

Sanitätsdienst and *Selbstschutz*: Russian-Mennonite Nonresistance in World War I and its Aftermath

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Never in their history have Mennonites demonstrated more admirably their willingness to live up to their Anabaptist doctrine of nonresistance in a time of war than they did in Russia during World War I. And never have they failed to live up to that doctrine more ingloriously than they did in the sad period of the *Selbstschutz* during the Civil War that followed. When Germany declared war on Russia on July 19 OT (August 1), 1914, the Russian Mennonites responded to the war effort promptly and with spontaneous patriotism (as documented in the Mennonite papers *Friedensstimme* and *Der Botschafter* in the early weeks and months of hostilities).¹ Five years later arms-bearing young Mennonites found themselves in combat not only against anarchist-bandit forces but also, briefly, against the Red Army, that is, the regular troops of what was by then the de facto Communist government of Russia and Ukraine. Technically, they were guilty of treason. And yet, by an ironic twist of history, the *Selbstschutz* period, for all its moral failure and

the uneasy conscience that resulted in the minds of Russian Mennonites, is to this day more vividly remembered and more thoroughly studied and understood than the much more idealistically motivated and nobler period of Mennonite alternative service during the War.

Why should that be? In the following pages I want to suggest some reasons for this strange anomaly in Russian-Mennonite history by focussing mainly on the period of Mennonite service in the First World War and try to shed some light on some of the more neglected and seemingly forgotten aspects of that service. The *Sanitätsdienst* in particular is not nearly as well documented as one might expect such an exemplary chapter in Mennonite history to be. Except for the remembered personal accounts of medical servicemen and forestry workers collected in the book "*Onsi Tjedils*"² and various articles which appeared in the thirties in the *Bote* and other Mennonite periodicals like Arnold Dyck's *Warte*, surprisingly little has appeared in print. And even the personal stories of wartime medical service are usually curiously bland and impersonal in tone. Compared with the vivid accounts of similar experiences by non-Mennonites, they are lacking in concrete details and dramatic tension. It may be that these Mennonite farm boys simply lacked the necessary language skills, but even if they had had them the shining story of the *Selbstschutz*, as James Urry has suggested, might have been put in the shade in any case by the even more dramatic and much more tragic myth of suffering later created by the Russian Mennonites who survived the horrors and destruction of the anarchic period between 1918 and 1920.³ There may also be other, less innocent, reasons that I shall touch on later.

Let me begin with a brief review of some of the events and actions that will serve to define the Russian-Mennonite role and participation in World War I. As soon as war was declared, the Mennonites announced their intention to assist the war effort in any way consistent with their pacifistic principles amidst fervent declarations of their loyalty to tsar and fatherland. There were immediate proposals of support for the Red Cross, from making donations to organizing a medical service for the frontline. In an editorial in the *Botschafter*, David H. Epp wrote: "...our confession forbids us as Mennonites to spill blood, but binding [up] wounds we hold to be our sacred duty. Medical service is open to us." Epp concluded his editorial by eliciting prayers for God "to intercede for our beloved monarch, for the greatness of his realm, and the strength of his armies."⁴ And in its "first war-time issue on July 26/August 7, *Friedensstimme* called for immediate participation in Red Cross work."⁵

The Mennonite response was swift, enthusiastic and resourceful. Several young Mennonites in Melitopol enlisted in the Red Cross on the very first day of war.⁶ Plans were developed in several Mennonite communities to set up field hospitals and to take care of soldiers' families.⁷

Before the end of July OT a delegation of Mennonite leaders was sent to St. Petersburg to work out a Mennonite alternate service programme and an agreement was reached whereby mobilized Mennonites would either be able to enter the medical service, serve as forest rangers or work in the forestry service (*Forstei*).

Mennonite men from 18 to 42 were to be called up and given a choice between the medical service and the forestry service. But even before mobilization began on September 3rd, a contingent of about 50 young men from the Old Colony led by Armin Lehn were already working in Moscow as volunteers, and the number of volunteers reached 1,000 in the early months of the war.⁸ It should be noted here that initially Old Colony Mennonites responded more strongly than those of Molotschna, and that they tended to be the better educated young men rather than farmers' sons. The reason for this may have been that Old Colony society was closer to an urban centre like Alexandrovsk, its educated young people a little closer to integration with Russian society than was the case in the more isolated Molotschna.

There was a good reason for the quick Mennonite response to the outbreak of war. Unlike their co-religionists in Canada and the U.S, Russian Mennonites had gradually developed a tradition of voluntary service to the state in times of war. There were precedents for Mennonites participating in wars as non-combatants, as a few had done in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 as medical orderlies. Before that Mennonites had set up field hospitals in the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) and, further back still, had during the Crimean War in the 1850s taken supplies down to the front in the Crimea and brought back wounded soldiers to be billeted in Mennonite homes in the Molotschna, Bertgthal and Khortitza for recuperation.⁹ Historically, the tradition had developed from strict non-involvement in state military affairs in the early years of settlement (e.g., the Napoleonic invasion) to reluctant involvement (the Crimean War), then to qualified involvement (Russo-Turkish War) leading finally to the voluntary involvement of young Mennonites serving away from home (the Russo-Japanese War and World War I). This historical movement would seem to reflect in general an increasing integration of Mennonites into Russian society but without the kind of wholesale assimilation that has taken place in North American Mennonite society.¹⁰

By far the largest number of Mennonites in the medical service—3,500-4,000—joined the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos,¹¹ a volunteer organization of district councils with headquarters in Moscow, which took over the bulk of the hospital train service when it was discovered early in the war that the hospital train service in Russia was woefully inadequate. A much smaller number of Mennonites served in a similar capacity with the All-Russian Union of Cities and, fewer still, with the United Council of Noblemen. Those who served with the Red Cross were mostly assigned to hospitals and administrative staffs in various cities. By 1915 the Zemstvo Union (VZS) was running 50 hospital trains and by 1917 had added 25 more. The standard pay scale was 20 rubles per month for volunteers and 75 kopeks per month for draftees. In September, 1914, 3,000 Mennonite men were called up, of whom 1,300 volunteered for the medical service and 1,700 opted for the forestry service alternative.¹² Altogether between 1914 and 1917, well over 6,000 Mennonite men served in the medical service with another approximately 7,500 in the forestry service.¹³ These figures represent between 12% and 13% of the total Mennonite population in Russia at the time. Of those in active service as medical



Mennonite Sanitäter (medics) in World War I. Here hospital train No. 190.

(Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)

corpsmen well over 100 died in the line of duty, almost all through disease.¹⁴

The VZS hospital trains were sent to the Western front as compact units usually consisting of three freight cars (*tepluishki*) loaded with medical supplies, one kitchen car, a fourth-class passenger car for corpsmen, and a second-class car for doctors and nurses, making a unit of six railway cars. Five such six-car units constituted a *piatiorka* that was despatched to the front and there “unrolled” so that each unit supplied a 30-40 car train loaded with wounded soldiers to be transported to hospitals in interior Russian cities. Each medical freight car was manned by a Mennonite orderly¹⁵ and had 12 stretcher-cots inside, six at each end of the car in two tiers suspended from the ceiling by means of ropes and rings through which the stretcher-cot handles were fitted. Each car had been carefully cleaned by the orderly and fitted with a small stove, a small table and some elementary medical supplies such as iodine and bandages and a little food and water. The young male nurse was then left on his own between stations to look after his wounded men as best he could. Each train usually carried one or two Russian doctors and four to six nurses.¹⁶

By and large, the *Sanitäter* carried out their often dangerous, unpleasant and varied duties with highly commendable efficiency and diligence. Their Russian superiors praised them again and again “as being punctual, orderly, industrious, honest, considerate, intelligent, clean, enduring, self-confident, ready to assume responsibility, respectful, but not toadying to authority, and so on.”¹⁷ T. J. Polner, first head of the Department of Hospital Trains, states in his book on the *zemstvos*’ role during the war that the problem of staffing the hospital trains was “admirably solved” by Mennonite servicemen and describes them as “excellent workers [who] performed their duties conscientiously and gallantly.”¹⁸ B. N. Saltykov, the official who succeeded Polner, was a great supporter of his Mennonite men and praised them enthusiastically many times. And a Russian nurse who served with them wrote: “All the medical orderlies on our train are Mennonites....They are quiet, polite, calm and tough...intelligent...they work steadily...and do so with an amiable expression and with a civility which characterize a cultured people.”¹⁹ Indeed, the demand for Mennonite corpsmen grew so great that they had to be allocated on a priority basis.

As the war continued, however, problems became evident. There are hints in some accounts that Russian military officials were nervous about sending Mennonite corpsmen all the way to the Western front because of their German origins. One train—#189—was in fact captured by the Germans and its Mennonite personnel sent to a German prisoner-of-war camp.²⁰ Vicious anti-German campaigns waged in the press were also beginning to affect morale at home, as did the serious threat of the Land Liquidation Laws of 1915, and the servicemen must have been depressed and anxiety-ridden when they received letters from home describing harassment and intimidation by local and district authorities, forced house searches, etc.²¹ Indeed, it was a sad irony that Mennonite communities had early on demonstrated their patriotism by giving large sums of money to the Red Cross and other organizations and had participated enthusiastically in useful war-time

activities, including such mundane tasks as the rolling of bandages by schoolgirls, only to have their loyalty questioned in various callous and brutal ways.

Another problem was the sheer diversity of service, with the better educated young Mennonites usually receiving safe administrative and secretarial postings in the big centres like Moscow or in regional hospitals and Red Cross offices. The less educated farm boys were usually posted to the trains that went to the Western front or, the less lucky ones, to the much more difficult and even more dangerous Caucasus front, where the conditions ranged from hard to intolerable. At home, Mennonite tax payers were grumbling more and more about the taxes required to support the enlarged wartime forestry service, although they did not have to pay anything towards the *Sanitätsdienst*. In fact, the few wartime civilian diaries we possess seem strangely detached from the war, being almost narcissistically focussed on personal and parochial concerns at home.²² This self-concern at home must have bothered the men in service as well.

Their own horizons, when we look at the positive aspects of Mennonite service in World War I, were being broadened as never before. Not only were they doing precisely what Anabaptist-Mennonite Christians ought to do in a time of war, that is helping to bind up wounds rather than inflicting them, they were also through their wide travelling exposing themselves for the first time to outside Russian society and culture and becoming men of the world. They were, of course, also being exposed to the negative aspects of Russian society, including the poverty of the masses, its many injustices, and the rampant corruption at every level of government and officialdom, including the military. As we shall see, this education through wartime experience had important political consequences for many of these impressionable young Mennonite servicemen. As David G. Rempel points out, on the whole the lives of the medical servicemen, at least on the Western front, was not only much easier but much more interesting than those of the men in the forestry service.²³

More specifically, Mennonite servicemen, especially the better educated who held administrative and service posts in larger urban centres like Moscow, Petrograd and Ekaterinoslav, were exposed to forces of radical political change throughout the war. The very non-state, non- or para-military organizations in which the men served, especially the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos and the All-Russian Union of Cities, became hotbeds of political activity devoted to democratic principles and reform. As the war progressed, the political demands made by these organizations grew even as the authority of the Tsar and his government diminished. The political pendulum was swinging left to socialist views, and Mennonite servicemen, particularly in Moscow, must have been increasingly influenced by the spirited debates and obvious discontent around them.

Then came the Revolution of February-March, 1917, and everything began to change forever. It is not too much to say that Russian Mennonites generally—both the servicemen away from home and the populace in the colonies—welcomed the revolution for a variety of reasons. As we have seen, the early euphoria and bursts of patriotism in 1914 had long since dissipated in the prolonged period of ethnic

discrimination and outright harassment that turned Mennonites at home into thoroughly disillusioned second-class citizens. The Revolution brought hope that things would change, including abrogation of the much-feared Land Liquidation Laws. As for the men in service, there is little doubt that at least some of them had become radicalized enough during their wartime service to be sympathetic to the idea of a socialist system in Russia. But even if their political motivation was minimal, they were intent, as they got ready once again to assume their places in the Mennonite community, on bringing about what they regarded as much-needed reforms in the Mennonite world, particularly in the church establishment at both the congregational and conference levels. One of the more pressing issues was that of a professional clergy. Again, this was to a large extent a generational issue that along with other church matters had not been resolved in the years before the war.²⁴

It is this exciting and promising confrontation between a younger, more liberal generation spearheaded by the returning servicemen and the older, conservative Mennonite establishment that has almost completely and mysteriously disappeared from the historical record. I want to present what evidence does exist for this dramatic generational confrontation, which was actually delayed by the war and had already been prepared for before the war by a small but growing Mennonite liberal intelligentsia, mostly teachers and their pupils, that had sought to bring about liberal changes in the Russian-Mennonite community, especially through the schools.

The servicemen pressed for reform in the following main areas: 1) they wanted ministers to be elected, not chosen by lot, and they wanted a better educated ministry; 2) they wanted reforms in education, and more welfare programmes and cultural institutions; 3) now that there was religious freedom they looked for greater evangelistic outreach on the part of the Mennonite church in Russia; 4) they wanted reform in the top administration of the *Forstei*, an administrative committee in which they would have a say, rather than a one-man, lifetime appointment as in the case of David J. Klassen; 5) they also wanted a structural reorganization of the Mennonite conference.²⁵

The servicemen's proposals for reform were presented at two important conferences held in the Molotschna in 1917, the General Conference of Mennonites in Russia at Neuhalbstadt, June 6-8, 1917, and the even more important All-Mennonite Congress at Ohrloff, August 14-18, 1917. At the first of these conferences, the Moscow servicemen submitted a resolution entitled "The Reorganization of the General Conference," with another similar resolution submitted by the servicemen stationed in Ekaterinoslav.²⁶ The resolutions called for the Conference to concern itself not only with religious matters but with social and political issues as well, to become in effect a Mennonite congress that would embrace all Mennonite affairs. The proposal was well received and led to the Ohrloff Congress two months later. More urgently, the June conference in Halbstadt discussed three related resolutions from servicemen in different areas that they would under no circumstances allow themselves

to be sent to the front lines as shooting soldiers, as many Russian soldiers in the regular army were now demanding. The resolutions were firmly supported, with the leading spokesman for the establishment, B. H. Unruh, declaring that "The Conference stands firmly and immovably on the principle of nonresistance...[and that] the Mennonites regard it as their sacred duty to serve the Fatherland faithfully, but without shedding blood."²⁷

At the Ohrloff conference in August the delegates representing servicemen made their presence felt in no uncertain terms, with several issues leading to spirited debate. A lengthy debate over land reform for the rural Russian population and about how to raise the general cultural level of the Russian peasant began well but ended acrimoniously. Here the political radicalization of the servicemen became evident. In a heated exchange between B. H. Unruh and serviceman delegate Peter Froese, the former maintained that Christianity had nothing to do with economic policy whether based on capitalism or socialism, while the latter maintained that socialism was more closely related to Christianity than was capitalism, even if the two couldn't be equated. The debate, if the minutes give an accurate indication, was quashed at this point by the chairman when he interrupted it in order to read a telegram from a delegate announcing that he was unable to attend the conference!²⁸ Probably as a sop, the congress did accept Froese's resolution that the economy should be improved through new agricultural techniques, the establishment of agricultural schools and experimental stations, as well as the founding of agricultural, business and credit cooperatives. And thus the Mennonite establishment effectively silenced the radical politics of Mennonite servicemen.²⁹

Another grievance that was vigorously pressed, especially by the *Forstei* representatives, was that of inadequate financial support for the personal needs of servicemen, the lack of funds for clothing, food, etc. Establishment delegates pointed out that taxes in Mennonite communities were already high and could not be raised. Again the servicemen were put off with a resolution that expressed the hope that the state could be persuaded to furnish the necessary financial support while continuing to respect the special nonresistant status of Mennonite servicemen.³⁰

Finally, there is no logical reason or historical evidence for thinking that the radicalization of the *Sanitätsdienst* veterans led to the radical action of the *Selbstschutz* during the Civil War. Nor is there reason to assume that more than a very few of the *Sanitätsdienst* veterans were active in the *Selbstschutz*. In fact, there was probably more of a connection between the old conservative Mennonite establishment, with all its land and possessions to protect from predators, and the *Selbstschutz* attempt to act as a police force. Indeed, it is instructive in this connection to look at the minutes of another Mennonite conference that was held the following summer: the Lichtenau Conference, June 30 to July 2, 1918.

This was a meeting of the Mennonite General Conference to which, presumably, no servicemen delegates, as such, were invited. The main debate at this conference focussed on the whole question of Mennonite pacifism and nonresistance and,

more specifically, on the *Selbstschutz* as a practical and moral issue. The debate was protracted and at times acrimonious, and can be summarized as an exchange between those delegates who insisted that the Mennonite principle of nonresistance was sacred and inviolate and those who were convinced that the dangerous and threatening exigency of the chaotic political situation in the country rendered the principle of nonresistance impractical if not completely irrelevant. In this heated atmosphere the issue came down to a bitter choice between religious idealism and urgent pragmatism. There were speakers like K. Wiens who urged complete nonresistance that would preclude even self-defense, and there were "hawks" like Johann Harder who declared that contrary to his will the circumstances were such that he now realized that "it becomes our duty to take up arms for our brothers, for right and justice, freedom and order, and to fight with weapons in our hands."³¹ And there were those, like minister Jakob Reimer, who affirmed the principle of nonresistance while pointing out that even in the Bible there were examples of "great men of God" like Abraham who had taken up arms, and so "tolerance" should be shown towards the young men who wanted to take up arms to defend "women and girls."³²

In the end it was the compromisers who prevailed, those who affirmed the collective principle of nonresistance but left it up to the individual conscience to accept or ignore that principle. And so, exactly a year after B. H. Unruh's ringing endorsement of the sacred principle of nonresistance, the debate at the Lichtenau Conference culminated in a typically Mennonite kind of compromise resolution which "proposed that individual congregations refrain from imposing that principle on individual members who thought otherwise,"³³ that is, who did not acknowledge nonresistance as a moral principle and who were thus free to fight in the *Selbstschutz*.

There is no doubt that the issue of the *Selbstschutz* cast a moral shadow over the last phase of the Mennonite commonwealth in Russia and led to an uneasy conscience that has lasted to this day. The issue cannot be explained away entirely, although many eloquent and morally ingenious attempts have been made to do so. Perhaps the judgement of John B. Toews is still the most balanced when he writes that, "In the emergence of the [*Selbstschutz*] the logic of circumstances spoke more strongly than the logic of theology. There was a fatal interplay of ideology and catastrophe."³⁴ Whatever the case, the Mennonites of Russia had taken an action with political consequences that came back to haunt them, and they had betrayed in a moral and theological sense the noble doctrine of nonresistance they had so splendidly realized at a practical level in World War I.

Epilogue ³⁵

Whatever burden of moral guilt the former *Selbstschützer* brought to Canada with them in the twenties has never really come to the fore except in isolated cases. In fact, during the 1930s, perhaps to some extent influenced by the growing

glorification of militarism emanating from Nazi Germany, these militia veterans began expressing publically their pride in their past achievements. Books like *Russlanddeutsche Friesen* by H. H. Schroeder, himself a former *Selbstschützer* who became a Nazi officer in Germany and was a rabid racist, and *Heimat in Trümmern*, G. G. Toews' romantic novel about the *Selbstschutz* attempt to save the Molotschna from Makhno's savage hordes, were read with approval and pride. In an article in *Mennonitische Rundschau* (61 [30], July 27, 1938, p.7), one Peter Schmidt of Winnipeg proudly called for a reunion of former *Selbstschutz* comrades. The plans for the reunion included a play by Schmidt entitled "Unser Selbstschutz," to be presented by a theatrical group in Winnipeg. The *Forstei* veterans also resumed their pre-World War I practise of holding reunions to reminisce about their experiences.

All the more strange then was the complete public silence of the former *Sanitäter*. They held no reunions during the thirties and did not really begin to publish memoirs of their wartime experiences until after World War II, when German militarism had been defeated and condemned (the reminiscences of World War I service collected in *Onsi Tjedils: Ersatzdienst der Mennoniten in Russland unter den Romanows* was not published until 1966). The only reunion of *Sanitäter* that this writer is aware of came as late as 1981 when they were invited to participate in the centennial conference of the *Forstei* held in Winnipeg. The *Sanitäter* had served a defeated regime in Russia and whatever left-leanings some of them had come home with had long since been drowned in the rising tide of rightist conservatism so popular during the thirties. In Canada, serving the state had to a degree, at least, been given approval by the Mennonite community during World War II, but when these World War I veterans tried to apply for pensions after World War II on the grounds that they had served on the Allied side in *their* war their claim was given short shrift by the Canadian government because they had merely served in civilian organizations rather than in the military. It was the final irony for a group of gallant Mennonites who had as young men served their country loyally and had, in many cases, risked their own lives in order to carry out their Christian duty to bind up the wounds of others and to save lives instead of taking them.

The following two poems, published in the *Botschafter* in the fall of 1914, exemplify the ardent patriotism Russian Mennonites felt in the early months of World War I—until the press campaign vilifying Russian citizens of German extraction began. The Low German poem illustrates graphically that the young Mennonite men in the ambulance service (*Sanitätsdienst*), far from enjoying a kind of pacifist sinecure, were carrying out dangerous assignments at the front and could become battlefield casualties much like regular Russian soldiers. The poems were made available by James Urry.

Twice Kameroden

**Du, Kamerôd, nu es't grôd Tid;
Du well wie't doch veseaken;
Daut Lazarett es goanich wit,
Vielleicht künn' wie't erreaken!**

**On Hendrik fôt Jehaunen aum,
On hewt am langsam hecha;
Hee halpt am mett, so vehl hee kaam;
See send sick beid nicht secha!**

**Jehaunen fehlt de linke Fot,
De es am aufgeschôten;
On Hendrick haft vom eguen Blot
So vehl von sick gelôten.**

**See schutwen sick, see schlappen sick
Von eenem Dat tom aundern,
On faulen dann, gaanz meed, toglick,
Dicht eena bie dem aundern!**

**De Nacht brackt aum; noch liggen see!
On't woat uck wada Morgen:
See speeren nich mea Rot noch Weh,
An drecken Keene Sorgen—**

**Nun earem Grauw singt leis de Wind:
Ruht saunft enn ew' gen Freden!
Zie beid han hier aus true Frind
For't Bôdalaund geleden! ...**

*J. Wolff, Osterwick
(Botschafter, 81, 10/23 Oct. 1914)*

Meinen Brüdern!

Beim Ausziehen unserer Sanitäre.

Friedensvolk, reg' deine Schwingen!
 Heb' vom Staube dich empor!
 Schan' des Vaterlandes Ringen
 Mit der Feinde frechem Chor!

Sieh'! Des Reiches Banner fliegen:
 Barenwort rief alle her;
 Und sie zieh'n zu Kampf und Siegen,
 Die des Landes Schutz und Wehr.

Bei des Vaterlandes Ringen
 Mit der Feinde frechem Chor,
 Friedensvolk, reg' deine Schwingen!
 Heb' vom Staub dich hoch empor!

Heil'ge Liebe, nie erloschen,
 Zeuge Samaritersinn;
 Reich' dem "Wirte" deine "Groschen,"
 Und dich selbst dem "Nächsten" hin!

Sei bereit zu allen Stunden,
 Ihm zu lindern jeden Schmerz,
 Tränfle Öl in seine Wunden,
 Und Erquickung in sein Herz!

Bei des Vaterlandes Ringen
 Mit der Feinde frechem Chor,
 Volk des Friedens, reg' die Schwingen!
 Weg vom Staube! Auf! Empor!

M. Fast

(Botschafter, 71, 5/18 Sept. 1914)

Notes

¹ Unfortunately, when the Russian government issued a decree on November 3, 1914, banning the use of German, these German Mennonite newspapers were forced to discontinue publication and no further print documentation of the war was possible in the Russian Mennonite community.

² "Onsi Tjedils": *Erzatzdienst der Mennoniten in Russland unter den Romanows*, collected and published by Waldemar Günther, David P. Heidebrecht and Gerhard J. Peters (Yarrow: The Columbia Press, 1966).

³ In a private letter to the author, 15 July, 1991. Indeed, this article has benefited throughout from Professor Urry's valuable comments, criticisms and suggestions.

⁴ David H. Epp, "In ernster Stunde," *Der Botschafter*, July 22, 1914, p.1: quoted in Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations," unpub. Ph.D dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1984, p.160.

⁵ John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets & Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), p.63.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For further details see Klippenstein, pp.159-166 and Toews, pp.63-66.

⁸ Compare this with the situation in Canada in World War II, where a delegation of Mennonites did not go to Ottawa to propose an alternative service programme until November, 1940, more than a year after war was declared.

⁹ For an interesting account of this initial participation in war by the Russian Mennonites see James Urry and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonites and the Crimean War, 1854-56," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol.7, 1989, pp.9-32.

¹⁰ I am indebted to James Urry for pointing out this pattern to me in a private communication (November 12, 1992).

¹¹ The zemstvos (from Russ. *zemla*, land) were elective rural district councils established in most provinces in Russia by Alexander II in 1864 as part of his reform policies.

¹² Most of these statistics and details, as well as others throughout this paper, have been drawn from "Recollections of War, Revolution and Civil War 1914-1920," an unpublished manuscript by the brothers John G. and David G. Rempel which gives a fascinating and extraordinarily detailed account of the subject. The ms. was made available to me by Prof. James Urry and deserves to be edited and published in book form.

¹³ It is interesting to compare these figures with those for Canadian Mennonites serving in World War II, in which, according to reliable recent estimates, app. 4,500 served in the military and 7,500 performed alternative service as COs. See T. D. Regehr, "Lost Sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol.LXVI, No. 4, October, 1992, p.465.

¹⁴ While it was certainly more dangerous and perhaps more "patriotic" to enter the medical service rather than the forestry service, the latter was no bed of roses, what with isolation, tedium, hard manual labor and often barely tolerable living conditions taking their toll. One might speculate that those Mennonites who went into the medical service tended to be the more educated, the more adventuresome and independent-minded, while those who chose the forestry service (or had it chosen for them by parents) came from the more conservative and less culturally integrated families.

¹⁵ Uniforms for the medical orderlies consisted of khaki pants, black leather jackets with Red Cross emblem and the letters VZS on a white cloth strip on the left sleeve, a black leather cap with ear flaps and a regular military cap with a small Red Cross metal emblem fastened to its front.

¹⁶ There were also Mennonite doctors and nurses serving on the trains, but they were few and far between.

¹⁷ Rempel ms., p.18.

¹⁸ Tikhon J. Polner, *Russian Local Government During the War and The Union of Zemstvos*

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), p.190.

¹⁹ Quoted in the Rempel ms., p.20.

²⁰ For a first-hand account of this protracted ordeal see "Onsi Tjedils", pp.236-249.

²¹ See Rempel ms., pp.30-33.

²² See, e.g., the diary of Peter J. Dyck, *Troubles and Triumphs*, ed. John P. Dyck (Springstein, Manitoba, 1981).

²³ Rempel ms., p.40.

²⁴ The unresolved situation before the war vis-a-vis the church is graphically described in an article by Cornelius Bergmann entitled "Die Lage der Mennoniten in Russland," pub. in *Mennonitische Blätter*, February 2, 1915, pp.10-11, and March 3, 1915, pp.18-19. Bergmann writes in part:

Der Redakteur des "Botschafter", einer Mennon. Zeitschrift in Russland [i.e. David H. Epp], hat diesen Prozess vor einigen Jahren als Problem ins Auge gefasst und seine Lösung in einer Reformierung des Laienpredigertums sehen wollen. Seine Bemühungen nach dieser Seite, den Zersetzungsprozess durch eine bessere Heranbildung der Prediger zu unterbinden, sind gewiss sehr beachtenswert, doch ist diese Frage nur ein Ausschnitt des Problems und vielleicht nicht einmal der wesentliche, jedenfalls nicht der grösste. Die Spannung zwischen den zwei Generationen, die sich aus dieser Differenzierung ergeben hat, ist allein durch die Reform des Predigerstandes schon deshalb nicht zu lösen, weil die Einzelnen mehr oder weniger in Bewegungen grösseren Stiles und im weiteren Rahmen aufgegangen sind, wohin ihnen das Mennonitentum im spezielleren Sinne nicht mehr folgen kann. (March 3, 1915, p.18)

²⁵ David G. Rempel discusses these hopes and demands in detail in the Rempel ms, pp.50-53.

²⁶ For the minutes of this initial general conference see *The Mennonites in Russia, 1917-1930: Selected Documents*, ed. John B. Toews (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975), pp.396-404, esp. p.399.

²⁷ *Selected Documents*, p.401.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.455.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.455-456.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.464.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.410.

³² *Ibid.*, p.413.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.416.

³⁴ John B. Toews, "The Origins and Activities of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* in the Ukraine (1918-19)," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol.XLVI, January, 1972, p.36.

³⁵ I am indebted to James Urry not only for suggesting an epilogue but also for providing much of its substance.

³⁶ Published by the author, Döllstädt-Langensalza, 1936.

³⁷ Published in Steinbach, Manitoba: Warte Verlag, 1936.