

stand. Many expected to be killed – like their ancestors in 1890 – and two did die.

On Feb. 27, 1973 approximately 200 people went to Wounded Knee to prepare for an early morning press conference. The government's response was a declaration of war. The press conference was never held.

According to Pentagon documents uncovered later, the government immediately deployed 17 armored personnel carriers, 130,000 rounds of M-16 ammunition, 41,000 rounds of M-40 high explosives for grenade launchers as well as helicopters and other aircraft. Three hundred miles away on an Army base in Colorado, an assault unit was put on 24-hour alert.

Messages of support poured in from around the world. Local support committees were organized from coast to coast to help educate mainstream America about the living conditions on every reservation and the need to defend the languages and cultures of American Indians.

Many young Indians like myself were moved to become a part of the effort to ensure the safety of those who were occupying Wounded Knee. Civil rights and religious organizations spoke out in their support. International appeals for a negotiated settlement were made to the U.S. government.

Compelled by worldwide pressure, the standoff came to a nonviolent end. Despite the weight of public opinion sympathetic to the cause, the government handed down the largest number of federal indictments ever to come out of one incident. Years of court cases and a long defense battle began, led by civil rights lawyers like William Kuntzler, Larry Leventhal and Mark Lane.

The Nixon administration pursued a stepped-up campaign to harass and frame Indian activists on and off the rez. The FBI hounded supporters, Indians and others. Sixty murders on Pine Ridge Reservation during that time remain unsolved.

The media attempted to quell the support by highlighting the violent nature of the standoff, neglecting to mention the incredible fire power brought onto the reservation by the Army and National Guard.

On the 25th anniversary we discussed the mood on the reservation in 1973. In the homes I visited, many said they had

supported the action. An elder, who was preparing food for the Wacipi honoring and powwow held in Porcupine, told me, "My children were on the inside. I knew it was dangerous, but late at night the young would come to my house here in Porcupine and I would package up food for them to carry into the compound. Yes, they had their tanks and roadblocks, but we knew how to go there in the dark with food."

The mood among the people in 1973 was a slow boil of anger and, according to many, something was bound to happen.

Goon squads often harassed members of the Wounded Knee Offense/Defense Committee on the reservation. Even more young activists were killed after the occupation than during it. Some, like Leonard Peltier, were sent to jail on trumped-up charges. He has served over 20 years in prison, despite the existence of evidence that proves his innocence.

*The situation on a rez is more ironic
because the land is owned collectively,
but by those without the resources
to make it a livable place.*

On Feb. 27-28, 1998, hundreds of Indian activists – veterans of militant struggles of the 1970s and 1980s – came to South Dakota to remember those who died during and after the occupation. In a blizzard, we gathered at the mass grave, the site of the 1890 massacre. We came to honor the militant action of 1973. With prayers, singing and speeches, we remembered their commitment to the struggle for a better life for the Oglala Sioux and all our people.

The blizzard continued and the temperatures were far below zero. Some arrived on foot, having participated in the Four Directions Sacred Run. Some had flown in; others had driven hundreds of miles, from as far away as Oklahoma, Arizona, Washington and Alaska, as well as Canada and Mexico. Hundreds gathered, carrying banners with the names of those who had died. We stood among the tipis, cheered by the broadcast support of the tribe's radio station. Young children played in the snow.

The mood was one of determination, with a note of sad-