155. April 25, 1711. Letter from Runckel to the Committee for Foreign Needs to accompany their copy of the memorandum to the government of Bern. He is resigned to their decision concerning the Bucheggberg Mennonites, and considers it better that the softening of the promises, which those departing from Bern must make, be worked on through diplomacy after their arrival in Holland. He has received and translated the circular, and although having preferred to wait a little, he will soon be printing it. He is resigned to the Committee’s decision to decline his offer to travel around the countryside to contact Anabaptists. He relates that George Ritter finally accepts the main leadership and has already ordered five ships; with him are two assistant directors, and the most competent of the Mennonites themselves are helping. He gives a brief report about Daniel Rychen, the passports, especially about negotiations with the Mennonites themselves and the council of Bern as a result of his memorandum.

[page 1]

Bern[[1]](#footnote-1) the 25th of April 1711.

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs!

I have safely received your very pleasant letter of the 31st of the last month in proper time, and in addition the most kind command of their High and Mighty Lords that I should remain here until the complete settlement of the whole matter and final departure of the poor local Anabaptists. However, over-abundant duties have hindered me on the one hand from answering sooner and on the other hand I have deliberately waited in order that I could produce a much more thorough report on all the points in the very valuable communication received from my highly honored Sirs. But foremost, I have learned happily that [my] letters of February 25, March 11, and 18 have safely arrived and that my highly honored Sirs continue to declare complete satisfaction with the performance of my duties and those yet to be performed.

This, then, urges me not a little to proceed more confidently in this very troublesome work already commenced and associated with so much irritation and opposition. In this, unfortunately of course, it is only too true that in the case of the Anabaptist Commission. [page 2] [I] must work with

very strange, (might not one say, injudicious?) malicious people, who take great pains, often out of self-love and all too great presumption and lack of understanding, [while they] themselves scarcely know what they are asking. Accordingly, as my highly honored Sirs will see from the accompanying memorandum[[2]](#footnote-2) about the different difficulties, which partly the local [Mennonite] communities, partly the gentlemen officials, and partly the said Commission itself, stir up. Although the Commission nevertheless is now supposed to be the advocate and protector of the poor Anabaptists, I have seen myself forced to have recourse to the Sovereign Council again so that such difficulties might be cleared out of the way as much as possible.

Otherwise, to answer my high honored Sirs’ very valuable communication exactly, I shall offer you this: The dissemination of the open letters of amnesty in neighboring areas is occurring with no other result (as my highly honored Sirs surmise) than that those who have something yet in the land to fetch may do so in this time of freedom, and I also am sending back home again all those who have actually settled elsewhere other than in Neuchâtel, as soon as they have completed their business.

Now as far as concerns the Anabaptists located in Bucheggberg, I can, so far as I am concerned, rest very well satisfied out of regard to my highly honored Sirs’ very wise reflections in this case. I can, however, accordingly not conscientiously conceal what I greatly fear. If these good people do not now set out and depart, they will afterwards and in time [page 3] see themselves exposed to all kinds of extortions and persecutions for the previously reported reasons and not have any safety anywhere, especially if the spirit of persecution should keep the upper hand in this Canton, as it unfortunately has far greater esteem than the opposite.

As to the forthcoming demand for a vow that neither the poor departing

Anabaptists, nor their descendants in belief, will never again enter this country: I greatly fear the illustrious Canton will never retreat from that, despite whatever grounds and arguments might be brought on the opposite side. But in this matter the Canton will stand stiff and firm with seven [watchful] eyes.[[3]](#footnote-3) In any case, however, when it comes time to speak of this, I desire not to be in the least lacking [in my efforts to see] that this measure might be modified as much as is possibly expedient. Yet for now I seriously doubt that anything can be achieved. I much more believe that this will be negotiated with the Lord St. Saphorin at his return to The Hague only retroactively and after the poor people have departed and have arrived in Holland. Through him a modification by the Canton of Bern of the said vow must be worked out in the future. Meanwhile I avail myself of the reply communicated from the Elector Palatine as much as possible, but I cannot yet notice that the local gloomy persons here think much about it.

Concerning the Mennonites who have settled in Neuchâtel,[[4]](#footnote-4) I hope they will have no danger [page 4] because if the Canton wants to have them out of there, it must be willing to grant them free passage through its own territory.

I have exactly translated into German the circular letter to the poor local Baptism-minded persons.[[5]](#footnote-5) Also I have used it already to inform a few gentlemen, who have declared it excellent, except for some passages that my highly honored Sirs will be able to notice in the copies ready to be sent, but [they say] also I should not hurry so much to have it printed, but first wait for the expected list of the Anabaptists. However, since such lists fail to appear as promptly as supposed, I will dispatch it to be printed in the coming week, if it please God. I will immediately thereafter begin to

distribute it and see what kind of result such a writing will produce. Meanwhile and because my highly honored Sirs think my proposed excursions into the countryside are not necessary, I will not think any more about that, especially as the remaining costs are enough.

Mr. George Ritter, after much delaying, has finally let himself be persuaded to take upon himself the general oversight of the approaching journey of the poor Anabaptists and would work in agreement with me on the necessary preparations. Yet he would do this only if he should be allowed to take along at least two subordinate overseers and that two capable men from among the Anabaptists themselves on each ship be allotted to him, who with him and his representatives [page 5] would help supply necessities on the journey, and also be on hand for him with advice and action. Both of them would be promised to him with the approval of my highly honored Sirs. He has actually traveled to Interlaken[[6]](#footnote-6) in the so-called Oberland to purchase the boards required for the five ships from the district magistrate of that place and for the speedy completion of the said ships, to hire the ship’s carpenters at Leissigen,[[7]](#footnote-7) and to take care of all the necessary arrangements for everything.

And when I was informed by the Anabaptists as to whether there were people among them experienced with ship travel and rowing, I learned that they certainly had twenty such persons. Mr. Ritter and I approved that on each ship there be no more than one experienced helmsman besides two good and experienced sailors. Also from the above twenty we wished to place four men on each ship so that these last would change off with one another, two and two. So the work might go more easily, because otherwise it might be too difficult for them as they were unaccustomed to the work. Moreover we will provide the best for all requirements and also will always take care of the household needs of the journey.

Daniel Rychen has accepted responsibility for 1000 rixdollars,

provisionally assigned, yet not other than to furnish supplies gradually so that in this case it is to be hoped that everything will be fair. But I will plan for myself such a sum, besides the other sums proper to reckon up, and will inform my highly honored Sirs promptly about everything that happens, as also of the types and amounts, and of the expenses further required.

[page 6]

The necessary passports, then, may be supplied only through Mr. Ritter and for 500 to 550 persons, more or less, children and adults together with their small amount of accompanying baggage. I want to take care of the same with the French passport. And since the definite time of the departure of these poor people may not yet actually be known, thus subject to correction, it will be arranged counting two or three months from the first of July.

This would be what at present I have to offer in response to my highly honored Sirs’ very worthy last communication. To this I should add that my memorandum mentioned above was read aloud before the Daily Council[[8]](#footnote-8) last Monday and at that point was handed over to the Anabaptist Commission with the instruction that they examine it without delay, draw up their opinion about it, and afterwards place it before the Council, and subsequently report it to the Sovereign Council.[[9]](#footnote-9) This, however, has not yet occurred, but I hope that action will be taken the following week.

Previous to and before I made the decision to report again to the Sovereign Council, I already presented to the said Commission two memoranda, dated March 19 and the 15th of the present month, about the difficulties mentioned, and also consulted with them about it on the 15th. On the one hand they explained that their power did not extend so far. On the other hand I sensed that this Commission had not completely laid aside their disposition to torment the poor Anabaptists, although they [page 7] like to have something else believed about themselves. Nevertheless, I have again had recourse in the name of God to the Sovereign Council, and yet

I judge it necessary to report nothing in my memorandum of what has happened so that these gentlemen may have no reason to complain or anything further to irritate their tender conscience.

And these gentlemen have the notion that an incomparable and unparalleled favor would occur at the release of these poor people, drained to the point of blood, so to say, and that our High and Mighty, gracious Lordships will adhere to it.

They devise nothing other than problems and one difficulty after another instead of facilitating everything. I have made the decision to appear as if neither the High and Mighty Lords, nor my highly honored Sirs, nor also myself place so much [stress] on the departure of these people—in case the illustrious Canton wants to make so many difficulties for these poor people contrary to its pledged word, nor release their few possessions—they may keep the people, and with them they may seek another way out.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Regardless of this, however, I remind these good people on every occasion and opportunity that they should not attach themselves too closely to their natural means. But rather they should prepare themselves in the name of God for their departure in order, the sooner the better, to leave their thankless fatherland, and with the help of God inhabit another. There they might have more peace and freedom of conscience. For this, then, some are quite willing; the greater part however, unfortunately, consent only with the greatest [page 8] indignation.

With this besides a mutual commitment to God’s mighty, gracious protection and best commendation of myself and mine to your devoted prayer, remaining always,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

1. 155 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 172-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This memorandum to the Sovereign Council of Bern with eleven points is the first part of Document 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Probably an oblique reference to Zach. 3:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Neuenburg = Neuchâtel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Alternative name for Anabaptists, as part of their descendants in the Netherlands were then calling themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The original gives Hinterlachen. Interlaken was earlier Hinterlappen, “behind the village of Lappen.” Also at the west end of Lake Thun is the village of Hilterfingen. It would be easy to transport boards from these places by water. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On the southern shore of Lake of Thun. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Small Council of Bern. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Great Council. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The meaning of this paragraph is obscure in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)