Karl Radek’s article on ‘The Driving Forces of Imperialism’, like the preceding one by Rosa Luxemburg, can be read as a response to Kautsky’s identification of democracy with the national state. Kautsky thought imperialist contradictions could be overcome by combining democratic states in an economic federation to eliminate tariffs. The significance that Kautsky attached to the state exemplified the thinking that paralysed the Second International. In every country, social-chauvinists found democratic justification for supporting the national war-effort: British and French labour leaders pointed to the threat of postwar reaction posed by Hohenzollern Germany, ignoring the fact that their own countries were allied with tsarist Russia; German and Austrian Social Democrats claimed that an Entente-victory would strengthen Russia, forgetting that defence of their own fatherlands meant war against bourgeois democracies in Britain and France. In every country, support for one’s own country’s war-effort could be linked with defending democracy against the threat of reaction posed by the opposing alliance.

Karl Radek’s essay articulated a different argument: the national state itself was becoming historically redundant. ‘The capitalist state-framework,’ he wrote, ‘is too narrow. Capitalism had to blow
it up everywhere.’ In Volume III of Capital, Marx had said that capitalist indus-
try has an ‘immanent need’ for constant expansion of the world market, ‘so
that now it is not trade that revolutionizes industry, but rather industry that
constantly revolutionizes trade’. Radek emphasised a similar causality that
led from capitalist industry to the depletion of European agriculture; from
reliance upon agricultural and raw-material imports to the predominance
of heavy industry and railway-construction in opening new territories; and
from the financial requirements of heavy industry to the universal predomi-
nance of finance-capital in a world economy forged by imperialism.

Radek’s views, like those of Rosa Luxemburg, pointed in the direction of
a new internationalism. Six months after publication of the article translated
here, an International Socialist Conference met in Zimmerwald to oppose the
imperialist war. The Conference Manifesto, drafted by Leon Trotsky, con-
demned socialists who supported their own country’s war-effort:

[They] have invited the workers to suspend the working-class struggle, the
only possible and effective means of working-class emancipation. They have
voted the ruling classes the credits for carrying on the war. They have put
themselves at the disposal of their Governments for the most varied services.
They have tried through their press and their envoys to win over the neutrals
to the Governmental policies of their respective countries. They have given
to their Government Socialist Ministers as hostages for the observance of the
national truce, and thus have taken on themselves the responsibility for this
war, its aims, its methods. And just as Socialist Parties failed separately, so
did the most responsible representative of the Socialists of all countries fail:
the International Socialist Bureau.2

While the official Zimmerwald Manifesto called for ‘peace without annexa-
tions or indemnities’ and defended ‘the right of self-determination of nations’,
Radek, together with Lenin, Zinoviev and others, proposed on behalf of the
Zimmerwald Left a draft that went much further, calling for the overthrow
of the capitalist governments as the only way to put an end to wars. For the