

Could Leonard Peltier leave prison next month?

Thomas C. Fox | Jul. 30, 2009 NCR Today

Leonard Peltier, convicted and sentenced in 1977 to two consecutive terms of life imprisonment [for the murder of two Federal Bureau of Investigation agents](#) [1] killed during a 1975 shootout on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, had his first parole meeting under the Obama Administration this week. There has been considerable debate over Peltier's guilt and the fairness of his trial.

The only alleged eyewitness to the shootings was Myrtle Poor Bear, a Lakota Native woman who lived at Pine Ridge. On the basis of her statements that she had seen Leonard Peltier kill the men, Peltier was extradited from Canada, where he fled. However, Myrtle Poor Bear retracted her testimony in 1977. In a public statement issued by Myrtle Poor Bear in 2000, she said that her original testimony was a result of months of threats and harassment from FBI agents.

The relationship between Peltier and those who have followed his case over the decades can be intensely personal. [Harvey Wasserman writes](#) [2]: "His imprisonment has come to stand not only for five centuries of unjust violence waged against Native Americans, but also for the inhumane theft of the life of a man who has handled his 33 years in jail with epic dignity, effectiveness and grace."

The decision on Peltier's parole will be made by the four sitting members of the [Federal Parole Commission](#) [3] whose offices are in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Commissioners Isaac Fulwood, Jr., Cranston Mitchell, Edward Reilly and Patricia Cushware are all Bush appointees. One seat is vacant; Fulwood was elevated to the Chairman's seat in May by President Obama.

The Commissioners are required to render a decision within 21 days - by August 18. Should they rule in his favor, Peltier could walk out of prison very soon after the decision is issued.

Letters to the Parole Commission, to local newspapers, to Congressional Representatives and other forms of public pressure are now timely and important.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.freeleonard.org/case/index.html>

[2] <http://www.freepress.org/columns/display/7/2009/1759>

[3] <http://www.usdoj.gov/uspc/>