98. December 13, 1710. From Runckel to the Committee Members: he has received in good order their letter of December 2 with a draft for 300 rixdollars and a comforting letter for the prisoners. The Commission appointed by the Council of Bern has taken the memorandum into consideration, but has two objections: first, the negotiations already begun with the King of Prussia are yet pending; and second, the request came not from the States-General but from the Mennonite churches in the Netherlands with whom they cannot negotiate unless further instructions come. Runckel counters that the proposal does not undo the plan of the King of Prussia because the Swiss could also move from Holland to Prussia and the Mennonites in the Netherlands certainly would not have dared to make such a proposal without first informing the States-General. Yet he still considers it advisable that the States General themselves appeal to the government of Bern. He gives a few instructions for the arrangements for the coming of the Swiss exiles and the necessity to ask for passports in France and Vienna.

[page 1]

Bern[[1]](#footnote-1) the 13th of December 1710

Worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

My last communication to you was from the 10th of the present month, which, as I hope and without doubt, will have been delivered already to my highly honored Sirs, with an enclosed copy of my memorandum submitted to the Illustrious Canton of Bern on behalf of the local Mennonites.

The day afterwards, namely the 11th of this month, I received your letter[[2]](#footnote-2) of the 2nd of the standing month from my highly honored Sirs with the enclosed bill of exchange[[3]](#footnote-3) for 300 rixdollars, 14 days at sight, on Messrs. Fäsch, Ryhiner, and Socin at Basel and in addition your letter of comfort[[4]](#footnote-4) to the fellow brothers and sisters lying imprisoned here. I am sending the bill of exchange with today’s post to Basel to get it accepted, because it could not be negotiated here, although it had been so wished. I think that on the coming [page 2] Monday I myself will deliver my highly honored Sirs’ letter

of comfort to the poor prisoners; [I think I will] discuss [matters] besides the bail required by the Illustrious Canton prior to and before the government wants to set them loose, so that when it comes to their bonds, no new difficulties may come up.

From my said last communication, my highly honored Sirs will have seen that my said memorandum was transmitted by the so-called Daily or Small Council here to the Anabaptist Commission for review and that they should report back to the said Council. This actually happened the day before yesterday. The said Commission is quite pleased with the propositions made by my highly honored Sirs in my name. However, they create two more problems, on the strength of which they think that the Illustrious Canton cannot move forward in this matter at present.

The first is the negotiation which the Illustrious Canton has actually taken up for these people with his royal Majesty in Prussia and its final resolution, which must be awaited for the sake of consistency before further steps are to be taken in this matter.

The second is that the propositions I have made are not made in the name of the High and Mighty Lords of the States General [page 3] but simply in the name of the Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands. Because the interest, the safety, and also the reputation of the Illustrious Canton should not be neglected in negotiating with the said congregations concerning the local Anabaptists, the said Commission is of the opinion that prior to and before further steps are taken in the matter either I am to produce a more precise order from the High and Mighty [Lords], or, instead, deliver a writing from the most highly regarded High and Mighty [Lords] to the Illustrious Canton of Bern.

Now about these two problems, so that they may not come up before the [whole] Sovereign Council, I am informing both the principal leaders and other members of the Small and Great Council at the present time.

Concerning the first problem, my memorandum gives sufficient evidence that the intention of the Mennonite congregations is absolutely not “to fall into the bargain,”[[5]](#footnote-5) as they often say here, of his royal Majesty of Prussia or to interrupt the ongoing negotiations. But much more they want to promote the complete departure of the local Anabaptists, to win some time for the disposition of their possessions, and to facilitate their transportation, which could be done more easily from Holland than from here.

They especially do not presume in the least that the [page 4] Illustrious Canton had ever intended to send off these poor people to a destination and place for which they have no inclination or desire, against their will, and glad acceptance. Much less [do they] believe that the world-famous impartiality of his royal Majesty of Prussia[[6]](#footnote-6) will agree to take up and receive these poor people contrary to their glad acceptance, but much more to be better assured of them, would gladly see if they in a freely, well considered state of mind should commit themselves under his protection and care. This could not occur otherwise than in the manner proposed by me, all the more so as his royal Majesty is inclined himself to negotiate concerning these people with the often-mentioned Dutch congregations. They [the Bernese officials] would not be able or want to do this, if they were not fully assured in advance of the intention of the local Anabaptists. To all of this I [might] add other reflections, here too extensive in view of the worrisome, greatly pressing[[7]](#footnote-7) loss of time.

Concerning the second problem I want to recognize that this has happened through certain causes moving me in this direction and certainly with the approval of the most outstanding gentlemen and leaders, that

I hope yet this omitted formality [page 5] will in no way hinder the publication of the amnesty and the release of the prisoners, especially not to presume that the often-mentioned congregations would venture to undertake anything of the sort without the previous approval and approbation of their High and Mighty Lords. Then further I also believe that their High and Mighty Lords would have no hesitation either to send me in this case a definite order, or on the other hand write directly to the Illustrious Canton of Bern about it, etc., etc.

Although I now trust with a positive hope that these difficulties disseminated by the Anabaptist commission will not find entrance among the Illustrious Sovereign Council, we are not yet certain of this. It will moreover be necessary to be alert in any case that such difficulty can be removed. So I most obediently request, my highly honored Sirs, on the one hand that you might choose my suggestion given by letter the 3rd of this month in order to avoid disturbing clashes between his royal Majesty of Prussia and the Illustrious Canton of Bern, in case such has not already occurred, and to proceed immediately to work. On the other hand, would you endeavor to get from the High and Mighty Lords of the States General either new orders to me going beyond this, or, what in my eyes is better, as soon as possible you might have a letter sent to me for the Illustrious Canton [page 6] of Bern so as to lose no appreciable time, in case, contrary to hope, the sentiment of the Anabaptist Commission should prevail in the Sovereign Council.

Moreover, what concerns the manner and means as perhaps to best approach the transporting and settlement of these good people, I believe, from my humble viewpoint, that such a matter, in the way as I have commenced, has rather well begun, and that I should continue just in the

way from here on. Concerning their transportation, I believe that it could be handled by water best and most conveniently, and also least expensively. For this purpose then, as the time for their departure nears, the Illustrious Canton would be requested to procure the needed passports from France, which, as for me, I would do with the imperial ambassador, unless my highly honored Sirs think it advisable in this case [to get] a passport from his imperial Majesty himself, this best accomplished through their High and Mighty Lords’ resident minister at Vienna, Mr. Hammel Bruyninx.[[8]](#footnote-8) Concerning their settlement I cannot report because I am not informed about the land where they think to place these good people. [page 7] I believe, however, the Bernese Mennonites who are already down there can give the best suggestion in this case.

My highly honored Sirs will have seen from my memorandum what is proposed to the Illustrious Canton concerning omission of the usual emigration tax. This hopefully may find some entry, but not the local and citizen rights[[9]](#footnote-9) desired by my highly honored Sirs in your last letter, as these rights are not otherwise for these good people than for others who move out of the land and settle elsewhere. For they renounce the previously enjoyed protection and care of the Illustrious Canton, the rights of inhabitants, and whatever is similarly dependent on that. They must forgo these forever so that they are no longer considered as native-born citizens, husbandmen, or subjects, but rather as strangers who no longer have a home here in this country.

Now from this, my highly honored Sirs can easily understand that the Illustrious Canton of Bern wants to have nothing to do with these people once they are out of their territory. If the Canton wants to achieve its goal, the so-called local, citizen, and homeland rights (which exist not so only with the Canton but with communities in every place, hamlet, or village),

cannot be maintained for them [these people]. I should yet add this: that [page 8] these good people have nothing to pay in this case and it consists in nothing other than a simple renunciation of the previously enjoyed rights and freedoms of the land, which they can no longer enjoy anyway being absent.

Moreover, my highly honored Sirs may be assured that on my part the slightest matter will not be neglected, which might be for the hastening of their liberation and the publication of the amnesty, also which otherwise might be most advantageous to these people or could contribute in some measure.

With this, my highly honored Sirs, I commit myself

into the supreme, gracious protection of the Almighty

and your persevering, devoted prayers most kindly

and besides a cordial greeting constantly remain,

My most highly honored Sirs,

P. S.

I hope that my memorandum will be

brought to the Sovereign Council

either the coming Monday or coming

Wednesday and that thereafter I will

be able to report the result with my

very next communication. Meanwhile,

it would be good in any event to be

prepared for anything.

Your most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

1. 98 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 103-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Probably Document 92. See also the note on the facing page. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Written documents, promises on paper, a long-distance method of payment, that is, bills of exchange had been in use in Western Europe since the twelfth or thirteenth century. Fernand Braudel, The Structures of Everyday Life (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979), I, pp. 472, 477. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This letter of comfort was given to the prisoners. See Document 92. See also note on Document 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “to interfere with.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. King Frederick I (1701-1713), not his grandson, Frederick the Great. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “jn sonderheÿd op den gevreesden verlies van tÿt kragtig aandringe.” Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392), p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Hamel Bruyninx” Vorsterman’s Relaes, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Furner refers to similar terms as municipal registration “Heimatrecht,” p. 290; the “1559/1659 Landrecht” is a law mentioned by Furner on p. 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)