

# F R E E

# LUMUMBA FORD

On November 24, 2003, Patrice Lumumba Ford, an American citizen born and raised in Portland, Oregon, was sentenced to 18 years in federal prison on charges of "seditious conspiracy." A year before, Ford had made a trip to China, just as the U.S. prepared to attack Afghanistan. He had hoped to cross the border into Afghanistan to aid and comfort fellow Muslims in nearby refugee camps, but he was not allowed to cross. One month after he left the country, he came home.

Unfortunately for Ford, the Ashcroft Justice Department – the same Bush appointees that trample on the constitution with illegal domestic spying – needed examples of domestic terrorism to exploit our fear of Islam and to draw attention away from their bungling of the situation following 9/11. Ford and the rest of the so-called Portland Terror Cell filled the bill. The trip to China was painted as an act of sedition, and six individuals, frightened and isolated, experienced the full weight of the government's power.

Federal prosecutors originally offered five-year sentences in a plea bargain, but then word came from Washington that the Portland defendants must be made examples of and the offer was withdrawn. In the end, all defendants, afraid of the very real possibilities of Guantanamo or life in federal prison, agreed to much longer sentences. Ford, the last to plead out, accepted an 18-year sentence.

The Portland arrests followed closely upon other Patriot Act arrests in Detroit, Seattle, and Lackawanna, New York, conveniently coinciding with administration's political needs, and preceding by six days the Senate resolution permitting President Bush to go into Iraq.

Eventually we learned that, of the hundreds of terrorism charges made by the Department of Justice across the nation, all were plea bargained: the only jury conviction was obtained in Detroit, and that was later thrown out by a federal judge. (David Cole, "Taking Liberties," *The Nation*, 10/4/04.)

The time has come to look at this harsh sentence with the awareness we now have of what was really going on: the "Portland Terror Cell" was Ashcroft's scapegoat, part of an elaborate justification for the suspension of civil liberties and due process that now threatens us all. Patrice Lumumba Ford has been incarcerated since his initial arrest on October 4, 2002. It is time for the Justice Department to reveal its motives and methods: Ford is an innocent U.S. citizen caught in the fear mongering that serves this government's ends. It is past time for an objective examination of his case.

You can send a letter of support and encouragement to Lumumba at:

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