

Sri Lankan SEP celebrates Wije Dias's 80th birthday

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held an online meeting on Friday evening to celebrate the 80th birthday of Wije Dias, the party's general secretary. Dias, who is member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), was a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), forerunner of Sri Lankan SEP, and has devoted nearly six decades of his life to the emancipation of the working class.

The event was chaired by SEP assistant national secretary Deepal Jayasekera and attended by party members and International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) leaders. David North, WSWS International Editorial Board chairman and SEP (United States) national chairman, told the meeting that Dias's birthday was more than the occasion to celebrate a personal milestone. "It is at the same time a milestone in the history of the Sri Lankan working class and the world Trotskyist movement," he said.

North pointed out that the exceptional and far-sighted leadership provided by RCL General Secretary Keerthi Balasuriya in the struggle against the opportunism of the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1985 was vastly strengthened by Dias' unwavering support. Concluding his remarks, North said that Dias had secured for himself an honored place in the history of the Fourth International and in the hearts of his comrades throughout the world.

ICFI secretary Peter Schwarz said that Dias's assumption of RCL leadership, after Keerthi's untimely death in 1987, not only proved his own outstanding political qualities but strengthened the cadre that had been steeled in the preceding years. Under Dias's leadership, the RCL, and then the SEP, became a powerful component of the progress made by the ICFI, Schwarz said. "You, comrade Wije, have

contributed decisively to defending and developing this [ICFI] perspective. And I am sure that with your immense historical experience you will continue to contribute to our work."

Keith Jones, SEP national secretary in Canada, told the meeting that Dias's "life has been bound up with struggles that were and remain pivotal not just to the development of the RCL and SEP in Sri Lanka but to our world party as a whole."

Jones reminded participants of the major role played by Wije Dias, alongside Keerthi Balasuriya under the leadership of the ICFI, in the fight against the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's historical betrayal in 1964, when it joined the bourgeois coalition of Sirima Bandaranaike.

"The revolutionary orientation to the international working class was defended and developed in opposition to all manner of petty-bourgeois right forces, and the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies to whom the Pabloites sought to subordinate the working class," Jones said.

Alex Lantier, national secretary of the French section of the ICFI, said the courageous role played by Dias in the establishment of the Sri Lankan party was a marvel for French comrades in the founding of their party, and the fight to establish it in the working class.

V. Gnana, SEP assistant national secretary in France, referred to Dias's irreconcilable opposition to Sinhala and Tamil nationalism and his central role in clarifying political questions among the Sri Lankan political exiles in Europe. This was decisive, Gnana said, in winning Tamil youth there towards the European sections of the ICFI.

Peter Symonds, national editor of the WSWS in Australia, sent a video message pointing out that the political struggle undertaken by Dias had placed the

SEP today in an exceptionally strong position. Of all the parties that emerged from the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's betrayal, only the SEP could claim to represent the principles of Trotskyism, he said.

Video greetings by Nick Beams, WSWs International Editorial Board member and a long-standing SEP leader in Australia, said that Dias was an indomitable fighter for the interests of the working class and a shining example of what it means to be a Trotskyist.

In her video message from the SEP in Australia, Linda Tenenbaum said Dias had dedicated his entire adult life to the struggle for world socialism in Sri Lanka, the Indian subcontinent and worldwide.

Greetings from SEP (Australia) National Secretary Cheryl Crisp were read to the meeting. Crisp said that Dias's principled fight for a revolutionary position on the Sri Lankan civil war—for the unity of the Tamil and Sinhala working class—and in defiance of government and right-wing attacks, were now winning the best elements of the powerful Sri Lankan working class and youth.

Following these messages, congratulatory remarks were made by K. Ratnayake, an RCL founding member and WSWs national editor in Sri Lanka, SEP senior members Vilani Peiris and Pani Wijesiriwardene. Other Sri Lankan speakers included Wasantha Rupasinghe, T. Sampanthan and Prageeth Aravinda, as well as Arun Kumar, on behalf of ICFI supporters in India.

Dias addressed the gathering, thanking everyone, including all the international participants, for the support they had provided him in fulfilling his political tasks as general secretary during the previous 34 years.



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