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# Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia

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There can be no doubt, I think, that the possession of money causes people to take a more favorable view of this world in comparison with the next. It is also sound strategy. There is that terrible needle through which the affluent must be threaded before they can emerge in paradise. Accordingly, if you are either rich or a camel you should, as a purely practical calculation, enjoy life now. (John Kenneth Galbraith, *The age of uncertainty*, London, 1977, p.43).

One view of history is that it is the study of the contradictions implicit in all human existence. Groups like the Mennonites, who have attempted to create separate communities set apart from the larger society, from dominant ideologies and prevailing trends, have a history particularly rich in such contradictions. In nineteenth century Russia, Mennonite communities faced a number of problems, some generated from within, others by forces beyond their control. Elsewhere I have dealt with some of these contradictions, especially that between the maintenance of old traditions in a closed order and the appeals of a 'modern' world of change, progress and an open community.<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this opposition manifested themselves in many areas of Mennonite life: in religious ideology, concepts of the person, the sense of community, attitudes to knowledge and education, national identity and so on. The Mennonites came to terms with most of these problems in Russia, but only at the expense of transforming their way of life and by abandoning many of the ideas, values and practices their ancestors had staunchly maintained for centuries. The transformation of Mennonite life in Russia, however, threw up new contradictions and Mennonite attempts to come to terms with the difficulties contributed to that sense of vitality in community life which was so apparent before the Mennonite commonwealth was shattered and swept away after 1917. One of the greatest

challenges the Mennonites had to face, both within and outside their own communities, was that of wealth. In Russia they created not only a distinctive way of life, but also a world prosperous beyond the wildest dreams of the first settlers. The dilemmas of wealth for Mennonites in Imperial Russia is the subject of this article.

### A measure of Mennonite wealth in late Imperial Russia

It is impossible to present exact statistics of Mennonite activities in Russia, especially in the years immediately before 1914 when the Mennonite population had reached over 100,000 and was spread across the wide expanse of the Russian Empire. Some indication of the total value of Mennonite property can be gauged, however, from the valuation carried out by the Forestry Commission to raise money through taxation to support the Mennonite alternative service programme. In 1909 it valued Mennonite property at over 245 million rubles (R from now on); in 1914 the figure was 276 million.<sup>2</sup> Given that the Mennonite population for 1909 can be estimated at 100,000 people, and 104,000 for 1914, this means that each Mennonite man, woman and child owned property valued between 2460R and 2654R. The valuation of property by the Commission was undoubtedly only a fraction of its true worth; Rempel states that in 1914 the value was estimated by *volost* (local government) officials at between 350 and 400 million R, a figure they believed to be on the conservative side.<sup>3</sup> Although we will never know the true value of Mennonite capital in Russia, these figures indicate its extent.

Mennonite wealth, however, must be considered in a wider perspective. The regional breakdown of the 1909 figures reveal, as Ehrt pointed out long ago, that the bulk of this wealth was concentrated in southern Russia, near to the areas of first Mennonite settlement (Table 1).<sup>4</sup> This is not surprising, as the settlements at Orenburg, at Terek and in Siberia, were all recent and, as the Mennonites had often experienced years of hardship pioneering the new lands, the value of the land was not very high. The figures also reveal that much of the valuable property in southern Russia was not concentrated in the large colonies. Although over 30% of the total value — more than 77 million R — was registered in the founding colonies of Khortitsa and Molochnaya, these figures included only the property of people registered in the colonies, but who also owned property outside the colonies. Many of these people actually lived in cities near their businesses or on privately owned estates. Some of these groups can be seen in the other regional figures. The thousand Mennonites in the Krasnopol district were mainly estate owners (Gutsbesitzer) who, though few in number, owned about 10% of the estimated total Mennonite property.<sup>6</sup> Estate owners can also be clearly seen in the figures for Kharkov and the Crimea.

Place	Taxable Property in Rubles	Taxable Persons Aged 14-60	Taxable Property per head in Rubles
Molotchnaia			
Halbstadt	27,638,403	4,754	5,814
Gnadenfeld	20,234,850	4,150	4,876
Khortitsa	29,255,673	5,349	5,469
Krasnopol (Schöfeld and Brazol)	24,399,325	1,040	23,461
Melitopol City	20,480,306	395	51,849
Crimea	19,041,763	2,165	8,795
Nikolaipol (Jazykovo)	14,719,631	1,042	14,126
Berdiansk (Estate owners)	15,713,227	187	84,028
Berdiansk (city)	1,095,970	103	10,641
Kharkov	10,325,204	1,368	7,450
Schoenwiese	9,439,847	707	13,352
Memrik	9,141,192	1,528	5,983
Zagradovka	6,489,196	1,863	3,483
Neu-Khortitza (Baratov)	6,463,870	1,400	4,617
New York	6,310,424	1,423	4,435
Nikolaital (Borsenko)	4,589,127	463	9,912
Malyshino (Koeppental)	2,695,511	742	3,633
Alexandertal (Alt Samara)	3,283,290	474	6,927
Neu-Samara	4,310,048	1,520	2,836
Ufa	2,585,300	618	4,183
Caucasia (Kuban)	2,397,751	898	2,670
Omsk (SW Siberia)	3,348,089	1,240	2,700
Orenburg	1,655,603	2,263	732
Polish Mennonites	230,500	262	880
Terek	306,328	1,050	292
Volhynia	25,717	7	3,674
Kurkland	15,000	38	395
Pavlodor (SW Siberia)	16,610	1,087	15
TOTALS	<u>246,207,760</u>	<u>38,154</u>	Average <u>6,445</u>

TABLE 1: Taxable value of Mennonite property for the Forestry Service, 1909.

Land lay at the core of Mennonite wealth in Russia and big land-owners were considerably more wealthy than most colonists who in comparison with estate owners owned small plots. In 1910 Mennonites owned an estimated 800,000 *desiatin* (1 *desiatin* = 2.7 acres) of land in Russia; by 1914 this had risen to 1,200,000 *desiatin*.<sup>7</sup> About a third of this land was situated in new settlements founded since the late 1890s in land which was not nearly as valuable or productive as that in southern Russia. In southern Russia the value of land had risen steeply since 1900 when land was worth about 150R a *desiatin*; by 1910 it was worth over 300R a *desiatin*, and by 1914 between 450R and 500R.<sup>8</sup> Most of the estate owners were concentrated in southern Russia, where up to 50% of Mennonite land was in their hands. The capital worth of their property in proportion to all Mennonite capital was probably higher than the 23% suggested by Ehrst, who based his calculations on the figures of the Forestry Commissioners.<sup>9</sup> A different approach would be to calculate the value of estate land from the total area owned, a difficult task as exact figures of ownership are lacking. Figures for estates in Russia for 1908 and 1914 (Tables 2a and 2b) give some impression, but not all land owned or rented is included and figures for the Kharkov and Don regions, where there were large estates, are excluded. The figures indicate that almost 40% of estates were under 1000 *desiatin*, but some were much larger. Of estates in Taurida in 1914, three exceeded 5000 *desiatin* and three more 10,000 *desiatin*, the largest being 14,617 *desiatin*.<sup>12</sup> In 1910 the largest estate was put at over 18,000 *desiatin*.<sup>13</sup> According to Russian convention possession of an estate of at least 500 *desiatin* qualified the owner to be considered as a 'large-landowner'. If the total area of estate land for 1914 for the three provinces is valued at 250R a *desiatin*, the total value of the land is 82 million R; at 450R it rises to 148 million R. It is obvious that the calculations of the Forestry Commissioners was extremely conservative.

Such figures of land value do not include the worth of buildings, stock, equipment and machinery. A Mennonite who owned an estate of 3500 *desiatin* in Yekaterinoslav before 1914 valued his land at 450R a *desiatin* (1,575,000R), the buildings at 130,000R, stock at 157,000R and the equipment and machinery at 99,520R, giving a total capital value of almost two million rubles (1,962,020R).<sup>14</sup> By contrast an average farm (65 *desiatin*) in the colony of Khortitsa, probably including buildings, was valued in 1911 at between 20,000 and 25,000R and in 1914 at 30-35,000R;<sup>15</sup> stock and equipment would add another 5-10,000R to these figures. Farms in the Molochnaia were probably a little higher in value, in the daughter colonies of southern Russia, such as Memrik and Zagradovka, slightly lower. The value often depended on the site, the condition of the land, the age and condition of the buildings, so it is difficult to generalize about the value of colony land. Many farms were also half or even a

	Number of landowners	Land Total in des.	Av. Land in des.
Khortitsa	74	45,264	612
Molochnaia			
Halbstadt <i>volost</i>	124	140,338	1,132
Gnadenfeld <i>volost</i>	<u>75</u>	<u>26,537</u>	<u>354</u>
TOTALS	273	212,139	779

TABLE 2A: Mennonite landowners registered in Khortitsa and Molochnaia in 1908 (10)

	Size of Estate in <i>desiatin</i>				Total
	100-500	500-1000	1000-2000	over-2000	
Taurida Province	126	29	27	21	203
Yekaterinoslav Province	67	40	11	10	128
Samara Province	<u>43</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>53</u>
TOTALS	236	76	36	33	384
Totals of land owned in <i>desiatin</i>	70,800	57,000	58,500	142,000	328,300
Average size in <i>desiatin</i>	300	750	1,500	4,303	855

TABLE 2B: Mennonite landowners in three provinces of Russia in 1894 (11)

quarter of the full farms of 65 *desiatin*. But even the smallest Mennonite farm was larger and more productive than that of most peasants. In the provinces of southern Russia where 'Little' Russian peasants predominated — Kiev, Podolia, Volhynia, Chernigov, Kharkov, Kherson and Yekaterinoslav — the average size of peasant holdings decreased from 9 *desiatin* in 1897 to 6.3 *desiatin* in 1905. Although the situation in provinces to the east of the Dnepr was not as bad as in those to the west, the size of holdings was barely sufficient to meet basic subsistence requirements. Most peasants were forced to work for estate owners, richer peasants or colonists; others drifted to urban centres or migrated to new areas such as Siberia.<sup>16</sup>

Land, though, was not the only source of Mennonite wealth. By 1914 many Mennonites were businessmen and industrialists, some small but others who owned large concerns. Many were concerned with agriculture; producing agricultural machinery or involved with milling and

selling grain. In 1908 the Forestry Commissioners calculated the property value of Mennonite trade and industry at 5,595,878R. P. M. Friesen believed this to be grossly under-estimated because it did not include the true value of the industries, and because a number of firms were missing from the calculations.<sup>17</sup> The exact value of Mennonite industrial concerns is impossible to calculate, but in 1911 the eight largest producers of agricultural machines accounted for 6.2% of total Russian production with an annual value of over 3 million R (see Table 3a). The milling industry was also profitable although production and profits were subject to sharp rises and falls due to changes in supply and market conditions. Before the First World War the four largest Mennonite milling firms produced flour worth 6 million R a year (see Table 3b). There were also numerous small Mennonite businessmen and store owners, the most important of whom, Heinrich and Peter Heese of Yekaterinoslav, dealt in grain and flour to the value of 1,5 million R a year.<sup>20</sup>

Firm	Founding Capital in Rubles	Annual Production in Rubles	Number of Workers
Lepp & Wallmann	1,200,000	900,000	270
A. J. Koop	?	610,000	376
J. G. Niebuhr	?	450,000	350
J. J. Neufeld & Co.	250,000	350,000	200
J. A. & W. J. Classen	?	241,000	145
Franz & Schroeder	?	209,190	153
G. A. Klassen & Neufeld	?	200,442	140
J. Jansen & K. Neufeld	?	200,000	110
TOTALS	?	3,160,632	1,744

TABLE 3A: The eight leading Mennonite producers of agricultural machines, 1908. (18)

Niebuhr & Co., Alexandrovsk	3 million rubles
J. J. Siemens, Yekaterinoslav	1.5 million rubles
J. Siemens, Nikopol	0.8 million rubles
Peter Unger, Neu York	0.7 million rubles
TOTAL	6.0 million rubles

TABLE 3B: The four leading Mennonite millers and the value of their production c. 1914. (19)

These figures for businessmen and industrialists stress the value of their annual production rather than their capital. Figures for other Mennonite incomes are more difficult to obtain than statistics of their capital value. The figures for businessmen and industrialists do not indicate their incomes as their costs are not included, but their profits undoubtedly were considerable. So were those of estate owners. The owner of the Yekaterinoslav estate discussed above had an annual income from his grain, sheep and other stock of about 250,000R; as his costs were only just over 40,000R, this gave him a profit of over 200,000R a year.<sup>21</sup> By comparison, the income for a colony farmer was considerably less but varied from village to village and farm to farm. Some colony farmers used more scientific methods and more modern machines than others, while some specialized in particular crops or in breeding high quality stock which provided additional income. A colony farmer with a full farm could expect an income from between 3-8,000R before 1914 though some easily exceeded 10,000R. Costs varied according to family size, debts and life-style but rarely exceeded 1,500R a year; most were under a 1,000R.<sup>22</sup>

Some idea of the value of Mennonite incomes can be gauged by comparing them with the incomes of Russian labourers, Mennonite salaries and the prices of goods. Mennonite school teachers, though highly respected, were not well paid; their salaries ranged between 600R and 1,000R a year although teachers also often received free accommodation and contributions of food. A Russian worker employed on a farm or estate was paid between 60R and 90R for a 'season' (May to October) in 1914. A day-labourer during the important harvest and threshing period received about 1R a day. Female servants tended to be paid only half that of men, and a maid received about 50R a year but also free food and board.<sup>23</sup> A skilled factory worker in southern Russia earned 2R a day, and experienced smiths and moulders 4R-5R a day.<sup>24</sup> A plough cost 40-100R, a harvesting machine 150-200R and a steam thresher up to 8,000R. In the world of goods, a good quality piano was about 500R and in 1913 the cheapest model Ford automobile was 1,965R, the most expensive 3,175R; the popular Opel in 1914 was 2,850R. P. M. Friesen's *magnum-opus* cost 6R!<sup>25</sup>

Mennonite wealth in Russia before 1914 was thus considerable. The average Mennonite was far better off than most Russian peasants who were his neighbours, and often his labourers. But among Mennonites there was also a great disparity of wealth. Ehrt calculated that the land-owners, industrialists and merchants, although constituting only 2.8% of the Mennonite population, owned 34% of Mennonite capital; as we have seen, even this figure is probably too low. Colony farmers, who represented 71.2% of the total population, owned most of the remaining capital, though again this was not evenly distributed. This still leaves over 25% of the Mennonite population with little or no capital.<sup>26</sup> The distribu-

tion of incomes likewise showed inequalities. How had this situation come about in Russia? What were the consequences for Mennonite life in Russia?

### The sources and development of wealth <sup>27</sup>

The bulk of Mennonite wealth was created in Russia. This is not to deny that some early settlers from Prussia possessed considerable capital which they increased in Russia, but many of those who later accumulated fortunes started from quite humble backgrounds.<sup>28</sup> After an initial period of hardship, most Mennonites prospered. This prosperity, however, was not the result of God's special favour upon His chosen people, nor a consequence of any inherent Mennonite genetic superiority over their Slav neighbours. Mennonite religious ideology, which stressed hard work and a frugal life-style, certainly contributed to their economic development but the Mennonites had settled in a region which particularly favoured their prosperity. New Russia had one of the fastest expanding economies of any region of the Empire in the nineteenth century; cheap land, good soils and climate, an expanding population to provide cheap labour, good communications and the development of local industry all contributed to a thriving economy. Mennonites were ideally suited to take full advantage of the situation.<sup>29</sup> In this regard the beneficence of the Russian government in the first seventy years of settlement should not be forgotten. The Mennonites received special loans, stock advice and other favours not generally available to most Russians.

While most colonists prospered, the really large fortunes were made by Mennonites who expanded their horizons beyond the colonies. Money could certainly be accumulated in the colonies, but usually only at the expense of other Mennonites. Certain Mennonite entrepreneurs gained control of monopolies in the colonies, supplying timber to the colonists or purchasing licences which gave them the right to brew alcohol or to own inns or mills.<sup>30</sup> Another way to gather capital was to sell Mennonite goods made within the colonies in distant cities or markets; Mennonite foodstuffs, such as butter, cheese and hams, as well as crafts products were traded in this fashion. Enterprising young men carted these items all over southern Russia and gathered not only good profits but also experience of the potential of the region for further development. Some of these merchant adventurers settled down and became affluent colony farmers, their wealth being divided among their heirs. But others increased their capital further by investing it in new ventures, particularly in sheep herds.

The original Mennonite settlers in Russia had hoped to re-establish a mixed-farming economy such as they had known in Prussia. The land,

the climate and a lack of market for their goods forced them to reconsider this. Encouraged by Russian officials, they took up new crops and new ways of farming. The production of silk was one new industry which had mixed success, but the sheep herding, mainly for wool, proved extremely profitable. Special merino stock was introduced, and soon large herds were to be found all over Russia. The colonists did well from the new industry, mainly from sheep kept in communal herds. Individuals, however, also began to farm on their own and to satisfy their increasing demand for pasture, rented vast tracks of grasslands from Russians on as yet unsettled crown land (including colony land), from Nogai Tartars and from private land holders. After 1820 the profits from wool increased, in spite of periods of drought and severe winters which decimated stock.<sup>31</sup>

The returns to individual herd owners was considerable. Johann Cornies on his Yushanlee estate of 500 *desiatin* made a profit of over 400,000R on his sheep between 1825 and 1845, that is over 20,000R a year. In a single year (1837) he made a profit of 51,000R.<sup>32</sup> This was probably only a part of Cornies' real income; at one time he rented over 32,000 *desiatin* for his sheep and he also bred cattle and horses for profit as well as experimenting in arable farming.<sup>33</sup> In the late 1830s his annual income was estimated at up to 60,000R.<sup>34</sup> Much of this money was ploughed back into various projects, some in the colonies, but as the surplus colony land he rented was settled by new immigrants Cornies purchased land outside the colony and founded a private estate. By 1841 he owned over 5000 *desiatin* of land, most at Tashchenak, where other Mennonites also purchased estates.<sup>35</sup>

Cornies, however, was neither the richest Mennonite nor the greatest landowner before 1850. This honour belongs to Wilhelm Martens, who rose from humble beginnings in Schoenwiese, accumulated capital by trade, settled in the Molochnaia and took up sheep farming on a grand scale.<sup>36</sup> In the late 1830s his annual income was calculated as up to 100,000R a year, he owned over 33,000 *desiatin* by 1841, and at his death in 1845 he was reputed to own 75-100,000 *desiatin*.<sup>37</sup> Although Martens' land was divided among his heirs, including his sons and step-sons, the value of his holdings was not markedly reduced. Changes in land use increased and the descendants of these first land owners consolidated and even increased their wealth by making strategic marriages. The politics of kinship and marriage were well known to all Mennonites, as were the advantages of good stock management; the wealthy landowners soon established a tight network of kin and friends, sealed by marriage alliances. The resulting labyrinthine pedigrees, masquerading as genealogies, have been lovingly preserved to this day.<sup>38</sup>

The wealth of these early Mennonites was measured not so much by the size of their land holdings, as by the size of their flocks. But after the 1840s the price of wool began to fall as competition from cheap Australian

wool increased. The colonists had already diversified their economies, breeding good cattle, developing a dairying industry and planting more crops, particularly wheat.<sup>39</sup> The estate owners likewise gradually turned to arable farming, increasing their incomes in the process. Land prices also rose rapidly, increasing the value of their owners' capital.

The period immediately after the Crimean War was a time of great change in Russia. Mennonites who had taken advantage of the war economy and the subsequent inflationary period used their capital to purchase land, often in modest quantities, outside the colonies. Here they utilized many of the farming methods which had been developed in the colonies. Often, families or friends purchased an estate from a Russian nobleman and divided it among themselves; the Krasnopol settlements began in this way and Khortitsa settlers founded similar estates.<sup>40</sup> Although many of the Russian nobility possessed no land, and those who did had only small estates, the landowners in southern Russia tended to own extensive estates, most of which were under-used or mortgaged.<sup>41</sup> In 1856, 36% of the 119,110 estates in Russia were mortgaged and between 1889 and 1900 the number of mortgaged estates doubled.<sup>42</sup> Most were mortgaged to the government who, for political reasons, were unwilling to foreclose on their owners. Nevertheless many were willing to sell in order to settle debts or to raise money which was often dissipated. Between 1877 and 1905 gentry landownership declined by 28.6% in 49 provinces of European Russia; in the southern steppe region the decline was over 49% and in the Dnepr-Don area over 34%. In the same period the average size of gentry holdings in the southern steppe region fell from 1330 to just 526 *desiatin*.<sup>43</sup> Although the emancipation of the peasants in 1861 also encouraged gentry to sell unprofitable estates, increased competition for land by enterprising peasants and colonists forced up land prices in southern Russia.

The shift to intensive arable farming mainly for grain growing not only assisted landowners in the colonies and on estates, but also provided an important boost to Mennonite industry, then in its infancy. Up to 1861 most Mennonite industry had barely progressed beyond the level of village crafts. The largest concern was Johann Klassen's cloth factory in Halbstadt, but this never employed more than one hundred workers.<sup>44</sup> Larger scale Mennonite industry first took off after 1860, particularly on Khortitsa which was better situated than Molochnaia to take advantage of Russian industrial developments to the north east of the colony and improved communications with the building of railroads. The story of the pioneer Khortitsa industrialists has been told before, though a detailed history of the rise of Mennonite industry in the context of Russian industrialization is still to be written.<sup>45</sup> Mennonite waggons and particularly agricultural machines, often copies of foreign models adapted and simplified to meet local conditions, were produced mainly

in the early years. Eventually larger factories were needed, more modern machinery and larger numbers of workers. Massive capital was involved, and large profits.

Milling also took off after the Crimean War and made many Mennonites very wealthy, but it often proved a risky business and many lost fortunes and went bankrupt as prices dropped in the agricultural depression and they could not meet their debts.<sup>46</sup> Less well known are the Mennonite traders who dealt in a wide range of goods, particularly grain merchants and agents for imported machinery who tended to live outside the colonies in the chief ports and urban centres.<sup>47</sup> Members of these three groups — industrialists, millers and merchants — tended to associate with one another; many purchased private estates and married into the families of the landed elite, thus combining the fortunes of the wealthiest Mennonites in Russia.

In the colonies the owner of a full farm also benefited from the shift to grain farming; the mechanization of agriculture allowed him to bring more of his land under the plough, and harvesting machines eased the difficulties of getting the harvest in. Mechanisation overcame the problems of a shortage of labour among Mennonites themselves, but as profits increased Mennonite farmers turned increasingly to Russian labour to help get the most from their farms. Labour was more expensive in southern than in central Russia, but it was cheap in comparison to the potential returns from production. Most of the labour was also seasonal which also reduced the costs. In the 1840s less than 400 Russians were employed in the Molochnaia. Although by the 1850s this number had risen considerably, in 1904 a Mennonite could look back on this period and note how different it was from the present when practically every farm employed 2-4 seasonal workers and some a worker for the entire year.<sup>48</sup> This does not include the Russian maid found in many homes, and other servants in the larger households. In the years before 1914 migrant workers from central Russia were a common sight in the southern colonies, often involved in building rather than agricultural work which was carried out by local 'Little' Russian labour.

Estate owners employed labour on a much larger scale than colonists. The exact number depended on the area farmed, crops grown, the degree of mechanization and the availability of local labour. Most estates with over 500 *desiatin* employed 10-20 full-time workers and 40-100 extra seasonal workers, though sometimes this could be over 200 on larger estates. Household staff also varied in size with anything from 3 to 10 staff, including maids, a coachman and, in later years, a chauffeur.<sup>49</sup>

Mennonite wealth, in the colonies and outside, in the context of the formation of the wider economy among Mennonites, was therefore founded and developed in southern Russia. Ehrt argued that before 1914 there were two economic systems among Mennonites, first the rich

landowners, industrialists and merchants who were involved in a capitalistic economy, and secondly the bulk of the population living in the colonies, which was a traditional 'peasant' economy.<sup>50</sup> Although in the early period of settlement Mennonite forms of production may have been based on the needs of self-sustenance and founded mainly on simple technology and family labour, the aim from the outset was to produce a surplus for external sale. One could argue that the aim of the majority of Mennonites was not to become extremely wealthy, but merely to secure for themselves a comfortable existence and sufficient capital to ensure the future of the members of their often large families. But achieving this often resulted in a closer connection with the wider world and involvement with the capitalist economy of southern Russia. By 1914 all colonists were actively involved in a sophisticated market economy, dependent upon prices set on a world wheat market, based on the investment of considerable capital in land and machinery and the employment of external labour from a competitive labour market.<sup>51</sup> Although not as rationally organized as many agricultural communities in western Europe, the Mennonite colonies undoubtedly were far more advanced than most Russian agricultural peasant communities. The difference between the economies of the colonists and estate owners, industrialists and merchants was not one of kind, but merely one of scale. This fact was to have important implications for the structure of Mennonite society and the forms of social relations between individuals in the Mennonite world.

### Status, wealth and class

Although it was never articulated in any Confession of Faith, all Mennonites were ideally equal in status. In everyday life no one could claim to be superior to their neighbour in religiosity or ability. Members of congregations were supposed to support each other and re-distribute earthly riches among the needy in their community. The reality was quite different. Already in Prussia before migration to Russia, considerable inequality in terms of employment and wealth had existed. Social distinctions and social attitudes based upon status differences were transferred from Prussia to Russia. In Prussia some Mennonites were affluent farmers and merchants, but many were small craftsmen eking out a living in urban areas. A few were servants in Mennonite households.<sup>52</sup> The perception of status differences was based on occupation and ties of kinship. In a predominantly rural economy, farming ranked above other occupations and Biblical justification could be found for this belief. Certain families enjoyed higher status than others, and many religious leaders were drawn from families with a long tradition of serving their congregations. While many of these social differences and attitudes persisted in Russia, there were also important changes.

Owning a farm and tilling the soil continued to be an important status marker in Russia to 1914, but new occupations challenged the established status system. The introduction of local government in the colonies established a hierarchical system of authority not connected with religious office and a skilled and educated salaried staff with links to Russian officialdom. Although not as status-ridden as the Russian bureaucracy, Mennonite holders of high office and senior clerks expected, and received, respect. These men were often highly educated, and it was access to education which challenged the older status system in the colonies during the nineteenth century. The status of school teachers rose rapidly and the possession of educational qualifications provided Mennonites with greater employment opportunities. Many young men, inspired by their teachers, themselves became teachers, while others trained as doctors, lawyers or engineers. By the early twentieth century this educated, professional élite constituted a distinctive group in Mennonite society — the intelligentsia — who were at the forefront of Mennonite cultural achievements in the years before 1914.<sup>53</sup>

The status of educated and professional people was only grudgingly acknowledged by the majority of colony farmers who referred to the intelligentsia in derogatory terms. Their attitude towards wealthy Mennonite industrialists and landowners, however, was ambiguous. Craftsmen were an essential part of colony life, but few were respected, and for many years merchants were mistrusted and excluded from holding religious office.<sup>54</sup> But many craftsmen expanded their concerns and became wealthy industrialists, merchants and estate owners — ‘farmers’ on a grand scale. The attitude of most of the colony farmers to this group was respect tinged with envy; many a farmer with a sense of ambition fancied himself as the owner of an estate. At the other end of the scale colony farmers looked down upon poorer Mennonites, small craftsmen and owners of plots, bargemen, carters and labourers without land. These people lived on the edge of some villages, at the fringe of the community or in industrial areas away from colony villages and at the bottom of the social system. They were often viewed as lacking the will to work hard and improve themselves. They also seemed to lack the moral virtues of most Mennonites. Certain poorer villages were believed to possess people of a lower quality than others, while some prosperous settlements were particularly favoured, especially in the search for suitable marriage partners.<sup>55</sup>

Although many of these attitudes in the colonies were based on old prejudices, other factors besides education influenced the ascription of status. The most important of these was wealth. In the colonies, differences in wealth highlighted existing social distinctions based on occupation and descent. Social attitudes also changed. The struggle between the landowners and the landless, particularly in Molochnaia in

the 1860s, was largely a struggle over wealth and power. The landowners wanted not only to keep colony land for themselves, but also to increase their living standards and repress the landless. This would provide them with a source of cheap labour as they expanded labour intensive arable farming for their own profit. Economic interests and self-interest overruled any concern with social justice or a sense of communal responsibility in a society supposedly based on religious principles. Although the problem was resolved in favour of many of the landless, some were still excluded from sharing fully in the prosperity of the colonies. The foundation of daughter colonies also relieved the pressure on the poor, but inequalities remained, particularly in the political sphere.<sup>56</sup>

By 1914 Mennonite society in the colonies had all the appearance of a class society, although a number of factors disguised the reality of the situation. Most of the poor had moved away from rural villages to urban areas or to daughter colonies. The feeling of community was also still strong. In part this was based on an old sense of common identity, of being 'Mennonite' and existing in a distinctive religious community. But it was also a function of the closed-off world of the colonies, and the continuing importance of ties of kinship, marriage and friendship. If anything, the sense of strict religious separation had weakened by the early twentieth century and Mennonites, like many minority groups in Russia, were concerned with their cultural continuance in a state dominated by increasing Great Russian chauvinism. Thus in the claustrophobic social world of the colonies, a feeling of attachment to place and community and the need to resist total commitment to the wider world, united Mennonites, making them less conscious of the widening divisions in their own society. In some ways it also concealed from many their position in wider Russian society.

The position of the really rich Mennonites in the emergence of class in Mennonite society is more ambiguous. Mennonite society was dominated by colony life, and wealthy Mennonites tended to live outside the colonies on their estates, and later, often in cities. As has already been noted, they married among themselves, and could be considered as constituting a separate social group. Certainly the main feature of their life they liked to stress was their independence, that they were their own masters, farmed as they liked and disposed of their property in their own way.<sup>57</sup> The colonists were looked upon as a people constrained by official regulations and the watchful eyes of their neighbours. This independence and separateness was really an illusion. Estate owners and other wealthy Mennonites maintained close contact with the colonies, where kin and friends were regularly visited. They were also involved in colony affairs; they paid their taxes to various funds, donated large sums to charitable institutions and invested capital in the colonies. They were members of the colony religious congregations, and their children, usu-

ally after initially receiving private tutoring on estates, attended colony *Zentralschulen*. The tutors employed on estates sometimes married into the ranks of the wealthy landowners and industrialists bringing with them an interest in education and culture and the next generation of this group formed part of the intelligentsia.<sup>58</sup>

Estate owners, industrialists and businessmen also had closer ties with wider Russian society than most colonists. Being large employers of 'Little' Russian labour, they knew the world of the peasant better than most colonists. Their children often grew up with 'Little' Russian children and, when sent to the colonies for higher education or conscripted into the Forestry Service, they experienced difficulty adapting to the new conditions.<sup>59</sup> Estate owners were known in the colonies as the Mennonite 'gentry' and although some may have affected the manners of the Russian nobility, at home they lived more like ordinary affluent Mennonite colonists. Some larger estate owners and industrialists certainly had contacts with Russian provincial nobility, and in some aspects their lives were influenced by the manners of these groups.<sup>60</sup> One must conclude that the really rich Mennonites were part of the class structure of Mennonite society, but in a sense they also transcended it.

The changing status system, increasing affluence and the emergence of social class in Mennonite society had a negative effect on the sense of community. But in certain areas of life increasing affluence also had a positive effect. The status of children improved. Children once had worked beside their parents in the field and farmyard, and although they still assisted in such chores, they were no longer viewed as an essential part of the labour force.<sup>61</sup> Childhood was seen as a time when children should be developing into proper adults and busy at school. The same change occurred in the status of women. Although still burdened by bearing and raising children, they worked less in the fields and more in the home, assisted by Russian maids and sometimes other servants. Labour-saving devices such as sewing machines and primitive washing machines reduced household chores, and by 1914 houses were being installed with running water, gas lights and bathrooms. Women also received better education than in the past, and were part of the intelligentsia. The status of women thus improved, although in the households of older conservative farmers, women were expected to know their place: subordinated to men.

### The manifestations of wealth

In 1856 a visitor to the Mennonite colonies noted that the settlers lived a plain life; pomp and luxury was spurned and clothes were simple, made of plain cloth with dark colours which reminded the traveller of the dress of fifty years previously.<sup>62</sup> But there were signs of change. As early

as the 1820s Daniel Schlatter had noted that some Mennonites favoured modern fashions<sup>63</sup> and wealthy Mennonites dressed and behaved differently from ordinary colonists. In the late 1840s another visitor to the Molochnaia home of Wilhelm Martens' brother noted that the big living rooms were 'stuffed with furniture' and 'old-fashioned Japanese porcelain'. Although Martens' own fortune was estimated at half a million rubles the visitor commented that he lived 'a simple life not spoilt by wealth', but he also noted that he had recently spent 4,000 paper R on a journey to spas in the Caucasus.<sup>64</sup> By 1914 the affluence of the wealthy was more extravagantly displayed and even in the colonies the plain, simple lifestyle was increasingly a thing of the past. Mennonite tastes were distinctly bourgeois and, although they had little direct contact with the emergent middle classes of western Europe, Mennonites read books, magazines and newspapers about such lifestyles.<sup>65</sup> Many Mennonites now possessed enough money to purchase consumer goods and to display their affluence. There is little doubt that the wealthy industrialists and estate owners set the trend in this regard and, however much the older generations despised such extravagance, some young people were attracted by such show of wealth.

The changes can be seen most clearly in the photographic collections of Mennonite life in Imperial Russia, starting in the 1850s and continuing up to 1914.<sup>66</sup> Even in the later photographs many old people are still dressed in the plain, dark coarse cloth favoured in earlier generations, but these give way about the late 1890s to finer cloth in well-cut forms; men are in neat suits, women in lighter coloured and even patterned dresses. The pictures of estate owners show greater elaboration, possibly earlier than many of the colonists. One should say, however, that many of the pictures are carefully posed, people are dressed in their best rather than everyday clothes. But later prints are more naturalistic and reflect everyday existence. The wearing of watches on chains among men and items of jewellery, lace and other frills on women also became more common in later photographs. Advertisements for clothes in the Mennonite press also give some idea of taste and costs.

Houses also show great variation. In the colonies they continued to be built in established patterns but timber frame houses give way to brick houses, the number of out-houses increase, and external walls and decorations become more elaborate. By 1914 new, two-storeyed houses were being built in certain areas. It is interesting to note that the *Kleine Gemeinde* during the 1840s objected to the colour and decoration on house gables in the Molochnaia; by 1914 such decorations were common.<sup>67</sup> Estate owners who built their own houses tended to do so on the pattern of colony dwellings, although on a slightly larger scale, especially in the extent of the barns, stalls and other outhouses. Some estate owners purchased existing houses of Russian noblemen and lived in a grander

scale. In later years a number of estate owners built much larger houses in the prevailing Russian style of grand country houses.<sup>68</sup>

The interior of houses also became more ornate. Finer furniture replaced older home-made pieces, and photographs, heavy hanging and curtains decorated rooms. Pianos became particularly popular as music was perhaps the one art form approved of by most Mennonites, although finer instruments were found mostly in the houses of the intelligentsia. The older style houses restricted what could be done to transform interiors, while some country houses became quite palatial. But the household was largely women's domain and men controlled the purse strings; money was better spent on machinery, stock or other capital equipment than on furnishings. In this regard many colonists no longer relied on their working carts for everyday transport, and more sophisticated vehicles became a common sight in the colonies. Estate owners and industrialists possessed particularly fine 'coaches', often with skilled Russian coachmen and special teams of horses carefully matched for colour and build and which had been trained to trot in a distinctive fashion.<sup>69</sup> The introduction of motor cars into southern Russia was noted with special interest by Mennonites and many wealthy persons purchased them. The manufacturers and distributors advertised the vehicles widely in the Mennonite press in the years before 1914. Telephones were also coming into use and were a sign of wealth and status.

Mr. Martens' trip to the spas reveals another facet of wealthy Mennonite life: the desire to travel, to see the world and be seen in the world. Such journeys were not restricted to Russia. Like many wealthy Russians, Mennonites liked to travel in Europe and even to America, but instead of the Riviera they preferred Berlin and visits to factories and industrial exhibitions in Paris, London and Chicago.<sup>70</sup> Some of these trips were also made to seek medical advice; like many Russians, Mennonites distrusted local doctors.

The life of wealthy Mennonites, however, was not one of self-indulgence and conspicuous consumption. Wealthy Mennonites made considerable financial contributions to the colonies which helped sustain and develop the quality of life there. Educational institutions were particularly well endowed, and the high standards maintained in such institutions and their relative independence from Russian control contributed greatly to the continued prosperity of the colonies.<sup>71</sup> Innovations in education, such as the Commerce School in Halbstadt, received very large sums from wealthy individuals. Also supported were hospitals, including the mental institution of Bethania, the school for the deaf at Tiege, orphanages and old people's homes.<sup>72</sup> The extent of such contributions is unknown, but one estate owner, Kornelius Toews, gave 21,000R to charitable and educational bodies including 10,000R to Bethania.<sup>73</sup> Others

certainly made larger contributions. These voluntary contributions were on top of the taxes the wealthy paid in support of the Forestry Service.<sup>74</sup>

### Masters and servants

The increasing prosperity of the colonies and the substantial financial contributions of the really wealthy helped maintain a Mennonite way of life apparently separated from the wider world. The colonies appeared as prosperous islands in a larger Russian sea. The fields, villages and houses contrasted markedly with most peasant settlements in the region; the colonists spoke a different language from the 'Little' Russians in everyday affairs and maintained an apparent air of superiority in their dealings with neighbours, both Russian and other foreign colonists. Contacts between the majority of Mennonites and outsiders, even in 1914, were limited. Where they did occur they were predominantly in the work situation, in the form of master and servant, a relationship increasingly marked by differences in wealth and opportunity.

Mennonites liked to believe that they maintained very good relations with their Russian workers. Masters they might have been, but they were fair employers. They laboured in the fields and yards, side by side with their workers. Many estate owners liked to stress this point; after all, the employment of labourers was not a means to conspicuous leisure, but to greater profit. The photographs of some wealthy Mennonites, however, show gross obesity was common and some state owners were so large they had to be carried from the houses to their carriage in order to drive across the yard! At work there may have been a sharing of tasks, but there was no equality of reward. At night the colonist and estate owner returned to their comfortable homes, the workers to their village, the barn or rough quarters. At the end of the season the worker was paid off, the Mennonite sold his produce and the rewards of their joint labour were very unfairly distributed. This is not to deny that many Mennonite employers treated their servants and labourers well. Some were allowed to eat with the family, others were given gifts and particular amenities and, in certain cases, domestic servants were taught to read and write. But the relationship of master and servant in the Russian environment was of long standing and well entrenched. Many of the peasants had been serfs or children of serfs, and a sense of hierarchy and subservience in relationships was difficult to change. Mennonites adopted many of these attitudes in their dealings with workers; employees were occasionally physically abused and rough justice was meted out to any caught stealing or suspected of other misdemeanours.

How were Mennonite masters viewed by their workers? This question cannot be answered easily, as there is little evidence. But the problem can be considered in a wider context by attempting to place the Men-

nonites in the larger Russian social world before 1914. Russian society was markedly hierarchical, but the hierarchy was based on ancient principles, on inherited rank and privileged status rather than upon wealth or occupation. Those who were recognized as of noble rank often had little money, no land and no particular occupation. Employment in government service gave a man a position in a hierarchy of offices and beyond a certain grade a man and his family entered the ranks of the nobility. The lower bureaucracy, however, was largely despised by the nobility, the intelligentsia and the peasants. The nobility, especially land-holding nobles, however, were expected to involve themselves in local affairs and hold positions of authority in local governmental and administrative bodies. Although not of noble rank, wealthy Mennonite landowners played a significant role in some local governments, holding senior positions such as Chairmen of *zemstva* (district councils) and mayors of major cities.<sup>75</sup> Two wealthy landowning Mennonites were elected to the Russian Duma.<sup>76</sup> Estate owners and industrialists therefore were associated with the upper ranks of Russian Provincial society.

The position of the colonists was more ambiguous. Their closest social group consisted of urban tradesmen, shopkeepers, petty-bourgeois industrialists or richer peasants who had taken advantage of post-emancipation conditions to raise their status. This group, in a minority in most areas, was not organized into a separate estate and was generally despised by other sections of Russian society. The nobility looked upon them as vulgar parvenu; the peasants viewed them as people who had betrayed their class. But members of this social group were often not Russian and thus despised for additional reasons. Many came from minority groups, were Old Believers, Jews, Poles, Armenians or Greeks, all of whom were particularly active in southern Russia.<sup>77</sup> Although in their affluence and lifestyle, as well as their alienness in terms of belief, language and culture, Mennonite colonists resembled such despised groups, they were also somewhat different. Most merchants and tradesmen lived near urban areas whereas Mennonites formed large, compact rural settlements with their own industrial town areas.

The Mennonite position in wider Russian society was thus complex and not influenced just by their status as colonists, their faith or their culture. Their relative wealth linked them with certain groups in Russian society, an association in which the long run proved not to be to their advantage. This was particularly true of Mennonite relations with local peasants as in the years before 1914 prices rose, Mennonite incomes increased while the wages and conditions of the peasants and workers improved more slowly. In the events which were to follow Mennonite separateness, their social status and apparent wealth made them particularly vulnerable at times of peasant unrest.

### The writing on the wall

There is a strange paradox about Mennonite life in late Imperial Russia. At the very time when most Mennonites were becoming more Russianized and identifying with the country, they were being rejected by sections of the Russian population. Pan-slavic nationalists rejected Mennonites because of their imagined 'German' affiliations and workers and peasants were alienated because of Mennonite wealth and class. The nationalists were also concerned by the prosperity of the colonists and feared that their large land purchases in southern Russia would result in their controlling the economy of the region. These fears, first openly voiced in the late 1880s, culminated in the formulation of legal measures during the First World War for the expropriation of all land belonging to enemy aliens (which in the eyes of the government included Mennonites).<sup>78</sup>

Peasant reaction was more sudden and violent. Peasant revolts were common in Russia throughout the nineteenth century, but in the decade up to 1914 they grew in scale and intensity.<sup>79</sup> In 1902 and 1903 there were disturbances in Kharkov and Poltava provinces when the estates of rich landowners were attacked and grain seized. In the troubled years between 1905 and 1906 disturbances were more serious and destruction was greater. Again estates were singled out for special attention and severe disturbances occurred in industrial areas. Mennonites suffered in the troubled times; estates were robbed and burnt, estate owners attacked and threatened; in mills and factories work was disrupted and buildings were damaged.<sup>80</sup> Some estates were attacked for no apparent reason, but others in repayment for grievances, real or imagined. These included the mistreatment of labourers and Mennonite purchases of land previously farmed by peasants which often forced them to become wage labourers.

These disturbances forced the Tsar to grant constitutional and other reforms. Mennonites were both excited and disturbed by these changes, particularly after 1907 as the government steadily eroded many of the concessions made in 1905. In the event, Mennonites became more aware of national politics and the conditions of the country. Estate owners and industrialists, along with some of the intelligentsia, became supporters of the new political parties which emerged.<sup>81</sup> Most supported the centre-right party, the Octobrists, but a number of liberals followed the Kadets, who hoped for a constitutional form of government. In the colonies after 1905 people were well informed about political events; the Mennonite press carried detailed reports of political events at home and abroad.<sup>82</sup> The impact of political events on the consciousness of the average colonist after 1905, however, is as difficult to assess as their political allegiances. Most prosperous colony farmers of this period had been brought up in a conservative Mennonite world during a reactionary period of Russian

history and the majority were undoubtedly highly conservative in their political outlook.<sup>83</sup> In comparison with the political aspirations of the majority of their local peasants who had expressed support for more radical groups in the Duma elections they were allowed to participate in, the colonists must have appeared quite reactionary. Politically, as well as socially, the gap between Mennonites and their neighbours was widening by 1914.

Peasant disturbances did not end in 1907; between 1907 and 1914 there were 20,000 peasant attacks against landowners and wealthy individuals, 17,000 between 1910 and 1914.<sup>84</sup> Mennonites were victims of these disturbances and some were murdered.<sup>85</sup> Feeling themselves vulnerable in their estates, many landowners moved away, employing managers instead. Some moved to the colonies where they purchased farms or houses, forcing up prices and further complicating the developing class structure. Others moved to the cities, continuing a trend which industrialists and professional people (mostly from the intelligentsia) had begun earlier. In the cities Mennonites came into even closer contact with the larger Russian society, and their ties with the colonies and the majority of Mennonites were weakened. Their way of life became more Russianized, some married Russians, especially the men, and abandoned their faith.<sup>86</sup> When war with Germany broke out in 1914 a number of young men from these groups joined the regular army, abandoning the principles of non-resistance.

Other factors were also changing Mennonite society. The sheer size of the Mennonite population and its wide distribution across the vast expanse of the Russian Empire divided the Mennonite world. In remote regions, Mennonites re-established many of their social and cultural patterns but they also adapted to local conditions and to the customs of the often non-Russian populations, especially in central Asia and Siberia. This regionalization of the Mennonite society, a trend which was accelerating in the years immediately before 1914, has rarely been commented upon but is of considerable interest. The settlements in Siberia, begun in the 1890s, are of particular interest as the system of land allotment and pattern of settlement marked a new development in Russian Mennonite life which was cut short by war and revolution.<sup>87</sup> The regionalization of Mennonite life also accentuated existing differences in wealth and established new bases for such differences. Most settlers in daughter colonies came from the poorer sections of Mennonite society and many found the task of pioneering the new land tremendously hard.<sup>88</sup> One of the problems was that although from poorer backgrounds, they were ill-prepared for the hardships of the new settlements; the wealth and prosperity of the mother colonies had spoilt them. Those who persevered often found prosperity of their own after a number of years, but they rarely achieved the same standard of living as their brethren in the mother colonies who

had continued to develop while they established themselves. Generally speaking, the newer the settlement the poorer and more culturally backward were the inhabitants. At the same time, Mennonite entrepreneurs, possessing considerably more capital than the average settler, established estates and factories in the pioneer regions and grew rich rapidly. The impact of wealth on Mennonite life in the new regions could thus be more profound than in the core settlement areas of New Russia, although the full implications of such developments were never to be experienced, as the break-up of Imperial Russia prevented their realization.

It is clear that by 1914 Mennonite society was subject to a number of centrifugal forces which threatened its continued existence. It was no longer as cohesive as it once had been. Social, economic and regional differences separated Mennonites. In the larger world Mennonites were becoming more Russianized but also more divorced, socially and politically, from the majority of the population. Economic changes were affecting all Mennonites. Many estate owners realized that the days of large landownership were numbered and that their estates would ultimately be divided among land-hungry peasants. Industrialists were facing increasing competition from foreign firms, particularly manufacturers of agricultural machinery who had established factories in Russia. There was unrest in the industrial centres of southern Russia in the years before 1914 as political and industrial disputes increased greatly.<sup>89</sup> In the colonies farmers would have experienced greater competition, particularly for labour, if Stolypin's land reforms had continued.<sup>90</sup> In terms of production the size of holdings in the colonies would also have had to be rationalized, particularly in response to further mechanization. The writing was thus on the wall for the discontinuance of the Mennonite Commonwealth, and although none could have foreseen that the Commonwealth would end as quickly or as violently as it did, some had begun to fear for its future.

### Conclusion

This article has concentrated on some of the social and political contradictions created by Mennonite wealth in late Imperial Russia. Readers might protest that I have avoided the core issue: the implications of wealth on Mennonite religious life. I could argue that I am a historian of Mennonite life, not a Mennonite historian, but this would be to shirk my responsibilities. History is a moral discipline and such issues are central to its concerns. But although I have not spelt out the issues, I believe they are implicit in my discussion; a full investigation of their implications I would prefer to leave to a Mennonite historian. The issues are clear, however.

How could the principle of a people with a distinctive faith, existing in separate moral space, be reconciled with an aggressive involvement

with a wider world of business, profit and capitalism? How could a group which stressed community and co-operation based on Christian love face the gross inequalities wealth produced, not only within their own settlements but also in their dealings with their neighbours? How could the stress on a simple life, which did not recognize 'worldly' pursuits and goods, be justified in the face of the increasing manifestations of wealth in everyday life?

How conscious were Mennonites of these issues? Most were probably as blissfully unaware of the contradictions wealth created in their lives as they were of the wider problems facing Russia before 1914. When discussion did touch upon such issues it was often parochial and poorly articulated. Mennonites worried about the fair distribution of the tax burden in the community. They discussed problems of health they associated with the close intermarriage of richer families. They fussed about the loss of German when Mennonite children first learnt Little Russian from their nurses. Some Mennonite newspapers such as the *Friedensstimme* did raise issues of social concern but often with the smugness of those who believed themselves spiritually superior to common people. A very few Mennonites, members of radical families or university graduates who had encountered socialist and revolutionary ideas while studying, voiced their opposition and sometimes joined revolutionary parties.<sup>91</sup> But it was the experience of the First World War and the subsequent revolution and civil war which forced Mennonites to reconsider their place in Russian society and to question their relative prosperity.

The war was a time for most Mennonites of increasing disillusionment with the prevailing orders in Russian society and pessimism concerning the future. For the young who served in various voluntary organizations away from the colonies the war years were a time of revelation concerning Russian society and conditions. When these people returned to the colonies in 1917 they were eager for reform; meetings were held to discuss such issues and the question of Mennonite wealth was raised obliquely.<sup>92</sup> But the civil war and chaos which followed prevented any real implementation of reform from within. The civil war swept aside what remained of Mennonite prosperity. Mennonites who stayed in Russia later questioned the wealth and privilege which had existed before 1914 in the Mennonite Commonwealth and criticized the materialistic tenor of life.<sup>93</sup> But among many Mennonites forced to emigrate after the terrible events of revolution and civil war a different attitude prevailed. Wealthy Mennonites tended to be blamed for bringing the wrath of the peasants down upon innocent colonists and as many of these people also were now living in exile, often in reduced circumstances, they could do little to defend themselves.<sup>94</sup> They withdrew into their own cliques, alone with their memories and the fading photographs of their once grand lives.

In a sense a conspiracy of silence has been promulgated by many Mennonites about the true nature of their existence in late Imperial Russia. The picture promoted is one of small, rustic Mennonite farmers, living a simple life on the southern steppes; a world of perpetual summer and sunshine captured in that popular and magical phrase 'the golden years'; a world of permanent childhood and innocence so strongly evoked in some of Arnold Dyck's writing.<sup>95</sup> The truth was otherwise. In human terms the revolution and civil war was an immense tragedy; in economic and cultural terms a disaster. But the destruction of the Mennonite Commonwealth presented Mennonites with a new challenge. At a stroke, wealth, position and privilege were swept away and Mennonites, both those who stopped in Russia and those who emigrated, had to establish a new way of life, quite different from that they had previously known.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>James Urry, *The closed and the open: social and religious change amongst the Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1889* (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1978); "The snares of reason"; changing Mennonite attitudes to knowledge in nineteenth century Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, pp. 306-22.

<sup>2</sup>Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978) p. 869; S. D. Bondar, *Sekta mennonitov v Rossii* (Petrograd: V. D. Smirnova, 1916), p. 64. See also Adolf Ehrht, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart* (Langensalza: J. Betz, 1932), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>David G. Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia; a sketch of its founding and endurance 1789-1919* (Privately printed, 1974 — also in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47, 1973, pp. 259-308; 48, 1974, pp. 5-54) p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Ehrht, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>Figures from Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 869-70.

<sup>6</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 861, 864 gives the total land owned in this area as 70,000 *desiatin*; Gerhard Toews, *Schönfeld. Werde- und Opfergang einer deutschen Siedlung in der Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Rundschau Publishing House, 1939), pp. 24-6, gives the figure for Schönfeld alone as 49,199 *desiatin*, with the largest estate as 5345 *desiatin* and the smallest (household?) as 12; most were under 1000 *desiatin*.

<sup>7</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 864-5 for 1910; Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, p. 94 for 1914.

<sup>8</sup>David H. Epp, "The emergence of German industry in the South Russian colonies (1911)" (translated and ed. by J. B. Toews), *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 55, (1981), p. 341 citing the increase in land values between 1882 and 1909 for A. Wallman.

<sup>9</sup>Ehrht, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup>Figures from Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 865.

<sup>11</sup>Figures from Bondar, *Sekta mennonitov*, p. 65; see also Ehrht, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 87, and additional details in David G. Rempel, *The Mennonite colonies in New Russia: a*

study of their settlement and economic development from 1789-1914 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1933), pp. 236-7.

<sup>12</sup>Bondar, *Sekta mennonitov*, p. 54

<sup>13</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 865.

<sup>14</sup>Based on details given in a questionnaire of Dr. David G. Rempel filled in by an estate owner in 1932-33.

<sup>15</sup>Epp, "The emergence of German industry," p. 340; Heinrich H. Epp, "Aus der Geschichte der Deutschen Kolonien," In, M. Joworsky, *Kurzgefasste Geschichte der Ukraine* (Kharkov: Zentralverlag, 1928), p. 184.

<sup>16</sup>For details see H. R. Weinstein, "Land hunger and nationalism in the Ukraine 1905-1917," *Journal of Economic History*, 2, (1942), pp. 25, 27-8.

<sup>17</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 866-69. Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, p. 64, reports that in 1912 there were 39 major manufacturers and dealers in goods.

<sup>18</sup>Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, pp. 91-2, based on figures in A. Bonwetsch, *Der Handel mit landwirtschaftlichen Maschinen und Geräten in Russland vor dem Kriege* (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1921), p. 125, Appendix 1, where further details may be found.

<sup>19</sup>Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 92 and Epp, "The emergence of German industry," pp. 312-71.

<sup>20</sup>Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>See note 14 for source. Kornelius Toews who owned only 615 desiatin made 110,000R from a good wheat harvest in 1903; see Jacob C. Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum in Russland," *Der Bote*, (29 Sept., 1954), no. 37, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Based mostly on interviews with elderly Mennonites in Canada, 1974.

<sup>23</sup>As above note 21.

<sup>24</sup>*The Russian Year Book* 1913. (London, 1913), p. 346.

<sup>25</sup>Prices derived from advertisements published in *Der Botschafter, Friedensstimme* and *Odessaer Zeitung* 1913-14.

<sup>26</sup>Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup>This is a brief summary of an extremely complex subject. For greater detail on the economic development of the colonies, see Rempel, *The Mennonite colonies*, Chapters 7, 8, 11, 12 and 13; and Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 60-66.

<sup>28</sup>On the capital of the Molochnaia settlers in particular see G. G. Pisarevsky, *Pereselenie prusskikh mennonitov v Rossiia pri Alexandre I* (Rostov on Don, 1917, pp. 43-44, 46.

<sup>29</sup>See especially E. Druzhinina's, *Yuzhnaia Ukraina 1800-25 gg.* (Moscow: Akademia Nauk 1970), *Yuzhnaia Ukraina v period krizisa feodalizma, 1825-1860 gg.* (Moscow: Akademia Nauk 1981).

<sup>30</sup>On the alcohol licences in Molochnaia, controlled in 1838 by the estate owners Wilhelm Martens and Johann Cornies, see "Opisanie mennonistskikh kolonii v Rossii," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Gosudarstvennykh Imushchestv* (1842), p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>On the importance of the sheep industry see Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, pp. 44-5; Rempel, *The Mennonite colonies*, p. 123-8; *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 61-3.

<sup>32</sup>Johann Cornies, "Auszug über den Ertrag der Schafe auf dem Vorwerke Jushanlee von 1825 bis 1845," *Unterhaltungsblatt für die deutschen Ansiedler im südlichen Russland*, 4 (1847), pp. 26-31 and David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies. Zuege aus seinem Leben und Wirken* (Steinbach: Echo Verlag, 1946), p. 21.

<sup>33</sup>David G. Rempel, "Historian challenges Sawatzky's review," *Mennonite Mirror* (June 1975), p. 20.

<sup>34</sup>*Opisanie mennonistskikh*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup>See Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum" (Sept., 1954), no. 34, p. 4 and H. H. Klassen "Mennonitische Gutsbesitzer in der Ukraine," *Der Bote* (5 Sept., 1972), no. 35, p. 11. The other purchasers included Wilhelm Martens, David Schroeder and Thomas Wiens.

<sup>36</sup>On his early years see Epp, "The emergence of German industry," p. 352.

<sup>37</sup>"Opisanie mennonistskikh," p. 26; A. A. Klaus, *Nashi kolonii: opyty i materialy po istorii i statistike innostrannoi kolonizatsii v Rossi* (St Petersburg, 1869), Appendix; Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutbesitzertum" (15 Sept., 1954), no. 35, p. 4. The final figure probably includes rented land although a nearly contemporary Dutch account reported Martens'

fortune at 2 million R; see H. Dijkema, *Rusland: Geschetst zoo als het is* (Groningen: A. L. Scholtens, 1855), p. 397.

<sup>38</sup>See for instance *The Willms genealogy* (Winnipeg: Privately Printed, 1971), and other volumes outlining the pedigrees of this clan.

<sup>39</sup>On these changes see Rempel, *The Mennonite colonies*, pp. 160-64, 242-89; *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>40</sup>Toews, *Schönfeld*; M. Peters, "Petersdorf," *Der Bote* (11 May, 1932), no. 441, pp. 2-3; D. Zacherias, *Zacheriasfeld* (Unpublished Ms., B. J. Schellenberg Collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre and Archives, Winnipeg, nd.).

<sup>41</sup>On the Russian nobility and landowning, see Jerome Blum, "Russia," in David Spring ed. *European landed elites in the nineteenth century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 83-7.

<sup>42</sup>On the situation in 1856 and up to emancipation, see Daniel Field, *The end of serfdom: nobility and bureaucracy in Russia 1855-1861* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 381, no. 90, 30-31; on the situation at the end of the century, G. M. Hamburg, "The Russian nobility on the eve of the 1905 Revolution," *Russian Review* 38 (1979), p. 327.

<sup>43</sup>R. Munting, "A note on gentry landownership in European Russia," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (1) (1978), p. 28. In Yekaterinoslav between 1861 and 1888 the landholdings of Russian nobles declined from 98% of total estate lands in the province to 76%; large peasant holdings rose from practically nothing to 7% and that of "German" colonists from 2% to 17%; figures from an article in *Odessaer Zeitung*, 28 Feb. (12 March) 1890, No. 47, p. 2, although these figures, which appear to be derived from Velitsyn, may be dubious (on Velitsyn see below). Most of the "German" colonists were in fact Mennonites although other colonists of German descent also purchased estates in southern Russia; see A. M-r, "Die deutschen Bauern im Schwartzmeergebiet und ihrer Kolonisation Leistungen," *Heimatsbuch der Deutschen aus Russland*, 1, pp. 86-7.

<sup>44</sup>On early Mennonite industry see Urry, *The closed and the open*, Table 7 and pp. 448-57.

<sup>45</sup>David H. Epp, *Sketches from the pioneer years of the industry in the Mennonite settlements of south-Russia* (transl. J. P. Penner) (Leamington: Privately Printed, 1972); Epp, "The emergence of German industry."

<sup>46</sup>See Epp, "The emergence of German industry," pp. 310-71; Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 64-66.

<sup>47</sup>On the important Berdiansk group of Mennonite merchants see Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 440-47.

<sup>48</sup>For the 1840s see Johann Cornies, "Über die landwirtschaftlichen Fortschritte im Molotschnaer Mennoniten Bezirke im dem Jahre 1845," *Unterhaltungsblatt für die deutschen Ansiedler im südlichen Russland* 1 (1846), p. 5; for the anonymous comment, on an account of the Molochnaya during the 1850s, see "Zustand der Molotschnaer Mennoniten-Kolonien," *Odessaer Zeitung* 18(31) (July, 1904), no. 161, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup>Based on interviews with the descendants of estate owners living in Canada in 1974 and their answers to a questionnaire.

<sup>50</sup>Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum*, pp. 93-6.

<sup>51</sup>On the market-oriented agricultural economy see Peter I. Lyashchenko, *History of the national economy of Russia to the 1917 Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 347.

<sup>52</sup>On the differences in occupation of the Prussian Mennonites in 1776, see K. H. Ludwig, *Zur Besiedlung des Weichseldeltas durch die Mennoniten* (Marienburg, 1961), Appendix summarized in Urry, *The closed and the open*, Table 1.

<sup>53</sup>On the changing status of teachers see Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 365-81; on the intelligentsia see N. J. Klassen, "Mennonite intelligentsia in Russia," *Mennonite Life*, 12 (1969), pp. 51-60.

<sup>54</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 882.

<sup>55</sup>For a semi-literary and somewhat partisan account of these social differences before 1914, see P. Klassen, *Bei uns im alten Russland* (Winnipeg: Echo Verlag, 1959).

<sup>56</sup>On the struggles of the landless, see the documents in Franz Isaak, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte derselben* (Halbstadt: H. J. Braun, 1908),

and discussions in Rempel, *The Mennonite colonies*, pp. 179-214; *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 68-78; and Urry. *The closed and the open*, pp. 609-46.

<sup>57</sup>This point was often stressed by past estate owners and their children in interviews and in replies to a questionnaire.

<sup>58</sup>According to one estimate of Mennonite graduates before 1914, 35% came from the ranks of estate owners, industrialists and businessmen, 33% were children of teachers and ministers and only 32% children of colony farmers; see Klassen, "Mennonite intelligentsia," p. 54.

<sup>59</sup>Colony-reared children soon brought the children from rich families down to earth. For an amusing account of a rich young Mennonite speaking High German and boasting of his family's material wealth when enlisted into the Forestry Service, see Arnold Dyck's play 'Wellkoam op'e Forstei!' *Szenen aus dem mennonitischen Forsteileben in Russland in plattdeutscher Sprache* (Winnipeg; 1950), pp. 18, 48.

<sup>60</sup>I was told that Russian servants employed by Mennonites disliked having Russian visitors to estates as the structure of social relations changed; the servants had more work and had to appear more subservient.

<sup>61</sup>On the use of a child labour in earlier times, see the account by [David H] E. [pp], "Historische Übersicht über den Zustand der Mennoniten Gemeinde an Molotschna [in 1836]," *Odessaer Zeitung*, 1(14) (May, 1904), no. 99, p. 2; reprinted in *Unser Blatt*, 3, (1928), pp. 110-12, 138-43.

<sup>62</sup>"Die deutschen Colonien in der Nähe der Krymschen Halbinsel und die Rossheerden in den südlichen Steppen," *Archiv für wissenschaftliche Kunde von Russland*, 16, pp. 374-75.

<sup>63</sup>Daniel Schlatter, *Bruchstücke aus einigen Reisen nach dem südlichen Russland in den Jahren 1822-1828* (St Gallen: Huber, 1830), p. 367.

<sup>64</sup>Dijkema, *Russland*, p. 396. The man in question was probably Wilhelm's younger brother Jakob Martens, owner of an extensive farm and store; the value of the property is undoubtedly overestimated. On the early Martens family in Schönwiese, see the entry in Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderung im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe: Privately Printed, 1955), p. 244.

<sup>65</sup>On Mennonite reading habits, see the fascinating articles, "Was wird von den Molotschnaer Mennoniten gelesen?" *Odessaer Zeitung*, 21 May (3 June), 1904, no. 113, pp. 2-3 for the Halbstadt volost and later articles for Gnadenfeld (13(26) July, no. 156, p. 2, 14(27) July no. 157, pp. 2-3) and Khortitsa 14(27) Oct. no. 229, p. 3).

<sup>66</sup>Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel, *In the Fullness of Time: 150 Years of Mennonite Sojourn in Russia* (Kitchener, 1974); Gerhard Lohrenz, *Heritage Remembered: a Pictorial Survey of Mennonites in Prussia and Russia* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1977 second ed.).

<sup>67</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 198.

<sup>68</sup>See photographs in Quiring and Bartel, *In the fullness*, pp. 118, 123.

<sup>69</sup>See photographs in Quiring and Bartel, *In the fullness*, pp. 126-7, 142.

<sup>70</sup>See the trips of the millers Niebuhr described in Epp, "The emergence of German industry," pp. 329-30, 334, 343 and of the estate owner Cornelius Toews in Jacob Cornelius Toews, *Biographie des Cornelius Toews* (Unpublished Ms., B. J. Schellenberg Collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre and Archives, Winnipeg, nd.), pp. 3-4.

<sup>71</sup>See Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, pp. 85-93.

<sup>72</sup>Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 809-28.

<sup>73</sup>Toews, *Biographie des Cornelius Toews*, p. 3; although the contributions were generous, Toews gave 1000R to each of his nephews as Christmas presents in 1914. Some idea of the contributions to Bethania could be calculated as they were printed regularly in *Der Botschafter und Friedensstimme*.

<sup>74</sup>Ehrt calculated that the estate owners, although constituting only 1.9% of the Mennonite population, contributed over 30% of the money needed for the service, *Das Mennonitentum*, p. 88.

<sup>75</sup>See the brief account in Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, p. 883; according to Friesen, p. 1038 n13, only one Mennonite almost achieved sufficient rank to be raised to the nobility.

<sup>76</sup>Hermann Bergmann to the Third and Fourth Duma (1907-12, 1912-17) and Peter Schroeder to the Fourth, Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup>See Alfred J. Rieber, *Merchants and entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>78</sup>See A. A. Velitsyn (A. A. Paltov), translated in Harvey L. Dyck's "Russian Mennonitism and the challenge of Russian nationalism, 1889," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 56 (1982), pp. 326-31; on the expropriation measures, see David G. Rempel, "The expropriation of the German colonists in south Russia during the Great War," *Journal of Modern History*, 4, 1932, pp. 49-67.

<sup>79</sup>See Arthur E. Adams, "The peasantry in Russia 1900-1917," in Ivan Volgyes, ed., *The peasantry of eastern Europe Vol. 2: 20th century developments* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), pp. 1-14.

<sup>80</sup>There is no full account as yet of the effect of these disturbances on Mennonites, although there are various contemporary accounts; on a rural disturbance, see "Die Unruhen auf der Ökonomie Umanzew in Melitopoler Kreise im Winter 1905/06," *Friedensstimme* 4(42) (21st October 1906), 466; on industrial disturbances see the account of Schönwiese in Epp, "The emergence of German industry," pp. 361-2.

<sup>81</sup>See Terence Emmons, *The formation of political parties and the first national elections in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), and the essays in Leopold H. Haimson, ed., *The politics of rural Russia 1905-1914* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1979).

<sup>82</sup>On Mennonite press reactions to the reforms and early events, see Len Friesen, "Aftermath of revolution: Russian Mennonites respond to crisis and opportunity," (Paper presented to the conference on Images of Imperial Russia, University of Waterloo, May 1984).

<sup>83</sup>On Mennonite political conservatism, see Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 92-8.

<sup>84</sup>Figures quoted by Dorothy Atkinson, *The end of the Russian land commune 1905-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 106.

<sup>85</sup>Numerous accounts and reports of attacks appear in contemporary newspapers. For accounts of a particularly gruesome murder of the entire Toews family on their estate near Ufa (significantly by former labourers), see A. Friesen, "7 Menschen auf bestialische Weise hingeschlachtet," *Odessauer Zeitung* 6(19) (April 1913), no. 79, pp. 2-3 and K. Klassen, "Über den entsetzlichen Raubmord," *Odessauer Zeitung*, 11(24), no. 83, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>Klassen estimated that 16% of the intelligentsia he had details on lived in cities before 1914, 21% married Russians of the Orthodox faith and 12% Evangelicals (Lutherans and Baptists?). See "Mennonite intelligentsia," p. 52.

<sup>87</sup>See Rempel, *The Mennonite Commonwealth*, p. 77; the move to Siberia was only part of a much larger shift of the Russian population before 1914; see Donald W. Treadgold, *The great Siberian migration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>88</sup>This was true of the Orenburg and Terek settlements although other problems were also involved; see Peter Dyck, *Orenburg am Ural. Geschichte einer mennonitischen Ansiedlung in Russland* (Clearbrook, B.C.: Christian Bookstore, 1951), and C. P. Toews, *The Terek settlement* (Yarrow, B.C.: Columbia Press, 1972).

<sup>89</sup>On industrial unrest, see the figures for strikes in Ralph Carter Elwood, *Russian social democracy in the underground: a study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), p. 165, Chart VII.

<sup>90</sup>Stolypin's reforms aimed at creating independent peasant farmers by alienating the commune; see Atkinson, *The end of the Russian land commune*, and George Yaney, *The urge to mobilize: agrarian reform in Russia 1861-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>91</sup>On a Mennonite affected by such contacts at university in the 1890s, see Norman Penner, "Jacob Penner's recollections," *Social History* (Ottawa) 7, no. 14 (1974), pp. 366-78; on later radicals and activists, see John G. Rempel and David G. Rempel, "Of things remembered: recollections of war, revolution and civil war 1914-1920," (Unpublished ms. especially Part IV, V).

<sup>92</sup>See the accounts of Mennonite conferences from this period published in J. B.

Toews, ed., *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975), esp. Part VI.

<sup>93</sup>See for instance the comments of Heinrich H. Epp in Klassen, "Mennonite intelligentsia," p. 56 and his enigmatic statement in his "Aus der Geschichte." Epp came from a famous family of religious and community leaders, was brother to David and Dietrich Epp and was an influential teacher and leader before he disappeared in the 1930s purges; see David G. Rempel, "An introduction to Russian Mennonite historiography," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 48 (1974), pp. 440-43.

<sup>94</sup>As late as 1974 an appeal for estate owners to answer a questionnaire on their lives in Russia drew a vehement response from one individual attacking this group for their wealth in Russia.

<sup>95</sup>See the title of a recent collection of photographs from this period, John D. Rempel and Paul Tiessen (eds.), *Forever Summer, Forever Sunday* (St. Jacobs, Ont.: Sand Hills Books, 1981); on Dyck see especially his *Lost in the Steppe* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1974).

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