

## feature

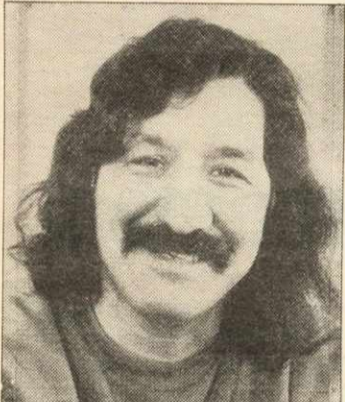
# Film brings to light Peltier's ongoing ordeal

by Alex Boston

Pine Ridge Reservation, a South Dakota back-water, was murder capital USA in the early 70's. Traditional natives and members of AIM (American Indian Movement) were victims in over 70 murders and 350 serious assaults. AIM had been invited by the elders to protect their land from government development. The crimes were never investigated despite the region's highest concentration of FBI agents in the country, many of whom are suspects.

The violence was largely perpetrated by the GOONS (Guardians of the Oglala Nation Squads), hired, trained and armed by Dick Wilson, the tribal chief. He was propped by a federal \$27 million per year puppet dictator package. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights described his rule as a "reign of terror" and declared his election "invalid". The U.S. Justice Department nevertheless allowed him to take office.

The war climaxed on June 26, 1975. A shoot-out near Oglala left three dead: a native guy and two FBI agents (the first non-native victims).



Today Leonard Peltier has served 16 years of two life sentences for killing the agents.

Robert Redford claims, "This man has been railroaded. It adds up to an outrageous default in the American system of justice." His documentary, Incident at Oglala, is the latest addition to a mini-library of films and books championing the cause of Amnesty International's only recognized political prisoner in North America. The first popular exploration of Peltier was Peter Mathiessen's fabulously researched book, In the Spirit of Crazy Horse. Washington spent over \$49 million and eight years in the country's most protracted legal suit against a publisher to have it completely and permanently censored. Washington lost in two consecutive cases. Oliver Stone is currently working on a film with the same title which will inevitably offer a dramatized (and high profile) version of events around the Pine Ridge shootout.

## PINE RIDGE SHOOTOUT

The gun fight precipitated one of the largest manhunts in U.S. history. SWAT and chemical warfare teams, tracking dogs, a spotter plane, a chopper and several hundred state troopers, military and FBI personnel con-

verged on the reservation to apprehend the AIM leaders camped on Jumping Bull Ranch. All of them temporarily escaped. One, Leonard Peltier, fled to Canada only to be fraudulently extradited.

Dino Butler, Bob Robideau and Peltier were charged with killing the agents. Two hundred fifty FBI agents assigned to the case uncovered 4000 pieces of evidence in 20 locations over 15 states. In stark contrast the murder of Joe Stuntz, the native, was never investigated.

The FBI claims the agents, who had neither jurisdiction nor warrant, drove into the Ranch to arrest Jimmy Eagle for stealing a pair of cowboy boots. The extraordinary size of the manhunt, its rapid mobilization and the ensuing investigation begs the question "What kinda goddam' boots were those?". As cowboy boots, particularly those of sheriffs and mounties, have always been used to proverbially "kick the shit outa Indians", this incident goes down as the FBI's biggest shitkicks.

## BEHIND THE INCIDENT AT OGLALA

Essentially, the incident was an attempt to destroy AIM. AIM's aggressive commitment to their communities, elders, traditional ways and land rights prompted a renaissance in native pride across the States and into Canada whose natives had launched a "red power" movement. In both countries native political mobilization was dubbed a "top national security threat".

Incident at Oglala effectively places the Pine Ridge terrorism and shootout into this context. Yet, Redford fails to explain the ultimate motivation for this disproportionately massive manhunt/shitkick.

It was not coincidental the shitkick occurred on the same day Dictator Dick passed 80 000 acres of land to the U.S. Department of Interior which was then transferred to uranium mining companies. The shitkick was a diversionary tactic, a legacy of which is contaminated water resulting in the lowest life expectancy in the country (45) and a rate of spontaneous abortion and miscarriage seven times the national average.

## JUSTICE DENIED

Where Redford failed to contextualize the destruction of AIM he succeeds at raising a specter of doubt around the judicial process.

The film tracks firstly Robideau and Butler's case which reveals serious FBI misconduct, coercion of witnesses, tampering with evidence, perjury and a federally-supported state of terror. Incident carefully juxtaposes interviews with for example a federal attorney who accuses AIM of intimidating the jurors, and a juror who says, "Baloney, the only Indians I saw were in the court room. If there was anything to fear it was the FBI." Robideau and Butler were acquitted on grounds of self-defense.

Peltier's defense had even stronger evidence against the FBI. Yet against

normal judicial procedure his trial site and judge were altered thrusting him in front of a racist judge in an anti-Indian town. The government presented 15 days of evidence. Peltier's defense was restricted to only six and frequently deemed "inadmissible". The jury was permitted to hear two and a half of those days.

Throughout the trial, the national media and Peltier's defense were

gagged while the press was able to paint Peltier as a "communist" and "terrorist".

In Incident Peltier hopelessly reflects, "I could feel the jail doors being closed and welded shut."

## CANADIAN COMPLICITY

Peltier was embroiled in extradition hearings in Canada at the time of the Butler/Robideau trial. Ironically, had he been tried with them,

he would probably be free today. However, he was later extradited on the basis of affidavits which the FBI obtained through coercion and death threats. The U.S. government and the Supreme Court of Canada later recognized them to be fraudulent. Recent information obtained through the Freedom of Information Act indicate Canadian officials were

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