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THE INDEPENDENT

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Nobel Peace Prizes 'are being awarded illegally'

By Hugh O'Shaughnessy

Norwegian author claims the committee behind the coveted award routinely violates the terms of Alfred Nobel's will

Can we have our Nobel Peace Prize back, please? We got most of our decisions wrong. We should have laid much more emphasis on abolishing the military and outlawing wars, but we didn't. Such is the message about to go out to the more undeserving winners of one of the world's most coveted awards.

More than half the Nobel Peace Prizes awarded since 1946 have been awarded illegally, says Fredrik Heffermehl, a Norwegian lawyer and peace activist, because they do not follow the expressed will of the millionaire inventor of dynamite. He says all but one of 10 prizes awarded since 1999 are illegitimate under Norwegian and Swedish law.

Mr Heffermehl's verdict, which caused controversy when it was set out in his book *Nobels Vilje* (Nobel's Will) published in Norwegian in 2008, is likely to stir up passionate discussion next month when Greenwood Press publishes *Picking Up the Peaces: Why the Nobel Peace Prize Violates Alfred Nobel's Will and How to Fix It*.

Mr Heffermehl's book emphasises that Nobel's will concentrated on rewarding the struggle to end wars through an international order based on law and abolition of military forces. Few of the recent winners can be seen to have engaged in that struggle. Among those awards he names as illegitimate are: Mother Teresa (1979); Lech Walesa (1983); Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin (1994); Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi (2003); Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai (2004); and Al Gore (2007).

The will, dated 27 November 1895, disbursed large sums to various relatives, friends and servants before leaving the bulk of the estate to establishing the awards that bear his name. The relevant sentence setting out the terms of what he called a prize for the "champions of peace" is: "One part to 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."

Bruce Kent, a member of the Movement for the Abolition of War, said: "Nobel's Will is a revelation. It is quite clear that over many years the Nobel prize committee has frequently made the award on the basis of what it would have liked Nobel to intend, not on what he clearly did intend. If the executors of any ordinary will did this they would either be sued or prosecuted."

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