

International condolences on the death of Sri Lankan Trotskyist Nanda Wickremesinghe

Our reporter
25 April 2025

On Thursday nearly five hundred people, including members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), family members and relatives, and friends gathered at the Borella Cemetery in Colombo from all parts of Sri Lanka to pay their respects to Comrade Nanda Wickremesinghe, a veteran party leader.

Wickremesinghe, known as Wicks by members of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), was a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the SEP's predecessor, in June 1968.

Comrade Wicks died on the morning of April 20 at the age of 85. Over the course of two days, nearly a thousand people from across the country visited the Jayarathne Respect Funeral Parlor in Borella to pay their respects to Comrade Wicks. Among them were SEP members, supporters, relatives and friends, as well as artists, intellectuals, workers and students. Groups from the northern, southern and central plantation regions made the journey to attend the funeral.

Below we are publishing condolence messages sent by leaders of sections of the ICFI. A detailed report on the funeral will be published early next week.

David North, Chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the national chairperson of the SEP (US):

Dear Comrades,

It is with profound sadness that I received the news of Comrade Wicks death. Though he was privileged to live a long and full life, we are all aware that his passing deprives his comrades in the Sri Lankan SEP and throughout the International Committee of a major figure in the world Trotskyist movement.

Comrade Wicks' life encompassed a vast historical experience. He is part of a remarkable generation of Trotskyists who, at a young age, opposed the betrayal of Trotskyism by the leadership of the LSSP (Lanka Sama Samaja Party) in 1964 and then, in the face of immense obstacles, fought indefatigably to uphold the banner of Trotskyism. In 1968, after an exacting process of political clarification, Wicks, alongside Comrades Keerthi, Wije and Ratnayake, established the Revolutionary Communist League as the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI.

Comrade Wicks brought to the struggle for Trotskyism an immense array of political gifts. Possessed of an extraordinary intellectual curiosity, Wicks was immersed in the history of the international Trotskyist movement.

It was my good fortune to have known and worked with Comrade Wicks for nearly 40 years. His visit to the United States in 1988 provided me with an opportunity to discuss the history of the struggle for Trotskyism in Sri Lanka. These discussions contributed significantly to the writing of the World Perspectives Resolution of 1988, which is among the most important documents of the International Committee.

While we mourn his passing, Comrade Wicks has left behind an enduring and inspiring political legacy which lives on in the work of the

ICFI.

David North

Peter Symonds, on behalf of the SEP in Australia:

To the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia, we send our condolences to the comrades and supporters of the SEP in Sri Lanka, as well as to his family and friends, on the death of Nanda Wickremesinghe. Comrade Wicks, or simply Wicks, as he was known throughout the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), devoted his entire adult life to the fight for Trotskyism and the defence of the interests of the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Wicks was one of the extraordinary group of youth, including Keerthi Balasuriya, Wije Dias and Ratnayake, who opposed the 1964 betrayal by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) when it renounced socialist internationalism and joined the bourgeois government of Madame Bandaranaike. This was the first time a party calling itself Trotskyist had entered a bourgeois government, and Wicks and his comrades, in collaboration with the International Committee, drew far-reaching political conclusions. He was a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) in 1968, based on the understanding that the betrayal was the consequence of Pabloite opportunism, that the ICFI had been established in 1953 to fight.

Wicks was part of the RCL's leadership led by General Secretary Keerthi Balasuriya that stood with the ICFI in the 1985–86 split with the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in which the orthodox Trotskyists reasserted their control of the Fourth International. The split opened the way for a renaissance of Marxism and international collaboration between the sections of the ICFI.

Wicks played a significant role in that work, travelling to the United States in 1988 where he took part in the discussions surrounding the writing of the seminal international perspectives document that laid the groundwork for the ICFI's analysis of the globalisation of production and its political consequences.

The ties between our two sections strengthened, particularly amid the fascist attacks against the RCL in 1988–89 by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) that was waging a reactionary patriotic campaign against the Indo-Lanka Accord in defence of "the unity of the nation." JVP gunmen murdered three RCL members in cold blood—R.A. Pitawela in November 1988, P.H. Gunapala in December 1988 and Gretian Geekiyanage in June 1989—after the RCL opposed its Sinhala chauvinist campaign.

Wije Dias, who became the party's general secretary following the untimely death of Keerthi Balasuriya in 1987, issued a letter in November

1988 to workers' organisations in Sri Lanka for a United Front to defend the working class against fascist and state terror. It called for the formation of defence squads in every workplace and working-class housing area, joint pickets and demonstrations, and a general strike as part of a counteroffensive to unify "the strength of the working class against the barbaric counterrevolutionary attacks by the class enemy."

The call for a United Front was part of an international campaign waged by the ICFI and its sections to defend the RCL and the Sri Lankan working class. Wicks and Comrade H.M.B. Herath, secretary of the Central Bank Employees Union in Sri Lanka, travelled to Australia and New Zealand in April/May 1989 to campaign for support in the working class for the United Front and defence of Sri Lankan workers.

The campaign won widespread support throughout the labour movement. More than 100 officials of trade unions representing hundreds of thousands of workers, as well as prominent members of the Australian Labor Party signed a statement supporting the RCL's call. Thousands of individual workers signed statements calling for a united front. The treacherous refusal of the LSSP, Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and Communist Party in Sri Lanka to form a United Front with RCL only exposed these organisations as agencies of the ruling class before the eyes of workers.

The collaboration between our two sections developed further with the establishment of the *World Socialist Web Site* in 1998. Wicks regularly contributed to the WSWS on politics in Sri Lanka and India, drawing on his extensive political experience and knowledge of the Trotskyist movement in South Asia. He co-authored with Wije Dias an important article on the death of Bala Tampoe in 2014 that traced the historical evolution of this well-known political figure from "Socialist revolutionary to class traitor," as the title explained. A series of four articles with WSWS national editor K. Ratnayake, published on the 50th anniversary of the LSSP's betrayal, examined its significance and the necessary political lessons for workers today.

Wicks was a highly cultured and well-read man. He was, of course, thoroughly familiar with the works of the Trotskyist movement and the ICFI—after all, he was born just one year after the founding of the Fourth International and his membership of the RCL/SEP encompassed well over half of its existence. He was always interested in the work of other sections of the ICFI.

His interests were extensive. He was well versed in the complexities of the Indian and Sri Lankan history and culture but was familiar with the greats of English literature. My many discussions with Wicks began when we first met in the US in 1988 and together walked the streets of Detroit. Topics ranged from the problems of the American working class to the foundation myths of Sri Lanka and a Marxist understanding of the class origins of Buddhism. He was an engaging and animated speaker whose eyes lit up especially when talking of politics.

Wicks will be missed not only by his comrades in Sri Lanka but his comrades throughout the ICFI and also by many others around the world.

With fraternal greetings,

Peter Symonds

From the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste*, French section of the ICFI:

Dear Comrades,

I express the deepest condolences of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* to comrades, family and friends, in Sri Lanka and around the world, who are grieving the loss of Comrade Nanda Wickremesinghe.

He is remembered by his comrades in France as a tireless fighter for Trotskyism, against Stalinism, Pabloism and all forms of bourgeois nationalism.

I had the opportunity to know Comrade Wicks only after the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in 1985–86. He is a great representative of the generation that stood up for Trotskyism and the ICFI against the Great Betrayal of the LSSP and its turn to Pabloism.

Comrade Wicks fought for the internationalist perspective of the International Committee, alongside the late comrades Keerthi Balasuriya, Wije Dias and the comrades of the Revolutionary Communist League, during the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party.

The split with the WRP was a rebirth of internationalism. Comrade Wicks fought tirelessly to bring the internationalist perspective of the International Committee to the workers, students and intellectuals of the Indian subcontinent and to teach them its history.

Comrade Wicks understood profoundly the power of the ICFI's response to globalization and the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union.

With the help of the book *The Heritage We Defend* written by Comrade David North, the leader of the International Committee of the Fourth International, Comrade Wicks fought among intellectuals and workers against the political and historical confusions created by the Pabloites in the Indian metropolises of Bombay, Calcutta, and Chennai.

He explained to me in a rare telephone conversation in the early 1990s how the discussion on the book *The Heritage We Defend* in Calcutta had greatly helped him expose the Pabloite opportunists.

Despite the noise of the telephone calls at that time, he said, very calmly and very carefully, "It was the *Open letter to the Workers of India* written by Leon Trotsky at the beginning of the Second World War that was able to win the young generation of militants of that time—Drubo Jyoti Majumdar, Dulal Bose, Ganesh Dutta, Nirmal Samajpati and many others—to the Fourth International."

He explained that they accepted Trotsky's call that "the working class should fight for its own class interests independently from the Congress and Stalinist parties... Its outcome ultimately led to the emergence of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India," he said.

"I never thought that four decades after the dissolution of the Indian section of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India in 1948, I would have a discussion with them and win them over with the help of the book *The Heritage We Defend*," he said with enthusiasm and pride.

Comrade Wicks, you have seen in your lifetime that the Trotskyist perspective to which you have dedicated your life is stronger than the Stalinist apparatus and that it is being carried forward by the International Committee and the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka.

A new generation of revolutionary workers, youth and intellectuals in the Indian subcontinent and around the world will draw great strength from your tireless character, your courageous intervention in the student struggles of your youth, and your unwavering faith in the liberation of the working class from slavery. Thank you Comrade Wicks.

With greatest respect,

V. Gnana, Assistant National Secretary, PES

From the *Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu* (Socialist Equality Group), the Turkish section of the ICFI:

Dear comrades and friends,

As the *Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu* (Socialist Equality Group), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, we would like to express our grief at the death of Comrade Wicks (Nanda Wickremesinghe). We send our sincere condolences to all comrades in Sri Lanka and to the family and loved ones of Comrade Wicks.

Comrade Wicks' life was intertwined with the great events of our epoch. Born in the year of the outbreak of World War II, Comrade Wicks died in conditions of the escalating danger of a Third World War, but also of the growing radicalization of the international working class, the only social force capable of putting an end to that danger and its main source,

the capitalist system. The fundamental question remains as it was before 1939: the building of the revolutionary party that will lead the working class to take power and end the capitalist system. That party is the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Comrade Wicks' life was dedicated to the struggle to build this party in Sri Lanka and around the world, and covers a very critical period in that history. He, along with the late Keerthi Balasuriya, Wije Dias and the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI as a whole, made a tremendous contribution to the development of the Trotskyist movement in Turkey and internationally. I had the opportunity to meet him in March 2023. He was very pleased that a section of the ICFI was being built in Turkey. Comrade Wicks was undoubtedly among those who had contributed to this development, which built on decades of political struggles by the Trotskyist movement.

Sri Lanka and Turkey have many differences, but also many similarities. In these countries, both with belated capitalist development, the entire last century has witnessed repeated vindication of the Theory of Permanent Revolution elaborated by Leon Trotsky: The inability of the bourgeoisie to fulfill basic democratic tasks, especially the national question (the Tamil and Kurdish questions) and to ensure independence from imperialism; these tasks can only be fulfilled if the proletariat, united across ethnic and communal divisions, rallying all the oppressed masses behind it, takes power as part of the international struggle for socialism.

The opposition of the young Sri Lankan Trotskyists, including Comrade Wicks, to the Great Betrayal of 1964, their principled advocacy of the revolutionary socialist unity of the working class and their defense of the oppressed Tamil people without any concessions to nationalism, and their carrying forward of the perspective of Permanent Revolution, played a critical role in the development of our group and in our assimilation and adoption of the historical foundations and perspective of the ICFI.

The task now is to carry forward the struggle for the Marxist-Trotskyist principles and program to which Comrade Wicks dedicated his life. The way to do this is to study and assimilate the history of the Trotskyist movement, of which he was a part, and to build the ICFI as the revolutionary leadership of the working class. We pay tribute to Comrade Wicks and express our gratitude for his contribution to the struggle for world socialist revolution.

Ula? Ate?çi

In the name of the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu in Turkey



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact