
IN MEMORIAM

K. D. Malaviya: an Indian nation-builder

by Ganesh Shukla

On May 27 Keshav Dev Malaviya died at the age of 77 after a long illness. Malaviya was one of India's great men. In his memory we reprint here brief excerpts of the obituary written by his good friend, the editor of the Indian weekly New Wave, Ganesh Shukla.

Along with the fiery Defense Minister V. K. Krishna Menon, Malaviyaji was one of the most controversial figures during the postindependence period, when, under Nehru's leadership, the Indian republic was trying to lay the foundations of industrialization.

A chemical engineer by education, Malaviyaji's commitment to India's scientific and technological progress was a shining example of patriotism to the younger generation of political workers and a source of strength to the scientific community. For the past four years, despite his fairly advanced age, he had been struggling to publish a monthly scientific journal which he used to fight against the ruralist offensive aimed at India's scientific and technological progress. He was impatient with the slow pace of progress in this vital area. Notwithstanding his age and indifferent health, he kept moving up and down the country meeting scientists, and writing note after note to the Prime Minister.

He was recruited to nationalist politics by Motilal Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru's father] as a young boy. Though proud of his uncle, the great Hindu leader Madan Mohan Malaviya, Keshav Dev became part of the Nehru household in the 1920s.

I first heard Malaviyaji's name during the Quit India Movement [the movement against British rule during World War II], of course in a hush-hush way as he was engaged in organizing anti-British activities and setting up a clandestine broadcasting unit. By then he had already served in the first Congress-led ministry [government] in Uttar Pradesh [U.P.] and was a member of the All-India Congress Committee and one of the general secretaries of the U.P. Congress Committee.

I first met Malaviyaji in January 1957, when he had come to my district in U.P. to seek election to the Lok Shaba [the lower house of parliament]. Knowing his objective, which we had already decided to support, I badgered him with a long list of the Congress's failings.

He patiently listened to me, his mischievous, mirthful smile occasionally enlivening the atmosphere. "Have you finished?" he asked me, adding, "I need young men like you. You agree we have to defeat the reactionary Hindu Mahashbha candidate. Let us do this. Then we shall have a longer conversation." Malaviyaji won.

During the Nehru period the Congress was a funny organization. At that time, more of the real enemies of Jawaharlal Nehru and all that he stood for were inside the Congress than outside. Most of these fellows had sold their consciences to foreign lobbies, which used their greed and ignorance to subvert the Congress. The press was controlled by agents, hired touts and Cold Warriors. Since these elements could not directly confront Nehru, they singled out Krishna Menon and K. D. Malaviya for attack.

In 1963 the foreign oil multinationals, upset by Malaviya's efforts to build up a domestic oil industry, organized a "corruption scandal" to oust him from the cabinet. A donation of 10,000 rupees made by a mine-owner to a Congress candidate on Malaviya's request was made a big scandal by agent politicians and hired newsmen. Nehru was forced to ask Malaviya to resign.

Despite personal harm, calumny, and character assassination, Malaviyaji continued the fight for India's right to have its own national oil industry, its own scientific and technological capability. Verily, Malaviya is the father of the modern Indian oil industry. The Prime Minister has honored the Indian oil industry by naming the Petroleum Research Institute in Dehradun after him.

Last year I suggested to Malaviyaji that he go to Frankfurt to address a conference on India's economic development [sponsored by the Fusion Energy Foundation and the *Executive Intelligence Review*]. A few days earlier he was to go to Moscow to attend the meeting of the committee which awards the Lenin Peace Prize. It was quite strenuous but he agreed.

In Frankfurt he called an old British geologist friend to come and see him. He came and remained closeted with him for three hours. "This man," Malaviyaji later told me, "has been insisting since 1950 that we should drill 5-6,000 meters deep in the foothills of the Himalayas. We shall either strike oil and gas, or sweet water. The Himalayas are floating on water. If we get that water we can convert the Gangetic plain into the breadbasket of the world."

For the past few months, Malaviyaji was working on a proposal to hold an international conference of scientists in India to discuss "Energy and Economic Development." He was writing notes to the Prime Minister and holding discussions with Professor Nural Hassan in addition to many eminent scientists. He wanted an assembly of top Indian, Soviet, American, and European scientists on the Indian soil to restart the broken processes of détente on the level of the best brains of the world.