

Sri Lankan SEP/IYSSE holds memorial meeting in Jaffna to honour Wije Dias

Our correspondents
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On August 31, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a memorial meeting in Jaffna, the largest city in Sri Lanka's war-ravaged north, to honour former SEP general secretary Wije Dias. It followed a July 29 meeting in Colombo, marking the first anniversary of his death.

About 50 people, including workers, farmers, fishermen, youth and students from Kilinochchi, Jaffna, Karainagr, Pungudutivu and Velanai areas, attended the meeting. The Tamil daily *Thinakkural* carried an announcement about the meeting and Shakthi TV covered the event, broadcasting brief footage in its news bulletin the following evening.

SEP and IYSSE members campaigned among workers at Jaffna Teaching Hospital, Telecom and the Electricity Board and students at Jaffna University, prior to the meeting. The campaign attracted enthusiastic support from workers and students who wanted to learn more about a comrade who had dedicated his entire adult life to building the Trotskyist movement as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

In accordance with the serious response of the SEP/IYSSE to COVID-19, the meeting was held with proper health precautionary measures, including mask wearing and maintaining safe social distancing. The meeting was chaired by T. Sambanthan, a longtime party member from Jaffna.

“Commemorating of Comrade Wije Dias is equivalent to reviewing the history of not just the Sri Lankan working class but the international working class. Wije lived as a consistent revolutionary fighter for Trotskyism and its internationalist socialist perspective from a young age and until his death,” Sambanthan said.

Sambanthan reviewed the decisive role played by Wije in leading the SEP, and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), against Colombo's anti-Tamil racist war and in opposition to the separatist perspective of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

This struggle, he said, was to unite Sri Lankan workers across Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and other communalist divisions and for socialist internationalism, and he quoted from *25 Years of the Racist War*, a book written by Wije Dias.

“It is important to bring a government of workers and peasant to power in line with socialist equality by overthrowing the capitalist government in order to end the racist war and defeat the Tamil capitalists' separatist program, and save the oppressed masses from poverty,” the quote said.

SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah explained the political consequences of the decision of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which claimed to be Trotskyist, to join a bourgeois coalition government led by Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike. This betrayal of the working class paved the way for successive Colombo governments to intensify their anti-Tamil discrimination, ramping it up to an open racist war in 1983.

The ability of the RCL/SEP to fight against the racist war, the speaker said, was made possible because of the struggle waged by the founders of the party, including comrade Wije Dias, to establish the RCL in 1968 in opposition to the LSSP betrayal. They responded to the political lead provided by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which explained that the roots of the LSSP's actions were “not in Sri Lanka but in Paris and in the role played by the Pabloite revisionists.”

Speaking on behalf of the IYSSE, Dilaxan Mahalingam called on youth and students to continue the fight for the international socialist perspective waged by Wije Dias. The LSSP's betrayal created confusion and saw the emergence of petty-bourgeois nationalist formations, such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and its eclectic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism in late 1960s, and armed Tamil militant groups, he said.

Mahalingam explained the SEP/IYSSE campaign to build an international anti-war movement of workers and youth to stop the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and to prevent the outbreak of an open nuclear world war and called on the youth in attendance to join this struggle.

SEP assistant national secretary Saman Gunadasa delivered the main report. He reviewed the courageous fight waged by RCL/SEP under Wije's leadership against successive Sri Lankan governments' communalist war, and the LTTE's separatist political program.

Gunadasa quoted from a WSWs perspective written by Wije following the bloody end of civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009: "The SEP says to workers: this was not your war, and it is not your victory. We warn that behind the victory parades, a savage new assault is being prepared on the economic and social position of the working class."

Gunadasa then asked: "Isn't this the stark truth what we have seen in last 14 years?"

The speaker referred to last year's mass uprising, across communal lines, against the then government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse. He pointed out that Wije, in collaboration with the ICFI, had played a key role in writing the SEP statement, "For a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses in Sri Lanka!" This Trotskyist perspective, the speaker said, was the only program advanced to prepare the working class to take power.

Gunadasa explained that the reactionary call for a bourgeois "interim government" advanced by opposition parties, such as the Samagi Jana Balawegaya and the JVP, with the assistance of the trade unions and pseudo-left parties like the Frontline Socialist Party, opened the way for Ranil Wickremesinghe to power.

"The country's grave crisis emanating from the global economic crisis, exacerbated by the US and NATO war against Russia and the COVID-19 pandemic, is being intensified and further imposed on working people through Wickremesinghe's brutal IMF program," he said.

Gunadasa said the recent ICFI meeting in Turkey titled "An Island at the Center of World History: Leon Trotsky on Prinkipo," was a confirmation of Wije's lifelong fight for socialist internationalism.

"Comrade Wije's six-decade political battle against all reformist-revisionist—i.e., capitalist—tendencies, is reflected in this decisive meeting. It marks a new stage in the relationship between the international working class and Trotskyism and one that we must recognise by intensifying our fight in the coming days, weeks and months," Gunadasa said.

The speaker concluded by calling on those present to "rekindle our faith and determination in Trotskyism by celebrating the revolutionary life of Comrade Wije" and appealing to those not already members to join the SEP/IYSSE and fight to bring revolutionary leadership to the working class.



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