this land. If we didn't realize that fact before the War we have had it forced upon us during and after the War...We want to

leave. The magic word "emigration" travels like a buran [winter wind] from place to place...It<sup>16</sup> is the one idea that keeps us going, our one hope.

The Mennonites' sense of identification with Russia had been seriously impaired. By 1922 the gap between these deeply religious, politically naive people and their oppressive, atheistic government, between the educated, wealthy Mennonites and their unrefined, impoverished Slavic neighbours had become an unbridgeable gulf.

Reasons for preferring emigration to an uncertain future in the Soviet state varied widely among the Mennonites but several factors emerged as paramount. Foremost among these, at least until the mid-twenties, was the economic crisis.<sup>17</sup> Most Mennonites, like the surrounding populace, were left completely indigent in the wake of war and revolution. Those with any livestock or produce saw these confiscated at the whim of local soviet leaders. The famine of 1921-23 confirmed for many the futility of their hope for the peace and prosperity promised by the new regime. Many Mennonites, as well as other Russians, survived the famine years of 1921-23 only through the aid provided by the North American Mennonites.<sup>18</sup> Added to this economic despair was a hopelessness brought on by the recognition of the seemingly irreconcilable chasm between Mennonite and Slav. "The events of recent years," one leader reported, "have brought us to the point where we see in every Russian - not individually but as a representative of his nation - our oppressor, tyrant, and enemy."<sup>19</sup> Those who had suffered the horror of retribution at the hands of peasant anarchists sought only escape from this memory.



Religious, cultural, and ideological motives ranked close behind the economic as reasons for emigration and, when conditions began to improve in 1923, gained the ascendancy.<sup>20</sup> As the survivors reflected on their future in the Soviet Union, it became increasingly clear to them "that the period of isolation was over and that gradual assimilation with the Russian populace was inevitable... A few were prepared to accept assimilation... To the vast majority, however, absorption into Russian life and culture was a bitter prospect."<sup>21</sup> What made this prospect even more unacceptable was the atheistic attitude of the communist state. Churches were closed, ministers exiled, and the young people indoctrinated with communist ideology. As this policy became increasingly evident, it emerged as the primary focus of the emigration impulse. According to one immigrant teacher and preacher, the decisive issue for many became "the law requiring socialized training for children and youth in the schools of the empire."<sup>22</sup> Fear and suspicion grew when Soviet officials disregarded Lenin's decrees of 1919 assuring military exemption to conscientious objectors and forcibly inducted all young men, including the Mennonites, into the Red Army.<sup>23</sup> Seeking to make amends for the Selbstschutz, Mennonite leaders met to reaffirm the principle of nonresistance and by the mid-1920s the basic forces behind emigration "had regrouped and centered around this one issue."<sup>24</sup> Changing circumstances, therefore, transformed the emigration question from that of mere survival into one of maintenance of religious principles. Many believed that the survival of their faith could only be assured in another state.

Not all Russian Mennonites shared this perception, however. The New Economic Policy introduced by the Soviet government in 1921, together with the material aid provided by North American Mennonites, the reconstruction efforts of several new Mennonite organizations in Russia, and the promise of assistance from Dutch and German governments brought a new mood of hope to the colonists. Some even dreamt of the restoration of the prewar commonwealth. One Mennonite leader resisted the immigration efforts in 1923 with these words:

Think of our mission here in Russia, our Mennonite ideals, our beautiful villages, the fertile soil! What a wonderful thing it will be when German help will<sup>25</sup> come. Our task is and remains in Russia!

That same year the study commission appointed in late 1919 to investigate the possibilities for resettlement in another country, presented its report. As they had almost 50 years earlier, the Mennonite colonists charged their representatives with finding a potential home offering not only religious freedom but also favourable economic, cultural, and political conditions. This time, however, they were not alone in their search. In the troubled period of post-war reconstruction, with hundreds of thousands of European refugees appealing desperately for a permanent home, preferably in North America, the commission's mandate proved extremely difficult to fulfill. Nevertheless, it boldly recommended full-scale migration.<sup>26</sup> Just where the Russian Mennonites could go was not entirely clear, although Canada was the preferred country. But Canadians did not look

kindly upon German-speaking, pacifist immigrants after World War I.

Canada had welcomed its first Mennonite settlers in 1786, a small group of whom joined the loyalist influx into Upper Canada following the American Revolution. By 1793 they had, together with the Quakers, secured exemption from militia duty in lieu of payment of an annual fine.<sup>27</sup> In 1849 even this condition was removed, thereby granting them complete exemption "provided they produce certificates of belonging, signed by the meeting or society, and presented to the assessors of the locality every year before the first of February."<sup>28</sup> By that time well over 6,000 Mennonites lived throughout Upper Canada, most concentrated in Waterloo County.

The presence of these peaceful, productive farmers in Canada predisposed the Federal government to take a keen interest in the potential Russian Mennonite migration in the 1870s. Anxious to attract settlers to the new province of Manitoba, the Department of Agriculture appointed William Hespeler, a German Lutheran businessman who lived among the Mennonites in Waterloo County, as a special emigration agent. It also invited Jacob Shantz, a prominent Mennonite from that region, to host the Russian study commission.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the government offered a number of inducements to the prospective settlers. By an 1873 order-in-council, the Mennonites were guaranteed complete exemption from military service, the exclusive right to eight townships of land permitting contiguous settlement in the Russian style, as well as the freedom to educate their children in their own schools.<sup>30</sup> As a result of these concessions, almost 8,000 Russian Mennonites chose to

relocate in Canada where both their faith and lifestyle were protected by government decree. The authorities were, at this point in time, "more concerned with attracting efficient settlers than with their cultural assimilation, or their social and political integration."<sup>31</sup>

That tolerant attitude did not prevail for long, however. By the 1890s these Mennonites had become embroiled in their own version of the contentious Manitoba schools question. Federal authorities, who promised them complete control over education, had neglected to mention that responsibility for this matter lay within provincial jurisdiction. In 1890 the Manitoba Liberal government of Premier Thomas Greenway abolished the system of confessional schools in an effort to make all public schools non-sectarian, state-controlled, and tax-supported. Whether motivated by a genuine concern for adequate education or by "the growing feeling that a country of heterogeneous population... should develop a uniform nationality through the agency of a 'national' school system,"<sup>32</sup> the Mennonites viewed this as, at best, a betrayal and, at worst, an outright attempt to assimilate them.

They responded swiftly and decisively, utilizing a critical loophole in the legislation, the omission of a clause providing for compulsory attendance. Whereas all 36 schools had been registered with the Protestant Board in 1879, only 8 of at least 100 were registered in 1891.<sup>33</sup> The Laurier-Greenway compromise of 1896 satisfied the more progressive Mennonites, but did little to alleviate the suspicions of the conservative Old Colony group. Premier R.P. Roblin's Conservative government antagonized this group even further after the turn of the

century by requiring the Union Jack to be raised daily at each public school. For these Mennonites, who regarded the flag as a military emblem, "this was the thin edge of the wedge which, if consented to, would finally mean the loss of their military exemption."<sup>34</sup>

The patriotic fervour aroused by the First World War threatened to turn that possibility into a reality. Little progress was made in this conflict in the intervening years. The provincial government remained adamant in its pursuit of complete control over all schools. The Mennonite immigrants were not unanimous in their response to the pressure to conform. Some of these differences stemmed from Old World congregationalism transported to the New. Others arose out of the varying degrees of cultural and economic accommodation permitted by church leaders within these groupings. But Anglo-Canadians cared little about these internal variations. The most conservative were the most conspicuous and most newsworthy and were, as a result, viewed as being representative of the entire group. The Mennonites, therefore, became as objectionable in the public mind as other eastern and southern Europeans settling en masse in western Canada where they were perceived as threatening the British character of the population. In 1915, T.C. Norris led the Manitoba Liberals to victory in a provincial election with a promise of "national schools, obligatory teaching of English in all public schools and compulsory school attendance."<sup>35</sup> In the process, education became, in the view of conservative Mennonites, a tool of the two main influences they sought not only to resist but to escape - the state and the 'world.' Few Manitobans had

seriously considered the eventuality raised in 1910 by the Manitoba Free Press that such interference would inevitably compel this group to "leave the country in spite of the large material interests which they have there."<sup>36</sup> But before the war had ended, the search for a new home had begun.

North American Mennonites in general experienced considerable hostility during the Great War. As was the case in Russia, both their refusal to demonstrate their loyalty by serving in the military as well as their continued use of the German language, the language of the enemy, contributed to this tension and conflict. In the United States, the Selective Service Act of 1917 required compulsory military service for all draft-age men. Not until July, 1918, when the war was almost over, was a noncombatant program of hospital service under civilian control organized in response to Mennonite demands. Still, barely a score of Russian Mennonites in the U.S. entered active service.<sup>37</sup> Over half of those who were drafted refused to enter the service in any capacity until an alternative program under civilian control was in place. Some of these were court martialed, others imprisoned for their stand. The consequences were felt in all communities with Mennonite residents.<sup>38</sup> The local press denounced them as "slackers, cowards, parasites, [and] draft-dodgers."<sup>39</sup> American Mennonites faced an excruciating public test of their nonresistant faith and of their loyalty to their homeland.

Anything that smacked of "Germanism" or "slackerism" was attacked with unmitigated fury; mob action dotted the experience of Mennonites in Montana,

Illinois, Kansas, Iowa, Ohio, and particularly Oklahoma. For a man of German ancestry who happened also to be a conscientious objector, America was in some areas the worst of all possible places in 1917-18. Pressure to buy war bonds; scurrilous press treatment; bans on the use of the German language in schools, churches, and on the street; and economic and social ostracism marked the plight of Mennonites during the war.<sup>40</sup>

These experiences contributed to at least two developments directly relevant to this study. In the first place, the depth of patriotism and tide of anti-German sentiment elicited by the war combined with an anti-Alien feeling aroused by the large influx of immigrants prior to the war to produce a powerful American nativism.<sup>41</sup> The federal government responded to these concerns by implementing a strict quota system for immigration following the war. This action effectively eliminated the United States as a possible destination for the Mennonites in Russia. At the same time, some American Mennonites looked to Canada as a haven from conscription and conformist pressure during the war. Seven or eight hundred of them joined over 1,000 Hutterites in this northward migration. A storm of protest here resulted in the suspension of military exemption for all Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Hutterites entering Canada by an order-in-council of October 25, 1918 and contributed significantly to the total exclusion of any such persons in 1919.<sup>42</sup>

Canadian Mennonites did not experience the virulence evident south of the border but they did become a target for the anti-German tirades of patriotic Anglo-Canadians. On the western prairies in particular

the conspicuous, if largely self-contained, Mennonite settlements endured angry verbal assaults from such groups as the Sons of England and the Orangemen.<sup>43</sup> Like their coreligionists south of the border, they were resented because they spoke German and they refused to fight. Howard Palmer's observations about Alberta apply equally well to Saskatchewan and Manitoba where the German-speaking Mennonites lived.

Wartime propoganda dramatized the image of Germans as barbarous "Huns," and the frustration, deprivation, and bitterness which the wartime experience engendered found a convenient scapegoat in the "enemy alien." The Germans, who formerly had been counted among western Canada's most desirable citizens, now became the most undesirable...For many western Canadians during the war, loyalty and cultural and linguistic conformity were synonymous.<sup>44</sup>

Most conspicuous among the German-speaking populace were the conservative Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan who refused to conform to compulsory public school legislation.<sup>45</sup> Most Anglo-Canadians agreed that the future of the nation depended on "developing in these people a true Canadian Spirit and attachment to British ideals and institutions."<sup>46</sup> This, they believed, could occur only through "an efficient common school system..."<sup>47</sup> Rev. Dr. Edmund H. Oliver, principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Saskatoon and vice-president of the Saskatchewan Public Education League, declared in 1915 that the primary function of the public school was to make the child into "an intelligent and patriotic citizen." This, he continued, meant "not to make Mennonites, nor Protestants, nor Catholics, but Canadian citizens."<sup>48</sup> Mennonite resistance to



this process, according to one western MP, gave rise "to intense feeling against them in the West" during the war.<sup>49</sup> In response, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta enacted legislation in 1916 and 1917 requiring compulsory school attendance for children aged 7 - 14 and making English the sole language of instruction.<sup>50</sup> In the words of C.B. Sissons,

When the war spirit got hold of the West, and to poor equipment [in Mennonite private schools] were added the dual sins of pacifism and German speech, the patience of public and officials could no longer stand the strain. Recourse was had to compulsion.<sup>51</sup>

For conservative Old Colony Mennonites, the time had come to redraw the line of separation from society. To them, the public school, represented the subtle yet powerful intrusion of the 'world' and the state into their lives. Frank Epp observes that

As they saw it, the public school pointed to Anglo-Canadianism rather than German Mennonitism, to urbanization rather than the rural life, to militarism rather than pacifism, to ostentation rather than the simple lifestyle they and their ancestors in the faith had always advocated. The public school also pointed in the direction of other unwanted "worldly" influences and, what was worst of all, social integration and ultimate assimilation. From that perspective they had no choice but to resist the public school.<sup>52</sup>

When a satisfactory compromise with provincial authorities became impossible almost 8,000 Mennonites sold their land and belongings in western Canada and emigrated to Latin America between 1922 and 1930.

Few Canadians expressed any regret at their departure. The Victoria Daily Times reflected the popular public sentiment when it editorialized that "Canada will be much better off in the long run without that type of citizenry...."<sup>53</sup>

Mennonite exemption from military service contributed substantially to that public sentiment. The federal government never wavered in its commitment to the 1873 agreement guaranteeing conscientious objector status for the Mennonites. But most Anglo-Canadians resented what they perceived as a special privilege. Indeed, they suspected the loyalty of these people who not only spoke German but also refused to fight against the German enemy. An editorial in Saturday Night captured the hostile public mood when it charged that exemption boards were being relegated "into the hands of a lot of German sympathizers and slackers."<sup>54</sup> In the words of one Member of Parliament, "We certainly do not want that kind of cattle in this country."<sup>55</sup> With American Mennonites and Hutterites coming to Canada to escape conscription in the U.S., the Manitoba Free Press demanded that no immigrant be permitted to enter Canada in the future "unless he is prepared to become a Canadian, and to see his children Canadianized."<sup>56</sup> This, one M.P. explained, meant assuming "the full obligations of Canadian citizenship."<sup>57</sup>

This rising tide of resentment forced the Conservative government of Robert Borden to take action. Three months prior to his reelection as Prime Minister, this time as leader of a Union government, in December, 1917, Borden promulgated both the Military Voters Act,

extending the franchise to all members of the armed forces, and the Wartime Elections Act, which disenfranchised all "enemy aliens," that is, immigrants from enemy countries who had entered Canada after 1902, as well as all conscientious objectors.<sup>58</sup> A year later, when the entry of Mennonites and Doukhobors from the U.S. became a volatile public issue, the government exercised its powers under the War Measures Act of 1914 to ban the publication or possession of all German language materials and to deny military exemption to any new Mennonite or Doukhobor immigrants.<sup>59</sup> In June, 1919 after the war had ended, the government prohibited the entry of all enemy aliens, that is persons "of German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian or Turkish race or nationality."<sup>60</sup> On the same day the government also decreed by order-in-council that "any immigrant of the Doukhobor, Hutterite, and Mennonite class" would no longer be admitted into Canada. The reason given was clear and simple..

Owing to the results of the war, a widespread feeling exists throughout Canada, and more particularly in western Canada, that steps should be taken to prohibit the landing in Canada of immigrants deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of living, and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship<sup>61</sup> within a reasonable time after their entry.

Many factors in Canadian domestic affairs after the war combined, therefore, to militate against any possibility of special consideration for European refugees in general, and Russian Mennonites in particular.

Soldier resettlement was a top priority for the government and the nation.<sup>62</sup> Economic and political unrest, as evidenced by the Winnipeg Strike of 1919, intensified the wartime animosity against the "foreigner" from central and eastern Europe, who was seen as the instigator of violence and revolution and the propagator of crime.<sup>63</sup> Amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization Acts in 1919 "took place against a national backdrop of social tension and labour unrest which has few parallels in Canadian history."<sup>64</sup> While most Canadians still perceived immigration as a national necessity, they advocated more stringent controls over the quality of that influx. In short, British immigrants, who could be trusted to uphold Anglo-Canadian institutions and traditions, were most desired and Americans and northern Europeans were welcomed, but the rest, particularly the destitute from eastern Europe, were clearly unacceptable.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to public hostility and legal restrictions, Mennonites in Canada faced a variety of internal problems of their own. In the first place, the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario and the Russian Mennonites in the West had virtually no contact with each other. In addition to this, the factionalism of the nineteenth century had created denominational barriers within both of these groups which made broader cooperation almost impossible. Only the wartime threat to their military exemption had induced them to take joint action, although disunity also marred and threatened to undermine even these limited efforts.<sup>66</sup> No formal organization existed, therefore, which could undertake to speak for or act on behalf of the Mennonites wanting to

emigrate from Russia. This task fell, then, to the most prominent and influential men in the Mennonite community, the church or conference leaders. Their task was twofold: first, to mobilize their people in anticipation of a large-scale resettlement in Canada and, secondly, to convince the government to repeal the restrictive legislation.

Although federal authorities refused to entertain the Russian Mennonites' study commission in 1920, one member, A.A. Friesen, returned in June of the following year and initiated a series of meetings among the western Mennonites. He suggested that a delegation journey to Ottawa to appeal to the government on behalf of their "brethern in Russia seeking asylum."<sup>67</sup> Two representatives of both the western and the Ontario conferences accompanied Friesen in July, 1921. Here they met with the acting Prime Minister, George Foster, who informed them that the barrier to Mennonite admission was not so much their refusal of military service as their reluctance to adopt Canadian customs and traditions and use the English language.<sup>68</sup> He noted in particular the recalcitrance of the Old Colony Mennonites in this regard and offered no hope for a change in the government position. With a general election imminent, the Conservatives doubtless considered any concessions to the Mennonites to be politically dangerous. A meeting with the Opposition Leader, Mackenzie King elicited a more favourable response, however. King, who had become well acquainted with the Mennonites in Waterloo County and now valued their votes in his North York constituency, declared himself a great friend of the Mennonites and promised to rescind PC 1204 should his party form the next government.<sup>69</sup>

But A.A. Friesen, driven by the desperate plight of his fellow Mennonites in Russia, persisted. Several days after the disappointing trip to Ottawa he appealed again to the goodwill and benevolence of government officials. Since J.A. Calder, the Minister of Immigration and Colonization, had been unavailable to meet with the delegation, Friesen addressed him in a lengthy and detailed letter. Responding to the objections raised by Foster, Friesen carefully distinguished among the various Mennonite groups in Canada. That branch "which endeavours to keep aloof from the Canadian people," he emphasized, was not representative of the majority who were, he maintained, "fully Americanized." Those Mennonites seeking admission to Canada, Friesen concluded, clearly belonged in the latter category.<sup>70</sup>

Several western Canadian Mennonite leaders concurred. In a separate letter to Calder they expressed their concern over "unwarranted attacks...upon the citizens of Canada who belong to the Mennonite faith, by the press of the land, by individuals and by various organizations...."<sup>71</sup> They went on to express the determination of the Mennonites they represented "to do all in their power, but within the limits of their conscience, that would likely promote the welfare and well-being of this country." Mennonites, they concluded, had proven to be "an industrious, law abiding, and altogether desirable class of people...." The admission of more of their kind would, they argued, clearly benefit Canada.

These arguments helped moderate Calder's earlier intransigence. A concern about Mennonite voters in the impending federal election may

also have contributed to this change of heart. In any case, Calder assured Mennonite leaders in late October, 1921 that the restrictive regulations would soon be removed. "These regulations grew out of a definite feeling during the war," he agreed. "I personally have no doubt that they will be dropped again."<sup>72</sup> But he gave no indication when that might be.

In December, 1921 Canadians elected a Liberal government and in March of the next year A.A. Friesen, accompanied by two Mennonite representatives from Ontario and two from western Canada, returned to Ottawa to remind the new Prime Minister of his earlier promise. Mackenzie King gave the delegation his firm assurance that the restrictive order-in-council (PC 1204) would soon be repealed.<sup>73</sup>

In a separate meeting, the Mennonite leaders received the encouragement and support of two other key cabinet members, Charles Stewart, the Acting Minister of Immigration and Colonization, and W.R. Motherwell, the Minister of Agriculture. Both agreed that the regulation in question was "an unjustified measure."<sup>74</sup> Buoyed by these assurances, the representatives travelled on to Montreal with a letter of recommendation from Charles Stewart to meet with officials of the Canadian Pacific Railway regarding transportation arrangements. Here they met another friend of the Mennonites, Col. J.S. Dennis, Chief Commissioner of the CPR's Department of Colonization and Development. Dennis had come to know and appreciate these agriculturalists in Manitoba and had tried unsuccessfully during the war to bring more of their number into Canada from Russia. He approached the proposal

enthusiastically and promised immediately to arrange for an initial transfer of 3,000 immigrants that year.<sup>75</sup> Ecstatic with their success, the Mennonite leaders returned to their constituencies to establish the necessary sponsoring organization and to secure the financial and moral support of their people. To their dismay, they soon discovered that "Winning the support of the churches and their members [would prove] to be a bigger task than getting the restrictive Order-in-Council rescinded or gaining credit from the CPR."<sup>76</sup>

Suspicious within the Mennonite community soon precipitated a storm of protest, threatening to undermine the entire project. Some, having heard rumours of the Selbstschutz, feared a compromise of their nonresistant faith and conscientious objector status. Others feared personal financial liability for the transportation debt. Eventually these protests surfaced in the Mennonite press where they aroused a heated debate. According to one Mennonite chronicler of this story, the gap between the leaders and their constituency intensified these difficulties, as did personality clashes, inter-church rivalries and jealousies, and the harsh truth that some Mennonites resented the prospect of financial obligation on behalf of the newcomers.<sup>77</sup> Still, if there was to be any extensive relocation, the planning had to proceed.

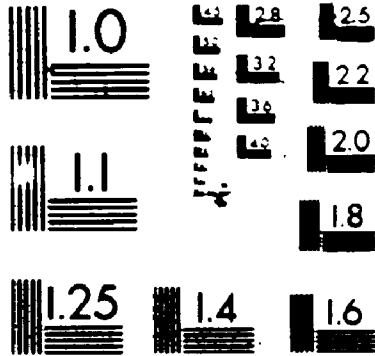
Taking matters into their own hands, the leaders of several Mennonite groups in western Canada continued to discuss plans for organizing and financing the project. In May, 1922 they established the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) as the sponsoring



agency.<sup>78</sup> This organization, totally independent of any Mennonite church or conference, would assume the responsibility for the resettlement of all newcomers. In addition to the transportation debt, the Board accepted these stipulations imposed by the government: (1) that the immigrants would be housed and sheltered upon arrival, (2) that they would settle on the land as farmers, and (3) that none would become a public charge for at least five years.<sup>79</sup> For its part, the government waived the normal passport requirements and literacy test.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, the main concerns of immigration officials, namely that these be "bona fide farmers" who could pass the requisite medical exam, had to be satisfied.<sup>81</sup> Although political conditions in Europe delayed the departure of the first group of emigrants for another year, these negotiations and arrangements had prepared the way. On June 2, 1922 the federal cabinet revoked PC 1204 and opened the Canadian gate to some 20,000 Russian Mennonite immigrants. But why had the government changed its mind? And how would these newcomers be received in Canada?

Few continental European immigrants were warmly welcomed into Canada in the 1920s. Postwar economic and social conditions convinced Canadians that the massive and largely unregulated prewar influx could not continue. In his Study in Canadian Immigration published in 1920 for the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene, W.G. Smith noted the widespread belief "which sometimes finds verbal expression, both vocal and written, that the river of our national life has been polluted by the turbid streams from immigrant sources."<sup>82</sup> The quota

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

system adopted by the United States shortly after the war reinforced this impression and added the concern that much of the "pollution" rejected south of the border would now flow northward into Canada. In the wake of public pressure, the federal government amended the Immigration Act in 1919 in order to reduce the influx of immigrants and in an effort to insure that those admitted were more socially, culturally, and politically acceptable to Anglo-Canadians. According to one official, these changes would provide for

the exclusion of a wider class of undesirables, and for increased powers of deportation. In addition... provision has been made by which the Governor in Council may restrict immigration on the ground of (a) Nationality or race (b) class or occupation (c) unsuitability of the immigrant having in view his assimilation.<sup>83</sup>

Two themes had dominated the ongoing immigration debate: economic utility and cultural acceptability. While neither was new, the urgency and intensity with which they reverberated throughout the country almost totally altered, for a time at least, the character of immigration to Canada. "Whereas before 1914 economic consideration had been paramount, now the principal criteria became political and cultural acceptability."<sup>84</sup> Many Canadians demanded vociferously, therefore, that the selection of newcomers be limited to those of Anglo-Saxon origin, or such as could be rapidly and wholesomely "Canadianized."

Yet another factor was the growing concern in Canada over the rapid and often uncontrolled expansion of towns and cities, a process which

had raised the proportion of the population classified as urban to 49.5% by 1921.<sup>85</sup> Most immigrants tended to settle in these centres, placing a severe burden on the social, economic, political, and educational institutions here.<sup>86</sup> Of course, the identification of continental European immigrants with urban squalor was a long-standing practice among Anglo-Canadians. By the end of the first decade of this century, social commentators like J.S. Woodsworth and John MacDougall lamented the passing of Canada's rural age and warned that "the city may become a menace to our whole civilization."<sup>87</sup> A glance at the consequences of massive continental European immigration to the United States after 1880 had further convinced Canadians that an unregulated influx from this source posed a grave threat to the 'Canadian way of life'.

Not surprisingly, therefore, both politicians and the press began to articulate these views. In April, 1919, J.A. Calder, the minister responsible for Immigration and Colonization, declared that Canadians had "failed to recognize...that Canada is essentially an agricultural country, and the efforts of Governments in the past have not been sufficiently directed towards the placing of people on the land."<sup>88</sup>

Canadian labour added its own variant to this theme, claiming that immigrants did not move into rural occupations but gravitated towards the towns and cities instead where they accepted lower wages, thereby displacing native workers. As evidence, union leaders cited the 10.2 percent of their members unemployed in November 1920, a figure which rose sharply to 16.3 percent five months later.<sup>89</sup> J.A. Calder

responded to these concerns by pursuing a two-point policy: preferential treatment for agricultural immigrants and "the exclusion of certain classes of people who cannot be readily absorbed."<sup>90</sup> When the postwar depression intensified further, Charles Stewart, the Liberal Minister responsible for immigration, imposed further restrictions on the European influx in January, 1923 by limiting admission from here, by order-in-council P.C. 183, to bona fide agriculturalists, farm labourers, and female domestic servants.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, after a decline of one third in the total number of immigrants from 1920 to 1921, from 138,824 to 91,728, and a further reduction by 30% in 1922, the total number of admissions doubled again in 1923 to approximate the 1920 level once more.<sup>92</sup> The proportion of British immigrants varied little, fluctuating between 48.4% and 56.5% of the total, while the number of Americans declined steadily from just over 40,000 to under 17,000 during these four years. The influx from continental Europe, therefore, remained large.

Part of the reason for this consistent trend was the crescendo of voices calling for a more aggressive immigration policy. Admittedly, most had a vested interest in the growth of the Canadian population. With the decline from wartime production and export levels, manufacturers needed a larger domestic market and a steady supply of cheap labour, the railroads needed cargo for their trains and ships and settlers for their lands, and debt-laden governments needed a broader tax base. In addition, there prevailed a popular nationalist notion that Canada's vast physical potential begged for "the speedy

development and exploitation of natural resources and the redistribution of population through migration in order to bring this about."<sup>93</sup>

Closely related was the economic argument which found in an increased population base the solution to the massive national debt, a crippling railway deficit, and stagnation in business and industry. T.D.

Pattullo, the Minister of Lands in British Columbia, maintained in 1922 that increased immigration was "the single and the most effective means of bringing about an immediate improvement in general conditions. We simply must have people."<sup>94</sup> C.P.R. chairman Sir Thomas Shaughnessy concurred.<sup>95</sup> Colonel J.S. Dennis, director of the C.P.R.'s department of Colonization and Development, set a goal of ten million more people in Canada in ten years and determined to do all he could to achieve it.<sup>96</sup> Not only would these newcomers build a stronger nation, they would also, he assumed, purchase farms and thereby help rid the railway of its vacant lands.

Charles Stewart, the Minister responsible for immigration from February, 1922 until August, 1923, responded favourably to these demands with his own vision of a burgeoning population. "I know Canada needs between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000 more citizens," he declared, adding his intention "to recommend a very comprehensive policy of immigration to the Government."<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister Mackenzie King joined this chorus, promising that as a result of increased recruitment efforts, "we should soon see a return of the flow of immigrants."<sup>98</sup> In the midst of these conflicting pressures, Stewart described his policy in the spring of 1923 as "the middle course between two extremes...being very selective, with a view to assimilation."<sup>99</sup>

Significantly, these circumstances and conditions, more than anything else, ensured a favourable reception from the government to the request for the admission of Russian Mennonites in the early 1920's. Canada wanted and needed more immigrants, agriculturalists in particular. Canadian Mennonites had achieved a reputation of being among the best farmers in the country. When the Board of Colonization guaranteed that these newcomers would settle on the land and would not become a public charge for at least five years, immigration officials became keenly interested. Moreover once provision had been made for the maintenance and care in Europe of those who did not meet the stringent health requirements, the Immigration Department ordered that technical difficulties such as passport, continuous journey, and monetary requirements be arbitrarily dispensed with in this case, as was the Minister's prerogative.<sup>100</sup> Hence the feeling expressed by one official that "if there is any mass movement I think we should try to encourage it...."<sup>101</sup>

Favourable attitudes in other quarters had facilitated these developments. Most propitious was the election of a Liberal government in December 1921. Certain key figures such as the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, who had grown up among the Mennonites of Waterloo County, as well as, W.R. Motherwell, the Minister of Agriculture, and Charles Stewart, the Minister of Immigration, both of whom had witnessed the progress in Mennonite settlements in western Canada, all expressed a high regard for the Mennonite people.<sup>102</sup> The support of these elected leaders provided the leverage the Mennonites needed in order to have the

restrictive order-in-council of 1919 removed in 1922. In subsequent years this rapport ensured their leaders of easy access to the government and, for that reason, of considerable influence on non-elected civil servants who administered the immigration law. From among these, too, emanated laudatory statements. F.C. Blair, departmental secretary and after 1924 the assistant deputy Minister in the Department of Immigration and Colonization, confided that he did not need to be convinced "that the Mennonites are a splendid, well-behaved and industrious people."<sup>103</sup> David Toews, chairman of the Mennonite Board of Colonization, expressed great delight after the 1926 election because "the Liberal Party is at the helm once again. We have some very good friends there...", he noted with some satisfaction and anticipation.<sup>104</sup>

With the passing of time, public animosity toward 'enemy aliens' in general and Mennonites in particular also diminished. Part of the reason may have been the exodus of the conservative Old Colony group. Their departure largely eliminated the focus of these hostilities and through this process of differentiation probably increased the acceptability of those who remained. Mennonite leaders themselves argued for such a distinction in the hope of minimizing fears that the newcomers might prove equally unassimilable.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, they countered the suspicion that special arrangements or concessions were being made for the Russian Mennonites, especially in regard to military service, with the assertion that they required no additional privileges. Bishop Toews explained that



the laws of Canada fully protected them in their religious scruples regarding military service and that the laws of Canada would guarantee them an equal treatment in this respect with the Mennonites already residing in Canada.<sup>106</sup>

After some initial confusion regarding the applicability of the 1873 order-in-council to the immigrants of the 1920s, the Liberal government was able to convince the Mennonite community, old and new, of the inviolability of its claim to military exemption under the Militia Act.<sup>107</sup> In doing so, Liberals assured themselves of the life-long loyalty of most immigrant Mennonites.

Eager both to reestablish themselves in their new homeland and to find acceptance among their Canadian hosts, the Russian Mennonites moved quickly and rather effectively to allay nativistic fears and integrate themselves into the larger society. The leader of the first group to arrive in Canada assured the curious crowd gathered at the C.P.R. station in Rosthern, Saskatchewan on July 21, 1923 that

the ambition of the immigrant Mennonites was to adjust themselves to Canadian conditions, to adopt Canadian customs, and to become, not an alien race with the privileges of Canadians, but Canadian, worthy of the name.<sup>108</sup>

The Manitoba Free Press, which had angrily denounced the Mennonites for their refusal to bear arms during the war, reflected the extent to which public opinion had changed by 1924. In a story outlining their recent settlement, the paper noted that these newcomers were farmers, that they belonged to the "progressive branch" and not the Old Colony, and continued:

The Mennonites now arriving in Canada are not communists, they are anxious to learn English, send their children to public schools and give promise of becoming real Canadian citizens.<sup>109</sup>

Kitchener-Waterloo residents appeared to be similarly impressed. On July 19, 1924 a large and curious crowd gathered at the train station in downtown Waterloo, Ontario to witness the arrival of 875 Mennonite immigrants. A reporter for the Kitchener-Waterloo Daily Record assured concerned residents that these refugees from Soviet Russia bore "not the slightest resemblances of squalor or dirt which is usually associated with European immigrants."<sup>110</sup> Although the immigrants could not hide "the undeniable marks of privation, persecution, hunger and suffering," this correspondent observed, they appeared to be clean and neat, well-mannered and well-educated.<sup>111</sup> Like their Swiss-German coreligionists, who, the paper reported, ranked among "the finest of citizens" in the region, these Mennonites intended to settle on the land.<sup>112</sup> It was assumed, therefore, that they would not compete for jobs with native Canadians as Italian and Slavic immigrants were accused of doing. "As a body," the Daily Record concluded, "the new arrivals leave little to be desired."<sup>113</sup>

German-speaking Lutherans and Catholics joined the Mennonite farmers in accommodating and employing these "Russians," as they called them.<sup>114</sup> By the end of 1924 just under 1,500 had found temporary homes in Ontario.<sup>115</sup> As if to counter potential objections, the Daily Record assured its readers that "Not all of them are going to be permanent residents of Ontario but they are being cared for here until

next year, when they will go out to the larger Mennonite colony at Rosthern, Saskatchewan."<sup>116</sup> With available farmland scarce and expensive in Ontario, and with the number of unemployed rising dramatically (it would reach 11 percent of the organized labour force in Canada in December, 1924),<sup>117</sup> this arrangement seemed necessary and satisfactory.

But not everything transpired according to plan. True, about one half of the 1924 arrivals ventured westward the following spring. Other newcomers, however, stopped in Ontario to take their place. Within two years, moreover, this westward movement had been reversed. By the end of 1927, some 1,700 Russian Mennonites sought permanency, security, and prosperity in Ontario.<sup>118</sup> The impact of deteriorating climactic and economic conditions on prairie agriculture increased this influx in the years that followed. By 1932, these migrants had swelled that number to an estimated 2,250 and six years later the total reached well over 3,500.<sup>119</sup> A significant Russian Mennonite community had emerged almost unexpectedly in Ontario.

In this new environment the Mennonites hoped to put behind them the fear and terror, the suffering and deprivation, the uncertainty and instability of their last decade in Russia. Not only their identity as a Mennonite people, but indeed their very existence had been threatened. In Canada, these immigrants believed, they had found the "promised land," the land of "Canaan."<sup>120</sup> They anticipated a land of peace and prosperity, a new home in which they could freely reclaim their historic identity. But how was a scattered, impoverished

immigrant group to rebuild its community and restore its sense of group identity? Would this setting allow them to reestablish the cherished lifestyle of the Russian Mennonite 'commonwealth' and to preserve the religious values which undergirded it?

Footnotes

- 1 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," (Jan., 1974), pp. 36-37; Suderman, "Mennonite State Service," pp. 44-46.
- 2 T[h]. B[lock], "Forestry Service," ME, II, pp. 353-54.
- 3 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 37. During the Napoleonic wars the Mennonites had raised a considerable sum of money which was donated to the Tsar as a demonstration of their loyalty. See Urry, "Closed and Open," p. 429.
- 4 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Sanitaetsdienst," ME, IV, p. 1119.
- 5 Toews, Lost Fatherland, p. 23.
- 6 John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonites and the Military Question," MQR, XLIII (April, 1969), p. 154.
- 7 Unruh, "Background and Causes," p. 267.
- 8 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 28.
- 9 Ibid., p. 30.
- 10 Smith, Story of the Mennonites, p. 467.
- 11 Francis, Utopia, pp. 199-200. Francis may be overstating the case somewhat since some of the Russian authorities had also spoken German.
- 12 For an historical account see Victor Peters, Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist (Winnipeg: Echo Books, 1970). From among the personal accounts see Gerhard P. Schroeder, Miracles of Grace and Judgement (Lodi, Cal.: by the author, 1974); Dietrich Neufeld, A Russian Dance of Death, trans. Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977). The casualties are estimated in "Machno, Nestor," ME, III, pp. 430-431.
- 13 Toews, Lost Fatherland, pp. 26-38; Toews, "Military Question," pp. 155-57.
- 14 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 35.
- 15 Toews, Lost Fatherland, p. 42.
- 16 Neufeld, Dance of Death, pp. 63-64.
- 17 Toews, Lost Fatherland, p. 86.
- 18 See James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Revitalization in the Wake of World War I," MQR, LX (Jan., 1986), pp. 15-30.

- 19 Toews, Lost Fatherland, p. 83.
- 20 The New Economic Policy instituted by Lenin in 1921 led to a general economic improvement. See Epp, Mennonite Exodus, pp. 140-41.
- 21 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 42.
- 22 Jacob H. Janzen, "Mennonite Immigrants in Ontario" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), p. 2; in the Jacob H. Janzen collection (hereafter JHJ) at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario (hereafter CGC). Originals on deposit at the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, Newton, Kansas.
- 23 See Toews, "Military Question," pp. 158f. for details.
- 24 Toews, Lost Fatherland, p. 84. Regarding the 1925 appeal for exemption see Walter Sawatsky, "What Makes Russian Mennonites Mennonite?" MQR, LIII (Jan., 1979), p. 6.
- 25 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 142.
- 26 H.S. Bender, "A Russian Mennonite Document of 1922," MQR, XXVIII (April, 1954), pp. 143-47.
- 27 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, pp. 100-101.
- 28 Ibid., p. 107.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 187-92.
- 30 Smith, Russian Mennonites, pp. 67-69.
- 31 Francis, Tradition and Progress, p. 315.
- 32 Francis, Utopia, p. 170. For background to the controversy see W.L. Morton, "Manitoba Schools and Canadian Nationality, 1890-1923" in Minorities, Schools, and Politics, ed. Ramsay Cook et.al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 10-18.
- 33 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 340.
- 34 I.I. Friesen, "The Mennonites of Western Canada With Special Reference to Education" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1954), p. 108.
- 35 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 354.
- 36 Free Press News Bulletin, Nov. 26, 1910, cited in ibid., p. 348.
- 37 Smith, Russian Mennonites, p. 273.

- 38 James C. Juhnke, A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of Kansas Mennonites (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), pp. 89-110.
- 39 Smith, Russian Mennonites, p. 286.
- 40 Allan Teichroew, "World War I and Mennonite Migrations," cited in Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, p. 396.
- 41 Nativism has been defined as "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign...connection." See Howard Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice. A History of Nativism in Alberta (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), pp. 6-7.
- 42 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, pp. 395-407.
- 43 See, for example, the letters of protest in the "Mennonites" file, Robert Borden Papers, vol. 214, Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC) and the report in the Canadian Annual Review (hereafter CAR), XX (1920), p. 892.
- 44 Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, pp. 47-49.
- 45 For the story of this group see Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites. Saturday Night described them as a "backward, grossly ignorant people who have the one virtue of industry." May 22, 1920, p. 2.
- 46 J.T.M. Anderson, The Education of the New-Canadian (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1918), p. 89.
- 47 Ibid., p. 114. Cf. Saturday Night, Oct. 19, 1918, pp. 1-2.
- 48 Quoted by Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Relations With Governments: Western Canada, 1870-1925" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1978), p. 206.
- 49 J.A. Calder, House of Commons, Official Report of Debates (hereafter Debates), May 19, 1919, p. 2572. Cf. Saturday Night, Oct. 19, 1918, pp. 1-2, Sept. 18, 1920, pp. 1-2.
- 50 See Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, ch. 3.
- 51 Cited by Ens, "Mennonite Relations With Governments," p. 197n.
- 52 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 100.
- 53 Ibid., p. 126.
- 54 Saturday Night, Oct. 26, 1918, p. 1. Cf. CAR, XVIII (1918), pp. 427-28.

- 55 J.W. Edwards, Debates, April 30, 1919, p. 1929.
- 56 Manitoba Free Press, Sept. 4, 1918 in Borden Papers, PAC, vol. 234, file 2183.
- 57 W.A. Buchanan, Debates, April 30, 1919, p. 1913.
- 58 Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 271-72.
- 59 Orders-in-council PC 2381 of Sept. 25, 1918 and PC 2622 of Oct. 25, 1918. On the issue of censorship see Ens. "Mennonite Relations With Governments," pp. 916-23.
- 60 Order-in-council PC 1203, June 19, 1919.
- 61 Order-in-council PC 1204, June 19, 1919.
- 62 See Debates, April 29, 1919, p. 1883; April 30, 1919, pp. 1914 ff.
- 63 For a fuller analysis see Donald Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners'. European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979) esp. ch. 3.
- 64 Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy," p. 541.
- 65 See Debates, April 30, 1919, pp. 1911-70; CAR, XX (1920), pp. 242-46.
- 66 Epp provides details in Mennonites in Canada, vol. I, pp. 365-89.
- 67 H.H. Ewert, "Bericht ueber die Reise der Deputation nach Ottawa," Der Mitarbeiter, 14 (Sept.; 1921), p. 71.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., p. 75. Just prior to the 1925 election King confided to his diary, "I would not be surprised if my majority in North York were over 2,000 provided Mennonites & Quakers vote." Nevertheless, he suffered defeat. Interestingly, there were less than 400 Mennonites in his constituency according to the 1921 census.
- 70 A.A. Friesen to J.A. Calder, July 25, 1921 in the Immigration Branch files, RG76, PAC (hereafter IB), vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24).
- 71 H.H. Ewert and H.A. Neufeld to J.A. Calder, July 19, 1921. IB, vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24).
- 72 October 24, 1921. Cited in Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 103.



- 73 H.H. Ewert, "Unser Zweiter Versuch, die Regierung in Ottawa zu bewegen, das Verbot der Einwanderung der Mennoniten aufzuheben," Der Mitarbeiter, XV (April, 1922), p. 28. See also the account in the Mackenzie King papers, PAC, vol. 17, file 872.
- 74 Ewert, "Unser Zweiter Versuch," p. 28.
- 75 H.H. Ewert, "Bemuehung der Delegation in Bezug auf den Transport der mennonitischen auswanderer von Russland nach Canada," Der Mitarbeiter, XV (April, 1922), pp. 28-29; Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. III. Cf. P.L. Neufeld, "Army officer played key role in moving Mennonites to Prairies," Mennonite Mirror, 8 (Jan., 1979), p. 10.
- 76 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 119.
- 77 For these details see ibid., pp. 116-31.
- 78 Jacob Gerbrandt, "Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization," ME, I, pp. 507-8.
- 79 David Toews, "Immigration From Russia in the Past and in the Future," Official Minutes and Reports...of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of N.A., 1926, p. 296.
- 80 See the correspondence dated Sept. 21, 1922, Nov. 2, 1922, and July 7, 1923 in IB, vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24) and F. Blair to T.B. Willans, Jan. 29, 1923 in the files of the Department of External Affairs, PAC, vol. 407, Immigration 2 (1923-24).
- 81 W.R. Little, Commissioner of Immigration, Ottawa to J.E. Featherstone, July 7, 1923. IB, vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24).
- 82 W.G. Smith, A Study in Canadian Immigration (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1920), p. 226.
- 83 W.D. Scott to J.A. Calder, June 24, 1919. IB, vol. 611, file 902168, pt. 2.
- 84 Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners,' p. 90.
- 85 Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, vol. I, Table 19.
- 86 For an excellent analysis of one city see Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: a social history of urban growth 1874-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1975).
- 87 J.S. Woodsworth, My Neighbour: A study of city conditions, a plea for social service (1911; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972, p. 23; Cf. John MacDougall, Rural Life in Canada (1913; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), and Berger, The Sense of Power, pp. 177-98.

- 88 J.A. Calder, Debates, April 29, 1919, p. 1868.
- 89 CAR, XIX (1919), p. 587; Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners,' p. 94; James Struthers, "Prelude to Depression: The Federal Government and Unemployment, 1918-29," Canadian Historical Review, LVIII (Sept., 1977), p. 290.
- 90 J.A. Calder, Debates, April 29, 1919, p. 1896.
- 91 Cited in Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners,' p. 94.
- 92 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Book Four (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), pp. 240-245. (Hereafter cited as B and B Report).
- 93 R.W. Murchie, et.al., Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier, vol. V (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), p. 1.
- 94 CAR, XXII (1922), p. 272. Pattullo maintained that Canada would absorb "at least 300,000 people annually" for an indefinite period of time. Montreal Star, April 5, 1923, p. 2.
- 95 The Globe, Nov. 18, 1922, p. 6.
- 96 CAR, XXII (1922), p. 271.
- 97 Ibid., p. 281.
- 98 Debates, Feb. 1, 1923, p. 29.
- 99 Ibid., March 13, 1923, p. 1082.
- 100 These measures were intended primarily to control the quantity and quality of the immigrant stream. The continuous journey provision limited access to selected countries, monetary requirements excluded the totally indigent who might become public wards, and a valid passport provided a destination in the event of deportation.
- 101 F.C. Blair memo, Sept. 21, 1922. IB, vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24).
- 102 Ewert, "Unser Zweiter Versuch," p. 28; A.A. Friesen to S.F. Coffman, Jan. 22, 1922 in Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) papers at CGC, "1920+Immigration" file; Debates, May 23, 1922, p. 2161; J.S. Dennis to W.J. Egan, April 7, 1924 in IB, vol. 196, pt. 2 (1921-25).
- 103 F.C. Blair to J.H. Janzen, Oct. 20, 1930. JHJ.
- 104 David Toews to J.H. Janzen, Sept. 16, 1926. JHJ.

- 105 A.A. Friesen to J.A. Calder, July 25, 1921. IB, vol. 196, pt. 1 (1921-24).
- 106 David Toews to F.C. Blair, April 26, 1923. IB, vol. 175, file 58764, pt. 9.
- 107 See IB, vol. 175, pts. 9 and 10 for details. The order-in-council denying military exemption to new immigrants in October, 1918 (see note 59) no longer applied because it had been issued under the War Measures Act which was no longer in effect.
- 108 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, July, 1923 in Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 145.
- 109 Manitoba Free Press, August 19, 1924, p. 6. Cf. The Toronto Globe, November 18, 1924, p. 4. For the wartime attitude see the Manitoba Free Press, Sept. 4 and 6, 1918.
- 110 "Unexpectedly Large Quota of Mennonites for Country," [Kitchener-Waterloo] Daily Record, Monday, July 21, 1924, p. 2.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 "Leading Event in Waterloo County for 1924," Daily Record, September 20, 1924, Section II, p. 1.
- 113 "Unexpectedly Large Quota," p. 2.
- 114 "Leading Event," Daily Record, p. 2. Oral History Interviews of Russian-Mennonite Immigrants in the 1920's (Ontario), Interview #15. CGC (hereafter Interviews).
- 115 The Board of Colonization reported that just over one third of the newcomers, or 1494 out of 4195, arriving in 1924 stopped in Ontario. D.E., "Ein kurzer Rueckblick," Der Bote, II (Jan. 7, 1925), p. 2.
- 116 "Leading Event," Daily Record, p. 2.
- 117 CAR, XXIX (1929-30), p. 196.
- 118 B.B. Wiens' report to the Zentrales Mennonitisches Immigrantenkomitee (ZMIK) in Der Bote, IV (Dec. 21, 1927), p. 6.
- 119 Estimates based on ZMIK reports. The Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. I, Table 44, reported 2023 Mennonites in Ontario whose birthplace was either Russia or the Ukraine.
- 120 In the German language, Canada and Canaan sound very similar. Interchanging the latter with the former became a popular expression. See Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, p. 152.

## CHAPTER III

### In Search of Permanence and Peoplehood

Some 20,000 Russian Mennonites entered Canada between 1923 and 1930. Although they constituted but a miniscule proportion of the total immigrant influx during that period, they would nonetheless increase the total Mennonite population here by more than one third.<sup>1</sup> But the interaction with these indigenous coreligionists proved difficult for everyone. The newcomers soon looked to reestablish their own congregations, communities, and institutions within which they might recover the stability and the sense of peoplehood which their last decade in Russia had denied them. Even in this new environment, however, those cherished ideals would prove rather elusive. Whether on the more familiar expanses of the western prairies or in the towns and cities of Ontario, disruptive forces soon arose both from within and without. In a sense, the Mennonite quest to recover the past in the face of an inevitably different future was but a microcosm of the national dilemma. Their adopted homeland was itself in search of its identity.

Postwar Canada was a nation in transition. The war had accelerated, if not precipitated, some of the social, economic, and political changes that would dominate the domestic scene through the 1920s. Of immediate concern was the resettlement of some 500,000 returning soldiers. But they constituted only a portion of the demographic problem facing the

country. The wartime economy had attracted many rural residents into the urban labour force and, as a result, the 1921 census revealed that, for the first time, Canada's urban population equalled the rural. This trend affected both the country and the city. It left farmers facing a labour shortage whereas, once the war industries slowed down, the cities had to cope with a surplus. At the same time, the period of inflation immediately following the war drove up prices without a concomitant increase in wages resulting in widespread labour unrest. The deflationary spiral which followed precipitated an economic downturn affecting all sectors of the economy. It meant higher interest rates for businessmen and farmers, a dramatic drop in the price of wheat, a decline in trade, and higher unemployment for labour. A mid-decade expansion briefly promised a better future; only to see another reversal diminish those gains and an international depression all but eradicate them.

These socio-economic developments significantly altered the Canadian political scene. The most effective and powerful force emanated, however, not from the nascent labour movement, which had vented much of its anger in the Winnipeg General Strike of May, 1919,<sup>2</sup> but from the suddenly organized and politicized Canadian farmers. Their appearance on both the provincial and federal levels changed the face of Canadian politics, and Canadian society, dramatically and irreversibly. Socially and spiritually, too, Canada wavered between a rural, conservative past and an urban, industrial, secular future. Prohibition, church union, and social reform represented various forms of and variant responses to that struggle within a national soul.<sup>3</sup>

Ontario could not escape this unsettled climate. During the war it led the way in industrial expansion and urban growth. Over 58% of Ontario residents were classified as urban in 1921, well above the national average.<sup>4</sup> Immigrant labourers were not welcome in its cities, although they rarely faced the vitriolic xenophobia evident in western Canada. They were needed, however, in the resource-based industries on the northern frontier, in what some called New Ontario. Mining and forestry demanded a steady supply of cheap labour. Cheap labour was also what Ontario farmers lacked following the wartime exodus into the cities. That complaint, together with other economic factors, propelled them into the political arena under the umbrella of the United Farmers of Ontario. In the October, 1919 provincial election they garnered enough seats to form the government, an omen of things to come across the country.<sup>5</sup> Canadian farmers and businessmen joined forces in a populist third-party protest demanding

a 'Back-to-the-Land' policy that would both 'shovel' unskilled workers 'back into the country' so that farmers could 'get labour more cheaply' and also return the country to the solid agrarian values of pre-war Canadian society.<sup>6</sup>

But the path to postwar recovery was not clear or easy in any region of the country.

Nor could Canadian Mennonites escape the turbulence and uncertainty of this decade. More than three-quarters of the 58,000 Mennonites counted in the 1921 census lived in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.<sup>7</sup> They had endured considerable harassment during the war years and faced

continued pressure to conform to Anglo-Canadian national ideals and cultural norms.<sup>8</sup> While the majority resolved to adapt their lifestyle in accordance with these societal demands, a significant minority adamantly refused. For them, such an accommodation, and particularly the acceptance of the public school system, represented too substantial a compromise of their separatist ethic and too great a threat to their nonresistant faith. That fear prompted almost 8,000 Old Colony Mennonites to emigrate just as their coreligionists from Russia were gaining admission into Canada.

For the 14,000 Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, the changing socio-economic climate presented a different challenge. They had maintained a peaceful coexistence with the 'world' by living quietly yet conspicuously within it. Their separateness had been characterized by a visible outer differentiation evident in their style of life and manner of dress. By the 1920s, however, there were many who questioned the need for, or value of, those visible distinctions. Those Mennonites living in the cities of Kitchener and Toronto were particularly resentful of such things as dress codes being imposed on them by their bishops.<sup>9</sup> For their leaders, however, as for the leaders of the Old Colony group in the West, these externals were an essential manifestation of the less visible, inner spirit of nonconformity. They were, in short, evidence of faithfulness to the fundamentals of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage.

The reaffirmation of the fundamentals meant not only strengthening Mennonite peculiarities such as the doctrine of nonresistance, directly tested by the war, and the practice of nonconformity, increasingly under siege, but also Christian theology and ethics in general, as taught by the Mennonites. This reaffirmation...had to take into consideration the religious winds that were blowing contemporaneously across the Canadian and American landscapes, because Mennonites were being influenced as<sup>10</sup> much by their environment as by their heritage.

Despite their shared beliefs and the common struggle to remain a separate people, however, there was no formal interaction between these groups. The Swiss in Ontario had provided considerable financial assistance to the immigrants of the 1870s now scattered across Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but there had been little contact since.<sup>11</sup> The plight of their coreligionists in Russia prompted another cooperative effort, although this one, too, would be short-lived. The bulk of the newcomers preferred to settle on the western prairies in close proximity to other Russian Mennonites and on land similar to that of the Russian steppes. In typical immigrant fashion, therefore, they sought out an environment most similar to the one left behind. Some moved directly onto the farms vacated by the Old Colony emigrants. Others settled in close proximity to those who had preceded them some forty years earlier. Here they hoped to become a part of the communities, congregations, and institutions already in place. Both groups soon discovered, however, that "the gulf between [them] ... was too large to bridge."<sup>12</sup> Consequently, most of the newcomers settled in entirely new areas and began the arduous task of rebuilding their lives and reestablishing their identity in the New World.



Those who chose to relocate in Ontario faced no less difficult a challenge. The settlement opportunities were much more limited here and the historical and cultural differences separating them from their Swiss Mennonite hosts even greater. While there was almost complete agreement on the fundamentals of Anabaptist-Mennonitism, there remained an underlying suspicion among the Swiss that the Russians had forsaken the central principle of nonresistance by permitting the participation of some in the Selbstschutz. The immigrants had to answer the charge that "you probably wouldn't have [had] to be chased out of Russia if it wouldn't [have been] for you taking the guns."<sup>13</sup> Culturally, the two groups were separated by centuries of history on opposite sides of the globe. The newcomers "were culturally sophisticated, for the most part better educated, progressive in their outlook, and quite aggressive in their style, all of which suggested Hochmut (high-mindedness or pride) or even arrogance"<sup>14</sup> to their hosts who, traditionally, valued Demut (humility or meekness) above all else. The colourful clothing of the Russian women, for instance, offended some of the Swiss Mennonites who considered this too "worldly."<sup>15</sup> The immigrants, for their part, considered their hosts to be rather plain and culturally somewhat inferior. They enjoyed mimicking the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, for example, which caused their hosts some chagrin.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the common faith heritage shared by both, therefore, the expectation that they would worship together did not last long. In the first place, most Swiss Mennonite congregations had switched to the English language some time ago. Though most newcomers joined their

hosts for worship initially because there was no other option for them, some of those closer to Kitchener and Waterloo attended German-language services in nearby Lutheran churches instead. One immigrant recalls that the Lutherans "also had an organ, so many newcomers preferred to go to church with them."<sup>17</sup> Her comment points also to some differences in the form and nature of church services between these Mennonites, each therefore preferring the familiarity of their own people and practice. Several other immigrants recall that the "longing to listen again to a German sermon and to have an opportunity to share one's experiences [with fellow immigrants] became more and more evident."<sup>18</sup>

Also increasingly evident, and contentious, was a difference in occupational background and preference. Though all the newcomers were placed on farms, not nearly all of them had farming experience. They comprised a cross-section of Russian Mennonite society, including teachers, craftsmen, labourers, shopkeepers, and factory owners, "people from all classes and occupations."<sup>19</sup> Some had "never gotten their hands dirty" in Russia and the last thing they expected was to serve as farmhands.<sup>20</sup> One immigrant acknowledges that "If someone had told me earlier in Russia that I would work as a labourer for someone else for ten years, I would have been very dejected."<sup>21</sup> Another immigrant, a teacher, said to his host, "We have not come here to work; we are guests." To which the host replied, "Guests do not stay around so long!"<sup>22</sup> During that first winter, however, there were few other employment opportunities for the 1,500 immigrants so

most remained with their hosts until the spring of 1925. By then, according to one observer, "the majority [of the immigrants] wish[ed] to be freed of the position of servitude [here] striving to go on their own as soon as possible."<sup>23</sup> As soon as the snow melted, therefore, the search for permanent homes and for new manifestations of their peoplehood began in earnest. But where could they go? How could they recreate the Old World community experience? Who would lead them?

In his study and analysis of this immigrant community in western Canada, sociologist Leo Driedger observes that "As much as possible the Mennonite canopy was transferred from Russia to Canada. Mennonites coming here sought to transplant the Russian reality [into their new homeland]."<sup>24</sup> According to Driedger, four stakes supported this "sacred canopy". The first was the biblical theology of the Anabaptists, a biblicism that required faithful obedience to the teachings of Scripture, particularly the ethic of love and nonresistance. The second, an emphasis on the community of believers, grew out of the first. This community served to give visible expression to the love mandate, in the practice of mutual aid, for instance, and was most often embodied in the local congregation. The third and fourth stakes, namely German culture and the possession and cultivation of land, had emerged as the particular cultural expression of that religious ideal. These four stakes at least, then, needed to be driven into Canadian soil if the Russian Mennonites were to survive as a separate people. Ontario would prove a harsh testing ground.

In their Old World environment the Russian Mennonites had relied on three constituent elements to both define and defend their separate identity: 1) the colony or community, 2) its organizations and institutions, and 3) their leaders, both civic and religious. They now turned to these same forces of continuity and survival in facing their new environment. The extent to which this new environment would reshape and redefine those communal elements was not apparent to them, nor was it to most other immigrants. Roberto Perin has pointed out, however,<sup>25</sup> that

The institutions and culture which immigrants established here were in response to specific North American conditions, and while they may have retained Old World forms,<sup>25</sup> their content had a peculiarly New World meaning.

It appears, moreover, that the nature and authority of Old World leadership was affected by the new environment. Without the coercive power of the church and the colony which the self-contained 'commonwealth' provided, immigrant leaders found it much more difficult to create or enforce community consensus. This weakening of authority and the resultant fragmentation demanded new responses.

Nevertheless, during the period under discussion church leaders would remain the single most important factor in the reestablishment of a distinct, cohesive, identifiable Russian Mennonite community. Their organizational and educational efforts were particularly vital during the first several years when the immigrants were scattered throughout almost two dozen localities in southern Ontario. Foremost among these

was Bishop Jacob H. Janzen,\* spiritual leader of the largest denomination among these immigrants in Ontario, that segment which, under his influence, came to be known as the United Mennonites. His counterpart among the Mennonite Brethren, who initially constituted about one-quarter of the total group, was Bishop Henry H. Janzen.\*\* Both men were located in Kitchener-Waterloo and both served their constituencies throughout the province from here with untiring devotion. Their responsibilities included seeking out and registering all the scattered immigrants, organizing them into active local congregations, nurturing these congregations through an itinerant ministry of preaching and teaching, developing local leadership, and serving as a liaison among the various churches. In addition, both

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\* Jacob H. Janzen (1878-1950) served as teacher and minister in the Molotschna before coming to Canada in 1924. He was called to serve full-time as an itinerant minister in Ontario in 1925 and was ordained as bishop in 1926. He led the Waterloo-Kitchener congregation, and for a time all the United Mennonite churches in Ontario, in that capacity until 1948, save for an interlude in 1935-37 when he worked in a similar capacity in British Columbia. Janzen had a university education, obtained in Germany, and was a gifted pedagogue and writer. He authored some 40 books or pamphlets that ranged from history and theology to poetry and drama. In recognition of his contribution, not only in Ontario but throughout North America as a preacher, teacher, and writer, Bethel College<sup>26</sup> in Newton, Kansas awarded Janzen an honorary doctorate in 1944.

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\*\* H.H. Janzen (1901-1975) was ordained in 1929 and assumed full-time leadership in 1934. He helped found, and then chaired, the provincial M.B. Conference from 1932-46. Displaying his zeal for mission, he served as principal of the Russian Bible Institute in Toronto from 1942-44. From 1946-56 he taught at the M.B. Bible College in Winnipeg,<sup>27</sup> then moved to Europe under the Foreign Mission Board.

sought to organize these far-flung groups into provincial church conferences. Both operated independently of each other, however, and, by virtue of their efforts and abilities, left their indelible imprint on the respective denominations. H.H. Janzen's typical M.B. missionary zeal contrasted with J.H. Janzen's more parochial concern for the preservation of a separate, distinct, faithful Mennonite identity.

Another prominent leader in Ontario was Bernhard B. Wiens of Waterloo.\* Wiens made his contribution in non-church immigrant concerns. These included economic matters such as land purchases and repayment of the transportation debt, mutual aid in the form of a cooperative health insurance scheme and a burial aid fund, and cultural preservation through German-language instruction. He frequently found himself in conflict with Bishop J.H. Janzen, however, because the latter believed that the church, and therefore its spiritual leaders, should retain control over all affairs, both religious and secular, as had been the case in Russia. Wiens disagreed, arguing that denominational differences would weaken, if not destroy, the united front necessary to overcome the difficulties facing the immigrants.<sup>28</sup>

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\* Wiens had taught for thirty years in the Old Colony in Russia before emigrating to Ontario in late 1924. In 1925 he became chairman of the provincial immigrant committee and, as a result, its representative on the national committee. As a part-time salaried staff person he travelled throughout the province collecting the transportation debt and promoting and implementing immigrant programs. In 1929 he helped found, and for eight years chaired, the provincial immigrant organization.

His motto for the immigrant organizations he chaired for 12 years remained "Unity Makes Us Strong!" long after that unity had become impossible on the congregational level.<sup>29</sup>

What made the task of these men more difficult was the initial dispersion of their people throughout the southern portion of the province and, indeed, into the north. That dispersion was a result of the search for suitable, and profitable, areas of settlement. The first priority for these immigrants, therefore, as it is for most immigrants, was the quest for economic survival and financial security. That search would lead them to three widely separated settlements.

In January, 1925 a few immigrants ventured northward into New Ontario to investigate the possibilities of homesteading here. The prospects of pulling stumps in the midst of a bleak wilderness without the immediate promise of profitable farming, however, discouraged them.<sup>30</sup> In southern Ontario the apparent shortage of available farmland and its prohibitive price, ranging upwards from fifty dollars an acre, further discouraged the newcomers. Moreover, none possessed the substantial cash outlay required to begin farming.<sup>31</sup> The absence of good, affordable land, therefore, prompted half of the 1,500 newcomers who had wintered in Ontario to venture westward, others to remain with their hosts, and not a few to seek more lucrative and steady employment in the city.

Gradually, however, other prospects appeared, or at least gained in attractiveness. The homesteads in New Ontario looked more promising to a second group of interested immigrants in the bright spring sunshine.

The terms and conditions offered here were appealing. A 75 acre homestead could be registered for ten dollars and purchased at fifty cents an acre, to be paid over three years.<sup>32</sup> What was more, the timber cut to clear the land could be profitably sold as pulpwood, thus providing employment through the winter. Until the land became arable, these earnings could be supplemented by contract work building township roads for the government during the summer. In time, therefore, an ambitious pioneer could perhaps realize the dream of acquiring his "eigene Scholle" (own piece of land).

One other aspect of settlement in the north aroused some interest. Coming, as they did, from a context of relatively isolated and virtually self-contained communal life in Russia, some Mennonites yearned for a reconstruction of that separatist milieu. Bishop J.H. Janzen verbalized and promoted this longing most vociferously. "Where," he asked, "can we settle together in groups, establish and build our churches [and] bring our schools under our influence...?"<sup>33</sup> "...[A]fter all," he explained, "that was our ideal from the very beginning and remains such."<sup>34</sup> According to Janzen, northern Ontario suited that purpose best. One resident, a school teacher, proclaimed an even loftier ideal:

If God gave [us] the opportunity to establish a closed Mennonite settlement here [in northern Ontario], then we should regard this as a valuable gift and apply ourselves accordingly to maintain it so that it becomes a blessing to<sub>35</sub> the neighbourhood and to all of Christendom.



In an effort to hasten settlement here, the provincial government agreed to reserve homesteads bordering those selected by the Mennonites for their exclusive use in the future. "This is very good," one settler explained, "for it permits the possibility of closed settlement and the exclusion of other nationalities. In time, a colony could be built here after our own wishes."<sup>36</sup> Here, according to B.B. Wiens, "the true Mennonite spirit" could be cultivated and perpetuated.<sup>37</sup>

Taken together, these prospects soon evoked the interest of Mennonite immigrants across the country. In June, 1925 seven settlers and their families disembarked from the Canadian National train at a place later called Reesor, 103 miles west of Cochrane and seven miles east of Mattice, the nearest town.<sup>38</sup> Thanks to extensive promotion in the Mennonite press, this number doubled by the end of the year, then grew to 38 homesteads totalling 128 people in 1926.<sup>39</sup> Two years later this number had grown by about 100 settlers, increasing again just slightly by 1930.<sup>40</sup> The devastating economic impact of the Depression in other parts of the country brought a steady influx of additional newcomers to replace those departing and the future of the settlement seemed secure.

In the meantime, some of the immigrants who had dismissed the northland as too isolated and forboding had found another haven. Essex County, the southern extremity of Ontario and Canada bordering lakes Erie and St. Clair, had no Mennonite settlers up until that time. When Edmund Wigle, a local farmer eager to sell his land, heard of these Russian agriculturalists, however, he invited them to inspect his

holdings. In November, 1924 a delegation travelled to the area and returned with a favourable report. Thereupon the group dispatched one of their number, Jacob W. Lohrenz, who knew some English, to make arrangements for the relocation of others interested in the prospects offered by this "Eldorado of Canada", as some perceived it. Various local Boards of Trade in the county encouraged these activities, in part because of a general depopulation in rural areas.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the relative isolation of this region from other Mennonites and despite their unfamiliarity with cash crop farming, 31 families moved to Essex county in the spring of 1925 and more followed that summer. Twenty-five other families followed when reports of the lucrative earning possibilities on the farms and in local factories became widespread. Seven families moved to Pelee Island, 16 miles off the mainland, to share-crop wheat and tobacco.<sup>42</sup> Some earned enough to repay their entire transportation debt in one year.<sup>43</sup> This kind of news soon attracted others hoping for similar financial returns. By 1927 almost 500 Russian Mennonites resided in the county, evidence of the powerful attraction the economic prospects here exercised over the deeply indebted immigrants. B.B. Wiens reported that "Essex county became the centre of attraction for the [financially] shipwrecked from the West and other parts of Ontario."<sup>44</sup>

But the cultural and religious conflict between farm and factory troubled these newcomers to southwestern Ontario. Many went there "simply to earn money."<sup>45</sup> The seasonal nature of most farm labour therefore impelled them to work in the brickyards of Kingsville and

Coatsworth, the automobile factories in Windsor and Detroit, or the canning and tobacco factories throughout the region. Betraying his discomfort, one correspondent defended this practice in 1927 by assuring his readers that these persons "did not take work away from anyone."<sup>46</sup> (Betraying another conflict, some of those employed in a tobacco-processing factory yet strictly opposed to smoking rationalized the inconsistency by referring to it as a "chocolate factory"!)<sup>47</sup> Volatile markets for vegetables and tobacco, particularly in 1928, intensified the dilemma. When prices dropped, renters and sharecroppers suddenly forgot their agrarian interests and became wage-labourers, often in local factories. In 1929 B.B. Wiens lamented that these people "prefer to enter the factories if the doors are opened to them."<sup>48</sup>

In Essex county, too, some Mennonites attempted to reconstruct at least a semblance of their separatist Russian communal system. Some 15 families purchased a 200 acre farm near Harrow, 20 miles southeast of Windsor, and divided the property into individual parcels.<sup>49</sup> The area became known as the "Mennonite settlement" but it represented more a cooperative purchase by like-minded newcomers with limited means than a genuine effort at reestablishing the Russian Mennonite village with its attendant culture and institutions. Others made similar joint purchases in Dunnville and Niagara-on-the-Lake. The lingering hope that these would become genuine Mennonite settlements, however, expressed little more than nostalgic memories of the Russian experience. Southern Ontario offered no such possibilities for

isolated or closed settlement and those who chose to remain here in effect accepted that condition in return for the permanence and prosperity they hoped to find here.

At the outset, few Russian Mennonites seriously considered the prospects for permanent settlement in the Niagara peninsula, the third main area of eventual concentration. Twelve of the families arriving on July 19 accompanied Christian Fretz, a Swiss Mennonite farmer from Vineland, to live and work on the fruit farms in the area during the summer and fall of 1924.<sup>50</sup> Others followed as additional groups landed in August and September. But, as one participant recalls, "Many were greatly disappointed. Instead of harvesting golden wheat, as they had done in their native lands, they were now to work in orchards."<sup>51</sup> The seasonal nature of this employment added to the dissatisfaction of immigrants intent on repaying their debt and establishing their independence. Most forsook the area that winter, therefore. Church records indicate that two individuals found their way to northern Ontario, thirteen travelled to Manitoba, and 68 moved to Kitchener-Waterloo.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently the prospects for steady work in the cities also proved less than favourable, however. In addition, the fruit farms offered steady summer employment for the entire family, increasing the total income considerably in some cases. Throughout the next few years this pattern of seasonal rotation continued, therefore, but with a decreasing exodus from the Vineland area each fall. By 1927 enough of the newcomers had established a permanent home here to warrant the

organization of a congregation.<sup>53</sup> Increasing unemployment in urban centres in the late twenties and early thirties brought a substantial influx of new settlers to the peninsula. By 1932 some 400 Russian Mennonites lived in the vicinity of Vineland and Port Rowan; six years later that number stood at almost 600.<sup>54</sup> In addition, half as many again had relocated in Virgil, some 10 miles east of St. Catharines, by 1938.<sup>55</sup> "The numerous orchards have swallowed our slightly spoiled city dwellers (Stadtkinder)," one observer noted. "There they toil, those into whose pockets the dollars once rolled more easily and plentifully."<sup>56</sup>

Various factors contributed to the settlement and employment patterns of the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario. Foremost among these, however, were not religious and cultural ideals and traditions. Relatively few, for example, responded to the call to recreate in northern Ontario a "closed Mennonite colony." The promise of immediate ownership and independence, conveyed by the phrase 'klein aber mein' (small but mine), proved more attractive.<sup>57</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen depicted three kinds of settlers in a letter to W.J. Black, the director of the CNR's Department of Colonization. Some, he maintained, were good, dependable farmers intending to stay. Others came as speculators, hoping to profit through the resale of their land. The third group he described as irresolute farmers who would remain only if settlement here proved profitable.<sup>58</sup> None of these motives recalled the once cherished values of the Russian Mennonite community. Nor, save for the first group, did they convey the much-vaunted image of an

"ackerbautreibendes Volk" (agrarian people).

This tendency to foresake the land, particularly evident in Ontario, troubled Bishop David Toews, chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the man largely responsible for the relocation of the Russian Mennonites in Canada. At a Canada-wide delegate convention in 1927 he reminded the newcomers that "the immigration of the Mennonites was possible only under the condition that the immigrants were farmers and as such would go on the land and work there."<sup>59</sup> As early as October, 1924, however, one Swiss Mennonite bishop in Ontario noted a tendency to forsake the farms and seek employment in local industries and factories. "...[S]ome feel that they are free to do as they please on that matter," he lamented. "Especially is this true with reference to some who have paid their own fares to Canada."<sup>60</sup> By the end of the next summer many more joined this trend, confident they had fulfilled the terms of their entry by working on the land for a year.<sup>61</sup>

B.B. Wiens, Ontario immigrant representative, reported in 1927 that over one third of these immigrants lived and worked in such major urban centres as Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, Hamilton, and Windsor or in the smaller satellites surrounding these cities.<sup>62</sup> Most men and some of the women worked in small shops or in the larger shoe, shirt, rubber, canning and automobile factories. Many women and girls served as domestics, a traditional immigrant occupation.<sup>63</sup> Wiens reported to the Central Mennonite Immigrant Committee (Zentrales Mennonitisches Immigrantenkomitee or ZMIK) that

Although formerly a few looked [for the opportunity] to get onto the land, they have now reconciled themselves to their fate. No one responds to the favourable offers of land anymore. On the contrary, many harbour the idea of obtaining their own home in the city.<sup>64</sup>

Their mobility and dispersion throughout much of Ontario undermined another stake in the Russian Mennonite "canopy", namely the sense of community. "Through dispersion," one immigrant suggested, "the feeling of Zusammengehörigkeit [unity; belonging together] disappears..."<sup>65</sup> Another complained that "the fellowship, as we knew it there [in Russia], is missing here in this strange land."<sup>66</sup> What characterized the Russian Mennonite community was not only a confession of faith, a language, and a set of cultural values, but also a common history, a shared experience of deprivation and sorrow, and the challenge of resettlement in a new, sometimes hostile, environment. These, too, constituted a part of that "canopy" defining Russian Mennonite identity. Bishop Jacob H. Janzen summarized the situation well when he noted that the dispersion of these newcomers in a new environment among a people unfamiliar to them,

with customs and habits that were strange to us, with ideals that differed here and there from ours, with work habits and views that were strange to us, aroused in us the burning desire for a close union [Zusammenschluss] with our fellows in work, struggle, and suffering [earlier] in Russia....<sup>67</sup>

During the early years in Canada, Jacob Janzen nurtured the hope that the dislocation and disruption of the last few years in Russia might have created the context for the reunification of the

Bruedergemeinde (Mennonite Brethren) with the Kirchengemeinde from which they had separated in 1860. On the basis of the biblical call for unity he addressed his plea to all immigrants.

My dear ones, there is to be one flock and one shepherd. Do we really believe that the basis of our salvation lies in the externals which, as a rule, constitute the differences between the individual denominations? The nearer we come to the centre of our faith, Jesus Christ, the nearer we will stand to one another. And that fact that we are still far from one another is<sup>68</sup> an indication that we are still far from Christ....

The conflicts and divisions of the past, Janzen argued, were not central but were, instead, the result of human interpretations. These interpretations could, and should, he maintained, be altered from time to time to conform to new circumstances. The new world, he believed, provided that opportunity.

Janzen's argument was also based on the shared experiences of the immigrants. The suffering and dislocation of the recent past had eclipsed the denominational distinctives of earlier years. One observer described it as a process of amalgamation (Verschmelzung). "In a time of great need in the old country, all things became secondary to life itself."<sup>69</sup> Another participant recalls, "We didn't make a distinction at that time. We were immigrants and that's...all [there was] to it."<sup>70</sup> Another suggests, "Maybe it was because we were all equally poor that we understood each other and got along so well."<sup>71</sup> Janzen added the admonition that "we must become at one [eins werden]. And if we do not become at one, then the world will



overpower us...."<sup>72</sup> Initially, at least denominational differences remained secondary to spiritual and social needs as the newcomers sought each other out for worship and fellowship, irrespective of their diverse Russian origins.

Jacob H. Janzen welcomed this development as "the destruction of one of the formellen Scheidewaende" (dividing walls of formality) which separated the two groups.<sup>73</sup> Several developments gave some credence to this observation. Not only did most Russian Mennonites continue to meet together irrespective of denominational background, but they were also served, for a time at least, by ministers of both groups.<sup>74</sup> Church leaders were primarily concerned to seek out and reestablish fellowship with all the scattered immigrants in the province. They freely shared this information and their itineraries, concerned more to reestablish the Russian Mennonite "canopy" than to define their particular place underneath it.

From the outset, therefore, the Russian Mennonite immigrants "sought ways and means to attain a solid union" in the face of those forces threatening to erase their unique identifying characteristics (Eigenart).<sup>75</sup> The primary concern, according to immigrant leaders like Janzen, was the preservation of a separate Mennonite identity. "We are asking ourselves today," he told a gathering of immigrants in 1929,

how we can preserve our Mennonite Eigenart in this country, and during the whole time of our sojourn here we have been concerned, despite the scatteredness in which we live here, to stay in touch with one another in order not to be absorbed into the mass of Canadian society and have to give up<sup>76</sup> our Eigenart and tradition, our way of life and ideals.

One of the earliest manifestations of this impulse for self-preservation was the provision for church services and the building of congregations. Frank Epp notes that

In the 1920s, as four centuries earlier, the congregations stood at the centre of Mennonite identity, activity, and history, not only because so many new ones were established at this time, but also because they represented to the people the spiritual salvation and social security to be found nowhere else. Where there was no local congregation there was no Mennonite community. In the congregation, the Mennonites found their identity, their <sup>77</sup>social status in the community, and their fellowship.

The church, in the form of the local congregation, therefore, sought to define within this new environment both the nature and composition of the immigrant group. A statement of faith contained in the church's constitution delineated the religious boundaries permitting membership while the membership list indicated who was included and, particularly in the case of the Mennonite Brethren, who had been excluded.<sup>78</sup> The language of communication in Sunday school and in the worship service, furthermore, symbolized the cultural identity of the group. Harry Stout concludes that this pattern is characteristic of immigrant ethnic groups. Central to all groups, he maintains, was the church.

Characteristic of all such immigrant churches was the functioning of the church as a community, the centrality of the pastor in affirming group solidarity, and the replacement<sup>79</sup> of an evangelical vision by ethnic insularity.

In the Russian Mennonite context, however, that concern for ethnic insularity was intensified and complicated, and sometimes superceded, by the Old World denominational boundaries soon reestablished in the New World.

On May 25, some 58 immigrants of kirchlicher persuasion met in Kitchener to organize a congregation under the leadership of Rev. Jacob H. Janzen. This group expressed its shared history by adopting the name "Die Mennoniten Fluechtlingsgemeinde in Ontario" (The Mennonite Refugee Church in Ontario).<sup>80</sup> The resolution expressed their rationale as follows:

Because of the attempts of force against us and having been compelled to concede the bringing up of our children in the ways of the godless we have fled from our native country in order to establish a new home here in Canada, where unrestricted religious freedom is granted us. Therefore we call ourselves "The Mennonite Refugee Church in Ontario."<sup>81</sup>

On the same day, immigrants from the Bruedergemeinde met under the leadership of Jacob P. Friesen\* to form the "Molotschna Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde", a name clearly reminiscent of their Russian origins.<sup>82</sup> Neither designation seemed appropriate for very long, however. The latter group soon claimed its Ontario identity and became the "Kitchener Mennonite Bruedergemeinde".<sup>83</sup> (See Table III).

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\* Jacob P. Friesen (1863-1934) served as unsalaried church leader from 1925 to 1932, when poor health forced him to step down. Friesen had received graduate theological training in Germany many years earlier.

Table II

## United Mennonite Church and Conference Developments

<u>Structure</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
Single congregation uniting all areas of settlement	Mennoniten Fluechtlingsgemeinde in Ontario	June 21, 1925
		to Aug. 15, 1926
	Vereinigte Mennonitengemeinde in Ontario	Aug. 15, 1926
		to Jan. 29, 1929
Several groups forming one congregation united by a council	Allgemeiner Kirchenrat	May 9, 1927
		to Jan. 29, 1929
Three independent congregations united by a delegate conference	Konferenz der Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinden in Ontario	Jan. 29, 1929
		to Jan. 13, 1934
Joint meeting of ministers and, later, deacons	Predigerkonferenz (served as a substitute for the delegate conference whenever this was lacking)	Oct. 17, 1929
Many independent congregations united by a delegate conference	Konferenz der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden in Ontario (Conference of the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario)	June 25, 1944

J.H. Janzen, meanwhile, led his congregation to redefine itself in just over a year after its founding as "Die Vereinigte Mennonitengemeinde" (The United Mennonite Church).<sup>84</sup> One participant explains that the word "United" was used "because members originated from various regions and congregations in Russia," each with slight variations in their practices and traditions.<sup>85</sup>

Jacob H. Janzen, the only ordained minister of the Kirchliche group in Ontario, agreed to assume the responsibilities of spiritual care for all the Kirchliche in the province. Their dispersion compelled him to assume the role of Reiseprediger (itinerant minister) as well in an effort to register, organize, and minister to all groups. The North American General Conference paid Janzen a nominal salary through its Board of Home Missions in support of this work.<sup>86</sup> A more dedicated, forceful, or gifted leader could hardly have been found.

Janzen faced a mammoth task. From the administrative centre of Waterloo he had to travel some 600 miles north to serve Reesor and almost 200 miles southwest to reach Essex County, Windsor, and Detroit. Nine distinct groups were scattered across this vast distance, some, like Essex, consisting of a series of sub-groupings which met separately for worship services because they lacked the means of transportation necessary to meet collectively. As the sole bishop, Janzen served these groups at baptism and with communion as well as conducting periodic evening courses in Bible, church history, and a variety of secular subjects. He maintained the church records and, because of the itinerant nature of his work, administered the Unterstuetzungskasse

(benevolent support fund) on behalf of his congregation. A year after its founding the United Mennonite Church counted 400 adult members.<sup>87</sup> (See Table II.) They remained widely dispersed, however. Bishop Janzen's task, therefore, had become Einigkeitsarbeit (the work of unification).<sup>88</sup> In effect, he was called upon as church leader to replace some of the functions of the Mennonite commonwealth whose existence had given this people its identity and a sense of peoplehood in Russia.

But neither J.H. Janzen's preaching nor his organizational skills could ultimately triumph over the historical Old World differences which separated the denominations. Those differences, whether in tradition, lifestyle, or practice, may have been rendered unimportant by the revolutionary upheavals and the refugee experience. But they had not been erased. In time, they became irritants, and then boundaries, once again. Although they continued to worship together in Waterloo for over a year, separate membership lists and separate baptismal and communion services distinguished the Kirchliche from the Bruedergemeinde. Even as they shared the preaching duties, the travelling, and the pastoral care, the ministers of these two groups continued to register the scattered immigrants as belonging to either one group or the other. Not surprisingly, therefore, in mid-1926 Bruedergemeinde began to meet independently in its own rented facilities in Kitchener. Bishop J.H. Janzen, in a last desperate attempt at corporate unity, offered to bring his group to Kitchener to resume joint worship services. To David Toews he confided, "[I] received no encouraging reply, so that I must consider

Table III

## Mennonite Brethren Church and Conference Developments

<u>Structure</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
Single congregation comprising all members	Molotschna Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde (also called Kitchener Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde)	May 25, 1925 to Jan. 31, 1932
Independent congregations united by a delegate conference	Ontario Konferenz der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinden (Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)	Jan. 31, 1932
Affiliation with the General Conference (North America)	Ontario District	limited membership, 1936 full membership, 1939
Union with the Canadian Conference (Northern District)	Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference	1946

it as importunate, were we to do so."<sup>89</sup> Janzen lamented, too, that the shared preaching duties were now a thing of the past. For these developments he blamed "several agitators from the Bruedergemeinde... [who] are intent on having a place where their influence is the only authoritative one."<sup>90</sup> The tone of the letter suggests Janzen took the separation rather personally.

All other areas, however, continued the joint meetings for a number of years, usually due either to a dearth of leaders or of numbers. Where one group or the other remained too small to organize and maintain itself, its members simply participated with the others. In most cases, this applied to the Bruedergemeinde.<sup>91</sup> This affiliation, born more of necessity than of conviction, proved a positive experience for most participants, however. Without the intervention of outside leaders and institutions it might well have served as a prelude to a new internal unity.

Denominationalism, however, while divisive from one perspective, is also a manifestation of the attempt to establish authority and maintain unity by way of an organized structure or group. Historian Paul Toews contends that "Denominations are also a part of the quest for religious community. They provide fellowship, support and discipline for local religious bodies."<sup>92</sup> Particularly at a time of dislocation and confusion, they provide an organizing centre and an external authority by which a religious group can rebuild and redefine its identity. As such, they function as a survival mechanism.



What distinguished the Bruedergemeinde from Janzen and the United Mennonites, therefore, was not just reemerging Old World traditions and practices. Nor was it simply a drive for independence, as Janzen and some others perceived it.<sup>93</sup> At bottom, what distinguished the Bruedergemeinde was a different survival strategy. While some religious groups seek to define and retain their identity through continuous boundary maintenance, others do so by relocating and reaffirming their organizing centre or nucleus. "The distinction between groups interested in boundary maintenance and those emphasizing nuclei revitalization does not imply that the former are not interested in a strong nuclei, or that the latter are not interested in boundaries."<sup>94</sup> It does, however, suggest differing emphases and priorities.

This distinction accurately reflects one of the underlying differences between the United Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren in Ontario. In 1929, for instance, Bishop Jacob H. Janzen was warning his people about "the efforts of Canadian domestic policy...to blend the various nations in Canada into one...." He urged his listeners "not to be absorbed into the mass of Canadian society...."<sup>95</sup> The German language, German culture, and settlement on the land were the primary methods of boundary maintenance advocated by Janzen in an address entitled, "How can we preserve our Mennonite Eigenart?"<sup>96</sup> The Mennonite Brethren also addressed this issue at a membership meeting in 1927. In response to the question "What can we as a church do to prevent the accommodation of our brothers and sisters to the world?" the participants resolved to "Teach and admonish one another as much as

possible."<sup>97</sup> This inward focus was confirmed later. . At about the time when J.H. Janzen issued his call for external boundaries, therefore, the Mennonite Brethren began to reaffirm one of the distinctives central to their denominational faith. At a Bible conference (Bibelbesprechung) in late 1928, church leaders resolved to begin practicing baptism by immersion only, although non-immersed members of other churches continued to be accepted into full membership.<sup>98</sup> The quest for broader denominational ties almost a decade later prompted an even clearer reaffirmation of this principle, reestablishing once again the only clear and visible barrier separating the two immigrant groups. Church leaders like Bishop H.H. Janzen believed this direction provided the best way to reunite the Ontario Mennonite Brethren and to ensure their survival as a vital community of faith.<sup>99</sup>

Bishop J.H. Janzen also looked to structures and organizations to help preserve the unity and the faith of the United Mennonites, though with less success. He soon recognized that his people, "working all the [sic] day to provide food and clothing for themselves and their families," cared little for conference matters.<sup>100</sup> Even the local church program remained poorly supported. Little more than fifty percent of the annual levy was contributed in the first year, prompting delegates at an August 7, 1926 membership meeting to halve it to \$1.50 per year.<sup>101</sup> In addition to being poor and widely scattered, the United Mennonites remained largely unorganized and bereft of strong leadership on the local level, those forces which had sustained them

during numerous crises in Russia. In addition, the various groups soon assumed their own unique characteristics and expressed differing needs reflecting the specific nature of local conditions and the diversity of backgrounds constituting their membership. By the spring of 1927, Bishop Janzen acknowledged a distinct lack of Gemeinsinn (public spirit) among the membership. The three major groups around Reesor, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Essex County had, he conceded, evolved to the point of independence such that "they could ~~impossibly~~ remain dependent on each other in their words and deeds."<sup>102</sup> The United Mennonites needed more than an itinerant bishop to unify them.

At a May 8, 1927 membership meeting, Bishop Janzen recommended a thorough and innovative reorganization to combat these difficulties. The new structure adopted by the United Mennonites on that occasion marked the first step in the laicization and decentralization of their church polity. Although they continued to regard themselves as a single congregation, they mandated each of the three main groups to elect a local church council to administer the business of its members. This body was requested to appoint representatives to the Allgemeiner Kirchenrat (General Church Council) which was charged with conducting the business and implementing decisions affecting the entire congregation. The Allgemeiner Kirchenrat was to meet at least once a year with each group carrying one vote for every 25 members.<sup>103</sup> This arrangement lessened the need for the periodic full membership meetings, which had become too costly because of the distances involved, while retaining at least the appearance of unity.

In effect, however, this new structure marked a return to the system of congregational autonomy which had characterized the Mennonite community in Russia. The allocation of the Unterstuetzungskasse to the individual groups symbolized this process. An additional thrust for self-sufficiency came in the recommendation that each group elect and ordain its own ministers and deacons. While these would deal primarily with spiritual matters, they would also sit on the church council where other church business was to be deliberated. Thus the administrative separation of spiritual from non-spiritual matters remained incomplete. The control of the council was to remain with its elected lay members, however, a departure from Russian antecedents like the Council of Elders, composed strictly of spiritual leaders who discharged all church business. The groups in Essex and Waterloo immediately implemented this structure whereas Reesor adhered to the Russian model for some time.

In proposing these changes, Bishop Janzen expressed the hope that these new organizations would perform the Verbindungsdienst (service of unification), within the province-wide congregation, thereby freeing him for the "specific ministry of preaching and spiritual nurture."<sup>104</sup> In practice, however, the Allgemeiner Kirchenrat lacked the authority or the participation necessary to fulfill its purpose. It met infrequently, dealing primarily with financial and administrative matters. These decreased in scope as the local councils assumed greater authority. One of the first actions at its second meeting, held on September 4, 1927, was to reduce the annual per member levy to one

dollar in response to continued opposition to this practice.<sup>105</sup> Reesor sent no delegates to this, or a subsequent meeting in January, 1928 while Essex County, also geographically and, consequently, psychologically removed from the administrative centre of Waterloo, displayed an increasingly insular attitude. Bishop Janzen continued to distribute funds from the Unterstuetzungskasse, an indication that even administrative functions had not been properly delegated within the new structure. At the last meeting of the Kirchenrat, held in Leamington from January 19-21, 1929, he acknowledged that the groups were finding it

difficult to agree with each other and to become unified because we are so scattered and because so few of us have permanent residences... The means at our disposal, [both] spiritual and material, are so meagre...and the problems...are so great.<sup>106</sup>

Despite their Bishop's exhortation to overcome these differences "through the inner riches of the Spirit and love," delegates adopted a recommendation from the Waterloo-Kitchener group that the United Mennonite Church be divided into three separate and independent groups.<sup>107</sup> By virtue of this action, the Allgemeiner Kirchenrat was dissolved and a "Conference of United Mennonite Churches in Ontario" established. (See Table II.) The three constituent groups in Reesor, Waterloo, and Essex were asked to organize and charter their individual

congregations under local leadership. Delegates agreed that the approximately 300 members in Essex County needed their own full-time bishop to provide more adequate and readily accessible spiritual leadership than was possible under Bishop Janzen's itinerant ministry. They also accepted Janzen's recommendation that a Predigerkonferenz (minister's conference) be convened simultaneously with the annual meeting of the new Conference. Two new structures emerged in 1929, therefore, in the ongoing effort to keep the United Mennonites united.

Both leaders and institutions played a critical role in the Russian Mennonite community from the outset, albeit with mixed results. Immigrant leaders like J.H. Janzen and B.B. Wiens recognized that the challenges facing the Russian Mennonite Eigenart in Ontario demanded a concerted response. Wiens noted that capable leaders and strong organizations had facilitated the exodus from Russia. These same tactics, he believed, could be effectively employed against the threat of dispersion and assimilation into Anglo-Canadian society. He urged the establishment of new organizations to combat the danger "that this feeling [of unity] could in time pass quietly away [einschlummern] and result in an absorption into the mass [of society]." <sup>108</sup> Frank Epp has observed that the Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s

looked to a whole series of church-related institutions to preserve 'essentials' [of religion and culture] and to serve as a counterforce <sup>109</sup> to the cultural onslaughts from the world outside.

In a sense, therefore, these institutions served as the superstructure reinforcing and supporting the "sacred canopy." While the local congregation served this function so far as religious values were concerned, a broader, inter-church structure emerged to provide leadership and resources in cultural and other matters.

Representatives of the first wave of Mennonite immigrants met in Eigenheim, near Rosthern, Saskatchewan, on September 9, 1923 to organize the Vereinigung der seit 1923 in Canada eingewanderten Mennoniten (Union of Mennonite Immigrants to Canada Since 1923).<sup>110</sup> An executive known as the Zentrales Mennonitisches Immigrantenkomitee (ZMIK, i.e., Central Mennonite Immigrant Committee) assumed the leadership of this informal union. The ZMIK assumed responsibility for such matters as collecting the transportation debt and facilitating the resettlement of the newcomers on farms, thereby strengthening the agrarian stake in the "sacred canopy". But the ZMIK mandate ranged more widely, explained B.B. Wiens, Ontario ZMIK representative, and included the preservation and promotion of "intellectual [geistigen] and cultural values." This body was also concerned, he continued,

to bring spiritual care to all groups and individual families so that the mother tongue might be maintained; in many instances it has taken the situation of the orphans into its own hands, and seeks to alleviate the needs of immigrants through the establishment of funds for the sick and needy. The [ZMIK] is concerned only with those matters which<sup>111</sup> have to do with the well-being of the immigrants.

D.H. Epp, ZMIK chairman, underscored the critical challenge of boundary maintenance and cultural preservation faced by his organization.

By far the greatest number of our immigrants live among an indigenous, non-Mennonite people. The threat of assimilation...lies near<sup>112</sup> at hand...To prevent this shall be our primary task.

To implement this ambitious program, the ZMIK established an extensive hierarchical structure. Provincial representatives met annually to report and plan programs while regional or district agents served as a liason within each area of settlement. Moreover, a provincial immigrant committee, comprising members elected from among the foregoing, undertook the ZMIK mandate on the provincial level.<sup>113</sup> Finally, the ZMIK recommended in 1928 that annual delegate meetings of all immigrants be held in each province. These provincial Vertreterversammlungen (delegate meetings) soon assumed many of the activities and interests of the national ZMIK, leading some immigrants to question the existence of that organization in addition to the Board of Colonization, whose primary concern remained the transportation debt. Inadequate financial support for both organizations, in addition to administrative difficulties, forced the amalgamation of these bodies in 1934. This new organizational pattern, writes Frank Epp,

became normative for the provincial and local organization with emphasis on welfare, cultural, and settlement activity. The district men remained the backbone of the organization and local achievements depended on the strength and aggressiveness of these men.<sup>114</sup>



The critical role played by strong leaders within the immigrant community soon became as evident in non-church affairs as it had, in the person of Bishop Jacob H. Janzen, for instance, in congregational life. B.B. Wiens emerged as the pivotal figure in this realm. In December, 1925, a year after his arrival, he assumed the chairmanship of the provincial immigrant committee, a half-time salaried position. In this capacity he assumed responsibility for collection of the transportation debt.<sup>115</sup> As the ZMIK representative in Ontario, Wiens visited the Mennonite settlements throughout the province to determine the progress of the resettlement process, to promote and implement ZMIK programs, and to foster the feeling of Zusammengehörigkeit (belonging together) among the immigrants. To accomplish those ends more adequately, he suggested to the ZMIK at its annual meeting in July, 1928 that regular provincial Vertreterversammlungen be convened.<sup>116</sup> In February, 1929, therefore, he presided over the first such official gathering of delegates representing all the immigrants in Ontario.

Wiens was convinced that only a strong, non-denominational organization could begin to alleviate some of the common cultural, financial, personal, and social needs of the immigrants. "The endeavour to overcome, with closed ranks, the obstacles which stood in our way [in Russia] brought us great success economically and helped us through many difficulties," he recalled.<sup>117</sup> He was convinced that only a similar non-partisan effort could save the immigrant community in Ontario. As a consequence of his tireless efforts on behalf of such an organization, a task he performed for over ten years, B.B. Wiens' name became synonymous

with the vital programs of the provincial Vertreterversammlung during the 1930s. Above all else, Wiens emphasized that "unity makes us strong" ("Einigkeit macht stark!").<sup>118</sup>

In Russia, the spiritual leadership had played a central role in all community affairs, both religious and civic. Until the Soviet period, the ecclesiastical structure served as the primary medium of organization and communication in all matters vital to the larger community. In Canada, however, the emergence of a strong immigrant organization under influential and capable lay leadership challenged that tradition. Bishop Jacob Janzen lamented this "separation of church and state," as he called it, whereby church leaders were stripped of all responsibility in non-church affairs.<sup>119</sup> He maintained that the local congregations would form the most solid basis for effective organization and that the clergy would lend to these activities a more effective authority.<sup>120</sup>

B.B. Wiens disagreed. He pointed out that some immigrants remained unaffiliated with any congregation and that most Mennonites assumed church membership around the age of twenty whereas the immigrant organization included everyone sixteen and over. Moreover, he added, the overworked, largely unpaid ministers did not need additional responsibilities.<sup>121</sup> Most passionate, however, was Wiens' plea for the ideal of unity long abandoned by Janzen. In observing the widening gulf between the two denominations, he warned of the danger this posed in non-church affairs. "It is necessary that we...build a united front in our civic affairs," Wiens argued. "...[C]hurch affiliation should

play no role in that case.<sup>122</sup> In the end, both men were to be proven partly right.

At the July, 1928 meeting of the ZMIK Wiens shared his concerns regarding both the future of Mennonite settlement in Ontario in general and the tenuous existence of the provincial immigrant committee in particular. He suggested, therefore, that

In order to strengthen the local organization and to deepen the understanding of the immigrants for the organizational effort on the whole, it would be advisable to hold at least one Ontario immigrant meeting annually at which a representative<sup>123</sup> of the ZMIK or the Board was present.

Other members endorsed this proposal and, after some discussion, the ZMIK recommended annual provincial immigrant meetings "to discuss and resolve economic and cultural questions, to foster the feeling of Zusammengehörigkeit [belonging together] and to strengthen the organization."<sup>124</sup> Wiens faced a formidable task in implementing this, his own, strategy among the approximately 1,600 Russian Mennonites scattered throughout Ontario by this time.

On February 2, 1929, B.S. Wiens convened the first annual Provinziale Vertreterversammlung (provincial delegate meeting) in Ontario. Twenty-four delegates, including five from Essex County and two from Vineland along with seventeen from Kitchener, Waterloo, Hespeler, and New Hamburg, met in Waterloo to chart the future of the immigrant organization.<sup>125</sup> They noted that, unlike the West where most newcomers tried to purchase farms and settle on the land, about

one half of the Ontario residents lived in the cities. The major concerns here, therefore, were not the agricultural questions which predominated on the prairies, but rather the intellectual-cultural (geistig-kulturell) issues of survival as a Mennonite group. One speaker addressed the assembly on "The Meaning of a Permanent Organization," emphasizing the importance of the ZMIK in this task. Highlighting the motto: "Unity makes us strong," he urged his listeners to adopt that principle in their struggle to preserve "those qualities which we have inherited from our fathers."<sup>126</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen underscored this theme clearly and dramatically in a presentation entitled "How can we Preserve our Mennonite Eigenart?"<sup>127</sup> The small group of delegates responded enthusiastically by affirming the intrinsic nature of the German language in the preservation and cultivation of the positive elements "in our voelkischen Eigenart" (uniqueness as a people). Their goal remained, they agreed, the establishment of a school where both German and religion could be taught according to the Russian tradition.

In other business, B.B. Wiens related the ZMIK recommendation, adopted at the annual meeting of the Vereinigung der seit 1923 eingewanderten Mennoniten in Herbert, Saskatchewan in December, 1928, that a Selbsthilfekasse (self-help benevolent fund) be established in all areas to assist the sick, the needy, and the mentally ill.<sup>128</sup> These local programs were intended to supplement the Hague Mutual Aid Association, a health insurance plan organized by the ZMIK in 1927. These developments recalled another tradition central to the Russian

Mennonite commonwealth, the practice of mutual aid.

Its reestablishment in Ontario, within the widely scattered, diverse, economically insecure immigrant community, however, required considerable persistence. One anonymous contributor to Der Bote, who sounded a great deal like B.B. Wiens, conceded that "We Russian Mennonites are, without exception, as poor as church mice."<sup>129</sup> By joining together in the Selbsthilfe, however, he maintained, a great deal could be accomplished. Two things militated against this development, the writer suggested, namely, the predominant concern for "das eigene Ich" (the individual self) and the Separationsgelueste (lust for separation) promoted by denominational leaders. Whether the principle of mutual aid could transcend these reemergent boundaries and overcome the practical obstacles remained doubtful.

At the July, 1929 ZMIK meetings, B.B. Wiens delivered a very pessimistic report. "...[U]nfortunately," he informed his colleagues, "the Selbsthilfe has not elicited a [favourable] response among the groups."<sup>130</sup> This at a time when six immigrants remained in the Freeport Sanitorium in Kitchener, suffering with tuberculosis, and three others were institutionalized elsewhere due to mental illness. The cost for their maintenance stood at \$13.15 per day, an impossible sum for the fledgling organization.<sup>131</sup> Deteriorating economic conditions in un-supportive areas, which threatened everyone equally with financial ruin, Wiens suggested, might cause residents here to reevaluate the need for and, consequently, their support for this venture. Where the appeal to Christian love and the tradition of

mutual aid failed, therefore, he urged participation purely out of self-interest since no one could be certain they would not be the next beneficiaries. "Our strength lies in the practice of benevolence," Wiens suggested, conceding that there would always be those "who [have to] stand in need of support themselves before they contribute anything to alleviate the need of others."<sup>132</sup>

Reluctant participation and, consequently, an inadequate financial base always plagued the Selbsthilfe. Six months after its inception, Wiens informed David Toews that "With the exception of N. Ontario and New Hamburg, all groups have entered the net of the Selbsthilfe."<sup>133</sup> Still, receipts failed to cover even one-third of the maintenance costs for eligible patients. Part of the reason was that even where immigrants in a particular district approved the program, not everyone contributed their dues. In addition, potential claimants to the fund suddenly appeared in the Waterloo region where the Waterloo-Kitchener Organization, whose executive administered the fund, had assumed liability for Selbsthilfe expenses. Residents here resented this influx, particularly since they had contributed several hundred additional dollars to the program for the benefit of local recipients.<sup>134</sup> The conflicts and ill-will which developed as a result of such abuses prompted some to propose that the responsibility for mutual aid be returned to the individual congregations and, therefore, the separate denominations once again.

These constant organizational realignments did little to alleviate the root causes of alienation, however. Geographic isolation,

immigrant mobility, poverty, and inadequate leadership all combined to undermine the Einigkeitsarbeit of leaders and organizations as the 1920s came to a close. Despite promising signs of inner revitalization and reunification, the Russian Mennonite immigrant community in Ontario remained not only fragmented but also widely scattered. It had not, moreover, found a way to cooperate meaningfully, much less integrate, with the indigenous Swiss Mennonite population, ten times its numerical size. Still, there were signs of promise as well. Local congregations were beginning to become active and organized, if not self-sufficient. (See Tables IV and V.) Provincially, an immigrant organization had been established in 1929 in an effort to deal with a variety of other immigrant needs and issues. But 1929 would be a pivotal year for other reasons as well. It was the year the stock market collapsed. It was also the year in which the Canadian government virtually closed the door to immigrants. It was a double blow for the Russian Mennonite immigrants. The financial hardship and dislocation caused by the Great Depression severely tested their embryonic organizational structures and their sagging communal spirit. At the same time, they were called upon to respond to the renewed suffering of their coreligionists in the Soviet Union and to face the resurgent hostility to foreigners among Anglo-Canadians in their new homeland.

Table IV  
United Mennonite Congregations

<u>Name</u>	<u>Groups Included</u>	<u>Date of Organization</u>
Waterloo-Kitchener U.M. Church	Waterloo Kitchener New Hamburg Elmira Hespeler Port Rowan Vineland	1929
Reesor U.M. Church		1929
Essex County U.M. Church	Leamington Pelee Island Wheatley Kingsville Harrow Windsor	1929
Vineland U.M. Church	Dunnville Port Rowan Niagara	1936
Niagara U.M. Church	Virgil Niagara-on-the-Lake	1938
St. Catharines U.M. Church		1944



Table V  
Mennonite Brethren Congregations

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Organization</u>	<u>Date of incorporation and conference affiliation</u>
Molotschna Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde	May 25, 1925	
Kitchener M.B. Church	reorg. 1932	1932
New Hamburg M.B. Church	March, 1927	1932
Hespeler M.B. Church	Fall, 1927	1932
Leamington M.B. Church	Oct., 1932	1932
Vineland M.B. Church	Nov., 1932	1932
Port Rowan M.B. Church	1927	1933
Virgil M.B. Church	May, 1937	1937
St. Catharines M.B. Church	Oct., 1943	1943

Footnotes

- 1 Over 1 million immigrants entered Canada during these years. See B and B Report, Table A-I. The 1921 census counted 58,797 Mennonites in Canada. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, vol. I, Table 31.
- 2 David Jay Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg. Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974).
- 3 For a brief overview see Part One of The Canadians 1867-1967, ed. J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), ch. 7.
- 4 Census, 1921, vol. I, Table 19.
- 5 Brown and Cook, Canada, p. 319.
- 6 Struthers, "Prelude to Depression," p. 285.
- 7 See note 1.
- 8 See John Herd Thompson, The Harvests of War. The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), esp. chs. 4 and 6.
- 9 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, pp. 69-81.
- 10 Ibid., p. 49.
- 11 Gerbrandt, Adventure in Faith, pp. 65-67.
- 12 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 243.
- 13 Interviews, #33.
- 14 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 245.
- 15 Margot Fieguth, "Erinnerungen," Der Bote, LVI (Aug. 15, 1979), p.9.
- 16 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, pp. 245, 247.
- 17 In Fieguth, "Erinnerungen."
- 18 Jacob Fast and Herbert P. Enns, eds., Jubilee Issue of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church (Waterloo, Ont.: Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church, 1974), p. 8. When they organized their first congregation in early 1925, one group of immigrants explained that although no "fundamental differences" separated them from the indigenous Mennonites, the language barrier "hampers our complete coming together." See the report in Der Bote, II (July 15, 1925), p. 2.

- 19 P. "Einwanderer und Einwanderung," Der Bote, V (April 18, 1928), p. 1.
- 20 Interview with Mrs. Agatha Riediger, Leamington, Ontario, March 12, 1981.
- 21 Jacob D. Janzen, Interviews, #59, pt. II.
- 22 Quoted in Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 245.
- 23 S, "Ontario," Die Mennonitische Rundschau (hereafter MR), XLVIII (Feb. 18, 1925), p. 5.
- 24 Leo Driedger, "Fifty Years of Mennonite Identity in Winnipeg: A Sacred Canopy in a Changing Society," in Mennonite Images. Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues, ed. Harry Toewen (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), p. 127.
- 25 Périn, "Clio as an Ethnic," p. 444.
- 26 For a brief biography see Henry Paetkau, "Jacob H. Janzen (1878-1950): A Man With a Mission to His People" (paper presented to the Institute of Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Jan. 14, 1977). Janzen's memoirs were published as Aus Meinem Leben. Erinnerungen von J.H. Janzen (Rosthern, Sask.: Der Bote, 1929).
- 27 See Janzen's autobiographical "Meine/Seine Lebensgeschichte," MR, 99-100 (Oct. 6, 1976 - Nov. 9, 1977).
- 28 See, for example, B.B. Wiens to David Toews, April 27, 1934. CMBC, vol. 1304, file 834. These personal differences became inescapable when Janzen's daughter married Wiens' son! They also erupted into a congregational conflict in the mid-thirties, prompting first the Janzen's, then the Wiens' clan, to relocate.
- 29 B.B. Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters des Z.M.I.K. fuer Ontario," Der Bote, VII (Nov. 26, 1930), pp. 1-2.
- 30 John H. Enns, "The Story of the Mennonite Settlement of Reesor, Ontario" (unpublished manuscript, 1973), p. 2, CGC.
- 31 Jacob H. Janzen, "Wieder Nord-Ontario," Der Bote, III (Oct. 13, 1926), p. 3.
- 32 D. Paetkau, "Klein aber mein," Der Bote, IV (Sept. 7, 1927), p. 2.
- 33 Jacob H. Janzen, "Siedlungsmoeglichkeiten in Ontario," Der Bote, II (Nov. 25, 1925), p. 2.

- 34 Adolf Noergler [Jacob H. Janzen], "Emigrantenbriefe," MR, XLVIII (May 6, 1925), p. 7.
- 35 D. Heidebrecht, "Reesor, Nord-Ontario," Der Mitarbeiter, 23 (Sept., 1929), p. 9.
- 36 J. Toews, "Die Ansiedlung in Nord Ontario," Der Bote, III (Aug. 4, 1926), p. 2. J.H. Janzen also expressed the hope for "a closed Mennonite colony" here. See his circular letter, October (?) 1925. F-397, JHJ. The other major group in this area was French Canadian.
- 37 B.B. Wiens report to the ZMIK, July 2-3, 1931. ZMIK minutes, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba (hereafter CMBC).
- 38 According to John H. Enns, "Reesor," p. 17, the settlement was named Reesor "in recognition of the encouragement, advice, and generous assistance received from Mr. Thomas Reesor," a Swiss Mennonite minister residing near Pickering. Henry Klassen, Kingsville, himself a Reesorite, recalled in an August 3, 1980 interview with the author that the name "Reesor" won out narrowly over "Janzen" in a vote of the settlement's Schultebott (town council).
- 39 Paetkau, "Klein aber mein;" Heidebrecht, "Reesor;" "Die Heimstaetten in Nord-Ontario," Der Bote, VI (Aug. 14, 1929), p. 2 and "Erntebericht von Reesor, Ont.," Der Bote, V (Nov. 15, 1928), p. 2.
- 40 Epp; Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 221; J.J. Schmidt, "Die Heimstaetten in Nord-Ontario," Der Bote, VII (Nov., 1930), p. 8. Enns, "Reesor," p. 22, however, estimates a total of 300 residents by 1930. All the evidence considered, this figure seems too high.
- 41 N.N. Driedger, The Leamington United Mennonite Church (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1972), p. 23. B.B. Wiens, "Geschichte der seit 1924 in Ontario eingewanderten russlaendischen Mennoniten," Der Bote, X (Aug. 16, 1933), p. 1.
- 42 Wiens, "Geschichte," ibid.
- 43 A.P. Driedger, "Insularfest," Der Bote, LII (June 17, 1975), p. 3.
- 44 Wiens, "Geschichte."
- 45 Noergler, "Emigrantenbriefe," p. 2.
- 46 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, October 19, 1926. JHJ; "Bericht von Essex, Ont.," Der Bote, IV (Jan. 19, 1927), p. 2.
- 47 A. Baerg, "Gedanken beim Tabakpflanzen," Der Bote, V (Aug. 22, 1928), p. 2. Fewer MB's moved here initially, however, because they did not want to compromise their religious values with this type of employment.

- 48 B.B. Wiens to ZMIK, July 3-4, 1929. ZMIK minutes, CMBC.
- 49 G. Papke, "Die mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Harrow in Ontario," Der Bote, VIII (Feb. 4, 1931), p. 1; N.N. Driedger, Leamington, pp. 159-64.
- 50 S, "Ontario," p. 5; Interviews #11.
- 51 G.N. Harder, "Fruit Growing in the Niagara Peninsula," Mennonite Life, XI (April, 1956), p. 75.
- 52 "Person Lists, 1924-." Archives of the Vineland United Mennonite Church, Vineland, Ontario (hereafter VA), file III-15.
- 53 25 Jahre Vineland Vereinigte Mennoniten Gemeinde, 1936-1961 (Vineland, Ont.: Vineland United Mennonite Church, 1961), p. 6.
- 54 "Die 4. Provinziale Vertreterversammlung in Ontario, abgehalten in Leamington am 29. und 30. Oktober 1932," Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), pp. 5-6; "Protokoll der Provinzialen Vertreterversammlung," 1938 in "1930 Ontario" file, CGC. Cf. "Familienverzeichnis der Vinelaender Gruppe" and "Liste der Immigranten in Vineland, Beamsville, Winona, Jordan und Hamilton, Ont.," Feb. 23, 1938. VA.
- 55 Karl Heinz [A. Reimer], "Freuden und Leiden auf unserer Ansiedlung," Der Bote, XIV (June 30, 1937), p. 2.
- 56 E. K[antig], "Im Fluge durch Ontario," Der Bote, VIII (Oct. 14, 1931), p. 1. The writer presents a rather romanticized view of farm life.
- 57 Paetkau, "Klein aber mein," p. 2.
- 58 J.H. Janzen to W.J. Black, June 18, 1929. JHJ.
- 59 "Die Vertreterversammlung in Reinland, Manitoba, 23-25 November 1927," Der Bote, IV (Dec. 7, 1927), p. 5.
- 60 S.F. Coffman to David Toews, Oct. 18, 1924. S.F. Coffman files, CMBC records, Heritage Centre, "Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba (hereafter CMBC). Most had come on credit from the CPR and had a travel debt to repay. These immigrants felt obligated to discharge their debt before relocating and jeopardizing their status.
- 61 The origin of this erroneous assumption is unclear, but it was a fairly widespread impression in Ontario.
- 62 B.B. Wiens report in Der Bote, IV (Dec. 21, 1927), p. 6.

- 63 B.S., "Was man in Waterloo treibt," Der Bote, IV (April 20, 1927), p. 1.
- 64 B.B. Wiens report to the ZMIK, July 3-4, 1929. ZMIK minutes, CMBC.
- 65 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Feb. 5, 1927. JHJ.
- 66 Fr. Dick to B.B. Janz, April 3, 1927. B.B. Janz files (hereafter BBJ), Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba (hereafter MBBC).
- 67 J.H. Janzen, "Bericht ueber die Entstehung und Entwicklung der 'Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinde in Ontario' vom Januar 1925 bis September 1927" (unpublished report, Sept. 4, 1927), p. 6.
- 68 Jacob H. Janzen, "Mennonitentum," MR, LXVIII (July 8, 1925), p. 13.
- 69 X, "Einigkeit macht stark," Der Bote, V (Dec. 6, 1928), p. 1.
- 70 Interviews, #3.
- 71 A.P. Driedger, "Insularfest," Der Bote, LI (June 17, 1925), p. 3.
- 72 Jacob H. Janzen, "Das Eins Werden," Der Bote, V (April 25, 1928), p. 1.
- 73 Jacob H. Janzen in a report to the General Conference Board of Home Missions, Oct. 31, 1925, p. 2. JHJ.
- 74 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Sept. 25, 1926. JHJ.
- 75 Janzen, "Entstehung," p. 1.
- 76 J.H. Janzen, "Wie wahren wir unsere mennonitische Eigenart," Der Bote, VI (May 8, 1929), p. 1.
- 77 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 237.
- 78 The annual reports from MB congregations indicated how many persons had been "ausgeschlossen" (excommunicated).
- 79 Stout, "Ethnicity," p. 210.
- 80 "Protokoll d. Bruderschaft der aus Russland immigrierten Mennoniten," MR, XLVIII (July 8, 1925), p. 8.
- 81 J.H. Janzen, "Synopsis of the paragraphs in our statutes and the conference resolutions passed from time to time, which give our present conference-board its characteristic [sic] of today and serve to make clear our membership in the various conferences to which we belong," December 30, 1931, p. 1. JHJ.

- 82 Jakob P. Friesen, "Ein Beschluss." MR, XLVIII (May 6, 1925), p. 11.
- 83 I.H. Thiessen, He Leadeth... History of the Ontario M.B. Churches, 1924-1957 (Virgil, Ont.: Ontario M.B. Conference, 1957), pp. 9, 63.
- 84 Jacob H. Janzen circular letter, August 10, 1926. JHJ.
- 85 Driedger, Leamington United Mennonite Church, pp. 37, 39.
- 86 David Toews to J.H. Janzen, May 12, 1925. JHJ.
- 87 Janzen, "Entstehung," pp. 8-14.
- 88 J.H. Janzen, "Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt," Der Bote, VII (March 26, 1930), p. 1.
- 89 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Sept. 25, 1926. JHJ.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Table V indicates when the various MB congregations were organized. Separation from the UM's usually occurred at this point.
- 92 Paul Toews, "Mennonite boundaries lowered; nuclei reinforced. (1876-present)," The Mennonite, 98:14 (July 5, 1983), p. 318.
- 93 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Sept. 25, 1926. JHJ.
- 94 Toews, "Mennonite boundaries," p. 317:
- 95 Janzen, "Wie wahren wir."
- 96 Ibid. (May 8 - May 22, 1929).
- 97 "Protokoll der Bruderberatung am 5. Juli 1927 in Kitchener, Ont." MBBC.
- 98 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Jan. 3, 1929. JHJ.
- 99 See the comments in "Seine Lebensgeschichte," MR, 100 (March 23, 1977), p. 10, for instance.
- 100 J.H. Janzen, "How Can the General Conference Cooperate with the Ontario and other Canadian Churches of recent origin?" (1933). JHJ.
- 101 J.H. Janzen circular letter, August 10, 1927. JHJ.
- 102 J.H. Janzen letter to family members, April 22, 1927. JHJ.
- 103 J.H. Janzen, "An die Glieder der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden in Ontario zum Protokoll der allgemeinen Bruderschaft vom 8. Mai, 1927." JHJ.

- 104 J.H. Janzen circular letter, May, 1927. JHJ.
- 105 "Protokoll der Allgemeinen Bruderschaft und Kirchenratversammlung der 'Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinde in Ontario.' Abgehalten zu Waterloo, Ont. am 4. September 1927." JHJ.
- 106 Jacob H. Janzen, "Bericht zur Sitzung des Allgemeinen Kirchenrates der Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinde in Ontario in Leamington am 19.20. u.21. Januar 1929," pp. 8,1. JHJ.
- 107 Ibid., p. 8; "Protokoll der Sitzung, des Allgemeinen Kirchenrates ... am 20. Januar '29," p. 4. JHJ.
- 108 B.B. Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters des Z.M.I.K. fuer Ontario," Der Bote, VII (Nov. 26, 1930), p. 1.
- 109 Frank H. Epp, "The Struggle for Recognition," in A Call to Faithfulness, ed. Henry Poettcker and Rudy A. Regehr (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1972), p. 168.
- 110 "Protokoll der 1. Allgemeinen Versammlung der mennonitischen Immigranten in der Kirche zu Eigenheim unweit Rosthern, Saskatchewan, am 9. Sept., 1923." CMBC files at CGC; D.H. Epp, "Das Zentrale Mennonitische Immigrantenkomitee," Der Bote, XXV (July 21, 1948), pp. 1-2 and (July 28, 1948), pp. 3-4. Cf. Epp, Exodus, pp. 204-14.
- 111 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," p. 1.
- 112 D.H. Epp to ZMIK, March 7, 1928. ZMIK files, CMBC.
- 113 "Protokoll der Sitzung des Immigrantenkomitees und der Districtmaenner der Immigranten von Ontario in Waterloo am 11. Juli 1925." Files of the United Mennonite Conference of Ontario (hereafter UMCO) at CMBC.
- 114 Epp, Exodus, p. 299.
- 115 David Toews letter of introduction, Sept. 18, 1928, and David Toews to B.B. Wiens, Feb. 17, 1930. CMBC.
- 116 "Protokoll der erweiterten Sitzung...abgehalten in Rosthern, Sask., am 5. & 6. Juli 1928." CMBC.
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- 118 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," pp. 1-2.
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- 121 "Protokoll der auserordentlichen Immigrantenversammlung in Essex County am 25. April, 1934." JHJ-CGC, F-324.
- 122 B.B. Wiens in his annual report to the ZMIK, November 1-2, 1930. ZMIK files, CMBC. Cf. B.B. Wiens to David Toews, September 19, 1929. CMBC.
- 123 "Protokoll der erweiterten Sitzung... am 5. & 6. Juli 1928."
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 D.E., "Waterloo," Der Bote, VI (March 21, 1929), p. 1.
- 126 H.K. Huebert, "Die Bedeutung einer festen Organisation," Der Bote, VI (Feb. 21, 1929), pp. 1-2.
- 127 Janzen, "Wie wahren wir."
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- 129 X, "Einigkeit macht stark," Der Bote, V (Dec. 6, 1928), p. 2.
- 130 B.B. Wiens, "Bericht ueber die Provinz Ontario...", minutes of July 3-4, 1929 ZMIK meetings, p. 3. ZMIK files, CMBC.
- 131 Ibid. Cf. J.H. Janzen circular letter, August 12, 1929. JHJ.
- 132 B. Wiens, "Bericht der Verwaltung der 'Selbsthilfe' in Ontario." Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), p. 6.
- 133 B.B. Wiens to David Toews, July 31, 1929. CMBC.
- 134 Wiens, "Bericht ueber die Provinz Ontario," p. 3.

## Chapter IV

### Socio-Economic Developments Through the Depression

Two crises of overwhelming proportions, one domestic, the other international, faced the Russian Mennonites in Canada at the end of the 1920s. The two became inextricably interwoven, however, as events unfolded. In 1929 reports from relatives and friends in the Soviet Union told of a sudden and rapid deterioration in the social and economic conditions there. The introduction of the first Five Year Plan in 1928, together with poor yields resulting from unfavourable weather conditions, had created an economic disaster and precipitated social unrest. In early 1929 a few Mennonite families from central Russia journeyed to Moscow to press their case for permission to leave the country. As the harsh winter progressed, and news of this venture spread, a second "emigration fever" gripped what remained of the Mennonite colonies. Most hoped to join their relatives and coreligionists in Canada.

While the bitter memories of their own suffering, and the many family connections, compelled the Russian Mennonites in Canada to respond with more than mere sympathy, they faced some significant challenges of their own. One was the deteriorating economic situation in Canada. The impending Depression would dissipate many of the hard-won financial gains they had made and severely challenge their resources and resolve as a Mennonite people. More immediately, they

found themselves, together with a number of other immigrant groups, as the targets of increasing resentment and hostility. These developments did not bode well for the future, much less for their efforts to rescue their Russian relatives.

## I

In the mid-twenties, those voices calling for a major new initiative in immigration policy, most notably the railways, had won a major concession from the Liberal government. The rate of immigration for the fiscal year ending in 1925 had declined by 25 percent from the preceding year.<sup>1</sup> Railway presidents Edward Beatty of the Canadian Pacific and Henry Thornton of the Canadian National warned of the imminent collapse of their colonization departments.<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie King promised a more aggressive policy and, in September 1925, a month before the general election, concluded a three-year agreement with the two railway companies which would have a significant impact on the rate and composition of the immigrant influx.

Under the terms of the Railways Agreement, the government empowered the CPR and CNR to recruit, transport, and settle immigrants from the previously "non-preferred" countries of southern and eastern Europe who met the requirements of PC 183 and were in possession of a letter of admission, or permit, issued as the companies' discretion.<sup>3</sup> These permits were required to stipulate the guaranteed employment for which the newcomers were being admitted so as not to flood the labour market. Nevertheless, opponents of the scheme criticized the government for

abdicated its responsibility in the matter of immigrant selection and, in the case of the Deputy Minister, W.J. Egan, denounced this arrangement as a "pernicious attempt to destroy the selective immigration policy, and to return to the chaotic labour market which existed in pre-war years."<sup>4</sup>

The government attempted to appease the opposition on these two points. James Robb, the Minister of Immigration, underlined the efforts to attract immigrants from Great Britain by pointing to the Department's cooperation with the Dominion government in London through which it subsidized British settlement in Canada.<sup>5</sup> Charles Stewart, who assumed the portfolio for a second time after the October 1925 election, underscored the need for the agricultural settlers this agreement was intended to attract. "We are bending all our energies on getting that class of settler," he informed the House, "believing that later on there will be an opportunity for immigrants of the artisan class...."<sup>6</sup>

Statistics reveal the impact of the Railways Agreement. The level of immigration rose sharply from 84,907 in 1925 to 135,982 during the following year, climbing yet again to the 160,000 range in each of the three succeeding years.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, the percentage of the total who entered as farmers more than doubled from 29.7 in the first half of the decade to 65.8 percent between 1925 and 1930.<sup>8</sup> But this development raised several concerns. Some denounced the government's policy as being "grossly unfair" to those already engaged in farming because it resulted in overproduction of agricultural products. Others

complained that the oversupply of farm labourers led to a reduction in wages.<sup>9</sup> Still others deplored the fact that immigrants were being admitted to settle Canada's prairies when the real need was "getting farmer's sons back on the land."<sup>10</sup> The high cost of land and machinery, it was argued, prevented Anglo-Canadians from entering into farming. The United Farmers of Alberta urged the government, therefore, "to discontinue the present immigration policy" and embark upon a program of assistance to potential Canadian landowners instead.<sup>11</sup>

Closely related was a second concern, namely that many of these immigrants soon drifted into towns and cities in search of more lucrative employment, that they came to nonexistent jobs, or that they displaced native labourers.<sup>12</sup> In each case, the result was increased unemployment which many Canadians attributed, whether justly or otherwise, to European immigrants. Already in the summer of 1927 a number of mayors of western cities complained to the federal government about the influx of "foreigners" into their cities as a result of the Railways Agreement.<sup>13</sup> A year later Robert Forke, the Minister responsible for Immigration and Colonization, conceded that "many thousands of non-preferred country immigrants" had indeed drifted into non-agricultural work, "almost immediately displacing Canadians and filling positions immigrants from the Mother Country might have filled."<sup>14</sup> Economic conditions, therefore, inflamed preexistent cultural and racial prejudices, intensifying resistance to non-British immigration and, indeed, resentment against those recently arrived as well.

The Russian Mennonites, particularly in Ontario, experienced some of that anger along with other newcomers. Bishop J.H. Janzen reported that in Kitchener-Waterloo the residents had begun to "stop our people on the street and threaten to make trouble...."<sup>15</sup> Another Mennonite immigrant recalls hearing that "Those foreigners...should all be sent back to their own country."<sup>16</sup> Alarmed by these incidents, Mennonite leaders pleaded with their people to return to farming. They recognized, according to a warning published in their German-language paper, that the situation

could become disastrous, not only for all immigrants, but for us Mennonites in particular. We have good reason to fear the latter, for we have been warned repeatedly by the authorities,<sup>17</sup> not to bring any more of our brethren into the cities.

Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Chairman David Toews confided to B.B. Wiens in Ontario that "the situation is more serious than most of our people think."<sup>18</sup> Exactly how serious the situation, and how inflammatory the public mood had become was demonstrated when these leaders began to appeal for support and assistance in rescuing their coreligionists in 1929.

Canadians, perhaps searching for a scapegoat for personal misfortune, felt betrayed by those to whom they had earlier gladly offered freedom and opportunity. Robert Forke, the Minister of Immigration, acknowledged in 1929 that only about 30 percent of the farm labourers entering under the Railways Agreement had remained on the land.<sup>19</sup> J.S. Woodsworth chided the government for pursuing a

policy which, he maintained, gave "the man in the immigration office in Europe...a better chance of getting a job in western Canada than the man in the employment office in Winnipeg."<sup>20</sup>

One other aspect of the immigration statistics alarmed Anglo-Canadians. While the total influx increased substantially, the proportion of British immigrants fell dramatically. Before 1925, 50 percent or more of all newcomers, not including those from the United States, were British. Under the Railways Agreement, this number dropped to only one-third of the total while the figures for southern and eastern European groups, the so-called "non-preferred" groups such as Czechs and Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians, and Yugoslavs, rose significantly.<sup>21</sup> Predictably, the realization of this fact reawakened quiescent Anglo-Canadian xenophobia.

During the late 1920s those voices expressing concern about retaining the "Britishness" of Canada increasingly attacked the existing immigration policy, even though they might have supported a substantial annual influx. R.B. Bennett captured the prevailing sentiment regarding the "non-preferreds" in a speech to the House in 1928. Canadians must, he asserted,

maintain that measure of British civilization which will enable us to assimilate these people to British institutions,<sup>22</sup> rather than assimilate our civilization to theirs.

What continued to threaten that process, most Anglo-Canadians agreed, was not only the extent of non-British immigration but also the persistence of Old World habits among these immigrants. The continued

existence of bloc settlements among such groups as the Doukhobors, Hutterites, Mennonites, and Ukrainians on the western prairies annoyed many Canadians. Communal land ownership among the first two groups rendered them particularly suspect, although the ethnic insularity of the others was also deeply resented. In a 1929 editorial, the Vegreville Observer expressed the feelings toward some European immigrants in the area as follows:

...the business of bringing in certain classes of settlers and giving them land in solid bloc, forming impermeable blocs of non-Canadian citizens is the finest method in the world of creating dissension in the long run. Keep them out! Let them hunt some other country where they can get away with their ridiculous ideas as to religion and as to their responsibility as citizens.... Western Canada<sup>23</sup> is already cursed with too many imported jackasses.

This resentment became most conspicuous in Saskatchewan and Alberta where the proportion of non-British settlers remained the highest. "The tension between the dominant society and these tight-knit groups," Howard Palmer observes, "was manifested generally at the political level and concretely at the local community level."<sup>24</sup>

George Lloyd, the Anglican Bishop of Saskatchewan, published an open letter in April 1928 entitled "British Australia, Mongrel Canada" in which he accused the Prime Minister of giving the two Railways "the liberty to denationalize this country...."<sup>25</sup> Lloyd described the Europeans as "dirty, ignorant, garlic-smelling, non-preferred continentals" and vowed to vote against the provincial Gardiner government because its immigration policy was "non-British, if not



165  
anti-British. While such comments were not new, the intensity of feeling they reflected became evident in another way, the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan. The Canadian Klan was the most visible expression of anti-alien sentiment in the West. Concern grew in eastern Canada as well. The Toronto Globe, for example, accused the government of making "a racial and linguistic checkerboard of the West."<sup>27</sup> Journalist James Gray explains that

The antipathy, which the Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority developed, during the hysteria of wartime, against all other breeds of humanity might well have evaporated during the decade that followed, if the good times had only come back. Instead there was a decade of business stagnation, a cessation of population growth, and a drying up of urban employment opportunities coupled with serious agricultural depression... Though the anti-alien agitation became quiescent, it never really subsided completely during the decade... The Anglo-Saxon zealots opposed foreign immigration and demanded increased British immigration.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, there remained those who defended the existing policy, extolling the contributions of immigrants and expressing great optimism about the future blending of these nationalities. Robert England, a CNR colonization manager, wrote with considerable optimism about the eventual assimilation of the central European immigrant in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Peter H. Bryce, an inspection officer for the Immigration Branch, underscored the importance of these immigrants. "[H]ad it not been for these foreigners filling up many of the waste places," he maintained, "there never would have been a prosperous and populous Canadian North West."<sup>30</sup> The Anglo-Saxon civilization was so superior

to the others, he insisted, that it would continue "reducing to a common denominator the diverse national elements" introduced by European immigrants.<sup>31</sup>

Col. J.S. Dennis, who had helped bring the Russian Mennonites into Canada through the CPR's Colonization Department, concurred. He appeared before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration in 1928 to argue against more restrictive policies.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, he urged the Mennonites in western Canada to help ease the tension by demonstrating their loyalty and their contributions to the Canadian nation. He suggested, for instance, that they participate in the Great-West Canadian Folk Song, Folk-Dance and Handicrafts Festival in Regina in March, 1929 in view of the favourable publicity it would generate for "the splendid class of Canadian citizens" the Mennonites were making. That, he maintained, was necessary because of "the present agitation in the West on the part of some narrow minded people for the exclusion of all but [the] British...."<sup>33</sup> As a result of this encouragement, and in response to the hostile agitation, a number of Mennonite communities took part in the "Community Progress Competition" sponsored by the CPR in the early thirties to allay some of these nativistic fears. This competition was designed, according to railway officials,

to bring within the sweep of our Canadian culture and life the traditional skills, homecraft and handicrafts of our European peoples and to interest them in the services provided by our provincial<sup>34</sup> institutions in education, health and agriculture.

Only communities whose population consisted of at least 70% first- or second-generation continental European immigrants were eligible.

Saskatchewan Mennonites won first prize each year from 1930-32.

Manitoba Mennonites, meanwhile, placed first or second each of those years.<sup>35</sup> In his study of assimilation among Canadian Mennonites, George Thielman declares this program a success because, he concludes,

it was based on a process of assimilation which did not look for speed and completeness but tended to attempt to change the social patterns of the minority<sup>36</sup> group gradually, imperceptibly, and effectively.

Still, most Anglo-Canadians had grown impatient. They were looking for speedy assimilation and complete integration into the larger society. The government's policy, as manifested in the Railways Agreement, appeared to prevent that process from occurring. By the late twenties the agitation of patriotic groups who wanted British immigrants only, and farmers and labourers who wanted less altogether, began to threaten an outbreak of social unrest reminiscent of the early postwar era. Perhaps recalling the violence of the Winnipeg Strike of 1919, Mackenzie King worried that the immigration debate might develop into an "open conflict between capital and labour...."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he maintained that "the policies of the government with respect to immigration...have contributed very materially to the prosperity of this country. We have endeavoured to bring into this country the numbers which we believed could be assimilated in a natural and normal way.... We have," he insisted, "avoided steps which would lead to unrest."<sup>38</sup> R.B. Bennet, leader of the Opposition, challenged

the government's record and called for a review of its policies by a committee of the House.<sup>39</sup>

In its June, 1928 report to the House, the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization summarized existing conditions and regulations wherein it found "considerable misapprehension and lack of information...."<sup>40</sup> Responding to widespread charges of the blatant abuse of the permit system, never clearly substantiated, the Committee urged more adequate supervision of this procedure. The Railways Agreement, the commissioners concluded, could not be continued in its existing form. The Committee also recommended that the provinces be granted greater responsibility in the placement, settlement, and supervision of immigrants.

These recommendations, in combination with increased instability in labour conditions, prompted the government to review its immigration policy, and the Railways Agreement in particular. The Minister, Robert Forke, had already increased his discretionary control over the Agreement upon its renewal for three years in October, 1927.<sup>42</sup> In January, 1929, just as the first Mennonites began their trek from Siberia to Moscow, he ordered a decrease of 30 percent in the number of farm labourers brought in by the railways.<sup>43</sup> After discussions with the Premiers of the Prairie provinces during the summer, the Minister indicated that the federal government would henceforth consult the provinces in establishing immigration levels.<sup>44</sup> With conditions deteriorating rapidly in the fall, Forke called for a further reduction of 25 percent in the European influx as precisely the time when the

"emigration fever" peaked in Russia. Total immigration fell by 36 percent to 104,806 in 1930, the lowest level since 1925.<sup>45</sup> The Canadian gate was quickly closing.

R.B. Bennett and the Conservatives won the 1930 federal election. One of the first actions of the new Minister of Immigration, Wesley Gordon, was the implementation of a more restrictive immigration policy.<sup>46</sup> Under its provisions, the provinces were granted virtual control over the size and nature of the immigrant influx. The federal government became little more than a clearing house for their requests. Local and regional socio-economic conditions as perceived by provincial governments, therefore, would define Canadian immigration policy until after World War II. According to one observer, this approach "seemed to reflect accurately the prevailing public opinion throughout the country especially with regard to the problem of unemployment which had expanded during the previous months."<sup>47</sup> By 1931 immigration from sources other than Great Britain or the United States had been all but eliminated.

In the midst of this national debate over immigration, Canadian Mennonites received reports that thousands of their Russian coreligionists were converging on Moscow in the fall of 1929 with the intention of obtaining passports which would take them to Canada. Conditions in Russia had also changed since the inauguration of the "Mennonite exodus" in 1923. Soviet authorities had placed severe restrictions on the availability of exit permits in 1927. As a result, fewer than 1,000 Mennonites left for Canada in that year, and just over

500 departed in 1928.<sup>48</sup> But the initiation of the first Five Year Plan that fall, with its program of collectivization and "dekulakization" together with a renewed persecution of religious and ethnic groups, a policy which struck the Mennonites with particular ferocity, caused many of those who remained to question their decision not to depart at the height of the emigration several years earlier.

Under their revised economic program, Soviet officials greatly increased the requisitions of grain in 1928. A crop failure that summer, however, left many regions unable to meet these demands, much less feed themselves and their livestock.<sup>49</sup> American Mennonite leaders, upon learning of an impending famine, approached the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fridjof Nansen, in late 1928 with the request that he seek to persuade the Soviet government to permit the distribution of aid among the Mennonites and to secure the emigration of those with relatives in Canada.<sup>50</sup> These initiatives brought no response, however. Desperation drove some Mennonites, as well as a few ethnic Germans, in Siberia to liquidate their holdings in January, 1929 and proceed to Moscow with the hope of obtaining passports. By late summer some of these, about 60 families, had been permitted to emigrate. When news of their departure reached the Mennonite and German colonies throughout the country, "...the American-fever [spread] like an epidemic."<sup>51</sup> One letter-writer confessed to relatives in Canada, "Many could not understand you [when you left]. Now, everyone without exception understands."<sup>52</sup> In October and November, 1929, more than 12,000 German-speaking colonists, most of

them Mennonites, amassed on the outskirts of the Soviet capital.<sup>53</sup> Since, for all intents and purposes, the U.S. borders remained closed to them because of the quota system, these refugees looked to Canada for their deliverance.

In late October the Soviet government agreed to the departure of 6,000 Mennonites in an effort to dispose of this burdensome refugee situation, and the German government gave its assurance that it would accept any of those denied admission to Canada. Officials in Ottawa, however, refused to permit the movement, thereby halting the westbound trains on October 30.<sup>54</sup> No pleas from Nansen, nor even the prospect of certain relocation and possible death for these refugees, could move the King administration to reverse its position.<sup>55</sup> After a meeting with his long-term acquaintance, Bishop David Toews, who pleaded the case on behalf of Canadian Mennonites, the Prime Minister confided to his diary that although he would have liked to help on humanitarian grounds, such action would "raise a serious problem here."<sup>56</sup>

Social, economic, and political factors combined to occasion King's uncharacteristically negative response to his friends, the Mennonites. Patriotic groups like the National Order of Canada, the Native Sons of Canada, and the Sons of England continued their vociferous opposition to non-British immigration, citing the Mennonites as a case in point.<sup>57</sup> Farmer's organizations in Saskatchewan and Alberta expressed similar sentiments.<sup>58</sup> Provincial authorities, moreover, argued that the destitution of the potential immigrants and the

deteriorating economic conditions in Canada rendered ~~the~~ proposed influx inopportune, particularly with a winter of high unemployment approaching. Premier J.E. Brownlee opined to Bishop Toews, in fact, that many Albertans, "as a result of [a] complete crop failure, are in nearly as destitute a condition as your people in Moscow."<sup>59</sup> To the Minister of Immigration he communicated his resentment, doubtless felt by all three prairie premiers, toward the federal government for the pressure it was exerting on the western provinces to receive the Mennonites in the existing circumstances.<sup>60</sup>

Ottawa could no longer ignore such provincial protests. Robert Forke's earlier decision to obtain the consent of the provinces on immigration policy precluded unilateral action. F.C. Blair, the assistant deputy minister in the Department of Immigration, angrily acknowledged that the hands of the federal government were tied in this regard.<sup>61</sup> But the defeat of Gardiner's Liberals in Saskatchewan earlier that year, in which the immigration question had played such a significant part, had given Mackenzie King pause in dealing with the provinces in this regard. Without their consent, federal officials, agreed, no movement of Mennonites would be undertaken. Ironically, however, the even more restrictive immigration policies initiated by the Conservative government of R.B. Bennett in 1930 assured the Liberals of the continued loyalty of the Russian Mennonites in Canada. Indeed, they contributed to the widespread myth that "It was the Conservative Party under the Prime Ministership of...R.B. Bennett which thwarted all efforts to bring the stranded Mennonites in Moscow to Canada."<sup>62</sup>



Nevertheless, some of those at the gates of Moscow did manage to enter Canada. Through the intervention of the German government, 5,671 refugees, 3,885 of them Mennonites, escaped the forced evacuation carried out by Soviet authorities at the end of November, 1929.<sup>63</sup> Over 1,300 of these eventually found their way into Canada under the terms of existing immigration legislation, most of them under the remaining provisions of the Railways Agreement.<sup>64</sup> A few joined their friends and relatives in Ontario.

Why had this attempted rescue effort failed in Canada a scant seven years after successfully opening the door to some 20,000 Russian Mennonites? The major reasons are easily discerned. Such a movement had, in short, become both inopportune and inappropriate. Deteriorating economic conditions had created a growing unemployment problem which, in turn, placed an increased burden on municipal and provincial governments who were responsible for relief. In the midst of the debate in November, 1929, an editorial in the Calgary Albertan summed up this dilemma as it affected sentiments toward the Mennonite refugees. The editor noted that

about this time of year we are accustomed to hearing something about municipalities palming off their indigents on one another, but this seems like an instance of the practice on an international scale.<sup>65</sup>

Since the Mennonites amassed around Moscow were generally impoverished, having simply abandoned their already meagre possessions in their haste to flee, they would not be self-supporting on arrival. In view of the crop failure on the farms and the high unemployment among labourers,

however, Canadians were not inclined to be very sympathetic to the suffering of unknown foreigners thousands of miles away.<sup>66</sup> It was simply not a good time to be seeking admission to Canada, even for Mennonite farmers. In the words of deputy minister F.C. Blair, "...we could scarcely do for Bishop Toews and the Mennonites what we are refusing to do for others."<sup>67</sup>

In the minds of many Canadians, such a movement was also inappropriate. The rising tide of anti-foreign sentiment vented its fury, in this instance at least, against the Mennonites. Whether they were Russian or German or Dutch mattered little at this point. To the xenophobic mind they were "non-preferred" and therefore unwelcome. In the words of one letter-writer from Saskatchewan to R.B. Bennett, "A slogan of 'Don't immigrate what won't assimilate' is a good one for Canada to adopt...."<sup>68</sup>

A third factor which determined the Canadian response was the change in policy permitting the provinces to determine both the level and the type of immigration. Although Mackenzie King pleaded publicly, during his trip through the West in November, 1929, for Canadians to put aside racial and religious prejudices and share their land and its bounty with others,<sup>69</sup> neither the public nor the premiers were convinced that immigration policy should be based on international or humanitarian considerations. Premier J.F. Brownlee of Alberta expressed the popular and political mood in a letter to the Minister of Immigration, Robert Forke.

We believe that immigration has already come into this Province beyond our power of absorption and that no further immigration of any kind should be permitted until it is clearly<sup>70</sup> evident that this condition has ceased to exist.

As the Depression steadily deepened, it became apparent that conditions could not improve, nor substantial immigration resume, for some time.

Finally, the Mennonites themselves must bear at least some of the responsibility for their failure to rescue the Russian refugees. They had not entirely fulfilled the expectations of their Anglo-Canadian hosts. B.B. Wiens allowed that he found little sympathy among Ontario residents for the proposed relocation.

A certain nervousness is evident when one broaches the subject with them. If you tell them that the Mennonites in question will go onto the farms, they counter, "What did you promise and where are you now?" If one tries to calm them by pointing to the prospect that these Russians will be sent to the West, they answer - "and after 24 hours they will be in Waterloo-Kitchener." They are not completely wrong, and if they had to decide - no Mennonite would set foot on Canadian soil. If one really thinks about it, the workers can't be blamed because we did not justify the faith placed in us, and the government, the CPR and the people believe themselves<sup>71</sup> to be disappointed in their expectations.

In view of these factors, it is not altogether surprising that the Canadian gate closed in 1929. The hardships and conflict of the ensuing years would keep it closed, even for the displaced and desperate victims of Nazi Germany a decade later.<sup>72</sup>

## II

For the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Canada, the events in the Soviet Union in 1928 and 1929 confirmed the wisdom of their decision to emigrate. The economic instability and the periodic public hostility notwithstanding, there had been no substantial reason throughout the 1920s to question their prospects for a viable future in Canada, as the Old Colony Mennonites had. By the early 1930s, barely half a dozen years after their initial settlement here, however, the outlook was decidedly less optimistic. Of course, the future looked bleak for many Canadians by then, but recent immigrants were particularly vulnerable to financial disaster.

Both city and country dwellers suffered hardship and loss. The Mennonites, still predominantly a rural people, experienced the loss of crops and income together with other farmers. The Saskatchewan farmer, for instance, who had been the most prosperous in Canada before the Depression based on net farm income, had become the least prosperous by 1933.<sup>73</sup> Mennonites, like other recent land owners, often lost not only their income, however, but also their land.

But urban residents also experienced this dislocation. The Jews, for example, who were as urbanized as the Mennonites were rural, were among those experiencing unemployment the soonest because, like many immigrant labourers, they had been the last ones hired. And if not laid off, many workers found their wages reduced to 10 or 15 cents an hour, sometimes even less.<sup>74</sup> Unemployment rose to 25 and 30 percent

by 1933.<sup>75</sup> Often it was the recent immigrant who was blamed for this situation and "foreigners" remained the target of xenophobic Canadians throughout the 1930s.<sup>76</sup> Again, both Mennonites and Jews would suffer as a result of these sentiments although, ironically, to the former was added the charge of pro-Nazi activities while the latter became victims of Nazi atrocities. Such were the forces unleashed by the "dirty thirties".

The Depression hit Canada with particular ferocity, though with an uneven impact. While many middle-class families suffered relatively little, the burgeoning urban working class bore the brunt of lowered wages and unemployment.<sup>77</sup> The Atlantic provinces and the prairies suffered the greatest economic decline and social dislocation. The national net farm income plunged from \$417 million in 1929 to \$109 million in 1933 and had barely recovered to pre-depression levels by 1939.<sup>78</sup> A disastrous drought and a shrinking world market for wheat devastated prairie farmers, causing many to lose their land and their livelihood. They also sought refuge in the city. But the impact of the devastation soon penetrated all levels and all sectors of the economy. By 1933 more than 1.5 million of Canada's 10 million people depended on relief for survival.<sup>79</sup> In 1932, for example, 13 percent of the population of Calgary and Edmonton and 20 percent of Winnipeg's were drawing relief. In Montreal, meanwhile, a full 30 percent of all residents depended on assistance.<sup>80</sup> Unemployment also peaked in that year, rising to more than thirty percent. Although it declined between 1934 and 1937, only to rise again in the two succeeding years, it did

not cease to be a serious problem until the war was well into its third year.<sup>81</sup> The social impact of these catastrophic statistics is difficult to measure or imagine.

Both on the national and regional levels there was sufficient evidence, however, of the growing mood of frustration and anger.<sup>82</sup> Its political manifestation came in the form of a mood of both militancy and mutualism. The militancy was directed at the powerful and vested interests perceived to be at the root of the economic crisis, interests which seemed not to suffer as individuals did. In Quebec this mood found expression in the French-Canadian nationalism of Maurice Duplessis and the newly formed Union Nationale Party; in Alberta in the Social Credit movement heralded by William Aberhart. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), established in 1933, presented a social democratic alternative, both provincially and federally, to a capitalistic system which many believed had caused the Depression. Ontario voters had also examined this alternative, in the form of the United Farmers and then the CCF, but chose instead the "liberal radicalism" of Mitch Hepburn in 1934. World War II would finally bring the economic recovery, and at least a measure of the national purpose and unity, lacking throughout the thirties. At the same time the war would, of course, also revive a legacy of old conflicts and create a host of new challenges.

For the Russian Mennonite immigrants, the economic deprivation and dislocation caused by the Depression, while painful and discouraging, was not new. They had, after all, suffered even more intensely in

Russia. Developments in the thirties did, however, test their commitment to an agrarian lifestyle and their resourcefulness in facing an economic crisis as a community. At the same time, and in a more subtle way, the Depression challenged the strength of another stake in the Russian Mennonite "canopy", the vitality of the German language and the faith traditionally expressed in that language. How would their communities fare in this struggle?

At the outset, Reesor stood as a symbol of the Russian Mennonite 'commonwealth' reborn. Its relative isolation permitted the reestablishment of an Old World community. But that isolation also undermined its stability and its profitability. For Reesor, the impact of the Depression was the last, and perhaps most devastating blow, to the idealism and courage of its residents. The small, isolated community had, from the outset, been beset with difficulties. In the first place, the short summer produced a limited range of cash crops and, more importantly, these could hardly compete with local produce at distant markets because of the cost of transportation. Secondly, the settlers could more easily and rapidly cut and sell the timber than they could bring the land into profitable production. Bishop J.H. Janzen observed that "...[I]t will be difficult to survive the period when the pulpwood is gone and insufficient land has been cleared to be able to make a living from it."<sup>83</sup> In addition, the restrictive market conditions of the Depression forced pulp mills to seriously cut pulpwood contracts. This guaranteed source of annual income had attracted settlers during the late twenties when the pulp and paper

industry doubled its capacity in Ontario. By 1929 this expansion had created a surplus in newsprint and a dramatic decline in prices.<sup>84</sup> This, together with the onset of the Depression, resulted in the reduction or cancellation of pulpwood contracts and the loss of this steady, if limited, income. Those who went south to find work on this account never returned.

Thirdly, the isolation, the primitive conditions, and the arduous demands of pioneering in unfamiliar northern woodlands shattered the idealism of most Mennonites. The provincial government discouraged expansion and growth, moreover, when it refused to build access roads to unclaimed homesteads in settled areas or to open new and more promising homesteads to the public until the less attractive and less accessible ones in established areas were claimed. Bishop J.H. Janzen appealed to his provincial Member of Parliament, W.G. Weichel, as well as to the Department of Lands and Forests in Toronto in an effort to persuade provincial authorities to be more accommodating to the Mennonite settlers. He was dismayed, and even angered, by the lack of a favourable response on this issue.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, there were divisive factors within the Reesor community itself which also undermined its strength and stability. Socio-economic tensions, stemming from differences of wealth and status in Russia, created an underlying tension.<sup>86</sup> The opportunism of some settlers who came to cut the pulpwood and then left created resentment.<sup>87</sup> Added to this was the growing conflict between the two resident ministers. Their power struggle not only divided the



settlement into two factions but also undermined the morale of all Reesorites.<sup>88</sup> One loyal resident lamented what he perceived as the breakdown of unity and community. "That is a tragedy," he concluded. "It is a sad chapter in the story of Canadian Mennonites." Almost pathetically, and somewhat rhetorically, he demanded, "Is there really no possibility of establishing a healthy closed Mennonite settlement in our Canada?"<sup>89</sup> Apparently that separatist ideal had been diminished, or at least redefined. As other Mennonite enclaves formed throughout Ontario, some of these pioneers believed they could abandon the unprofitable economic situation in Reesor for a more lucrative one elsewhere without completely compromising their ideals.<sup>90</sup>

Consequently, a slow but steady exodus of Reesorites began in the early thirties, barely matched by the continued influx of fortune-seekers from the West. In 1936 one of the founders of the settlement also forsook his dream. "...[H]is decision to leave was a blow to the equanimity and fortitude of the others," a resident recalls.<sup>91</sup> Next year twelve other families left, and the exodus began in earnest. Wartime prosperity in the more populated southern areas of the province dealt the final blow to this experiment in colonization and community building. Nature and economics, together with a divisiveness born of personal and historical differences, had triumphed over the ideals and values of the Russian Mennonites.

Next to Reesor residents, Mennonite settlers in Essex County suffered the greatest financial hardship and became the most demoralized. This decline was all the more dramatic in view of the

relative prosperity experienced here during the initial period of settlement. The weakening of resolve among residents here, and the paucity of financial resources, became evident when the congregation delayed its commitment to elect and ordain its own bishop for over four years, until 1933. Similarly, the building program initiated in 1931 remained uncompleted until 1934. While some attributed the delay to poverty, others blamed a lack of personal dedication to and sacrifice for the well-being of the Church.<sup>92</sup> Discontented residents looked to other parts of the province, primarily the Niagara peninsula, for brighter prospects. One correspondent observed, "Our people are restless."<sup>93</sup> Another wrote, with despair,

Home..., only a very few among us have had the good fortune of establishing their own home. By far the majority must change their residence frequently in search of their daily bread just as they did ten years ago [in Russia]. It is tiring and demoralizing....<sup>94</sup>

Changing membership statistics illustrate this restlessness. The Essex County United Mennonite Church saw 18 adults move out and transfer their membership in 1930, although nearly twice as many, a total of 34, joined the congregation, most of these coming from western Canada.<sup>95</sup> By the mid-thirties, as the prairie economy collapsed, this trickle became a flood: The "Ontario fever," as one observer called it,<sup>96</sup> struck Saskatchewan residents in particular because among Canadians they suffered the greatest deprivation.

Table VI

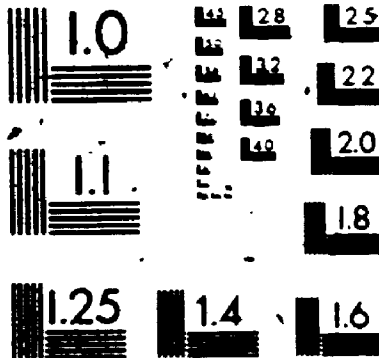
Socio-Economic Status of Essex County Russian Mennonites<sup>97</sup>

	1932	1934	1938	1941
Total	830	978	1312	1200 (est.)
Farm owners	25	35 (est.)	68	81
Farm renters	34	60 (est.)	53	61
Farm labourers				45
Factory workers	53	100	122	43
Home owners	-	-	16	23
On relief	4	2	1	-

This influx from the West upset some of the local residents, however. B.B. Wiens reported a growing resentment among the workers, especially seasonal labourers. "Abusive articles appeared in the papers," he reported in 1937, conceding that some employers "give preference to Mennonites."<sup>98</sup> As unemployment grew, wages fell. In Essex County the average daily wage of \$4.00 in the late twenties fell to \$2.50 by 1931 and even lower by 1933.<sup>99</sup> The newcomers received some of the blame for this situation. "We immigrants were blamed for the Depression because we were taking jobs away from Canadians," recalls one person. "Some people were so kind, but others...."<sup>100</sup>

The price of farm produce also collapsed in the process, leaving many owners unable to meet the payments. In Essex County, the bountiful crops and high prices of the mid-twenties had induced at least 40 families to purchase their own farm. By the mid-thirties over one third of these had been foreclosed.<sup>101</sup> The Depression "upset the

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

calculations" of many Mennonite immigrants, B.B. Wiens observed laconically.<sup>102</sup> Some sought employment in local canning factories, others moved to the city. The 1941 census listed 30 percent of Essex County Mennonites as urban residents.<sup>103</sup> Others, again, returned to being farm labourers and a few were forced to accept relief. (Table VI.) Bishop J.H. Janzen summarized this predicament in his typically dramatic style.

...[T]axes, levies, land and travel debts must be paid in cash while the fruits of our labours hardly bring in any money anymore. And so often the farmer must lose what he paid on the farm, must leave the piece of land he learned to love, must hole himself up in a small dark corner of the city and try, through sporadic employment, to eke out an existence.<sup>104</sup>

Not everyone accepted their fate with that tinge of resignation, however. Many of the dispossessed simply packed up and sought out better conditions elsewhere. By the mid-thirties, therefore, the Niagara peninsula had become the new "Eldorado" of Canada among Russian Mennonites, both from other parts of Ontario and from the West.<sup>105</sup> The Vineland United Mennonite Church register indicates, for example, that 121 of 343 persons on its list in 1931 had recently arrived from the prairies.<sup>106</sup> That influx would only increase in the later thirties (see Table VII), to the eventual resentment of even the local Russian Mennonites. "Vineland is overflowing with our people from the West," one resident complained, "and the lodging situation is highly acute in both Vineland and Virgil."<sup>107</sup> The sometimes reluctant hosts tried to assist in the search for housing and employment. Meanwhile,

the provincial immigrant committee collected clothing and other items for distribution among the recent arrivals, some of whom had ~~lost~~ all their possessions once again.<sup>108</sup>

Table VII

Socio-Economic Status of Vineland Area Russian Mennonites<sup>109</sup>

	1932	1934	1938	1941
Total	400	475	576	754
Farm owners	12	-	41	56
Farm renters	-	2	1	2
Farm labourers	26	-	-	-
Factory workers	-	30	170	16
Home owners	-	-	4	19
On relief	-	5	1	-

What relieved the demographic pressure on Vineland was the beginning of settlement in Virgil in 1934. One of the Vineland settlers on the local immigrant committee found that some of the abandoned fruit farms were available there at reasonable prices. Although no one immigrant could afford them individually, they were more easily acquired if purchased corporately and then subdivided. Some 30 families were settled on two large farms purchased in that way in 1934.<sup>110</sup> By 1937, a total of 50 families had acquired between 800-900 acres in the Virgil area.<sup>111</sup> Four years later that number

had more than doubled, as had the total number of Russian Mennonites resident here. (Table VIII.) Much of that increase stemmed from the arrival of Mennonite Brethren from Saskatchewan. As a result, membership in the Virgil MB Church, established in 1937, jumped from 48 in that year to 225 in 1941. (See Figure 1.)

Table VIII

Socio-Economic Status of Virgil Area Russian Mennonites<sup>112</sup>

	1934	1938	1941
Total	-	350 (est.)	660
Farm owners	30	67	102
Farm labourers	-	12	35

Also attracting newcomers to the Niagara area were the employment opportunities in the city of St. Catharines. The 1931 census counted only 24 Mennonites here in a population of over 24,000.<sup>113</sup> During the 1930s the immigrant families in the surrounding vicinity increasingly sent their daughters into the city to work as domestics in order to supplement the family income. By 1941, therefore, some 200 Mennonites were counted in the census here.<sup>114</sup> By that time, however, local industry, stimulated by wartime demands, was providing the bulk of the employment for recent arrivals.

Most urbanized of Ontario groups was the Mennonite population in Kitchener-Waterloo. Until the large influx from the West in the late thirties, this region attracted about one quarter of the immigrants from Russia. About 400 were counted here in 1927, a figure which grew to some 650 by 1941.<sup>115</sup> The number of Mennonite Brethren, who worshipped in Kitchener and resided largely in this city, remained constant between 1932 and 1940.<sup>116</sup> From this point on the wartime influx contributed to an increase of one third in the total membership of the Kitchener MB Church in just three years, rising from 149 to 198 adult members in 1943.<sup>117</sup>

Table IX

Socio-Economic Status of Russian Mennonites in Kitchener<sup>118</sup>

	1932	1938	1941
Total	370	434	491
Farm owners	4	4	1
Home owners	9	10	45
Factory workers	116	100	100
On relief	4	3	1

Most of the United Mennonites, meanwhile, lived in Waterloo and vicinity. This congregation was much larger than the MB Church and grew slightly during the early thirties. That growth slowed as the



Depression eased, however; and once other areas, particularly Niagara, offered brighter employment prospects the number of residents here even declined slightly.

Table X

Socio-Economic Status of Russian Mennonites in Waterloo<sup>119</sup>

	1932	1938	1941
Total	195	201	150
Farm owners	3	4	2
Home owners	5	4	10
Labourers	54	75	
On relief	5*	2	

\* 1934 statistic

Like most other immigrants, the Russian Mennonites faced the compelling force of what B.B. Wiens called "the struggle for existence, the struggle for bread."<sup>120</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen, who could himself barely meet his financial obligations throughout the Depression, remained highly critical of the unrest these conditions precipitated. He described it variously as a manifestation of a "chasing after the dollar for the sake of the dollar," or as the age-old pursuit of the elusive dream of happiness.<sup>121</sup> He expressed the hope that his people had not succumbed to the illusion portrayed by the German poet Heinrich

Heine in the words: "Dort wo du nicht bist, - dort wohnt das Glueck," ("Where you are not, - there happiness dwells.")<sup>122</sup> Janzen maintained, rather idealistically, that spiritual and cultural values could triumph over material forces. But for most, neither the problem nor the solution were that simple or clear cut. Another struggling immigrant perhaps summarized the Russian Mennonite dilemma best when he posed the question: "How then, [can we] get to the point of prospering [gutes Fortkommen haben] and also cultivating our own interests and maintaining our unique characteristics [Eigenart]?"<sup>123</sup> Under prevailing conditions in their new environment, those two aims appeared largely incompatible to the newcomers in Ontario.

Despite the constant rejoinders of their leaders, and the occasional harassment of fellow workers, the Mennonite immigrants persisted in their relatively urbanized settlement pattern. The first stake in the Russian Mennonite "canopy" to fall victim to the challenges of resettlement, therefore, was the agrarian tradition. Census statistics illustrate the changing pattern. In 1931, a mere 12.9 percent of all Mennonites in Canada were classified as urban dwellers, one quarter of the national average.<sup>124</sup> The same census revealed, however, that only 9.3 percent of all Manitoba Mennonites and 13.7 percent of Saskatchewan Mennonites were so categorized in comparison to 21.5 percent of all Ontario Mennonites. Among Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario, however, that figure stood at almost 40 percent.<sup>125</sup> In the ensuing decade, moreover, the only appreciable change in these statistics occurred in Ontario where the proportion of

Mennonite urban dwellers rose yet again.<sup>126</sup> The much-vaunted image of an "ackerbautreibendes Volk" no longer held true for the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario.

Perhaps the Russian milieu of these Mennonites demands a reappraisal in the light of this trend and pattern of settlement and employment. The 'commonwealth' model, it appears, had lost much of its formative significance, for these newcomers believed they could retain their Eigenart without reestablishing that context. Indeed, that context itself bears a closer examination because the people it nurtured displayed a substantial level of independence and urbanization. Sociologists Leo Driedger and J. Howard Kauffman draw attention to this factor in a recent study of Mennonite urbanization in Canada and the United States. They point to the relative sophistication of Mennonite community life in Russia inasmuch as residents here

were obliged to take on urbanlike duties such as colony administration, protection and extension, economic development and manufacturing, educational, health and welfare organization, and to some extent linkage with the larger Russian economic and political society.<sup>127</sup>

As a result, the nature and extent of Russian Mennonite interaction with the "world" had changed significantly. Most, however, had failed to recognize the extent of their industrialization, urbanization and, indeed, integration by 1914.<sup>128</sup> Their colonies included many skilled craftsmen as well as unskilled labourers. The village of Chortitza, in the colony of the same name, for instance, had a population of almost 3,000 by World War I and boasted 131 establishments, including several

of the largest Mennonite factories. It also included a Greek Orthodox church and the district government offices.<sup>129</sup> Nearby Osterwick counted over 1,500 persons.<sup>130</sup> The provincial capital, Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk), 50 miles to the north, harboured over 150 Mennonites by 1900, most of them mill owners, in its population of several hundred thousand. Many others took up residence here during the next two decades. Villages in the Molotschna colony generally remained smaller, although Halbstadt grew to about 1,500 by 1925. More significantly, because it served as a regional administrative centre, and due to the large number of factories and, consequently, factory workers here, Mennonites were in the minority in this, their own village, even before the war.<sup>130</sup> The port city of Berdyansk, to the southeast, attracted Mennonite businessmen by the mid-nineteenth century. The assessment for 1909 revealed 109 taxable Mennonite residents with property valued at one million rubles.<sup>133</sup> One Mennonite served for a time as mayor, indicating the extent of integration among their number. This comparatively urbanized and metropolitan mind set became clearly evident later in Ontario.

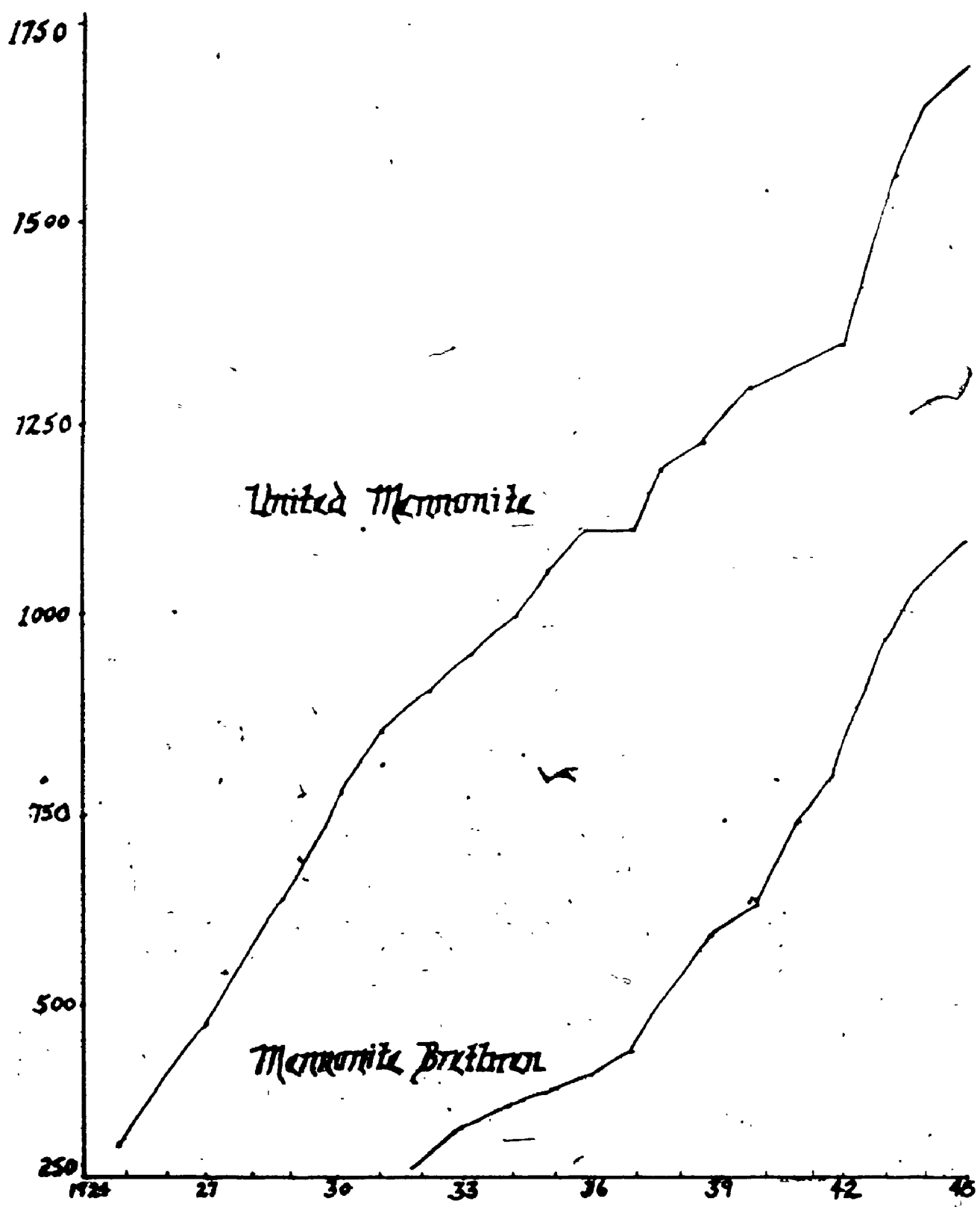
Towns the size of Elmira, Hespeler, New Hamburg, Kingsville, and Leamington, with a population of several thousand, therefore, seemed well-suited to their experiences and expectations. Nor could larger centres like Kitchener-Waterloo, with a combined population of almost 40,000 in 1931, intimidate these Russian Mennonites. Philosophical, emotional, or theological appeals to the ideals of the 'commonwealth' evoked a minimal response. Even the exhortations and admonitions of

respected leaders generally elicited little obedience. Gone were the coercive powers inherent in the Mennonite community in Russia. The religious leadership that remained continued to receive high respect but it carried little authority. Most immigrants conceded that their future within Anglo-Canadian society depended on a substantial accommodation to it. In the words of one, "We want to learn English and [we] want to remain German."<sup>134</sup> Could the "sacred canopy" be stretched to accommodate that duality? Moreover, would Anglo-Canadians accept it?

Events and experiences during the decade of the Depression raised serious questions about those possibilities. The Russian Mennonites' endeavour to reestablish themselves in Ontario had suffered serious setbacks. Their political and economic attractiveness as immigrants disappeared in the face of domestic socio-economic crises. Their ethno-cultural identity became first a point of contention and then, increasingly, a distinct liability in the view of Anglo-Canadians. As a result, they were unable to rescue their coreligionists seeking to flee the Soviet Union. What was more, the economic hardship resulting from the Depression affected these newcomers substantially. Many saw their socio-economic status decline, at least for a time. Only their resourcefulness, a willingness to work hard, and a meagre standard of living, values born of the spirit of independence and self-sufficiency bred in the 'commonwealth', enabled the Russian Mennonites in Ontario to survive the thirties without serious dislocation. Nonetheless, those experiences severely tested the cultural vitality and spiritual resilience of the immigrant community and its fledgling institutions.

Figure 1

Russian Mennonite Church Membership in Ontario  
1925 - 1945



Footnotes

- 1 B and B Report, Table A-1. Immigration for 1925 totalled 84,907, down from 124,164 in the preceding year.
- 2 Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners', pp. 99-100.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
- 4 Quoted in Avery, ibid., p. 101.
- 5 James Robb, Debates, June 25, 1925; CAR, 1925-26, pp. 163-65.
- 6 Charles Stewart, Debates, March 25, 1926, p. 1890.
- 7 B and B Report, Table A-1.
- 8 Based on statistics in Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners', p. 195.
- 9 E.J. Garland, Debates, April 14, 1927, pp. 2530-33.
- 10 CAR, 1926-27, p. 189.
- 11 CAR, 1928-29, pp. 164, 172.
- 12 CAR, 1926-27, p. 179; J.S. Woodsworth, Debates, Feb. 11, 1927, p. 210 and April 6, 1927, p. 2013.
- 13 CAR, 1927-28, p. 177.
- 14 CAR, 1928-29, p. 159.
- 15 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Feb. 9, 1927. JHJ.
- 16 Interviews, #12.
- 17 "Protokoll einer ausserordentlichen Sitzung des Kitchener-Waterlooper Immigrantenkomitees am 23. Januar 1928," Der Bote, V (Feb. 8, 1928), p. 2. Cf. J.H. Janzen to B.B. Janz, June 9, 1927. BBJ.
- 18 David Toews to B.B. Wiens, Dec. 20, 1927. B.B. Wiens file, CMBC.
- 19 Quoted by A.D. McRae, Debates, May 22, 1929, p. 2736.
- 20 J.S. Woodsworth, Debates, Feb. 11, 1929, p. 49.
- 21 B and B Report, Table A-1.
- 22 Quoted in Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners' p. 110.

- 23 Quoted in Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, p. 119.
- 24 Ibid., p. 117.
- 25 CAR, 1927-28, p. 189.
- 26 William Calderwood, "Pulpit, Press, and Political Reactions to the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan," Prophecy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Canada, ed. Samuel D. Clark, et.al. (Toronto: Gage, 1975), p. 159. Cf. CAR, 1928-29, pp. 162-63.
- 27 CAR, 1927-28, p. 187.
- 28 James H. Gray, The Roar of the Twenties (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), p. 246.
- 29 Robert England, The Central European Immigrant in Canada (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929).
- 30 Peter H. Bryce, The Value to Canada of the Continental Immigrant (Ottawa: n.p., 1928), p. 8.
- 31 Ibid., p. 12.
- 32 Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence and Report (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1928), pp. 363-64.
- 33 J.S. Dennis to David Toews, Feb. 8, 1929. CMBC.
- 34 Robert England, quoted in Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, p. 115.
- 35 Thielman, "Canadian Mennonites," p. 145.
- 36 Ibid., p. 143.
- 37 CAR, 1928-29, p. 26.
- 38 Debates, Feb. 11, 1929, p. 32.
- 39 Debates, Jan. 30, 1928, pp. 21-24.
- 40 Quoted in Debates, June 6, 1928, p. 3807.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 3807-10; Select Standing Committee, pp. x-xi.
- 42 CAR, 1927-28, p. 177.
- 43 CAR, 1928-29, p. 160.
- 44 CAR, 1929-30, p. 179.



- 45 B and B Report, Table A-1.
- 46 Gerald E. Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism? (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), pp. 41-42; CAR, 1930-31, p. 573.
- 47 CAR, 1929-30, p. 181.
- 48 Epp, Exodus, p. 282.
- 49 For a fuller treatment of this episode see Epp, Exodus, pp. 221-30.
- 50 Simon Belkin, Through Narrow Gates (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Colonization Association, 1966), p. 132.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 124-26.
- 52 "Aus Einem Privatbriefe von der Molotschna," Der Bote, V (May 2, 1928), p. 3.
- 53 Epp, Exodus, pp. 231-36.
- 54 A.H. Unruh to David Toews, Oct. 25, 1929 and Oct. 30, 1929; J.S. Dennfs to David Toews, Oct. 29, 1929. CMBC.
- 55 L. Kempff to F.C. Blair, Oct. 31, 1929 and Nov. 5, 1929; Fridjof Nansen to Robert Forke, Nov. 15, 1929; Forke to Nansen, Nov. 18, 1929. IB.
- 56 W.L. MacKenzie King Diaries, Nov. 5, 1929. PAC.
- 57 See the letters, etc. in file 58764, pt. 12 of the papers of the Immigration Branch. IB.
- 58 See the excerpt from The Regina Daily Post, Nov. 9, 1929 in ibid., and Debates, March 19, 1930, p. 766.
- 59 J.E. Brownlee to David Toews, Nov. 19, 1929. IB.
- 60 J.E. Brownlee to Robert Forke, Nov. 27, 1929. IB.
- 61 F.C. Blair to Robert Forke, Nov. 26, 1929. W.L.M. King Papers, PAC.
- 62 Belkin, Narrow Gates, p. 150. Cf. Interviews, #46, part II.
- 63 Belkin, Narrow Gates, p. 102.
- 64 Epp, Exodus, pp. 250-51.
- 65 Cited in Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, p. 119.

- 66 J.F. Brownlee to Robert Forke, Nov. 27, 1929. IB.
- 67 F.C. Blair to file, Feb. 18, 1930. IB.
- 68 T.D. Agnew to R.B. Bennett, Nov. 21, 1929. R.B. Bennett Papers, PAC.
- 69 See the reports in the Saskatoon Star Phoenix and the Prince Albert Daily Herald, Nov. 5, 1929 in the King Papers, PAC.
- 70 Brownlee to Forke, Nov. 27, 1929. IB.
- 71 B.B. Wiens to D.H. Epp, Nov. 15, 1929. ZMIK files, CMBC.
- 72 For an account of the Jewish refugee crisis see Irving Abella and Harold Troper, "The line must be drawn somewhere": Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-9," Canadian Historical Review, LX (June, 1979), pp. 178-209.
- 73 Michiel Horn, ed., The Dirty Thirties. Canadians in the Great Depression (Toronto: Capp Clark, 1972), p. 86.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 119-20.
- 75 Ibid., p. 10.
- 76 Ibid., p. 256; Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners,' pp. 112-15; Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, pp. 127-40.
- 77 Kenneth McNaught, "The 1930s" in Part One of The Canadians, 1867-1967, ed. J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (1967; rpt. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. 239.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Horn, Dirty Thirties, p. 12.
- 80 Ibid., p. 255.
- 81 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- 82 For an overview see McNaught, "The 1930s."
- 83 J.H. Janzen, "Ueber Nord-Ontario," Der Bote, VIII (April 15, 1931), p. 2.
- 84 Joseph Schull, Ontario Since 1867 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 263.

- 85 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Jan. 11, 1935. JHJ. Janzen believed that the Catholic clergy were behind this reluctance because they resented the presence of so many Protestants in a predominantly French-Canadian area of settlement.
- 86 Interview with Henry Klassen, Kingsville, Ontario, Aug. 3, 1980.
- 87 Ibid. The terms of settlement stipulated that the pulpwood was to be cut in stages over a period of several years so as to sustain the settlers until the land could be brought into agricultural production. Some cut their pulpwood in one year when the market was good, earned a healthy profit, then abandoned their homestead.
- 88 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Jan. 3, 1929. JHJ.
- 89 J.H. Enns, "Eine Tragoedie," Der Bote, XX (May 26, 1943), p. 2.
- 90 Paul Dick, "The Experience of Reesor, Ontario" (unpublished term paper, Conrad Grebel College, 1973). makes this suggestion.
- 91 Enns, "Reesor," p. 52...
- 92 Driedger, Leamington, pp. 39-44; Der Junge E[sser]. "Unsere Probleme," Der Bote, XI (April 11, 1934), pp. 2-3.
- 93 "Leamington, d. 15. Aug. 1930," Der Bote, VII (Aug. 127, 1930), p. 2.
- 94 Johann H. Janzen, "Ein Markstein im Gemeindeleben," Der Bote, XI (Dec. 12, 1934), p. 2.
- 95 Statistics of the United Mennonite Church in Essex County, Jan. 25, 1930 and Aug. 7, 1931. JHJ.
- 96 A.A. Toews, "Namaka, Alberta, am 12. Maerz '38," Der Bote, XV (March 23, 1938), p. 4. Cf. Eben-ezer. 25 Jahre Niagara Vereinigte Mennoniten Gemeinde (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.: Niagara United Mennonite Church, 1963), p. 4.
- 97 These statistics are based on reports submitted by the district representative to the delegates at the annual Vertreterversammlung. CMBC.
- 98 B.B. Wiens report to the Board of Colonization, Oct., 1937. CMBC.
- 99 B.B. Wiens report to ZMIK, July, 1931 and July, 1933. CMBC.
- 100 Quoted by Margot Fieguth, "Refugees of 50 years ago: Women recall arrival in Canada," Mennonite Reporter, 9 (Sept. 17, 1979), p. 9.

- 101 B.S. Wiens report to ZMIK in Der Bote, IV (Dec. 21, 1927), p. 6; "Die 4. Provinziale Vertreterversammlung," Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), p. 6.
- 102 Wiens, "Geschichte," (Aug. 9, 1933), p. 1.
- 103 Census, 1941, vol. II, Table 38.
- 104 J.H. Janzen, "Daheim und draussen," Der Bote, IX (Sept. 14, 1932), p. 2.
- 105 X, "Zwei Goldmācherkolonien," Der Bote, XII (July 31, 1935), p. 1.
- 106 "Familienverzeichnis der Vinelaender Gruppe im September, 1931." VA.
- 107 J.A. Dyck to David Toews, May 29, 1938. CMBC.
- 108 Provinziales Komitee files, June 14 and July 5, 1937. CMBC.
- 109 See n. 97.
- 110 B.S. Wiens, "Bericht ueber die Lage in Ontario....," Nachrichtentenblatt, I (July 1, 1935), p. 1.
- 111 Based on a report to the Vertreterversammlung, Nov., 1937. CMBC.
- 112 See n. 97.
- 113 Census, 1931, vol. II, Table 42.
- 114 Census, 1941, vol. II, Table 38.
- 115 Based on reports from the district representative. CMBC.
- 116 Adult membership stood at 144 in 1932 and 149 in 1940. See the statistical reports to the annual conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ontario in the published Minutes. MBBC.
- 117 Ibid. About 80 new adult members were accepted by transfer from another congregation during these three years.
- 118 See n. 97.
- 119 See n. 97.
- 120 In "Die 4. Provinziale Vertreterversammlung," p. 5.
- 121 Janzen, "Heimat, suesze Heimat," Der Bote, XIV (March 31, 1937), p. 1. Cf. "Voelkerwanderung," Der Bote, XIII (Oct. 14, 1936); p. 2.

- 122 Ibid.
- 123 "Ueber die Siedlungsfrage in Essex County, Ontario," Der Bote, VI (April 3, 1929), p. 1.
- 124 Census, 1931, vol. I, Table 43.
- 125 Ibid., Table 44.
- 126 Census, 1941, vol. II, Tables 36 and 37.
- 127 Driedger and Kauffman, "Urbanization," p. 281...
- 128 See Urry's observations in "Wealth and the Mennonite Experience," pp. 18, 22 and Rempel, "Commonwealth," pp. 87-88.
- 129 K[rahn], "Chortitza," p. 573.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 D[ietrich] E[pp], "Ekaterinoslav," ME, II, p. 174.
- 132 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Molotschna," ME, III, pp. 732-36; "Halbstadt," ME, II, 632.
- 133 C[ornelius] K[rahn], "Berdyansk," ME, I, p. 276.
- 134 A. Wiens, "Nord-Ontario," Der Bote, IV (March 9, 1927), p. 2.

## Chapter V

### Community Survival and Institution Building, 1929-39

By the onset of the Depression the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario had initiated a substantial institutional effort to combat the "Zerstreuung und Zerissenheit" (dispersion and disunity) which increasingly characterized, and demoralized, them in their resettlement efforts. In the absence of the internal and external constraints which had served to unite the Mennonites in their former homeland, while at the same time separating them from the surrounding society, they were now compelled to erect new boundaries and create new avenues of interaction. To recall Reitz's discussion of group cohesion, both the instrumental and the expressive bases of ethnic solidarity required attention if the Russian Mennonites were to survive as a separate ethnoreligious group in Ontario.

Both internal and external factors complicated that endeavour. Internally, the immigrant community was becoming increasingly characterized by denominational distinctions and differences. These eventually divided all of the far-flung settlements into separate congregations. Those distances themselves weakened even further the fragile bonds of community and undermined the authority of church leaders residing in Kitchener-Waterloo. In an attempt to overcome these barriers, leaders like Bishop Jacob H. Janzen organized a provincial Sunday school teacher's conference as well as a province-

wide minister's conference (Predigerkonferenz). Initially, both UM's and MB's participated in these leadership training events. B.B. Wiens led a similar development on the lay level in the form of the Vertreterversammlung. This organization took major responsibility for cultural and economic concerns. For a time this endeavour enjoyed a higher level of support and participation than did some church-oriented programs, an indication that socio-economic factors were as significant among the Russian Mennonites as in any other immigrant group. One correspondent observed that some of the Mennonites were prepared to sacrifice their "peculiarities" (Sonderstellung) for the sake of economic gain and social acceptability.<sup>1</sup>

That conflict, and challenge, was greater, of course, for Mennonites in Canada than it had been in Russia. The open society here permitted a degree of interaction, and necessitated a level of integration, not possible or permissible in the Old Country. As immigrants at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, moreover, the Russian Mennonites experienced the attractions of a surrounding lifestyle generally superior to their own. The lack of geographic boundaries and the freedom of mobility rendered them more susceptible to these materialistic impulses than had generally been the case in their former homeland. These same factors made acceptance into the predominant culture and the acquisition of the English language not only attractive but even imperative. Without the community context and consensus of the Russian 'commonwealth' to inculcate and preserve a ~~common~~ identity, the Mennonites increasingly relied on their

educational programs, in church and at school, to perform that task of socialization and separation. Rudy A. Regehr, in reviewing "A Century of Private Schools" among Canadian Mennonites, notes that the immigrants

knew immediately that the Canadian educational system was designed to assimilate them into the mainstream of this new society. They knew also that their identity as a people depended in large part on how successfully they would transmit their<sup>2</sup> religious and cultural heritage to their children.

In the words of Bishop J.H. Janzen, "If we want to preserve our Eigenart, then we must also maintain the religious instruction which has made us into what we are."<sup>3</sup> Janzen warned his people about the dangerous secular influences he perceived in the public school system. "Don't you realize," he argued,

that the advancing culture is dangerous because it is anti-Christian and that it cannot be countered with ignorance on the part of the faithful?...[W]e overlook the fact that we will become meaningless [as a people] if we abandon our schools and hand our maturing ones over to<sup>4</sup> be educated in indifferent or irreligious schools.

In contrast to their stubborn resistance to the Tsarist program of Russification and the more recent Soviet policy of indoctrination, the new arrivals seemed intent on adapting as quickly as possible to their new host society and "becoming English, no matter what the cost."<sup>5</sup>



The former Chortitza (Old Colony) residents who settled among the Kanadier in western Canada in 1923 no less than the predominantly Molotschnaer group relocating in Ontario in 1924 "endeavour[ed] to learn the language of [their] new home."<sup>6</sup> One contributor to Der Bote in 1927 sharply, if somewhat naively, rejected the notion that the Russian Mennonites were becoming susceptible to rapid assimilation while at the same time conceding, with a tinge of self-pride, that "There is hardly a group of immigrants as concerned to learn English as the Mennonites."<sup>7</sup> Bishop Jacob H. Janzen told the Toronto Star in 1929 that the Russian Mennonites "want to learn English and become assimilated with the rest of the people."<sup>8</sup>

Few of the Russian Mennonite immigrants, at least at the outset, therefore, resisted what they quite accurately perceived as a prevailing demand for Anglo-conformity. Bishop J.H. Janzen himself embodied this contradiction, seeking both integration and separation. On the one hand, he boasted that he had "taught himself the English language and adopted Canadian customs..."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in commenting on remarks about "unwelcome settlers" made by C.P.R. President Edward Beatty in Kitchener in January, 1929, he warned his fellow immigrants that

These words...indicate clearly what the efforts of Canadian domestic policy amount to, namely, to melt the various nations<sub>10</sub> in Canada into one, to make them all Canadians.

He urged diligence and sacrifice to preserve the Mennonite Eigenart in the face of this external threat.

The ill-fated settlement at Reesor represents the only significant attempt to withdraw from assimilationist pressures in Ontario, although economic factors also attracted settlers to this region. The transience of residents here, however, suggests a low commitment to that cultural ideal. One such temporary homesteader rejected the Reesor experiment altogether. "If we isolate ourselves," he argued in Der Bote, "we will only lose what we have and gain nothing.... It is, of course, our first obligation to conform to the American situation, to adapt ourselves to the customs and habits of [our] new home...."<sup>11</sup> Good citizenship, whether out of gratitude or for economic gain, seemed to have become paramount to cultural survival. A certain accommodation and integration ensued as the immigrants concluded that "we must find the path to English culture."<sup>12</sup>

Economic gain, indeed, economic necessity compelled the Russian Mennonites toward this accommodation. Some facility in the English language remained a prerequisite for most non-farm employment. Without it, one immigrant explained, he remained illiterate and unable to communicate, and, consequently, unemployed.<sup>13</sup> "The acquisition [of the English language] brings material advantages to us," B.B. Wiens confessed.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, J.H. Janzen noted that the newcomers were "eagerly bent on mastering the English [language]...."<sup>15</sup> In the cities they took advantage of existing programs of language instruction while residents in rural areas like Leamington, Kingsville, Pelee Island, and Vineland organized similar evening classes for themselves. "Regardless of who is better or worse," Bishop J.H. Janzen conceded,

"we are tied economically to the people of this country and must, if we want to prove ourselves equal to them, master their tongue at least as well or better than they."<sup>16</sup> These simple facts of life in Ontario - the dispersion among its English-speaking residents, the inevitable socio-economic contact, and the prospect of rejection in an increasingly competitive labour market - compelled the Russian Mennonites to abandon, somewhat uncharacteristically, their cultural and linguistic insularity.

Like most immigrants to North America, the Russian Mennonites, it seems, anticipated a favourable exchange for this accommodation. They evidently accepted what Victor Greene depicts as "the widespread myth and firm conviction [among immigrants], that American success required assimilation, too. 'Making it,' that is, achievement, here was tantamount to Americanization."<sup>17</sup> The American ideal, J.H. Janzen observed, was the "self-made man."<sup>18</sup> By 'making it' in their new homeland, moreover, the Mennonites hoped first to accumulate the resources, acquire the education, and achieve the acceptance which, in turn, would enable them to preserve their "intellectual, cultural-national-confessional inheritance."<sup>19</sup> "[I]t should not be overlooked," the newcomers were reminded,

that our holiest Gueter [qualities] were best preserved and flourished there, where a solid material basis existed... Cultural development and material prosperity are closely bound up with each other, they interlock, as it were, one depends on the other....<sup>20</sup>

Bishop J.H. Janzen was among those recognizing in time, however, that this accommodation seriously threatened the Russian Mennonite Eigenart. "We thereby fall prey to the schools, intermarriage and other things which we fear," he observed, "and there is no use kicking about it."<sup>21</sup> Janzen feared that the entire "sacred canopy" could collapse in the process. Grasping for another stake traditionally used to support that "canopy" to prevent this integration, Janzen urged a geographic separation. "Our people must leave the cities if they are not to be lost in them," Janzen opined, adding, "We must make haste...."<sup>22</sup> Quoting the Russian Mennonite historian, P.M. Friesen, Janzen wrote that

We Mennonites are Heckenmenschen [people who live within hedges]. As long as we live together in closed company, as if it were a hedge, we can endure. But as soon as we are to grow like an<sup>23</sup> individual tree torn out of that fellowship, we perish.

The closed colonies in Russia, he continued, testified to the perfection of that principle of restriction and limitation. Those who dared to "stick their nose out of the Mennonite hedge somewhat" soon recognized, however, that other nationalities merited more than the designation "only." Most of these then turned their backs on their Mennonite identity, although many eventually returned. The Mennonites in Russia thought too highly of themselves, Janzen concluded. "We should have regarded ourselves more as a modest part of mankind and not as the quintessence thereof."<sup>24</sup>

In Canada, however, these boundaries could not be as easily drawn, when they could be drawn at all. Geographic separation had proven, if not impossible, then at least impractical and undesirable in Ontario. Leaders like J.H. Janzen and B.B. Wiens would need to present a more attractive alternative. Cultural separation seemed similarly unrealistic. Bishop J.H. Janzen noted that the surrounding culture here was "at least equal to our own" and, indirectly acknowledging its attractiveness, added, "we drown all too easily in it."<sup>25</sup> Obvious and remaining differences, moreover, were often experienced or perceived as obstacles to be overcome rather than as protective barriers.<sup>26</sup> The Mennonite immigrants experienced the dilemma sociologist John Porter has noted among other groups, namely that

The more a minority group turns in upon itself and concentrates on making its position strong, the more it costs its members in terms of their chances to make their way as individuals in the larger system.<sup>27</sup>

By a fateful reversal of fortunes, the Russian Mennonites now experienced a sense of cultural inferiority similar to that experienced by many other groups in Canada.<sup>28</sup> The anxious pursuit of the English language already noted demonstrates that in part, as does the speedy renunciation of their "Russian" and "refugee" identities. Still, as J.H. Janzen observed, the transformation of one's "nationality" was not a sudden but a very gradual process, indeed a process of several generations' duration.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he considered it a retrogressive step. B.B. Wiens concurred, indicating that mastery of the English language did not qualify one as a genuine Englishman. Instead, he

warned, "we only sink down to [become] pitiful caricatures [of our true selves]." <sup>30</sup> In observing the immigrants in his capacity as Reiseprediger, Bishop J.H. Janzen observed, nonetheless, that "interest for das Deutschtum is dying... Where have we failed?" he asked. <sup>31</sup>

Within five years, once the early enthusiasm for acceptance and integration had receded, many Russian Mennonites were beginning to ask that very question. An anonymous contributor to Der Bote in 1929 focused the dilemma most succinctly. "How then can we get to the point of prospering and also cultivating our interests and preserving our Eigenart?" he demanded, betraying a hint of desperation. <sup>32</sup> The Russian Mennonites needed a new strategy if they were to survive as a separate people.

Frank Epp notes that with the disappearance of the geographic and cultural boundaries which had defined and preserved Mennonite identity in Russia, the immigrants attempted to erect a linguistic barrier in Canada by preserving the German language. <sup>33</sup> On this point the newcomers, at least the older ones, appeared to agree. "[I]f we lose our mother tongue, then the Mennonite Eigenart will go as well... Therefore," B.B. Wiens advocated, "use every means at your disposal and try to preserve das Deutschtum in the children." <sup>34</sup> Numerous contributors to Der Bote in the late 1920s and early 1930s made a similar appeal. The German language, these writers maintained, was the most important ingredient in that Germanism. By retaining the language, therefore, they believed that "our future generations would be preserved from completely blending with the indigenous society, and

our voelkische Eigenart [unique characteristics as a people] would also be assured a future [existence]."<sup>35</sup>

More than a language was at stake here, however. It should be recalled that "Deutsch und Religion [German and Religion] became twin educational concepts in the Russian Mennonite mind."<sup>36</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen could quite accurately assert, therefore, that what distinguished the Russian Mennonites was "our eigenartigen religious ways and our eigenartigen culture."<sup>37</sup> Frank Epp observes that

For hundreds of years the German language had been the religious language of the Mennonite people and for this reason their spiritual growth was intimately tied up with the nurture of the German language. Loss of the language would mean a substantial loss of the Christian spirit.<sup>38</sup>

It was inconceivable to these immigrants, therefore, that the one could be preserved without the other. Their faith, they believed, could only be adequately expressed in the German language. A correspondent from Manitoba reported the concern of Mennonite school teachers there for the preservation of Deutsch und Religion. Underlining the dependence of the latter on the former, he warned, "We Mennonites in Canada stand in grave danger of losing the faith of our fathers."<sup>39</sup> In the words of N.N. Driedger, who was ordained bishop of the Leamington Church in 1933,

The preservation of the German language in Mennonite circles also belongs to the things of the kingdom of God. It is our duty to postpone as much as possible the transition from German to English since a too rapid abandonment of the German language in our families and churches would also be related to a comparatively greater loss in the spiritual qualities of our people.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, this issue ranked high on the agenda of congregations, conferences, and the Vertreterversammlung. B.B. Wiens convened the first Provinziale Vertreterversammlung in Ontario in February, 1929. One of the resolutions emerging from that delegate meeting read as follows:

[We] hold it to be absolutely necessary that the German language be maintained for us and our children because it contributes vitally to the preservation and strengthening of our voelkischen Eigenart. Schools for Religion und Deutsch, which exist in many places, albeit with considerable difficulties, are to be continued or such schools are to be established where they do not exist. As long as there are no regular schools for these subjects the major burden of the task of preserving the German language lies with the family.<sup>41</sup>

Some groups had already attempted such a program, though with little success. Both the Brethren and the United Mennonites in Kitchener-Waterloo organized a Saturday school in 1926 but lack of support forced the abandonment of the effort the following year.<sup>42</sup> In 1929, when the Vertreterversammlung made its recommendation, only the small enclaves of Pelee Island and Port Rowan were still operating a Saturday German school.<sup>43</sup> Even the admonition and encouragement of that immigrant body produced few results, however.

One of the main reasons for the weakness of this language-instruction program, ironically, was the strength of the religious program. The success of the regular German Sunday school program for children and young people led many immigrants to perceive it as an adequate substitute for the Saturday school, particularly since it involved no cost to them. B.B. Wiens noted the widespread assumption



that "The Sunday schools, which exist in all groups, are supposed to replace everything."<sup>44</sup> Instead of the language serving to preserve the faith, therefore, by default, the inverse had become true. By 1932 Wiens could report that, in terms of seeking to prevent the loss of the German language, "The Sunday school is seriously concerned to shove a dam before the calamity breaking in upon us."<sup>45</sup> He noted with alarm, however, some young people were already requesting English-language Sunday school. In many cases the same teachers volunteered their time for both the Saturday and the Sunday School programs. Consequently, the annual Sunday school teachers' conference became increasingly preoccupied with German-language education, an item which regularly appeared on its agenda. One participant in the 1936 meeting expressed dismay over the existing situation.

The absence and non-attendance of students on Saturdays demonstrates a great lack of discipline which absolutely must be combatted. The influence of the outside world on our children must be counteracted everywhere inasmuch as it is precisely due to these circumstances that the teacher cannot find his way into the <sup>46</sup>world of ideas [Gedankenwelt] of the children.

The gathering therefore elected a committee charged with initiating the development of a German Saturday school curriculum. A graded German Sunday school curriculum had been commissioned by the United Mennonites in 1929 in order to ensure not only the teaching of Mennonite faith and history but also the continued use of the German language in that setting.<sup>47</sup>

After 1936, under the guidance of an elected committee, the Saturday school program grew steadily stronger. In the process, its close association with the Sunday school was broken. Although the local congregation remained the context for instruction, and provided the students and teachers, it was no longer an extension of the church program. At the same time, the Saturday school received increasing support from non-Mennonite sources interested, for other reasons, in the perpetuation of the German language. Despite being interrupted from 1939 to 1945 due to wartime suspicion of all things German, the schools, some of which were now held on Friday evenings, reemerged as a significant factor in preserving the German language and culture after the war. A wave of postwar immigrants added new vigour to this program, which in many instances outlasted the use of German in the Sunday school.

Both the Saturday and Sunday school programs were, however, directed primarily at the public school age children. The absence of effective programs which would appeal to a somewhat older group, those of high school age and beyond, troubled both parents and church leaders. This age group was particularly susceptible to the allurements of the "world" and stood in the greatest danger of forsaking both the German language and culture as well as the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. As early as 1930, participants at the annual Sunday school teachers' convention took note of the preference of some young adults for the English language.<sup>48</sup> The question of how to appeal to these young Mennonites in such a way that both language and faith could be preserved

preoccupied both the UM Predigerkonferenz and the MB provincial conference throughout the thirties. "Keeping the young people and preserving the culture," Frank Epp has noted, "...were in constant tension with each other...."<sup>49</sup> Without the benefit of their own schools, without the cohesion and constraints provided by separated communities, and in the face of the availability and attraction of "worldly" entertainment, church leaders looked for more exciting and relevant methods of passing on the Mennonite Eigenart.

The model they adopted, like the Sunday school, originated among other Protestant denominations. The Jugendverein, or young people's association, became an integral part of the church program in almost every congregation. These weekly Sunday evening meetings were intended to provide a forum for religious instruction, an opportunity for cultural expression, as well as the occasion for recreation and fellowship. A report from Essex County indicates that the program consisted of singing one week, a religious theme the next, Mennonite history, and an open discussion on a rotating cycle.<sup>50</sup> A Leamington resident wrote after participating in an outing with the local Jugendverein,

In my opinion we should have more such get togethers. Maybe we could keep the youth together more in that way and <sup>51</sup>prevent them from becoming mixed with other nations.

Like other programs, the Jugendvereine experienced a constant ebb and flow in participation. During the Depression in particular, attendance fell and a number of youth groups were dissolved. Church

leaders, taking note of this development, became increasingly concerned. In 1933 and 1934 the ministers of both the Mennonite Brethren and the United Mennonites discussed how they might relate more effectively to their young people.<sup>52</sup> In 1934, delegates to the Mennonite Brethren conference heard a paper suggesting how the young people might be more effectively drawn into the work of the church. In 1935 this body resolved to hold a provincial youth conference in order to nurture both spiritual growth and group cohesiveness. A year later delegates agreed that even stronger Conference initiative was imperative and moved to appoint B.B. Boldt of Kitchener as a part-time youth worker for the Conference. Reports on this work and a discussion of issues related to it subsequently appeared on the agenda annually.<sup>53</sup>

Similar concerns continued to engage the attention of the United Mennonites. In 1934, Herman Lepp, minister at Reesor, proposed the establishment of a provincial association of young men and women "for the nurture of Christianity and Germanism among our Mennonite youth."<sup>54</sup> For a decade this concept of a broader organization remained unrealized while local groups focused their energies on the Jugendvereine. In time, however, even these groups developed a character and program of their own which, at some points, diverged from the expectations of parents and church leaders. In 1941, for instance, members of the Waterloo-Kitchener UM congregation officially requested that their Jugendverein develop a closer relationship with the church and a more spiritual program, a concern expressed by the provincial Predigerkonferenz about all groups some years earlier.<sup>55</sup> This move to

exert considerable influence and even control over the Jugendvereine reflected the genuine and deep-seated concern of the immigrant generation for the future of their children, their churches and, ultimately, their people. "If we want to give up our most cherished possessions one after the other," wrote one immigrant, "then we are soon no longer Mennonites."<sup>56</sup> Since the United Mennonites had no provincial conference body, the Predigerkonferenz served as the forum for sharing about and acting on mutual concerns. At two separate meetings in 1938, for example, this gathering spent considerable time sharing concerns about the alarming disinterest in the church perceived among the young people. The ministers and deacons agreed in November, 1938 that German language instruction and spiritual nurture should receive top priority in their efforts. They also agreed to encourage their young people to attend Mennonite Bible schools in western Canada as another means of strengthening them in the fundamentals of the Mennonite faith.<sup>57</sup>

In those areas in which the efforts of the home and the church seemed insufficient to preserve and perpetuate the faith, the Russian Mennonites looked again to their church-related institutions

to preserve the 'essentials' [of religion and culture] and to serve as a counterforce to<sup>58</sup> the cultural onslaughts from the world outside.

In the 1930s and 40s the Bible school movement played a major role in this strategy for survival as a separate people. In addition, and equally critical in the long term, was the training of a new generation

of church leaders, both clerical and lay, which these schools provided. As early as 1929, after the Mennonite Brethren had established several Bible schools in the West, B.B. Wiens demanded of Bishop David Toews, "and why shouldn't we also have one?"<sup>59</sup>

Although this wish remained unfulfilled for some time, Ontario residents gradually developed an informal, congregationally-based evening Bible school program. Courses were conducted during the winter months in a number of the larger churches of both denominations. In 1936 Rev. J.J. Wichert organized a course of study in Vineburg which attracted an average of 30 students a year for several years.<sup>60</sup> In the same year Henry Janzen from Kitchener went to Leamington to upgrade the Bible school curriculum offered by the United Mennonite Church here.<sup>61</sup> The Mennonite Brethren in Leamington, meanwhile, offered their own limited program of Bible instruction for young people.<sup>62</sup> Similar courses were offered in Kitchener and Waterloo for a time.<sup>63</sup> In Virgil the MB's introduced a more extensive program of study in co-operation with the Winkler, Manitoba Bible school in 1938.<sup>64</sup>

While the curriculum varied according to local interest and the qualifications of teachers, courses focused on Bible and theology, church history, homiletics, and music, all conducted in the German language, of course.<sup>65</sup> The main purpose of these schools was to inculcate the religious heritage and spiritual values among the young people. For some whose education had been interrupted by emigration from Russia or cut short by financial considerations in Canada, this program also provided a most welcome opportunity to return to school.

As well as providing the possibility for further education, these schools were "small enough, safe enough, short enough in duration, and flexible enough in terms of entrance requirements to be rather desirable as well as affordable."<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately for the increasing number of students, concern for wartime anti-German sentiment in 1939 forced the temporary closure of the schools. Still, the experiment had underscored the need for a comprehensive educational program, a concern which would give birth to several permanent institutions some years later.

In the meantime, an increasing number of Russian Mennonite children were attending high school. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, for instance, nine of fifty students who passed their high school entrance exams in 1939 were Mennonite offspring, including six of thirteen who passed with honours.<sup>67</sup> Many parents, however, remained suspicious of the public schools. In them, J.J. Wichert maintained, the mindset of the youth was being formed by teachers "to whom our Eigenart is totally foreign." Precisely when they should be led into closer association with their community of faith, he continued,

Their view of life and the world is being shaped by the norms which prevail in the school and among their fellow students instead. Naturally, these are very different from the norms which are held in the home.<sup>68</sup>

One of these "worldly" values to which the Mennonites objected was the cadet training program offered in grades 10-12.<sup>69</sup>

In an effort to provide an alternative, the United Mennonites reached an agreement with an existing private Christian school whereby

their students could receive special instruction. The Brethren in Christ churches in Ontario, a splinter from the Swiss Mennonites, operated their own institution, the Fort Erie High School and Bible School. In addition to the academic subjects and the religious instruction already provided, Russian Mennonite students were taught church history and German by a teacher appointed by their churches. Rev. J.J. Wichert of Vineland was chosen to fill that role.<sup>70</sup>

Response from the immigrant community, by now better able to afford this option, was substantial. In the first year, beginning in September, 1943, 40 Russian Mennonite students, both UM's and MB's, registered at Fort Erie. A year later that number more than doubled to 95, a clear indication of the growing interest in both a high school and a Mennonite education.<sup>71</sup> Both denominations were quick to respond to this opportunity.

Wartime anti-German sentiment could not long dampen the growing Russian Mennonite zeal for the Bible school programs. The Virgil MB Church reestablished its evening program in 1940 after a year's absence. Other MB churches followed suit. The Niagara UM congregation, which had suffered the malicious wrath of Nazi-hunting vandals in early 1939, resolved to reopen its evening Bible school in the winter of 1940.<sup>72</sup> In describing the closing program at the end of the 2 1/2 month course of study, Bote correspondent B. Toews expressed the concern underlying this work.

Since religion is not taught in the schools in this country, these Bible schools are a most valuable arrangement [for] imparting to our young people the knowledge in Bible, church history and religion



essential for life, and we should come increasingly to recognize that <sup>73</sup>this is an extremely important branch of church work.

While the focus of the courses was on the religious faith and heritage of the Mennonites, however, the instruction in, and in some cases the instruction of, the German language rendered these schools equally vital for the maintenance of the language and the cultural values it represented and conveyed.

Literature distribution became another method of propagating German culture. According to Bishop J.H. Janzen, "The preservation of our Eigenart is unthinkable without the furtherance of our own literature ...."<sup>74</sup> The ZMIK established libraries in most of the congregations throughout Ontario. These were stocked with used books received from American Mennonites or with new ones ordered directly from publishers in Germany. One such shipment from Germany in 1938 included 41 titles "an die volksdeutsche Jugend" (for German youths abroad).<sup>75</sup> German-language periodicals like Der Bote and Die Mennonitische Rundschau likewise served as media for the dissemination of culture. The former carried a children's feature designed to foster interest in the German language. Bishop Janzen, who edited this section in 1937, characterized the cultural conflict experienced by the young people as a battle between German religious stories and the English "funnies".<sup>76</sup> Other events in the congregations, and sometimes the Conferences, which had cultural overtones included Saengerfeste (music festivals), dramatic presentations, and literary evenings. For

example, the Waterloo group for a time sponsored a weekly "Fritz Reuter-Abend" in order to foster interest in German literature.<sup>77</sup>

None of these programs could, however, effectively counteract the threat of verenglischung (anglicization) to which the immigrants had exposed themselves and, to a much greater degree, their children. The public schools led the process of acculturation, a fact which the immigrants recognized well enough but remained too scattered and too organizationally and financially weak to combat by establishing their own schools. In view of the absence of their own educational system and the weakness of congregationally-based programs of cultural activities, the Russian Mennonites in Ontario looked increasingly to the home as the last bastion against the encroachment of the Anglo-Canadian "world".<sup>78</sup> Delegates to the annual sessions of the General Conference of Mennonites in Canada, to which the United Mennonite churches belonged, agreed in 1933 that all Mennonite families should "in all seriousness see to it that the language of everyday conversation in [their] homes remain German."<sup>79</sup>

That was a difficult task, however, particularly for those with Canadian-born children whose exposure to the English language often matched or exceeded that of the German. As a result, by the mid-thirties they began to prefer English or to speak an imperfect German. While acceptable in most homes, this frustrated those Russian Mennonites intent on keeping the language pure. "Don't you know your mother?" one writer in Der Bote demanded, referring to the mother tongue.<sup>80</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen warned, however, that "if we present

the English language to our children as a foe of the German, which they must avoid, then the English will not lose their respect but we and the German will...."<sup>21</sup> That, indeed, was the case in the Saturday schools where those students making mistakes sometimes quit rather than endure the embarrassment.<sup>82</sup> Almost imperceptibly, yet relentlessly, therefore, the forces of verenglischung continued to penetrate the hastily constructed linguistic boundary. The impact of these programs was minimal, however, because of the pervasiveness of Anglo-Canadian influence, the limited resources of the immigrants, and the uneven participation of Mennonite young people. Indeed, many of these did not perceive their cultural distinctives as a valuable heritage to be protected but rather as a liability to be overcome in order to be accepted, and to succeed, in the New World.

## II

That struggle against the erosion of their ethnoreligious heritage and the encroachment of the "world" was made more difficult by the internal differences and divisions which increasingly marked the Russian Mennonite community in Ontario. On one level, it is true that the common threat to a shared cultural identity drew the larger Mennonite community closer together. The cooperation of all Russian Mennonites in national, provincial and local organizations such as the ZMIK and the Vertreterversammlung has already been noted. The preservation of the German language and culture ranked high among the priorities of these bodies. It also became increasingly evident in the

late 1920s that the Kanadier in western Canada shared this concern with the newcomers. H.H. Ewert, editor of the official organ of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, Der Mitarbeiter, editorialized in very strong terms, and from the perspective of the Kanadier, against "the uncontrolled drive to adapt [Anpassungstrieb] [which] is nothing else than a craving to be equal with the world."<sup>83</sup> Among the cultural and religious values he believed were being compromised, Ewert noted particularly the diminishing use of the German language.

The Canadian Conference, in which some of the Kanadier and the Russlaender participated together, agreed on the urgency of German language instruction. In 1933 delegates heard a stern reminder of its importance from a prominent bishop in a presentation entitled "German and Religion in family, school, and congregation."<sup>84</sup> They authorized the preparation of a uniform Sunday School curriculum intended to teach both a faith and a language, a project earlier abandoned by the United Mennonites in Ontario.<sup>85</sup> On the question of preserving the German language, and on an ideological level, therefore, the Russlaender and Kanadier were able to cross historical and denominational barriers in an effort to defend a shared cultural heritage.

But translating those good intentions into specific programs and actual cooperation proved difficult at best. On the provincial and local level, those historical and denominational differences grew in significance over time. As the immigrants became better established, an increasing individualism marked both their personal and congregational

lives. Ironically, ~~therefore~~, the decade of the thirties saw the development of two countervailing trends, one toward unity, cooperation, and mutual aid, the other toward division and independence. The United Mennonites experienced, and reflected, this conflict most dramatically.

On October 26, 1929, even as the fateful crash of stock markets began to echo across the continent, Bishop J.H. Janzen convened a meeting of representatives of the United Mennonite Churches with the intention of creating a formal organization. The purpose of the gathering, he explained, was to establish a provincial structure which would provide for "the nurture of the church, its healthy development, its vigorous growth, its convalescence, and its security in the land of the evil one."<sup>86</sup> Little was accomplished, however, to bring the widely-separated congregations into closer cooperation. The immigrants were not convinced of the need for, or desirability of, joint action. A second conference, held in Leamington on October 25, 1930, proved even more ominous. The Reesor congregation, which had suffered a formal division earlier that year, remained unrepresented once again. Part of the reason for this split was the objection of a conservative minority, led by Rev. Cornelius Penner, to the acceptance into membership of non-Mennonites baptized as infants without requiring their rebaptism as adults. Both his group and the larger one led by Rev. Herman Lepp resented the inaction of the fledgling Conference on this matter.<sup>87</sup> Each apparently looked to that body for official support and recognition of its position and for an authoritative voice to restore unity and impose unanimity. But such authoritative action was not possible in this context.

The ambivalence of the Conference on this question demonstrated the inherent weakness of its policy. As a constituent body, it was authorized to discuss and act upon issues affecting the entire membership. In order to preserve the independence of its constituent groups, however, it had not been given the authority to enforce its policies or decisions. The self-contradictory resolution on Conference authority and congregational autonomy adopted in October, 1930 reflected this weakness and foreshadowed the disintegration of this form of provincial cooperation. The resolution declared that

Questions of principle may be debated beforehand but not decided upon by the membership of the churches. The Conference adopts the resolutions, which may then be accepted as binding by the churches, or rejected.<sup>88</sup>

Of the 31 eligible votes, 13 from Essex and 18 from Waterloo, only 19 were cast in favour of this motion, evidence of the deep division within the Conference. The decision to suspend regular meetings, in light of financial difficulties, in favour of special sessions only when conditions warranted undermined the proposed cooperative effort further still.

Records indicate that precisely such an emergency conference convened on January 31, 1932. Only the text of Bishop Janzen's opening address has been uncovered, however. In it, he urged the United Mennonites once again to make greater material sacrifices in order to realize the growth and permanence of their cooperative efforts.<sup>89</sup> To that end, the delegates moved to formalize the existence of their Conference. Letters Patent, recorded on May 2, 1932, officially

incorporated it as the representative body of the three United Mennonite Churches in Ontario. The constitution recorded its development and purposes as follows:

WHEREAS through the blessing of God the work of the Church in Ontario has prospered and extended in a number of directions, and, WHEREAS there is a need of unifying these varied activities, and of a closer cooperation and more systematic regulation of the work of the Church...the following<sup>90</sup> organization has been affected....

Affirming its solidarity with other Mennonite groups and organizations, moreover, the constitution pronounced the intention of its constituents to

unify and extend all the interests of the churches ...in Ontario...in close connection with the General Conference of the Mennonite Church in North America and with the "Conference<sup>91</sup> of the Mennonites of Central Canada"....

This first legally constituted Conference of the United Mennonite Churches in Ontario emerged still-born, however. Only H.P. Lepp's group from the Reesor United Mennonite Church joined the Waterloo United Mennonite Church on August 1, 1932 for the first and only meeting held under the official charter.<sup>92</sup> Cornelius Penner's group in northern Ontario boycotted the gathering to demonstrate its dissatisfaction with lack of Conference recognition. The Essex County United Mennonite Church, still unincorporated and leaderless, failed even to respond to Bishop Janzen's invitation. Its absence deprived the organization of one half of its membership and much of its credibility. It was a blow the Conference could not survive.

A number of factors contributed to the recalcitrance of this group. Misgivings about possible financial commitments persisted, a legacy of the earlier suspicion that Essex County had not received its fair share of the benevolent fund, heightened by Waterloo's purchase of a church building for which some in Essex County believed the entire Conference would be held liable.<sup>93</sup> The Essex County United Mennonite church building, meanwhile, remained uncompleted. One member maintained that "Leamington was always the one that had to give to others."<sup>94</sup> That Waterloo had always been and remained the administrative centre despite the preeminence of Essex in size intensified this resentment. Because this congregation still remained without the strong leadership needed to unify it and coordinate its program, it also lacked the leadership required to propel it into prominence and active participation at the provincial level. Nonetheless, the settlement soon developed its own character and identity, one clearly distinct from Waterloo, Vineland, or Reesor. To outsiders, "the biggest difference was with Leamington ... They had their own idea about things. They were... the most conservative...."<sup>95</sup> Without their participation, however, the United Mennonite Conference collapsed.

In January, 1934 Bishop Janzen requested the dissolution of this body. He explained that

the supposed cooperation of the Conference Churches along material and financial lines failed to materialize in [sic] account of the great distance by which these churches are separated from one another, and because of the same, THE ESSEX COUNTY UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH which first consented to incorporation of the Conference, later withdrew, preferring to settle her material and financial affairs by a Board of Trustees, without being incorporated.<sup>96</sup>



It would be a full decade - once the war-induced prosperity had dispelled the gloom of the Depression, when the immigrants had become more "sesshaft" (settled) and some of the smaller groups had grown and gained their independence, and with wartime conditions posing an immediate threat to the Mennonite Eigenart - before another, more permanent, union of United Mennonites could be realized.

The orderly development and strong unifying influence of the Mennonite Brethren Conference stands in sharp contrast to the UM struggle. Their smaller numbers and the greater threat of absorption may have contributed to this dependence on and loyalty to the provincial organization and its leadership. Although internal disagreements, and even division, did occur, the MB traditions of separation not only from the "world" but also from other Mennonite groups, together with a greater reliance on and submission to church leaders, became evident in the growth and function of the provincial conference.<sup>97</sup>

These differences in emphasis and polity were apparent from the outset. Participants in a brotherhood meeting (Bryderberatung) of the Kitchener MB Church in January 1931 called for an inspirational meeting of Mennonite Brethren province wide.<sup>98</sup> This motivating concern was significantly different from the predominantly material and financial considerations which had prompted the attempts at cooperation by the United Mennonites. A year later the MB's defined the purpose of their conference more specifically. It was intended, they agreed, to unite individual congregations and thereby to strengthen and unify the membership in order that the work and witness of the churches might be

more effective.<sup>99</sup> The emergence of this conference also had another effect. It hastened the separation of the Brethren from the United Mennonites in such areas as Leamington, Vineland, and Port Rowan where this had been impractical or unnecessary heretofore. Unity and division, therefore, went hand in hand, and provincial cooperation led to wider denominational affiliation.

Just as Bishop J.H. Janzen's devotion to Mennonite unity prompted him to lead the United Mennonites into immediate affiliation with the Canadian and North American Conferences, Bishop H.H. Janzen's missionary interests motivated the eventual application of the Mennonite Brethren for membership in the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in the U.S. This body welcomed Ontario Conference participation in its overseas mission program. It refused to accept that group into full membership, however, because the Ontario policy of admitting persons not baptized by immersion into full membership and the practice of open communion, that is, celebrating the Lord's Supper with such persons, conflicted with its own guidelines.<sup>100</sup> This decision left the Ontario Conference in an awkward position. Acceptance of General Conference policy meant repudiation of its own, placing the status of some of its members in doubt. Delegates chose, for a time, an unsatisfactory Conference relationship in order to preserve unity in their provincial fellowships.

This compromise was not satisfactory for long, however. Between 1937 and 1939, the influx into Ontario from the West, principally northern Saskatchewan, increased the membership of the Conference by 50

percent (Figure 6). "These new members were unacquainted with the Molotschna experience," one commentator has observed, "and more rigid in their view of church membership."<sup>101</sup> Moreover, their former congregations in western Canada had participated fully in General Conference programs as members of the Northern District. Feelings became so strong that a group of 21 members separated from the Leamington Church in 1938 to form their own congregation, stricter in its adherence to MB fundamentals, and sought affiliation with the Manitoba and the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.<sup>102</sup> This development, and the growing controversy, jeopardized the entire Ontario Conference.

In 1939 the General Conference reiterated its offer of full membership to the Brethren in Ontario "provided that they submit to all provisions and obligations of our constitution."<sup>103</sup> At a special closed session of their annual meeting in November, delegates of the Ontario churches reluctantly acceded to these conditions.<sup>104</sup> On the one hand, their action illustrates the power and authority vested in Conference bodies by this time. On the other, it helped to ease a festering local issue by clearing the way for the reunification of the Leamington church. However, it left the status of non-immersed members unclear. By recommendation of the 1940 Ontario conference, these were given the choice of rebaptism or a circumscribed role in church activities.<sup>105</sup> "Some...were rebaptized; some acquiesced to their second-class status; others withdrew."<sup>106</sup> This may account, in part, for the unusually large number of baptisms and withdrawals during this

period. Niagara reported 24 baptisms in 1939, for instance, and Leamington had eleven in 1940 when the two MB churches here were reunited. On the other hand, the 1940 statistics simply indicated that a total of 54 members had withdrawn from the seven Conference churches.<sup>107</sup> In that same year, the United Mennonites in Port Rowan began separate services and, for the first time since its inception in 1929, the provincial Sunday school teacher's convention divided along denominational lines. As the Mennonite Brethren moved into the larger sphere of the North American MB Church and returned to the orthodoxy of their founders, therefore, they also retreated further from the Kirchengemeinde by reaffirming the Scheidewaende (dividing walls) which had originally separated these two groups in Russia some eighty years earlier.

It was precisely this denominationalism which Bishop Jacob H. Janzen had hoped to overcome and which B.B. Wiens sought to transcend. Whereas Janzen's dream of a spiritual reunification had since been thwarted, however, Wiens still hoped to see the flowering of his efforts in the provincial Vertreterversammlung, the lay delegate conference of immigrants from all churches he helped establish in 1929. This organization, too, experienced a mixed reception. While the common experiences and needs of the immigrants continued to draw them together, the specific programs found a less enthusiastic reception.

At the second delegate meeting of immigrants (Vertreterversammlung), held in November, 1930 in Leamington, Essex County residents finally agreed to follow the policy adopted by the other groups a year earlier

by raising its Selbsthilfe levy to ten cents.<sup>108</sup> The financial report suggested that while most residents in Kitchener-Waterloo and Hespeler had paid their dues, barely a third of those living in other areas had done so. Receipts from dues had more than doubled, however, due largely to the doubling of the assessment. Five permanently ill patients received partial assistance from the Selbsthilfekasse (self-help benevolent fund).<sup>109</sup> In 1931, the effects of the Depression became dramatically evident, however, as receipts from dues declined by one quarter. Other methods of fund raising covered a portion of the shortfall, which the committee hoped to offset further by raffling a car.<sup>110</sup> This persistent shortage of funds prevented any significant assistance to the temporarily ill, much less to those suffering financial difficulties due to unemployment.

Although receipts increased substantially in 1932, permitting the Selbsthilfekasse to assume two-thirds of maintenance costs of its beneficiaries, it managed only small loans to several families experiencing unexpected medical expenses.<sup>111</sup> The eight Russian Mennonite families on relief received no assistance whatsoever, partly due to a lack of funds and partly because they were not under threat of deportation. The Selbsthilfe board expressed its intention, however, of establishing an insurance program "against illness and other eventualities."<sup>112</sup> Two years later, at the November, 1934 Vertreterversammlung, delegates elected a committee to initiate such a program.<sup>113</sup> This proposal never materialized, however, because those immigrants interested in such protection had joined the ZMIK Mutual Aid

Assistance plan based in Hague, Saskatchewan while others remained indifferent altogether. In 1937, Wiens reported that only half of the eligible participants had paid their full dues.<sup>114</sup> Many, it seems, still maintained the attitude satirized by one participant at the 1932 Vertreterversammlung in the following rhyme:

Haett' mich der David nicht hierrhergenommen, -  
 Sie haetten keinen Cent von mir bekommen..  
 Nun aber sah man mich auch hierher wallen,<sup>115</sup>  
 Und alle Steuern muss ich nun bezahlen.

[If David (Toews) had not taken me here,  
 They would not have gotten a penny from me.  
 But since I have been seen wandering into here,  
 I will have to pay the entire levy.]

Although B.B. Wiens assured delegates that "No one has become poorer or gone hungry..."<sup>116</sup> because of the Selbsthilfe levy, which remained at ten cents per month throughout its duration, in combination with other assessments for local and Canadian organizations this system aroused constant resentment. The Board of Colonization had requested two three dollar contributions while the ZMIK continued to request fifty cents a year. Lack of support nationally necessitated the reorganization and merger of the Board and the ZMIK in 1934, after which time only the latter assessment remained.<sup>117</sup> In addition, the reconstituted Waterloo-Kitchener Komitee, which administered the Selbsthilfekasse, requested twenty cents per member for expenses and an additional ten cents for delegate travel to the annual meetings.<sup>118</sup> Those without a transportation debt and others who were naturalized and out of danger of deportation, in other words, many who derived no

direct benefit from these funds, refused to support the immigrant organizations. It was in response to this individualistic attitude, of a striving for "unser eigenes Ich" (our individual selves), according to Wiens, that he reiterated his motto, "Unity makes us strong."<sup>119</sup>

Both provincial and national organizations underwent periodic restructuring in an effort to preserve that unity. Such had been the case with the Immigrantenkomitee in 1929. Wiens' election as ZMIK representative by both the Waterloo-Kitchener Organisation and the Essex County group in the spring of 1934 in effect reunited all Ontario immigrants, reestablishing thereby a Provinziales Komitee.<sup>120</sup> This committee assumed responsibility for the Selbsthilfekasse but operated on a separate budget. It experienced successive deficits in 1936 and 1937, however, prompting B.B. Wiens to urge once again, as he had eight years earlier, that the Provinziales Komitee be disbanded.<sup>121</sup>

Delegates to the 1937 Vertreterversammlung rejected the proposal. They maintained that this organization was still needed as a liason to the Board of Colonization, to foster the feeling of "Zusammengehörigkeit," to help liquidate the transportation debt and to initiate other immigrant programs, particularly in cultural affairs.<sup>122</sup> They agreed, however, to attempt to create more local interest and support by transferring the administrative centre to Vineland. Three Niagara area residents were elected to the new Provinziales Komitee, thereby ending twelve years of leadership by B.B. Wiens. The 1937 meeting became historic for another reason, however. It initiated a Statutenprojekt (a project to codify the statutes of association) for the

Vertreterversammlung. The passage of these statutes in 1938,<sup>123</sup> while not guaranteeing the continued existence and increased effectiveness of the provincial organization, marked the culmination of Wiens' efforts to realize a permanent non-church structure in Ontario.

Reflecting the concerns of the Mennonite immigrants, the section on "Purpose and Goals" listed five priorities. This list included support for the Geisteskranke (mentally ill), material aid to needy immigrants, collection of the transportation debt, the fostering of a feeling of "Zusammengehörigkeit" (belonging together), and cultivation of "our intellectual-cultural qualities."<sup>124</sup> This prioritization reflected a significant shift from earlier statements. In 1930, B.B. Wiens had agreed with J.H. Janzen on the preeminence of "intellectual-cultural" concerns.<sup>125</sup> By 1932, he acknowledged that the predominant concern among the immigrants had become "the struggle for existence, the struggle for bread."<sup>126</sup> This preoccupation relegated interest in the German language to second place and relief and mutual aid to a distant third. By 1937, however, issues such as collection of the transportation debt and maintenance of the mentally ill dominated the discussion at the Vertreterversammlung.<sup>127</sup> As a result, Ontario preceded the other provinces in liquidating its debt over the next several years. In the realm of mutual aid, however, the Russian Mennonite achievement here was not as noteworthy.

"Our strength," B.B. Wiens proclaimed in 1932, "lies in the practice of benevolence."<sup>128</sup> To his dismay, however, provincial support for the Selbsthilfekasse never substantiated that assertion.



Nor did the debate and delays surrounding the establishment of a home for the mentally ill in the late 1930s when at least a dozen Russian Mennonites in Ontario remained institutionalized and partially dependent on public support.<sup>129</sup> Only the determination and dedication, not to mention the personal financial resources, of one man, Henry P. Wiebe, brought this institution into existence.<sup>130</sup>

In sharp contrast stood the strong support for the Beerdigungskassen (burial aid societies), an institution new to the Russian Mennonites. In their colonies, burial had remained a simple, inexpensive family responsibility. In Canada, however, the 75 to 80 dollar cost of funeral arrangements often imposed an unmanageable burden on most immigrants. In January, 1934, therefore, the residents in the Kitchener-Waterloo area as well as those in the Vineland region, including Dunnville, Port Rowan, and Virgil, organized separate mutual aid funds designed to defray the expenses incurred by the family of the deceased. A year later, Essex County established its own burial society.<sup>131</sup> By the end of 1937, 41 percent of all immigrants in Ontario belonged to one of the three societies, a better rate of participation than the Selbsthilfekasse elicited.<sup>132</sup> The membership continued to grow, moreover, as the influx from the West increased. The Vineland Beerdigungskasse doubled its membership to 1,600 by 1943 while in Niagara well over 75 percent of the Russian Mennonites enrolled, double the level of involvement in the mutual aid fund.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the long tradition of mutual aid in Russia, therefore, the Canadian setting tested the true nature of this practice. According to

historian David Rempel, the Russian Mennonites "have always taken care of their sick, poor, orphans, delinquents and defectives."<sup>134</sup> While this may have been true in Russia, it was perhaps partly so because, within the confines of the colonies, there was no alternative. In the Canadian setting, however, the state offered some assistance with this task and even a biblical, theological mandate for such benevolence could not induce many Russian Mennonites to assume complete responsibility for their coreligionists. That tradition of benevolence had, moreover, been directed only at the hard-core cases, those without other resources or the social misfits. It was difficult, therefore, to transfer that benevolence to the indigent and dispossessed. They were expected, it seems, to make it on their own somehow. In addition, an attitude of independence and self-sufficiency prompted most of those Russian Mennonites eligible for assistance to reject government relief or any other form of aid.<sup>135</sup> What had become even more difficult than giving aid, therefore, was receiving it, even, and perhaps especially, from one's own people. As far as the tradition of mutual aid was concerned, B.B. Wiens opined in 1937, "The future will show whether our idealism has fallen to pieces."<sup>136</sup> Certainly the present gave him little reason for optimism.

Russian institutions, or even ideals, could hardly be transplanted outright into a new environment. Geographic and demographic factors prohibited large-scale cooperation and effective communication. Moreover, the constant mobility which marked the lives of most Mennonite immigrants in Ontario during the first decade and a half after their

entry undermined the stability of immigrant organizations, religious and secular. Even more critical were forces largely beyond anyone's control, economic conditions which transformed the efforts at resettlement into a struggle for existence, overshadowing a long tradition and deep convictions about mutual aid and compassion for others. Religion became, in that context, more deeply individualistic and personal and much less social or communal, a process hastened if not begun by the persecution and destruction under Bolshevik rule. While a few leaders strove valiantly to rebuild a people, therefore, individuals sought primarily to rebuild their lives and their families. Therein lay the tragedy of the Mennonite experience and the misunderstandings and incongruities between belief and life, between tradition and reality, which emerged among the Russian Mennonites in Ontario. As the thirties unfolded, some would strive ever more ardently to recapture what had become the essence of their Eigenart in Russia, the German language and their religious faith. Both would be severely tested by forces both national and international in scope.

Footnotes

- 1 H.J. Klassen, "Die Bedeutung der deutschen Sprache Speziell fuer uns," Der Bote, II (May 6, 1925), p. 2.
- 2 Rudy A. Regehr, "A Century of Private Schools," in Call to Faithfulness, ed. Henry Poettcker and Rudy A. Regehr (Winnipeg, Man.: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1972), p. 106.
- 3 Janzen, "Wie wahren wir," (May 15, 1929), p. 1.
- 4 Janzen, "Daheim," p. 1.
- 5 Klassen, "Bedeutung," p. 1.
- 6 A. Vogt letter in Der Mennonitische Immigranten - Bote, I (Jan. 23, 1924), p. 2.
- 7 J.K., "Gegenreaktion," Der Bote, IV (April 27, 1927), p. 1.
- 8 "Mennonites Detest Russians' Tyranny," Toronto Star, Dec. 11, 1929.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 J.H. Janzen, "Wie wahren wir" (May 8, 1929), p. 1. Beatty is quoted as saying, "I have no desire to see this country made a melting pot for races whose traditions, standard of living and national ideals are so different from ours as to make it difficult that they should be assimilated and become in time Canadians." These immigrants he labelled "unwelcome settlers." The Kitchener-Waterloo Daily Record, Jan. 26, 1929, p. 1.
- 11 D. Paetkau, "Wie man's nehmen will," Der Bote, IV (March 23, 1927), p. 1.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," p. 1.
- 15 Jacob W. Janzen, "Das Eins Werden," Der Bote, V (May 2, 1928), p. 1.
- 16 J.H. Janzen to B.B. Janz, April 7, 1937. BBJ. Cf. "Bericht von Essex, Ont.," Der Bote, IV (Jan. 19, 1927), p. 2 and Interviews #12, 33.
- 17 Victor Greene, "Old Ethnic Stereotypes and the New Ethnic Studies," Ethnicity, 5 (Dec., 1978), pp. 330-31.

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- 21 J.H. Janzen to B.B. Janz, April 7, 1937. BBJ.
- 22 J.H. Janzen to David Toews, Feb. 5, 1927. JHJ.
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- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Janzen, Wanderndes Volk, vol. I, p. 86.
- 26 Janzen, "Eins Werden," p. 1.
- 27 John Porter, "Ethnic Pluralism in Canadian Perspective," The Measure of Canadian Society: Education, Equality, and Opportunity (Toronto: Gage, 1979), p. 126.
- 28 See, for example, John Marlyn, Under the Ribs of Death (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957).
- 29 Janzen, Wanderndes Volk, vol. I, pp. 86-87.
- 30 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," p. 1.
- 31 Janzen, Wanderndes Volk, pp. 87-88.
- 32 "Ueber die Siedlungsfrage in Essex County, Ontario," Der Bote, VI (April 3, 1929), p. 1.
- 33 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, pp. 503f., 519ff., 548ff.
- 34 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," p. 1.
- 35 Joh. H. Janzen, "Welche Einrichtungen treffen wir, den deutschen Unterricht in unsern Gruppen zu foerdern?" Der Bote, IX (Dec. 14, 1932), p. 1.
- 36 Smith, Story of the Mennonites, p. 440.
- 37 Janzen, "Bericht ueber die Entstehung," p. 2.
- 38 Frank H. Epp, "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930s" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1965), p. 85.

- 39 W.S. Buhr, "Aufruf an die Mennoniten aller Richtungen," Der Bote, V (Sept. 27, 1928), pp. 2-3.
- 40 "Bericht ueber die Lehrerkonvention, abgehalten zu Leamington, Ont., am 3. Mai 1936," Der Bote, XIII (July 8, 1936), p. 7. Emphasis added.
- 41 D.E., "Waterloo," Der Bote, VI (March 21, 1929), p. 1.
- 42 B.S., "Was man in Waterloo treibt," Der Bote, IV (April 20, 1927), p. 1.
- 43 B.B. Wiens report to the ZMIK, July 3-4, 1929. CMBC.
- 44 Ibid.
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- 46 "Bericht ueber die Lehrerkonvention," p. 7.
- 47 J.H. Janzen, "'Einleitung zur Konferenz der Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinden in Ontario' am 26. Oktober 1929, in Waterloo, Ontario" (report to the first annual conference, 1929), pp. 7-10. JHJ.
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- 53 "Protokoll der jaehrlichen Konferenz der Ontario Mennoniten Bruedergemeinden," Nov. 3-4, 1934; Nov. 2-3, 1935; Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 1936; Nov. 6-7, 1937; Nov. 5-6, 1938. MBBC.
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- 59 B.B. Wiens to David Toews, Jan. 9, 1929. CMBC.
- 60 B.T., "Vineland, Ont. den 8. Nov.," Der Bote, XIV (Nov. 17, 1937) p. 3. Cf. "Bericht der Vinelaender Bibelschule," Dec. 27, 1940. VA.
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- 77 B.S., "Was man in Waterloo," p. 1. Reuter was a nineteenth century German poet. Cf. J.H. Janzen to Rudolf Mirbt, Oct. 28, 1938. JHJ.
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- 86 Jacob H. Janzen, "Einleitung zur Konferenz ... Oct. 26, 1929," p. 6. JHJ.
- 87 Jacob H. Janzen, "Einleitung zur Konferenz ... am 25. Oktober, 1930 zu Leamington, Ont.," p. 3, and "Protokoll der Allgemeinen Konferenz ... am 25. u. 26. Oktober 1930 ...," item 6. JHJ.
- 88 "Protokoll der Allgemeinen Konferenz," ibid., item 1. Emphasis added. Interestingly, the Waterloo group seems to have carried this motion. Cf. "Protokoll der Delegiertenversammlung in der Waterlooer Kirche am 5. Oct. 1930." JHJ.
- 89 J.H. Janzen, "Bericht zur Allgemeinen Konferenz ... am 31. Januar 1932," p. 3. JHJ.
- 90 "Constitution and Bylaws of the Conference of United Mennonite Churches in Ontario." n.d. JHJ.
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- 92 "Minutes of the first session of the Conference of United Mennonite Churches," and "Zusatz zu dem in englischer Sprache verfassten 'Protokoll,'" Aug 1 1932. JHJ.



- 93 Bishop Janzen explained that the relationship among the churches "cooled off" "because of money and mistrust." See his letter to David Toews, Dec. 28, 1936. JHJ. Cf. Interviews #11 and #52.
- 94 Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Dick, Leamington. "1920 Leamington" file, Mennonites in Canada collection, CGC (hereafter MC).
- 95 Interviews #11.
- 96 "Memorandum of Dissolution," Jan. 22, 1934. JHJ.
- 97 See Chapter III, Tables III and V.
- 98 "Protokoll der allgemeinen Bruderberatung," Jan. 4, 1931. MBBC.
- 99 "Protokoll der Bruderberatung der Vertreter der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde in Ontario," Jan. 31, 1932. MBBC.
- 100 "Protokoll der jaehrlichen Konferenz der Ontario Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde...", Nov. 6-7, 1937. MBBC.
- 101 Allan J. Siebert, "Mennonite Brethren in Ontario: A place to stand and grow," Mennonite Brethren Herald, 18 (June 8, 1979), p. 4.
- 102 "Protokoll der jaehrlichen...Konferenz," Nov. 5-6, 1938. MBBC. Cf. Thiessen, He Leadeth, p. 85.
- 103 Toews, Mennonite Brethren History, p. 211.
- 104 "Protokoll...der Konferenz," Nov. 4-5, 1939." MBBC.
- 105 "Protokoll...der Mennoniten Brueder Gemeinden," Nov. 2-3, 1940. MBBC.
- 106 Siebert, "Mennonite Brethren in Ontario," p. 4.
- 107 See the congregational reports to the annual Conference sessions.
- 108 The Selbsthilfekasse was a province-wide mutual aid fund designed to assist the mentally ill or indigent. It was to relieve the burden of unemployment, unexpected health care costs, and, more importantly, to prevent the immigrants from becoming public charges and facing possible deportation. An annual levy on every person between 16 and 60 years of age provided the funds. See "Protokoll der Provinzialvertreterversammlung...", Nov. 1-2, 1930, p. 3. JHJ.
- 109 B.B. Wiens, "Die Selbsthilfe in Ontario," Der Bote, VII (Dec. 24, 1930), p. 2.
- 110 "Bericht der Verwaltung der Selbsthilfe," 1932. CMBC. Cf. "Protokoll der Sitzung...der Verwaltung der Selbsthilfe," Sept. 29, 1931. UMC0.

- 111 B. Wiens, "Bericht der Verwaltung der 'Selbsthilfe' in Ontario ...," Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), p. 6.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Wiens, "Bericht ueber die Lage in Ontario," p. 2.
- 114 Karl Heinz, "Streiflichter!" Der Bote, XIV (Dec. 15, 1937), p. 1.
- 115 X.Y.Z. "Von der Seite gesehen," Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), p. 2.
- 116 Wiens, "Bericht der Verwaltung," p. 6.
- 117 "Bericht des Vertreters...," Der Bote, XI (Jan. 10, 1934), p. 4;  
"Bericht ueber die Provinziale Vertreterversammlung von Ontario...,"  
Der Bote, XIII (Jan. 8, 1936), p. 3.
- 118 "Protokoll der Sitzung des Komitees...," Jan. 2, 1932. UMCO.
- 119 X, "Einigkeit macht stark," Der Bote, V (Dec. 16, 1928), p. 2;  
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- 120 "Protokoll der Delegatenversammlung der Waterloo-Kitchener  
Organisation," May 6, 1934. CMBC.
- 121 "Protokoll der Sitzung des P. Komitees," Sept. 1 and Oct. 30,  
1937. UMCO.
- 122 "Protokoll der 9. V.V. der Provinz Ontario," Nov. 20-21, 1937,  
p. 2. UMCO.
- 123 "Protokoll der 10. V.V. der Provinz Ontario," Nov. 18-19, 1938  
p. 3. UMCO.
- 124 "Statutenprojekt," ibid.
- 125 Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters," (Nov. 26, 1930), p. 1; J.H. Janzen  
"Waterloo," 1927, p. 1. JHJ.
- 126 B.8. Wiens report to "Die 4. Provinziale Vertreterversammlung...,"  
Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7, 1932), p. 6.
- 127 "Protokoll der 9. V.V.," p. 3.
- 128 "Bericht der Verwaltung der 'Selbsthilfe,'" Der Bote, IX (Dec. 7,  
1932), p. 6.
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Ontario," Feb. 2, 1937. UMCO.

- 130 I.H. T[hiessen], "Bethesda Mental Hospital," ME, I, p. 317; P., "Vineland, Ont.," Der Botē, XXII (May 2, 1945), p. 4. Cf. "Founder of Bethesda Home Passes," Mennonite Brethren Herald, 19 (July 18, 1980), p. 22.
- 131 See the reports of these societies in the Provinziales Komitee files, UMCÖ.
- 132 "Protokoll der 9. V.V.," p. 4.
- 133 Annual reports in the files of the Provinziales Komitee. UMCÖ.
- 134 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," (Jan., 1974), p. 39.
- 135 On the typical attitude toward relief see Interviews #29, 30, 32.
- 136 B.B. Wiens to David Toews, Feb. 6, 1937. CMBC.

## Chapter VI

### Cultural and Political Conflict in the 1930s

The decade of the Depression proved pivotal for the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Ontario on many fronts. Economically, they struggled like many other Canadians to escape or survive financial ruin. By the end of the decade, a good number of them had found a permanent home and the promise of prosperity. Organizationally, these Mennonites experienced both the unifying power of shared beliefs, values and experiences and the divisive force of denominational loyalties, Old World traditions and regional differences. By 1939 they were both better organized and more fragmented than ever before. Culturally, these immigrants began to recognize the impact of the all-pervasive pressure for Anglo-conformity on their identity as a German-speaking people. In their endeavour to preserve their uniqueness through the German language and cultural heritage, the Russian Mennonite immigrants found an unexpected but eager ally across the sea. The rising tide of pan-Germanism spawned by Hitler's National Socialists offered the Mennonites a broader, more clearly defined, and more prominent cultural and racial identity. Their Germanization in Russia and the valuable assistance of the German government in their emigration to Canada predisposed the Russian Mennonites to a romanticized cultural, if not a political, Germanism.<sup>1</sup> Frank Epp has concluded that

Perhaps the vast majority had long ago become so habituated to the automatic twinning of religion and language, Mennonitism and Germanism, that their inclinations toward Germanism were as natural and predictable as was their love of land and learning.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1930s this intrinsic concern for the German language and culture made a closer link with a resurgent Germany an attractive opportunity, so attractive to some that one Berlin newspaper announced in 1934 that "The Mennonites are one of the strongest pillars of Germanism in Canada."<sup>3</sup> Herein the immigrants hoped to find renewed pride and prestige, a prominence and self-confidence denied them since the Russian revolution.

The Mennonites constituted only a small, albeit a highly visible, portion of the total German-Canadian population of over half a million in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, these Russian Mennonites, like the vast majority of German-speaking Canadians, had not come from Germany itself and were, in fact, naturalized citizens.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, their self-conscious German identity and the overly zealous enthusiasm of some of their number for the ideals and policies of the National Socialist Reich rendered them suspect to ardent Anglo-Canadians. Indeed, German-speaking Canadians, like those of Italian and Japanese origins, became suspect as "enemy aliens" once their cultural or racial homeland became the political enemy of the Allied powers during World War II. What had once appeared as an opportunity for ethno-cultural revival quickly became a reason for suspicion and harassment. Since religious values were so integrally related to the German language in the Russian Mennonite Eigenart, the immigrants and their children soon had to

choose which, if any, of these two values they cherished enough to preserve. For a time, however, the Germanism of the Reich posed a tempting panacea to the cultural decline of the German-speaking Russian Mennonites.

## I

Jonathan Wagner, in an illuminating article tracing German voelkish elements<sup>6</sup> in the Mennonite response to National Socialism, suggests some reasons for this cultural sympathy and racial identification. Wagner points, for instance, to the nature of the Canadian immigrant experience. Many of the newcomers, he suggests, "[felt] foreign and consequently uncertain about their place in Canada."<sup>7</sup> A resurgent Germany offered the German-speaking Mennonites a source of pride and a sense of belonging. Jonathan Sarna has observed that in the face of adversity, immigrants tend to unite around the ethnic identity ascribed to them "as a defence against prejudice and hostility."<sup>8</sup> A form of "ethnicization," he concludes, will occur. Walter Quiring, a strongly pro-Nazi Russian Mennonite living in Germany and a frequent contributor to Der Bote on Germanism, verbalized this process most clearly.

All German people in the world are presently engaged in a process of transformation, including also our little splinter. We were probably German already in Russia but our being German was unconscious and passive there. Today it is gradually being transformed into a conscious, active [awareness]. We, that is, all Germans around the world, are in the process of becoming a people [Volkwerden]. A centuries-old development is now (precisely in our time!) coming to a conclusion: we are all being blended into a pure German, national [Voelkischen] and racial [volklichen] unity.



attitudes and behavior of persons in other parts of the world...."<sup>14</sup> Sengstock illustrates this contention with reference to the rejection of their Germanism among Germans in the U.S. during World War II due to unfavourable attitudes toward Germany in the larger society at the time, a process paralleled by the so-called Hollaenderei of the Mennonites in Russia, and to a certain extent in Canada, during the Great War.<sup>15</sup> It seems reasonable, however, that this process could also function in reverse, that is to say, positive changes or attitudes would induce a positive response. Events in Germany during the early thirties, therefore, not only revived a latent cultural identification but in fact evoked a level of association and identification unknown heretofore among the Russian Mennonites.

But the depth of that feeling should not be overestimated, nor the nature of that loyalty misunderstood. Few Mennonites openly promoted Germanism beyond the Mennonite community and even fewer emigrated to participate personally in this great national transformation. Indeed, it may well be asked whether, had the opportunity presented itself, these immigrants would have moved en masse to Germany to live in the cultural motherland or whether, assuming circumstances had changed and conditions permitted it, they might not rather have returned to their native homeland, Russia itself. "The positive interpretation of German policies and the German leader," Frank Epp concedes, "was not universally accepted among the Russlaender Mennonites...."<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, certain elements of German voelkisch thought clearly resonated with Russian Mennonite values and deeply felt needs. The



Mennonite search for permanence and identity was noted earlier. Their alienation in Anglo-Canadian society remained unresolved in the 1930s and now a Volk-concept offered them a sense of belonging and importance. Secondly, voelkisch thought represented a nostalgic retreat into nineteenth century romanticism, a retreat, therefore, from urbanization and industrialization into a simple, rural past. J.H. Janzen's concern regarding settlement on the land reflects this perspective. In 1925 he wrote,

I want to say categorically at the outset that our future here in Canada very definitely lies on the land and not in the city. A few may find their fortune<sup>17</sup> in the city but the majority will be lost in it.

Janzen also reflected a third element in voelkisch writings, namely that "Germanism lies not within the blood but in the character."<sup>18</sup> He even expressed a fourth characteristic, the substitution of the Volk for the person and function of Christ.<sup>19</sup> In a 1935 poem, published anonymously at the time but republished by Janzen himself in 1949, entitled "Three Songs of a German Living Abroad," Janzen depicts the German nation as Christ crucified and, indeed, risen again!

Ob uns die Sache nun gefaelt,  
Ob nicht, taet keiner fragen:  
Den Deutschen hat die boese Welt  
Noch stets an's Kreuz geschlagen.  
Drum lieben wir trotz Spott und Hohn  
Den dorngekroenten Gottessohn.

Wohl schlug man ihn an's Kreuz, und doch,  
Aus Todesnacht' und Banden  
Ist er zu allen Zeiten noch  
Als Sieger auferstanden.  
Drum bet' ich an als deutscher Christ,  
Den, der vom Tod erstanden ist.

Aus tiefer Not rang Deutschland sich  
 Schon oft zu stolzen Hoehen;  
 Drum folg' ich dem, der treulich mich  
 Durch Nacht zum Licht heisst gehen.  
 Heut', gestern und auf ewig ist  
 Mein Herr und Meister Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Not as evident in Janzen's writings but indisputable elsewhere was a final aspect of voelkisch thought which emerged directly out of the rural nostalgia. At the same time as they idealized the rootedness and simplicity of rural life, voelkisch writers expressed antipathy for "the restless proletariat." The Jew, according to this interpretation of history, came to represent all that was destructive and evil in the modern world.<sup>21</sup> A few Mennonites openly expressed this form of anti-Semitism, though in a subdued form it was undoubtedly more widespread.<sup>22</sup>

Wagner overstates the case, however, when he concludes that "It was clear to many that the end of the Mennonites as a farming people would nullify their membership in the German Volk."<sup>23</sup> It was, in fact, the language which the Russian Mennonites sought to preserve more than the lifestyle. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some of the immigrant leaders feared a "proletarianization" of their people. J.H. Janzen and B.B. Wiens both expressed this concern. The assimilative pressures of the city, Janzen believed, would reduce the Russian Mennonites to "proletarians."<sup>24</sup> Both Janzen and Wiens, however, reflected more the impact of their Russian experience than the pervasiveness of voelkisch thought in this attitude. The anarchy of the so-called proletarian revolution of the Bolsheviks had left its imprint on the Russian

Mennonites. In one of his short stories Janzen portrays an elderly Mennonite landowner as hating the proletariat "to the depths of his soul."<sup>25</sup> He himself warned his people of the threat of "degrading themselves with the commonplace" and being stampeded by "the herd-instinct of the masses."<sup>26</sup> That the term "proletarian" had primarily socio-economic significance is underscored by the sentiments of one immigrant in recalling the visit of a Mennonite leader from the West.

He came here and preached one day and mentioned amongst other things...[that] most of the people that go in [sic] shops [and] that work in the city turn [out] to be proletarian. That was a bad word for us ...I didn't agree with him. That really hurt.<sup>27</sup>

Another warned that those working in factories "would in time become proletarianized."<sup>28</sup>

Their Russian experience predisposed the immigrants toward Hitler's Germany in another sense. Frank Epp notes that whereas the new, cleaned-up Germany represented all that was good, Russia represented all that was evil.<sup>29</sup> The loss of freedom, of possessions, and of loved ones under the Bolsheviks had left most Russian Mennonite immigrants unequivocally anti-Communist. Bishop Janzen, who lectured frequently to non-Mennonite groups regarding conditions in Russia, acknowledged that he perceived the Nazis to be the only force capable of opposing Communism.<sup>30</sup> One contributor to Der Bote admonished the Russian Mennonites to warn their fellow Canadians of the dangers of Communism.<sup>31</sup> Another immigrant recalls, "We were not so much for Hitler as against the Bolsheviks."<sup>32</sup> The dream that Hitler, or

someone else, would free Russia of the Communists and permit a return to the homeland was nurtured by a considerable number of immigrants until their death.<sup>33</sup>

These expressions of political preference did not, however, represent a shift from the traditional Mennonite attitude toward the state. Jonathan Wagner rightly perceives another aspect of commonality between the Russian Mennonites and voelkisch emphases on this point. The immigrants still were, he notes, "basically indifferent to the state."

With no firm political attitudes, they felt no conflict in joining a movement which put Volk before state; with no firm political system, they possessed no positive political reason not to identify with National Socialism. Since they had several seemingly good reasons for becoming Volkish (anti-Communism being the most obvious one), the absence of a historical political commitment made identification with Hitler's<sup>34</sup> movement that much easier.

A dialogue on the pages of Der Bote in 1939 illustrates this point. One writer asserted that

Our Mennonitism stands in danger of being tarnished with the accusation of disloyalty to the state. With the emphasis on our mother tongue and our German descent, with the shipment of so many books and by joining literary societies, ect. one makes propaganda for a foreign political party which wants to make us bear arms. In the event of war against Germany this could produce serious conflicts<sup>35</sup> within some individuals and entire families.

Another immigrant disagreed. He maintained that the battle against Communism and for the survival of Germans in Canada did not imply total dedication to the cause of National Socialism. Indeed, he argued, good Canadian citizenship demanded active resistance to Communist propaganda in general and to attacks against German-speaking people in particular.

In order to wage this battle like-minded persons are joining together, societies and clubs are being formed, which the state permits. All those of German heritage who espouse Germanism are welcome here. No pressure! Being German and remaining German is all that is desired. <sup>36</sup>

It was, therefore, not primarily on the political level that the Russian Mennonites identified with the Reich, save for a very few exceptions. Bishop J.H. Janzen summarized the widespread, if somewhat schizophrenic feelings best in a 1933 article in Der Bote. He suggested that genuine German Treue, meaning faithfulness or loyalty, permitted the coalescence of various diverse, seemingly contradictory, elements into one. We will, he pledged, remain

faithful to the German character [Wesen] which lies in our blood, faithful to the culture in which we were raised, and faithful to the King and to the homeland, to which we have solemnly pledged our loyalty. <sup>37</sup>

Even in 1938 Janzen could write,

It may sound...as if Canada, Germanism, Mennonitism, [and] Russian-Mennonitism are distinct conceptions ...[T]hey are so in part, but they are conceptions which are not mutually exclusive but rather inclusive.... <sup>38</sup>

The boundaries of the Russian Mennonite "canopy" were, it seems, being either expanded or at least stretched to the breaking point. How long could the stakes hold?

In his analysis of Germanism in the Russian Mennonite press, Frank Epp notes three rather distinct aspects of Germanism, namely the cultural, the racial, and the political.<sup>39</sup> In a significant sense, these represent not different types of Germanism but rather differing levels or degrees of identification with Germany, a distinction Epp does not sufficiently make. James Banks and Geneva Gay, in proposing a typology for the process of "ethnicization," argue the necessity of differentiating, for instance, among complete ethnic identification, acceptance of a particular ethnic heritage, and adoption of an ethnic culture. Moreover, it is imperative, they contend, "to distinguish ethnic group behavior from the behavior of individual members of ethnic groups...."<sup>40</sup> Other researchers have also argued for the use of more subjective criteria in the definition of ethnic groups, criteria which focus on the social boundaries which delineate and distinguish various groups as well as on the cultural "stuff" enclosed by these boundaries.<sup>41</sup> Where any individual commentator stands vis-a-vis those boundaries becomes itself a critical factor in the description and evaluation of a given group.

This consideration demands more attention in Epp's analysis, as do the distinctions among aspects and levels of ethnicization. Epp argues that the "opinion leaders" in his survey were not "marginal men".<sup>43</sup> Yet each one wrote from a somewhat different perspective on the Mennonite 'world'. It becomes highly significant, therefore, that

three of these writers, contributing 77 percent of the material from Mennonite sources favourable on race, 57 percent favourable on politics, and 11 percent favourable on culture, lived in Germany.<sup>44</sup> They clearly defined the boundaries and the content of Mennonite identity differently than most writers in Canada. Their "marginality" consisted, therefore, of being German-speaking Mennonites in the midst of a resurgent Germany and not, as did the "marginality" of commentators in Canada, of being aliens in a predominantly Anglo-Canadian society, surely a considerable difference in perspectives.<sup>45</sup> No less significant is the fact that one of these men, Walter Quiring, who penned about one-third of the material on race and over half of that on politics contributed by the three German residents, served as an official representative of and correspondent for the Deutsches Auslands-institut. This agency sought to prevent the assimilation of Auslandsdeutsche (Germans living abroad) and to restore their ties to the fatherland.<sup>46</sup> While the process of "ethnicization" or "ethnogenesis" among the Russian Mennonite immigrants was proceeding rapidly toward Canadianization, therefore, Quiring advocated a full-fledged Germanization.<sup>47</sup> William Toll's comment on American Jews is instructive in this regard. The histories of their communities, he maintains, "should not begin with a preconceived notion of identity but should emphasize how persons were predisposed to be selective in their use of tradition" in defining that identity.<sup>48</sup>

Jonathan Wagner likewise betrays his preconceptions in his attempt to find voelkisch elements in Russian Mennonite thought. That there

were significant points of commonality, and of contact, has been acknowledged above. In his eagerness to confirm this connection, however, Wagner, the "outsider," fails to distinguish the finer shades of meaning evident in the writings of these immigrants. Most seriously, he reads the National-Socialist concept of Volk whenever this term is used.<sup>49</sup>

Mennonite writers employed it variously, however, to mean perhaps "people" in a general sense or "peoplehood" in a narrower ethnic sense, devoid in either case, however, of the racial and political implications inherent in voelkisch thought proper.<sup>50</sup> The concept of Mennonite "peoplehood", of a "Mennovolk", emerged within the more narrowly circumscribed and more clearly defined boundaries of community life in Russia. "Mennonitisches Voelklein", notes historian Harvey Dyck, "was a term of self-identification used widely in ingroup publications in the last decade before World War I."<sup>51</sup> Another historian, John Toews, suggests that the strong sense of identity among the Russian Mennonites, their solidarity as a community, and the broad spectrum of activity within that community gave rise, in the early twentieth century, to the expressions "das Mennonitische Volk" or "unser Volk."<sup>52</sup> Several poems, authored in Russia during the 1920s, well before the advent of Hitler and after a process of Hollaenderei, published by Der Bote during the height of anti-German sentiment during World War II, attest to the early emergence and non-voelkisch character of the Volk-concept among the Mennonites.<sup>53</sup> That some of the elements inherent in this definition of Mennonite peoplehood, or



Mennonite Eigenart, coincided with elements of voelkisch thought and, indeed, to an extent predisposed some Russian Mennonite immigrants to these ideas, is not sufficient evidence to suggest, as Wagner does, that "they were supporters of the same ideology Hitler used to build his mass support."<sup>54</sup>

In making this argument, Wagner ignores the ethnoreligious nature of Russian Mennonite identity. The concern to preserve the German language represented, at bottom, a determination to perpetuate the faith. Having been transformed, over time, into an ethnoreligious group,<sup>55</sup> these Mennonites found it inconceivable that their religious identity could be expressed in or preserved by a different cultural identity. It was this religious component, the origin and essence of Mennonitism, that the linguistic boundary was intended to enclose and protect. "Jacob H. Janzen probably spoke for most of the Russfaender church leaders," Frank Epp concludes, "when he insisted that every religious soul needed a cultural body to carry it, and while he praised the attributes of German culture and ethnicity, he also insisted that all of this was secondary to the religious consideration."<sup>56</sup> This connection, however, lent a divine imperative to the maintenance of the German language. Therefore Janzen could also write:

Als Deutsche schuf uns unser Gott;  
Deutsch bleiben wir bis an den Tod!<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, Janzen made it clear that neither Germanism nor Germany represented his ultimate values. "Should there be war," he wrote in 1936, "then you will find me on the British, that is, the

Canadian side, even though my heart may bleed to death."<sup>58</sup> Another writer in Der Bote made the spiritual application:

I am a German Mennonite and not a Mennonite German and as much as I love my German language, I would rather give this language up<sup>59</sup> twice over than give up the faith of my fathers.

One contributor took the argument to its logical conclusion, warning readers that:

It is, however, wrong to speak in a voelkisch sense of Mennonite Germans or German Mennonites. Our Mennonite faith has nothing to do with our Germanism. We should recognize that once and for all. We must learn to differentiate: here Mennonitism (Christianity) and here Germanism. Those are two very distinct concepts. When the discussion in the Bote is about being German, about Germanism, then some [people] should not behave as though our Mennonite-Christian faith were in danger. It does not even come into question in this connection and should therefore<sup>60</sup> not be forcibly dragged into the discussion.

This line of reasoning reversed the centuries-old process whereby Deutsch und Religion had become the twin pillars of Russian Mennonite identity. Such a separation suited those eager to promote the German language, on the one hand, for it permitted their active participation in some clearly non-Mennonite and strictly cultural and even voelkisch activities. It pleased those anxious to preserve the integrity of the Mennonite faith, on the other hand, by allowing them to disassociate themselves, at least subconsciously, from their more intensely pro-German coreligionists. The boundaries defining Mennonite identity expanded accordingly to accommodate both elements on that continuum.

It never occurred to anyone to challenge Walter Döring's identification with the Mennonite people, therefore, despite his "rabid anti-Semitism, pseudo-scientific racism, intense German nationalism, and pervasive, paranoid anti-communism,"<sup>61</sup> to say nothing of his compromise of the traditional Mennonite peace position.<sup>62</sup> Unable to establish clear and effective cultural boundaries, the Russian Mennonite immigrants also proved themselves unable to define the boundaries of their religious self-identity, albeit some enunciated strong and precise positions on this issue from that perspective.

But this gradual, almost imperceptible, separation of religion and culture had another, more, ironic result. Frank Epp notes that, in their eagerness to preserve a mother tongue and with it the Mennonite ethnic heritage, those who zealously promoted the German language and culture affected the identification of the Mennonite ethnic culture with the culture of the German Reich, assuring that even as the former gained ascendancy with the latter, it would also evaporate in the heat of wartime anti-Germanism.<sup>63</sup>

## II

In the process of reaffirming or redefining their cultural identity, the Russian Mennonite immigrants in Canada also reassessed two central and interrelated tenets of their historic faith, the separation of church and state, and nonresistance. Unlike some of their coreligionists, they had not adopted either geographic isolation or social nonconformity as a means of separation from the "world".<sup>64</sup>

Thus; their socio-economic integration with Anglo-Canadian society left them dangerously exposed, particularly in Ontario, to the forces of Canadianization. The effort to retain a distinct linguistic environment, if not a separate cultural identity, in this setting produced mixed results at best. While contributing to a revitalization of the German language and culture among some, it also engendered dispute between those who differed on the nature and extent of their German allegiance. At the same time, a renewed Germanism underscored the "foreignness" of the Russian Mennonites. This, in turn, increased the alienation, though not necessarily the isolation, of the immigrant generation in Canada and rendered them suspect once more among Anglo-Canadians. Far from preserving the language among their young people, moreover, this development more often served, ironically, to widen the ever-growing chasm separating the immigrants from their predominantly English-speaking children. The dark clouds of war hanging over Europe presaged the crisis which would demonstrate how deep and wide these divisions had become.

The principle of nonresistance, severely tested during the civil war in Soviet Russia but reaffirmed by all groups thereafter, received periodic attention in the Russian Mennonite press during the first decade of their sojourn in Canada. Reminiscences and recollections of those years often included reference to and either a defence or a condemnation of the Selbstschutz (self-defence corps). Such retrospection and introspection sparked a lively debate in Der Bote towards the end of 1934 on the question of whether Mennonites should

bear arms.<sup>65</sup> The rising threat to peace posed by the increasingly belligerent fascist regimes in Italy and Germany may have contributed to this renewed interest in the issue. In November of that year, for instance, delegates to the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches heard a message reaffirming the principle of nonparticipation in the military.<sup>66</sup> This item appeared on the agenda again in 1936 and 1938 suggesting that both clarification and education were ongoing.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the United Mennonite Predigerkonferenz heard a presentation on this subject at their October, 1934 meeting whereupon they recommended that their congregations observe each "Remembrance Sunday," the Sunday before November 11, "in the Mennonite way" by emphasizing Christ's call to work for peace and oppose war.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the curriculum being developed for the Sunday school and the program of the Jugendvereine included peace teaching as part of the instruction in Mennonite history. Some efforts were being made, therefore, to preserve this foundational principle of faith and life.

Nonparticipation in the military did not, for the Mennonites, imply disloyalty to their adopted homeland. "As citizens, we must be loyal to our homeland and seek what is best for it," Bishop J.H. Janzen explained, "even if not everything which is undertaken therein in reference to us suits us... We should," he continued, "further every good undertaking of the state through intercession and cooperation, [but] protest against evil in that we draw back from it."<sup>69</sup> Rather than being warned about the unwelcome or unacceptable responsibilities of citizenship for Christians, therefore, the Russian Mennonites were

encouraged to become model citizens, and that as soon as possible. In 1929, exactly five years after the arrival of the first group of immigrants in Ontario, the first Vertreterversammlung included a presentation on citizenship.<sup>70</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen, who travelled extensively as a colonization agent for the CPR to visit, encourage, and assist settlers in far-flung regions of the province and across the country, reported frequent presentations on citizenship during these trips. "I have encouraged [our people], as best I could," Janzen wrote to J.N.K. Macalister, the chief commissioner for the railway, in 1934, "to take out their Naturalization Papers and become good and faithful citizens of this country."<sup>71</sup> Janzen and his family themselves had done so as soon as it became legally possible, as did most other Russian Mennonites.<sup>72</sup> Gratitude to Canada for receiving them when no other country would, as well as the prospect of a secure and permanent residence here prompted this step more than the desire to participate fully in civic life, however.

Janzen seemed particularly concerned, moreover, that the young people understand and appreciate the Russian Mennonite view of citizenship. In three separate sessions he addressed the Waterloo Jugendverein on this issue. The series included presentations on "Good Citizenship," "Christianity and Good Citizenship," and "German Culture and Canadian Citizenship."<sup>73</sup> The Bishop emphasized that it was their Christian duty to become loyal citizens of Canada. He reiterated, however, the limits of Mennonite loyalty and participation.

A Christian can and should participate in the economic and political life of his homeland as a conscientious citizen, but he does not expect the perfect world [to come] through the perfection of [human] systems or the substitution of one system for another. Instead, [he expects it] through the transformation of mankind<sup>74</sup> through [spiritual] rebirth.

The community of those reborn, that is, the church, "should be the conscience of the state," Janzen believed, "but as such she must be independent of it."<sup>75</sup> He reaffirmed thereby the Anabaptist tradition of separation. In terms of political involvement, however, the meaning of this separation was less clear, at least in a democratic society. The ministers and deacons of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church issued a statement during the 1934 provincial election declaring that the decision on whether to vote lay with each individual but that direct and public participation in partisan politics, such as campaigning for a particular party, remained "reprehensible."<sup>76</sup> While allowing closer contact with the state, therefore, by permitting some involvement in the democratic political process, immigrant leaders nevertheless limited the extent of such participation. Less clear or certain was in what way, and for how long, such a fragile boundary could be maintained.

Direct political intervention was, after all, not entirely new to the Russian Mennonites. While it may well be true, as historian David G. Rempel has suggested, that less than one percent of the Mennonites in Russia had become politically conscious even until the outbreak of

the First World War,<sup>77</sup> their leaders had nonetheless maintained a close and ongoing rapport with the Tsar and some of his officials.

This relationship had helped to preserve and enhance their separate and privileged way of life in Russian society. In similar fashion, direct negotiation with and intervention by Soviet authorities in Moscow had facilitated the emigration of the 1920s.

At the same time, the Mennonites in Canada had pursued their own interests by direct appeal to provincial and federal politicians. Adolf Ens has noted some general characteristics which marked the Kanadier attitude toward government. These included: 1) a preference for dealings with the highest officials, that is, with the Prime Minister instead of a cabinet minister; 2) concern for securing and preserving their privileges; 3) a preference for dealing through intermediaries; and 4) an expectation of and dependence on government benevolence.<sup>79</sup>

These same characteristics applied to the Swiss Mennonites, albeit by World War I both groups were more inclined to approach government authorities directly. They are also characteristic of the Russian Mennonite attitude toward the state. Bishop David Toews, as already noted, fostered and utilized a warm and personal relationship with Prime Minister Mackenzie King as well as with the Member of Parliament from Rosthern, where Toews lived, Walter A. Tucker.

Bishop J.H. Janzen also lobbied provincial politicians in Ontario in a similar manner. W.G. Weichel, the Conservative MPR for Waterloo from 1926 to 1929, whom Janzen claimed to "know well personally," assisted him in some matters regarding northern Ontario knowing full well.



according to the Bishop, "that the Mennonites were Liberals down to the marrow of their bones."<sup>80</sup> In 1930, the Liberal member, S.C. Tweed arranged discussions with various officials in behalf of Janzen who sought to have some of the Moscow refugees placed in Ontario.<sup>81</sup> Far from being hostile towards government, or even simply apolitical, as some maintained, therefore, the Russian Mennonite immigrants readily accepted and even pursued a limited measure of political involvement, albeit strictly in the pursuit of their own group interests. The extent of this involvement, however, contradicts the assertion of a group of Niagara-on-the-Lake settlers who assured the Ontario government in 1939 "that any political activities are alien to the Mennonites."<sup>82</sup> This purist ideology hardly coincided with the reality of Mennonite life in Canada.

Clearly contentious and generally disavowed, nevertheless, was any identification with or involvement in German politics. Bishop J.H. Janzen deemed such activity to be disloyal.<sup>83</sup> B.B. Janz expressed himself more strongly, likening it to adultery, and stressed that any suggestion that Mennonites were pro-German emanated from "propaganda... from across the Rhine."<sup>84</sup> Janz, a Mennonite Brethren leader in Alberta where considerable hostility toward "foreigners" had been demonstrated over the years, warned his people that any overt identification with National Socialism could inflame the hostility of Anglo-Canadians, particularly in western Canada. J.H. Janzen's attempt to reconcile potential conflicts with the all-inclusive formula of tripartite loyalty- to Canada, to Mennonitism, and to Germanism-<sup>85</sup>

simply begged the question. Two issues remained unclear in both the public mind and among many young Mennonites: to whom did the ultimate allegiance of the immigrants belong and how could it be appropriately expressed?

During the late 1930s, as Anglo-Canadians became more anxious about the possibility of war, there emerged a growing suspicion about the Germanism of the Mennonites, whether cultural, linguistic, or political. In February, 1938, for instance, amidst rumours of political meetings being held in the building, someone set fire to the Niagara United Mennonite Church.<sup>86</sup> Delegates to the annual Vertreterversammlung in November heard "that some unpleasant [incidents] have already resulted from careless talk in our circles."<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the gathering adopted the following resolution:

The provincial meeting warns our people about careless conversation, particularly in the area of politics, and in keeping with our belief and the tradition of our fathers, asks them to be loyal citizens of the country into which the Lord has led us.<sup>88</sup>

Additionally, at the behest of the national immigrant body, delegates to this provincial gathering agreed to ask the Board of Colonization to prepare a statement expressing the loyalty, obedience, and thankfulness of the immigrants to the "Royal Couple" on the occasion of their visit in May, 1939. This statement was to be published in the local English-language press, undoubtedly to allay Anglo-Canadian doubts about Mennonite loyalty.

During the spring of 1939 Anglo-Canadians, particularly in the West, began increasingly to suspect the loyalty not only of Mennonites but of all German-speaking Canadians. Rumours and suspicions, often fueled by sensational newspaper headlines, fueled this apprehension, arousing fears in some quarters of a "fifth column" movement in Canada. On April 21, 1939, for example, the Winnipeg Free Press announced in bold headlines, "HIDDEN HEILS. Hitler Honored [sic] in Winnipeg But Behind Guarded Doors."<sup>89</sup> The story concerned a fiftieth anniversary celebration by the Canadian Society for German Culture and the "Westphalian Schuetzenverein", a sports club, but gave the initial impression of reporting serious subversive activities.

Ontario's large German-speaking population experienced relatively little animosity during the late thirties. The generally harmonious relations between German and Anglo-Canadians was due in part to the fact that the German-speaking community here was older, more established, and consequently more fully integrated because the more recent immigrants had settled primarily in the West. World War I had forced a mutual accommodation between these two ethnic groups, with German-Canadians largely abandoning their political affiliation with the former homeland. The renaming of Kitchener, formerly Berlin, was one indication of the forced accommodation, all the more significant inasmuch as fully 10 percent of all Germans in Canada lived in this vicinity and over half of the residents of the city itself had German origins.<sup>90</sup> Germans in Kitchener-Waterloo also demonstrated that their Germanism, as that of Germans in Ontario in general, was not as

politicized or organized, and consequently, less visible and less offensive than that of Germans in western Canada. One indication of this disinterest was the fact that, despite the presence of almost 200,000 German-Canadians in the province, no German language paper was published here.<sup>91</sup>

In November, 1937, for instance, The Globe and Mail featured a story on Germans in Waterloo County announcing that "Naziism is Anathema to German-Canadians." According to the account,

Days of visiting around, at clubs, in homes, in offices and stores, showed that the people of this preponderantly Germanic area of Canada want no part in any strutting, <sup>92</sup> race-antagonizing that may be suspected in Canada.

Spokesmen for the German-speaking community acknowledged that these were "a few young bucks who like to swashbuckle a bit," but emphasized their cultural and historical, not political or ideological, affinity for the former homeland. "We love Germany," they declared, "but never at the expense of Canada."<sup>93</sup>

Events almost a year later confirmed this attitude, and underscored the resolve of the community to avoid the suspicion and hostility experienced during the First World War. When a pro-Nazi element appeared at the annual Labour Day celebration by German Canadians in Kitchener in September, 1938, leaders of the Ontario branch of the German-Canadian People's Society publicly disassociated themselves from both their ideology and their tactics and pledged allegiance to Canada.

While loving the old culture of our forefathers, we wholeheartedly align ourselves with Canada's democratic institutions. We call upon our brother Canadian-Germans to rid themselves of the seditious Nazis who, through German reunion days, through bluster and intimidation, attempt to infect us with their contempt for all things democratic, all things Canadian.<sup>94</sup>

The same group publicly condemned "the barbarous occurrences" in Europe in November, 1938 and urged the Canadian government to boycott German trade.<sup>95</sup> This was not enough, however, to prevent the war hysteria from gripping other parts of Ontario during the spring of 1939.

As tension mounted and conflict increased overseas, the fear of a possible invasion by Germany and the probable collaboration of German Canadians gripped many parts of the country, including Ontario. "Press reports about thefts of dynamite from large construction firms led to fears of sabotage against hydro-electric installations, industries, and ship yards in the province. On April 18, the St. Catharines Standard reported, for instance, that rocks apparently thrown against the steel door of a warehouse at the Homer shipbuilding dock on the north-east side of the city had been mistaken for gunshots. As a precaution, two car loads of veterans were called in from Niagara-on-the-Lake to guard the installation. Only then was the origin of the disturbance investigated and identified.<sup>96</sup> The following day the paper reported that the dominion and provincial governments were planning a "sabotage conference," an indication of how widespread and serious this paranoia had become.<sup>97</sup> On April 27, Conservative leader Col. George Drew demanded a full inquiry into the activities of "subversive

organizations" in Ontario. Communist, Nazi and Fascist organizations, he alleged, "were commonly believed to be working in Canada to impose foreign doctrines of government by force."<sup>98</sup> The provincial attorney general, while conceding the existence of such groups, replied that there had been "few or no violations of present law."<sup>99</sup>

Still, the enemy alien hysteria persisted. In Niagara, some five miles east of St. Catharines and just across the river from the United States, the immigrant Mennonite community once again became the focus of suspicions. Rumours circulated that German spies were being arrested in the area, that the Mennonite church was being used to store weapons, ammunition, and dynamite, that it was adorned with pictures of foreign political leaders, and that political activities were taking place there.<sup>100</sup> On the basis of this hearsay, local police raided the building on April 26, 1939. They found no evidence to support these accusations, however. The Niagara Advance, the local weekly, reported these events the following day, assuring its readers in a front page story that "if any of these things were true the daily press would have featured them prominently...."<sup>101</sup> The editor defended the Mennonites in the strongest terms possible.

Suffice it to say that these rumours are absolutely false. Practically all the Mennonite people in this district are naturalized Canadians and there has never been any reason to regard them as anything but good citizens. As many of them are Russians, Polish and extraction other than German, there is no reason whatever to conclude they are pro-Nazi.<sup>102</sup>

Demonstrating their distrust of the local police and their confidence in the fairness and sympathy of political leaders, the Mennonites decided on the evening following the raid to take their protest directly to the provincial attorney general, Gordon Conant. The formal petition was signed by 46 members of the congregation and accepted by the assistant attorney general from three representatives on May 10. It denounced "the profane invasion by police of our church" which had left "the impression that these hostile feelings are being shared by the authorities, as the police would not have acted without orders."<sup>103</sup> Perhaps reflecting the feelings aroused by wanton acts of religious persecution and sacrilege perpetrated upon their communities in Russia, the statement continued,

We, the congregation, cannot but consider this detestable, unchristian act as a humiliating insult to our congregation constituting a wanton<sup>104</sup> disgrace to our most sacred object - our church.

The petitioners claimed that "traditional Mennonite policy" had always been "to avoid publicity" and that it was with "extremely deep sorrow" that they departed from the practice of being "the quiet in the country." However, they now felt so profoundly humiliated that they claimed their rights as citizens for an immediate public investigation as well as "redress and protection." Ironically, the petition concluded with the assertion that "any political activities are alien to the Mennonites."<sup>105</sup>

About a week after this meeting in Toronto, the Mennonites took the issue to the public. In a letter to the editor of The Niagara Advance,

published on May 18, 1939, F.J. Andres, one of the delegates to Queen's Park, reported on that meeting. He appealed to the principle of "British fair play" in the treatment of local Mennonites, admitting publicly for the first time, however, that the immigrants themselves were not entirely blameless. Andres explained that,

if there is an odd one of the settlers, who may not even belong to our congregation, who has expressed himself favorable to Hitler, it is only because Hitler has crushed and stamped out Communism.<sup>106</sup>

The editor himself, after some investigation, reiterated, however, that he had found "not one particle of truth to bear out the rumours that the Mennonite people in this district are displaying any spirit of pro-Naziism."<sup>107</sup> He also registered his objection to the police search of April 26.

A week later The Niagara Advance took another step towards helping to resolve the community conflict. In a lengthy editorial entitled "An Appeal for Better Understanding of New Canadians," the editor attempted to set the recent developments into context. While continuing to denounce "unfounded rumours of pro-Naziism," he concluded that the Mennonites had, "maybe unconsciously, been responsible in part for conditions that existed lately." Hoping that an open discussion of these circumstances would dispel the hostility, he set out the reasons for some of these feelings.<sup>108</sup>

This statement in the Advance suggested that integration with the local community and participation in the larger society remained the primary criterion among Anglo-Canadians for evaluating the loyalty of



"New Canadians." The Mennonites, it was reported, "in adopting a policy of segregation, or keeping to themselves in a clannish manner, have caused some of the trouble."<sup>109</sup> This factor seemed paramount, and two examples of such separation were cited. The first was linguistic, but with social ramifications. Many of the Mennonite settlers still spoke English poorly, the paper reported, making interaction with the indigenous population difficult. As a result of this communication barrier, the newcomers felt unwelcome. This might be a natural feeling, the Advance concluded, but was not an accurate perception of the situation. Some of the earlier residents, it explained, in turn took offence at this implicit suggestion that they were responsible for the barrier. Whatever the cause, such feelings would have contributed to greater "clannishness" on the part of the Mennonites, inadvertently increasing the resentment of the resident population thereby.

More substantial because it was more tangible was the impact of the Mennonite influx on the educational system. Almost 100 families had settled here in little more than three years. A new addition to the Virgil Public School, opened in early 1939, was built, according to the Advance,

because of the single fact that the influx of Mennonite children forced the ratepayers of that public school section to build, equip and supply teachers for a public school as large as will be found in most towns. <sup>110</sup>

At the closing program of the Virgil Public School that year, for instance, over 40 Mennonite students were promoted into the next grade. About half that number were enrolled in Niagara-on-the-Lake.<sup>111</sup> That most of these newcomers would have paid few taxes might have upset hard-pressed local taxpayers, themselves only just recovering from the impact of the Depression. According to the paper, what had angered residents, however, was that "not a single Mennonite was to be found" at the opening ceremonies for the new building. Many persons apparently felt that they could at least have sent representatives to express their appreciation. Their failure to do so, the editor concluded, was "a bad mistake."<sup>112</sup>

The issue of anti-Communism was another dimension of the controversy. The editor of the Advance noted that, although some Mennonites supported Hitler because of his opposition to communism, this was an unwise and unacceptable position. "Canadians deplore Naziism just as much," he explained. Consequently, they could not tolerate any evidence of "favoritism to one or the other."<sup>113</sup> For the time being, however, the Russian Mennonites remained unable to make that comparison.

Nevertheless, the editor of the Advance affirmed the loyalty of the Mennonite community. Indeed, he noted that some Mennonite leaders had recently enquired about a space for the Mennonites to congregate to view the royal entourage, tangible evidence of their pro-British affections.<sup>114</sup> To underscore this point, the Advance reprinted, in the same issue, an article from the Globe and Mail entitled "Mennonites

Vow Loyalty to Canada in Event of War." It was reported that those persons interviewed had agreed that "in time of war, the Mennonites would serve Canada to the fullest possible extent within the limits of their religious beliefs."<sup>115</sup> Coincidentally, another event reported that week suggests that the very public school which had caused some ill will on account of the high level of Mennonite enrolment was performing precisely the task of Canadianization which many Canadians expected of it. The cast for the Empire Day play at the local public school included a Mary Klocker (Krocker), a Mennonite student.<sup>116</sup> Although few will have noted the symbolic significance, or even made the connection, this incident illustrates the subtle but unmistakable integration of the Russian Mennonite community into the mainstream of Anglo-Canadian society, a process by now as necessary as it was inevitable if the Mennonites were to be regarded as loyal citizens.

Two weeks later, on June 8, The Niagara Advance claimed that a "Better Feeling is Developing Toward New Canadians."<sup>117</sup> The editor noted an improvement in mutual understanding between the groups. For their part, some of the Mennonite settlers had "accepted the words of reprimand and regretted that their lack of understanding was partly at fault."<sup>118</sup> Other residents were, in turn, it was reported, becoming more tolerant. Then, by citing a news story from May 31, the editor spoke on behalf of the Mennonites once more. The item, datelined Winnipeg, reported that Jacob Morris, a Great War veteran, had completed the "black, gold and white address of welcome which will be presented to the King and Queen when they visit Saskatoon [on] June

3rd. The address is a pledge of loyalty on behalf of 80,000 Canadian Mennonites."<sup>119</sup> By its public investigation and explanation of the facts, its refutation of the falsehoods, and its sympathetic defence of the Mennonites, The Niagara Advance contributed significantly to the peaceful resolution of this crisis, to a better mutual understanding, and to the gradual integration of the Mennonite settlers into the Niagara community.

The questions of loyalty to country and acceptance in society received considerable attention on a broader scale during the spring of 1939. Although incidents of confrontation or violence were rare, the Niagara-on-the-Lake experience typified the circumstances elsewhere. In May of that year, Bishop J.H. Janzen described the situation in Ontario to his fellow ministers meeting in Winkler, Manitoba as "grave". "[O]ur brethren [there] are under suspicion and oppressed," he reported, "[because] the community is prejudiced against the Mennonites."<sup>120</sup> Bishop N.N. Driedger of Leamington concurred, suggesting that all Mennonites join in preparing a uniform statement on their peace position. According to Driedger, Ontario residents were making "a marked distinction...between the German and English-speaking Mennonites in their communities."<sup>121</sup> The reason, according to some participants at the May 15, 1939 meeting in Winkler, called by Bishop David Toews of Rosthern in an effort to define a clear and uniform Mennonite response to the impending war and the question of military service, was that too much German literature had been brought into Canada! This, they noted, created "an unfriendly feeling among the

English-speaking neighbours. Added to this comes the daily press with its attitude of hatred towards everything German," they maintained.<sup>122</sup>

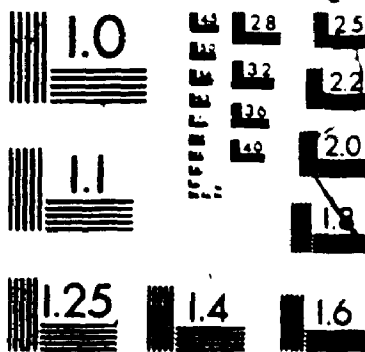
David Toews concluded from his perspective in Rosthern, Saskatchewan that the media had driven Canadians into "hysteria". Reports in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix claimed that 35 percent of the voters in Rosthern were Nazis, he wrote to Bernard Toews of Niagara-on-the-Lake in May, 1939. In other areas, the paper charged, the numbers reached "70, 80 to 90%, and at one place some 95% of the voters are registered Nazis."<sup>123</sup>

Some of those present at the Winkler meeting suggested that resentment had arisen in many places because of "careless remarks about especially spiteful statements in our daily papers on the European situation."<sup>124</sup>

An American Mennonite observer, at the May 15 meeting, Harold Bender, pointed out that articles in Mennonite papers like Die Mennonitische Rundschau and Der Bote had created erroneous and harmful impressions, even among American Mennonites, "about military problems and the life of the church."<sup>125</sup> The open discussion and disagreement in these papers on such issues as Germanism, nonresistance and military service, and the meaning and merits of National Socialism had shaken, if not shifted, the stakes of the "canopy" defining Mennonite identity. This had caused confusion and concern both within the Mennonite community and beyond.

Something had to be done to counteract and combat these tensions. By virtue of their authority as leaders in the Mennonite community, those assembled at Winkler in May, 1939 sought to reassert the orthodox teachings of the church. The editors of the two aforementioned periodicals were, they agreed, to be asked "to refrain from printing any

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

news or articles contrary to our Mennonite principles."<sup>126</sup> According to Frank Epp, it was unnecessary to elaborate "because it was clear that writers in both papers had carried their pro-Germanism far enough to suggest disloyalty to Canada and a discarding or nonresistance."<sup>127</sup> In order to allay public suspicions about Mennonite allegiance, moreover, the Mennonite leaders called on Bishop David Toews to prepare and present an address to King George VI on behalf of all Mennonites in Canada, assuring the King of "the deepest devotion and unwavering loyalty" of the Mennonites.<sup>128</sup>

Despite this consensus on such generalities, however, disagreement over what constituted an adequate and consistent response to the anticipated crisis of loyalty persisted among the various Mennonite groups. The Swiss and the Kanadier, by and large, remained more separatist than the Russlaender in terms of the type of alternative service they were willing to perform for the state to demonstrate their loyalty. At the same time, all groups defined their loyalty more narrowly than most Canadians. In the words of one Russian Mennonite,

...we would like to be citizens of the British Commonwealth of Nations, which pledge their loyalty and pray for their country and their Government and endeavour to perform their duties and obligations in every respect as far as they are in accordance with the Scriptures and with their Christian conscience.<sup>129</sup>

How strongly and precisely this boundary was defined within the constituency itself remained unclear. Bishop J.H. Janzen told the Globe and Mail in May, 1939 that "Mennonites who take up arms for Canada under any provocation would 'probably' be excommunicated from

their church." He maintained that "not many would actually take up arms" and that those who did "would not be Mennonites in good standing."<sup>130</sup> Bishop N.N. Driedger of Leamington agreed with this assessment, according to the report. But individuals interviewed by the reporter left a very different impression. George Dick, a Russian Mennonite service station operator in Kitchener, believed that "If Mennonites were asked to fight for Canada they would go. I know they would make good soldiers," he added.<sup>131</sup> A coreligionist who worked in a local factory maintained that adherence to the Mennonite peace position "has fallen off so that in Canada you can say it is completely gone. Mennonites would fight with conviction to save Canada from invasion."<sup>132</sup> In Niagara-on-the-Lake, meanwhile, Peter Wall, a Mennonite settler, addressed the local branch of the Canadian Legion concerning his experiences in Russia. Wall, who had served as a major in the White Army, was also asked how he would respond should Canada go to war. "I would be with you to the best of my abilities," he told the legionnaires.<sup>133</sup>

Some of this confusion and, indeed, inconsistency simply reflected the genuine concern to be faithful on two seemingly irreconcilable fronts, namely to traditional Mennonite teaching on nonresistance as well as to Anglo-Canadian expectations of loyalty. The former demanded a separation of sorts, or at least a fine distinction in language and loyalties. The latter could accommodate no such distinctives nor tolerate such arguments. On a deeper level, the division within the Russian Mennonite community revealed a diversity which threatened the



very fundamentals of the faith and challenged the cultural garb in which these had traditionally been embodied. The community could not long tolerate such pluralism if it was to survive as a distinct and separate entity. A choice would have to be made. "The time had come," Frank Epp notes, "...to take society very seriously, not to withdraw from it, but to be involved on the basis of, and separated from it in terms of, an alternative ethic and value system."<sup>134</sup> Whether this traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite response was both possible and acceptable the impending war would soon demonstrate.

### III

On September 3, 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Prime Minister Mackenzie King, insistent that the Canadian parliament should determine this country's foreign policy, declared Canada to be at war with Germany a week later, on September 10. Some aspects of domestic policy in the event of war had been defined much earlier, however. On March 14, 1938, immediately after Hitler's occupation of Austria, the Liberal government had appointed a committee "to make representations to the government as to what should be done in the event of war with respect to persons of enemy nationality resident in Canada."<sup>135</sup> The committee's recommendations provided the blueprint for federal action when hostilities peaked once more almost a year and a half later.

On August 25, 1939, by order-in-council, the cabinet declared a state of "apprehended war," permitting the government to assume the powers authorized under the War Measures Act of 1914.<sup>136</sup> This

enabled the authorities, among other things, to authorize the arrest and detention of enemy aliens whose activities it regarded to be "prejudicial to the interests or safety of the state."<sup>137</sup> The plans for these arrests were finalized on August 31, the legal powers were formalized under the Defense of Canada Regulations adopted on September 3, and the round-up began on September 4, one day after Britain declared war but six days before Canada officially followed suit. In the course of this action, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrested 265 German nationals resident in Canada and 60 naturalized Canadians of German origin.<sup>138</sup>

In taking this decisive action, federal authorities simply reflected widespread public sentiment. Another wave of anti-alien paranoia had struck Canadians that summer. In Ontario, for example, the Lincoln and Welland Regiment was mobilized on August 26 to guard the Queenston hydro-electric generating station as well as the Welland ship canal, which was temporarily closed to traffic.<sup>139</sup> Three days later guards were posted at the Ambassador bridge spanning the Detroit River in Windsor.<sup>140</sup> Border areas such as these were considered particularly vulnerable. A columnist in the Windsor Daily Star speculated on the perceived menace:

There are Nazi troopers in Detroit. They have been drilling there under the guise of clubs. Supposing the Nazis decide on a hurricane invasion of Great Britain. With the German flair for the spectacular, Nazi groups from the United States might decide to launch expeditions against Canada simultaneously with the assault on England. These Nazi groups - might cross at Windsor, Niagara Falls, Prescott, on the prairies, and on either coast. Their plan would be to capture key centres and then to terrorize the people. They would be walking in with the idea of

taking over Canada for Germany... That's why Windsor, and other border points, should have a strong force on the job to guard against any spectacular move by the Nazis in the United States, acting <sup>141</sup> under orders from Berlin to march against Canada.

Scenarios such as that aroused an angry and aggressive public mood. The most vocal and patriotic elements soon gave expression to their sentiments. Canadian Legion branches throughout the country advocated stern measures to deal with the "enemy alien" problem.<sup>142</sup> An Ontario war veteran issued a stiff warning to Canada's 'foreign-born' in a letter to The Globe and Mail on September 8. "If Canada is good enough to seek refuge in, and if it is good enough to live in," he argued, "then it is good enough to fight for."<sup>143</sup> The paper itself warned in an editorial statement that "If these aliens are not with us, they are against us."<sup>144</sup> Dissent, even abstention from the "war fever," was disallowed. Patriotism could not tolerate pacifism, determined instead to marshal all forces, including religion, into this crusade against "evil". Christianity, as the basis for democratic government, one writer argued, was also the basis on which to engage the totalitarian forces of Nazism and Fascism in armed combat.<sup>145</sup> A group of United Church ministers in Ontario, who had issued a statement entitled "Witness against War," came under investigation for prejudicing the war effort.<sup>146</sup> To counteract a suspected threat of subversion, the Ontario government, at the request of the Toronto police force, passed a bill making meetings in public places illegal without permits from municipal authorities.<sup>147</sup> Officials in Toronto, meanwhile, warned

the estimated 2,000 aliens on city relief rolls that they would forfeit their benefits unless they took the oath of allegiance.<sup>148</sup> In Kitchener-Waterloo as in most other urban centres, sentries were dispatched to guard vital industries and to protect key communications and transportation links. By September 6, four days before Canada officially entered the war, employees at a local shirt manufacturer were told to "be patriotic or resign... The time for toleration" they were informed, "is over."<sup>149</sup> Three days later the Daily Record reported that some "known Nazis" had been dismissed from municipal jobs.<sup>150</sup> However, although the special Sunday, September 3rd edition of the paper reported police chief William Hodgson as confirming that "We know a lot of them [Nazis]" in the city, only seven had been interned by the end of the month.<sup>151</sup> Still, tension remained high in the region for some time.

Although the German-speaking Russian Mennonites in Ontario were never at the root of this anti-German phobia, they nonetheless suffered the consequences of their sporadic involvement in and tentative identification with the rising tide of Germanism. Even Thomas Reesor, a Swiss Mennonite leader who was deeply involved with the resettlement of his coreligionists, declared it to be a well-known fact that the immigrants received and distributed German propaganda.<sup>152</sup> As a result of these suspicions, at least three Russian Mennonites were among the 325 persons interned in September 1939, one in Saskatchewan and two in Ontario.

One of these was William W. Hildebrand of Jordan Station, Ontario, a tiny hamlet some five miles west of St. Catharines, the other a Henry Schroeder, chairman of the Deutscher Bund in Windsor and a pro-Nazi.<sup>153</sup> Hildebrand had entered Canada in 1930 and had been naturalized in 1936. In November, 1937 the Vertreterversammlung had elected him to collect the transportation debt owing the CPR from the immigrants in Ontario. In the course of this assignment, Hildebrand travelled extensively among the Mennonite settlements in the province. On September 11, the R.C.M.P. arrested him at his place of employment and detained him at their regional headquarters in Niagara Falls. They also entered and searched his residence. Here they found and seized several pictures of Hitler, some German literature including a book written by Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, as well as ledgers and files related to his assignment as Reiseschuld collector.<sup>154</sup> Within two days Hildebrand was transferred to Toronto, then sent to an internment camp located at Fort Henry in Kingston. From here he was permitted to send a terse telegram to David Boews in Rosthern. "Unable to collect our community money owing to CPR," it read.<sup>155</sup>

Release from detention was possible only upon the order of the Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, who based his decision on the recommendation of a Board of Inquiry. Hildebrand's appeal was heard on October 13 with Bishop J.H. Janzen present to plead his case.<sup>156</sup> Not until two months later did the Minister sign the order for release, however. Hildebrand returned home a free man on December 13, three

months after his arrest. No reason for this delay ever emerged. The only official explanation for his detention came from the Deputy Minister of Justice, J.F. MacNeill. Following a personal appeal to the Department from David Toews, who travelled to Ottawa in early December for that purpose, MacNeill wrote to the Bishop that

Mr. Hildebrand was arrested because of certain indiscreet remarks which he made and I hope that now that he is to be released that he will not express pro-German sentiments as you know that in time of war it causes <sup>157</sup>a good deal of resentment in the community.

Although the specific grounds for Hildebrand's arrest were never revealed, the circumstantial evidence was sufficient to cast doubt on his loyalty, particularly amid the paranoia evident throughout the country in August and September, 1939. He had some unacceptable German literature in his home at the time of apprehension. His travels throughout the province to collect the Reiseschuld and the detailed records of these contacts and transactions, moreover, may have aroused suspicions of espionage once he was under surveillance.

Most damaging to his integrity as a Canadian citizen, however, seems to have been an unbridled tongue. Bishop J.H. Janzen noted that "a big mouth has caused trouble for quite a few [people], and [also] our pursuit of the sensational, of which our people so often eagerly spread what has been told to them...."<sup>158</sup> In regard to Hildebrand, Janzen speculated that an "enemy," made during the course of his unwelcome visits to collect the Reiseschuld, may have reported a "careless deed or a thoughtless word" to the authorities which set

them on his trail. Janzen's letter also gives evidence that such rumours were commonly believed and then blown out of all proportion in the retelling. From Bishop S.F. Coffman of Vineland he heard, for instance, that 30 young Russian Mennonites had been arrested, a report which proved to be totally unfounded. "[E]ven such leading men [as Coffman] believe it and find it to be self-evident that we are persecuted." Whenever they hear of the arrest of some vagabond, Janzen lamented, "our Old Mennonite brethren in Vineland and the vicinity... assume [it is] a Russian Mennonite...."<sup>159</sup>

The immigrants themselves demonstrated a similar ability to exaggerate, however. When thieves entered and ransacked the home of Bishop N.N. Driedger in Leamington, rumours spread that the police had undertaken this action and that, when the Bishop complained about it, he was told to keep it quiet. Those telling the story believed that such action would be taken against the Mennonites everywhere.<sup>160</sup>

Memories of the civil disorder in Russia twenty years earlier may have inclined the immigrants to believe such unfounded rumours alleging the unwarranted transgression or suspension of their civil liberties.

The volatile public mood more than the overreaction of public officials, however, engendered these fears among the Mennonites. J.H. Janzen believed that "As far as our authorities are concerned, we have nothing to fear."<sup>161</sup> Government officials continued to be friendly and helpful. J.G. Gardiner, the Minister of National War Services, informed the House of Commons that the Mennonite privilege of exemption from military service would continue to be honoured.<sup>162</sup> F.C. Blair,

who had facilitated the immigration of the 1920s as departmental secretary and who now served as director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, assured David Toews that "It is difficult for me to believe that Mennonites are Nazi sympathizers."<sup>163</sup> Meanwhile, Walter Tucker, the Rosthern MP, and Senator W.D. Euler, former MP for Waterloo North, continued to provide extensive and crucial assistance in matters of concern to the Mennonites.<sup>164</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen concluded, therefore, that

we are not at all concerned about the attitude of our government toward us;<sup>165</sup> but rather about the attitude of the mob....

He recommended to his fellow bishops in Ontario, therefore, that all larger meetings in which the German language would be used, such as the Sunday school teacher's convention and the Predigerkonferenz, be suspended for a time because they would arouse suspicion and distrust among Anglo-Canadians.<sup>166</sup> It was not the state, therefore, which the Mennonites distrusted or feared, for governments had become valuable and powerful allies in the preservation of some elements of their Eigenart. It was, rather, the yagaries of public sentiment, the hostility of a "world" from which the Mennonites had traditionally sought to be separate, which would provide the ultimate test of loyalty to their Eigenart.

The 1930s had proven a difficult, and a pivotal decade for the Russian Mennonite immigrants in many respects. The promise of linguistic and cultural renewal under the aegis of a resurgent European



Germanism had proven illusory, even dangerous. Not only did it create internal dissension, but it also threatened to alienate and isolate the Mennonites from the very society into which they were seeking to be integrated for socio-economic reasons. Canada's active participation in the European conflict would sharpen that tension, testing Mennonite loyalties once more and challenging again their traditional nonresistant religious values.

## Footnotes

- 1 Epp, "Germanism and National Socialism," pp. 116-123.
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- 4 Jonathan F. Wagner, Brothers Beyond the Sea: National Socialism in Canada (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), ch.I.
- 5 Robert H. Keyserlingk, "'Agents within the Gates': The Search for Nazi Subversives in Canada during World War II," Canadian Historical Review, LXVI (June, 1985), p. 214, and "The Canadian Government's Attitude Toward Germans and German Canadians in World War II," Canadian Ethnic Studies, XVI (No. 1, 1984), p. 18.
- 6 The Volk (lit. people) became in National Socialist usage a term referring not only to a racial group but suggested also a superiority and exclusivity attributed to the Germanic race alone. See George L. Mosse, The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).
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- 8 Jonathan D. Sarna, "From Immigrants to Ethnics: Toward a New Theory of 'Ethnicization'," Ethnicity, 5 (Dec., 1978), p. 374.
- 9 Walter Quiring, "Wachsen lassen...!" Der Bote, XIV (Jan. 27, 1937) p. 3.
- 10 G. Hege, "Wie ich Deutschland wieder sah," Der Bote, XII (March 6, 1935), p. 2.
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- 12 Epp, "Germanism and National Socialism," pp. 126ff.
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- 19 Mosse, German Ideology, p. 43.
- 20 X.Y.Z. [Jacob H. Janzen], "Drei Lieder eines Auslandsdeutschen," Der Bote, XII (June 5, 1935), p. 3. Cf. Janzen, "Die Geschichte vom torichten Fiedelkasten," Der Bote, XIII (July 8, 1936), pp. 3-4.
- 21 Mosse, German Ideology, pp. 7, 20-28, 126-45.
- 22 Interviews, # 62; J.H. Janzen, "Der Deutsche Gedanke," Der Bote, XVI (Aug. 30, 1939), p. 2. Cf. Wagner, "Transferred Crisis," pp. 208-9.
- 23 Wagner, ibid., p. 207.
- 24 Jacob H. Janzen, "Heimat, suesze Heimat," Der Bote, XIV (March 31, 1937), p. 1. Cf. B.B. Wiens report to ZMIK, July 2-3, 1930, CMBC and P.D. Willms, "Wahret eure heiligsten Gueter," Der Bote, VIII (June 3, 1931), p. 2.
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- 26 Janzen, "Wie wahren wir," (May 8, 1929), p. 1. Cf. Janzen, "Repetitio est mater Studiorum," Der Bote, XVII (Aug. 14, 1940), pp. 2-3; Unruh, "Flight of the Mennonites," (Jan., 1931), p. 29.
- 27 Interviews, #11.
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- 31 Jul. Heinrichs, "Bewahre uns vor...," Der Bote, XVI (Feb. 22, 1939) pp. 4-5.
- 32 Interviews, #76. Cf. Interviews #66, #68, #109.
- 33 Interviews, #3.
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- 35 Quoted in Heinrichs, "Bewahre," p. 4.

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- 40 James A. Banks and Geneva Gay, "Ethnicity in Contemporary American Society: Toward the Development of a Typology," Ethnicity, 5 (Sept., 1978), p. 248.
- 41 See the discussion in James H. Dormon, "Ethnic Groups and 'Ethnicity': Some Theoretical Considerations," The Journal of Ethnic Studies, 7 (Winter, 1980), pp. 23-36.
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- 44 For details see ibid., ch. 6.
- 45 On the subject of "marginality" see Greene, "Old Ethnic Stereotypes," pp. 331-34. John Marlyn illustrates this experience through the eyes of Ukrainian immigrants in Winnipeg in the 1920s in Under the Ribs of Death.
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- 54 Wagener, "Transferred Crisis," p. 203.
- 55 Francis, "From Religious to Ethnic Group."
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- 75 Janzen, Pastoraltheologie, p. 13. Cf. Janzen, "Kirche und Staat," p. 1.
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## Chapter VII

### Enemy Aliens or Loyal Citizens?

#### The Challenge of World War II

Canadians could not escape the fury unleashed by the European conflict in 1939. From the internment of suspected subversives to the relocation of Japanese residents from the Pacific Coast, from the registration of "enemy aliens" to the conscription of Canadians for overseas service, the Second World War brought controversy, confrontation, and conflict into the forefront of social interaction and political debate. The economic doldrums of the Depression vanished amid the feverish industrialization of a wartime economy. With the growth of industry came a concomitant increase in urbanization, a rapidly increasing trend which saw the proportion of town or city dwellers rise from 54.3 percent in 1941 to 62.9 percent by 1951.<sup>1</sup> Canada had come of age, in many regards, and most Canadians happily turned their backs on the past by the end of the war. The country, and its people, would not emerge from those trying years unchanged.

Canadian Mennonites, at least the Russian Mennonite immigrant community, were also irreversibly transformed by the wartime experience. This, too, was a coming of age, a loss of innocence, a breakdown of community and consensus which shook this people as dislocation and deprivation had been unable to do. The socio-economic and political climate in Canada continued its relentless assault on all

four stakes in the 'sacred canopy', particularly in Ontario: The battle lines, for the Russian Mennonites, stretched not only across a distant continent but also reached into the very heart and soul of their peoplehood. The struggle to preserve their separate identity intensified on all fronts.

## I

Inasmuch as Germany was the primary enemy once again, the first target for Anglo-Canadian hostility, as it had been during the First World War, was everything that smacked of Germanism. A relative calm followed the initial outburst of anger and fear after the outbreak of war in September, 1939. These feelings rose again and peaked during the spring and summer of 1940. Anti-alien and anti-German sentiment grew with each of the rapid advances of the German army across European boundaries. These feelings translated into fear of "fifth column" activity in Canada. Howard Palmer notes that

The subsequent panic over such potential "subversives" focused primarily on people of German origin, and to a lesser extent on Communists. Those articulating the scare seldom made distinctions in their sweeping denunciations between people of German background, immigrants from Germany and German-speaking immigrants from other countries, or between naturalized and unnaturalized immigrants. The term "enemy alien" was applied indiscriminately to all of these groups.

When Italy entered the war in June, another group of "foreign-born" residents was added to the list.

Events in Alberta illustrate the angry mood of Anglo-Canadians, particularly in western Canada, a scene reminiscent of World War I. In May, 1940, for example, as the "blitzkrieg" overran country after country, 7,000 Calgarians rallied to demand "more vigorous action" against enemy aliens in Canada. Suggestions ranged from banning the use of the German language and outlawing the employment of Germans to the internment of anyone with German origins.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of this protest, three Lutheran churches in the city discontinued the use of German in their services.<sup>4</sup> Alberta Mennonites, numbering some 8,000, also responded quickly and defensively to this hostile public mood. German-language Bible and Saturday schools were closed and the number of religious services, of necessity still in German, was kept to a minimum.<sup>5</sup> Still, the public mood grew sufficiently volatile that two Mennonite churches in the town of Vauxhall were burned.<sup>6</sup> Anxious to prove their loyalty, some Mennonite immigrants bought war bonds while their young men enlisted in the armed forces. For the Russian Mennonite community here, three aspects of their historic identity were shaken, and at times compromised, in the face of external pressure. Some forsook their historic nonresistance and even more discarded their German cultural identity, precipitating in some congregations and communities a severe test of their corporate peoplehood and unity.<sup>7</sup> Because of their increasing assimilation and their willingness to cooperate in the war effort in a limited way, however, the Mennonites did not encounter the same degree of hostility vented upon the more isolated groups like the Hutterites.<sup>8</sup>

As it had done ten months earlier, the federal government responded to these widespread fears by taking action against alleged "subversives." By order-in-council under the War Measures Act the cabinet of Prime Minister Mackenzie King outlawed a number of pro-fascist and pro-Communist groups, including the Communist Party of Canada, and banned the publication of some newspapers published by or sympathetic to these groups.<sup>9</sup> In addition, all persons of German or Italian racial origin over 16 years of age who had been naturalized after 1929 were required to register as "enemy aliens". At the same time, a number of Communist activists and leaders in Canada were arrested and interned together with "Germans, Italians, small groups of fascists, and some Québécois who were opposed to Canada's participation in the war against Hitler."<sup>10</sup>

For the Russian Mennonite immigrants, these developments presented a dilemma. Being a Canadian citizen no longer sufficed for acceptance by patriotic Anglo-Canadians. They were required, now, to clarify not only their allegiance but also their racial origins. The Germanism of some vanished quickly in this process. According to Bishop David Toews, the enemy alien registration did not apply to these Mennonites, although nearly all of those who had been naturalized had done so after 1929. Citing the accounts of Mennonite historians, however, Toews informed the Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, that his people were descended from the Dutch, not the German.<sup>11</sup> The 1941 census revealed the extent of this second Hollaenderei (an emphasis on Dutch origins). Whereas in 1931, 39 percent of all Canadian Mennonites had listed their

ethnic origin as German, only 28 percent did so in 1941. Conversely, the number claiming Dutch descent rose from 42 to 58 percent.<sup>12</sup> Privately, Toews confided to J.H. Janzen that many were looking for possible Dutch origins "out of cowardice."<sup>13</sup>

Janzen himself used another approach. He assured residents of the twin cities that

It is evident that Canada is not interested in names but in our convictions and feelings. In these all of our people are not German, even if they would consider themselves to be so. They have never seen Germany and would be surprised if they should find out how much they differ from original Germans.<sup>14</sup>

He went on to argue that "the so-called 'Russian Mennonites'" were a "hopeless mixture of French, Italian, German, Flemish, Frisian, Celtic, Polish and other kinds of blood" making it "entirely impossible to tell their racial origin from that angle."<sup>15</sup> B. Mabel Dunham, well-known author of a book on Swiss Mennonite immigration to Waterloo County, presented a similar historical argument, concluding that "We are all mongrels."<sup>16</sup> How graciously pro-British Anglo-Canadians accepted that contention is not clear.

Since German origins rendered them suspect and Dutch descent was both distant and in dispute, some immigrants became "Russians" once again, though not without some ambivalence. The general fear of Communism in Canada, only recently outlawed, and the Russian Mennonite loathing of it in particular, together with the prejudices born of the culture gap experienced during their sojourn in that country made it

difficult to accept such a designation. Still, the purpose of the registration was to determine country of origin. Hence David Toews urged the immigrants to register as "German Mennonites from Russia."<sup>17</sup> J.H. Janzen agreed that "Consequently we are Russians," conceding that this would "rub many [of the immigrants] the wrong way."<sup>18</sup> Confessing his own discomfort, Janzen explained the predicament in a letter to the Kitchener Daily Record:

I was born in Russia; so was my father, my grandfather and even my great-grandfather.

"In that case you are a Russian to us," the registrar said, and that settles it as far as I am concerned.

After the treatment they got from the Russian Bolsheviks the Russian Mennonites are not so keen about calling themselves "Russians". But the registrar cares little for our feelings in that respect and goes by his rules according to law - and we here in the Twin City will have to be Russians,<sup>19</sup> in this registration whether we like it or not.

According to the 1941 census returns, however, few Mennonites found that identity personally acceptable, even if it was necessary, convenient, or true. Only 6.5 percent claimed Russian ancestry that year, less than half of the 13.6 percent who did so in 1931.<sup>20</sup> Their fear and loathing of Communism, intensified by reports of Stalinist excesses during the thirties, made such a claim unthinkable for most. Since a German identity had become increasingly unacceptable, most Russian Mennonites chose a Dutch racial origin, at least on the census returns, even though that culture or language was unknown to them. Another stake in the 'sacred canopy' had been noticeably loosened.

Most Russian Mennonite immigrants accommodated themselves to the social and political pressures for conformity, therefore. A few went so far as to anglicize their surnames.<sup>21</sup> By and large they tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible in order to avoid potential conflict. Official pronouncements by conferences and church leaders, public declarations of loyalty, and personal affirmations in courts of citizenship were intended to resolve this crisis of identity and loyalty. For some, these gestures were not enough, however. They would seek a more tangible demonstration of their loyalty, thereby testing once again the historic principle of nonresistance. Anglo-Canadians, too, remained unconvinced in some quarters about Mennonite loyalty, particularly as the "phony war" became a reality for Canadian servicemen.

During the Great War the anti-German attitude directed at Canadian Mennonites had been closely intertwined with resentment and anger about their exemption from military service. Mennonites in Canada, like the Hutterites and Doukhobors who were barred from entry together with them in 1919, were expected, in the future, "to become Canadian citizens in the truest and best sense of the term, and...[to] assume all the obligations of citizenship including military service...."<sup>22</sup> Anglo-Canadians watched closely during World War II to see whether their expectations would be met. In the words of the author of a letter to the Pincher Creek (Alberta) Echo, "Why would these people be privileged above all others, to ignore the laws of the country? Why should they have any concessions that every Canadian-born or British could not have?"<sup>23</sup>



Keenly aware of the World War I experience and the intensity of public opinion, Canadian Mennonite leaders sought assurance for their legal status as soon as international conflict seemed even a remote possibility. Already in 1936 David Toews visited government officials in Ottawa to confirm their intentions to abide by the laws protecting Mennonite exemption. He was assured by F.C. Blair of the Immigration Department that "In the event of Canada being drawn into war there would be plenty of time then for persons who are exempt under law to claim that exemption."<sup>24</sup> At the same time, these leaders gave clear expression to the historic peace principle. The "Mennonite Peace Manifesto" proclaimed at the Third Mennonite World Conference in Amsterdam in 1936 enunciated this Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching, as did a North American gathering in Chicago in March, 1939 as war clouds loomed ever more ominously over Europe.<sup>25</sup> In May, 1939 representatives of nine Mennonite groups in Canada met in Winkler, Manitoba, also to reaffirm their peace teaching and to agree on a common approach to the government in the event of war. David Toews, who had called the meeting, stressed the importance of a united front, both in relation to the government and in the public perception. Many of the difficulties encountered during the First World War could have been avoided, he maintained, had there been such unity. Delegates agreed, in a closing resolution, that they had "not always been true" to the fundamentals of their faith and resolved to teach nonresistance more thoroughly to their young people. They also expressed gratitude to Canada for the freedom found within its borders enabling them to

live "according to the dictates of our faith and our conscience." They pledged "to remain true to Canada" insofar as they could in accordance "to the teachings of God's Word."<sup>26</sup>

Once the war erupted and negotiations with the government began, this initial unity crumbled.<sup>27</sup> Old cleavages and suspicions separated the Kanadier and the Russlaender. In addition, significant differences concerning an acceptable form of alternative service emerged between the Kanadier and the Swiss on the one hand and the Russlaender on the other. All agreed that active military service conflicted with their religious values and teachings. The Kanadier maintained, however, that the terms of their admission in 1874 guaranteed them total exemption from any form of state service. Being uncertain that the Russlaender enjoyed a similar status, they were reluctant to be identified too closely with them for fear of jeopardizing their privileges and compromising their beliefs. They suspected, moreover, that their coreligionists, who had performed alternative service in Russia, would readily accept a similar arrangement in Canada, or perhaps even take up arms as some had in the Selbstschutz.

The Russlaender, meanwhile, were clearly more inclined to accept some form of alternative service. They espoused a "fundamentally different understanding of the obligations of citizenship,"<sup>28</sup> having agreed to state service in Russia. Their primary concern was to present a mutually-acceptable program to the government, assuring the Mennonites of civilian control, before the government imposed an unacceptable form of alternative service, under military jurisdiction, upon them. The

Russlaender hoped to establish a form of alternative service which their young men could accept as being equal in the demands and sacrifice to active service. Anything less, they feared, would prompt many of their youth to enter active service. This approach displeased both the Kanadier and the Swiss, however, who agreed in their opposition to any form of state service. For these, such involvement represented a compromise of their religious values and an unacceptable cooperation with the state.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually, the alternative service program agreed to by all groups and the government took three forms: 1) work camps in National Parks or at Forest Experimental Stations, 2) service in agriculture or industry, and 3) service in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and the Canadian Dental Corps.<sup>30</sup> In the early years of the war most conscientious objectors (COs) went into work camps. By the spring of 1943 a labour shortage led to most COs being placed on farms or in essential industry. The noncombatant service in the medical or dental corps was not chosen by many because it remained under military supervision and was therefore unacceptable as an alternative service to most COs.

Public sentiment toward COs remained markedly hostile for the duration of the war, but grew particularly intense during the conscription crisis. COs in Ontario had a relatively easy time of it, however. Here the submission of a registration form signed by a young man's minister sufficed to obtain CO status. Other provinces, however, required the applicant to appear before the registration board to defend his request.<sup>31</sup> Eighteen young men in Manitoba went to prison rather

than enter the army when the judge there declared their responses to be inadequate for a CO exemption.<sup>32</sup> Some were simply unprepared to give an account of their personal religious beliefs. Hildegard Martens has suggested some reasons for this:

The fact that Mobilization Boards expected exemption from military service to be based solely on the principle of conscientious objection by the individual, instead of on the tenet of religious liberty, posed many problems for the Mennonite community. Young men were suddenly called upon to give a convincing theological defence of a tradition which they had inherited and which they<sup>33</sup> had never needed to understand fully or justify.

Of some 10,872 postponements for conscientious objection, about two-thirds were granted to Mennonites.<sup>34</sup> Still, not all the young men perceived this to be an adequate expression of their allegiance.

Precise figures are difficult to obtain. Some have estimated that up to one-half of those called up for duty, or more than 7,000 men, enlisted for active service.<sup>35</sup> Estimates in the U.S. placed the figure at 40 percent choosing to enlist.<sup>36</sup> An extensive search has uncovered only about 4,000 Mennonite names in the records of the army and air force in Canada.<sup>37</sup> Reports from Ontario churches are intermittent and incomplete. In 1943, Bishop H.H. Janzen of the Mennonite Brethren Church reported that of 51 young MBs from Ontario called into service, 25 had enlisted in the army, 4 in the air force and one in the navy while 21 served in CO camps.<sup>38</sup> In 1945 he summarized the response among MBs in Ontario as shown in Table XI. This list does not include deferments for work deemed essential on the

farm or in industry. It indicates, however, that when faced with the choice, about one-fifth of those called up chose active service. Significantly, among non-members, that figure stood near three-fifths whereas only 6.4 percent of those who were members chose active duty.

Table XI  
Mennonite Brethren in State Service<sup>39</sup>

	Church Members		Non-members	
	COs	Active	COs	Active
Kitchener	19	5	7	7
Hespeler	-	-	2	2
New Hamburg	-	-	-	-
Port Rowan	5	-	4	1
Leamington	17	1	3	4
Vineland	20	-	-	1
Virgil	26	-	-	5
St. Catharines	<u>16</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>
Total	103	7	19	27

A similar pattern appears to have held true among the United Mennonites. At least 67 men joined the service while a dozen or more entered the medical corps.<sup>40</sup> In Waterloo and Leamington, about 25 percent went active. In the case of the Leamington, the largest congregation, 29 men joined the service as did 5 from Niagara, 11 from Vineland, and 5 from Hespeler.<sup>41</sup>

For Mennonite churches and leaders, this was a difficult time. On the one hand, they recognized that individually and collectively they

had failed to preserve fully and pass on a central tenet of their faith.<sup>42</sup> One writer in Der Bote suggested that "right down the line we have forfeited many things through indifference, worldliness and liberalism."<sup>43</sup> As Mennonites, we are more or less following the world, he observed, without setting any visible boundaries. Under these circumstances, it had become necessary, on the one hand, to draw more clearly those lines defining Mennonite religious identity. On the other hand, many struggled with the nature of their response to those who had so openly compromised their historic faith. That this boundary needed to be clarified and strengthened in order to preserve that faith was beyond question. Less clear was precisely who had transgressed the limits and whether the bounds should be exclusive or inclusive.

Ultimately, the question of loyalty had to be answered by the young men themselves. With the exception of a disagreement regarding the acceptable form of alternative service, Mennonite leaders remained clear on the limits prescribed by faith and tradition regarding military service. One speaker at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada annual sessions in Winkler, Manitoba in July 1942, summarized this position as follows:

...it should probably belong to scriptural church discipline that those who have taken up service in the army should be considered<sup>44</sup> to have withdrawn themselves [from membership].

The argument for this strict position was strengthened by the fact that the Canadian government had agreed to and provided an alternative service program for COs.

Still, many chose not to accept that alternative and, by accepting active duty, compromised the nonresistant teachings of the Mennonite church. The congregational polity of the Mennonites meant that individual congregations needed to take action regarding the servicemen from their midst. But there was no consistent policy or practice. Bishop N.N. Driedger recalls that such discipline was not made an issue in Leamington.<sup>45</sup> The secretary of the MB Conference, on the other hand, opined that these young men "should by no means be found in our churches!"<sup>46</sup> By and large, Bishop H.H. Janzen seems to have reflected the MB position with his exhortation to "draw the boundaries clearly in all instances."<sup>47</sup> Although the annual statistics reported a number of exclusions (Ausschlusse) each year, there is no clear indication that this action was also taken against servicemen. There was some consolation in the fact that only seven of the 34 men from the Bruedergemeinde who entered active service were church members (Table XI). Since membership in the church was on the basis of a personal, adult decision, at which time the individual made a commitment to the congregational statement of faith, only those who had become members could be held accountable for compromising their faith. The MBs, therefore, drew the line at this point, assuming a position also taken by the Swiss Mennonites.<sup>48</sup> A strong desire for the purity of the group meant the exclusion of those who remained unrepentant and were, therefore, spiritually impure.

United Mennonite leaders took a more pragmatic and inclusive view. At a meeting of ministers and deacons in November, 1940, this issue

received considerable attention. Those present agreed on the traditional peace position. They encouraged a greater emphasis on this teaching at the time of admission into membership but stopped short of recommending the automatic exclusion of those who took up arms. Instead, they suggested that these men needed to have their consciences pricked.<sup>49</sup> Bishop Jacob H. Janzen reflected this ambivalence in an article in Der Bote in 1945. Acknowledging that the strict position of the "Formalisten" made it easier for them to respond because they did so on the basis of principle alone, he suggested, however, that the churches owed a debt to the returning soldiers because of their failure to adequately prepare them for that decision. He could not in good conscience, therefore, urge their exclusion.<sup>50</sup> Another writer verbalized the dilemma more succinctly. "Whether or not we believe in nonresistance is not the question," he argued. "Our duty is to reach out a loving hand."<sup>51</sup> No church members, he suggested, could claim complete purity in faith and life.

When compelled to choose between their passion for the purity of the faith and their compassion for those weak in that faith, the UMs were inclined to prefer the latter. Bishop J.H. Janzen expressed the concern of his people for "extending our care" to servicemen stationed or on leave in Toronto. "Many of our own men are among them," he noted, "and if they, perhaps, care little for Christ and our churches, they still are living souls...."<sup>52</sup> Janzen himself made little distinction between members and non-members. He was concerned to meet the spiritual and personal needs of both, regardless of whether their



present lifestyle was consistent with his own beliefs or the principles of the Mennonite faith.<sup>53</sup> A similar concern had prompted him to become a self-appointed army chaplain to the Mennonite soldiers involved in the civil war in Russia.<sup>54</sup> Janzen did not regard this as compromising the faith. He believed it was necessary in order to "win them for the faith" at some point in the future. He also reflected thereby a concern for personal salvation which did not necessarily imply the ethical transformation demanded by the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship, at least not initially.

In his Christmas letter to the young men from United Mennonite Churches in December, 1943 Janzen allowed that the individual decisions made by these men, whether for active duty or for CO status, were equally based on Christian convictions and hence equally valid, whether he agreed with them or not. "You know that I am a steadfast conscientious objector," he wrote, conceding however that his young coreligionists had made their own choice on the matter. Then he drew the bottom line.

Be good Christians! If you are soldiers, then follow the advice of John the Baptist and be not soldiers for worldly gain but out of the conviction that God has led you to serve King and fatherland in this way. - If, however, you are workers in a CO camp, then be honest and try your best to be a blessing to all those with whom God leads you into contact. Whether you are a soldier or a ... C.O., remember the counsel of the apostle Paul, "Let each one be true to his belief."<sup>55</sup>

This position, which David Toews shared with Janzen, was, however, closer to mainline Protestantism than orthodox Anabaptism. Bishop Toews warned Bishop S.F. Coffman in September 1939 that

A neglect on our part to do what we can for these young men may in some cases mean death to them and not only physical death, but it may mean a turning away from our church and from Christianity, and if in that condition they are killed in battle, what will be their lot after death. <sup>56</sup>

If none were to be lost to the faith, or to eternal damnation, then none could ipso facto be excluded. This did not imply that the principles of the faith were being abandoned. It did, however, make it more difficult to define or defend those boundaries. That, Janzen believed, was a postwar task.

These distinctions were complicated by the all-pervasive nature of the war effort. J.H. Janzen asserted that "[The person] who served under arms is no more guilty than the one working in war industries or pocketing the profits of war in another way."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, he maintained that no one could escape some involvement in the war effort.<sup>58</sup> Rather than construct an arbitrary boundary, therefore, Janzen preferred to suspend such distinctions temporarily.

Nevertheless, it should be added that both denominations took similarly clear positions on related issues. Both discouraged employment in war industries and encouraged their members to purchase specially-marked Victory Bonds or Non-Interest Bearing Certificates, the proceeds of which would be used "to alleviate suffering" rather

than wage war.<sup>59</sup> Decisions on these matters were left to the individual, however, suggesting the collapse of a collective consensus and of congregational constraints. In effect, therefore, the wartime experience confirmed the triumph of the individual conscience over group consciousness among the Russian Mennonites. An action taken at the annual membership meeting of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church in January, 1941, illustrates this tendency. After reaffirming the principle of nonresistance, the congregation agreed that "under the diverse circumstances encountered by our members [we] must leave the decision to individual consciences for the most part."<sup>60</sup> Their response also demonstrated how extensively these immigrants had become integrated into the socio-economic milieu of Canadian society and demonstrated their resolve to be accepted, as much as possible, as full-fledged and loyal citizens of their adopted homeland. According to one historian, if the Mennonites were a "separate people" prior to the war, this "most certainly was not true after 1945."<sup>61</sup>

Many factors undoubtedly contributed to the decisions of those young men who, against the unanimous wishes of their parents and church leaders, enlisted voluntarily. Hildegard Martens suggests that they either reacted against the pro-Germanism of their parents or felt compelled to do so by the pressures of a society into which they were largely assimilated.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, these young people may have shared the feeling prevalent among other Canadians that the immigrants were not completely loyal. Participation in the military alongside their

English-speaking peers represented one way of demonstrating their own allegiance to an entity larger than their Mennonite peoplehood. That world had become too small for them. If this participation represented a reaction against Germanism, it may have been so in part because the Germany waging this war bore no resemblance to the epitome of cultural achievement proclaimed by earlier propagandists. At the same time, military service represented a rejection of traditional Mennonite values. That a large majority were non-members indicates that many of these young men had not committed themselves to the traditional tenets of the faith and suggests that some did not want to assume that identity. One veteran of 18 years in the intelligence branch of the service conceded that he never fully lost his Mennonite identity and, by the same token, that he never truly had it.<sup>63</sup> In response to this ambivalence, Mennonite leaders moved quickly following the war to establish a more comprehensive congregational and conference-based educational program in an effort to inculcate traditional values and beliefs more effectively in their young people.

## II

World War II served to heighten and underscore the struggle for their Eigenart which characterized the Russian Mennonite immigrant experience. In its broadest terms, that struggle represented a search for both a revitalized separate identity and, at the same time, acceptance into the larger Anglo-Canadian society. Whereas the former was primarily an internal matter, the latter represented the point of

contact with the "world". On this front, the wartime experience brought considerable change. Burgeoning war industries offered steady and lucrative employment, luring seasonal farm labourers and many young people into the city and exposing them to all the temptations of a "worldly" life. How the bonds of family and community and the boundaries of faith and morality could be reestablished and maintained in this context proved a significant new challenge.

While city life and work appeared to be the most threatening to the survival of Mennonite identity, the greatest conflict with Anglo-Canadian society came, however, not in the city but in the country, in the rural areas such as Niagara-on-the-Lake, as already noted, and Essex County. It was here that the ethnoreligious character of the Russian Mennonites remained the most vibrant, and the most visible. It was in Leamington, therefore, and not in Kitchener-Waterloo, or St. Catharines or Toronto for that matter, that this conflict erupted most violently in all of Ontario. Part of the reason lay in the fact that Essex County experienced the largest influx of these newcomers prior to the war. Over 1,000 Russian Mennonites had settled here since 1925, part of a German-Canadian population of over 6,000.<sup>64</sup> The relative size and newness of this influx contributed to the hostilities which surfaced during the war.

Evidence of tension within the Leamington community first surfaced in July, 1939 during the first major anti-alien scare. A local Mennonite resident wrote to the editor of The Leamington Post and News "seeking better understanding between people living in the

community."<sup>65</sup> The impetus for the letter is unclear. It represented, in effect, an apology for the Mennonite immigrants who had settled here. The writer distinguished them from the radicals and revolutionaries of the European labouring class, indicating that they fully supported and participated in democratic society. The Russian Mennonites, he made clear, were not communists or anarchists.

The author of this letter also denied the existence of Mennonite sympathies for Germany. "[T]he present political, religious and social trend there does not coincide with Mennonite principles," he explained. Pacifism, he continued, did not mean, however, that his people shirked their obligations to their homeland. Nor, he argued, did the maintenance of their mother tongue suggest a lack of loyalty. "We have done our best to master the English language in the last 15 years," he wrote. "We must do so not only to qualify for positions [of employment], but as a duty to our new country." He maintained, nonetheless, that there was not and need not be a contradiction of loyalties in the Mennonite community, adding

...good citizenship does not depend on [the] sacrificing of language and tradition. People who reveal the weakness of giving up such things and others too readily are only too apt to possess weaknesses in other aspects of citizenship.<sup>66</sup>

Immediately after the declaration of war, the editor of the Leamington Post, Philip Fader, reported his disgust upon hearing stories about "local German-sympathizers who say they would fight for Hitler, or that Britain will be Ticked."<sup>67</sup> Cautioning that no one

should be condemned "purely on the basis of nationality or race," Fader warned, however, that "Canadians shouldn't have to stand for such statements."<sup>68</sup>

For the next eight months these tensions appear to have remained subdued. On May 9, 1940, however, as the second wave of anti-alien and anti-German sentiment swept over the country, a columnist in the Windsor Daily Star alerted readers to the spectre of "fifth column" sabotage by foreign-born Canadians. Quoting other sources, he named the German-speaking Mennonites as posing a particular threat.<sup>69</sup> Five days later a "Canadian" from Leamington responded to this warning with a letter regarding "the Mennonite menace." "[W]ith very few exceptions," the writer asserted, "every Mennonite is an ardent and active worker for Germany and Hitler. This also applies to every other German... Before it is too late let us do something to purge ourselves of this poison in our midst."<sup>70</sup>

Several residents apparently took action immediately. On May 16 the Leamington Post and News reported that "One 'German sympathizer' who was doing too much spouting had his mouth closed by a local young man's fist."<sup>71</sup> Three soldiers also "threatened and choked" another person, the article continued. The editor, Philip Fader, warned again that "The ballyhoo of these so-called 'German sympathizers' will not be tolerated in Leamington, and all concerned might just as well understand that right now - and that's that."<sup>72</sup>

The Leamington town council, which Fader had chaired since his election as mayor in January of that year, met in special session on

May 16 in order to deal with the growing tension. Noting that there were many Germans in the area, "among them subversive elements who appear to be dangerous," that the German language was being taught privately and used widely in public, and that there had already been "at least two brawls in public places in Town," the council recommended

- (1) THAT the Defence of Canada Regulations be rigidly and effectively enforced and that local authorities be given wide authority and discretion to enforce the same.
- (2) THAT the German language in public places be forbidden for the duration of the war.
- (3) THAT units of Home Defence be immediately organized.

Moreover, it challenged German-speaking residents to lift "the veil of suspicion" by registering their Loyalty on a form in the town office. Any who failed to do so would, according to the report in the Leamington Post, be assumed to be "Nazi Sympathizers."<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, the news reports became increasingly alarming. On May 23, the paper reprinted an article from the Windsor Star entitled "Concrete Evidence of Nazi Sympathizers." Eldon Stonehouse, a Star reporter, maintained that there were indeed Nazi sympathizers, "but whether or not this district (South Essex) is the hive of Nazism many people believe it to be has yet to be shown," he noted.<sup>75</sup> He indicated that he had overheard "a comparatively few" of the "much maligned Mennonite faith" express hopes for a German victory, noting that Mennonites were not the only ones sympathetic to Germany.<sup>76</sup> The editor of the Star warned readers not to downplay this issue and raised



the spectre of a "fifth column" movement in the region.<sup>77</sup> The presence of the Deutscher Bund, a pro-Nazi German-Canadian league,<sup>78</sup> in Windsor in the late 1930s contributed to this suspicion. At least two Mennonites, Henry Schroeder and J. Fast, had belonged to this organization.<sup>79</sup> According to one immigrant, these men were "body and soul for Germany."<sup>80</sup> Schroeder, who served as local Bund chairman, was one of eight Bund members from Ontario interned by the RCMP in September, 1939.<sup>81</sup>

These circumstances made conditions extremely difficult for the Mennonites. Bishop N.N. Driedger indicated to his fellow Bishops, J.H. Janzen in Waterloo and D.H. Koop in Vineland, that the action of the town council in particular had focused attention on the two Mennonite churches. Consequently, the United Mennonite congregation cancelled a series of evening meetings scheduled with a visiting missionary from India.<sup>82</sup> These meetings would have been conducted in the German language. German language instruction for the children was either cancelled or moved into private homes. One of the teachers received a threatening letter because of this involvement.<sup>83</sup> A funeral service on May 24 was held in a private home in order to avoid public attention.<sup>84</sup> Some sympathetic neighbours advised their Mennonite friends, "If you were wise, you would start speaking English." Bishop N.N. Driedger responded, however, that they "might as well lock the doors" of the church.<sup>85</sup> The church building itself became a target for abuse. Vandals broke a number of windows and on two occasions entered the church, tearing up Sunday School pictures and

hymn books, overturning benches, breaking dishes, and stealing some money.<sup>86</sup> Following the break-in on Saturday, May 25, Driedger did indeed lock the church doors for a brief time, cancelling the worship and communion service which was to be held that Sunday.<sup>87</sup>

On the same day, members of the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church met to discuss the town council challenge of registration. This request for a signed statement of loyalty placed the Mennonites in an awkward position. They did not believe there were any grounds for doubting their loyalty. Furthermore, some maintained that signing the statement could suggest an admission of guilt. Church leaders protested that they and their people had pledged their allegiance upon their naturalization. Nonetheless, at a special meeting of the Brethren called to consider the question, members agreed "to indicate their submission to the authorities by signing such a declaration."<sup>88</sup> Arrangements had been made with the mayor permitting them to sign such a statement at the church. Some 96 persons, about three-quarters of their membership, did so.

MENNONITES HERE DECLARE LOYALTY, the bold headline in the Leamington Post declared on May 30. Two days earlier, Mennonite leaders had appeared before the Leamington town council to present their declarations of loyalty. The statement from the Mennonite Brethren Church, accompanied by the 96 signatures, read as follows:

We hereby openly confirm our loyalty to our King and the British Empire. Furthermore we give our assurance not to participate in any activities contrary to the laws of our government. We disown the accusations brought against us for having taken part in intrigue, "fifth column" or "~~Trojan~~ horse" work of

any character. As in the past so in the future it shall be our endeavour to promote peace and good will among our fellow citizens.<sup>89</sup>

The United Mennonites, on the other hand, presented only a terse statement without any signatures attached. In it they affirmed that

Being Canadians we are standing firmly with Canada and thereby with <sup>90</sup>Great Britain. Any other stand would be treason.

Presumably a few UM's were among the 56 who had signed at the town office. About one half of those names were Mennonite and some of these also appeared on the MB list.<sup>91</sup> On the whole, therefore, the UM's seemed much less inclined to parade their loyalty in order to appease the public despite the harassment they experienced. Their response may, in part, have been a reflection of Bishop J.H. Janzen's attitude. He was confident that the accusations and the vandalism were, in all cases, nothing but the mindless passions of "the ignorant mob."<sup>92</sup> As such, they did not deserve a response. The sentiments of another Mennonite, who wrote anonymously to the Leamington Post, may also have captured something of the mood of the immigrants. "We are proud of this country," he assured his readers, "and you - now, you, in turn, be proud of us!"<sup>93</sup>

There were a number of major reasons for the traumatic experience of the Mennonites in Essex County. A German-speaking Mennonite community of significant proportions had emerged in Essex County in a decade and a half. Many had come during the late thirties and early forties in search of economic opportunity, swelling the Mennonite

population here by as much as 40 percent. (See Table VI.) Local residents observed the emergence here of what some described as a "Mennonite colony" and "a veritable 'little Germany'."<sup>94</sup> Bishop N.N. Driedger concedes that the Mennonites kept to themselves too much and became "a closed group."<sup>95</sup> Inter-marriage and even social interaction with "Englaender" (Anglos) was openly discouraged.<sup>96</sup> For other residents in the area, he admits, "we were a puzzle."<sup>97</sup> The widespread and undiminished use of the German language, especially in public places, aggravated this situation and precipitated the town council's action restricting its use. The 1941 census underscores the strength of German cultural identification among the Mennonites here. Even at that time, after the crisis of 1940, almost one half registered their racial origin as German, 18 percent more than the national average.<sup>98</sup> Occasional indiscreet expressions of German patriotism caused this cultural separation to become suspect as subversion. Hitler salutes and boisterous German conversation in public, even when done in jest, aroused the anger and even hatred of Anglo-Canadians.<sup>99</sup>

When the prospect of military exemption for the German-speaking Mennonites was added to this tension, the situation became extremely volatile. The Leamington town council expressed its strong objections to these exemptions to the Prime Minister.<sup>100</sup> The Leamington Post issued a similar declaration, demanding that at the very least Mennonites be required to serve actively in an alternative way in defence of the country. "Only too often have we heard...the statement from young men," wrote the editor, Philip Fader, "I'll go and do my

duty when they take the Mennonites too, but I will be darned if I am going and defend my country and leave them here to the jobs!"<sup>101</sup> One young Mennonite was quoted as saying, when asked why his people didn't go to war, "Oh, we are like the British. We let others fight for us."<sup>102</sup> This kind of arrogance and insensitivity undoubtedly contributed to the tension which resulted in the barroom brawl of May 23, 1940, although no Mennonites were involved.<sup>103</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen confessed to N.N. Driedger that the Mennonites themselves bore a large responsibility for the hostility they encountered. Some, by virtue of their foolish behaviour, he observed, "have sown the wind and are now reaping the whirlwind."<sup>104</sup> Driedger agreed that the issue of nonresistance was causing "a great deal of resentment."<sup>105</sup> To mitigate this anger, he urged the young men in his congregation not to request deferrals for farm work, which permitted them to stay home, but to serve under the alternative service program instead. In the face of this public pressure, however, some chose military service to prove their loyalty and win the approval of their Anglo-Canadian peers.<sup>106</sup>

A final factor in the conflict was the competition for jobs, especially better-paying factory work. One Leamington resident wrote to the Windsor Star accusing local merchants and industries of giving preference to Mennonites because they agreed to work for lower wages. The letter indicated that a petition was being circulated urging a boycott of any establishments employing persons "suspected or known to be Nazi sympathizers."<sup>107</sup> Chrysler workers in Windsor, meanwhile, demanded that all German workers, whether naturalized or not, be

dismissed from their plant. Management subsequently banned the use of German on Chrysler premises and dismissed three employees until they could provide proof of citizenship.<sup>108</sup> That Mennonite residents benefited from the improved economy is clear. The number of farm owners among them, for example, increased from 68 to 81 between 1938 and 1941 and then doubled during the wartime boom. By 1946, therefore, over one half of the United Mennonite families had purchased their own farms. Others had established their own business or pursued a trade and many who did not farm bought their own home.<sup>109</sup> Inasmuch as the Russian Mennonites shared in the prosperity brought on by the war, therefore, Anglo-Canadians expected them to make the personal sacrifices necessary to defend their country as well.

While outsiders did not distinguish between denominations in Essex County, some differences in the responses of the two groups became apparent. The evidence suggests that the Mennonite Brethren, a smaller group which included many recently arrived from western Canada where tensions ran even higher, were more intimidated by these events. In June, 1940, shortly after publicly declaring their allegiance, the MB congregation felt constrained, "because of the attitude of the authorities," to adopt English Sunday school materials and an English hymn book. It also seemed advisable to them to begin using English in the Jugendverein.<sup>110</sup> This removal of the protective linguistic barrier signaled the inevitable integration of this group into the cultural milieu of the larger society. The larger group of UM's would maintain this boundary for some time. The MB's also made other

significant expressions of solidarity with the indigenous community. The congregation agreed to assist in the canning of fruit for the Red Cross at the local Baptist Church, to help with the packing and shipping of materials for the Red Cross several times a month, to send representatives to the local ration board, and to delegate two of their female members to participate in the English prayer meetings in the community.<sup>111</sup> In each case, the desire for acceptance by Anglo-Canadians overshadowed the concern to maintain a separate identity.

If Essex County Mennonites endured the most hostility throughout the war, then those resident in the Kitchener-Waterloo region experienced the least unrest during these years. Bishop Jacob H. Janzen tried to alleviate Anglo-Canadian concerns through the public media. Three months before the outbreak of war he assured readers of the Globe and Mail that the Mennonites did not seek "any special privileges or exemptions that would make things easy for us." Indeed, he asserted,

We would be willing to face the same dangers that others face and bear the same burdens. We would work all together for Canada, only we could not actually bear arms. We served in Russia as members of the medical corps,<sup>112</sup> and were not compelled to bear arms there.

Shortly after the declaration of war, Janzen informed the local convener of the International Committee that his people would like to express their loyalty and love for Canada and its people "in something more than just nice words... We may not kill," he added, "but we may,

and are willing to, die for our adopted homeland to which we owe so much."<sup>113</sup> Elsewhere he conceded that

...if our efforts, of necessity, must aid the war effort, we try to engineer things so that they aid our side and not the enemy. It is impossible for us to be impartial, and, moreover, we do not want to be so.<sup>114</sup>

As evidence of their loyalty, Waterloo County Mennonites immediately joined forces to raise funds for the Red Cross, a relief action they believed did not compromise their nonresistant faith but gave expression to their concern for the preservation of human life instead.<sup>115</sup> The local paper, however, applauded the action as a clear demonstration of patriotism. The editorial commending this response appeared under the headline, "Mennonites Help Stamp Out Hitlerism!"<sup>116</sup>

Because of the large German-speaking population in the area, Mennonites did not become the focus of anti-alien sentiment as they did in Essex County or Niagara, for instance. When the 1940 wave of fear swept the country, some Kitchener residents joined in the search for possible "fifth columnists." The Royal Canadian Legion urged the city council to take action against suspected Nazi-sympathizers after law enforcement officers indicated there was no evidence for investigation or prosecution.<sup>117</sup> Mennonites were not specifically implicated in these accusations, however. Still, Bishop J.H. Janzen urged the utmost discretion upon his people, so as to be sure "not to provoke the passions of the mob, and to avoid everything that could be misunderstood by ignorant people."<sup>118</sup>



Except for "a few loud-mouthed Germans," Bishop J.H. Janzen reported on September 8, 1939, five days after the outbreak of war, that the situation remained peaceful in Waterloo. "Of course, we Mennonites here were never that enthusiastic about Hitler," he continued, "and after he made that pact with hell [Russia]... apparently the last remnants of warmth for his regime also cooled off."<sup>119</sup> Several developments a week later, after war had been declared by Canada, suggest, however, that the twin cities did not completely escape the anti-German backlash. One of the large Lutheran churches here cancelled its German-language worship service.<sup>120</sup>

Neither of the Mennonite congregations, whose programs were still entirely German, followed suit despite the suggestion from the local police chief that this might be advisable for the duration of the war.

"Our younger generation welcomes that [suggestion] with joy," one immigrant noted, "the older one is hesitant."<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, in order to avoid attracting undue attention, the Kitchener, MB Church withdrew its invitation to host the annual immigrant meeting in November, 1939 and the event was cancelled.<sup>122</sup>

A month after the outbreak of war Bishop J.H. Janzen reported to David Toews:

We continue to have our worship services as always and no one disturbs us. The leaders here in the twin cities are well-disposed towards us, know our loyalty and do not doubt it. We have our faults, of course, and have probably been injudicious [taktlos] toward our neighbours here and there, but on the whole our workers here seem to have gained the confidence of both their co-workers as well as their superiors and life is not being made difficult for them and us at the present time.<sup>123</sup>

Church leaders continued to exercise caution regarding the frequency and nature of special services, however, avoiding particularly foreign visitors, including missionaries, because they might be suspected as foreign agents.<sup>124</sup>

Several circumstances contributed to the more ready acceptance of the Russian Mennonite immigrants into the socio-economic milieu of Waterloo County. Bishop J.H. Janzen noted quite correctly that racial origins did not seem to be as important here as in other areas.<sup>125</sup> This was true, at least, as far as German-speaking Mennonites were concerned. They had entered a region dominated by settlers of German origin. In 1921, this group outnumbered the Anglo-Canadian population by two-and-a-half to one in Waterloo North.<sup>126</sup> Over time, the Swiss Mennonites resident here had established a cordial if subdued relationship with their German-speaking neighbours and had earned the acceptance and respect of English-speaking residents. Although Berlin had been renamed Kitchener, not even the tensions of the Great War had noticeably affected those relationships over the long term. The warm reception accorded the Russian Mennonites in 1924 testifies to that rapport. So strong and secure was their racial and cultural identity, in fact, that even in 1941 81 percent of all Mennonites in the area registered their racial origin as German.<sup>127</sup> The presence of a larger German community undoubtedly rendered the Mennonites less visible and hence less threatening.

Unlike the other two main areas of concentration, the Mennonite immigrants here scattered rather widely throughout the region. The

largely urban environment affected not only the settlement pattern but also the occupational choices of the newcomers. Together, these factors contributed to a greater social and economic integration with the host society. The prominent presence of J.H. Janzen, and to a lesser extent of H.H. Janzen, also contributed to the acceptance of the Russian Mennonites in the community. The frequent appearances of the former before civic and community groups enhanced the level of understanding as well as the stature of these people among the Anglo-Canadian population.<sup>128</sup> His reasoned arguments and explanations in the public press may also have been helpful in this regard. Indeed, so undisturbed did the Russian Mennonite community in Kitchener-Waterloo remain through the anti-alien hysteria in the spring of 1940 that Janzen could write to his colleague, N.N. Driedger, in Leamington, "we have it so good here that we would be committing a large sin if we grumbled."<sup>129</sup>

Apart from the tension which had surfaced in the spring of 1939, the rapidly growing Russian Mennonite settlement in the Niagara peninsula also experienced relative calm and general acceptance throughout the war years. Perhaps that earlier confrontation had resulted in a mutual accommodation and acceptance which helped prevent the recurrence of a similar conflict of cultures and loyalties. The presence of a diverse and well integrated Swiss Mennonite population in the region had undoubtedly prepared residents for the pacifist stance of the newcomers during the war. The immigrants themselves, by virtue of their hard work and enterprising nature, won the respect of the local populace through their economic success.

Reaching back to their tradition of mutual aid, the Russian Mennonites maximized their resources by investing them jointly. Peter Wall, of Vineland, helped the settlers purchase and divide large properties in the vicinity of Virgil. In 1935, their first year of farming here, the Mennonites established the Niagara Township Fruit Co-operative.<sup>130</sup> By this means they were able to purchase farm supplies on credit as well as dispose of their produce to repay those debts. When it became apparent to these farmers that they would be unable to sell their produce to the existing canning factories, Peter Wall established the Niagara Canning Company in 1940.<sup>131</sup> This enterprise not only helped the farmers, but it also provided seasonal employment for some of the newcomers. Another farming family in the area, Martin Boese Sr. together with his three sons and a son-in-law, capitalized on this rapid growth by opening a canning factory in Port Dalhousie, west of Niagara-on-the-Lake on the shores of Lake Ontario. Boese, who had come to Canada in 1930, built this plant in 1946 with the proceeds from his own peach farm. During the peak season, his ~~factory~~ offered employment to 150 persons, most of them Mennonite migrants from western Canada.<sup>132</sup>

One further indication of the self-sufficiency, and prosperity, of this Mennonite community was the establishment of a Credit Union in 1944. When local banks hesitated to extend the recent newcomers the credit they needed to establish and finance their own farming operations, A.P. "Ed" Regier, who had himself only recently arrived from Alberta, initiated the establishment of a separate institution in

association with the farmers' Co-op. According to observers, Regier, who managed the Credit Union for its first 21 years, "walked, talked and thought Credit Union, spreading the word and proving the idea would work."<sup>133</sup>

This form of vertical integration of institutions recalled the self-sufficiency of the Mennonite settlements in Russia. It also reflected the strength and self-confidence of the group, particularly of certain individuals, in financial affairs even as the emergence of a private high school here at this same time demonstrated that characteristic in matters of education and religion. These enterprises also represented a certain separation from the larger socio-economic order, though more out of necessity than out of a separatist ethic. In that sense they were a form of adaptation rather than isolation, of integration into the competitive free-enterprise system rather than withdrawal into a separate social order. The Co-op, the canneries, and the Credit Union stood ready to serve all members of the surrounding community. As such, they were not perceived as separatist or subversive but rather as evidence of integration and Canadianization.

Another indication of that trend was the emergence of a Russian Mennonite community in nearby St. Catharines. The 1941 census counted 200 Mennonites here, a figure which more than doubled to 510 in 1951.<sup>134</sup> Some came from the surrounding area but most were disillusioned settlers from western Canada. Industries such as General Motors, spurred by the wartime economy, offered good employment opportunities. Although many of these newcomers established contact

with the churches in Vineland or Virgil, they preferred a more local congregation. The first service was held in September, 1943, in a room rented from The St. Catharines Standard.<sup>135</sup> The presence of 125 worshippers testified to the need for a church. A month later, 66 charter members organized the St. Catharines MB Church. By the end of 1945, the membership of this congregation had doubled.<sup>136</sup> A small number of United Mennonites also began to meet in 1942. This group organized itself into a congregation in October, 1944 with 16 charter members.<sup>137</sup> A year later, the St. Catharines UM Church counted 63 members and 113 souls on its roll.<sup>138</sup>

In comparison to a larger centre such as Toronto, those Russian Mennonites moving into St. Catharines did not experience the same isolation or face as great a risk of gradual alienation from their heritage. In part, this difference can be ascribed to the difference between these two urban centres. Toronto, a much larger and more cosmopolitan city, represented a greater distancing, geographically, socially, culturally, intellectually, and spiritually from traditional Mennonite life. St. Catharines, meanwhile, situated as it was between two strong and growing Mennonite settlements, offered the advantages of urban life as well as the security of contact with kith and kin. Perhaps the most important factor was the presence of capable leaders in this city who took upon themselves the task of gathering together the newcomers. By providing the social fellowship and spiritual nurture sought by these persons, they prevented their total integration into the dominant Anglo-Canadian society.

The emergence of a permanent Russian Mennonite congregation in Toronto was not as quick or easy, however. While a few had ventured here to study or work, generally leaving their Mennonite community connections behind in the process, it was the military base situated here which added a significant number of temporary residents to this small group. The first Mennonites here had been the Swiss, some of whom had begun to move into the city after the turn of the century. By World War I enough of them had settled here to warrant the establishment of a city mission, which later grew into a congregation. The 1921 census counted 151 Mennonite residents in the city, a number which grew to 326 by 1941.<sup>139</sup> Some of these were Russian Mennonites. In October, 1941 I.G. Neufeld, a self-proclaimed and self-styled "city missionary" to these newcomers,<sup>140</sup> reported that a group of some 50 Russian Mennonites was meeting periodically for worship and fellowship. By the end of the year he had located 25-30 more and a year and a half later, in 1943, this number had risen to about 100.<sup>141</sup> Neufeld expressed concern the fate of this "splinter of our people...here in this Babylon." In the city, he noted, one could see the consequences of a sudden uprooting from the land in the lifestyle of these young men.

Free of the fetters of tradition and the home, relieved of every social and church-related obligation, they often become their own worst enemies.<sup>142</sup>

Various reasons brought these young Mennonites to the city. Neufeld noted that many came from the West, particularly Saskatchewan,

hoping to escape the lingering economic doldrums occasioned by the Depression. While some sought higher wages, others hoped "to see the world."<sup>143</sup> Apart from the great diversity of occupational opportunities, education interests also attracted young students, anxious for a university training. Still others came for medical treatment and remained isolated and lonely during their entire stay. A few, according to the papers, Neufeld noted, got into trouble with the law and had nowhere to turn for counsel or assistance.<sup>144</sup> But the largest group consisted of transient soldiers. In July, 1944, for example, Neufeld estimated that hundreds had passed through the city during the preceding six months, without any contact from Mennonite churches or individuals.<sup>145</sup> Most were young and single, drifting through the city without a place to seek fellowship or to have their personal and spiritual needs met. Neufeld lamented the indifference in the immigrant community.

How many young men may there be who need our services? And how many congregations are there which simply shrug their shoulders and pass by on the other side of the road from the one [who has] fallen among the thieves? "He broke the rules of the congregation and excluded himself," we reassure our slumbering conscience. In the meantime, however, our young men die on the fields of France. Will God inquire of us regarding their souls?<sup>146</sup>

In response to these needs, the UM Predigerkonferenz, in conjunction with both their Canadian and North American conference bodies, established a Home Missions Committee in 1942 to initiate a



program in Toronto.<sup>147</sup> For about a year, various ministers commuted to the city to conduct Sunday evening services. In September, 1943, Rev. Arnold Fast of Butterfield, Minnesota, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, was engaged as a full-time mission worker.<sup>148</sup> Five years later, this group organized itself into a chartered congregation.<sup>149</sup>

The Toronto Mission represented the first genuine mission effort of the United Mennonites in Ontario. In this endeavour they were attempting to gather and evangelize primarily those of Mennonite parentage who had crossed not only the geographic boundaries of Mennonite settlement but also the bounds of traditional Mennonite pursuits and lifestyles. While inclusive in that sense, this outreach program was also exclusive in that it sought to reestablish the Mennonite identity of these persons and to prevent their integration into either secular society or other religious faiths. Bishop J.H. Janzen resented, for instance,

the influence of Rev. Oswald Smith's "Peoples Church" which is an interdenominational church not only in trying to serve the strayed away [sic] members of every denomination, but not thinking too much of "Organized Religion" altogether, and therefore this group cannot understand very well why we should be so anxious to have our <sup>150</sup>Mission a General Conference Mennonite Mission....

He also expressed concern over denominational influences coming from other groups, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite. He pointed with some suspicion to I.G. Neufeld's mixed religious heritage. "...[B]eing a Baptist from our own MB Church, he, of course, cannot but engage in

church politics a little," according to Janzen. He suggested that Neufeld had a strong "political following" among the leadership of the Toronto group, including Rev. A.A. Fast, the conference employee. He acknowledged, however, the invaluable, unsolicited, and unremunerated service Neufeld had rendered the mission effort.<sup>151</sup> Still, for Janzen even I.G. Neufeld had crossed that shifting boundary of Mennonite identity.

It remained difficult, throughout the war, to reestablish or redefine the boundaries of Russian Mennonite identity. That task awaited a less stressful and less turbulent time. The wartime experience revealed clearly, however, how fragile those boundaries had become in the face of the powerful socio-economic and ideological forces of the larger society. The Mennonites were faced again with a crisis of loyalty, a crisis which revealed once more how divided the Mennonites were internally. The willingness of many of their young men to take up arms necessitated a quick and concerted response if further losses were to be avoided. But the recognition that many parents had participated as eagerly, albeit less conspicuously, in the war effort by working in war industries indicated that a more thorough-going reappraisal of the meaning and significance of traditional Mennonite values was required. The demographic changes evident in an increasing urbanization meant that those boundaries would have to be stretched and the proverbial stakes of the Russian Mennonite "canopy" driven into new ground once more.

Footnotes

- 1 These figures are based on census statistics.
- 2 Howard Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime," pp. 5-6.
- 3 Ibid., p. 6.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., p. 12.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Mennonite author Rudy Wiebe depicts this conflict in Peace Shall Destroy Many (1962; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).
- 8 Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime," p. 12.
- 9 Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada. A History (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 142. For the Ontario scene see Robert C. James, "'The City Where God Has Caused us to Come.' The Story of the Leamington Mennonite Community, May 09 - June 03, 1940: An Examination of Wider Circumstances" (unpublished research paper, University of Waterloo, 1982), pp. 24-27.
- 10 Avakumovic, ibid.
- 11 David Toews to Ernest Lapointe, July 18, 1940. Cf. C.F. Klassen to David Toews, July 26, 1940. CMBC.
- 12 Census, 1931, vol. IV, Table 45, and 1941, vol. IV, Table 6.
- 13 David Toews to J.H. Janzen, Aug. 20, 1940. CMBC.
- 14 J.H. Janzen, "Origin and Racial Origin," a letter to the editor of the Kitchener Daily Record, Aug. 15, 1940.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 B. Mabel Dunham in ibid., Aug., 1940. JHJ.
- 17 David Toews to N.N. Driedger, July 29, 1940. JHJ.
- 18 J.H. Janzen to N.N. Driedger, Aug. 15, 1940. JHJ.
- 19 Kitchener Daily Record, Aug. 15, 1940.
- 20 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 526.

- 21 Interviews, #51. Andres was anglicized to Andrews, for example, and Willms to Williams.
- 22 J.H. Calder to Joseph Kleinsasser, a Hutterite leader in South Dakota in Sept., 1919. Quoted in David Flint, The Hutterites. A Study in Prejudice (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 94.
- 23 Quoted in Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime," p. 12.
- 24 Cited in Epp, Exodus, p. 326.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 326-27.
- 26 Ibid., p. 327.
- 27 For a detailed outline and analysis of this aspect see David Warren Fransen, "Canadian Mennonites and Conscientious Objection in World War II" (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Waterloo, 1977).
- 28 Ibid., p. 58.
- 29 See the discussion in ibid., pp. 75-78.
- 30 Epp, Exodus, p. 329.
- 31 See Fransen, "Conscientious Objection," pp. 133-47.
- 32 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1943, p. 72.
- 33 Hildegard M. Martens, "Accommodation and Withdrawal: The Response of Mennonites in Canada to World War II," Social History, VII (Nov., 1974), p. 315.
- 34 See Epp, Exodus, p. 331; Fransen, "Conscientious Objection," p. 159; J.A. Toews, Alternative Service in Canada during World War II (n.p.: Publications Committee of the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1959), p. 49.
- 35 Thielman, "Canadian Mennonites," pp. 293-94; Epp, Exodus, p. 331.
- 36 This figure applies only to those who had come from Russia. See C.H. Friesen, "Die Mennoniten," Der Bote, XXI (Nov. 1, 1944), p. 1.
- 37 Fransen, "Conscientious Objection," p. 122n.
- 38 Minutes of "The Twelfth Convention of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches," Nov. 6-7, 1943, p. 25.
- 39 "Protokoll of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches," Nov. 2-4, 1945, pp. 9, 11.

- 40 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1944, p. 111.
- 41 Ibid., 1945, p. 87; "Statistischer Bericht des Kirchenbuchfuehrers ...am schluss des Jahres 1943." UMC0.
- 42 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1946, p. 25.
- 43 Friesen, "Die Mennoniten," p. 1.
- 44 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1942, p. 34.
- 45 Interviews, #52.
- 46 "Protokoll of the...Mennonite Brethren Churches," Nov. 2-4, 1945, p. 11.
- 47 "The Eleventh Convention," Oct: 24-25, 1942, p. 33.
- 48 Martens, "Accommodation and Withdrawal," p. 316.
- 49 "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," Nov. 2-3, 1940.
- 50 J.H. Janzen, "Nachkriegsprobleme der Mennonitengemeinschaft," Der Bote, XXII (Aug. 1, 1945), pp. 1-2.
- 51 G. Enns, "Heimkehr der mennonitischen Soldaten," Der Bote, XXII (July 18, 1945), p. 2.
- 52 Circular letter to church leaders, Feb. 15, 1944. JHJ.
- 53 This attitude is clearly evident in a Christmas letter sent to all the young men from UM Churches in the service, whether active or as noncombatant COs. See Jacob H. Janzen, "Ein Weihnachtsbrief," Der Bote, XLVIII (Dec. 19, 1984), pp. 3,5.
- 54 Jacob H. Janzen, "Alternative Service and the Cessation of Non-resistance of the Mennonites in Russia, after 1914" (unpublished manuscript, 1944 [?]), p. 4.
- 55 Janzen, "Ein Weihnachtsbrief," p. 5.
- 56 Quoted in Martens, "Accommodation and Withdrawal," pp. 315-16.
- 57 "Protokoll der Bruderschaft der Waterloo-Kitchener Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinde am 3. Feb. 1946." JHJ.
- 58 J.H. Janzen, "War and Peace" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), p. 1. JHJ.
- 59 "The Eleventh Convention," 1942, p. 32; "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," July 22, 1940. JHJ.

- 60 "Resolutions fuer die Jahresbruderschaft," Jan. 19, 1941. JHJ.
- 61 Fransen, "Conscientious Objection," p. 170.
- 62 Martens, "Accommodation and Withdrawal," pp. 319-20.
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- 71 May 16, 1940, p. 1.
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- 140 For an introduction to Neufeld see Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, pp. 485-86.
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- 145 G. Enns, "Ein Besuch bei Menn. Soldaten," MR, 67 (July 26, 1944) p. 1.
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- 149 "Toronto United Mennonite Church," Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1948, p. 31.
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## Chapter VIII

### Reaffirming the Faith, Redrawing the Boundaries

World War II changed the nature of Russian Mennonite life no less than it transformed the social and economic character of Canada. By virtue of their extensive involvement in those facets of society, the erstwhile immigrants participated in the emergence of an increasingly industrialized and urbanized nation. A hostile wartime atmosphere, moreover, prompted them to minimize their cultural distinctives. The war cut them off, almost totally and permanently, from the European source which had helped nurture that separateness. By the same token, it compelled them to choose, consciously and intentionally, to identify themselves as Canadians. Indeed, some, particularly those young men who took up arms, indicated by their actions that they perceived themselves first and foremost as Canadians and only secondarily as Mennonites.

In many respects, then, the integration of the Russian Mennonites into the socio-economic structure of Ontario proceeded apace. Their movement off the farms and into urban centres demonstrates the extent to which the immigrants were willing to associate with the indigenous population as well as the degree to which they responded to external factors rather than to internalized cultural or theological beliefs or traditions about Mennonite identity. This was true particularly among the younger generation. The young people inherited none of the visible

differences which might set them apart from Anglo-Canadian society and place them firmly into the ethnoreligious context of their parents. They had, after all, attended the public schools, spoke English fluently, dressed appropriately, and aspired to success in the socio-economic context of the "world" from which the Mennonites had traditionally sought to be separated. The challenge facing the Russian Mennonites in Ontario after World War II, therefore, was to reaffirm the beliefs and values which had come to define their Eigenart and to inculcate these in the younger generation. The new boundaries defining their identity as a people would, of necessity, be less visible and more flexible. As such, they would be more difficult to maintain. That, however, was the price of retaining the young people, a challenge which the experiences of the war had brought to the fore.

## I

The extent to which these socio-economic changes had already occurred become evident from an analysis of the registration forms filed by Mennonite men from the ages of 17 to 39 between 1940 and 1945, in order to receive conscientious objector status.<sup>1</sup> Although any findings based solely on this information are incomplete, particularly for those over the age of 20, the 335 forms surveyed give an indication of educational and occupational trends among young Mennonite men during the early forties.

In Essex County, for example, just over one-third of the registrants had acquired some education beyond public school, including

at least four with a post-secondary education. Some 27% had left the farm to work elsewhere, most as labourers in local factories. In Lincoln County, meanwhile, a full 50% of these young men were engaged in non-farm employment. Most worked in industry or on construction. Sixty-one of the registrants, representing 40% of the total, had some secondary school education while three others had some University training.

Residents of Waterloo County reflected the urban character of that region. Almost 60% of these registrants had some secondary school education and over 90% pursued non-farm related employment. Overall, just over 40% of the 335 registrants had attained some education beyond the primary school level by the end of the war. Almost half, some 47%, no longer worked on the farm. Significantly, that is precisely the percentage of Ontario Mennonites of Russian origin who registered as urban dwellers in the 1951 census.<sup>2</sup> These young men, most of them born in Canada, presaged, therefore, the integration of the Russian Mennonites into the educated, urbanized mainstream of middle-class Canadian society.

These developments had implications for their involvement in the program of the church and for their identity as Mennonites. In some cases, their employment took these men out of their parental home and community, weakening or severing ties of affiliation. Moreover, as Bishop H.H. Janzen noted, youth programs were poorly attended because many worked the night shift.<sup>3</sup> The association with non-Mennonites, moreover, whether at school or at work, increased the

possibility of intermarriage with persons of other, or no, church affiliation. By 1947, for example, 17 persons in the Waterloo-Kitchener UM Church had married "outside the church."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Essex County reported nine "mixed marriages" already in 1938.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear in the latter case whether this meant with another Mennonite denomination, with non-Mennonites, or both. In any event, it demonstrates something of the clannish mentality of the immigrants.

Despite this persistent attitude, however, they were not prepared to withdraw from their active participation in other dimensions of socio-economic interactions. During the prosperous war years, some observers began to suggest that the increasing level of involvement indicated a shift in the values and the lifestyle of the immigrants. A few, rather nostalgically and unrealistically, called the Mennonites back to a more traditional, rural past. One commentator held forth the ideal of the "Bible-believing peasant." He warned that those moving off the land to live in the urban "diaspora" stood to forfeit those two elements of Mennonite tradition, namely biblical orthodoxy and the rootedness in the land. Closed settlements, he maintained, represented the only protection against a complete and permanent loss of Mennonite identity.<sup>6</sup>

While some may have yearned for such a simple solution, few seemed willing, even if it were possible, to take that step back into a romanticized past. True, some of the older immigrants who had lost their land in Russia and now feared the loss of their language in Canada never gave up the hope and dream of returning to their native

homeland to reclaim an identity and inheritance within which they had once felt comfortable and secure. Most, however, had, since coming to Canada, gradually but steadily imbibed the forward-looking optimism of a society and nation coming of age. If, as B.B. Wiens suggested, the first challenge to the newcomers had been "the struggle for existence, the struggle for bread,"<sup>7</sup> then surely the second was the struggle to reestablish and retain their Eigenart. This, then, became the battle front for the Russian Mennonites in Ontario during and after World War II.

Particularly disturbing was the increasing disinterest in those elements central to the traditional Russian Mennonite Eigenart, the German language and the religious faith. Despite ongoing efforts to inculcate these values in the young people, the enthusiasm for them remained weak and sporadic. "It pains me deeply," Bishop J.H. Janzen admitted in 1942, "that we have been unable to make our holiest goods [heiligsten Gueter] so important to our young people that they will hold to them at any cost."<sup>8</sup> As evidence, he cited the large number of young men accepting active military service in direct contradiction to the historic nonresistant teaching of the Mennonites. At the same time, Janzen lamented the fact that "our mother tongue is no longer in style."<sup>9</sup> "What are our cultural values worth [to us]?" he asked rhetorically, adding

Will the war really cause the death of our long standing cultural work? Are we going completely out of style and being constrained to give up<sup>10</sup> what is precious to us to satisfy the times?

Janzen blamed the hostile wartime environment for these developments. "Have you allowed yourself to be so frightened by politics," he demanded of his people, "that you became like cattle...?"<sup>11</sup> Another writer from Ontario answered quite simply, "assimilation is taking over."<sup>12</sup>

This tendency was, of course, most evident among the young people. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Russian Mennonite community included a generation whose living memory did not reach back into the Russian experience. The simple fact of growing up and being educated in Canada further weakened the identification of these young people with the history and faith of their parents and grandparents. Strong anti-German feelings among Canadians reinforced their reactions against a culture and a language not fully their own. For some, according to one reader of Der Bote, it was more convenient to "lay aside the uncomfortable baggage and swim with the stream."<sup>13</sup> That stream, according to J.J. Wichert of Vineland and J.H. Janzen of Waterloo, threatened to disintegrate the Russian Mennonite community. Quoting the American Mennonite church leader H.P. Krehbiel, Wichert observed that

In Russia the peril of persecution forced [us] together and [our] Christianity was deepened thereby; forces of separation [auseinanderdraengende Kraefte] are at work here in America<sup>14</sup> and give rise to a superficiality [of faith].

These forces, Wichert and Janzen agreed, were tearing the once cohesive community of faith apart internally. The young people represented the front line of this battle.



"[It] must be acknowledged," Bishop Janzen conceded before his congregation in Waterloo in 1943, "that we have lost much of our hold on the youth."<sup>15</sup> The resulting tensions illustrated the conclusion drawn by Karen Blu on the basis of her study of Anglo-Saxons, Blacks, Indians and Jews in the southern U.S.

When a group views itself as part of a long and continuing tradition, members often find that a validation for their present "differentness," as well as a variety of adaptive techniques, is offered by this tradition. However, when a group is severed from its distant past, it does not have access to historical validation and strategies which were developed and<sup>16</sup> employed in that distant but now forgotten past.

The younger generation, it appears, felt compelled to make an unpleasant choice between a separated past which isolated them from the present or integration into a rapidly changing society at the risk of alienation from their parents, their church, and the ethnoreligious values these represented. Those young men who enlisted made a clear, if painful, decision to break with their past. But even the others took their time in weighing the options.

One manifestation of this tendency was the reluctance of young adults to make the required confession of faith in order to become church members. In Russia, this had customarily, and almost without exception, occurred between the ages of 20 and 22.<sup>17</sup> Information on the registration forms filed between 1940 and 1945 to request CO status indicates that in Essex County, for example, less than a quarter of registrants between the ages of 17 and 21 of both denominations were

baptized church members. At the Waterloo-Kitchener UM Church, meanwhile, almost one half of the young men between 18 and 30 had not become members by 1940.<sup>18</sup> That decision appears to have been left for later in life, seldom before these young men reached their early or mid-twenties.

This tendency, and the wartime pressures affecting these young people, contributed to increased concern among parents and church leaders. They saw their young people becoming increasingly exposed and susceptible to "worldly" lifestyles, values, and moral standards which they could neither regulate nor condone. One observer, commenting on "The Preservation of the Young People," warned his readers about the dangers of bad company, bad literature, movies, the theatre, the dance hall, the pool room, and the beer hall.<sup>19</sup> Another cautioned against Weltfoermigkeit, (conformity to the world). He was quick to add that the separateness of his people should not be equated with being outwardly conspicuous. Still, he maintained, "no one wants to be seen or treated as someone who is separated (ein Abgesonderter)."<sup>20</sup> In reviewing the situation in 1942, Bishop Henry H. Janzen, chairman of the MB Conference, called for a quick and clear reaffirmation of the traditional boundaries. He exhorted delegates at the annual meeting "not to take all of these things too lightly, and to set clear limits at all times."<sup>21</sup>

For their 1941 meeting the Predigerkonferenz asked Bishop J.H. Janzen to provide some direction for dealing with the question of young people and the church. In his presentation, Janzen suggested some ways

in which the young people could be encouraged to be more faithful in their church attendance. We all recognize that something is wrong, Janzen began, conceding that "we would like to drive them into church with a stick."<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, he added, "we know it wouldn't work," a realistic if painful concession to the individual freedom of choice available in this new milieu where constraints of community and tradition were becoming less compelling. Janzen went on to point out that "we live in a different time," a time in which force and parental authority had become inadequate once young people reached a certain age. "It has long become clear to us," he added, "that we will lose our young people if we do not enthuse them about our ideals. Compulsion in religious things can only accomplish the opposite of what we are after."<sup>23</sup> He warned of the bitterness which could result from such tactics. The only effective method, Janzen concluded, was the same one that made children glad to be at home with their parents. Such a situation, he maintained, depended on an open relationship of mutual trust and respect, of confidence and communication in Mennonite homes.

Rev. J.A. Dyck of Leamington agreed. "The [same] spirit which prevails in the families will also prevail in the churches," he suggested.<sup>24</sup> This approach, however, represented a different pattern of family relationships than the traditional authoritarian one which had characterized Mennonite homes in the Old World.<sup>25</sup> Without the protective and nurturing community structures of that world parents were expected to assume "the lion's share of religious instruction,"

according to Bishop Janzen.<sup>26</sup> Hans Dyck of Swift Current, Saskatchewan agreed with this analysis. In a presentation to delegates gathered in national convention in 1943, Dyck placed the major responsibility on parents to assure that "we can win and keep our young people for our Sunday morning worship services, Sunday schools, and Jugendvereine."<sup>27</sup>

Immigrant parents, born and raised in a significantly different environment, were hardly prepared to deal with this dramatic change in intergenerational dynamics, much less to shoulder the major responsibility for the spiritual and cultural nurture of their children. For that reason the programs of the church and church-related institutions became so important. Moreover, neither were these parents prepared to give moral guidance in the face of the unprecedented availability of "worldly" attractions and amusements to which their young people were exposed in Canadian society.

In their attempts to reestablish that separation from the "world" on the basis of an alternative ethic, that is, an internalized and voluntary boundary, the Russian Mennonites employed a number of the strategies for maintaining unity outlined by Rod Sawatsky.<sup>28</sup> First and foremost, they sought to reaffirm the historic faith and religious principles of the Anabaptists. Church leaders were particularly concerned about the loss of the nonresistant peace position. One minister from western Canada estimated that half of the young Mennonite men "compromised the faith of their fathers" and, as a result, called his people to repentance.<sup>29</sup> In December, 1945 the United

Mennonite Predigerkonferenz took up the challenge and encouraged all congregations to observe a day of repentance and prayer.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the MB Conference urged parents not to permit their children to participate in cadet training in the public high schools.<sup>31</sup> Delegates were admonished to renew their efforts to teach peace to the young people "who will in all likelihood soon be called to shed blood once again."<sup>32</sup> This concern was central to the curriculum in Bible and Church History being taught at the two emerging private Mennonite high schools, the MB school in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the UM school in Leamington, as well as in the congregational winter Bible schools organized within each Conference.

In addition, congregations were encouraged to clarify their peace position. Within the Mennonite Brethren churches this took the form of disassociating themselves from, that is to say, by excommunicating those who had compromised that principle by "going active."<sup>33</sup> The boundary was to be drawn very clearly in this case. Among the United Mennonites, however, the line was not as clear. At the insistence of Bishop J.H. Janzen, both the Predigerkonferenz and his own Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church acknowledged that, "to a greater or lesser extent we have all strayed from the principle of nonresistance."<sup>34</sup> Those who had taken up arms, in other words, were to be regarded as no more guilty than those who worked in war industries or otherwise benefited from the war economy. Consequently, all were called to self-examination and a reaffirmation of an opposition to war that was more consistent in the type of involvement or activity it accepted or rejected.

Janzen also helped his youth group draft a list of "Proposals for a Declaration of the Young People of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church on the question of Nonresistance."<sup>35</sup> This statement declared that "We may not kill, but we, too, are ready and willing to die for our country." It affirmed a noncombatant service, such as the medical corps, "side by side with our fighting forces" and requested no special privileges. The statement concluded, "Only he who would not kill in self defence has a moral right to refuse to kill...in the defence of others."<sup>36</sup> The declaration reaffirmed, in concise detail, the traditional Russian Mennonite peace position.

Similar efforts to reestablish the authority of right theology arose at the national level. The Conference of Mennonites in Canada, through the auspices of a committee charged with the task of clarifying matters of faith, published a variety of pamphlets and books intended to reinforce the centre and clarify the boundaries of orthodox Anabaptist-Mennonitism. The list of books promoted by the Conference covered such basic issues of faith as nonresistance, baptism, the oath, the Lord's Supper, and universal salvation.<sup>37</sup>

Closely related to this theological concern was the concern over ethics and morality. Sawatsky defines it as the authority of orthopraxis, that is, the attempt at boundary maintenance through the definition of correct ethics and lifestyle.<sup>38</sup> Increased contact and interaction with the dominant society, whether in school, at work, in the city environment, or through the media, exposed the younger generation of Russian Mennonites to values and lifestyles both new and

threatening to their parents and grandparents. These issues, it soon became clear, were larger and more widespread than could effectively be dealt with by individual families or even congregations. They became agenda for a broader debate. If the discussion in Der Bote is any indication, sexual mores and movie-going ranked among the most pressing concerns.

According to Frank Epp, "Of sex education, that is, overt, formal, and direct sex education, there was very little in most Mennonite homes and communities."<sup>39</sup> After a decade and a half in Canada, however, the issue and the questions could no longer be avoided or ignored. Once again, the Predigerkonferenz provided the necessary leadership. Whether at its request, or at the suggestion of J.H. Janzen, the Bishop published a booklet entitled Das sexuelle Problem (The sexual Problem) in 1941.<sup>40</sup> It was intended, according to Janzen, to assist and encourage parents and church leaders in the delicate task of sex education. One reviewer greeted this brief volume enthusiastically as having the potential to accomplish a great deal more. He lauded it as

the first book which, with all openness and based on God's Word, [with] thorough research of the problem and unbiased observations, without any prudishness and hypocritical silliness about chastity, calls a spade a spade and gets so close to the facts that there can be no misunderstanding, comes from the pen of a Mennonite and is intended to interest our young people more<sup>41</sup> in worship services and keep them in the church.

It was hoped that by dispelling the apparent antipathy between church and "world" on this issue, Mennonite youth would not be forced to choose between two worlds.

Some months later, following the warm reception of his earlier offering and numerous requests for additional guidance, Janzen published Leben und Tod (Life and Death), a companion piece intended as "A guide and a warning for young people and those who love them."<sup>42</sup> Both volumes became popular enough to warrant a second printing in 1946.

This response suggests more, however, than simply a dearth of such materials. It indicates that the Canadian environment provided a context wherein this matter could, and indeed needed to be discussed openly. Public schools in which non-Mennonite friends and non-Christian literature became the daily fare of young minds, employment in factories and offices where similar influences prevailed, and jobs and residences away from home, often in the city, which exposed young adults to moral standards which could be neither regulated nor condoned - all of these factors contributed to an intensified concern about and a greater openness to a public discussion of this once-forbidden subject. These developments also provided the opportunity for church leaders to try to reestablish some orthodoxy and uniformity in the life of an increasingly diverse community.

City life offered other attractions which challenged traditional Mennonite moral standards. The Mennonite Brethren Conference took a strong stand on the participation of their members in "worldly amusements." Conference policy discouraged attendance at movie theatres and public swimming pools as well as participation in certain sports "where clothes are too revealing." All these, the statement adopted as Conference policy warned, contributed to the "unnecessary excitement of



natural desires."<sup>43</sup> In 1944, readers of Der Bote engaged in a lively debate regarding the attraction and impact of the movies on their children. Most writers decried the moral depravity they perceived to be the mainstay of these "shows" and denounced those who attended them.<sup>44</sup> Bishop J.H. Janzen, ever the calm and reasoned voice of moderation and realism, understood the issue differently. Although he agreed that the movie theatre could "neither be excused or recommended," he conceded that

[it] is there and it is spreading and our children attend it... The difference between us Christians is only that some are honest enough to admit this [fact] while others put themselves at ease with the assertion that their children don't go to the theatre, and perhaps don't know or don't want to know that they do it behind their backs,<sup>45</sup> anyway. This attitude is much more comfortable.

Like infants, Janzen continued, our children put everything into their mouths. But simply complaining about all the filth (Schmutz) they feed on is no answer, he pointed out. "The filth must be replaced... by good, nourishing, tasty food, and in time they will prefer it to the smut."<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, when the question of movie attendance arose among the students at the United Mennonite Bible School in Leamington, the Prädigerkonferenz was quick to indicate that such a practice was not acceptable.<sup>47</sup> Within that self-contained environment, at least, a certain amount of social control remained possible.

A similar debate ensued over the increasing presence and use of radios in Mennonite homes. Some suggested that the radio presented the same danger and temptation for those young people growing up on the

farm as the "show" did for those in or near the city.<sup>48</sup> Others pointed to the potential benefits of this medium if used selectively or even utilized to promote the spiritual and cultural values of the Mennonites.<sup>49</sup> As in other matters, this latter, more accommodating attitude eventually prevailed.

Another writer expressed her dismay over the prevailing fashions. The dresses were too short, she complained, the fingernails too long - and painted to boot - and the makeup too heavy. The young people, she suggested, were just going along with the rest of society.<sup>50</sup> A Kitchener resident concurred with this analysis. The greatest threat to a separate Mennonite identity, he opined, came from what he described as this "passion for assimilation" (Assimilierungssucht) evident among the Russian Mennonites. He went on to describe the evidence of this process in great detail.

Whoever thinks he must - because it is the practice in this country - accommodate himself and not show himself on the street other than with a toothpick between his lips, chew gum or tobacco, paint lips and nails, tear out eyebrows and paint [them] on, again in a bigger arc (as though the Creator didn't rightly know where these belong), talk, laugh [and] scream loudly on the streets and not take any passersby into consideration, whistle totally unmelodious sounds, shout all manner of ungodly expressions to travellers at every opportunity, address every old person disrespectfully [on a first-name basis], speak a gibberish which is neither German nor English, and do all manner of other things along this line, - such a person I would accuse of a passion for assimilation and [would] permit no respect to arise for him. There is a great difference in the manner in which one accommodates or assimilates himself, i.e., whether with intelligence or with folly.

In the measured words of Bishop J.H. Janzen, "Some things in the behaviour of our young people no longer please us."<sup>52</sup>

According to Bishop John Wichert of Vineland, these developments demanded a "strong counter offensive" on the part of the Mennonite church leaders and educators.<sup>53</sup> For that, the Russian Mennonites increasingly looked to another strategy to preserve their unity and identity, namely institutions and structures. On the local level, congregations and conferences urged stronger Jugendvereine. Provincially, both the Mennonite Brethren and the United Mennonites organized large youth rallies. The MB's sponsored the first such gathering in Virgil in the fall of 1944, providing a program of inspiration, education, and fellowship.<sup>54</sup> A year later, over 500 UM youth converged on St. Williams, near Port Rowan, for a one day retreat.<sup>55</sup> The program featured Bishop E.J. Swalm, a prominent Brethren in Christ church leader who had made an outstanding peace witness during both World Wars. Swalm addressed the gathering on the theme of "The Christian lifestyle of Youth,"<sup>56</sup> a clear reflection of the prevailing concern for nonconformity among church leaders. After the enthusiastic response to these initial gatherings, both became annual events under the auspices of permanent provincial youth organizations within each Conference.

On another front, church leaders moved quickly to establish their own educational institutions for their youth. All agreed that "the religious education of [our] children is the most important element in building the church."<sup>57</sup> These schools would provide both the forum

for instruction in Bible, Mennonite history, and the German language and the environment within which an acceptable lifestyle could be nurtured. In 1943, therefore, the Mennonite Brethren in Virgil expanded their evening Bible school into a day school, patterned after that of the MB schools in western Canada. Twenty-one students attended classes here during the first year, a number of which doubled to 41 in 1944.<sup>58</sup> One third of these came from Mennonite homes outside of Virgil. By 1945, a high school curriculum was added, an arrangement similar to that of the Brethren in Christ school in Fort Erie. In 1948 Eden Bible and High School became a provincial Mennonite Brethren project when it was adopted by the Ontario MB Conference. The enrolment grew rapidly, with as many as one-third of the students coming from UM homes, as the school evolved into the present Eden Christian College.<sup>59</sup>

United Mennonite churches, too, offered a variety of evening courses, directed primarily at the young people. In October, 1944 J.J. Wichert addressed the annual UM Sunday school teacher's convention on the theme of "Preparation of Church Workers." Wichert outlined three requirements for such preparation: a solid foundation in the principles of the faith, a working knowledge of the Bible, the German language, and Mennonite history, and some practical work experience. He concluded with a strong plea for a Bible school in Ontario, both to provide this training and to counteract the growing attraction of other religious denominations among Mennonite young people.<sup>60</sup>

In response to Wichert's appeal, the convention resolved to ask the Predigerkonferenz, scheduled to meet in November, to pursue the possibility of establishing their own private high school. The ministers and deacons endorsed the proposal but recommended that public response be tested by operating three local programs in Vineland, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Leamington during the winter of 1945.<sup>61</sup> The response was sufficiently strong to warrant the establishment of a provincial Bible school in the fall of 1945. In addition, academic courses for grades 9 and 10 were offered to the 25 students enrolled. Leamington, the largest congregation of United Mennonites in the province, was chosen as the location for the United Mennonite Bible School, later renamed the United Mennonite Educational Institute and offering a four-year high school program.<sup>62</sup>

Although the two groups of Russian Mennonites could not agree to co-operate in establishing or operating these schools, they were agreed in the purpose and the importance of these institutions for the preservation of the faith and the perpetuation of a sense of peoplehood. In the words of one report from the United Mennonite Educational Institute,

In addition to the subjects prescribed by the government, we also have religion and Mennonite history here. Such courses help us to better understand the<sup>63</sup> differences between our people and other peoples.

One parent explained, "the building of a Christian character, the nurture of our Mennonite ideals and a sound general education belong to

a Christian upbringing."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Russian Mennonites across Canada agreed with this assessment. Again, separated as they were from one another by conference divisions, they moved independently but in unison to establish their own national post-secondary institutions in the early forties. As the war in Europe drew to a close the plans for the opening of two Mennonite Bible Colleges began to take shape. After some four years of discussion and planning the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church opened the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg in the fall of 1944.<sup>65</sup> Three years later the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, after six years of planning, established the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, also in Winnipeg.<sup>66</sup> Both the MB's and the UM's in Ontario were closely associated with these larger developments.

The development of these institutions became possible in large part because the Russian Mennonites had achieved the financial well-being necessary to support them as a result of the healthy wartime economy. Ironically, while the improved economy provided the means with which the immigrant community could more effectively resist the forces of integration into Anglo-Canadian society, it also presented a new, more subtle, and perhaps more pervasive threat to a separate Mennonite peoplehood. One Vineland resident wrote in 1940 that in church on Sunday

we feel united in the Lord, [but] on week-days we chase after the almighty dollar, without which we cannot live here, and often give little notice [to the fact] that we don't have the dollar but the dollar has us. The poem, Have Time for One, Another, is most appropriate for our beautiful East.

A visitor from western Canada noted that most Mennonites seemed well off due to the many opportunities to earn good wages in the Niagara region. What concerned him, however, was the relentless "racing and chasing after the dollar."<sup>68</sup> This, he observed, did not produce a comfortable life. Another observer, writing from St. Catharines in late 1944, had this to say:

By and large, the Ontarians appear to take less interest in Mennonite affairs than the Mennonites in the West. I see the reason for this in that so many of them work in the factories, others race [against each other] on account of the dollar and forget, what they were and what they should be.<sup>69</sup>

But the strongest warning came from a long-time Ontario resident. After describing the economic development of the Leamington settlement up to 1945, J.C. Toews concluded as follows:

But we must not leave out of consideration, and also point out, the dangers.... Our people are as though [they were] gripped by a madness [Wahn], and there prevails a striving after luxury and the leading of a life[style] which far exceeds the circumstances. Immense sums are spent on buildings, furnishings, furniture and such like... It is to be feared that this desire for luxury can become the ruin not only of our economic stability but also of our Eigenart as [a] people. Wherever our Mennonites have settled, they soon achieved prosperity. The reason for that usually lay in their simple way of living, perseverance and diligence. Whether rich or poor, the style of life varied little. We are departing farther and farther from the good, plain manner and simplicity of our forefathers, and [it] could become our undoing, or more accurately, it has already. It is as the Mennonite historian P.M. Friesen said: "Piety and industry bring forth wealth, and finally the child devours its mother." One should take note of this.

Bishop J.H. Janzen added to this his concern that the preoccupation with "chasing the dollar" detracted from the pursuit and maintenance of a strong cultural heritage.<sup>71</sup> The succeeding generation would determine whether peace and prosperity could rob the Russian Mennonites of what remained of their separate identity.

## II

In the meantime, however, new initiatives were underway to ensure the survival of a faithful Russian Mennonite community in Ontario. Ironically, these initiatives were prompted, initially at least, by the very forces and factors which appeared most threatening to the Mennonite faith. The impetus required to bring these efforts to fruition subsequently came from a European refugee crisis which included thousands of Mennonites from Russia. These refugees, in turn, later revitalized a separate Russian Mennonite cultural, if not religious, identity in Ontario. A convergence of national and international factors, therefore, provided the framework for these developments.

On the domestic front, the wartime environment precipitated the activities which eventually united and strengthened the United Mennonite congregations in Ontario. Twelve years after the first abortive attempt to organize a conference of United Mennonite churches, members of the Vineland and Niagara UM churches unanimously agreed that a provincial conference was both necessary and desirable. At a March 12, 1944 meeting in Vineland, they noted that four items of broader



concern demanded their immediate and concerted attention. All were precipitated by the war and wartime economy. The common tasks these delegates listed were: 1) representation on the Military Problems Committee, an inter-Mennonite group in Ontario; 2) the spiritual nurture of those in the service; 3) itinerant ministry and mission work among Mennonites in the cities; and 4) schools and education.<sup>72</sup> At their invitation, the first provincial delegate conference convened in Vineland in June of the same year. Bishop John Wichert of the host church challenged those present

to acknowledge the problems which face us, and to judge whether we can resolve them better individually or whether a closer union might be preferable. Often it is the case that where the individual is too<sup>73</sup> weak, many [who are] united can do it together.

As had been the case in the early thirties, less than total participation by UM churches handicapped this effort. By 1947, however, international factors added a task and an urgency which few, if any Russian Mennonites could resist. The refugee crisis in Europe included many coreligionists who, little more than 20 years before, had been friends and neighbours in the Soviet Union. The practical concern and compassion for these displaced persons finally united the United Mennonites as no issue of theology or morality and no program or project had been able to do heretofore.<sup>74</sup> On December 6, 1947 delegates gathered in Vineland once again, this time specifically to consider how they might assist in bringing their coreligionists into Canada. Other issues, too, appeared on the agenda, but it was that

crisis in particular which propelled the UM laity into active, annual session and activity.<sup>75</sup> The emergence of a permanent delegate conference also marked the decline of the significance and authority of the Predigerkonferenz among United Mennonites.

The international refugee crisis had more far-reaching implications and consequences, even for the Mennonites, however. This need arose at a time when the existing immigrant organizations, established twenty years earlier, were being dismantled by the very people whom they had benefitted. With the gradual liquidation of the transportation debt and the return of full employment and renewed prosperity, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the provincial immigrant and mutual aid committees were rapidly losing support. In February, 1943 the Ontario immigrants decided to dissolve their Immigrantenkomitee and to delegate responsibility for these matters to the individual congregations via their constituent conference bodies.<sup>76</sup> This action reversed the decision made fifteen years earlier to pursue these concerns on an independent, non-church basis through the Vertreterversammlung, a lay organization composed of both MB's and UM's. According to the record of that last meeting, delegates believed that the local congregations had the greatest authority and could therefore fulfill the remaining needs most adequately.<sup>77</sup>

The refugee crisis changed that direction and momentum somewhat only three years later. The Board of Colonization in Rosthern, Sask. immediately assumed the initiative in undertaking to make provision for a renewed influx. It asked each province to mobilize its Provinziales

Komitee to that same end. As a result, a delegate conference of Mennonite Brethren and United Mennonites convened at the Vineland MB Church on May 3, 1947. This gathering, reminiscent of earlier Vertreterversammlungen, established the Mennonite Provincial Relief Committee, composed of representatives from both conferences and supported by funds from both groups.<sup>78</sup> By the end of 1947, 542 European Mennonites had been resettled in Canada by this concerted effort, 100 of these locating in Ontario.<sup>79</sup> Almost 8,000 others would come during the next five years, nearly 1,300 of whom settled in Ontario.<sup>80</sup> This influx increased the Russian Mennonite population by at least 25 percent, significantly impacting those congregations to which they gravitated.

Their enthusiastic and concerted response to these displaced coreligionists in Europe indicates that something more than a common faith and culture united and motivated the Russian Mennonites. Indeed, on questions of faith and life they were, because of the lack of a central or hierarchical authority, inclined to disagree and divide rather frequently. Even stronger, it seems, was the force of a common ethnocultural heritage and a shared experience of deprivation and suffering. This force empowered them jointly and compelled them both to respond immediately to the perceived need and to confront and overcome those obstacles to achieving that end, even as the Canadian Mennonites had done for them 25 years earlier. This time all major Mennonite groups acted in concert in the face of impediments little less overwhelming than those faced after World War I.

The Canadian government moved slowly in response to the plight of over one million displaced persons in Europe. Officials argued that a possible postwar recession militated against significant immigration, as did the immediate need to return and integrate thousands of Canadian servicemen and their dependents.<sup>81</sup> A report submitted to cabinet in September, 1945 suggested that no new policies or initiatives would be considered before 1947.<sup>82</sup> Representatives of organized labour concurred with this cautious attitude, arguing before a Senate committee in 1946 that

Employment must be provided to all Canadians requiring work before immigration regulations are liberalized... When immigration does commence, care should be taken to admit only those immigrants quickly assimilable to the Canadian way of life.<sup>83</sup>

In a debate reminiscent of the post-World War I discussions, business leaders urged a more aggressive policy. In the words of a railway executive, "The admission of more people would increase Canada's prosperity and assist in its development."<sup>84</sup> Understandably, ethnic group representatives were the most outspoken and active in the pursuit of a broader immigration policy. On July 5, 1946 Canadian Mennonites joined that public debate when J.J. Thiessen and J. Gerbrandt, two representatives of the Board of Colonization, presented a petition to Prime Minister Mackenzie King requesting a broadening of the categories of admissible persons.<sup>85</sup> Seven months later, Thiessen joined leaders of six other groups, including Catholics, Lutherans, and Ukrainians, to express their appreciation "for the recent broadening of the Immigration

Regulations" and to request further modifications.<sup>86</sup> Specifically, the delegation asked that "on humanitarian grounds" and "in the best interests of Canada" the existing regulations be interpreted with generous liberality, that these be broadened to include admission of "all immediate relatives (up to and including first cousins and their children)," and that better and more readily accessible inspection facilities be established in Europe.<sup>87</sup>

Governmental response took two forms. On the one hand, the cabinet acted to make minor adjustments to the admissible categories through a series of orders-in-council in 1946 and 1947. These extended the list of relatives which Canadians could sponsor, provided they were able to care for the newcomers, and included not only farmers but also experienced mine and forestry workers coming to guaranteed employment in Canada.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, the Senate reconstituted its Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour in order to provide a forum for the public debate of immigration policy. This committee held hearings annually through 1949. Its initial report in 1946 described the existing government policy as a "non-immigration policy." The committee recommended further that a new Immigration Act be introduced in response to postwar conditions, that immigration offices be reopened in Europe, and that immediate action be taken to admit as many displaced persons and refugees as Canada could successfully absorb.<sup>89</sup> There was no clear indication, however, how many this might be.

By the beginning of 1947 the federal government seemed prepared to pursue a more comprehensive immigration policy. On May 1, Prime

Minister King outlined the general principles of the proposal in a speech before Parliament. The government would seek, he stated, "to ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as can advantageously be absorbed into our national economy." The new policy would also, King emphasized, "take account of the urgent problem of the resettlement of persons who are displaced and homeless, as an aftermath of the world conflict." For the time being, he continued, primary consideration should be given to "the admission of relatives of persons already in Canada, and, on assisting in the resettlement of the displaced persons and refugees." Canada had "a moral obligation," King conceded, to assist in this task, quickly adding, however, the conviction that Canadians did not wish "to make a fundamental alteration in the character of [their] population." Consequently, the immigration branch and the Department of Labour would jointly determine the extent and nature of the influx. At bottom, however, this policy would admit only those who could "be readily placed in employment and absorbed into various industries and occupations."<sup>90</sup> Economic considerations, in other words, would remain paramount in Canadian immigration policy.

Happily, albeit somewhat unexpectedly, the Canadian economy continued to grow and expand after some initial postwar adjustments. As a result, the Canadian government was able to implement this policy more aggressively than might have been expected. Slowly, but surely, Gerald Dirks observes, the country was opened to immigration from Europe, "for those prepared to join the labour force, admittedly near the bottom of

the [socio-economic] ladder."<sup>91</sup> In 1948, the level of immigration exceeded 125,000, double that of the previous year and the highest rate of influx since 1929.<sup>92</sup> Although that total fell below 100,000 again in 1949 and 1950, it would continue above that number for the ensuing decade. According to one estimate, at least 200,000 refugees joined this immigrant stream.<sup>93</sup>

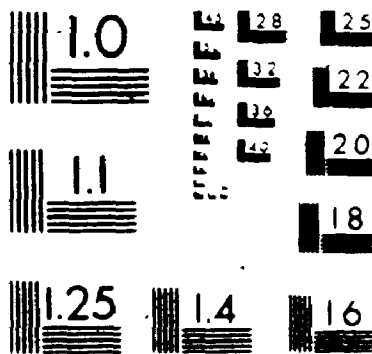
Despite the narrow definition of permissible categories and the continued shortage of transportation, a total of 4,227 Mennonite refugees had entered Canada by the end of 1948.<sup>94</sup> All but 395 of these were admitted under the close relatives category, the remainder coming to guaranteed employment, mostly as farm labourers. Some 580 of these immigrants settled in Ontario.<sup>95</sup> To transport all of them, moreover, close relatives in Canada had paid over \$800,000 through the Board of Colonization which coordinated this effort. Through this system of prepayment, the Board was able to avoid another problematic transportation debt.<sup>96</sup>

The 1948 influx included most of those eligible under the close relatives provisions. Mennonite representatives estimated that at least 2,000 refugees remained in occupied Germany without this possible avenue of rescue. In order to provide for their admission, the Board of Colonization, together with Mennonite Central Committee, an international relief agency, proposed the Farm Labour Movement to A.L. Jolliffe, the director of the Immigration Branch, in October, 1948.<sup>97</sup> Under this scheme, the Board committed itself to finding both housing and accommodation for the prospective immigrants, much as it had done 25

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years earlier for the Russian Mennonites. The Immigration Branch approved this arrangement for 1,000 additional refugees, provided none came between November and April, traditionally months of high unemployment. More than 1,000 Mennonites eventually arrived under this program.<sup>98</sup> Only a few families settled in Ontario, most finding sponsorship in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

By the end of 1949 some 6,000 Mennonite refugees had been resettled in Canada, 800 of these in Ontario, almost 2,000 in Manitoba, some 1,500 in British Columbia and the remainder divided between Alberta and Saskatchewan. Together with those who had gone to South America, a total of 10,510 refugees had been brought out of Europe.<sup>99</sup> "This meant," Frank Epp notes in his history of this exodus, "that quantitatively the Mennonite refugee operation was nearly complete."<sup>100</sup> The process of adjustment to a new environment had, however, just begun.

These newcomers faced many of the obstacles and difficulties encountered by their hosts 25 years earlier. They struggled in an all-too-familiar manner to cope with an unfamiliar language, a new socio-economic and political environment, and a different culture and lifestyle. They, too, had borne the pain of oppression, separation, deprivation, and relocation. Time and circumstances had served to differentiate them from their coreligionists in Canada during the 25 years of separation. "Sometimes one might discover some strange, inexplicable, reprehensible things on both sides," one of the recent immigrants noted. "That might be so, but it must not be permitted to

damage the good understanding, to diminish the goodwill, if brotherly love prevails as the compensatory force on both sides."<sup>101</sup>

At the same time, the new arrivals enjoyed some advantages not available to those who had come in the 1920s. The newcomers were welcomed by like-minded coreligionists who spoke their language and had a good understanding of their background. In many cases the new arrivals had close relatives who hosted and provided for them initially. Their reception, therefore, was like a big family reunion, a feeling which served to mitigate some of the discomfort in other areas. Equally important, these immigrants were immediately integrated into existing congregations and religious programs, such as Sunday school and the Jugendverein. "How comforting this loving reception into the midst of the congregation is, [as well as] the Christian fellowship accompanying it," one newcomer confessed.<sup>103</sup>

For their part, the Mennonite refugees contributed to a revitalization of the Russian Mennonite community in Canada. They arrived with a deep, vibrant faith, strengthened rather than destroyed by their suffering. This spiritual intensity challenged and inspired their hosts. Their facility in the German language, meanwhile, ensured that the mother tongue would remain in use for some time. Their material need had evoked a response which precipitated the growth of Mennonite relief and service programs provincially, nationally, and internationally. Perhaps as significant is the fact that these programs were carried on cooperatively, providing the context out of which the inner separation among the Mennonites could be diminished. At the same

time. Their European origins induced Canadian Mennonites to look outward once again, beyond their narrow congregational, conference, or denominational loyalties, to embrace, however tentatively, a wider, international identity which encompassed them all. That identity, they discovered, transcended language, culture, class, or clan. At its base were the rudiments of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Beyond that, however, was a community whose history and self-understanding remained unique. Perhaps that community could, despite its ongoing adaptations to the "world" around it, remain separated and united somehow after all.

Footnotes

- 1 These forms are on file with the records of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (hereafter CHPC) at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ont.
- 2 Census, 1951, vol. II, Table 35.
- 3 "The Twelfth Convention of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches," 1942, pp. 6-7.
- 4 Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1947, p. 53.
- 5 Report of the Provinziales Komitee to the Vertreterversammlung, Nov. 18-19, 1938. UMCO.
- 6 Cornelius Krahn, "Eine brennende Frage des Mennonitentums," Der Bote, XIX (Sept. 16, 1942), p. 1.
- 7 "Die 4. Provinziale Vertreterversammlung," p. 5.
- 8 J.H. Janzen, "Matthaeus 24,35: Himmel und Erde werden vergehen aber meine Worte werden nicht vergehen," 1942(?). JHJ.
- 9 J.H. Janzen, "Besprechung, Beurteilung, Empfehlung," Der Bote, XIX (Jan. 28, 1942), p. 3.
- 10 J.H. Janzen, "Aus der Werkstatt fuer unsere Schriften," Der Bote, XIX (Sept. 2, 1942), p. 4.
- 11 Janzen, "Besprechung," p. 3.
- 12 K.G. Rempel, "Zum Zentralschulthema," Der Bote, XX (April 14, 1943), p. 3.
- 13 Ein Leser, "Um die Wehrlosigkeit," Der Bote, XVII (Nov. 27, 1940), p. 1.
- 14 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1941, p. 30.
- 15 "Zur Bruderschaft am 15. Januar 1943." JHJ.
- 16 Karen I. Blu, "Varieties of Ethnic Identity: Anglo-Saxons, Blacks, Indians, and Jews in a Southern Country," Ethnicity, 4 (Sept., 1977), pp. 266-67.
- 17 H[arold] S. B[ender], "Church," ME, I, p. 596.
- 18 Registration forms in CHPC files. CGC.

- 19 G.H. Peters, "Die Bewahrung der Jugend," Der Mitarbeiter (May-June, 1933), p. 1.
- 20 J.F. Redekopp, "Die Gefahren unserer Gemeinden in der Jetztzeit," Der Mitarbeiter (May, 1934), p. 2.
- 21 "The Eleventh Convention," 1942, p. 33. MBBC.
- 22 J.H. Janzen, "Den Dienern am Wort der Vereinigten Mennonitengemeinden in Ontario," Dec. 14, 1941, p. 1. JHJ.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1945, p. 46.
- 25 J.H. Janzen noted that "neither we [as church leaders] nor our church families have the authority over our children to force them to go to church, according to the old method." See "Dienern am Wort," p. 1. Cf. J.H[oward] Ka[uffman], "Family," ME, II, p. 297.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1943, p. 59.
- 28 Sawatsky, "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity," pp. 286-88.
- 29 G. Enns, "Lasst uns Busse tun," Der Bote, XX (Feb. 24, 1943), p. 3.
- 30 "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," Dec. 8, 1945, pp. 2,5.
- 31 "Minutes of the 15th Annual Provincial Conference," 1946, p. 43.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 "Protokoll of the Ontario Conference," 1945, pp. 11, 20-21.
- 34 "Protokoll der Bruderschaft," Feb. 3, 1946; "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," Dec. 8, 1945. JHJ.
- 35 An undated statement. JHJ.
- 36 This statement reflects clearly the position of Bishop J.H. Janzen.
- 37 See Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1943 and 1946, for example.
- 38 Sawatsky, "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity," p. 287.
- 39 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 476.
- 40 Jacob H. Janzen, Das sexuelle Problem (Waterloo, Ont.: by the author, 1941).

- 41 P.J. Klassen, "Rezension und... 'Das sexuelle Problem'." Der Bote, XIX (Jan. 14, 1942), p. 3.
- 42 Jacob H. Janzen, Leben und Tod (Waterloo, Ont.: by the author, 1942). See "Zur sexuellen Frage," Der Bote, XIX (June 3, 1942), p. 8, and the review by P.J. Klassen, "Leben und Tod," Der Bote, XIX (June 17, 1942), p. 3.
- 43 "Protokoll der jaehrlichen Konferenz," Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 1936. MBBC.
- 44 For a summary of the debate see P.J. Klassen, "Dies und das und wir," Der Bote, XXI (May 3, 1944), pp. 3-4; (May 10, 1944), pp. 3-4; (May 17, 1944), p. 4. Cf. P.S., "Das Kino," Der Bote, XXI (March 15, 1944), p. 3.
- 45 J.H. Janzen, "Das Kino," Der Bote, XXI (June 3[7], 1944), p. 1.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," Nov. 8-9, 1947. CGC.
- 48 P.J. Klassen, "Dies und das und wir," Der Bote, XXI (May 3, 1944), pp. 3-4.
- 49 N.J. Kroeker, "Eine Neue Aufgabe," Der Bote, XX (Jan. 27, 1943), p. 3; H.P. Bartel, "Eine neue Aufgabe," Der Bote, XX (March 24, 1943), p. 2; Fritz Fransen, "Das Radio: Unterhaltungsquelle oder Hausuebel?" Der Bote, XX (April 14, 1943), p. 6; E.M., "Eine Traebertonne? Nein!" Der Bote, XXI (May 31, 1944), p. 2.
- 50 Die Stimme einer Alten, "Etwas ueber die Mode," Der Bote, XXII (Sept. 4, 1945), pp. 3-4.
- 51 K.G. Rempel, "Zu dem Korrekturen im Boten Nr. 17," Der Bote, XX (May 19, 1943), pp. 2-3.
- 52 "Zur Bruderschaft am 15. Januar 1943." JHJ.
- 53 Johann Wichert, "Heranbildung von Gemeindeglieder," Der Bote, XXII (Jan. 10, 1945), p. 5.
- 54 "The Thirteenth Convention," Nov. 3-5, 1944, p. 23.
- 55 H.P. Lepp, "Das erste Jugentreffen in Ontario," Der Bote, XXII (Dec. 12, 1945), pp. 2-3; Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1946, pp. 78-79.
- 56 "Aus der 'Vereinsglocke' M.C.Y.R.: 'Mennonite Christian Youth Retreat,'" Der Bote, XXII (Dec. 19, 1945), p. 6.
- 57 "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," March 17-18, 1945. CGC.

- 58 "The Thirteenth Convention," Nov. 3-5, 1944, p. 25...
- 59 H.S. B[ender], "Eden High School," ME, II, p. 146.
- 60 Wichert, "Heranbildung."
- 61 Jahrbuch der Konferenz, 1946, p. 123. Cf. Annie Dick, "Unsere Bibelschule zu Leamington," Der Bote, XXII (April 11, 1945), pp. 6-7.
- 62 Driedger, United Mennonite Educational Institute, pp. 7-8.
- 63 Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1950, p. 18.
- 64 Ibid., 1947, p. 101.
- 65 J[ohn] A. T[oews], "Mennonite Brethren Bible College," ME, III, pp. 594-95.
- 66 H[enry] H. F[unk], "Canadian Mennonite Bible College," ME, I, pp. 506-7.
- 67 K. Janzen, "Vineland, Ont.," MR, 63 (Nov. 13, 1940), p. 5.
- 68 E.D. Harder, "St. Davids, Ont., der 10. Dez.," Der Bote, XX (Dec. 22, 1943), p. 3.
- 69 Der Bote, XXII (Jan. 3, 1945), p. 5.
- 70 Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1947, p. 80.
- 71 J.H. Janzen, "Offener Brief," Der Bote, XXII (May 30, 1945), p. 2.
- 72 "Protokoll der Vertreterversammlung der Vinelaender und Niagara V. Mennoniten-gemeinden, abgehalten am 12. Maerz 1944 in der Kirche zu Vineland." NA.
- 73 Jubilaeums Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1954, p. II.
- 74 Jahrbuch der Verefnigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1947, p. 8.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 "Protokoll der...Provinzialen Vertreter Versammlung," Feb. 27-28, 1943; "Protokoll der Predigerkonferenz," Dec. 5, 1943. CGC.
- 77 Ibid. Cf. J.H. Janzen to B. Toews, Jan. 17, 1944. JHJ.
- 78 Jubilaeums Jahrbuch, p. 23.
- 79 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 443.

- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy, p. 123.
- 82 Ibid., p. 125.
- 83 Ibid., p. 129.
- 84 Debates, 1945, p. 3525.
- 85 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 392.
- 86 Ibid., p. 393.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Orders-in-council PC 2071, May 28, 1946, and PC371, Jan. 30, 1947.
- 89 Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy, p. 133.
- 90 Debates, May 1, 1947, pp. 2644-96.
- 91 Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy, p. 151.
- 92 B and B Report, Table A-1.
- 93 Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy, p. 151.
- 94 Epp, Mennonite Exodus, p. 402.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Ibid., p. 403.
- 98 Ibid., p. 405.
- 99 Ibid., p. 408.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Jahrbuch der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden, 1948, p. 13.
- 102 Ibid.



## Conclusion

The experience of the Russian Mennonite immigrant community in Ontario demonstrates that the struggle both to define and preserve their peculiar identity as an ethnoreligious group had not ended despite their flight from Soviet Russia. Indeed, the very factors which had prompted that emigration, namely economic security, cultural independence, and religious freedom, became the focal points of conflict and contention in their new homeland. The foregoing outline and analysis of that experience permits some observations about the survival of ethnic groups in general and raises some questions about the Mennonites in particular.

An assimilationist mood dominated Canadian society during the period under discussion. Immigrant ethnic groups adopted a number of survival strategies in the face of this pressure to conform to the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture. Traditional approaches to the study of that experience, Alan Anderson notes, "have tended to view ethnic group survival as dependent upon the 'cultural vitality' of an ethnic group, the group's 'institutional completeness', and the extent of the group's 'ethnic enclosure'."<sup>1</sup> Anderson dismisses these approaches, however, as being too one-dimensional. A more realistic analysis of ethnicity, he contends, must take into consideration that ethnic identity is "dynamic rather than static" and that it changes, not voluntarily or without resistance, but as a capitulation to the culture and values of the dominant society. He proposes, therefore,

"a conflict model suggesting forced change and differential minority response."<sup>2</sup>

The experience of the Russian Mennonites suggests that Anderson's critique has some validity. Neither cultural vitality nor institutional completeness marked their scattered communities. Nor were they able, in Ontario, to recapture the self-contained lifestyle which characterized their Russian experience. By those standards of measurement, therefore, they should have rapidly disintegrated as an identifiable ethnic community. Yet they persisted and, indeed, experienced a measure of internal revitalization as a result of their ethno-cultural conflict with the dominant society during World War II. Anderson's conflict model, meanwhile, may help to explain why so many of the young men chose to enlist in the armed forces in violation of their historic pacifist faith. Frank Epp has suggested that this response was "the reaction of the sons to the Germanism which was wed to pacifism in the value system of the fathers." For these sons, Epp concludes, the choice of loyalty to Canada over loyalty to Germany "seemed also to require the choice of militarism over pacifism."<sup>3</sup>

While Anderson's conflict model can help us understand cultural change and adaption, it fails to explain the persistence of the ethno-religious distinctions which characterize the Mennonites. How, for instance, does one account for the renewed affirmation of nonresistance in the face of the wartime experience? Surely something more than a clash of two cultures resulting in a selective accommodation is at work in this instance. More instructive is a theory for religious change

and persistence proposed by Ninian Smart. Smart suggests that when a tradition is confronted with strong cultural and religious pressures to conform, there will be two consequences. On the one hand, some will make the accommodation demanded from outside. That adaptation, however, will be followed by an equally strong backlash resulting in a renewed emphasis on the value or practice in question.<sup>4</sup> That is precisely what happened among the Russian Mennonites once they realized the extent to which their tradition of nonresistance was being compromised. A similar reaction, though less intense, had followed the realization in the early thirties that the younger generation was losing the German language. That same principle may also help explain other developments in the larger Mennonite community, particularly the diversity among the Kanadier in western Canada during the public schools crisis.

In a sense, the very migration of these Mennonites represented a reaffirmation of the fundamentals of their ethnoreligious identity in the face of its anticipated demise under Soviet rule. In Canada, then, they hoped to reestablish that peculiar ethnic identity. In that effort, and in their relative success in doing so, the Russian Mennonites test another recent theory regarding ethnic identity. Roberto Perin has argued that the concept of "ethnicity" is not particularly helpful in analyzing the North American experience of immigrants. According to Perin, "The notion of a space is basic to ethnicity."<sup>5</sup> On this continent, however, the newcomers soon found themselves dispersed within the receiving society. Their experience

was not that of ethnic groups, Perin maintains, but of immigrant groups. He prefers, therefore, to speak of "immigrant communities" and "immigrant cultures."<sup>6</sup>

The Russian Mennonites were, clearly, an immigrant group. This study has shown that many of their choices, actions, and activities were not unique to them but were typical of most immigrants. They were more prone to regulate their lives according to those external forces and factors than leaders like Jacob H. Janzen and B.B. Wiens cared to admit. But in this New World environment, as Perin has also suggested, the controlling function of the church and the communal bond among the immigrants were seriously undermined. This weakening of both the bonds and the boundaries of ethnic identity the Russian Mennonites experienced as intensely as other immigrant groups.

In spite of these disintegrating forces, however, they sought to establish themselves as an ethnic group in their new setting. Despite their relatively small numbers and the long distances separating the main areas of settlement, the Russian Mennonites in Ontario sought alternative ways of preserving their ethnoreligious identity. Through the itinerant ministry of church leaders, all of the scattered immigrants were located, registered, and incorporated into a local congregation. These congregations sought to reinforce both the cultural and religious identity of the participants. At the same time, both church and non-church institutions (conferences) served as unifying agencies on the provincial level. In this way, the Mennonites maintained a sense of corporate ethnic identity which transcended the

disruptive forces of an Anglo-Canadian society intent on assimilating them.

Not that the Russian Mennonites in Ontario were alone in that struggle to survive. Their coreligionists throughout North America, together with many other ethnic minorities, faced a similar challenge. In 1926 one of the leaders of the U.S.-based General Conference Mennonite Church, composed primarily of 1870s immigrants in the United States, posed the dilemma this way:

How shall we maintain and cultivate that reverence for spiritual values, for the Christian home, and school, and the Church which will stamp us indelibly as a "peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9) in a day when almost all customs and even ideals seem in flux and so many influential social and political, and even religious agencies apparently feel called upon to batter down all protecting barriers?

Frank Epp has chronicled the larger Canadian Mennonite experience during that time in the second volume of Mennonites in Canada. Epp concludes his account, which ends with the outbreak of World War II, on an optimistic note.

The visible continuity of the Mennonite communities, congregations, and conferences was obvious. The loyalty of the young people was impressive, in terms both of the quantity and quality of their responses. Within and across the five main provinces in which they were now scattered, the Mennonites were tied together by informal networks and formal organizations, which contributed both to identity and solidarity. The culture was being preserved. The faith was being taught. And every new generation was being challenged.

This study has demonstrated that the situation in Ontario was not quite that promising in 1939. Perhaps, because of the smaller numbers, the greater dispersion, and the more urbanized setting here, the experience of the Russian Mennonite immigrants in this province was somewhat unique. That in itself is worth noting. On the other hand, the Ontario experience also raises some questions about the larger Russian Mennonite experience, both in Canada and, prior to that, in Russia, questions which other local and regional studies in western Canada will have to address. In any case, it is clear that the Ontario group can no longer be ignored in future accounts. Generalizations about the Russian Mennonite immigrants based on the experience of those in the West are inadequate, even inaccurate. Indeed, even generalizations about the Ontario scene are dangerous because, as has become evident, each of the four main regions of settlement developed a character of its own. Demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors were as significant in that development as were internal factors such as the nature and strength of local leadership and the size and composition of the immigrant group. Still, some general conclusions are possible on the basis of the preceding account.

One of the main reasons for emigration from the Soviet Union had been the quest for economic security. In Canada, the Mennonite immigrants found the same opportunities, and faced the same obstacles, encountered by other newcomers. Like most immigrants, they were particularly susceptible to and affected by economic factors. Their choices of settlement, whether at Reesor in northern Ontario, in Essex

County, or in the Niagara fruit belt, were made primarily on the basis of farming and employment opportunities. Although they preferred to settle in close proximity to one another, few were willing to sacrifice material gain for the ideal of an isolated, self-contained settlement. Even such communal purchases as were made in Harrow and Virgil, for example, were done more for financial than for cultural or religious reasons.

All three main areas of concentration, moreover, be that Waterloo, Essex, or Niagara, were urban or semi-urban. They therefore provided the amenities of the town or city while permitting many, clearly still the majority, to engage in agrarian pursuits. But these Russian Mennonites were no longer predominantly the agriculturalists that some of their religious leaders preferred them to be. Their decision to settle in Ontario had, in a sense, been confirmation of that, as was the later influx of those who had originally chosen to move to western Canada. These immigrants were not intimidated by a semi-urban environment and most were not reluctant to accept employment in the city if available or when necessary. They were, therefore, not the "stalwart peasants" of European stock who had tamed the prairies prior to the first World War. These Mennonites came out of a more advanced and sophisticated environment in Russia, an environment which itself requires some reappraisal in view of this behaviour. They came, many of them, expecting to become independent farm owners or business people, or at least middle class home owners. They demonstrated an intense drive to improve their economic condition and were reluctant to

accept a lesser status in society. Their general prosperity in Ontario by the end of World War II is an indication of those ambitions, and a measure of their integration into the socio-economic structure of the larger society. Although these economic factors were not as critical for maintaining group identity or cohesion as the argument for instrumental forces would suggest, they were, nonetheless, more significant in determining behaviour than the ethno-religious ideals proclaimed by leaders like J.H. Janzen and B.B. Wiens.

That same striving for financial security prompted some cultural changes, concessions the Mennonites had been unwilling to make in Russia. Recognizing that without some facility in the English language they would remain outsiders, without social or economic mobility, these immigrants began immediately to learn English. The Mennonites seemed to assume, rather naively, that the process of acculturation could be halted at the point of language adoption as it had been in Russia. Too late they discovered the powerful attraction of the predominant culture among their young people. Nor had they fully appreciated the weakness of their boundary maintenance techniques in this new environment. When the Great Depression intervened, further sapping both their material resources and their personal resolve, the alternative programs they had devised or envisioned were left severely handicapped and largely ineffectual. Even the relative prosperity occasioned by the wartime economy was a mixed blessing. While it provided some of the financial resources needed to operate religious and educational programs, it also drew a significant number of Russian Mennonites, especially the young



people, out of the sphere of community and congregational influence. Indeed, some observers warned that affluence and materialism undermined spiritual and communal life altogether. The result of these developments was a much greater acculturation within one generation in Canada than had been permitted through four or five generations in Russia.

In the 'commonwealth' setting of the Old World the impact of such factors on communal identity could be controlled to a considerable extent: In Canada, however, it seems that the ability to retain a pure and separate ethnoreligious existence was inversely proportional to the desire to "get ahead".<sup>9</sup> Stuart Rosenberg has concluded that affluence is "a double-edged sword". Among Canadian Jews, he notes, "It often creates problems of spiritual insensitivity and materialism which can debase Jewish community life."<sup>10</sup> The Russian Mennonites in Ontario encountered the same threat to their identity. That threat, ironically, emerged out of the very freedom the immigrants praised and prized in their new homeland. Nowhere was it more evident than in the mainstream of their religious identity.

For the Russian Mennonites, the primary motivating factor in their emigration had been the search for religious freedom. Canada, they soon discovered, clearly offered the freedom to hold and practice their religious beliefs without outside interference or control. That freedom, however, also eliminated the boundaries which had served to define and protect their ethnoreligious identity in Russia. As a result of this setting, therefore, the cohesive and coercive powers of

the Mennonite community and its leaders were largely negated, if not eliminated. Affiliation and obedience now had to come, as they had in the sixteenth century, on the basis of individual decision and inner motivation. While there obviously remained other personal and interpersonal factors and forces encouraging continued affiliation, the possibility of defection from the people and its faith was easier and more attractive than it had been since the years of persecution. The attrition experienced during World War II in particular was a manifestation of that situation.

As a result, the Russian Mennonite immigrants resorted to all of the strategies to counteract the pluralist phenomenon outlined by Rodney Sawatsky.<sup>17</sup> Church leaders attempted to reassert theological orthodoxy through their preaching and teaching ministry as well as through church and conference statements and the publication of books. They appealed to their Russian traditions, to the unique Anabaptist-Mennonite history, and to the common experience of suffering and immigration in an effort to revitalize and retain a distinct and separate identity. They established congregations, conferences, and other institutions in order to bring and keep their people together. On rare occasions, some leaders and groups or conferences set forth normative ethical statements as a means of defending against an erosion of the boundaries. In Ontario at least, these efforts met with only limited success.

It should be recognized that there were significant differences among the Russian Mennonites in Ontario insofar as these techniques

were employed. By and large, the Mennonite Brethren were more intent on maintaining their orthodoxy throughout all their member churches. This approach was in keeping with their tradition, but it was also more feasible because they were smaller in number and hence more easily regulated. The Conference and its leadership continued to enjoy, and assert, a degree of authority neither practiced or widely accepted among the United Mennonites. That Conference influence became particularly noticeable when the Mennonite Brethren moved into broader national and binational conference affiliation. These developments created some internal dissension and, for a time, some internal divisions within both denominations, albeit to a greater extent among the Mennonite Brethren than was the case among the United Mennonites.

These conflicts and debates were an indication, moreover, that the Russian Mennonites were being compelled to redefine some aspects of their ethnoreligious identity and to devise some new ways of preserving it. Initially the church and its leaders carried the burden of this task. The local congregation became the medium through which both cultural and religious values were to be transmitted. The Russian Mennonites soon discovered that this task was too large for the church and its spiritual leadership alone, however. More significantly, the immigrants realized that this convergence of ethnic and religious identity was both precarious and dangerous. During the 1930s the rise of Germanism aroused such fervour in some Mennonites that their ethnicity did, in fact, become their religion. This zeal prompted a reaction not only from patriotic Anglo-Canadians but also from those

Mennonites for whom that cultural identity was either meaningless or indicative of disloyalty. The danger of that reaction in the Canadian environment lay in the fact that these Mennonites were now free, as they had not been within the 'commonwealth', to reject both their cultural and religious identity and still retain all the privileges of citizenship. In fact, since the communal boundaries were so fragile and ill-defined here, the young people could postpone their baptism and church membership, could learn and speak English, could move into the city or join the military and still be identified as "Mennonite". Therefore not only the nature and function of the church as a voluntary, religious institution but also the meaning of being Mennonite required some redefinition in the New World.

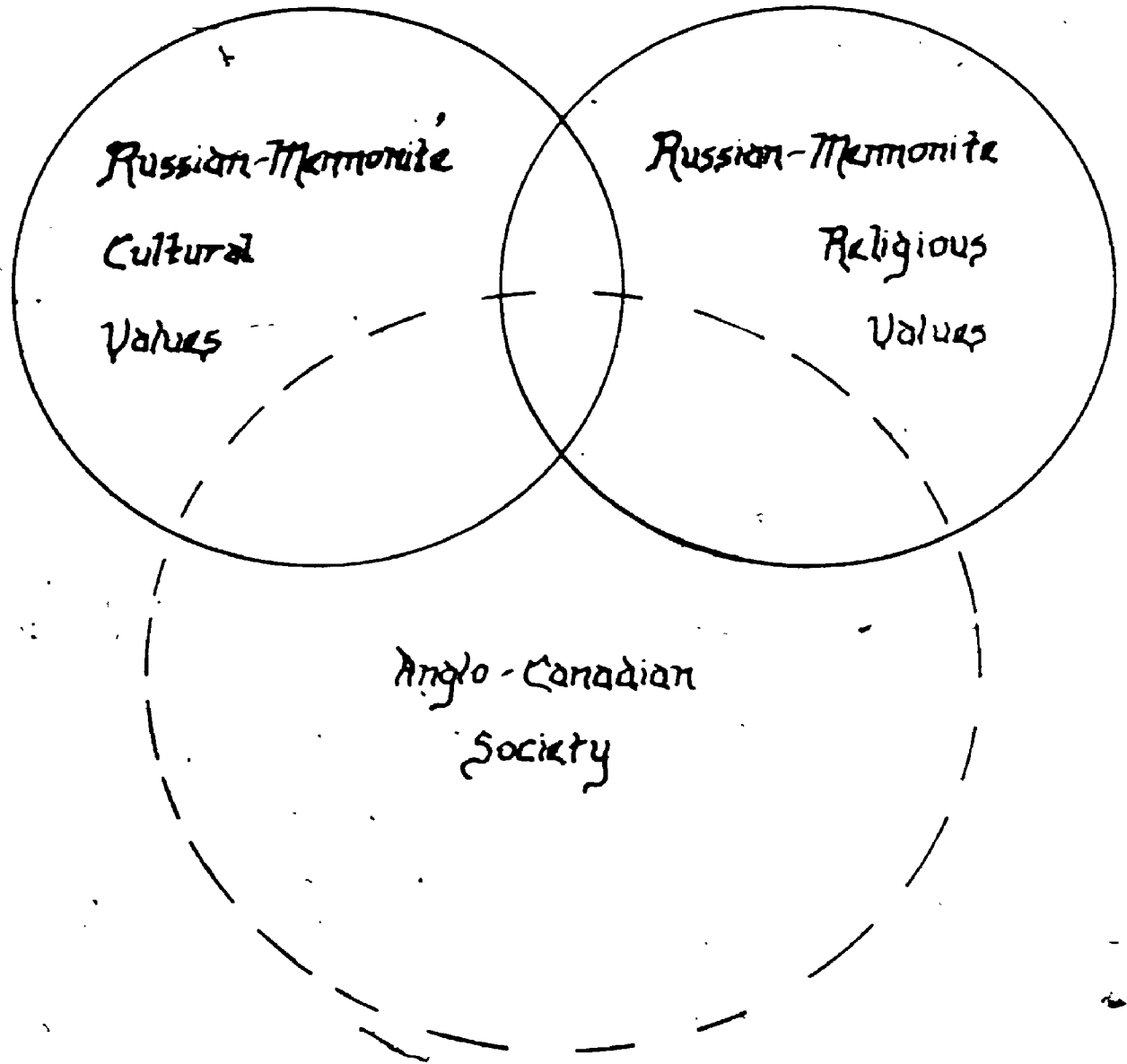
In the Russian setting, the abandonment of or the exclusion from the 'commonwealth' marked the loss of one's Mennonite identity. Those who remained in the colonies were assumed to be, or inclined to become, Mennonite by church affiliation, if for no other reason than to be permitted to marry. In Canada, however, a young person's eventual integration into the church could not be assumed since those same geographic and communal constraints did not apply. The perpetual concern about the young people reveals a search for new ways of encouraging conformity. When that was not forthcoming, a new understanding of Mennonite identity was required. It became necessary, as one recent commentator has suggested, to begin to distinguish between "biblical" and "secular" Mennonites, a dilemma similar to that faced by the Jews.<sup>12</sup> But what did that mean for Mennonite identity?

Jeffrey Reitz provides a model for ethnic group affiliation which can be adapted to depict the Mennonite situation. Reitz suggests that there are three categories of ethnic group identification: 1) full members, 2) peripheral members whose identification is either nominal or latent, and 3) non-members who have chosen not to identify or interact with their ethnic group.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Mennonites had, in true Anabaptist tradition, always maintained only two categories, full membership or non-membership. They were now being compelled to consider whether another alternative was possible or acceptable.

What prompted, and complicated, this question was what Calvin Redekop calls the "ethnic ghost",<sup>14</sup> that is, the seemingly inevitable convergence of culture and faith among the Mennonites. That dilemma, and debate, can be depicted as in Figure 2. The debate focuses on the extent to which ethno-cultural values and lifestyles intersect with religious values. In the environment of the 'commonwealth' these two circles virtually coincided. In Canada the extent of that overlap steadily declined, however, creating considerable internal conflict and debate. At the same time, these spheres intersected to an increasing extent with the values of the dominant Anglo-Canadian society, an intersection which the 'commonwealth' environment of Russia had largely prevented. In Canada, however, that intersection could hardly be avoided. As a result, there was considerable controversy on all sides over the extent to which Mennonite ethnoreligious values should coincide with Canadian cultural norms. That conflict erupted most visibly during periods of economic decline and was generally restricted

Figure 2

Dimensions of Ethnoreligious Identity  
in Canada



to ethno-cultural differences. During the two World Wars, however, the Mennonites came into direct conflict with the larger society in both the cultural and religious spheres. The resulting tension caused the circles of affiliation and identification to move farther apart, which helps to explain why some young men rejected both aspects of their Mennonite identity during World War II in their bid to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada.

These young Mennonites, together with others who moved into the city to attend University or to find employment, tested the boundaries of Mennonite identity. By rejecting, either passively or actively, those values which still identified and united their parents' generation as a distinct people, they challenged that generation to consider whether it was possible to be a "secular" Mennonite, that is, one who had moved out of the sphere of Mennonite ethnoreligious identity altogether. That dilemma would increasingly face the Russian Mennonites during the succeeding generation.

This movement out of the sphere of congregation and community also prompted the emergence of a home mission work among the Mennonites. Ironically, the object of their missionary efforts, as the Toronto Mission of the United Mennonites illustrates, was the reclamation of the lost "sons and daughters of Menno." The city mission would become another major preoccupation as the rate of urbanization, and attrition, increased. In this instance, however, that effort was largely restricted to the sphere of religious values. The English language, and Anglo-Canadian cultural norms, prevailed in the Toronto Mennonite

Church, as well as in the Hamilton Mennonite Church established in the early fifties and in other city churches to follow. This development marked the beginning of an ethnic shift among the Russian Mennonites, in Ontario, a shift away from their German cultural identity to an Anglo-Canadian, and later a multicultural, identity and composition.

The wartime experience, which had greatly accelerated that development, also had another effect, this one more subtle and imperceptible. At the same time as the hostility against all things German caused the Mennonites to deemphasize that aspect of their identity, it also prompted them to refocus that identity on their historic religious values. If ethnicity had in fact become the religion of some, even to the point of claiming biblical justification for their zealous Germanism, then the decline of that aspect of their identity compelled others to reinforce the nucleus of their religious identity, namely the principle of nonresistance. In effect, therefore, the wartime experience, difficult as it was for some, helped the Russian Mennonites to focus their uniqueness once more on the religious principles which had given birth to the Anabaptist movement some 420 years earlier. These religious values, then, were called upon to define the "faithful" Mennonites, reestablishing once again a clear biblical criterion for their identity. How clearly that boundary could be maintained during peacetime became another challenge for the next generation.

That generation would come to rely increasingly on conferences, institutions, and other organizations to help preserve their identity.



Private high schools and Bible colleges, in addition to the Bible schools already in existence, would be called upon to carry the burden of this task. For a time, however, these institutions became again the means to that end, and not ends in themselves as the institutions in the Russian 'commonwealth' had tended to become. Initially they were intended primarily to reestablish, maintain and perpetuate a distinct religious identity. How effective they would be in the task of boundary maintenance also remained to be seen.

Another development which reinforced that effort was the arrival of a new wave of Mennonite immigrants. These newcomers had also had their religious faith severely tested by the war. This common bond demonstrated once again that the essence of Mennonite identity transcended regional, national, and denominational boundaries. At the same time, however, this influx of German-speaking Mennonites after the Second World War served also to revitalize the ethno-cultural identity of the Russian Mennonites already in Canada, thereby prolonging the process of acculturation and, in some instances, exacerbating the generational conflict inherent in that process. Within a decade or so of their arrival those churches in Ontario which absorbed the largest numbers of these postwar immigrants would see the most anglicized of their members leave to establish independent unilingual congregations. The cycle of separation from within continued unabated, therefore, and once again the divisive issue was the cultural manifestation of a common religious heritage. The Russian Mennonites were discovering anew that although the religious essence of their identity transcended

any one cultural expression, those historic religious values would always need to be embodied in a particular cultural manifestation.

The Anglo-Canadian culture predominant in Ontario had, moreover, proven both overwhelming and, in many respects, attractive. By the end of the Second World War, therefore, these Russian Mennonite immigrants were well on the way to being integrated into that larger society.

Footnotes

- 1 Anderson, "Canadian Ethnic Studies," p. 7.
- 2 Ibid., p. 9.
- 3 Frank H. Epp, "Problems of Mennonite Identity: A Historical Study," in The Canadian Ethnic Mosaic. A Quest for Identity, ed. Leo Driedger (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 287.
- 4 Ninian Smart, A Theory of Religious and Ideological Change, cited in Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, "Midcentury Change in the Mennonite Church," MQR, LX (Jan., 1986), p. 60.
- 5 Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic," p. 443.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 H.P. Krehbiel, The History of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, vol. II (Newton, Kan.: by the author, 1938), p. 255.
- 8 Epp, Mennonites in Canada, vol. II, p. 600.
- 9 Daniel Boorstein has argued that those groups whose "concern for their own purity overshadowed their desire to improve their community" are most successful in retaining their ethnoreligious identity. See Stout, "Ethnicity," p. 219.
- 10 Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Canada, vol. I (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 171.
- 11 Sawatsky, "Diversity and Unity," pp. 286-88.
- 12 Roy Vogt, "Chaim Potok and the Mennonites," Mennonite Mirror, vol. 8 (Feb., 1979), p. 22.
- 13 Reitz, Survival of Ethnic Groups, p. 93.
- 14 Redekop, "Ethnic Ghost," p. 133.

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