Russification
Nationalism and an effort to make a mono culture sweep through Russian in the 1860’s. By 1870 laws are passed that directly effect the Mennonites.

Changes
1) All local government must be conducted in Russian
2) All schools must be taught in Russian
3) There will be no military exemption for anyone. All are drafted to serve in the army.
4) Colony government is changed and more Russian government control is exerted over the colonies.

Response
1) Mennonites try to change the government’s opinion. They have to argue through an interpreter, because they can’t speak Russian.
   “if we allowed that everyone would want to be a Mennonite!”
   “we would be over run!”
   “there would be no war if all were Mennonites”

2) Mennonites go looking for a place to emigrate to. North America (Kansas, Manitoba) South America, and the far eastern provinces of Russia. (frontier laws were different.
   - everyone wants to go, no one buys land, good deals for those that stay
   - graft for passports etc.
   - Canada is very generous, they offer them exemption from service and everything else.
   - US is less generous, but railway companies push for settlers.

Russian Compromise (1874)
1) Offered alternative service, paid for entirely by Mennonites, usually in the form of forestry work. (not offered to converted Mennonites or outsiders)
2) Russians run a slur campaign of calling America a land of convicts and thieves (cowboys)
3) They try to convince them that England (Canada) will go to war soon and then they’ll have to serve anyway.

Mennonite Response by 1880
1) 8000 go to Manitoba, this includes all of the Kleine Gemeinde,
2) 10 000 go to Kansas
3) some move to the Russian frontier to avoid military service, includes Claas Epp’s trek east.
4) General Conference is formed to help the colonies organize and run the forestry services.
5) Colonies continue to grow, by 1914 there are 150-170 000 Mennonites in Russia
World War I
Selbstschutz Notes

- Advised and recruited and equipped by German forces who occupied south Russia late in 1918.
- Winter of 1918-19 most active time for the unit
  - Began organizing itself before Makhnovite raids became severe (Smith)… probably did not expect to have to use force.
- Joined forces with neighboring Lutheran colony… Lutherans also forced to leave their colonies
- Mennonites later condemned the Selbstschutz, they felt it was:
  - a tactical blunder (Bolshevik’s viewed it as a rebellious group fighting against the Red Army forces
  - violation of the peace position, “the logic of circumstances spoke more strongly then the logic of theology.
- The Molotschna unit (the one in the novel) is the only one that was militarily significant
- All Mennonite Conference in the summer of 1918, reinforced non resistance stance but refused to condemn Mennonites who took up arms.
- 2700 infantry men, 20 companies (7 non-Mennonite Germans) 300 Cavalry
- they held off Makhno about 20 miles north of Molotschna colony
- they were forced to retreat when the Red Army gave Makno assistance. They disbanded in Halbstadt.
- The majority of the Mennonites did not support the action and organization of the Selbstschutz
- Committee tallied the losses on the Molotschna colony at 3.3m rubles.
- Arguments and comments to support the units in: Toews. Czars, Soviets and Mennonites p. 85,86 p.89 German officers described.

Up From the Rubble, Peter Dyck pp.87-99
(story of the refugees from Nieder Chortitza)
1. What was the Mennonites situation in the Soviet Union (Russia) before the coming of the Germans during World War II?
2. How did the Mennonites treat the arrival of the German army, (for the second time) and why did they react that way? What problems do you think this caused for them in their quest for survival? What problems would it cause later after the war?
3. What do you think of the choices made by those Mennonites who joined the war effort for the Germans because they were “drafted” into their army?
4. This excerpt is from the second meeting Peter Dyck has with Mennonite refugees at the end of World War II, they are trying to flee into Holland. How do you think he reacted to them?

5. Mennonites faced a particular problem in post war Europe, no one except the Soviet Union would accept them as being of their ethnicity. Does this mean Mennonites are a separate nation? Or why do you think countries reacted in this way?

**Mennonites in Manitoba**

**Situation in Russia**
- Russian government began to “modernize” and had a strong push for Russian Nationalism. Schools, laws and government in the colonies is now required in Russian.
- The exemption from Military service was under threat, although the Russian government was indicating an interest in compromise.
- Mennonites were under economic pressure as well. Many could not find land, and land was the only means to status (political and religious). The new colonies that were being established were sometimes not covered by existing Mennonite privileges.

**Situation in Manitoba**
- British government and the Canadian Dominion were anxious to establish a “presence” in western Canada. They felt under threat from the United States and were worried about “defacto settlement”
- Manitoba was too small and “inexperienced” to handle their own immigration policy so… the feds did it. That led to some disagreements with the Menno’s later on about who had the power to grant what.

**Earliest Settlements**
- Beginning in 1874 two reserves were established, one on each side of the Red River. Between Winnipeg and the border.
- Most of the Manitoba Mennonite settlers were from the Chortitza colony (old colony) and its daughter colonies Bergthal and Furstenland in Russia
- The delegates that came to Manitoba were after the best deal that would guard their economic, cultural and religious life.
- They were not willing to assimilate. (they wished to create conditions similar to the ones that they had in Russia)
• Kleine Gemeinde and the Bergthalers were conservative offshoots of the main Mennonite Church in Russia. It had taken them awhile to get their status as Mennonites recognized by the Russian government.

**Delegate Inspection**
• The privileges in Russia were being withdrawn, Russification was taking place so Mennonites sought a new privileged position in another country.
• The Canadian Department of Agriculture sent William Hespeler to Berdyansk to meet Russian Mennonite delegates in 1872.
  • Hespeler Swiss German from Ontario. He had secret meetings and was advised by the British that the Russians might arrest him if he went to Russia.
• They were promised the fullest assurance as to freedom from military service
• Twelve delegates including:
  a) Bergthal Church: Jacob Peters, Heinrich Wiebe
  b) Kleine Gemeinde: David Classen, Cornelius Toews
• They inspected Kansas, Texas, Colorado, Nebraska and then the Red River Valley in Canada.
• **East Reserve;**
  a) A group of 24 traveled by wagon to the east reserve in the Steinbach area.
  b) They returned to Winnipeg before seeing all 8 townships.
  c) They were disappointed with the swampy, poor farming area.
  d) Most of them went to the United States.
• **West Reserve:**
  a) Hespeler took four Bergthaler’s and Kleine Gemeinde reps to the west reserve.
  b) They liked what they saw and went to Ottawa July 26th, 1873 to negotiate conditions
  - note of interest, they seem to have recognized that there were shady land deals going on with the Metis being mistreated, they also didn’t think much of the Metis. They even got into a brawl in Wpg and had to be rescued by a detachment from

**Conditions of Mennonite Settlement**
1. Complete exemption from military service
2. Free grant of land in Manitoba
3. Right to conduct, maintain traditional schools, German and Bible courses.
4. Right to affirm rather than take and oath in court.
5. Cash grant to help pay for the passage from Hamburg Germany. $30 per adult, 15 children under 8 years old, $3 for infants.
   - The delegates probably misunderstood the extent and duration of some of these privileges.
   - The east and west reserves were set aside for Mennonites to establish their own schools, local administration etc. just like in Russia.

**Mennonites and the Schools Question**

Education became a point of conflict between the Mennonite Communities and the Government of Manitoba.

**Manitoba Government**

1. They wanted to assimilate the immigrants to Canada into the “British Empire” and Canada. This melting pot idea meant that education was a vital tool in installing values for new citizens.
   - 1916 58% of MB population were British in origin. They wanted to maintain their dominance.
   - Bilingual schools were a threat.
2. World War One meant an even stronger push to nationalize, for security reasons.
   - private schools were made public
   - flags were flown outside the classroom
   - students were forced to attend school

**Conservative Mennonites**

1. Regarded education as a threat to their views and way of life, their identity
2. Felt they needed German to stay Mennonite
3. Felt that the schools question indicated a untrustworthy ness of the other promises of the government.

   - 1921-1930 aprox. 6000 left (from MB) for Latin America (Mexico, Paraguay.)
     - they settled in Chihuahua or the Chaco
     - Those left behind were know as the Kanadier (Canadians), they became less conservative because the most conservative members had left.
     - Those who left were replaced by 8000 Russian Mennonites (in MB), “Russlander”

**Russlander (1922-1930)**

- Canadian government was not keen on Mennonite or Hutterite immigrants because of their conscientious objector stance.
- CPR helped finance refugees backed by Mennonite guarantees (finally paid up towards end of WWII)
Russlander were not as conservative, Russification, education and war experiences had shaped their views.

- Not a block immigration, more individual, although in groups.
- The Depression, hurt them badly, they had debts from trip and start up costs plus they had costs from helping others across. (This includes the Kanadier who helped out by guaranteeing loans.)
- Depression also ended immigration

1. Mennonite migration and immigration

Original Kanadier
- 1921-1930 – 8000 leave for Mexico, Paraguay + those who stay are less conservative

Russlander
- move in to fill many of their spaces, trying to escape Communists and war.

David Toews
- heads up the Canadian Mennonite Colonization Board and works with the CPR to bring refugees into Canada (fights with Ewert to get the job.

Russlander (1922-1929)
- Canadian government was not keen on Mennonite or Hutterite immigrants because of their conscientious objector stance.
- Liberal government under King changes that
- CPR helped finance refugees backed by Mennonite guarantees (finally paid up towards end of WWII), CPR had land to settle and steamboats etc.
- Russlander financed by the Kanadier
- Russlander were not as conservative, Russification, education and war experiences had shaped their views.
- Not a block immigration no block settlements, more individual settling in among other ethnic groups, although they still settled in areas, just not villages.
- The Depression hurt them badly, they had debts from trip and start up costs plus they had costs from helping others across. (This includes the Kanadier who helped out by guaranteeing loans.)
- Depression also ended immigration, Conservatives under Bennett stopped any more immigration.
- about 1000 Mennonites went to Brazil at this time.
- About 2000 go to Paraguay and establish colonies there in the Chaco in 1926 another wave of Mennonites go in 1930.

Mennonites settle not in villages but across Western Canada in wherever they can find land.

Questions
1. Does a Christian have a greater responsibility than the rest of society to try and help immigrant refugees?
2. Does it matter if they are economic or religious refugees? Explain
3. Does it matter if they are Christian? Explain
4. Are churches doing enough to help with refugee problems around the world? What more could they do?

**Conscientious Objector Status**

1914-1918 WWI
- although they were of “German” background, they spoke it, the Mennonites in Manitoba experienced little real pressure to give up their pacifist beliefs. They had been guaranteed that right in 1874 and the federal government did not challenge them (much). They were asked to register their young men, which they eventually did.

1939-1945
- The original guarantee of 1874 was felt by the government to no longer apply since many of the immigrants were “new” Russlander, who had not signed that deal. The government was under pressure to conscript all eligible men from the parents of those whose sons were in the army. Quebec resisted the draft for an “english” war, so the Mennonites were not alone in their resistance.

- The nature of their “mixed” settlements now meant that they had to face, pressure from neighbours and friends thus making pacifism more difficult. Some chose to serve as C.O.’s in alternative work programs in Canada, some served as medical orderlies, some chose to serve in the active armed forces.