
REMEMBERING A SOCIALIST PIONEER SELINA PERERA – THE RELENTLESS REVOLUTIONARY

Charles Wesley Ervin

In Sri Lanka the historic leaders of the Old Left still loom large in the pantheon of national heroes. Yet not all the pioneers have received their due credit. One such “forgotten soldier” is Selina Perera. She was a founding member and front-line leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). She went to India with her comrades in 1942 to participate in the independence struggle. After the war, Selina chose to remain in India for the rest of her life, fighting for the revolutionary ideals of her youth. I had the privilege of meeting her in Calcutta in 1974. She was a relentless revolutionary who deserves to be remembered and honored.¹

Formative Years

Selina Margaret Peiris was born in 1909 in Badulla. Her father, reputed to be one of the wealthiest landowners in Uva Province, wanted his children to get a good English education. He sent Selina to the local Catholic Convent school, where she earned a reputation as Badulla’s brightest student. After completing her primary education, Selina went to Musaeus College in Colombo, one of the girls’ schools that the Theosophists founded in Ceylon to promote a Buddhist revival.

After passing out of Musaeus, Selina continued her education at the local University College. Petite and attractive, she wore large, round wire-framed eyeglasses which gave her a studious look. A contemporary remembers her as “a sweet, sensitive, unspoiled, and intelligent woman.”² Attracted to the stage, she made her debut at the Royal College theatre playing the lead role in *The King’s Wife*, a drama by the Irish Theosophist, James Henry Cousins, who was then professor of English at Madras University.³

Selina started her career as a teacher at the Buddhist Girls’ College in Mount Lavinia and became its first principal. Yet she was not content simply to teach. Like many educated youth of that time, Selina was awakening to the call of progressive nationalism. The freedom movement in India reverberated in Ceylon. Gandhi launched a mass civil

disobedience campaign in 1930. The following year restive young Ceylonese nationalists launched their own Youth League movement to press the fight for complete independence that the local elite refused to support, much less lead. Selina joined the South Colombo Youth League and hosted political meetings at her school in the evenings. She was one of the ‘New Women’ of the period – independent, educated, courageous and politically active as were Caroline (Gunawardena), Anonypillai, Doreen (Young) Wickremasinghe, Susan de Silva and later Vivienne Gunawardena.

In late 1932 Philip Gunawardena, the father of Ceylon Marxism, also joined the South Colombo Youth League. Philip had become a socialist during his student years in America and then spent the next five years in London working with the British Communist Party, until he was expelled for supporting Trotsky against Stalin.⁴ Given his depth of experience and immense charisma, Philip quickly became the driving force behind the South Colombo Youth League. Selina gradually was attracted to Marxism.⁵

Radical Protest

In Ceylon, like everywhere else in the Empire, the British Establishment celebrated Armistice Day with jingoistic parades, formal banquets with toasts to Her Majesty, and all the rest. The ladies sold poppies and donated the proceeds to war veterans. Some nationalists complained that the Ceylonese veterans got the short end of the stick. In 1931 Aelian Perera, an ex-servicemen, started a *swadeshi* version of the campaign, in which Ceylonese volunteers sold the *suriya* flower and gave the proceeds to Ceylonese veterans. The South Colombo Youth League enthusiastically joined the next Suriya Mal protest. Selina and her comrades radicalized and took over the committee.⁶ “Register your refusal to encourage participation in Imperialist War,” declared their manifesto. “Every Suriya Mala is a blow against Imperialism, Fascism, and War.” In the context of that time, this was shocking. Nice middle-class Ceylonese women

weren't supposed to be handing out leaflets that sounded like they'd been written in Moscow.

In 1933 a malaria epidemic swept the island. The government response was tardy and more than 10,000 perished in two months alone. The Suriya Mal activists organized their own grassroots relief campaign. Selina trekked from one stricken village to the next, distributing medicine and food. She saw babies sucking the breasts of their dead mothers, and huts filled with corpses. The experience stoked her anger at social injustice and siffened her resolve to fight for the uplift of the masses.

In the course of this work she became close with a fellow Suriya Mal activist, Dr. N.M. Perera, a handsome university lecturer who had just earned his doctorate at the London School of Economics. He was one of Philip Gunawardena's devotees. A sweet romance soon developed. Their relationship was intertwined with their politics from the start.

The Red Party

In 1935 the British government announced that elections would be held to the State Council early the following year. Selina and her comrades decided that the time was opportune to launch a socialist party. In December 1935 Selina participated in the founding conference of the LSSP. The party brimmed with youthful idealism. She was elected to the Central Committee and served as the party's treasurer.⁷ Getting off to a roaring start, the LSSP fielded four candidates in the elections. Selina stumped with N.M. Perera in Ruwanwella. Much to the shock of the establishment, they toppled the wealthy and powerful incumbent. Philip Gunawardena also won in Avissawella, where his family was well known and respected. Gunawardena and Perera used the State Council brilliantly to broadcast their political message to the people and to fight for reforms that would better the lot of the poor.

On 6 March, 1936, Selina and N.M. Perera married. In a sense they were also married to the LSSP. Both had dedicated their lives to the cause. She was a party leader in her own right and had a big influence in his political success.⁸ She was regarded as "one of the most able and militant women in the party."⁹

In 1937 a young Australian, Mark Bracegirdle, arrived in Ceylon to learn the planting business. He felt sorry for the estate laborers and contacted the LSSP. The party decided that this callow youth with pinkish Communist sympathies

could be put to good use. Selina and her comrades organized open air rallies in the plantation districts at which Bracegirdle would thunder against the Planter Raj. The government issued a deportation order against the rabble-rouser. Selina played a key role in hiding him from the police. The party cleverly turned "the Bracegirdle Affair" into a cause célèbre. When he was finally deported in 1938, Selina was at the jetty to see him off.

All this publicity made Selina's parents anxious. Her father offered to pay for her to go to England and get her degree.¹⁰ Selina and her comrades saw this as an opportunity. They decided that she should go to England, work with the British Trotskyists, and then visit Leon Trotsky at his refuge in Mexico on her way home. And so in 1938 she said goodbye to her husband, family, and comrades and set off on her mission.

Mission to Mexico

Selina enrolled at the School of Oriental and African Studies, which was part of the University of London. She studied Sanskrit and Pali, the language of the ancient Theravada Buddhist canon. In June 1939 she completed her B.A. degree in Indo-Aryan Languages with a Lower Second Class Honors.¹¹

Meanwhile, Selina worked closely with the local Trotskyist groups and stayed for a while with Charlie Van Gelderen, who was one of the delegates to the founding conference of the Fourth International in Paris in September 1938. Though vastly outnumbered on the left, the British Trotskyists were engaged in a fierce political war with the Communist Party. Selina and her comrades denounced the crimes of the Stalinists. In the USSR Stalin was carrying out the Great Terror. He staged the infamous Moscow trials in order to eliminate all remaining rivals. In Spain the Stalinist agents murdered the Trotskyists and other leftists fighting Franco. Just as Trotsky predicted, the counterrevolutionary policy of the Stalinists in Spain led to the defeat of the Republic and set the stage for the next world war.

In September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany. Selina had to continue her mission posthaste. Arriving in New York the following month, she made a bee line to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the American section of the Fourth International, who welcomed her with open arms. The SWP newspaper printed her statement of opposition to the "imperialist war."¹² On 2 November, she briefed the members of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth

International in New York City. Up to that point, the leaders of the Fourth International, including Trotsky himself, didn't know that they even had supporters in Ceylon, not to mention that they led the hegemonic party of the left.

The SWP made the arrangements for her trip to Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City, where the Trotskys were living a precarious exile life. When she reached San Antonio, Texas, she sent Trotsky a short letter asking to be met at the bus terminal in Mexico City. "I do not think you will have any difficulty in identifying me, if you look out for a brown-skinned female in a strange costume!"¹³ However, she was stopped at the border in Laredo on a visa technicality. Deeply dismayed, she wrote to Trotsky from California four days later: "I was reluctantly forced to abandon my trip to Mexico and forego perhaps the one chance in my lifetime of meeting you."¹⁴ She was right. A Stalinist assassin murdered Trotsky in his home less than a year later. She often told her comrades that missing that one opportunity to meet Trotsky was the greatest disappointment of her life.¹⁵

Fighting in the Front Rank

Returning to Ceylon in early 1940, Selina plunged back into party work. Following the Trotskyist line, the LSSP refused to support the British war effort. Selina once again became a familiar figure on party platforms. In the State Council her husband and Philip Gunawardena voted against the war budget and delivered blistering antiwar speeches that alarmed the Colonial Office in London.

In June 1940 the Governor of Ceylon issued an order for the arrest of top party leaders. Alerted to the impending repression, the LSSP decided that Leslie Goonewardene should go underground immediately and begin to organize a clandestine apparatus, while the other leaders would court arrest. On 18 June the police arrested Philip Gunawardena, N.M. Perera, and Colvin de Silva; Edmund Samarakkody was arrested the following day. The LSSP called a mass meeting to protest the arrests. The police attacked. In the melee Selina rallied the crowd and led a march to the Welikada prison. "A vanload of baton-waving Policemen jumped on us as we reached Norris Road," recalls one of her comrades, "and having introduced us to the heavy ends of their batons, took several of us into custody."¹⁶ Selina was jailed and later released.

From that point on, "Selina became the principal mass figure around whom the open activity of the party was organized and developed."¹⁷ She worked under the constant threat of

arrest. In 1941 she addressed the Jaffna Youth Congress. "Selina made a fiery speech but worded it cunningly to avoid an open denunciation of the British. Nevertheless, she was arrested and charged with sedition in the Mallakam courts and was acquitted of the charges."¹⁸ Later she helped lead a strike at the Rothman's cigarette company in Colombo. When a police officer tried to arrest her on the picket line, she slapped him and said, "That should teach you not to lay hands on a woman!"

In April 1942 the LSSP carried out a well-planned raid on the jail where Selina's husband and the other three party leaders were being held. The prisoners were spirited under cover of darkness to hideouts around Colombo. Embarrassed and infuriated, the government jailed more party members and put Selina under house arrest. The LSSP was in effect driven completely underground.

The Exodus to India

Unable to do much in Ceylon at that point, the party leaders decided to shift their activities to India. This made good sense for several reasons. First, while Ceylon was quiet at that point, India was a volcano ready to erupt. Gandhi was threatening to summon another mass movement to force the British to "quit India." Second, they had co-thinkers in the major cities of India with whom they could seek refuge and join forces. In May 1942 these groups of Indian Trotskyists merged into the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) with its headquarters in Bombay.

In July 1942 Selina and her comrades made their well-planned escape from Ceylon in little fishing boats. While some went to Madurai, Selina and the main contingent continued on to Bombay. She and her husband, assuming fictitious names, rented a flat in Girangaon.

Just a few weeks later, the Quit India revolt erupted in Bombay and quickly spread across India. While the Communist Party opposed the struggle, the Trotskyists gave it their unconditional support. Though the party was small and new to the scene, the government regarded the BLPI as a significant potential threat.¹⁹ They stepped up their manhunt for the Ceylonese fugitives. Detectives who could recognize Selina and her comrades were brought up from Ceylon. The Bombay police were told to look for a woman with a "Rosa Luxemburgian" character.²⁰ Selina used to go out to demonstrations in various disguises.²¹ Using an assumed name, she got a teaching job at a school in Bombay and helped to finance the party with her earnings.

As a result of their interventions, the BLPI recruited a number of youth who needed to be trained in Marxism and Trotskyism. Selina was outstanding in that role. However, even within the BLPI she had to be cautious, knowing that the police were trying to plant spies in the party. The new recruits in her study classes knew her simply as "Margie."²²

On the Run

In July 1943 the Bombay police, acting on a tip from the Communist Party, raided BLPI hideouts and arrested most of the cadres, including her husband. Alerted to the danger, Selina, Colvin de Silva, Leslie and Vivienne Goonewardene fled to Madras, where there was a strong BLPI branch. Selina and her comrades took up residence at the BLPI "commune," a spacious two-storied house in Venus Colony in Teynampet. She became part of the party executive committee.

During this period an emissary from the American SWP contacted the underground party in Madras. He was a comrade whom Selina had met in the US in 1940. It was a happy reunion. "Her eyes sparkled with immense delight as we recalled her tour and some of the people we knew. She wants to be remembered to all the comrades she had met over here."²³ He also noted that she looked like she had aged considerably. The nerve-wracking life of a revolutionary on the run was taking its toll.

In 1944 Selina participated in the first all-India conference of the BLPI, which was held in Madras under the tightest security. Somehow the police got wind of this meeting. The delegates had to disperse quickly. With the police hot on their trail, Selina, Colvin de Silva, and the Goonewardenes went to Calcutta, where there was another strong branch of the party. They settled in the Entally suburb of the city and integrated themselves in the work of the branch.

The move to Calcutta opened a happier chapter in her life. She had developed a close political and personal relationship with Colvin de Silva.²⁴ In addition, the internal life of the Calcutta BLPI was stimulating. The leaders of the branch were urbane, well-read Marxist intellectuals who were her intellectual peers. The Bengali comrades adored her. They affectionately called her "Sheela." From then on, that became her name, and Calcutta became her home.

No Turning Back

When the war ended, huge political demonstrations against the British took place in Calcutta. In February

1946 there was a mutiny in the Indian navy in Bombay and fighting in the streets. "Selina was highly delighted to find a genuine revolutionary situation in India," recalls Sainen Bannerji, a former member of the BLPI in Calcutta.²⁵

Selina played an important role in helping the party get important bases in the labor movement, notably with the fire fighters in Calcutta, paper mill workers in Titagarh, pottery factory workers in Purulia, and coal workers in Raniganj. She also patiently trained the young recruits. A visiting British Trotskyist commended her initiative in "the work of giving study groups, classes and lectures, the work of training up new members, candidates and contacts in dialectical materialism, in economics, in the general theory of Marxism."²⁶ As one of her young protégés later recalled, Selina "guided me towards reading books of great socialist thinkers who weren't always mentioned in the common run Marxist literature."²⁷

Meanwhile, in Ceylon the Trotskyists fielded candidates for the parliamentary elections in 1947. Selina returned to help Colvin de Silva with his campaign. However, after the election, she returned to Calcutta. The BLPI had become her mission in life, and her true love. She settled in a modest, little street-level flat at 54 Ganesh Chandra Avenue in central Calcutta, next to the law office of her friend and comrade from the London days, Ajit Roy. She supported herself by tutoring Bengalis in English.²⁸

The Demise of the BLPI

In 1947 a group within the BLPI proposed that the party merge with the Congress Socialist Party, the large left wing of the Indian National Congress. In their view, the BLPI was too small to compete effectively on the left. If they joined the Socialist Party, they argued, they would be able to win over left-wing Socialists, build up a Trotskyist caucus within the party, and then exit stronger than before. Selina had misgivings. Why merge with the Socialists when the BLPI was starting to make headway, especially in Madras and Bengal?

The pro-entry faction gradually gained a majority in the party, and in late 1948 the BLPI voted to enter the Socialist Party. For Selina, the demise of the BLPI was painful. Nevertheless, she carried out the party decision with energy and discipline. She circulated Fourth International literature within the party and prodded the leadership to take more militant positions. "Sheela Perera went on with dedication," recalled one of her comrades. "As a result, she earned the respect of many leaders

and activists of the Socialist Party.”²⁹ She was elected to the West Bengal executive committee and worked with unions in the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, the Socialist trade-union federation.

In 1952 the Socialists contested the general elections with high hopes. The ruling Congress Party, however, won a landslide victory. Demoralized by the humiliating defeat, the Socialist leaders decided to unite with a breakaway group of dissident old-school Congressmen, forming a new party based on a hodge-podge of Gandhism and Marxism. Upon hearing the news, Selina immediately rallied about 500 Socialist Party members to reject the merger. She became their recognized public spokesperson. But the dissident Socialists had to swim against a strong stream. The Nehru government had won a lot of popular support with its claims to be building “democratic socialism” in India. The dissident Socialists were marginalized.

Abortive Socialist Regroupment

In the aftermath of the 1952 elections several left parties began talking about the need for unity in order to build an effective opposition. On 27 January, 1955 more than a dozen leftist parties met in Bombay and voted to launch the Mazdoor Kisan Party (Workers and Peasants Party) at a future conference.³⁰ Selina welcomed this initiative, and she and six other Trotskyists were elected to the 20-member Provisional Central Committee.

In Bombay the new front of parties got off to a promising start by taking leadership of the popular movement for a United Maharashtra. But mass work alone couldn’t resolve the political differences amongst the different parties in the front. Taking an active role in the debate over program, Selina criticized the fuzzy formulations and semi-Stalinist positions and fought for the Trotskyist line. The discussions dragged on for more than two years with little progress.

As the general election of 1957 drew near, the two largest parties in the front unilaterally mounted their own independent election campaigns. Clearly, the “urge to merge” wasn’t very strong. Selina concluded that the regroupment exercise was futile. She called upon all Trotskyists in India to close ranks and form a purely Trotskyist party. “Let us tell them [the other Left parties] that instead of running after illusions of half-baked unity just now, we are consolidating Trotskyists to contribute in clarifying our stand and laying a sound basis of Left unity if it ever comes about.”³¹

Fighting for the Party Perspective

In November 1957 Selina convened a conference of Trotskyists in Calcutta. The delegates voted in favor of building a new party that would be associated with the international Trotskyist movement. Selina was enthusiastic. She could finally devote herself to rebuilding a Bolshevik party in India. She promptly made a financial donation to support the production of the internal discussion bulletins.

Some of the Trotskyists, however, waffled on the conference decision, temporized, and wanted to chase after other centrist parties. In the discussion bulletins Selina and her group sharply criticized their proposals as wishful thinking and opportunist maneuvers. Selina defended the fundamental perspective of building a disciplined Bolshevik party, no matter how long and hard that struggle might be.

In 1958 Selina hosted another conference in Calcutta that launched the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP).³² The new party declared: “The only revolutionary ideology today in this world has the name of Trotskyism, i.e. contemporary Marxism.” The RWP program was based on the original program of the BLPI. Selina was elected to the three-member political bureau.

Selina was keen to re-establish the link with the Fourth International that had been severed when the BLPI entered the Congress Socialist Party in 1948. In the intervening years, however, the world Trotskyist movement had been wracked by an ideological crisis fueled by the onset of the Cold War and the unexpected expansion of Stalinism globally. In 1953 the Fourth International split in two. “I don’t recall seeing documents at the time,” she told me in 1974. “We in India had only a murky idea of what was happening in the Fourth International.”³³ Through contacts with visiting Trotskyists, she opened a dialogue with both wings of the Fourth International. Jimmy Deane, a veteran British Trotskyist, advised the RWP to “maintain close and friendly relations” with both factions.³⁴ Selina and her comrades urged both sides “to seriously consider and find out ways and means to heal up this wound with democratic organizational safety for future.”³⁵

Though the RWP got off to a good start, there were still those in the party who had appetites for a bigger merger. In Bengal some RWP members started discussions with the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), a maverick communist group that had been around since the ‘thirties and

had a pro-Trotsky faction of its own. Selina opposed this initiative. In her view, the Trotskyists in India had wasted too much time and lost too many valuable cadres by trying to find short-cuts to building a revolutionary party. The pro-merger faction, however, prevailed and the RWP merged with the RCPI in June 1960.

For Selina the liquidation of the RWP was the last straw. According to one of her close comrades, "Her lofty dream [of a Trotskyist party] was torn asunder."³⁶ Selina withdrew to the sidelines. Just as she had predicted, the merger with the RCPI produced an unstable amalgamation. The party was put to the test when the Sino-Indian war broke out two years later. The RCPI majority took a pro-India line, while the Trotskyists defended China on the basis that it was a "workers state." The Trotskyists had to split and start all over again.

Though she didn't rejoin her old comrades, Selina continued to support leftist causes and worked with various unions in the Calcutta area. When the Communist Party split in 1964, Selina was on good terms with the leaders of the wing that became the CP(M), such as Ashok Mitra, who became finance minister in the first Left Front Government in West Bengal in 1977.

The Tragic End

In her later years Selina became more and more depressed. The death of her parents grieved her terribly. She also couldn't seem to resolve her emotional attachments with her ex-husband or Colvin de Silva. She gave money to her students for tuition and lived in virtual poverty herself. Her health deteriorated. Her letters to old comrades in Sri Lanka became less and less frequent, and then stopped altogether.

Selina made arrangements to have her family property in Maharagama donated to the LSSP after her death. She also instructed in her will that her personal savings be donated to social service organizations in India. Was she contemplating suicide? If she was, she wouldn't have been the first revolutionary to do so.

In late May 1986 her neighbors noticed that they hadn't seen Selina recently. They called the police, who entered her flat and found her body. She had been dead for some time. The Calcutta government kept her corpse in the morgue for a month with various pretexts. Finally, her friends and comrades were able to give her a proper funeral. She was cremated at Sahanagar in south Kolkata on 15 June 1986.

In his obituary Sailen Bannerji eloquently summed up the life of his friend and comrade: "Sheela remained in the forefront of a revolutionary party for over three decades. She had to suffer sarcasm and persecution for her political ideology. Disease, old age and grief had taken a harsh toll but her revolutionary self was indomitable. A relentless revolutionary, she was not only an ideal, but a great and rare pioneer."

End Notes

- 1 Hector Abhayavardhana, who joined the LSSP in the late 'thirties and knew Selina for many years, was the first to pay homage: H. Abhayavardhana, "Selina Perera – The Forgotten Socialist Militant," *Pravada* 4, nos. 10-11, 1997, 19-22.
- 2 E.C.B. Wijeyesinghe, *Selected Writings of E.C.B. Wijeyesinghe: Actor and Journalist*, Colombo: 2001, 235.
- 3 *Selected Writings of E.C.B. Wijeyesinghe*, 235.
- 4 Charles Wesley Ervin, *Philip Gunawardena: The Making of a Revolutionary*, Colombo: 2001; and C.W. Ervin, *Pilip Gunawardhana: Viplavavadiyake Hadagasma*, Colombo: 2005.
- 5 Sailen Bannerji (Bandopadhyay), "Biplabee Kamred Sheela Perera," *Ganabani*, 15 July 1986, 16.
- 6 Vernon Gunasekera, interview with Michael Roberts, 7 July 1966. University of Adelaide Library, Barr Smith Special Collections, Roberts Oral History Project, cassette 41.
- 7 H. Abhayavardhana, "Selina Perera – The Forgotten Socialist Militant," 19.
- 8 N.M. Perera acknowledged that he would not have developed into such a successful party leader himself "if I had married any other woman." E.P. de Silva, *N.M.: A Short Biography*, Colombo: 1975, 59.
- 9 Ajith Samaranyake, "Selina Perera – The LSSP's Link with Trotsky," *Pravada*, 4, nos. 10-11, 1997, 93.
- 10 S. Bannerji, "Biplabee Kamred Sheela Perera," 16.
- 11 I thank Nathan Sivasambu in London for getting this information.
- 12 *Socialist Appeal*, 10 November 1939.
- 13 Trotsky papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University: bMs Russ 13.1, file 3798.
- 14 Houghton Library: bMs Russ 13.1, file 3799.
- 15 Letter from Sailen Bannerji (Kolkata), 14 October 2007.
- 16 Reggie Perera, "Journey into Politics," *Ceylon Observer*, August-September 1962.
- 17 H. Abhayavardhana, "Selina Perera – The Forgotten Socialist Militant," 86.
- 18 Handy Perinbanayagam, a prominent Youth Congress leader, reported her speech and arrest in his newspaper, *Kesari* (The Lion). Santasilan Kadirgamar, *Handy Perinbanayagam: A*

- Memorial Volume* (Jaffna, 1980, part 1, 93. I thank his son, Robert Siddharthan Perinbanayagam, for this information.
- ¹⁹ Charles Wesley Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48* Colombo, 2006, chapter 4.
- ²⁰ Letter from Sailen Bannerji, 14 October 2007.
- ²¹ Lakmali Gunawardena, *Kusuma: A Life in Left Politics* Colombo, 2004, i.
- ²² Vinayak Purohit, *A Life of Surfeit and Overflow 1927-2005*, Pune, 2005, Chapter 1, 12.
- ²³ Hoover Archives, Stanford University, SWP Papers, box. 38.
- ²⁴ Hector Abhayavardhana, interview with C.W. Ervin, Colombo, 18 December 1997.
- ²⁵ Letter from Sailen Bannerji, 14 October 2007.
- ²⁶ Jock Haston Archives, University of Hull Library.
- ²⁷ Letter from Sitanshu Das (New Delhi), 24 October 2003.
- ²⁸ Letter from Sailen Bannerji, 22 November 2007.
- ²⁹ Sailen Bannerji, "Biplabee Kamred Sheela Perera," 17.
- ³⁰ *A New Marxist Party is Born: The Policy Statement of the All-India Mazdoor Kisan Party*, 30 November 1955, 7-8.
- ³¹ R.N. Arya, "Reply to Comrade Kolpe on His Recent Proposals," *Internal Bulletin* (Socialist Party (Marxist)), 1, no. 4 June 1957, part 1, 9.
- ³² *Marxist Unity—For Socialism in India. Statement of Policy of the Revolutionary Workers Party of India* Calcutta, 1958, 3.
- ³³ Selina Perera, interview with C.W. Ervin, Kolkata, 29 January 1974.
- ³⁴ Jim Deane, "On the Fourth International," *Internal Bulletin* (RWP), 2, no. 3, September-October 1958, 11.
- ³⁵ R.N. Arya, "An Appeal to the International Trotskyist Conference (Affiliated to the International Committee)," 2 May 1958.
- ³⁶ Letter from Sailen Bannerji, 14 October 2007. ■

Charles Wesley Ervin is the author of *Tomorrow is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48*, published in 2006 by the Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka. He lives in the USA. Email: wes_ervin@bellsouth.net



Selina Perera in the 1930s.