

Peltier Response Letters

Dear Editor of *Smoke Signals*,

We are writing to express our concerns about the article on Leonard Peltier, published in the August 15 issue of *Smoke Signals*.

The case of Leonard Peltier has been fraught with government misconduct since its beginning. Leonard was extradited into this country for trial only because the government knowingly filed fraudulent affidavits in the extradition proceedings. Then, when the trial was held in this country, the government, among other wrongful acts, manufactured false evidence, withheld exculpatory evidence, witnesses were held and intimidated by the FBI, the FBI had ex parte communications with a judge trying the case, Peltier's defense team was infiltrated and the prosecution was receiving first-hand information concerning the defense. That there is no dispute about the travesty of Leonard's case is evidenced by a statement by the United States Court of appeals for the Tenth Circuit in November 2003: "Much of the government conduct on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and in the prosecution of Mr. Peltier is to be condemned. The government withheld evidence. It coerced witnesses. These facts are undisputed." In 1986, the United States Court of appeals for the Eighth Circuit recognized evidence of FBI misconduct relative to the ballistics evidence. It even went so far to reason that the withheld exculpatory evidence could have caused "serious doubts" in the minds of the jurors as to whether to convict Mr. Peltier. Yet, the Court refused to give Mr. Peltier a new trial by applying an erroneously harsh standard, thereby doing its part to uphold this injustice and frankly encourage more government misconduct...

Sincerely,

Russell Redner

National & International Director of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee

Barry Bachrach

Leonard Peltier's Lead Counsel

Dear *Smoke Signals*,

After reviewing a few facts about Leonard Peltier's current situation, Mr. Karten concludes that "the news about Peltier these days is not as dramatic as it once was." It has been almost thirty years, so the novelty to the public is not there anymore, but the passing of time certainly makes his imprisonment more dramatic to Peltier himself. The news of his transfer, that seem so quickly dismissed in Mr. Karten's article, meant a great deal of suffering for Leonard, who is sixty and of frail health. Imagine living in an 8' X 8' metallic box for forty two days, with no fresh air, no direct sunlight and only getting to see two inches of sky out of a boarded up window, almost no human contact (direct or indirect), and very little food affecting your diabetic glucose level. Is this not dramatic enough? How about the deprivation of freedom for almost thirty years for the single reason that he shot back when he and his people were being attacked by highly trained and well armed forces? What was he supposed to do, cry like a baby until they killed him?

Lastly, asking whether Peltier was guilty of killing those agents obscures what was really going on during that incident: indigenous people were being attacked by a military/paramilitary force that entered their land illegally. International law allows people under siege to defend themselves from their occupiers. This is not about who shot the agents or how far they were when they did it, this is about who has an unalienable right to the land, and who has taken it by force and extreme violence. That is the principle those warriors, including Peltier, were upholding, and the reason Amnesty International and countless of human rights organizations and supporters around the world consider him a political prisoner. If Native people forget that or chose to buy the invaders logic that you so subtly present, they might as well give the little they have left to the occupying power.

Mary Smith

San Francisco, CA.

Dear Editor of the *Smoke Signals*

Many thanks go to *Smoke Signals* for its comprehensive update on Pine Ridge, and the associated report on the Anti-war Conference, featuring the words of Leonard Peltier and Dino Butler. Ron Karten has done his homework well and provided us with much-needed information that is not readily available in the mainstream media.

With Peltier in prison, Karten asks, who today will defend the traditional people of Pine Ridge? We must all step forth to defend these people. As long as anyone is denied full rights and justice, we all are. We must never forget what happened in the Dakotas, and, indeed, as Karten indicates, is still happening there. We must never forget for a moment how far the United States's government will go in imposing injustice on its own citizens (not to mention those of other countries) through brute force, agent provocateurs, spies, coercion and murder. We must never forget the ruthless propaganda fostered by it through the media blaming the powerless, poor, disadvantaged and minorities. Already those opposing the Iraq War and aggressive military recruitment in our schools are being labeled as cowards and traitors, even though we represent the majority opinion.

Under the guise of The Patriot Act, our country is evolving more and more noticeably towards a military-corporate-police state of billionaires using any means to destroy those who oppose it. The demonizing is no longer limited to Indians, but "the genocide of our minds and hearts" is applied to all of us who are relatively powerless and in poverty throughout the world.

Though Peltier could possibly be guilty of killing, he surely did not get a fair trial. Moreover, he saw himself as a soldier defending the inalienable rights of people. If it is just and fair that he be punished for his acts, then where are the dozens of politicians and policemen who fought against him and murdered Indians? Are they also doing hard time in prison? I know of none.

We Americans are the only people on earth who can stop this government, defend Pine Ridge and redress these wrongs.

Ken McCormack

Neskowin, OR.

Dear *Smoke Signals*,

Congratulations on the finest *Smoke Signals* that I have read in the 7 years I've been reading it. The August 15, 2005 is fantastic.

Thank you for bringing up the things that need to be brought up. I listen to KBOO and I've listened to Eugene Johnson many times before. I've just been following a lot of the issues and I have always been against the war.

I really appreciate this issue of *Smoke Signals*. It was right in time to distribute during pow-wow.

Paula Craven

Grand Ronde

Editors Note:

These are just some of the responses to our Leonard Peltier article that we received. The response was legion and I wish we had room to print it all word for word, but we don't. So at the risk of more critical fodder, we have attempted to capture the essence of those readers who responded to our efforts and give them an opportunity to be heard here. To those of you who attacked us just for asking questions I truly feel sorry for you. And just so you know, we will keep asking the important questions that face our people today locally, nationally and internationally. We will not be intimidated by party rhetoric on either side of an issue and we will continue to seek the truth — asking questions is part of that journey. To those of you that took the opportunity to compliment us for our efforts we say thank you, but know that we were not trying to please anyone. We were simply doing what we believe a quality Tribal newspaper in this position does — ask questions, seek truth and inform our readers.

We knew when we took this project on that we'd hear about it. We have heard about it from coast to coast and right here in Grand Ronde.

We have heard from one reader who thought it was the best thing we ever did, and another who thought it was a yawn.

We had interesting changes of heart from people who read or at least received the piece. Some started out positive, excited, even ecstatic. Others started out hating the piece and after hearing what we had to say, came to accept what we were trying to do.

Here's what we believe our readers should keep in mind: with good cause, advocacy groups like the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee develop a strategy and oppose any dissent from it. They believe their strategy presents the best possibility of achieving their goal — in this case, ending Peltier's imprisonment.

The role of a newspaper is broader. We take in the great variety of advocates out there. At our best, we embrace dissent as a valuable and Constitutionally protected right.

Both elements are necessary parts of a functioning democracy. The first seeks justice where it is missing in the world. The second provides the playing field of free ideas that makes justice possible.

In fact, there may be only three people in the world today who know what happened to the two F.B.I. agents at Pine Ridge on June 26, 1975. And none of them are talking.

That Peltier was tied to a rifle that ballistic tests showed could not have fired the fatal bullets only says that he did not shoot the agents with that rifle.

On the other hand, that witnesses remember Peltier bragging about killing one of the agents does not prove that he actually killed anybody.

There is a bigger picture here that we were going after.

Our story started when Dino Butler read a letter from Peltier at "Native Perspectives on War & Militarism." Peltier's words rang with the wisdom of a great Elder, and his being at the event also tied together the anti-war movement with what the conference called, "NATIVE PEOPLES' HOLOCAUST: First Nations' Experiences with Terrorism."

Here was a way to show a relationship among the injustices that aboriginals long have faced on every continent and continue to this day to face. Here was a way to join Peltier with many who suffer silently and hopelessly because of the accident of their births. Taking the cases one by one is important, vital even, but there is also the wider understanding that we were after.

Another reality is, many of our readers have a greater interest in the Tribe's cultural and educational activities than in national news like this; many are Elders who want to see pictures of their grandchildren graduating or dancing or washing cars. These are all beautiful things. We have competing interests for our news pages, so, we made choices about what issues to tackle and what to leave out.

In times like these, it is a good sign when people run around as if their hair was on fire. It means they're paying attention. Our job at the newspaper, though we have not perfected the art, is to be honest brokers and provide a marketplace for the ideas and the experiences of the people of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the wider community that reads *Smoke Signals*. With the addition of these letters, we hope that we are on the way to becoming just that.

Dear *Smoke Signals*,

Thank you *Smoke Signals* and reporter Ron Karten for going outside Grand Ronde for Native news. I subscribe to *News From Indian Country* and this is the first time *Smoke Signals* has scooped the national paper re: Peltier being moved to a prison in Indiana.

Whether you believe in Peltier's innocence or guilt, or whether the War in Iraq was justified or not, I believe it is very important to be informed on all sides of the debate.

I saved the edition *Smoke Signals* did on "Water is Gold" on October 01, 2003. That was a very important edition also because it placed Grand Ronde in context with a nationwide problem: water.

I also liked the story about Healing and Unity Journey in the August 15 paper. Great job!

Judith Pettibone

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