

Sri Lankan SEP marks 25th anniversary of Keerthi Balasuriya's death

By our correspondent
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka commemorated 25 years since the death of Keerthi Balasuriya, the founding general secretary of the SEP's forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), with a ceremony at his graveside in Colombo yesterday. Balasuriya died in 1987, at the age of just 39, of a massive heart attack while working at the party office in Colombo.

SEP members and supporters, including comrade Keerthi's long-time political collaborators, attended the event at the Colombo General Cemetery. Two SEP Political Committee members, K. Ratnayake and Nanda Wickremasinghe, laid a floral tribute on behalf of the SEP. Ratnayake, who presided over the ceremony, called for two minutes' silence to honour Keerthi's memory.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias, one of several founding RCL members in attendance, told the gathering: "Rich lessons are embodied in the political struggles conducted by comrade Keerthi. These should be remembered and assimilated again and again in the current period of social revolutionary struggles now unfolding—not only in the Middle East and North Africa but also in the advanced capitalist countries and the backward countries."

Dias said the international appreciation of Keerthi's political contributions to Trotskyism was reflected in the WSWs Perspective published on December 18 and the republication of the assessment written by WSWs editorial board chairman David North on the 20th anniversary of Keerthi's death.

Dias explained the political evolution of the small group of youth, including Keerthi, who strove to overcome the political confusion created by the Great Betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which had joined the bourgeois coalition government

of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964.

The SEP general secretary outlined the decisive role played by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in that process of clarification. The ICFI had explained that the real political roots of the LSSP betrayal were to be found in Pabloism, a revisionist tendency that had developed inside the Fourth International during the early 1950s.

Keerthi had emerged as the firmest representative of socialist internationalism during the political discussions and debates among the youth who established the RCL in 1968 as the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI. "Comrade Keerthi never wavered from those international foundations during his life time," Dias said.

Outlining the necessity for a new generation of revolutionaries to seriously study and assimilate Keerthi's struggle for proletarian internationalism, Dias explained: "Only on the basis of those lessons is it possible for the working class, the oppressed masses and the youth to open the way for social emancipation in the future revolutionary explosions."

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris told the gathering: "Comrade Keerthi based himself on the ICFI's struggle against Pabloism in 1953 and its principled opposition to the reunification of the American Socialist Workers Party with Pabloism in 1963. He worked to deepen the theoretical struggle against the various revisionist tendencies that emerged in the Indian sub-continent and instil the new political lessons in the working class. We are the cadres who were trained on those lessons."

Peiris referred to *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka*, adopted in 2011 at the SEP's founding congress. "The central underlining feature of that

document is that the SEP fights for a revolutionary strategy for the entire Indian sub-continent. We were only able to make that development after ICFI's 1985-86 split from the renegades of British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP).”

Peiris explained Keerthi's important role in that struggle, which was led by David North, the national secretary of the Workers League in US, against the WRP's betrayal of Trotskyism.

In January, the SEP will hold a major public meeting in Colombo to commemorate the life and work of Keerthi Balasuriya.

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