

Eightieth birthday tribute to Sri Lankan Trotskyist Nanda Wickremasinghe

David North
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David North, the chairperson of the international editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site and national chairperson of the Socialist Equality Party (US), sent the following tribute to veteran Sri Lankan Trotskyist Nanda Wickremasinghe on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, which he celebrated on October 15. Wickremasinghe, known affectionately as Wicks, is a founding member of the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1968.

Dear Comrade Wicks,

On behalf of the International Committee of the Fourth International, I am honored, on the occasion of your eightieth birthday, to not only extend the congratulations of our movement but also to express our profound appreciation and gratitude for all that you have done to build the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Trotsky declared in 1938 that each cadre of the Fourth International carries on his shoulder a particle of the fate of mankind. In the course of political struggles that span more than a half century, you have carried, one dare say, somewhat more than one particle of mankind's fate.

The eighty years of your life encompasses nearly the entire history of the Fourth International. The chronology of your life is embedded in the historical struggles of our movement. Only a few months before you were born, Trotsky wrote his celebrated "Open Letter to the Workers of India," dated July 25, 1939, in which he issued a sharp warning:

"The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with and dependent upon British capitalism. They tremble for their own property. They stand in fear of the masses. They seek compromises with British

imperialism no matter what the price, and lull the Indian masses with hopes of reforms from above. The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and a false prophet!"

From this scathing assessment of Gandhi, Trotsky drew the essential and inescapable political conclusion:

"We must cast away false hopes and repel false friends. We must pin hope only upon ourselves, our own revolutionary forces. The struggle for national independence, for an independent Indian republic is indissolubly linked up with the agrarian revolution, with the nationalization of banks and trusts, with a number of other economic measures aiming to raise the living standard of the country and to make the toiling masses the masters of their own destiny. Only the proletariat in an alliance with the peasantry is capable of executing these tasks."

This letter provided the decisive political impulse for the development of the Trotskyist movement in Ceylon. You were part of a generation of Ceylonese youth whose political orientation was determined by the perspective of permanent revolution imparted by Trotsky to the LSSP.

The depth and seriousness of your convictions were put to the test by the LSSP's betrayal of Trotskyism in 1964. In the course of a complex process of political clarification, you aligned yourself with the International Committee and became a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968. For more than a half century you have remained in the leadership of the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Your unflinching devotion to principles is an inspiration to your comrades throughout the world.

On a personal note, allow me to acknowledge that I have treasured our long and close political

collaboration, which now spans a third of a century. I have always appreciated and highly valued your honest and candid assessment of political issues and problems. Over many years this collaboration has acquired the characteristics of a deep and enduring friendship.

Once again, congratulations on the attainment of this impressive milestone. Along with all your comrades in the International Committee, I wish you good health and happiness as you continue, in the ninth decade of your life, the fight for victory of the World Socialist Revolution.

With warmest greetings,
David North



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