119. January 24, 1711. From Runckel to Clerk Fagel[[1]](#footnote-1) of the States General with an extensive report of how he had two meetings with the Anabaptist Commission appointed by the Bernese Great Council and refuted all their objections, although they had until now held up settlement with all kinds of pretexts. Nevertheless after the second meeting, Chief Magistrate Willading proposed waiting again. When Runckel threatened to drop all negotiations and depart from Bern to proceed with his other work, Willading yielded and presented the matter to the Great Council, who on January 23 dealt with and settled it almost entirely as wished. The Great Council is confusingly also called the Sovereign Council and the Council of Two Hundred in this document.

[page 1]

Bern

January 24, 1711

Copy[[2]](#footnote-2)

Confidential

Sir!

By means of my most humble [communication] of the 17th of this month, I have the honor to inform you in a most respectful manner about what has happened up until today in the affair of the Anabaptists of this Canton. The Commission that was established to deal with them wanted to confer with me before making its report in the Sovereign Council.

Then, when the courier for Germany and the Netherlands had already been dispatched, that is at 4 p.m., two deputies of the said Commission, namely Mr. von Graffenried,[[3]](#footnote-3) former sheriff[[4]](#footnote-4) of Thun, and sheriff Pottier, came to get me from my lodgings in order to escort me to an audience at the Chamber of the Standard-Bearers of the City of Bern, as it is called, and where this Commission was assembled in the number of five persons only,

namely, Senator[[5]](#footnote-5) von Diesbach, President; Senator Wurstemberger; Minister or Deacon Delosea[[6]](#footnote-6); the two sheriffs mentioned above; and a secretary.

After I had taken my place, which was opposite the President, and after the customary formalities, the President made a speech, quite long, but which, in summary, had no purpose other than [to ascertain] whether the Senate or the Small Council had read the letter which it had pleased the High and Mighty Lords to write most recently to the Laudable Canton in favor of the Anabaptists, and the memorandum I had sent accompanying the said letter— both letter and memorandum had been turned over to the Commission established concerning these people. [p. 2] There was an order to hear me out in case I should have something more to propose and, if not, to engage in conference with me on the points contained in my memorandum of last December 7th, points which had been approved by the High and Mighty Lords.

And finally [the President said] that it had been for this purpose that I had been asked to take the trouble to come to the Commission for giving opinions[[7]](#footnote-7) and that I would be much obliged to the Senate for the honor accorded me by that body in consideration of the character of the High and Mighty Lords, an honor which I had the right to assume.

But that I was not a little surprised to learn that, during the time I would be present, the Sovereign Council would have the last say in an affair which had already been stretched out for four months, and on the subject of which I have several times in the past six weeks requested a meeting in order that all would be ready when the letter of the High and Mighty Lords arrived. Only then would they begin to engage in substantive [discussion] with me.

I had already had the honor to point out, by means of my memorandum of last December 7th, that I would have nothing else to propose except to repeat the same propositions in the name of the High and Mighty Lords, and to request on their behalf that this affair be concluded in a timely fashion and in such a manner that the High and Mighty Lords would be able to understand that their intervention in this affair would not be unimportant to the Laudable Canton. And, as for the rest, if there would still be several difficulties in the execution of my proposals, I should be ready to provide some necessary clarifications.

Mr. von Diesbach replied to me that in effect the Senate would find

some difficulties in execution of all [p. 3] the points contained in my memorandum, and especially with the inclusion of Anabaptist prisoners in the general amnesty for those who have been dispersed, with the emigration of all their relatives who are still Reformed, and with the remission of duty on exports or exit payment which I had demanded. With reference to the first point, the Canton would not be able to consent because, since these people are without faith and without loyalty[[8]](#footnote-8) and are unwilling to take the oath, there is reason to doubt that they would return at the time prescribed for them, and to fear that they would hide themselves so well in the country that it would be very difficult to force them to leave, and that consequently the Canton would lose all its efforts and expenses and at the same time its authority to set them at liberty.

As for the amnesty, it should be extended only to those of the Anabaptists who had never been apprehended under judicial control or chased out of the country by the Sovereign Council’s order. The emigration of Reformed relatives of the Anabaptists with the right to leave with their goods would cause very great damage to the Canton, and in particular, in this case, several of the territorial divisions of the Canton would be completely depopulated, and, moreover, policy ought to permit chasing out only disobedient or headstrong subjects and subjects who are not useful; also obedient, faithful, and useful persons are permitted to follow them. And, finally, that remission of duty on exports ought not to be accorded to these people, all the more so since this should be a right of royal prerogative established for all time, and that this right had already been refused [by Bern] to His Majesty, the King of [p. 4] Prussia, although His Majesty had offered reciprocity.

To all that I responded that, since I had listened to everything up to now and, given that the proposals I had made for the exodus of all the Anabaptists from this country had generally been appreciated, I should be extremely surprised to learn now all the difficulties being proposed in this respect. My surprise would be all the greater, if these difficulties were brought forth only after it had pleased the High and Mighty Lords [of the Netherlands] to intervene in this affair, and to intervene not only on their own initiative but in some manner at the actual request of the Canton, which had at first made it difficult to negotiate in this respect with the Mennonite Churches established under the jurisdiction of the High and

Mighty Lords. Further action should now be no more about the unfortunate Anabaptists of this country or the said [Dutch] Mennonite Churches, but about the States General of the United Provinces [Dutch government] which it would be quite wrong to refuse what no one would wish to deny the above said churches.

To return to the very difficulties which are being encountered presently, the States of the United Provinces should attempt to ascertain if the Canton wished in earnest once and for all to be rid of these people, or if they did not so wish. There being little likelihood of the latter, one should reasonably be able to expect the former. To arrive at that point, there would be no route–either more secure or shorter or more reasonable or likewise more useful to the Canton–than that which I had proposed, I repeat, to facilitate the exit of these people so far as that would be possible.

The [continuing] detention of [p. 5] Anabaptist prisoners would result in a general failure, seeing that the somewhat favorable open letter of amnesty would be claimed to be made widely known and [yet] any of those dispersed in the neighboring countries or hidden in the Canton would never venture to present themselves for the sale of their goods any more than would their brothers and sisters in the prisons. I myself would not want to advise anyone under the latter circumstances. Meanwhile, to alleviate the Canton’s fears of bad faith on the part of these people, I would be ready to furnish the Canton on their behalf sufficient guarantors of security who would respond to them and of which I have the list in my pocket. And I would ask the Commission to glance over this list after it has been presented.

As to the second point, the Canton would be right to fear that if the amnesty which is about to be made public would not apply generally to all those sent away and hidden, it would restore a number of them to the vicinity, a number who would always continue to creep into the country and furnish some new [troublesome] activities to the Canton. Whereas if all would be able to dispose of their property, one could hope that all these people would leave together with the others, or at least that the Canton would then be in the right to pursue them, if necessary, seeing that leniency would not have produced the effect that one might have reasonably expected.

The emigration of Reformed relatives having been proposed only as one sure and effective means of preventing the Anabaptists from returning to the country, and of making them lose all desire to do so at the same time, I

would not see what considerable damage this permission would be able to bring to the Canton, all the more as this [p. 6] emigration would have to be purely voluntary and in no way coerced. Of all the complaints of the Anabaptists who have left the Canton, this separation from their wives, fathers, mothers, and children would always be the most bitter and have everywhere the most strikingly negative effect on spirits; and, as for the rest, it would also always be the most specious pretext to have the Anabaptists pledge to return to the country at the very peril of their lives, and that by such permission this pretext at least would be removed for them.

As to the fourth point, it would certainly be true that the Canton had refused His Prussian Majesty remission of the duty on exports or export payment, but it would be necessary also to remember once more that His Prussian Majesty at the same time had also demanded transport of these people under control of the Canton as far as the borders of his territories. And the Canton had refused His Majesty the first request and at the same time had granted the latter request as far as Frankfort,[[9]](#footnote-9) whereas presently one should be content with the simple remission of the duty on exports and undertake in exchange complete arrangements for transport of these people. As for the rest, I would entreat the Commission to reflect seriously on the exhibition of documents, which I am about to make to that body, and, moreover, be willing to hasten the conclusion of this affair as far as that would be possible.

After I left the Commission, time was still needed for [discussion of] this affair, up to 6 p.m. And the following Monday the Commission once more made its report in the Senate, which directed the Commission to confer with me a second time before [p. 7] taking the affair to the Council of Two Hundred. Tuesday there will again be discussion on this in the Senate, all the more since the Minister of His Prussian Majesty, Mr. Bondeli, had made it known that he had received an order of the King, his master, to join himself with me to push this affair, something he himself had already said to me the preceding day. The Senate resolved, as had so forcefully been advocated in discussion with me, that negotiations with me should be continued, especially since Mr. Bondeli had made known the fact that he had approved and would approve all that I would do with the Commission, since we have only the same purpose.

The Anabaptist Commission then had me come to an audience for the

second time last Tuesday toward evening, the same time as on the first occasion. And, after the customary civilities, the President told me that the Senate, having heard his report, agreed, so far as it was in their power, to the release of the Anabaptist prisoners contrary to the will of the guarantors or bailsmen, of whom I had presented the list, and this on certain conditions which do not impact the fundamental aspect of the affair. That, as for the amnesty, the President would continue in his original opinion, that is to say, that those of the Anabaptists who had actually been subject to condemnation, whether of short duration or long, should not be included, with the restriction that nevertheless their relatives or even their friends would be permitted to sell those of their goods which they still have left and to conclude their business affairs by restoring to them that which originated with them. That the President would again agree that those among the Reformed who would want [p. 8] to follow their Anabaptist husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, or children should be able to do so, and that, as for the rest, they should be treated like the Anabaptists with reference to the sale of their goods and the exit payment. And, finally, that the President should also agree to remission of a good part—actually of a better part—of the duty on exports, but all this was to be done at the good will of the Sovereign Council, which would have the right to enhance these acts of mercy or to lessen them. And, finally, that, in consideration of all that, the Senate would dare to entertain hopes that the High and Mighty Lords would be quite willing, by means of a treaty, to give some guarantees that these people, having once left the country, would not return again.

I replied to him that I would like to thank the Senate and the Commission most humbly for the easy terms they would be quite willing to bring to bear on a slow exit of the unfortunate Anabaptists out of the Canton, but that I could not understand how the Canton would be able to claim that the High and Mighty Lords [should] get themselves involved through a treaty over one provision of which they would never be the masters, and from which they would never derive any profit. They had intervened in this affair only with a view to aiding the Canton to acquit itself the more readily of a burden which, in its own words, it had already been accommodating for 180 years.

The High and Mighty Lords would be quite willing to help make it possible for these people to leave the country, but that they would not be able to give any assurances that these people would never return, since

that would depend entirely on the Canton, by means of steps the Canton would be able to take in closing off entry to them decisively. I should certainly want to know what the [p. 9] Laudable Cantons of Zurich and Bern would have said, in such a case; for example, whether they would have wanted [permission for the] departure of [Anabaptist] inhabitants of Vaud to be sought for them by their ambassadors to His Royal Highness of Savoy, if this Prince were requiring assurances from them that these people would not return to his territories. That [whereas] His Royal Highness could reasonably have done this, the Canton [of Bern] in the present case, could not. Beyond this, I had no order of my own to this effect, and that in my view all initiative on this topic should be taken by the [Anabaptist] Commission appointed by the Bernese Council—to implore the [Dutch] High and Mighty Lords that it would please them to have some assurances from the [Dutch] Mennonite Churches, promising to prevent, so far as it would be possible for them, these people from returning to the country.

After that, the President again said to me that the Senate would wish that I myself had set the time that should be given to these people to prepare themselves for their complete departure. But I replied to him that, since the Canton knows better than I the abilities of these people and the time that would be necessary to get themselves into a state of readiness to leave, I should not want to prescribe anything to the President of the Commission, contenting myself with demanding only time enough, and that others should be able to bring the affairs of these people to completion, if perchance one or another of them could not achieve these ends himself. And that is the favorable outcome of the second conference.

The next day, or last Wednesday, the Sovereign Council met, and the affair ought to have been brought forward then and there. But the matter of those recruited as officers who have the honor to serve [p. 10] the government took up discussion such a long time—I do not know by what fault of the said officers on the subject of the approved leaves of absence that they were obligated to grant every year to a certain number of soldiers—that it was midday before it was possible to close discussion on this matter, even though my case had been postponed just yesterday.

But, during the time that the Great Council ought to have been meeting, the chief magistrate, Mr. Willading, had me told that the President of the Anabaptist Commission, having fallen ill, would not be able to report on the affair in the Sovereign Council, and that he therefore entreated me not

to be willing to find fault if it were brought up again next Monday. But I had to say to him that, since this affair had already dragged on so long and everything concerning him was being cleared up, I implored right away that he be willing to make the proposal and, in place of an oral report, to have the legal documents read aloud, an action that in my view would have the effect of the most successful verbal exhortation the President would be able to make. If that did not succeed, it meant a loss of advantage to me through improper use of allotted time. I was going to depart right away to attend to other more pressing matters, and I would leave it to the Canton to look after getting rid of the unfortunate Anabaptists by itself or through the agency of His Majesty, the King of Prussia.

This steadfastness, although inconvenient, [produced] such an admirable result that the chief magistrate presented the affair in the Council of Two Hundred yesterday and had it dealt with ahead of all the other matters. This matter occupied discussion during the whole morning, and finally the [p. 11] Sovereign Council complied with—or very nearly complied with—all the resolutions that the Senate had already made in this regard last Monday and which have been mentioned above, with the exception of the duty on exports, which the Sovereign Council remitted in its entirety in favor of the unfortunate Anabaptists and the Reformed who would follow them.

But, Sir, since this is already too long, and I did not yet have the extract[[10]](#footnote-10) from the Registers of the Sovereign Council of Bern in order to know its resolutions from a fair copy, I hope that you will permit me to postpone until the next regularly scheduled session what there remains for me to express by way of comment on this chapter. And, until such time, I always frame my words with profound respect.

1. 119 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 121-125. For a discussion of these events see J. Brüsewitz, Van deportatie naar emigratie, pp. 62 and 88 n. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The text, with omissions, of another version of this document in English, which appeared in a London newspaper, called The Post Man, and the Historical Account, February 3-6, 1711: British Library Board, London, is quoted in full in Yelton, pp. 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mr. Vinzenz Bartlome of the Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern, in a letter of May 8, 2012, identifies him as Albrecht von Graffenried, former local magistrate of Thun, Lord at Carrouge. He believes that his death date (1714) given in Historisch-Biographisches Lexikon der Schweiz, (Neuenburg, 1926) III, 628, is incorrect. It conflicts with information in Document 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In this French document he is called “Baillif,” but in German in Document 204 “Alt Schultheis” (former sheriff or mayor), or “Landvogt” (local magistrate). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. member of the Small Council. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The date of the present document is too late for this to be Abraham Delosea (ca. 1615-1690) a Reformed pastor friendly to the Anabaptists, who from 1672 was a pastor in Thun. Perhaps this is a relative of his. See references in Lowry, Documents of Brotherly Love, I, p. 156 n. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Chambre de repondis. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vorsterman here gives “sonder Trouwe.” A 1392, p. 122. Could the French imply sans parole d’honneur, “without word of honor” ? [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “…had toegestaan tot aan Franckfurt.” A 1392, p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Maer Mÿ Heer, also deese reets al te lang is, en ik tot nog toe het extract uyt de Resigster…”   
    A 1392, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)