

Screening Refugees: Mennonite Central Committee and the Postwar Environment

AILEEN FRIESEN*

Abstract: In the last few years, MCC has undergone an intense period of introspection as it reconsidered its role as a post-World War II refugee resettlement organization. After the end of the war, Mennonite Central Committee provided aid to 12,000 Mennonite refugees and sought to secure their future. Some of these individuals had collaborated with the Nazi regime, committing acts of violence against Jews, Roma, and other groups. While some scholars have recently focused on antisemitism among MCC workers as a significant factor in shaping MCC's responses, policies, and actions, this is an overly simplified account. Serious historical research requires historians to seek the wider context of an event. Within this methodology, a multitude of motivations appear to have molded MCC's work. MCC's Anabaptist operating principles, the improvised and emotional nature of post-war refugee work among co-religionists, and the role of conventions of patriarchy all influenced MCC's response to refugee resettlement within this complex environment.

Following the end of World War II, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) mobilized to help alleviate suffering by bringing food, clothing, and other aid to the local and refugee populations in war-torn Europe. It also worked extensively with the International Refugee Organization (IRO) to resettle Mennonites—many from the Soviet Union—in North and South America. In January 1953, however, after most of its resettlement work had ended, MCC learned of a manuscript accusing it of misleading IRO officials about the background of Mennonite refugees. The manuscript, prepared by the IRO, claimed that MCC used its connections with the governments of the United States and Canada to bully the IRO into processing Mennonite refugees even though they were ineligible for emigration since they were ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) who had voluntarily taken German citizenship. The IRO also alleged that many Mennonite refugees “[had] served in the German army, the *Waffen-SS*, [and] the German Security Police.”¹ In response, William T. Snyder,

*Aileen Friesen is an associate professor and co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. She is grateful to Jeremy Wiebe, Royden Loewen, Hans Werner, and John D. Roth for their constructive comments, and thanks Lori Wise and Frank Peachy at the Mennonite Central Committee Archives and Peter Letkemann

MCC's executive secretary, complained to George Warren of the U.S. State Department:

One scarcely knows where to begin . . . because [the report] is built on the foundation that the Mennonites helped by [the] IRO were not eligible for that help and that the Mennonite Central Committee was part of a diabolical scheme to withhold information from the IRO officials.²

At stake for Snyder was more than simply MCC's reputation. His deeper concern was that MCC's ability to help future refugees from Eastern Europe could be derailed if the IRO's interpretation became part of the historical record.³

This disagreement, especially the question of Mennonite eligibility for IRO support, has been covered in detail by various scholars such as Frank Epp, T. D. Regehr, Steven Schroeder, Erika Weidemann, and others. These scholars have investigated how MCC presented Mennonite refugees to the IRO and laid out the conflict that arose between these institutions over Mennonite eligibility.⁴ Recently, research has focused more intensely on MCC's role in aiding Mennonite refugees who had participated in the Holocaust, committing or facilitating violence against Jews, Roma, and other groups targeted by the Nazis. Led by Benjamin Goossen, this research has alleged that MCC established a resettlement program in order "to assist people facing legal or material hardship because of their associations with Nazism"⁵ and asserted that "MCC publicly and

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1. "Mennonites," unpublished International Refugee Organization (IRO) manuscript—Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada [hereafter cited as MHA], vol. 1325, folder 957.

2. William T. Snyder to George Warren, Jan. 28, 1953.—MHA, volume 1325, folder 957. Also quoted in T. D. Regehr, "Of Dutch or German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC, and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (Jan. 1995), 18.

3. William T. Snyder to C. F. Klassen, Jan. 23, 1953.—MHA, vol. 1325, folder 957.

4. See T. D. Regehr, "Of Dutch or German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC, and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (Jan. 1995), 7–25; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Manitoba: Published for Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council by D.W. Friesen, 1962); Erika Wiedemann, "A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957," PhD diss., (Texas A&M University, 2020); Steve Schroeder, "Mennonite-Nazi Collaboration and Coming to Terms With the Past: European Mennonites and the MCC, 1945-1950," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 2 (2003), 6-16.

5. Ben Goossen, "The Real History of the Mennonites and the Holocaust," *Tablet Magazine*, Nov. 17, 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/history/articles/heinrich-hamm-mennonite-holocaust>.

systematically downplayed the collaboration of tens of thousands of European Mennonites with National Socialism.”⁶ It has also identified antisemitism as a strong motivation for this cover up.⁷

Certainly documents exist, some of them accessible in scholarship since the early 1960s, demonstrating that MCC knew that some Mennonites from the Soviet Union had collaborated with the Nazi regime.⁸ More recently, evidence has emerged showing that MCC facilitated, knowingly or unknowingly, the immigration of individuals who had collaborated with the Nazis.⁹ This includes people who served as SS guards, members of the Nazi security service (SD – *Sicherheitsdienst*), translators for the SD, members of the local police, mayors of occupied cities and villages, and others.¹⁰ Such evidence rightfully raises questions about the actions and motivations of MCC workers as they engaged with Mennonite refugees in the post-war environment, particularly with those from the Soviet Union. However, it should be noted that scholars can only identify several dozen of specific perpetrators, a far cry from Goossen’s tens of thousands of

6. Benjamin W. Goossen, “MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955,” *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2021), 8.

7. Goossen, “MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955,” 3-12.

8. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 406–407.

9. In some cases, this new scholarship has mistakenly assigned blame to MCC. In 2010, for example, historian Gerhard Rempel claimed that MCC helped Jacob Reimer, who served as a guard in Trawniki. Rempel built his claim on a letter that provided a certificate allowing a certain Jacob Reimer from Halbstadt, born in 1924, to cross the Dutch border. But this certificate was merely a prototype, not a real document. Indeed, it is unclear whether “Jacob Reimer from Halbstadt” even existed. And if he did, he was not the Jacob Reimer, born in Friedensdorf, who served as an SS guard at Trawniki and whose post-war movements have been thoroughly investigated by historian Eric C. Steinhart. See Gerhard Rempel, “Mennonites and the Holocaust: From Collaboration to Perpetuation,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 4 (Oct. 2010), 507-549. Rempel bases his claim that MCC helped Reimer on one document: John Kroeker to T. O. Hylkema, March 7, 1946.—Mennonite Library and Archives [hereafter cited as MLA], Bethel College, MS.501 (John J. Kroeker papers), “Berlin correspondence, 1946 Jan–May.” For a comprehensive assessment of how Jacob Reimer ended up in the United States, see Eric C. Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (Oct. 2009), 239-262. For immigrant lists, see Mennonite Central Committee Archives, Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, MCCA [hereafter cited as MCCA], IX-12-01, box 17, P-S.

10. For instance, Willi Dyck, who traveled to Paraguay on the Volendam in November 1948, had served as an SS guard in the Falstad prison camp. For a photograph of Dyck in his uniform, see <https://digitaltmuseum.no/021018613870/jacob-ballach-og-willy-dyck>. For Dyck’s passage onboard the MCC sponsored Volendam, see MCCA, IX-12-01, box 17, A-E; Jacob Fast, who served in the SD, left with his family for Canada with MCC’s help through the Hannover-Buchholz camp in July 1947. See Aileen Friesen, “A Portrait of Khortytsya/Zaporizhzhia under Occupation,” in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 229-249. Maria Epp, who was a translator for the Simferopol SD, arrived in Paraguay with MCC’s help. See Daria Rudakova, “Soviet Women Collaborators in Occupied Ukraine 1941-1945,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 62, no. 4 (2016), 529-545.

Mennonite collaborators, unless we are willing to define as collaborators all people living under Nazi occupation.¹¹ This observation is not meant to bolster claims minimizing Mennonite collaboration, prevalent in the Mennonite community for decades, but rather to encourage more systematic historical research into this important question.¹²

This article is a first attempt to describe and contextualize how MCC addressed the issue of refugees who collaborated with the Nazi regime. I do not tailor my findings for either MCC's redemption or its damnation. Instead, I lay out the facts, along with the contradictions, as I encountered them within the documents produced by MCC at the time. Tracking this story accurately—placing events, arguments, and information into chronological order—is a messy enterprise. The movement of millions of people in the post-war system involved a dense international bureaucracy. MCC was represented by well over a hundred people deployed into the chaos of post-war Europe. Its activities alone created thousands, if not tens of thousands, of records in multiple archives. As scholars continue to explore these collections, a more detailed and accurate picture of MCC's work will emerge.

Nonetheless, based on my readings of the sources to date, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn that question easy generalizations regarding MCC's culpability in moral acquiescence. While antisemitism among Mennonites working for MCC cannot and should never be

11. Holocaust studies have debated issues of collaboration. See, for instance, Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Collaboration in a 'Land without a Quisling': Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005), 711-746; Daria Rudakova, "Civilian Collaboration in Occupied Ukraine and Crimea, 1941-1944: A Study of Motivation" (The University of Western Australia, 2018); Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*, 2018; Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, "Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Towards a Social History of Politics in Hitler's Empire," *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 4 (2015), 865-891. Olga Kucherenko, "Reluctant Traitors: The Politics of Survival in Romanian-Occupied Odessa," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 15, no. 2 (2008), 143-155; Olga Baranova, "Nationalism, Anti-Bolshevism or the Will to Survive? Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi Occupation of 1941-1944," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 15, no. 2 (2008), 113-128.

12. In the last few years, scholars have made progress in studying Mennonite collaboration during the Nazi occupation. However, more research is required. See, Viktor K. Klets, "Caught between Two Poles: Ukrainian Mennonites and Trauma of the Second World War," in *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789-1945*, ed. Leonard G. Friesen (University of Toronto Press, 2018), 287-317; Dmytro Myeshkov, "Mennonites in Ukraine before, during, and immediately after the Second World War," in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, ed. John D. Thiesen and Mark Jantzen (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 202-228; Gerhard Rempel, "Mennonites and the Holocaust: From Collaboration to Perpetuation," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 4 (Oct. 2010), 507-549; Aileen Friesen, "A Portrait of Khortytsya/Zaporizhzhia under Occupation," in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 229-249; Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

discounted, this lens over-simplifies MCC's responses, policies, and actions in the cacophony of post-war Europe. Attention must also be given to the effect of MCC's deeply rooted Anabaptist operating principles, the improvised and emotional-laden nature of its work, and the role of conventional ideas of patriarchy as factors shaping MCC's post-war work in resettling Mennonite refugees from Europe. Examination of these factors reveal how MCC navigated a bureaucratically and morally complex international environment by developing its own moral framework based on its own religious and cultural values. Within this framework, the accountability of refugees to the IRO's emerging bureaucratic understanding of who qualified as a deserving refugee did not weigh on the minds of MCC workers. Their work under intense and uncertain circumstances was rooted on a multi-layered, historically conditioned set of evaluations that defy easy conclusions.¹³

PRINCIPLES FOR RELIEF AND REFUGEE WORK

Following Germany's surrender to the Allied forces in May of 1945, MCC quickly developed programs of both relief and refugee work in Europe. Within a short period of time, MCC established relief operations in Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and other places, aimed at feeding and clothing the needy.¹⁴ As MCC workers entered these devastated countries, they operated under an evolving set of principles.¹⁵ In an official outline for workers about to be stationed in Europe, Martin C. Lehman, a Goshen College professor who was educated at Yale and had spent twenty-five years as a missionary in India, articulated some of these principles.¹⁶ According to Lehman, "Allied and enemy peoples both will be helped by the Mennonite Central Committee as opportunity offers. Following its principle of no discrimination among recipients of relief, one, and only one, test as to eligibility for relief will be considered. That

13. This article builds on my previous publication: "Defining the Deserving: MCC and Mennonite Refugees from the Soviet Union after World War II," *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2021), 50-54.

14. For more on MCC operations in Germany and France, see Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988); M. J. (Mary Jane) Heisey and Nancy R. Heisey, *Relief Work as Pilgrimage: "Mademoiselle Miss Elsie" in Southern France, 1945-1948* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

15. For more on the evolution of MCC's operating principles, see Alain Epp Weaver, *Service and the Ministry of Reconciliation: A Missiological History of Mennonite Central Committee*, 2020.

16. The idea that Lehman would have approved of Nazi Germany waging war against neighbors because it might offer a space for Mennonite resettlement, as implied in Goossen's article, is quite extraordinary and deserves further scrutiny.—See Goossen, "MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955," 6-7.

test is the fact of need.”¹⁷ Lehman’s report also introduced MCC workers to their “special obligation” to help the various groups of Mennonites in Europe. For Lehman, the possible complicity of European Mennonites with the Nazi regime during the war did not, in principle, prohibit MCC from providing them with aid. As he wrote: “The fact that many of our brethren in Europe have gone far in departing from the faith and practices which characterized the church . . . rather increases than diminishes our obligation for service among and to them.”¹⁸

As MCC moved from the theoretical to the practical support of refugees, its workers continued to operate under the principle of providing relief to all people, without discrimination based on “race, class, or political sympathies.”¹⁹ In Italy, MCC received praise for its effective assistance in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) camps, particularly to Jewish refugees. In the spring of 1946, Benjamin Brooks, who represented the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Rome requested that Moses Leavitt of the New York office thank MCC for the team sent to work among Jewish refugees and for its donations of clothing and soap.²⁰ Leavitt expressed JDC’s “deep appreciation to the Mennonites for this characteristic action and concern for the welfare of persecuted and distressed human beings.”²¹ In the Netherlands, Peter Dyck reported feeding Jewish families who had remained hidden during the occupation of the Netherlands.²² He also recorded giving clothing to the “children of collaborators” or the children of members of the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands.²³ Under MCC’s operating principle of non-discrimination, these were not contradictory or incompatible acts.

To be sure, there were times when MCC workers apparently operated outside this principle. In Austria, Bertram Smucker, who headed MCC’s aid program there, approved a gift of flour to the Aid Committee for the Victims of Nazi Terror based on his sense of guilt rather than on clear

17. M. C. Lehman, “Mennonite Relief for Europe,” 1945.—MCCA, IX-12-01, box 22, folder 12. Also see Goossen, “MCC and Nazism,” 7-8.

18. M. C. Lehman, “Mennonite Relief for Europe,” 1945.—MCCA, IX-12-01, box 22, folder 12.

19. Peter Dyck to W. M. Berends, June 7, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

20. Benjamin Brook to Moses Leavitt, March 18, 1946.—http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY_AR_45-54/NY_AR45-54_Count/NY_AR45-54_00077/NY_AR45-54_00077_00159.pdf#search=.

21. Leavitt to Central Mennonite Relief Committee, March 28, 1946.—http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY_AR_45-54/NY_AR45-54_Count/NY_AR45-54_00077/NY_AR45-54_00077_00158.pdf#search=.

22. Peter Dyck to Joe Bayler and Ernest Bennett, Aug. 15, 1945.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

23. Peter Dyck to Orie Miller, Jan. 15, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

evidence of physical need. In his report to MCC's head office in Akron, Pennsylvania, Smucker justified his decision in the following way:

Looking back at the terrible suffering which millions of innocent people endured at the hands of the Nazis, one feels moved to make some kind of gesture of "offering," small though it may be, in an effort to atone for these great sins. Although we were certainly not directly involved in persecuting a "folk," we do feel guilty to the extent in which we had racial pride or were indifferent to the problems and sufferings of the millions who were persecuted because they were of another religion, race or belief.²⁴

In the Netherlands, one of MCC's partners, the Inter-church Reconstruction Committee, accused the organization of favoring Mennonites in their aid work, which not only contradicted MCC's operating principles but also violated the agreement under which MCC carried out its work in the region. Peter J. Dyck, who worked in MCC's relief, and then its resettlement, program, defended the work of his group, claiming that within the relief program "it is our intent and purpose to find out not the Mennonites but those people of all classes and all religions (and no religion) who are in greatest need."²⁵ Nevertheless, despite Dyck's emphatic defense of MCC, it appears that Mennonites received proportionally more aid: even though they comprised a smaller percentage of the total population, Mennonites as a group received a case of food from MCC for every case donated to non-Mennonites.²⁶ This seems to indicate that MCC workers were not simply distributing food and clothing based on need but were seeking out Mennonite recipients for their aid.

The question of who deserved help was especially complicated as MCC aid workers encountered Soviet Mennonites among refugees in Europe. Here MCC volunteers experienced pressure to do more than simply offer food and clothing since these refugees feared, with good reason, that they would be repatriated to the Soviet Union.²⁷ Thus, in 1945 MCC quickly

24. Monthly Report Mennonite Central Committee Vienna, Austria by Bertram Smucker, March 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 68, folder 38/46.

25. Peter Dyck to W. M. Berends, June 7, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

26. Peter Dyck to Orrie Miller, Jan. 15, 1945.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

27. In his 1945 report, Lehman recognized that Mennonites in North America with relatives from the Soviet Union would want information about the situation of the family members. See M. C. Lehman, "Mennonite Relief for Europe," 1945.—MCCA, IX-12-01, box 22, folder 12.

initiated a program of resettlement in addition to its relief work, having much experience with both types of these activities.²⁸

Although the organization was established in the early 1920s with a primary focus on providing emergency aid to Mennonites and others in South Russia suffering from the aftershock of the Bolshevik Revolution and a subsequent famine, by the end of the decade MCC had expanded its operations to assist in the resettlement of Soviet refugees to Latin America. C. F. Klassen, who served as the European Commissioner for Refugee Aid and Resettlement for MCC immediately following the war, was eager for an opportunity to bring Mennonites out of the Soviet Union. As vice president of the All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union, Klassen had played an important role in the 1920s in the emigration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union. While 21,000 Mennonites, including Klassen and his family, managed to leave the Soviet Union during the 1920s, tens of thousands of Mennonites remained behind. At the second Mennonite World Conference held in Danzig in 1930, Klassen spoke passionately about the ongoing suffering of Soviet Mennonites, sharing his assurance that God would provide Mennonites with an opportunity to help their co-religionists and relatives trapped under Communism.²⁹ Once the opportunity appeared in 1945, Klassen enthusiastically led MCC's efforts to resettle the Mennonite refugees fleeing from the Stalinist regime, which had caused countless deaths within the community.

Despite the commitment of people like Klassen and MCC's experience with this type of work, from the outset MCC's resettlement program was reactive. It unfolded without clearly articulated parameters and MCC workers often improvised their responses in real time on the ground. Adding to their difficulties, MCC's work took place within a broader international system grappling with how to address the basic needs of millions of displaced people. Years after MCC's resettlement work began, Siegfried Janzen, director of MCC's Gronau camp, noted that "MCC's policy on the exact scope of responsibility in regard to our assistance in emigration of Mennonite refugees has remained somewhat undefined." Janzen pushed for the organization to articulate exactly who fell within MCC's mandate and who should be considered outside of its care.³⁰ The

28. Executive Committee to Marie Brunk and C. F. Klassen, June 24, 1949.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box, 64, folder 35/137. The committee had offered its services to the Church World Service to help non-Mennonite DPs immigrate.

29. C. F. [Cornelius F.] Klassen, "The Mennonites of Russia, 1917-1928," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 6, no. 2 (April 1932), 79-80. Herbert Klassen and Maureen Klassen, *Ambassador to His People: C. F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1990), 89.

30. Siegfried Janzen and Lois Yake to Klassen, "MCC Policy on Refugee Borderline Cases," July 29, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 27, folder 15/21.

request revealed that MCC workers were still deciding these issues based on their own assessments and not by institutionally defined criteria.

REFUGEE SCREENING

The millions of refugees in post-war Europe created a humanitarian crisis that required the mobilization of resources and the formation of an administrative system of care. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, created already in November 1943, quickly established camps to house and feed displaced persons (DPs) and assisted in the repatriation of refugees.³¹ Some of these functions would be taken over first by the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization (PCIRO), a United Nations organization founded in early 1945, and then by the IRO, established in April 1946.

From the outset, MCC struggled with how to represent Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union to these international organizations and to the military governments established to temporarily administer parts of Europe. As Dyck engaged with the American military government in Germany, for instance, the complexities of the Mennonite case were fully illuminated. During these conversations, Dyck attempted to reconcile the reality that Mennonites who had fled to central Europe did not want to acknowledge their Soviet citizenship due to fears of repatriation, yet their acceptance of German citizenship in 1943 had made them ineligible for the status of displaced persons within an international system understandably hostile towards Germany.³²

In the context of their complicated national identity, some officials approached Mennonite refugees sympathetically while others looked on them with hostility. In Austria, MCC worker Johan N. van den Berg found British officials supportive of Mennonites; in the British zone the PCIRO was willing to regard Mennonites as eligible for support and to consider

31. Malcolm Jarvis Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939-52: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1956), 279.

32. Memorandum on Mennonite Refugees in Germany by Peter Dyck, July 25, 1946.—MCCA IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81. Also quoted in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Man.: Published for Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council by D.W. Friesen, 1962). According to Erika Wiedemann, MCC accidentally revealed Mennonite acceptance of German citizenship in 1947. See, Wiedemann, "A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957," 158-159. Although that specific official might have believed this to be the case, UNRRA officials knew about this issue as early as 1945. See John Kroeker to C. J. Taylor, Director UNRRA TEAM, Sept. 10, 1945.—MLA, Bethel College, MS.501, John J. Kroeker papers, Correspondence: Bender, Harold S., 1939-1946. The issue of when people knew specific pieces of information is extremely confusing. In 1949, Klassen indicated that he told the IRO about Mennonite acceptance of German citizenship only in 1948. See C. F. Klassen, Letter of Aug. 30, 1949.—MHA, vol. 1325, folder 959.

resettling them through the various Canadian immigration schemes. In contrast, Van den Berg reported that officials in the American zone held the opposite viewpoint. He informed MCC that the Americans viewed Mennonites as “*Volksdeutsche* and as ex-enemies because of their participation in the SS.”³³ At the American embassy in Poland, MCC workers encountered a similar response. After a cordial welcome, the head of the embassy offered them no help, since “in the eyes of the Embassy, he would be assisting Russian Nationals, who were regarded as collaborators with the Germans, to escape from being repatriated to their own country where they could be tried.” Hoping to find support with the local IRO representative, Janzen sought out information about his character. After discovering that this official might be a communist, Janzen abandoned his plans, presuming that he would find little sympathy for the predicament of Soviet Mennonite refugees.³⁴

Early on, MCC workers understood that Soviet Mennonites who had collaborated with the Nazi regime were not eligible for immigration and, in fact, could be subjected to forcible repatriation.³⁵ They did not hide this fact from the broader Mennonite community. According to Van den Berg, MCC informed Mennonites in Canada that their relatives who had been in the SS would not be allowed to emigrate. These people were easily identified by the SS blood type tattoo on the underside of their left arm. As Van den Berg informed Klassen: “There is no chance for those [refugees] who are marked under the arm.”³⁶ As American and Soviet officials interrogated Mennonite refugees located in Berlin, Peter Dyck understood that if any of the people in the camp fell into the categories of Red Army deserters, collaborators, or war criminals, the Americans would support forcible repatriation.³⁷ As MCC workers prepared a group of refugees for transportation to Paraguay, the United States Forces

33. Johan N. van den Berg likely to C. F. Klassen, Nov. 20, 1947.—MCCA IX-10-09, box 2, folder 01/59.

34. Siegfried Janzen to C. F. Klassen, Oct. 17, 1947.—MCCA IX-06-03, box 58, folder 32/42.

35. By fall 1945, John Kroeker had informed a well-connected group of professors at Goshen College the following: “there have been exceptions who are guilty of collaboration with the Nazi regime.”—J. J. Kroeker to Harold Bender, M. Lehman and A. Warkentin, Sept. 18, 1945.—MLA, Bethel College, MS.501, John J. Kroeker papers, Correspondence: Bender, Harold S., 1939–1946. Dyck also shared this information. See, Memorandum on Mennonite Refugees in Germany by Peter Dyck, July 25, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81. For more on John Kroeker, see John D. Thiesen, “A Deeper Perspective on the ‘Berlin Exodus,’” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 96, no. 2 (April 2022), 207–228.

36. Johan N. van den Berg likely to C. F. Klassen, Nov. 20, 1947.—MCCA, IX-10-09, box 2, folder 01/59.

37. Peter Dyck to Marie Brunk, July 3, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81. For more about forced repatriation, see Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 38–46.

European Theatre (USFET) informed them that exit permits would be given only to “those Mennonite Refugees who do not fall in the category for forceable [sic] repatriation to Russia.” As USFET vetted the passengers, two men, H. Koslowsky and Peter Peters, were denied exit visas since they had been identified as Nazi party members. Skeptical of this claim, C. F. Klassen investigated the situation and then intervened on their behalf. According to Klassen, the cases were sent to a political office in Berlin for reconsideration, where they were overturned, and the men received clearance for travel. Presumably they were cleared of any Nazi connection. For Klassen, this incident held an important message for MCC’s resettlement work—the Americans “take the matter of exit permits very seriously.”³⁸ During the course of MCC’s resettlement activities, workers kept track of people rejected for security reasons, including those who had been members of the SS.³⁹ This was not a hidden aspect of their work.

Military intelligence agencies in both the British and American zones had the right to perform security checks on refugees before issuing exit visas. In the American zone, the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) performed this function; in the British zone, it was the British Intelligence Division at Hereford.⁴⁰ Both agencies had access to documentation housed at the Berlin Document Center (BDC), which accurately listed at least some of the activities of refugees during the war. The BDC, established by the Allied forces shortly after the capitulation of the Nazi regime in May of 1945, contained Nazi-produced documents, including records from the *Einwandererzentralstelle* (EWZ, the central bureau for immigration). This vast repository served as a crucial database for the prosecution of war criminals and for the assessment of refugees applying for exit visas from military zones. Indeed, to this day, scholars continue to rely heavily on EWZ records to determine wartime collaboration by Mennonites. Even if

38. C. F. Klassen to Orié Miller, Dec. 26, 1946.—MCCA IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56. In subsequent correspondence, Miller emphasized that this group of Mennonites received exit visas because American officials had vetted them, not because these officials believed the argument that Mennonites were of Dutch origins. See Orié Miller to C. F. Klassen, Feb. 22, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56. Despite Miller’s insistence that the Dutch argument was not a deciding factor, Snyder made that exact claim in a confidential report to Cornelius Krahn after receiving Professor Morton Royse’s assessment that Mennonites should be categorized as Volksdeutsche. William Snyder to Cornelius Krahn, March 12, 1948.—MHA, volume 1325, folder 957. Some within the IRO believed that Mennonites received funding because of the Dutch argument.—Wiedemann, “A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957,” 152-154.

39. For these lists, see MCCA, IX-19-16, box 27 folder 15/27.

40. For more on the CIC’s operations, see United States Congress, *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 81st Congress, Second Session* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 4726-27; These agencies had other duties beyond screening refugees. These security agencies were also involved in anti-communist activities. See Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-1953: The Information Research Department* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Soviet Mennonite refugees destroyed documents and lied about their past, their military service and their German naturalization status were preserved in the records of the BDC.

MCC workers did not interfere with attempts by military governments or the IRO to identify Mennonites who had collaborated with the Nazi regime. By the same token, however, they did not necessarily assist officials in obtaining this information. In MCC's Gronau refugee camp, IRO officials interviewed refugees, sometimes for hours, to determine their eligibility for emigration.⁴¹ During these interviews, MCC considered it the obligation of the refugee to disclose information about their past actions. When asked by Snyder as to how MCC workers addressed the issue of refugees who had served in the German military, Dyck responded that MCC workers did not share information about military service with officials, but rather told refugees to tell the truth. He also claimed that the IRO officials did not always ask about military service, allowing some ex-soldiers to be processed without having to lie.⁴² After the interview, the British military government received the files of all eligible candidates "for security and exit clearance."⁴³ MCC provided officials with names, birthdates, and birthplaces of each candidate with the understanding that this information would be used to perform security checks. In correspondence at the end of 1947, Dyck bluntly shared why they needed this information: "This is simply for checking against lists of SS, criminals, etc. . . . undesirables who may not emigrate."⁴⁴ Among MCC workers, it was common knowledge that governments conducted their own checks and did not, especially in the case of the United States, accept the documents presented by refugees or even the assessment of the IRO, as truth.⁴⁵

Dyck's statement about how MCC workers dealt with Mennonites known to have served in the German military was not completely accurate. In some cases, MCC workers sought information about the men under their care through official channels to help argue their cases. Janzen, for example, reported that on several occasions he had sent Mennonite

41. Dyck used the imagery of a NKVD interrogation to communicate the intensity of these interviews to MCC headquarters in Akron. Cf. Peter Dyck to William Snyder, Feb. 4, 1948. —MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

42. Peter Dyck to William Snyder, Sept. 17, 1949. —MCCA, IX-06-03, box 70, folder 39/59.

43. For an example of the processing schedule for people applying to immigrate to Canada see "Canadian Processing." —MHA, vol. 5456, folder 3. For an example of this type of screening, see Hans Werner, *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War*, 2013, 159.

44. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen, Dec. 5, 1947. —MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

45. For more information on how the Americans and British conducted security checks, see United States Displaced Persons Commission, *Semi-Annual Report to the President and the Congress — The Displaced Persons Commission* (Displaced Persons Commission, 1949), 16-18.

names to the British Intelligence Division for further information. In one case, he inquired about a young Mennonite man who had served in the *Waffen-SS*. Janzen claimed to have received information from the British that the man had been a private in the SS, but had “served under physical compulsion.” Initially this person had been turned down by the IRO, but after an IRO eligibility official, who happened to be a Dutch Mennonite, went through the camp, this man as well as several other “ex-SS or ex-Wehrmacht men” were processed. Janzen claimed that the official, while lenient in carrying out his duties, was abiding by the IRO constitution since the British Intelligence Division had formally stated that the men had been forced to join.⁴⁶ Whether the IRO official acted properly is unclear; however, Janzen informed Klassen that he would continue to inquire directly with the British Intelligence Division at Hereford when he encountered problematic cases.

Other documents indicate that MCC workers did attempt to filter out those who had served in the German military. As Van den Berg shepherded a group of Mennonite men through the process in Linz, Austria, he complained to Klassen that the CIC investigations had determined that most of the men were ineligible. Van den Berg expressed his frustration that the men had not revealed their past to him in their conversations. If they had been honest, Van den Berg claimed, he would not have presented them for processing. Even though Van den Berg understood that some Soviet Mennonite had legitimate reasons for joining the German military, he communicated both his “surprise” and “disappointment” that so many had taken this path, as well as his frustration that their dishonesty had drawn negative attention to MCC’s work.⁴⁷ As the examples of Van den Berg and Janzen demonstrate, MCC workers understood the obstacles for emigration facing Mennonites who had served in the German military or joined Nazi punitive organs.

The idea of legitimate, or voluntary, versus involuntary military service emerged as an important issue in the post-war environment. Among the public and government officials, the association of non-Jewish displaced persons with Nazi collaboration was strong. Such accusations were directed at Ukrainian, Polish, and Baltic refugees who, for a variety of reasons, preferred to immigrate rather than be repatriated back to their home countries.⁴⁸ As displaced persons of all nationalities were processed in the British and American zones, the question of voluntary versus

46. Siegfried Janzen to C. F. Klassen, Aug. 27, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 66, folder 36/137.

47. Johan N. van den Berg to C. F. Klassen, Feb. 20, 1948.—MCCA, IX-10-09, box 2, folder 01/59.

48. Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 179.

involuntary collaboration arose frequently.⁴⁹ In the case of Mennonites, MCC accepted the position that not all collaboration was voluntary, especially among Soviet Mennonites incorporated into the *Waffen-SS* after 1943 who had little choice in the matter.⁵⁰ However, the issue caused some discomfort as the example of Van den Berg indicates and MCC workers struggled, as do scholars to this day, to define exactly what constituted voluntary collaboration for those who lived in occupied territories and had experienced the wrath of the Soviet system before invasion.

Initially, MCC workers only facilitated IRO screenings; they did not engage in their own process of assessment. In January 1948, key MCC workers dealing with resettlement—C. F. Klassen, Siegfried and Margaret Janzen, Elfrieda Klassen Dyck, and Peter Dyck—changed their approach for identifying refugees suitable for settlement in Paraguay. With approval from Akron, they introduced moral screenings to ensure that only “good Mennonites” emigrated. These MCC workers understood that refugees would interpret such inquiries into their backgrounds as hostile and would view any exclusion undertaken because of this process as “punishment.” To lessen the feeling of confrontation and judgment, Dyck recommended using the word “interviewing” instead of “screening” as it “sound[ed] less Gestapo.”⁵¹ MCC workers also created a space for refugees to help adjudicate problematic cases by incorporating their representatives (*Vertrauensmänner*) in the process.

MCC workers listed several points to consider in assessing applicants to Paraguay. Defining who constituted a good Mennonite included scrutinizing the person’s family structure. Mixed marriages between non-religious Mennonite women and non-Mennonite men were specifically identified as problematic. The committee also recommended that people who displayed “anti-Church, anti-Bible, and anti-Mennonite” characteristics should not be eligible. Some exceptions, however, were indicated, especially for young people who had been without access to proper spiritual guidance and for refugees who had held questionable political affiliations but had repented from their past. Examples of what constituted a questionable political past included leaving “Russia as a

49. Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons*, 185.

50. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 362. For a treatment of the experience of Soviet Mennonites during this period, see James Urry, “Mennonites in Ukraine During World War II: Thoughts and Questions,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 1 (Jan. 2019), 81-111; James Urry, “‘This Dead Weight of Evidence’: Revisiting the Story of Amalie Franziska Reimer—Soviet Agent, Nazi Collaborator, Nuremberg Witness, Immigrant to Canada,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 96, no. 2 (April 2022), 275-306.

51. Peter. Dyck to Snyder, Jan. 6, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

communist” and “being an active and ardent Nazi in Germany.”⁵² The specific qualifications attached to these criteria bear some scrutiny and appear to indicate that MCC viewed the political actions of Mennonites under both the communist and Nazi regimes as being strongly situational.

Despite MCC’s intention, its screening process did not always function as planned. As overworked MCC personnel navigated their various duties, the task of interviewing sometimes fell to a single person—Peter Dyck. In February of 1948, Dyck informed Akron that he had personally performed all interviews as they prepared another group of Mennonites for Paraguay.⁵³ During that year, four Mennonite Dutch nationals implicated in or convicted of collaboration during the Nazi occupation had traveled to Paraguay from MCC’s Backnang camp on the MCC-sponsored ship *Charlton Monarch* under false identities.⁵⁴ Johan Sjouke (Joop) Postma had posed as Heinz Wiebe, Jakob Luitjens as Gerhard Harder, and two brothers named Behage (first names unknown) as Guenther Klassen and Lothar Driedger.⁵⁵ MCC would first learn of Joop Postma’s deception when a woman approached Dyck in the Netherlands asking to be reunited with her husband in Paraguay. Dyck soon learned that Heinz Wiebe was Joop Postma and that everything he had been told by Wiebe was a lie. Deeply embarrassed, Dyck admitted his failure and urged a quick response since he needed to figure out how to react to Postma’s wife and children, who wished to travel to Paraguay, and how to inform the Dutch government that MCC had helped a Nazi collaborator without destroying the organization’s work.⁵⁶ Dyck also investigated how such a blunder had occurred. Under pressure, Postma’s wife revealed that Benjamin Unruh, a Mennonite leader based in Germany with ties to both MCC and the Nazi regime, knew about the deception.⁵⁷ In subsequent correspondence with MCC officials, Dyck reported confronting Unruh during a two-hour conversation. Unruh initially denied knowledge of

52. Minutes of Jan. 4, 1948.—MHA, volume 1369, folder 1366. Also see Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 105.

53. Peter Dyck to William Snyder, Feb. 4, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

54. MCCA, IX-12-01, box 17, T-Z and MCCA, IX-12-01, box 17, F-J. For more an overview of the Jacob Luitjens case, see David Barnouw, “MCC’s Resettlement of the Dutch War Criminal Jacob Luitjens,” *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9 (Fall 2021), 60-62.

55. John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi?: Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933–1945*, *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*. No. 37 (Pandora Press, 1999), 206–207.

56. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen, DeFehr, Warkentin, Aug. 11, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, 35/137. Dyck retells part of this story in *Up from the Rubble*, 262–263. Documents from MCC’s archives confirm parts, but contradict other parts, of Dyck’s story.

57. For more on Benjamin Unruh, see Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, “Benjamin Unruh, Nazism, and MCC,” *Memnonite Quarterly Review* 96, no. 2 (April 2022), 157-206.

Postma, and then blamed his silence on tension between himself and MCC, before he finally acknowledged that he had met personally with Postma.⁵⁸

The MCC office in Akron expressed shock and discomfort upon learning that the organization had helped a Nazi collaborator. William T. Snyder, MCC's executive secretary, advocated that MCC warn not only colony leaders in Paraguay, but also both the Paraguayan and Dutch governments. If MCC remained silent, he warned, "it might appear that we were a party to the plan for Postma to leave Europe." Snyder, however, was not willing to cast Postma away completely, recommending that MCC consider re-establishing relations with Postma if he showed that "he is genuinely repentant."⁵⁹

Compounding the situation, Postma, along with the Behage brothers, disappeared after informing MCC representatives that they were traveling to inspect land south of Asunción.⁶⁰ By October, Snyder, acting on Dyck's recommendation, reconfirmed his permission to allow Postma "every opportunity to reinstate himself in the Mennonite church and in the Mennonite communities in Paraguay." Snyder, however, expressed some skepticism, maintaining that the previous correspondence on the case had indicated that "Rev Postma is a 'bad' man." Nonetheless, he appeared willing to accept Dyck's assessment to the contrary. Snyder also agreed that the issue be addressed openly in the colony, but that "Postma's case not be taken beyond the confines of the MCC and the colony in South America."⁶¹ Eventually MCC leaders would track down these men and close the case, claiming that the men had already made their presence known to the Dutch Consulate in Asunción.⁶²

At the beginning of 1949, Dyck informed Klassen and Snyder about two more problematic cases that he had discovered: Gerhard Harder (Jakob Luitjens) and Gerhard Driedger (Albertus Postma). Luitjens, who would be sentenced to life imprisonment by the Dutch government, arrived in Paraguay on board the same ship as his brother-in-law, Joop Postma. Albertus Postma, who had been a member of the SS, was still in the MCC camp at Backnang, awaiting emigration. Dyck recommended that MCC end its connection with him, but not hand him over to the Dutch authorities. For Dyck, this approach was "in keeping with our spirit of

58. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen, Aug. 20, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

59. William Snyder to C. A. DeFehr, Ernst Harder, Sept. 8, 1948.—MCCA, box 64, folder 35/128.

60. Ruth Harder to Peter Dyck, Sept. 3, 1948.—MCCA, box 18, folder 9/52. Also see, C.A. DeFehr to Dyck, Sept. 11, 1948.—MCCA, IX-19-16, box 18, folder 9/52.

61. William Snyder to Peter Dyck, Oct. 28, 1948.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 70, folder 39/59.

62. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen and William Snyder, Jan. 15, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16, box 18, folder 9/52.

helping all men if possible.”⁶³ With Albertus’s wife expecting a baby, Dyck hoped that Albertus would “settle down to ordinary living”; however, help from MCC could not continue.

In the case of Luitjens, Dyck had a different proposal. Luitjens, according to Dyck, had adapted well to colony life in Paraguay. Dyck reported to MCC that Luitjens had only been accused of “sympathizing with the Germans,” and did not seem to demonstrate any continued political allegiance (presumably to Nazism). Dyck suggested “perhaps all that would be required would be for one of our MCC representatives to have a good talk with him. . . . It is not the way we planned it, but perhaps it is the way God sees fit to use the MCC to save one more man.”⁶⁴ MCC appears to have followed this advice, permitting Luitjens to remain. He continued to live in Paraguay until he emigrated to Canada in 1961; he was eventually deported to the Netherlands in the early 1990s and sentenced to a prison term.⁶⁵

MENNONITES, IRO, AND ELIGIBILITY

As MCC dealt with these cases of Dutch collaborators, it also had to address another significant issue threatening Mennonite immigration. Early on, MCC formulated the argument that Mennonites were ethnically Dutch, rather than German, and therefore eligible for IRO assistance. IRO officials accepted the argument. This categorization helped MCC to circumvent the restrictions placed on people with German citizenship and of German ethnicity in the post-war immigration system, which, in the early years of Soviet repatriation, proved useful in saving Mennonites from deportation eastward and their likely demise.

To be clear, MCC did not invent this argument. Mennonites in tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union had claimed a Dutch ethnic identity in cases where they felt incorrectly categorized by the state.⁶⁶ In recent years, some scholars have made much of this argument, suggesting that it fit into a pattern of complicity that enabled Mennonite collaborators with National

63. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen and William Snyder, Jan. 15, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16, box 18, folder 9/52.

64. *Ibid.*

65. For more on Jacob Luitjens, see David Barnouw, “Jacob Luitjens: A Dutch Mennonite War Criminal,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 96, no. 2 (April 2022), 255-274.

66. For the imperial period, see David G. Rempel, “The Expropriation of the German Colonists in South Russia during the Great War,” *The Journal of Modern History* 4, no. 1 (1932), 49-67; David G. Rempel, *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789–1923*, ed. Cornelia Rempel Carlson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 162. For the Soviet period, see John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921–1927* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2003); John B. Toews and Paul Toews, *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922–1927): Mennonite and Soviet Documents* (Fresno, Calif.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011).

Socialism to escape justice. Lost in the scholarly argument on the integrity of MCC's position, however, is an acknowledgment that eligibility criteria among the countries involved in the creation of the IRO were always contentious.⁶⁷ In 1947, Snyder, for example, reported that Dutch representatives to the IRO expressed support for *Volksdeutsche* IRO eligibility, using Mennonites as an example of a deserving group.⁶⁸ A month later, Janzen quoted from a PCIRO circular that stated Mennonites from Russia or Ukraine should be considered "not of German ethnic origin" but rather a "religious sect," and, therefore, potentially eligible for support under certain conditions.⁶⁹ Even as the IRO implemented its criteria for eligibility, not everyone within the system found those parameters administratively or morally convincing.

Despite this uncertainty over categorization, many Mennonite refugees managed to leave Europe under the IRO system. In the winter of 1948, however, an American professor, Morton Royse, presented an argument to the United States State Department that Mennonites were not Dutch but rather ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) and therefore ineligible for IRO assistance. The State Department seriously considered this allegation.⁷⁰ In the summer, the security officer of the U.S. Consul sent a batch of Mennonite names to the Records Office in Frankfurt, and discovered that most of them had accepted German citizenship. Marie Brunk, who worked for MCC in Stuttgart, informed Akron about this development and the criticism she faced when asking for clarification on the situation. In response to Brunk's inquiry, Adelphos TePaske, the visa officer in the U.S. Consulate General's Stuttgart office, expressed surprise that MCC had not informed him that most Soviet Mennonites had taken German citizenship. Brunk replied that "both [MCC] and the refugees were under the impression that citizenship taken on under such circumstances was

67. The IRO struggled with how to address the issue of the "Volksdeutsche." As Central and Eastern European countries expelled German-speakers as a part of the Potsdam Conference, their numbers grew in Austria and Germany, the IRO had to decide whether this group fell into the category of "former enemies" or "victims of political and racial discrimination in eastern and southern European countries." It wavered in this decision, at one point assessing *Volksdeutsche* as eligible for IRO "protection and resettlement opportunities" except for finances toward their maintenance and then overturning this interpretation, leaving the issue for future consideration.—Cf. United States Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Displaced Persons and the International Refugee Organization* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 9.

68. William Snyder to C. F. Klassen, Sept. 12, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56.

69. Quoted in Siegfried Janzen to Arthur Voth, Oct. 15, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 58, folder 32/42.

70. For more on this case, see T. D. Regehr, "Of Dutch of German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC, and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (Jan. 1995), 7–25. Dr. Royse lived an eventful life. For his obituary see, <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1992/10/08/morton-w-royse-96-scholar-resident-of-college-harbor/>.

not considered to be valid by the authorities." In light of the exchange, Brunk recommended that MCC focus on sending refugees to Canada.⁷¹

MCC's head office based in Akron appeared unwilling to accept Brunk's suggestion. In October, Snyder informed Brunk that he expected Mennonite immigration to the United States to proceed shortly. He based part of his expectation on the public response to an influx of Jewish immigration to the United States.⁷² While nothing excuses Snyder's lack of empathy for the suffering of Jewish refugees and his use of antisemitism to promote MCC's access to the limited number of immigration spots available, within MCC's correspondence, there are hints that the small number of Mennonite refugees allowed into the United States was viewed by MCC leaders as a source of embarrassment for its American constituency. By November 1948, the United States had allowed the entry of 21 Mennonites; in contrast, 4,749 had arrived in Paraguay, 3,981 in Canada, and 791 in Uruguay.⁷³

By early 1949, Mennonite resettlement slowed considerably as the dispute between the IRO and MCC over the eligibility of refugees intensified. At this time, MCC's resettlement program could be considered a success as 9,672 out of 13,000 Mennonite refugees had already emigrated.⁷⁴ Even if the IRO declared the remaining Mennonites as ineligible, they could still potentially emigrate; however, MCC would have to absorb the cost of maintaining them in Europe and funding their transportation. Canadian Mennonites had already supported the resettlement program financially, contributing approximately \$822,000 for the transportation of their relatives to Canada.⁷⁵ It seems likely that MCC officials were preparing themselves for the possibility of losing IRO funding.

At the end of 1948, as tensions continued between MCC and IRO, Snyder requested that Janzen provide details regarding the IRO's financial

71. Marie Brunk to Willian Snyder, July 8, 1948. —MCCA, IX-03-06, box 64, folder 35/93. Brunk, based in Stuttgart, only mentioned a "Mr. TePaski." I found reference to TePaske in a list of foreign service workers. See United States Department of State, *Foreign Service List* (U.S. Department of State, Office of Operations, Publishing and Reproduction Services Division, 1951).

72. Willian Snyder to Marie Brunk, Oct. 7, 1948. —MCCA, IX-03-06, box 64, folder 35/93. Snyder made a similar comment in 1947. See Goossen, "MCC and Nazism," 11–12.

73. Mennonite Central Committee Refugee Section. Report of Siegfried Janzen, Nov. 24–25, 1948. —MHA, vol. 5456, folder 4.

74. Peter Dyck to M.R. Thomas, Jan. 20, 1949. —MCCA, IX-19-09, box 2, folder 1/74. Benjamin Goossen interprets this document differently. See Goossen, "MCC and Nazism," 8. By the summer of 1949, MCC would offer its services to the Church World Service to help non-Mennonite DPs to emigrate. This perhaps hints that they were close to completing their resettlement work for Mennonites. See Executive Committee to Marie Brunk and C. F. Klassen, June 24, 1949. —MCCA IX-06-03, box 64, folder 35/137.

75. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 401.

support of Gronau. According to Janzen, MCC had received approximately \$150,000 from the IRO over the course of seventeen months, including \$4,716 per month for food (not \$20,000 as has been claimed) and \$1,040 per month for train tickets (not \$9,000).⁷⁶ This amount could be viewed as minuscule in light of IRO's annual operating budget of over \$100 million; nonetheless, such assistance enabled MCC to carry out its resettlement work among Mennonites while still maintaining its other programming among Europe's needy.

As these negotiations unfolded, MCC workers continued to save Soviet Mennonites. Mennonites in the Allied zone were relatively safe after 1947 (although they did not feel safe because of their experiences within the Soviet Union) but some Mennonites remained in territories under Soviet control.⁷⁷ Janzen worked to move them to the Gronau camp where they could be out of the reach of the Soviets. In a report submitted to MCC in November 1948, Janzen indicated that 503 Mennonites from the Russian zone, as well as 95 from Poland and 62 former prisoners of war, had been admitted to Gronau. Janzen gestured to the moral compromise necessary to bring people out of the Russian zone. Procuring the proper border crossing permits would have resulted in the repatriation of these refugees to the Soviet Union and therefore Janzen found other means. He was purposely cagey about his actions in his report: "I will not go into detail describing the means and methods by which this is possible, but I do wish to point out that many exciting and fearful moments are often witnessed by all involved."⁷⁸ Even in 1950, Mennonite refugees continued to illegally make their way to Gronau from the Russian zone.⁷⁹

The fiasco of the Dutch Nazi collaborators in Paraguay, the rejections of several applications for security reasons, and the resurgence of the eligibility issue might explain why at the end of February 1949, Dyck submitted 147 random names of Soviet Mennonite refugees awaiting emigration to be checked against the records in the Berlin Document Center.⁸⁰ He apparently undertook this action on his own, only sharing

76. Siegfried Janzen to William Snyder, Dec. 7, 1948.—MCCA, IX-19-16, box 27, folder 15/23. According to this document, MCC received approximately \$80,172 over seventeen months for food (\$4,716 per month) and \$17,680 (\$1,040 per month) for rail travel. These numbers are different than those proposed by Goossen. See Goossen, "MCC and Nazism," 9. For the IRO budget, see Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 403.

77. For an example of Soviet Mennonites continuing to feel unsafe, see Marie Brunk to Elma Esau, Oct. 19, 1948.—MCCA, IX-03-06, box 64, folder 35/93.

78. Mennonite Central Committee Refugee Section Report by Siegfried Janzen, Nov. 24-26, 1948.—MHA, vol.1328, f.977.

79. MCC Gronau Report by Gaeddert, May 1-Sept. 15, 1950.—MHA, vol.1328, f.977.

80. For more on the rejection of application based on collaboration in the late 1948 and early 1949, see T. D. Regehr, "Of Dutch of German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC,

the results with Klassen.⁸¹ What Dyck found disconcerting about this list cannot be ascertained. It contained only a handful of Mennonites with links to the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the *Waffen-SS*, the Nazi party, or membership in the German army (*Wehrmacht*)—hardly a damning portrait of Mennonite collaboration as Benjamin Goossen has claimed, especially as Dyck already had plenty of experience with complicated biographies as this article has shown.⁸² Everyone on the list, however, had been naturalized by the Nazi regime, a reality that plagued MCC for the entire period of its resettlement work. It is worth noting that over half of the names submitted by Dyck passed the check, indicating that they had not become German citizens or had a documented history of engagement with the Nazi regime. These names hint at another part of this story that scholars have, thus far, failed to investigate.⁸³

By April 1949, MCC had instituted a new system of collecting information on the background of refugees using questionnaires. Heinrich Wiebe, a resident at MCC's Backnang camp, recalled how Elfrieda Klassen Dyck and Siegfried Janzen had communicated to the refugees that "each head of the family now had to fill out a large questionnaire 'truthfully.' . . . According to these questionnaires, the camp residents were now examined and sorted."⁸⁴ The questionnaire of Heinrich Wiebe, completed during an interview with Dyck, shows the type of information that MCC workers wanted to know from the applicants. Wiebe's interview revealed that both his parents were Mennonite, that he had been baptized in 1907, that he belonged to the *Kirchliche* Mennonite denomination, and that he had attended church in the Soviet Union until 1929. Wiebe also attested that he had been married in the church, did not serve in the army, did not join the SS, was not a member of the Communist party, did not join the National Socialists, and became a German citizen in 1943 only under duress.⁸⁵

Although it was true that Wiebe was not a part of the SS, German and Soviet documents nevertheless confirm that as mayor of the city of Zaporozh'e (Zaporizhzhia), Wiebe had directed the implementation of

and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (Jan. 1995), 15. I attempted to find out more information about these cases, but could not find documentation.

81. Peter Dyck to C. F. Klassen, March 11, 1949. —MCCA, IX-19-09, box 2, folder 174.

82. See Benjamin W. Goossen, "MCC and Nazism," 10.

83. John Kroeker shared the following with Dyck, which might help explain the difference. As Dyck wrote: "He tells me that our people were divided into groups A and B. A included all those considered safe and were therefore settled in the Poland [sic] (Warthegau) area, while B consisted of those who still needed environment and 'education' before they could be considered 'Gute Deutsche' and settle." Peter Dyck to William Snyder, Howard Yoder, Hiebert/Goering, June 25, 1946. —MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

84. Heinrich Wiebe to J. J. Thiessen, June 8, 1949. —MHA, volume 1364, folder 1316.

85. Allgemeiner M.C.C. Fragebogen. —MCCA, IX-19-16.2, box 1.

Nazi racial policies, which included persecuting the local Jewish population.⁸⁶ MCC knew about Wiebe's position as mayor, but not necessarily the extent to which he collaborated during the Nazi occupation of Soviet Ukraine. His file contains a certified statement from two other refugees attesting to his character: "We confirm that during his short term of office Mr. Wiebe protected the interests of the people as their dutiful representative and took part in no National Socialistic [sic] movements."⁸⁷ Eventually, with the help of MCC, Wiebe, along with his wife, Olga, would receive permission to emigrate to British Columbia, Canada.

It is unclear if MCC workers understood the myriad of ways that Mennonites and others assisted the German occupying forces. This does not necessarily indicate willful ignorance on the part of MCC. Only within the past thirty years have scholars developed an understanding of how the Holocaust unfolded in occupied Ukraine, including the method of execution (mass shootings instead of concentration camps) and the role of local police officers and mayors in the violence perpetrated by the Nazi regime.⁸⁸

To be sure, the answers to these questions were under investigation in the Soviet Union as MCC carried out its work. After the Soviets regained their lost territory, the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) quickly collected information on German atrocities in Soviet territory and the local collaborators who aided in the violence.⁸⁹ Reports from this commission for Zaporozh'e province included references to atrocities committed on the outskirts of Mennonite villages and also documented allegations of

86. See, for instance, "Report about the Inspection of the Administration in Zaporizhia," USHMM RG-11.001M.0092.00000346; Martin Dean, "Soviet Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust in the Reich Holocaust in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 248-271; Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Aileen Friesen, "A Portrait of Khortytsya/Zaporizhzhia under Occupation," in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, ed. Mark Janzen and John D. Thiesen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 229-249.

87. Certification in Lieu of Oath, July 30, 1950. — MCCA, IX-19-16.4, box 23, folder 13/8.

88. Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003); Eric C Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine*, 2018; Markus Eikel and Valentina Sivaieva, "City Mayors, Raion Chiefs and Village Elders in Ukraine, 1941-44: How Local Administrators Co-Operated with the German Occupation Authorities," *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 3 (Aug. 2014), 205-228.

89. Tanja Pentter, "Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005), 782-790; Alexander Victor Prusin, "Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!": The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, Dec. 1945-Feb. 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 2003), 1-30.

collaboration by Mennonite men; in addition, interrogations conducted during the post-war period by Soviet security agencies also offer information on Mennonite complicity.⁹⁰ But these findings would not have been accessible to MCC workers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. And despite access to these sources today, in many cases finding the evidence necessary to assign guilt to individuals for specific actions is still often difficult.

Clearly, some Mennonites in MCC's camps simply lied about their past. Jakob Ediger applied for a visa to the United States along with his wife and a young son. His questionnaire is similar to Wiebe's with a few slight alterations.⁹¹ During his interview with Siegfried Janzen, Ediger claimed he had attended church in the Soviet Union until 1932, that he had not served in the army, had not joined the SS, was not a member of the Communist party, had not joined the National Socialists, and became a German citizen in 1944 under duress. Despite his biography, Ediger was rejected by the CIC. As Janzen wrote: "Applied to U.S. Had trouble with C.I.C. in Stuttgart."⁹² This note does not necessarily mean that Janzen knew something was amiss. As Janzen would state in a report on rejected cases to MCC's Akron office: "There are a good number of reasons why a person may be rejected by the security or the intelligence officer."⁹³ Considering how few applications made it through the U.S. system, perhaps it is less surprising that this rejection did not seem to arouse Janzen's curiosity. He simply moved Ediger and his family from Backnang (American zone) to Gronau (British zone) to attempt the Canadian route. Interestingly, Janzen expressed concerns that spots on the lungs of Ediger's wife would stall the family's immigration to Canada under the sponsorship program and made no statements about the security check.

Ediger's story would not end there. In late July 1949, the IRO accused Mennonites of having "served in the various reprehensible German units

90. Part of the file for Zaporozh'e is located at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum RG-22.002 ChGK. Also see Dmytro Myeshkov, "Mennonites in Ukraine before, during, and immediately after the Second World War," in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust*, ed. John D Thiesen and Mark Jantzen (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 202-228.

91. The case of Ediger is listed in Rempel, "Mennonites and the Holocaust," 533.

92. Jakob Ediger Allgemeiner MCC Fragenbogen, April 13, 1949. —MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 5, folder 3/14. The questionnaire also revealed that Ediger had been baptized by Peter Dyck. Dyck congratulated Ediger on his baptism, expressing his wish that Ediger "keep the covenant you have made with Him [God] for your whole life." Peter Dyck to Jakob Ediger, April 20, 1949. —MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 5, folder 3/14. As Ediger's past was only discovered in August, it is unclear whether Dyck knew about it. However, Dyck believed in the redemption offered by sincere baptism, and he expressed criticisms of refugees who asked to be baptized without true belief. Peter Dyck to William Snyder, Feb. 4, 1948. —MCCA, box 64, folder 35/137.

93. Siegfried Janzen, "The Hard Core." —MHA, vol.5456, folder 3.

such as the Waffen SS and the Sicherheitsdienst."⁹⁴ Consequently, the office determined that all Mennonite applications must be sent to Berlin Document Center for investigation before processing and that all Mennonites who had accepted German citizenship would be considered ineligible for IRO support. After receiving this notification, Klassen traveled to Geneva for further clarification. There he was informed that a Dr. Ettinger, one of the IRO eligibility officers in the American zone, had compiled lists of Mennonite refugees who had been members of Nazi punitive organs. Ettinger claimed that 30-40 percent of the 1,000-1,500 Mennonites screened fell into this category. Klassen balked at Ettinger's estimate, claiming that Mennonite men of military age did not constitute 30-40 percent of the IRO applicants. MCC received a list of only 25 selected names from Ettinger's report; however, this list included Jakob Ediger's name along with the various positions had he held within German units.⁹⁵ From 1939 to 1941, Ediger was a university student in Kharkov (Kharkiv). Soon after the start of German occupation, he joined the *Sicherheitspolizei* and *Sicherheitsdienst*. In 1943 he joined the *Einsatzkommando* 6B until March 1944.⁹⁶

The appearance of Ediger's name on this list might explain why Janzen's initial hopefulness for the family had faded by August. He informed Ediger that processing the family in Gronau was no longer possible as they had been in Germany for too long and were now considered German-born citizens (*Reichsdeutsche*). Janzen recommended that the family seek help from the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (CCCR).⁹⁷ This information appears not to have been shared among MCC staff members as they continued to follow

94. Attention: Chief Eligibility Officer from Myer Cohen, July 23, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-09, box 2, folder 2/7.

95. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 406. Also see "Minutes: Meeting of MCC refugee Section Workers, Germany held in Frankfurt, July 30, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-09, box 3, folder 2/1. For the list of names, see MCCA, IX-19-09, box 02, folder 1/78. There is also a copy among the papers of the Canadian Board of Colonization. See MHA, vol. 1331, folder 996. Some confusion exists as to when MCC received this list. Goossen assumes that it came before Dyck's discovery. See Goossen, "MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955," 10. It is clear from the minutes of MCC's meeting that Ettinger's report was received after Dyck had made his inquiry. Finding a copy of Ettinger's full report would help to shed some light on this issue.

96. Ediger's German naturalization files do not indicate that he had joined the *Einsatzgruppe* in 1941 as indicated in Goossen, "MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955," 7, and Ben Goossen, "How a Nazi Death Squad Viewed Mennonites," *Anabaptist Historian* <https://anabaptisthistorians.org/2021/01/16/how-a-nazi-death-squad-viewed-mennonites/> fn. 21. Instead, Ediger joined the *Einsatzkommando* 6B in 1943. See A3342-EWZ50-B034 1214 and "Selected Mennonite Cases."—MCCA, IX-19-09, box 02, folder 1/78.

97. Siegfried Janzen to Jakob Ediger, Aug. 25, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 5, folder 3/14. For more about the CCCRR, see Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 397.

up on Ediger's case with American officials, inquiring for clarification as to why his file had been rejected.⁹⁸

At the end of August, Klassen met with IRO officials in Geneva to discuss the eligibility of Mennonites who had taken German citizenship. As he pleaded the Mennonite case, Klassen clarified that MCC did not object to the IRO checking every Mennonite applicant with the Berlin Document Center to determine if they had served in German units and then declaring those applicants as ineligible.⁹⁹ Although he did not explicitly make the case, the historical record demonstrates that MCC had always understood that people with complicated pasts would receive greater scrutiny and would likely not be allowed to immigrate.

However, Klassen fought strenuously against the principle of using German naturalization alone as a reason for determining Mennonites to be ineligible for IRO support. In the end, Klassen succeeded in his argument. The new IRO directive, issued on October 3, determined that Mennonites who "claimed that they were Volksdeutsche and used the German EWZ scheme to escape from Russian and Communist dominated areas" might still be accepted as IRO-eligible. But it maintained the clause that automatically sent every Mennonite application to the Berlin Document Center for a security assessment without exception.¹⁰⁰ It is notable that Klassen backtracked slightly from his original position before the publication of the new directive, asking that to save time, only applications in which "the screening officer has some doubt" be dispatched to the Berlin Center. After receiving assurances that processing at the center would be quick, Klassen appeared to accept this system.

EMOTIONS AND MORAL DILEMMAS

Despite the straightforward, often heroic, narratives of MCC, interactions with Mennonite refugees were frequently difficult, emotionally laden, experiences. Especially for Mennonites with familial connections to the Soviet Union, these encounters stirred up complex feelings of guilt. One can detect this layered emotion as Dyck described meeting refugees from the Soviet Union for the first time in 1945. He wrote: "If I thought that I and my parents had witnessed terrible times in Russia during the revolution and the subsequent years of famine they . . . assure[d] me that [it] was mild in comparison to what followed since 1927

98. See Doreen F. Harms to Elma Esau, Nov. 11, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 5, folder 3/14.

99. Letters from C. F. Klassen, Aug. 26, 1949.—MHA, vol. 1325, folder 959.

100. International Refugee Organization. Subject: Eligibility of Mennonites, Oct. 3, 1949.—MHA, volume 1325, folder 957.

when we left Russia.”¹⁰¹ It was as if the gaunt, aged faces he saw everywhere could have been his family, if they had remained in the Soviet Union instead of immigrating to Canada.

Soviet Mennonite refugees were often desperate, despondent, and in some cases, suicidal, creating an emotional vortex of vulnerability and expectations.¹⁰² As MCC workers spoke to “tired, worn out, and haunted” refugees in their own language, these refugees began to hope for a future once again.¹⁰³ Such promises of salvation could create difficult encounters. In a memo, Dyck lamented not being able to bring all of the Mennonites congregated on the Dutch-German border into the Netherlands using the so-called Menno-Pass, a document created by a Dutch Mennonite minister that allowed Mennonites to cross the border out of the reach of the Soviets.¹⁰⁴ Apologizing as he accompanied them back into Germany, Dyck’s own words felt “cold and ironical” to his ears.¹⁰⁵ From this incident Dyck learned an important lesson about relief work: “I kept saying to myself, we must keep this work clean and honest, and I realize[d] again that a relief worker must, at times, also be hard.”¹⁰⁶ Hardness, however, did not come naturally to everyone employed by MCC, and workers often absorbed the pain and blame of refugees who struggled with the weight of everything they had experienced.

Official correspondence sometimes hints at how existing in this emotional raw state affected MCC workers. In one letter, C. F. Klassen vented his anger at the response of people who downplayed the crisis in Europe.

Are we that far advanced in cruelty that human life does mean so little to us? Have we become so indifferent to all the misery and unspeakable suffering here? Who could throw a bomb into the still waters of the self-content and overfed masses in North America? Excuse my bitterness, please, but having spent three weeks amongst the refugees, and having seen their plight once more, having noticed the hopelessness on their pale faces, the tears streaming down their meagre cheeks, and having listened to their sad—most well fed Americans would call them unbelievable—stories and having heard

101. Memorandum on Mennonite Refugees in Germany by Peter Dyck, July 25, 1946.—MCCA IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81. The document is also quoted at length by Frank Epp. See Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 368.

102. C. F. Klassen to T. O. F. Herzer, June 19, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56.

103. Peter Dyck to Orië Miller, Feb. 15, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

104. Gerlof D. Homan, “‘We Have Come to Love Them’: Russian Mennonite Refugees in the Netherlands, 1945-1947,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007), 39-59. Also see Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 368-369.

105. Peter Dyck to Orië Miller, Feb. 15, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

106. *Ibid.*

their sometimes childish prayers to God the Almighty for a refuge after all the storms they have gone through, I am in danger to forget that I am a non-resistant Christian, a Mennonite.¹⁰⁷

Such tirades provide a glimpse into the toll resettlement work had on MCC officials who carried out complex negotiations and bureaucratic maneuvering in emotional minefields.

In this heightened state, MCC workers were also forced to navigate moral dilemmas, which posed institutional risks and personal distress. On the one hand, MCC workers did not want to reduce someone's chances of finding a safe home elsewhere in the world. Helen Good Brenneman, an MCC worker in the Gronau refugee camp, summarized the primary goal of resettlement: "[to] bring these refugees to new homes—real homes."¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the means and methods of finding such homes did not always meet MCC's own ethical standards and could draw negative attention to the organization's broader activities. Bertram Smucker, working in Austria, faced this type of situation as he addressed the case of the Grunzky family, which ended up on MCC's radar after a request arrived from an American Mennonite to help his family. Smucker disapproved of the way the IRO official presented the family as being persecuted by the Germans; but he also did not want to interfere. As he reported: "I am afraid that this IRO man will make up the 'best' story for them that he can without 100% regard to honesty, but the wheels are grinding, and we also do not wish to put the damper on their chances of going to America."¹⁰⁹ Smucker admitted that his conscience bothered him with this case. MCC workers likely often encountered these types of moral dilemmas; if they intervened with a more honest portrait of a person's background, they risked harming the person's application.

RE-ESTABLISHING MENNONITE PATRIARCHY

Even though the theme of patriarchy is difficult to uncover in the source material, it is essential for understanding MCC's response to collaboration. First, nearly all men of a certain age bracket were complicit in some way within the German military apparatus, whether voluntary or involuntary. Men who survived were viewed as essential to their family's well-being or to their future family. As statistics from the Gronau camp demonstrate, women and children constituted the largest portion of registered Soviet Mennonite refugees, with 4,918 women, 3,563 children,

107. C. F. Klassen to T. O. F. Herzer, June 19, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56.

108. "Homelife at Gronau" by Helen Good Brenneman.—MHA, vol. 5456, folder 3.

109. Bertran D. Smucker to Wayne D. Kempf, Nov. 11, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 68, folder 38/46.

and 3,285 men in 1948.¹¹⁰ To scrutinize young Mennonite men too closely would reduce an already small pool of male candidates.

MCC's emphasis on recreating traditional family structures with a Mennonite man as the head of the household helps to contextualize why diminishing this pool had significance. Through their screening process, MCC workers prioritized the formation and maintenance of families led by Mennonite men, especially for settlement in Paraguay. Notably, no restrictions for immigration to Paraguay were articulated if a Mennonite man was married to a non-Mennonite woman.¹¹¹ In contrast, MCC categorized "mixed marriages"—those involving Mennonite women and non-Mennonite men—as on the borderline of their responsibility for resettlement.¹¹² In the case of Paraguay, MCC's policy meant Mennonite female headed households, instead of those headed by a non-Mennonite man, would be sent.¹¹³

The establishment of Mennonite male leadership within the refugee community also demonstrates the significance of patriarchy to understanding this post-war environment. Much has been made of MCC employing or empowering Mennonite men with pasts that involve some sort of complicity with the Nazi regime. It has been argued that "MCC partnered with or directly hired multiple former Nazi officials and even SS agents because of the expertise they had built promoting fascist schemes to resettle Mennonites during World War II."¹¹⁴ First this characterization misses the fact that some of these men occupied roles of responsibility long before the war. Heinrich Wiebe, the former mayor of Zaporozh'e, had a long history of leadership within the Mennonite community which extended to the beginning of the Soviet regime.¹¹⁵ Wiebe also demonstrates how some Mennonite male refugees used these past connections as well as their ability to conduct themselves in a way that was culturally and religiously recognizable as "Mennonite" to integrate themselves with Mennonite North American leadership.¹¹⁶

110. "Statistik: Gesamtzahl in der Zentralkartei erfassten Mennoniten Fluechtlinge des MCC-Gronau nach dem Stand vom 1.6.1948."—MHA, vol. 5456, folder 3. For more on the gender balance of the refugees, see Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (University of Toronto Press, 2000).

111. Minutes of Jan. 4, 1948.—MHA, volume 1369, folder 1366.

112. Siegfried Janzen and Lois Take to C. F. Klassen, July 29, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16.04, box 27, folder 15/21.

113. Epp, *Women Without Men*, 105.

114. Goossen, "MCC and Nazism, 1929–1955," 9–10.

115. See Aileen Friesen, "A Portrait of Khortytsya/Zaporizhzhia under Occupation," in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 229–249.

116. These themes are demonstrated in Heinrich Wiebe's correspondence with the leadership of the Mennonite Board of Colonization, J. J. Thiessen.—MHA, volume 1364, folder 1316.

Second, at least in the case of Soviet Mennonites, this claim misses the importance of gender. Even though Mennonite women had undertaken significant roles as head of their families after the loss of their husbands during the Soviet terror or the subsequent war and migration, women were not incorporated into leadership roles as MCC worked with the refugee community.¹¹⁷ Instead, the system of *Vertrauensmänner* (representatives) that connected MCC to the refugee population was comprised of men.¹¹⁸ In this system, women were portrayed as needing care. Heinrich Hamm, a refugee who worked for MCC, illustrates this point.¹¹⁹ At a meeting between MCC workers and the *Vertrauensmänner*, Hamm praised each of these men as “a cog in the great MCC machine” who had an important role to perform in helping to ease suffering in their community, especially among “single mothers and their children.”¹²⁰ Mennonite men from the refugee population, who often had complicated biographies, established themselves as the protectors and providers of their community’s well-being with the help of MCC. MCC likely viewed this leadership as a positive step towards reconnecting these refugees with their cultural and religious Mennonite heritage.

117. For more on the changing gender role under the Soviet system and the role of women during the evacuation of Ukraine in 1943, see Epp, *Women Without Men*.

118. Protokoll, Oct. 1947.—MCCA, IX-19-09, box 2, folder 1/78.

119. The case of Heinrich Hamm requires greater consideration. Goossen argues that Hamm was a Nazi.—Ben Goossen, “The Real History of the Mennonites and the Holocaust,” *Tablet Magazine*, Nov. 17, 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/history/articles/heinrich-hamm-mennonite-holocaust>; Ben Goossen, “How to Catch a Mennonite Nazi,” *Anabaptist Historians*, <https://anabaptisthistorians.org/2020/10/29/how-to-catch-a-mennonite-nazi/>. It is unclear what definition of Nazi Goossen is using. Hamm was not a member of the Nazi party, nor did he serve in any military capacity as confirmed by his EWZ documents. Hamm did write about his life in which he used antisemitic remarks. But I am struck by an element of his biography overlooked by Goossen. In the document that Goossen emphasizes proves Hamm’s allegiance to Nazism, there are details that appear to indicate that he worked for the Soviets before occupation. Hamm described how during the 1932 famine, he traveled from village to village collecting unpaid taxes as part of the Soviet financial department in the region of Zaporozh’e. The following year, in 1943, he moved to Dnepropetrovsk, according to his EWZ documents. He massaged this part of his history claiming that collectivization forced his family to relocate to the city. He also falsely stated that Germans were not allowed to join the Communist party. Hamm’s role in the Soviet system before German occupation might offer some insight into why he so quickly adopted Nazi racialized language and appeared determine to prove himself on paper to be loyal. At the moment, this is speculation, but it deserves some consideration. For his EWZ documents, see Einwandererzentralstelle or Central Bureau for Immigration Collection “Heinrich Hamm.”—EWZ50-CO46-1670-1690. For a translation of document used by Goossen (Heinrich Hamm, “Schilderung vom Volksdeutschen,” Nov. 12, 1941, Captured German and Related Records on Microfilm, T-81, roll 606, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, USA (hereafter NARA), see Gerhard Rempel’s unpublished manuscript, “Dove and Swastika: Russian Mennonites under Nazi Occupation, 1939-1945.”

120. Protokoll, Oct. 1947.—MCCA, IX-19-09, box 2, folder 1/78.

REDEEMING LOST SOULS

Several other factors allowed MCC workers to turn a blind eye to the complicated and sometimes murderous pasts of mainly Mennonite men. First, they recognized that under an atheist Communist state, these men had not been given the opportunity to learn and understand the Mennonite faith. Reflecting on the Mennonite refugees under her care, Brenneman commented that “the Russian Mennonites have been spiritually starved for a long time. . . . Many need to be instructed in spiritual matters and to be helped with troubles that have arisen in the[ir] recent abnormal past.”¹²¹ Janzen reported to his MCC superiors that the spiritual state of Mennonite refugees remained “a great concern.” He especially noted how “the last years of life in Russia under the Communist . . . regime as well as the years of their travels during the war” had affected their spiritual condition.¹²² Since Soviet Mennonite youth had not received proper support in their spiritual development, some MCC workers reasoned, they could not be held fully accountable for their choices.

As a result MCC workers often viewed their work as offering redemption to lost souls. Van den Berg, for example, expressed a willingness, with humility, to help those who “really were guilty” if he could still find “the conscience of a true believer.” In such cases, he felt comfortable explaining the circumstances fully to the IRO official and asking for mercy, contending that “there is a place of grace in the heart of men.”¹²³ He also expressed great sympathy for what Soviet Mennonites had experienced under Stalinism, understanding that:

I am never going to say that Mennonites are not guilty and are free from Nazis[m] any more than other Volksdeutsche in Russia, but I do know the history of these people and I have spoken a long time with all of the Mennonites to feel [sic] the precarious situation in which they found themselves.¹²⁴

Such an approach fit with the Christian theology of forgiveness and the Mennonite tradition of reintegrating the excommunicated back into the faith community upon repentance to the congregation. Reintegration was a prevalent theme in MCC’s correspondence about the Dutch collaborators who had taken false identities, which presumably extended

121. Homelife at Gronau by Helen Good Brenneman.—MHA, vol. 5456, folder 3.

122. Mennonite Central Committee Refugee Section Report by Siegfried Janzen, Nov 24-26, 1948.—MHA, vol. 1328, folder 977.

123. Johan N. van den Berg likely to C. F. Klassen, Nov. 20, 1947.—MCCA, IX-10-09, box 2, folder 01/59.

124. Johan N. van den Berg to likely C. F. Klassen, Nov. 20, 1947.—MCCA, IX-10-09, box 2, folder 01/59. Goossen uses this part of this quote to draw a different conclusion. See Goossen, “MCC and Nazism, 1929-1955,” 9.

to others under its care. MCC required acknowledgement of past harms, but only within the confines of the Mennonite community.

This form of repentance and reintegration, however, also often involved the minimization of Mennonite actions, as scholars have argued.¹²⁵ In the case of the Dutch collaborators, Peter Dyck downplayed the alleged actions that led to their initial arrests in his correspondence with the Akron office.¹²⁶ It is difficult, however, to attribute this minimization to antisemitism on the part of Dyck. His correspondence with MCC's executive committee makes clear that he despised his colleagues with Nazi ties. For example, when he faced pressure from Walter Quiring for help, Dyck criticized Quiring as "a member of the Nazi Party, an outspoken anti-Jew and consequently also anti-Old Testament." In his conversations with Quiring, Dyck wanted confirmation for MCC that "Saul had changed to Paul." After not receiving a satisfactory answer, Dyck reported, "I consider the matter as taken out of my hands" unless told otherwise by Akron.¹²⁷

MCC AND ANTISEMITISM

Despite this gesture of disapproval, MCC—and Mennonites more broadly—had a complicated relationship with National Socialism.¹²⁸ As historian Frank Epp has demonstrated, some Mennonites who left the Soviet Union during the 1920s harbored an antisemitic worldview based on the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, the idea that communism was a Jewish plot.¹²⁹ They welcomed a National Socialist Germany as an ally in the fight against communism and as offering a strong cultural identity for Mennonites fearful of assimilation in Canada.¹³⁰ Although this history has been known for decades, the institutional influence of these ideas on policies of Mennonite organizations has not been fully explored.

125. See Schroeder, "Mennonite-Nazi Collaboration and Coming to Terms with the Past: European Mennonites and the MCC, 1945-1950"; Wiedemann, "A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957"; Goossen, "MCC and Nazism"; Friesen, "Defining the Deserving: MCC and Mennonite Refugees from the Soviet Union after World War II."

126. Peter Dyck to Klassen and Snyder, Jan. 15, 1949.—MCCA, IX-19-16, box 18, folder 9/52.

127. Report of Peter Dyck to MCC Executive Committee, July 25, 1946, Memorandum A.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81. The response of Dyck does raise question as to why Walter Quiring was welcomed as editor of *Der Bote* in 1955.

128. See, *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9 (Fall 2021), 1-68.

129. Frank H. Epp, "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930's" (University of Minnesota, PhD diss., 1964).

130. See, Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*.

Some statements found in MCC documents from the post-war period raise questions about antisemitism among some MCC workers, most notably C. F. Klassen. This is most apparent in a letter Klassen wrote in January 1953 as the IRO was preparing to publish a manuscript accusing MCC of misleading its officials about the background of Mennonite refugees. Klassen categorically denied any deception. Instead, he criticized Jewish, Polish, and Latvian IRO officials for creating difficulties for Mennonite refugees. Reflecting on the treatment of Mennonites during a row with the IRO, he wrote, "The questioning often was done by people who were prejudiced against anyone whose mother tongue was German: Poles, Jews, and Latvians." Klassen described the eligibility officers from these three groups as harboring "ignorance, prejudice, stupidity, and not seldom, even wickedness."¹³¹ Klassen also criticized Myer Cohen, the IRO assistant director general, with whom he had hostile encounters during the summer and fall of 1949, at the height of tensions between the IRO and MCC, emphasizing how his "Christian boss" had sided with Klassen. The letter also contained Klassen's most often repeated quote, in which he deployed an antisemitic trope of the cunning, materialistic Jew to explain to Snyder that many refugees lie:

Yes, some refugees were so frightened after all the horrible experiences they went through that they began to believe their own made up stories. I have never concealed this in my talks to IRO in Geneva. But why single out the Mennonites in this history? I have seen Jewish refugees appear before the examining IRO officers in not exactly rags, but very poor clothing, and then seen the same people after they passed, in expensive furs and dresses with more than one diamond ring on their fingers and other jewelry.¹³²

The quote stands out when compared to Klassen's heartfelt compassion to the suffering of Mennonite refugees. Scholars still have much to uncover in the story of Klassen's attitude towards Jews, the Holocaust, and collaboration, as a leader who wrote prolifically and deeply influenced Mennonite institutions like MCC.

Additionally, some scholars have highlighted the many comparisons made by MCC's officials between Jews and Mennonites as further

131. C. F. Klassen to William T. Snyder, Jan. 28, 1953.—MHA, volume 1325, folder 957. Klassen was not the only MCC worker to assume that a person from a specific background might hold ill-will toward MCC's work. During the *Volksdeutsche* controversy, Snyder inquired whether Dr. Royse might be of Catholic or Lutheran background, which could help to explain his position as a grudge against the Mennonites for their success in obtaining IRO status. See William Snyder to H.S. Bender and C. F. Klassen, April 8, 1948.—MHA, vol. 1325, folder 957.

132. C. F. Klassen to William T. Snyder, Jan. 28, 1953.—MHA, vol. 1325, folder 957.

evidence of antisemitic attitudes.¹³³ The historiography on competitive suffering among Central and Eastern European groups and its links to antisemitism has been well established.¹³⁴ In some ways, Soviet Mennonite refugees fit that model of emphasizing their own suffering in an attempt to minimize or erase the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust.¹³⁵ In the post-war years, MCC also deployed a rhetoric of comparative suffering as it navigated the international environment—by comparing Jewish persecution under the Nazis to the experiences of Mennonites under the Soviets, they developed a shorthand for communicating to officials both the special category of nationality that they felt Mennonites belonged to while highlighting the level of suffering that Mennonites had experienced before the war.

Clearly, MCC did not invent this impulse to compare Mennonites with Jews or the idea of Mennonite as a nationality, which was part of this narrative. In the early Soviet period, as the Bolsheviks imposed a system of national categories, Mennonite leaders strongly advocated for their own recognition as a nationality within this system. In Soviet Ukraine, Mennonites submitted legal documents in 1921 for the formation of a union of Mennonite communities of southern Russia. Mennonites reiterated the position that they were of “Dutch origin” and that they formed a distinct social, legal, and cultural group not based solely in religion. In this regard, they considered the Jewish case as comparable to their own, since even though Jews were a religious group, they also constituted a nationality.¹³⁶ In a tract published during this period, Philip Cornies, a leader within the Mennonite community in the Soviet Ukraine, claimed that Mennonites and Jews shared similar origin stories, as they both emerged “through a lofty religious ideal” and grew into peoplehood.¹³⁷

133. Schroeder, “Mennonite-Nazi Collaboration and Coming to Terms with the Past: European Mennonites and the MCC, 1945-1950”; Schroeder; Wiedemann, “A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957”; Erika Wiedemann, “Facing the Future, Reinterpreting the Past: MCC’s Solutions for Successful Mennonite Immigration after the Second World War,” *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2021), 45-50.

134. See, for example, John Paul Himka, “War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora.” — *Spacesofidentity.Net*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1496-6778.7999>.

135. For more on how Soviet Mennonites addressed this past, see Hans Werner, “A Usable Past: Soviet Mennonite Memories of the Holocaust,” in *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 290-306.

136. John B. Toews and Paul Toews, *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922-1927), Mennonite and Soviet Documents* (Fresno, Calif.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011), 82-83.

137. Philip Cornies, “Confessional or National? A Study” in *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922-1927), Mennonite and Soviet Documents*, ed. John B. Toews and Paul

The Soviet regime, however, did not agree with this assessment. According to the NKVD, Mennonites were attempting “to lay a religious basis under its economic activity.” As the Soviet system of nationality developed, Mennonites would eventually be placed under the category of “Germans.” Jews, in contrast, were given nationality status, but pushed to relinquish all religious elements of their identity and to embrace a secularized version of their culture.¹³⁸

Even though Mennonites did not receive nationality status in the Soviet Union, as Peter Dyck encountered refugees in Europe he observed that many used the term “Mennonite” when questioned about their nationality by American officials. Although some chose to identify as Russian, German, or Dutch, Dyck indicated that most stayed with “Mennonite.” For Dyck, this gesture confirmed his opinion that Soviet Mennonites should be categorized as belonging to a Mennonite nationality. He knew that people might view this position cynically: “I very much hope that no one will say that these poor refugees and . . . the MCC . . . are being expedient and diplomatic, that we are looking for an easy way out.” Dyck used the example of the Jews to illustrate his point that some religions evolve into a broader identity: “The only classic parallel of this which I know of is that of the Jew.” As he laid out his argument, Dyck acknowledged that viewing “Mennonite” as a nationality was controversial within the community and was unlikely to be accepted by the military governments administering Germany who followed their own “iron-clad definitions and categorizations.” Nonetheless, Dyck explained his position in detail because he “honestly believe[d] to be purporting the central truth of a complex picture which has been blurred by the passing of time and distorted by abnormal conditions of war.”¹³⁹ As they encountered IRO officials who struggled to understand who the Mennonites were, Dyck and other MCC officials continued to use this comparison with the Jews to contextualize Mennonite history while

Toews (Fresno, Calif.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011), 144–145. Cornies served in the Association of Citizens of Dutch Lineage. Goossen interprets Cornies’ tract as another example of Mennonites attempting to “dissociate [themselves] from Germanness and embrac[ing] a Zionist form of religious nationalism.” See, Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 16. This approach misses the importance of Soviet nationality policy on Cornies’ work.

138. See, for instance, Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

139. Memorandum on Mennonite Refugees in Germany by Peter Dyck, July 25, 1946.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 50, folder 27/81.

advancing their position that Soviet Mennonites should not be considered German or Russian.¹⁴⁰

MCC's use of the Jewish example to problematize the category of nationality for government officials, however, is different from MCC equating Mennonite suffering under the Soviets with the experiences of Jews during the Holocaust. As Erika Weidemann has demonstrated, MCC workers consistently made this comparison during their interactions with IRO and government officials.¹⁴¹ This position, in addition to being offensive to Jews who lost their families through unspeakable violence, was historically inaccurate. Although Mennonites had suffered tremendously under the Soviet regime during the late 1920s and the 1930s, they were mainly targeted as Germans, not as Mennonites.¹⁴² Such nuance, however, was not necessarily understood by MCC workers whose knowledge of life under the Soviet regime emerged out of their own experiences during the 1920s, as well as from accounts printed in Mennonite newspapers and letters from family members still living in the country. This source material helped to create a narrative focused on the immense suffering of Soviet Mennonites often assumed to be based on their Mennonite religious identity.

CONCLUSION

The complexities of the post-war environment created moral quandaries for MCC workers. Despite the investment of MCC and the Mennonite community in a narrative of moral purity and righteousness, relief and resettlement work inevitably involved ethical compromises. Humanitarian work often operates in a gray zone in which good intentions confront logistical, legal, political, administrative, financial, and ethical realities. Refugees arrive in this quagmire with weighty baggage, many of them not fitting comfortably into the model of principled virtue often expected by those controlling access to food, clothing, and a

140. Also see, William Snyder to C. F. Klassen, April 17, 1947.—MCCA, IX-06-03, box 59, folder 32/56. There is evidence to support Dyck's observation that the Mennonite identity continued to have meaning beyond the confines of religion among refugees from Soviet Ukraine. In the EWZ documents of several people involved in "reprehensible German units" chose to identify their religion as "Mennonite." These people, by all indications, were not religious under the Soviet regime and had demonstrated their usefulness to the Nazi regime through their service. It is unclear what they hoped to gain through their identification as Mennonites. These examples serve as a hint that "Mennonite" had meaning for them beyond the religious realm.

141. Wiedemann, "A Malleable Identity: The Immigration of Ethnic Germans to North America, 1947-1957," 108-112.

142. Terry Martin, "The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State, 1917-1955," *Conrad Grebel Review* 20 (2002), 40.

future. Defining and sorting the deserving was a messy business that required quick and hard decisions.

In the case of MCC, those decisions allowed some individuals who had collaborated with the Nazi regime and committed acts of violence against Jews, Roma, and other groups to emigrate. This cannot be ignored and must be incorporated into an honest portrait of MCC's post-war work. As scholars continue to investigate MCC's activities and weigh the roles of the various factors that contributed to these decisions, however, I also encourage them to grapple with the complexities of this period. Certainly, antisemitism shaped aspects of MCC's post-war work; but that is not the entire story. MCC's Anabaptist operating principles, the improvised and emotional-laden nature of refugee work, and the role of deeply rooted ideas of patriarchy all influenced the tendency of MCC leaders and workers to adopt a posture of leniency toward refugees who may have been complicit with the Nazi regime.