

Sri Lankan SEP marks 20th anniversary of Keerthi Balasuriya's death

Our correspondents
20 December 2007

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held a short ceremony on December 18 at the graveside of Keerthi Balasuriya to mark the 20th anniversary of his death. Keerthi Balasuriya was the founding general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the forerunner of the SEP. He died in 1987, at the age of just 39, of a massive heart attack while at work in the RCL offices.

Leading SEP members, including comrade Keerthi's long-time political collaborators, party supporters from around Colombo and members of Keerthi's family gathered in the Colombo General Cemetery. SEP general secretary Wije Dias, also a founding member of the RCL, laid a floral tribute and read a commemorative message sent by Nick Beams, SEP national secretary in Australia, which stated:

"It is hard to believe that 20 years have passed since the death of comrade Keerthi. His loss is felt all the more keenly because of the knowledge that, having battled through all the difficulties created by the degeneration of the WRP, he was about to come into his own. But we who had the honour and privilege of working with him still find much to draw from the legacy of principled struggle and attention to theoretical understanding which he left behind. What we said 20 years ago about the significance of that legacy is truer than ever today. We will need to draw upon it in the upheavals in Sri Lanka and internationally which are to come.

"Please pass on our deepest and warmest regards to comrade Vilani and all our comrades in Sri Lanka on this day when we recall one of the finest fighters of our international movement."

Dias also quoted from the two-part article by David North, chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and national secretary of the SEP in the United States, to mark the 20th anniversary of Keerthi's death. (See "Twenty years since the death of Keerthi Balasuriya

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Dias pointed out that imperialist aggression had intensified with the Bush administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as its military preparations against Iran. A rebellion was developing among workers and young people against militarism and deepening social inequality. The situation in Sri Lanka and South Asia was not separate from these international processes.

"The mood among the working class and oppressed in this country toward the civil war today is not the same as that which existed at the time of comrade Keerthi Balasuriya's death in 1987. Then racism had been intensified to fever pitch and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was aiming its guns at the heads of the working class," he said.

New opportunities were opening before the party to mobilise working people and youth based upon a socialist program against war. Dias said it was essential to assimilate the political and theoretical contributions made by Keerthi in order to grasp these political opportunities.

SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris told the gathering: "When Keerthi started his political life as a student in 1966, the political issues he had to grapple with were immense. By 1964, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), under the influence of Pabloism, had completely betrayed Trotskyism by entering into a bourgeois coalition led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Under those conditions, a group of young people, with comrade Spike [long-standing Trotskyist Wilfred Pereira], had to take up the struggle for the international Trotskyist movement in Sri Lanka.

"Keerthi was thoroughly committed to Trotskyist principles and waged an uncompromising struggle against opportunism and revisionism. He brought the whole experience of Marxist movement into the party and we today in the party were educated through those struggles.

"We are preparing to publish Keerthi's political and

theoretical works for the international working class on the 20th anniversary of his death... The contributions made by Keerthi in his relatively brief political life of 22 years are vital for educating workers and youth on a revolutionary program today.”

The SEP invites supporters and readers to attend a public meeting on Sunday to commemorate 20 years since Keerthi Balasuriya’s death.

Time: 3 p.m. on December 23

Venue: Mahaveli Centre, Green Path, Colombo 7

Twenty years since the death of Keerthi Balasuriya

Part one

[18 December 2007]

Twenty years since the death of Keerthi Balasuriya

Part two

[19 December 2007]



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