

The 2001 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist Mennonite Studies

**THE RUSSIAN MENNONITE ENCOUNTER
WITH THE SOVIET STATE, 1917-1955**

by
Terry Martin

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LECTURE 1

Revolution and the Search for Accommodation, 1917-1926

Let me begin by sharing with you two anecdotes that helped define my overall approach to these lectures. A few months ago, I was reading broadly in preparation for a course I am teaching at Harvard this year on the modern police state, while at the same time beginning to think seriously about the content of these lectures. The goal of the course was to study the origins of the police practices typical of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Reading a book on the police in nineteenth-century Prussia, I came across instructions on the duties of the local police in 1817. There were twelve duties listed. These included criminal policing, censorship, the prevention of riots, and other unexceptional police matters; but I was drawn immediately to point seven: “Jewish and *Mennonite* matters.”¹ Seeing “Mennonite” there on the page next to “Jewish” in a German police document, especially given that I was then focused on understanding the origins of Nazi German police practices, made me snap to attention. I was suddenly being reminded in a visceral way that a century before the Holocaust, alongside “Jewish,” “Mennonite” was also a surveillance category for the German political police. It reminded me of a fact we here perhaps all know but typically forget, namely that the Mennonites were also once one of those populations that certain states have labeled as undesirable, threatening, and alien. And I knew very well from my own work what happened to such population categories in east-central Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

This made clear to me that one of the main goals of this lecture series should be to introduce my audience to a state, the Soviet Union, that approached its population in exactly this manner, that saw its subjects not as individuals but as members of various population categories, whether defined according to class, ethnicity, religion, past occupation, family membership, or citizenship; a state that asked not what individuals had done but who they were, that is, to what population category did they belong; a state that then divided its population into friendly and hostile elements. The former received preferential access to

education, employment, and, in general, what we today call upward mobility. The latter were to be watched, registered, and controlled; at certain times they might also be fired, stigmatized, denied housing and food, arrested, exiled, or even executed. What I will try to do in these lectures, then, is to explain how the Soviet state *saw* the Mennonites, how it interpreted and categorized them, how the Bolsheviks understood and responded to Mennonite action, how their vision of the Mennonites changed over time, and how this vision affected, and in the end probably determined, the Mennonites' fate in the Soviet Union.

Now for my second anecdote. I was reading, in direct preparation for these lectures, an essay by the distinguished Mennonite historian John B. Toews on the history of the Russian Mennonites in the 1920s.² Toews was describing the lobbying efforts of the Mennonite leader, B. B. Janz, in 1921-22. Janz had traveled from the remote Mennonite colonies of southern Ukraine to Moscow. His major goal was to secure for the Mennonites the right to alternative military service. He first made contact with Petr Smidovich, a middle-ranking figure in the Soviet government who was unusually sympathetic to religion and religious minorities. Smidovich put Janz in touch with Petr Krasikov, who headed the Justice Ministry's department on church-state relations. Through Krasikov, Janz secured an interview with the Red Army's Chief of Mobilization, a man by the name of Specter. Specter proposed that the Mennonites serve in the Red Army medical service, just as they had served in the Tsarist army during World War I. Janz worried that this would put the Mennonites in too close contact with an aggressive army, and countered with a proposal for service in noncombatant medical and forestry units, the form of service Mennonites had rendered from 1880 to 1914. After a year of negotiations, the Mennonite right to alternative service was recognized in principle in 1923. In 1925 a law was passed allowing individuals to petition to local courts for the right to alternative service.³

This story put the Russian Mennonite experience in a completely different light. I knew from my own research into religious affairs that in Smidovich and Krasikov, Janz had rapidly located the two central officials most likely to sympathize with his mission and to help him in achieving it. I was amazed that Janz had so quickly managed to contact a major figure in the Soviet army, an institution about as hostile to pacifism as one is likely to find, and got him to make major concessions on military service. Janz, after all, represented

approximately sixty to seventy thousand Ukrainian Mennonites, the population of about three average-sized Ukrainian rural townships. I knew very well that it would never, in a million years, occur to the population of any other three Ukrainian townships that they could send their representative to Moscow to negotiate an issue of this magnitude. They might send an emissary with a petition, but if he met an important leader, he would certainly not *negotiate* with him; he would beg humbly; he would emphasize their weakness and wretchedness, and the strength and magnanimity of the leader; and he would ask for merciful treatment. But he would simply lack the skills, personal connections, and imagination to undertake a mission of the type that Janz had undertaken almost as a matter of course.

This story reminded me that, despite their self-image as the Quiet in the Land, the Russian Mennonites were not ordinary Russian rural citizens. They were an exceptionally savvy and politically sophisticated group with over a century's experience in negotiating their social, economic, and religious privileges with high Russian officials. This is not to say that their self-image as the Quiet in the Land was a complete myth. Rather, it is simply to state that in a modern state, in order to be the Quiet in the Land – to be left alone to mind one's own affairs, to run one's own economy, one's own schools, in one's own language, according to one's own beliefs – a community requires a political elite that can defend it from the insistent claims of the modern state. The Mennonites had such a political elite.

My first anecdote, then, paints the Mennonites as quintessential victims, a group seen as categorically unacceptable to the modern state due to their tenacious insistence on their pacifism and particular way of life. The second anecdote paints them as an active and formidable political force, quite capable of managing their destiny and political fate. Neither of these images is false. And the topic of tonight's opening lecture is the initial confrontation between these two forces. On the one hand, one of the most radical revolutionary regimes in world history; on the other, one of the most savvy and united subcultures within that state: the force of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Mennonites' search for a political accommodation with the new rulers that revolution produced.

The Tsarist Government and World War I

Before turning directly to that confrontation, I will devote the first half of this lecture to a brief overview of the Russian Mennonites' relationship with the Tsarist state prior to the 1917 revolution.

The Mennonites have been, historically, a paradigmatic example of what social scientists call a *mobilized diaspora*, and this was particularly true of the Russian Mennonites.⁴ What does this term mean? That the Mennonites were and are a diaspora is clear enough. From their origins in central Europe, they rapidly spread out eastward to Prussia, Poland, Ukraine, and central Russia until they finally reached Siberia and Central Asia in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, other Mennonites spread eastward across the Atlantic Ocean to Pennsylvania, then to the American Midwest and to Ontario, until they eventually reached California and British Columbia; other Mennonites migrated southward to Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize and the jungles of Paraguay. One of the most striking traits of the Mennonites has been their willingness to uproot themselves entirely, move long distances, and enter new states in order to preserve their way of life.

The meaning of the term "mobilized" is less clear. It does not simply mean 'mobile', which the Mennonites surely were, but typically involves two further qualities as well: first, the group must have a strong corporate identity, with a legitimate leadership that can and does represent their interests; in short, they must function like a group, not isolated individuals or families. Religion often provides such a common identity and recognized leadership, as it did with such well-known ethno-religious diasporas as the Jews, the Armenians, and the Mennonites. Second, the group must have some skills to offer their host governments or monarch. The Russian Mennonites were an unusual mobilized diaspora in that they were predominantly rural, whereas most such mobilized diasporas have been urban; the Mennonites' skills were agricultural, rather than mercantile or industrial.

Leaders of a mobilized diaspora behave the way B. B. Janz did in the early 1920s. They negotiate the conditions of their entry, or of their continued residence, in a given state with the major advisers of the monarch, or in Janz's case, the newly-established revolutionaries; and they negotiate, if not from a position of great strength, then certainly not from a position of complete weakness and isolation either. The origins of the Mennonites in Russia

exemplified the traits of the mobilized diaspora.⁵ In the mid-eighteenth century, the enlightened Russian monarch Catherine the Great invited foreigners to settle her newly conquered lands in the Volga region and southern Ukraine. She offered a standard set of legal and economic privileges to any foreigners who would agree to immigrate, since clearly no one would come if they were to be placed in the same position as Russia's enserfed rural population. In almost all instances, foreigners would accept Catherine's privileges as offered, and settled where they were assigned with no negotiation. The Mennonites behaved differently. The Mennonites of Poland were ready to move, for they were in the process of being absorbed into the rapidly expanding Prussian state which, as we have seen in my introductory anecdote, categorized them as an undesirable and suspect population. The Mennonites, therefore, sent two representatives to Catherine's court where they negotiated with her powerful favorite, Potemkin. They surveyed and chose the land they wished to settle on; and they negotiated a special deal, which gave the Mennonites greater economic and political privileges than other foreign settlers had received. Obviously, such negotiations implied that the Mennonites had something to offer the Russian state, which they did. They were well known as excellent agriculturists who had drained and successfully farmed the swampy land of the Vistula river basin in northern Poland.

The Mennonites' status as a mobilized diaspora helps explain what might otherwise seem to us modern Mennonites a curious and somewhat baffling aspect of traditional Mennonite politics, namely their strong preference for the pre-modern monarchical state and their considerable distrust of modernizing and democratizing governments. This seems especially mysterious to us, given that the modern, democratic states of Canada and the United States provided almost the sole safe haven for the Mennonites in the twentieth century. Why did the Mennonites not see that this would be the case? They had good reasons for their prejudice. Traditional states, such as the Russian empire, were organized according to the principle of estate or status groups, what the Russians called *soslovie* groups, such as the nobility, clergy, townspeople, and peasants. Russia also had ethno-military estate groups like the Cossacks and the Turkic Bashkir host. In such a society there was no expectation of equality before the law. Each group owed the state, and ultimately the Tsar himself, particular service obligations and in turn received specific

privileges in exchange. The Tsarist government, therefore, did not find it strange or insulting that the Mennonites should try to negotiate for themselves a particular set of legal and economic privileges in exchange for the economic services they had to offer. This was normal. The Russian Mennonites fit into this *soslovie* order quite naturally and quickly adopted the service mentality typical of it. The *soslovie* principle suited the Mennonites' sense that they were a people apart. The last thing they wanted was to be treated like all the others.

The modernizing state threatened this situation. It demanded equality before the law and conformity to the culture of the majority nationality. It was the threat of the modernizing Prussian nation-state that led the Mennonites to move to the pre-modern Russian empire in the first place. The modernizing authoritarian state has been particularly harsh on diaspora nationalities that possess a strong and inassimilable religious identity. The two great cases of twentieth-century genocide, the Turkish murder of the Armenians in World War I and the Nazi annihilation of the Jews in World War II, both involved such diaspora nationalities. The first great shock to the Russian Mennonites, likewise, involved the liberalizing and democratizing Great Reforms of the 1860s in Russia. For Russians, these reforms were a great step forward. Serfdom was abolished; a modern legal system was established; primary education was standardized and expanded; censorship was reduced; local self-government was introduced; and military service was now demanded of all Russian citizens, whether noble or serf, or, and here was the rub, Mennonite. To the Mennonites, who already had their own form of local self-government and local education, these reforms were a major threat and a violation of their contract with the Tsarist government. The Mennonites responded in two ways, both of which would be repeated in the 1920s. About one-third of the entire Mennonite population emigrated to the United States and Canada. The leaders of the remaining population found a patron in the high-ranking ethnic German General, Todleben, who helped them negotiate alternative military service in special forestry brigades that would be paid for and run by the entire Russian Mennonite community.⁶

This new, special deal allowed the Mennonite community in Russia to thrive for another forty years. If we look at the period between the Great Reforms and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, however, we find three

emerging threats to the Russian Mennonites' way of life, all of which would manifest themselves again under Soviet rule in a much more intense form. The first threat was a national one. With the growth of a military threat to Russia from the newly united German empire, Russian nationalists began to identify the German colonists, including the Mennonites, with the German state and stigmatize them as potentially disloyal.⁷

The second threat was religious. Mennonites had always been recognized by the Russian state as an official foreign confession – along with Islam, Catholicism, Lutheranism, Buddhism, and others – which guaranteed them religious freedom and autonomy so long as they did not attempt to proselytize Orthodox believers. Other religious groups, such as the indigenous Russian Dukhobors and Molokans, or the rapidly expanding Baptist and Evangelical movements, were labeled sects and not given legal recognition. They were, in fact, subject to numerous legal disabilities and repression, including internal exile and the occasional removal of children from their parents. Because the Mennonites lacked a regular clergy and shared the pacifism of many of the Russian sects, and because the Mennonite Brethren movement did proselytize among Russians, there was a strong movement to re-categorize the Mennonites as a sect in the years leading up to World War I.⁸

The final threat was economic. This came in two forms. Nationalists wanted to limit German landholdings, in particular in regions close to the Russian border with Germany, on the argument that the Russian Germans were a potential security threat. In 1913 they even formally proposed a law to the state Duma limiting German landholdings, but the Mennonites and their powerful political allies managed to squelch it.⁹ The economic threat from the strong Russian socialist movement was more hypothetical for the time being, since its members were far removed from power. That would soon change. The socialists defended the Russian Germans from the charge of treason, but nevertheless viewed their great economic wealth and massive landholdings as the unjust consequence of past privilege, rather than the just reward of a hard-working and special people, and so favored a radical land re-distribution to remedy this historic injustice.

Prior to 1914, the Mennonites had with some effort successfully fought off these three threats. The outbreak of World War I greatly exacerbated the danger. Although the Mennonites and Russian Germans demonstrably supported

the war effort, anti-German sentiment was suddenly all-powerful and, within a few months of the outbreak of the war, it was forbidden to use the German language in schools, in the press, or in any other public gatherings. Then in February and December 1915, laws were passed calling for the expropriation of German landholdings and businesses in a wide swath of territory running along the Russian state's western and southern borders, a territory which included the major Mennonite settlements of southern Ukraine. Individuals whose land was confiscated could be, and often were, deported to eastern territories such as Siberia.¹⁰ Finally, Mennonites were increasingly labeled as a sect and threatened with the extreme war-time measures being directed against the sectarians.

The Mennonites responded with characteristic energy to these new threats. They were well-connected in the Russian capital, Saint-Petersburg, with two deputies to the Russian parliament – eight times their representation in the population as a whole – who had ties to powerful patrons. The Mennonites put forward the argument, backed by several published brochures, that they were not Germans but rather of Dutch descent and that they spoke a Dutch dialect, the “low German” or *plattdeutsch*. Intellectually, this was a silly dispute. Neither the Netherlands nor Germany existed in the sixteenth century when the Mennonites emerged in the Dutch-German border regions, and the Mennonites certainly would not have identified with either state in any case. However, at a time when Russia was at war with Germany, and Germany had invaded and violated Dutch neutrality, and was accused of committing horrific atrocities against the Dutch, it was a clever tactical move. After two years of intense lobbying and, according to Mennonite historian David Rempel, the mobilization of a certain amount of well-targeted bribes, this strategy succeeded. In January 1917 the Mennonites were formally re-categorized as Dutch and exempted from the land expropriation laws.¹¹

It turned out to be a waste of effort, as a month later the Tsarist state collapsed, and the newly formed Provisional Government ceased to enforce the anti-German legislation. Despite their reputation for political conservatism, their identification with the Tsarist *soslovie* state, their fear of the modernizing, democratizing and, in this case, revolutionary state, the anti-German legislation had so soured the Mennonites' relationship to the Tsarist state that they welcomed the February revolution. However, revolutions can rarely be

contained at their initial stages. In October 1917 a second revolution occurred which brought the radical socialists, the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin, into power. Initially, this change in power had surprisingly minor consequences for the Mennonites. They lived on the periphery of the Russian empire. Of the approximately 120,000 Russian Mennonites, about sixty percent lived in south Ukraine and another forty percent lived in Russia, most of these in Siberia. They experienced the change in power not as a revolution but as a descent into anarchy and civil war. In my grandmother's narrative of the revolutionary years in the Turkic regions of the North Caucasus, I was always struck by the absence of the October revolution. By that point, local anarchic conditions were much more salient.¹²

The years from 1917 to 1921, then, were experienced by the Mennonites primarily as a period of war and anarchy rather than a period of Bolshevik terror, although the latter was not absent. In my grandmother's settlement in the North Caucasus, there were few Russians and no Bolsheviks to be found; there the Mennonites were driven from their settlement by the local Turkic peoples who, with considerable justice, viewed the Mennonites as foreign interlopers who had settled on their land. In south Ukraine, where my grandmother's family fled in 1918, by far the greatest terror was associated with the so-called *Makhnovtsy*, the local peasant anarchist bands under the leadership of Nestor Makhno, who greatly resented the wealth and prosperity of the Mennonite settlements and took advantage of the collapse in order to rob and terrorize them.¹³ It was the threat of the Makhno bands, rather than the Bolsheviks, that led the south Ukrainian Mennonites to abandon their pacifism and form a so-called *Selbstschutz*, a self-defense army that was armed and trained by German officers, and that fought several bloody battles with the anarchists and, on one occasion, with the Bolshevik Red army as well.¹⁴ Although the Mennonites very much favored the anti-Bolshevik White side in the Civil War, the experience taught them, above all, that any government was superior to no government. The final triumph of the Red Army was therefore greeted with nervous relief by many Mennonites.

In the period from 1917 to 1921 Mennonites by and large suffered the same fate as the rest of the Russian population: war, anarchy, and a terrible famine in 1921 that resulted in the death of five to six million people. There were, however, two important differences. First, as an unusually prosperous

group, the Mennonites had much more to lose. If the majority of ordinary Russians experienced these revolutionary years as terrible but nevertheless containing the promise of a better future, for the Mennonites the experience was terrible and suggested a much worse future with the loss of their privileged economic, political, and legal status. Second, the Mennonites were objects rather than subjects of class warfare. The Makhno movement made crystal clear to them, for the first time, the degree of class hatred felt towards them by the neighboring impoverished peasantry. And they were well aware that the new Bolshevik government supported exactly those social forces that had made up the Makhno movement in the Civil War period. Our story of the confrontation between the Mennonites and the Soviet state, then, really begins in the year 1921, when the Bolsheviks had finally won the Civil War and when they introduced what they called their New Economic Policy or NEP. Faced with a series of peasant rebellions, with strikes in several major cities, revolts in the non-Russian regions of the Soviet Union, and a dangerous military mutiny in the naval fort of Kronstadt, the Bolsheviks abandoned their attempt to create a socialist state immediately. The NEP legalized individual, rather than collective, agricultural production. It allowed the peasantry to pay a tax-in-kind and then sell their surplus grain on the open market. This in turn meant the legalization of market trade and the merchant profession. While all large industrial enterprises remained nationalized, private small enterprise was now allowed. Censorship was significantly scaled back and the assault on the church likewise reduced. The NEP provided an opening for the Mennonites to negotiate an accommodation with Bolshevik rule.

The Bolshevik View of the Mennonites

Before we consider the Mennonite survival strategy, let us first look in more detail at how Mennonites were viewed by the new Soviet leadership. In the Bolsheviks' Marxist ideology, class divisions were paramount, and society was divided into so-called class-friendly and class-hostile elements as well as certain wavering or neutral classes.¹⁵ A large set of class-hostile elements were grouped together under the label of "former people" (in Russian, *byvshie*); that is, individuals who were associated intimately with the old regime: industrialists, landlords, clergy, Tsarist officials, policemen, army officers, White Army volunteers. These "former people" were deprived of their civil rights.

They could not vote; they were denied ration cards, housing, access to education; and they were subject to a variety of formal and informal harassment. For the Mennonites, the most important of these categories was the clergy, who formed a crucial part of their leadership elite.

The part of Bolshevik class ideology of most direct relevance to the Mennonites was a three-fold division of the rural population into rich peasants (or kulaks), middle peasants, and poor peasants. The kulaks, who were estimated to make up between three and five percent of the rural population, were portrayed as terrible exploiters of their fellow villagers. It is difficult to convey how strongly the Bolsheviks stigmatized the kulaks, but the following quotation from Lenin in 1918 perhaps gives a good sense:¹⁶

Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be **mercilessly** suppressed. The interests of the **entire** revolution requires this, because now “the last decisive battle” with the kulaks is under way **everywhere**. One must give an example.

1. Hang (hang without fail, so **the people see**) **no fewer than one hundred** known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.
2. Publish their names.
3. Take from them **all** the grain.
4. Designate hostages - as per yesterday’s telegram.

Do it in such a way that for hundreds of [kilometers] around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout: **they are strangling** and will strangle to death the bloodsucker kulaks.

Telegraph receipt and **implementation**.

Yours, Lenin. [*All emphasis in original*]

Who exactly were these kulaks? Like most metaphysical enemies, they could not be clearly identified. Their most typical trait was the use of hired labor. There were no clear economic criteria for defining the kulak, but the possession of several horses, eight to ten head of cattle, and twenty to thirty acres would almost always be sufficient to qualify.

In other words, a substantial part of the Mennonite rural community before 1914 could have been characterized as kulak. In fact, among the local peasantry and local Bolsheviks in south Ukraine (and elsewhere) – many of whom came from the local peasantry and had supported or even participated

in the Makhno movement – the Mennonites were seen as a *kulak community*. This prejudice was strengthened by the fact that the Mennonites had clearly tilted towards the White side in the Civil War and their Selbstschutz had fought the Makhno bands and, on one occasion, the Red Army as well. Here, oddly, Bolshevik class ideology had a positive consequence for the Mennonites. For the Bolsheviks, there could be no kulak community as a whole. All communities were divided by the same class categories. Poor Mennonite peasants, therefore, just like poor Russian and Ukrainian peasants, were the Bolsheviks' natural supporters; if they did not realize this immediately, they would eventually be convinced of it. The middle peasants were the wavering class. They would begin under the influence of the kulaks but could, with time and effort, be recruited to the Bolshevik side. These made up the vast majority of the peasantry. The kulaks alone were to be eliminated. As a result, the higher Bolshevik leadership often intervened in support of the Mennonites against local officials. This, naturally, reminded the Mennonites of their pre-revolutionary experience.

In addition to this class perspective, the Bolsheviks also viewed the Mennonites in economic terms. Here the outlook was quite positive. The Bolsheviks desperately wanted to re-build agricultural production after the devastation of the Civil War and the great famine of 1921-22. Like the Tsarist government before them, they admired the Mennonites' farming ability, or what they called their "economic culture," and were willing, as we shall see, to make substantial concessions to support its re-establishment. They were also well aware of the financial and technical support that foreign Mennonite organizations – the newly formed Mennonite Central Committee in particular – would provide if the Mennonites were treated sufficiently well. This was an opening for negotiations. A third prism through which the Bolshevik regime viewed the Mennonites was religion. Here one would have expected that the Mennonites' intense religiosity, which the Bolsheviks did observe and lament, might have made them a special target for persecution. But due to a quirk of Bolshevik religious policy, it did not. The Bolsheviks were atheists and hostile to religion on principle. However, their extreme religious hatred is better understood as resentment of the Russian Orthodox Church's close alliance with the Tsarist state rather than a hatred of religion *per se*. The Bolsheviks were, for this reason, most hostile to state churches: the Orthodox church

above all, but also Islam, Catholicism, Lutheranism. They had much more sympathy for the sectarians – Dukhobors, Molokans, Baptists, Evangelicals, Tolstoyans – who had been brutally repressed by the Tsarist regime and its state church. These sectarians were viewed by the Bolsheviks as potential allies, especially since many of the sects practiced some form of communal property. Thus in the 1920s, these religious groups were given state land to form agricultural communes; Dukhobors were encouraged to return from Canada and, grudgingly, sectarians were allowed to apply for alternative military service.¹⁷ Ironically, given their successful pre-revolutionary efforts to avoid being labeled a sect, the Mennonites stood to benefit from that same status under the Soviets.

A still more important factor than religion was nationality.¹⁸ Bolshevik policy explicitly defined the Soviet Union as a multiethnic state. It condemned Russian chauvinism as a greater danger than non-Russian nationalism. It called for granting all nationalities, regardless of their size, their own national territories, the use of their national language, and the staffing of administrative and educational institutes with members of their own nationality. It did not allow for ethno-religious nationalities, so the Mennonites had to accept a German national identity. There could be no official Mennonite national regions. This policy most certainly did not mean self-determination or even minimal political autonomy. Schools and newspapers could be in German, but they must propagate Communist ideas. Germans could run the local soviets, but they must be Communists or at least loyal to Communism. Nevertheless, Soviet nationalities policy did allow traditional Mennonite settlements, from Slavgorod and Orenburg in Siberia to Khortitsa and the Molochnaia in Ukraine, to re-establish themselves as German national regions.¹⁹

A fifth and final prism through which the Bolsheviks viewed the Mennonites was their foreign ties, the fact that they were a diaspora community. In the long term, this would prove fatal for the Mennonites. Even in the 1920s it was a cause of great suspicion. Foreign ties were viewed as *ipso facto* suspect.²⁰ Individuals who corresponded with relatives abroad or who visited a foreign consul – both extremely common among Mennonites – were as a matter of course registered with the political police as a suspect element. Internal Soviet documentation again and again accused the Mennonites of espionage due to their ties with the MCC and other foreign organizations.²¹

However, in the short term, foreign ties surely helped the Mennonites. The Soviets were eager for foreign financial help and concerned about potential foreign embarrassments. Mennonite famine relief efforts demonstrated their ability to direct financial assistance to the Soviet Union. Likewise, the Mennonites had foreign political connections who could publicize any persecution undertaken against them.

The Mennonites Develop a Strategy

As we can clearly see, the Bolshevik vision of the Mennonites was quite complex and did seem to offer some possibility of accommodation. Mennonite leadership could recognize in the Bolsheviks much that was new and terribly threatening but also some reassuring old qualities. In particular, like the Tsarist regime, the Soviet government divided up its population into different categories and offered each of them different privileges and different disabilities, though of course the categories were quite new and the punishments unusually severe. Like the Tsarist regime, the Soviet government admired the Mennonite economic contribution. Perhaps there was, after all, room for a deal.

From the Mennonite leadership's perspective, the deal would ideally include the following items: first, the preservation of the Mennonite economic base – their land, the practice of private agriculture, perhaps their milling industry as well; second, the right to alternative military service; third, permission for a sizable number of Mennonites who had been ruined during the years 1917 to 1921, such as my grandmother's family, to emigrate; fourth, the preservation of as much of their traditional autonomy as possible, in particular control over their churches, schools, economic institutions, charitable institutions and, if possible, local self-government. They were well aware that the last point might be a deal-breaker. In exchange, the Mennonites could offer little more than their traditional economic skills, plus the prospect of foreign investment in the form of much coveted tractors and other technology.

The Mennonite strategy involved the formation of an organization that could, on the one hand, represent the Mennonite community in negotiations with the Bolshevik government and, on the other hand, serve as a kind of extra-territorial Mennonite government that would by-pass the class-based local soviets under the control of local Communists. The south Ukrainian Mennonites formed such an organization, the Union of South Russian

Mennonites, in February 1921 under the leadership of B.B. Janz. Remarkably, a year later, it gained official recognition from the Bolshevik government under a new name, the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent, a remnant of the wartime “Dutch” strategy and a name that omitted any religious referent. From the Bolshevik perspective, the Union was a purely economic organization, but one given quite broad rights: “Commercially it had the right to deal in any raw materials or manufactured goods essential to its program. It could participate in any financial and credit operation and even draw on foreign capital if necessary. Agriculturally it could initiate cooperatives, maintain storage facilities, utilize existing transportation systems and exploit certain lands for experimental purposes. Industrially, it could bring the production of items as needed for the success of its program. In the social sphere it was given a free hand in the operation of benevolent and cultural institutions.”²² In May 1923 a similar organization, the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union, was formed to service the Mennonites living in Russia.

The establishment of these unions was an extraordinary achievement. The Bolsheviks opposed religiously-based organizations of any kind, but in Ukraine under the fig leaf of “citizens of Dutch descent” and in Russia with no fig leaf at all, they allowed the formation of a purely religious organization. The Bolsheviks opposed all extra-territorial national organizations, that is, organizations that served members of a given nationality spread out throughout the country, but in this case allowed two such organizations. (The All-Russian Mennonite union included in its agricultural cooperatives 80 percent of all Mennonites spread out across Russia, while only 2.5 percent of its membership was non-Mennonite.)²³ The Bolsheviks opposed all autonomous organizations, but in this case allowed the formation of a powerful economic organization with freely elected officers. The Ukrainian Mennonite Union, for instance, used its profits to support Mennonite charitable institutions such as the school for the deaf and the hospital for the mentally ill. I have been researching this time period in Soviet archives for a decade now and I have never encountered any organizations remotely comparable.

The second major Mennonite accomplishment came in the land question. Bolshevik land policy called for the re-distribution of agricultural land. In the Mennonite communities of south Ukraine, this meant that in the period up through 1923, large quantities of agricultural land were taken from Mennonite

farmers and redistributed both to landless Mennonites and to local Russian and Ukrainian peasants. The latter policy was viewed as a particular threat by the Mennonites, because it meant that outsiders were being settled in “their” villages – from the Bolshevik perspective, of course, the villages were no longer “theirs” – which endangered their autonomy. Here the Bolshevik nationalities policy came to the Mennonites’ rescue. In 1924 the previous policy was denounced as Russian chauvinism, as was the policy of attaching German villages to nearby Russian districts. Instead, beginning in 1924, nine German national districts – with populations of around ten thousand – were formed in Ukraine, including two in the traditional Mennonite regions of Molochnaia and Khortitsa. Equally important, a policy was established that all land taken from rich Mennonites was not to be given to local Russians and Ukrainians, but was to be held in reserve for the in-migration of landless Mennonites from outside the new German districts. Moreover, because of their valuable “cultured” agriculture, Mennonites were allowed farms as large as 80 acres. By Mennonite standards this was still considered inadequate – traditionally this would be called a half-farm – but considering many Russian regions had average farm sizes of 8 to 10 acres, it was again a major concession.²⁴

The third, more limited, victory came in the struggle for alternative military service. As already noted, the Bolsheviks’ positive attitude toward sectarian organizations allowed the Mennonites to pursue this path successfully. After a four-year period of negotiations in pursuit of a special deal, the Mennonites finally had to settle for a September 18, 1925 law on alternative military service that allowed individuals to appeal to local courts for the right to alternative service on the grounds of conscientious pacifism. Unlike in the Tsarist period, this law gave no guarantee of alternative service for Mennonites, but given the militant nature of the Bolshevik state, it was an important concession.²⁵ Sectarian ministers were also granted concessions not given to Orthodox clergy, on the grounds that their clerical work was part-time and unpaid. They were allowed, for instance, to own land and were often not formally disenfranchised as Orthodox clergy invariably were. Still, religion remained a major problem. Not only did the Bolsheviks not allow any religion to be taught in school, they also actively promoted anti-religious rhetoric and forbade formal religious instruction for minors outside school.

The fourth and final Mennonite triumph came in the field of emigration. Between 1923 and 1926, approximately 19,000 Mennonites were allowed to emigrate legally, most to Canada, including my grandmother's family in 1924.²⁶ Another five thousand left legally in 1929, so that in total about one-fifth of the entire Mennonite community was allowed to leave the country legally. Again, I am not aware of a remotely comparable legal emigration movement in this period.

If we take a snapshot of Mennonite-Soviet relations at the height of the New Economic Policy in 1925-26, then, we could make a strong case that the Mennonites had once again come to an accommodation, made a special deal, with a potentially very hostile authoritarian state. It was a very shaky deal indeed, but its existence was in itself remarkable. Why did the Bolsheviks allow such concessions to the Mennonites? Note that I have not yet detailed how grudging these concessions were and how short-lived they would be. With that caveat in place, we can point to the following factors. First, the Bolshevik religious and nationalities policy overlapped with important Mennonite objectives in the sphere of alternative military service and control of agricultural land. Second, the Mennonites' agricultural skills and their foreign connections were, for the time being, of considerable value to the economically weak Soviet state. Again and again, it was the Soviet agricultural ministry that defended the Mennonites from attacks by Party loyalists. Third, the Soviet state was still highly divided and fragmented. The Party and security organs were focused on more serious concerns than the Mennonites. The Ukrainian secret police, for instance, only singled Mennonites out for surveillance in the fall of 1924. Fourth and most fundamental, the Mennonites used their centuries-old skills as a mobilized diaspora in dealing with authoritarian states. They cultivated friendly officials, sold their agricultural skills, and mobilized their foreign contacts, and in this manner they extracted more concessions than the Bolsheviks desired.

As we shall see, however, it was the Mennonites' status as a mobilized diaspora that would lead both to the complete annihilation of their hundred-year-old autonomous community in less than a decade and to their being singled out for disproportionate suffering and punishment.

LECTURE 2

Collectivization, Famine, and Terror, 1926-1934

Let me begin, as in my last lecture, with two illustrative episodes. On March 6, 1925 the Ukrainian National Minorities Commission directed a letter to the highest authority in Ukraine, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. Their letter was a response to the results of a secret investigation of the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent – which as we have seen was a euphemism for the Union of Ukrainian Mennonites – an investigation carried out in early 1925 by the Ekaterinoslav regional government. The letter did not object to the investigation’s conclusions: namely “that the union was a national-religious organization under the leadership of socially harmful elements, carrying out a policy of playing down class contradictions, preventing the emergence of class divisions, and also preventing the Sovietization of the German Mennonite colonies and preventing the development of Soviet cooperatives and so forth.” If one removes the abusive language, this was not an inaccurate description of the Union’s mission. The letter went on, however, to dispute the conclusion of the investigators, namely that the Union should be immediately liquidated, and instead proposed an alternative course: “The materials of the secret investigation should serve as the basis for an official well-rounded investigation of the political and economic activities of the Union and their relations with the appropriate government agencies. If the conclusions of the commission are confirmed, a show trial [of the Union leadership] should be organized involving the broad mass of Mennonite toilers, concluding with an appropriate judicial conviction.”²⁷ For the time being, the Party Central Committee accepted neither of these proposals.

The second episode occurred a little over a year later, in May 1926, and at a still higher level of authority. The head of the all-Union Communist Party’s Agitation and Propaganda Department, Abolin, wrote a memorandum to the all-Union Central Committee of the Communist Party, which in turn served as the basis for a discussion of the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union at a June 4, 1926 meeting of the Secretariat of the Communist Party

Central Committee, the second highest decision-making body in the Soviet Union after the Politburo. Abolin began his memorandum with a discussion of the sins of the Ukrainian Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent. They had done little to restore the economic level of the Mennonite communities although this was their official function. Instead, they had engaged in “the legal defense of individual Mennonites, by-passing the local soviets” (this was indeed one of the Union’s intended functions); they had assisted Mennonite emigration and even helped finance it; they had “organized collective demands in the name of the population for more privileges for the Mennonites, up to and including the demand that several government decrees be repealed”; they were a phony cooperative organization and had, in fact, erected a wall between the Mennonite masses and the local soviet organs; they had “held back normal economic development” [“normal” meaning normal *socialist* economic development]; they had “played down and stalled the process of class divisions [in the Mennonite community]; and finally and most seriously, they had “engaged in economic espionage.” Abolin went on to note that the All-Russian Mennonite Union had concentrated on more legitimate economic operations, but that it too had “engaged in the same activities as in Ukraine, only to a lesser degree and in a more masked form.” Abolin concluded his letter not with a demand for the liquidation of the union but for a more thorough investigation of its activities.²⁸

I ended the previous lecture with a snapshot of Mennonite-Soviet relations at the height of the New Economic Policy in 1925-26, and I argued that a good case could be made that the Mennonites had, remarkably, managed to come to an accommodation with the new Soviet state. But I also noted that I was not yet presenting the entire picture of Mennonite-Soviet relations. As the two episodes that began this lecture illustrate, there was also a great deal of discontent within the Communist Party over concessions granted to the Mennonites and over how the Mennonites had exploited those concessions to pursue what the government quite plausibly interpreted as an anti-Soviet agenda. I presented the material in this manner to emphasize the extraordinary accomplishments of the traditional Mennonite strategy of using their economic abilities and political skills to negotiate a special deal from authoritarian states, the classic political behavior of a “mobilized diaspora.” More important, I wanted to stress the external, public picture available to ordinary Mennonites

when they had to decide in 1925-26 whether to stay or to go, whether to rebuild their households in Russia or depart for Canada. It was not an easy decision, and no one had a crystal ball. The Mennonites were receiving mixed signals from the Soviet government, some enormously threatening and others quite reassuring. (My grandmother told me that when her family emigrated in 1924, she did not want to go. It was probably only because her family had been driven out of their North Caucasus settlement and economically ruined that they chose the hard path of emigration.) Things would only become clear five to six years later. At that point, it was too late for most, though as we shall see, not all, Mennonites to depart. This lecture, then, is devoted to the collapse of Mennonite attempts to reach an accommodation with the Soviet regime.

The Soviet Government Discusses the Mennonites, 1925-1928

When I was researching my book on the Soviet nationalities policy, I worked through the entire files of the highest Communist Party leadership in Moscow – the Politburo and the Orgburo/Secretariat – for the years from 1923 to 1938. I was not specifically looking for Mennonite materials – indeed, I did not expect there to be any – but was astonished to discover how often the higher Party leadership discussed the fate of this small community of a hundred thousand, slightly less than one-tenth of one percent of their total population. Between November 1925 and June 1928, the Central Committee’s Secretariat discussed the Mennonites no fewer than six times, and the Mennonites were also touched upon in two further discussions of religious sects.²⁹ To put this discovery in context, I did not find a single discussion of the much larger population – about four times as large – of non-Mennonite Germans living outside the Volga German republic. In 1929 to 1930, in response to the massive Mennonite emigration movement, Mennonite affairs were again discussed another half dozen times, including at least one discussion in the Politburo itself. So, if prior to 1925, the Party and security police had more important things to deal with than the Mennonites – that was very much to the Mennonites’ advantage – this quite dramatically ceased to be the case in late 1925 and was very much to their disadvantage.

In the first lecture I discussed how the Soviet government saw the Mennonites in the most general terms, how their way of categorizing the population – by class, religion, nationality, economic capacity, and foreign ties

– informed their initial attitudes toward the Mennonites and helped explain their surprising willingness to make substantial concessions to particular Mennonite desires. Central Committee archival files now allow us a glimpse at how the higher Party leadership interpreted actual Mennonite behavior, in particular that of the two Mennonite Unions.

The primary critique directed at the Mennonite Unions by the Communist Party was a charge of insincerity, that the Mennonite organizations had been authorized exclusively for economic purposes but had nevertheless pursued primarily political and religious goals. This was the central charge made by Abolin in June 1926, quoted at the beginning of the lecture. A March 1928 Central Committee memorandum repeated the charge even more succinctly: “The data we have gathered convincingly demonstrates that the Central Council [of the All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union] is needed by the Mennonite elite as a political organization to defend the interests of the wealthy stratum [of the Mennonite villages], and as a religious center, but not at all as an economic center.”³⁰ Given the dominance of class in the Bolshevik’s world view, it was not surprising that both unions were always accused of serving the interests of the rich Mennonites at the expense of the poor. “As a result [of this approach],” Abolin noted, “the domination of the social elite over the masses is not only being preserved [in the Mennonite communities], but strengthened, and the social elite, as a matter of fact, dictates popular opinion.”³¹ Although the language here is pejorative – *dictates*, not influences, popular opinion – nevertheless most Mennonite historians agree that the traditional Mennonite religious and social elite did indeed maintain mass popular support through to the end of the New Economic Policy in 1928. For the Bolsheviks, of course, this signified a major policy failure.

The Party leadership initially drew a quite strong contrast in this matter between the aggressive political behavior of the Ukrainian Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent, under the leadership of B. B. Janz, and the more moderate all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union. As a result, the Ukrainian Union’s leadership council was abolished in September 1925, while the Russian Union survived until May 1928. In fact, it was the Ukrainian Party’s decision to abolish the Ukrainian Mennonite Union that first drew central Communist Party attention to the Mennonites. In October 1925, an Agitprop conference was held to discuss the Mennonite question. The conference endorsed the

Ukrainian Party's decision to liquidate their Mennonite union but argued that it was premature to consider a similar step for the Russian Mennonite Union. Indeed, the Union was even allowed to hold its all-Russian conference in January 1926.³²

At that gathering, the Union made a tactical mistake in sending a petition to the formal head of the Soviet government, Mikhail Kalinin, calling for the following rights:³³

1. The right to conduct religious gatherings and discussions in the churches and in private homes, both for adults and for children.
2. The right to conduct special gatherings for children of a religious character, including choirs, the preaching of God's word and religious teaching in the churches and in private homes.
3. The right to organize Christian education classes for Mennonite children in orphanages.
4. The right to satisfy needs for published religious materials, including both bibles and textbooks for religious seminaries.
5. The right to organize Bible courses for the preparation and further training of religious leaders.
6. To declare the school a neutral territory, where science is taught without any propaganda for or against religion.
7. To free Mennonites from military service and from general military training, substituting for this some kind of generally useful work for the state.
8. To substitute for the oath a simple promise to be faithful in service.

This petition did no more than repeat demands that the Mennonites had been making persistently from 1921 onward but, coming in the wake of the abolition of the Ukrainian Union and coming from a nation-wide Congress of what the Party saw as a purely *agricultural* union, it was received with particular indignation. Above all, the Bolsheviks were enraged at the suggestion that they – a Party for whom ideology was the central value – should be *ideologically neutral* in their own schools. It would appear that this petition led to Abolin's angry memorandum accusing the Russian Union of being little better than the Ukrainian Union, only masking their activities more carefully. This petition

was also attached to the materials leading to a June 1926 Central Committee decision that began what would be a two-year-long process of gradually abolishing the Russian Union by detaching its regional cooperative branches.

The second major charge directed against the Mennonite unions was their extra-territoriality, the fact that they serviced *only* Mennonites and intentionally isolated themselves from the surrounding non-Mennonite populations. After all, the economic value that the Mennonites had to offer the Soviet state as agriculturists involved not only their own economic production or the foreign aid they might attract but also their positive economic influence on the surrounding non-Mennonite communities. Party reports again and again stressed the Mennonites “isolation” (*obosoblennost’*) and their “closed-off nature” (*zamknutost’*), their attempt to “build a wall” between themselves and local non-Mennonite communities and local organizations. (This rhetoric is strikingly similar to complaints directed against the Mennonites and other German colonists by Russian nationalists in the Tsarist period.³⁴) A report from the Samara Communist Party committee in the Middle Volga region in April 1928 complained that the Mennonites, on average, had sixteen acres per farm while the local non-Mennonite population had only six acres. The report said that the surrounding peasantry “reacted extremely negatively to the situation where the Mennonite colonists preserved their higher land allotments, allowing some [Mennonite] households to conduct small-capitalist enterprises. . . . [Since 1923] the number of written and oral complaints by local peasants demanding the expropriation of Mennonite land continues to grow dramatically.” This report did note, accurately, that the current Mennonite higher land holdings were legal, but regretted this fact and requested permission for the redistribution of Mennonite land.³⁵

The third and most damaging charge was the one related to foreign ties. As already noted, Abolin accused the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent of economic espionage due to its close ties with foreign Mennonite organizations. Likewise, a March 1928 Central Committee document summarizing the activity of the all-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union accused it of organizing the Mennonite emigration by working closely with the Berlin firm, Ausland Deutsch, which was headed by “well-known Fascist activists such as Admiral Khimtse, Von-Dergolts and others.”³⁶ This was an early instance of what would ultimately be the devastating accusation of “fascist” German connections.

By 1925, the Soviet government was growing increasingly concerned about both Poland's and Germany's interest in the Russian Polish and German populations. A 1925 government control commission reported the following:³⁷

Our information demonstrates the existence of national chauvinism in the Polish population, the enormous influence of priests, which creates a base for the influence of [foreign] Poles. The German, Polish and, to a degree, the Czech colonies are a foothold for spreading the influence of their governments, nests of spies in support of these governments. It is interesting to note that tied to the election of Hindenburg [in 1925], in the German colonies a rumor is spreading about a 15-year German occupation of Ukraine.

In connection with this suspicion of foreign ties, a word should be said about the increasing interest of the Soviet political police, the GPU, in the Mennonites and other German colonists, especially given the major role that fear of the GPU has played in Mennonite memoir literature.

In January 1926 the GPU submitted a report on their work "servicing" the foreign colonist population in Ukraine for the year 1925.³⁸ This report noted that until the fall of 1924, the German colonies were "serviced" in the same matter as the surrounding population. Surprisingly, no special measures were taken. The report went on to say that "a series of circumstances has forced us to direct our attention toward the German colonies and to engage in more work to discern the situation and popular mood in the colonies." These circumstances included:

1. The exceptional role that the German colonists played in the Civil War, when they created special German battalions and self-defense units [here a reference to the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* and other comparable organizations], that fought within the [White] army.
2. The particular enclosed nature (*zamknutost'*) and isolation (*obosoblennost'*) of the [German] population in the years following the Civil War.
3. The extremely strong interest shown by the German government in the conditions in the colonies, not only in the famine years, when a variety of German aid organizations were active, but in the latter years right up to the present moment.

4. The existence in the colonies of national organizations such as the “Colonist” union, and the Union of the Citizens of Dutch Descent; moreover, the latter organization continues to exist up to the present moment. (In fact, the union’s leadership was dissolved in September 1925, but its local cooperatives continued to exist.)

Unsurprisingly, the role of foreign ties was of considerable interest to the GPU. Their annual report contained a special section describing GPU surveillance of the Mennonite colonies. Since this is the only such report I have ever encountered, I will quote from it at length:

The Mennonites.

In our work in the Mennonite colonies ... we have two important and distinctive tasks: first, the servicing of the Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent; and second, the examination of the activities of the Mennonite pastors.

The Union of Citizens of Dutch Descent ... using the cover of its economic activities, carries out a hidden political activity in the direction of protecting the Mennonite masses from Soviet influence. On the other hand, being tied with Mennonite organizations in America, Canada, Germany, Holland and other countries, it endeavors to carry out a policy supporting the unity of the interests of Mennonites world-wide, from which comes the desire to be as independent as possible from the government on whose territory they reside. The 1925 emigration was nothing else but a planned transfer of 2500 individuals to Canada, through a jointly planned operation by Canadian and Ukrainian organizations ... [in our battle with this organization] we are creating an opposition group within the current leadership of its Central Directorship.

As for the activities of Mennonite pastors, one must say they are the Union’s closest helpers. Moreover, Mennonites are the strongest sect in Ukraine. They conduct strong religious propaganda, publishing the journal “Unser Blatt” and organizing the masses, so as to minimize Soviet influence. For instance, in the battle for influence over youth, in opposition to our Komsomol the [Mennonite]

preachers create discussion circles, which along with religious questions, discuss so-called “pure scholarship”, sport and song ...

This document is of unusual value, for it gives voice to the policy orientation that would gain the upper hand in 1928 with the abolition of the New Economic Policy and the onset of a radical program of socio-economic transformation.

Collectivization and Emigration

In 1928 Stalin launched his famous Revolution from Above, which fundamentally transformed the Soviet Union and the Mennonite community along with it. The construction of a socialist society involved the following policies: nationalization of all industrial production, rapid industrialization, abolition of the market, collectivization of all agricultural land, complete domination of society by the Communist Party, and establishment of Stalin’s personal dictatorship. To effect this transformation, the Party unleashed an unprecedented wave of terror. The terror was not, however, random. There were particular targets: the “former people” mentioned in the previous lecture (landlords, industrialists, Tsarist officials, White Army volunteers, and others associated with the old regime), the so-called “bourgeois specialists” (non-Bolshevik professionals such as engineers, teachers, academics, and so forth), the clergy, and the kulaks (or rich peasants). The strategy was clear enough. The New Economic Policy had meant a temporary policy of cooperation with useful non-Bolshevik elites. With the commitment to a fundamental transformation of society, those elites could only be seen as an obstacle. Needless to say, this meant that the Mennonites’ entire strategy of political accommodation through direct elite negotiation with the Soviet regime immediately became obsolescent. This wave of terror affected the Mennonite community in largely the same fashion as it affected the rest of the Soviet Union’s peoples, although, again, with the same qualifications we made earlier concerning the Mennonite experience of the Civil War: one, the Mennonites had more to lose; and two, they were exposed to a greater degree of class hostility from the local population, and especially the local Bolshevik authorities, who tended to view them as a *kulak community*. The entire leadership of the two abolished Mennonite unions, if they had not already fled abroad, as B. B. Janz had done, were targeted for arrest or internal exile to Siberia and the Far North. Through the revolutionary

years, despite enormous chaos, famine, and flight, there had been a fundamental continuity in the Mennonite teaching community. This changed irreversibly in 1928. Teachers with any black mark – participation in the *Selbstschutz*, landlord or kulak relatives, past religious activism, a pattern of anti-Bolshevik comments – were removed and replaced with loyalists, often non-Mennonite Germans, but also the many Mennonites who joined the Communist Party in this time period.

Mennonite clergy suffered particularly dramatic losses from 1928 to 1933. According to Mennonite historian Colin Neufeldt, “of the approximately 40 ministers who had once served villages in the Khortitsa colony in the late 1920s, 30 had been exiled by 1933 . . . of the 72 preachers who had once lived in the Molochnaia colony in the late 1920s, there were fewer than 10 ministers still serving the villages by mid-August of 1933.”³⁹ These are truly breathtaking numbers and convey better than most the complete decimation of the traditional Mennonite elite that took place in those years. Again, this was not the result of a policy that targeted Mennonites specifically. In the first half of 1930 alone, over five thousand clergymen of all confessions were exiled to Siberia and the Far North.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, if Neufeldt’s numbers are correct, Mennonite clergy suffered disproportionately. If this is true, then the explanation probably lies in two factors. First, concessions granted to the Mennonites in the NEP period emboldened and enabled more members of the Mennonite elite to engage in what would soon be categorized as anti-Soviet behavior than was the case in other communities; since the Mennonite clergy was a major part of the Mennonite elite, there were simply more Mennonite pastors with black marks on their record. Second, already by about 1925-26, the Bolshevik leadership began to reverse its attitude toward the religious sects. They had found that their support of these sects had not been reciprocated in the manner they wished. Instead, the Baptists and Evangelicals, in particular, had used their limited religious freedom to proselytize aggressively and successfully. With the attack on the churches and clergy in 1928, I believe that the sectarians were actually hit harder than the state churches. After all, if one is targeting religious activity, then religious groups that emphasize mass lay participation will appear more dangerous. I have no statistics to back up this claim for the 1928-1933 period, but it certainly was true of the terror in 1937-38 and I suspect it was the case for this earlier period as well.⁴¹

If the decimation of the Mennonite clergy represented an unprecedented assault on the traditional Mennonite community, an even more dramatic attack came with the policy of collectivization, that is, the expropriation of all private agricultural land, all horses, all agricultural implements, and most livestock, as well as the creation of collective farms and collectivized agricultural production. This policy began gradually in 1928 in response to a crisis in grain collections in the winter of 1927-28 that most historians would attribute to the low prices the state was willing to pay for grain, but that Stalin blamed on a “kulak grain strike.” In order to break this strike, Stalin traveled out to Siberia in January 1928, and encouraged local officials and the secret police to jail kulaks and grain traders as speculators and to increase coercive grain collection. This was a clear violation of the New Economic Policy and signaled to both local Bolsheviks and peasants alike that a policy change was in order. Coercive collectivization only began on a large-scale in the second half of 1929, and took on epic proportions after Stalin’s December 1929 speech declaring that the peasants were now voluntarily entering the collective farms (a clearly mendacious claim) and calling for “the liquidation of the kulaks as a class.” This latter policy, called dekulakization, began in February 1930 and would result in the arrest of tens of thousands of kulaks and the deportation of an astonishing 1.8 million peasants to Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far North in the course of 1930-31, a total of 2.1 million by the end of dekulakization in May 1933.⁴² Once again, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Mennonite community suffered greater losses from dekulakization than did other communities.

The Mennonite community’s response to the collectivization campaign was unique and again extraordinary. It was not the result of any centralized planning but rather the spontaneous actions of local Mennonite communities and individuals. The non-Mennonite peasantry resisted collectivization violently with, according to GPU statistics, 9,000 acts of peasant terror against Soviet representatives in 1929 and another 14,000 in 1930; likewise, in 1930 alone there were 13,754 local peasant rebellions involving over 2.5 million individuals.⁴³ While there were a few uprisings in the Mennonite villages, the Mennonites’ primary response was a mass movement to Moscow to petition for the right to leave the Soviet Union. In short, the Mennonites were true to their historical political tactics, those of the mobilized diaspora. If it was not

possible to make a deal with the government, then leave. Unfortunately, it was not that easy.

This spontaneous Mennonite emigration movement had serious political consequences, and not only for the Mennonites.⁴⁴ On October 10, 1929, the German embassy in Moscow sent its agricultural attaché, Professor Otto Auhagen, to the Moscow suburbs to investigate reports of the mass arrival of German peasants. Two German and three American journalists accompanied him. The next day Auhagen reported they had found around 4,500 Germans. Most were from Siberia – where following Stalin’s visit violence was particularly severe – and about ninety percent were Mennonites. They told of horrible repression and reported they had sold or abandoned all their possessions and were resolved to emigrate to Canada. The foreign correspondents immediately published accounts of this visit that led to enormous media coverage and created a large political scandal in Germany. An organization, “Brothers in Need,” was formed to raise money for the Soviet Germans, and President Hindenburg donated 200,000 Marks of his own money to it. The German embassy, initially inclined to downplay the issue, was forced to intercede aggressively on behalf of the Soviet Germans. Surprised by this unexpected development, the Soviet government behaved erratically. They first threatened to deport all the Germans, then to permit them all to leave, and finally, after five weeks of negotiations, they allowed 5,461 Germans to emigrate and returned another 9,730 to their original places of residence. The episode ended up embarrassing the Soviet government at the height of the collectivization drive and significantly souring Soviet-German relations.

This had an important impact on two Soviet policy realms crucial for the Mennonites: nationalities policy and foreign ties, in particular, cross-border ethnic ties. In theory, collectivization was not supposed to have an ethnic dimension – there were no decrees specially targeting any national groups – but in practice, it quickly developed one. The anarchy and violence of collectivization led to the expression of repressed ethnic hostility. As we have noted, local peasants and local Bolsheviks resented Mennonite privileges. Popular opinion, again shared by local Communists, viewed all Germans as kulaks. A Central Committee report noted that “certain high officials have the incorrect opinion that all German villages are exclusively kulak.”⁴⁵ A Turkmen Communist put it more colorfully: all Germans were “kulak colonizers to the

marrow of their bones.”⁴⁶ The numerous internal reports attempting to explain the emigration movement unanimously agreed that these sentiments had led to an exceptionally harsh treatment of Germans during collectivization.

The Mennonite emigration movement significantly undermined a major premise of the Soviet nationalities policy: that granting ethnic groups national territories, national schools, a national press, and other forms of national self-expression would reduce national unity and sharpen class differentiation. The emigration movement forced the Soviets to admit that they were confronted with “a united national front” and a distinct national form of resistance to collectivization. As one Mennonite put it, “we are not so stupid as to organize rebellions and uprisings. We have another way out, we will abandon our farms and leave for Canada.”⁴⁷ This strategy completely undermined what had been a Soviet policy of using the nationalities policy to attract the support of ethnic groups in neighboring states, such as the Ukrainian and Belorussian minority populations in Poland. Instead of attracting foreign support, the Soviet Germans were fleeing abroad in huge numbers. And not just the Germans. There were also smaller emigration movements among the Poles, Finns, Latvians, Greeks, Estonians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Swedes, and Bulgarians.

Not only were Soviet citizens fleeing abroad, but foreign diplomats were overtly interfering in internal Soviet affairs. In March 1930 the German ambassador wrote Berlin that “I leave no occasion unused to impress upon the Soviet government that measures against the German colonists will have an unavoidable impact on German[-Soviet] relations.”⁴⁸ Germany had made protection of Germans abroad a major concern and aggressively used the League of Nations to that end. Prior to 1929, Germany had exempted the Soviet Union, not a League of Nations member, from this policy. Now Germany informed the Foreign Ministry that “the protection of German minorities in other nations plays an extremely important political role in Germany and therefore must be paid attention to by the German government.”⁴⁹ Internal Soviet documents complained bitterly about interference by the foreign bourgeoisie and foreign consuls. We can date an enormous escalation in the suspicion of Soviet authorities toward their diaspora nationalities to the Mennonite mass emigration movement of 1929.

Let us now briefly summarize the transformed Soviet view of the Mennonites. During NEP, the Mennonites’ status as a religious sect earned

them preferential treatment or at least mitigated Soviet anti-religious campaigns; now Soviet repression of sectarians was, if anything, more extreme. During NEP, the Mennonites' agricultural skills were considered to be "of state significance" by the Soviet Agricultural Ministry; with collectivization, these skills were now worthless as a negotiating tool. During NEP, the Mennonites' cross-border ethnic ties had been a strong plus in negotiations with the Soviet leadership; now they had led to a major international scandal and were increasingly seen as *ipso facto* treasonous. Only two NEP-era factors still continued to work in the Mennonites' favor. One, Bolshevik class ideology still rejected the idea of a kulak community and rebuked local activists who behaved otherwise. All communities were made up of class-friendly and class-hostile elements. Second, despite increasing Soviet suspicions of their diaspora nationalities, the Soviet nationalities policy remained in effect.

In fact, surprisingly, the official response to the Mennonite emigration movement, both in published and in secret Communist Party resolutions, called for an intensification of the existing nationalities policy. This policy had not failed, it was declared, but rather had never been properly implemented and had been seriously distorted during collectivization. This explained the emergence of a united national front. This was not simply verbal cover for a real change in policy. Throughout 1930, enormous effort was put into increasing the number and quality of German national institutions. Of course, there was also an increase in repression. The GPU was ordered to remove "notoriously malicious elements" who had led the emigration, and German institutions were purged.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, neither Germans nor Mennonites were yet categorized as "enemy nations."

Two further events would be necessary to bring about this tragic development. The first was the great famine of 1932-33, during which approximately six to seven million peasants starved to death, about four to five million of them in Ukraine.⁵¹ Mennonites were concentrated in all the four major famine zones – south Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the middle Volga, and northern Kazakhstan – and so suffered terribly during the famine, though it is impossible to determine how many Mennonites perished. (My great-grandfather received a letter from his sister in south Ukraine in 1933 begging for a needle to be sent, as hers had broken and without her sewing income she would perish; as far as I could find out, she did indeed die in the

famine.) For understanding how the Mennonites, as Germans, came to be categorized as an enemy nation, two aspects of the famine crisis need to be taken into consideration.

First, the Soviet leadership faced a grain requisitions crisis in the fall of 1932. They were undertaking desperate efforts to extract all the grain from the peasantry after a disastrous harvest, exacerbated by the violence of collectivization and unreasonably high grain exports in 1930-31, had left them without enough grain to feed the population. They were determined to feed the urban population and the Red Army. Facing the threat of catastrophic famine, the peasantry naturally resisted this policy, usually through theft and hiding grain rather than through open violence. This resistance was greatest in the Soviet Union's two largest grain-growing regions: Ukraine and the regions of the North Caucasus inhabited by the ethnically Ukrainian Kuban Cossacks. Stalin, therefore, interpreted this peasant resistance as the result of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism, and he decided that this nationalism had been fed by his own policy of supporting the Ukrainian language and the promotion of ethnic Ukrainians to positions of leadership. He also blamed cross-border ethnic influence from the highly nationalist Ukrainian community in Polish Galicia. On December 14, 1932, for the first time the Soviet Politburo passed a resolution that blamed its own nationalities policy – in this case the policy of Ukrainization – for creating nationalism. This opened the door to a fundamental revision of that policy and the emergence of the category of “enemy nations.”

The second important aspect of the famine was again the German and, in particular, the Mennonite response to it. As with collectivization, Mennonites did not respond with violent resistance; an emigration movement was no longer possible, but it was still possible to mobilize cross-border ethnic ties. In this case, the major impulse came from Mennonites and Germans abroad, especially in Germany, but it was seized upon with alacrity by the Soviet Germans. The strategy was the mass sending of food packages and, in particular, foreign currency transfers from individuals in Germany (which sent ninety percent of the aid) and North America that could be used at the Torgsin hard currency stores established in the Soviet Union in 1932-33 to extract the remaining gold and valuables from the starving Soviet population. The major campaigner for this movement in Germany was the well-known Russian Mennonite leader Benjamin Unruh. The legal firm Fast (a Mennonite) and Brilliant in Berlin

helped organize the financial transfers. Various German organizations, including “Brothers in Need” (formed during the 1929 crisis), raised money.⁵² The latter raised 500,000 Reichsmarks in the first half of 1933 alone. According to the data of the Ukrainian GPU, from April 1933 to April 1934 (when the transfers were officially stopped), Ukrainian Germans alone – who represented less than half the total Soviet German population – received a remarkable 487,825 gold rubles.⁵³ According to Colin Neufeldt this aid led to substantially lower mortality rates in Mennonite villages than in surrounding Slavic peasant villages. But, as we shall see, it also had serious long-term political costs.⁵⁴

Why did the Soviet Union allow this mass transfer of resources? This question becomes even more difficult to answer when we realize that the violently anti-Communist Nazi movement, headed by Adolf Hitler, came to power in January 1933 and quite quickly formed a mortal threat to the Soviet Union’s existence. This, along with the famine, was the second factor making possible the stigmatization of the Germans as an enemy nation. By mid-1933, all of the organizations raising money for the Soviet Germans were thoroughly Nazified. Benjamin Unruh’s political patrons included prominent Nazis. The Nazi Party supported and publicized this movement. Members used the starvation of the Russian Germans to propagandize their anti-Bolshevik views. Why, then, did the Soviet Union permit this to go on? It was only a few months ago that I finally realized the rather simple answer: a Russian colleague of mine, Elena Osokina, gave me a paper that demonstrated that resources gained from the Torgsin stores had contributed a whopping one-fifth of the total foreign currency resources used to fund Soviet industrialization.⁵⁵ The Soviet Union wanted the money.

By April 1934, however, the cost of allowing the transfers had become higher than the value of the foreign currency received. Transfers were now stigmatized as “Hitler help,” and a wave of terror was launched against individuals said to have organized the movement. In May 1934 the head of the Ukrainian GPU reported the following measures: “in order to paralyze fascist work in the German national regions, it is necessary to take decisive measures . . . among them, . . . conduct a determined purge of Party, soviet, educational and cooperative cadres in the German national regions . . . carry out the arrest of active organizers of the “Hitler help” and the fascist agents. We have thus far arrested 85 individuals, mostly pastors, sectarian preachers, Catholic clergy, active lay church members, kulaks and so forth. We’ve already

targeted another sixty for arrest.”⁵⁶ This would only be the beginning of a four-year arrest campaign that would devastate the Soviet German community. The official launching of that purge campaign came with a November 4, 1934 telegram sent out by Stalin to the Party leadership in all of the Soviet Union’s German regions. It read:⁵⁷

The Central Committee of the Communist Party has received information that in the regions, settled by Germans, in recent times, anti-Soviet elements have become more active and are openly carrying out counter-revolutionary work.

Moreover, local Party organs and the organs of the NKVD [that is, the secret police] are reacting to these activities extremely weakly, in reality therefore aiding them, completely mistakenly thinking that our foreign policy requires such concessions to the Germans or other nationalities living in the USSR who are violating the principle of elementary loyalty to Soviet power.

... The Central Committee considers such behavior on the part of the Party and local organs and the NKVD completely incorrect and suggests that they immediately take repressive measures against the most active counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet elements, carry out arrests, deportations and for notorious leaders, sentence to execution ... explain to the population [of these regions] that even the smallest attempt at anti-Soviet activity will not be tolerated ... the local organs should demand from the population a complete end to all ties with foreign bourgeois fascist organizations, the receipt of money or packages.

This telegram, in my opinion, marks the definitive emergence of the categorization of the Soviet Germans, including the Mennonites, as an enemy nation, as identified essentially with the fascist enemy. The historically effective Mennonite political tactics, associated with their role as a mobilized diaspora, which had seemed to be succeeding in 1926 and which were pursued doggedly through 1934, had now failed. They had not only failed but had proven counter-productive. For the next nineteen years, until the death of Stalin in 1953, Mennonites would suffer terribly not as Mennonites but as Germans, as members of a stigmatized diaspora nationality. That is the sad subject of our concluding lecture.

LECTURE 3

Terror, Forced Labor, and Internal Exile, 1935-1955

Our previous lecture concluded with Stalin's November 1934 telegram that unleashed a wave of mass terror in the Soviet Union's German national regions. This event marks a decisive turn in our account of Soviet-Mennonite relations. After 1934 the Mennonites become much more a passive object in our narrative rather than an active subject. This final lecture has much less to say about Mennonite survival strategies but much more to say about Soviet repression of the Mennonites. Yet that is not quite correct, for from 1934 to 1953, the Mennonites did not suffer *as* Mennonites but rather overwhelmingly *as* Germans. This fact had a strong long-term impact on Mennonite identity, greatly strengthening their ethnic identity as Germans and weakening their sense of themselves as a separate Mennonite *people*.

From 1934 to 1953, the Soviet German community experienced two major forms of state violence: arrest and exile. Arrest affected a substantial minority of the population, particularly men, and it typically led to incarceration in a concentration camp or, particularly in 1937 and 1938, to execution. Internal exile, on the other hand, was the fate of almost every single Soviet German citizen (only a few German women, married to non-German men, were exempted). Exile in turn involved the experience of forced labor in the so-called Trudarmee – or labor army – during World War II, and agricultural servitude after the war.

Ethnic Cleansing

Soviet ethnic deportations or, as we now would call it, ethnic cleansing, began in the Soviet Union's western border regions in 1935.⁵⁸ The targets were diaspora nationalities – primarily Poles, Finns, and Germans – whom the Soviet government suspected of treasonous cross-border ethnic ties to a foreign nation-state. As we noted in lecture two, these diaspora nationalities were subject to considerable popular ethnic hostility, which led to harsh treatment during collectivization and the resulting emigration movements that in turn

raised further concerns about their loyalty. These concerns escalated in 1933-34, when a campaign was launched in Germany to help starving German “Brothers in Need” in the Soviet Union by sending tens of thousands of food packets and foreign currency remittances (called “Hitler help” by the Soviets). This campaign provided still more evidence that the diaspora nationalities could be used by foreign governments as weapons against the Soviet Union. To quote the Ukrainian secret police: “from the moment of Hitler’s rise to power, there was a significant rise in activity in our German national soviets and among the German consuls in Ukraine . . . the Hitler government through its [pan-German] organizations organized in the fascist press a broad anti-Soviet campaign about famine in Ukraine, organized displays of photographs of starving [Ukrainians] and published provocative declarations of the German population in Ukraine asking for help.”⁵⁹ As Hitler solidified power in Germany and destroyed the powerful German Communist Party with surprising ease, Soviet concerns escalated. The German-Polish non-aggression pact of January 1934 was seen as particularly ominous. These concerns eventually led to Stalin’s November 1934 telegram and the anti-German terror campaign unleashed in its wake.

At the same time, in the fall of 1934, the Politburo formulated a new regime for its Western border regions. This regime created a “forbidden border zone,” into which no one could enter without NKVD permission, that ran 7.5 kilometers deep along the whole western border but at times ran as deep as ninety kilometers. A variety of security measures accompanied this decree. One of them was ethnic cleansing. Between February 20 and March 10, 1935, a total of 8,300 families (about 42,000 individuals) were deported from the border regions of western Ukraine into the Soviet interior. Although Germans and Poles made up only a few percent of the local population, they represented 57.3 percent of the deportees (very few of these Germans would have been Mennonites). This limited initial action against “unreliable” elements was expanded in the course of 1935. In July an additional 300 Polish households were deported. This was now a completely ethnic deportation. In October the Ukrainian Party petitioned Moscow for permission to deport still another 1,500 Polish households. In response NKVD chairman Genrikh Iagoda wrote that the spring deportations had “significantly cleansed the border regions, especially Kiev oblast, from counter-revolutionary nationalist [Polish and German] and

anti-Soviet elements . . . [but] there remain significant cadres of counter-revolutionary Polish nationalist elements” that must be removed.⁶⁰

In January 1936, before this third deportation had even been completed, the order was given for a massive new deportation of fifteen thousand German and Polish households, now to Kazakhstan in Central Asia. In Kazakhstan they were quickly reduced to the same status as the formerly deported kulaks of 1930 to 1933, which meant they were placed under NKVD supervision and subject to forced labor and other deprivations. These deportations, however, still remained partial. Not all Germans and Poles were labeled counter-revolutionary and deported. The deportations of 1935-36 included approximately half the German and Polish population of the Ukrainian border regions. No Poles or Germans from outside the border regions were deported, which meant that there had not yet been major deportations from the Khortitsa or Molochnaia Mennonite regions. At the same time, there were comparable deportations of Finns, Latvians and Estonians from the Leningrad border regions. In 1937 the entire Korean and a substantial part of the Chinese population of the Soviet Far East would be deported to Central Asia.

Enemy Nations

By 1937, then, the Soviet Union’s diaspora nationalities had been stigmatized as collectively disloyal and subjected to a first wave of ethnic cleansing. As I have noted, the Mennonite German population largely escaped this initial phase of ethnic deportations. However, with the onset of what historians call the Great Terror of 1937-38 when Stalin, in anticipation of a future war with Hitler’s Germany, unleashed a mass wave of terror against all potential “fifth columnist” elements, not only did ethnic cleansing spread outward to all the Soviet border regions but terror against diaspora nationalities spread inward to embrace the entire Soviet Union. This process had already begun with Stalin’s November 1934 telegram, but it took on truly horrific dimensions in the summer of 1937 with the launching of the Great Terror’s so-called “mass operations.” In July 1937 the Politburo issued a decree calling for mass arrests and executions of “former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements.” Each region of the Soviet Union was given a quota for the number of anti-Soviet elements to be executed (category 1) and incarcerated in a concentration camp (category 2). The quotas were raised again and again throughout this unprecedented

mass terror campaign until, by the end of the Great Terror in November 1938, approximately 1.5 million individuals had been arrested; of these, a shocking 680,000 were executed.⁶¹

The “former people” (such as kulaks, criminals, White Army officers, non-Bolshevik political party members, and so forth) made up only half of the mass operations. The other half focussed exclusively on the Soviet Union’s diaspora nationalities, including the Germans. On August 9, 1937, the Politburo confirmed NKVD decree 00485, “On the Liquidation of the Polish Sabotage-Espionage Group and the Polish Military Organization.” This decree launched what the NKVD called their “Polish operation,” which resulted in the mass arrest and execution of Soviet Poles.⁶² This Polish decree served as the model for a series of NKVD decrees targeting all of the Soviet Union’s diaspora nationalities. The NKVD referred to these decrees collectively as “the national operations” (to distinguish them from the other mass operation targeting “former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements”). A January 31, 1938 Politburo decree extended this “operation for the destruction of espionage and sabotage contingents made up of Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians, *Kharbintsy*, Chinese, and Rumanians, both foreign subjects and Soviet citizens, according to the existing decrees of the NKVD.” This decree also authorized a new operation “to destroy the Bulgarian and Macedonian cadres.” Koreans and Afghans were targeted by NKVD decrees as well. The NKVD spoke of their “German operation” and “Latvian operation.” They arrested individuals “according to the Polish line” or “Finnish line” of the nationalities terror. Most revealingly, internal NKVD documents referred to their operations as directed against “nationalities of foreign governments,” a designation for the diaspora nationalities – the vast majority of whom were Soviet citizens and whose ancestors, like the Mennonites, had resided for decades and sometimes centuries in the Soviet Union and Russian empire.

The national operations were not at all a minor part of the Great Terror. According to recently released statistics from the former KGB archive in Moscow, from July 1937 to November 1938, a total of 335,513 individuals were convicted in the national operations, of whom 247,157 or 73.7 percent were executed. Thus, diaspora nationalities made up 36.3 percent of all individuals executed during the Great Terror.⁶³ We do not yet have exact statistics for the number of Germans repressed, but a sophisticated study by the Moscow-based scholars and human rights activists, N. G. Okhotin and A.

B. Roginskii, estimates that 69-73,000 Germans were repressed during the Great Terror, of whom approximately 40-45,000 would have been executed.⁶⁴ In other words, Germans made up approximately four percent of total victims and seven percent of total executions during the Great Terror, although they represented just under one percent of the total Soviet population. The Great Terror was not random. It specifically targeted diaspora nationalities, among them the Soviet Germans.

The NKVD did not keep statistics by religion, so we do not know, and may never know, how many Mennonites were repressed in the Great Terror. Mennonites made up about eight percent of the Soviet German population, so if they were affected at the same rate as other Germans, there would have been about 5,500 Mennonites arrested and 3,500 executed. Working from information collected by the German SS during World War II, Peter Letkemann has estimated that 8,000 to 9,000 Mennonites may have been repressed.⁶⁵ Sectarrians were also a target of the Great Terror, which would have affected the Mennonites to a greater degree than other Germans, as it would individuals with relatives living abroad. So, while the Mennonites were not specifically targeted in the Great Terror, they may well have suffered even more than the larger Soviet German population.

In order to put a human face on these terrible numbers, let me quote from two Mennonite eye-witnesses who related their experiences to German investigators in 1941. The first from the village of Burwalde in Khortitsa: "So began the year 1937. On September 5th five men were taken from our village by NKVD officials. Between spring and fall in 1938, the NKVD arrested another sixteen men. These arrests always happened at night and involved intensive house searches. Consequently in the space of several months the twenty-one wives who lost their husbands and the many children who lost their fathers were subjected to a wretched existence. . . . The fate of the twenty-one hard-working and capable men remains unknown to the present day. They have vanished without a trace. . . ."⁶⁶ As we now know, it is most likely these men were executed. A second report comes from the same village from a man who was arrested towards the end of the Great Terror and then, as sometimes happened after November 1938, released in February 1939:⁶⁷

After our arrest we were taken by trucks to the prison in Zaporozhye. There we were incarcerated for some two weeks. . .

During this period we had the opportunity to discover what such an arrest really meant. Eighty men were imprisoned in a room suitable for twenty or thirty. In the morning and evening we could leave the room for some five or ten minutes. We slept on the floor. There was no contact with one's family. Men who had been there for some time told us of the gruesome, merciless treatment given them by the NKVD. Men returned from the NKVD interrogation with thick swollen feet and wounded bodies. They cried and moaned because they had been excessively tortured. We were all made aware of the accusation against us. By and large this involved the fact that we were in contact with Germany and, in the event of war between Germany and the Soviet government, we wanted to help the Germans. . . .

One could produce thousands of such accounts from Soviet citizens of all nationalities.

Mass ethnic cleansing and the national operations were unsurprisingly accompanied by decrees in December 1937 abolishing all national territories and national schools of the stigmatized diaspora nationalities. These national institutions were declared to have been "artificially created." Stalin's close comrade Georgii Malenkov stated that it was often not even the Party that had created them: "it has now been established that in numerous cases national districts were created by the initiative of enemies of the people in order to ease the development of counter-revolutionary espionage and wrecking."⁶⁸ In any case, from 1938 onward, German institutions and German language schools were not permitted anywhere except in the Volga German republic, where they would exist until the mass deportations of all Germans in August 1941.

War and Internal Exile

The period from the end of the mass operations of the Great Terror in November 1938 to the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941 represented a breathing space for the Soviet Germans after the carnage of the preceding decade. This was especially the case after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 that officially made Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union allies, and that unofficially divided up eastern Europe into a Nazi

and Soviet sphere of influence. This agreement led to the invasion and occupation of Poland in September 1939. Nazi German ideology considered all ethnic Germans living beyond the borders of the Third Reich to be future citizens and therefore to be under the protection of the Reich. As we have seen, Stalin likewise viewed the Soviet Germans in this manner and for that reason the Soviet Germans had suffered six years of terror as putative “fascist spies.” Now Stalin was deathly afraid of a Nazi invasion – for very good reasons – and was willing to do almost anything to forestall a German attack. As a result, arrests and exile of Soviet Germans almost entirely ceased in this period, although those already in exile were not allowed to return home; the many Soviet Germans in the GULag were not freed; and German national institutions were not restored. Nevertheless, if we look at the grim quarter-century from 1928 to 1953, undoubtedly the least grim years for the Germans were the period from September 1939 to June 1941.

As part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, all ethnic Germans living in territory conquered by the Soviet Union after September 1939 – which included eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and parts of Romania – were repatriated to Germany. Only a tiny fraction of these Germans were Mennonites. Their fate, however, would in many ways anticipate the fate of many Mennonites during the so-called Great Trek of 1943 to 1945, when those Soviet Germans who had remained under German occupation in Ukraine retreated with the German army and suffered enormous hardships and mortality, even though they were considered, as Germans, to be infinitely more valuable than the eastern Slavic populations. Likewise, the ethnic Germans repatriated in 1939 to 1941 were scheduled to replace the deported and exterminated Polish and Jewish populations of western Poland. However, due to Nazi bureaucratic inefficiency and callousness, they actually spent these years suffering in transit camps.⁶⁹ One further aspect of this population transfer is relevant for our concerns. Before allowing the Germans to leave, the Soviet security police systematically recruited a network of informers among them to serve as spies.⁷⁰ This is important for our topic, since many Germans ended up as displaced persons after World War II in the American and British zones of occupation and were subsequently returned to the Soviet Union. Of course, the Soviets assumed that the Americans and British had done the same, which would lead to the punishment of these Germans as American and British spies.

It is often asserted that Stalin saw in Hitler a kind of fellow dictatorial soul-mate, that he trusted Hitler implicitly from 1939 to 1941, and that he was completely surprised by Hitler's betrayal of him in June 1941. This is nonsense. Stalin used the two years prior to Hitler's invasion to engage in a massive and ultimately successful build-up of Soviet military and defense industry potential. He desperately sought to delay the war, and so allowed himself to be surprised by the timing of the war but not by the fact that Hitler would attack. Stalin was paranoid but not naïve. As part of these plans for war, given the Soviet obsession with categoric enemies and potential fifth columnists, it is not surprising that plans were in place for arrests and exile in the case of war. In the Moscow archive of the NKVD, I have seen some of these plans, and naturally Germans figure in them as one of the major arrest categories.⁷¹ What I have not found, nor have any other researchers with better access to secret materials than I, is a plan for the deportation of all Soviet Germans in the event of war. It was long suspected that such a plan did exist, but this does not appear to have been the case. This fact explains why the majority of the south Ukrainian Mennonites were not deported before the German army reached their settlements.

On June 22, 1941 the German army crossed the Soviet borders and advanced with extraordinary speed on all fronts. The same day an order in Moscow called for "the internment of all German citizens." Three days later the NKVD called for a "strict regime controlling the movement of persons of German descent." Already in July 1941 selective deportations of Soviet Germans began. Finally, on August 3 the military council of the Army's southern Ukrainian front claimed that German settlers had shot at the retreating Soviet army, that German villages had greeted the German army with bread and salt (the traditional Russian welcoming gesture), and that therefore there should be an immediate deportation of these "unreliable elements." On August 12 the State Defense Committee, which replaced the Politburo for the duration of the war, ordered the deportation of the entire population of the Volga German republic. Subsequently – primarily in 1941 but continuing through to 1948 – 1.2 million of the 1.4 million Soviet Germans were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan.⁷² The rest of the population was already living in those regions, or they fell under German occupation and either escaped to the west or died during the war, or they were returned to the Soviet Union and deported. (This is why the deportations continued through 1948; all those repatriated from Germany after the war were then deported to Siberia.)

When the orders were given to deport the south Ukrainian Germans, the German army was already approaching the major Mennonite settlements of Khortitsa and Molochnaia. All Khortitsa villages received evacuation orders between August 8 and 16, but only 831 Mennonites were deported before the arrival of the German army on August 18. In Molochnaia, where the Soviets had more time to carry out the deportations, because the villages lay to the east of the Dnepr river, a little over half of the settlement was exiled. Still, the majority of the Ukrainian Mennonite community was not exiled.⁷³ The entire Russian Mennonite community, however, was either exiled or already living in Siberia, so approximately sixty to seventy percent of the Mennonite community ended up in internal exile in 1941. When the Germans retreated in 1943, they took with them about 35,000 Mennonites, about 12,000 of whom ended up in the west after the war.⁷⁴ The remainder either perished in those years or were repatriated to the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, I do not have precise statistics for how many Mennonites were returned to the Soviet Union from Germany after the war, but it would undoubtedly have been thousands. These Mennonites suffered most severely, for they were assumed to be spies or potential spies.

For those who were exiled by the Soviet authorities in 1941, the actual process of deportation typically went as follows.⁷⁵ A village, or an entire settlement, would be ordered to gather in twenty-four hours for what was usually called “evacuation.” During this period, the secret police would arrest some two to three percent of the population, those deemed to be “anti-Soviet elements” and so considered likely to resist deportation or create trouble during the long train ride eastward. German Communists and Komsomol activists would actually participate in and help organize their own deportation. Each family was given a strict weight limit for the amount of personal belongings they could take with them. Livestock and machinery were left behind – unless there was a danger of German army occupation, in which case they would be evacuated elsewhere. The Germans would be promised similar livestock and machinery in the place of deportation, but this never materialized. On the day of the deportation, the villagers would gather in the central square and they would be taken to nearby trains and loaded, typically into cattle cars, for deportation. Anyone who resisted, which was rare indeed, or failed to appear, would be arrested. The actual train trip to the place of deportation took

agonizingly long, due to war-time demands on the railway system, and disease and malnutrition killed a little under one percent of the deportees.

When the trains did arrive at the places of settlement in Siberia and Kazakhstan, there would theoretically be housing waiting for the deportees, but this was also rarely the case. Instead, as my grandmother's cousin told me when we met in northern Kazakhstan in 1990, they were dumped onto the open steppe and had to dig themselves earth huts to survive the coming winter. Her family was fortunate that they were deported to an area with a pre-existing German Lutheran settlement which could provide them with some minimal emergency assistance. Others were less fortunate. I do not have precise mortality statistics for the German deportation, but in the subsequent deportations of the Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and other nationalities in 1943-44, the typical mortality rate in the first year was a loss of 15 to 25 percent of the entire population, overwhelmingly through disease and malnutrition. Typically it took four to five years before the birth rate once again exceeded the death rate in these settlements. For the Germans, due to extreme wartime privations and family separations, this did not occur until about 1948-49. However in the last six years of the deportation regime, from 1949 to 1955, the German population was experiencing real population growth.⁷⁶

The worst wartime experience was not deportation or life in exile, as bad as those were, but forced labor in the so-called *Trudarme* or what was formally called "mobilized labor columns." On January 10, 1942 a State Defense Committee decree called for the mobilization of all German men between the ages of 17 and 50 to undertake forced labor for defense needs. On October 7, 1942 this requirement was made much more onerous by including not only men aged 15 to 55, but also all women aged 16 to 45 so long as they did not have children under age 3. Children aged 3 to 14 were to be given to their grandparents or their nearest relatives, or to anyone in the community who would take them in.⁷⁷ As a result the German exile communities in the war years consisted of children, mothers with infants, and the old. This naturally increased mortality rates enormously in the exile communities.

The majority of mobilized Germans were put in concentration camp-like conditions, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by NKVD troops, where they worked on either construction projects or on felling timber.⁷⁸ These construction sites were mostly under the official supervision of the

Soviet GULag, that is, the concentration camp system, which had great expertise in exploiting forced labor for construction purposes. Indeed, a Russian scholar has concluded that in 1942-43 the conditions in the construction sites were every bit as bad as in the actual GULag concentration camps, both in terms of the meager food rations and the work required of the Germans.⁷⁹ Since fatality rates in the GULag were higher in 1942 than in any other year in Soviet history, we can only imagine how many Germans perished in these camps. Conditions improved somewhat in the last two years of the war and immensely after the end of the war, when the barbed wire was removed, NKVD supervision much reduced, and food rations raised. Nevertheless, the Trudarmee veterans were mostly not allowed to return to their families in exile. Instead, in many cases they were required to continue with their forced labor through to 1948 when the Trudarmee was finally shut down, and the MVD (the new name for the NKVD) adopted a program of family reunification on the grounds that this would increase economic efficiency.

Life in Exile 1948-1955

From 1948 to 1955, then, the majority of Germans lived together as families, albeit often families missing many members, particularly males, for those in the GULag system proper were not freed to join their families. They lived mostly in agricultural villages (collective farms) in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Soviet authorities did not categorize the Germans by religion, so it is impossible to say much about the distinctive Mennonite experience by relying on Soviet documents. Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics were often settled together and, judging by the experience of my relatives, intermarriage was common, if not the norm. The Soviets did divide their German exile community into five categories: first, those deported in 1941-42 (this would include those who served in the Trudarmee and then returned to their family after the war; in 1953, there were 856,000 in this category); second, the local Germans already living in Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1941, such as the Mennonite communities of Orenburg and Slavgorod (111,000); third, the so-called mobilized Germans, that is, the small percentage of Trudarmee veterans who did not go to the exile settlements – usually because they had no family to return to – and instead continued to work in their Trudarmee jobs (49,000); fourth, the repatriated Germans, those Soviet Germans who had lived under Nazi occupation, and

were either captured by the Red Army or returned to the Soviet Union by Britain and the United States according to their treaty obligations (208,000); fifth, the so-called Volksdeutsche, namely those Soviet Germans who had, according to the judgement of Soviet authorities, acquired German citizenship from the Nazis (4,800).⁸⁰ Of these five categories, those considered most suspect in the eyes of Soviet authorities were the repatriated Germans and, even more so, the Volksdeutsche.

What was the exile regime like in 1948? In many ways, the best analogy is with the pre-1861 Russian institution of serfdom, in particular the so-called state peasants who had no personal master but were in essence owned by the state. There were in 1953, 2.8 million of these twentieth-century serfs, who were called by the Soviets “special settlers.” Of these, the Germans made up almost half or 1.2 million. The majority of the other special settlers were also deported due to their nationality: Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, Balkars, Meshkhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, and others, who were all accused of collaboration with the Nazis. There were also a large number of deportees from the newly acquired Baltic and west Ukrainian territories, where dekulakization and a violent civil war were then taking place. A few religious sectarian populations were also deported: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the True-Orthodox Christians. Finally, there were individuals deported for serving in the Nazi army and peasants deported for failing to work hard enough in the collective farms.⁸¹

The Special Settlers were similar to nineteenth-century serfs in that they lived as families in villages that looked pretty much like other Soviet villages – by 1953, many German villages were more prosperous than surrounding “free” Russian villages – they were not under guard and could, in their local village and even township, move about freely. In other words, their day-to-day life did not feel like or look like a prison camp. There was no barbed wire surrounding their settlements. However, they lacked the right to leave their villages and take up residence elsewhere. They were, like serfs, attached to the land. Like serfs, they also owed forced labor to the state. They could not choose or change their occupation. In the war, this meant forced industrial service wherever the state chose to send them. For many Germans, this situation continued after the war as well, but for the majority it now meant forced agricultural labor. Even as agriculturists, however, they could be uprooted

at a moment's notice, say, when the state needed fishermen and would send a whole Special Settler village to a fishing village to work there. It is important to remember, however, that forced labor was not uncommon in the Soviet Union. There was no yawning divide between free and forced labor as in some serf or slave societies. Most collective farmers, for instance, viewed their work in the collective farms as a form of forced labor and, as I just mentioned, tens of thousands of peasants were exiled for shirking their collective farm labor duties. Likewise, from 1940 to 1953, industrial workers were not free to leave their jobs for other work without receiving permission, and many workers were jailed for doing so. So the German Special Settlers occupied a position on a spectrum of more or less forced labor. And they did not even occupy the extreme position. That was reserved for the GULag concentration camp inmates.

Along with restrictions on mobility and forced labor, the Special Settlers were also in the uncomfortable position of being under the direct supervision of the political police. All settlements in a given county were under an MVD special commandant who was in essence a local dictator. All settlers had to report to him once every two weeks in the early years; later this was reduced to once a month. The MVD operated an extensive network of secret informers among the Soviet German population to monitor the mood of the Special Settlers and to identify individuals who made anti-Soviet comments. Such individuals were then often arrested. This meant that many Germans were coerced into serving as secret informers against their own neighbors and even their own families, under the threat of arrest and incarceration. This naturally had a terribly negative moral effect on the entire community, both on those who served as secret informers and those on whom they informed.⁸²

The Soviet Germans were in a difficult moral position for they had been stigmatized as traitors, as allies of the fascist invaders. The published justification for their deportation in August 1941 stated that "according to reliable data, received from military authorities, among the Volga German population, there are tens of thousands of saboteurs and spies who are waiting for a signal from the German army to commit acts of sabotage."⁸³ This charge was repeated by local officials in all the areas where the Germans were resettled.⁸⁴ As a result, both state officials and local residents treated the Germans as a particularly stigmatized and odious population. This stigma was, according

to the memoirs of many Germans, internalized to a considerable degree and felt as a source of shame throughout the Soviet period. Especially stigmatized were the 200,000 repatriated Germans, who were viewed as potential spies since they had been on enemy territory and, in some cases, had been in contact with American or British authorities. For instance, in 1951-52 between 17 and 30 Mennonites were arrested in Tajikistan in Central Asia. All were sentenced to twenty-five years hard labor and their putative leaders, Dietrich Klassen and Heinrich Wiens, were sentenced to death (though only Wiens was executed). Both Wiens and Klassen had retreated with the German army and then escaped to the American zone of occupation in Germany, where they had been visited by American Mennonites. They were later forcibly repatriated and subsequently accused of espionage.⁸⁵

Finally, the Soviet Germans and other deported nationalities suffered the unique fate of having been exiled “eternally.” Until 1948, all of the exiled Special Settler populations, including the 2.1 million kulaks deported in 1930-31, were exiled for a limited period of time; sometimes the period was stated clearly and sometimes it was left open-ended. On November 26, 1948, however, the so-called “national contingents” were declared to be “eternally” exiled. They could never hope to return to their home regions in the Volga or southern Ukraine. Even the so-called “Vlasovtsy,” individuals who served in General Vlasov’s Russian Liberation Army and fought alongside the Nazis against the Red Army and therefore had definitely committed treason, were only exiled for six years and were in 1951 freed from their Special Settler status. The Soviet Germans and other nationalities, however, had no such hope for eventual freedom and rehabilitation.

A final word needs to be said about religion. As I have noted several times, the Mennonites suffered in this period as Germans, not as Mennonites. In reading thousands of pages of published and unpublished archival material, I have not yet encountered the word “Mennonite” in a Soviet document of the period, though surely there must be a few such documents. (Of course, one sees the names Dyck, Epp, Friesen and assumes that these documents refer to Mennonites.) Organized religion was not possible in the special settlements. There were no churches and there were no legal gatherings, though we gain a glimpse occasionally of underground religious activity. Walter Sawatsky, for instance, tells the story of Elder Johann Penner, who had been ordained in

1941 and who, after the war, returned from the Trudarmeï and began traveling to isolated Mennonite communities and secretly baptizing individuals. But such heroic efforts were the exception.⁸⁶ By and large, religion, to the extent it did survive, was confined to the home and sometimes even to the conscience of individuals.

There was, however, a crucial change in official state religious policy in this period. World War II had intensified the Soviet state's rehabilitation of Russian nationalism. Russian patriotism and traditional pre-revolutionary heroes were officially propagandized during the war to encourage a patriotic defense of the Russian Soviet fatherland against the Nazi German invaders. Along with this came a rehabilitation in 1943 of the Russian Orthodox church, which involved permission to elect a new Patriarch, the re-opening of several monasteries and seminaries, as well as permission to publish a church journal. A year later, a much bigger surprise came with the recognition of an All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists, which gave legal recognition to the indigenous Russian sectarian movement, in particular the Baptists and Evangelical Christians.⁸⁷ This marked the official end of any attempt to exterminate religion entirely in the Soviet Union. From now on, there would be occasional serious waves of persecution and much routine repression; there would be constant surveillance and interference in church affairs; but the actual existence of organized religion itself would no longer be placed in doubt. This change did not initially affect the enserfed German Special Settlers, but it would have an important long-term effect on the Mennonites, since the newly-formed Evangelical Council would provide a legal umbrella for Mennonites seeking recognition of their churches.

Conclusion

Our lecture can end on a comparatively happy note, with the death of the dictator Iosif Stalin in March 1953 and the subsequent surprisingly rapid dismantling of the great Soviet slave labor system.⁸⁸ At the time of Stalin's death, there were over five million individuals in the GULag and Special Settlements. Within three years, there would be only several hundred thousand, many of them convicted for ordinary criminal behavior. Already in 1953-54 large numbers of Special Settlers were released from their villages and allowed to return home. For the Soviet Germans, foreign ties once again emerged as

crucial to their fate. In the negotiations leading up to the visit of West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer to the Soviet Union in September 1955, Soviet authorities agreed to issue a decree in December 1955 that freed all Germans from the status of Special Settler, though it did not rehabilitate them and still forbade them from returning to their home regions. A subsequent 1964 decree did formally rehabilitate the Germans by declaring the 1941 charge of collective treason baseless. Finally, a 1972 decree removed the remaining restrictions on German mobility, though it still did not allow the re-establishment of the Volga German republic or any of the Mennonite German regions.

Let us conclude by returning to our specifically *Mennonite* story. From the emergence of the Dutch Mennonites in the sixteenth century, through their movement to Poland and then to Russia, all the way up to 1928 in the Soviet Union, a distinctive and united Mennonite community existed. Moreover, it existed and functioned not only as a religious community but, thanks to a lack of proselytizing and inter-marriage as an ethnic community as well. As a sometimes persecuted ethno-religious community, the Mennonites developed a political tradition of negotiating special deals with monarchs and aristocrats, which allowed the community to survive and prosper. I have called this the “mobilized diaspora” tradition. The quarter-century of Stalinist repression killed that Mennonite community. After 1955, there were still over a hundred thousand individuals of Mennonite descent in the Soviet Union, but there was no single Mennonite community, nor did one re-form under the comparatively less repressive post-Stalinist conditions. Individual “Mennonites” did form isolated communities – religious communities identifying themselves as Baptist, German-speaking Baptists, Mennonite-Baptist, Mennonite Brethren, or church Mennonite (though many others adopted a Baptist identity and abandoned the Mennonite label entirely). Perhaps the majority abandoned any organized religious identity and simply identified themselves as Soviet Germans.⁸⁹ This was the case with my relatives.

In any event, “Mennonite” ceased to be an ethnic label and became exclusively a religious label. When I traveled through the formerly Mennonite colonies in Orenburg in 1990 and spoke with many Penners and Dycks and Friesens, and would casually refer to them as Mennonites, they would, unless they happened to be regular church-goers, correct me politely and point out that Mennonite was a religion, that they were not believers, and that surely I

meant that they were Germans. When Gorbachev and Kohl opened the floodgates to mass emigration to Germany, then *former* and practicing Mennonites left as they had attempted to in the 1920s, yet no longer as a mobilized diaspora community but as individual Germans, some religious Mennonites and some not. If a Russian Mennonite community does re-form, it will now have to do so in Germany. If it does, then surely a crucial part of its identity will be the historical memory of the tragic Russian Mennonite encounter with the Soviet state under Stalin's rule.

Notes

¹ Alf Lüdtke, *Police and State in Prussia, 1815-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), 206.

² John B. Toews, "Early Communism and Russian Mennonite Peoplehood," in John Friesen ed., *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, 1989), 265-88.

³ John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS, 1982), 95-106.

⁴ Terry Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma, 1905-1914," *The Donald Treadgold Papers* no. 4 (December 1995): 1-77.

⁵ James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, 1989), 21-63.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-218.

⁷ Harvey Dyck, "Russian Mennonitism and the Challenge of Russian Nationalism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56 (1982): 307-41.

⁸ Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma."

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Eric Lohr, "Enemy alien politics within the Russian Empire during World War I" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999).

¹¹ David Rempel, "Zum 200 jährigen Jubiläum der Mennoniten Einwanderung in Russland 1789-1889," *Der Bote* (1991), nos. 22-23.

¹² My grandmother, Margaret Horst geb. Lohrenz, grew up in the Terek settlement in what is today northern Dagestan.

¹³ For classic accounts, see Diedrich Neufeld, *The Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in Ukraine* (Winnipeg, 1977); and Gerhard Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment* (Lodi, CA, 1974).

¹⁴ On the *Selbstschutz* episode, see Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 79-94.

¹⁵ On the Bolshevik class paradigm, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (December 1993): 745-70.

¹⁶ Richard Pipes, ed., *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven, 1996), 50.

¹⁷ Heather Coleman, "The Most Dangerous Sect: Baptists in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, 1905-

1929” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana, 1998).

¹⁸ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001).

¹⁹ Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs – ein Fall doppelter Loyalität* (Gerlingen, 1984).

²⁰ Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998): 813-61.

²¹ For documentation, see lecture two.

²² Toews, “Early Communism and Russian Mennonite Peoplehood,” 270.

²³ RGASPI [former Central Party Archive] 17/113/611, 93-98.

²⁴ Good documents describing this policy can be found in B. V. Chyrko et al., eds., *Nimtsi v Ukraini 20-30ti rr. XX st. Zbirnyk dokumentiv derzhavnykh arkhiviv Ukrainy* (Kyiv, 1994). The policy is contextualized in Chapter eight of Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

²⁵ Lawrence Klippenstein, “Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations, 1789-1936,” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 1984).

²⁶ The classic studies of this movement are Frank Epp, *Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB, 1962); and John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland. The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-1927* (Scottsdale, PA, 1967).

²⁷ Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 71-72.

²⁸ RGASPI 17/113/202, 33-37.

²⁹ The discussions took place on the following dates: 09.01.25, 20.11.25, 08.05.26, 04.06.26, 05.07.26, 15.10.26, 06.05.27, 30.03.28, 18.05.28. The materials may be found in RGASPI fond 17 opis’ 112 dela 627, 713; and opis’ 113, dela 200, 202, 211, 235, 288, 611, 624.

³⁰ RGASPI 17/113/611, 87.

³¹ RGASPI 17/113/202, 37.

³² RGASPI 17/113/202, 40-43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

³⁴ Dyck, “Russian Mennonitism.” Terry Martin, “The German Question in Russia, 1848-1896,” *Russian History* 18 (1991): 373-434.

³⁵ RGASPI 17/113/611, 93-98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁷ GARF [Moscow State Archive] 374/27s/594, 79.

³⁸ TsDAHOU [Ukrainian Party Archive] 1/16/2, 117-133.

³⁹ Colin Neufeldt, “The fate of Mennonites in Ukraine and the Crimea during Soviet collectivization and the famine (1930-1933)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1999), 91. This is an important new work, based on both Mennonite and Soviet sources, that greatly advances our understanding of this important period of Mennonite history.

⁴⁰ N. A. Ivnikskii, *Repressivnaia politika sovetskoi vlasti v derevne (1928-1933 gg.)* (Moscow, 2000).

⁴¹ There is no good single source for this question and I am generalizing from my own archival work and scattered remarks and documents I have encountered in others’ works. I hope to address this question directly in the near future.

⁴² The best study of this is Ivnitskii, *Repressivnaia politika*. In English, a good study that focuses on peasant resistance is Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Oxford, 1996).

⁴³ See the charts in Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*.

⁴⁴ This discussion summarizes a passage in Chapter eight of my book *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

⁴⁵ RTsKhIDNI 17/113/786, 44.

⁴⁶ GARF 1235/141/561, 59.

⁴⁷ RTsKhIDNI 17/113/822, 13ob.

⁴⁸ Captured German Materials Reel 1416, 307.

⁴⁹ CGM Reel 5213, K481216.

⁵⁰ GARF 3316/64/759, 2.

⁵¹ I discuss this in Chapter seven of, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

⁵² Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 64-71.

⁵³ Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 175-85.

⁵⁴ Neufeldt, "The Fate of Mennonites," 237-62.

⁵⁵ Unpublished paper. Elena Osokina is preparing a book on the role of Torgsin and the sale of art and other cultural treasures abroad to help fund industrialization in the 1930s.

⁵⁶ Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 184-85.

⁵⁷ RGASPI 558/11/51, 71-72.

⁵⁸ The following summarizes Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (1998): 813-61.

⁵⁹ Chyrko, *Nimtsi v Ukraini*, 179.

⁶⁰ GARF 5446/16a/265 (1935): 14-15.

⁶¹ The best summary of this is Oleg Khlevnyuk, "The Objectives of the Great Terror" in Julian Cooper et al., ed., *Soviet History, 1917-1953. Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies* (New York, 1995), 158-76. The actual document authorizing the mass operations has been translated and published in Arch Getty, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks* (New Haven, 1999).

⁶² I address these mass operations in Chapter eight of *The Affirmative Action Empire*. See also N. V. Petrov and A. B. Roginskii, "'Polskaia operatsiia' NKVD 1937-1938 gg." in *Repressii protiv poliakov i pol'skikh grazhdan* (Moscow, 1997): 22-43.

⁶³ Calculations from Petrov and Roginskii, "'Polskaia operatsiia.'"

⁶⁴ N. Okhotin and A. Roginskii, "Is istorii 'nemetskoi operatsii' NKVD 1937-1938 gg." in *Nakazannyi narod. Repressii protiv rossiiskikh nemtsev* (Moscow, 1999): 35-74.

⁶⁵ Peter Letkemann, "Mennonite Victims of 'The Great Terror,' 1936-1938," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 33-58.

⁶⁶ Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 164.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 164-65.

⁶⁸ RGASPI 17/114/829, 122.

⁶⁹ Gotz Aly, *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London, 1995).

⁷⁰ V. I. Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-1950-e gg.* (Moscow, 1994): 88-90.

⁷¹ I am referring here to the archive of the NKVD-MVD in GARF fond 9401, not in the KGB

archive.

⁷² Alfred Eisfeld and Victor Herdt, eds., *Deportation. Sondersiedlung. Arbeitsarmee. Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956* (Köln, 1996): 37-50.

⁷³ Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*, 171-75.

⁷⁴ Marlene Epp, "Moving Forward, Looking Backward: The 'Great Trek' from the Soviet Union, 1943-45," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 60-61.

⁷⁵ On the deportations, see Eisfeld and Herdt.

⁷⁶ V. N. Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR)" *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* no. 11 (1990): 8-9.

⁷⁷ *Istoriia rossiiskikh nemtsev v dokumentakh (1763-1992 gg.)* (Moscow, 1993): 168-69, 172-73.

⁷⁸ The best documentary source on the Trudarmeï experience is Eisfeld and Herdt, *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee*.

⁷⁹ G. Malamud, "Mobilizovannye sovetskie nemtsy na Urale v 1942-48 gg." in *Nakazannyi narod*, 128-45.

⁸⁰ V. N. Zemskov, "Zakliuchennye, spetsposelentsy, ssyl'noposelentsy, ssyl'nye i vyslannye (statistiko-geograficheskii aspekt)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* no. 5 (1991): 155.

⁸¹ See Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy" and "Zakliuchennye".

⁸² On this, see L. Belkovets, "Spetsposelenie nemtsev v Zapadnoi sibirii (1941-55 gg.)" in *Nakazannyi narod*, 158-79.

⁸³ Eisfeld and Herdt, 36-37.

⁸⁴ For examples, see the important document collection, *Iz istorii nemtsev Kazakhstana (1921-1975 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov* (Almaty-Moscow, 1997).

⁸⁵ Sawatsky, 306-07.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 305-06.

⁸⁷ On this organization and its significance for the Soviet Mennonites, see Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, ON, 1981).

⁸⁸ On this, see the two previously cited articles of Zemskov as well as V. N. Zemskov, "Gulag (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 6 (1991): 10-27; and V. N. Zemskov, "Massovoe osvobozhdenie spetsposelentsev i ssyl'nykh," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 1 (1991): 5-26.

⁸⁹ Again, see the article and book by Sawatsky cited above for this period.