## In This Issue

In the spring of 1921, only months after five different Mennonite denominations in North America agreed to collaborate in providing emergency relief to hunger-stricken Mennonites in South Russia, the newly-formed Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) encountered the realities of global politics. The organization—a hitherto unprecedented expression of inter-Mennonite cooperation—had been formed out of a sense of shared identity with fellow believers, whose lives had been upended by the turmoil of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. But when representatives of MCC began to work out the logistics of providing aid to Mennonites in South Russia, Soviet officials made it clear that the only way they would be permitted to enter the country was if they provided assistance to *all* needy people, not just Mennonites.

Although MCC had been conceived with a narrow denominational focus, there were good reasons for accepting these terms. Already a generation earlier the International Committee of the Red Cross had been founded on the humanitarian principle of assisting everyone wounded in war, regardless of which side of the fighting they were on. To this principle, Mennonites could add strong theological arguments for extending compassion to all those in need, irrespective of politics or merit.

But even if the principle made sense, MCC would continue to wrestle with questions of denominational favoritism—and the larger challenge of determining who was worthy of assistance—for the remainder of the century. Nowhere were these issues more urgent or consequential than in the chaos following the end of World War II as millions of civilians, ex-combatants, stateless refugees, and Nazi war criminals—with many thousands of Mennonites in the mix—desperately sought help from humanitarian relief organizations, including MCC.

This issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* continues a searching, ongoing conversation about MCC's involvement—some have argued, complicity—in post-WWII relief efforts. We begin with a long essay by **Arnold Neufeldt-Fast** that details MCC's early encounters with National Socialism in the person of Benjamin H. Unruh, a charismatic Mennonite leader who dedicated his life to assisting Mennonites who were suffering in Russia even as he openly embraced Hitler's rise to power and the racial policies of the Nazi party. Although MCC eventually distanced itself from Unruh and his politics, in the heat of the humanitarian crisis it relied heavily on his expertise and governmental connections.

**John Thiesen** further complicates the narrative by revisiting an iconic MCC story, recounted hundreds of times by Peter Dyck in settings across North America, of the miraculous emigration of several thousand

Mennonites from the Soviet sector in Berlin in 1947 known as the "Berlin Exodus." In his focus on the crucial, previously ignored, role of John Kroeker—a pro-German Mennonite of questionable morals—Thiesen's account may discomfit readers who prefer the clarity of Dyck's version.

**Astrid von Schlachta**, historian and director of the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, draws on a host of primary sources in her overview of the many challenges faced by MCC, and especially the German Mennonite church, in the years immediately following the war. Her essay provides a very helpful context for three subsequent articles, each of which offers a glimpse into the kaleidoscopic complexity of the moral, political, theological, and personal choices Mennonites confronted in postwar Europe. Dutch historian **David Barnouw**, for example, tells the story of Jacob Luitjens, a Dutch Mennonite who supported the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and then escaped prosecution as a war criminal by taking advantage of MCC's efforts to resettle Mennonites refugees in Paraguay. In the 1990s, when the Dutch and Canadian government finally identified Luitjens, then living with his family in Vancouver, and brought him to justice, the Mennonite community largely continued to support Luitjens. **James Urry** painstakingly combs through the evidence surrounding the story of Amalie Franziska Reimer, a Russian Mennonite woman who alternately spied for the Soviets and supported the German war effort, even testifying on behalf of an SS officer at the Nuremberg trials. Urry, however, challenges recent depictions of Reimer as simply a Nazi collaborator, offering readers a much more complex insight into Reimer's painful, even tragic, personal narrative. Finally, **Stéphane Zehr** concludes the issue with a description of MCC's work in southern France during World War II. That work, an extension of MCC's relief efforts to refugees of the Spanish Civil War, focused on several convalescent homes and internment camps for children. But during the course of the war, as the Nazis intensified their efforts to identify and deport Jews from France, Mennonite volunteers faced increased pressure to engage in illegal activities. Their responses were mixed. But at least one MCC worker, Lois Gunden, actively hid Jewish children, saving them from deportation. In 2013 Gunden was posthumously granted the "Righteous Among the Nations" award by Yad Vashem in recognition of her actions.

Every story recounted in this issue of *MQR* unfolded in a larger context. That context should never exonerate individuals from accountability for their moral choices. But these stories might also invite readers to temper the clarity of moral judgment with compassion and empathy.

- John D. Roth