

Anti-Menno: Introduction to Early Soviet-Mennonite Literature (1920-1940)

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I

Russian-Mennonite creative writing in the West, especially in Germany and North America, had its beginning in the 1920s and 1930s when writers such as Jacob H. Janzen, Theodor Block, Peter Epp, Dietrich Neufeld, Gerhard Friesen (Fritz Senn), Arnold Dyck, Johannes Harder and others left the Soviet Union following the upheavals of the Revolution of 1917 and the end of Mennonite institutional life (c.1928-29) in that country. These early Mennonite writers, who wrote poems and prose works in German, laid the foundation, especially in Canada and the United States, for the Russian-Mennonite literary tradition.¹

There were other Mennonite writers who did not emigrate but for whatever reason remained in the Soviet Union, throwing in their lot with the new regime and writing in support of the "new order." Some of these Soviet-Mennonite writers were among the most zealous propagandists of Communist ideology. Some of them, including David Schellenberg and Gerhard Sawatzky, achieved prominence among Soviet-German intellectuals, becoming leaders and literary role models for other young writers to follow. Turning away from their Mennonite people and

religious tradition, they came to believe that Mennonites in the past had been part of the oppressive and exploitative order of the tsarist regime. They were convinced that the German and Mennonite institutions, religion, and especially private property needed to give way to progress in the form of atheistic materialism and collectivization. Their writings deal specifically with issues related to collectivization of farming and agriculture, policies Stalin sought to implement in the late twenties and early thirties.

Who were these Soviet-Mennonite writers? While we know little about their social background, there appears to be some evidence to suggest that at least some of these writers came from poorer farming families and working people among the Russian Mennonites.² Some were children of teachers who themselves had met opposition because of their progressive and unorthodox views.³ Most of these writers had studied in Mennonite elementary and high schools prior to the Revolution, and thereafter had entered universities and pedagogical institutions in Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa and other centres.

When the early Soviet Union pursued what might be called multicultural policies in order to win the support of ethnic groups within its borders and to that end even established a German republic in the Volga region, Germans and Mennonites saw an opportunity to define themselves as a people with their own culture and language within Soviet society. It must be remembered that Mennonite writers thought of themselves as ethnically German, not specifically Mennonite. For them Mennonite was a religious faith, a faith they now sought to discard. In some of their writings they included Low German words and phrases, to be sure, but this they did in order to give their writing color and authenticity and not because they wished to set themselves ethnically apart from other Germans. Low German for them was merely another *German* dialect.⁴

And yet, it is not difficult to identify these writers as Mennonites. Their names give them away. There is no doubt that surnames like Janzen, Loewen, Schellenberg, Ediger and Sawatzky indicate their Mennonite ethnic background, the question of their religious faith notwithstanding. Thus, while these writers wrote what they considered "Soviet-German" literature and together with other Soviet Germans sought to build a new society, we shall focus on them in this article as *Mennonite* writers, commenting on their literary works regardless of whether they deal with specific Mennonite issues or not. As will become apparent, the world these writers portray and the issues they deal with apply equally to the German and Mennonite communities of the Soviet Union of that time. German and Mennonite colonists may have lived separate lives under the old regime, due largely to their different religious affiliation, but after the Revolution religious-cultural differences receded into the background and all Soviet Germans, including Mennonites, faced similar economic, social and cultural problems with which they had to deal in the light of the new reality.

II

Before we consider who the Soviet-Mennonite writers were and what, how and why they wrote, we must explore their historical-political context and the ideological norms and standards that were their guide.

Early Soviet-Mennonite literature cannot be understood without knowing something about Stalin's economic policy in general and collectivization in particular. From 1917 on the Soviet government sought to eliminate private possession of land and introduce communal farming, although due to other pressing problems these plans could not be realized for some ten years. Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1921 even allowed and encouraged a limited measure of private farming and capitalistic activity. However, the Soviets never abandoned their objective to collectivize the peasant communities. Most peasants, especially well-to-do farmers, did not welcome collectivization and thus continued to offer both active and passive resistance to government policy. Consequently the Bolsheviks under Stalin resorted to increasingly harsh measures to achieve their economic objectives, culminating in the economic reforms of 1928, the so-called first five-year plan. The reforms included liquidation of the so-called *kulaks* (meaning prosperous farmers) as a class. Confiscation of property, arrests and exile to Siberia, along with other pressures, were used to force Soviet farmers into collectives, that is cooperative farming under state control. In 1932 and 1933 the Soviet Union, particularly the Ukraine where many German and Mennonite people lived, suffered a severe famine which claimed millions of human victims. Whether "man-made" or not, the famine was used by Stalin to force through his policy of collectivization, which he achieved by 1937. Much of the Soviet literature of this time deals with the government's economic policy and the social and human problems that resulted from it.

How Soviet writers were to deal with these economic and social issues creatively was prescribed in considerable detail by the Party establishment. In the first issue of *Sturmschritt*, a Soviet-German literary journal established in Kharkov in 1930, V. Baumgärtner outlines the standards and rules according to which Soviet-German writers ought to write. In a programmatic article, "Unser Weg" ("Our Way"), Baumgärtner states that it is necessary to write creative literature "according to a certain system" and that writers should have "definite objectives." Baumgärtner writes that while the literature published in this new journal will deal primarily with agricultural and village life issues, it must nevertheless seek to support the struggle of the proletarians in the cities and thus help to transform Soviet society along Marxist-Leninist lines.⁵

Are there any guides or models, Baumgärtner asks, which Soviet-German writers can follow as they seek to develop their literature? The great Russian socialist authors, who were being translated into German might be of help, the author answers, but since Soviet-German writers wrote in German, they were tempted to seek their models among the socialist writers in Germany. According to Baumgärtner this temptation should be resisted. The proletarian writers in Ger-

many could no doubt inspire Soviet-German writers, but they should not become normative, for the German writers were still trapped within a capitalist society, whereas in the Soviet Union the Revolution had been successfully completed. Soviet-German writers must reflect in their works this victory of socialism in their country. Thus, since there were no adequate models anywhere, Soviet-German writers must develop their own original literature.

Of utmost importance for Soviet-German literature was its ideological orientation, according to the *Sturmschritt* article. In portraying the economic and social transformation that was taking place in the Soviet Union, the writer must not emphasize the individual activities of farmers, but focus on the agricultural collective, on the communes as grain factories, thus helping to shape the agricultural proletariat.⁶ Since collectivization had begun to take place throughout the country and the introduction of machines and technology enabled farmers to produce foodstuff communally, collective farming had become a mass movement. This victorious mass movement must be reflected in Soviet literature. Moreover, the farmer-writer, according to Baumgärtner, must himself participate in the process of socialist reconstruction so as to be able to understand the forces which drive this transformation: "He must be able to artistically reflect the intense class struggle, and that he can only do by means of dialectic materialism."⁷ In other words, the new literature must portray correctly the struggle between the old and the new world views, making clear to readers what the past has been, what the present is, and what the future ought to become. "The Soviet state marches forward so rapidly that it becomes impossible for literature to stand still."⁸

In conclusion, the article expresses the hope that the new literary journal *Sturmschritt* will contribute toward encouraging and educating young Soviet-German writers and supporting the development of "proletarian Soviet-German literature." Mennonite writers who contributed their material to this journal and to others, accepted and even helped to draft the standards by which Soviet writing was to be judged. Their poetry and prose were written not merely to entertain, but to educate and transform their readers' minds and psyches. How successful they were remains to be seen. In the eyes of hard-core Stalinists, most Soviet-German, including Mennonite, writers failed to produce "pure" socialist literature.

III

About most of the Soviet-Mennonite writers and their work we know very little. The knowledge we have of them comes from Soviet anthologies, literary journals like *Sturmschritt* and *Heimatliche Weiten*, the Soviet (now Russian) paper *Neues Leben*, and from work done by Western scholars such as Annelore Engel-Braunschmidt, Alexander Ritter and others. Of writers who did not write along

Party lines we know even less. And it bears repeating that not all Soviet-German and Mennonite writers submitted to the new ideology and wrote in accordance with its literary standards. Consequently their work was never published, at least not until fairly recently. In fact, when their poems and other writings became known to the authorities the authors paid dearly for their writing, often with imprisonment and death.⁹ Others, however, wrote in the spirit of Marxist-Leninism out of conviction and no doubt necessity, and only much later, at the time of *glasnost*, did they revise or modify their former views.¹⁰ The writers we are dealing with in this article wrote in the twenties and thirties and had some of their work published in their life-time. As far as we know these ideologically-committed writers never recanted their Communist views.

Johann Janzen (1893-1967) and David Loewen (1888-1974) were among the first Soviet-Mennonite writers of poetry and prose. Janzen was a teacher, writer of textbooks, artist, and poet. We know little concerning his literary activity except that he began writing in the 1920s, and that at that time he worked on a novel entitled *Die Wehrlosen* (*The Non-resistants*) which was never published and whose manuscript has been lost. He must have been a poet of note, for in the early 1930s in Kharkov Janzen was awarded the Gorki-prize for poetry.¹¹ Stories like "Frühlingsahnen" ("Premonition of Spring") and "Im Nebel" ("In the Fog") are "Stimmungsbilder," i.e., impressionistic pieces dealing with nature, moods and reflection.¹² Both these stories have no Mennonite content, nor do they reflect a specifically Soviet ideology.

David Loewen came from a large, fairly poor Mennonite family. After attending the Central School in Chortitza he hoped to study medicine, but lack of money forced him to give up the idea. In 1914 he graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Petersburg and thereafter taught school. During the First World War Loewen served as a medical orderly with the Red Cross. Between 1917 and 1921 he studied agriculture in Odessa and worked thereafter as a breeder of cattle, agronomist and teacher. While pursuing his careers, Loewen wrote poems and had some of them published in Soviet-German papers.¹³

Loewen's first poems were written in the 1920s. In poems like "Selbst ist der Mann" ("Man on his own") he encourages readers to work toward a better future, and in "Mein Heimatland" ("My Homeland") Loewen praises his country, "mein Sowjetvaterland": "Es ist das Land/wo Knechtschaft nahm ein Ende,/wo gleich und gleich/sich in die Augen schaun." (His homeland is the country where serfdom ended and where equals stand together, side by side.) In another stanza of the poem the poet writes that his homeland is the land where both farmers and city workers build their own happiness and future.¹⁴

Other early Soviet-Mennonite writers were Helene Ediger, Peter Klassen, and N. Dueck. I have been unable to ascertain anything about Ediger, and little is known concerning Klassen, except that he was born in 1906. Klassen did not have his stories published until 1956. In that year they appeared in the Soviet-German paper *Arbeit* (*Work*). In the story "Ins rechte Licht gerückt" ("Put into the right light") Klassen writes of honesty and integrity in the Soviet state.¹⁵

N. Dueck, writing in a 1932 issue of *Sturmschritt*, deals with the “bad” old times in a Mennonite colony. In his story “Als es noch Schulzen gab” (“When there were still village mayors”), two characters, Heinrich Janzen and Heinrich Thiessen, seek to acquire a piece of land at an auction sale. Janzen gets the land not because he needs it more than the other but because he has good personal connections through his well-to-do relatives and thus can outbid Thiessen. In the end Thiessen and Fast, the poor night watchman, decide: “Wir Armen müssen etwas machen! So kann das nicht weiter...” (“We poor people must do something! Things can’t go on like this...”) With the abolition of private property and collectivization, the story implies, greed and influence by the rich would be eliminated.¹⁶

IV

Among the more prominent Soviet-Mennonite writers of this early period were David Schellenberg (1903-1954) and Gerhard Sawatzky (1901-1944), fellow students, friends and literary associates. Of Schellenberg, Victor Klein and Johann Warkentin, authors of a Soviet-German textbook, write: “The great October Revolution opened beautiful perspectives for this poor people’s son.”¹⁷ These perspectives included studies at the pedagogical institutes in Moscow and Leningrad, fruitful literary connections with socialist writers, including his friend Gerhard Sawatzky, with whom he founded the first German-speaking literary circle in the Soviet Union, and opportunities to publish his early poems and stories. In Kharkov Schellenberg together with other Soviet-German writers helped to establish the first but short-lived centre of Soviet-German writing, which came to an end in 1935. In 1932 Schellenberg achieved a pinnacle of success by becoming an editor of the literary journal *Sturmschritt*.

In his early poems the young Schellenberg sought to promote most zealously — to the point of fanaticism — the Communist ideology. Most of these poems deal with land and agricultural issues, village life and its transformation along Communist Party lines, and the role of writers in the new society.¹⁸ In a “storm and stress” poem entitled “Würmer, Türmer und Stürmer,” Schellenberg celebrates the cultural achievements of the intellectual workers, workers who work two “shifts”, one with their hands and the other with their mind and pen. And doing so does not even tire them out! “Ist vorbei eine Schicht,/gleich die nächste beginnt./Kulturschicht machen wir,/die Blätter der Bücher rauschen,/Und wir merken dabei, dass/Wir garnicht müde und schläfrig sind.”¹⁹

In a poem entitled “Liebknechts Faust” (“The fist of Liebknecht”), the poet calls for hate and destruction of capitalism and the old order: “Genossen!/Genossen!/Stellt glühendes Hassen/und wogenden Zorn/in Reih und Glied!/Sie sollen/in Massen/marschieren auf Strassen,/in Kampfrevolution.”²⁰

Schellenberg’s most ambitious work was a projected three-part novel dealing with the past, present and future of Russian-Soviet society. The first two parts,

Lechzendes Land (*Languishing Land*) and *Pundmenniste* (*Greedy Mennonites*), were completed and published in the 1930s. The third part, which was to deal with the Revolution of 1917, was not completed but remained a collection of a few stories entitled *Verzweigte Erzählungen* (*Entwined Stories*).²¹

When the first part, *Lechzendes Land*, was completed Schellenberg's old teacher Georg Luft read it through in one sitting and declared: "Aside from a few minor details, I am generally satisfied with the work. I can now leave the scene, for our literature has come into good hands."²² There were other critics who found the work falling short of Marxist ideology. Reinhold Mickwitz, a professor of literature in Odessa, criticized especially the way Schellenberg had portrayed the process of collectivization: as a struggle of individual characters and not as a mass movement of Soviet society.²³ This criticism did not bode well for Schellenberg. The perception by the ideological watchdogs that Schellenberg, among others, lacked in philosophical correctness was to cost him dearly a few years later.

Lechzendes Land describes life in a Ukrainian-German village prior to collectivization with a focus on the inevitable class struggle.²⁴ The "machine" in this novel is symbolic of all that which is new and good. At the same time machines, including tractors and threshing machines as well as technology in general, are concrete means by which social transformation and economic development can take place. A poem included in the novel states that "smiling steel" will wage war against and in the end conquer the enemies of the Revolution: "Siegen kann nur lächelnder Stahl./Stählern muss unsere Organisation sein,/stählerne Maschinen werden den/Kampf entscheiden."²⁵ Since machines are powerful weapons, it is important that workers acquire them as soon as possible, for whoever controls the means of production has won the battle. Much of the novel's action and struggle turn on this issue.

The characters in *Lechzendes Land* are more types than fully developed individuals, representing as they do the "good" and "bad" classes in society. The poor people in the village are generally in favour of economic change, including collectivization, whereas the rich landowners oppose all change and seek to subvert the positive efforts of the Communist Party. The Mennonites in this novel are part of the rich classes. "Then there are rich, strong farms [Wirtschaften] like those of the Mennonites," we read, "who are skillful in many things and they apply their skills to farming as well."²⁶ This reference to Mennonites may appear like backhanded praise of the industrious and successful Mennonite farmers, but within its context it is not. The rich Mennonites here are *kulaks*, i.e., enemies of the new order.

While the rich farmers may be knowledgeable in the pursuit of profit and exploitation, they are portrayed as culturally backward and unwilling to inform themselves concerning the new ideology, collectivization, and transformation of society. Their reading material, we are told, consists of religious books and magazines, including the Bible, the "stories of Zenian" (J.H. Janzen), the 1906-1909 issues of the *Christlicher Familienkalender*, a dozen "old" issues of the *Odessaer Zeitung*, and a few agricultural journals.²⁷ The emphasis here is on the

"old" pre-Revolution and religious materials, materials that should have been consigned to the dustbin long ago.

Mrs. Gerlinger, the wife of a rich reactionary landowner, had pressed her husband for some time to get rid of the many useless things that had accumulated on the shelves over the years, but Gerlinger refused, for he had become too "attached" to them.²⁸ Mrs. Gerlinger herself is becoming old and worrying about the many wrinkles she sees in her face. By means of cosmetics and heavy makeup she tries to appear young. And the Gerlingers' plush home certainly smacks of decadence and a by-gone era.²⁹

The clergy especially, according to the novel, keep the villagers ignorant and trapped within their antiquated norms. Pastor Winkel, for example, warns his parishioners against what he calls the dangers of "science and progress," using his sermons to instill fear among his congregation concerning the "evils" of collectivization and socialism. "There is much argument in our time about faith and science," he proclaims. "The godless seek to confuse the sheep of the Lord, shouting, 'Look, look, here is science! We no longer need any religion!'" If people will continue to listen to these dangerous men, the pastor warns, they will be deceived and suffer shipwreck in their faith.³⁰ Kunstmann, the Communist party man, of course ridicules both the pastor and his reactionary and antiquated views. People who acquire their "knowledge and science" from the pastor, he remarks, need not use their brains but merely "have faith and wait for heaven."³¹ Religion, obviously, has no place in the new order. It is to be overcome and discarded like scrapmetal ("Rostzeug").³²

Can the exploiters and oppressors be enlightened and transformed so as to become useful members of the new society? As Schellenberg is to show more fully in *Pundmenniste*, the second part of his novel, *kulaks* apparently cannot be rehabilitated and made into loyal and committed Party people. According to the novel, and certainly according to Communist Party thinking, the old class has to be swept away, liquidated, to make room for the proletarian society and state.³³

Despite the criticism of the novel by academics like Reinhold Mickwitz, Schellenberg proceeded to work on the second part, *Pundmenniste*, and submitted it for evaluation to the German section of *Pflug*, the Soviet-Ukrainian literary society formed in 1922 to encourage peasant writers. The committee of readers, including the respected Georg Luft, decided that *Pundmenniste* needed to be "thoroughly reworked." One can only guess at the reasons for the committee's dissatisfaction with the novel. While grammatical, stylistic and typographical errors no doubt were part of the committee's objection to the novel — and there were many such errors — ideological deficiencies must have been of more serious concern to the committee than mere grammar, style and form. Schellenberg, however, decided not to respond to the committee's criticism, for he felt that as editor of *Sturmschritt* he could and would publish his *Pundmenniste* in installments in the journal. Thus in 1932 and 1933 large sections of the novel were published in *Sturmschritt*. There was not even a hint of any controversy about the novel.³⁴ In a note to the first installment, Schellenberg mentions laconically: "We are publish-

ing the novel in a shortened version. It will appear complete in our press shortly.”³⁵

Pundmenniste is a continuation of *Lechzendes Land* and deals again with the struggle between those who wish to establish communal farming and those who are opposed to collectivization. Small-scale farmers like Kornelius Retzlaff received some land after the Revolution, but they still depend on the rich farmers and their machines to get their work done because they realize more and more that the means of agricultural production must come into their own hands and be shared communally. However, people like village mayor Dueck, the *Vollwirte* (full farmers) and the clergy seek ways and means to foil the efforts of Party men like Kunstmann. The Mennonite clergy still exert considerable influence on the community, but their power is waning. Retzlaff, for example, is still attached to the church, but he no longer believes that prayer and church services are the answers to their social and economic problems. Reason, science and technology, not faith, are the keys to a successful future.³⁶

At the centre of the novel's ideology and conflict stands the story of Dr. Sturius, a young and idealistic medical man who comes to the Mennonite village to open his practice. Sturius confides his story to his diary under the title “Die Rolle des Enttäuschten” (“The Role of a Disappointed Man”). Party man Kunstmann believes that the diary should be read widely, including abroad, to convince people that the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class, cannot be expected to change and fall in line with the new social order. A summary of Dr. Sturius' diary is in order as it enables us to see how Schellenberg and other dissident Mennonite intellectuals of the twenties and thirties viewed Mennonitism.

When Dr. Sturius comes to this Mennonite village he is quite impressed with Mennonite culture, institutions, and even with what he calls the “democratic” congregations. All that the Mennonite villagers lack, he thinks, is a good education and enlightenment, that is, information about how their lives and ways can become even better. Once they see the light, according to Sturius, they will embrace socialism and collectivization.³⁷ However, as soon as he meets village mayor Dueck, Dr. Sturius' disappointment begins. Sturius is told that the villagers are not much interested in education, not even in a doctor's medical skills. Sturius would thus do well to supplement his income by acting as Dueck's secretary at the village council's meetings. At first disinclined to accept Mayor Dueck's proposal, Sturius eventually agrees to help out, for the position will provide him with valuable insights into the villagers' lives.

Sturius learns more and more about the Mennonites, lessons he had not expected. He finds that there exists a wide gap between the well-to-do farmers and those who own little land. The rich Mennonites employ both “Russian” and Mennonite servants, although they prefer Russian workers because they can pay them less and at the same time feel less guilty about exploiting them.³⁸ There are quarrels, tensions, even enmity among these people who claim to be religious pacifists. The traditional principle of nonresistance, however, is no longer practiced. Many of the Mennonites carry weapons. Contradictions between profession and practice, greed, materialism, sexual immorality, the abuse of alcohol and other

vices are common.³⁹ Dr. Sturius' disappointment deepens.

Of significance and interest is Sturius' reflection upon Mennonite history in general and Johann Cornies in particular. In inviting the Prussian Mennonites to come to Russia and settle in the southern Ukraine, the tsars, according to Sturius, had their own geopolitical interests in mind. Strong German and Mennonite settlements in South Russia were to act as buffers between the Russian empire and the discontented elements among the Ukrainians, Tartars and other ethnic peoples. Moreover, the rich and pacifistic Mennonites were used by the Russian government as bait ("Lockspeise") for the southern "robbers," the various tribes north of the Black Sea. These enemies of the tsars could thus attack and raid the colonies at will instead of attacking the Russian military. But in time the Mennonites were found not to be all that nonresistant. The privilege of exemption from military service merely concealed the fighting readiness and ability of "these soldiers for Menno Simons' and Cornies' teachings."⁴⁰

Reading about Johann Cornies and his achievements, Sturius came to the conclusion that whatever good he may have done for his people, it was done undemocratically. Cornies' policies "for the good of the colonies," according to which trees were planted, roads built, and villages improved and beautified, were simply imposed by the Agricultural Society with the backing of the Imperial government, and with little regard for the wishes of the colonists.⁴¹ Sturius is convinced that all activity and life in a community needs to be regulated by a wise and benevolent government, a government that will not allow one individual to become a virtual dictator. Only such regulation from above can ensure the existence of democracy.⁴² However, there appears to be a contradiction here in Sturius' thinking. While he is critical of Cornies and the old regime's dictatorial actions, he believes that a government must impose democracy from above.

Dr. Sturius ends his diary as a thoroughly disillusioned and defeated man. He has failed to educate and enlighten the villagers whom he came to serve, his marriage has broken down, and in the end he is physically beaten and humiliated when he supports striking workers. Reflecting on the doctor's story, Kunstmann states at the end of the novel: "Schluss mit der Geschichte der Pundmenniste!—Her die Geschichte der Kollektivisten!" ("An end to the story of Pundmenniste!—Now to the story of the collectivists").⁴³ This announcement concerning the upcoming third part of the novel was obviously premature. Except for a few stories the third part of Schellenberg's work was never completed.

Neither *Lechzendes Land* nor *Pundmenniste* is great literature, to say the least. The plot of the novel is predictable; the characters, while intended to be individuals actually remain types, representing the two sides in the class struggle; the life and history of the Germans and Mennonites are presented one-sidedly; the purpose of the novel is to propagate Soviet ideology—and the novel's text abounds in typographical errors!

Schellenberg obviously did not consider Mennonites to be distinct from the German colonists living in the Ukraine and in the Volga regions. While some of the Mennonites in the novel speak their Low German dialect, even they are seen as

Soviet-German people. Mennonites and Germans share similar values, they both consider the church as a bulwark against godless socialism, and they work closely together in attempts to foil the forces of collectivization. Similarly, the proletarians in the novel include both Mennonites and Germans. As Soviet-German people they work together for a better future.

From a Soviet ideological perspective, *Pundmenniste* must have appeared too pessimistic. The diary of Dr. Sturius, which forms the heart of the novel, must have been especially unacceptable to the Soviet ideologues. The young idealist Dr. Sturius is defeated and the evil forces of capitalism still remain strong. The class struggle in the novel is far from over. Also, as was the case with *Lechzendes Land*, the class struggle in *Pundmenniste* is portrayed more as a continuing fight between opposing individuals than as a victorious social mass movement. No wonder that Schellenberg's reading committee demanded that the novel be thoroughly reworked.

Schellenberg's literary activity came to an end in 1935. In that year the *Sturmschritt* journal died, both for lack of funds and through Party action, and Schellenberg moved to Moscow, after which there is a gap in his biography. After the Second World War Soviet-German writers learned that "fate had sent [Schellenberg] to Magadan," the eastern part of the Soviet Union, apparently to a sanatorium to be healed of a lung disease!⁴⁴ There is little doubt that criticism against him in 1934, namely that he was "politically blunted" ("politische Abstumpfung"), contributed to the authorities' suspicion of this fanatical fighter for the new order.⁴⁵ There is some evidence, however, that after the war Schellenberg taught German in Ustj-Omutsch, a workers' colony, where he died in 1954.⁴⁶

V

Gerhard Sawatzky (1901-1944), a friend of David Schellenberg, was born into a Mennonite farmer family in Blumenfeld, Ukraine. He studied pedagogy in Moscow and Leningrad, taught in a high school after graduation, wrote and published poems and stories in Soviet-German papers, and worked as an editor for literary papers such as *Nachrichten* and *Der Kämpfer*. Sawatzky joined the Communist Party and since 1934 he was a member of the Soviet Writers Union. He died in 1944 in Solikamsk without seeing his major work, a novel entitled *Wir selbst* (*We Ourselves*), published. It was his widow Sophie Sawatzky, who carefully preserved the manuscript and had it published serially in the 1980s.

The young Sawatzky began to write poems in the 1920s, poems which generally extol the freedom, progress and justice of the Soviet state. In a poem entitled "1. Mai," the workers' holiday in the Soviet Union, the poet contrasts the

past and the present, showing how much better life has become after the Revolution of 1917:

Wir hatten kein Vaterland
und keinen Feiertag...
Wir waren die Fremden zu Haus,
wir mussten in feuchten Löchern wohnen
den Wanzen zum Schmaus
und hatten ein einziges Recht,
das Recht - im Elend für andere zu schuften.⁴⁷

All this has changed under socialism, according to the poem:

Unsere Bergwerke pochen, Fabrikschlote rauchen;
wir bauen uns Güter, für niemand Profit,
den Traktor dem Bauern, die Felder zu pflügen
Die Iljitsch-lampe in Hütten glüht.
...
Wir haben die Zukunft euch abgerungen,
unsere Welt ist gesund und neu.⁴⁸

Sawatzky's poem "Dürre" ("Drought"), is, according to the editors of the *Anthology of Soviet-German Literature*, a masterpiece, unsurpassed in German-Soviet writing.⁴⁹ Alternating between long and short lyrical lines, the poem depends on symbolism, images and philosophical reflection for effect.

Im Wüstensand hinter dem Kaspischen Meer
da nistet die Dürre, die Geißel der Steppen.
Dort sammelt sie Gift und kommt dann daher,
um müde zu machen, ins Elend zu schleppen.⁵⁰

Similar to Theodor Block's series of poems, "Hungerlieder" ("Songs of Hunger"),⁵¹ Sawatzky's long poem describes the devastation that the drought causes in the communities affected by it. But there is an important difference between the two poems: In Block's poems help comes from Americans across the Atlantic Ocean, whereas in Sawatzky's poem the hard-working people themselves fight and overcome the drought and its accompanying famine. For Soviet writers neither God nor capitalism can overcome natural and man-made disasters; only machines, technology and human strength can conquer the enemies of socialism. The poem concludes: "Nur Kämpfe bringen Siege,/allmächtig/sind nur wir!"⁵²

Among Sawatzky's early prose works is his *Unter weißen Mördern* (*Among White Murderers*), a historical short story dealing with the civil war after 1917.⁵³ However in the centre of Sawatzky's literary activity stands his monumental novel *Wir selbst* which was completed in the 1930s but not published till the 1980s in *Heimatliche Weiten*.⁵⁴ Introducing the first installment of the novel in 1984, Woldemar Ekkert, a prominent Soviet-German writer, states that *Wir selbst* is the "most significant work of Soviet-German literature of the pre-World War II period."⁵⁵ Dominic Hollmann, another Soviet-German writer, comments: "Reading Sawatzky's novel, one sees vividly portrayed the actual life of that time in all its

details, nuances, colors and forms....One recognizes that those super-human efforts, those sacrifices [by the early Soviet people] were necessary, so that we today can lead a more satisfied, ordered, and happy existence.”⁵⁶

While there are many characters and the issues are varied and at times complex, the plot of the novel is fairly straight-forward. Elly Benkler, a young German girl from the Volga region, is abandoned by her *kulak* grandfather who seeks to escape abroad and take his money with him. When she is found at a railway station, Elly is taken in by Jacob and Emma Kraus, poor working people who have recently lost their own daughter through death. As Elly matures she becomes a respected and loved member of the progressive, forward-looking farmers and workers of her community. She falls in love with Heinrich Kempel, a young working man in the village. As the couple prepares for a life together, Elly's grandfather, Benkler, appears and seeks to persuade the young woman to leave the village and the Soviet Union with him. Toward the end of the novel even her father, Oskar Benkler, appears. He has served in the White Army against the Soviets, had fled, and has now come back to sabotage the efforts of the Soviets. Elly rejects her *kulak* father, reports him to the authorities who arrest him, chooses to remain a daughter of the Kraus family, and marries Heinrich Kempel.

As in Schellenberg's novel, developing collectivization is one of the main themes of *Wir selbst*. The main outward struggle in the novel revolves around collectivization, dividing the characters into those who favour this economic policy and those who oppose it. For the *kulaks*, including the well-to-do farmers and all church people, collectivization is evil, for some even antichristian. It will mean holding all things in common, including foodstuffs, clothes, spouses, and children who would be taken away by the state to be trained in godless institutions.⁵⁷ The poorer farmers and workers, on the other hand, believe that the old ways need to be transformed by “Lenin's way.” Only through socialism can there be justice for all and a better future.

It is young people like Heinrich Kempel who are prepared to leave the old private ways of farming for communal and progressive agriculture. Practically it would mean, according to Kempel, sharing their horses and equipment and in time acquiring machines to do the work. At meetings these matters are discussed, weighed and reflected upon, and in the end what is best for the community is decided democratically. It is also known to these people that the *kulaks* will be busy raising doubts and dissensions among the villagers so as to derail the efforts of the emerging commune.⁵⁸

The young people are willing to sacrifice all to bring about social and economic changes. They risk their lives when fire breaks out in the communal stable,⁵⁹ and at great risk to themselves they prevent saboteurs from undermining the emerging Soviet system. No danger is too great for them and no cost too high in their noble work for the new order.

The young also pursue uncharted courses in love, discarding old practices and taboos of the past. Heinrich and Elly, for example, are overcome by their passion for each other in a nearby forest. Questions of religious morality do not even enter

the discussion; the young people simply follow their "pure" instincts and drives. When they return to the village after their love-making, Heinrich is struck by the absence of the cross on the church steeple. It had been removed and replaced by a red flag.⁶⁰ Heinrich and Elly will henceforth live under the red flag of Communism, not under the cross of a past era.

The external and inner conflicts in the novel come together in the person of Elly. As part of the working class, she is deeply involved in the class struggle, which in this novel constitutes the outer conflict between the working people and the *kulaks*. Through circumstances and her personal decision, she joins the struggling villagers, works alongside them with her hands, and in the end marries a person from the proletarian class. The other conflict, the struggle in her heart, is a much more difficult one, for it is a struggle to come to terms with her past and bourgeois tradition. In rejecting her grandfather and father, who represent all that which the Soviet state fights against, Elly frees herself from the tentacles of a past which seeks to reclaim her. That this struggle is a very difficult one is shown at the end of the novel where Elly breaks down and weeps. As her father is led away to face justice, a socialist friend who seeks to comfort Elly says: "Stop crying. I know you well, and I can tell you this: Among us we believe that only those have a right to happiness who work honestly and who fight valiantly against bandits like this...bookkeeper...."⁶¹ Benkler is thus no longer a father for Elly but a bandit who needs to be flushed out and destroyed. The novel ends with the promise of a new and better beginning. The full moon rises over the endless stubble fields, the expansive rich black earth, over the apple trees of the collective commune called "Lenin's Way," and over the hills which connect the village and the city.⁶²

Sawatzky's novel *Wir selbst* has been called by one Soviet-German critic "Neuland unter dem Pflug" ("Virgin land under the plough").⁶³ Sawatzky has skillfully portrayed a colorful panorama of characters, actions, processes, human-interest stories, and the clash of ideologies in which the 1920s and early thirties were engaged. Yet this young author also faced literary pitfalls which he could not altogether avoid. Some of the minor characters and events are portrayed one-dimensionally, almost superficially. In fairness to Sawatzky, however, these pitfalls are due to the demands of "socialist realism" according to which Soviet writers had to write. Generally, Sawatzky managed to portray real-life human relationships and flesh and blood characters, and to develop his novel with due regard for motivation, psychological necessity, and historical reality.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that as a writer Sawatzky surpasses his friend David Schellenberg. Sawatzky's poems are more lyrical and profound than Schellenberg's and certainly the novel *Wir selbst* is more developed and nuanced than anything that Schellenberg wrote.

However, as with all Soviet literature of that time, *Wir selbst* has all too obvious weaknesses as literature. It accepts too readily and unquestioningly the official ideology as the only solution to all economic, social and cultural problems. It is certainly most negative in its portrayal of the bourgeoisie. Its apologia for the Communist system is couched in terms of black and white, with the proletarians being all good and the capitalists all bad. While there is some symbolism in the

novel, the detailed description of events, actions, thinking and feeling leaves little room for the imagination. Sawatzky, like Schellenberg and other Soviet writers, saw himself deeply involved in the class struggle, using his writing to bring about revolutionary changes in society. Sawatzky may have been aware of these literary weaknesses in his novel, but as a Communist he could not write otherwise and as a propagandist for what he considered to be a "good cause" he was willing to subordinate his literary insights to the demands of the Party.⁶⁵

VI

The early Soviet-Mennonite writers, together with their Soviet-German colleagues, had only a short period in which their literature could develop. In the 1930s when Hitler and his National Socialists (Nazis) came to power in Germany, Soviet Germans throughout their country were suspected and accused of Nazi sympathies and collaboration. To this day there is no documented evidence for the truth of these accusations.⁶⁶ By 1935 Soviet-German literary activity had come to an end in the Ukraine and effectively transferred to the Volga region where there existed an autonomous republic of Soviet Germans.⁶⁷ But the days of the Volga Republic were numbered as well. In 1941, the year in which Germany went to war against the Soviet Union, the German republic on the Volga was liquidated and its German people resettled in parts of the eastern Soviet Union. The fact that Soviet Germans were loyal citizens of their country, fought during the Second World War alongside other Soviet soldiers against Germany, and contributed in every way, including writing, toward building the Soviet Union—all this did not prevent Stalin from moving harshly against them. Only much later, in 1964, were Soviet Germans "rehabilitated" and allowed to resume their cultural life at least officially, although with little public acknowledgement.⁶⁸

For the early Soviet-Mennonite writers life turned out to be tragic indeed. Alienated from their religious and cultural traditions, they pursued a new identity as Soviet-German writers and sought to contribute toward building a new society. Not only did they see themselves as Soviet-Germans, but they also identified with Soviet-Russian intellectuals and authors, whose work they often imitated and translated into German.⁶⁹ In their youthful enthusiasm and desire to be ideologically correct, their poems and prose works became propaganda rather than good literature. Having no literary and cultural traditions to follow, their literature, like the early Soviet state, became an island unto itself. Within this circle, life and writing were not governed by freedom and creativity, but by rigid rules established by the watchdogs of Soviet orthodoxy. Ironically, in the end these "storm and stress" writers were silenced and removed from the cultural and literary scenes. This was not only a loss to the writers themselves, but also to Soviet literature. Had a writer like Gerhard Sawatzky been allowed to develop his literary skills and craft, Soviet-German literature would have been the richer for it.⁷⁰

There are interesting differences between those Mennonite writers who migrated to the West in the 1920s and those who remained in the Soviet Union. Indeed, their only similarities are their common Mennonite background and the German language in which they wrote. The writers who went to Germany and Canada⁷¹ were generally anti-Communist, although their antipathy for Communist ideology did not necessarily reflect clearly in their works. Soviet-Mennonite writers were in the main committed Marxist-Leninists and sworn enemies of bourgeois capitalism. Mennonite writers in the West wrote largely about the loss of their Russian homeland, generally looking back positively and nostalgically upon a closed chapter in Russian-Mennonite history.⁷² Soviet-Mennonite writers condemned their German-Mennonite past with its institutions, beliefs and values, and looked forward to a new society which they were helping to build. German-Mennonite writing in the English-speaking West came to an end with Arnold Dyck's *Koop enn Bua en Dietschlaund* (1960) and two years later with the publication of Rudy Wiebe's novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. "The German Book," as Arnold Dyck called German-Mennonite writing, did not survive in North America. Soviet-German, including Soviet-Mennonite, writing, while not flourishing nor of a high literary quality, continues to exist in the former Soviet Union. Younger and older poets and prose writers, writing in High German and some even in Low German, appear regularly in publications such as *Neues Leben* and *Heimatliche Weiten*. But this more recent Russian-Mennonite literature is a subject for another study.

Notes

I wish to thank professors Victor Doerksen, J.W. Dyck, Al Reimer and James Urry for valuable criticisms and suggestions with regard to this article. Also, the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen in Stuttgart, Germany, where I did much of my work for this article in the summer of 1992, deserves my gratitude for friendly and efficient service.

⁷¹There is by now a large corpus of secondary literature dealing with Russian-Mennonite creative writing, including articles in journals, anthologies, and proceedings of symposia and literary conferences. See especially Al Reimer, "The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction," in *Mennonite Images. Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues*, ed. by Harry Loewen (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), pp.221-235; Harry Loewen, "Canadian-Mennonite Literature. Longing for a Lost Homeland," in *The Old World and the New. Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians*, ed. by Walter E. Riedel (Toronto/Buffalo/London: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), pp.73-93; and articles in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vols. 1-10 (1983-1992).

⁷²See David Penner, "Kindheit und Jugend," in *Heimatliche Weiten*, 2, 1989:164-228. Writers like Penner comment on how the poor and landless among the Mennonites were treated and that some intellectually inclined young people associated the Mennonite religion with injustice toward the poor. Karl Götz wrote of Penner: "Es hat gottlob nur ganz wenige Volksdeutsche gegeben, die zum Ruhme des Bolschewismus zur Feder gegriffen haben. Einer der wenigen, ein heruntergekommener Kerl, der seinen

rechten Namen hinter dem Decknamen Reimarus [sic] verbarg..." (quoted in Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs - ein Fall doppelter Loyalität?* Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1984. p.114. Italics mine.)

³*Ibid.*, p.165. For a history of the Intelligentsia in Russia, see the excellent chapter in Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 121-52.

⁴It might be noted that while Canadian Mennonite writers also thought of themselves as being German, they generally emphasized their Mennonite peoplehood, and Low German for them was the language of the Mennonite people. See especially Arnold Dyck's reflection on peoplehood and language in his *Koop enn Bua enn Dietschlaund* (*Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p.459). At this point it might be instructive to note that there were reasons for German-literary activity in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. Each nationality was given official status, allowing it to conduct education in its own language and to develop its culture. Thus Mennonite schools reverted to teaching in German and Ukrainian replaced Russian as the major language for Ukrainian Mennonites. The Mennonites became part of the German national minority alongside other ethnic minorities. The Soviet Germans, including the Mennonites, established their literary centre in Kharkov, which until 1934 was the nominal capital. Meier Buchsweiler in his *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine* deals with the German issue in the Ukraine and comments on the role of German writers, including David Penner, David Schellenberg, and Gerhard Sawatzky.

It is of interest to note the number of German and Ukrainian titles published between 1925 and 1928:

Titles published	in German	in Ukrainian	Total
1925	26	1722	4007
1926	14	1719	3431
1927	10	2146	3834
1928	83	2679	4394

Source: George Liber, "Language, Literacy, and Book Publishing in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923-1938," *Slavic Review* 41(4) Winter 1982:673-85.

In 1929 new laws were issued against religion and religious groups (Law on Religious Association) and these laws were recodified and intensified in 1932. It is thus not surprising that independent publishing ceased in 1928. In Kharkov there was a Ukrainian anti-religious journal, *Bezvirnik*, published from 1925, and one in German, *Neuland*, from the following year. See Daniel Peris, "The 1929 Congress of the Godless," *Soviet Studies*, 43(4) 1991:711-32. No doubt Mennonites living and writing in Kharkov will have known about the anti-religious laws and journals.

⁵V. Baumgärtner, "Unser Weg," *Sturmschritt*, 1, 1930:6. This literary journal, which became the voice of the Soviet-German writers, existed until 1935. The history and difficulties of *Sturmschritt* are well described by Annelore Engel-Braunschmidt, "Sowjetdeutsche Literatur im Aufbruch: Die Zeitschrift *Der Sturmschritt* zwischen kultureller Autonomie und dem Würgegriff Stalins," *Germano-Slavica. A Canadian journal of Germanic and Slavic comparative studies*. IV, 4(Fall 1983):169-190. On the history of socialist realism literature, see Nicholas Luker, ed., *From Furmanov to Sholokhov. An Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers: 1988), especially the Introduction, pp. 11-38. It might be added that until 1932 Soviet writers were guided by the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). In 1932 RAPP was abolished and at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (1934), a national Union of Soviet Writers was organized and the doctrine of socialist realism propounded to guide creative activity. Literature now became identified with politics and the Party's ideological objectives.

One of the best general sources on this period of change are the essays by Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet Union* (New York: Methuen, 1985). On the cultural revolution see the essays in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1932* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). On Soviet literature, see *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932* (New

York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953).

⁶*Sturmschritt*, 1, 1930:7.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹See, for example, Adam Emich, who initially joined the Communist party and worked in a literary capacity in the early period of the Soviet Union. In 1930 he was arrested and in 1937 shot. His poems written between 1930 and 1937 reflect disillusionment, loss of freedom and family, and intense suffering. Some of these poems are now published in *Heimatliche Weiten*, 2, 1989:143-147.

¹⁰See, for example, David Penner, who in 1930 wrote a book, *Anti-Menno*, in which he severely attacked the Mennonites and their institutions. Recently, he has written articles in which he expresses criticism of the Soviet regime during Stalin's time: "Prokopjewsk, Arbeitsarmee (Erinnerungen)," *Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1989:236-263.

¹¹*Anthologie der sowjetdeutschen Literatur* (In 3 Bänden) Alma Ata, Kasachstan, 1981. Vol. 1:29-30.

¹²*Anthologie*, Vol. 3:231-240.

¹³This biographical note on Loewen comes from Victor Klein and Johann Warkentin, *Poesie und Prosa der deutschsprachigen Schriftsteller der UdSR*. 3. Auflage (Moskau, 1980), p.104. Hereafter *Poesie und Prosa*.

¹⁴*Nachrichten aus Kasachstan, Deutsche Dichtung in der Sowjetunion*, edited by Alexander Ritter (Hildesheim/New York: Olms Presse, 1974), pp.60-61. Hereafter *Nachrichten*.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp.159-161.

¹⁶*Sturmschritt*, 4-5, 1932:25-28.

¹⁷*Poesie und Prosa*, p.19.

¹⁸*Anthologie*, Vol. 1:42-43.

¹⁹*Sturmschritt*, 2-3, 1932:11-13.

²⁰*Sammlung sowjetdeutscher Dichtung* (1931). Geordnet und eingeleitet von David Schellenberg. Mit einem Vorwort von Annelore Engel-Braunschmidt (Reprint. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms Presse, 1990), p.93. Hereafter *Sammlung*. Engel-Braunschmidt is no doubt correct when she writes that Schellenberg's references to historical and party figures were not understood by his "peasant readers." (*Sammlung*, p.ix).

²¹*Anthologie*, Vol. 1:42-43.

²²Quoted in Engel-Braunschmidt, "Sowjetdeutsche Literatur im Aufbruch," p.182. Translation mine.

²³*Ibid.* See *Sturmschritt*, 3, 1931:17-22.

²⁴For references to *Lechzendes Land* I am using the sections from this novel included in *Sammlung*, pp.130-174. In a note in his *Sammlung*, p.130, Schellenberg states that his "story" appeared in the Zentral-Völker-Verlag in Moscow. A copy of the book was not available to me. It may be of interest to note that land was a popular subject among Soviet writers of this period. See, for example, Mikhail Sholokhov's *Podnyataya tselina* (1932 ff.), translated in two parts as *Virgin Soil Upturned*, 1935, and *Harvest on the Don*, 1960.

²⁵Quoted in *Sturmschritt*, 6-7, 1932:4.

²⁶*Sammlung*, p.161. Translation mine.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p.132.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp.131-132.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p.163.

³¹*Ibid.*, p.169.

³²*Ibid.*, p.132.

³³See *Sturmschritt*, 10, 1932:27, and especially the diary, "Rolle des Enttäuschten," in *Pundmenniste*.

³⁴Engel-Braunschmidt, "Sowjetdeutsche Literatur im Aufbruch," p.182.

³⁵*Sturmschritt*, 9, 1932:33. In my analysis of *Pundmenniste*, all references to the novel are to the installments in *Sturmschritt*.

³⁶*Sturmschritt*, 9, 1932:43. Kunstmann and Wildbach, both party men, talk about the pious kulaks' belief that they are God's "chosen" ones, which gives them a moral right to exploit those who are not "chosen." According to these party men, "imperialist politics and exploitation" and "National Socialism" are based on the view that some classes and races are God's elect. (*Sturmschritt*, 10, 1932:27-28).

³⁷*Sturmschritt*, 10, 1932:28-29.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp.33-34.

³⁹With regard to nonresistance a youngster says to his parent: "Wer hat von uns hier kein Gewehr, Papa?" ("Who among us, papa, doesn't have a gun?") And with regard to drinking alcoholic beverages, one Mennonite boasts: "Yes, gentlemen, our forebears would wring their hands if they were to see us drinking alcohol." Translation mine. (*Sturmschritt*, 11, 1932:45,47).

Schellenberg was not alone among Mennonites to express criticism of Mennonite inconsistencies and contradictions. See David Penner's book *Anti-Memno* (1930), which is a scathing attack upon the history and religiosity of Russian Mennonites. As late as 1989 Penner confirmed his criticism of some fifty years earlier. See *Heimatliche Weiten*, 2, 1989:179.

⁴⁰*Sturmschritt*, 11, 1932:50. Schellenberg no doubt has in mind the more recent history of the Russian Mennonites: Anarchy, civil war, Mennonites serving in the White Army, and Mennonite "Selbstschutz."

⁴¹"...das wurde vom Gebietsamt nach Bestätigung der Regierung, einfach grob durchgedrückt" (*Sturmschritt*, 11, 1932:48-49).

⁴²Cf. *Sturmschritt*, 11, 1932:43.

⁴³*Sturmschritt*, 1, 1933:17.

⁴⁴Engel-Braunschmidt, "Sowjetdeutsche Literatur im Aufbruch," p.182.

⁴⁵Engel-Braunschmidt in *Sammlung*, p.x.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p.xvii.

⁴⁷*Anthologie*, Vol. 1:256-57. Translation: "We had no homeland, no holiday, and we were strangers in our own home. We had to live in damp holes, plagued by bed bugs. We had only one right, the right to slave in misery for others."

⁴⁸*Ibid.* Translation: "Our mines work, our factory stacks smoke, we produce goods for ourselves, profit for none; the tractor is for the farmer to plow his fields. The lamp of Lenin glows in our huts....We have wrested the future from you, our world is well and new."

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p.44.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p.258. Translation: "In the desert sands beyond the Caspian Sea broods the drought, the scourge of the steppes. There it gathers poison and then approaches to cause fatigue and to drag [people] into misery."

⁵¹See my article on Block's poems in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 6, 1988:152-164.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p.262. Translation: "Only struggles bring about victories. Almighty are only we!"

⁵³This work was not available to me.

⁵⁴The novel appeared in nine installments of approximately 100 pages each. *Heimatliche Weiten*,

1,2,1984; 1,2,1985; 1,2,1986; 1,2,1987; and 1,1988. Sophie Sawatzky, the author's widow, released the manuscript for publication upon Woldemar Ekkert's urging (*Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1989:192).

⁵⁵*Ibid*, 1, 1984:6.

⁵⁶*Poesie und Prosa*, p.28. Translation mine.

⁵⁷*Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1984:96. See also 2, 1985:66.

⁵⁸*Ibid*, 2, 1985:75.

⁵⁹*Ibid*, 1, 1987:12-13.

⁶⁰*Ibid*, 1, 1987:41-42.

⁶¹*Ibid*, 1, 1988:94-95. Translation mine.

⁶²*Ibid*, 1, 1988:95.

⁶³*Ibid*, 1, 1989:192. The editors of the *Anthology of Soviet-German Literature* are full of praise for the novel: "Lebenswahr, vielseitig, tiefgehend stellt der Autor die Klassendifferenzierung, das politische Reifen der Bauern, die stürmischen Jahre des Bürgerkriegs, den Klassenkampf im deutschen Dorf und die ersten Schritte der Kollektivierung dar. Die Sprache des Werkes ist einfach. Die Handlung entwickelt sich folgerichtig, bei natürlicher Verflechtung und Widerspiegelung des Nationalen. Der Autor dringt in den seelischen Zustand seiner Helden ein. Der Roman nimmt einen würdigen Platz in der Sowjetliteratur ein" (*Anthologie*, Vol. 1:45).

⁶⁴See Hugo Wormsbecher, *Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1989:193

⁶⁵Wormsbecher writes of Sawatzky and his novel: "Even if a writer was convinced that not all was right [as literature], he could not write otherwise" (*Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1989:193). Translation mine.

⁶⁶See Hugo Wormsbecher, "Die Sowjetdeutschen: Probleme und Hoffnungen," *Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1988:252-78. For Russian-Soviet attitudes and actions against Mennonites, see N. Theodorowitsch. "Die Mennoniten in der UdSSR," in *Sowjetstudien* Nr.25, 1968 (München: Institut zur Erforschung der UdSSR), pp.99-109.

⁶⁷For an informative historical survey of the fate of the Volga Republic, see *Ibid*.

⁶⁸*Ibid*, pp.266-69. With regard to Mennonite writers after 1964, there are many Mennonite names of poets and prose writers in publications such as *Neues Leben* and *Heimatliche Weiten*. On how well German and Mennonite culture and languages are being preserved in the Soviet-Union's eastern regions today, see Eugen Warkentin, "Wege in die Zukunft," *Heimatliche Weiten*, 2, 1986:208-225.

⁶⁹Hugo Wormsbecher, "Mit dem Volk durch alle Härten gegangen (Notizen über die sowjetdeutsche Literatur)," *Heimatliche Weiten*, 1, 1989:190.

⁷⁰*Ibid*, pp.192-193.

⁷¹Among many others: Theodor Block, Johannes Harder, Jacob H. Janzen, Fritz Senn (Gerhard Friesen), and Arnold Dyck.

⁷²See my article, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland."