Chapter Thirty-One

‘Petty-Bourgeois or Proletarian World Policy?’
(19 August 1911)

Rosa Luxemburg

This polemic of Rosa Luxemburg with Eduard Bernstein over the Second Moroccan Crisis is a good example of the growing schism in the attitude towards imperialism between the left and right wings of the SPD. It is also notable as a stepping stone in Rosa Luxemburg’s developing view of capitalism as a search for ‘third-party’ markets outside the capitalist world to realise surplus-value (‘the innermost essence, the core, the whole meaning and content of the policies of the imperialist capitalist countries is the continuous and incessant tearing apart of all countries and peoples so that they can be gradually devoured and digested by capitalism’) and as a defence of the native peoples’ rights in their fight against imperialism – a matter of secondary concern to most European socialist politicians, who were worried above all about preventing the outbreak of a war between the major imperialist powers.

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The mass-action organised by the Party against the Moroccan policy had hardly begun when already a well-meant but nonetheless quite mistaken attempt was made to steer this action into the wrong channels. In two articles in Vorwärts – which the editorial staff of the central organ printed without comment on the first page – Comrade Bernstein analysed the concrete solution that our protest movement against the Moroccan affair should advocate. He obviously wants to adopt a ‘practical policy’. Bernstein thinks it is the duty of Social Democracy to advance ‘positive’ proposals for the solution of world-political problems. As Social Democrats, we should now find a way out that we should then recommend to the capitalist states as the ‘best’ and most practical settlement of the Moroccan Crisis. How could Social Democracy fulfil such an alien task and prepare recipes for capitalist diplomacy and its cabinets? Bernstein tries to show how to do just that. Since he, as a Social Democrat, is also dabbling in a craft foreign to him, the result is something quite remarkable. He lifts from the floor a scrap of paper he found under the table of the diplomats, smoothes it down on his knee with all care, and then waves it joyfully in the air as the single best solution to the Moroccan conflict – the only policy in the spirit of ‘peace and equality of rights’, in the spirit of the ‘highest commandments of humanity’, as well as in the best material interests of the peoples and the only solution worthy of Social Democracy and the twentieth century: the Act of Algeciras. Who could possibly avoid crying – or laughing?

The Act of Algeciras was the expression of an international situation in which France could not yet openly claim Morocco as a colony, while the other powers did not want to and could not undertake warlike actions for Morocco’s sake. The international guarantee for the sovereignty of Morocco’s Sultan, i.e., for the formal independence of the country, which all the states then underwrote ‘in the name of the Almighty’, expressed a certain momentary

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1. Luxemburg 1911c. In this and other sources of the period, the term ‘world policy [Weltpolitik]’ is used as synonymous with ‘imperialism’.
2. Bernstein 1911b.
3. [The Act of Algeciras of 7 April 1906, ended the First Moroccan Crisis. The treaty guaranteed Morocco formal independence, but it also solidified the influence of France in the country by stipulating that the country should remain for five years under French and Spanish control.]