

NOTE

Kalyan Sanyal—A Short Recollection

Anirban Biswas writes :

ON 18 FEBRUARY, KALYAN Sanyal, a professor of economics of the University of Calcutta, passed away at a private hospital of the city. He was only sixty-one at the time of death, and is survived by his wife and two sons. Sanyal, who was educated at the Presidency College and University of Calcutta joined the latter as a young teacher of economics in 1975, and later rose to the position of a professor. His father, late Abanti Sanyal, was a well-known professor of Bengali literature, and was better known for his command of French. Abanti Sanyal translated many valuable French books into Bengali, and earned the epithet 'French Abanti'. Kalyan however chose to study economics and built up a successful career; he was immensely popular among his students.

He was however something more than that. When a first year college student, he participated in the historic student demonstration occasioned by the visit of McNamara, one of the architects of the USA's Vietnam policy in the 1960s, to Calcutta. In 1977, he was an active participant in the movement for the release of political prisoners. He also joined the protest movement against police torture in Singur and Nandigram. Not many of this kind these days can possibly be found among university teachers, who generally prefer not to react to such greater social phenomena except on the sly, lest their self-interest should be harmed. As a companion, Kalyan was exceedingly cooperative and affable. His thought-provoking book—*Rethinking Capitalism* (Published by Routledge) deserves serious attention. What were particularly enjoyable were his sharp comments on many issues. This writer, who was his classmate at the college, can recall one later incident. A Cambridge economist built up a model of economic growth in terms of the difference in saving propensities between capitalists and workers. Kalyan sharply drew this writer's attention to the premise of the model in these words : 'See, they seem to suggest that there is no difference between the two classes except the difference in saving propensity'. His discerning eyes grasped the inability of modern theoretical economics to capture the essentials of living issues even when classes rather than individuals are brought into analysis, in fact his skill in making caricatures of apparently well-argued cases was a treat to watch. As a teacher he was very much popular among students, although not as famous as the great professors of yore. He has been prematurely and rather unexpectedly called to eternal rest, but will continue to live in the minds of his students, colleagues, friends and well-wishers. □