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Part 9 of the Series: Centenary of the Russian
Revolution and the Repudiation of Debt

The Soviet counter-attack: the Treaty of Rapallo, 1922

- Features -

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The London report presented in the previous chapter was such a deliberate provocation on the part of Western powers that the Soviet delegation immediately got in touch with the German delegation, which Paris and London had somehow prevented from fully attending the Genoa Conference. France and Britain were hoping that they could coax the Soviet Russians into accepting the conditions mentioned above or, at least some of them, to strengthen their position when negotiating with Germany afterwards. The Russian issue clearly was a priority.

Joffé, one of the people in charge of the Soviet delegation, phoned the Germans at 1 a.m. on Easter Sunday, 16 April 1922, to suggest they should meet at once and try to reach a bilateral agreement. The biographer of the then German minister for economy, Walther Rathenau, writes that the members of the German delegation met in their pyjamas in Rathenau's hotel room to decide whether they would accept the Soviet invitation. They did, and sixteen hours later, on Sunday 16 April 1922 at 5 p.m., the Treaty of Rapallo was signed between Germany and Soviet Russia [1]. The treaty included mutual waiving of financial claims, including German compensation after Soviet nationalisations "on condition that the government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic does not satisfy claims for compensation of a similar nature made by a third Party" [2]. It is important to note that Soviet Russia remained fully consistent with the position that the Soviet government had adopted in its peace proposal in the very wake of the revolution: peace without either annexation or compensation. As we know, in March 1918 the German Empire had imposed drastic conditions on Russia with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, as it annexed Russian territories and demanded a heavy war ransom. In June 1919 that treaty had been cancelled by the Treaty of Versailles, in which Western powers amputated the German Republic of large stretches of its territories and demanded heavy compensations. In the Treaty of Rapallo, Soviet Russia signed a peace agreement that included mutual waiving of compensation while article 116 of the Treaty of Versailles granted Russia a right to financial compensation from Germany. This step taken by Soviet Russia was also consistent with the treaties it had signed with the Baltic Republics and Poland in 1920-1921.

Another provision in the Treaty of Rapallo said that Germany would help to boost trade between the two countries.

In a nutshell, the Treaty of Rapallo, signed on the suggestion of the Soviet delegation, was a strong response to the dominant and aggressive behaviour of the Western powers.

Next, the Soviet delegation took the time to communicate its official answer to the Western powers in response to the demands they had formulated on 15 April.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille and Vicki Briault (CADTM).

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[1] See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923 Volume 3* (Macmillan, 1953) Norton, 1985, p. 376.

[2] Treaty of Rapallo, 16 April 1922, Article 2, see http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/rapallo_001.asp