

## **“As the West Goes to War, Crafting Peace Today”: A Report**

The present war in Europe and its representation in global media has greatly unsettled the world, particularly with speculations on the possibility of a third World War. This scenario brings several concerns to immediate focus: including the impact of a European war in the third world countries, the understanding of ideas like democracy and liberalism in the face of military aggression, and the very idea of the West itself - what the boundaries and critical understandings of the West mean now in the current political and economic circumstances in Europe, America, and the expansion of NATO. Such were some of the questions raised in “As the West Goes to War, Crafting Peace Today” - an online panel discussion organized by the Calcutta Research Group on the possibilities of global peace in the contemporary scene of war and violence in Europe, on 25 April 2022.

The speakers in this panel discussion were Professor Marcello Musto, Professor of Sociological Theory, York University, Toronto; Professor Sandro Mezzadra, Professor of Political Philosophy, University of Bologna, Italy; and Professor Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group, India. The discussion was moderated by Professor Paula Banerjee, Professor and Head in South and South-East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta & Calcutta Research Group, India.

Professor Paula Banerjee, the moderator of the discussion, opened the session with an insightful introductory address, placing the discussion in the context of the U.S.A's occupation and leaving of Afghanistan, and the Russia-Ukraine war. She raised several questions that would be discussed back and forth across the session: “What happens to peace? What happens to the world's workers in this conflict? Is this conflict really about two world views? Is it about democracy or lack of it thereof? Is Ukraine the representative of all the democratic countries?” And the most pressing question of it all - what needs to be done?

Alongside the pressing importance of the above questions, in the context of war, a crucial and often overlooked question is, ‘What is the nature of this war?’ This is the very question that Professor Sandro Mezzadra raised about the Ukraine War at the very outset of his discussion. One of the leading thinkers on globalization and migration and the new political processes on contemporary capitalism and in political theory and criticism, Professor Mezzadra located a fundamental connection between the current wars and the notion of the

West, as well as globalization. He noted a substantial shift in not only the present times but also the world history of the past few decades, arguing that the defeat of the US in Iraq and in Afghanistan produced a deep change in the general awareness of the way in which global processes were developing. Today, Professor Mezzandra argued, there is a change in the conception of the West - from the image of the West as the world, to the West as part of the world; Europe, too, is peculiarly compromised in this scene, being almost dominated as it is by NATO. The Ukraine war has added to the general pandemic consensus that the age of globalization is over - the age of global culture wars has now begun. And the way towards peace? Professor Mezzandra called for a new internationalism as the only way to achieve this. "We need new discourses of internationalism," he argued, "and in particular we need to experiment with the political internationalist organizations, beyond the scale of the nation states that was the constitutive scale for historical experiences of socialists and communists internationally."

In continuity with several of the issues raised by Professor Mezzandra, Professor Ranabir Samaddar's discussion especially focused on the ethics of peace activism in the current times. Arguing that the 'Just War' theory should on no grounds be accepted in peace activism, he underlines how in the recent global politics, humanitarianism itself has been weaponized; sanctions during the war, mark the weaponization of global economy, and a similar weaponization may be seen even in refugee contexts through selective aid and rescue. Professor Samaddar emphasized on the "ethics of violence and legal frameworks" in peace activism. He spoke of the discontinuities among the continuities in war-waging in the neoliberal times: like Professor Mezzandro, he highlighted the clash of cultures, and how terms like democracy and authoritarianism have acquired largely cultural connotations today. That "democracy can safeguard human rights, advocate global peace, ratify democratic establishments - this it has to be subjected to fundamental critique," Professor Samaddar argued, "and the indiscriminate way we have adopted this word 'democracy', turning it from a political thing to a cultural thing", needs to be questioned.

According to Professor Samaddar, peace politics can never be formulated without including the question of war - in fact, it must contend with not just the predefined phenomenon of war but also the "fog of war" - the modes of socioeconomic weaponization. He raised the question of defining the West through border politics, marking how borderlands, initially considered a harmless concept, are also the first locales of military mobilization. Both Professors Mezzandra and Samaddar referred to the Zimmerwald

conference as providing an important blueprint for peace politics; like Professor Mezzandro, he too called for a reconfiguration of peace politics in the current times, particularly emphasizing on the need to question the historical right to remain neutral in these times.

The final discussant in the panel was Professor Marcello Musto, who spoke on the relation between the Left and war, tracing a history of the same in the past 150 years. In a succinct narration of this history, he spoke of how already in 1868, it was being deemed necessary to understand wars not through individual ambition but in relation to the dominant socioeconomic model; as well as the alternating narratives on war as being crusades for liberty or the idea that the liberation movement was essentially against wars propagated by capitalism. Referring to the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, he presented the frequently fragmented and contradictory ideologies of war across Leftist history. In the final part of his discussion, Professor Musto contextualized this history of war and the Left with the Russian-Ukrainian war, observing that this once again leaves the Left with the dilemma of what it is to do when a country's sovereignty is under attack. To this end, he located various positions, for instance those who fail to condemn the Russian invasion clearly, and Professor Musto argued that this makes possible denunciation of future wars much less credible; he critiqued the Left's direct or indirect co-belligerence in this context, importantly reminding us that progressive forces lose an important reason for their existence when not opposing war, becoming dangerously similar to the ideology of the opposite side. Further, he identified the position of non-alignment, including the opposition of NATO's expansion - and mentioned that this position could be the best for ending and preventing war. Finally, Professor Musto ended his discussion with a direct critique of several of the Left's existing ideologies on war, arguing that war can never be a continuation of politics, and in fact certifies the failure of politics; and if the Left intends to become hegemonic again, it needs to move very strongly towards anti-militarism.

The question-answer session that followed this discussion further brought the questions of feminism and decolonialization, among others, into the subjects on war, peace and the West. The discussion raised the issue of war as the complex phenomenon with far-reaching consequences that it is; it contemplated non-alignment and neutrality, the need for a radical reconfiguring of internationalism and peace activism, and the lessons that history continues to give us on the present despite its discontinuities. While the measures highlighted for achieving peace may appear distant, what emerged in this webinar is the fundamental need for a reconsideration and shift in the ethics of violence, and importantly, the need for a

constant dialogue on the West and the global phenomenon from the position of the Global South, decentering and questioning the very notion of it.

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