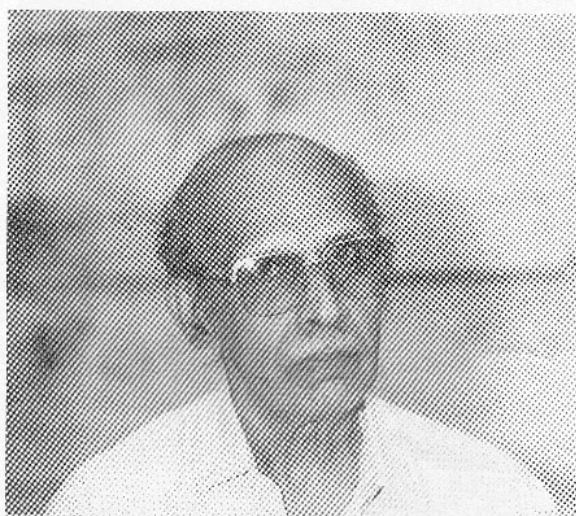


IN MEMORIAM

SYDNEY WANASINGHE - PEERLESS PUBLISHER

Sydney Wanasinghe, the veteran LSSP activist, died following a heart attack on 29 April at his home at Wellawatte, Colombo. He was 75 years old. He was in failing health for some time, which affected his physical movements but left untouched his marvellous memory. He was a boon to struggling writers researching the left movement.

He was born at Raddoluwa, Seeduwa, on 16 February 1932 and was educated at St. Mary's College, Negombo, St. Joseph's College, Colombo, and S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. He joined the LSSP while still a university student in the early 1950s. He was the live-wire of an active group of Samasamajists who distributed the party documents on the Peradeniya campus. These were the pre-and post-Hartal days when the LSSP dominated campus politics. Sydney and his university comrades used to collect bundles of the party weeklies at the Peradeniya railway station for street sales in Kandy.



After his graduation Sydney served as a teacher at Carey College, Colombo. In the 1960s he was back at Peradeniya University to obtain a diploma in education. He was also active in the teachers' trade union.

In 1958 he was nominated by the party to contest the Wellawatte North ward of the CMC. He succeeded his friend and party comrade Osmund Jayaratne as the LSSP representative for this ward. In the municipal by-election that ensued Sydney won the seat, which he held till 1965.

In the heady university days Sydney had teamed up with Vijaya Vidyasagara and Saravana Bhagawan (Baggy), editors of the *Samasamajist*. In the years to come they were drawn more closely together. Baggy began publishing Marxist classics in pamphlet form under the Star Press imprint. And eventually Sydney took over where Baggy left off and blossomed as a

peerless publisher of left books. He initiated the popular *Young Socialist* series, the publication of which coincided with the emergence of the left-wing faction in the LSSP on the eve of the party split in 1964. At that time he also opened a sales outlet – Suriya Bookshop.

Following the electoral defeat in the mid-1960s of the SLFP, its allies the LSSP and the CP unleashed a chauvinist campaign against Tamils. It was left for Sydney in the *Young Socialist* to document the wave of dreadful diatribes in the LSSP and CP press.

Sydney was one of the signatories of the resolution moved by fourteen central council members at the party conference in June 1964, which opposed the resolution of the leadership for entry into a coalition with the SLFP-led government. The former was defeated by an overwhelming margin and supporters quit the LSSP to form the LSSP-R. Sydney later rejoined the party.

In the 1990s he became senior partner at the 'firm' of Wanasinghe and Wesley Muttiah. They searched the party archives and offered readers several volumes of vintage speeches and writings of the iconic figures in their glory days, when they reached commanding political heights. It has been a successful publishing venture; their books to mark anniversaries of working-class struggles spearheaded by the LSSP and birth centenaries of the left luminaries. Sydney was preparing a memoir of his friend Baggy when the end came.

His remains were cremated at the General Cemetery, Colombo, on 30 April. We extend condolences to his family, comrades and friends.

T.P.
Kelaniya

BERNADEEN SILVA LIVES ON IN THE MOVEMENTS SHE WORKED FOR

Selvy Thiruchandran

My association with Bernadeen started twenty-five years ago, except for a brief period when I was in the Netherlands. I was in touch with her constantly. The conversations we had over the phone and the meetings were meaningful. She had a tone that was very determined and forceful. There was no lingering. She personified kindness and compassion and was ready to help anyone. She was able to easily transcend ethnic, religious and class factors to join in any struggle for achieving justice, peace and fair play. She was quick to condemn ethnic chauvinism, religious extremism and class oppression. Unlike many others in our midst she was loud and clear in the views she expressed.

She was always available for people in need. We could go to her without appointment if necessary. Often she would think aloud without hesitation "What can we do? We should do something."

For a person with such conviction and ideological commitment it is not strange that she was sought after and became associated with the format or the founding of many important organizations in Sri Lanka. She will no doubt find a place when the history of Alternative Movements in Sri Lanka comes to be documented. Her vision was not limited but covered a wide spectrum.

She was, along with others responsible for founding *Kinshabonika, Puro Koral* in Tamil and *Wings of Women* in English. This organization was the first feminist organization of the 1970s and pioneered the women's movement of this country into new directions. The original copies of the journal brought out by this organization would bear ample testimony to the level of new dialogues it started. The first meeting during which the need for a women's organization was discussed, was held at Bernadeen's home at 16/1, Don Carlos Road, as well as the subsequent meetings until the organization found its own premises.

Bernadeen was associated with the founding of Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) – the pioneer movement for Liberation Theology in this country. In fact, she operated in

many of the issues that were launched by the CSR. The pamphlets, journals, newsletters and books that were published by the CSR bear witness to Bernadeen's intervention and input. In 1971, when there were many human rights violations, The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) was also launched which gave us lessons on *The Value of Dissent* to a society that was fast deteriorating into intolerance. Bernadeen was one of the founders of CRM, and first CRM meeting was inaugurated in Bernadeen's flat at Barnes Place. Knowing her commitment to such issues as peace and justice and fair play others sought her out. The Social Scientists' Association, the National Peace Council (NPC) and People's Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFRE) got her into their organizations and benefited immensely by her contribution. She had the time and energy till the end to play a proactive role in various such alternative movements.



My personal dealings with Bernadeen began when I joined Women's Education Centre (WEC) in the founding of which Bernadeen was instrumental. WEC was later renamed Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC) and accepted its directorship. Bernadeen as a Trustee and Board member gave us directions and guidance along with Kumar Jayawardena. It was indeed a pleasure working with the coordination and cooperation extended to me. Bernadeen took a keen interest in the

development of the organization, in buying a premise and in converting the old house into the present structure. She played a major role in the progress of WERC. When depressed over national disasters or private problems, Bernadeen was there to give advice and guidance and cheer us up.

Bernadeen was involved in all our activities at WERC. It was a joy that she was always there at meetings seminars and parties. At the end of such get-togethers she would stay behind to say a few words, talk to the staff, find out how they are faring and cheer us up all. She talked, sang and danced with us.

Our question that came to all our minds when I announced her passing, was will we ever again have anyone like Bernadeen Silva. The loss is irreparable. ■