

Long live the memory of Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya (1948-1987)

David North
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The following letter was sent by David North, the chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the SEP in Sri Lanka on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the death of Keerthi Balasuriya.

Dear Comrades of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka:

Yesterday's opening session of the National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party began with a tribute to Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya and the observation of a minute's silence to honor his memory on the thirty-fifth anniversary of his death.

The passage of more than a third of a century since Keerthi's death has not diminished the sense of the loss suffered by the international working class, the cause of world socialism, and his innumerable comrades and friends throughout the International Committee of the Fourth International. The sorrow evoked by the untimely character of his passing is still deeply felt by all those who knew Keerthi, worked with him, and respected and admired him. He was 39 years old. It will be only in November of the coming year that the International Committee will commemorate what would have been Keerthi's seventy-fifth birthday.

And yet, today's tribute to Comrade Keerthi is motivated not by sorrow but, rather, by deep admiration for the enormous contribution he made to the fight for Trotskyism, the defense of the International Committee, the building of its Sri Lankan party, and the fight for the liberation of the working class from capitalist oppression through the victory of the world socialist revolution.

At the funeral of Comrade Keerthi on December 23, 1987, my tribute to his life included a prediction:

In the period immediately ahead, the workers, not only in Asia but throughout the world, will read and study the writings of Comrade Keerthi. And we are confident that it will not be the Mao Zedongs, Ho Chi Minhs and Castros that will be the teachers of the youth. Rather, it will be from Keerthi Balasuriya, the Revolutionary Communist League and the International Committee that the advanced elements among the workers and youth will learn their revolutionary lessons.

In the life of Comrade Keerthi, the International Committee created a leader of great historical significance. Comrade Keerthi, as an individual, cannot be replaced. But the movement he built lives on and will become a revolutionary beacon for millions in the coming period.

The events of the last thirty-five years attest to the correctness of that assessment of Keerthi's role on history. Within less than two years of his death, the seemingly all-powerful Stalinist movement had entered into its final death throes. In June 1989, the Chinese Communist Party crushed resistance to its turn to capitalist restoration with the bloody massacre at Tiananmen Square. Before the year was over, the Stalinist regimes throughout Eastern Europe had dissolved themselves ignominiously. And in December 1991, just four years after Keerthi's death, the Gorbachev regime dissolved the Soviet Union, completing the Stalinist counterrevolution. The historical perspective upon which the founding of the Fourth International had been based was tragically vindicated.

These events refuted the opportunist revisions of Trotskyism. The International Committee of the Fourth International had been formed in November 1953 in opposition to the impressionist and false claims of Pablo and Mandel that the Soviet bureaucracy was a revolutionary force under whose leadership socialism would be achieved, albeit in the form of centuries of deformed workers states.

A reactionary codicil of Pabloite liquidationism was that bourgeois nationalist movements were also capable of leading the masses to socialism. Thus, there was no need for independent political action by the working class, let alone a Marxist-Trotskyist party of the working class. The entire historical perspective of the Fourth International was to be consigned to the rubbish heap. What need was there for a Trotskyist movement, the development of socialist consciousness in the working class, and the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership of the working class when the realization of socialism could be accomplished by bureaucracies and petty-bourgeois national movements of one sort or another?

Keerthi devoted his entire adult life to the struggle against the insidious opportunism of the Pabloites. The high point of this struggle was his essential contribution to the fight against the national opportunism of the Workers Revolutionary Party. The role that Keerthi played in the struggle of 1985-86, when the very survival of the Trotskyist movement was threatened, was of historical significance.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has made enormous advances during the past 35 years. These advances have been based on the political perspective and program to whose defense and development Keerthi Balasuriya made so great a contribution.

Long Live the Memory of Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya!



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