

# Sri Lankan Trotskyist P. V. Nandasena dies at age 71

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
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P. V. Nandasena, a long-standing member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), died on Saturday at the Kurunegala general hospital in North-Western Province. His funeral took place on Monday at Rambukkana in the same area, with the participation of about 500 people, including his party comrades, showing great respect for this fighter.

Nandasena was hospitalised on November 25 in an unconscious state with a fever. Doctors later diagnosed that he had contracted rat fever—a deadly ailment transmitted by rats often to those working in paddy fields. He was put in the intensive care unit and showed some signs of recovery, but his condition suddenly deteriorated last Saturday. Nandasena leaves behind his wife, J. Misilin Dayaratna, who is a retired teacher, and his daughter, Thilini Subodhika Nandasena, a state employee.

The death of this courageous comrade is a great loss for the party.

Nandasena was a retired bank employee, popularly known among his comrades and workmates as Nande. He was born on October 28, 1943 at Hewadiwela, a village nearly 100 kilometres from Colombo. It is a poor village, typical of rural Sri Lanka. Nandasena's family farmed, which is the main occupation in the area.

Nandasena joined the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the forerunner of the SEP, in late 1976 while working at the state-owned Bank of Ceylon in Colombo. He was strongly attracted to the RCL's steadfast political fight against the bourgeois coalition government of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike and the treachery of the trade union bureaucracy.

The RCL was able to clarify Nandasena on the role of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which betrayed the principles of international socialism and first entered a coalition government with Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964. That government

collapsed in six months, but the coalition came to power again in 1970, also with the participation of the Stalinist Communist Party.

Within months, the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition imposed emergency rule, citing the emergence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which preached "armed struggle" based on Castroism, Maoism and Sinhala communalism. The government crushed the adventurist JVP uprising in 1971, killing 15,000 rural youth and imprisoning many more.

The RCL opposed emergency rule and warned workers that it would be used against them. As a result, the RCL was forced underground. All its publications were banned and two RCL members were arrested and killed in police custody.

Amid rising militancy among workers, the Ceylon Bank Employees Union (CBEU) went on a strike on September 1, 1972 over demands for a pay hike and other benefits. The coalition government—in which LSSP leader N. M. Perera was the finance minister and in charge of the state banking sector—invoked the emergency laws to break the strike. However, the bank workers defied the government and the threat to sack them, continuing their stoppage for 108 days, one of the longest-ever strikes in Sri Lankan history.

Only the RCL and its members in the CBEU advanced a political program to fight back. The RCL called on all workers to support the struggle and raised the demand that the LSSP and CP break from the bourgeois coalition government and form a workers' and peasants' government. The purpose of this tactical demand was to expose the treachery of the LSSP and CP and mobilise the working class on socialist policies, independently of every faction of the capitalist class.

The CBEU bureaucracy bitterly opposed this program, saying that militant strike action would force the government to give in. When the CBEU leaders

capitulated and called off the strike on December 17, workers were reinstated, but only on the basis of a probation period. All employees of the State Mortgage and Savings Bank, however, including Nandasena, were sacked. He later recalled he was deeply impressed by the RCL's struggle during the strike, but did not join the party immediately.

During his three years out of a job, Nandasena faced enormous economic hardships and lacked the means to adequately maintain his family. Together with a friend, he made shoes and bags to sell in Colombo and also worked in the paddy fields. He was reinstated in the Bank of Ceylon in 1975 and placed on a one-year probation. He met RCL members at the bank and joined the party the following year.

The bank strike marked the beginning of an upsurge of working class struggles against the attacks of the coalition government. The mounting political crisis was reflected in the dismissal of LSSP ministers from the government in 1975. The opposition of workers culminated in a general strike in December 1976. The strike was contained and defeated by the LSSP, CP and union bureaucracy, but nevertheless dealt a final blow to the SLFP-led government.

After joining the RCL, Nandasena became a vigorous campaigner for the party's Trotskyist perspective among bank employees and participated in its political activities among other workers, university students and in rural areas. He joined the party in a turbulent period. In 1977, the right-wing United National Party (UNP) came to power by exploiting widespread disillusionment with the SLFP, CP and LSSP.

The UNP government was one of the first in the world to turn to pro-market restructuring to open up the economy and attract foreign investors to exploit local cheap labour.

Determined to crush the opposition of the working class, the UNP defeated a determined public-sector strike in July 1980 by imposing draconian emergency laws and sacking 100,000 workers. It was assisted by all the fake left parties, including the Nava Sama Samaja Party, and the trade unions, which bitterly opposed any political struggle against the government based on socialist policies.

Faced with rising social tensions and widening opposition, the UNP resorted to anti-Tamil communalism to split and divide the working class. One communal provocation after another culminated in an island-wide anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983 that marked the beginning of a

quarter century of war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Some RCL members retreated from political activity in the wake of the defeat of the 1980 general strike, but Nandasena only deepened his commitment to the party's political struggle. He denounced the attempts by CBEU bureaucrats to compromise with the government and bank management, and fought courageously to win workers to revolutionary policies and the party.

At the union's annual general meetings, Nandasena was not afraid of standing alone. One bank employee explained: "He stood up and explained the political situation. He talked about the necessity of fighting for a workers' and peasants' government. He opposed the war and urged us to demand the unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces from the north. The henchmen of the union leaders tried to shout him down, but he ignored them and finished his speech."

Nandasena was greatly respected by his party comrades. He was tireless in his work for the party, which he always carried out promptly and meticulously. Even though he had turned 70, he participated enthusiastically in the SEP's campaign this year for a workers' inquiry into the army's attack on Weliveriya residents protesting against industrial pollution. He travelled 60 kilometres from his home to get to the town.

On November 21, just four days before he was hospitalised, Nandasena campaigned for and participated in a public meeting in Kurunegala on the political lessons of the LSSP's betrayal in 1964. He also took part in an SEP membership meeting to discuss the ICFI resolution "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War," which he regarded as very important.

Nandasena did not speak much, but when he did he always got to the essence of the political issue. He was very vocal in his exposure of political opponents, using the opportunity to educate others who were listening. In his village, he was respected as someone who always helped others. His memory will live on among party comrades and many others who knew him for his political determination and humanity.



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