

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.

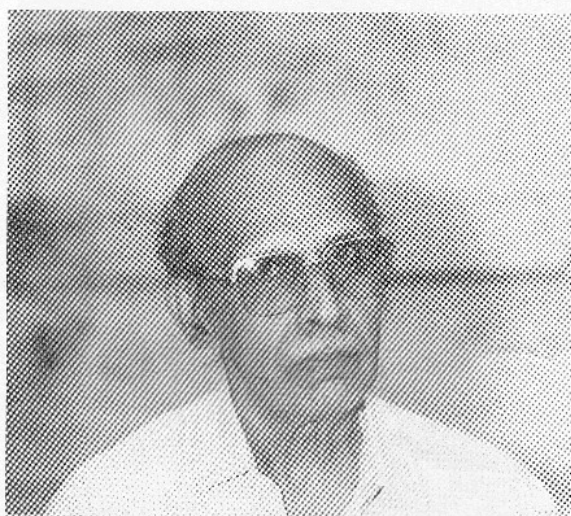
He was born at Raddoluwa, Seeduwa, on 16 February 1932 and was educated at St. Mary's College, Negombo, St. Joseph's College, Colombo, and S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. He joined the LSSP while still a university student in the early 1950s. He was the live-wire of an active group of Samasamajists 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