

## EXPANDING BRANCH BOOKSTORES

by Peggy Brundy

Branch bookstores, organized as a regular party institution, are a relatively new phenomenon. In most areas they grew alongside of and in response to the radicalization. Many began by carrying only the books published by Pioneer or Merit plus copies of the classics by Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc. Within a few short years, they have expanded qualitatively. The attached statistics will give a rough idea of their scope. Hundreds of young radicals come into our bookstores each year, some looking for a particular book, others out of curiosity. Thousands browse through our book and pamphlet displays on campus literature tables all around the country. And the potential of these bookstores and related activities around sales of literature is still far from realized.

The sheer number of books and pamphlets we sell is important. Literature sold from our bookstores, and campus literature tables, by hawking special pamphlets, through university and commercial bookstores due to Pathfinder Press sales representatives, and through university classroom adoptions helps explain the current radicalization to thousands. Inevitably, it will have an effect on the consciousness and understanding of broad layers of people. Although the effect may not be immediately apparent, many of those who have read our literature will draw on the lessons we teach as they become involved in anticapitalist struggles, and will be drawn closer to Trotskyism.

It is becoming increasingly clear that because of the character of the current radicalization and as a result of the fact that more people are better educated than ever before, we have an unprecedented opportunity and responsibility to reach out with our ideas through our literature. Expanding our bookstore and sales of books and pamphlets is one important part of taking maximum advantage of that opportunity.

Since they are a relatively new party institution, the direction the bookstores should take in further expansion is still somewhat uncharted. The purpose of this report is to outline some ideas and initial experiences in maximizing the effectiveness of the bookstores in bringing people around the SWP, recruiting and educating them.

### What should the bookstores carry?

The bookstores are part of the public face of the party, and at the same time they have an important internal function to fulfill. Both these aspects should be considered when deciding what books to sell in them. The number of different titles carried will, of course, vary according to the financial resources and space of the bookstore. But, given these restrictions, it is to our advantage to make available a very broad selection of literature. Our comrades will want to be familiar with the positions and arguments of our opponents -- both radical and bourgeois, and such a wide selection will bring more young radicals into our bookstores.

We do not have to take political responsibility for these books; we are simply making them available for people to read and judge for themselves.

For example, several bookstores have reported that Gus Hall's Lame Duck in Turbulent Waters started many good discussions on electoral policy for revolutionaries, and about the Communist Party's odious record. Bookstores can carry Norman Mailer's books -- along with books and pamphlets exposing his positions. Likewise, it would be to our advantage to carry not only The Militant, IP, and the ISR but also Monthly Review, The Guardian and the Daily World, to name just a few.

In some areas of the country, it makes an important political point for our bookstores to carry radical books in Spanish, as well as making these available to people whose language is Spanish. Our bookstores can also provide a unique service by making available books and pamphlets that have come out of the radical movement both in the U.S. and other countries. Pathfinder Press has begun distributing books in foreign languages (primarily Spanish), and is currently looking for good books and pamphlets on women's liberation, the national struggles, etc., from other countries.

Finally, our bookstores should not ignore socialist and labor novels, or books of protest poetry, and other books in those general categories. People are led to socialist understanding through a variety of questions and interests.

In short, our bookstores can carry any literature of interest to radicals, and can reflect the wide-ranging interest that we as Trotskyists have in a myriad of political, social and cultural questions.

By carrying a broad variety of literature, Merit Bookstore in Lower Manhattan and Labor Books in the Twin Cities, for example, have earned the reputation of being bookstores where any radical book can be obtained. If they don't carry it, they will order it. On occasion, the much larger general bookstores in those areas refer their customers to these stores to find special items. These kinds of bookstores, well publicized and imaginatively promoted, are a very real asset, bringing people into our headquarters where we can talk politics, invite them to forums, sell them subscriptions to The Militant and ISR, and involve them in activities.

Another benefit of building such bookstores will be to further undercut the authority of other radical tendencies as representatives of Marxism and radical ideas in this country. The Communist Party, for example, has a chain of relatively well-known bookstores all over the country. It should be our bookstores that people seek out, not theirs.

### Reaching out with our literature

It goes without saying that it is not enough for the bookstores to make available a carefully thought out, broad selection of literature. Relatively few people seek us out on their own initiative; we must seek them out. Doing this effectively will require organization integrating literature distribution into every area of branch activity.

One of the most important facets will be taking our literature out of the bookstore and setting up literature tables. Campus fractions may assume responsibility for regular literature tables on campus. Bookstore directors or committees can find out about conventions or community meetings and set up a literature table. Antiwar, women's, Black or Chicano fractions can make sure our pamphlets are available at appropriate meetings.

One function of our pamphlets is to make available programmatic statements on the current struggles at a price people can easily afford. Election campaign directors can display these pamphlets prominently at meetings for candidates, and refer interested people to them.

Pathfinder Press will be publishing from time to time pamphlets priced at 25 cents, covering subjects that the SWP is making a special propaganda effort around. The recent examples of this are The Meaning of the Vietnam Accords and Inflation: What Causes It, How to Fight It. Branches should make a special effort to sell these, including hawking them.

### Advertising and promotion

Essential to the expansion will be advertising the bookstores and the books it carries. Advertising possibilities are practically unlimited, so it is particularly important that this work proceed with an eye on the bookstore's budget. The most effective promotion will often be the least expensive: leaflets stuffed into Militants sold; distribution of the 1973 Pathfinder newsprint catalog with the bookstore's name and address stamped in it; sales held on slower moving or very popular books; a sign outside letting people know the bookstore is inside; and simply keeping in stock the political books that are of current interest to radicals. Free advertising of special sales can sometimes be obtained in campus or community radio or newspapers.

Some internal "promotion" to comrades should also be planned. The tremendous amount of Trotskyist reading material that is currently being published -- books, pamphlets, The Militant, ISR, IP, internal and international discussion bulletins and so forth -- makes it unrealistic to expect all comrades to buy and read all books

and pamphlets. They should, however, be informed of new literature through announcements at YSA and branch meetings and in the city letter. Special emphasis should be put on books of particular importance to comrades political development and those that should be a part of their personal revolutionary libraries.

Other ideas for promotion include special displays, a section called "new books" in the bookstores, posting up reviews on a bulletin board, mailings to regular bookstore customers, campaign or forum mailing lists.

#### Planning the expansion

Building bookstores and literature activity of such scope takes time and careful, budgeted planning. The expansion process of both Merit Bookstore and Labor Books began in the mid to late 1960s -- and has yet to be completed.

The first step is an evaluation of the bookstores financial situation, current stock and the use of literature. It will then be possible to project a plan for adding new titles, new topics, and integrating the sales into other branch work such as sales of The Militant and ISR.

Granma Bookstore in Berkeley is the biggest and best known of our bookstores. Recently a woman wrote to them from Florida(!), sending an order, and a comment: "No other bookstore that I've encountered can compete with the scope of yours of the gay and feminist subjects." It is highly unlikely that other areas will be able to establish bookstores of Granmas scope in the immediate future; Granma was the product of a unique situation. But bookstores can surely become as well-known and carefully stocked as Merit and Labor Books. With that perspective, expansion of stock can procede at a steady rate; there is no need to invest thousands of dollars all at once. Staffing is not such a problem since often the person who keeps the headquarters open anyway can take care of customers who drop in. Finally, such bookstores can be a not insignificant help financially by paying rent.

Merit, for example, has about \$4,000 inventory wholesale, built up since 1968. They pay \$250 a month rent, and sustain a full-time person. All of which requires that the store gross around \$1,200 a month. Operations of this scope seem like a realistic, intermediate goal for many of our bookstores. Furthermore, attaining this puts the bookstores in an immeasurably better position to expand even further if that becomes politically justifiable at some point in the future.

In the course of this expansion, branches and bookstore directors will be faced with some organizational problems unique to

this institution. Bookstores must comply with the regulations and demands required of a commercial bookstore. This means that they register as a business and collect and pay sales taxes in states where that is required. Very careful financial records should be kept. This attention to detail will not only avoid possible legal problems. It will also make it possible for the branch to supervise and plan the expansion and political use of the bookstore. For example, in order to determine how much rent the bookstore can pay, or how much the stock can be expanded, it is not enough to know how much money is in the bank and what debts are outstanding. Other factors, such as the inventory and stock turnover must be taken into account. A profit and loss statement should be prepared. In most cases, this will require someone learning this technical, business skill. (Initial suggestions on how this is done will be mailed out to branches within a month.) Experience has shown that frequent checks of stock and frequent reorders of small amounts are the most effective way of keeping books of current interest. It will also prevent tying up capital in a large quantity of a single item that might take a year to sell out, and make possible stocking a larger number of different titles.

In the coming months the monthly Pathfinder Newsletter to bookstore directors will deal with these and other problems facing the bookstores.

April 24, 1973

BRANCH BOOKSTORES

Area	Rent	Monthly Sales Av. Jan & Feb	Campus Feb	Sales March	Meaning order	Viet Accords sold	Inflation order
Atlanta	\$ 35	\$ 248	*	\$ 2	50	25	35
Austin	25	101	*	*	50	*	*
Boston	125	621	\$ 46+	103	100	42	50
Brooklyn	25	233	24	73	100	45	100
Berkeley	sep. bldg.	4,475	64+	26	100	45	150
Chicago	50	427	71	*	100	*	*
Cleveland		188	18	34	100	65	100
Denver	25	235	28+	5	50	30	50
Detroit		520	124	30	50	17	50
Houston	20	*	*	10	100	20	50
Los Angeles	20	626	38	*	75	69	*
Lower Manhattan (Merit)	250	1,112	134	180	200	70	100
Twin Cities	60	450	46	30	50	41	50
Portland		*	*	*	25	*	*
Philadelphia	40	144	25	7	25	22	30
San Francisco	40	*	10+	76	50	20	100
Seattle	30	217		*	35	*	*
San Diego		84	36	76	50	30	40
Upper West Side New York	20	295	62	149	35	32	30
Washington, DC		338	6	20	30	10	50

\*not reporting  
+January figures

The figures given are a rough indication of the scope and relative size of the bookstores.