

# Sri Lankan SEP pays tribute to Wije Dias on first anniversary of his death

Our reporters  
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a well-attended meeting on July 29 to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of comrade Wije Dias. The event was at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute auditorium in Colombo.

Comrade Wije died in the morning on July 27 last year due to sudden heart failure, just two months before his 81st birthday.

About 150 people, including Wije's immediate family, attended the meeting, which began with one-minute of silence in honour of Wije. SEP and IYSSE members and supporters travelled from Jaffna in the country's north, Hatton and Bandarawela in the central plantation districts, Ambalangoda in the south, and from Kandy.

A monument in memory of Wije and Piyaseeli Wijegunasinghe—his beloved life-long partner and wife—was made public on Thursday July 27 at the Borella Public Cemetery in Colombo with the participation of SEP and IYSSE members, supporters and family members.

Messages paying tribute to Wije's contribution to the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) were read to the meeting from David North, chairperson of the International Editorial Board of *World Socialist Web Site* and SEP in the US, and SEP leaders in Australia, UK and Germany. A message was also received from the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey.

North said that the SEP Summer School in the US would be dedicated to the memory of Wije. "A full review of Comrade Wije's life would be more than the biography of an individual. It would necessarily encompass the modern history of the Sri Lankan working class and that of the world Trotskyist movement.

"He became a Trotskyist as a member of the youth movement of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) which, on the basis of its decades-long struggle for Trotskyism, developed as a mass revolutionary party of the Ceylonese working class. But the LSSP in June 1964, as a consequence of its decade-long and ever-more apparent adaptation to

parliamentary opportunism, repudiated the revolutionary socialist program of Trotskyism and formed a coalition government with the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Prime Minister Bandaranaike.

"Comrade Wije was in the forefront of a remarkable generation of principled and courageous young revolutionaries who opposed this betrayal and set out to rebuild, in unrelenting struggle against the LSSP opportunists, the Trotskyist movement in Sri Lanka...

"Comrade Wije Dias possessed great authority within the ICFI. In all the discussions in which he participated, we could rely upon his vast experience, objectivity and knowledge. Wije has entered into the history of the International Committee and his example will remain forever a source of inspiration for the cadre of the World Party of Socialist Revolution."

K. Ratnayake, WSWs national editor in Sri Lanka, who chaired the meeting, said: "The death of Comrade Wije is a great loss to our party and the international. We are holding this event not as a ritual but to focus attention on the perspective and principles he fought for and to strengthen the party's struggle for the political independence of the working class and to provide it with revolutionary leadership."

Ratnayake quoted from Gerry Healy's document *Ceylon: The Great Betrayal*, which explained the LSSP's repudiation of Trotskyism: "The answer lies not in Ceylon but in an international struggle against Pabloism. The real architects of the coalition reside in Paris."

A group of youth, including Keerthi Balasuriya and Wije, who opposed the LSSP's entry into the capitalist government, were attracted to the ICFI. Their intense study of the international struggle against Pabloism laid the basis for the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) as the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI in 1968, Ratnayake said.

"After the untimely death in December 1987 of comrade Keerthi, the RCL's founding general secretary, Wije was elected to the post and led the party for 35 years. Keerthi and

Wije fought to develop the party's struggle on the basis of the historical lessons of the Trotskyist movement."

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris told the meeting that the truest way of commemorating comrade Wije's life was to base oneself on the Trotskyist principles that he had fought for in order to prepare the leadership for the international working class for socialist revolution.

"Comrade Wije's firm conviction to internationalism and his uncompromising commitment to political principle was an inspiration to all those who knew him. He opposed all forms of nationalism and opportunism. That's the basic lesson of his political life, which spanned 60 years, to those with whom he worked in this party," Peiris said.

SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah said the political experiences of Wije's youth contained important lessons for the younger generation today. "Following the LSSP's entry into a coalition government with the bourgeois SLFP, many young people turned to figures such as Mao, Castro, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. But comrade Keerthi and Wije upheld Trotskyism and turned to the working class, the only revolutionary force in this epoch. The RCL was formed as the section of the ICFI on the basis of proletarian internationalism," Thevarajah said.

Sakuntha Hirimutugoda addressed the meeting on behalf of the IYSSE. Referring to the ICFI statement issued the day after Wije's death, Hirimutugoda said Wije fought intransigently for the political independence of the working class on the basis of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. "The entire revolutionary life of comrade Wije sets an example for the working class, youth and toiling masses," he said.

The LSSP's betrayal created enormous political confusion in Sri Lanka and internationally. "All the political tendencies that mushroomed in Sri Lanka following the LSSP's betrayal, including the JVP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna] in the south, and the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] in the north, were based on the middle class and rejected the revolutionary role of the working class," Hirimutugoda said.

SEP general secretary Deepal Jayasekera was the final speaker. He said that the meeting was commemorating the life of an extraordinary comrade, someone who had dedicated three quarters of his life to the fight for international socialist principles.

He referred to Wije's pioneering role as part of a group of politically brilliant youth who took up the fight against the LSSP's betrayal of international socialism in 1964 and for the political independence of the working class.

"The most important factor in this development," he said, "was the very decisive political intervention by the ICFI which explained that the real roots of the LSSP's betrayal were not in Sri Lanka but in international Pabloite

revisionism which emerged within the Fourth International and betrayed the principles of Trotskyism. Those comrades, including Wije and Keerthi, under the political and theoretical guidance of the ICFI worked to establish the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968 as the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI."

Jayasekera referred to the situation in Sri Lanka when Wije assumed the RCL leadership following Keerthi Balasuriya's untimely and tragic death.

"During that period, the party was confronted with an intensification of the civil war against the LTTE, the United National Party government's military repression, and the JVP's fascist terror.

"That the RCL was able to successfully confront this very difficult situation and to develop its socialist internationalist program and orientation to the working class was a powerful vindication of political integrity of the party leadership in general and the decisive role played by Wije in the leadership, in particular," he said.

Jayasekera explained the central role played by Wije during last year's mass uprising against hated President Gotabaya Rajapakse and his government. Despite his age and weakened health, Wije "was politically active within the party leadership until the final day of his life, providing guidance to the leadership based upon his immense political knowledge and experience."

The speaker pointed to Wije's participation and collaboration with International Committee comrades in the drafting of the party's July 20 statement and the launching of a campaign for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses. The statement provided "a political strategy for the working class to consolidate its forces, win the active support of the rural masses and lay the basis for its own rule through a workers' and peasants' government committed to restructuring society on socialist lines," he said.

Jayasekera concluded by inviting all those in attendance who were not members of the SEP to initiate discussions with the party and apply to join. "That is the best way to pay your tribute to comrade Wije Dias," he said.

*The SEP will publish international greetings and interviews with meeting participants in the coming days.*



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