



Written by on October 26, 2009

Obama's Ignoble Peace Prize

President Barack Obama had been in office for less than two weeks prior to the arrival of a fateful day: February 1, 2009. That day held little of historic note for most Americans save that they needed to turn the page on their calendars.

Yet someone, somewhere, supposedly had decided the fledgling U.S. President had already made historic contributions to world peace. February 1 was the deadline by which he (or she) had to nominate Obama for the Nobel Peace Prize.



Fortunately for the admirer and the President, the nomination arrived in time and the wheels were set in motion. Approximately eight months later, on October 9, the Norwegian Nobel Committee bestowed the Peace Prize on the 44th President of the United States.

In announcing the award, Nobel Committee chairman Thorbjørn Jagland claimed that President Obama's "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples" merited the honor. "Very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," Jagland averred.

How insightful Obama's secret admirer must have been to perceive this magnificence less than a fortnight into the President's four-year term. The condition Alfred Nobel set forth for the Peace Prize was that it should go to "the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses." Did President Obama really squeeze all of that into his first two weeks in office? Or did the Nobel Committee breach its own rules in order to select Obama? And if the answer to the latter question is in the affirmative, what has the President done *to date* to warrant the Peace Prize?

French news agency AFP reported on October 15 that the majority of the Nobel Committee initially had their wits about them and expressed the same incredulousness. AFP noted that the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG) had dug up some juicy information about the committee deliberations. The newspaper stated: "VG has spoken to a number of sources who confirmed the impression that a majority of the Nobel committee, at first, had not decided to give the peace prize to Barack Obama."

It is informative to see how the AFP article describes the majority opposed to and the minority in favor of choosing Obama. The initial "nays" came from Inger-Marie Ytterhorn, who represented Norway's right-wing, populist Progress Party; Kaci Kullmann Five, who was the Conservative Party representative; and Aagot Valle, representing the Socialist Left. The very strong "ayes" for Obama came from chairman Jagland and Sissel Roenbeck, both representatives of the Labour Party.



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Now it doesn't matter so much which Norwegian political party any particular Committee member is affiliated with; what matters is that the affiliation exists at all. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee members are appointed by Norway's Parliament, and while they do not sit in Parliament, they retain their status as party representatives.

This is significant because these political relationships make the Nobel Committee a de facto instrument of the Norwegian government. It is no less the government of Norway bestowing the prize than if the U.S. Congress formed a committee composed of ex-Congressmen or the President of the United States called together a panel of former Presidents. No one would claim that the hand-picked ex-Congressmen or former Presidents were not acting on behalf of the U.S. government.

Thus it is that the real sticking point arises. Not only has President Obama done nothing deserving of the Peace Prize, by accepting it he has done something patently unconstitutional.

It is true that other sitting Presidents have gotten away with accepting the Nobel Prize, but that doesn't make it any less wrong. Article I, Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution clearly states: "No person holding any office of profit or trust under them, shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, emolument, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince or foreign state." Suffice it to say that any breach of the Constitution, no matter how seemingly insignificant, eats away like rust at the chains binding those in power from doing mischief.

A prize worth \$1.4 million is certainly a "present," and a body beholden to the Norwegian Parliament surely counts as a "foreign state." If Obama had at least sought the consent of Congress to accept the prize, he could have been within constitutional bounds. That, of course, would not fit his vision of the presidency as being above congressional oversight.

How sad that President Obama could not muster the genuine humility to either turn it down or ask for "the consent of Congress." If Obama would seek to one day be worthy of a Nobel, then let him be noble enough to admit that it is not this day.

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