

# The untimely death of Upali Cooray

Friday 28 August 2009, by [BOPAGE Lionel](#), [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [GANESH Ratnam](#), [PHILIPS Rajan](#), [RAJANAYAGAM P](#), [SILVA Redley](#), [SILVA Wilfred](#) (Date first published: 3 September 2009).

**We shall complete this page with more contributions on Upali when available to us.**

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With extreme sadness, we announce the untimely death of UPALI COORAY, a reputed stalwart of the left and a lifelong champion of oppressed people, on 21 August 2009.

UPALI is survived by his wife Sylvia, son Alex and daughters Samantha and Jasmine.

**Viewing:** The body may be viewed on Wednesday, 2 September 2009 between 9.00 am and 4.00 pm at the chapel at Co-operative Funeralcare, 451 Harrow Road, London W10 4RG, (020 8969 6260)

**Funeral Service & Cremation:** There will be a humanist service on Thursday, 3 September 2009 at the West London Crematorium, Harrow Road, Kensal Green, London W10 4RA. The service will be brief (approx. 30 minutes).

Parking is available at the Crematorium. The nearest underground station is Kensal Green.

No flowers please. However, there will be a charity collection for UNICEF and Amnesty International - charities nominated by the family - at the service.

Announcement by friends of UPALI in association with his wife Sylvia and children, Alex, Samantha, and Jasmine Cooray

25 August 2009

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## **Comrade Upali's Unfinished Task**

We mourn the sudden and untimely death of Comrade Upali in the early hours of 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009, and pay our tribute to his active political life as a champion of the oppressed and the poor of the world. Had he recovered from his sudden illness he would have celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday on 17<sup>th</sup> September. At this sorrowful occasion we join his wife Sylvia, son Alex and daughters Samantha and Jasmine in sharing their grief over the loss of a dear husband and a father for we have lost a dear friend and a comrade.

Comrade Upali, throughout his active political life, spanning over 50 years, stood at the forefront of struggles of the oppressed people all over the world. He was a socialist intellectual and an internationalist who spearheaded anti-neo-colonialist, anti-capitalist and anti-racist campaigns both in Britain and in Sri Lanka. He fought tirelessly and passionately against the oppression of workers, women and minority nationalities. In Britain he played a key role in the anti-Vietnam War Movement as its secretary. He vehemently opposed the war in Sri Lanka, denounced human rights violations, political assassinations and other atrocities committed by successive regimes and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, from 1979 onwards, in the context of anti-Tamil rhetoric and riots and the banning of the Tamil United Liberation Front's demand for a separate State in the North-East of Sri Lanka, comrade Upali as a founder-member of the Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) played a leading role in formulating and articulating the principle of Tamil people's right to self-determination. In 1983, during the 'Black July' pogrom against the Tamil people in the south comrade Upali physically intervened to protect individual Tamils from attacks by Sinhalese thugs.

Comrade Upali firmly believed in the ability of the oppressed people to change the socio-economic and political conditions of their oppression and make a better world. He never used his intellectual abilities for his personal gain. Motivated by socialist ideals comrade Upali committed all his strengths and abilities for organising, educating and empowering of the oppressed people. He did not merely stand by them, he stood with them and fought with them and sought ways and means of resolving their issues.

It was his unwavering commitment to the cause of the oppressed that led him to join the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's (LSSP) Youth League. But in the 1960s when the majority leadership of the LSSP joined a coalition government with the Communist Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) comrade Upali broke away with the minority who opposed the coalition with a capitalist party. In the aftermath of the split within the LSSP he emigrated to Britain and graduated in Economics from the London School of Economics and joined the International Marxist Group (IMG), the British Section of the 4<sup>th</sup> International. Comrade Upali matured as a militant socialist in the thick of anti-neo-colonialist, anti-war and anti-racist struggles and campaigns in Britain. When the Sri Lankan coalition government of the LSSP, CP and the SLFP crushed the youth rebellion led by the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) in 1971, and imprisoned a large number of young rebels including their leadership comrade Upali joining with activists of the Ginipupura group campaigned for their release.

In 1975, Comrade Upali returned to Sri Lanka and as a leading member of the Revolutionary Marxist Party he immersed himself in the activities of building a revolutionary party and worked closely with

leading activists of the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU). He inspired younger comrades and dedicated his time to educating and encouraging them to play a leading role in the decision making bodies of the party. Comrade Upali played an instrumental role in initiating joint discussions and activities with other leftist groups and individuals with a view to regrouping and rebuilding the revolutionary left in Sri Lanka. He contested the Dehiwala-Galkissa constituency in the 1977 general elections and, probably, for the first time on a Sri Lankan election platform comrade Upali articulated women's rights. He actively defended the rights of the Tamil people and workers' rights when President Jayawardena's regime unleashed repressive laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and Emergency Rule to crush the Tamil liberation movement and the trade unions. He made an immense contribution to building MIRJE as a broad-based movement that campaigned for the rights and the political aspirations of the Tamil people. He initiated alternative institutions to organise and educate women workers in the Katunayaka Free Trade Zone by setting up a Women's Centre, a Legal Advice Centre and assisted women activists in publishing *Da Bindu* and *Nirmani* to raise awareness of women's issues. He set up a Resource Centre for Community Groups with modern printing machinery and internet technologies to help community groups in mass communication. He also set up another Centre in Balangoda as a meeting place for Tea plantation workers. In 1984 while comrade Upali was having a meeting with plantation workers at this Centre he was arrested by the Balangoda Police and was held in custody for 20 days under the PTA. He initiated *Janahanda* and *Venasa*, Sinhala language newspapers to counter capitalist media, war mongering and anti-Tamil propaganda in the Sinhala media. He also launched several projects such as Development Education Publications and Workers' Rights Publications under which books such as *Aid: Rhetoric and Reality* by Teresa Hayter, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire were translated into Sinhala. He himself wrote a series of booklets titled Workers' Rights explaining legal jargon in simple language for the benefit of worker activists. During this period comrade Upali's family was with him in Sri Lanka and we were aware that they had to undergo severe hardships and we pay our gratitude to them for standing by him and supporting him in his political life.

In the late 1980s comrade Upali returned to Britain and tirelessly campaigned against disappearances and assassinations during the reign of terror in Sri Lanka under President Premadasa's regime. He together with democratic and leftist Tamil/ Sinhala individuals and colleagues founded Friends of the Disappeared and the Committee for Democracy and Justice in Sri Lanka to highlight human rights violations and disappearances in international arena. He strongly opposed both state-sponsored violence and that of the LTTE. In this spirit he was involved in a continuous dialogue with non-LTTE Tamil leftists and others in forums such as the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum to forge links and to find alternative strategies to fight for democracy, justice, equality and dignity for all the people within a united Sri Lanka.

Finally, in paying our tribute to Comrade Upali we quote Marx, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." That was the point of Comrade Upali's life, and that was his unfinished task.

**Wilfred Silva & Redley Silva**

28<sup>th</sup> August 2009

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## **A tribute to Comrade Upali Cooray**

I join with many comrades and friends, who are saddened by the passing away of Comrade Upali Cooray. He dedicated his life to the protection of human rights of the working people. He always persevered to preserve and enhance those rights against individuals, groups and parties that violated them. He always struck me as a simple man who was always politically conscious.

I first heard of Comrade Upali when I was behind bars in the seventies, convicted for conspiring and waging war against the Queen's government in Sri Lanka. Formerly, he was a member of the LSSP and left it in 1964 when its leadership decided to form a bourgeois coalition with the SLFP. Comrade Upali was an active member of the International Marxist Group in London and worked together with the comrades of the Ginipupura Group agitating for the release of the political prisoners.

My recollection is that he came back to Sri Lanka at the end of the seventies and worked with Comrade Bala Tampoe as a member of the Revolutionary Marxist Party. He visited Comrade Rohana Wijeweera and me when we were in prison and later after our release. When I left the JVP in 1984, Comrade Upali with Comrades Gunasena Mahanama and Professor Sumanasiri Liyanage met me at the GCSU office in Colombo to discuss the political situation in the country.

I remember with pleasure his response to several comments made on Letter to a Grandnephew: Building a new society in Sri Lanka based on equality and justice, which expressed his genuine commitment for a fair, just and better Sri Lanka. A Sri Lanka where all its residents could take part and enjoy life as equals with dignity and security. I admit I did not agree with some of the positions he took. Nevertheless, I never had any doubt that he meant well. For his intention, like all his social activism, was for achieving a just and lasting peace in the island.

I met him last when I was in London a few years back. We had a fruitful discussion about the ways to rid Sri Lanka of the terror being practised. We also discussed the political means on how to achieve a fair and just solution to the national question in Sri Lanka. He had been unwell for some time but this did not deter him from being engaged and active.

Even though we moved along different paths and followed different strategies we had the same cherished secular ideal of protecting and upholding the democratic rights of working people irrespective of their socio-cultural background.

As a fellow traveller on the path to social justice, I take this opportunity to pay tribute and to un-categorically state, how much I and other activists on the road to justice and equity will miss Upali and his immeasurable contribution.

My heartfelt and deepest sympathy go out to his wife Sylvia and children Alex, Samantha and Jasmine, friends and loved ones. All I can say is that I share their grief.

In the end keeping Comrade Upali's fight for justice, fairness, equity and democracy alive will be the best way to remember and honour him and his legacy.

**Lionel Bopage**

25 August 2009

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# **Remembering Upali Cooray: From what might have been ... to the hell we are in**

**by Rajan Philips**

On Tuesday, August 25, I saw the email subject in the inbox: Upali Cooray – Funeral Arrangements. There is no dearth of death news in a given week, but this one – I was not expecting. I have not seen Upali in more than twenty years, but I can still picture the tall, robust frame that was Upali, remember his disciplined and healthy life style, and cannot come to terms that he could not have lived for at least 20 years past the biblical life span.

Even though we have not met in years and have corresponded or spoken on the phone only occasionally, I was aware of his presence through his activities and writings just as, I am sure, he was of mine. Last autumn when Tariq Ali delivered a lecture in Waterloo, Canada, where I live, I asked him during a private chat after the talk, if the name Upali Cooray rang a bell. “Of course”, came the reply and a broad smile, “and where is Upali now?” I said that he was still in London as we veered into talking about national questions in South Asia.

Many readers and internet loafers would be familiar with the wise old epistle that Upali publicly sent to his curious grand nephew explaining not only the history of the recent Sinhala-Tamil political relationship but also the outline of what needed to be done to address the grievances of the Tamil people. While there was nothing new in what Upali said, what was shockingly new was that a whole new generation of Sri Lankans has grown up in ignorance of our recent past and therefore lacking in the background to think clearly and constructively of ‘what is to be done?’.

Upali was the quintessential Leftist. He cut his political teeth in the Sama Samaja Party, but broke ranks as a young man when the Party by a majority vote decided to enter into a coalition with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Despite the severance, Upali was aware of and respected what the LSSP and its old leaders – NM, Colvin and Leslie – had stood for at great political and personal risks on the controversial issues of citizenship for the Tamil plantation workers and language rights of non-Sinhalese Sri Lankans. He was aware that the old Left Sinhalese had stood for programmatic devolution of power both as an extension of democracy and as a matrix to augment minority rights. He was aware that new Left Sinhalese have gone further and supported nothing less than the right of self determination for the Tamil people. More than being aware, Upali raised slogans, took to the streets, and stood up to state brutality in order to protect and enhance minority rights.

As his recent writings indicate, Sri Lanka missed out – on what might have been – by failing to support the ideas of equality and fairness that the old Left stood for, and it has no alternative but to adapt and adopt the same ideas if it is to get out of the hell into which our island has been plunged.

Upali was a principled and progressive champion of all oppressed sections society and his championing was not limited to familiar circumstances in Sri Lanka only but was his driving passion in England, where he studied, worked, married and eventually settled down. He was a friend of anyone whose rights were infringed – children, women, workers, queers, seniors, immigrants, and the list can go on. Once riding his motorcycle in Ratmalana, he saw a man beating up his wife on the road. He stopped the bike and scared the hell out of the bully until he promised that he would never abuse his wife again. Upali was the first male feminist I came across and I can say that he was a role model to other men in shedding the convenient shackles of patriarchy and male chauvinism.

Upali was more than a friend of the wronged and the oppressed for he could and did help those in need in his professional capacity as a barrister. In Colombo, he limited his legal service to trade unions and workers, representing them in labour tribunals against some big-name employers and

even bigger-name lawyers. Intelligent, articulate and witty, he was an unrepentant thorn on the backsides of some highly paid Colombo lawyers. Later, in England, he had taken not only to practicing law but also teaching it and making academic contributions.

I first saw Upali Cooray in July, 1979, at the YMCA auditorium in Colombo. It was the inaugural meeting of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) and I was there as a member of the Provisional Committee and Secretary to-be. Upali was intervening in the discussion on the resolution condemning the State of Emergency that had just been declared. "A superb debator", I told Dr. Chris Rodrigo, who was seated near me. "Upali is a great guy", Chris, who had known Upali in England, replied. "You will find him great to work with", he went on and added that in London Upali was known for taking on racial police officers who were hard on immigrants.

Upali was great to work with. He was one of the moving spirits in MIRJE and was a key organizer of many of its activities. Upali was a co-author with Paul Caspersz and me of the first MIRJE publication, *Emergency'79*. It was also the first publication to deal with the human rights violations in Jaffna that began in 1979 and have not let up since. The monograph documented the results of the MIRJE fact finding mission comprising Paul Caspersz, Kumar David, Yohan Devananda, Jayaratne Malliyagoda and myself that went to Jaffna to investigate the deaths of six young Tamils who were taken out of their homes and murdered on the first night of the Emergency rule.

MIRJE also served an inadvertent nostalgic purpose by providing a friendly forum for all Left groups and leaders that came together in camaraderie and friendship despite their ideological differences to contribute to finding a solution to the national problem. The tent became even bigger with the formation of the Marx Centenary Committee in 1983 to commemorate Marx's death centenary. The Committee would meet at Hector Abhayavardhana's Chitra Lane study and Upali was a frequent visitor along with Edmund Samarakoddy, N. Sanmugathan, Osmund Jayaratne, Prins Rajasooriya - among others.

All hell broke loose in July 1983 and the lives of so many of us were irreversibly altered. Hopelessness and despair set in as years rolled by with no end in sight and those of us living abroad were getting reconciled to making fire on remembered wood. A new ray of hope emerged with the election of Chandrika Kumaratunga as President. Upali had helped her restore her shattered life to normalcy when she went to England after losing her husband to JVP madness. Many of us were delighted that Upali would be able to bring to bear on the new President some positive and progressive influence. That was a mistake - to assume that progressive friendships could prevail over reactionary politics. As President, Chandrika Kumaratunga is said to have reminded Vasudeva Nanayakara that unlike others the SLFP was not revolutionary party. Who said it was?

It was the extent of his disappointment with her that made Upali accuse the former President of political culpability in the assassination of Lakshman Kadirgamar by the LTTE. It was a stunning indictment that reminded me of Dr. Colvin's accusation of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike over the police shooting of Peradeniya University student Weerasuriya in November, 1976. I did not quite agree with every argument Upali made in his hard hitting article but I appreciated his disappointment and anger.

Upali made the criticism, that many of have made repeatedly, that state and government leaders would hypocritically praise the likes of Lakshman Kadirgamar as national martyrs but will not do anything to implement even the most modest of their moderate policies to address the Tamil problem. It is hardly conceivable that Lakshman Kadirgamar or Ketish Loganathan would have condoned the forced encampment of over 250,000 displaced Tamils, or the treatment of the doctors who stood by the people to work in the war zone. No past Sinhalese national leader would have condoned police brutality that is becoming so rampant, extrajudicial killings, the death threats to

critics and potential critics of the government, or the poisoning of young minds by asking them to write essays on the LTTE in a national exam.

Yet, we bear witness to such atrocities and more almost on a daily basis. And we have lost the one man whose rallying cry in the face of oppression and human rights violation was to organize and resist, gather more support and fight, and not to give up until the job is done. Even as we mourn his death, we cannot give up hope that we shall overcome, sooner than later. That would be the biggest political tribute we could ever pay to Upali Cooray.

**Rajan Philips**

[http://transcurrents.com/tc/2009/08/remembering\\_upali\\_cooray\\_from.html#more](http://transcurrents.com/tc/2009/08/remembering_upali_cooray_from.html#more)

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## **Upali Cooray: A Tribute From Canadians for Peace**

**by Ratnam Ganesh**

Mr. Upali Cooray – Comrade Upali Cooray to the many who worked with him from the left of the political spectrum – relentlessly campaigned against all oppressions and abuse of power in Sri Lanka. He formed The Committee for Democracy and Justice in 1988 and worked with several political organisations and trade unions and defended democracy, justice and pluralism in Sri Lanka and outside.

In 1971-72, he toured Canada campaigning for the release of 80,000 political prisoners held in detention in the aftermath of the failed JVP insurrection of April 1971. Although he did not agree with the JVP's policies, he believed that every person is entitled to human and fundamental rights, regardless of his or her political opinions and actions.

He was arrested and detained by the police in Sri Lanka in 1972 for these activities. It a similar brave and principled campaign by him and his colleagues in 1988-89 that helped Mahinda Rajapakse to present in foreign human rights fora the data on killings and disappearances during the Premadasa regime. This has deep lessons for sections of the present Sri Lankan government that claim that those presenting information abroad on rights abuses within Sri Lanka are traitors. Not so – they do it out of their love and affection for and commitment to the oppressed and their motherland.

Once again he visited Canada in November 2007 to campaign for peace and to end all forms of violence in Sri Lanka.

He also campaigned for the human and democratic rights of people in the south such as the workers in Balangoda as a result of which he was arrested and detained for 6 months in 1984. He was the Secretary of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the UK and campaigned against the Americans in Vietnam and Iraq, The list of his activities in support of human and democratic rights is too long to enumerate and detail.

With the demise of Upali Cooray, Sri Lankan Tamils lost one of their best and ablest friends among the Sinhalese people. Upali consistently stood with and supported the Tamils in their struggle for

greater political autonomy. His pioneering activities, along with a few other dedicated and like-minded friends, helped to awaken the consciousness of all progressive Sinhalese on the plight of the Tamils who were subjected to various forms of discrimination at the hands of successive governments since 1948 when Ceylon gained independence from the British colonial power.

Even after leaving Sri Lanka in the early 1980s Upali continued to defend vigorously the rights of the persecuted Tamil population and championed their right to be equal in all things at various forums in different countries. He continued to have dialogue with different Tamil parties in the hope of fostering strong links with the Sinhalese to enable all the communities to lead a peaceful co-existence in a united Sri Lanka and work together towards that noble end.

Unfortunately post-independence politics in Sri Lanka saw the emergence of parochialism and communalism as a significant trend. Few stood up against this or opposed it vehemently. Upali certainly was one of those courageous few. He was unchanging in that he always stood for the weak and the oppressed – be it a JVP-er in prison or an oppressed Tamil. In spite of opposition to his ideas and schemes, he pressed on undaunted. His efforts cannot be assessed with any yardstick for they are immeasurable at this very critical period of Sri Lankan history.

Upali contracted an infection while he was on his way to Sri Lanka in May this year. He came back to the UK where after some tests doctors found that blood eating bacteria had entered his system and attacked his knee – Alfa Haemolytic Streptococcus Pneumonia. He recovered from this and continued to write his second letter to Pody seeya, the first having been well-received in the press.

He was taken to the hospital on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August following breathing difficulties and succumbed the following day morning.

A cultured gentleman he was, and all those who came to know him also learnt to love and admire him. Now that Upali Cooray has left the scene of time, we can echo Leon Trotsky's words: it is victims who move humanity forward. All of us who worked with him – indeed all of us for whom he worked – mourn his death.

We salute our dear departed friend and mourn his demise, an especially unbearable loss to all those who want Sri Lanka to be a country of peace and freedom. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this difficult time.

**Ratnam Ganesh**

[http://transcurrents.com/tc/2009/08/upali\\_cooray\\_a\\_tribute\\_from\\_ca.html](http://transcurrents.com/tc/2009/08/upali_cooray_a_tribute_from_ca.html)

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## **Upali Cooray: The Unrepentant Marxist**

**P Rajanayagam**

*(Text of the tribute by, P. Rajanayagam, Editor of 'Tamil Times', on behalf of Upali's friends and comrades at his funeral on 3 September 2009)*

We are gathered here today to remember, pay tribute and bid farewell to our friend, colleague and



comrade, Upali Cooray, whose untimely death on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009 has grieved us all.

Upali's professional qualifications included a BSc (Hons) in Economics (London), LLB Hons (London) and MA in Business Law at London Guildhall University

Called to the Bar in 1974, Upali practised as a Barrister. Upali was also a Senior Lecturer in Law at London Metropolitan University and taught in many areas including Immigration Law and Comparative Labour Law.

As a committed human rights lawyer, Upali has worked tirelessly for the unrepresented in Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom. Upali's practice has included a large amount of cases in Immigration, Employment, Criminal, Housing and Family Law.

My association with Upali spans a period of over fifty years. Upali, by his natural inclinations and ideological persuasion was the classical version of "the Leftist" fighting for causes and defending cases that others would not touch.

Like many of us belonging to his generation, Upali cut his political teeth in the Sama Samaja movement, beginning as a youth leaguer, then being a member, and later playing leading roles in political and trade union struggles.

The 1960's were traumatic times for the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), and for that matter the entire left and working class movement in Sri Lanka. When the majority of the leadership of the Party began to embrace the strategy of coalition politics, it was resisted and opposed by the Left Tendency within the Party to which Upali and I belonged. When the LSSP, at its historic two-day conference in June 1964, decided by majority vote to enter into coalition politics, those of the Left Tendency, which was at that time led by Edmund Samarakkody, Bala Tampo, Merryl Fernando and V. Karalasingham, broke away from the LSSP and founded the LSSP(R). Among others, Upali and I were also elected to the Central Committee of the new party.

There is no doubt that the decision of the LSSP and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CP) in 1964 to enter into coalition politics determined the fate and future of not only these parties, but also the entire left and working class politics in the country. These parties from the 1940s had been powerful bastions on the Left having substantial support with branches and youth leagues functioning throughout the length and breadth of the country. They had under their political leadership and control almost the entire working class movement. These parties had well acclaimed leaders with intellect and stature who were acknowledged as political giants even by their opponents. Even at the worst of times, these parties between them were able to win 15 to 20 seats in parliament. However, today these parties have become a pale shadow of their long, powerful and glorious past having insignificant impact on the politics of the island nation. Would these parties have suffered this fate had they avoided the strategy of coalition politics and continued to remain as champions of the Left fighting the cause of the oppressed and marginalised is a question that is worth pondering.

Upali was one of the founding members of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) in July, 1979 of which Fr Paul Caspersz was the President. It was founded in the context of rising violence particularly in Jaffna where the military had been deployed, Emergency rule had been imposed and the draconian provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act had been invoked leading to widespread and gross human rights violations.

Upali "was one of the moving spirits in MIRJE and a key organizer of many of its activities. He was a co-author with Paul Caspersz and me of the first MIRJE publication, "Emergency'79", the first publication to deal with the human rights violations in Jaffna that began in 1979." (Rajan Philips)

Another report in the form of a booklet titled "What happened in Jaffna: Days of Terror" published by MIRJE graphically details of uncontrolled violence including arson that was unleashed in Jaffna May 1981 in the course of which the Jaffna public market and its shopping centre, the TULF office, the residence of the then Jaffna MP Mr V Yogeswaran and most tragically the Jaffna Public Library were set ablaze which was described by Sri Lanka's most famous Bibliographer Ian Goonetillake as an exercise in "cultural incineration"

Though well versed in the theoretical concepts of Marxism, Upali was not dogmatic. He was the quintessential political activist and campaigner agitating for causes he believed in. Upali was always in the vanguard of struggles of the oppressed people all over the world and played prominent roles in anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, anti-war and anti-racist campaigns.

As the ethnic conflict escalated Sri Lanka, there was massive proliferation of human rights abuses including detention without trial, torture, extra-judicial executions and involuntary disappearances. It was during this period that Upali became one of the leading figures who set up many campaigning organisations in the UK such as the "Ceylon Solidarity Forum", "Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners", "Friends of the Disappeared", and the Committee for Democracy and Justice in Sri Lanka".

In regard to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Upali firmly rejected the strategy of war and violence and forcefully argued for negotiated political settlement that recognised the legitimate rights of all nationalities. He denounced and campaigned against violations of human and democratic rights, political assassinations and other excesses for which successive Sri Lankan governments and the LTTE were responsible.

Above all, Upali was a man of action. He believed in the capacity of the downtrodden people to make a better world by transforming the exploitative socio-economic and political conditions to which they were subjected. Believing that organising, educating and empowering of the oppressed people was the key to their emancipation, Upali helped to creating alternative institutions. He helped in setting up a Women's Centre and a Legal Advice Centre in the Katunayaka Free Trade Zone. He set up a Resource Centre for Community Groups with modern printing machinery and internet technologies to help community groups in mass communication. He also set up another Centre in Balangoda providing for a meeting place for Tea plantation workers. He facilitated the setting up a charity "Lanka Care" to enable bright students from poor backgrounds to further their education by the provision of financial assistance.

One of his longstanding comrades, Rajan Philips, recalls an incident to illustrate Upali's commitment to those who have been wronged or whose rights have been violated: "Once riding his motorcycle in Ratmalana, he saw a man beating up his wife on the road. He stopped the bike and scared the hell out of the bully until he promised that he would never abuse his wife again. Upali was the first male feminist I came across and I can say that he was a role model to other men in shedding the convenient shackles of patriarchy and male chauvinism."

Upali would have celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month. Sadly it was not to be. No amount of tributes to Upali would compensate for the irretrievable loss his wife Sylvia, son Alex, and daughters Samantha and Jasmine have suffered. May they be consoled that many of Upali's compatriots will cherish his memory and his services for ever.

Even in death, Upali stands tall as he has been throughout his life, a courageous stalwart of the Left and the valiant champion of the oppressed and marginalised. The casket containing his mortal remains, at his own request, is draped in the red flag with the hammer and sickle and the humanist service that is being performed today profoundly demonstrates 'the unrepentant Marxist' that Upali

has been until his death.

Today, we bow our heads and salute Upali in celebration of his life and service to humanity which he performed with courage, conviction and dedication.

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009

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