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AN ARRAY OF CONTRADICTIONS: MENNONITE EXPRESSIONS OF NATIONALISM IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA DURING WORLD WAR I

Висвітлено протиріччя етнонаціональної ідентичності менонітів у контексті підданих чи громадян, етнічних парій (знедолених) і привілейованих «братів і сестер». Завдяки детальному вивченню даних національних газет, конференцій, щоденників та спогадів було доведено, що меноніти були не в змозі адаптувати свої етнорелігійні почуття ідеалам самовизначення і націоналізму. Намагання менонітів знайти «своє місце» (свій шлях) в умовах розвалу імперії, ліберальної демократії, що зароджувалася, анархії, окупації і революції виявились нездійсненними.

Ключові слова: ***меноніти, націоналізм, Перша світова війна, Росія, німецькі колоністи.***

Освещены противоречия этнонациональной идентичности меннонитов в контексте подданных или граждан, этнических париев (обездоленных) и привилегированных «братьев и сестер». Благодаря детальному изучению данных национальных газет, конференций, дневников и воспоминаний было доказано, что меннониты были не в состоянии адаптировать свои этнорелигиозные чувства идеалам самоопределения и национализма. Попытки меннонитов найти «свое место» (свой путь) в условиях развала империи, либеральной демократии, что зарождалась, анархии, оккупации и революции оказались невыполнимыми.

Ключевые слова: ***меннониты, национализм, Первая мировая война, Россия, немецкие колонисты.***

Beleuchtet werden die Widersprüche der ethno-sozialen Identität der Mennoniten im Untertanen-Bürger- Kontext bzw. aus ethnischen Gründen Ausgegrenzter oder privilegierter «Brüder und Schwestern». Durch detailliertes Studium der nationalen Presse, aussagekräftiger Konferenzen, Tagebücher und Erinnerungen kommt der Verfasser zu der Erkenntnis, dass die Mennoniten außerstande gewesen waren, ihre ethnischen und religiösen Gefühle den Idealen der Selbstbestimmung und des Nationalismus anzupassen. Die Versuche der Mennoniten, ihren eigenen Weg unter den Bedingungen des Zerfalls des Imperiums, der noch unterentwickelten liberalen Demokratie, der Anarchie und der Revolution zu definieren, mussten fehlschlagen.

Schlagwörter: ***Mennoniten, Nationalismus, Erster Weltkrieg, Russland, deutsche Kolonisten.***

Until 1990 at least, World War I and the peace discussions that followed it represent the apogee of the idea of political self-determination and its somewhat unrealistic corollary that every ethnic group should have its own nation-state, or at least autonomy. While as a small ethno-religious group, Mennonites could not aspire to nationhood, they were tossed about in the swirl of what constituted self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Europe. One commentator suggests, the pain of World War I «helped propel the Russian Mennonites towards their finest hours» [1]. Another notes it was also a time of «moral failure» that produced an «uneasy conscience…in the minds of Russian Mennonites» [2]. In the space of a few short years between 1914 and 1918, Mennonites confronted and displayed what one participant in these events calls an 'array of contradictions' [3]. The paper will explore these contradictions in Mennonite ethnic and national identity in the context of being subjects or citizens, ethnic pariahs and privileged 'brothers and sisters'. Through a careful reading of Mennonite contributions to ethnic newspapers, documents from conferences, diaries and memoirs, this paper willargue that Mennonites were unable to adapt their ethno-religious sensibilities to the reality of the ideals of self-determination and nationalism. Mennonite attempts to navigate a place in the contexts of a fractured empire, a nascent liberal democracy, anarchy, occupation and revolution proved to be unattainable.

Keywords: ***Mennonites, Nationalism, World War I, Russia, German colonists.***

The Anabaptists of the 16th century were challenged on all sides by secular rulers who remained avowedly Catholic, or became Reformed or Lutheran believers bent on aligning their subjects with their own religious persuasions. Even if the heretical beliefs of Anabaptist-Mennonites were tolerated in exchange for the economic gain they might bring, a pledge of allegiance to an earthly ruler was inimical to a people that avoided the swearing of oaths altogether. The Mennonite aversion to connecting their identity to membership either as subjects or citizens of an earthly realm ran counter to a historically engrained sense of their belief that their only citizenship belonged to a heavenly realm. It was, however, not that simple. Living in the world necessarily resulted in constant tension between benefitting from an ethnic identity and eschewing it as part of the enticements of the 'world'.

When forced or motivated to, Mennonites could legitimately claim Dutch ancestry since most their forbears who had migrated to Polish Prussia and Danzig in the 16th century had come from Dutch areas. They could also claim German ancestry since some of them had origins in Germany and their high language of church had become German by the time the emigrated to the steppes of Ukraine. They had also lived at least some years under Prussian rule. On the other hand, a Mennonite ethno religious identity that had developed over many centuries also spawned a

sense of being a separate people, not Dutch or German in the nationalist sense of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Regardless of their own sense of becoming a people unto themselves, in the Tsar's empire, Mennonites were clearly *Nemetzky*, Germans. In the context of Russia's involvement in World War I as an enemy of Germany, such an identity was problematic. In response, Mennonite intellectuals and community leaders began emphasizing their Dutch ancestry when faced with the loss of their land. During the period of the Provisional government a brief notion of creating a Russian-German political identity seems to appear, only to be displaced by a German national identity when Mennonite areas were occupied by German forces in the spring of 1918. When German forces left Mennonite areas in November 1918 Mennonites were seriously compromised in how they would fit in to the nascent communist state that they found themselves in.

In the story of Russia's Germans, the events related to World War I has often played the role of being the final chapter in a history that began with Catherine the Great's invitation for Mennonites and other Germans to settle the steppes of the Black Sea region. Historians of the Mennonite experience have tended to focus on the trauma experienced as the waves of war, revolution and anarchy swept over Mennonite life and ultimately destroyed what had been built up over 150 years. Respecting their identity, historians have concluded that Mennonites were generally unaware of their history until well after the pressures of Russification descended on them in the late 1880s. John B. Toews suggests that as late as 1910 «the Russian Mennonites knew who they were, but, ironically, they did not know where they had come from or what they had become» [4]. Abraham Friesen is more categorical, suggesting a 1911 call by Mennonite teacher and leader David Epp for historical education arose from his dismay about the «pervasive historical ignorance of his students, an ignorance that extended even to their own past and was encouraged by a nearly universal indifference to history in the Russian Mennonite public» [5].

The most extensive analysis of the vacillation of Mennonite identity in the years leading up to and including World War I is that by Abraham Friesen in his *Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*. Friesen's work is primarily that of intellectual history focusing primarily on the writings of Mennonite intellectuals and their grasping for a national origin that would allow Mennonites to sustain the privileges granted to them by the Tsars and used by them to create an «identity as an ethnic linguistic, religious, and cultural minority» [7]. My aim here is to seek to understand the problem of

identity from the point of view of a broader cross section of Mennonites of the period. Using diaries, memoirs and the articles read by Mennonites in German newspapers, this paper will examine the path of changes in self-identification along which Mennonites travelled between the declaration of war in August 1914 and the withdrawal of the German army in the fall of 1918. Much like their German colonist counterparts, Mennonites progressed from a primarily ethnic identity towards a form of German-Russian nationalism. When threatened with the liquidation of their land in 1915, their intellectual elite recovered their Dutch ancestry to escape being German. During the German occupation they flirted with a German national identity, but seemed to struggle with the implications of that identity and appeared to be on a path back to a Russian-German ethnic identity when the German armies left and anarchy and civil war overtook them.

As all over Russia, the declaration of war against Germany in August 1914 brought an outburst of patriotic emotion among Mennonites and the rest of Russia's German colonists. Certainly the declaration of war against Germany brought mixed feelings and foreboding; however colonists were unrestrained in encouraging sacrifice for the fatherland. The *Odessaer Zeitung*, a widely read German language newspaper, called all the sons of colonists to follow the call of the Tsar and «shoulder to shoulder with all true sons of the fatherland go into battle, preoccupied with one thought: either to be victorious or to die for the dear fatherland» [7].The Mennonite newspaper, *Friedenstimme*, had already suggested appropriate responses for its pacifist readers before Russia declared war. The editor, Abraham Kroeker, suggested that Mennonites should show that «they wanted to participate in the interests and the suffering of the fatherland». Kroeker proposed that Mennonites collect funds for the Red Cross or establish hospitals in their colonies for the wounded. His second suggestion was that young Mennonite men be organized into medical corps units to be sent to the front to care for the wounded [8]. The outbursts of loyalty to the Tsar came in the context of longstanding pressure on German-speaking colonists to be assimilated into Russian society. The reign of Alexander III was noted for its Russification of borderland regions and while Germans did not suffer as much as Jews, Poles, Finns, or Baltic peoples, they too were subjected to various restrictions of their cultural and linguistic freedoms [9]. In spite of some restrictions on their ethnic freedoms, the average Mennonite was largely oblivious to the anti-German sentiments of some Russian intellectuals. Most of Russia's German colonists lived in their own world of church, village and family. They spoke Russian poorly and often held a low opinion of their Russian and Ukrainian neighbours

[10]. Although they clearly remained separated from their neighbours and Russian society, German colonists in general, and Mennonites in particular had no particular separatist political aspirations – no sense of nationalism.

The outbreak of the war was considered an opportunity to show Russian society and the Tsar the devotion and dedication of his ethnic German subjects. Ludwig Lutz, a German colonist from Odessa and an Octobrist Duma representative, argued that the outbreak of war was reason to set aside the memories of anti-German sentiments. He reminded German-speaking readers of the *Odessaer Zeitun*g that the coming events would provide the answers to any remaining questions of colonist loyalties and left no doubt that Russia's German colonists would not be found wanting [11]. German colonist members of the Duma also tried to reassure their fellow Duma members of the loyalty of the empire's German speaking citizens and other influential colonists repeated the assurances of Russian-German loyalty [12]. The reaction of colonists, be they Mennonite, Volga German or Black Sea Lutherans and Catholics, was very similar. Their language was patriotic with a strong sense that the war would prove that they rightfully belonged in Russia and they argued that their ethnicity should not be confused with their national allegiance. The editor of the *Odessaer Zeitung* maintained that

Our love for our heritage does not apply to the German Reich, but rather to the German nation, to German intellectual life, German distinctive customs and traditions. This love does not hinder us from being true to Tsar and country and giving our possessions and lives for our Russian fatherland [13].

Gerhard Schroeder's memoir echoes this patriotic fervor. He writes: «when the news of the outbreak of hostilities reached our villages there was a great outpouring among our people of a genuine feeling of loyalty to Russia», but also «a great feeling of uneasiness and apprehension among them, especially among a number of leading men of the laity and the church» [14].

While the initial German colonist reaction to the outbreak of war was very similar to that of other Russians, the tone of the articles in the German language newspapers soon changed. This change was due primarily to attacks on the colonists in the Russian press. The conservative *Novoe Vremia* was the leader in the «campaign to liberate Russia from the 'German Yoke' [15]. By late summer of 1914 the German press was responding to regular diatribes against German colonists in Russian newspapers. As early as mid-August the readers of the *Odessaer Zeitung* responded

to accusations of disloyalty levelled at a colonist medical organization in Odessa. A letter to the editor was quick to point out that the executive of the organization included a father with five sons in the army, a father who had already lost a son, and others who had sons in the officer corps and other areas of service [16]. Another writer from the Volga German colonies reported that rumours about colonist treason were rampant. These rumours included a report that a German pastor had prayed for a German victory in his church, reports of villages where no one had volunteered, and reports that a prominent Volga German merchant had sent flour to Germany. The writer assured the readership of the *Odessaer Zeitung* that these rumours are untrue and that Volga German colonists were at the forefront of efforts to support the Russian war effort [17].

By October 1914 the attacks on the German colonists were no longer restricted to questions of their loyalty but began to suggest actions that should be taken against them. In the October 1, 1914, issue, the Mennonite *Friedenstimme* reported that the *Novoe Vremia* had proposed the «liquidation» of Russia's German colonists [18]. In the next few weeks the campaign to expropriate the land of Germans in Russia gathered momentum and on October 14, 1914, the Tsar's Council of Ministers «raised the issue of foreign property and endorsed the opinion of the minister of foreign affairs that the state should liquidate German landholdings along the western frontier» [19]. The initial discussions of the liquidation of colonist landholdings resulted in a change in the tone of the German press. The Mennonite *Friedenstimme*, in an article that betrayed the knowledge of defeat at the front, expressed hope for an early «peace with honour», and outlined the political and cultural position of Germans in Russia. The language was not as enthusiastically patriotic as before but focused on the cultural mission of the German colonists. Although the editor allowed that Russian reaction to Germans was understandable, he maintained that Germans «were called to Russia to cultivate the steppe» and also to «be of benefit to Russians and other nationalities. This cultural mission, which must be apparent to all, could be extended considerably to benefit everyone» [20]. In the last few weeks of their existence the German press devoted all its attention to news of how the expropriation law was to be applied and what way colonists would be affected.

By November 1914 the German colonists were severely restricted in expressing themselves in the German language. In November both the *Friedenstimme* and the *Odessaer Zeitung* ceased publication as did all other German papers in Russia. In 1915 these restrictions were expanded to ban all speaking of German in public or in correspondence with soldiers at

the front. In July 1915 teachers of German origin were replaced with Russians and in most areas the conduct of worship services in German was forbidden [21].

If the early months of the war can be characterized as period where German colonists thought of themselves primarily in ethnic terms the period of the debate on the expropriation of their lands up to the February Revolution must be considered as a time of rapid transition in their view of themselves. Although a certain quiet descended on the land in German colonist regions due to restrictions on the public use of German in the fall of 1916, the following two years witnessed increasing politicization of colonist activities.

The main issue that preoccupied German colonists in 1915 and 1916 was the spectre of the loss of their land. In February 1915 Tsar Nicholas II bent to the agitation of the anti-colonist lobby and issued a decree under the emergency powers of the Fundamental Laws of 1905. The decree restricted acquisition of land by German colonists all over Russia with expropriation to be applied to border areas. In December of the same year the decree was extended to much larger areas of Russia and was to apply to land originally received by colonists from Catherine the Great. The December laws also provided for the Peasant Land Bank to carry out the expropriation at a compensation price to be decided by the Bank. In August 1916 and in the spring of 1917 these provisions were extended to cover almost the entire empire [22].

The prospect of losing their land resulted in numerous petitions to various government bodies requesting the decrees to be repealed or modified. Moscow Professor Karl Lindeman, a supporter of the Octobrists, immediately published a critique of the new decree in March 1915 [23]. In spite of his efforts and the efforts of Duma representatives Ludwig Lutz and Heinrich Bergman – both colonists and fellow Octobrists – the law was not repealed but rather expanded. Mennonites were also active in making petitions to the various government authorities with one source crediting them with over 5000 separate petitions [24].

Alongside the drafting of petitions to preserve their right to own land there was also increasing evidence that the continuing pressure on their existence was driving the various German colonist groups towards a more political orientation. Among Protestant pastors and school teachers the restrictions on the use of German encouraged strident nationalist opinions. Some colonist pastors refused to obey the decrees forbidding German sermons and were exiled to Siberia [25]. In January 1917, Mennonites petitioned the government for numerous concessions respecting their service

in the medical corps and included a request to be exempted from the land expropriation decree. The submission, allegedly prepared by a Russian lawyer and signed by unauthorized representatives, claimed that Mennonites were of Dutch origin and had «not a drop of German blood in their veins» [26]. The suggestion of Dutch heritage did not first appear with the above mentioned submission to the authorities in early 1917. Abraham Friesen argues that the pamphlet *Kto takie Mennonity*, which advanced the 'Dutch' argument, was circulating as early as September, 1914 [27]. Certainly by the time Mennonites were working to escape the land expropriation laws in 1915 the 'Dutch' argument had been discussed publicly. At that time the Ministry of the Interior responded with a ruling that regardless of their ancestral origin Mennonite culture was German and for the purposes of the law they would be considered German [28].

Peter Dyck expressed dismay at the prospect of signing his name to one of the many Mennonite petitions submitted to the government. In his March 28, 1916 entry he notes: we are to state that we are actually not German, but Dutch, and that the Boers in Africa are our *Rodneje Bratja* (true brothers). There is a fair amount of self praise in the petition. It also seems problematical to have each Mennonite present his own petition. We really seem to lack faith in God, as Pastor Kuegelgen is to have said in Petrograd. The other Germans, who also wish to remain German, and are not suddenly turning into Dutchmen, are, I believe not working nearly as hard as the Mennonites. Nor are they spending as much money. Nothing more will happen to them than will happen to us Mennonites [29].

By October he had become quite pessimistic. With the dismissal of all the Germans on the Board of the bank where he worked and a run on its funds, Dyck worries that "the situation for us Germans is becoming more and more serious" [30]. For the younger Anna Baerg the deteriorating situation had evaporated any sense of Russian nationalism. «For whom should I show great patriotism?» she asks her diary, «for Russia, who would prefer to leave us homeless and without rights because we are German?» [31]. For John Nickel a visit to an acquaintance triggered both the realization and guilt associated with being a privileged Mennonite. Mennonites were «the objects of national hatred, since we had not shown sufficient love toward the Russian people» [32].

The pressure of the various restrictions on colonists directly attacked their ethnic awareness and their economic and physical presence in Russia. During the period beginning with the first defeats of the Russian army in the fall of 1914 to the February Revolution they became increasingly aware of the need to be organized politically. The progression to nationalism

was not universal nor was it a drift to a nationalism that identified with the German state with which Russia was locked in mortal combat. The budding German colonist nationalism would, however, blossom with the fall of Tsarist autocracy in February 1917.

The fall of the Tsar and the establishment of the Provisional government brought «joyous demonstrations and efforts to offer assistance to the new government» in the German colonies [33]. Much of this joy and optimism stemmed from the favourable position taken towards non-Russian nationalities in the first statements of the Provisional Government. On March 16, 1917, the Provisional Government outlined an eight point statement of principles that included the «abolition of all social, religious and national restrictions» and «the calling of a Constituent Assembly, elected by universal and secret vote, which shall determine the form of government and draw up the Constitution for the country» [34].

The renewed optimism, tempered with the lessons learned from the previous two years, resulted in a flurry of activity in the colonist community. Numerous conferences were held in the spring of 1917 beginning with a «Congress of Russian Citizens of German Nationality» convened by Karl Lindeman in Moscow April 20 to 23rd and attended by 86 delegates. This conference was followed by a meeting in Saratow in the Volga colonies three days later with 300 delegates and a meeting in Odessa May 14–16 with 2000 delegates. In May there were also conferences of German colonists in Siberia as well as in the Caucasus. Later in summer a major conference of Mennonites took place in the Mennonite centre of Ohrloff in Taurida [35]. Along with the conferences the freedoms initiated by the Provisional Government also brought back to life the German press. The *Wochenblatt* began publishing in mid-April and the *Friedenstimme* reappeared as *Nachrichten des "Volksfreund",* and later the Molotschna *Flugblatt* [36].

A common theme of the conferences and the early issues of the reborn German press was the need to strengthen German colonist cooperation and improve the education among the German speaking community. The conferences were also a forum for the debate of new nationalist sentiments and reflected the heightened awareness of political options in the new environment. The Moscow Conference, organized by the nationalist oriented Karl Lindeman, was called to «work towards an all-encompassing German national unification movement». The Mennonite delegate to the conference, Benjamin Unruh, conveyed the much less «German» national orientation of his constituency to the meeting. Unruh, a Swiss trained Professor of Theology, reflected the increasing attempts by Mennonites to

distance themselves from German nationalism and their attempts to find their own political position in the Russian context. With respect to Mennonite involvement with other German colonists, Unruh argued that:

1) The bulk of Russian Mennonites came from the Netherlands.

2) For hundreds of years Mennonites have been under the influence of German culture and have been Germanized--this to be understood as a cultural and not a political influence.

3) Mennonites must cooperate with other colonists but with due regard for their autonomy [37].

The Moscow meeting dutifully amended its name to mention Mennonites particularly and went on to advocate a strong centralized organization to coordinate the political activities of all colonists and to mitigate the differences between them. Other than the dissenting voice of the Mennonites the congress adopted an aggressive nationalist stance particularly on cultural and linguistic issues.

The largest meeting of German colonists took place in Odessa in May 1917. This meeting reflected a marked shift in political allegiance of the Black Sea area colonists. With the liberal and socialist parties defending the colonists in the Duma, the position of the Octobrists had become tenuous. The ethnic issues dominated the discussion and like other colonists the Black Sea Germans displayed a marked progression towards a political, nationalist position. V. G. Reissig spoke of the need to form organizations to assure the survival of the German presence in Russia. He spoke of the earlier apathy of German colonists but, he said «then came the war, and we all began to feel our heritage» and «deep-seated national feelings or instincts». He spoke in glowing ethnic-nationalist terms of a future where German colonists «would only have to have the desire, and they would find an interest in their past and a source of strength for their future». He also reinforced the German colonists strong sense of their right to live in Russia.

This earth is as dear to us as to the native peoples. We love this little piece of land without bounds. We have quenched its thirst with the dew of our blood. Our children are born on it. Our grand-parents got their last embalming on it, and we hope, that this earth will accept our dying remains. We love this land. No one can take our rights to it [38].

The support of the liberal and socialist-leaning parties in the Duma on the question of land expropriation swayed the German colonists of the Black Sea area towards a more socialist outlook than their traditional conservative outlook would have predicted. The Octobrist Duma representative Ludwig Lutz appeared before the delegates and renounced his Octo-

brist party affiliation to become a Kadet and many of the resolutions of the conference bore the mark of Kadet policy [39].

The large Mennonite Congress at Ohrloff in August, 1917 mirrored the shift to the left that characterized the earlier Odessa conference. At the opening of the conference a request to have the delegates register their occupation, age, and level of education was hotly debated. In the opinion of some of the participants it was «not desirable to underline class differences» because the conference was convened "to discuss general issues, not specific class interests» [40].

In spite of the emergence of class consciousness in the language of delegates, the conference passed resolutions indicative of the increasing national consciousness of Mennonites. The conference deliberations included the acceptance of a proposal for the establishment of an all Mennonite Congress that would promote «rights of national self-determination» and the «special interests of Mennonites with the appropriate jurisdictions» [41]. The expressions of loyalty characteristic of the newspapers before being closed down reappeared in a resolution proposed at the conference by the editor of the *Friedenstimme*. Delegates now found such expressions of loyalty «out of place» in the context of their demands to be treated equally with other citizens [42]. In spite of the objection to the editor's language the congress strongly supported the return of the German press.

The renamed *Friedenstimme*, now called the *Nachrichten des «Volksfreund»,* in its opening issue responded to questions about the language of the new paper. In keeping with the Dutch origin that Mennonites had been advocating, someone had suggested that the paper be printed in the Low German vernacular of everyday Mennonite speech. The editor argued that this was impractical since it was no longer a written language. In response to a suggestion that it be printed in Russian he argued that language was not to blame for the politics of the war [43].

The pressures of war and the resulting chauvinism of their Russian neighbours contributed to a progression from an ethnic to a national identity among various German colonist groups in Russia. In spite of the differences between Russia's Germans, they all progressed towards a more politically active nationalism from an earlier more neutral ethnic identity. The progression towards thinking of themselves not only in ethnic but also nationalist terms would make them vulnerable when German armies occupied their region.

The arrival of German troops in Mennonite areas in April 1918 changed everything for Mennonites. Peter J. Dyck's entry for April

19th reports that «about 5:00 o'clock a long train of Prussians arrived in Halbstadt. They were greeted joyfully by the populace». But the release from the pressure of being the enemy was not shared universally or unequivocally. His entry five days later suggests: «The mood is varied. Some people fear a reaction, which could be terrible. Others believe that because of the presence of the Germans all danger is past» [44]. Anna Baerg also conveyed a sense of confidence in her German identity while at the same time some ambivalence about the extent to which it was shared with the occupying army.

They say that the Prussians were surprised that we Germans in Russia had remained so German. I was happy about this observation, even if the idea seems a little offensive to me. That one should think otherwise! What are we but Germans! Naturally there are sorry exceptions; but the real Germans, the ones who feel it from the heart, have never been able to adapt themselves to the Russian way of life [45].

Others were immediately willing and desirous of German citizenship. John P. Nickel assured his diary readers that «Germany has not forgotten us. All Mennonites in the Old Colony as well as in Jazykovo will accept German citizenship». A few weeks later when he reported to his diary the outcome of a conference of Russian-Germans in Prischib where they decided to accept German citizenship Nickel reasserts that they "agreed with this position completely» [46].

The interaction with the German troops during the summer of 1918 conveyed both a sense of relief to be away from the earlier ethnic conflict, but also a growing tension that identification with a German national identity was in conflict with their sense of being Mennonite Russian-Germans. The summer featured festivals honouring German soldiers organized by Mennonites and then later 'Ludendorff' festivals, organized by the occupying army and named after a German General. Peter J. Dyck reported on one of the former held in Ohrloff in May, "arranged by several villages. There must have been 2000 people present. A thirty piece military band played….Beer, sausage sandwiches, ice-cream, raspberries and cherries were sold". In July he comments on one of the Ludendorff festivals where beer was important and «German patriotic speeches were held». By now he is critical, concluding the «whole affair demoralized our society. It got in touch with the outside world and out of our isolation, much to our detriment» [47]. Anna Baerg complains to her diary about «the conduct of our girls with the German officers» at one festival and considers their participation «a disgrace» [48].

The dismay at the conduct of some Mennonites seems to have been reflected in a gradual reaction and a shift away from German nationalism to the Russian-German identity Mennonites had begun to claim before the German occupation. John Nickel confided to his diary that one of the presentations made at a June conference in the village of Lichtenau «stated that Mennonites actually possessed no fatherland which they could love or show loyalty to» [49]. From the fall assembly in Ohrloff he confided to his diary: «As to our citizenship, one concludes the following: we are Ukrainian, since we live or were born here. We will still be able to become German citizens after the eleventh of October. Nothing specific is known about this question either. If only we could put our confidence in the Lord… instead of on Germany and the Germans [50].

The cooperation and welcome extended to German troops was a contradiction of earlier Mennonite professions of loyalty, but was not entirely surprising. It was a small step from connecting their recently developed sense of German colonist nationalism to attaching this identity to the occupying German state. German colonists experienced for the first time a sense of nationality that was out of step with their Russian homeland. The arrival of a German state, with its language and customs, suited this rising nationalism. The glow of basking in the seeming alignment of ethnic and national identities seems to have been short lived. At least in the diaries examined here doubts about membership in the German nation begin to emerge in midsummer 1918. Little is said during these months about their watching Slavic neighbours. The result was disastrous when the German armies left. The Civil War and period of anarchy was particularly brutal in German colonist areas and the compromised national allegiance was an important element in the treatment of German colonists by their neighbours.

Jacob H. Janzen, writing his memoirs from the safety of Canada in 1929, exclaims: «What an array of contradictions pressed together in such a short time! We no longer knew where we stood» [51]. Certainly in the space of a few short years between 1914 and 1918, Mennonites had confronted very different circumstances that forced them on a path of having to choose uncomfortable nationalist identities. Mennonites tried to escape the German aspect of their identity when it became untenable almost immediately after the declaration of war. They were able to reach back to a Dutch identity, which while historically true, seems to not have been coherent for many Mennonites even though it was convenient. After the fall of the Tsar and the relaxation of anti-German pressure, Mennonites

and other German colonists experience a brief window where they see an opportunity to create a much more political Russian-German identity. During the German occupation attaching their ethnic German identity to a national German identity held tremendous appeal for Mennonites, although by midsummer 1918, the diarists examined here seem to be trying to reassert a Russian-German ethnic identity. It would be too late. During the civil war and period of anarchy that followed the departure of German troops in the fall of 1918, their Russian and Ukrainian neighbors remember their search for identity to be a convenient way to attempt to maintain privilege. The dream of colonist nationhood would die along with the violent deaths of many of its prospective citizens.

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