

THE NOBEL PRIZE

Award ceremony speech

Presentation Speech by Gunnar Berge of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Oslo, December 10, 2002.

Translation of the Norwegian text.

Your Majesties, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, and – not least – this year's Laureate, Jimmy Carter:

In one of his volumes, the Norwegian poet Kolbein Falkeid writes:

Do not hang splendid
moments up on the walls
in your thoughts
and gild them
with your longing.
Drive your crowbar
hard under scarred
working days
and force them up.
One by one.
That is why
life has you
on its muster roll.

This year's Laureate Jimmy Carter is most decidedly on life's muster roll. He is one of the most deserving and least controversial Laureates for a long

time. To quote from the Nobel Committee's reasons for awarding Carter this year's Peace Prize:

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2002 to Jimmy Carter, for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development."

That long sentence reflects the fact that this year's Laureate has contributed in practically all the areas that have figured most prominently through the one hundred and one years of Peace Prize history. He was the politician who during his presidency attempted to bring about a more peaceful world. He was, and continues to be, the mediator who seeks peaceful solutions to international conflicts. He was, and is, engaged in disarmament and arms control. He has shown, and still shows, an outstanding commitment to democracy and human rights. His humanitarian and social activities have been, and are still, far-reaching.

Not all his efforts have been equally successful. But, as Carter himself has said, and taken as his motto: "The worst thing that you can do is not to try." Few people, if any, have tried harder. This year's Laureate does the opposite of what his countryman Mark Twain once wrote about forgetting where you bury the peace-pipe, but not where the battle-axe is. Carter never mislays the peace-pipe.

The Nobel Committee has not very often honoured mediators. It is the parties to a conflict that attract attention. That was the case at Camp David in September 1978. But a mediator has rarely played a more important part than on precisely that occasion. Through thirteen days, and as many nights, Carter showed that a mediator could make a decisive contribution to the creation of peace between Egypt and Israel. But Carter had broader aims than peace between those two countries: he wanted peace in the whole Middle East. He was the first American President to favour giving the Palestinians their own "homeland". He emphasised that the Israelis had to stop building new settlements on the West Bank. If only the parties had listened to both pieces of advice!

Jimmy Carter should of course have been awarded the Peace Prize a long time ago. It is no secret today that the Norwegian Nobel Committee wished to give him the Prize in 1978, together with Anwar Sadat and Menachim Begin. A mere formality prevented Carter from receiving his well-earned Peace Prize at that time: he had not been nominated by the 1 February deadline. And no member of the Committee nominated him at the Committee's first meeting. They could of course not have known in

February what was to happen at Camp David in September. In September, the Committee wanted to add Carter's name to the list, but the statutes of the Nobel Foundation made that impossible.

So Carter seemed to have missed his chance. The Committee could not go on to award also the following year's Peace Prize to the efforts to achieve a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. No one could have blamed Carter if he had felt that this was unfair. Every year since then, there have been speculations about when Carter would receive the Peace Prize. And every year he has been obliged to comment on awards given to others. This he has always done with the same generosity, though once, in a very mild outburst, he did say:

"I'd be delighted, not to mention surprised, if just once before I die nobody would suggest that what I'm really trying to do with these years – my hidden agenda – is to win the Nobel Peace Prize."

It became increasingly obvious that the by-passing of Carter had been one of the real sins of omission in Peace Prize history. This year we can finally put all that behind us.

Jimmy Carter only served one term as President of the United States. In a country where such importance is attached to outward success, that has cast a shadow. Carter's principal concern was to do what he felt was right, even when it was not the smartest political step to take.

Our historical perspective enables us to see so much more clearly those features of Carter's presidency that were forward-looking. We can see them in the Middle East. We can see them in Carter's work for disarmament and arms control.

As President, he admittedly launched a number of controversial weapons programs, but that was only after he had failed to obtain Soviet agreement to radical disarmament proposals. Carter was convinced that the weapon stockpiles held by the superpowers were far too big. His so-called "deep cut" proposal in 1977 may not have been very realistic, given the deep-rooted scepticism of Brezhnev and the Kremlin towards any sweeping reductions. But it pointed forward, to the kind of real disarmament agreements entered into by his successors. Carter worked hard to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, even when this created difficulties in relation to close allies.

The mediator in Carter had already emerged when he was Governor of

Georgia. He intervened in a number of heated racial conflicts, to prevent violence and instead find solutions that both parties could live with. The peace between Egypt and Israel was the great triumph of his presidency. But he also righted an old injustice by returning the Panama Canal to Panama.

Since the end of his presidential term, Carter's mediation efforts have been innumerable. The most successful one was probably in Haiti in 1994. In the last few years, Carter has given increasing emphasis to creating a broader foundation for mediation through the International Negotiation Network (INN) – a network which includes several Peace Prize Laureates.

The fight for human rights is probably the most frequently recurring theme in Carter's lifework, from his term as Governor of Georgia, via his presidency, and on to his many active years as an ex-president. When Carter was elected President, the position of the United States had been weakened by its war in Vietnam and the support it had given to various dictatorships. Carter met the situation by going back to the heritage from Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt: the USA's strongest weapons are the ideals the country has stood for in its finest hours.

Many people regarded Carter's campaign for human rights as naive idealism and interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Today we can see more clearly how important those efforts were in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Of course the issue of human rights was also a weapon in the power struggle with the Soviet Union. But Carter's work for human rights in Latin America and in southern Africa showed how much more was involved.

Carter's activities as ex-president testify to the genuineness of his commitment to human rights. Carter and his staff at the Carter Center in Atlanta, which celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year, have served as election observers at three dozen elections in twenty countries. The Centre has built up routines that have had and are still having a major influence on such work all over the world.

The same can be said of Carter's election reports. In 1989 his report that the elections in Panama had not been lawfully conducted contributed to the withdrawal of all regional support for President Noriega and ultimately to his removal. In 1990, Carter persuaded President Ortega to acknowledge his election defeat in Nicaragua. Few could be better placed than Carter to explain with conviction that an election defeat does not necessarily put an end to political activity. Only a few hours after digesting the news that he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2002, Carter was off on a new

election assignment – this time to Jamaica.

As if mediation, human rights, and disarmament were not enough, the Carter Center has in cooperation with other organizations headed a number of important health campaigns. So far the best results have been achieved in the fight against guinea worm infection. When the campaign began in 1986, over 3.2 million people in nineteen different Asian and African countries were afflicted with this parasitic disease. Today the number of cases has been reduced by over 95 per cent. Most of the remaining cases are to be found in civil-war-ridden Sudan. Having overcome smallpox, the world is now on the verge of exterminating another major epidemic disease.

The Carter Center also reports considerable progress in the fight against river blindness in Africa and Latin America. More than 15 million vaccinations have been carried out. The aim is to eliminate the disease on both continents by 2007.

A third program is more geared to development. Through *Global 2000*, the Carter Center is seeking to improve living conditions in a score of poor African countries. It uses a wide range of instruments, from reforestation and health initiatives to the introduction of new varieties of grain. In the latter field, the Center has joined forces with another Peace Prize Laureate, Norman Borlaug. Although there appears to be a long way to go, there is hope that the “green revolution” will produce the same good results in Africa as in Asia and Latin America.

One of the basic principles of the Carter Center is that “people can improve their lives when provided with the necessary skills, knowledge, and access to resources”. This applies not only at the international level, but also in the highest degree also at home in the United States. Every year we see pictures of Jimmy and Rosalynn in a slum somewhere or other, busy building housing for and together with the poor. While there must have been good opportunities for an ex-president to make money for himself, Carter has instead through Habitat for Humanity and the Atlanta Project wielded hammer and saw for the benefit of others. As the Norwegian poet Arnulf Øverland says in his poem “Domestic Decalogue”, “to make someone else happy is the only happiness”.

Rosalynn is always at Jimmy’s side. It is hard to recall any other American presidential couple who have stood together to the same extent in practically every connection. This is how Carter himself put it, as long ago as in 1975, in the book *Why Not the Best?*: “When WE (emphasised here) decided to enter politics, Rosalynn helped me from every standpoint. We

have been full partners in every major decision since we first married.”

Jimmy Carter has always preferred to look ahead. Not that he need be ashamed to look back. There is much in his four years in the White House that he can remember with pride. But he is always setting himself new targets. He has been the despair of historians, also at the Nobel Institute, who have tried to get him to talk about his presidency. He would rather move on; there is so much to do. Jimmy Carter sees this as his duty as a Christian. Even when he was President, he held Sunday school classes – and he still does. His deep faith goes hand in hand with an exceptional degree of religious tolerance.

Carter’s work on so many fronts has been marked by the finest form of Christian optimism. He has often told his Sunday school in Plains that “We’ll never know whether something new and wonderful is possible unless we try. Let’s scratch our heads, stretch our minds, be adventurous! Serve God with boldness, and who knows what wonders the Lord may work?”

In the last paragraph of the reasons it gave for awarding this year’s Peace Prize to Jimmy Carter, the Norwegian Nobel Committee mentioned “a situation marked by threats of the use of power”, and emphasised that “conflicts must as far as possible be resolved through negotiation and international co-operation based on international law, respect for human rights, and economic development.” These are principles which Carter has stood for, ever more firmly. These are the principles which the Norwegian Nobel Committee hopes that the international community will take as its guidelines in the difficult conflicts the world is facing today and will face in the years to come.

Most of us become more conservative as we grow older. With Jimmy Carter the opposite seems to be the case. In this respect he is an atypical pensioner, growing with the years more and more radical and critical of society. His criticism of those in power in his own country and abroad has grown sharper. One does not have to agree with everything he says in order to admire his involvement.

Jimmy Carter has evidently taken the advice of his favourite poet, Dylan Thomas:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at the close of day.

Jimmy Carter will probably not go down in American history as the most effective President. But he is certainly the best ex-president the country ever had. And, most importantly for us: he is a most worthy recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Jimmy Carter stands out very clearly on the muster roll of life!

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