

LECTURE 1. MENNONITES AND THE ROMANOV DYNASTY: LOYALTY AND IMPASSE

NATALIYA VENGER

John and Margaret
Friesen Lectures

Revisiting the Mennonite Experience in Ukraine

Professor Nataliya Venger

*Professor of History and Chair of the World History Department
at Dnipropetrovsk National University, Ukraine*

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In person only recordings will be available for later viewing



**Lecture 1 | Mennonites and the
Romanov Dynasty: Loyalty
and...Impasse**

11:00 AM | CMU Chapel
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.

**Lecture 2 | The Mennonites 'Return'
to Ukraine: Dialogue with a Lost
and Regained Motherland**

7:00 PM | Marpeck Commons
2299 Grant Ave.

IN THIS PRESENTATION, THE FOLLOWING FACETS OF THE ISSUE ARE DISCUSSED:



1. The interactions between Mennonites and the monarchs from the Russian Empire history and “changing monarchy” perspective.
2. The transformation of mutual perception.
3. Who were those dignitaries – real political “decision-makers” influencing the monarchs` opinion about the Mennonites.
4. Why the Privileges from the tzar became an “impasse”



- Was famous for their ties with the German Holstein-Gottorp dynasty

Strong supporters of Mennonites as a colonization group:

Catherine II (1762–1796), Paul I (1796–1801), Alexander I (1801–1825), Nicholas I (1825–1855).

Turning point: Alexander II (1855–1881)

Opponents: Alexander III (1881–1894), Nicholas II (1894–1917).

MY APPROACH

Modernization and nationalism were crucial processes that –

- changed the empire in the 19th cent.,
- influenced the monarchy (changing monarchy),
- impacted the personal attitudes of monarchs towards the Mennonites as a colonization group.



GRIGORY POTEMKIN: AGAINST CATHERINE II`S PLANS TO ABANDON COLONIZATION PROGRAM



- The Manifestos (1762-63) never mentioned the word "colonization" (but said about "colonies and settlements").
- The 1763 Manifesto focused on the resettlement to the Russian (not Ukrainian) provinces.
- After some difficulties with Volga German colonies, Catherine II was ready to abandon colonization.
- Prince G. Potemkin renewed interest in the colonization program in Ukraine and Crimea (as a decision-maker person).
- Chortitza – his former estate that he offered to the Mennonites. Evicting former villagers became a practice.



PAUL I OF RUSSIA AND SAMUEL CONTENTIUS: “PRIVILAGES” IN 13 YEARS (1800)

- Bartsch-Hoeppner Petition (content - “Tzarina`s obligations”) – approved in 1787.
- “Granted Charter” to the Mennonites/”Privileges“/”Жалованная грамота” – granted in 13 years (1800).
- It was firstly mentioned about the “Mennonite mission” in “Charter” (with “obligation to the tzar”)
- Samuel Contentious can be identified as an author (if to compare his report submitted after inspection of colonies in 1799).

NAIVE MONARCHISM (MEDIEVAL STUDIES` TERM)

- This notion characterizes the pre-modern peasants` conciseness who blindly believed in the infallibility of the monarch and entrusted him.
- Mennonites, metaphorically speaking, found themselves in a “historical trap”. Mennonites considered the “Privileges” as a fundamental foundation for their prosperity and religious freedom, fostering optimistic expectations for its enduring sustainability. From that moment onward, and for many years to come, they not only acknowledged their loyalty to the monarchy but also accepted their dependence solely on it.
- However, the Empire and the monarchy were being changed. Modernization and nationalism influenced the monarchy, increasing the tsar’s dependence on society.



ALEXANDER I AND NICHOLAS I REIGNS AS A “GOLDEN AGE ” OF MENNONITE “PRIVILAGES”

- Brothers, both had German wives and supported so called “German party” in the Empire.
- In-person meetings with Mennonites: Alexander I (1818, 1825), Nikolas II (1837)

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ALEXANDER I AND VIKTOR KOCHUBEY (A MINISTER AND A “MANAGER BEHIND”) (1801 - 1825)



1804 – a law about new conditions of colonization was passed. V. Kochubey (*right picture*) - the author of the text . “Boiling passions” around colonization in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Alexander I approved the new emigration waves of Mennonites in 1802, 1818 (the emperor violated his earlier law which had prohibited emigration)

- financed the construction of the churches (in Orlovo, Rudnerweide).

JOHANN CORNIES ABOUT ALEXANDER I DEATH (IN HIS LETTER, FEBRUARY 1826)



"The death of His Majesty, Tsar Alexander, deeply affected us, especially since His Majesty had blessed our villages and visited them a month before his death. It was a great happiness that he visited my home, and we organized a tea party for him. You can imagine how saddened we were by the news of his death... We pray to God that the Russian throne will again be under our protector. We will pray and support him."

NICHOLAS I AND COUNT P. KISELEV (1825 - 1855)

An unfavorable political situation for foreigners and non-Orthodox peoples, a discussion on "privileges for foreigners," some early nationalistic and anti-German sentiments.

HOWEVER, MENNONITES WERE PROTECTED:

- “Great Projects” (Count P. Kiselev (Ministry of State Domains, bottom photo), J.Cornies, Ph. Wiebe)
- The czar affirmed the law about exemption the Mennonites` apprentices from military service.
- Meeting of the Mennonites with the czar in Crimea in 1837 (Count A.H. Benkendorff).
- Mennonites were awarded a commendation for organizing transportation and hospital during the Crimean War (1853-1856).



ALEXANDER II` REIGN AS A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD: BETWEEN THE POSITIVE IMAGE AND MIS-PRESENTATION (1855 - 1881)



- Modernization was accompanied by discussions. Mennonite discourse, their success and difficulties were present in the debates in positive and negative meaning.
- Points of positive communications with the tzar (positive image):
 - “Letter of allegiance”,
 - participation in national exhibition projects (the Romanovs were curators),
 - scholarships – “Alexander Fellows”,
 - food supplies and hospitals during 1877–1878 war (awarded a commendation),
 - Tiege school was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Alexander II`s reign.
- Points to fuel suspicions against Mennonites (a trend for the nationalists):
 - sectarianism, proselytism,
 - land issue (however, “business as usual” prevailed)

A. BRUN AND COUNT A. SIVERS ABOUT SECTARIANISM AMONG THE MENNONITES



Two reports about sectarianism (Alexander II read the second one):

1. "Information about the case of the religious sect that arose in the Mennonite colonies of Southern Russia" (by A. Brun)
2. "Sects Among the Protestant Population of Southern Russia" (by A. Sivers (*on the picture*) and P. Valuyev (the minister))

Statements

- "the decline of Mennonite church and worship resulted in debauchery and indifference towards faith and the inclinations of the [Mennonite] people".
- proselytism as conspiratorial activity
- the contacts with Prussia and Courland (Baltic Province)
- "Friends of Jerusalem" is a "political sect"

Thus, a new image of the Mennonites was started generating (less appealing, no longer reliable, but "problematic and dangerous" for the state).

REFORMS 1871, 1874 (ABOLISHING OF COLONIST STATUS, COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE)



- Alexaner II read the reports which offered a new Mennonites` image.
- Traditionally, the monarchs distanced themselves from those ethnic groups and social circles whose social image and reputation were somehow tarnished.
- Passing 1871 law the Russian state demonstrated that the mission of the colonists had been completed, and the era of "privileges" had been over.
- Alexander II's refused to support the Mennonites during the discussion of military reforms. 1873 – unsuccessful meeting with Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov (*on the picture*)

ALEXANDER III AND KONSTANTIN POBEDONOSTSEV: TZAR AND HIS TEACHER AGAINST PROTESTANTISM AND THE MENNONITES (1881 – 1894). RUSSIFICATION AND NATIONALISTIC POLICY



As the heard of the Holy Governing Synod, Pobedonostsev proclaimed:

- religious tolerance impossible;
- Orthodoxy and Protestantism are antipodes;
- there is connection between religious and national identity;
- a Protestant is intolerant, arrogant, hostile.

Pobedonostsev:

"What can freedom of religion lead to? Only to our enemies snatching masses of Russian people from us and turning them into Germans, Catholics, Muslims..., and we will lose them forever for the church and the homeland."

TIEGE AND NIKOLAYEVKA CHURCH CASE AND POBEDONOSTSEV (1882-89)



- The church was constructed but needed registration. It was necessary to obtain the permission from the local Orthodox priests. They submitted negative reviews about the influence of Mennonites on the local population.
- Denying request, K. Pobedonostsev asserted that “wealthy German Mennonites hired a significant number of workers and did not hesitate to mock the rituals of the Orthodox Church”.
- He labeled Mennonites as a sect, hostile to the Russian ecclesiastical and governmental structure.
- Mennonites -“freethinkers”, That kind of accusation was almost a verdict in the late 1880s (after the assassination of the emperor by the terrorists).



NICHOLAS II – A WEEK REIGN TO WITHSTAND THE CATASTROPHE ... (1894-1917)



1. Pobedonostsev personally lectured the future tzar.
2. "Law on Strengthening the Principles of Religious Tolerance" (1904) and October Manifesto (1905) pledged to grant basic civil rights, including freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association (under the influence of Serhei Witte, who was the PM)
- 3. Met with Mennonites delegation in Katerinoslav (1915) (middle pic,)

HOWEVER

- - Supported radical nationalistic Black Hundreds party
- - Did not support the Mennonites' request to abandon anti-German legislation in 1914-17





NICHOLAS II AND BLACK HUNDREDS PARTY

- The Black Hundreds was one of the more powerful radical nationalistic parties
- It was noted for extremism and incitement to pogroms, nationalistic doctrines, and different xenophobic beliefs, including anti-Jewish and anti-German sentiments.
- Their ideas were widely propagated in Russian society and easily involved the peasantry (ressentiment!).
- Supported anti-German laws in 1915 – 1917
- Nicholas II attended the Congress of Black Hundreds and had a badge

CONCLUSIONS

- Objective historical scenario: The Mennonites, aspiring for privileges and the patronage of the czar, found themselves without the privileges and without the czar's support (before the Revolution period).
- *Naive monarchism* of the Mennonites wasn't their irrationality or political blindness. The "Privileges" were obtained in the premodern stage of the Russian Empire history. On the spiral of modernization, the monarchy was changing. Being supported by the nationalists, it shifted towards the "enemy [for the Mennonites] camp".
- The successful communication of the Mennonites with the monarchy depended on personality of the monarch, in-person meetings, tzars' dependents on society, as well as the individuals around them. Sometimes, they delegated decisions to politicians whom they trusted, assuming a "spectator's seat in a hall" instead.
- It was challenging for the Mennonites as a traditional society to reject their sacral connection with the czar dynasty. The next period of the Mennonite history (the Revolution and early Soviet period) proved that the Mennonites were able to make conclusions and rid of some "odd" traditionalism.