

American and Dutch Food Aid in 1922: Differing Attitudes?¹

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In March 1922, Peter C. Hiebert, chairman of the American Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and Christian E. Krehbiel made a stopover in the Netherlands while on their way to the Mennonite colonies in Ukraine.² In Haarlem they had a meeting with the board of the Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden (General Committee for Foreign Needs, ACBN) which was organizing Dutch relief for their Mennonite co-religionists in Ukraine. After exchanging views about the priorities of American and Dutch aid, the American guests tried to get an impression of similarities and differences between the ways of life of American Mennonites and the Doopsgezinden (Dutch Mennonites). Hiebert and Krehbiel were surprised by the wealth of the Doopsgezinden, as evidenced by the lavish stone houses and churches they owned in cities like Den Haag, Amsterdam, and Haarlem. They observed small, but highly assimilated communities with many members who had married non-Doopsgezinden. Douwe Woelinga, the secretary of the ACBN, reassured his American guests that not all Doopsgezinde communities were as wealthy and that life in the Dutch provinces was more aligned with old customs. The Americans told him that there were hardly any rich Mennonites in North America where houses and churches were simple and made of wood, and every Mennonite was a hard-working person. The Americans recalled that they had supported the Mennonite mission centre in Amsterdam, but now wondered why the rich Dutch had not found the necessary money

themselves. When it came to relief destined for Russia, the situation was not much different. The comparatively rich Dutch had collected about \$60,000 whereas the North Americans had raised almost a million dollars.³

Two months later Krehbiel, now supervisor of American Mennonite Relief (AMR) for famine aid to Ukraine, had dinner in Halbstadt where he had been observing three of his Dutch colleagues.⁴ In his diary he commented on their work, stating that “the Dutch seem to be after business more than to find the hungry.” Looking back on his work in Russia many years later, he commented that the “Dutch were planning to do their relief work on a business basis, while the A.M.R. did their work strictly on charity basis.”⁵ According to him, the American and Dutch aid workers expressed fundamentally different attitudes. The Americans seemed to offer altruistic relief while the Dutch were after profit. But was he right?

Between 1921 and early 1923, there were four stages of contact and cooperation between American Mennonites and their Dutch counterparts, the Doopsgezinden. Initially there was only an exchange of information, but in the autumn of 1921 their representatives negotiated together in Moscow. In the spring of 1922, both groups had aid workers in Ukraine. By the end of 1922, MCC offered reconstruction support while the Dutch took over relief efforts for the remaining refugees in Constantinople. What follows is a history of these four successive stages of cooperation that examines the similarities and differences between American and Dutch approaches to relief work in Ukraine, asks whether the aid provided by each group produced different results, and reflects on how both parties looked back on this cooperation. The American side has already been well described in P. C. Hiebert and Orië O. Miller’s *Feeding the Hungry*, and since Peter Letkemann’s article in this issue also discusses a number of aspects of that story, this article will examine the lesser-known Dutch side of the story.⁶

Two Committees Exchanging Information

By the end of 1919, the once prosperous Ukrainian Mennonite communities were devastated. Some Mennonite landowners had fled to Germany after the revolutionary redistributions of land in 1918.⁷ Those left behind had been robbed by all the warring factions during the Civil War, primarily by the anarchist forces of Nestor Makhno in the fall of 1919. Nearly all their property had been looted, many farms had gone up in smoke, and many Mennonites possessed nothing more than the clothes they were wearing.⁸ In December

1919, the Chortitza and Molochna communities decided to send scouts to Europe and North America to ask co-religionists for help with emigration and reconstruction. In January 1920, the *Studienkommission* (Study Commission), consisting of the Ukrainian Mennonites Abraham Friesen, Kornelius Warkentin, and Benjamin Unruh, set course for the United States via Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands.⁹

When the trio arrived in the Netherlands in May 1920, they were welcomed by the Dutch Doopsgezinden. There had been little contact between the Doopsgezinden and the Mennonites who had left West Prussia for Ukraine after 1789, and few Dutch people had family ties there. Since the beginning of the First World War in 1914 the Doopsgezinde weekly *De Zondagsbode* regularly reported about the situation in the Ukrainian colonies: the liquidation laws which the Russian government intended to use to expropriate German Russian lands in 1916, the 1917 revolutions, and then civil war.¹⁰ Sometimes this information was taken from the German *Mennonitische Blätter*. At other times it came firsthand, like the stories of missionary Johann Thiessen, who had visited Russia in 1916 and 1917.¹¹ When he returned home, he gave lectures in the Netherlands about his experiences during the revolution. In April 1920, *De Zondagsbode* published a call from Alvin Miller, a young American Mennonite who had recently visited Odessa,¹² where he had heard about the situation in the colonies. In that call, he asked the Doopsgezinden to send someone to help him with organizing relief work in Ukraine and Crimea.¹³ Thus, when the members of the *Studienkommission* arrived in Amsterdam and made a presentation at a national meeting in Lunteren in May 1920, the Dutch were not surprised by the Ukrainian Mennonites' report. Nevertheless, the Dutch audience was impressed by the personal experiences they heard and decided it was time to organize Dutch aid.¹⁴

Leaving Amsterdam, the *Studienkommission* travelled to North America, where their reports in Elkhart and Chicago provided the impetus for forming the Mennonite Central Committee. MCC's goal was to provide assistance to the colonies in southern Russia and in September three young American Mennonites went to Constantinople to establish the Mennonite Relief Unit (MRU). This unit was intended to function as a steppingstone to relief work in the Ukrainian colonies. In October they crossed the Black Sea and visited the colonies. They made the first contacts with the Ukrainian Mennonites and decided to equip a ship with relief supplies. The ship left for Sevastopol at the beginning of November but had to return with the cargo still on board because the Bolsheviks had conquered the Crimea a few days earlier and hermetically sealed off Ukraine.¹⁵

In December 1920, the pastors of Amsterdam (Abraham Kuiper), Haarlem (Adriaan Binnerts), and Giethoorn (Tjeerd Hylkema) founded the Steuncommissie (Support Committee). The Doopsgezinde postal worker Douwe Woelinga from Vlissingen acted as secretary. They immediately appealed to the Doopsgezinden to donate money and clothing for the Mennonitische Flüchtlingsfürsorge (MFF), which supported Mennonite refugees in Germany,¹⁶ and the American MRU. Hylkema wrote a booklet about the history of the Mennonites in Russia based on information gathered from the Studienkommission. By emphasizing the Dutch roots and customs of the co-religionists and their terrible fortunes since 1914, he hoped to incite the Dutch readers to donate generously. The booklet rolled off the press in December and was distributed at the beginning of January 1921. The book included a banking form to facilitate donations.¹⁷

Woelinga contacted Orië Miller, who coordinated the MRU activities in Constantinople. The MRU was now receiving Mennonite refugees there, mostly men who had taken part in General Wrangel's anti-Bolshevik White Army. Miller wrote to Woelinga indicating that he was exploring options for bringing these refugees to Amsterdam on Dutch ships. From there they could go to the United States. Woelinga bought material for the MRU from the first donations. He sent flower bulbs to Constantinople to beautify the organization's garden, and magazines (which curiously enough included the newspaper of the Dutch Communists). Orië Miller wrote that he was coming to the Netherlands to make further arrangements and that he also wanted to speak with Benjamin Unruh, who had returned to Europe to serve as a liaison between Ukraine and European co-religionists.¹⁸ At the end of February, Hylkema took Unruh and Miller to England. Here he introduced them to his Quaker network to find aid and support for emigration. The Quakers referred Unruh to English politicians and officials who could pave the way for emigration to Australia, South Africa, and Canada. At the same time, the Quakers also informed Unruh about the assistance they had been providing in the Volga region since 1916.¹⁹

In February 1921, the Steuncommissie decided to organize itself more professionally into the ACBN. All Doopsgezinde congregations in the Netherlands joined. An executive committee was to take care of the day-to-day activities but would have quick access to the congregations through the general committee.²⁰ The executive committee consisted of Kuiper, Binnerts, Hylkema, and Woelinga. They found the Winterswijk pastor Frederik Fleischer willing to make his great organizational skills available; he was one of the founders of the Groene Kruis, a national association for district nursing and

home care. The ACBN's express purpose was to support the American and German aid organizations, not to send its own expedition to Russia.²¹

In March the American Mennonites attempted to re-enter the Ukrainian colonies. They got no further than Novorossiisk in the Kuban region, and the Dutch Doopsgezinden concluded that the Americans would not be allowed entry to the colonies as long as Bolsheviks were in power. The ACBN referred to the enclosed area as a "sealed tomb" where Mennonites would die a slow death if no help came.²² Dutch aid would therefore only be able to reach the area if the ACBN organized a helpline of its own, which might be possible if they followed the methods of the Quakers. The American and British Quakers had been providing relief in the Volga region since 1917 and had gained the trust of the Bolsheviks, who in April 1921 allowed them to extend their aid. The Dutch hoped to benefit from this connection to access Ukraine.²³ Hylkema left for London in July to visit the Bolshevik trade representative, Leonid Krasin, who told him there was a possibility if the Dutch offered help to all inhabitants of a specific area, not just to their fellow believers. On July 17, the executive committee placed an appeal in the *Zondagsbode*: "Young energetic Mennonites wanted for important and noble work, not without danger." The committee was aware of the rumours that Clayton Kratz, an MRU employee, had been murdered by the Bolsheviks.²⁴

Thus, in their first contacts with each other, the most important difference between the Americans and the Dutch was that the Dutch had modest ambitions and intended to follow and support relief efforts that had already been initiated in Constantinople and Germany. This changed when it appeared that the Americans would not be able to offer relief on the spot.

Negotiating in Moscow

A week after the publication of the article, the Russian writer Maxim Gorky appealed to the world to provide aid to Soviet Russia.²⁵ After three years of civil war the Bolsheviks had managed to consolidate their power, but the countryside was exhausted after war, revolutionary agricultural experiments, requisitions of food, and drought. This resulted in a major famine in spring 1921 in the Volga region, which would also affect Ukraine in autumn. The Bolsheviks were incapable of solving the famine without help from Western governments, with whom they were very unpopular because of their anti-capitalist policies. The Bolshevik leader Lenin turned to the

internationally respected writer Gorky to send his appeal to the world on behalf of the Russian people.²⁶ Herbert Hoover, the American secretary of commerce, reacted on behalf of the US government. He had, since the end of the First World War, organized aid in Europe through the American Relief Administration (ARA). On behalf of the League of Nations, the famous explorer of the Arctic Fridtjof Nansen also offered help. Nansen had been involved in the repatriation of prisoners of war and had developed friendly relations with the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks responded and negotiations began in August. The American Mennonites looked to Hoover in their effort to regain access to Russia, whereas the Dutch Doopsgezinden took Nansen as an example. At the end of August, the Bolsheviks concluded agreements with both sides. The fervent anti-Bolshevik Hoover wanted no interference from local Soviet organizations. With great reluctance, the Bolsheviks accepted that the ARA would be completely free to organize aid without interference and to choose which individual Russians it wanted to deploy, including opponents of the Bolshevik regime. Nansen, on the other hand, agreed to work with local organizations and allowed Bolshevik oversight. The American Mennonites formed the American Mennonite Relief (AMR), which joined the ARA. This meant eventual agreements with the Bolsheviks had to be approved by the director of the ARA. As long as the AMR followed ARA policies, they were able to provide assistance in accordance with Hoover's contract.²⁷

At this time the Dutch Doopsgezinden wanted to negotiate freely in Moscow, bearing in mind the good reputation Nansen and the Quakers had with the Bolsheviks.²⁸ They decided to send Doopsgezinde pastor Jakob Koekebakker to Moscow to obtain a contract for Dutch relief. Koekebakker was chosen because he had experience in providing relief to Belgian Protestants during the war and because the ACBN board hoped he would lead an eventual Dutch relief expedition to Ukraine.²⁹ They managed to contact the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow through Willy Kruyt, a member of the Dutch Communist Party. The board members knew that Alvin Miller had made arrangements with Hoover's ARA for relief in the Volga region and that he was also going to Moscow to obtain entrance to Ukraine. The Dutch were unable to contact Miller and feared that he would make agreements with the Bolsheviks without consulting them.³⁰ It was therefore of great importance to get Koekebakker to Moscow as quickly as possible. On August 28 he urgently left for Reval (now Tallinn) where he hoped to meet Miller, but Miller had already left. Koekebakker did meet Nancy Babb, a member of the Quaker mission at Samara. They agreed that the Dutch would take

over aid in Ukraine if the Quakers' contract was extended to this area.³¹

After some delay, Koekebakker obtained a visa. He arrived by train in Moscow on Friday, September 16, and was given a room at the Savoy hotel, where Miller had arrived a few days earlier. Miller had already established contacts with Russian Mennonite representatives and finished his first talks with the Bolsheviks, who in general agreed to Mennonite relief in Russia and Ukraine.³² Over the weekend of September 17 and 18, Miller, Koekebakker, and the local Mennonites agreed on the most convenient strategy. Although the ACBN had only \$7,500 in cash,³³ Koekebakker decided to offer aid worth \$75,000 to be seen as a credible negotiating partner by the Bolsheviks. He also feared that they would not issue him an exit visa without this offer. On Monday, September 19, Koekebakker had a friendly conversation with Maxim Litvinov, deputy commissar of foreign affairs, who said Miller's proposal was too much in line with the ARA agreement and suggested that the Americans and the Dutch should work together. One contract for both would suffice. Koekebakker thought that this was a good idea.³⁴ The Bolshevik Max Levien was to negotiate the content of the contract.³⁵ Levien probably tried to use Koekebakker's presence to force Miller into a contract like the one negotiated with Nansen, which would give the Bolsheviks a large degree of control. But Koekebakker fully supported Miller as "a man with years of relief experience," and because a contract with the ARA stipulations would give the Dutch enough space to cooperate with local Mennonite or Soviet organizations. When no contract had been finalized on September 26, the day Koekebakker had to return to the Netherlands, he authorized Miller to sign possible changes on his behalf. Miller managed to retain "full control in our boards" and succeeded in obtaining one contract for both the American and Dutch relief with Kamenev's signature on October 1.³⁶

Although the contract explicitly mentioned relief in Ukraine, Miller still had to go to Kharkov to sign a contract with the government in independent Ukraine. The chairman of the Union of Societies and Groups of Mennonites of Southern Russia, Benjamin Janz, organized an invitation to come to Kharkov. The famine in the Ukrainian Mennonite colonies at the end of 1921 was relatively mild compared to the surrounding German and Russian communities because of the larger food reserves of the Mennonites. Because the Mennonites had foreign contacts, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks decided not to feed the Mennonites. Instead, they gave them the opportunity to organize their own relief in collaboration with their foreign co-religionists. Relief should be aimed at all needy in a region, not only

co-religionists, but the AMR and ACBN chose regions with a large majority of Mennonites like Chortitza and Molochna.³⁷

In 1921 the Bolsheviks were looking for a way to have foreigners invest money in the reconstruction of Russia and Ukraine. Relief contracts with Western parties might pave the way for investors after the famine had subsided.³⁸ So the Ukrainian Bolsheviks received Miller graciously, and on October 20 they signed a contract for both the American Mennonites and the Dutch Doopsgezinden to provide famine relief in the Ukrainian colonies.³⁹ Miller informed the MCC that their Russian and Ukrainian contracts also included aid to non-Mennonites and that the relief work would be fully supervised by US personnel, emphasizing that this was not an expression of distrust toward the local (Mennonite) organizations.⁴⁰ The Ukrainian Bolsheviks had informed Miller about opportunities for investors. Western capitalists could lease land, import and use their technology, and export their products. To draw the attention of potential investors from the Netherlands and North America to these possibilities, Janz sent a letter to the ACBN on November 13. Instructed by the Bolsheviks, he urged the ACBN to invest generously in reconstruction: "I would also like to see our young men working with motor plows beyond the borders of the Mennonite lands. If e.g. a foreign organization acquires free lands, landowners' land, etc. from the government for a lease price (to be paid in grain) [. . .] I also sent a similar letter to the Americ. Central Committe with a request to organize technical assistance."⁴¹

In the meantime, Koekebakker had returned to the Netherlands with great enthusiasm because he had obtained the contract. Almost immediately after his return he placed an appeal in a large number of Dutch newspapers during the first days of October: "Appeal for help. Six million children are starving to death!"⁴² Many Dutch Protestants responded with generous contributions. This presented the ACBN with problems. Firstly, Koekebakker had appealed for relief to hungry children in the Volga region, not to adult Mennonites in Ukraine, and secondly, the executive committee had not counted on so much money. In these confusing weeks, Frederik Fleischer took over the secretariat. He quickly made connections with other Dutch organizations that were organizing aid to Russia and found a way to use the money received for the Mennonites in Ukraine. At the end of November, there was enough money to send a Dutch ship with relief supplies to the Molochna colony in Ukraine.⁴³

On November 9, 1921, Alvin Miller visited the executive committee of the ACBN in Haarlem to hand over and explain the contracts with the governments in Moscow and Kharkov. He told members that the Ukrainian contract offered more possibilities than the

Russian contract, as the former included provisions for sending food parcels to specific individuals. Implicitly referring to Koekebakker's action in the Dutch press, he told the executive committee that he only sent factual information to the MCC about the state of affairs, and that the MCC decided what to make public. Reconstruction efforts were not discussed.⁴⁴ Miller then travelled with Fleischer to Winterswijk to enjoy the hospitality of the pastor and his wife. Having led a nomadic existence for two years, Miller was happy to feel completely at home by the crackling fireplace for a few days. Here he also became acquainted with Rein Willink, the eldest son of a prominent Doopsgezinde textile entrepreneur in Winterswijk, who would soon lead the Dutch relief expedition to Ukraine.⁴⁵

Janz's request for a contribution to reconstruction had inspired Fleischer and Willink and given them some ideas. In addition to providing famine relief, they thought of sending an expedition of Dutch experts and workers who could quickly restore the colonies. The Heidemij, a large company that in the previous decades had converted large areas of Dutch peatland into fields and forests, was seriously interested in the idea. Recent legislation in Soviet Russia had made it possible to create such a project in the form of a commercial agricultural concession. Fleischer started looking for investors. He approached prominent Doopsgezinden such as the Amsterdam merchant Samuel van Eeghen and the director of De Nederlandse Bank, Gerard Vissering. They agreed it was an interesting idea but would only advise Dutch entrepreneurs to invest money if the Dutch government would issue a guarantee. However, the government thought the prospects for profit on the Russian market too small and the Bolsheviks too unreliable. Meanwhile, it was rumoured that the Bolsheviks were willing to give a guarantee of five million gold rubles to Western investors. Once Willink was in Ukraine to organize the hunger relief, he could try to get that guarantee from the Bolsheviks.⁴⁶

At the beginning of 1922, it was clear that Mennonites in Ukraine were looking to their foreign co-religionists for help with emigration, famine aid, and reconstruction. These were the three themes Hiebert and Krebhiel discussed in Haarlem with the Dutch. Their different backgrounds notwithstanding, they operated under the same contract and agreed on all important matters: emigration should not be encouraged, because there were too few possibilities in the United States and the Netherlands; famine aid would be the main goal of the relief; and reconstruction support (seeds and tractors) would be a task for *Geschäftsleute* (businessmen), not the relief workers.⁴⁷

Providing Famine Relief in Molochna

As Dutch and American teams became operational in Ukraine the question remained: would they also agree on the most important matters in practice? In December, Miller had returned to Russia and sent telegrams to Molochna promising that food would be there soon.⁴⁸ Because Mennonites had sufficient supplies the famine had not become dire but stocks were running out. The residents of Molochna and Chortitza were happy when Miller announced that he expected the arrival of trains with food from the ARA around Christmas. He would set up food kitchens with these. However, because of American bureaucracy and the battered railway network, the cars were detained at Kharkov.⁴⁹ This did not, however, prevent the AMR from continuing its preparations for relief. Arthur Slagel was in charge of the coordination of American relief in Ukraine. Entirely in line with the contract of the ARA, the Americans formed their own committees in each *volost* (district) in Alexandrovsk, Halbstadt, and Gnadenfeld. These committees answered to the Americans only. Members made a regular inventory of needs, and this formed the basis for the distribution of food at the feeding points (usually kitchens) where the hungry came to eat. They were not allowed to take rations home.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the Dutch had also arrived. At the end of January, Willink came to Kharkov, and two months later he welcomed his assistant, Dirk Jongens, and two nurses in Sevastopol. Whereas the Americans chose to operate as autonomously as possible, Willink and Jongens worked closely with Janz's Union of Societies in which almost all Mennonite communities in southern Russia were represented. Each community in Chortitza and Molochna was to appoint two representatives, usually preachers, who knew how much food was needed. Every two weeks they would come to Lichtenau or Ohrloff to fetch the food and take it back to the needy in the community.⁵¹ Chairman Janz was disappointed by the autonomous behaviour of the Americans and tried to integrate them in his Union as well, but the Americans politely resisted.⁵²

On March 17, Miller and Willink discussed what to do when the American and Dutch food would arrive. They concluded that there were more starving people than their foreign philanthropic organizations could feed. If they had to choose, it was best to bet on "that part of the starving population that can still do productive work in the future."⁵³ Miller, having been instructed by the MCC to limit his aid to the Mennonite communities, asked Willink to feed the Lutheran neighbours in Prishib. Willink and Janz were, however, surprised by this directive. They had seen the ARA distribute packages

in Kharkov and so assumed that the Americans had more than enough for the needy non-Mennonites. As a result, Willink refused to comply.⁵⁴

In March the Americans managed to start their kitchens, but relief supplies were not yet at the level they wanted.⁵⁵ The Ukrainian Mennonites pinned their hopes on the Dutch ship's speedy arrival, but this also took time. Finally, just before Easter, American and Dutch aid arrived: sixteen American box cars in Alexandrovsk and forty Dutch ones in Lichtenau. On Easter Monday, the Americans and the Dutch started supplying food.⁵⁶ Slagel soon had tens of kitchens working and Jongens was able to pack the relief supplies quickly and hand them over to the representatives of *Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft* (Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage, VBHH), the name under which Janz's Union had been formally recognized by the Ukrainian Bolshevik government in April 1922.⁵⁷

It soon became clear that some Ukrainian Mennonites were trying to have it both ways and showed up in American kitchens as well as at Dutch distribution points.⁵⁸ It therefore became necessary to coordinate efforts. Although they had been in the area for some time, it turned out that the Americans and Dutch were largely working at cross-purposes. Whereas Slagel and Jongens got on well on an executive level in Molochna, Miller and Willink had little contact. Because Miller was often travelling between Ukraine and the Volga and Willink had been managing contacts in Kharkov and Sevastopol, they only met in Russia in March. On May 5, the American and Dutch aid workers met in Ohrloff to discuss cooperation but failed to reach any formal agreement. According to Krehbiel, who was responsible for the relief work in Molochna and for the distribution of clothing, this was due to the fact that "the Dutch were planning to do their relief work on a business basis, while the AMR did their work strictly on a charity basis." In addition, the Dutch worked closely with the VBHH, about which Krehbiel had earlier remarked: "The Verband fellows fought hard to tie us up . . . but [we] did not let them."⁵⁹ Willink also noted an important difference in implementation. According to him, the Americans strictly adhered to their system of excluding persons between the ages of fifteen and sixty, as well as families who had two lactating cows, even when they were completely lacking in other foodstuffs. This affected about 90 percent of Mennonites, so that American aid potentially reached only a very small number of persons. Krehbiel gave the impression that the Dutch had wanted to limit their aid to Molochna and that the Americans did not agree. They broke with no clear agreement other than to respect each other's rules.⁶⁰

Even though there were no formal arrangements, in practice both teams agreed that famine aid was philanthropic and that American and Dutch efforts were complementary. The Americans organized food kitchens for children and the elderly, the Dutch distributed packages among the needy adults. Jongens stated explicitly that the Dutch aid was intended to supplement the American aid.⁶¹ Whereas Chortitza was the centre of American aid, the Dutch focused on Molochna. In a note dated May 9, Willink clearly indicated that he was targeting the two districts of Molochna. The distribution lists in the Amsterdam archive confirm this picture. Shortly afterward, Willink agreed with the VBHH that anyone who owned less than fifteen pounds of flour or had a cow that produced less than three quarters of a litre of milk per day was eligible for Dutch aid.⁶² Whereas the Americans remained loyal to the agreements of the ARA, which aimed at feeding children and giving medical care to the sick, the Dutch used their space for manoeuvring to quickly make as large a group as possible strong enough to take on the recovery of the communities.⁶³ Peter Dyck gives a contemporary impression of how the recipients valued the relief efforts: he thought the American relief efforts too meagre, but after having eaten three Dutch meals, this “wasn’t enough to satisfy our hunger” either.⁶⁴

Reconstruction Aid

But what was the background of Krehbiel’s observation that the Dutch were giving relief primarily on a business basis? Willink had gone to Ukraine to use the famine aid as a steppingstone to a major reconstruction operation. Immediately after his arrival in Kharkov he went to the Bolsheviks and presented them with the Dutch ambitions but made them subject to a guarantee of five million gold rubles. The Bolshevik leaders Rakovsky and Yermoshchenko listened with interest, informed him that they had no money for the guarantee, and waited to see what famine aid Willink would be able to provide. Although their policy was to issue concessions, the Bolsheviks were cautious not to deal with “adventurers” that were out for short-term results but would not assist in reconstruction. When the large number of box cars with Dutch relief goods arrived in Molochna, Willink had proved not to be an adventurer. He sent his plan to the members of the VBHH, who discussed it shortly thereafter at their founding conference in Landskrone on May 30. Although Willink himself was not present, Krehbiel was. Meanwhile, Fleischer’s plan had taken on a clear shape. The plan was to turn the Molochna into an agricultural concession, organized as a shareholder’s company,

an *Aktiengesellschaft*. This company would get the usufruct of the nationalized land, including the mills and tools. Farmers who were members of the VBHH would be able to develop the farms; the VBHH would supply and maintain the necessary tools and make experts available. The company would also take care of facilities (such as telephone systems) and retail. This was consistent with the Bolshevik policy of allowing foreigners to invest in concessions as well as encouraging cooperatives at home. Finally, it corresponded with the Mennonites' wish not to depend on charity for reconstruction, but rather on business agreements with investors who gave credit that the beneficiaries could repay.

The discussion of the plan was not included in the report of the meeting, nor did Krehbiel mention whether any decision had been made. But Willink later reported that the Ukrainian government supported the plan. Meanwhile, Benjamin Unruh had contacted a German-Russian reconstruction syndicate that was willing to pay for the concession if Dutch or American investors would give a guarantee.⁶⁵ Willink returned to the Netherlands to find investors⁶⁶ and complied with the request of the VBHH to find seed that Mennonites could purchase on credit. In August, he visited the Ukrainian trade mission in Berlin, where he concluded a contract in principle worth f50,000 to ensure that the seed was available in Ukraine before October 1.⁶⁷

Unruh proposed the provision of credit to the Ukrainian Mennonites by issuing shares. Early in 1923, it was rumoured that the American investor Ginsburg intended to invest one million dollars in the Ukrainian colonies if American, Dutch, and Swiss Mennonites guaranteed half the amount. The American and Dutch Mennonites would each pay \$200,000, the Swiss \$100,000. We do not know what became of the contribution of the American and Swiss Mennonites, but in 1923 the Doopsgezinden issued 2,000 bonds of ten guilders each bearing an annual interest of 5 percent. Unruh signed them on behalf of the VBHH. Fleischer assured investors the Mennonites would repay the loan, since they were "kindhearted, simple, industrious and reliable Christian people, who wish nothing better than toiling for their daily bread."⁶⁸ A total of 1,506 bonds were sold, and Willink ensured that the money arrived properly in the Ukrainian colonies. Eventually the Mennonites paid the interest but were unable to repay the principal, whereupon the ACBN compensated the small shareholders with money left from the collection for the famine relief.⁶⁹

These transactions were not fundamentally philanthropic in nature, but rather business transactions intended to promote the reconstruction of Ukrainian communities. But did these Dutch

activities differ essentially from the American activities? Did they justify Krehbiel's remark?

While Willink and Fleischer acted upon the business opportunities the Bolsheviks suggested through Janz's letter to the ACBN dated November 13, 1921, the American Mennonites did as much in the fall of 1922. In October the AMR signed an agreement with the Bolsheviks that was included as an appendix to the original contract. It allowed and urged Mennonites to supply tractors and to use them on concession lands for agricultural work.⁷⁰ The Americans had already imported twenty-five tractors and the government made available a piece of land of 265 *desyatinas* in Molochna, which Mennonites cultivated, so that no grain had to be imported.⁷¹ The provision of tractors had been a joint Dutch-American action. Because the farms in Europe had much smaller fields than in America, Europeans had little experience with them. In December 1921, Fleischer and Willink started looking for tractors, but found only a handful in Germany at very high prices. Fleischer had been offered one hundred inexpensive tractors in Rumania but was unable to get the Dutch Doopsgezinden to guarantee them. He then asked Jacob G. Ewert, co-editor of the monthly *Vorwärts*, if the Americans could look for tractors. The Americans had already begun, but Ewert nonetheless published Fleischer's appeal in his magazine. By spring, the Americans were able to get their hands on twenty-five tractors for a fair price, and on behalf of the MCC, P. C. Hiebert organized their transport to the colonies, proposing that those Mennonites that could obtain the tractors over time.⁷²

When it came to reconstruction, therefore, there were no differences between the Dutch and the Americans. Seeds, loans, and tractors were all commercial investments that Mennonites had to repay. In this respect, the Dutch were no more "after business" than the Americans.

Schröder, Fleischer, and the Refugees Left Behind in Constantinople

Did the Dutch and Americans differ in their approach to the refugee question? The American Mennonites established the MRU in September 1920 as a bridge between relatively safe Constantinople and the Ukrainian colonies.⁷³ But as the city was flooded by some 150,000 refugees who had fled Sevastopol with Wrangel's White Army, the MRU members could no longer travel to Ukraine. The organization quickly changed its focus from relief ambitions in Ukraine to helping the refugees. In November, Heinrich "Henry"

Schröder joined the MRU office. He had been a manufacturer, a founder of the *Selbstschutz* in Halbstadt, and had served in Wrangel's army. Schröder told the managing officer of the MRU, Frank Stoltzfus, that there were some 115 Mennonites among the refugees in need of help. Stoltzfus gave him a job as bookkeeper for the following year, during which time the MRU organized homes for men (the largest group), women and children. He also leased farmland in Constantinople for the refugees to work, so that they could take care of themselves, paying three quarters of the rent. The refugees were expected to pay the rest with the proceeds of their harvest.⁷⁴ Most refugees wanted to go to the United States, some to Germany or Holland. The MRU gradually succeeded in getting many of them to North America; three refugees found their way to the Netherlands, while the Studienkommission continued to look for other possibilities.⁷⁵

In late February 1922, Fleischer visited the Balkans to explore the possibility of settling Mennonite refugees in either Bulgaria or Greece. At the beginning of March, he went to Constantinople to report to the MRU and became acquainted with Frank Stoltzfus.⁷⁶ He also had pleasant talks with Vesta Zook and Vinora Weaver, who had taken care of refugee women and children. After Fleischer's departure, Stoltzfus went to Varna to continue the reconnaissance, and in doing so, he followed Fleischer's advice to involve the Dutch consul Gueshof in Sofia. Ultimately, the investigation yielded little. The Bulgarians could handle only the Russian refugees from Wrangel's retinue. Stoltzfus sent Fleischer the results of his research, whereupon the latter reproached the Bulgarians for "cheap national egotism."⁷⁷ The offices of the MRU closed on May 1, 1922. On their way to America, Zook and Weaver took a trip through Europe and in July visited Fleischer in Winterswijk.⁷⁸

Stoltzfus transferred the care of the fifty-nine Mennonites still in Constantinople to Near East Relief (NER), an American organization which brought relief to persecuted Armenians and other Christians in the former Ottoman Empire. Most of Mennonite refugees had obtained the necessary papers and were waiting for ships to bring them to America. Heinrich Schröder was one of them and became the intermediary for solving the remaining problems in Constantinople. The next year he had to ward off the threat of a new flood of Mennonite refugees, find a way to earn a living, and handle problems with the leased plot of land.⁷⁹

In January 1922, several dozen Mennonites from the Crimea and the Caucasus sold their possessions and left for the Black Sea harbour of Batum, Georgia. This was the only Black Sea harbour in the collapsed Russian empire that was still open for international

traffic. The Mennonites, hoping to obtain travel papers to South America, approached the Dutch consul in Tiflis, the Georgian capital, for information and support.⁸⁰ In spring 1922 the group rapidly grew to 252 persons.⁸¹ A few managed to make the crossing to Constantinople and get papers for America. They asked Stoltzfus to help the emigrants in Batum, but he refused and advised them to go home to the Crimea or Molochna, where it had become possible to survive because of foreign relief. When Stoltzfus left Constantinople, therefore, he did not visit Batum on his way to America and had no first-hand knowledge of their situation, which, during the summer, deteriorated dramatically. The group was housed in small quarters and fifty-two of the refugees succumbed to malaria and typhoid. They sent more and more pressing requests to Schröder in Constantinople, who then turned to Fleischer for help. On Willink's advice, however, Fleischer took the same position as Stoltzfus: the refugees had rashly left their communities in the expectation that the Americans and Dutch would take care of them. There was no need to emigrate; they could just go back to their communities. Fleischer promised that Willink would visit them when he was back in Ukraine after his stay in the Netherlands.⁸² In October, Willink sent his interpreter, Gerhard Harder, to Batum. Harder again advised the refugees to go home and arranged for medicines and clothing through the German Red Cross. A number had already found work in Batum.⁸³ In fall, eleven refugees seized the opportunity to go back to Ukraine; thirteen had managed to obtain visas for America.⁸⁴

In January 1923, Willink received a message that sixty-six refugees were still trapped in Batum. After the turn of the year, the NER no longer offered them assistance and their lodgings had become virtually uninhabitable. They asked Willink to provide wheat and rice. Meanwhile, they made frantic efforts to obtain papers from the Russian consul in Tiflis. In the end, the Red Cross intervened on their behalf, such that, according to Willink, a total of forty refugees managed to reach Constantinople. It is unknown how many of them eventually returned to their old communities or made their way to America via Constantinople or with the first wave of emigrants via Libau.⁸⁵

Although Stoltzfus had promised Heinrich Schröder that he would prolong his contract in the autumn of 1921, he did not honour his promise, and this led to disagreements. When Hiebert was in Constantinople in the spring of 1922, Schröder asked him for help, which, despite promises, did not materialize. With the end of the MRU, Schröder had to look elsewhere for income. He found a partner to start a small business. Fleischer advanced him more than a month's salary out of his own pocket for this business, which failed

a few months later. An attempt to have him act as an agent for Dutch entrepreneurs at a Persian trade office also failed. Because of the economic crisis in the Netherlands, businessmen were not interested. In the months that followed, Schröder tried more and more desperately to get money from Fleischer, who slowly lost confidence in him.⁸⁶

In the meantime, the situation of the other Mennonites in Constantinople also became more problematic. The harvest on the rented plot turned out to be disappointing. By autumn they could no longer pay the rent. The Russian landowners demanded their money and the English judge ruled in their favour. Two refugees who, by guaranteeing the lease, had to hand over their passports until they had paid, had to wait until summer for permission to emigrate to America. Assuming the MCC would pay in the end, Schröder took over the guarantee so that they could leave.⁸⁷

By the spring of 1923, most of the refugees had left Constantinople. Schröder wanted to visit his family in Germany, but first had to pay the debt on the plot of land. When he asked Fleischer to loan him \$300 for that purpose, Fleischer responded that the ACBN could not send so much money without jeopardizing the primary relief projects. At the same time, Schröder assured him that he was not taking any risk because MCC would pay his debt in the end. He desperately wrote that the court had already given him an ultimatum: if he did not pay by June 9, he would have to go to jail. This prospect worried him greatly, "because the treatment here in prison is horrible; on the other hand I'm already so physically and morally beaten that it doesn't take much to break me completely."⁸⁸ In the end, Fleischer probably arranged the money for him, because on September 26, Schröder sent him a letter from Rotterdam asking for money to travel to Germany.⁸⁹

When looking at the practice of refugee support, we can conclude that the Dutch followed the course of the Americans and that here there was no difference in attitude: both Stoltzfus and Fleischer discouraged emigration.

Comparing the Results of the American and Dutch Aid

What were the results of the American and Dutch relief efforts? Here we must discriminate between philanthropic support and reconstruction agreements between businessmen (*Geschäftsleute*). If we look at the "philanthropic" aspect of the famine relief, we see the following picture from Western and Russian sources. North American Mennonite organizations spent \$1.3 million in total aid for

Russia.⁹⁰ With this amount, they bought 150,000 *pud* of relief supplies for Ukraine.⁹¹ At the height of the famine, July 1922, they fed about twenty-five thousand people in Ukraine.⁹² Over the entire period, from March 1922 to April 1923, this involved at least 7.3 million rations.⁹³ One ration had a nutritional value of 778 calories. The Americans supplied this via soup, bread, rice, corn, cocoa, sugar, and milk.⁹⁴

When Hiebert and Krehbiel passed through the Netherlands in early 1922, they were surprised at the great wealth of the *Doopsgezinden* and their seeming unwillingness to give money for relief.⁹⁵ Although the size of the Dutch *Doopsgezinde* population was about a fifth of that of the North American Mennonites,⁹⁶ the ACBN raised less than a tenth of what the American fellow believers did. But from this money they bought 97,000 *puds* of supplies, which they used to feed about twenty-one thousand people in July 1922. Every two weeks, Jongens distributed packages of three and a half pounds of white beans, two pounds of flat beans, two pounds of flour, one pound of rice, and two pounds of herring.⁹⁷ Over the entire period, he distributed about 7 million rations. It's not clear how the Dutch managed to distribute almost as many rations of 778 calories with two-thirds the weight of food. Peter Dyck suggests a higher nutritional value of the components, like herring, but a daily Dutch ration had a nutritional value of 724 calories.⁹⁸

Regarding philanthropic aid, we can conclude that the North Americans collected much more, but they also spent a lot of money on relief in the Volga region. If we limit ourselves to philanthropic aid, we can conclude that the effect of the relief provided to Ukraine by the AMR was about the same as that of the ACBN. By autumn 1922, the Mennonites had lost relatively few people to hunger and had recovered sufficiently to start rebuilding their communities. The difference in the efficiency of both organizations is surprising: the average cost of an American ration appears to have been \$0.069,⁹⁹ and that of a Dutch ration only \$0.013. But this account depends on the reliability of the data provided by Miller and Willink to the Bolshevik authorities. Considering Miller's remarks about ARA officials' lack of knowledge about local situations and Willink's judgment about the ARA as "bureaucratic," it might be relevant to do further research with the available data from American, Dutch, Ukrainian, and Russian archives.¹⁰⁰ Explanations might be found in the higher prices the Americans had paid in the US for wheat, the lower prices the Dutch had paid in Bulgaria, and the higher cost of transport for the Americans.¹⁰¹

Table 1. Famine relief and results in Ukraine

			AMR	ACBN
Input (collected money)	Total	\$	1,292,825	89,811
		f	3,425,986	238,000
	Ukraine	\$	502,735	89,811
		f	1,332,248	238,000
Throughput (delivered food, clothes, etc.)		pud	150,000	97,597
		kg	2,460,000	1,600,594
Output		rations	7,300,000	7,000,000
Outcome (July 1922)		persons fed	25,000	21,000
Input/Output		\$	0.069	0.013
Input/Outcome (total invested per person fed in July 1922)		\$	20	4

If we turn to the “business” element of reconstruction aid the picture is fragmented. In the autumn of 1922, the Americans briefly cultivated a kind of concession of 265 desyatinas in Molochna on which they demonstrated the operation of the twenty-five tractors. They then handed the tractors to the Mennonites who agreed to repay the costs over a period of three years. It is unclear what role the American tractors played in the reconstruction in subsequent years. After all, they could only be used on large tracts of even land, and the Mennonites did not have much of that since the loss of their large landholdings after the revolution. Willink acquired a concession of 1,200 desyatinas of neglected land in 1923. He restored this in a few years. He had a few tractors in his possession, and they turned out to be less effective than draft horses. When the concession appeared to be profitable around 1926, the Bolsheviks allowed Willink to expand it to 1,700 desyatinas. In 1927, however, he had to leave Russia because his shareholders did not want to invest further, and the political climate deteriorated rapidly. Willink and his shareholders lost their investment of \$75,000.¹⁰² The Dutch seed contract also ended in failure due to miscommunication between Berlin and Kharkov. In the end, this turned out not to be a problem because the need was less than expected and because the Bolsheviks offered good quality seed.¹⁰³

Conclusion

To what extent, then, did the American and Dutch aid workers have a different attitude, and what value should we attach to this? If we look at the start of the aid, differences can obviously be expected. The North Americans raised more money because they were more personally involved with their needy relatives in Ukraine. This was not the case with the Dutch *Doopsgezinden*, who had few family contacts with Ukrainian Mennonites. Subsequently, the Americans committed themselves to the ARA policy of avoiding cooperation with local organizations and focusing on children and medical aid, while the Dutch were free to choose how they wanted to organize their relief. But despite initial differences, the Americans and Dutch signed the same contract with the Bolsheviks in Moscow and Kharkov, which means that their approaches to famine relief were the same. In addition, they both received the same requests from Ukrainian Mennonites for charitable famine relief and business support in reconstruction. In Haarlem they agreed on their preferred policies: philanthropic famine relief, business-like reconstruction aid, and the discouragement of emigration.

The practices of both teams in Ukraine were consistent with these policies. The famine relief of both was charitable work, although the Dutch appear to have been more efficient. This was not due to a difference in attitude, but because the Americans were tied to the ARA policies, which made them buy expensive food in the US, use more expensive transport, and maintain an independent local organization. The Dutch could buy cheap food in the Balkans and use the VBHH infrastructure. Providing reconstruction aid after the famine was explicitly not a goal of the ARA and initially not of the AMR, but for the Dutch it was. Seed loans and tractors were business-like enterprises for both organizations, which the Ukrainian Mennonites were supposed to repay. Finally, the employees of the MRU and the ACBN did not differ in their attitude towards the refugees in Constantinople. Fleischer supported Schröder in settling the cases concerning the refugees who were left behind after the closure of the MRU. Willink and Fleischer followed Stoltzfus's policy of discouragement towards the refugees in Batum.

The only difference was the Dutch ambition to obtain a concession. When Willink was negotiating with the Bolsheviks at the beginning of 1922, he discussed both famine relief and the possibility of the agricultural concession in the context of reconstruction. This confused Krehbiel and provides context for his remarks. He strongly disapproved of a "Dutch contract" that would "culminate in the *Verband Praesidium* as the dictator for the Dutch. No group

of American farmers would listen to such a contract.”¹⁰⁴ Probably this had made such a strong impression on Krehbiel that this dominated his memory of the cooperation with the Dutch more than twenty years later.

To the extent that there was a difference in attitude, it relates more to the level of the involvement and generosity of the Doopsgezinden and the different organizational context. When Hiebert met Hylkema in Berlin in 1924, he was full of praise for Willink: “Willink helped quickly, energetically, so that, while the Americans had long been lingering there . . . , he left with the [victor’s laurels]. His nickname was the Flying Dutchman. . . . Where Willink was, he was loved.” After that, according to him, Dutch aid diminished and American aid became more important. Willink, on the other hand, was less laudatory regarding the Americans. He considered them bureaucratic sticklers (*Principienreiter*) who could not deviate from their rules.¹⁰⁵ Yet that was due to the AMR’s obligations to the ARA, not to a difference in attitude of the American and Dutch relief workers. In general, the cooperation between the Americans and Dutch can be characterized as cordial, as can be seen from the way Miller and Koekebakker operated in Moscow and the appreciation of Krehbiel and Slagel for their contacts with Jongens in Molochna.

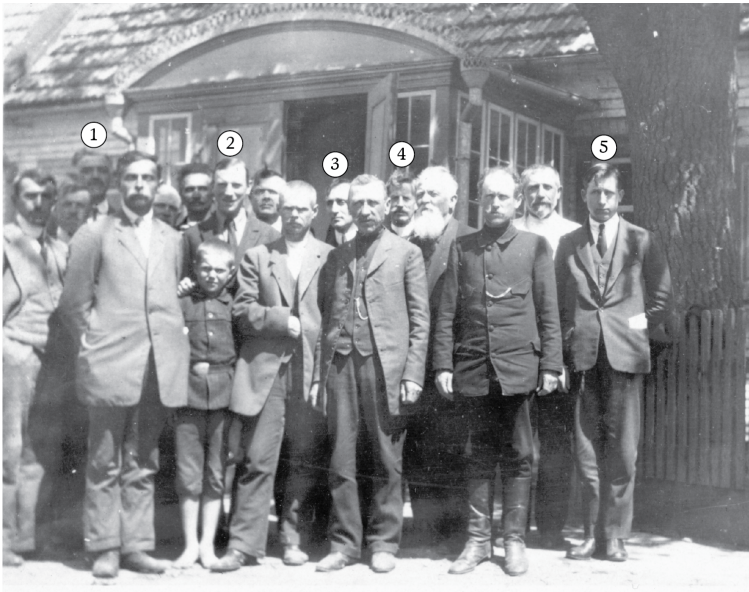


Figure 1. American and Dutch Mennonite relief workers with VBHH representatives in 1922. *Pictured:* (1) Christian E. Krehbiel, (2) Rein Willink, (3) Alvin Miller, (4) Dirk Jongens, and (5) Arthur Slagel. Courtesy of Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College (photo 2008-0063).

Notes

- ¹ The author is grateful for the careful reading of an earlier draft of this article by Carola Sosef, Lydia Penner, Peter Letkemann, Jan Pendergrass, and an anonymous reviewer. Their comments led to substantial improvements.
- ² Ukraine declared itself independent in January 1918 but came under Bolshevik control in November 1920. The Bolshevik governments of Ukraine and Russia formalized their relations in a treaty in December 1920. In 1921 the Mennonites of southern Russia (comprising the Mennonites in Ukraine and the Kuban) intended to form a union that could function as the recipient of relief from the Mennonite diaspora. The Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine would be formed in April 1922, but was restricted to Ukrainian Mennonite communities. Sometimes Mennonites referred to their region as Southern Russia, sometimes as Ukraine. Since the American and Dutch relief in southern Russia was aimed at Ukrainian communities, I will use Ukraine. Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 562–564 and John B. Toews and Paul Toews, eds., *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922–1927): Mennonite and Soviet Documents* (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011), 76, 164.
- ³ All information about the discussion in Woelinga’s minutes of the meeting of March, 8, 1922 are from Stadsarchief Amsterdam (SAA), 1118/009d/2500.
- ⁴ Halbstadt was located in Molochna Colony, Ukraine.
- ⁵ C. E. Krehbiel, “Diary of C.E. Krehbiel 1922–1923,” Apr. 18, May, 5, 1922 (inserted comment from interview with Amanda Ediger in 1944), Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, KS, transcription in MS. 11.
- ⁶ P. C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, eds., *Feeding the Hungry: Russia Famine, 1919–1925* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929). There are no recent monographs on the work of the AMR in Russia. The most extensive references in secondary literature can be found in John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921–1927* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967). See also Peter Letkemann, “Negotiating with the Soviets: Alvin Miller of American Mennonite Relief, 1920–26,” in this issue.
- ⁷ The first redistributions of land in February 1918 had given Mennonite landowners a good impression of what to expect from Bolshevik rule. The Bolsheviks were temporarily halted by the German occupation of Ukraine in 1918, but when German troops had to leave after the armistice of November 1918, some landowners decided to join them. In April 1921 about forty-five Mennonite refugees from Ukraine were living in Germany; most of them had fled during the war and the revolution. Gerhard P. Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, (Lodi: self-pub., 1974), 25–26; B. H. Unruh, “Die Auswanderung der niederdeutschen mennonitischen Bauern aus der Sowjetunion, 1922–1933, unpublished manuscript, Hoover Institution Archive (Stanford), inv. 48016, 213–214; *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), s.v. “Mennonitische Flüchtlingsfürsorge,” https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonitische_Flüchtlingsfürsorge; “Adressen der sich z.Zt. in Deutschland befindlichen Mennoniten aus Rußland, Apr. 30, 1921,” SAA, 1118/004/Ag 38.
- ⁸ Tjeerd O. Hylkema, *De geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinde Gemeenten in Rusland in de oorlogs- en revolutiejaren 1914 tot 1920* (Giethoorn, 1920);

- Dietrich Neufeld, *Tagebuch aus dem Reiche des Totentanzes* (Emden: self-pub., 1921); Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* (Winnipeg: Echo Books, 1970); Sean D. Patterson, "The Makhnos of Memory: Mennonite and Makhnovist Narratives of the Civil War in Ukraine, 1917–1921" (master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 2013).
- ⁹ Unruh, "Auswanderung," 198–199, 205–206.
- ¹⁰ *Zondagsbode*, Nov. 19, 1916, Mar. 18, 1917, and Nov. 17, 1918.
- ¹¹ Johann Thiessen was born in Einlage in 1869. He had served as a missionary in Sumatra between 1901 and 1912 and settled in the Netherlands after 1912. GAMEO, s.v. "Thiessen, Johann (1869-1953)," [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Thiessen, Johann_\(1869-1953\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Thiessen,_Johann_(1869-1953)).
- ¹² After the declaration of Ukrainian independence, Ukrainian became the official language and names of towns were written in Ukrainian: Kiev became Kyiv, Kharkov became Kharkiv, Odessa became Odesa, etc. After the Russian-oriented Bolsheviks took power, both ways of writing were possible. Outside Ukraine and in the correspondence of Mennonites with the Dutch, the Russian spelling was maintained, I will follow this practice to avoid anachronisms.
- ¹³ For Miller see Letkemann, "Negotiating with the Soviets." Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 43–44; *Zondagsbode*, Mar. 21, Apr. 25, May 9, 1920.
- ¹⁴ Minutes CGD 12/10/1920, SAA, 389/006; *Zondagsbode* Oct. 24, 1920.
- ¹⁵ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 48–54, 90–101.
- ¹⁶ GAMEO, s.v. "Mennonitische Flüchtlingsfürsorge."
- ¹⁷ Minutes CGD Oct. 12, 1920, SAA, 389/006; Douwe Woelinga, "Nood van en hulp aan de Mennisten in Rusland, 1920–1921," *Doopsgezind Jaarboekje* (Assen: L. Hansma, 1922), 77; Hylkema, *Geschiedenis*.
- ¹⁸ Correspondence: Woelinga, Rahusen, Miller, en Unruh, SAA, 1118/004/Ag 19b, 19c; correspondence: Woelinga-Miller, Apr. 1, 9, 30, 1921 in SAA, 1118/004.
- ¹⁹ "Report of Unruh's visit to England," SAA, 1118/004/Ag 046; Unruh to Woelinga, Feb. 9, 1921, SAA, 118/004.
- ²⁰ Dutch: *dagelijks bestuur* for executive committee, *algemeen bestuur* for general committee.
- ²¹ Minutes CGD, Feb. 13, Nov. 3, 1921, SAA, 389/006; Minutes ACBN, July 1, 1921, SAA, 1118/018; Woelinga, *Nood*, 79–81.
- ²² Frederik C. Fleischer, *Ons hulpwerk in Oekraïne en de Krim* (Assen: L. Hansma, 1922), 17; Woelinga, *Nood*, 76.
- ²³ Minutes ACBN, July 10, 1921, SAA 1118/018.
- ²⁴ Minutes ACBN, July 1 and 10, 1921, SAA 1118/018; *De Zondagsbode*, July, 17, 1921.
- ²⁵ In the Netherlands Gorky's appeal was published in most national and local newspapers on July 27. See for instance *Het Volk* and *Delftsche Courant*, Jul. 27, 1921.
- ²⁶ Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 26–27.
- ²⁷ The AMR joined the European Relief Council agreement (Aug. 24, 1921) which defined the relations between the ARA and the organizations that intended to work under the protection of the Riga agreement. This implied that the director of the ARA had to approve of the contracts between the AMR and Russian/Ukrainian Bolshevik governments. Harold H. Fisher, *The*

- Famine in Soviet Russia: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 161–162, 511–512
- ²⁸ Fisher, *Famine*, 28–59, 62–64; Patenaude, *Big Show*, 38–44, 46; Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 62; Minutes ACBN, Sept. 17, 1921, SAA 1118/018.
- ²⁹ Binnerts to Woelinga, July 28, 1921, SAA 1118/005/Ag 111.
- ³⁰ Minutes ACBN, Sept. 17, 1921, SAA 1118/018.
- ³¹ Telegrams and letter from Miller to Hylkema, Aug. 24, 1921, in SA 1118/005/Ag130; “Dagboek Koekebakker,” SAA 1118/005/Ag127.
- ³² In his letter to Miller on September 15, Kamenev gave the AMR permission to organize relief in the Volga region. Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 146.
- ³³ Twenty thousand guilders. In March 1922 a dollar was worth f2.65 according to exchange rates in *De Standaard*, Mar. 15, 1922.
- ³⁴ “Dagboek Koekebakker,” SAA 1118/005/Ag127.
- ³⁵ Although Koekebakker and Miller referred to “Levean,” the person in question probably was Max Levien, a German Russian who had been one of the leaders of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1918–1919. He had returned to Moscow in June 1921 and had a role in organizing famine relief.
- ³⁶ In his diary, Koekebakker gives important information that Miller omits in his description in Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 148–149. This is Litvinov’s remark that Miller took the ARA agreement too much as his point of departure. This explains Levien’s behaviour of placing all kinds of obstacles in the way, and his pressure on Miller to allow the Bolsheviks more influence in the boards of the local AMR organizations. But Miller did not give in and realized a contract with maximum freedom for the American and Dutch teams to organize the relief work as they preferred. “Dagboek Koekebakker,” SAA 1118/005/Ag127; telegram Miller to Koekebakker with refusal, Levien, Oct. 7, 1921; Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 148–149, 446–450, telegrams Miller and Woelinga, Oct. 13 and 14, 1921, SAA 1118/008a.
- ³⁷ Nataliya Ostasheva Venger, *Na perelome epokh: Mennonitskoye soobshchestvo Oekrainy v 1914–1931* (Moskva: Gotika, 1998), 69–70.
- ³⁸ In 1921 the Bolsheviks relaxed their revolutionary economic policies with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This not only reintroduced the free market in Soviet Russia to some extent, but also offered the opportunity for foreign investors to obtain commercial concessions. Although the atheist Bolsheviks knew Mennonites were a religious group, in the early 1920 economic interests would dominate the relations between the Mennonites and Bolshevik leaders. J. Stepanov, “Über ausländische Konzessionen,” *Russische Korrespondenz*, no. 1–2 (1921); John B. Toews, *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B. B. Janz (1877–1964)*, (Winnipeg: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 50–52.
- ³⁹ This meant the AMR had signed a contract with the Ukrainian government before the ARA did (January 1922). Apparently, Miller did not inform William Haskell, the director of the ARA in Soviet Russia, about it, because when Haskell found out, he accused Miller of lying to him. Information from correspondence of the author with Bertrand Patenaude, Jan., 8, 2022; Fisher, *Famine*, 529–531.
- ⁴⁰ Miller from Kharkov to Mennonite Brethren, Oct. 19, 1921 and from Moscow, Oct. 25, 1921, SAA 1118/008c.
- ⁴¹ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 452–456; N. Ostasheva Venger, *Perelome*, 69; Janz to ACBN, Nov. 13, 1921, SAA 1118/026a.

- ⁴² Appeal on Oct. 3, 1921: *de Zutphense Courant*, *de Nieuwe Courant*, and *de Bredasche Courant*; on Oct. 4, 1921, for example: *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, and the *Tribune*.
- ⁴³ Minutes ACBN, Oct. 17, 1921, SAA 1118/018 and 1118/023; accounts by the accountant of ACBN in *Zondagsbode* concerning the months October and November 1921.
- ⁴⁴ Minutes, Nov. 8, 1921, SAA 1118/018.
- ⁴⁵ Miller to Fleischer, Nov. 28, 1921, SAA 1118/008c; Willink's reference of Mar. 17, 1922, SAA 1118/152.
- ⁴⁶ Fleischer to Unruh, Jan. 8, 1922, SAA 1118/9a; Fleischer, *Hulpwerk*, 32–4; J. Stepanov, "Konzessionen," 74, 86–87. Ben Knapen, *De lange weg naar Moskou: De Nederlandse relatie tot de Sovjet-Unie, 1917–1942* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1985) 75, 85–86.
- ⁴⁷ Minutes, Mar. 8, 1922, SAA 1118/009d/2500.
- ⁴⁸ John P. Dyck, ed., *Troubles and Triumphs: Excerpts from the Diary of Peter J. Dyck 1914–1924*, ed. Joh (Springstein, MB: self-pub. by the editor, 1991), 164 (entry Dec. 27, 1921), 168 (entry Jan.24, 1922).
- ⁴⁹ Toews, *Union*, 395.
- ⁵⁰ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 216–219; Alvin J. Miller, "Relief Work in Revolutionary Russia," *Mennonite Life* 17, no. 3 (July 1962): 131–132.
- ⁵¹ Jongens, reports 2 and 3, SAA 1118/151; Fleischer, *Hulpwerk*, 28–29.
- ⁵² Willink remarks on March 21, 1922, that it is a "big deception for the Colonies" that Miller sticks to the ARA policy, "2d Report to Fleischer," SAA 1118/152 p.4. Krehbiel writes on May 5, 1922, in his diary that the AMR is annoyed by the attempts of the VBHH to pressure the AMR into closer cooperation.
- ⁵³ Willink to Fleischer, Mar. 21, 1922, SAA 1118/152; see also A. Miller, "Relief," 128. Fortunately, Miller and Willink did not have to decide who was likely to be productive in the future, because the relief turned out to be sufficient for the Mennonite communities.
- ⁵⁴ Willink to Fleischer, Mar. 21, 1922, SAA 1118/152. It is difficult to find facts about the extent the AMR and ACBN provided help to non-Mennonites in Ukraine. The relief given to Germans in Prishib and Tatars in Crimea probably was only incidental. Letters of thanks to the Americans are primarily from Mennonites, and to the Dutch exclusively Mennonite. Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 151, 394–408; A. Miller, "Relief," 130; letters of thanks in SAA 1118/004/Ag61, SAA 1118/011d.
- ⁵⁵ The first box cars with food for relief kitchens arrived on March 11, the first mention of a functioning kitchen is Krehbiel's diary entry on April 3. Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 214–216.
- ⁵⁶ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 199–200, 214–215; Willink to Fleischer, May 17, 1922, SAA 1118/152.
- ⁵⁷ This was no coincidence. While Miller was busy organizing relief on the Volga, Willink joined Janz in his negotiations with the Bolsheviks to have the Union recognized. Since the atheist Bolsheviks refused to recognize religious organizations and Willink gave the impression Dutch entrepreneurs were interested in investing in Molochna, the Bolsheviks told Janz they would recognize his organization if it referred to the Dutch origins of the Mennonites. Janz to Unruh, Mar. 31, 1922, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg, MB, vol. 980, series I, file 05; Toews, *Union*, 90–98, 117–119.

- ⁵⁸ Krehbiel, "Diary," May 5, 1922.
- ⁵⁹ Krehbiel, "Diary," May 5, 1922.
- ⁶⁰ Notes Willink in 3d report to Fleischer on May 17, 1922, SAA 1118/152.
- ⁶¹ Jongens, report 6, May 4 and 11, 1922, SAA 1118/151.
- ⁶² Reference Willink on May 9 and 17, 1922, SAA 1118/152; Jongens's reports 6, 7, 8, SAA 1118/151; distribution lists in SAA 1118/154. Neither from Jongens's reports nor from the letters of thanks to the Dutch can it be inferred that the Dutch distributed their bi-weekly rations beyond Molochna.
- ⁶³ The relief of the ARA focused on starving children and medical aid to the sick; the AMR added women to this. Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 441, 447; Fisher, *Famine*, 511.
- ⁶⁴ Dyck, *Troubles*, 193, 194, 196.
- ⁶⁵ "Project plan" in SAA 1118/149; advice to director of the Syndicate (and Mennonite) Gerhard Voth, May 30, 1922, SAA 1118/26a; Unruh to Fleischer, June 3, 1922, SAA 1118/011a; Unruh to vd Vlught, July 17, 1922, SAA 1118/012b.
- ⁶⁶ Krehbiel, "Diary," May 29 and 30, 1922, manuscript 222-223; Janz to Willink, July 13, 1922, SAA 1118/12b/5602; Janz to Studienkommission, July 13 and 25, 1922, CMBS, vol. 980, series I, file 9.
- ⁶⁷ SAA 1118/12a/5431.
- ⁶⁸ In March 1923 the VBHH members had bound themselves to guarantee the loan with five times its value, Toews, *Union*, 179, 189; Toews, *Fatherland*, 126-129; Fleischer's appeal to invest, Apr. 1923, SAA 1118/005a.
- ⁶⁹ Janz to ACBN, Oct. 17, 1922, SAA 1118/26a; call for a loan of \$1 million, SAA 1118/005a; Ostasheva, *Perelome*, 106, 109; Toews, *Union*, 205, 210; Minutes, Mar. 8, 1923, SAA 1118/018; request from VBHH to Ukrainian Economic Soviet, Mar. 20, 1923, SAA 1118/150; correspondence, Friesen-Fleischer, Dec. 24, 1927, Mar. 5, July 1, 1928, SAA 1118/015c/10.886, 015d/10.902 and 10.925.
- ⁷⁰ Janz to ACBN, Nov. 13, 1922, SAA 1118/26a; Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 293-294 (the document from August on 461-462 appears to be a concept, containing twelve conditions, whereas the document of October contains only nine); abstract appendix in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, Sept. 6, 1922, SAA 1118/175; appendix of Oct. 10, 1922, SAA 1118/012b/5580.
- ⁷¹ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 299-300. A *desyatina* is 2.7 acres.
- ⁷² Fleischer to Ewert, Jan. 1, 1922, Fleischer to Mumaw, Jan. 4, 1922, SAA 1118/009a; Jacob Ewert to Fleischer, Feb. 20, 1922, SAA 1118/009d/2401; Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 295-298, 306-307; see also "Amerikaans hulpwerk in Rusland," *De Zondagsbode*, Apr. 9, 1922.
- ⁷³ Since November 1918, Constantinople was occupied and controlled by Allied forces (Great Britain, France, Italy, and Greece), John Freely, *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 292.
- ⁷⁴ Probably Stoltzfus rented the piece of land for a year, assuming the refugees would have managed to emigrate by autumn 1922.
- ⁷⁵ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 99-106, 110; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen and Sons, 1962), 76-79; Minutes, Sept. 17, 1921, SAA 1118/022; Schröder to Fleischer, Jan. 27, May 9 and 24, 1922, SAA 1118/013a, 014b.
- ⁷⁶ Fleischer, *Hulpwerk*, 25.
- ⁷⁷ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 103,105; business cards, Stoltzfus and Zook with notes, SAA 1118/010a; report, Mar. 29, 1922, SAA 1118/047; correspondence, Stoltzfus-Fleischer, Apr. 21 and 22, June 6, 1922, SAA 1118/010b and 011a.

- ⁷⁸ Zook to Fleischer, Aug. 9, 1922, SAA 1118/011d.
- ⁷⁹ Schröder to Fleischer, Jan. 27, May 9 and 24, 1922, SAA 1118/013a, 014b.
- ⁸⁰ John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 121.
- ⁸¹ In March 1922 they had turned to consul Donkers in Tiflis for help with immigration to Brazil, referring to their Dutch background and language. The Dutch minister of foreign affairs forwarded the request to Fleischer. Donkers to Buitenlandse Zaken, Mar. 27, 1922; Buitenlandse Zaken to Fleischer, Apr. 29, 1922, SAA 1118/010c/3407; Dirks to Willink, Jan. 11, 1923, SAA/1118/15a/10.001.
- ⁸² Fleischer had asked Willink for advice; he had told him it would be best for the refugees to return to their communities. Report to *dagelijks bestuur*, July 28, 1922, SAA 1118/018; Fleischer to Schröder, July 31, 1922, SAA 1118/011b.
- ⁸³ Harder in short report, Willink to Fleischer, Mar. 1923, SAA 1118/152.
- ⁸⁴ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 109; Epp, *Exodus*, 79–80.
- ⁸⁵ Dirks to Willink, Jan. 11, 1923, SAA/1118/15a/10.002; Willink, report, Mar. 1923, SAA 1118/152; Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 109. In his presentation at the meeting of the *dagelijks bestuur* on March 8, 1923, Willink does not refer to the situation in Batum. According to Toews, *Czars*, 128–129, everybody who had wanted to emigrate had managed to do so by August 1923, but he is also uncertain about the number of refugees in Batum because of the “continuous influx and exodus,” and he does not mention refugees staying in Batum or returning to the Crimea or Ukraine, as Willink does.
- ⁸⁶ Schröder to Fleischer, Sept. 8, 1922, SAA 1118/11d. Willink also thought the NRE’s support insufficient, short report, Mar. 1923, SAA 1118/152.
- ⁸⁷ Schröder to Fleischer, Jan. 27, May 9 and 24, 1922, SAA 1118/013a, 014b.
- ⁸⁸ Schröder was not exaggerating: minor offenders and serious criminals were put together; prisoners were expected to have relatives who took care of the necessary food, etc. Schröder to Fleischer, May 9, 1923, SAA 1118/014b/8831; Vladimir Alexandrov, *The Black Russian* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2013), 237–238.
- ⁸⁹ Schröder to Fleischer, Sept. 26, 1923, SAA 1118/014c.
- ⁹⁰ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 329. According to Tatyana P. Nazarova, *Blagotvoritel’naja Deyatel’nost’ zaroebezjnykh mennonitskich organizatsii v Sovetskom gosoeदारstve (1920–1930 gg)* (Volgograd, 2013), 261–265, the AMR distributed at least 8.8 million rations, of which 7.3 million were distributed in Ukraine.
- ⁹¹ A *pud* is 16.4 kilograms.
- ⁹² Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 217; Ostasheva, *Perelome*, 75–76. But A. Miller, “Relief,” 130, gives a much higher number: 38,600, and a cost of \$ 0.75 to feed a person for one month.
- ⁹³ Ostasheva, *Perelome*, 76; Nazarova, *Deyatel’nost’*, 265.
- ⁹⁴ This is the ration as mentioned by Slagel in Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 216–217, but Ostasheva in *Perelome*, 75, refers to 440–750 kilocalories. One calorie (in American) equals 1 kcal, so both are correct.
- ⁹⁵ Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 69–84; Minutes, Mar. 8, 1922, in SAA 1118/009/2500. At the time of their visit to Holland, the Northern Americans had collected already more than a million dollars, the Dutch Doopsgezinden no more than f120,000.
- ⁹⁶ GAMEO, s.v. “World Mennonite Membership Distribution,” https://gameo.org/index.php?title=World_Mennonite_Membership_Distribution.

- ⁹⁷ Jongens, report 7, SAA 1118/151.
- ⁹⁸ Ostasheva, *Perelome*, 75–76; list of delivered cargo in SAA 1118/108; Dyck, *Troubles*, 193, 194, 196. The ingredients of a standard Dutch package added up to a nutritional value of 10,140 kcal for two weeks, which is 724 calories daily, <https://www.voedingswaardetabel.nl/voedingswaarde>.
- ⁹⁹ According to Slagel, an American ration cost about \$0.015, and it took \$0.75 to feed one person one month. Among the AMR workers, it appears to be common information that 13,000 persons could be fed one month for \$10,000. It's not clear where this information came from. Was this the amount paid to the ARA warehouses for the delivery of the necessary food to keep the kitchens running for a month? Hiebert and Miller, *Feeding*, 218.
- ¹⁰⁰ Miller, "Relief," 126; Bartels to Janz, Mar. 8, 1922, noted that Miller had only \$10,000 at his disposal, which would be too little to feed the colonies, SAA 1118/010a/2635; Willink to ACBN, July 28, 1922, SAA 1118/018.
- ¹⁰¹ Fisher, *Famine*, 154, 169, refers to Hoover expecting the Soviets to buy wheat in Bulgaria, and that transport cost the Americans about \$8 per ton, for Europeans, only \$5.
- ¹⁰² Audit report C. J. Lambrechtsen, Oct., 1926, in personal archive of F. R. Willink.
- ¹⁰³ Correspondence in SAA 1118/177.
- ¹⁰⁴ Krehbiel, *Diary*, June 8, 1922.
- ¹⁰⁵ "Kort verslag van de reis naar Berlijn door T. O. Hylkema 16–20 juni 1924, "SA 1118/020; Willink to ACBN, minutes July 28, 1922, SAA 1118/018.