

SEP in Sri Lanka commemorates second anniversary of death of Trotskyist leader Wije Dias

Our reporter
30 July 2024

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality held a commemoration event at the Borella Public Cemetery in Colombo on Saturday July 27 to pay tribute to comrade Wije Dias on the second anniversary of his death.

The well-known Trotskyist leader was the long-time General Secretary of the SEP (Sri Lanka) and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

About 50 party members, supporters and relatives of Wije, including his son Keerthi, daughter-in-law Anjana and granddaughter Janarthi, participated. At the beginning, the attendees held a minute's silence in respect to the memory of Wije.

During the event, the SEP launched the Sinhala language translation of Leon Trotsky's seminal work written in the mid-1930s, *Whither France?* Comrade Wije spent much of the last few years of his active political life, despite difficult health conditions, translating Trotsky's works, including *Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects* and *Germany: What Next?* and *Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution*. *Whither France?* was the last of this series translated by Wije.

K. Ratnayake, who chaired the event, explained the circumstance in which Wije translated these works and said Wije's aim was to arm the party cadres and workers and youth with the historical experiences of the Trotskyist movement. Ratnayake handed the first copies of the new translation to Deepal Jayasekera, the SEP General Secretary, and to Keerthi Wijegunasinghe, Wije's son.

Ratnayake, national *Weditor* of the *Site* in Sri Lanka, briefly noted that Comrade Wije assumed the leadership of the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI after the tragic and untimely death in 1987 of Keerthi Balasuriya, the founding General Secretary of the RCL, a brilliant Trotskyist leader.

"When the RCL was formed in June 1968, Wije belonged to the group of young people who took up the initiative to form the ICFI section in Sri Lanka and he played a leading role in the movement for 54 years until his death," Ratnayake said.

Comrade David North, the chairperson of SEP in the US and the International Editorial Board of the WSWWS had made clear the enormous role played by Wije in the struggle for the resurgence of the Trotskyist movement in the Indian subcontinent, he said.

Recalling the mass uprising in Sri Lanka in 2022, Ratnayake said: "Comrade Wije worked in his last days with the ICFI leadership preparing a perspective document drawing the lessons from the uprising. This document "For a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses" was published just seven days before Wije's demise. This statement has been guiding us in our political work since then."

In her remarks, SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris said: "I first met with Comrade Wije in 1969 when the Wellawatte branch discussed the lessons of the 1953 split in the Fourth International and the 1963 unprincipled unification of Socialist Workers Party with the Pabloites, who rejected the revolutionary role of the working class."

Wije's enormous contribution stood like a plank in preparing the working class for its historical tasks, she said. He was a clever orator. At the same time, he was

interested in art and Marxist teachings on art. He also took part in the production of several artworks related to the Marxist party. In one of them, Comrade Wijie had written: “We do not retreat until we will win this struggle.”

Deepal Jayasekera said the purpose of the gathering was to commemorate the second anniversary of the death of an extraordinary revolutionary fighter, who fully dedicated nearly six decades of his life—three quarters of his entire life—to the interests of the Sri Lankan and international working class, based on the Trotskyist principles of international socialism.

“Comrade Wijie belonged to the group of politically brilliant youth who took the initiative in the struggle against the great betrayal of the principles of international socialism and the political independence of the working class by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which claimed to be Trotskyist at that time, in entering the bourgeois coalition of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964,” he said.

Jayasekera pointed out that the most important factor then was the very decisive political intervention made by the ICFI, which explained that the real roots of the LSSP betrayal lay not in Sri Lanka, but were international, that is, in Pabloite revisionism, which emerged within the Fourth International.

Amid the enormous difficulties that the RCL faced owing to the vicious nature of capitalist class rule in Sri Lanka, Comrade Wijie and others fought courageously for Trotskyist principles. “This exemplary leader gave the leadership to the party in its fight for the political independence of the working class against all the bourgeois parties, and their pseudo-left and trade union appendages, after assuming the party leadership,” Jayasekera said.

Jayasekera pointed to Wijie’s leading role in the party’s struggle to provide a revolutionary socialist program, perspective and leadership to workers, youth and rural poor in Sri Lanka in their mass uprising against the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse in 2022, despite his weakening health situation.

Stating that the loss of Wijie “is particularly felt amid this unprecedented economic, political and social crisis in Sri Lanka, the sharpest expression of the global crisis of capitalism,” the speaker pointed out that, “his powerful political legacy lives on in the cadre of the

SEP and the ICFI, which continue his lifelong struggle for a socialist future of humanity.”

Jayasekera also paid tribute to the memory of Piyaseeli Wijegunasinghe, the late companion of Wijie. Comrade Piyaseeli was a life-long Trotskyist and Marxist intellectual fighting for the interests of the international working class. “The role played by her in the field of Marxist literary criticism was an essential component of ICFI’s work to resolve the crisis of leadership of the proletariat,” he said.

Jayasekera then turned to today’s global crisis of capitalism, which is exemplified by the developing danger of an imperialist world war, intensified by the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the US war preparations against China. “That is, we have entered into a decisive period in which the theoretical and political struggle that Wijie engaged should be deepened,” he said.

This same crisis, Jayasekera said, was also pushing the international working class into developing class struggles. This had made the development of a global anti-war movement of the working class, based on international socialism, urgent.

The SEP in Sri Lanka was fully dedicated to the struggle to build the party as the mass revolutionary party of the working class and to build the ICFI throughout South Asia. Jayasekera concluded by calling on those in the audience to join with the SEP in taking forward that decisive political struggle “as the great tribute we can pay to Comrade Wijie.”



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