61. September 20, 1710. The only existing copy of this letter from Runckel is a Dutch translation to an unidentified recipient. He explains that plans for helping the Anabaptists must proceed in secrecy at present so that hostile Bernese officials do not thwart them and fears that religious freedom will be approved only with limitations.

[recto]

Confidential copy

Bern, September 20, 1710.

Sir:

Lord St.-Saphorin, since his arrival in this city, has been occupied with making up a report concerning his negotiations in The Hague and with paying visits to the leading persons in this Canton. We have not made much progress on the orders which their High and Mighty Sirs were pleased to give me concerning the Mennonites in this Canton, including handling this business in concert with the aforesaid Lord St.-Saphorin.

On his arrival I communicated to him the plan that some people of good will had made for these poor people, which I reported in my recent communication[[1]](#footnote-1) of the 30th of last month. Since I had pointed out to him the observations for and against attaining the desired goal, each of us went to speak to the members both of the Small and of the Great Council concerning the unfortunate people and have attempted to formulate as many positive arguments as possible. But until the present we have found, yet with deference to them, sentiments to be quite divided. The people of good will, after thoughtful consultation and discrimination, were of the opinion that it is best, even necessary, not to work on these matters in public for these unfortunate people, but to let it rest until their fellow brothers in Holland, Hamburg, and other places will have found a sure means of refuge. Or in case the plan mentioned above were to be implemented, those unfortunate people as a result would be relieved of an otherwise unavoidable departure.

We have been obliged to follow and take this path because we are, not without reason, alert to the possibility that the slightest public activity in their favor would give the severe parties the opportunity to dispose of the matter and take it in hand to disadvantage in such a way that no possible means could be found to reverse this. And this is much more so because it has been noted that Chief Magistrate Willading has gotten wind of the ways

that people of good will are using to keep the poor people in the country if at all possible, having already attempted to persuade the Sovereign Council to resolve that the list, which the King of Prussia has demanded, be handed over to that Majesty by the Anabaptist Commission, but they are nevertheless not at all in a position to do so because of those people being dispersed so widely.

Further, it has been agreed that, in order to attain the desired goal, an attempt shall be made thereafter to show that a sure refuge has been found for these miserable people, and by this means to increase the number in the Council who are striving to save them. When this refuge should be at all secure, I will present a memo to the Sovereign Council on behalf of their High and Mighty Lords to request a general amnesty for these unfortunate people with a view to offering them liberty and to procure adequate time for getting their affairs in order and for disposing of their property to the best advantage. In all this, His High Excellency[[2]](#footnote-2) refuses to listen to reason.

It is therefore not to be expected that they will receive a total liberty of conscience. But perhaps indeed by the mediation of someone or other of the people of good will—and the means mentioned above were able to keep them in the country, which will be supported by them through every possible argument, after which an attempt will be made to continue those matters more forcefully—it is to be hoped that were such a proposition to be brought forward by people with credit in this Canton, it would find more entrance than anything that might be undertaken from without. It would at least result in a more bearable situation being negotiated for the poor Anabaptists, considering that they were so unfortunate here in that [the authorities] persist in trying to get them to leave the country and to have them sent to another one.

[verso]

This is the policy that we intend to pursue until the time that the intention of the Mennonites in the Netherlands concerning the said subject [can be fulfilled] and it will be understood that they have found a sure refuge for their poor fellow brothers in these lands. We will continue in this manner until we encounter a noteworthy change in those matters which obliges us to take a different route in order to attain our goal.

1. 61 This is Document 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Probably Willading. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)