

## **Sri Lanka: Bala Tampoe, our comrade no more - “Bala Tampoe belongs to the era of the old heroic period of Sama Samajism with the struggle against British imperialism”**

Thursday 4 September 2014, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \(“Bahu”\)](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2014).

Bala Tampo, our comrade Bala is no more. He joined the left movement when he was a student and continued to work for the LSSP while he was a lecturer in Botany and Horticulture in the Department of Agriculture. He came into the limelight as a strike leader after his dismissal from public service, for participating in the strike of public servants in 1947. Soon after, he joined the CMU as an energetic new leader. He was interested in political theory and soon became a political teacher as well within the LSSP. At the same time, he was keen to work among the urban workers and devoted much time for the CMU.

The CMU was originally built in 1928 as a white-collar union in the mercantile sector. After Tampo became its general secretary in February 1948, the union came under the influence of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which at the time was part of the Fourth International. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tampo was known for his militant challenges to the political decisions of the government of the day. In 1963, he led a strike in the Colombo port that escalated into an all-island general strike and defied the government of Sirima Bandaranaike when it invoked its emergency powers.

When the LSSP left the Fourth International to join the Bandaranaike government in 1964, Tampo became a central leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary), which the United Secretariat of the Fourth International recognized as its section. However the LSSP-R could not survive as a mass organization and when NSSP evolved as a mass party Bala was eager to work with us. He remained loyal to the forth international though he was not very active. In 2010 when the pro government thugs tried to kill me when I was retuning from London after addressing the Tamil commemoration meeting, he embraced me and said ‘you are a true Sama Samajists living among us’.

He retained the position of CMU general secretary and participated actively in major negotiations with the government and employers even recently. He departed with the dignity and power of a proletarian leader.

**Vickramabahu Karunaratne**, Nawa Samasamaja Party (NSSP), section of the Fourth International

\* *Lanka-e-News- 01.Sep.2014, 10.30PM:*

<http://www.lankaenews.com/English/news.php?id=14433>

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## **Bala Tampoe struggled against British imperialism**

Bala Tampoe belongs to the era of the old heroic period of Sama Samajism with the struggle against British imperialism and the Hartal that shook the so called comprador bourgeoisie regime. Comrade Bala is dead as an uncompromising proletarian leader.

Today the ruling elite may give him a state funeral [\[1\]](#); but it will not change the basic nature of this trade union leader who did not accept any price or present from the bourgeoisie. He joined the left movement when he was a student and continued to work for the LSSP while he was a lecturer in Botany and Horticulture in the Department of Agriculture. He came into the limelight as a strike leader after his dismissal from public service, for participating in the strike of public servants in 1947. Soon after, he joined the CMU as an energetic new leader. He was also interested in political theory and soon became a political teacher as well, within the LSSP. At the same time, he was keen to work among the urban workers and devoted much time for the CMU.

The CMU was originally built in 1928 as a white-collar union in the mercantile sector. It was an organic working class organization with Labour affiliations and welfarist social democratic thinking. After Tampoe became its general secretary in February 1948, the union came under the influence of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which at the time was a part of the Fourth International, the Trotskyite world organization.

So he became a Trotskyite who explained that a proletarian regime is possible in the course of a permanent revolution. Revolt of the people could start on the basis of democratic demands. But the inability of the bourgeois political parties to establish a dynamic democratic change, will give rise to an opportunity for the working class organization to lead the struggle forward and capture power to establish a socialist state. In the 1950s and 1960s, this permanent revolution theory got rooted in the minds of the working people. It was spread beyond the working class to include the radical peasants and the fishing communities. Bala, a Tamil from Jaffna proved that Trotskyism could spread beyond community barriers to build left leaders in Tamil and Muslim communities. Tampoe was known for his militant challenges to the political decisions of the government of the day. In 1963, he led a strike in the Colombo port that escalated into an all-island general strike and defied the government of Sirima Bandaranaike when it invoked its emergency powers.

When the LSSP left the Fourth International to join the Bandaranaike government in 1964, Tampoe became a central leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary), which the United Secretariat of the Fourth International recognized as its section. With the veteran LSSP leader and a contemporary of NM and Colvin, Edmund Samarakkody joining him, many Sama Samajist leaders at grass root level were hopeful of the new leadership of the left movement. However the LSSP-R could not survive as a mass organization. Bala and others failed to understand the mass backing received by the opportunist leaders for their illusive project of building socialism with populist bourgeoisie leaders. It was necessary for Trotskyites to orient towards the masses following the coalition, and to go into joint actions with them. However, when NSSP evolved as a mass party, Bala was eager to work with us.

He remained loyal to the Forth International, though he was not very active. In 2010 when the pro government thugs tried to kill me when I was returning from London, after addressing the Tamil commemoration meeting, he embraced me and said 'you are a true Sama Samajist living among us'.

He retained the position of CMU general secretary and participated actively in major negotiations with the government and employers even recently. He departed with the dignity and power of a proletarian leader. Workers will remember him ever as a leader who remained loyal to the class in spite of mistakes Bala made.

## **Vickramabahu Karunaratne**

\* *Ceylon Today*. September 4, 2014 2:00 am:

<http://www.ceylontoday.lk/51-72124-news-detail-bala-tampoe-struggled-against-british-imperialism.html>

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### **Footnotes**

[1] This was written prior to Bala Tampoe's funeral. In fact, he was not accorded a 'state funeral'. The funeral arrangements were entirely made by his union and with no official honours. Some members of the government were present in a personal capacity including two of the sons of Philip Gunawardena, so-called 'Father of Marxism' in Ceylon; as well as the Governor of the Western Province who remains the titular leader of the ruling party's trade union front. None of the parliamentary representatives of the LSSP and Communist Party attended.