Nobel Prize for Al Gore: “Old Europe” fires back at the Bush administration

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The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to former Vice President Al Gore is a political statement by the European bourgeoisie about the policies of the Bush administration and the politics of the United States. Rarely has there been such an open intervention by the European ruling elite in the internal politics of America.

The political significance of Gore’s selection is clear, given that he is still an active figure in American politics, widely mentioned as a potential presidential candidate, who has on occasions attacked both the foreign and domestic policies of the Bush administration. At the very least, the award can be taken as a signal from the Norwegian political establishment—from which the selection committee is chosen—that it hopes for a Democratic victory in the 2008 presidential election.

The chairman of the prize committee, Ole Danbolt Mjoes, denied the obvious rebuke to the Bush administration, declaring, “A peace prize is never a criticism of anything. A peace prize is a positive message and support to all those champions of peace in the world.”

Vice President Gore, however, is hardly to be identified with the cause of “peace.” One of only ten Senate Democrats who voted for the first US war against Iraq in 1990, he was second-in-command of an administration that dispatched US troops to Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, financed death squads in Colombia, bombed Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan, maintained an economic blockade of Iraq that caused the death of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children, and waged a devastating air war against Serbia.

The Nobel Peace Prize has little in common with the similar prizes awarded to leading scientists and literary figures, whose recipients are being honored for an entire career, or a signal achievement, usually decades old, that has stood the test of time. Because of the worldwide prestige and visibility given the Peace Prize, the choosing of its recipient has become a major political event, signaling those issues, events or countries that are of greatest concern to the European ruling elite.

The method of selection, laid down in the will of the billionaire inventor of dynamite, Alfred Nobel, ensures that the award will be a political decision reflecting a broad consensus in the European bourgeoisie. While the other Nobel prize winners are selected by committees of experts in the various fields, such as the Swedish Academy of Science, the recipient of the peace prize is picked by a committee chosen by the Norwegian parliament, its five members selected on the basis of party strength in that legislative body.

The five members of the committee that selected Gore include four former members of parliament, two of them former cabinet members, and the former president of the University of Tromso. Five political parties are represented, from the far right to the far left of the bourgeois political spectrum in Norway: Progress (ultra-right and anti-immigrant), Conservative, Christian Peoples Party (Christian Democratic), Labour (social democratic) and Socialist Left (Green and anti-European Union). All five parties have held government office as part of rival coalitions at one time or another in the past five years.

Two concerns seem evident in the selection of Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN organization, as the joint recipients of this year’s award: a determination to elevate the issue of climate change, and concern over signs of increasing political, social and economic instability in the United States.

In its award citation, the prize committee emphasized the political implications of climate change, declaring that global warming “may induce large-scale migration and lead to greater competition for the Earth’s resources. Such changes will place particularly heavy burdens on the world’s most vulnerable countries. There may be increased danger of violent conflicts and wars, within and between states.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted, in our analysis of the G-8 summit held in June (“Climate compromise masks mounting conflicts”), German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other European government leaders have begun to raise the issue of climate change for a combination of domestic, economic and foreign policy reasons.

At home, Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy in France and other right-wing politicians have made use of the issue to woo sections of the middle class away from social democratic and Green parties. They also aim to establish European predominance in the increasingly lucrative markets for alternative energy sources and fuel-efficient technology, and to decrease Europe’s dependence on outside energy suppliers, partially Russia and the Persian Gulf.

Climate change has also become a means to creating a common front of all the major European powers, overcoming the divisions that came to the surface over the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. France and Germany—derided as “old Europe” by then-US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld—publicly opposed the war, while Britain, Italy, Spain and many eastern European countries participated in it. At this year’s G-8 summit, the European powers were able to form a bloc on the danger of global warming that for the first time compelled the Bush administration to make at least verbal concessions, six years after Bush unilaterally repudiated the Kyoto Treaty on climate change.

If its purpose had been limited to highlighting the danger of climate change, however, there would have been no need for the Nobel prize committee to select Gore. Giving the Peace Prize to the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change would have been quite sufficient. The action would have been well within the traditional

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pattern for the award, which has been given to a series of UN agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Peacekeeping Forces, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In selecting Gore, the peace prize committee was taking direct aim at the Bush administration, for the third time in the past six years: in 2002 the peace prize went to former US President Jimmy Carter, an increasingly vocal critic of the Bush administration; in 2005 the award went to the International Atomic Energy Agency and its chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, then under fire from the Bush administration because he had criticized its fraudulent claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and refused to back a similar campaign against Iran.

The prize committee's citation declared that Gore's "strong commitment, reflected in political activity, lectures, films and books, has strengthened the struggle against climate change. He is probably the single individual who has done most to create greater worldwide understanding of the measures that need to be adopted."

It is true that Gore is widely identified with raising public concerns about the danger of global warming, in his books and in the lecture tour that became the subject of the documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth*, as well as in a series of environmentally themed rock concerts like this year's Live Earth day.

But for all his claims of a "planetary emergency," the measures which Gore proposes for dealing with the dangers of climate change fail to address the fundamental cause of environmental degradation: the unplanned and anarchic nature of the profit system. (See: "Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*: political posturing and the Democratic Party")

To deal seriously with the threat of global warming requires a rational and internationally coordinated scientific plan, including the provision of enormous resources for public transportation systems and alternative forms of energy production. Such worldwide planning would become possible only through a bold campaign of socialist measures, carried out on an international scale, including the transformation of the energy and utility companies into publicly owned entities operated under democratic control.

Gore, of course, is a capitalist politician, and has grown wealthy from stockholdings in Apple, Google and other high-tech giants. He is incapable, by ideology and by social interest, of offering a serious program to deal with climate change.

Moreover, Gore has talked a better game than he has played. When in office, as vice president for eight years, he did little to advance his avowed environmental concerns. The Kyoto Treaty, which Gore played a significant role in drafting, was a largely symbolic exercise, and the Clinton administration never submitted it for ratification by the Senate because of intense opposition by American business interests.

There has been considerable media speculation, in the wake of Nobel prize announcement, that Gore may seek to leverage the award by entering the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination. Dozens of "draft Gore" committees have sprung up and been given wide media publicity, although Gore himself and his closest aides have disavowed any immediate interest in such a race.

It is doubtful that the Nobel prize committee aimed to inject Gore into the presidential campaign in such a direct and obvious fashion. However, behind the award is a widespread concern in ruling circles of Europe that the crisis in the United States is developing far more rapidly than the US political establishment anticipates.

Gore is being held in waiting, in the event that a political radicalization erupts, sparked by financial crises, rising social tensions, the ongoing bloodbath in Iraq or some new military adventure by the Bush-Cheney administration, that threatens to escape the boundaries of the established two-party system in the US.

This danger is exacerbated by the extreme telescoping of the US presidential election process. Both Democratic and Republican nominees are likely to be selected by mid-February, given the accelerated primary schedule in which nearly half of all delegates will be chosen by February 5 for nominating conventions that do not take place until late August.

The Democrats and Republicans could well have settled on pro-war candidates—Hillary Clinton for the Democrats, any of the leading Republicans—leaving mass antiwar sentiment disenfranchised and millions of people looking for an alternative. Under such circumstances, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and critic of the Iraq war could well play the role of safety valve for bourgeois politics.

Gore has already demonstrated his fundamental commitment to the stability of bourgeois institutions and bourgeois rule, through his conduct during the 2000 election crisis in Florida. Despite winning the popular vote, Gore capitulated to the right-wing Republican hijacking of Florida's electoral votes, ratified by the intervention of a politically motivated 5-4 majority of the US Supreme Court.

Gore and the Democrats refused to conduct any serious struggle against the trampling on democracy in Florida because they were far more alarmed by the possible consequences of a popular mobilization against the right-wing electoral coup than they were by the coup itself, which placed Bush in the White House. They thus share political responsibility for all the crimes committed by Bush, Cheney & Co. since the Bush administration was inaugurated on January 20, 2001.

There is ample history to suggest that the Nobel prize committee took note of Gore's conduct in the 2000 crisis in its internal deliberations. From the 1970s through the 1990s, the Peace Prize was frequently awarded to political dissidents whom the prize committee hoped to build up as alternatives to popular revolutionary movements against corrupt and crisis-stricken regimes. These included figures such as Lech Walesa of Poland, Desmond Tutu in South Africa, Adolfo Esquivel in Argentina, Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, Rigoberta Menchu in Guatemala, and Jose Ramos-Horta in East Timor.

The selection of Al Gore for the Nobel Peace Prize suggests that the European bourgeoisie sees the danger of a mass upheaval from below taking place in the United States, the center of world capitalism.

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