

Save the Nobel Peace Prize from Itself

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Theme: [History](#)

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[War Is a Crime](#)

On October 11, we'll learn whether the Norwegian Nobel Committee is interested in reviving the Nobel Peace Prize or putting another nail in its coffin.

Alfred Nobel's vision for the Nobel Peace Prize created in his will was a good one and, one might have thought, a legally binding one as well.

The peace prize is not supposed to be awarded to proponents of war, such as Barack Obama or the European Union.

It is not supposed to be awarded to good humanitarians whose work has little or nothing to do with peace, such as most other recent [recipients](#). As with the Carnegie Endowment for Peace which works for almost anything but, in violation of its creator's will, and as with many a "peace and justice" group focused on all sorts of good causes that aren't the elimination of militarism, the Nobel has become a "peace" prize, rather than a peace prize.

The peace prize was not supposed to be given even to war reformers or war civilizers. The peace prize [is for](#): "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." The prize is not a lifetime award, but goes, along with the other Nobel prizes, "to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind."

Nobel laureates are not even asked whether they support the abolition of standing armies. Few have taken the approach of Barack Obama, who praised wars and militarism in his acceptance speech, but many others would almost certainly have to respond in the negative; they do not support and have not worked for the abolition of standing armies. Nor do they plan to put the prize money to work for that goal.

Norwegian author and lawyer Fredrik Heffermehl has for years now been leading an effort to enforce Alfred Nobel's will. "Letters Nobel wrote confirm," says Heffermehl, "that he established his prize to fulfill a promise to [Bertha von Suttner](#)," a promise to create a prize to fund work toward war abolition. In March 2012 the Swedish Foundations Authority ordered the Nobel Foundation to examine the will and ensure compliance. When the next award was given to the European Union in blatant violation of the will, former recipients — including Adolfo Esquivel, Mairead Maguire, and Desmond Tutu — protested. The Nobel Foundation has defied the order to comply with the will and applied for a permanent exception from such oversight.

This year there are 259 nominees, 50 of which are organizations. (Even Heffermehl does not object to the practice of giving the prize meant for a "person" to an organization.) The

list of nominees is kept secret, but some [are known](#). In Heffermehl's view, none of the favorites for this year's prize legally qualifies. That includes Malala Yousafzai, whose work for education certainly deserves a prize, just not this one. And it includes Denis Mukwege, whose work to aid victims of sexual violence should be honored, just not with the prize intended for those working to abolish armies. Civil rights in Russia, freedom of the press in Burma, and many other great causes could end up being awarded with a prize for opposition to war next week.

The name [Steve Pinker](#) has been mentioned along with the proposal that he be given the peace prize as reward for having written a [grossly misleading and deceptive](#) book falsely arguing that war is going away on its own. That would at least be a new twist on the abuse and degradation of this prize, although with Bill Clinton on the nominees list the options for truly disgusting outcomes are not exactly limited.

Heffermehl has found [some names](#) on the list that do actually qualify. They include American professor Richard Falk, Norwegian ambassador Gunnar Garbo, American David Krieger of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, the former director general of UNESCO Federico Mayor of Spain, Swedish peace scientist and organizer Jan Oberg, and American professor of peace education Betty Reardon. "These clearly are," says Heffermehl, "the kind of 'champions of peace' described in Nobel's will, working for global disarmament based on global law." I would include Gene Sharp, from among the list of nominees, as someone who probably qualifies, although there are certainly arguments against it. Among qualified organizations nominated for 2013, in Heffermehl's view, are the International Peace Bureau, the Transnational Foundation, UNESCO, and the Womens' International League for Peace and Freedom.

Other individuals and organizations on the list, Heffermehl thinks, are "dedicated peacemakers or have courageously exposed the dangers of militarism, but they may not pursue the vision of general and complete disarmament that Nobel saw as essential for world peace." These include Norwegian Steinar Bryn, Americans Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and Edward Snowden (the latter not nominated by the 2013 deadline), Israeli Mordechai Vanunu, and Abolition 2000.

Many of us have urged [that Manning be given the prize](#), arguing with Norman Solomon that "the Nobel Peace Prize needs Bradley Manning more than Bradley Manning needs the Nobel Peace Prize." There are, however, many options for the Norwegian Nobel Committee to begin to redeem itself, and many options for its continued desecration of a noble ideal.

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