

Copy.

Vineland Ont., October 22nd, 1917.

To the Prime Minister of Canada,
The Honourable Sir Robert Borden,
House of Parliament, Ottawa.

Honourable Sir:-

Kindly allow me, as the representative of the Mennonite Church of Ontario, the Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference and other Congregations of like faith with us, to address you with reference to the recent Proclamation calling out the men comprised in class I as described by the Military Service Act, and also with regard to the proposed regulations as referred to in the daily papers of October 18th.

The recent Proclamation deems all men called "To be soldiers in the military service of Canada, save as the said Act otherwise provided." It seems that this proviso exempts from "Combatant service" only, the adherents of religious denominations whose creed forbids "combatant" service, and holds for "non-combatant" service as soldiers "on leave of absence without pay." In this respect the Proclamation seems to us to contravene the articles of faith of our Church, and its members would thus be made to transgress its principles and practices which have been maintained during the centuries past.

In view of the fact that the Government considers the members of our Church eligible for non-combatant service and states the position of non-combatant Churches as opposed to "combatant service," we beg that our position be regarded in the light of the "Statement of our position" which was placed in the hands of the Government along with our petition of October 11th, in which it is stated that "We cannot participate in war in any form; that is, to aid or abet war whether in combatant or non-combatant capacity."

The Government has already given recognition to those principles which we hold as vital to our faith and life as followers of Christ, in excepting from the Military Service Act certain religious bodies, the first of which mentioned were granted total exemption by an order in council as a result of our having enjoyed such exemption under the Government of Canada. Our claims for total exemption are identical with those of the one class excepted being based upon the same articles of faith of the Mennonite Church.

We realize that conditions are such that the Government feels the necessity of taking exceptional means in order to meet the needs of all. We have borne and are willing to bear and share in the burdens and privations that all are experiencing, and we feel that it has not been the purpose of the Government to impose on any of its citizens the most grievous sorrow of being deprived of those religious liberties which have been confirmed to them during other trying periods in the history of Canada; but, military duty under the military arm of the Government would mean to us an exceptional hardship and would not be in harmony with the recognition accorded our people in the past.

The Canadian Press Despatches of October 18th state that in new regulations to be issued shortly, "A Local Tribunal is not to allow an application for exemption on conscientious grounds unless the applicant

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signifies in writing his willingness to, perform when required, non-combatant work or service, including service in the Army Medical Corps, the Army Service Corps and Mechanical Transport. " This may be an erroneous statement or interpretation. In case such attestation were required of any member of the Mennonite Church it would be understood by the Church to be equivalent to a voluntary enlistment in the army service and hence a denial of the profession of his faith which he holds as vital to his spiritual wellbeing and eternal salvation. It is understood that we do not consider non-combatant service an alternative for combatant service for our people, since we esteem both as service in the army which is organized for the prosecution of war. We most earnestly desire that no such attestation will be expected of any member of our Church.

By the Elections Act our members are disfranchized, temporarily; by the Military Service Act they are partially exempted from service. While we feel there is some inequality between the sacrifice of privileges and the service demanded, we do not wish to hold this against the Government; we but desire that there may be a uniform recognition of our faith. We do not ask for enfranchisement at this time, since matters of war are inconsistent with our profession of faith; we ask only that we may enjoy that which it has evidently been the purpose of the Government to grant us, - freedom from military service.

In our recent interview, Honourable Sir Robert, with yourself and the Honourable Arthur Meighen, then Secretary of State, the question of non-combatant service was brought to our attention. It was then advised that the matter be held in abeyance until such a time as when such service would be called for, and, that at such a time our people would be again consulted regarding such service. In recent governmental changes these matters may have been overlooked. Our people are complying with the regulations for claiming exemption. The vital issue is, that, when they appear before the Exemption Tribunals, with proper credentials from ministers and bishops, they shall be required to attest for army service of a non-combatant character and under the rules of the Church they shall not be able to do so. We trust that this will receive the earnest consideration of yourself and your Government, and that there may be at that time no occasion for friction between our government and our young men who are members of the Church.

We desire to do no act that may be construed as insubordination, rebellion or disloyalty in any form. We have always endeavored to prove ourselves as worthy and honorable citizens of this land, endeavoring by our honest labors and faithful duties to support the nation and its laws, respecting our law-makers and rulers. It is our desire to continue to respect and honor our Government and to bear our part of the nation's burdens, feeling that it is not the cost of our blood and life that withholds us from sharing in the military burden, but rather that there are other worthy services in which we may conscientiously and effectively engage for the welfare of our country and fellow-men while faithfully following the teaching and example of Christ our Lord.

Most respectfully and humbly, I am, Sir,

Your servant who doth humbly pray,

For the Committee.

COPY.

Oct. 22, 1917

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House of Parliament, Ottawa.

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In view of the fact that the Government considers the members of our Church eligible for non-combatant service and states the position of non-resistant Churches as opposed to "Combatant service", we beg that our position be regarded in the light of the "Statement of Our Position" which was placed in the hands of the Government along with our petition of October 11th, in which it is stated that "We cannot participate in war in any capacity."

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We realize that conditions are such that the Government feels the necessity of taking exceptional means in order to meet the needs of all. We have borne and are willing to bear and share in the burdens and privations that all are experiencing, and feel that it has not been the purpose of the Government to impose on any of its citizens the most grievous sorrow of being deprived of those religious liberties which have been confirmed to them during other trying periods in the history of Canada; but, military duty under the military arm of the Government would mean to us an exceptional hardship and would not be in harmony with the recognition accorded our people in the past.

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Prime Minister.--2.

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Most respectfully and humbly, I am, Sir,
Your servant who doth humbly pray,
Signed, S.F.Coffman.

For the Committee

MENNONITES EXEMPT FROM MILITARY SERVICE.

A reply to our letter of Oct. 22, to the Prime Minister asking for total exemption from military service has been received from the Department of Justice and stated that "Mennonites are excluded from the operation of the Act and have no duty to perform thereunder;" also that the matter has been thoroughly discussed by the Military Service Council and the opinion now is that if Mennonites should be prosecuted for non-compliance with the Act, the answer to the prosecution would be that they are Mennonites, and with the proof of the fact, undoubtedly the prosecution would be dismissed."

Since most, if not all, of our young men who are called have already registered for exemption they will not be prosecuted and they should all appear before the Exemption Tribunals when called and present their Church Membership Certificates, whereupon they should be dismissed by the Boards as excepted from the Military Service Act.

Let us thank God for this liberty and show gratitude toward the Government for the favor and loyalty toward the Church and good will toward all men and especially toward the suffering world.

The Committee, per S.F.C.

DEPARTMENTS:
ACADEMY
BIBLE
COLLEGE
NORMAL
VOCAL MUSIC

Hesston Academy
and
Bible School

D. H. BENDER, PRINCIPAL
J. B. SMITH, SEC. OF FACULTY
J. D. CHARLES, REGISTRAR
T. M. ERB, BUSINESS MANAGER

Hesston, Kansas,

Oct. 23, 1917.

S.F.Coffman,
Vineland, Ont.

Dear Brother, Greeting in His name:--

I received the Appeal the Canadian brethren made to the government for military exemption, and have no objections to file whatever.

It seems the Canadian government is more gracious and considerate than that of the United States in this matter, for which your brethren need to be thankful. Some of our boys in camp here are experiencing some very severe trials. The other Sunday a number of the Russian Mennonite boys who refused to work on Sunday were taken out by under officers, knocked down and pounded until they agreed to work. Some are yielding and are putting on the uniform. It seems that it is the scheme of those who have then in charge to use every means to trap them and get them into the ranks before the president decides what is to be done with them.

We have visited Camp Funston three times and are trying to do what we can for the boys. They need our sympathy, prayers and all the help we can give them.

With best wishes, I remain,

Yours in His service,

D.H.Bender

Vineland Ont. October, 24, 1917.

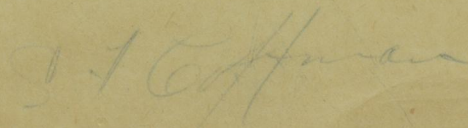
Asa Bearss,
Ridgeway Ont.

Dear Brother:- Greeting.

Your letter received. Since that time there has been a new report concerning the exemption of those who have conscientious objections to combatant service. Regulations about to be published say that no exemption claim will be acknowledged unless the applicant signs in writing a willingness to do non-combatant service when called for. This is against the principles of the church. Brother Burkholder, our Moderator has assigned me the task of corresponding with the Government on these points and I have sent him a letter to be approved and forwarded to the Prime Minister. I am enclosing a copy for yourself. Also a little slip which we are sending to our ministers as advice to our young men subject to the call.

We will be pleased to give all the help we can to our non-resistant Brethren and trust that they will also help us in our problems and unite with us in prayer that we may be patient and steadfast for the truth and pray also for the welfare of our Government, and the peace of the world. It may be that our church and others will make Nov. 4 a day of prayer for our young men and others whose faith will be tried when they are called before the Exemption tribunals. and for the many who will be compelled to go into army service against their wills. We should not forget any who are suffering in these days of stress and strife. Thanking you for your help and sympathy, I a,

Yours in faith,



Vineland Ont., Oct. 24, 1917.

Aaron Loucks,
Scottsdale Pa.

Dear Brother:- Greeting.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Proclamation under which we are now endeavoring to regulate ourselves and claim exemption frm service for our young men. The issue is not clear. The Government will no doubt apply all the pressure possible in order to force us to co,ply with the non-combatant regulations.

The enclosed copy is of a letter just recently sent to the Prime Minister. We are not calling for a statement but are placing our position befre the Government as we are situated by their regulations. We ~~do not~~ have liberty of conscience and freedom of worship and that is what we desire. We leave it with the Government to extricate themselves and us from the tangle, and pray for the overruling providence of God to help us and enable us to be steadfast in oyr faith.

Am also enclosing a not to our ministers to instruct the young brethren as to their duties o the Government and to the Church.

Pray for us as we also pray for you and the breth ren who are in difficuktles on your side of the line.

Yours in faith,

Markham, Ont. Oct. 26th 1917

David Bergey

New Dundee, Ont.

Dear brother, Greetings. I am forwarding copy of the correspondence with the Government re. Military Service which you should put on file with other conference records.

Our deputation should have organized when we were together. I called bro. Coffman's attention to the press item referred to in his letter to Ottawa under date of Oct. 22nd. I also took it upon myself to ask him to carry on the correspondence with the Government for our deputation. I trust I have your approval in this matter. As I see it the situation has not developed satisfactorily. Unless the King of Kings intervenes I fear our brethren will meet with difficulties when claiming exemption.

I have asked that our churches observe Sunday Nov. 4 as a day of special prayer for the young men who by recent proclamation "are deemed to be soldiers". Our people should continue to pray for our brethren as they are called before the Exemption Tribunal / Nov 8 - Dec. 10.

I believe bro. Coffman has sent to each church 10 points of instruction for our young men. I think these courses

2.

should be carefully observed.

If it should be so that our efforts with the Government have not accomplished the desired results what next steps do you suggest. As a member of the Executive Committee you would do well to recommend some course of action. I really think the letter of the 22nd inst. addressed to Sir Robert should help the government to recognize our position. If not then what? I will await an early reply.

In His service,

L. J. Burkholder



THERE is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.—Prov. 11: 24, 25.

Ridgeway Oct-26, 17

S. F. Coffman, My Bro—Greeting

Yours of 24 to hand, containing instructions relative to the military act for the exemption of nonresistant-people. Accept my hearty thanks for same, hoping we may continue in the same likeprecious faith and stand by each other and face the crisis manfully in a christian spirit— In such times of Excitement and disturbed conditions for there is much published that is not authoritative. Many already have lost their heads, some of our young have run before the time, as though exemption could be claimed by presenting themselves for medical examination, which was all wrong.— I shal warn all who come under my notice to not sign any papers that will involve them in any military, either combatent or noncombatent service.

Trusting that all things under our united prayers may work out for peace and good will and may be the means of enlarging

the borders of Zion

again thanking you for the timely instructions
given which I appreciate very much.

I remain your humble
Servant Asa, Beards

R.R. #2

Princeton Ont

Oct 26th 1917

David Berguy
New Dundee

Dear Bro. Greeting

The "Local Mission Board" is in need of money to put in a toilet at the Mennonite Mission Toronto which we are obliged to do. So we are asking the different congregations to contribute for this purpose. According to the membership at Blenheim Church we would like to receive about \$11. from there. This is a special collection aside from your regular collections for the maintenance of the work there. send all money to M. C. Cressman Kitchener, Ont.

Yours for the cause of Missions

A. B. Snyder

New Dundee, Oct. 30. 17
S. F. Coffman

Dear Bro. Greeting,

I sent fifty cents to Gretna, Manitoba, with the request to send as many copies of "Wichtige Dokumente" as that would pay for. They sent me four copies, and I am enclosing one with this note for you.

Hoping that our young brethren will escape all forms of military service I remain

Yours sincerely

David Bergay

OFFICE OF
THE PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
CANADA.

Ottawa, 31st October, 1917.

Dear Sir,

I have your letter of October 22nd, addressed to the Prime Minister, asking that members of the Mennonite Church of Ontario, and others of like faith, be exempted from both combatant and non-combatant war service.

At the request of the Prime Minister, I am bringing the matter to the attention of the Chairman of the Military Service Council, from whom you will no doubt hear in due course.

Yours very truly,

Hugh Clark

S. F. Coffman, Esq.,
Vineland,
Ontario.

COPY.

MILITARY SERVICE BRANCH
130 Sparks St.

Ottawa, October 31, 1917.

Sir: Military Service Act, 1917.

With reference to your letter of the 17th Instant, addressed to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Borden, G.C.M.G., as to the position of the Mennonites, I have to inform you that Mennonites are excepted from the Above Act and have no duty to perform in connection therewith.

In a former letter to a member of your sect, I suggested that there would be no objection to Mennonites claiming exemption in order to obtain a proper Exemption Certificate, with a view to relieving them of any annoyance or embarrassment that might occur if they were prosecuted for not complying with the Act. After further consideration, the Military Service Council has come to the conclusion that even this is not necessary, as the answer to any such prosecution would be proof that the person so prosecuted was in fact a Mennonite and, therefore, outside the Act altogether.

I

I think this will put an end to all doubts on the subject.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,

Signed, E. L. Newcombe

Deputy Minister of Justice.

J.L.Byer, Esq.,
Markham,
Ontario.

Ontario, 1917.

Copy,

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Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(signed) E.L. Newcombe

Deputy Minister of Justice.

J.L. Byer Esq.,
Markham,
Ontario.

Stc.

COPY.

Office of
The Parliamentary Secretary of State
for External Affairs

Canada.

Ottawa, 31st October, 1917.

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Yours very truly,

Signed, Hugh Clark.

S. F. Coffman, Esq.,
Vineland,
Ontario.

Copies of replies to letter to Prime Minister.COPY.

Office of
Parliamentary Secretary of State
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Signed, Hugh Clark.

S.F.Coffman, Esq.
Vineland,
Ont.

COPY.

Military Service Branch.
130 Sparks Street.

Department
of
Justice.

Ottawa, 3rd November, 1917.

S.F.Coffman, Esq.,
Vineland Ont.

Military Service Act.

Sir,

With further reference to your letter of the 22nd Inst., addressed to the Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Canada, I have to inform you that under paragraph 7 of the Schedule of Exceptions to the above Act, Mennonites are excluded from the operation of the Act and have no duty to perform thereunder.

In a former letter to an adherent of your sect, I suggested that any Mennonite might claim exemption on the ground of his being excluded by paragraph 7, with a view to relieving him of any annoyance which might be caused by prosecution after the 10th Inst., for non-compliance with the Act, the production of the counterfoil being sufficient answer to an enquiry. Since expressing that opinion the matter has been thoroughly discussed by the Military Service Council and the opinion now is that if Mennonites should be prosecuted for non-compliance with the Act, the answer to the prosecution would be that they are Mennonites, and on the proof of the fact undoubtedly the prosecution would be dismissed.

I think this fully covers the contents of your letter and your mind may now be at rest on the whole subject.

I have the honor to be
Sir,

Your obedient servant,
Signed, E. L. Newcombe,
Deputy Minister of Justice.

COPY.

Certified Copy of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, approved By His Excellency the Governor General on the 13th day of August, 1873.

The Committee of Council have had under consideration the annexed memorandum, dated July 28, 1873, from the Honourable the Minister of Agriculture, stating that he has made an arrangement with certain delegates from the Mennonites settled in South Russia in view of their formal announcement to him of their intention to settle, together with the Mennonite colonists whom they represent, in the Province of Manitoba, and submitting for Your Excellency's approval the terms of the said arrangement as set forth in the said annexed memorandum.

The Committee advise that the arrangement so made be sanctioned.

(Signed) Rodolphe Boudreau,
Clerk of the Priyy Council.

Secret.

The undersigned has the honour to report that he has made an arrangement with the following named delegates from thr Mennonites settled in South Russia, in view of their announcement to him in their joint letter of the 23rd July, instant, of their intention to settle together with the Mennonite colonists whom theybrperesent, in the Province of Manitoba: David Klaasen, delegate of Henboden colony; Jacob Peters, delegate of Bergthar colony; Heinrich Wiebe, delegate of Bergthar colony; Cornelius Jows, delegate of grienfield colony:-

The arrangement made is to the follwing effect:-

1st. That an entire exemption from any military service, as is provided by law and Order in Council, will be granted to the denomination of Christians called Menninites.

2nd. That eight townships will be reserved, under the Order in Council passed on the 3rd March last, in the Province of Manitoba for free grants on the conditions of settlement, as is provided in the Dominion lands Act, that is to say: "Any person who is the head of a family or has attained the age of 21 years, shall be entitled to be entered for one-quarter section or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion Lands, for the purpose of securing a homestead right^l ~~respective~~ thereof .

3rd. The said reserve of eight townships to be for the exclusive use of the Mennonite settlers, and the free grants of one-quarter section to consist of 160 acres as provided by the Act.

4th. That should the Mennonite settlement extend beyond the eight townships set aside by the Order in Council of 3rd March last, other townships will be reserved to meet the full requirements ofn Mennonite immigration.

5th. If next Spring the Mennonite settlers, on viewing the eight townships set aside for their use, should prefer to exchange them for any other eight townships unoccupied, such exchange will be allowed.

6th. That, in addition to the free grant of one-quarter section to every person over 21 years of age, on condition of settlement, the right to purchase the remaining three-quarters of the section at one dollar per acre is granted, as provided by law, so as to complete the whole section.

7th. That the Mennonite settler, will receive a patent for a free grant after three years residence, in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Lands Act.

8th. That, in the event of the death of the settler, the lawful heirs can calim the pate nt for the free grant, upon proof that the settlement duties for three years have been performed.

9th. That from the moment of occupation the settlers acquire a "homestead Right" in the land.

O. IN C. --/Russian Mennonites.--2.

10th. That the Mennonites will have the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles, and educating their children in schools, as provided by law, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever.

11th. That they will have the privilege of affirming, instead of making affidavit, as is provided by law.

12th. That the Government of Canada will undertake to furnish Passenger Warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry for Mennonite families of good character for the sum of \$30 per every person over the age of eight years, half price, or \$15, for persons under the age of eight years, and for infants under one year, \$3.

13th. That the arrangement as to price shall not be changed during the seasons of 1874, 1875 and 1876.

14th. That, if ^{such} arrangement is changed after the year 1876, the price shall not, subject to the approval of Parliament, for a period to extend to the year 1882, exceed \$40 per adult, and for children in proportion.

15th. That the immigrants shall be provided with provisions during the portion of their journey between Liverpool and Collingwood; but that during other portions of their journey they are to find their own provisions.

He respectfully recommends that the arrangement as hereinbefore recited with the Mennonite delegates be concurred in.

The whole respectfully submitted.

(Sgd.) J. H. Pope,
Minister of Agriculture.

Department of Agriculture,
Ottawa, 28th July 1873.

66

Note: /

This copy is made from a copy of the report of the Order in Council sent to me from the Department upon request. You will also be able to find the same, or a report of the Privy Council to the Governor General, in a Pamphlet in the German and English language, entitled "Wichtige Dokumente", published by B. Everts, Gretna Manitoba, 1917.

I would advise the use of this for official purposes only. Our maintaining the confidences of the Government at such times as this is most important. - S. F. C.

COPY.

This is a part of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council approved by His Excellency the Governor General on the 6th December, 1898.

----- After reviewing the negotiations which the Doukhobors had with the British Government and stating the nature of the People and their thrifty habits and their desirability as citizens, the report says,-

"But as from ~~their~~ religious doctrines they are averse to bearing arms, an exemption which the Russian Government has refused to countenance, they have been permitted by the latter to depart from Russia."

"The Minister, under the circumstances, and considering that the Doukhobors would appear to be a most desirable class of settlers to locate upon the vacant ~~lands~~ Dominion lands in Manitoba and the North West Territories, is of the opinion that it is expedient to give the fullest assurances of absolute immunity from military service in the event of their settling in this country.

"The minister submits that subsection 3 of section 21 of the Militia Act, chapter 41 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, contains the following provision:-

'Every person bearing a certificate from the society of Quakers, Mennonites or Tunkers, and every inhabitant of Canada, of any religious denomination, otherwise subject to military duty, who, from the doctrines of his religion, is averse to bearing arms and refuses personal military service, shall be exempt from such service when balloted in time of peace or war upon such conditions and under such regulations as the Governor in Council from time to time prescribe.'

"The Minister recommends that under the power vested in Your Excellency in Council by the above provision, the doukhobors, upon the production in each case of a certificate of membership from the proper authorities of settling permanently in Canada, be exempted unconditionally, from service in the Militia, upon the production in each case of a certificate of membership from the proper authorities of their community.

"The Committee submit the same for Your Excellency's approval.

(Signed) Rodolphe Boudreau,
Clerk of the Privy Council.