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<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/02/05/my-40-years-in-prison/print/>

## My 40 Years in Prison

By Leonard Peltier  
February 5, 2016



What can I say that I have not said before? I guess I can start by saying see you later to all of those who have passed in the last year. We Natives don't like to mention their names. We believe that if we speak their names it disrupts their journey. They may loose their way and their spirits wander forever. If too many call out to them, they will try to come back. But their spirits know we are thinking about them, so all I will say is safe journey and I hope to see you soon.

On February 6th, I will have been imprisoned for 40 years! I'm 71 years old and still in a maximum security penitentiary. At my age, I'm not sure I have much time left.

I have earned about 4-5 years good time that no one seems to want to recognize. It doesn't count, I guess? And when I was indicted the average time served on a life sentence before being given parole was 7 years. So that means I've served nearly 6 life sentences and I should have been released on parole a very long time ago. Then there's mandatory release after serving 30 years. I'm 10 years past that. The government isn't supposed to change the laws to keep you in prison — EXCEPT if you're Leonard Peltier, it seems.

Now, I'm told I'll be kept at USP Coleman I until 2017 when they'll decide if I can go to a medium security facility — or NOT. But, check this out, I have been classified as a medium security prisoner now for at least 15 years, and BOP regulations say elders shall be kept in a less dangerous facility/environment. But NOT if you're Leonard Peltier, I guess.

As you'll remember, the history of my bid for clemency is long. My first app was with Jimmy Carter. He denied it. Ronald Reagan promised President Mikhail Gorbachev that he would release me if the Soviet Union released a prisoner, but Reagan reneged. George H.W. Bush did nothing. The next app was with Bill Clinton. He left office without taking action even though the Pardon Attorney did an 11-month investigation (it usually takes 9 months) and we were told she had recommended clemency. George W. Bush denied that petition in 2009. And in all of the applications for clemency, the FBI has interfered with an executive order. That's illegal as hell!

Today, I'm facing another dilemma — an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). It's the size of an AAA battery. The doctor told me if it bursts, I can bleed to death. It's also close to my spine and I could end up paralyzed. The good news is that it's treatable and the operation has a 96-98 percent success rate. BUT I'm in a max security prison. We don't get sent for treatment until it is terminal.

As President Obama completes the final year of his term, I hope that he will continue to fight to fulfill his promises, and further the progress his Administration has made towards working in partnership with First Peoples. It gives me hope that this President has worked hard to affirm the trust relationship with the Tribal Nations. With YOUR encouragement, I believe Obama will have the courage and conviction to commute my sentence and send me home to my family.

Looking back on the 40 years of efforts on my behalf, I am overwhelmed and humbled. I would like to say thank you to all the supporters who have believed in me over the years. Some of you have been supporters since the beginning. You made sure I had books to read and commissary funds to buy what I may need to be as comfortable as one can be in this place. You made donations to the defense committee so we could continue fighting for my freedom, too. You all worked hard — are still working hard — to spread the word about what is now being called the most outrageous conviction in U.S. history. There are good-hearted people in this world, and you're among them. I'm sorry I cannot keep up with answering all of your letters. But thanks for the love you have shown me. Without it, I could never have made it this long. I'm sure of it.

I believe that my incarceration, the constitutional violations in my case, and the government misconduct in prosecuting my case are issues far more important than just my life or freedom. I feel that each of you who have fought for my freedom have been a part of the greater struggle of

Native Peoples — for Treaty rights, sovereignty, and our very survival. If I should be called home, please don't give up on our struggle.

In the Spirit of Crazy Horse...