The War has turned Europe into a huge battlefield for more than a year already, yet the causes leading to all these horrors are still very little known. This is true not only in the belligerent countries – whose governments raised the slogan of defending the endangered homeland in order to blame the enemy for the War and to prevent by censorship the expression of any other opinion – but even beyond their frontiers, where the same superficial statements prevail. On one side, the blame is placed on predatory German militarism, which, as the tool of a feudal Junker-caste and a domineering dynasty, seeks to enslave free, developed Western Europe. On the other side, ‘Perfidious Albion’ is the silent instigator of the slaughter: threatened by the preponderance of more efficient German industry in the world-market, England artfully surrounded its emerging rival with a network of enemies who are now assaulting peaceful Germany from all directions. Pacifists of all kinds lament the incomprehensible madness that has seized humanity, believing that, through peace congresses and propaganda, the peoples will better

1. Pannekoek 1915.
2. [This statement indicates that the document was written after July 1915.]
understand and appreciate each other in its aftermath, thus securing a lasting peace.

The actual cause of the war is imperialism, the policy that aspires to possession of foreign territories as the means to world power. Thus, the economic development that has led to this imperialism is at the same time the root cause of the world war.

Imperialism is the most modern, highly developed form of capitalism. To the extent that ever more money from profits and dividends is accumulated as new capital, which must be profitably invested, it becomes increasingly difficult to find good investment opportunities in the domestic market. That is why capitalists cast their eyes on distant, undeveloped countries and foreign continents. Expensive products are there to collect, cultivate, or extract from mines, products that in the European market are worth a great deal as raw materials for industry or as means of consumption: ores, petroleum, rubber, ivory, cotton, coffee, tobacco. Since the right to exploit them is often sold for a song or simply taken by force, vast profits can be made. In countries with a dense, intelligent population (e.g. India or China), factories can be set up that promise to yield high profits due to the frugality of a population that is satisfied with low wages. Where handicrafts and agriculture flourish, railways can carry products to the world market. The construction of railways in foreign continents is always the beginning of capitalist exploitation; and the iron industry, which supplies locomotives and rails, has the greatest interest in promoting this development wherever it can.

Such an extension of capitalist business over the undeveloped world demands, at the same time, extension of the political domination of European nations over those regions. The legal concepts and forms of primitive peoples do not fit with capitalist enterprise and must be replaced by European law; their freer attitudes and way of life do not correspond to the requirements of capitalist exploitation, which elicits a resistance that can only be broken through armed intervention, conquest and subjugation in favour of European capital. In countries that were already united into large states under despotic rulers, the existing governments are used for this political mastery: through loans (whose proceeds are used to buy luxury-products and guns or else for public works) the monarch is made dependent on the European banks, which gradually bring all the tax-revenues of the country under their control as collateral, gaining more and more concessions and influence. In case of a dispute