

The European Union's Nobel Peace Prize

Peter Schwarz
15 October 2012

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union is motivated by purely political considerations. It is aimed at providing support to all those who, in the name of defending the EU, are carrying out the most brutal attacks against working people since the 1930s.

The five-member Nobel committee of the Norwegian Parliament justified its selection by citing the “successful struggle of the EU for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights.” The committee recalled “the terrible suffering in World War II”, as well as the three wars fought between Germany and France over a period of 70 years, and declared, “Today a war between France and Germany is unthinkable.”

This entire line of argumentation turns reality upside down. Since the Maastricht Treaty, twenty years ago, which laid the basis for the European Union, the EU or its leading powers have been involved in every major imperialist war and crime—including the first Iraq war, the bombing of Yugoslavia, the war in Afghanistan, the second Iraq war, and more recently the war against Libya and the preparation of wars against Syria and Iran.

As for the reference to “unthinkable” wars within Europe, the unrelenting austerity measures imposed by the EU reignite all the social and national tensions that transformed the continent from 1914 to 1945 into the battlefield of two world wars and the site of the worst crimes committed in history.

Far from promoting “democracy and human rights,” the EU is the main driving force for mounting social inequality, national tensions and authoritarian forms of rule across the continent. It embodies the dictatorship of finance capital over all aspects of economic and social life, imposing social cuts against the will of the vast majority of the electorate and—as took place in Italy and Greece—installing technocrats to replace

elected governments when the latter were no longer able to impose EU diktats over popular resistance. The EU's ruthless persecution of refugees and immigrants has, moreover, strengthened extreme right-wing organizations.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU is an affront to millions of European workers seeking to defend their social and democratic rights against the diktats from Brussels. The threat bound up with the decision of the Nobel committee is clear: “If you oppose the policies laid down by the EU and jeopardize its future, Europe will once again be plunged into war and dictatorship.”

The very opposite is the truth. Europe can be united and its population enabled to live together in peace and prosperity only when the power of the financial markets is broken and social inequality overcome. This requires the unification and mobilization of the working class against the European Union and its replacement by the United Socialist States of Europe.

For countless European workers and young people, the European Union has become synonymous with unemployment, welfare cuts and bureaucratic arrogance. They react to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize with disgust and contempt.

All the more enthusiastic is the reaction of the media and the entire spectrum of official political parties. Rarely has such an outlandish decision been met with such unanimous—and hypocritical—praise.

Herman von Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso, the two leading figures of the EU, described the prize as the “highest recognition for the unique effort to overcome war and division, to jointly create a continent based on peace and prosperity.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the driving force of EU austerity measures, assessed the prize as confirmation that the euro is more “than just a currency, because, in the last resort, it is about the idea of Europe as a community of

values and peace.”

The leaders of the Greens in the German parliament, Renate Künast and Jürgen Trittin, commented, “The most successful peace project in the history of the European continent has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.” Gabi Zimmer, chairperson of the European Left in the European Parliament, expressed joy over an award that “commemorates the positive values of the EU.”

This is not the first time the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded for clearly political purposes. In fact, it is difficult to find a case in the 111-year history of the award when this was not the case. Endowed by Alfred Nobel, the man who invented dynamite and multiplied the destructive power of bombs, mines and guns—making a fortune in the process—the prize has always been characterized by hypocrisy.

The recipients include political reactionaries such as Henry Kissinger (1973), Menachem Begin (1978) and FW de Klerk (1993), as well as four American presidents—Theodore Roosevelt (1906), Woodrow Wilson (1919), Jimmy Carter (2002) and Barack Obama (2009).

The awarding of the prize to Obama three years ago was particularly bizarre. He had been in office for just nine months and had seamlessly continued the war-mongering policies of his predecessor. Comments at the time described the prize as a “symbolic boost” and “encouragement” for Obama to depart from the course of George W. Bush. In reality, the committee presented Obama with a *carte blanche*. It signaled that the commander in chief of the most powerful military machine in the world had the support of liberal European public opinion to do what he liked.

This has since been confirmed. Obama has continued the policies of his predecessor. Guantanamo remains open. The president uses drones to assassinate opponents of US imperialism. He has intensified the war in Afghanistan, authored a new war against Libya, and is preparing military intervention in Syria and war against Iran—with the support of virtually all of those who criticised the war policies of the Bush administration.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU and the enthusiastic reaction of the media and erstwhile liberal and left layers of the middle class demonstrates the extent of the social and political polarization in

Europe. As the economic crisis deepens and unemployment, poverty and social inequality continue to grow, these layers are lining up behind the EU and other bastions of reaction precisely as growing numbers of working people are coming into conflict with these institutions. This contradiction will inevitably explode in the form of massive class struggles.

Peter Schwarz



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact