

Rally calls for retrial of jailed Native American

By Rene DeCair
Emerald Associate Editor

A quiet crowd gathered at the Federal Building Wednesday to show support for a Native American man they say was wrongly convicted of killing two FBI agents more than 14 years ago.

About 50 people met at noon to publicly voice concerns that Leonard Peltier — a man they consider a political prisoner — did not receive a fair trial for a shoot-out that took place on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in the summer of 1975.

"It really hurts my soul, my spirit to think of his imprisonment," said Theresa Black Owl, a member of the Lokota Tribe in the Midwest, because she said he cannot "touch the earth."

"We really would like to see him free," she said, adding that because Native Americans have always been subjected to racism, people find it hard to empathize with their cause.

"I feel a great lack of support from the American people," she said.

Peltier, 47, received an evidentiary hearing Wednesday in Bismarck, N.D., to determine whether the case warrants a new trial. Between speeches and songs the crowd sat in silence and listened to a reading of a press release on the trial, hoping to receive word that he will be retried.

At the time of the rally, however, no

decision had been reached.

Peltier has become a symbol for Native Americans, and his case has gained much publicity in recent years. The television show "60 Minutes" recently aired a report about him and director Oliver Stone is reportedly making a movie about the case.

Moreover, U. S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, has become involved in the case, and is pushing to get President George Bush to pardon Peltier on the grounds that Peltier has served enough prison time for a crime that it appears he did not commit.

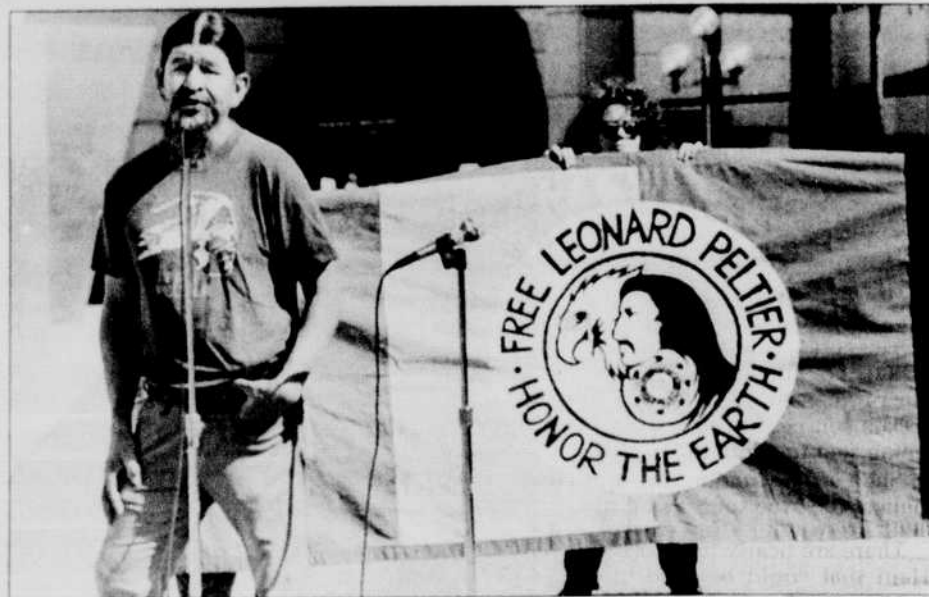
Additionally, Peltier supporters contend that his conviction was politically motivated because he was part of the American Indian Movement, which the FBI considered to be a radical, dangerous group at the time.

But Ed Little Crow, a Lokota Tribe and AIM member, said the U.S. government wrongly labeled AIM as a government-sabotaging group.

"It has always been a spiritual movement," he said, but the government has always called them militants.

A Peltier supporter in the crowd, David Rubin, said he first heard of the case after taking a class on the FBI at the University of Colorado. Rubin equated Peltier with former political prisoner Nelson Mandela.

"He's as important a political prisoner being held by our government as Nel-



Ed Little Crow speaks Wednesday at a rally at the Federal Building. The crowd quietly protested the jailing of a Native American man they believe was convicted of a crime he did not commit.

son Mandela was being held by the South African government," he said.

While Peltier's case may not be as famous as Mandela's, many at the rally were quick to draw comparisons.

Black Owl said a lot of ignorance exists in America about the number of political prisoners the country has. Barbara Turrill said American people are unaware of the plight of Native Americans.

"The level of oppression that has followed these people ... is definitely silenced in the media," Turrill said.

Though the public has been fairly unsupportive, they see things changing and expect Peltier to eventually be freed, they said.

"A lot of us are real positive that he is going to be free because our medicine elders have said so," Black Owl said.

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Photographer sheds light on plight of occupied Tibet

By Dustin Welch
Emerald Contributor

"Free Tibet" was clearly the message of Wednesday night's presentation on the country by an outdoor adventurer and photographer.

Galen Rowell has been to Tibet five times and has written a book on the country — which has been occupied by China for more than 30 years — with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader.

Rowell's pictures, shown to a packed EMU Ballroom, captured the rugged beauty of the Tibetan landscape, the strength of an oppressed people and the endangered wildlife. One slide showed the diversity of the Tibetan scenery with a snow-capped mountain, a rolling green plain and mountain stream.

Pictures of Tibetan monasteries high in the Himalayas and the smile of a young hopeful Buddhist monk were part of Rowell's presentation.

During the Chinese occupation, the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and Nobel Peace Prize-winner, has lived in exile in India.

Since the Chinese began occupying Tibet in 1959, almost 1.2 million Tibetans have died, 6,500 monasteries destroyed and \$54 billion worth of trees cut, Rowell said. He added that nuclear testing and dumping has taken place in Tibet during the Chinese occupation.

Despite these injustices "the Tibetan people have a lot of

hope and a positive attitude," Rowell said.

Rowell said the Chinese outnumber the native Tibetans by more than a million, and that the Chinese have a higher standard of living in a segregated society. He said Chinese aims in Tibet have been to destroy the native culture and religion by harassing Buddhist monks, preventing public prayers and forms of genocide such as sterilizing Tibetan women.

Possibly Rowell's most significant achievement for the Tibetan cause is his book *My Tibet*. The book contains pictures of Tibet that are supposed to convey hope for the country's freedom, coupled with quotes from the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama's royalties for the book go to the Tibetan cause and copies of the book were given to all the members of the U.S. Senate before they passed a Tibetan aid bill.

The bill, HR 145, has yet to be passed by Congress, Rowell said.

When the Chinese occupied Tibet the Dalai Lama told his people not to retaliate and to find and work with the good in the Chinese government.

Rowell quoted the Dalai Lama from *My Tibet* in his speech. "If basic human nature were aggressive, we would have gotten animal claws and huge teeth - but ours are very short, very pretty and very weak! So that means we are not well equipped to be aggressive beings ... So I think the basic nature of the human being should be gentle."

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