

Nobel Peace Prize goes to Jimmy Carter—the “friendly” face of US imperialism

Bill Vann

12 October 2002

It was highly appropriate for the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award its annual Peace Prize—named for the inventor of dynamite—to former US president Jimmy Carter. The consequences of actions initiated under his administration 25 years ago are today producing a veritable explosion of American militarism from Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf.

Having for years shamelessly lobbied for the prize, Carter now joins the ranks of three prior US statesmen who were honored by the committee in Norway as men of peace. The first was Theodore Roosevelt, who explicitly embraced the “white man’s burden” of American imperialism. Announcing that his policy was to “carry a big stick,” he repeatedly used military force to suppress the democratic aspirations of the peoples of Central America, the Caribbean and the Philippines.

The second was Woodrow Wilson, who continued these colonial interventions, led the US into World War I, and dispatched American troops to Russia to aid the counterrevolutionary White armies in their attempt to overthrow the workers’ state that emerged from the October, 1917 socialist revolution.

The third was Henry Kissinger, who now is unable to leave the US for fear of being dragged into courts in Latin America and Europe as a war criminal. His award was given in recognition of the Paris peace accord, extorted from the Vietnamese after the Christmas 1972 terror bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong.

Carter’s record during his four years in office places him squarely within the ranks of such well-known pacifists.

The committee’s citation singled out Carter’s role in negotiating the Camp David treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1978. Israel’s Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize that year. While the Nobel committee wanted to include Carter at that time, they were unable to because his nomination had been submitted too late.

The Camp David accord was not a framework for Middle East peace, but rather an instrument of rapprochement between a section of the Arab bourgeoisie on the one hand and Israel and US imperialism on the other, at the expense of the Palestinian people. The main “achievement” of this deal was to isolate the Palestine Liberation Organization and leave the central questions of the status of the Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and the rights of Palestinians unresolved to this day. Twenty-five years later, Israeli military occupation and raids in those territories continue, while the death toll among both Palestinians and Israelis has never been higher.

Carter, who served a single four-year term as the 39th president of the US from 1977 to 1981, has often been cast as a dedicated advocate of human rights by his supporters and an ineffectual and bungling appeaser by his Republican opponents. In reality, the Carter presidency, which coincided with a sharp intensification of the crisis of US and world capitalism, set the stage for both the eruption of US militarism and a ruthless government-corporate offensive against the working class at home.

A former naval officer and nuclear submarine expert, Carter entered politics as a state senator in Georgia and was later elected as the state’s governor. He was the first Democrat from the deep South to be elected president since the Civil War, and his nomination signaled a sharp turn to the right by the national Democratic Party.

Entering office after defeating Gerald Ford, whose pardon of Nixon had only deepened the atmosphere of political crisis and corruption that surrounded the White House, Carter made populist promises of economic reform while promising a foreign policy centered on the promotion of “human rights.”

Both of these declared shifts in policy proved largely rhetorical. On the international front, the Carter administration preached détente with the Soviet Union, while initiating an aggressive policy—which would be intensified under his successor, Ronald Reagan—aimed at undermining and rolling back the USSR.

The most infamous operation in this regard was the covert US support for Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas fighting against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. Washington poured money and arms into the country—ultimately spending about \$5 billion—to foment a war that devastated the country and claimed 1.5 million lives.

While the Carter and Reagan administrations portrayed their backing for the Afghan Mujaheddin as a response to the Soviet Union’s dispatch of troops across the border to back the secular government in Kabul, this has since been exposed as a lie. Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski admitted in a 1998 interview with a French newspaper that the CIA began the operation well before the Soviet invasion, with the aim of drawing the USSR into a “trap.”

“It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap ...” declared Brzezinski. “The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter. We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war.”

Asked whether he regretted US actions, given their effect on Afghanistan and the rise of an armed right-wing Islamic fundamentalist movement, Brzezinski replied: “What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?” Among those whom Washington armed and funded was Osama bin Laden.

Thus the Carter-Brzezinski provocation in Afghanistan set in motion a process of turmoil and destabilization that ultimately led to the terrorist attacks that took nearly 3,000 American lives on September 11, 2001.

Elsewhere, Carter’s professed dedication to human rights was allowed to influence foreign policy only to the extent that it did not conflict with US geopolitical interests and the profits of the major US corporations and banks. It was notably absent in relation to Iran, where Carter praised the Shah, a dictator installed by the CIA in a 1953 coup, for his “progressive administration,” even as Iranian security forces were massacring thousands of unarmed demonstrators. When US support proved unable to

rescue the Shah from revolution, the Carter administration unsuccessfully attempted to foment a military coup.

In response to the upheavals in the region, Carter announced in his January 1980 State of the Union Address a new US policy that came to be known as the Carter Doctrine. He warned: “An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” He went on to explain that this policy was necessitated by the “overwhelming dependence of Western nations on vital oil supplies from the Middle East.”

It is essentially a more aggressive version of this same doctrine—the US right to use military force to control Persian Gulf oil—that is now being implemented by the Bush administration in its preparations for an unprovoked war to conquer and occupy Iraq.

Carter first established the military means for carrying out this kind of aggression, founding the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) and reorganizing the US military for intervention in the Persian Gulf. By the time Reagan took office in 1981, this intervention force had already grown to include more than 200,000 troops.

The human rights approach found expression only in what were peripheral areas for US imperialist interests. Security assistance was cut off to the dictatorships in Ethiopia, Chile and Uruguay. In the latter two countries, ties with the US military and economic aid remained untouched. Moreover, the secretary of state announced that the military regime in South Korea and the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines would be exempted entirely from the policy on grounds of “national security.”

In Central America, the Carter administration came up with a unique method for limiting direct security assistance to right-wing dictatorships, while assuring that they remained armed to the teeth for the purpose of suppressing popular revolt. Israel was recruited to fill the gap, supplying Galil assault rifles and Uzi submachine guns to substitute for American-made M16s. Israeli military advisers were likewise dispatched to the region, while US aid to Israel rose dramatically.

The Carter administration attempted unsuccessfully to bring Nicaragua’s infamous National Guard to power following the overthrow of the dictator Somoza. Having failed in this attempt, it began the process of regrouping ex-guardsmen into a military force that, under Reagan, would become known as the “contras” and would wage a war of terror, claiming tens of thousands of lives.

The Carter administration steadily increased aid to the regime in El Salvador, where in 1980—Carter’s last year in the White House—the death toll reached an estimated 13,000, the vast majority peasants massacred by the army and police.

At home, Carter responded to a growing economic crisis with policies aimed at slashing social services and attacking the power of the working class. The blueprint for the Reagan administration’s smashing of the air traffic controllers’ union, PATCO, and replacing striking controllers with scabs was drawn up by the Carter administration. This action signaled a nationwide onslaught against the working class by the employers and the government.

Prior to Bush’s invocation of the Taft-Hartley law against the West Coast longshoremen earlier this week, Carter was the last president to use this strike-breaking legislation. He declared an emergency under Taft-Hartley in an unsuccessful attempt to force coal miners back to work and break their 1977-78 national strike.

The widening of social inequality in the US and internationally accelerated under the Carter administration, which tapped Chase Manhattan banker Paul Volcker to serve as chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board in 1979. Volcker announced that “a decline in real income” was necessary to fight inflation, and implemented a high interest

rate policy that saw the prime rate hit 20 percent. The result was a deep recession in which less profitable sections of industry failed and layoffs mounted. These policies set into motion what became a vast transfer of wealth from the working class to the financial aristocracy.

The economic crisis and the attacks on working people eroded the Democrats’ electoral support, allowing Ronald Reagan to defeat Carter and drive both foreign and domestic policy further along the rightward trajectory that has continued until this day.

Carter meanwhile, established his Atlanta-based Carter Center, which serves as a non-governmental instrument of US foreign policy, carrying out operations in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Cuba, North Korea, Central America and the Horn of Africa.

A regular mission of the former president has been election monitoring in the former colonial countries, to assure that they meet the “democratic” standards set by Washington. Given the suppression of the vote and the outright theft of the presidency by the Republican Party in the 2000 US election, Washington’s seal of approval in such questions has become more than a little tarnished.

The Nobel prize is a European institution, and the selection of Carter was bound up with the increasingly poisoned state of political relations between Europe and America. The judges made it clear that their choice was intended as a rebuke to the present occupant of the White House. As improbable as it may sound, George W. Bush was also a candidate for the award.

This year’s prize “can and must be interpreted as a criticism of the position of the administration currently sitting in the US towards Iraq,” Nobel committee chairman Gunnar Berge told reporters. “In a situation currently marked by threats of the use of power, Carter has stood by the principles that conflicts must as far as possible be resolved through mediation and international cooperation based on international law, respect for human rights and economic development,” the committee said in its politically pointed citation of the former American president.

In reality, the foundations for the criminal policies now being carried out by the Republican administration of Bush were laid by the Democratic President Jimmy Carter a quarter of a century ago.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact