

# Sri Lanka: Hundreds pay their last respects to veteran Trotskyist Nanda Wickremesinghe

**Our reporters**  
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Around a thousand family members, comrades and friends visited Jayaratne Respect Home on April 23 and 24 to pay their last respects to comrade Nanda Wickremesinghe of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Nanda Wickremesinghe, also known as Wicks, died in his sleep on the morning of April 20 at the age of 85 from a heart attack. He was a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the SEP's predecessor, a member of its central committee and a regular contributor to the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) in both English and Sinhala.

On Thursday afternoon, the funeral took place at Borella Cemetery in Colombo attended by family members, SEP comrades, workers, students, artists and intellectuals. They had come from all parts of the country.

The casket with remains of Wickremesinghe was taken to the cemetery in a solemn procession. Hundreds participated, marching from the funeral parlour about one kilometre to the funeral venue. The Internationale was played throughout the march.

Prior to the cremation, a funeral meeting was held by the SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) to pay tribute to the internationally well-known Trotskyist.

K. Ratnayake, WSWS Sri Lankan national editor and also a founding RCL member, chaired the meeting.

"It was a privilege for me that I, along with a leading comrade Lasitha, was able to meet comrade Wicks on April 6 and 13 for about two hours each day. We discussed the international political developments and the party's work. Wicks was extremely enthusiastic."

Ratnayake explained that Wicks' revolutionary enthusiasm was because he belonged to the ICFI, which carries forward the historic heritage of the struggle of Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution with Lenin.

The speaker said that Wicks was one of the young people who struggled to overcome political confusion and problems

created by the great betrayal of Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in 1964, when it joined the bourgeois coalition government of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike.

On the road to forming the RCL, they were given guidance by the ICFI and discussed and debated its documents prepared in the struggle against the Pabloite revisionist current.

Ratnayake also paid tribute to the role of the RCL's founding general secretary, Keerthi Balasuriya, who died in 1987, and his successor, Wije Dias, who died in 2022.

Vilani Peiris, an SEP Political Committee member, spoke of her strong political bond with Wicks over decades. She explained how Wicks used to discuss with her the importance of the experience of 1964 LSSP betrayal.

There was an immense pressure on the youth who had opposed the LSSP betrayal to adapt to Pabloism and nationalism. However, these youth did not succumb to that pressure and went forward to form the RCL. "I appeal to everyone, particularly young people, take the path that was taken by comrade Wicks and join the SEP to fight for his cause," she said.

Speaking in Tamil, M. Thevarajah, an SEP Central Committee member, said that he had worked with Wicks in both the RCL and SEP for over five decades. "He was an important source of knowledge of Marxist history and philosophy, and I learned a lot from him," Thevarajah said.

He recalled Wicks' bravery during 1987–89 period when the fascistic forces of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) were attacking and killing party members and workers.

Wicks took a leading role in the RCL's fight against JVP's terror campaign and the party's call for a United Front to unite the working class against those attacks. Wicks went with comrade Herath, who was then a Central Bank Employees Union leader, to Australia and New Zealand to campaign for the united front.

Thevarajah explained that Wicks had visited India several times, staying several months in very difficult conditions, to develop the political struggle to build a Trotskyist party there.

Saman Gunadasa, SEP assistant secretary, said that Wicks, who joined the revolutionary movement in his 20s, had been a fighter for the revolutionary cause of the working class to his last breath.

After the 1964 betrayal, the stalwarts of the Sri Lankan left—LSSP leaders like Colvin R de Silva and N.M. Perera—could not convince youngsters like Wicks to compromise with the capitalist class. Instead, Wicks challenged them. He did not just challenge but he searched for the correct path for the Sri Lankan and international working class.

Wicks was a revolutionary fighter. At the same time, he was full of humour and, being well read, was able explain complex issues excellently.

IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando recalled his experience in closely collaborating with Wicks. “The burning questions of the last century—world wars and fascism—have reemerged in this century as well. That is what the predatory policies of US President Donald Trump represent, including the massive tariffs targeting China in particular. That is why the ICFI speaks of the ‘unfinished 20th century.’ The life-long struggle of comrade Wicks guides us in carrying forward our struggle against war and fascism.”

Deepal Jayasekera, SEP general secretary, delivered the concluding remarks. “Today we all salute a comrade who dedicated more than six decades of his 85 years, or more than three fourths of his life, to fighting in Sri Lanka and internationally for the interests of the working class based on the principles of international socialism and Trotskyism.”

As other comrades have explained, the speaker said, Wicks joined the young group of comrades who fought against the betrayal of the LSSP. “The most important thing at that time was the extremely decisive political intervention of the ICFI, which explained that the roots of the LSSP’s great betrayal did not lie nationally, but internationally.”

Jayasekera explained that Pabloite revisionism, which emerged within the Fourth International, betrayed Trotskyist principles, but there was a principled struggle against it. “In 1953, the ICFI was formed to defend Trotskyist principles and politically fight Pabloite revisionism. The continuity of the Trotskyist movement was maintained and exists through the International Committee.”

The speaker explained Wicks’ role in preserving the continuity of the Trotskyist movement. “In response to the betrayal of the LSSP, various petty-bourgeois movements emerged—so-called populist responses. They rejected the revolutionary role of the working class and turned to other forces – the youth, the students, the peasantry. The most prominent of these was the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

“Comrades, including Wicks, rejected that populist petty-

bourgeois alternative and turned to the International Committee, to the Sri Lankan and international working class and to building the revolutionary leadership of the working class,” he said.

Jayasekera referred to the brilliant book on the class character of the JVP written by Keerthi Balasuriya in 1970. “He was deeply concerned about the JVP’s subsequent political degeneration, especially its transformation into a naked tool of finance capital,” he said.

“Later, the JVP further degenerated along the path of Sinhala chauvinism, evolving into a fascist movement during 1988–89. In subsequent years, it became a party of the bourgeois political establishment. Today it has taken the reins of bourgeois class rule.”

Jayasekera stressed that Wicks had played a critical role in the political struggle against the JVP to develop the Trotskyist strategy.

Vera Wickremesinghe, Wicks’ eldest daughter, thanked the speakers for the moving memories of her father. She explained how proud she was to have grown up under the shelter of the great revolutionary party. Despite numerous difficulties, Wicks kept them all happy.

The revolutionary party was enormously strengthening her understanding of society, she said. As Wicks was engaged in full-time party work, his mother (Vera’s grandmother) used to ask him to focus on the well-being of his children. At those times, Wicks used to respond her with a smile, saying only, “All children in this world are mine.”

“Despite being a serious political figure, my father said such funny things that made his children smile and be happy. Meanwhile, he allowed his children to argue on issues and thus trained them to face challenges. He was such a beautiful person. He strongly loved his children and wife, Manike.

“We immensely honour this revolutionary party, this giant international family, which gave us strength, love and confidence,” she said.



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