38. May (?) 1710.[[1]](#footnote-1)*The Committee of Mennonites in the Netherlands intercedes with the Lords of Bern, responding to their letter of April 26 (Document 34), refuting in detail charges brought against the Anabaptists in Bern, evidently on another occasion. This is an eighteenth-century translation of the document on the facing page and is an exact transcription of that English version.*

*This document gives the first known use of the English adjective “nonresistant.” It is noteworthy that this first use applies to Mennonites.*

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A Coppy translated[[2]](#footnote-2) 1710

The Subscriber Committees of

the Mennonists, vulgarly cald Annabaptis,

in the Netherlands, deliver, with al due respect, their

following considerations concerning a letter

of ye[[3]](#footnote-3) Lords of Bern, being an answer upon

ye very Christian, and incomparable letter

written bÿ their High Mightinesses ye States

to ye sayd Lords of Bern, Dated 15 March 1710.[[4]](#footnote-4)

[1] In ye first place

ye Lords of Bern say, Whereupon. We answer that everÿ bodÿ

that if thÿ3 did ans- kan easilÿ See that ye Lords of Bern pas

wer upon all ye motives bÿ al ye motives, and arguments of their

and friendly serious High Mightin[esses] without answering upon

remembrances, wich any article of them; as being (let it be

are contained in ye sayd with all due respect) fully incapable

Letter of their High of rendring them without force unto good

Mightin[nesses] thÿ and impartial Protestants. it being incon-

ware lyable to fall testable that if ye motives and arguments

into a tedious largenes. of their High Mightines[ses] fall away, ye

whole foundation, whereupon ye Reformation

stands would quite fall, and be not able

to hold against ye Roman Catholicks nor

to be Justified.

[2] the Lords of Bern To which we reply, that it ware to wish

saÿ further that their Lordships had bene pleased to show this

ye Mennonists living with but one example; but because ye

under ye Dominion expulsd Mennonists of Switserland have

of their High Might[inesses] made an openlÿ and authenticq declaration

have not exposed ye before their Lordships ye Burgemasters of

Mennonists in Switserl[and] ye Cittÿ of Amsterdam, concerning ye thre

so as it is indeed, but with articles, which are brought in to their

to much moderacy.

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charge in ye Placcart of ye Lords of Bern.

Just so and in ye same manner as ye Menno-

nists in Netherland have declared before their High

Mightines[ses] that their opinion is. So follows

of it self, under reverence, ye vain pretext

of rendring ye sayd Mennonists of Switserland

Suspitious, and is thereby wholey annullated.[[5]](#footnote-5)

[3] the Lords of Bern Say To which might be replied that if such

also, thÿ have been people is to be called capricious as hold fast

inevitably necessitated to their principles, which are after their

to show ye required opinion clear and plainly founded upon

ernest against this ye Holy Scriptures, & that therefore thy kan not

Capricious People, there- renounce them upon ye persuasion of

bÿ to prevent ye further their adversaries, than, under reverence,

disasters of their country, all ye Protestants in General might

which it would other- be calld so by ye Roman Catholicks, for

ways be in danger of. not haveing bene to be remouved from

their principles of Religion bÿ any

of their arguments; but to ye contrarÿ

have in case of necessity sealed them

with ye losse of their estates and blood,

it is also a most perverse opinion, that

ye Mennonists must be expulsed out

of ye land, and persecuted with all severity

for preventing disasters of ye Country. thy3

not onelÿ making themselves very useful

in all countries when thy are tolerated;

but willinglÿ submit themselves with

a passive obedience whollÿ unto ye ordi-

nances of their Souverains. in al such

cases as thÿ think not to be contrarie to

ye Lawes of God.

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[4] the Lords of Bern Whereupon we answer if this be a suffi-

alledge further, that cient reason for ye persecution that

thÿ have done their then ye Roman Catholicks are wholey

endeavor by all Justified in their cruel persecutions against

inmaginable means ye Protestants haveing, yet of late, in

and instructions to France, endeavoured to bring ye Protestants

bring ye Mennonists over into ye bosom of ye Mother ye Chatilic[sic]

over from their errour Church so named, first by friendly and

unto ye Sound Doctrine, mild, and after wards by heavy and cruell

but all in vain. wayes of instruction: but all in vain.

a maxime so much, more becomming

ye Roman Catholicks than ye Protestants,

as ye first do reguard all those of other

religions without their communion, as

damed heriticks, Whereas the protestants

and in particular ye Reformed, for as much

as we know never would nor dared declare

ye same of others.

[5] Further say ye Lords Whereupon may be sayd, how great a

of Bern thÿ have mercÿ this seems to be showne to people

allowed for a long which in their forefathers and those of

while ye Mennonists their Religion have dwelled more than

to go out of ye land 200 Years in Switserland, so is this

with their Wives neverthelesse to be estimed very hart

Children and goods. and in a manner not lighter than

death it self, in reguart to some, considering

their mariage with espouses of ye

Protestant reformed Church, or by a near

relation of Father, Mother and Brother

& Sistership. and when men with a good

Familly and few provisions, are sacrificed

to an inevitable povertie yea to beggery

in Foreign Countries.

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[6] The Lords of Bern Whereupon we answer that we never met

do Complain that with any who, contrarie to such their

a prettÿ number of Promise and word, are returned to their

Mennonists, which countrÿ, not withstanding we have ques-

had quitted y[e] country tioned them upon this point particularly

have made bold from but we know very wel to ye contrarie that

time to time to return, a good number of miserable ones of them,

contrarie to their, so deprived of all things necessary, have

high estemed, word setled themselves in ye Palatinat & Elsace,

of truth. and at present are retired under ye Dominion

of his Majesty ye King of Prussian, in

ye Principallties of Neufchatel & Valengin

[7] Further do ye Lords To answer upon Which we say that ye

of Bern Complain Mennonists kan not spread about any

that ye said Mennonists dangerous seeds of Errour, considering ye [sic]

have travelled up & thre principal articles contained in ye

down ye countrÿ, and Placcart of their Lordships of Bern are

spread about ye most, partly founded upon falls reports, as we

dangerous seeds of have humbly showne in our modest

their errours, endevou- apologie thÿ agreing in many and

ring to mislead others fully most part of ye articles of their

their faithfull subjects beleeff with ye Reformed Church, and

from ye right way where thÿ differ from it kan not be

bringing them over dangerous neither to their Souverains,

to their errour. their native countrÿ, nor their nabours

as we have showne in ye sayd apologie

for which reason. this seems to have bene

rather exposed under a generall and very

hatefull name, than that it should be showne

bÿ one onely point of their doctrine where

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under this so dangerous seed of errour layeth hid

it being sufficiently inpossible to ye Mennonists

in Switserland, to transfer their doctrine unto

others, since thÿ layto [?] under such severe

placcarts that thÿ kan not exercise their

devotion, but very secretly in woods and

holes, bÿ night and inconvenient times

and onelÿ in ye presence of such which

are not like to betray or accuse them about

it. and if with all this ye Doctrine

of ye Mennonists be transferred unto othe[rs]

it happens doubtlesse most by means of ye

hard proceedings against them, which

occasions that those of ye Reformed Religion,

being persuaded of ye good behaviour, and honest

demeanour of this people, undertake, out

of curiosity, ye inquiring after their doctrine

and do sometimes embrace ye same, being

ye blood of Martires in this point as ye

seed of ye church.

[8] ye Lords of Bern do Whereupon we say that ye Mennonists

Pretend, thy found bÿ virtue of their doctrine, not being backt

themselves forced or fortified bÿ any worldly powr or Princes

to procure more safety who have declared themselves for their

against ye Mennonists confession of religion, Are intyerlÿ

for preventing ye dangerous incapable of anÿ revolution or violent

concequences, which resistance, but thÿ must out of a

were notorious to be plain ernest of their soules (saving due

caused by them as in ye respect) say, that it is one of ye most

former ages as in Germany horriblest and fallsest calumnys that

and other parts. ever ye Mennonist have bene attact with

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or can be opposed upon them, When against

all justice and equity ye wars of ye Boors

in Germany, and ye abominable revolution

at Munster is layd to their charge, whereof

ye Mennonists have never bene ringleaders

nor instigators, but which is spun on by

a parcell of ill ungodly men of other

religions, and where amongst one or orther [sic]

of ye so named Annabaptists perhaps have

bene trained[[6]](#footnote-6) along, but none of ye true Menno-

nists (who for themselves deject[[7]](#footnote-7) ye use of arms

and lead a non resistant[[8]](#footnote-8) life, betwixt which

two ye vulgar makes no true distinction, but

takes them commonly for ye same, bÿ reason

of ye conformitÿ in one article concerning ye

Baptising of aged[[9]](#footnote-9) people, whereas ye first

are nowayes by their doctrine non resistants

nor out of conscience shun ye exercise of

magistrature or publicq employments, which

ye true Mennonists do, and from which

concequently no revolution is to be feard.

[9] the Lords of Bern This not withstanding some, that never was out

saÿ further that thy of ye country, have, for ye meanest punishment,

have let mildness prevail bene a year and above clapt up in prison,

upon them concerning and forced to live upon drey bred and water,

ye Mennonists which also to labour verÿ hard from 4 at clock in

audaciously are returned ye morning until eigt at clock at night

into their country: in Yea during whole hard winter Ao 1709

steet of imposing upon have layen in darck R~~g~~oals, sometimes with

them ye requisit pu- yron clusters on their feet. Until thy would

nishment.

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have bene send at last to America, without

any conditions of freedom in case ye Lords

of Bern had obtained their ends.

[10] ye Lords of Bern say Whereupon might be saÿd that ye confis-

further that thÿ have cation of the estates of these prisonners, &

employed good summs ye fines thÿ expressed[[10]](#footnote-10) to ye summs of

of money for transport[ing] 100, 200 and 300 florines at a time, from

ye prisonners to America wives for harbouring their beloved husbands

Parents their children, and children their

Parents, hath made out the money for

ye transports. more than fourfold, besides

what thÿ earned more bÿ their hard labour in

prison, than ye water and bred which was

distributed to them. So that this good summ

of moneÿ, their Lordship speaks of, saving

due respect, is but a drey cake of their own dough.

[11] ye sayd Lords go on Where upon is to be considered that many of

with telling that ye them haveing bene kept in hart and lasting

Mennonists have prisonments where out thy had no hopes

declared them selves to be delivered, have accepted of being

verÿ willing towards transported for America, as ye least of two

ye voyage to America Miseries. but is easily to conclude with

and have showne thank-how much willingnes, considering that

fulnes for ye great mercÿ thy are not onelÿ send away under custody

which is done them in of some officers and soldjers, and that

this case. pasports with ye powrfull assistence of

their High Mightinesses are desired

that so, as his Exell[ency] Mr. Saphorin sayes

in his memorie[[11]](#footnote-11) delivered to their High Migh

tin[esses] dated 22 March. none might escape

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butt also that ye most part of them, deprived

of their goods, have bene obliged to leave their

beloved wives and children behind.

[12] Lastlÿ say ye Lords Where upon may be took into consideration

of Bern that if that ye constitution of any country infers

their High Mightin[esses]that tillage of ye ground and ye fruits of ye

knew ye constitution land must be cultivated whereby those peop[le]

of their Canton thy for ye most part get their Living, being also

could not but aprove willing; in case of necessity, to work at all

of their procedings ye fortifications, and for ye freedom from

in this case, since thy militarÿ employments; to contribute a certain

must arm their summ of money acording to their habilities,[[12]](#footnote-12)

subjects to employ for which easily a man were to be had

them in case of necessity.in their steed, besides that never, or verÿ

seldom, ye danger is so generall that all

ye men which are able to bear armes are

summond, but commonlÿ verÿ few of each

company which in regart to ye small number

of men amongst ye Mennonists, is as we are

informed, not one against four hundred.

Wherefore bÿ conclusion we flatter our selves, ye

Lords Magistrats of ye Laudable Canton of Bern,

haveing considered all this with a composed mind,

will most graciously allowe ye desired freedom

unto these bÿ their owne confession otherwayes

good subjects, delivering them from all further

persecution.

is subscribed by

Jans Willenk jansz.

Hermanus Schyn

Hendrik Toren

Abram jacobsz Fries

Jacob vorsterman

Frans van Aken

Cornelis Beets

Jan van Gent[[13]](#footnote-13)

1. 38 Municipal Archives Rotterdam, Mennonite Church Inventory No. 40, pp. 13-20. This document presents a number of interesting, archaic English words and word meanings, explained in the footnotes. Variations in spelling as were common for this era are largely ignored, and only a few seem to be the result of the document having been written in a land where English is not the native language. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The page numbers in this translation do not correspond to the folio numbers of the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ye = the; thÿ, thy = they. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Document 15 in the English translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. annulated (obsolete), “annuled.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “pulled” (obsolete). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “reject” (obsolete). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The first known use of this term in English. Here, the use of nonresistant interestingly rejects specifically the violence of the Münsterites. The Oxford English Dictionary records also uses of the noun, “non-resistance” in 1643, 1685, and 1687. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “adult.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “extorted” (obsolete). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “memorandum, record.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “abilities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Except for Jacob Vorsterman, the same names are listed in Document 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)