

The Party Bookshop

January 1, 1985 will mark the 35th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Progressive Party. For this important anniversary, it is of interest to deal with an aspect of the Party's history and growth that is accepted as a fact of party life — **the Party's Bookshop.**

The official notice of the Party's first bookshop was made in the February 2, 1963 issue of the then monthly **THUNDER**, official organ of the PPP. The notice read:— "**The People's Progressive Party will be opening a PPP Bookshop on the bottom flat of Freedom House during the month of February. Books, Literature, school supplies and stationery will be on sale.**"

After that notice, **THUNDER** carried one of the first of many advertisements throughout the years of the bookshop — "On Sale at Freedom House — **The Two Faces of Burnham** — 2 cents; **Towards an Understanding of the Race Problems** by the Hon. Ram Karran — 10 cents; **History of the PPP** — 15 cents; **What is Socialism** by Richard Hart — 10 cents." And by September 1963, it carried the name **Progressive Bookshop.**

A bookshop for the Party was always one of the Party's dreams. As far back as during the days prior to the foundation of the PPP, when the Political Affairs Committee was functioning, Cheddi Jagan was on his own, importing thousands of booklets from abroad for distribution in Guyana. All the booklets dealt with socialism, the classics of Marxism-Leninism and socialism in practice in the USSR.

Massive quantities of political literature were imported during the '40s by Cheddi Jagan, who has been rightly called the Father of Independence and Socialism in Guyana. This was the first time that Guyanese working people had the opportunity to read about socialism and to be informed about developments in the world's first socialist state. Later when the PPP was formed out of the Political Affairs Committee in 1950, this literature continued to flow into the country and was sold and distributed widely. So greatly was this influx of books with explosive ideas against colonialism, capitalism and imperialism feared by

the colonial rulers, that in 1952, Lionel Luckhoo, spokesman for big business moved a bill in the Legislative Council, (of which Cheddi Jagan was an elected member) to ban all such literature as "subversive".

This was known as the Subversive Literature Bill and, despite a monumental fight put up by Dr. Jagan against the bill, it was passed. Later, when the Constitution was suspended in 1953 and martial law by the British authorities was imposed, several PPP members were jailed for having subversive literature in their possession. One of those persons, Janet Jagan, was jailed for being in possession of a copy of **Soviet News.**

Until the actual opening of the first party bookshop below Party headquarters, Freedom House in 1963, literature printed locally for the Party and imported from abroad, mainly England, continued to be widely circulated at conferences, public meetings and in house-to-house campaigns.

The person who helped build the Progressive Bookshop into the number one bookshop in Guyana was a comrade from the USA, **Una Mulzac**, who came to Guyana in the 1960's after the PPP won office for a third time in the 1961 elections. Wishing to know more about the exciting changes taking place under the People's Progressive Party government, this progressive black American woman came to Guyana and pitched into the struggle, which was then growing more intense, as the CIA, the trade unions and the opposition PNC and United Force joined together to try to destabilise the PPP government.

Examining the background of Una Mulzac, it is not difficult to understand her keen interest and later full involvement in the struggles in the then British Guiana. She is the daughter of the late **Captain Hugh Mulzac**, a West Indian born on Union Island, near St. Vincent, who became the first black sea captain in the USA to command a merchant marine. Having earned his ship master's licence soon after World War I, the only time he could work as a ship's captain, because of the colour bar, was when **Marcus Garvey's Black Star line** operated in the 1920s. From then on, the capable and accomplished seaman had to work in lowly jobs as cook or steward on ships.

An ardent political activist and trade unionist, Captain Mulzac finally broke the colour bar and was given a berth as captain on the Liberty ship **Booker T. Washing-**

ton in World War II. With an inter-racial crew, he made 22 successful round trips from the USA during World War II, transporting 18,000 troops to Europe and the Pacific and shot down two enemy planes without a loss of crew or cargo. This dynamic West Indian-born seaman considerably influenced his daughter Una.

The Party gave Una Mulzac the task of organising a Party bookshop, which she did capably and creatively. However, in 1964, when the destabilisation campaign of the CIA-backed opposition grew stronger, there were frequent bombings and killings. On July 17, 1964, Ms. Mulzac noticed a parcel in the Progressive Bookshop and asked members of the staff what it was doing there. She was told that a customer had left it there. She then investigated further, and found that the customer bought an item, and paid for it, but did not wait for the change. That made her suspicious and so she asked Michael Forde, a PYO activist, to remove the parcel, for safety, to an empty lot just east of Freedom House.

She intimated that it could possibly be something dangerous, and she believed in taking no chances. With this in mind, Michael Forde grabbed the parcel and walked swiftly towards the empty lot, with Ms. Mulzac almost directly behind him. Just before he reached the spot where he was to throw the parcel, it blew up in his hands and killed him immediately. Those nearby, including Una Mulzac were injured and had to be rushed immediately to hospital. It was one of two time bombs which blew up simultaneously at Freedom House and at Gimpex, commercial arm of the Party. The buildings were damaged badly. If the bomb, placed by a PNC activist had not been removed from under Freedom House, about 60 persons in the building, including a number of leading Party members, would have perished.

Later, after she recovered, Ms. Mulzac and others proposed the renaming of the Progressive Bookshop as the **Michael Forde Bookshop** in honour of the youthful PYO stalwart who lost his life in saving Freedom House. This was accepted by the highest Party body.

Under Ms. Mulzac's management, the bookshop prospered and became, not only the best stocked bookshop in Guyana but the only one of its kind in the English speaking Caribbean. It carried complete works on Marxism-Leninism, a wide range of political subjects, particularly about the newly independent nations and the libera-

tion struggles throughout the world as well as children's books, classics, scientific works and a wide stock of school books. It excelled in both quality and variety, but excelled in its wide variety and excellence of books on scientific socialism.

The Michael Forde Bookshop extended branches to two interior areas, Bartica and the North West and to four other areas — No. 78 Village, Corentyne; Rose Hall, Corentyne; New Amsterdam and Cotton Field, Essequibo.

The Bookshop took part in book exhibitions and won awards for superior content and display. Its books have been used to build group, district and regional PPP libraries throughout the country. Its books are used as the basis of studies at Accabre College of Political Science, the Party School. Even the University of Guyana purchases books from the Michael Forde Bookshop.

In 1967, Ms. Mulzac decided to return to her homeland and become active again in the struggle there. Janet Jagan accompanied her as far as St. Vincent, where they stayed with Captain Hugh Mulzac, who had gone to live there in retirement. It was an invigorating experience to meet this stalwart of the struggles for the equality of blacks in the USA from the 1920s to the 1940s. They spent a great deal of time sorting out his vast collection of clippings, photos and correspondence, seeing photos of the Marcus Garvey period and up to Paul Robeson. As a footnote, Ms. Mulzac now manages a bookshop of excellence in New York known as **Liberation Bookstore**.

The Michael Forde Bookshop continued to function successfully until the PNC government imposed severe restrictions on the importation of many items, including books. The decline in the importation of books has severely hampered the Bookshop, forcing it, gradually, to close down all its branches, even including the New Amsterdam branch. Now, there is only the Michael Forde Bookshop below Freedom House, managing the best it can under the difficult circumstances, but still maintaining the standards of old and continuing to specialise in the best and latest works on scientific socialism and related subjects. (J.J.)