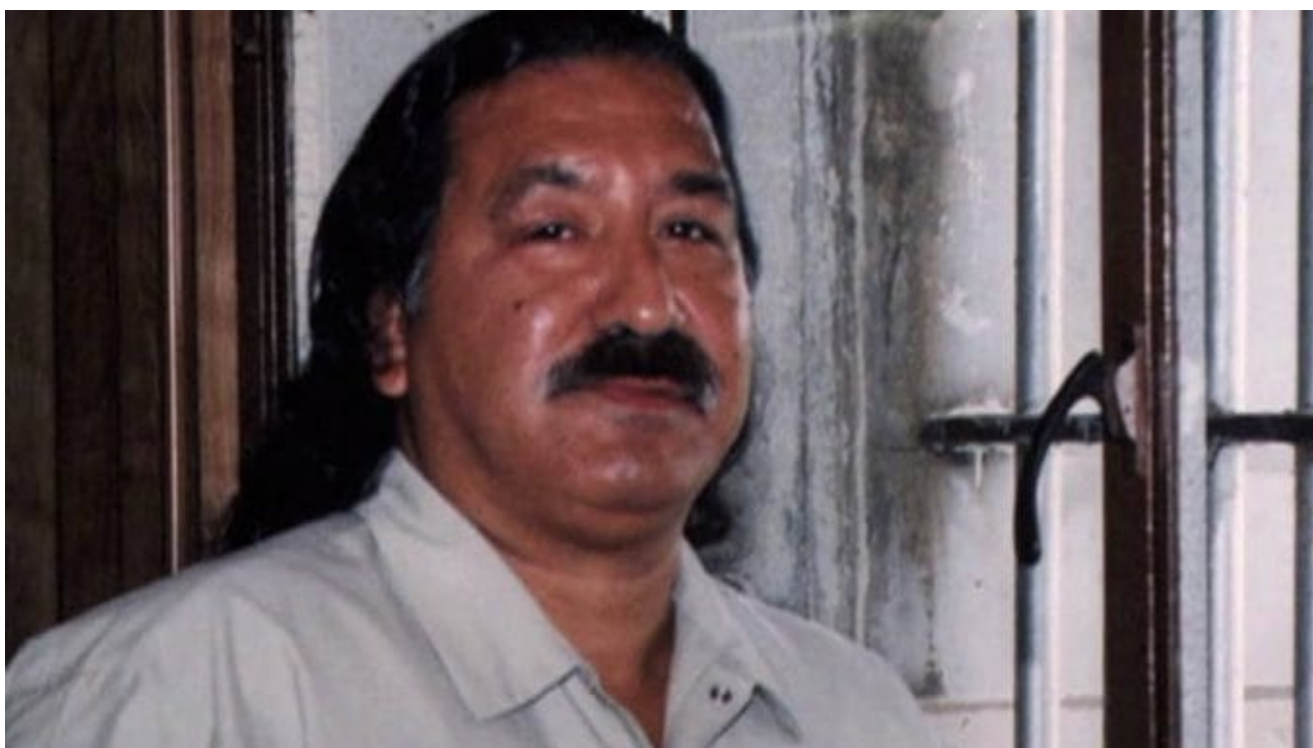


Political prisoner profile: Leonard Peltier

written by Mary Lou Finley
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Leonard Peltier

On Feb. 6, 2019, Indigenous political prisoner Leonard Peltier will mark the beginning of his 44th year in prison. Now 74, Peltier is Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) and

Lakota from the Turtle Mountain Reservation and was framed up for the 1975 shooting of two FBI agents at Pine Ridge Reservation as part of the FBI's Cointelpro actions to destroy the American Indian Movement.

Peltier was once the most famous U.S. political prisoner, with support from millions of people in the Soviet Union, South Africa, Ireland and elsewhere. Around the world, his supporters demanded that the courts grant him a new trial and petitioned president after president to grant him clemency. Now, Peltier's case is not as well known as it should be, largely because the U.S. mainstream media very rarely cover any political prisoners in a country that pretends it does not have any. It's time to change that!

FBI's Cointelpro targeted AIM warriors

In the early 1970s, a corrupt tribal chairman named Dick Wilson created a period of political violence on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Dick Wilson hired groups of vigilantes, called GOONs (Guardians Of the Oglala Nation), who initiated what became known as the Reign of Terror on the reservation. Known traditional opponents of Wilson were stopped while driving on the reservation, pulled out of their cars or trucks and severely beaten.

Finally, the traditional people asked AIM to provide protection for the elders, women and children, and AIM occupied Wounded Knee in 1973 for 71 days, garnering worldwide solidarity and participation from many organizations and Indigenous nations.

Later, Leonard Peltier was among the AIM leaders who set up camps near family compounds to protect the people, and he and others were at the Jumping Bull compound in 1975. On June 26, two FBI agents in separate unmarked cars chased what they described as a red pickup truck onto the Jumping Bull compound with a highly suspect warrant for a young Lakota man accused of stealing an expensive pair

of cowboy boots (not exactly on the level of a major crime). They did this even though they had been warned by tribal police not to enter the reservation.

No one knows how a shootout between the FBI agents and the occupants of the compound started, but Leonard and other campers heard gunshots being fired and went running up to protect the elders and children living on the compound. As the shooting went on, the two FBI agents were wounded, radioed for backup and then were killed. Unexplained to this day is what hundreds of federal law officials were doing in the vicinity of this isolated community, but within a short while they had the compound surrounded. One Indigenous defender, Joseph Stuntz, was killed by a federal sniper. His murder was never investigated, and no one was ever charged in his death. Leonard Peltier and the other AIM campers managed to escape from the encircled compound and fled the area.

It would later be revealed that Dick Wilson at that time signed over some of the sacred Black Hills area to the U.S. government for toxic uranium mining, mining that has created serious health issues on Pine Ridge.

Eventually Bob Robideau, Leonard Peltier and Dino Butler were charged with the murder of the two FBI agents. Robideau and Butler were initially tried by a federal jury in Iowa and acquitted on the grounds of self-defense, given the climate of fear on the Pine Ridge Reservation and that there was nothing to tie them to the shooting of the two agents.

Leonard had fled to Canada, fearing he would not receive a fair trial. He was arrested in Canada in February of 1976 and extradited to the U.S. based on false affidavits. Eventually, the truth came out that the Myrtle Poor Bear affidavit used by the U.S. was false, since Poor Bear had never met Leonard and had not been present on the day of the shootout. The FBI threatened that they would kill and mutilate her young daughter if she did not sign.

Peltier's trial was moved to North Dakota, where a conservative judge refused to allow the case for self-defense and most of the evidence of the Reign of Terror that had existed on the reservation. The FBI also lied about a ballistics test, claiming that it tied Leonard to the weapon used to kill the two agents. In fact, the ballistics test said that the weapon in question had been too badly damaged in a car fire to be able to be tested. Over 140,000 pages of FBI evidence were withheld from Peltier's defense lawyers. Given the judicial and FBI misconduct and outright lies, Leonard was found guilty and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

During Leonard's ongoing appeals, the prosecuting attorney admitted that the government had no idea who had actually shot and killed the two agents, but that Leonard was guilty because he was present at the shootout, even though the government admitted that there were over 40 other Indigenous people present at the time.

Past time to free Leonard Peltier

The federal courts have continually denied Leonard's appeals for a new trial while glossing over the misconduct and lying that occurred. The federal parole board has continuously denied parole to Leonard because he hasn't admitted guilt, and his appeals for clemency have been continuously ignored. In 2000, when President Clinton was considering a pardon for Peltier, FBI agents illegally marched in Washington in protest. Clinton left office without signing the request after previously stating that this case deserved serious definitive consideration, and President Obama and other presidents have also denied freedom to Peltier.

Leonard Peltier is now 74, in failing health with diabetes, high blood pressure and other serious health problems. It's way past time for Leonard to walk free and be able to spend his remaining days with his family.

Leonard is imprisoned in Florida, thousands of miles from his Indigenous homelands.

He is an internationally noted artist and humanitarian organizer. You can write to him: Leonard Peltier, #89637-132, USP Coleman I, P.O. Box 1033, Coleman, FL 33521

Updates on Leonard's case can be found at the website of the International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee: www.whoisleonardpeltier.info There, you will find more information about his case and about what supporters are being asked to do. Please help to spread the word about Leonard Peltier!

Free Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu-Jamal, the remaining members of the Move 9 and all political prisoners!

