Chapter Thirty-Two

World Politics, World War and Social Democracy!
(August 1911)

Karl Kautsky

This document was originally published as a broadsheet by the Central Committee of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany in mid-August 1911, on the occasion of the Second Moroccan conflict, also known as the Agadir crisis (1 July–4 November 1911). It should be read together with the next item in this anthology, a sharply critical response from Rosa Luxemburg. The paragraphs that provoked Rosa Luxemburg’s condemnation were those suggesting that imperialism (or world policy, as Kautsky called it, following the old nomenclature) was not in the interest of most sections of the German bourgeoisie. Kautsky thought arms-expenditures were ‘actually detrimental to large numbers of the possessing classes’. He claimed that

It is in the interest not only of the proletariat but of the entire German people, and even the mass of its propertied classes, to prevent the government from continuing its world policy, which

1. See the debate on the Moroccan policy of the Parteivorstand at the SPD-congress in Jena (10–16 September 1911) in Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands 1911, Bericht der Kontrollkommission, pp. 204–70. For an assessment of the debates by the SPD left wing, see Anonymous 1911a and 1911b.
saddles the people with unheard-of burdens and brings ever closer the risk of a devastating war without any benefit except for a few monopolists and speculators.

In this conviction, Kautsky would soon find himself increasingly at odds with those who attributed imperialism to strictly economic imperatives of the capitalist system as a whole. Lenin saw imperialism as an objectively necessary consequence of the law of ‘uneven development’; Luxemburg saw a compulsive need for ‘third-party’ markets; even Hilferding linked colonial expansionism with the concentration and centralisation of capital. For those on the Left, imperialism was inseparable from capitalism – it was certainly not a matter of political choice in which ‘large numbers of the possessing classes’ might oppose what Kautsky called ‘a small minority of officers, public officials, armour-plate manufacturers, suppliers and speculators’ who profited directly.

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**World Politics, World War and Social Democracy**

The peoples of Europe see themselves, unexpectedly and overnight, threatened by all the horrors of a world war. Thanks to the loving efforts of its neighbours to maintain its integrity, the Moroccan kingdom seems about to collapse; and the quarrel of those who reported themselves as its heirs is temporarily assuming dimensions that could set the whole of Europe ablaze.

Apparently, it is France that got itself into a dangerous contradiction with the other powers, particularly Germany, but, actually, the greatest danger to world peace comes not from the antagonism between France and Germany but from the antagonism between Germany and England. The current clash is only an accompanying phenomenon, a part of the great antagonism between the two powers that has been emerging since Germany, a dozen years ago, began its new world and naval policy. That antagonism has been deepening and growing from year to year.

Morocco had a different importance for England than for Germany and France. For the latter, Morocco is important as a missing link to round off

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2. Kautsky 1911d.