

# SOME RECOLLECTIONS

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In November last year, David invited me over to select a few books as mementos from Kathleen's library. A postcard on the bookcase shelving, with its faded-colour reproduction of a magnificent ancient temple, caught my eye. Turning the card over I surprised myself, for it was one I had sent Kathleen almost two years earlier from Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, near the villages where she had done so much methodical and insightful field work.

What memories of India the card evoked for Kathleen, prompting her to put it in view, I of course cannot know. I want to speculate that her memories wove together many images of beauty and misery and political vitality: the remarkable stone carvings; the women who sit on endless roadsides smashing rock for hours with the frailest of tools in broiling sunlight; the energetic public debate that instantly exposes our own political culture's scandalous backwardness and monochromatism.

My first visit to India, four months as a traveller, deepened still further my appreciation of Kathleen's accomplishment of discerning, amidst that tangle of stimulating particularities and puzzles, the shapes of political economy and class struggle in village India. Hers was a very fine mind, penetrating and rigorous. With a gift for clear expression, she has left a lasting revolutionary intellectual contribution.

When I returned to Vancouver that spring of 1990, I phoned Kathleen full of my enthusiasms and now larger and more tangible curiosities—for India sharpens the senses. I brought warm greetings from the contacts Kathleen had given me before leaving, and expressed my own gratitude. For it was with her assistance that I had been able, among other things, to walk through rice fields, guided by a village communist organizer, meeting with Harijan families.

That spring Kathleen too was full of enthusiasm, and busy with practical preparations for her new project in Vietnam. She planned to study, in the combination of detail and scope at which she was so skilled, the complex efforts to revolutionize productive relations in the Vietnamese village. But practical preparation itself brought a sudden end to her planning. As she recounted to me so boldly: I took the car for a check with the mechanic, the

cat for a check with the vet and so decided to take myself for a check with the doctor. Thereby she discovered her rampant cancer.

Kathleen approached this malignancy as she had approached other destructive forces in our world: with intelligence and courage. Nothing decent can be accomplished without that, but the tragedy we all know is that no success is assured by that either. In the tragedy of Kathleen's dying I feel deeply it was my very good fortune to have been able to have had time with her. We did not reminisce about our long and determined efforts, with many others, to construct a mentally rigorous, co-operative and empowering, authority-challenging milieu at Simon Fraser University. That was when we first developed our bond of comradeship. That bond endured without any need for its formal reaffirmation. It proved stronger than political disagreements and had outlasted periods of infrequent contact.

Perhaps it was this mutual gift that silently gave us the confidence and the wish to dialogue about the fate of this century's revolutionary struggles for emancipation. As Kathleen faced her own death, we speculated, as self-conscious humanity everywhere speculates, on the fate of the global struggle to eradicate the scourges of class oppression, patriarchy and racism—on the prospects for socialism.

Each of the three times we spoke, the horsemen of counter-revolution had loomed larger over the horizon. Kathleen died before they savaged the Iraqi people, before that formal annunciation of a world where the dogs of U.S. militarism roam unleashed and unrivalled, where frightened states rush to appease and where competition for the role of praising Caesar is fierce—from Gorbachev's pitiful fawning to delusionary liberals who herald a "revitalized" U.N. Meanwhile in the wings, holding their counsels in private, the imperial rivals of Europe and Japan plot their impending counter-moves.

In the difficult moment of her too-early dying, Kathleen was entitled to project despair or to seek solace in a maudlin gloss on history. She chose neither. Rather, manifesting her personal loyalty to comradeship, her thinking continued to challenge what is unwanted and evil with a passionate commitment to the needed and the good. She probed recent events with a still vital conviction that the communist internationalist heritage remains a most creative seedbed for practical emancipation from this inhumane world order.

We are a small, disorganized band today who draw sustenance from that revolutionary vision of egalitarianism. It is a vision which continuously has to be extracted with mental effort from the contemporary turmoil, and which has been fought for with pride and with courage in the past 150 years.

I believe Kathleen would want us to carry this vision forward, with clarity and fortitude; also with love for one another and with loyalty. She wrote that she learned these qualities from the Vietnamese. But my moments with her convince me she also knew something of them herself.