



The Russian Road to Rapallo

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THE RUSSIAN ROAD TO RAPALLO

THE Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and Soviet Russia was signed on April 16th, 1922, as a by-product of the Genoa Economic Conference. By Articles I and II of the Treaty all mutual claims between the two countries were annulled; by Article III full diplomatic and consular relations were re-established; Article IV introduced the most-favoured-nation clause into the commercial dealings of the two parties, with the exception of the relations between Russia and Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania; and by Article V the German government declared its readiness to encourage trade between German industry and the U.S.S.R.

The Treaty derives its interest not only from the political context at the time of signature; it was also the only Treaty of its kind to be signed between Russia and a non-proletarian state. In 1922, at Genoa, the effect was that of a bombshell. Nevertheless, the antecedents of Rapallo reach back three years to 1919. It was at this time that the conception of backing the German national revolt against Versailles was first adumbrated. In another sense the Treaty did not become practical politics until the winter of 1921-22. It will be the task of this paper to analyse from the Russian angle how the one led to the other.

As late as August 1918 Chicherin considered the main danger to the Soviet Republic to emanate from possible German advances further into the interior of Russia.¹ But soon afterwards this view changed into a greater appreciation of the danger to be expected from the Entente. Germany had ceased to count as a political factor. 'In the space of a few months', said Lenin on October 22nd, 1918, 'Germany has been transformed from a mighty empire into a rotting tree.'²

This optimism was, however, limited by what he had said earlier in the same speech: 'It seems to me that our present position, with all its contradictions, can be expressed thus: firstly, we were never so near to the international proletarian revolution as we are now; and secondly, we were never in a more dangerous position than we are now.'³ Lenin also expected joint Entente-German action against the Bolsheviks.⁴

¹ p. 15, CHICHERIN, *Vneshnaya Politika Sovetskoi Rossii za dva goda*, Moscow, 1920.

² p. 238, vol. 23, *Sochineniya*, ed. Adoratsky, etc. Moscow, 1935.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

To counteract this threat, grain had been assembled for transportation for Germany and the tribute imposed by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk continued to be paid even after the German request for an armistice so as to deprive the German government of any excuse for expelling Joffe.⁵ This precaution was in vain. On November 5th the new German government, consisting of three Majority Social-Democrats and three Independent Socialists, expelled the Russian ambassador; and on November 19th it refused the Russian offer of grain, fearing in both cases to jeopardize its relations with the Entente. As one Russian writer puts it: 'the fraternal hand extended by the Soviet government remained hanging in the air'.⁶ Nothing daunted, on December 5th, a five-man delegation consisting of the expelled Joffe, Radek, Bukharin, Rakovsky and Ignatoff was hurriedly assembled by Lenin to participate in the Berlin Congress of Soviets. This move was also forestalled by the German government which, on December 23rd, refused to admit any representatives of the Bolsheviks, including those from the Red Cross.⁷

Radek, however, in the guise of an Austrian prisoner of war, did succeed in getting through the German lines and reaching Berlin. The story of his subsequent experiences is at the same time the story of the origin of the Rapallo Treaty.

He was as unaware of this as anyone else could be at the time. His speech at the foundation congress of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) was redolent, in its anticipation of a German revolution, of the illusions of Brest-Litovsk. But this did not blind him to the fact that the KPD was as yet an inexperienced party, possessing only a tenuous link with the masses. 'I did not feel that here in front of me was a party,' he writes.⁸ For this reason he opposed the Party's participation in the January rising in Berlin when the left-wing Independent Socialist police chief Eichhorn was deposed.⁹ Shortly after this Radek was arrested and incarcerated in the Moabit prison in Berlin. In contrast to the treatment given to German Communists — Liebknecht and Luxemburg were killed in cold blood — the Russian bolshevik was maintained in comparative comfort and became an object of some curiosity.

His prison cell was a sort of 'political salon'.¹⁰ Passes to visit him were obtainable at the German Ministry of War.¹¹ Through this channel a

⁵ p. 140, *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 10, 1926, article by Radek.

⁶ p. 40, M. TARIN, *10 let vneshney politiki SSSR - 1917-1927*. Moscow/Leningrad, 1927.

⁷ p. 22, CHICHERIN, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*. Report of Narkomindel to Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Engl. transl. London, 1920.

⁸ pp. 150-52, *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 10, 1926.

⁹ p. 282, *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*. Berlin, 1929.

¹⁰ The expression is Radek's own; cf. Radek, *op. cit.*

¹¹ p. 206, RUTH FISCHER, *Stalin and German Communism*. Harvard, 1948.

series of distinguished visitors attended the 'political salon'. They included Rathenau, who foresaw firstly that the Soviets would eventually win out against the interventionists and, secondly, that no revolutionary developments would be possible in Germany for many years;¹² Professor Hoetzsch, who later became a leading advocate in the Reichstag and outside of the pro-Russian orientation amongst the German nationalists; and Paul Levi with whom Radek discussed communist tactics in Germany. More exotic visitors were Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha, the fallen leaders of the Young Turk movement, now leading the semi-legal life of political refugees in Berlin. Through this pair the 'wire to St. Petersburg' was re-established. Radek encouraged Enver to go to Moscow¹³ and in April 1919 the latter set out on his journey.¹⁴ What lends point to the significance of this visit is Enver's contact with General v. Seeckt, who was already beginning to think in terms of an arrangement with the Bolsheviks.

Equally significant was a visit from a former war-time colleague of Ludendorff's, a Baron Reivnitz, who had broken with Ludendorff and was, Radek says, the first representative he met of the 'National-Bolsheviks', meaning by this a bourgeois politician or soldier who was prepared to initiate a radical economic transformation of Germany as the price of an alliance with Soviet Russia against the Entente. He propounded to Radek the conception of a union with Russia based on a peaceful revolution in Germany via the nationalization of the means of production.¹⁵

A very similar plan was also put to Radek by two Communists from Hamburg — Lauffenberg and Wolffheim. They proposed to seize power preparatory to repudiating Versailles in alliance with Soviet Russia.¹⁶ These views were unrepresentative of the Party as a whole and Radek rejected them.¹⁷

At the end of 1919 Radek was released and went to stay in the apartment of Baron Reivnitz¹⁸ where he was introduced to Colonel Max Bauer, who had been propaganda chief at Ludendorff's headquarters. Bauer, too, was an adherent of Reivnitz's ideas for he looked forward to an arrangement between the officer class and the Communist Party. The officers, he said, understand that Russia is unbeatable and is Germany's ally in the fight against the Entente and against Versailles.

¹² p. 165, *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 10, 1926.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴ p. 306, RABENAU, *Seeckt — Aus Seinem Leben 1918-1936*. Leipzig, 1940.

¹⁵ p. 166, *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 10, 1926.

¹⁶ pp. 92-3, RUTH FISCHER, l.c.; vide also LAUFFENBERG and WOLFFHEIM, 'Revolutionärer Volkskrieg oder konterrevolutionärer Bürgerkrieg'. Hamburg, 1920.

¹⁷ See below (p. 112).

¹⁸ p. 169, *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 10, 1926. He is presumably the same person as the Baron Reivnitz mentioned above on this page.

Admiral Hintze was another of Radek's visitors who told him he saw the future in terms of a Russo-German rapprochement. Radek eventually returned to Moscow with Major Hey who later became Councillor of the German Embassy.¹⁹

Before his return Radek wrote several articles which sum up his experiences and show the drift of his mind. He rejected the Lauffenberg and Wolffheim thesis of National Bolshevism since the German bourgeoisie would undoubtedly prefer a complete foreign occupation of Germany to a German Soviet Republic.²⁰ On the other hand, the decisive factor for Russian foreign policy was the delay in revolution in Western Europe and America. This altered the condition of Russian foreign policy and therefore the 'problem of the foreign policy of Soviet Russia . . . consists in attaining a *modus vivendi* with the capitalist states'. Nor was this a utopian hope for in the past capitalist and feudal states had lived side by side in peace.²¹

In another article Radek foresees that the world revolution will not be an 'explosion' but a 'disintegration'.²² Thus the question of a *modus vivendi* again arises.

But as a long process will have to be reckoned with, Soviet Russia does not for that very reason get round the question of seeking and finding a *modus vivendi* with those states that are still capitalist. If the proletarian revolution in Germany or France is victorious tomorrow, the situation of Soviet Russia will be easier for two proletarian states will exercise greater pressure as economic and military powers on the capitalist world; but they will nevertheless have an interest in concluding peace with the remaining capitalist states, even if only to proceed eventually to economic reconstruction.²³

Elsewhere, in an article directed at the German bourgeoisie and urging them to adopt a pro-Russian attitude and disregard the Entente, Radek pleads for the re-establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations between Germany and Russia.²⁴ Some six years later he was able to point to the wider significance of the situation prevailing at the end of 1919: the victory of the German bourgeoisie over the Communist threat — such as it was — coincided with the Bolshevik victory over the Whites.²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 169-72.

²⁰ p. 16, *Die Auswärtige Politik des deutschen Kommunismus und der Hamburger National-Bolschewismus*, first published in *Die Internationale*, Heft 17/18, December 20th, 1919.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

²² p. 37, *Die Auswärtige Politik Sowjetrusslands*. Hamburg, 1921 (written December 1919).

²³ Ibid., pp. 37-8.

²⁴ p. 11, *Deutschland und Russland*, first published in *Die Zukunft*, No. 19, February 7th, 1920.

²⁵ RADEK in *Izvestia*, November 5th, 1925.

In other words, the German bourgeoisie was now in a position to work together with the Bolsheviks, relieved of the fear that it might thereby become contaminated, at the very same time as the Soviet power had become consolidated in battle. The implications of this were not realized at the time. The ideas discussed in the 'political salon' went into cold storage for more than a year and when they did re-emerge it was in rather a different form. Lenin in 1920 was no more sympathetic to 'National-Bolshevism' than Radek had been. He called the theories of Lauffenberg and Wolffheim 'crying absurdities' and added '... the position is obviously such that the German communists should not tie their hands and promise positively and without fail to repudiate the Versailles Treaty in the event of the victory of Communism'.²⁶

Radek was replaced in Berlin by Vigdor Kopp and on February 20th, 1920, the latter was recognized as the official Soviet plenipotentiary for prisoner-of-war matters.²⁷ Kopp's opposite number in Moscow was Hilger. 'When receiving him, Comrade Chicherin declared that Russia's attitude towards Germany would be dictated solely by the wish to establish closer economic, political and cultural relations.'²⁸

This was said without prejudice to the hopes of a German revolution still entertained in Moscow. At the beginning of 1920 Lenin was full of confidence in the Russian position. On March 1st he said: 'the international position of the Soviet Republic was never so favourable and victorious as it is now'.²⁹ A few weeks later, at the Ninth Party Congress, he was more precise in linking up the improvement in Russia's international position with the growth of revolution in Germany:

... In the international sphere our position was never so advantageous as now and what particularly fills us with joy and courage is the news that we receive every day from Germany and which shows that with however great a strain and effort a socialist revolution is being born, the proletarian Soviet power in Germany is growing irresistibly. The German Kornilov-affair has played the same rôle in Germany as in Russia. After the Kornilov affair began the swing over to proletarian power not only in the masses of the town workers but also in the agricultural proletariat of Germany and this swing over has a universal-historical significance. It gives us not only again and again the absolute conviction of the correctness of (our) path; it gives us the certainty that the time is not far off when we shall march hand in hand with a German Soviet government.³⁰

²⁶ p. 55, LENIN, *Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder*, Engl. transl. London, 1947.

²⁷ p. 106, MAISKY, *Vneshnaya Politika RSFSR, 1917-1922*. Moscow, 1922.

²⁸ Quoted p. 148, *Soviet Russia*, August 14th, 1920. *Soviet Russia* was the official organ of the Soviet Government Bureau in New York.

²⁹ p. 47, vol. 25 LENIN, *Sochineniya*, ed. Adoratsky, etc. Moscow, 1935.

³⁰ p. 5, *Devyati syezd RKP (b)*, ed. Meshcheryakov. Moscow, 1934. By the German Kornilov-affair is meant the Kapp Putsch of March 1920; cf. also Bukharin's greeting to the German workers, pp. 10-11 and Lenin's later remarks, p. 23.

Nevertheless, the continued delay in the German revolution was the compelling reason for Lenin's decision to carry the war against Poland across the rough ethnographical division formed by the River Bug. He was anxious above all to break out of the continuing and wholly unexpected isolation of the Russian Revolution. In this he succeeded, though not in the way he had anticipated: the Polish war was the decisive factor in clearing the ground for the later Rapallo Treaty.

It differed in the first place from the struggle against the Whites in being a war against the Versailles system: 'If Poland had become Soviet,' said Lenin, 'if the Warsaw workers had received the help from Soviet Russia which they awaited and which they welcomed, the Versailles Peace would have been crushed and the whole international system forced by the victors on Germany would have collapsed.'³¹

In the second place, the rapid Russian advance on Warsaw was a graphic illustration to the Germans of the possibilities latent in co-operation with the Bolsheviks. To such an extent was this the case that at the height of the Russian advance the German Foreign Minister, Dr. Simons, not only declared German neutrality but he and the chief of the Eastern Department in the Foreign Office, v. Maltzan, were ready to open diplomatic relations with Russia.³²

Lenin was not slow to draw certain conclusions from this state of affairs. A definite change came over his approach to the international situation in the latter part of 1920. There were, besides the experiences of the Polish War, solid reasons for this. The blockade had been lifted from the beginning of the year; Russia had also signed peace treaties with Finland, Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania and a provisional peace treaty with Poland was signed in October 1920. More important, active trade negotiations were in progress with England. Taken all in all, Lenin was able to sum up the international position in these terms. The Polish War he took to be the last attack on Soviet Russia.³³ In a speech on November 20th, 1920, he considered the implications of this:

We have shown ourselves to be in such a position that, without having obtained an international victory — the only stable one for us — we have won for ourselves the conditions under which we may exist side by side with capitalist states who are now forced to enter into trading relations with us. In the process of this struggle we have won for ourselves the right to an independent existence.

Thus, looking at our international position as a whole, we see that we have won enormous successes, that we have not only a breathing space but something much more serious . . . we have a new phase when our basic international existence has been fought for and attained within the network of capitalist states.

³¹ p. 402, vol. 25, *Sochineniya*, ed. cit.

³² RADEK in *Izvestia*, October 15th, 1921.

³³ p. 401, vol. 25, *Sochineniya*, ed. cit.

He went on to say that 'now we must already talk not only of a breathing space, but of a serious chance for reconstruction over a longer period of time'.³⁴

With regard to Germany, there are at least three occasions when Lenin speaks of the sympathy aroused on both the German Right and Left as the Russians approached Warsaw. On October 15th, 1920, he said that this was a time when 'everyone in Germany, even the blackest reactionaries and monarchists, said that the Bolsheviks would save us, when they saw that the Versailles peace is splitting at all its seams, that it is the Red Army which has declared war on all capitalists'.³⁵

A few weeks earlier he had told the party conference that 'as our troops approached Warsaw all Germany began to ferment. There was reproduced there the picture which could be observed in Russia in 1905, when the Black Hundreds aroused and called to political activity extensive layers of the most reactionary peasantry, who today march against the Bolsheviks but who tomorrow will demand all the land from the landowners. And in Germany we saw a similar unnatural bloc of Black Hundreds and Bolsheviks. There appeared a strange type of reactionary-revolutionary. . . .'³⁶

But it was in a speech on December 21st, 1920, to the Party fraction at the Eighth Congress of Soviets that Lenin dealt with the implications of the phenomenon observed in Germany, making at the same time an exposé of the decree on concessions (November 23rd, 1920) and indicating the close connection between the two. The speech is lengthy and extensive extracts require to be quoted.

He began by reiterating his belief that the Soviets owed their survival to the divisions prevailing amongst their enemies. The concessions to be offered under the terms of the decree would have the effect of intensifying these divisions and ensuring that should war be renewed, some capitalists would find themselves on the Russian side.³⁷ As for Germany:

this country, bound by the Versailles Treaty, finds itself in circumstances that make its existence impossible. And in such a position Germany is naturally pushed into an alliance with Russia. When the Russian troops advanced on Warsaw, all Germany was in a ferment. The alliance with Russia of this country, which is stifled, which is in a position to set in motion gigantic productive forces — all this had as consequence that a political mix-up was produced in Germany: the German reactionaries marched with the Spartacists in sympathy with the Russian Bolsheviks and this is fully understandable for it emerges from economic causes. This forms the basis of our economic position and of all our foreign policy.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 485-6.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 418.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 378.

³⁷ pp. 7-9, vol. 26, LENIN, *Sochineniya*, ed. cit.

Our foreign policy while we are alone and while the capitalist world is strong consists, on the one hand, in our exploiting contradictions. (To conquer all the imperialist powers would of course be the most desirable thing but we will not be in a position to do that for a rather long time.) Our existence depends on there existing a radical divergence amongst the imperialist powers on the one hand and, on the other, that the victory of the Entente and the Versailles peace have made it impossible for the overwhelming majority of the German nations to live. The Versailles peace has created a position such that Germany cannot dream of a breathing-space, cannot dream of not being plundered, of not being deprived of the means of life, of her population not being condemned to hunger and starvation. Germany cannot dream of this and naturally her only means of saving herself is by an alliance with Soviet Russia, whither they are directing their glances. They madly attack Soviet Russia, they hate the Bolsheviks, they shoot their Communists like real genuine White Guards. The German bourgeois government madly hates the Bolsheviks but the interests of its international position impel it towards peace with Soviet Russia against its own wish. This, comrades, is the second pillar of our international and foreign policy: to prove to those peoples, conscious of the bourgeois yoke, that there is no salvation for them outside the Soviet Republic. And in so far as the Soviet Republic for three years has withstood the pressure of the imperialists, this speaks of the fact that there is one country in the world — and only one country — that successfully rejects this yoke of imperialism. . . .

The existence of Germany is impossible by virtue of the conditions created for her by the Entente. The people are dying there . . . such a position pushes Germany towards a rapprochement with Soviet Russia. I do not know the details of the treaty between Germany and the Entente. In any case it is well known that in this treaty direct trading relations between Germany and Soviet Russia are forbidden. The conditions of their existence force the people of Germany as a whole, not excluding the German reactionaries and capitalists, to seek relations with Soviet Russia. Thus it is clear that we must put forward concessions, as an economic method, even independently of how far we will succeed in realizing our plan . . . We must pursue this policy because by it we hamper a crusade of the imperialist countries against us. . . .

Our policy groups round the Soviet Republic capitalist countries which imperialism is stifling. That is why this offer of concessions has not only a capitalist significance, that is why this hand is extended not only to the German capitalists: 'Send us hundreds of tractors and take 300 per cent ruble profits if you want them' — but this hand is also extended to oppressed peoples and the alliance of the oppressed masses, which is one of the factors of the growing proletarian revolution.³⁸

In this way, the necessity of a *modus vivendi* with Germany, as foreseen by Radek in 1919, re-emerged. But although it was on the basis of

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

a common Russo-German opposition to the Versailles system, it differed from the earlier formulation in providing for encouragement to revolution in Germany. Lenin, in fact, was trying to ride two horses simultaneously. By opposing the Versailles 'yoke of imperialism' the Soviets would gain the sympathy of those suffering under this yoke; and by offering concessions to the German capitalists they would be intensifying the divisions within the capitalist world. It was only later that the question arose of how long it would be possible to go on exposing the imperialist nature of Versailles to the German masses without at the same time not supporting the national struggle of the German bourgeoisie against the Treaty. (The latter's interest in opposing the Treaty was of course different from those of the German proletariat.) In the event — and this is the kernel of the Rapallo policy as far as Russia is concerned — the distinction between the two policies disappeared and it was the national German interest that gained the upper hand, i.e. the interests of the German bourgeoisie. This was inevitable in view of the continuing delay in revolution in Germany.³⁹

At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 the policy of commercial rapprochement via concessions and trade agreements with the capitalist powers was affirmed.⁴⁰ Kamenev explained that this was because 'the world revolution is not marching with quick steps and is not taking into its own hands the means of production in Western Europe as would be desirable'.⁴¹ Lenin was more categorical. He acknowledged that:

in comparison with last year the international revolution has taken a big step forward . . . But if we were to deduce from this that within a short interval help will come to us from there in the form of a stable proletarian revolution, then we would simply be mad and I am sure that there are no such people in this hall . . . And therefore we must learn so to co-ordinate our activity with the class relationships inside our country and other countries that we may maintain over a prolonged period the dictatorship of the proletariat and — although gradually — heal the wounds and crises which have been inflicted on us. This is the only correct and sober way to pose the question.⁴²

Kopp had in the meantime returned from Berlin with the good news that 'in the near future the organization of a mutual trade representation will be established'.⁴³ In early May a Russo-German trade treaty was signed in Berlin. Its principal feature was an undertaking by the

³⁹ Although it exceeds our present scope, it must nevertheless be pointed out that the support given by the Soviets to the German national struggle against Versailles was strictly limited. It did not, for example, extend to the revision by force of Germany's post-1919 frontiers.

⁴⁰ p. 328, *Stenographicheski otchet: desyati syezd RKP (b) 1921*. Moscow, 1921.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁴³ Kopp's interview with *Izvestiya*, February 1st, 1921.

German government to recognize solely the Soviet government as the Government of Russia and to refuse to maintain relations with any emigré organizations. The treaty was greeted in Moscow as a 'new diplomatic success'.⁴⁴

In July of 1921 a further revision in the adaptation of Communist policy to the non-materialization of the German revolution was carried through at the Third Congress of the Comintern. It propounded the slogan 'To the Masses'. In fact, this policy had already been anticipated in Germany via the Radek-Levi 'Open Letter' of January 1921 to all working-class organizations. This was the first sign of an abdication of immediate revolutionary hopes and of the realization that revolution would not be as automatic as expected. Thus the way would be left clear, until revolution *did* mature, for the development of an alternative policy based on existing class-relationships in Germany, or, as Lenin had put it, 'co-ordinating our activity with the class relationships inside our country and other countries'.

The next overt steps on this path were taken in the late summer of 1921. On September 19th Professor Wiedefeld, the head of the foreign trade department of the Auswärtiges Amt arrived in Moscow, as provisional German representative and on October 25th, Krestinski, former Commissar for Finance, arrived in Berlin.⁴⁵ The fact that both men were experts on financial questions has obvious significance. To this period also belong talks between Russian representatives and a Rhenish-Westphalian group of industrialists regarding credits for Russia.⁴⁶

On November 15th, 1921, Krestinski handed over his credentials to Wirth, the Reich Chancellor, as ambassador to Germany. He also said: 'For the economic reconstruction of Russia, torn by the imperialist and civil wars as well as by intervention and blockade, a resumption and a many-sided widening of her relations with Germany are vitally necessary.

'The post-war position of Germany also demands collaboration with Russia. These mutual interests found their first juridical expression in the treaty of May 6th, 1921. In the name of the Soviet government I express the hope that the mutual relations between Russia and Germany will not be limited by the framework of the treaty of May 6th but will lead to the closer collaboration of Russia and Germany, indispensable in the interests of the people of both countries.'

Wirth replied: 'For my part, I declare that I consider it my main task to strive for the consolidation of the relations of both peoples on the basis of their co-operation.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Steklov in *Izvestya*, May 10th, 1921.

⁴⁵ MAISKY, l.c., pp. 106-7.

⁴⁶ p. 89, YERUSALIMSKI, *Germaniya, Antanta i SSSR* Moscow, 1927.

⁴⁷ *Izvestya*, November 27th, 1921.

Included in the foreshadowed co-operation were talks in Berlin on the establishment of a German arms industry in Russia. The first conference on this topic took place in the apartment of the then Major Kurt v. Schleicher at the end of September 1921. Krassin represented the Russians and General Hasse the Reichswehr. The real inspirer of the move was General v. Seeckt who preferred to keep out of the lime-light.⁴⁸

In other fields, too, there was progress. 'During the whole winter of 1921-22 there continued a gradual widening of Russo-German commercial operations; negotiations were also under way between several powerful German firms and the Soviet government on the possibility of offering them different concessions on the territory of the Russian Republic.'⁴⁹

In the background, Chicherin's note of October 28th, 1921, to Great Britain, the United States, France, Japan and Italy, suggesting a final settlement between them and the Soviets, coincided with the increasing need felt by the rest of the world to enter into commercial relations with Russia. This took the form of trying to organize a Consortium, a project which was discussed at Paris in December 1921. The two conceptions, despite the unalterable Russian objection to dealing with a united capitalist world,⁵⁰ were somewhat artificially brought together by Lloyd George at the January 1922 session of the Supreme Council. Here the decision was taken to organize the Conference at Genoa and to invite Germany and Russia on a basis of equality with the other powers.

A little later Radek, Krassin and Rakovsky visited Berlin to discuss with the Germans a common policy for the Conference.⁵¹ This was in January-February 1922. Back in Moscow the Eleventh Party Congress laid down the Russian policy for Genoa. 'We are going to Genoa,' said Lenin, 'with a practical aim — to widen our trading relations and to create the conditions whereby they may develop as extensively and as successfully as possible.'⁵² This was underlined by Chicherin in a press interview he gave at Riga where he said Russian foreign policy was 'economics and production'.⁵³ He had, however, little faith in the ability of Genoa to achieve this⁵⁴ and when the Russian delegation arrived in Berlin, he tried to come to a separate agreement with the

⁴⁸ RABENAU, l.c., p. 308. Earlier in the year Hasse had led a German military mission to Moscow (p. 46, DIRKSEN, *Moskau-Tokio-London*. Stuttgart, 1949).

⁴⁹ MAISKY, l.c., p. 107.

⁵⁰ Cf. Chicherin's remarks to the Central Committee reported in *Izvestya*, January 28th, 1922.

⁵¹ pp. 250 and 261, LORD D'ABERNON, *An Ambassador of Peace*, vol. I. London, 1929.

⁵² p. 12, *Protokoli — odinmatzati syezd RKP (b)*, ed. Poper, 1936.

⁵³ *Izvestya*, April 1st, 1922.

⁵⁴ p. 333, LOUIS FISCHER, *The Soviets in World Affairs*. London, 1930.

Germans and confront the Conference with a *fait accompli*.⁵⁵ Rathenau, the German Foreign Minister, was the only obstacle to this, for he clung to the idea of settling Russo-German relations within the framework of a Russo-European settlement.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the basis of the future Rapallo was worked out at these talks⁵⁷ and the Treaty drafted with the exception of clauses 2 and 4, dealing respectively with nationalized German property in Russia and most-favoured-nation treatment for Germany.⁵⁸ All the Russian efforts to go any further were in vain. 'Evidently', said Joffe afterwards to the Central Committee, 'the European atmosphere and, so to speak, the specific weight of Russia had at that time still not sufficiently defined themselves for Germany to venture on such an important step.'⁵⁹

On the other hand, Rathenau did not by any means exclude the possibility of an eventual separate Russo-German agreement. On the eve of Genoa, March 29th, 1922, he told the Reichstag:

Genoa will certainly bring Russia many essentials and I do not for one moment want to leave unspoken the attitude of the Government, which is as follows: we will sincerely co-operate in the reconstruction of Russia within the limits of our capacity. In this the path of syndicates is not the decisive one. Syndicates can be useful and we should not shut ourselves off from such syndicates. On the other hand the essential part of our reconstruction work will be for discussion between ourselves and Russia herself. Such discussions have taken place and are again being held and I will further them by every means. There is no thought of Germany intending, for example, to play the part of a capital-hungry colonizer.⁶⁰

The Genoa Conference opened on April 10th. In his opening speech, Chicherin, notwithstanding the military aspect of the Russian rapprochement with Germany, was able to exemplify bourgeois hypocrisy in making a bid for the sympathy of the German delegation by stressing the desirability of armaments reduction as a means to peace.

Three days later Chicherin brought greater pressure to bear on the Germans when he accepted Lloyd George's invitation to private conversations with the Western Powers. This left the Germans isolated and a prey to fears that Article 116 of the Versailles Treaty might be used against them. (This reserved Russia's right to claim reparations from Germany.) It hung over them, writes one of the German delegates, 'like the sword of Damocles'.⁶¹ This fear was groundless. The

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ pp. 328-9, KESSLER, *Walter Rathenau - His Life and Work*, Eng. transl. London, 1929.

⁵⁷ p. 15, A. A. JOFFE, *Ot Genoi do Gaagi*. Moscow/Leningrad, 1923.

⁵⁸ LOUIS FISCHER, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁵⁹ A. A. JOFFE, *l.c.*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ pp. 665-6, vol. 354, *Stenographischer Bericht, Verhandlungen des Reichstags*.

⁶¹ p. 126, CARL BERGMANN, *The Path of Reparations*, Eng. transl., 1927.

talks at Lloyd George's private residence were entirely concerned with Russia's pre-war debts, war debts and nationalized Allied property.⁶² But Chicherin's manœuvre had the desired effect and when the Russians contacted the German delegation in the early morning of April 16th a meeting was arranged at Rapallo for later in the day. Rathenau's opposition was not overcome until he found himself completely isolated inside his delegation.⁶³ The question of paying German claims was now thrashed out as well as that of most-favoured-nation treatment. The Treaty eventually granted Germany the latter and cancelled all mutual claims between the two countries.⁶⁴

On the Soviet side a certain divergence in evaluating Rapallo is discernible. Roughly speaking, there were those who considered the Treaty to be a stop-gap affair, who emphasized its instability and minimized its possible effect. But there were also others who drew more far-reaching conclusions and emphasized its weight in the balance of power. Of the first Joffe and Trotsky were the spokesmen. The former, in his report to the Central Committee on May 17th, 1922, after saying that Rapallo 'breaks the united front of world bourgeoisie . . . in the basic question of debts', goes on: 'it would be very much more possible . . . to speak of the possible instability of the Rapallo Treaty, more advantageous to Russia than to Germany. For that which is born of cowardice can also be destroyed by cowardice'.⁶⁵ Trotsky, for his part, explicitly denied that the treaty was bound up with the balance of power. In response to a question from the U.S. International News Service: 'Is the Russo-German Treaty an alliance of Russia and Germany as a counterweight to the other groupings of the European countries?' he replied:

Germany is separated from the Soviet Republic by the same basic contradictions of property systems as the countries of the Entente. This means that the possibility of talking of the Rapallo Treaty as of some offensive-defensive alliance to counterbalance other states is excluded. It is a question of the re-establishment of the most elementary inter-state and economic relations. On the principles of the Rapallo Treaty, Soviet Russia is ready to sign today a treaty with any other country.⁶⁶

The Central Committee also took this view. In its resolution it hailed Rapallo as alone capable of giving 'equality of rights of the two systems and agreement between them, although as a temporary condition, until the whole world has advanced from private property . . . to a higher system of property'.⁶⁷

⁶² JOFFE, l.c., pp. 10-13.

⁶³ Krassin in *Izvestya*, June 27th, 1922. Krassin was one of the Russian delegates.

⁶⁴ See above, p. 1.

⁶⁵ JOFFE, l.c., pp. 31-2.

⁶⁶ *Izvestya*, May 18th, 1922.

⁶⁷ *Izvestya*, May 18th, 1922.

The other point of view was put by Steklov, at this time the editor of *Izvestya*. In a leading article on April 21st, 1922, he wrote that if Germany does not give way under Allied pressure at Genoa 'then the hegemony of imperialist France forcibly imposed on Europe will be broken'. He goes on: the German bourgeoisie is imperialist 'to the core' 'But, in the first place, the position of Germany at the moment is such that in the near future she cannot dream of any aggressive plans. Secondly — and this is the most important thing — if she did cherish such plans then in this matter she could in no case count on support from Soviet Russia . . . But it is quite another affair if it is a question of defence against Entente imperialism. If the latter refuses to enter into an agreement with the Soviet Republic on terms acceptable to her . . . if, in this way, the question again arises before Soviet Russia of the defence of her right to existence, then, of course, she will use all means and all forces for the maintenance of her political and economic independence.' On April 26th, Steklov again wrote in *Izvestya* that Rapallo was a blow at French hegemony on the continent. It was left to Radek to draw the full implications of this situation. He, to whom the possibility of Rapallo had first occurred, saw more than anyone else that Rapallo was a foothold in the capitalist world but that for this a price had had to be paid — Russia had to commit herself to the balance of power in Europe. He told the Fourth Congress of the Comintern at the end of 1922:

The policy of throttling Germany implied as a matter of fact the destruction of Russia as a great power, for no matter how Russia is governed it is always her interest to see that Germany exists . . . A Russia which has been weakened to the utmost by the war could neither have continued as a great power nor acquired the economic and technical means for her industrial reconstruction unless she had in the existence of Germany a counter-balance against the supremacy of the Allies.⁶⁸

LIONEL KOCHAN

⁶⁸ p. 16, RADEK, *The Winding-up of the Versailles Treaty* — Report to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Eng. transl. Hamburg, 1922.