
SUSAN DE SILVA: FEMINIST REBEL AND PIONEER LEFTIST

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In colonial Ceylon women played an important, if not always fully acknowledged role, in the progressive movements of the early twentieth century. Susan de Silva was one of those pioneers.

Born around the turn of the century to an elite Catholic family in Colombo, Susan de Silva became involved in radical politics in the 'twenties. In 1931 she played a leading role in mobilizing a new radical youth movement that carried out the famous Suriya Mal protest campaigns. She was one of the first women to associate with the communist group that formed within the youth movement. In 1935 she was a founding member of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the country's first socialist party, and remained an active cadre until 1947. She subsequently joined the Communist Party of Ceylon. She retired from active politics when she was in her sixties.

In October 2010 I wrote a short biography of Susan de Silva for *The Sunday Island* in Sri Lanka.¹ As I noted in that article, I hadn't been able to uncover much information about her family background and upbringing. Her nephew, Eymard de Silva Wijeyeratne, read the article and responded with a letter to the newspaper, providing some crucial additional information.² Thanks to his input, I can now present a more rounded picture of this brave feminist rebel and dedicated leftist.

Rebellious and Brilliant Ancestors

Susan de Silva had rebellion in her family tree. Her grandfather, Stephen de Silva, was a member of a small, schismatic Catholic church that had rebelled against "the slavery of Rome" in 1888.³ He personally knew the founder of the church, Dr. P.M. Lisboa Pinto, who had emigrated from Portuguese Goa to Colombo.⁴ Lisboa Pinto was one of the first to call for the formation of trade unions and for including a "workers' representative" in the Legislative Council.⁵ In 1893 Lisboa Pinto and his colleague, A.E. Buultjens (another religious rebel), formed the Ceylon Printers Association, the first union in Ceylon.⁶ Given that Stephen worked at the Government Printing Office, he may have been involved in these activities.

Susan's father, Walter C. de Silva, born in 1873, made his mark as an intellectual. He attended Royal College and in 1889, at the age of 16, he won the coveted University Scholarship.⁷ His classmate and friend, Gerard Wijeyekoon, who later became the

first president of Ceylon's Senate, described him as "one of the most brilliant young men that Ceylon ever produced."⁸ Walter went to the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper's Hill in England and finished his first year with top marks.⁹ But in his second year he became ill and had to return home.

Susan's father started a private school, the Lorenz Tutor, on Skinners Road in Maradana, not far from his father's house in Silversmith Street and the Independent Catholic Church in Wolfendhal. The tutor prepared boys from well-to-do families to sit for their matriculation exams. It is telling that he named it after one of the most progressive and secular reformers of the nineteenth century - the lawyer and Freemason, Charles Ambrose Lorenz.¹⁰ Under Walter's direction, the Lorenz Tutor became "one of the most prestigious and exclusive tutories in Colombo."¹¹

Walter de Silva married Margaret Perera, who was a Roman Catholic. As Susan's nephew explains, the local Independent Catholic Church had to disband, due to lack of funds, and Walter decided, "with reservations," to join the Roman Church.

Family Upbringing and Education

Susan grew up with three siblings - a younger sister, Hope Marion Gertrude, and two brothers, Stanislaus and Ladislaus. Like so many Westernized Ceylonese at that time, her parents spoke mainly English, even at home. They sent Susan to St. Bridget's Convent, a private Catholic girls' school in a posh area of Colombo. The nuns were "benevolent disciplinarians." Old photos of the school from that era show pupils in crisp, white uniforms in tidy classrooms.

At home, however, Susan learned about progressive politics. As I have discovered, her father had connections with some of the leading critics of British rule. He was the brother-in-law of Armand de Souza, the editor of the influential Ceylon Morning Leader who condemned the government's draconian repression following an outbreak of communal rioting in 1915.¹² As a girl, Susan frequently visited uncle Armand.

In addition, her father was associated with some of the radicals who formed the Young Lanka League, the first organization to openly call for the end to British rule.¹³ At least two of the fourteen founders of the League (Valentine Perera and E.A.P. Wijeyeratne) were connected with Walter and the Lorenz

Tutary.¹⁴ With family friends like these, it is easy to imagine how Susan became interested in politics.

By the time she was in her twenties, Susan was rebelling against just about everything that the good nuns of St. Bridget's had taught their girls. She adopted the radical "flapper" look that was all the rage in England and America during the Roaring 'Twenties. She cropped her hair in the short, slicked-down "Eton cut," wore slacks, and smoked cigarettes.¹⁵ But her thirst for self-discovery went deeper than mere fashion statements. She questioned and ultimately rejected religion. As her nephew puts it, paraphrasing the famous quote from the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, "In my view Susan's approach was that of regarding institutional religion as a defence against the experience of God."

Marriage and Motherhood

Susan married George Caldera, who was a Proctor. They had three sons – Gamini, Singhe, and Tissa – and one daughter, Rukmani. As her nephew observes, the fact that Susan and George gave their children Sinhalese names, rather than British names, suggests that they were also national-minded.

Susan suffered two traumatic losses while still a young woman. Her father died of typhoid fever, and then her daughter Rukmani died very young. Her nephew believes that those painful losses left an indelible imprint on her temperament: "Her aggressive character was in our view largely attributable to the early deaths of her father and her daughter."

Nationalist Politics

Susan and George Caldera became associated with the rising nationalist star of the 'twenties, A.E. Goonesinha.¹⁶ He had been a founding member of the Young Lanka League and was arrested during the 1915 riots. In the 'twenties he started organizing industrial laborers and dockworkers in Colombo and led the first militant strikes in Ceylon. Several of his close associates, including George E. de Silva and Stephen W. Dassenaik, had links to Susan's father.¹⁷

In 1928 Goonesinha formed the Ceylon Labour Party. Though small, the Labour Party was quite radical, in the context of that era. It stood for political independence, universal suffrage, equal rights for women, and reforms to better the condition of the working class. Susan and George Caldera joined the Labour Party. George was a member of the executive committee. In the Labour Party Susan had the opportunity to work with some of the most progressive women of that era. Agnes Marion de Silva (nee Nell), the rebellious daughter of a fashionable Burgher family who married George E. de Silva, had organized the Women's Franchise Union. Annie Eliza Preston was an English

Theosophist who taught at Musaeus College and founded the first Montessori school in Ceylon.¹⁸

Impatience with Constitutional Reform Politics

In 1927 the British government deputed to Ceylon a Parliamentary delegation, known as the Donoughmore Commission, to review the progress of constitutional reform. That generated a flurry of political activity on the island. Susan and George Caldera supported Goonesinha in his demand for universal suffrage and self-government. A delegation from the Women's Franchise Union met with the commissioners and made their case for extending the vote to women.

In the end, the British government decided to replace the old Legislative Council with a more representative State Council, elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. Goonesinha was satisfied with this "seven tenths of self-government." But Susan and other radicals in the Labor Party wanted to escalate the fight for self-rule. This group included her father's friend, Valentine Perera, who by that time had become inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Susan, too, was beginning to show interest in revolutionary socialist ideas.¹⁹

The Youth League and Suriya Mal Movement

In December 1931 Susan and her husband participated in a conference of activists who decided to launch Youth Leagues throughout the island. George Caldera was elected co-secretary of the new organization. "Among the live wires in Youth League politics," recalled a fellow Youth League member, "were Mrs. Susan Caldera, a pioneer woman politician and a confirmed matriarchist."²⁰

Susan and her husband worked in the South Colombo branch of the Youth League, one of the largest and most active. George was president of this branch. An activist at heart, Susan wanted to get the Youth League's political message out to a broader audience. She found an opportunity in a very unexpected place.

Every year the British establishment commemorated Armistice Day by selling poppies and donating the proceeds to World War I veterans. Valentine Perera and others had complained that Ceylonese veterans weren't getting their fair share of the funds. In 1931 Aelian Pereira, a member of the official Poppy Day committee, and also president of the Youth Congress, decided to start a parallel committee to sell a local sunflower, the Suriya Mal, on the day before Poppy Day and donate the proceeds to Ceylonese veterans. But he had no following. The Youth League decided to provide the personnel that he needed.

Susan was in her element. She went through the streets of Colombo on November 10 with her fellow volunteers and

appealed to passersby to buy and wear the Suriya Mal as a patriotic gesture. The first campaign made quite a splash.

Worried by this rival, the official Poppy Day committee came to terms with Aelian Pereira, who withdrew from his own committee. Susan and her comrades took over the organization. Doreen Young, the English principal of Ananda Balika Vidyalaya, became president of the new committee and recruited her teachers and students to the next campaign.

Conversion to Revolutionary Politics

At that point Susan came under the influence of a new arrival on the scene – the brilliant, charismatic Trotskyist-communist Philip Gunawardena.²¹ Returning home from his political apprenticeship abroad in November 1932, he joined the South Colombo Youth League and started to recruit a following.²² Since the Ceylon police kept close tabs on this notorious Red, he had to develop his group secretly. I can imagine how a young bourgeois-bohemian rebel like Susan could be attracted to something that was so taboo and outlandish.

Meeting behind the scenes, this group drafted a manifesto for the next Suriya Mal campaign that had some strong anti-imperialist language. When it was presented to the Youth League, Susan's husband George, who was president of the branch, stated that he would veto any propaganda that would bring the government of the day into contempt. No doubt he knew that such overt anti-imperialist propaganda could result in severe repression. In fact, only a few months earlier the government in India had sentenced more than two dozen Communist Party leaders to long prison terms for conspiring "to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India."

Susan was not one to bite her tongue or defer to anyone, even her husband. When the political fight over the manifesto split the Suriya Mal organization, Susan left her husband and went with the revolutionaries.²³ For a mother with young children, that act alone says a lot about her courage.

First Taste of Bloody Class Struggle

As part of this group around Philip Gunawardena, she got her first taste of real class struggle in 1933. The workers at the Wellawatte Spinning Mills in Colombo were frustrated that their leader, Goonesinha, would not lead a strike to redress their grievances and turned to a well-known lawyer, H. Sri Nissanka, who also was a member of the Youth League. He referred them to Colvin R. de Silva, a newly minted lawyer who was part of Philip Gunawardena's group.²⁴ Seeing an opportunity to outflank Goonesinha, Philip convinced his group to jump in and form a new union to lead the workers.

Susan and her comrades "helped in organizing the strikers, spoke at mass meetings, collected funds, and distributed relief."²⁵ The young radicals fought bloody battles with the company's strikebreakers at the mill gates. Selling Suriya flowers on the street was a lark compared to the rough-and-tumble of labor strikes.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party

In 1935 the radicals in the Youth League decided that the time was opportune to form an openly socialist party. On December 18, 1935 Susan participated in the founding conference of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in Colombo. Three days later the LSSP held its inaugural public meeting at the former Lorenz Tutor, which had become Lorenz College after Susan's father's death.²⁶

In simple language, free of alien jargon, the party manifesto called for complete independence, nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and political equality regardless of race, caste, creed, or gender. In order to bring their new message of socialism to the people, the LSSP fielded four candidates for the State Council. Philip Gunawardena and N.M. Perera won. They used the State Council to broadcast their socialist politics to a wider audience.

Susan was an active cadre in the new party and may have been a member of the Central Committee. As the LSSP grew, Susan played a role in training the recruits. She taught Marxism to student sympathizers at the University College in Colombo. In 1939 Susan was selected to be part of the LSSP delegation to the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress.²⁷ After the Congress sessions ended, Susan returned home via Calcutta, where she witnessed a mammoth demonstration against the British.

The Underground Period

With the start of World War Two, the government cracked down hard on the party for its militant anti-war message. The top leaders were jailed, the printing press confiscated, its public meetings banned. Many party members got frightened and abandoned the LSSP.²⁸ Susan remained steadfast.

With the threat of more police repression hanging over their heads, Susan and her comrades reorganized the party apparatus on a clandestine basis. Her cousin, Doric de Souza, played an important role in this process.²⁹ Younger than Susan, he had become a socialist only a few years before, during his student days in London, and upon his return in 1937 he became a lecturer in English literature at the Ceylon College. Perhaps to protect his job, he didn't openly associate with the LSSP but did establish a covert connection with the top party leadership. And so, unknown to the police as a LSSP cadre, he was a good candidate to step into the breach after Philip Gunawardena and other senior leaders were arrested in 1940.

Susan continued to lead the student group at the University College. They issued leaflets with blistering attacks on the “imperialist war” and painted the hammer and sickle in red on the walls of the campus.³⁰ With the police breathing down her neck, Susan moved the student meetings to the home of a Burgher friend who was not connected to the LSSP.³¹ She also used the café that she owned, called the Red Lion, as a place for students to meet to discuss politics. Her nephew recalls: “The café was not only a locus for impassioned political debate but also a place frequented by soldiers for tea, cakes, and hardly any sympathy.”

Defying the restrictions on labor action, Susan organized a strike of gas workers in Colombo in 1941. She used a pseudonym, “Martins,” in an effort to conceal her identity.

Turmoil in the Party

Infuriated that the LSSP was still functioning, the government resorted to a different tactic – infiltration. We now know from declassified British intelligence reports that the police had agents inside the LSSP. In November 1940 the LSSP went into a “state of alarm” upon learning that the police had detailed knowledge of their supposedly clandestine party organization.³² And that is exactly what the police wanted - to inject fear, suspicion, and paranoia into the underground party.

Susan started to suspect her cousin, Doric de Souza, the new party organizer. Why? Though he was a good organizer, Doric had his own ideas about how the LSSP should be reorganized and run. He took the position that the pre-war LSSP “was not run on Bolshevik principles and was a hotbed of bureaucratism.”³³ That, of course, was a not-so-veiled attack on Susan’s hero, Philip Gunawardena, the architect of the LSSP. According to Susan, Doric de Souza “maligned Philip to the rank and file with the object of ousting him.”³⁴ Susan, like many others who had been in the party from the very start, regarded Philip Gunawardena as their Lenin. Susan believed that Doric’s campaign to “Bolshevize” the party would split and destroy it. And isn’t that what the government wanted?

But why would Doric de Souza become a government agent? Susan had a theory. Doric had been a protégé of the Ceylon University College principal, Dr. Robert Marrs, a proud defender of the British Raj. Doric went to London University on a scholarship to get his PhD but returned without completing the degree. Dr. Marrs appointed him to the faculty position anyway. Susan concluded that something was fishy. Why did Dr. Marrs sponsor Doric de Souza, who didn’t complete his degree, yet earlier block the academic career of N.M. Perera, who had a double doctorate? Looking back now, with all the benefit of hindsight, I must say that there is another, more

plausible explanation for Doric’s actions. He was a young, over-confident, under-experienced intellectual who made a mess of a very difficult situation through his own immaturity. He had no previous experience building a revolutionary party. His knowledge of Leninism was abstract, drawn mainly from books. Unlike Susan, he hadn’t been through the struggles that begat and shaped the LSSP. When Susan and Philip were facing thugs at the gates of the Wellawatte Mills in 1933, Doric was a conservative career-minded student, studying his Latin diligently, and going to church every Sunday.

The two were as different as night and day. Susan was tempestuous, high-strung, driven to socialism by a deep, moral outrage at injustice done to real people in the real world around her. Doric de Souza was the epitome of the brainy Marxist intellectual, cool and efficient like a machine, converted to the cause by the awesome intellectual power of Leon Trotsky’s writings.

In any case, given the threat that the party faced from police agents at that moment, Philip Gunawardena took Susan’s reports seriously. He recalled the case of that famous Czarist spy in the Bolshevik party, Roman Malinovsky, who succeeded in hoodwinking even Lenin until he was finally unmasked after the Bolsheviks seized state power and opened the police archives. In 1942, after the four LSSP leaders were liberated from jail, Philip voiced his suspicions of Doric in the party. The situation went downhill from there. An ugly, personalistic, unprincipled faction fight ensued. The party split and as a result more repression followed. If the government had wanted to disrupt the LSSP, they couldn’t have done a better job.

A “Persona Non Grata”

Though she still believed that Doric de Souza was a spy, Susan wanted to see the split healed. The rivalries between the two competing Trotskyist groups were damaging their credibility and hindering their ability to capitalize on the post-war upsurge in labor militancy and nationalist feeling.

Susan went to England, apparently to seek the support of the British Trotskyists for her proposal to settle the differences between the two parties. Returning home in 1947, she reported:

“We entered Parliament as an offensive force. Today we have surrendered that role to the Government. The main reason being the squabbling between our groups, which the government has capitalized within Parliament to strengthen its position. Even so there is the possibility of our climbing back if we can only close our ranks.”³⁵

By this time she had become something of an outcast, standing between the two parties: “I am not persona grata with any group though officially I stand with Philip.”

A Political Reorientation

At this point Susan’s political thinking was changing. With the onset of the Cold War in 1947-48, Susan believed that the Stalinist regime in Russia would be forced to return to the revolutionary path. She concluded that the Trotskyist movement, in Ceylon and internationally, needed to mend fences with the Communist movement and close ranks.

In a letter to the leadership of the Fourth International, she wrote:

“Russia has at last taken the Road to Permanent Revolution with the result that Fascism is openly and feverishly arraying itself on a world scale against her... I believe the conditions have been fulfilled for the entry of the Trotskyists into the ranks of the Parties standing with Russia.”³⁶

Four days later Susan resigned from the LSSP. She applied for membership in the Ceylon Communist Party (CP) but was refused. Perhaps the CP leaders were suspicious of a Trotskyist who had such a sudden change of heart. She was known in political circles as a follower of Philip Gunawardena. The last thing the CP wanted was an agent of Philip in their ranks.

But after several years politics took an unexpected twist. In 1950 Philip split from the LSSP and formed the Viplavakari LSSP. He abandoned his Trotskyism and took up a position on the USSR and Communist movement that was very similar to Susan’s. In 1951 he entered into a tight united front with the CP. That paved the way for Susan to enter the CP in 1952.

But history didn’t play out as Susan had expected. The Cold War didn’t reverse the Stalinist degeneration in the USSR. Even after the death of Stalin in 1953, and the false dawn of “de-Stalinization” under Khrushchev, Soviet tanks crushed the popular uprising in Hungary in 1956.

Susan didn’t play much of a role in the CP, as far as I have been able to determine. She retired to a plantation on the Thalawathugoda Road in Talangama, a quiet rural area far from the political beehive in Colombo. Kumari Jayawardena visited her there in the ‘sixties. She described Susan as a “feisty” old lady who still blamed her cousin, Doric de Souza, for “wrecking the LSSP.”

A Tempestuous Radical

Susan de Silva spent more than thirty years of her life fighting for the freedom of her country and for a just society cleansed of oppression. She dared to enter politics at a time when it was strictly a “man’s world.” She courageously pursued her convictions even when it meant sacrificing her marriage. She devoted herself to building a revolutionary party and didn’t flinch even when her comrades were being arrested and jailed.

Yet I think that the very passions that drove her also defeated her. She was too rebellious and impatient to be confined to any disciplined party over the long haul. As her nephew Eymard so aptly puts it, “Aunt Susan was a tempestuous radical who believed in a randomly ordered type of free choice that was not subject to any form of traditional authority or to the prevailing views of an epistemic community (including the LSSP).”

Whatever her faults and errors, Susan de Silva deserves to be elevated from obscurity and honored for her personal sacrifices and courage in the fight for freedom and social justice in Sri Lanka.

Endnotes

- 1 Charles Wesley Ervin, “Susande Silva: Feminist Rebel and Pioneer Leftist,” *Sunday Island*, October 3, 2010.
- 2 Eymard de Silva Wijeyeratne, “Susan de Silva: A Feminist Rebel, But A Lovable Aunt,” *Sunday Island*, October 10, 2010.
- 3 The reasons for the break with the papacy were evidently more political than doctrinal. Since the sixteenth century, the Holy See had allowed the King of Portugal to nominate Bishops to the diocese of Latin Rite India. In 1887 Pope Leo XIII abolished this royal Portuguese patronage (“Patronado”) system. In India some dissident priests formed a “Patronado Defense Association” that tried unsuccessfully to get the old system restored. In 1888 the Association elected a Goan priest, Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvarez, to be the first bishop of the (Latin Rite) Independent Catholic Church of Ceylon, Goa and India. Peter Anson, *Bishops at Large* (1963), 105.
- 4 **P.M. Lisboa Pinto** (1857-1898) was a medical doctor and scholar of some repute in Goa. He was the leading layman in the Patronado Defense Association and had traveled to both Rome and Lisbon on their behalf. According to a contemporary report, “Dr. Lisboa Pinto is the most vigorous defender of the faith of this new Church.” Eugene R. Smith (ed.), *The Gospel in All Lands* (1892), 204. He was active in the Christian Temperance movement and published a book, *Alcoholic Drinks, or notes on the medical, social, political and religious aspects of the liquor question*.
- 5 Kumari Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* (1972), 86-89.
- 6 **A.E. Buultjens** (1865-1916) won the Cambridge Scholarship at St. Thomas’ College in 1883. In England he converted from Christianity to Buddhism. After his return home, he played a leading role in the Buddhist Revival movement. He founded the Young Men’s Buddhist Association and was principal of Ananda College from 1890 to 1898.


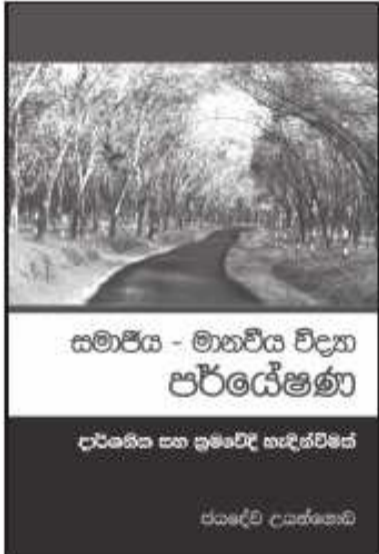
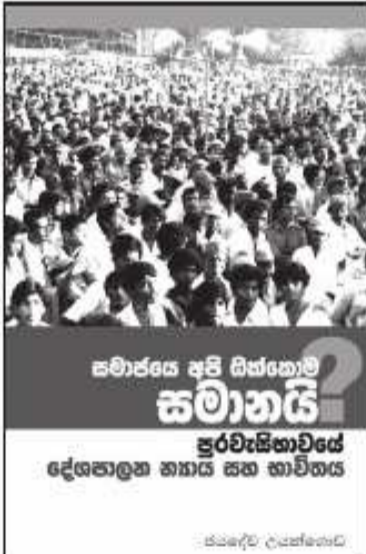
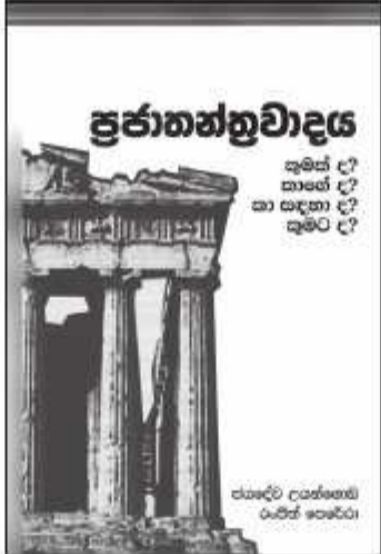
- 7 William Thomas Keble, *History of St. Thomas' College, Colombo* (1937).
- 8 Sir Gerard Wijeyekoon, *Recollections* (1951), 276-77.
- 9 The Royal Indian Engineering College had been established in 1870 to train engineers for the rapidly expanding railway network in India and other public-works projects in the British colonies. The college was situated in a picturesque estate mansion on Cooper's Hill, near Egham, Surrey. A. Cameron Taylor, *General Sir Alex Taylor, G.C.B., R.E.: His Times, His Friends, and His Work* (1913), vol. 2, 240-89.
- 10 **Charles Ambrose Lionel Lorenz** (1829-1871) became a prominent lawyer, started the progressive journal *Young Ceylon*, helped establish the Ceylon Railways, pioneered the development of modern local government, represented the Burgher community in the Legislative Council, and was a high-level member of the Sphinx Lodge of Masonry in Colombo. See Kumari Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia* (2007). For his Masonic affiliation, see *Freemason's Magazine and Masonic Mirror*, vol. 21, no. 528 (14 August 1869), 135-36.
- 11 Jane Russell, *Our George: A Biography of George Edmund de Silva* (1981), 8. Walter invited other organizations, such as the Ceylon Shorthand Writers Association, to hold their meetings at the Tutory. Reported in *Pitman's Journal of Commercial Education*, 66 (1907), 317.
- 12 **Armand de Souza** (1874-1921) was born in Goa, orphaned at a young age, and sent to Ceylon by his grandmother to live with his uncle, Dr. P.M. Lisboa Pinto (see footnote 4). Though he could speak almost no English at first, he attended the Royal College, married Walter de Silva's sister, and then got a job as a railway stationmaster in a rural station where only one train stopped a day. With plenty of time on his hands, he read voraciously. He took up journalism at the *Ceylon Independent*, then at the *Times*, and eventually became editor-in-chief of the *Morning Leader*, which he built up into one of the leading papers of the day. In 1915 he was arrested as an instigator of the Sinhalese-Muslim rioting. He subsequently blasted the government in his book, *One Hundred Days in Ceylon Under Martial Law in 1915*.
- 13 V.K. Jayawardena, *Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 226.
- 14 **Valentine S. Perera** was a barrister who wrote for the *Lorenz Tutory Magazine*. See *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon*, 43:2 (October 1928), 65.
- Sir Edwin Aloysius Perera Wijeyeratne** (1889-1968) went to work at the Lorenz Tutory after passing out of St. Joseph's College in Colombo. He helped establish the first night school in Ceylon for adult education, became a journalist under Armand de Souza, was a founding member of the Ceylon National Congress, served in the Legislative Council, and was elected to the State Council in 1931 and appointed to the Senate in 1947.
- 15 One of her comrades in the LSSP later recalled in his memoirs that Susan "had the marks of a liberated woman, wearing short hair and smoking." Regi Siriwardena, *Working Underground: The LSSP in Wartime* (1999), 29.
- 16 **Alexander Ekanayake Goonesinha** (1891-1967) started the Servants of Lanka Society in 1913 to promote education and Temperance. Together with Charles Edward Victor S. Corea, he launched the Young Lanka League in 1915. He was arrested during the rioting in 1915. In 1921 Goonesinha and Corea started a non-compliance campaign against the Poll Tax, in which they did manual labor on the roads rather than pay the tax. In 1922 the duo set up the Ceylon Labour Union, and Goonesinha led strikes of railway workers in 1923 and harbour and coal workers in 1927.
- 17 **George Edmund de Silva** (1879-1950) was one of the early students at the Lorenz Tutory. Walter de Silva recognized his talent, encouraged him to take the Proctor's Preliminary Exam, and awarded him a scholarship to the Law College. He was in the liberal wing of the Ceylon National Congress. He was elected to the Kandy Municipal Council and then the State Council in 1931 and 1936.
- Stephen William Dassenaike** (1874-1933?) was a student at Royal College a few years behind Walter de Silva. He too won a scholarship to attend the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper's Hill and, like Walter, came out at the head of the class in the first year's examination in 1892. (Sandra Raban, *Examining the World: A History of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate* (2008), 45.) He worked as an F.C.H. District Engineer in the Public Works Department and became a member of the Legislative Council. He was elected to the first State Council in 1931 as a Labour Party candidate from Colombo South.
- 18 Kumari Jayawardena, "The Participation of Women in the Social Reform, Political, and Labour Movements in Sri Lanka," *Praxis*, 5:2 (May-August 1980), 5.
- 19 Kumari Jayawardena, *Doreen Wickremasinghe – A Western Radical in Sri Lanka* (1991), 22; reprinted in Wesley Muthiah, Selvy Thiruchandran, and Sydney Wanasinghe (eds.), *Socialist Women of Sri Lanka* (2006).
- 20 Reggie Perera, "Journey into Politics," serialized in *The Ceylon Observer*, August-September 1962. **R. Arthur Reginald Perera** (1915-1977) attended St. John's College in Panadura, joined the Youth League, and participated in the Suriya Mal movement. He was a founding member of the LSSP, was elected to Parliament in 1947, and served in the Senate from 1959 to 1972.
- 21 **Don Philip Rupasinghe Gunawardena** (1901-1972) is widely regarded as "the father of Marxism" in Sri Lanka. He had become a Marxist during his university days in the USA and then worked full-time for the British Communist Party for four years, until he was booted out in 1932 for supporting the views of the exiled Bolshevik, Leon Trotsky, against Stalin, who had usurped power in the USSR. For information on his formative years abroad, see Charles Wesley Ervin, *Philip Gunawardena: The Making of a Revolutionary* (2001) and *Pilip Gunavardhana: Viplavavadiyakuge Hadagasma* (2005).
- 22 Robert Gunawardena, "My Political Life," *Daily Mirror*, November 4, 1971; also Vernon Gunasekera, *Pilip: ohuge jivitaya ha desapalana satan* (1960), 10.
- 23 **Vernon H. Gunasekera** (1908-1996), unpublished audiotape interview with Michael Roberts, July 7, 1966. I thank Michael Roberts, adjunct associate professor of anthropology at the University of Adelaide, for providing an audio copy of this interview. The original tapes are now deposited in the University of Adelaide Library.
- 24 **Colvin Reginald de Silva** (1907-1989) attended Royal College in Colombo and then the London University, where he earned a PhD in history. He also read law and was admitted to the bar. He was secretary of Ceylon Students' Association in London and in 1931 he visited the USSR.

- 25 Kumari Jayawardena, "The Background to the Formation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party," reprinted in Al Richardson (ed.), *Blows Against the Empire: Trotskyism in Ceylon* (1997), 25.
- 26 Apparently, after Walter C. de Silva died, the Lorenz Tutorry became Lorenz College. Around the beginning of the Second World War the College opened a branch in Gampaha. In his memoirs the well-known actor and dramatist, Henry Jayasena affectionately describes the Gampaha branch, where he studied, and the mother school in Maradana.
- 27 From the start the LSSP established fraternal relations with the Congress Socialist Party in India, a broad socialist caucus that functioned within the "big tent" of the Indian National Congress. Starting in 1936, the LSSP sent delegates to the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. The Congress gathering in 1939 was held at Tripura.
- The LSSP delegation had an appointment to meet with Jawaharlal Nehru. However, Susan missed her chance. Her fellow delegate, Reggie Perera, recounted later in his memoirs, "As several of our delegates were sick with malaria, and some others were busy otherwise, it ultimately transpired that W.S. de Silva and I were the only two to keep the appointment with the great Indian leader." Reggie Perera, "Journey into Politics," serialized in *The Ceylon Observer*, August-September 1962.
- 28 According to Leslie Goonewardene, a senior leader of the LSSP at that time, "Most of the members and sympathizers disappeared. We couldn't find them." **Leslie Simon Goonewardene** (1909-1983),

- unpublished audiotape interview with Michael Roberts, April 26, 1967, deposited in the University of Adelaide Library.
- 29 **Anthony Theodoric Armand de Souza** (1914-1987) was the son of Armand de Souza. Armand married Susan's father's sister. A brilliant student, Doric got a first class honors degree from University College in Colombo in 1934, won a university scholarship, and enrolled in the University College in London as a PhD student in October 1935. He returned to Ceylon in 1937 before completing his degree. I thank Richard Temple, Archivist at the Senate House Library, University of London, for providing the details of Doric de Souza's attendance at the university.
- 30 Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe, *Britain, World War 2 and the Samasamajists* (1996), 145-50 and 169.
- 31 Amaradasa Fernando, "Elmer de Haan-Eccentric, godless, musical genius," *Sunday Times*, June 20, 2004.
- 32 Muthiah and Wanasinghe, *Britain, World War 2 and the Samasamajists*, 11, 190-91.
- 33 For a detailed account of the faction fight in the LSSP, see Charles Wesley Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48* (2006), chapter 6.
- 34 Susan de Silva, *The Wrecking of the LSSP* (1959), 2-3.
- 35 Susan de Silva, letter to E. (Ted) Grant, February 12, 1948, reprinted in *Wrecking of the LSSP*, 22.
- 36 Susan de Silva, letter to Secretary of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, June 20, 1948, reprinted in *Wrecking of the LSSP*, 24. ■

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