

What happened on July 17, 1964

by Janet Jagan

It's hard to know if the report in Kaieteur News by the famous, or is it infamous, "Peeping Tom" is for real or not, since it purportedly comes from Sharma's TV channel and was printed in Kaieteur News. I don't tune in on Sharma's channel - I remember how the dear man used to turn up at State House functions with his camera crew and stand next to Dr Jagan and myself until his cameras recorded the three of us - and I don't read Kaieteur News, so I'm at that disadvantage. But "Peeping Tom" - whatever happened to the charge by a magistrate that his real name be revealed? - claims he heard on Sharma's channel that Mr Burnham used to pick up Dr Jagan in his car and take him to the seawall for talks. One of my close associates showed me the article.

So that is the first time I ever heard of such a preposterous story - or should I label it more accurately as a 'nancy' story?

But it did remind me of a moment in history when Dr

Jagan and Mr Burnham did meet. It was the morning of July 17, 1964 and Mr Burnham was at Premier Cheddi Jagan's office in the Public Buildings keeping an appointment. The timing of this meeting was diabolically precise for during the discussions two bombs went off in Georgetown, one at Freedom House in Robb Street and one at Gimpex, the PPP's commercial arm, on Brickdam. Two people died as a result of the bombings and many were injured, seriously.

It was well known that I was at Freedom House daily, so I believe the intention was that Dr Jagan would learn of my death during these discussions.

However, all of us at Freedom House, and there were some 40 people there at the time, were lucky to have an alert comrade in the Progressive Bookshop, under the offices at Freedom House. Una Mulzac, the manager of the Bookshop, an Afro-American, came to Guyana in the 60s. Michael Forde, who worked at the Bookshop reported to Ms Mulzac that a customer, who had just departed, left a parcel on one of the shelves. She asked him to describe this customer and what he had bought. Michael Forde then mentioned that he had not stayed back for his change. That

struck a note in the mind of this alert woman and she immediately told Forde to take the parcel and throw it in the vacant lot east of Freedom House. She followed him.

The bomb, placed by one of the terrorists of the PNC, described so well in the secret Police report known as "X-13", went off as Michael Forde approached the vacant lot. He was blown to bits, Una Mulzac's ear drums were ruptured and the whole eastern wall of Freedom House was blown off.

Those of us in the building were saved by the bold and courageous acts of these two people. Later, the Bookshop was named after Michael Forde and the name remains 40 years after the event.

Several of the people on the third floor of Freedom House were so terrified when the bomb went off that they leaped from windows onto a building on the western side of Freedom House and were injured.

At Gimpex, the bomb, which was carefully timed, like the visit of Mr Burnham to Premier Jagan, went off simultaneously, killing Mr Griffith, one of the employees there.