

On the 30th anniversary of the death of Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya

By David North
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This letter was sent by WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North to a gathering of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka marking the 30th anniversary of the death of Keerthi Balasuriya. Comrade Keerthi was the founding general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and predecessor to the SEP. The event was held at the Colombo Cemetery in Sri Lanka on December 18.

Dear Comrades,

Thirty years ago, on December 18, 1987, Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya died at the untimely age of 39. When I received the news on that Friday morning, it came as a terrific shock. Only a few weeks earlier, Keerthi and I had worked together in London, writing a political statement on the treacherous accord between the Indian and Sri Lankan bourgeoisie. It was difficult to believe that this brilliant revolutionist, at the height of his intellectual and political powers, was suddenly gone.

Keerthi's death was an irreplaceable loss to the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Sri Lankan section. In Sri Lanka, Keerthi had led the Revolutionary Communist League since its founding in 1968. Under the most difficult political conditions, exacerbated by the increasingly unprincipled national opportunism of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), Keerthi fought to uphold the revolutionary internationalist program upon which the founding of the RCL had been based.

In October 1985, as the crisis within the WRP erupted, Comrade Keerthi traveled to London. He immediately aligned himself with those within the International Committee who were fighting to defend the historically-grounded principles of the Fourth

International. During the next two years, in drawing the political lessons of the break with the WRP, Keerthi played a critical role in the theoretical and political rearming of the International Committee.

At the funeral of Comrade Keerthi, I stated that his work as a revolutionary Marxist would prove more enduring than all those who claimed to have discovered, through the treacherous mixture of Stalinism, nationalism and pseudo-socialist demagoguery, an alternative to the principles of Marxist internationalism.

That prediction has been proven correct. During the 30 years since Keerthi's death, history has carried out a brutal reckoning with the political legacy of Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Tito, and Castro, not to mention the innumerable representatives of "Third World" bourgeois nationalism (i.e., Nelson Mandela, Nasser, and Gaddafi, to name only few).

Thirty years after Comrade Keerthi's death, it is an incontestable fact that the International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political tendency in the world that represents the program of World Socialist Revolution. Herein lies the imperishable legacy of the life of our comrade and dearest friend, Keerthi Balasuriya.

David North

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*

See also:

In Memory of Keerthi Balasuriya
[18 December 2012]

South Asia's foremost Marxist of the second half of the 20th century
[27 December 2012]

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