

SEP in Sri Lanka pays tribute to Keerthi Balasuriya

Our correspondent
20 December 2017

On December 18, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), paid tribute to Keerthi Balasuriya. Balasuriya was the general secretary of the SEP's predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), from its inception in 1968. He died due to a sudden heart attack on December 18, 1987, just weeks after his 39th birthday.

Party members and supporters took part in the commemoration, which was held at the general cemetery at Borella, Colombo.

K. Ratnayake, the national editor of the *World Socialist Web Site* in Sri Lanka, chaired the event, which began with one minute's silence to honour the memory of comrade Balasuriya.

Ratnayake explained the importance of Balasuriya's unrelenting political struggle, especially against the descent into national opportunism by the leadership of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), then the British section of the ICFI.

"When Keerthi passed away in 1987, the ICFI was in a profound fight for the development and flourishing of Trotskyism. This was after the struggle against, and break from, the British WRP renegades in 1985. He joined this struggle led by comrade David North, who is now the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

"The death of Keerthi was a huge loss for the RCL and the ICFI. On the basis of this renewed fight for Trotskyism, our movement has taken giant theoretical and political strides. We are now in the midst of a deep crisis of world capitalism and unfolding social struggles, and that is why the lessons of the history of our movement are essential in preparing the working class for socialist revolution."

Ratnayake then read to the gathering a letter sent by

North on behalf of the SEP (US) and the International Editorial Board of the WSWs.

Vilani Peiris, Balasuriya's life-long companion and SEP political committee member, underlined the international foundations of the struggle to establish the RCL and Balasuriya's role in the party's founding. The RCL's formation was based on the political principles elaborated at the ICFI's Third World Congress in 1966.

Peiris said Balasuriya had pointed to the need to settle political accounts with the Pabloite leader Ernest Mandel, who was being fraudulently described as the foremost "Trotskyist economist," and who argued that a new period of capitalism had dawned.

Peiris then turned to those once-glorified leaders, like Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro. "Their nationalist perspectives have collapsed. In Sri Lanka, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) glorified them, rejected the revolutionary role of the working class and insisted that the peasantry was the revolutionary force. Keerthi engaged in relentless theoretical and political struggle against such conceptions, elaborating an internationalist line. These lessons are important for the younger generation, which is turning to our movement."

Wije Dias, the general secretary of the SEP, began his speech by referring to the year-long and worldwide centenary events organised by the ICFI to commemorate the 1917 Russian Revolution. In these events, insistence was laid on the decisive role played by the revolutionary party of Lenin and Trotsky in establishing working class rule, supported by the peasants.

"This centenary has raised before us the responsibility to re-work our own history, as part of the world party of socialist revolution, to train new cadres

for the continuation of the struggle begun in 1917, and to fulfill the tasks of our own October in this country and South Asia.

“We decided to make the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the death of comrade Keerthi Balasuriya the first step of the campaign for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League, the predecessor of the SEP. Keerthi played the leading role in the group that established the RCL and justifiably became the party’s general secretary for 20 years until his untimely death.”

Dias continued: “Keerthi was just 19 years when the RCL was founded. He was fresh to politics, unlike us. We were a few years older than him and had to go through the torturous events of the great betrayal of the fake Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which joined the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964, and also the experience of the split-away group, the LSSP (Revolutionary), which followed the same criminal revisionist political line laid down by the Pabloite tendency. Keerthi had the advantage of coming directly under the influence of the politics of the ICFI.

“He was quickly able to grasp the essence of the long drawn-out struggle carried out by the ICFI against the national opportunists, in order to train a new generation of revolutionary fighters based on Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. That is why he was elected to be our leader. His untimely death in December 1987 cut short an invaluable and devoted service to the cause of international socialism. The fact that a whole group of us, who were with Keerthi from the preparatory days of founding the RCL—myself, Ratnayake, Wickremasinghe and Wakkumbura—are still in the political battleground is testimony to the power and ever-increasing relevance of the program upon which Trotsky called for the founding of the Fourth International in 1938.”

Dias concluded: “As comrade David North stated in his letter to this meeting, Keerthi was at the height of his productive revolutionary work after the ICFI split from the renegades of the Workers Revolutionary Party of Britain. He was energetically engaged in international work with our Trotskyist co-thinkers, to resurrect the revolutionary socialist program of the ICFI and re-establish the Trotskyist foundations of the world movement. It is on the basis of that invaluable

work that we have to recruit and train a new layer of workers and youth to continue that struggle. This is the only way to stop the development of barbaric dictatorships and another world war, and to reorganise the productive forces of the entire globe on a socialist basis, in order to satisfy the fundamental democratic, as well as social, needs of world humanity.”



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