

PIETER KEUNEMAN

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-A Profile

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by
BASIL PERERA



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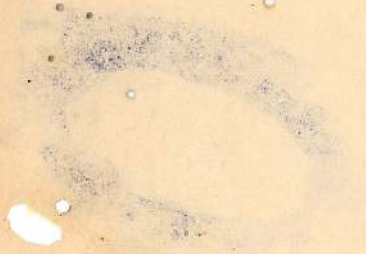
BASIL PERERA

OCTOBER 1967.



PIETER KEUNEMAN

in profile



BASIL VERTRE

CONTENTS

	Page
1. BOYHOOD	1
2. CAMBRIDGE	12
3. INTO BATTLE (1940 - 47)	25
4. AGAINST U.N.P. RULE (1947-56)	55
5. THE BANDARANAIKE PERIOD (1956-64)	80
6. THE HATH HOWLA AND AFTER	107
7. INTERNATIONALISM	116
8. COMRADE PIETER	128

CONTENTS

1. BOYHOOD
2. CHARIOTS
3. INTO BATTLE (1811-1812)
4. AGAINST THE RIFLE (1812-1813)
5. THE BARRACADE PERIOD (1813-1814)
6. THE BATH HOUSE AND AFTER
7. INTERNATIONALISM

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BOYHOOD

In the year 1967 Pieter Keuneman M.P; General Secretary of the Ceylon Communist Party and President of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, celebrates four separate anniversaries.

In this memorable year of the 50th anniversary of the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, Keuneman completes his thirtieth year as a member of the Communist Party and his twentieth continuous year as a Member of the Parliament of Ceylon. The fifteenth anniversary of his marriage and his fiftieth birthday also occur in this year.

Pieter Keuneman was born on the 3rd October 1917, just three weeks before Lenin and the Bolshevik Party took power in what was then Tsarist Russia. "I'm pre-revolutionary - but only just," he often quips.

Keuneman once described the birth of a fellow-Communist as "a fleshy manifestation of the Marxist tenet that the capitalist-imperialist system generates within itself

the seeds of its own overthrow." He might well have been talking about his own birth.

For the family into which he was born at "Belair", Serpentine Road (now Reid Avenue), Colombo, was by no means poor or proletarian. His father, Arthur Eric Keuneman, was at that time a barrister with a lucrative practice on the civil side. He was later to take silk, become Mr. Justice Keuneman, and to act as Chief Justice just before his retirement. He died in 1958.

On his father's side, Pieter Keuneman's ancestors had been connected with the law for nearly two centuries, first at Galle and later at Matara where the family moved to in the nineteenth century. Both Pieter Keuneman's father and one of his uncles (L. M. Maartensz, who married his father's sister) became Judges of the Supreme Court of Ceylon, while his father's elder brother, the late Percy Keuneman, was Crown Proctor of Matara.

Although Pieter Keuneman, at his father's wish, later studied law at Gray's Inn, London, he was the first male member of the family for several generations not to practise as a lawyer. His younger brother, Arthur Eric (Jr.) followed the family tradition, became a Crown Counsel in Ceylon and now holds a high legal appointment in Australia.

Speaking after dinner at a legal ceremony, Pieter Keuneman once described his departure from family tradition thus: "My forefathers interpreted and administered the law for generations. I differ from them in that I only make and break laws!".

Describing his father to a foreign journalist who once interviewed him, Pieter Keuneman said:

“He was a professional man and did quite well at his profession. But unlike so many professional men today, he did not use the profits of his profession to buy estates, dabble in the share market or live on the exploitation of the labour of others. When he died, he had—apart from his pension—two houses, including the one he lived in, and some gilt-edged Government securities. He spent most of his money on educating his children, helping other people, and indulging in his hobbies of buying books and collecting antique Dutch colonial furniture.”

Keuneman spoke just as warmly about his father to me:

“You remember the story about Voltaire who said: ‘I disapprove of everything you say, but I will defend to death your right to say it’. Well, my father was like that.

“He was a liberal in the real sense. And he had all the good points and weaknesses of genuine liberals.

“Apart from courtesy and compassion, he had developed to a high degree the qualities of detachment and judiciousness. He always liked to examine all sides of a question before reaching a conclusion and, as is often the case with liberals, this process sometimes took so long that it prohibited both conclusion and action.”

Pieter Keuneman tells two stories to back up this opinion.

The first was when, shortly after his return from Cambridge, the Communist Party decided that he should become a full-time Party worker.

Keuneman journeyed to Galle, where his father was presiding over the Supreme Court sessions, to break the news of his decision. His father took the news calmly.

"I won't pretend that this is what I hoped for you," he told his son, "but you must make your own decisions and live your own life. I have done my duty and given you the best education I could afford."

And as his son turned away, Mr. Justice Keuneman added: "And by the way, if you get into difficulties and need any help, don't be shy to call on me."

Very much later Keuneman's father told him that he had hoped that his son would become a writer. "You had the talent," he told him "and there are more than enough lawyers in the family."

Another story that Keuneman tells about his father is how the latter, after his retirement, admitted to having voted for his son's Communist colleague, M. G. Mendis, whom he had sentenced to jail when he was a judge.

"I don't agree with your Party's views," he told his son, "but your candidate is an honest man, and we badly need honest men in politics."

Mr. Justice Keuneman has also referred publicly to his relations with his elder son.

At a University dinner in his honour, Mr. Justice Keuneman was introduced by an undergraduate speaker as "the father of Pieter Keuneman".

"I have heard of many a person being introduced as the son of a famous father," said the Judge. "But this is the first time I have heard of a person being introduced as the father of a famous son."

But Mr. Justice Keuneman was later to get his own back. For Pieter Keuneman once turned up as a witness in a case before him. The Interpreter Mudaliyar, under the impression that it was not necessary to tell the father who the son was, dispensed with the usual practice of asking the witness his name.

But not so Mr. Justice Keuneman. "Mudaliyar," he asked gravely, "who is this witness?" And turning to his son, he asked, "Witness, what is your name?"

Pieter Keuneman's mother, Marjorie Eleanor Schokman, hailed from Kandy. She was the daughter of a wealthy doctor and the sister of several Heads of Government Departments.

A talented pianist, she had tried to teach her son music. Although she did succeed in instilling into Keuneman the love for music that he has today, her efforts to turn her son into an accomplished performer on the piano proved futile.

His piano teacher gave up in disgust. And his musical career ended when, at the age of ten, he took part for the first and last time at a Royal College concert.

Keuneman played the first half of his set piece with grim determination and then, in the middle, realised to his horror that he had forgotten the second half. Nothing daunted, he played the first half once again, to the accompaniment of derisive cheers from his audience.

Curiously enough, it was from his mother that the young Keuneman learnt his first lessons in social consciousness. Fashionable upper class Ceylonese society at the time was thoroughly snob-ridden and dedicated to the proposition that

the more faithfully one could imitate the Englishmen who filled the colonial bureaucracy, the nearer to 'civilisation' one reached. This whole milieu has been well described in the early novels of Dr. Lucian de Zylva.

Keuneman's mother, who detested all forms of social snobbery and racial exclusiveness, constantly held those who practised such pretensions up to ridicule before her son. And it is from her that Keuneman learnt the first elementary lesson that all men are equal.

Pieter Keuneman's parents were determined to give him the same education that his father and his father's father had had before him.

He was sent to the Royal Primary School (then misnamed Royal Training College) and entered Royal College, which his forefathers had attended since the school was founded, in January 1926.

Keuneman's school career was certainly an all-round one. He quickly made his mark in studies, sports, general student activities and in the school administration.

In 1931, he passed his Junior School Certificate Examination and became top sergeant of the Ceylon Cadet Battalion (Juniors). In the next year, he won his 'colours' for Rugby Football and became the 'baby' of the school Rugger XV, some of whose leading lights Keuneman was later to expose and denounce when they became leaders of the abortive reactionary coup d'etat of 1962.

In 1933, at the junction between junior and senior school, Keuneman's parents took him on a 6-month visit to Great

Britain and Western Europe. This first visit abroad took place in the year of Hitler's rise to power in Germany and gave the young Keuneman a first-hand acquaintance with some of the problems of world politics.

On his return from abroad, Keuneman re-entered Royal College on what was, in those days, called the 'classics' side where, in addition to history, literature and the humanities, a few selected students were taught ancient Latin and Greek classics by the late Principal L. H. W. Sampson and P. I. Roberts.

Keuneman won the Sir James Peiris Memorial Prize for English Essay and was elected Secretary of the Senior Literary Association, as the College debating society was called.

In 1934, he became a School Prefect, Captain of Harward House, Captain of the Rugby Football XV, Senior Librarian and Chairman of the Senior Literary Association.

He carried away the Best Speaker's Prize, the Mrs. F. J. de Saram Memorial Prize for Reading and the Gooneratne Memorial Shakespeare Prize.

He was a leading figure in the amateur dramatics of the school and played the main role in Aeschylus *Oedipus Rex*.

Keuneman also became the Editor of the Royal College magazine to which he had written earlier. Under his editorship, the magazine was twice censored by the Principal—once for trying to publish an article supporting the Suriya Mal movement, the first popular anti-imperialist movement in Ceylon.

Keuneman created history not only by having the school magazine censored but also by writing the entire editorial of the 1934 Christmas issue in verse form—"at metrical pranks to aspire", as he put it.

He claims to be the first editor ever to publish the cartoons of Aubrey Collette, then a timid second-former, whose caricatures of the school prefects were published by Keuneman despite the protests of his fellow-prefects.

Keuneman capped his career at Royal College by carrying away the E. W. Jayewardene Memorial Prize for English, the Sir James Peiris Memorial Prize for English Essay, the Reading Prize, the Best Speaker's Prize and the most coveted of them all, the Dornhorst Memorial Prize for General Merit. He also won the Steward Scholarship to the University College.

His conduct, says the official school record, was "excellent". And there are few names that can compete with Pieter Keuneman's for the frequency with which they appear in the panels of honour in the Royal College Hall.

Pieter Keuneman's first introduction to Communism took place when he was still at school.

At that time there was no organised Left movement in Ceylon—only Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe speaking about socialism in the first State Council of Ceylon and outside.

Keuneman took no part in these first socialist activities, apart from wearing and helping to sell the *Suriya Mal* at Royal College—which got him into trouble with Principal Sampson.

But he had been a keen reader of Rationalist Association publications and one of the things that had struck him was the

consistency with which these publications, which set out the views of bourgeois rationalists like the millionaire Ingersoll, attacked two men called Lenin and Yaroslavsky. This attack appeared incomprehensible to Keuneman as both Lenin and Yaroslavsky seemed to him to be on the same side as the rationalists.

One day, while going through his father's well-stocked library, Keuneman came across a copy of Lenin's *Imperialism*. He recalled the name from his reading of Rationalist publications and read the book with interest. And then a new world opened before him.

Imperialism, as anyone who has read it knows, is one of the Marxist classics where Lenin traces the development of world capitalism over the course of half a century after the publication of Marx's *Capital* and makes a profound scientific analysis of the economic and political substance of imperialism as the highest and last stage of capitalism where all the contradictions of capitalist society inevitably get aggravated and capitalism becomes a parasitical and dying society to be superseded by a higher form of society known as socialism.

Here then was the stuff to fire the imagination of a young man in search of a key to the problems of society. It also taught the young Keuneman, who had until then been an active pacifist, the class basis of wars.

Keuneman was so taken up with the force of Lenin's cogent logic that he immediately wrote to the publishers of the book in Great Britain ordering all the books that they had by the same author—having first persuaded his father to foot the bill!

The books soon arrived, and Keuneman began in earnest to study the doctrine that was to guide the rest of his life—the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism.

After leaving Royal College at the end of 1935, Keuneman spent about a year at the Ceylon University College as his father thought him still too young to enter Cambridge.

It was at the University College that Keuneman came into contact, for the first time, with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the first socialist party in Ceylon which was itself founded at the end of 1935 and united all shades of socialists and radicals.

But although Keuneman was now a convinced socialist, he had not yet learnt one of the fundamental axioms of socialism—the need for unity between theory and practice. His socialism was at that time confined to reading and discussion, and he did not take part in the day-to-day activities of the incipient socialist movement of the time.

As Keuneman later told a public meeting celebrating the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Ceylon Communist Party:

“I didn’t realise at the time that intellectual snobbery is as bad as social or any other kind of snobbery.

“I was attracted by the great intellectual and moral principles of Communism, but had not yet learnt that Communism is a guide to action, a means by which we can change the world.”

He also described his reaction on attending an early public meeting of the new socialist party. He said that he had

expected high philosophical dissertations, but was 'disappointed' to hear speeches about national independence, the problem of unemployment, the abolition of the headman system and so on.

Keuneman had not yet reached that stage of political understanding to see the connection between the struggle for the solution of these immediate problems and the victory of the socialist cause.

Then, in 1936, he left for Cambridge and pastures new.

II

CAMBRIDGE

When Pieter Keuneman left Ceylon for Cambridge University, he had already become theoretically convinced of the truth of Communism. But both his own upbringing and the absence, until the time he left Ceylon, of an organised socialist movement in Ceylon kept his convictions on the theoretical plane. It was while a student in Great Britain, and more particularly at Cambridge University, that Keuneman first came into contact with the organised Communist movement and joined the Communist Party.

Keuneman has related how surprised and suspicious the members of the University branch of the Communist Party were when, soon after arriving at Pembroke College, Cambridge, he applied in 1937 to join the Party. He had attended a meeting organised by the Communists of his college for "freshers" where an appeal was made for those interested to consider joining the Communist Party.

Keuneman applied and, in due course, came up before the relevant Party Committee.

“What do you know about socialism, comrade?” he was asked.

“I’ve read Lenin,” Keuneman replied.

“Do you read the *Daily Worker*?” was the next question.

“No,” said Keuneman, who had not yet made acquaintance with that newspaper. Nor did he know any other Communists to recommend his application.

The Party Committee was obviously taken aback by this strange young man who wanted to join the Communist Party but knew nothing of its practical activities, who had read Lenin but not the *Daily Worker*. It took them a couple of more interviews before they overcame their initial suspicion that he was an eccentric or a police spy and admitted Keuneman to Party membership.

The Cambridge University that Keuneman entered was in the throes of a great intellectual and political ferment. The spectacular advances made by Soviet Russia, the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany, and the fascist aggression against Republican Spain, together with the consciousness of the students of the growing danger of a Second World War for which they would be the first to be conscripted, had led to a tremendous swing of student opinion in favour of the Communist Party and socialism.

Nearly one out of every three students at Cambridge was a member of the Cambridge University Socialist Club

(C.U.S.C.), by far the most powerful student body of the day. The Communist Party itself had nearly 400 members in the University.

It was not only the British students who were affected. The generation of students from Ceylon and India who entered British Universities at the same time as Keuneman did, produced a remarkable number of future leaders of the Communist Parties of those countries.

Two of Keuneman's colleagues at Cambridge, A. Vaialingam and the late P. Kandiah, were to join him later to found the United Socialist Party and the Ceylon Communist Party and to serve with him on their Central Committees and Political Bureaux. The late P. Kandiah was also Keuneman's colleague in Parliament.

Among the leaders of the Communist Party of India who were students together with Keuneman, and remained his close friends are Bupesh Gupta, Indrajit Gupta, Nikil and Renu Chakravaty, N. K. and Parvati Krishnan, and many others. Like Keuneman and Kandiah many of them were also elected to the Indian Parliament where they served and still serve with distinction.

Both in Ceylon and India, it was this generation of students abroad that, more than any other, remained steadfast to their Communist convictions after they returned home and who spurned the lucrative careers that their foreign education had made possible in favour of the lives of full-time workers for the Communist Party.

Pembroke College, which Keuneman joined following in his father's footsteps, was best known for the athletes it

produced. Its head was Sir Montagu Butler, a retired Indian colonial Governor and the father of R. A. Butler, later to become deputy leader of Britain's Conservative Party. But Pembroke College also had one of the most flourishing Communist organisations in the University. It had two Communist dons, Maurice Dobb and Roy Pascal, and many of the leading Communist students of the University. Foremost among them was E. A. ("Ram") Nahum, leader of the student Communists of Cambridge and a close friend of Keuneman's who influenced him greatly. Nahum was a brilliant scientist, an able political organiser and a skilled Marxist dialectician. Had he lived, he would undoubtedly have risen to one of the outstanding positions in British science and the British Communist Party. But he was killed by a Nazi bomb that, in the first year of the war, fell on the house in Cambridge where he and Keuneman as post-graduate students lived.

The political work in which Keuneman took part while in Britain was extremely varied. He was active in the work of the Cambridge University Socialist Club and was elected one of its Secretaries. Through the C.U.S.C. he took part in the student work in Britain and internationally, especially with the work done by the student organisations to mobilise support of all kinds for the anti-fascist struggle in Spain.

The civil war in Spain dominated the thoughts and activities of the student Left and all Left circles in Britain and Western Europe at the time. Keuneman himself had been attracted to the anti-fascist cause not only on account of his Communist convictions, but also by the inspired conduct of Georgi Dimitrov at the Leipzig trial, where this famous Communist, as an accused, became the accuser of the Nazis who put him on trial.

Many of Keuneman's friends had gone to Spain to fight in the International Brigade and some of them, like the poet John Cornford and the writer and critic Christopher Caudwell with whom Keuneman had sold the *Daily Worker* outside the tube stations, had been killed in battle. Keuneman himself was active speaking and collecting funds for Republican Spain among the students and was a member of an organisation that helped smuggle volunteers for the International Brigade into Spain despite the bans imposed by the British and French Governments.

Keuneman was himself in Spain for a short period during the Civil War—incidentally, at the same time as his wife, Maud, although the two did not know each other or meet at the time.

In addition to his work for Spain, Keuneman took a leading part in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial work in Britain at this time. In Britain, India and to a lesser extent countries like Ceylon were at that time the focus of the anti-imperialist movement. Keuneman, together with Vaidialingam and Kandiah, was extremely active speaking at meetings and attending conferences both in Britain and the continent in furtherance of the anti-imperialist campaign.

In this work Keuneman was closely associated with the late Ben Bradley, the British Communist who had been a co-accused with Indian Communists in the Meerut Conspiracy Case and had spent several years in Indian gaols for his work for Indian freedom. R. Palme Dutt was the mentor and guide of the young student Communists from India and Ceylon and his writings influenced them considerably.

In his anti-imperialist campaigning at the time, Keuneman was closely associated with the League Against Imperialism,

and later with the India League, the main propaganda centre for Indian Independence in Great Britain run by the redoubtable and indefatigable V. K. Krishna Menon. In his work with the India League, Keuneman became a good friend of the late Firoze Gandhi, who later married another student contemporary, Indira, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru and herself to become Prime Minister of India. The flat in London which Keuneman shared with Firoze Gandhi became a centre for churning out propaganda for independence for India and Ceylon. When Jawaharlal Nehru visited Britain in 1938 after his tour in Republican Spain, Keuneman was one of the students selected by the India League to act as his secretary.

A further stage of the young Keuneman's connections with the anti-imperialist movement was reached in 1939 when he began political work among seamen from the British colonies who arrived in London's docks, thus making his first contacts with the working class of the colonial countries.

Together with his other political activities, the young Keuneman actively participated in all aspects of student life at Cambridge.

As is well-known, Keuneman distinguished himself at the Cambridge Union Society. In his second term itself, he was given his first speech "On the Paper" (i.e. named as one of the four main speakers pro and con on the question under debate), reached the Committee in his third, was elected Secretary in his seventh, then Vice-President and finally President. After Sir James Peiris who held this office in 1882, Keuneman was the only other Ceylonese to achieve the rare distinction of being elected President of the Cambridge Union.

The book *Recollections of the Cambridge Union*, which contains an official history of the Union over the

period of 1815 to 1939, refers to Keuneman as "one of our brightest and best who arrived from his Burgher family in Ceylon.....to dazzle Cambridge with his sophistication and omniscience."

Keuneman took part in the Union debates on subjects serious and light. It was his capacity for brilliant wisecracks and sharp retorts that first delighted his student audience and brought him Union fame. Among the examples recorded in the undergraduate magazines of the time is his description of Neville Chamberlain as "the greatest statesman Germany ever had", as well as his retort to someone who admonished him that "familiarity breeds contempt."

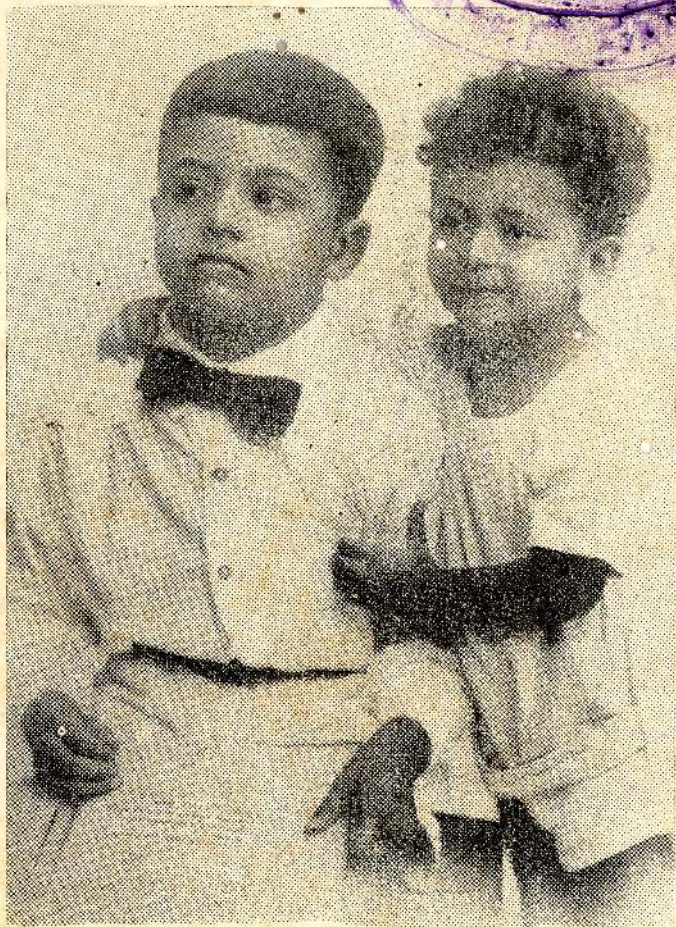
"Do you know anything that can be bred without a little familiarity?" Keuneman snapped back.

On another occasion, Keuneman shattered a speaker who boasted that "I treat every girl as my sister" with the interjection: "Don't add incest to injury."

But it was not long before the students realised that, as one of his contemporaries wrote about Keuneman, "Beneath his veneer of wisecrackery there is one of the best analytical minds in the University".

Keuneman was among those selected to represent the British Universities' debating team against Harvard and Yale. But he was unable to make the trip as his application for a U.S. visa was rejected

Whenever he had in later life, to apply for a visa for the U.S.A. the long questionnaire that Keuneman filled up on this occasion has been produced against him. Apart from



An early picture, with his younger brother



At Cambridge

admitting that he was a Communist and a member of the Communist Party, Keuneman answered the question: "Do you believe in the overthrow of the U.S. Constitution by force and violence?" with "This is a matter for the American people to decide—but if they do decide to do so, I certainly won't blame them." Even as late as 1950, this youthful admission—plus of course, the fact that he was still a Communist—got Keuneman refused permission even to change planes at New York airport on his way to Cuba.

Undergraduate journalism was another field of Keuneman's student activities. In his second term, he was taken on to the staff of the *Granta*, the best-known and most influential student magazine in Cambridge and one with a long and proud history.

The editor of the *Granta*, Frank Singleton, the well-known British editor and journalist, has later confessed that when he took Keuneman on he felt "like Northcliffe making a shot in the dark." But he was quick to concede later that Keuneman was a sure-fire hit from the start.

Keuneman's journalistic output was prodigious. He was literary editor, book reviewer, political columnist, reporter of Union debates, poet, short-story writer and a regular contributor of signed articles on many diverse subjects.

Then he became editor of the *Granta* itself. When he finally relinquished his duties as editor, that journal wrote appreciatively that Keuneman as editor "has helped to make it one of the finest and most useful student papers in the country." His performance also earned him a temporary job on the *Daily Express* where, says Keuneman, "I learnt the trade of journalism, but little else."

One of the most memorable events of Keuneman's sojourn abroad was the first six-week visit that he paid to the Soviet Union in 1937. He has visited the first workers' state several times since then, but probably no other visit left such an indelible impression on him as this one.

In a series of articles in the *Sunday Observer* shortly after he returned to Ceylon, Keuneman described what he had seen on this visit and wrote movingly about his reactions. Through a number of anecdotes and personal first-hand experiences, he depicted vividly the great advances that the October Revolution and the socialist system had brought the Soviet people and answered the familiar slanders of the anti-communists.

One of the incidents he describes is his visit to the Lenin Mausoleum where he was struck by the "atmosphere of awe, reverence and affection as the Soviet people gaze upon the leader" who lay there "as in a brief rest between the thing accomplished and the thing still to be done."

Keuneman describes how an old man ahead of him in the queue burst into tears as he caught sight of the dead Lenin. When he came outside, Keuneman spoke to him. Under the Tsar he had been a poor peasant, illiterate, landless and hungry. After the October Revolution he had learnt to read and write, and joined a collective farm. It was, like Keuneman's, his first visit to Moscow and one thing he was determined to see was the man who had made all this possible for simple peasants like him. It was a first-hand lesson to Keuneman—and later his readers—on what the October Revolution had achieved.

Keuneman described the people of Moscow as "very affable, interested in foreign countries and extremely well-

informed. Their enthusiasm for what they were doing was immense and infectious. They talked of 'our' everything—our Government, our Metro, our theatres, our Red Army—as things of their own creation, belonging to them."

1937 was a difficult year for the Soviet people. But Keuneman was able to see beyond these temporary difficulties, on which some other commentators concentrated, to the positive motive forces of Soviet society and the Soviet people and to discuss the tendencies helping to create the good life for all.

The Soviet writer, S. Kochetov, a close friend of Keuneman's, in his book on Ceylon relates an anecdote told by Keuneman in a conversation at which he was present.

Commenting on the Moscow Metro (which Keuneman in his articles had described as "a sumptuous affair which reminds one of the interior palace architecture of the more artistic Mogul Emperors"), one of those present had said that its decorations were too ornate, too lavish, and too costly.

"Maybe so," said Keuneman. "It is easy to see and say this now." But he recalled what this Metro had meant to so many young Communists from abroad, and may be at the time to the Soviet people too.

Keuneman then told the story of a young man he had helped to smuggle into Spain to join the International Brigade. On the long and devious journey the young man had mainly talked of two things - the girl he left behind him and the Moscow Metro that he had recently seen. "It was difficult," Keuneman remarked, "to say which topic animated him more."

Keuneman heard later that this young man, who had been rushed to the front as soon as he learnt to handle a gun, had died as a result of wounds sustained in his first battle. Even before he died, he had kept talking about the Moscow Metro.

"The person who told me this was surprised, but I wasn't," said Keuneman. "For, you see, to so many of us young people who had seen the first workers' state for the first time, the Moscow Metro was part of our vision of socialism."

During his vacations, Keuneman also visited several of the capitalist countries of Western Europe, especially France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Ireland, where he made contact with the Communists. "I never knew how much poverty there was in Europe until I visited these countries," he said. "I remember how surprised I was when I saw children in Sicily and Southern Ireland going about without shoes. I had thought that this happened only in Asia." On his return from the Soviet Union, Keuneman journeyed across Poland and Nazi Germany, where he had some hair-raising first hand experiences of fascist rule.

Keuneman also kept up, albeit indirectly, his connections with the socialist movement that had begun to develop in Ceylon. At a meeting of the Ceylon Society at Cambridge, he had made contact with Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, the guest speaker, and through Dr. Wickremasinghe, then living in London, he was kept informed of developments in Ceylon. When his two colleagues, Vaidialingam and Kandiah, preceded him in returning to Ceylon, following Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, they sent him regular information on how events at home were developing.

In 1939, Keuneman graduated from Cambridge, and began the preparation for his Master of Arts degree, which he received later. He continued his law studies at Gray's Inn, London, residing alternatively at a house at Great Percy Street, London, and Roundchurch Street, Cambridge. Both houses were later blown up by German bombs.

In the course of his stay abroad, Keuneman got to know many of the leaders of the British Communist Party, and retained these friendly relations with them, especially with the late Harry Pollitt and William Gallacher and with R. Palme Dutt, whom he was later to meet at many international Communist conferences. He was very pleased when Gallacher visited Ceylon and spoke in his constituency and was deeply grieved when Harry Pollitt died on his way to Ceylon, where he was to be Keuneman's guest.

Keuneman was also acquainted with many of Britain's Left-wing intellectuals of the time - both those like his friend Professor J. D. Bernal, former President of the World Peace Council, and those like John Strachey who were later to renege and become Right-Wing Social-Democratic Ministers. Indeed, when Keuneman visited Great Britain again after the Second World War and was grilled by immigration officials who asked him, among other matters, whether there was anyone in Britain who knew him personally, he was able to startle these officials by naming three Ministers of the then Labour Government. But he added: "I don't think they'll give you a good report on me now."

When the Second World War broke out, Keuneman was in Switzerland. He had gone there with the girl who was to become his first wife, Hedi Simon, a fellow-student at Cambridge, daughter of anti-fascist refugees from Austria

10241

and a great-grand-daughter of Johann Strauss, the famous composer. A brilliant student of philosophy and psychology, Hedi Simon had first astonished Cambridge by being the only woman to win a first class honours degree in the Moral Sciences Tripos. Keuneman had convinced her of Communism.

Keuneman and Hedi Simon were married at a registry office at Ascona, a small Swiss village near the Italian border, where Lenin had once been in exile. Hedi Simon's parents, driven from Austria by Hitler's occupation of their country, had taken residence there.

The Keunemans began a circuitous journey over war-time Europe back to Britain, where they met Keuneman's parents who had arrived in London. Here they stayed, until letters from Ceylon persuaded them to return.

III

INTO BATTLE

(1940 - 47)

The Ceylon to which Pieter Keuneman returned after his studies abroad had witnessed many changes.

One of the most striking of these changes had been the development of an organised anti-imperialist and socialist movement.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which had been founded just a few months before Keuneman left for Cambridge, had attracted to itself a number of persons who had become radical-minded as a result of their experiences during the economic crisis of the early thirties, who were consequently disillusioned with the compromising and collaborationist policies of the so-called "national" leaders of the day like Sir Baron Jayatilaka and Mr. D. S. Senanayake, and who had been attracted to socialism by the example of the Soviet Union about which they had begun to learn for the first time.

The early L. S. S. P. which combined varied radical streams in a single party, had made considerable headway. Both outside and within the second State Council of Ceylon, to which two members of the new party had been elected in the 1936 General Elections, it conducted a number of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles. Among these were the annual Suriya Mal campaign, struggles against the special powers of the colonial Governor of Ceylon, and the campaign to abolish the headman system.

In 1937 a young Australian named Mark Anthony Lister Bracegirdle had come to Ceylon to learn planting. He had been so shocked and scandalised by the wretched conditions under which the plantation workers lived and worked that he threw in his lot with them. He even appeared on LSSP platforms, to the great chagrin of the planter raj and the colonial bureaucracy.

Using an antiquated Order-in-Council of the nineteenth century, the British Governor had ordered that Bracegirdle should be deported. In a series of dramatic moves that thrilled the entire country, the LSSP successfully hid and produced Bracegirdle and equally successfully challenged the Governor's order and had it reversed by the Supreme Court. This had brought immense prestige to the new party.

So had the campaigns of international solidarity with the anti-fascist popular struggles in Republican Spain and China that the LSSP conducted. The new party also established relations with the Indian national movement and invited Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and later Jawaharlal Nehru to Ceylon as its guests.

But unfortunately, at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, sharp differences had arisen in the

leadership of the hitherto united party. Under the influence of Trotskyism, the leaders of the LSSP expelled the Communists from the Party, including a number of founder members of the LSSP like Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, M. G. Mendis, the late Udakendawela Siri Saranankara Thero and others.

The colonial government, too, had launched its own offensive against the Communists. Several of them had been prosecuted and imprisoned. A prosecution had also been launched against Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe.

This repression did not, however, deter the Communists. Together with their supporters, they formed the Colombo Workers' Club, began to issue their own newspapers and socialist publications, and to conduct Marxist study circles among the Colombo workers.

It was at this stage that Pieter Keuneman received a letter from his friends A. Vaidialingam and P. Kandiah, who had returned to Ceylon. Their letter told Keuneman of the new developments at home and asked him to return as early as possible.

Keuneman suspended his law examinations and began what turned out to be a longer voyage home than he imagined. Due to war-time difficulties, his ship sailed around Africa stopping at many ports for several days, until the war-time convoys could be gathered to escort it to the next port.

Thus Keuneman found himself for several days at Freetown, Cape Town, and Durban, where he was able to make contact with progressive circles and see at first hand the colour and class discriminations practised against Africans.

After a little over two months, Keuneman arrived in Bombay when he broke journey to go to New Delhi to sit for his incompletd law examinations and to carry out certain political assignments in various parts of India which involved clandestine contacts with the illegal Communist Party of India.

It was while travelling by train from New Delhi to Madras that Keuneman made his first direct acquaintance with the colonial bureaucracy. Uniformed government officers boarded the train and began searching the luggage of all the passengers.

Keuneman's luggage contained quite an amount of illegal Communist literature which he had agreed to transport for his Indian comrades. Unable to get rid of this incriminatory luggage, Keuneman reconciled himself to detection and arrest.

But to his astonishment, the uniformed officers, after opening the bag, did not glance at the literature which they placed on one side, but burrowed deep into the clothing. They replaced the pamphlets, closed the bags, thanked the astonished Keuneman and went their way.

It was only later that Keuneman learnt that the officers were conducting a search for dope and could not care less about illegal literature which was the concern of another section. "This is the first time I realised how useful rigid departmentalism can be," Keuneman said later.

While in India, Keuneman received news that his mother had suddenly died. He returned home via the Dhanuskodi-Talaimannar ferry, then the main and only direct link between India and Ceylon.

The colonial authorities of Ceylon who had got wind of Keuneman's return gave him a typical reception. As he stepped on to the ferry at Dhanuskodi, Keuneman was taken charge of by officers of the Special Branch of the C.I.D.

When Keuneman refused to answer their questions on where he had been and what he had seen, he was handed over to the Customs who searched his baggage and his person with great thoroughness.

His few books and papers were confiscated, including a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that he was reading. When Keuneman protested against this and pointed out that this was a famous novel, the Customs officer stared stolidly back at him.

"It's about war, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," Keuneman admitted.

"And the author is a Russian?"

"Yes"

"Well, there you are !" the Customs man replied triumphantly, as he proceeded to confiscate the book.

Keuneman was to fare no better with the bulk of his library which he had earlier shipped from Britain and which was waiting for him at the Customs in Colombo. In his presence, all the packing cases were later broken open by senior police and Customs officials and all his political books and Marxist-Leninist classics confiscated.

"This lot," said Keuneman describing this experience, "were just as reactionary, but much more literate and intelligent. One of them - he became a colonial Governor later - asked me whether I really believed in the theory of surplus value."

However, on the ferry, Keuneman did manage to get through certain factual material, including the text of a letter from Indian Communists to the Communists in Ceylon.

Keuneman had taken the precaution of typing these out on the middle sheets of a roll of toilet paper and then re-rolling it. Although the Customs officers went through everything else, they did not think of unwinding this roll of toilet paper.

It was only at the end of the war, after many years of agitation, that Keuneman's books were returned to him.

Once back in Ceylon, Pieter Keuneman quickly made contact with the colleagues he had known in Britain - Dr. Wickremasinghe, A. Vaidialingam and P. Kandiah. On his second day, he met M. G. Mendis and Udakendawela Siri Saranankara Thero for the first time. They, together with others whom Keuneman met, were to become his comrades and close associates in the working class and Communist movement.

Keuneman was briefed about the developments in Ceylon, and held several discussions with the Communists and others who had been expelled from the LSSP and with the new working class contacts that had been made through the Colombo Workers' Club.

Shortly afterwards - in November 1940 - most of those mentioned above held a conference at Peliyagoda and decided

to form themselves into the United Socialist Party. Pieter Keuneman was elected General Secretary of the U.S.P. and played a main part in drafting its constitution and aims.

The U.S.P. was the precursor of the Ceylon Communist Party. It sought to carry forward the progressive traditions of the socialist movement of the 1930's and to develop them on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.

Describing the USP in a later lecture, Keuneman said: "Both in policy and in its form of organisation, the USP resembled the Communist Party. It accepted Marxism-Leninism, built its organisation on the principles of democratic centralism and modelled itself on the new type of party that Lenin had created.

"But it would have been wrong to call ourselves a Communist Party, for we had not yet matured to this stage. We were still feeling our way, establishing links with the workers and the people, acquiring experience.

"The USP was a necessary stage in our development. It marked a transition from the forms of workers' organisation that had existed in the 1920's and 1930's to the Communist Party that was to be formed in 1943. The USP created the basis for and made possible the formation of the Ceylon Communist Party."

One of the main tasks that the USP members set themselves was to build strong working class organisations and thereby connect socialism with the working class movement. The militant trade unions that had been built in the 1920's had been destroyed after Mr. A. E. Goonesinha's defection and the original LSSP of the 1930's had not paid anything

like serious attention to the need to build new militant trade unions. The USP sought to rectify this by building such unions and leading the day-to-day struggles of the workers against capitalist exploitation.

One of Keuneman's first political assignments was to help to build a trade union among the dockers of Colombo. His first attempts to establish contacts with Ceylon workers were hardly a success.

Keuneman used to sit in a pokey little trade union office at Kochchikade. The harbour workers passed and re-passed his office without showing any interest or desire to enter it. Nor were his attempts to make contacts at the harbour gates or even outside the toddy taverns any more successful. In desperation, Keuneman discussed with his colleagues a plan to attract the workers' attention by playing the drum as the Salvation Army did !

Ultimately a worker did enter the office. He told Keuneman that he had heard that he was a very educated man and wanted to write a letter to his employer asking for a wage increase. "Write it especially well" he told Keuneman. "It must be something to move his heart."

Keuneman obliged, and the worker came almost daily for the next three weeks, sometimes with his friends, to see if a reply had come. When the reply, with its inevitable refusal, finally arrived, Keuneman convinced the worker of the futility of such individual efforts and persuaded him both to join the Colombo Harbour Workers' Union which had just been formed and to enrol others to it. In this way, taking up the day-to-day problems of the workers, Keuneman was able to forge his first links with Ceylon's workers.

"It was an invaluable lesson," he said in his lecture on the 24th anniversary of the Ceylon Communist Party, "a lesson in humility and in the realities of class struggle which was a good corrective to a rather conceited young graduate who had just returned from abroad. I shall always be grateful to our Party for helping me to learn that lesson."

At this time there were less than 50 registered trade unions in the whole of Ceylon. The Department of Labour consisted of a "Controller of Labour" and some subordinate officers whose main function was to control labour in the interests of the employers. The workers had few rights or privileges. They earned a paltry 60 or 70 cents for a 10-12 hour working day, were generally called 'coolies' and were treated like animals by the employers, the colonial government and 'society' of the day. Paid leave or holidays and other social benefits were unknown.

Together with the other members of the USP, Pieter Keuneman set about organising the Colombo workers, building new unions and leading workers' struggles. Their task was by no means easy. They had to cope with the dictatorial and draconian powers exercised by Admiral Geoffrey Layton who virtually ruled war-time Ceylon for the British Government.

On top of this, physical violence was used against them by hirelings of the employers and by thugs set up by Mr. Goonesinha. Keuneman and his comrades had often to hold their meetings in the face of volleys of stones and bottles and to run for their lives in order to avoid being beaten up or stabbed.

But the persistent work of the USP began to bear results within a short time, as the already impoverished standard

of living of the workers began to deteriorate very rapidly. Figures prepared by the Statistics Branch of the Government showed that, at the end of 1940, the cost of living had increased by 12 per cent over and above the pre-war level. Official investigations of the budgets of 381 working class families in Colombo revealed that almost all of them were deeply in debt.

The struggles led by the USP for increased wages and a dearness allowance to compensate for the rise in the cost of living therefore began to attract more and more workers.

By the end of 1940, Keuneman and his colleagues had organised 35 new trade unions in Colombo factories. In December of that year, these unions were united in a single federation. This was followed by the re-grouping of unions, so that instead of separate unions for each factory, which had been the pattern earlier, all workers in one trade were united in one union.

It was in this period that some of the well-known and powerful unions of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions were born. Skilfully combining illegal strikes with the use of legal machinery established under the Defence Regulations, the Communists step by step won for the Colombo workers many of the gains they enjoy today such as legal minimum wages, sick leave with pay, casual leave with pay, a shorter working day, overtime at a time and a half, free mid-day meals, attendance and incentive bonuses, seniority allowances, gratuities and other benefits.

Through such work Pieter Keuneman and the Communists established their solid base among the workers, especially the workers of Colombo.

Interlude at Lake House

At this stage, Pieter Keuneman was not yet a full-time Party worker. The money that he inherited from his mother had been used to buy printing machines for the new Party and to help maintain the few full-timers in the Party and the trade unions.

The late Mr. D. R. Wijewardena, founder of Lake House, had been a colleague of Keuneman's father at Cambridge. Through the late Lionel Wendt, then in charge of Chitrafoto, he offered Keuneman a job as a Features Editor for the Lake House newspapers, especially the *Observer*.

With the consent of his Party, Keuneman took the job. But he did not stay long at Lake House. As H. A. J. Hulugalle, the famous editor under whom Keuneman worked, says in his book *The Life and Times of D. R. Wijewardena*:

“Wijewardena tried to make a tame journalist of Pieter Keuneman, but the latter chose to give to the Communist Party what Wijewardena thought was meant for mankind, at least that section of it which bought his newspapers.”

Although D. R. Wijewardena and Pieter Keuneman were poles apart politically, they treated each other with wary respect. Wijewardena recognised Keuneman's talents, gave him privileges that he did not give his other employees, and even paid him better. But he spent long periods trying to convince Keuneman that his ideas were correct and Keuneman's wrong.

Keuneman, who to this day speaks highly of Wijewardena's news-sense and managerial ability, was just as determined

not to give in. "Please," he once told his boss, "I am not paid to believe your ideas, only to reproduce them in readable prose. Can't we keep it at that?"

The range of new features that Keuneman wrote or introduced into the Lake House newspapers in the year that he remained there is astonishing. Under a variety of pseudonyms, Keuneman turned out gossip columns, short stories, film and drama criticism, book reviews and even the original agony column in Ceylon journalism. Together with Jayanta Padmanabha, later to become editor of the *Daily News*, he wrote editorials for the *Daily News* under the general supervision of Mr. Hulugalle.

Keuneman's colleagues at Lake House consisted of some of the legendary names in Ceylon journalism - E. C. B. Wijesinghe, Orion de Zylva, R.E. de Alwis, C.F.G. Perera and others. Keuneman's personal assistant was Anandatissa de Alwis, later to become Secretary to Sir John Kotelawela, a leading advertising executive, and now a Permanent Secretary. Two young reporters on whose behalf Keuneman argued with D.R. Wijewardena for more pay were the present editors, Denzil Peiris and Fred de Silva.

But the colleague with whom Keuneman formed the longest and most lasting association was Martin Wickremasinghe, the outstanding novelist, then editor of both the *Dinamina* and the *Silumina*. First drawn together by a common love of the nineteenth century Russian novel, Martin Wickremasinghe and Keuneman used to spend their spare time talking over a variety of matters. It was from Martin Wickremasinghe that Keuneman first learned about contemporary currents in Sinhala literature and Oriental philosophy. Their friendship, formed at Lake House, continues to this day.

Keuneman enjoyed his short stint at Lake House. Journalism had always interested him ("I have printers' ink in my veins," he once told me), and he showed considerable competence at it. Several of those who later rose to be editors of daily newspapers or to other positions of eminence in Ceylon journalism received their early journalistic training under Keuneman, either at Lake House or on the Communist Party newspapers.

Pieter Keuneman got on well with his colleagues at Lake House. So much so that, years later, in 1947, when Keuneman had left Lake House and was contesting a Parliamentary election for the first time, his former colleagues at Lake House came to his rescue when he ran out of funds a few days before polling day. When they heard of Keuneman's plight, they clubbed together and presented him with a contribution that helped him to tide over the difficulty. This they did despite their personal political views and the political campaign that the bosses of Lake House were currently waging against Keuneman and his Party.

Keuneman left Lake House when his Party decided that he should become a full-time party worker which he remains to this day.

In this connection, it is worth reproducing the following passage from the book *Three Prime Ministers of Ceylon* by Mr. J. L. Fernando, the former Political Correspondent of the *Daily News* who admits having written more columns of criticism against Marxism and local Marxists than any other newspaperman in Ceylon and who frequently berated Keuneman (once he called him a dangerously pleasant personality) and the Communist Party in his column:

"I must in all sincerity salute the consistency of Marxist leaders like Pieter Keuneman.....I came across Pieter Keuneman, newly returned from a successful debating career in the Cambridge Union, when he joined the Lake House as a leader-writer. In fact at the request of the late D. R. Wijewardena I took Keuneman round to the State Council lobbies to get him interested in the study of politics and politicians, which was my special function then. Apparently D. R. Wijewardena with his experience saw in Pieter Keuneman a star newspaperman of the future. I always hold it to the credit of Pieter Keuneman that when he realised that the policy of Lake House was contrary to his own political ideology he resigned from Lake House. He was one of those rare newspapermen who was not willing to prostitute his talent for an income. So he went away to become a famous Communist leader."

"The Soviet Way"

Pieter Keuneman's activities immediately after his return to Ceylon from Cambridge were not confined to journalism and trade union work. In 1941 he was one of those mainly responsible for forming the "Friends of the Soviet Union" and was elected as the first President of this organisation, the precursor of the present Lanka-Soviet Friendship League.

The objects of the F.S.U. were three-fold.

Firstly, to study and enlighten the public about the Soviet Union.

Secondly, to give direct and practical aid to the Soviet people in their fight against fascism.

Thirdly, to work for friendly relations between the peoples of Ceylon and the Soviet Union.

In pursuance of these objects the FSU launched a "Medical Aid for Russia Fund", published pamphlets on the Soviet Union and a regular monthly magazine called the *Lanka-Soviet Journal*, and organised discussion groups, lectures and debates on various aspects of Soviet life. Large crowds attended these meetings including progressive British servicemen stationed in Ceylon and, of course, the inevitable representatives of the Special Branch of the C.I.D. and M.I.5.

Pieter Keuneman made a name for himself as a public speaker in Ceylon through the various lectures he delivered under the auspices of the FSU. Many still recall a famous debate at the Colombo Town Hall when the Nazi armies were approaching Moscow, when Keuneman sharply contradicted Dr. E. M. V. Naganathan, then a writer on military affairs to the Lake House newspapers, and told him bluntly that it would not be the Nazis who would occupy Moscow but the Red Army that would occupy Berlin.

It was about this time that Keuneman published his first book entitled *The Soviet Way*. In an "Author's Note" to this book, he wrote:

"I have written this book because it is not easy to obtain in Ceylon accurate information about the Soviet Union."

Keuneman described how the Ceylon authorities had confiscated all the books which he had hoped to use as source material, including even books by that eminent British divine, the late Dean of Canterbury, while all the books which

slandered, misinterpreted or straightforwardly attacked the Soviet Union, including the writings of Mussolini and Hitler with whom the British Government was at war, were carefully and courteously returned to him. He commented :

“This discrimination could not be accidental. Books in favour of the Soviet Union obviously had something about them which made it undesirable for people in Ceylon to read them - something not found in the writings of Hitler and Mussolini. This was their capacity to influence and convince people that the new and better world for which they wished, not only could, but already had been built over one-sixth of the earth's surface.”

Keuneman continued: “I have written this book because the truth about the Soviet Union must be told - and there are many who want to hear it. The new civilisation which has grown and flourished under twenty four years of Soviet power is not a mere ‘experiment’ carried out by people in a far-away country whose interest to us is only academic. It is the world of tomorrow, organised on principles which give all peoples the opportunity for a better and fuller way of life than is their lot at present.”

The Soviet Way was the first truthful and comprehensive account of the history and achievements of the Soviet Union and the life of its peoples to appear in Ceylon. Published in both Sinhala and English, it ran into several editions and in the absence of other socialist literature, was used as a text-book in study classes organised by the USP. The writing of this book was quite a feat as all Keuneman's basic source material had been confiscated by the colonial authorities and he had to rely on his notes, his memory and such books which had managed to find a place in public and private

libraries prior to the war-time ban on the import of socialist and communist literature.

Meanwhile, the USP had been carrying on its work amidst great difficulties. Its offices and printing press were constantly raided by the police. Many of the members, including leading members like Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe and Udakendawela Siri Saranankara Thero were prosecuted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

In March 1942 the USP itself was declared illegal by the colonial bureaucracy acting under the Defence Regulations. The young party had thus to learn in practice how to combine illegal with legal forms of work.

From the legal point of view the USP kept popping up under a series of different **aliases** such as the "Anti-Japanese Propaganda Centre", the "Workers' Study Circle" etc. As one organisation was investigated by the police and closed down under the Defence Regulations, another took its place. The whole process became so routine that the Home Minister, Sir A. Mahadeva, had ruefully to tell the State Council that it was no use banning the Communists under one name as they would always turn up under another.

The USP also established its illegal centres. Part of its printing establishment was transferred to Rajagiriya where it functioned under cover of a separate press doing job work and printing religious tracts. The late D. R. Wijewardena would have had a fit had he known that one of the key clandestine political centres of the illegal USP was situated in one of the Borella flats that he had rented out to a seemingly respectable professional gentleman.

On one occasion when the police raided a 'dump' of the USP and forcibly removed the last of its hidden stock of newsprint, the Party decided to fall back on the protective sanctity that bourgeois law attaches to the private ownership of property.

Keuneman was despatched to the nearest Police Station to lodge an entry that his stock of newsprint had been forcibly removed and stolen by some persons claiming to be Police Officers. The police were apparently so intimidated by this lordly counter-charge from the son of a Supreme Court judge and well-known Lake House journalist that they handed the newsprint back to Keuneman and even complied when he insisted that they should deliver it back to the place from which they had taken it !

In the year and a half of legal and illegal work that followed, the USP completed its pioneering task of laying the foundations for a truly Marxist-Leninist party in Ceylon.

Accordingly, under conditions of illegality, a clandestine conference of members of the USP was held at 85, Cotta Road, Borella, Colombo, on 2-3 July 1943. On the second day of this conference a decision was taken to dissolve the USP and set up the Ceylon Communist Party in its place.

Pieter Keuneman, who delivered the main report to the illegal conference, was elected the first General Secretary of the new Ceylon Communist Party.

One of the decisions taken at this clandestine conference was for the Communists to apply to join the Ceylon National Congress as individual members.

Until 1942, it was only the Left parties that had demanded political independence for Ceylon. At its 1942 Kelaniya Sessions, the Ceylon National Congress also decided to replace its former demand for Dominion Status with the demand for full political independence for Ceylon. This decision led D. S. Senanayake to resign from the leading position he held in the Congress. When the Congress followed this up at its 1943 Ambalangoda Sessions by adopting a resolution to permit the admission of Communists as individual members, D. S. Senanayake flew off the handle and resigned from membership of the Congress as well.

The Communists campaigned through the Congress to popularise the aim of national independence for Ceylon and work for the objective of building a united national front of all sections standing for independence in order to achieve this object. Pieter Keuneman, A. Vaidialingam and, after his release from prison, Dr. Wickremasinghe became members of the Working Committee of the Ceylon National Congress.

At the end of 1943, Keuneman was nominated by the Communist Party as one of its two candidates at the general elections to the Colombo Municipal Council. The other candidate was his colleague A. Vaidialingam who contested the big employer, Moosajee, at Hunupitiya. Keuneman was elected to beard the lion in his own den and to contest the Right-wing 'Labour' leader A. E. Goonesinha in his stronghold at Borella.

The manifesto issued by the Communist Party for this election promised that, if elected, Communist Councillors would work to rid the Municipal administration of bribery and corruption, to reduce rents, to improve the various

Municipal services and carry through slum clearance and housing schemes and to see that free milk and schoolbooks were supplied to needy children.

Keuneman's fight against Goonesinha was by far the keenest one at that Municipal general election and attracted great public attention. Polling then, both in the State Council and local government elections, was different from what it is now. Each candidate was allotted, not a symbol as now, but a colour, and the voters were given a blank white ballot paper to deposit in a ballot box bearing the colour of the candidate of his choice, secretly, unseen by anyone.

Under such a system, corruption was at a premium and ballot papers were smuggled out and sold to the highest bidder. And there was no lack of bidders at Borella where Goonesinha was fighting with his back to the wall against a Communist challenger whom he hated like the plague. In fact, they must have had ballot papers to spare, for when the author of this book, with some fellow University students, was out canvassing votes for Keuneman on polling day, his companions and he were surrounded by Goonesinha supporters who tried to frame them by forcing ballot papers into their pockets and sending for the police. Only the sudden arrival of Keuneman himself to the spot saved us from an otherwise ugly situation.

The communal cry in full vigour was raised against Keuneman, and his supporters were treated to the thuggery and intimidation that characterised Goonesinha's campaigns. Keuneman's wife was abruptly transferred out of Colombo lest her Presidency of the local cooperative society should influence the electors ! Commenting on this election later, Keuneman said: "It was my first practical experience of the sordid realities of bourgeois democracy."

Nevertheless, Keuneman did very creditably and gave Goonesinha a close run. Keuneman was to increase his vote greatly and narrow the difference between them when he contested Goonesinha for the second time at Borella in 1946.

The 1943 fight was the first of many electoral contests between Goonesinha and Keuneman which ended in 1952, when Keuneman topped the poll at the Colombo Central election and forced Goonesinha to fourth place. From that time on, Goonesinha was out of active politics. It was the Communist Party that challenged and finally destroyed the reactionary power of A. E. Goonesinha in Colombo both in the trade union and political field. Keuneman's first election battle at Borella in 1943 was one of the main events that laid the foundation for this eventual victory.

Apart from these early ventures into Municipal elections, Keuneman and the Communists were in the forefront of the campaign to boycott the Soulbury Commission and to demand full political independence for Ceylon. The Communist Party worked together with the Ceylon National Congress to hold a series of meetings and demonstrations around this demand. Keuneman was a star speaker at these meetings and marched at the head of the demonstrations. He also starred in the Communist Party's own campaign for an All-Parties Conference to forge a united demand for independence and a free constitution for Ceylon.

The Communist Party also continued to build its base among the workers. At this time, despite the small concessions won the inadequacy of the basic wage was keenly felt by all sections of the workers. The Communist-led federation of trade unions, therefore, demanded that Wages Boards

should be set up to fix minimum wages by law for various trades. Its agitation around this demand led to the establishment of several such Wages Boards in 1944 and consequent improvement of the conditions of the workers. These successes helped the Communists to consolidate and expand their work on the trade union front, popularise the slogans of the Party among the workers, and mobilise them for the anti-imperialist freedom struggle.

On 1st August 1944 the Communist Party also started to publish its first weekly newspaper in English - *Forward*. This was in addition to its three other weekly newspapers in Sinhala, Tamil and Malayalam. Keuneman, who was the first editor of *Forward*, wrote in the first issue an article entitled "Assert National Unity to Smash the Stalemate".

In his article, Keuneman stated that "the way forward at the present juncture is not through individual or separate representation before the (Soulbury) Commission, nor through mere negative boycott of it," but by uniting all patriotic parties and forces to support the world-wide anti-fascist struggle and to demand the "recognition of Ceylon's right to independence and a free constitution, to be approved by a new State Council, at the end of the war..."

In April 1945, the First Congress of the Ceylon Communist Party was held in Colombo. The Congress discussed and endorsed a report of the Central Committee presented by Pieter Keuneman and adopted four main resolutions on national unity, working class unity, freedom and post-war economic development, and party organisation. It elected a new Central Committee. Keuneman was re-elected as General Secretary.

In order to implement the decisions of its Congress, the Communist Party launched a nation-wide campaign under the slogan "Independence, More Jobs and a Living Wage." Through 1945 several more rallies and demonstrations were held throughout Ceylon opposing the Soulbury Commission and demanding the grant of independence and a free constitution framed by the Ceylonese themselves.

The Communist Party's proposals for post-war economic development were popularised through meetings, pamphlets and other publications. In addition to speaking at the rallies, Keuneman wrote a number of pamphlets on different aspects of the campaign.

Keuneman's booklet *More Jobs - How ?* set out for the first time the Communist Party's proposals regarding the problems of unemployment and the national economic development of Ceylon.

"The crucial issue in tackling the problem of post-war employment," wrote Keuneman, "is not only that of maintaining the war-time levels of employment and income but also of providing more jobs and a rising standard of living for all categories of workers."

On behalf of the Communist Party, Keuneman demanded that the Government should immediately prepare a short-term programme of public works for promoting constructional activities - the development of irrigation, railways and road-building, the re-starting of the hydro-electric scheme which had been suspended during the war, the building of the University at Peradeniya, a national house-building scheme, a nation-wide water service scheme, etc. Such a programme, he argued, could help to reduce the volume of unemployment

and to mitigate the worst features of the interim period until long-range schemes of development could be brought into effect.

The long-term solution to the problem of unemployment, Keuneman continued, could only be found by carrying through a bold policy of industrialisation. This did not merely consist of setting up a few 'pilot' factories as the Department of Commerce and Industry was doing at the time, but in making industry the dominant feature of the national economy through the maximum development of the country's natural resources. Keuneman quoted from official and other sources to show the need and possibility to develop iron, steel and cement factories, tyre, tube and other rubber manufacturing industries, cotton and sugar-cane cultivation to promote the growth of a textile and sugar industry and a whole range of other industrial projects.

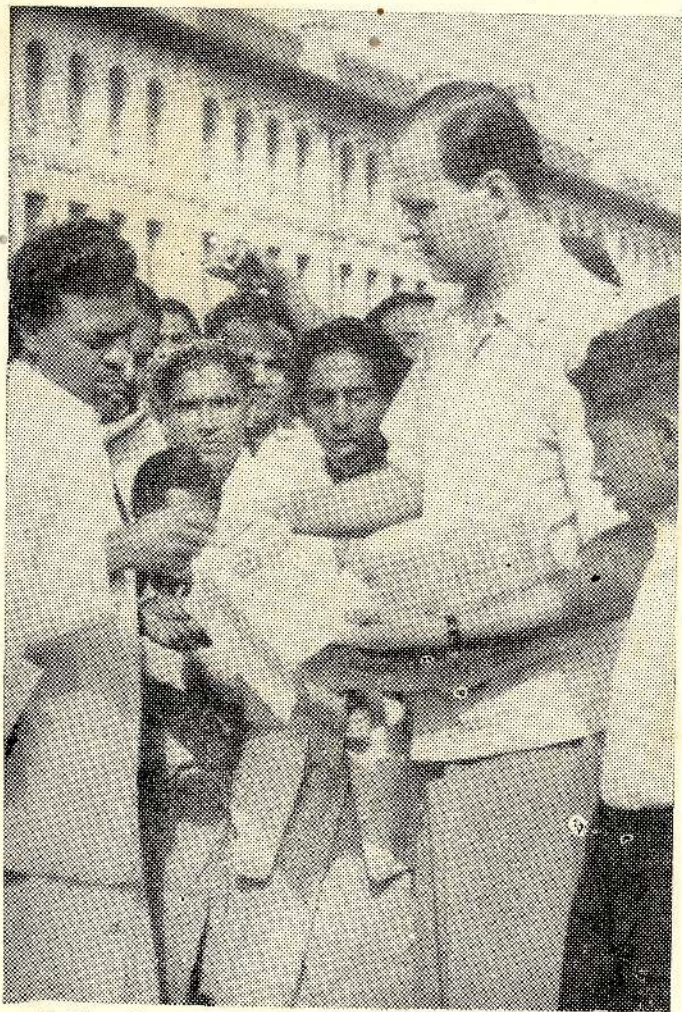
Keuneman sharply criticised the ruling economic policies of D. S. Senanayake and other Ceylonese bourgeois leaders which "take for granted that the plantation system and small-scale peasant farming must remain forever the economic system of Ceylon."

"The net result of this policy," he added "is maintaining our country as a backward economic appendage of British economy."

Such views are today part of the accepted common programme of the entire anti-imperialist and progressive movement. Several such industries as Keuneman proposed were in fact started with the help of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries after the UNP was defeated in 1956. But when Keuneman first made such proposals 22 years



After his first election to Parliament in 1947



Selling the Party Newspaper to Harbour Workers.

ago on behalf of the Communist Party, they were treated in official circles as absurd and as rank heresy. In this respect, as in so many others, Keuneman and the Communist Party pioneered what later became the accepted common demands of the entire anti-imperialist and working class movement of Ceylon.

At the end of his pamphlet Keuneman said:

“The fight for industrialisation to provide more jobs and a living wage depends on the struggle of the entire nation to end British domination and win independence. Independence is the first step that is necessary to remove the political factors thwarting our industrial and economic development.”

He called for a united front of the trade unions on the issue of post-war employment and the creation of organisations for the unemployed and the ex-servicemen.

The Communist Party itself sought to organise the ex-servicemen and the unemployed to fight against retrenchment. In September 1945 it led a demonstration of over 25,000 workers and unemployed to the State Council to demand that their urgent problems should be attended to. This demonstration was stopped and beaten up by the police, leading to the first post-war general strike in Colombo when over 30,000 workers downed tools.

Keuneman played a main part in these events and in the number of strike struggles that the Communists led in 1946, the most important of which was the strike of 6,000 harbour workers in Colombo which broke out towards the end of April and lasted nearly a month. In these struggles, Keuneman endeared himself to and forged close links with Colombo's workers.

In 1946, the Communist Party started a theoretical monthly magazine called *New Age*, devoted to the theory and practice of the national and working class movements in Ceylon and abroad and to the contributions made by Marxism - Leninism to science, culture, politics, economics and history.

In this very first issue Keuneman, who was the magazine's editor, wrote an article entitled "The Future of Political Parties". He exposed the machinations of the D. S. Senanayake caucus, then trying to bring together a motley group of various political hues to form the United National Party. Commented Keuneman on the UNP which had just been proposed:

"The purpose of this organisation is to unite all those who are prepared to support Mr. Senanayake's policy of collaboration with British imperialism, to assure him of a stable majority in order to put through this policy in the Soulbury Parliament, and to fight against the demand for independence and the working class from whom it most forcibly comes."

He continued: "The progressive development of political parties will depend on the extent to which they rely on and seek the support of those social classes whose interests are fundamentally opposed to those of imperialism.... These classes - particularly the working class, the peasantry and the middle strata from the professional sections - have not yet fully entered the political arena and still play a subordinate role in political life. But it is these classes which have a future before them. Only in as much as the existing political parties can draw in these progressive classes and bring them together in a national front against imperialism and its social

allies in this country, can these parties develop and have a future.

“In the case of a working class party in a colonial country like Ceylon, its duty is not merely to oppose imperialism by itself, but also to unite with and lead all other anti-imperialist, non-working class elements in a common front against imperialism and its Senanayake allies. The striking growth of the Communist Party in its short period of existence is proof of the correctness of this policy”.

It was when these political ideas, first put forward by the Communist Party and Keuneman, were accepted by the widest mass of the progressive forces that they were able to bring about the first defeat of the UNP Government in 1956.

Another general election to the Colombo Municipal Council took place at the end of 1946. In the absence of State Council elections which were dispensed with during the war, local elections assumed a special importance as an index of how political trends were developing. This time the Communist Party nominated 10 candidates and one of them, M. G. Mendis, was elected. Keuneman once again contested Goonesinha at Borella, polled over 1,100 votes and lost by a mere one hundred odd votes. Colombo Communists under the leadership of Pieter Keuneman polled one-third of all the votes cast in the wards they contested. The results of the elections showed that the Communists had become a force to be reckoned with in the capital city.

1947 saw the high tide of working class struggle which had been steadily growing in intensity since the end of the Second World War.

In May 1947 a fresh round of strike struggles broke out, culminating in the May-June general strike of 1947. This was the first time that workers in the public and private sectors struck work together. It was also the first time since 1940 that Communists and Samasamajists worked together, in a Joint Action Central Strike Committee.

It was in the course of this historic strike that Pieter Keuneman emerged as one of the accepted leaders of the working class on an all-Ceylon and not merely a Colombo scale. He represented the Communists in the Joint Action Central Strike Committee and was prominent in all the demonstrations and picket lines. No one who had anything to do with the 1947 general strike will ever forget the speech Keuneman made at Galle Face when he chaired the meeting just after the police had fired on the workers' demonstration at Kolonnawa, killing Kandasamy. Holding the blood-stained shirt of the dead Kandasamy aloft like a banner, Keuneman made probably the most fiery speech of his career.

The 1947 general strike was finally defeated by the colonial bureaucracy and the Board of Ministers. But it paved the way for independence, for it was this strike that made the British colonialists and their local servitors realise that they could no longer continue to rule in the old way. On the 18th June 1947, Whitehall offered Ceylon "fully responsible status within the British Commonwealth of Nations". The State Council was dissolved in July after it had functioned for eleven years (six years more than the period for which it had been originally elected), and elections to a new Parliament proposed by the Soulbury Commission were fixed for August-September 1947.

The Communist Party made repeated efforts to unite the Left and progressive forces so that they might put forward a

single list of candidates on the basis of an agreed programme. But its efforts did not bear fruit and, as a result, the Left and progressive forces entered the 1947 General Elections divided, while D. S. Senanayake had by that time succeeded in uniting all capitalist, communalist and feudal political groupings in his newly-formed United National Party.

All the influence and power of British imperialism and all the resources of the colonial administration and the vested interests were thrown behind the UNP at the 1947 General Elections. The polling for the various electorates was spread out for almost one month beginning on the 23rd August and ending on the 20th September. D. S. Senanayake saw to it that his election and those of most of his fellow-Ministers were held on the very first day, thus leaving them free to stump the country for the rest of the month, while the elections of Left leaders like Pieter Keuneman and Drs. N. M. Perera and Colvin R. de Silva were set back for the very last day, thus tying them up unduly and allowing their opponents free rein to concentrate forces against them.

Yet despite these dirty tricks, the UNP failed to win an absolute majority. Its attempts to scare the voters with the bogey of Communism which was the UNP's main electoral tactic (with lurid posters of temples burning and the slogan "Save religion from the flames of Marxism") misfired. The three Left parties emerged as the leading force in the Opposition. The Communist Party itself won 5 seats.

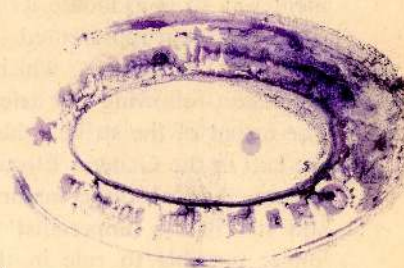
Pieter Keuneman himself was elected to Parliament as the Third Member for Colombo Central, a constituency that he has continuously represented ever since. The 15,435 votes that he polled were most creditable considering that, at that stage, Keuneman was known mainly to the organised trade

unionists and political militants, a great number of whom could not afford to reside in Colombo. Keuneman himself was a stranger to many wards in the constituency. But, undeterred, he gate-crashed into them, introducing himself, and moving up and down in a battered and borrowed Bug Fiat car accompanied by his perennial election agent, Proctor T. Duraisingham, and such other election workers as he could squeeze in.

As in early elections, the communal cry was once again raised against Keuneman and he had to fight the Tammany Hall tactics at which Goonesinha was past-master. But with a devoted band of Party and election workers, Keuneman was able to overcome this and win a seat, thus creating history by being the first Burgher ever to be elected to the supreme legislature—and from a constituency in which Burghers were less than one per cent of the registered voters.

This author still remembers the scenes of wild enthusiasm opposite the Registrar-General's office when the Colombo Central results were announced. Messrs A. E. Goonesinha and T. B. Jayah, who were elected First and Second Members respectively, peeped out of a window on the first floor and spoke a few words to the crowds below, the former, in an obvious hint to Keuneman, saying that he preferred evolution to revolution.

Then Keuneman stepped out on to the ledge of the window and, precariously perched, began to address the crowd. There was tumultuous applause, but some supporters of Goonesinha booed and even threw stones. Raising his voice above the din, Keuneman told the crowd that they had just sampled the kind of evolution about which Mr. Goonesinha had spoken!



IV

AGAINST U.N.P. RULE (1947 - 56)

In the unstable political situation following the General Elections to the first Parliament of Ceylon and the failure of the UNP to gain an absolute majority, the Communist Party lost no time in appealing for a united initiative by the three Left parties represented in that Parliament (the Communist Party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Bolshevik Leninist Party) to rally other anti-UNP forces for an alternative Government to prevent D. S. Senanayake from stabilising the position of the UNP by forming a Government with the support of Independents. Pieter Keuneman played a prominent part in this attempt to form an alternative Government, both at the so-called 'Yamuna' conferences held at the residence of the late Mr. H. Sri Nissanka and at public meetings organised by the Communist Party in support of this demand. Unfortunately, attempts at forming an alternative Government did not succeed and D. S. Senanayake was able to form a minority UNP Government under his Premiership. The Communist Parliamentary group led by Keuneman immediately swung into action against it.

The main aim of the UNP government in the first Parliament was to consolidate its position and the position of the social classes it represented, and to smash the working class and Left movement which was undergoing considerable repression following the defeat of the general strike of 1947. The extent of the strike, the many striking victories won by the Left in the General Elections and the failure of the UNP to secure an absolute majority made both Mr. Senanayake and his British imperialist patrons realise that it was no longer possible to rule in the old way.

One of the first major issues to come before the Parliament was the question of Ceylon's independence. In an attempt to deceive and confuse the people of Ceylon and consolidate his jerry-built government, D. S. Senanayake negotiated fresh agreements with the British government whereby Ceylon was granted formal "Dominion Status" while secret agreements guaranteed that the military and economic power of British imperialism in Ceylon remained intact. Following this horse-deal between Mr. Senanayake and Whitehall, a Ceylon Independence Act was passed in the British Parliament and Mr. Senanayake introduced a motion in the Parliament of Ceylon that we should 'rejoice' at the attainment of this 'independence'.

Speaking in Parliament on behalf of the Communist Party, Pieter Keuneman said that what they were witnessing was not the culmination of the struggle for freedom, but the culmination of an elaborate process by which British imperialism was passing from direct to indirect forms of rule. He referred to the words of a song popular among the hilly-billies of America to the effect - "The old grey mare, she ain't what she used to be many long years ago" and commented: "I think that old grey mare reminds us, to some extent,

of the position of Britain today, of British imperialism. Like the old grey mare, she ain't what she used to be. . . . As a result of the tremendous advances made during the war by the progressive movement in every country, particularly by the national and socialist movements in the different countries of the world, Great Britain finds it impossible to continue her rule in the old way."

Keuneman pointed out the limitations that had been placed on Ceylon's independence by the Agreements that D. S. Senanayake had entered into with the British Government. Said he: "The Agreements which have been entered into were not Agreements between equals but were Agreements concluded between a sovereign state and a dependent state, agreements which were a condition precedent to the grant of fully responsible status."

He insisted that we demand from the British Government that it unequivocally recognise the sovereignty of the people of this country and that it transfer power to the people of this country without talking about 'Dominion Status'. The people of this country should be allowed to frame their own constitution according to their desires instead of grafting powers to the trunk of the Soulbury constitution. He also demanded the removal of British bases, the nationalisation of British-owned property and an independent foreign policy—demands that were later taken up by the entire progressive movement and led to the extension of Ceylon's independence when most of them were implemented following the defeat of the UNP Government in 1956.

In order to consolidate its rule and defend its agreements with British imperialism, the UNP Government struck at the working class, the trade unions and the Left parties.

Leaders of the public service trade unions which had joined the 1947 general strike were victimised and these unions were gagged and divided by a series of repressive laws and regulations.

The failure of the 1947 strike, the formation of the UNP Government, the confusion created by the 'independence' Agreements and the repression of the trade unions and the Left also led to a certain amount of demoralisation and defeatism among certain supporters of the Left movement. It was in these circumstances that the Second Congress of the Communist Party met in Colombo on New Year's Day in 1948 and sounded a clarion call to the entire Left movement.

The Political Resolution presented by Pieter Keuneman at that Congress soberly analysed the current political situation and declared that the choice before the nation was:

“(a) Either, to seize the present initiative and to close our ranks now and defeat the intrigues of British imperialism and the Senanayake Cabinet, for winning complete freedom and for working out a progressive domestic and foreign policy.

“(b) Or, to surrender the initiative to imperialism and the Senanayake Cabinet who are desperately seeking to consolidate their position and drag the nation in the wake of Anglo-American plans for world domination and another war against the progressive forces of the world.”

The Resolution stressed that the Agreements entered into by the UNP Government with British Imperialism “are compromising the freedom of this country and isolating our nation from the progressive peoples of South East Asia

who have by their struggles compelled Britain to make substantial concessions to Ceylon." "The interests of the nation, therefore, demand," it said, "the unity of all progressive and Left elements to defeat the Senanayake Cabinet, to completely end Britain's domination of Ceylon, to build our national economy and satisfy the immediate demands of the people and to contribute our share to the maintenance of world peace and freedom. It is only in this way that the nation can go forward along the quickest path to the ultimate victory of socialism".

The Resolution stressed the essential instability of the UNP Government's position, emphasised the need for 'Left joint action' and trade union and progressive unity for all-round political struggles with the aim of establishing an alternative Government to ensure full independence, democracy and social advance. The Congress adopted a minimum programme and appealed to all Left and progressive elements to come together to struggle inside and outside Parliament for the establishment of a Government committed to the policy of implementing such a minimum programme.

In line with these Congress decisions, the Communist Party succeeded in establishing united action with the other Left parties on a number of *ad hoc* issues, but unfortunately, Left unity at that stage did not extend beyond that. Nor was the Communist Party itself free from certain confusions and mistakes, for the repudiation of defeatism at the Second Congress was followed by the growth of Left-sectarian tendencies within the Party. The adherents of this tendency grossly over-estimated the possibilities of direct revolutionary struggle of the masses at that stage and advocated adventurist policies and tactics that ran far ahead of actual possibilities.

This Left-sectarian tendency gained the upper hand at the Third Congress of the Party which met at Atureliya in September 1948, and following which Harry Abeygoonewardena was elected General Secretary of the Party. This tendency did great damage to the Party and trade union movement in the two years that followed, ultra-Left slogans and isolated adventurist actions leading to the weakening of the trade unions, especially in the plantations. However, led by Dr. Wickremasinghe and supported by Pieter Keuneman, M. G. Mendis and the Old Guard of working class comrades in the Party, resistance to the Left-sectarians began to develop, and they were completely routed at the Fourth Congress of the Party which was held at Matara in September 1950.

The Fourth Congress was a turning-point in the history of the Communist Party, and indeed of the entire progressive movement. The political thesis adopted by the Congress stated that the independence arrangements of 1948 had not completed the tasks of the anti-imperialist stage of the Ceylonese revolution. In order to do so, it called for the formation of a broad, democratic front composed of the working class, the peasantry, the middle classes and intellectuals, and all other anti-imperialist sections including sections of the bourgeoisie who had been thrown into opposition to the UNP and imperialism. This front should be led by the working class, the most consistently anti-imperialist section of this front, and its aim should be the mobilisation of all these sections of the people for the defeat of the UNP and the formation of a People's Democratic Government free from imperialist control.

Dr. Wickremasinghe was elected General Secretary after this Congress. Pieter Keuneman and M. G. Mendis were elected Assistant Secretaries.

Later Pieter Keuneman was to write in a short history of the Communist Party that he wrote for its twentieth anniversary in 1963 that "the resignation of Mr. Bandaranaike and his supporters from the UNP in July 1951 confirmed the analysis of the Fourth Congress that the unity of the Ceylonese bourgeoisie within the UNP would soon disintegrate and its compradore and national wings take separate paths." Also: "When Mr. Bandaranaike and his supporters formed the SLFP with a number of anti-imperialist aims in its programme, the Communist Party welcomed this development and declared its readiness to cooperate with the SLFP too in the struggle against imperialism and the UNP".

Meanwhile, Pieter Keuneman had been making a name for himself as a Parliamentary speaker and debater, combining fearless and searching exposure of the sins of omission and commission of the UNP Government with many concrete proposals brought forward on behalf of the people.

The **Daily News** commented: "Mr. Keuneman is a revolutionary by profession, but his speech - making is stamped with the polish of the Cambridge Union Society of which he was once President. As a rule, he desists from indulging in personal taunts but this does not detract from his fiery eloquence which often wins him applause from friend and foe alike in the House."

The **Observer** wrote: "When Keuneman starts going, he makes one's blood creep. Comrades like Philip and Robert and Colvin could never produce the same feeling down one's spine as Pieter does. Even one's temperature falls down, down, down, to zero!"

And the **Times of Ceylon** in an estimate of his first year's work in Parliament said: "Mr. Pieter Keuneman, in addition to being one of the finest speakers in the House is perhaps the most able debater on the Opposition side. More often than not, he speaks a language that the ordinary man understands. . . . Moreover, he has the capacity to coin phrases and slogans that gain current usage ("Join the UNP and see the world" etc.) He has all the polish and finesse of a good Parliamentary speaker, and it is not only a delight to watch his movements, but his voice - except when he drops it too low - is also pleasant to the ear."

"The greatest merit of the Third Member for Colombo Central," it continued, "is that he nearly always examines all that which comes up in Parliament from an eminently practical point of view and he has been responsible for some of the most embarrassing moments for the Government. If in the same way he can offer some solutions for immediate problems, he would become the most respected as well as feared of the Government's critics."

Not only was there no important question of public policy discussed in Parliament to which he did not make a valuable contribution in debate, as M. P. for Colombo Central he paid particular attention to the problems of various sections of people who live in the metropolis.

One of his first concerns in Parliament was to fight against the bribery and corruption which had become an alarming and ugly feature of public life and administration under the first UNP Government. In January 1948, he moved his first motion in Parliament demanding the appointment of a Bribery Commission to inquire into charges of bribery and corruption against public servants. This motion was passed

and, curiously enough, his father, Mr. Justice Keuneman, was appointed Bribery Commissioner. The UNP Government however, refused to accept all Pieter Keuneman's recommendations about the powers of the Commission. As a result bribery was detected and those guilty punished only in the lower ranks of the administration, while offenders in high places escaped scot free.

In 1949, he succeeded in getting a motion passed in Parliament calling for the appointment of a Commission to probe into the activities of the Colombo Municipal Council which under a UNP administration had become a veritable hot-bed of the most blatant forms of bribery and corruption. This Commission found ten UNP Councillors including the Mayor guilty of the most heinous practices.

Two other urgent problems of Colombo Central were the housing shortage and its natural outcome, excessive house rents. To combat this problem of increasing house rents, he introduced a motion in Parliament in 1948 calling for legislation freezing house rents at the 1941 level when the Rent Restriction Act was first passed. As the small landlord and house-owner might be adversely affected by such legislation, his motion simultaneously suggested the abolition of the present rating system and the substitution in its place of a graded property tax. This motion was so closely debated that the voting resulted in a tie and Keuneman's motion was defeated only on the casting vote of Mr. Speaker.

Another burning problem at that time, as now, was that of unemployment. To help the unemployed, Keuneman campaigned that the Government should either provide them with work or else give them relief during the period of unemployment, based on his booklet *More Jobs—How?* which was described earlier.

He agitated for legislation to fix a national minimum living wage, the implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex, and for a comprehensive system of state social insurance involving pensions, sickness benefits etc.

He fought for democratic and trade union rights for public servants and other government employees and opposed the so-called Trade Union Act introduced by the Government to curtail the right of public servants to form proper unions. Together with his other Communist and Leftist colleagues, he forced the Government to withdraw the repressive Public Service Regulation 208 B which gagged public servants.

In 1951 when the government placed the majority of imports on an open general licence, Keuneman raised in Parliament the plight of Ceylonese business firms whom the Government encouraged to enter the import trade and later threw to the wolves by yielding to the pressure of foreign companies.

In the field of foreign affairs, Keuneman exposed the plots of the imperialists against the rising national liberation movements in South East Asia, in particular the armed American intervention in Korea and Taiwan, the French colonial war in Indo-China, Dutch invasion of Indonesia and British aggressions against Burma and Malaya. He bitterly opposed the UNP Government's policy of tailing behind the Western imperialists in foreign policy matters and fought hard for the establishment of friendly relations with the new world of socialism and national liberation.

In December 1947, Keuneman had also been elected as a Member of the Colombo Municipal Council for Kota-

hena West, a ward he represented until December 1959. Keuneman, who led the Ceylon Communist Party's group in the Colombo Municipal Council throughout this decade, was in the forefront of many struggles for Municipal reforms. He succeeded in getting a housing and slum clearance scheme, a Municipal dispensary and library, and other social amenities for his ward.

Keuneman's persistent fight in Parliament, in the Colombo Municipal Council, and in the mass movement outside for so many popular causes, won him great renown. So much so that when the next General Election to Parliament took place in 1952, he more than doubled his 1947 vote. He polled 32,346 votes and became First Member for Colombo Central. The Communist Party had made such advances in this period in Colombo that in this election they were able to reduce A. E. Goonesinha to fourth place and knock him permanently out of Parliamentary and political life.

The 1952 General Election was the result of the sudden dissolution of Parliament by Dudley Senanayake who had become Prime Minister after the death of his father and the internecine *Premier Stakes* which Sir John Kotelawela described so vividly later on. By calling a snap election, Dudley Senanayake and the UNP hoped to capitalise on D. S. Senanayake's death and get back to power before their internal differences could mature and before they had to raise the price of rationed rice and carry out the anti-people measures that the US—dominated World Bank wanted.

As soon as Parliament was dissolved, the Communist Party called a Special National Conference at the Colombo Town Hall. The report of the Central Committee, delivered by Pieter Keuneman, reviewed the work of the Party since

1024

the Fourth Congress and proposed an electoral agreement between the anti-UNP parties to contest the imminent General Elections unitedly, or failing this, at least a no - contest agreement.

This was one of the many efforts of the Communist Party to build the unity of the anti-UNP forces, a tactic that finally succeeded only in 1956. But the Communist Party's effort in 1952 did not meet with a favourable response from the other anti-UNP parties. As a result the UNP swept the board and won an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, chiefly due to the lack of unity among the anti-UNP parties. The striking electoral victories of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Pieter Keuneman were the only two really bright spots for the Opposition in this General Election.

Enter Maud — and How She Entered

Keuneman's first marriage had ended in a divorce shortly after the end of the Second World War. Towards the end of 1950, Keuneman visited Great Britain for the first time since the war in order to attend the World Peace Congress due to be held in Sheffield in November.

At the International Department of the British Communist Party he met Maud Rogerson, a full-time worker and assistant to the head of this department, R. Palme Dutt. Their meeting took place only after Keuneman had gone to Warsaw to which the Congress had to be hastily shifted when the British Government refused entrance to most of the delegates, and returned to London after visits to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic. In a comparatively short time, they agreed to marry.

But the marriage itself was not to take place until over a year afterwards. Keuneman left for Ceylon early in 1951, expecting that Miss Rogerson would join him within a few months. But the UNP Government of the day had other plans.

Hearing that a Communist called Maud Rogerson was coming to Ceylon to marry Pieter Keuneman, Premier D. S. Senanayake had, before his death, issued strict instructions to his Permanent Secretary, Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan and to the Ceylon High Commissioner in London, Sir Edwin Wijeratne that she should not be allowed to come to Ceylon at any cost. And so Keuneman and his bride-to-be had to resort to the most complicated subterfuges to circumvent the directives of Mr. D. S. Senanayake.

Finding her way to Warsaw, Maud Rogerson got abroad a Polish ship carrying cargo to China. The ship put into port in Colombo on the last day of the General Elections of 1952. The Ceylon immigration and police authorities were not expecting her, and as she was being met by Mr. Justice Keuneman (he only knew that his future daughter-in-law was arriving), they were more than eager to help her ashore. In fact, the Communist whose entry into Ceylon D. S. Senanayake had forbidden came ashore in the Harbour Police launch with full honours ! Every one was much too interested in the outcome of the General Elections to pay much attention to a British girl coming ashore in Colombo.

Pieter Keuneman himself was campaigning in the deep South for his Party colleagues on the day Miss Rogerson arrived. At the end of the election, he motored down to Colombo. When Dudley Senanyake was busy forming his new Cabinet, Pieter Keuneman and Maud Rogerson were mar-

ried by special licence at the Registrar-General's Office in Colombo, thus forming an alliance that was to prove more lasting than the Dudley Senanayake Cabinet of 1952.

The new Premier, Dudley Senanayake, bowed to the inevitable and offered Keuneman his congratulations in Parliament: "I sincerely congratulate him," said the Premier, "not only on the acquisition of a comely spouse but also congratulate him on the acquisition of a very able comrade-in-arms."

The attempts of the UNP to get Maud Keuneman out of Ceylon did not, however, end there. When Sir John Kotelawela became Prime Minister in 1953, she was one of the foreign wives of Ceylonese marked for deportation. But Maud Keuneman had anticipated such a move and become a citizen of Ceylon by registration. So Sir John had to be content with amending the citizenship laws to ensure that, in future, the acquisition of Ceylon citizenship by the spouse of a citizen of Ceylon would depend on the consent of the Prime Minister.

Maud Keuneman, who was to become the editor of the Communist Party's newspaper *Forward*, has been a constant source of strength to Pieter Keuneman in his political work - thus proving that at least one prediction of Premier Dudley Senanayake came true !

The Fight for the China Pact

Soon after the Dudley Senanayake Government took office, Ceylon was in the midst of a major economic crisis. The export price of rubber slumped, many small and medium rubber plantations were forced to close down, and

thousands of plantation workers and workers in the rubber packing firms in Colombo were thrown out of work. The 1952 Budget was hardly passed when the UNP Government cut the rice ration by half and increased the price of sugar.

In this situation, the Communist Party launched a campaign to demand that Ceylon's pattern of external trade should be diversified by the conclusion of bilateral trade agreements with the socialist countries. One of the particular demands they put forward was for a rice - rubber trade agreement with the People's Republic of China.

Keuneman, who spearheaded this campaign of the Communist Party in Parliament, had to bear the full brunt of the scorn and rage of the big foreign and local vested interests who dominated the export trade and sought to keep it as a monopoly of the imperialist countries.

He was accused of trying to "sell Ceylon to Russia and China" and of "playing politics" with a national disaster. The UNP's Food Minister asked Keuneman how he expected to get rice from China when everyone knew that the starving Chinese had to eat grass ! The Minister of Trade told Keuneman that he would fly a red flag from the top of his house if any rice could be got from China.

Instead the UNP Government sent a high-powered delegation led by Sir Oliver Goonetilleke to Washington to ask their American patrons to help them out of the difficulty. But the Americans were not ready to listen to their pleas. It was in these desperate circumstances that the UNP Government was forced to open negotiations with China, which was able to offer Ceylon rice and also provide a stable market for our exports of rubber.

A Trade Mission led by R. G. Senanayake was sent to China and successfully concluded an agreement for the purchase of rice and sale of rubber. Pieter Keuneman on behalf of the Communist Party was the first to hail this agreement in a statement which said:

“The Communist Party, which first drew the attention of the people of Ceylon to the need and possibility of mutual, beneficial trade with China, joins with other public bodies and sections of the press in expressing pleasure at this agreement. It nevertheless warns the people of Ceylon that strenuous steps are being taken, on the instigation and orders of the American Embassy, to sabotage this agreement and prevent the people of Ceylon from receiving the rice and other benefits which they need so urgently. The people must unitedly intervene now and rebuff the efforts of these American puppets who would rather see their own people starve than conclude an honourable and equal agreement with a great Asian country.”

This warning did not come a day too soon, for as soon as the agreement was announced, reactionaries including anti-Communists within the Cabinet itself, were up in arms against the trade agreement with China. The Communist Party and other Opposition parties had to lead a mighty island-wide campaign to force the Ceylon Government finally to ratify the agreement. Keuneman played a great part in this campaign and when the agreement, after ratification, was presented in Parliament on the 20th January 1953, Keuneman could proudly say:

“You know, Mr. Speaker, that both in and outside Parliament for the last two and a half years, I have been personally agitating for a trade agreement with China. . . . A

good deal of what I said was laughed and jeered at, but there is no need for me to go into that matter now. It would, however, be ungenerous of me not to offer my congratulations to the Government for abandoning its former resistance to this proposal and concluding the Trade Agreement with the People's Republic of China. . . . I can think of no other Agreement, Mr. Speaker, which this country had concluded in its recent history which is as favourable to Ceylon as this Ceylon-China Pact."

He continued: "We must now bring our mind to bear on the extent to which we must continue to diversify our trade, adopt a new pattern of trade and carry on trade not only with one bloc of states but with all states who are prepared to enter into beneficial trade agreements with us." He appealed to the Prime Minister "to continue to explore these hitherto unexplored spheres of trade" and "send trade missions to the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe to explore the possibilities of favourable trade with these countries."

He said: "We must trade with all manner of countries, irrespective of their political and social systems. The development of such trade with all countries in the world, irrespective of their social systems, and the restoration of the all-embracing world trade which has been disrupted by American policy since the Second World War will contribute considerably to ease international relations and to maintain peace in the world."

But the Dudley Senanayake Government did not go beyond the China Pact which saved that Government from the immediate economic crisis facing them. The implementation of the proposals made by Keuneman for mutually beneficial

trade with all countries including the Soviet Union and other socialist countries had to await the election into power of the Government led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

The Hartal

If the successful campaign for the ratification of the China Pact was the first blow, the historic Hartal of 12th August 1953 was the second blow struck by the people of Ceylon against the pro-imperialist policies of the Dudley Senanayake Government, especially against its policy of subordinating the national interests of Ceylon to those of US imperialism.

Pleading that the only way of avoiding complete bankruptcy was to obtain a loan from the US—dominated World Bank, the Government accepted and began fulfilling all the pre-conditions for such a loan laid down in the report of the World Bank Mission. They abandoned a number of industrial projects which were on the verge of being started; land settlement policy was drastically changed; all remaining hindrances in the way of investment of foreign capital in Ceylon were swept away; the subsidy on rice was totally removed; money spent on social services reduced; and rail fares and electricity rates increased.

The 1953 Hartal was the result. Despite the brutal intimidation practised by the Government and private employers, despite the terrorism of the police and the army which was called out to intimidate the people, despite the lying slanders of the capitalist press and the open intervention of the propaganda agencies of the American Embassy, the people of Ceylon followed up nation-wide protests against Government policies with a one-day Hartal on August 12th

which brought the Government to a standstill, revealing its complete political bankruptcy and utter isolation from the masses and forcing it to order a curfew for the first time since 1915 and to declare a state of emergency.

And under cover of emergency regulations and supported by police and army terrorism, the Government shot down and killed nine persons, injured hundreds more, arrested and imprisoned political opponents, smashed the offices of Opposition political parties and trade unions, sealed the Opposition press and reduced the people to such a position that they needed a police permit before they could even bury their dead.

The Communist Party and other Left Parties had led the fight of the people against the Government and in the pre-Hartal campaign of mass meetings throughout the country exposed the connection between the Government's anti-people decisions and their attempt to obtain so-called American aid.

When Keuneman rose in Parliament to speak against the Government's terror, the police had just raided the offices of the Communist Party and the trade unions, closed and sealed the Communist Party's printing press, suppressed its newspapers and arrested and beaten many of its leading comrades. All opposition outside Parliament had been silenced and the anti-UNP forces were in temporary retreat as a result of the brutal repression launched against them.

As a writer in a newspaper later put it, "in this great darkness Keuneman's fighting speech shone like a beacon." He passed to the attack from the word 'go' and used Parliament, the only forum left at that time, to justify the aims

of the Hartal, expose the terror and repression of the Government and rally the scattered anti-UNP forces.

The memory of Keuneman's speech in Parliament on the 17th August 1953 is still vivid. He began: "The father of the present Prime Minister, the late Mr. D. S. Senanayake, began his rise to fame by being a victim of the terror unleashed by the British Government during the Martial Law of 1915. His son, the present Prime Minister, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, will go down to the history of this country as the first Prime Minister of Ceylon to call out the troops and use them against his own people."

He went on: "There is no justification whatsoever for the terrorism which it has unleashed against the people of Ceylon who demand food at a price which they can afford to pay. There is no justification whatsoever for this Government invoking the Public Security Ordinance, declaring a state of emergency and imposing a curfew at a time when the 24-hour Hartal on August 12th was almost reaching its end. . . I accuse the Government of declaring a state of emergency not in order to maintain peace, but in order to cover up their bankruptcy and panic by giving the armed forces legal powers to join the police in shooting down the people. . . . I accuse the Government and the police, acting on behalf of the Government, of working from 13th August onwards to provoke incidents and provide opportunities for justifying the continuation of the state of public emergency which they proclaimed in a panic on the 12th August. . . . I accuse this Government of proclaiming an emergency and issuing repressive regulations, not for the purpose of maintaining public peace and order, but with a view to suppressing all opposition to the party in power."

In order to 'justify' its mass repression, the Government produced a forged document about an "army of liberation for the Central Province" alleged to have been found in the premises of the Kandy branch office of the Communist Party. Keuneman tore this forgery into shreds, turned the Communist Party from an accused into an accuser, put the Government into the dock and said: "I have no hesitation in branding this document as a very clumsy forgery on the part of the police. This, Mr. Speaker, is the UNP equivalent of the notorious Zinoviev letter. No such document was ever issued by the Ceylon Communist Party. If the Government brings that document into a court of law, we can prove, without any doubt, that it is nothing but a stupid and clumsy forgery deliberately introduced by the police."

Keuneman described how by all manner of emergency regulations the police were being given a *carte blanche* to terrorise the people for daring to demand rice at 25 cents a measure, and said: "The country can now see that the democracy of which this Government boasts is only a police state buttressed by bayonets of the armed forces. In the Budget the Government demonstrated its financial and economic bankruptcy. In its attempts to meet the demonstration of the people on August 12th and its subsequent actions, the Government has demonstrated its political bankruptcy, incompetence and inability to govern democratically. It has lost even a pretence of popular support. The Prime Minister surrendered all powers to Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, the new Fuehrer, a man who is not even elected by the people, who is not responsible to any elected assembly and whom the people universally distrust."

He ended his speech saying: "The Government has lost all moral right to govern. Let not the Government think that

the people will forget their excesses just as they have never forgotten the excesses of the British Government during the Martial Law of 1915. Has the Government forgotten that the excesses of Martial Law in 1915 began the movement of political reform in this country? Let the Government ponder on what type of movement it will start by the excesses which they are perpetrating today in the name of an 'emergency' which exceed the excesses of the Martial Law days of 1915.

"We demand that the so-called emergency be lifted. We demand that this Government resign. It can terrorise the the people but it cannot govern. Let it resign immediately and allow the country to give a democratic decision on its future."

Keuneman's speech was so hard-hitting that Premier Dudley Senanayake slunk out of Parliament immediately afterwards and, as he confessed later, was sick in the lobbies. Shortly afterwards, he resigned from his post of Prime Minister.

He was succeeded as Prime Minister by Sir John Kotelawela who, in his very first broadcast and his first public speeches, vowed to stamp out Communism from Ceylon. To achieve this object, he soon indulged in a few anti-Communist antics like banning the import of socialist literature and deporting wives of Communist workers here. But the Communists met these attacks with courage and Pieter Keuneman told Sir John Kotelawela to his face in Parliament:

"This crushing of Communism is not a new thing. There have been other people much more qualified than the Hon. Prime Minister who have taken on this job. There was Mussolini. What happened to him? He ended up by hanging by

his heels from a lamp-post in Milan. Then there was Hitler, who was much more competent than my Hon. friend and how did he end? He ended by blowing his brains out in a bunker in Berlin. So I really hope that such an engaging personality as my Hon. friend the Prime Minister will seriously study history and set about trying to solve the problems affecting the people of this country rather than take the fatal road taken by Hitler and Mussolini which ended, not in the destruction of Communism, but in the destruction of these famous anti-Communists themselves."

Inside and outside Parliament, Keuneman and the Communists kept up such a ceaseless fight against the attempts of the Kotelawela government to use anti-Communism to destroy the working class and progressive movement and take Ceylon steadily along the road to fascism that soon the Prime Minister was singing a different tune. He admitted at a famous meeting that of all the political parties in Ceylon, he feared the Communist Party most. This was one of the best testimonials to the fighting character of the Communist Party and its leaders like Keuneman.

The Fifth Congress of the Communist Party which met in Grandpass early in 1955 summed up the experiences of the Party in the fight against the Kotelawela Government and chalked out the strategy for the widest possible mobilisation of the masses that was to hound out the Government next year.

During the period between the Fifth Congress and the dissolution of Parliament early in 1956, Keuneman exposed Kotelawela's formation of a private Gestapo under the guise of establishing a Public Security Department.

He opposed the use of the police to break strikes and of the army to terrorise villagers as in the notorious "Operation Ganga" incidents.

He resisted Government attempts to militarise the public services by forcibly forming "volunteer" units of stool-pigeons and informers.

He was a leader of the famous South Western Bus Co. strike and fought against the ban on stay-in strikes against these bus workers and the working class in general.

But probably his most notable success during this period was the way he forced the Government to withdraw a Bill to amend the Rent Restriction Act - a Bill which would have not only increased rents but also allowed landlords to evict tenants without any notice whatsoever.

For one full hour Government front-benchers sat uneasily while Keuneman tore the Bill to shreds and pointed out how it was an election bonus to landlords and a severe blow to tenants. Ending his speech he said: "I demand from the Government that this repressive and obnoxious Bill be withdrawn forthwith. Otherwise, we as Members who represent Colombo and other urban areas will have no alternative but to struggle against this Bill not only in this House but outside. I am quite prepared if the Hon. Minister is not going to be reasonable about this, to organise all my constituents who are tenants to come and squat in the Minister's office until he hears what they have to say."

The prospect of a tenants' demonstration on the eve of a General Election was more than the Government could bear. Immediately after Keuneman sat down, Premier Ko-

telawela rose. His usual arrogance gone, he looked like a deflated tyre, and in a hang-dog manner mumbled that it was rather unfortunate that the Bill was moved and asked the permission of the House for its withdrawal.

It was great day for Keuneman for by forcing the Government to withdraw this Bill he had chalked up another victory for tenants.

In appreciation of all the services rendered to them by Pieter Keuneman and in order to help him to serve them better, his constituents in Colombo Central presented him with a new car. One of them said on that occasion: "He is our man. We stand by him because he stands by us."

Little wonder that shortly afterwards, he topped the poll again and was re-elected as First Member for Colombo Central with the record poll of 45,296 votes in that memorable General Election which routed the UNP and brought into power the Government under the leadership of Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

And as Keuneman was to comment later, the so-called strong-man Kotelawela who came to power threatening to hunt down the Communists had to leave the island and be content with hunting foxes in England.

THE BANDARANAIKE PERIOD (1956 - 64)

What did Pieter Keuneman and the Communist Party think of the policies of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike? Their attitude is clearly stated in the articles in *Forward* that Keuneman wrote on Mr. Bandaranaike after his death.

He said: "The late Mr. Bandaranaike was a nationalist. Although he came from a different class and, in certain things, shared different experiences and values, he understood, reflected and expressed the aspirations of the Sinhala-educated intelligentsia whose numbers had swollen with the progress of the free education scheme and whose advancement had been consistently obstructed by the political, cultural and administrative set-up inherited from imperialism.

"Through this important strata of Ceylonese society which has strong links in the rural areas, the late Mr. Bandaranaike was able to reach and influence the mass of the

Sinhalese peasantry and inspire them with respect for themselves and a new hope for the future.

“Mr. Bandaranaike, however, differed from many earlier nationalists. Like them, he realised that there was another powerful, progressive trend both in Ceylon and abroad—the working class movement for socialism. But while other nationalists sought to picture nationalism as a rival and enemy of socialism, Mr. Bandaranaike always insisted that nationalism and socialism were allies.

“He frequently and publicly debunked the ‘Communist bogey.’ He ended the one-sided and discriminatory foreign policy of the UNP and opened direct diplomatic, trade and other relations with the socialist countries. Even when conflicts arose between him and the working class, as they sometimes did during strikes, he invariably intervened to settle them, always stressing that imperialism and the UNP were the main common enemies of the whole progressive movement.

“Although he had philosophical reservations about socialism and communism, the late Mr. Bandaranaike realised that all peoples of the world were inevitably moving in this direction, albeit by different roads, and that honest nationalists should also help in the realisation of this bright future.”

About the situation prevailing in Ceylon and the world when Mr. Bandaranaike came to power, Keuneman wrote: “When Mr. Bandaranaike became Prime Minister in 1956, the world situation had also changed significantly. Socialism was no longer confined to a single country, the USSR, but had become a world system which had begun to win victories in ideological struggle and peaceful competition with what remained of the capitalist world system.

“The colonial system of imperialism had begun to disintegrate under the hammer-blows of the national liberation movement. The socialist world system was now in a position to give not merely political but also material support to new national states that had emerged from colonial rule.

“Unlike the Prime Ministers before him, Mr. Bandaranaike understood and appreciated these changes, and made the fact of this change part of his policy for the renaissance of Ceylon. Internally, the need for co-operation with the Left parties, and, externally, the need for friendship and co-operation with the world socialist system in order to achieve and consolidate the all-round independence of Ceylon, therefore, became significant factors of the ‘Bandaranaike policies’. Added to this was the perspective of socialism as the goal towards which newly-free Ceylon should eventually develop.”

This appraisal of Mr. Bandaranaike helps to explain Communist policy towards the Bandaranaike Government after its return to office in 1956.

In a series of speeches, articles and statements in 1956 both the Communist Party and Pieter Keuneman showed that, from the start, their attitude towards the Bandaranaike Government differed from that of other Left parties.

“Our party,” said Keuneman, “does not take the view that the formation of Mr. Bandaranaike’s Government is a mere substitution of one capitalist government by another. Nor do we believe that the MEP’s electoral victory over the UNP has brought socialism into being, as some supporters of the new Government claim.

“The Communist Party recognises that the electoral victory over the UNP and the formation of the new Government represent a significant shift in the balance of forces in Ceylon. This shift is in favour of the anti-imperialist forces and against the interests of imperialism and its Ceylonese collaborators. This political victory itself became possible because the policy which the Communist Party had advocated for so long — the policy of building the unity of all anti-imperialist and anti-UNP forces — was accepted in considerable measure.”

Pointing out that “it is folly to believe that either imperialism or the UNP is dead”, and that representatives of the vested interests still held powerful positions in the armed forces, public administration, the economy and the new Government itself, Keuneman said that all the anti-imperialist forces should make good use of the favourable opportunities for further advance that had been created by the shift in the balance of forces.

The Left parties, in particular, should take a positive attitude towards the new Government. They should launch public campaigns for the speedy implementation of all the progressive measures that the people had endorsed in the 1956 General Elections — measures such as the establishment of a Republic, the removal of British bases, an independent and peaceful foreign policy, establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with the socialist countries, nationalisation of foreign monopolies and vested interests, the rapid development of the economy, and democratisation of the public administration, the armed forces, and political and social life. In these campaigns, Keuneman said, the Left parties should seek to combine with the progressive forces within the Government itself — in a common front against

imperialism and Ceylonese reaction. It was in this way, he said, that the vested interests within the Government itself could be curbed and isolated and the progressive aims for which the people had voted realised.

At this time, the Communist Party was the only Left party to take such a stand. It was only after 1960 that the rest of the Left movement adopted this same position.

To ensure independence of action in pursuing this policy, the Communist Party instructed its Parliamentary group in 1956 to withdraw from the official Opposition, which now included the UNP. In a statement issued to explain this step Keuneman said:

“The Communist Party is not prepared to take part in discussions with the UNP which is now trying to raise its head again in order to regain power. Whatever our differences with the MEP Government, we are not prepared to give direct or indirect assistance to the UNP in its efforts to stage a comeback.”

After a thorough inner-party discussion, the Communist Party also corrected certain mistakes it had made earlier in relation to the campaign for Sinhala as the official language of Ceylon. These mistakes had caused a temporary separation between the nationalist and working class movements which the Right-wing within the anti-UNP movement had seized upon to take the upper hand and isolate the Left parties.

From 1956 onwards, the Communist Party ran many campaigns for the implementation of the progressive aims for which the people had voted. The united initiatives of

the progressive forces resulted in the establishment of a new foreign policy, the establishment of diplomatic and other relations with most of the socialist countries, the nationalisation of cargo handling in the Port of Colombo, the nationalisation of the bus services, the removal of the British bases, the Paddy Lands Act, the renaissance of national culture, the expansion of the public sector, greater social equalisation, the widening of democracy and the extension of trade union rights.

Pieter Keuneman was in the thick of all these campaigns and, on behalf of the Communist Party, took the initiative in sponsoring some of them. One such campaign was that which sought to reduce the qualifying age for the right to vote from 21 years to 18.

As far back as 1948, Keuneman had moved a motion in Parliament to this effect. But it was defeated by the UNP Government of the day. In 1955, Keuneman again brought up this matter in the Parliamentary Select Committee to revise electoral laws. His motion to this effect was again defeated, with only the late Mr. Bandaranaike and Dr. N. M. Perera supporting him. But after 1956, Keuneman was able to get this proposal accepted by the new Select Committee and enacted into law in the electoral reforms of 1959. Perusal of the various reports of Select Committees to revise electoral laws over this period reveal how big a part Keuneman played in making the election laws more democratic.

When Keuneman rode with the late Mr. Bandaranaike in the first nationalised bus, he had reason to be happy and proud. For it was during the great and bitterly fought strike against the South Western Bus Company in 1955, in which Keuneman played a leading part, addressing meetings and picketing

the bus stands, that Mr. Bandaranaike, then Leader of the Opposition, publicly promised at a Town Hall rally in support of the strike that he would nationalise the bus services if he was returned to power.

While uniting with the progressive sections within the Government in order to carry through anti-imperialist and democratic reforms, the Communists and Pieter Keuneman continued their fight to improve the lot of the workers. Keuneman himself figured prominently in several strike struggles of this period, especially the great strike struggle led by the Communists in Colombo from 23rd April to 28th May 1958 which led to the workers in the private sector winning the government rate of cost-of-living allowance. He was in the thick of many clashes with the police and employer-supplied blacklegs, which was a feature of the strike, and was in the midst of the "battle of Lipton Circus" when the workers fought back the attempt to introduce blacklegs into Lipton's factory under cover of police batons, tear gas and rifles.

During this period, the Communists and Keuneman repeatedly exposed and warned against the attempt of the SLFP Right-Wing to use anti-communism in order to split the progressive forces and stop social advance. Keuneman's constant exposure of Stanley de Zoysa, Jim Munasinghe (whom he dubbed "Roman Candle"), Buddharakkita, Marikkar and others of this ilk were later accepted as true by the mass of the progressive movement, including large sections of the SLFP itself.

With the aid of external reaction, the Right-wing within the SLFP succeeded in splitting Mr. Bandaranaike's Cabinet, dismissing the Ministers with a Left past, and threatening

Mr. Bandaranaike himself with removal if he continued to co-operate with the Left forces of Ceylon or to pursue policies which interfered with established vested interests. When Mr. Bandaranaike sought to strike back at these Right-wing forces, he was brutally assassinated by them.

In one of the most memorable and hard-hitting speeches that he had ever made in Parliament, Keuneman brilliantly exposed and helped to prevent the attempt by the Right-wing to consolidate their position under the Premiership of W. Dahanayake.

“The character and actions of the Dahanayake Government,” he said, “can only be understood in terms of its origin — and that origin is the criminal, brutal and cowardly assassination of the late Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. Mr Bandaranaike’s tragic death was no accident or isolated thing. The history of assassination throughout the ages confirms that the murder of political leaders is never purely the result of personal grievance or revenge. Whatever the motives that animate the man who pulls the trigger, behind him stand social forces who hope to gain from the death of the victim. In this respect Mr. Bandaranaike’s sudden and brutal death was both an intimate part and logical development of the effort of reaction, both foreign and domestic, to destroy the democratic gains made by the people in the General Elections of 1956 and thereafter.....”

“The forces behind this assassination are the same forces who have, since 1956, been working assiduously to prevent the progressive aims for which the people voted from being implemented; to purge the Government of those forces within it who are fighting for these aims; to move the Government steadily to the Right; to create the conditions and pave the

10241

way for a coalition of the Right-wing forces in this country; and by these means to instal reaction once again in power in Ceylon.....

“The whole country can now see the real face of the Right-wing in all its nakedness. It can see how despicable, how unscrupulous those forces are. It can see the real nature and aims of the obscurantists who paraded chauvinism as patriotism. It can see the real character of the racketeers in robes who use religion as a cover to promote their most sordid business interests and their struggle for political power. It can see the real nature of the men and women who were praised as heroes when they opposed the Paddy Lands Act, when they fought against the vote at 18, when they conspired to wreck the Co-operative Development Bank Bill and other pieces of progressive legislation. They are all exposed now and the people can see their real aims and nature. These are the heroes of anti-Communism, these degraded wretches with democracy on their lips and blood on their hands.”

Turning to Premier Dahanayake, Keuneman said: “This Government claims to be a successor to the Government of the late Mr. Bandaranaike. But it is headed by a man who has been built up by the Right-wing as a rival to Mr. Bandaranaike. We all know what went on before the SLFP Sessions of May 1959. We know the intrigues that went on. We know how the late Mr. Bandaranaike was told sharply that if he did not agree to the demands of the Right, he would not be President of the SLFP and Mr. W. Dahanayake would be President instead; that very shortly not he but Mr. W. Dahanayake would be Prime Minister of this country.

“Those who were working to displace Mr. Bandaranaike from the leading position which he held in his party and the

state now claim to be his political heirs and successors. They call him a **Bodhisatva** now. But when he lived, they called him a spineless and weak man, an appeaser of the Left. These men are not Bandaranaike's political heirs. They are men who have stepped over his dead body into positions of power which they do not deserve."

Then turning to the government back-benchers he said:

"Let me now say a final word to the Members opposite. We do not agree with you, nor do you agree with us; but we know that there are among you many honest and decent men anxious to do the right thing. Can you be satisfied that even what you want can be achieved under this Government headed by the Prime Minister? . . . Can you be satisfied that, under their auspices, there can be a full and thorough - going investigation into the murder of your late leader? Do you think that such leaders as you have now will help you or redound to your credit when you have to face the people once again? That is why there is a clear duty before you."

Keuneman's speech spotlighting the role of the Right in the murder of Mr. Bandaranaike and his unremitting exposure of the reactionaries to consolidate their power behind the Dahanayake Government had such a telling effect that it provoked a revolt against Dahanayake within the SLFP, and Dahanayake had to sack half his Cabinet, dissolve Parliament in December 1959, and fix elections for March 1960.

"The main question that the voters will have to decide at the forthcoming elections," said Keuneman in a press statement after the dissolution of Parliament, "is whether we are to continue the progressive advance begun in 1956

under Mr. Bandaranaike's leadership or go back to the old state of affairs." To ensure the former alternative, the Communist Party sought once again to unite all parties opposed to the UNP and Dahanayake's newly-formed Lanka Prajathantra Party (Ceylon Democratic Party). These attempts failed; the SLFP, LSSP and Communist Party fought one another in practically every electorate and the UNP was able to win 50 seats, enabling Dudley Senanayake to form a minority UNP Government.

Keuneman himself won the Colombo Central seat. But with candidates from the SLFP, LSSP, MEP and the Ceylon Democratic Congress splitting the progressive vote (between them they polled over 40,000 votes), Keuneman polled only 30,574 votes and was elected as Second Member. For the first time since the Colombo Central constituency was constituted, a UNP candidate topped the poll and another won the third seat to boot.

Dudley Senanayake's minority Government was a short-lived one and was defeated in its very first vote in Parliament, after the Throne Speech debate when Keuneman made mince-meat of the political pretensions of Dudley Senanayake who had been built up by the capitalist press as a straightforward, honest man.

Said Keuneman: "I have known the Prime Minister for a long time and have regard for his intelligence and some of his personal qualities too. But I must say that I cannot repose any political confidence in the political assurances which either he or his party gives. How can we repose confidence in a party which has broken so many public promises and in a leader who has acted contrary to so many of his public promises?"

“You ask us to trust the United National Party which promised during the 1952 General Election that, as long as the UNP Government lasts, rice will be sold at 25 cents a measure. No sooner it was elected to power, the UNP and this Prime Minister increased the price to 70 cents. Do you ask us to trust a Party that gives such an assurance and breaks it immediately afterwards?

“You ask us to have confidence in your leader who publicly announced his retirement from politics about five years ago and then decided to come back at the propitious moment.

“Do you ask us to have faith in a political leader who during the last General Election went round the country saying that he will not have an **achcharu** coalition and no sooner he was elected went fishing around trying to find out what other parties or independents might be willing to become condiments for his **achcharu**?”

Then he went on to expose the double-tongued politics of the UNP:—

“When the UNP is negotiating with the Federal Party, it is perfectly all right. It is an act of great statesmanship! It is meant to bring about communal harmony! But if the SLFP has a talk with the Federal Party or if the Federal Party signs the common amendment along with any other party, why, Sir, it is nothing but a sinister attempt to sell the Sinhalese to the Tamils!

“When the late Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike held negotiations with the Federal Party which led to the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam Pact, he was denounced bell, book

and candle by these gentlemen of the UNP for 'selling out' the Sinhalese. They started an abortive march to Kandy in which the Hon. Leader of the House (J. R. Jayewardene) was able to test out in practice whether his head or Ceylon granite was harder. In any case, these people who went on shouting in this way within a few hours of taking office were negotiating with the same Federal Party - to 'save the Sinhalese' I presume!

"Now they talk about the 'Indian menace' and how they are out to save the country from the Indians. . . . Have these gentlemen who talk about saving the country from the 'Indian menace', about the 'hordes of Indians pouring into this country', forgotten that their own leader, the Hon. Dudley Senanayake, when the Hon. Member for Yatiyantota (Dr. N. M. Perera) moved a motion in the State Council to stop further immigration into this country, not only voted against it but also spoke against it ?

"Look at what they say about the SLFP. On the one hand, the SLFP is a bunch of effete, corrupt and power-hungry politicians, ready at the drop of a hat to sell the country, democracy and the Sinhalese. In the next breath, they tell the SLFP: 'After all, we are both democrats; let us unite against the Marxists and finish them off.' Both these arguments come from the same side!

"Look at their attitude towards the Hon. Member for Avisawella. Up till four weeks ago, the Hon. Member for Avisawella was denounced as a subversive red devil bent on tearing the country asunder by racial and religious riots. He was Public Enemy No. 1. But now, in the eyes of the UNP, the Hon. Member for Avisawella is a sober and responsible statesman.

“And what about the LSSP and the Communist Party? For years the UNP has denounced us for not abandoning Marxism which they have described as an alien, evil and godless creed. Now, what do they do? They give us long lectures. They warn us: ‘Please do not abandon your Marxist positions; please remember you are Marxists; we are surprised that you are behaving in this way.’ And all this because these two parties have said that if the SLFP is in a position to form a Government on the defeat of the UNP, we are ready to help it to do so.”

Dudley Senanayake in that Throne Speech announced the reduction of the price of rice to 25 cents as an election stunt. The way Keuneman dealt with this was a minor masterpiece. Thundered Keuneman:

“Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, after seven years you have restored the price of rice to 25 cents a measure, to what it was in 1953 when you raised it to 70 cents. But I ask you, Mr. Prime Minister, can you also restore the lives of the people whom your army and your police shot down when they made this very same demand seven years ago? You have exorcised one ghost. But you cannot exorcise these other ghosts that will haunt you to the end of your days.”

And this delightful exchange:

Mr. Keuneman: “It is indeed ironic that the present Prime Minister should have lost power when he increased the price of rice from 25 cents to 70 cents in 1953 and that he will lose it again when he has brought the price of rice down to 25 cents in 1960. In any case there is no real reason for anybody to be sad. Blessings tend to follow one another, and we can say that after tomorrow rice will still be 25 cents but there will be no UNP Government.”

The Hon. Dudley Senanayake: "Thanks to the UNP."

Mr. Keuneman: "Thanks to the UNP, there will be no UNP Government."

The UNP Government was defeated and elections fixed for July 1960. By now the experiences of the March election had convinced other anti-UNP parties too of the correctness of the policy of progressive unity for which the Communist Party had fought so long and so hard. An electoral agreement was concluded between the SLFP, LSSP and the Communist Party. As a result, the UNP was trounced at the July 1960 elections and a Government headed by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike elected to power.

Keuneman increased his poll to 38,663 at this election, but again succeeded in getting elected only as Second Member as Colombo Central was not included in the No-Contest arrangements and in addition to an SLFP candidate, candidates of the LSSP and MEP who stood no chance of being elected came forward to contest this three-member seat again in spite of their experience in the March election, and only succeeded in splitting the Left vote.

The Sixth Congress of the Communist Party which met in December 1960 summarised the experience that the Party had gained in the sharp and complicated struggles between reaction and progress that had taken place since 1956. The Political Thesis presented by Keuneman analysed the new and favourable conditions that had been created for further initiatives to unite the Left and the anti-imperialist, democratic forces to complete the unfinished tasks of the anti-imperialist stage of the Ceylonese revolution and lay the basis for further advance in the direction of socialism.

In a special Appeal to the People of Ceylon, the Sixth Congress also warned them that a period of sharp struggles between the forces of progress and reaction lay ahead. "It is naive," said the Appeal, "to believe that reaction can be put down by relying on the armed forces and the police, some of whose leaders have proved that they have no sympathy with the people's cause. . . . Let reactionaries in high places in the armed forces, the police and public administration be replaced by men who are loyal to Ceylon and the cause of progress." The Appeal concluded with a call for strengthening the unity of all anti-imperialist and progressive forces in order to resist and rout reaction and carry forward the advance begun in 1956.

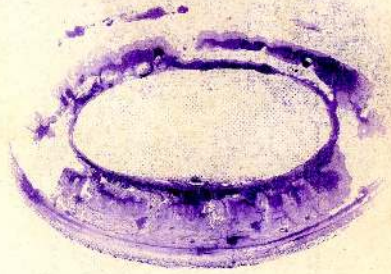
As the Communists had predicted, the sharp struggles between progress and reaction were soon to begin. The Communists whole-heartedly supported the take-over of the assisted denominational schools, the nationalisation of insurance and the foreign oil companies, the extension of social benefits and other progressive measures. In public speeches, in articles in the newspapers and in Parliament, Keuneman justified and supported these steps forward. His speeches supporting the nationalisation of insurance and the Anglo-American oil companies were detailed and factual exposures of how Ceylon and her people had been exploited and swindled by these imperialist monopolies.

Within and outside Parliament the Communists, especially Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe and Pieter Keuneman kept up a consistent fight for the end of foreign monopoly domination of Ceylon's economy and the building of an independent and viable multi-branch economy based on industrialisation, diversified external trade and reformed agriculture.

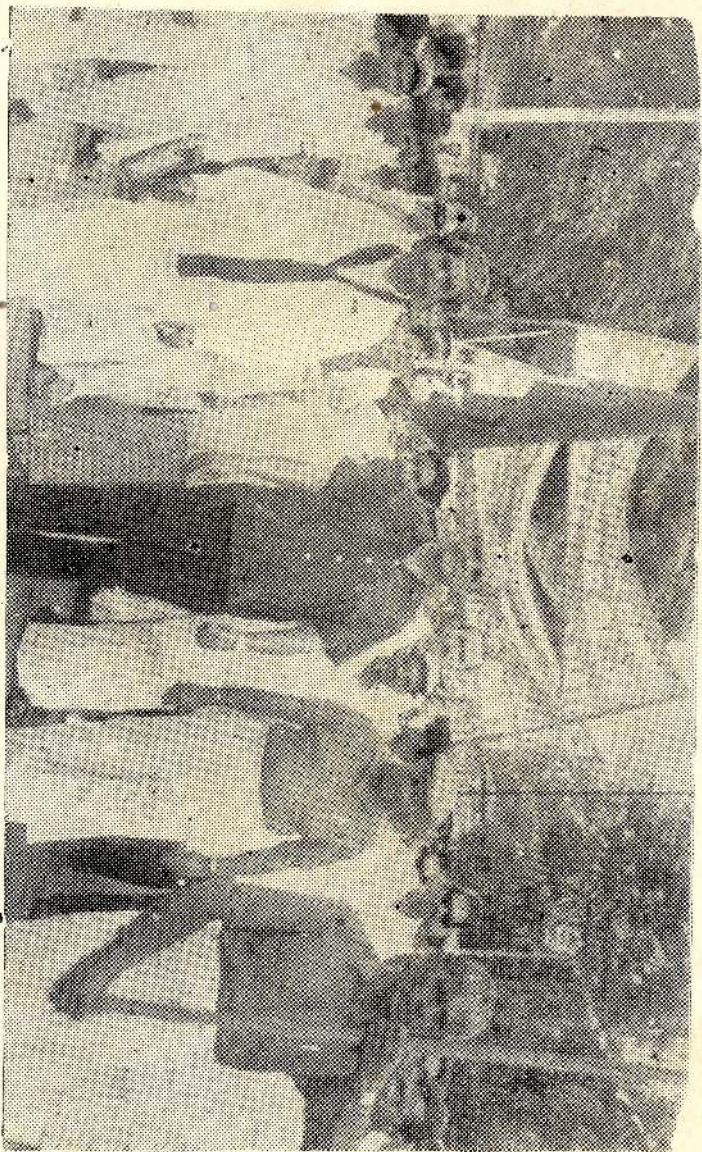
In a number of speeches Keuneman pointed out how the British sterling plantation companies, in the face of the new political changes in Ceylon, were selling their less profitable estates to Ceylonese capitalists at inflated prices and re-investing this money in Kenya and other countries from where they hoped to compete with Ceylon tea. In detailed accounts of the vast profits made by the foreign sterling companies, Keuneman showed that on an average these companies had made as profit every ten years the equivalent of their original investment in Ceylon. On this basis he demanded that the export of their profits, dividends and capital should be stopped and these companies nationalised.

Public sector industrial development with the aid of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries was another major economic measure that the Communists fought for. Despite the resistance and active sabotage of reactionary elements in high places in the administration, many such projects such as the Iron and Steel Mill at Oruwela and the Tyre and Tube Factory at Kelaniya, both built with Soviet aid, were started. The extension of the state's share in the import trade through the take-over of the import of dried fish and the extension of activities of the C. W. E. were also fought for and defended by the Communists. The "People's Budget" campaign was perhaps one of the most successful of the many public campaigns run by the Communists to mobilize support for their economic programme.

All these developments were bitterly resisted by the UNP and the vested interests it represented and defended. The Roman Catholic hierarchy fought the take-over of the assisted schools with great bitterness. The UNP itself launched a "break the law" campaign and the Federal Party attempted to set up a separate administration in the North and East of Ceylon.



At a factory gate meeting



Heading a united demonstration, with Dr. N. M. Perera (LSSP)

It was Pieter Keuneman who was the first to sound the warning in Parliament that foreign and local reactionaries had entered into a conspiracy to stage a coup d'etat and were promoting this conspiracy step by step.

On 9th January 1962, a month before the attempts at a reactionary coup d'etat were made, Keuneman said in Parliament:

“On behalf of the Communist Party, I would like to say that it is necessary to warn the country, the progressive forces of this country, this House and the Hon. Members on the other side that the stage is being gradually but steadily set for a permanent military government in this country. In the name of dealing with a strike situation, a situation is being progressively developed in which more and more authority is passing out of the hands of civilian organisations and coming under direct military control.”

He returned to this same question on January 25th when he told the Government: “You are now taking on a friend who will cut your own throats. Some of you hope to use the military to smash the working class. The military may do its best to oblige you. But if they do succeed in smashing the working class, you are next on the list. As I told you last time, if you put us in prison this week, you will be there a few weeks later — or some of you will be there. And it will be the same military forces that will put you there.”

Two days later was discovered the attempted coup d'etat a few hours before it was due to start and Keuneman was to tell Parliament on the 14th February, referring to his earlier warning: “I underestimated the plotters. They were not prepared even for a time interval between arrests. Both the

Government and the Left were to be arrested and imprisoned on the same day."

On behalf of the Communist Party, he declared that "whatever may have been the differences between us and the Government in the recent past and whatever may be the differences between us at present, we shall give the Government our full and undivided support in all efforts to smash this reactionary conspiracy and to punish its perpetrators."

He said: "As far as our party is concerned we consider that, at this critical juncture, sectional and partisan differences must now take second place to the overall need that all democratic and progressive forces should immediately unite to defeat and crush this reactionary conspiracy which is aimed at subverting the independence of this country and destroying the democratic rights and gains of the people."

Keuneman described the attempted coup as "the latest chapter in a sordid story of reactionary intrigue whose earlier chapters include the break-up of Mr. Bandaranaike's Government in 1959; the foul assassination of Mr. Bandaranaike himself; the short-lived and unsuccessful attempts to stabilise the position of reaction under the two Caretaker Governments; and the struggles against the Petroleum Bill, the schools take-over and other progressive measures which took place in the latter part of 1960 and the early part of 1961."

"The root cause of this coup d'etat," he said, "lies in the continued political, social and economic power of the reactionary forces behind this conspiratorial coup. That is why we say: 'While you continue your investigation into the military land police aspects of this coup d'etat, we ask you, equally firm, to carry on with the investigation into the political aspect'."

He concluded: "In order to facilitate the inquiry, please realise that your best friends are the people of this country and not the armed forces. Please realise that the workers and the Left parties are your allies, whatever differences there may be between us."

"This is not a question of a few Ministers, even the whole Cabinet, and the Left leaders being taken into custody or killed. We are all expendable as persons. But the real intended victims of this conspiracy were the common people who are eternal. In the name of the common people who have sent us to this highest democratic authority in this country, we of the Communist Party ask you to take the steps which we have suggested."

After the experience of the abortive coup d'etat, the Communist Party in August 1962 appealed for the CP, LSSP and MEP to unite on the basis of a minimum programme, to rally other progressive forces behind this programme, and to provide a real fighting leadership to the entire anti-imperialist movement.

The result was the formation in August 1963 of a United Left Front between the CP, LSSP and MEP. At the great rally at Independence Square to inaugurate the ULF formally, the leaders of the other two Left parties paid public tribute to the unremitting work Pieter Keuneman had performed to bring this united front into being.

The struggle to build the unity of the Left movement was made more complicated for Keuneman and his colleagues in the leadership of the Ceylon Communist Party by an organised attempt, supported and encouraged in every way by the leaders of the Communist Party of China,

to split and disorient the Ceylon Communist Party and the mass organisations it led. One of the main planks of the splitters was their fight against Left unity.

The result was a sharp inner - Party struggle in which the overwhelming majority of the Central Committee and the Party rallied together and routed the splitters. In this struggle Pieter Keuneman played a notable part, indefatigably exposing the splitters and the wrong policies and actions of the Chinese leaders and defending the decisions of the Ceylon Communist Party and the general line of the international Communist movement as expressed in the 1957 and 1960 meetings of the fraternal Marxist-Leninist parties.

The growing success of the campaign for unity of the Left had a response within the SLFP itself. In March 1964, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike in an important public speech appealed for the support of the Left parties to fight reaction and take the country forward.

The Seventh Congress of the Ceylon Communist Party met in Colombo in April 1964 after the splitters had been routed and as the campaign for unity forged ahead. A number of delegations from fraternal Communist Parties, including the CPSU, attended this Congress. Messages of support and solidarity were received from almost all the Communist Parties of the world.

Presenting the report of the Central Committee to this Congress, Keuneman said:

“Unity between a united Left movement and the progressive sections within the SLFP is not a new policy for us. Nor does the radical and Leftward shift that has started with-

in the SLFP surprise us. Our policy has all along taken such factors into account. So why should we panic when the very things we predicted start coming true? Our Party welcomes the developments which are taking place which confirm the correctness of our policy.....

“We consider that co-operation between the ULF and the growing radical forces within the SLFP who seek a solution on the Left should be a principled one, based on a common programme. Naturally enough, such a programme must be one that can enthuse and mobilise the progressive movement to defeat reaction and to solve the political and economic crisis in a radical way.....

“A government of the progressive forces, pledged to implement a programme along the lines set out in the 1963 ULF agreement and in which the ULF plays a decisive role, will certainly be a positive development. It can help bring about a series of important political, social and economic transformations and strengthen the role played by Ceylon in the fight for peace and against colonialism.”

Soon after the Congress was over, Mrs. Bandaranaike began negotiations with the ULF with a view to include representatives of the Left in the Government. Unfortunately, the Coalition Government that was eventually formed as a result of these negotiations included representatives of one Left party only—the LSSP. The Right-wing of the SLFP, led by Mr. C. P. de Silva, who were soon to stab their party and Government in the back in collusion with the UNP, vigorously opposed the inclusion of the Communist Party or Mr. Philip Gunawardena in the new Cabinet.

In a statement issued soon after the new Government was formed, the Communist Party pointed out that, although

the inclusion of representatives of the Left in the Government was a welcome step forward, the Coalition Government had been formed on the basis of the destruction of the ULF and the exclusion of the two other Left parties. This was a source of weakness and instability of which the Right-wing reactionaries could take advantage, whatever the numerical majority of the Government in Parliament might be.

Unlike Philip Gunawardena, who viewed these developments subjectively and allowed this set-back to throw him into the arms of Right-wing reaction, the Communist Party appreciated that this step was an improvement on the earlier relation of forces within the Government and pledged its support to the new Government in the struggle against reaction.

In his remarks on the Throne Speech debate that year, Keuneman explained his Party's position —

“This Government is certainly an improvement on the last one. As one who has been associated with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the Left movement, and the Hon. Members who are in the Front Bench and in the Government today, we cannot say that any Government that includes them is worse than one in which they are not there.

“As far as the Communist Party is concerned, we do not agree with the LSSP's decision to join the Government on its own. But now that a Government of the SLFP and the LSSP has been formed, it is an objective fact and all political considerations must start from that objective fact.

“As we have already announced, we shall certainly support and co-operate with every genuine attempt to imple-

ment in this session such progressive measures as the new Government has announced.”

The Communist Party was as good as its word and did all it could to co-operate with the new Government in the fight against reaction. It supported the Government's efforts to break the monopoly of the daily press by capitalist concerns and fought side-by-side with the Governemnt against the attempts of the reactionaries to overthrow it.

But the Communist Party's assessment of the essential weakness of the SLFP - LSSP Coalition Government despite its large numerical majority in Parliament proved to be true. Foreign and local reaction were quick to seize on the fact that the new Government did not represent all progressive forces, and on mistakes that the Government itself made in the management of the economy to mount a general offensive to overthrow the Government. In this offensive, foreign and local reaction received the support of splitters like the Samarakkody and Sanmugathasan groups that had been expelled from the LSSP and the Communist Party for their disruptive actions.

Using the most dubious and despicable methods, these reactionaries arranged the defection of the SLFP Right-wing and their supporters in a crucial vote in Parliament on 3rd December 1964.

In a succinct intervention while “Operation Crossover” was under way, Pieter Keuneman remarked:—

“I remember — and I was present in this House — when the late Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike crossed over from the United National Party. That was the beginning of a new

stage in the political history of this country. Since then there have been many attempts to thwart and to prevent the further development that started in 1951 and again in 1956.

“We have had since the assassination of Mr. Banadara-naike, the abortive election of March 1960, the attempted coup d’etat of 1962 and today we are witnessing the coup d’etat that Lake House, particularly, has been threatening for a long time.

“In this straight class fight, when all the reactionaries have joined together, when certain Hon. Members have suddenly started to search their political consciences when Lake House is in trouble, and when a clear division is taking place between reactionary forces and those opposed to them, the intention of the Communist Party is to vote with the Government.

“We do that because a very clear line of division is taking place. I am only sorry that some people who have been in the progressive movement, some people who call themselves revolutionaries have at the moment associated themselves with the United National Party and Lake House. .

“As far as our Party is concerned, we shall stand against all those forces that are with the United National Party.”

A few minutes after Keuneman sat down, Mr. C. P. de Silva and his group crossed the floor and joined the UNP-led Opposition. Mrs. Bandaranaike’s Government was brought down by one vote.

Together with other progressive forces, the Communist Party called out a huge demonstration to condemn the

reactionary conspiracy that had overthrown the Government. All over Colombo the workers downed tools and Keuneman was one of those marching at the head of a mammoth demonstration to Galle Face. Mrs. Bandaranaike, who came specially to attend this Galle Face Rally, announced that her Government was ready to face the polls.

It was at this historic rally that Pieter Keuneman announced that a new daily newspaper, *Aththa*, would start in a few days to spearhead the fight of the progressive forces in the coming General Election and thereafter.

The General Elections of March 1965 which followed saw the polarisation of political forces between progress and reaction and was bitterly fought. Once again the SLFP, LSSP and the Communist Party contested on the basis of an agreement.

The progressive camp, however, met with a temporary set-back in this General Election. The UNP was unable to win an absolute majority, but formed a Government based on a secret agreement between the leaders of the UNP and the Federal Party, with other reactionary groups also tacked on.

Pieter Keuneman was himself re-elected in Colombo Central. He polled 41,478 - more votes than he had received in any previous election bar the 1956 one. The leaders of the two splitters' groups that had been expelled from the LSSP and the C.P. - P.B. Tampoe and Nagalingam Sanmugathan - contested Keuneman in the hope that they could split the progressive vote and defeat him. But both these gentlemen were defeated and forfeited their deposits. An SLFP candidate,

who also contested the seat, was not elected but took away a slice of the progressive vote. As a result Keuneman was returned as Third Member for Colombo Central in a General Election when the UNP generally swept the polls in Colombo.

VI

HATH HOWLA AND AFTER.

The formation of the UNP - Federal Party **Hath Howl** Government delighted the foreign and local reactionaries. In certain sections of the progressive movement this temporary victory of reaction caused bewilderment and dismay.

On behalf of the new Government, the reactionary monopoly newspapers tried to sow confusion and division in the ranks of the anti-UNP forces. They told the SLFP that the main reason for its electoral defeat was Mrs. Bandaranaike's alliance with the Left parties.

These manoeuvres were exposed by Pieter Keuneman in a series of articles he wrote in the newspapers of the Communist Party setting out the CP's views. In these articles he debunked the claims of the reactionary newspapers. He pointed out that the Left parties had, in fact, polled more votes in this General Election than in any previous one, a clear enough proof of the falsity of the claim that the voters

were opposed to the LSSP and the Communist Party or to any alliance that included these parties. On the basis of a concrete analysis of the electoral results, Keuneman also showed that it was precisely in those constituencies and areas where the alliance between the SLFP and the Left parties had been firmest that the anti-UNP forces had done best.

In these articles, Keuneman also analysed the real reasons for the temporary defeat of the progressive forces. Among the reasons he gave were an insufficient degree of overall unity between the anti-UNP parties, mistakes made by the SLFP and Coalition Governments in the sphere of economic management and in improving the lot of the common people, the failure of these Governments to get rid of reactionaries, opportunists and careerists in high places or to weed out corruption resolutely enough, as well as a number of mistakes in the selection of candidates and other detailed matters concerned with electoral arrangements.

Keuneman went on to show that, despite its majority of seats in Parliament, the new Government was neither united nor stable. An analysis of the electoral results showed, in fact, a relative equilibrium in the balance of forces between Opposition and Government, with only a slight edge in favour of the Government.

Keuneman predicted that the contradictions within the Government and between the Government and the people would mature and grow as the people realised that the Government was unable "to redeem the political promissory notes and to honour the political dud cheques that it scattered about so freely during the recent General Election."

The main task before the progressive forces, he said, was to cement the unity between the SLFP, the LSSP and the

Communist Party that had developed prior to and during the General Elections, to convert this alliance into a stable united front around a common programme, and under the leadership of such a united front conduct a series of mass struggles of all kinds whose aim was to defeat the **Hath Howl** Government as early as possible and replace it by a SLFP-LSSP-CP Coalition Government.

When Parliament met to debate the first Throne Speech of the **Hath Howl** Government, it was Pieter Keuneman whom the Opposition parties chose to lead their attack.

In this celebrated speech, Keuneman was at his sparkling best, using to full advantage his talent for lucid exposition and cogent analysis, his gift for striking phrases and sharp repartee, and his long experience in Parliamentary strategy and tactics. Rarely has any Government in Ceylon been so devastatingly dissected and debunked.

Keuneman set out to establish his major premise that the "so-called National Government has no mandate from the people and is, in reality, an opportunist and unstable coalition of divergent anti-national and reactionary forces." In order to do so, he first used his skill at cajolery, question, provocation and even downright insult on the Prime Minister and the Federal Party chief in turn, in order to prise out of one of them the admission that a secret agreement had, in fact, been entered into by their two parties.

Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake nibbled at but did not swallow any of the baits Keuneman threw out. All he would concede was that "if there is an agreement or no agreement, that is a matter between the United National Party and the Federal Party."

This drew from Keuneman the retort: "If the two main parties of the so-called National Government have come to an agreement or an understanding or a bargain or a sell-out, and a Government is formed on that basis, does my Hon. Friend, with his long experience of politics, seriously expect us to regard this fact as being on the same level as a private communication between two lovers, or as a letter between a man and his wife, or as a business transaction between two private firms, or even as top security classified material whose secrecy is essential to the security of the state?"

Keuneman did however succeed in trapping the Federal Party chief. Baiting Mr. Chelvanayakam with copious extracts from the speeches of the leader and other M.P.'s of the Federal Party, Keuneman extracted from that canny Queen's Counsel an admission that such an agreement did exist. Having drawn blood, Keuneman then proceeded to twist his knife in the wound:—

"I wish to establish the point," he thundered, "that the so-called National Government is an opportunist alliance and not a principled alliance. It is an alliance based on deception of the people, an alliance to promote only the selfish class interests of the upper strata of the Sinhalese and Tamils.

"The leading parties of this Government, the UNP and the Federal Party resorted to the most abject forms of chauvinist demagogy in order to maintain their political hegemony over the Sinhalese and Tamil masses. Their claims to represent the so-called national interests of the respective communities to which they make demagogic appeals will now be tested in practice. They can avoid and dodge the issue now, but very soon what they have done must come to light."

Tearing to shreds the Government's claim that it had established "national unity" Keuneman remarked:

"Surely, if they have created a basis for national unity, that is something to be proud of and not something to hide as they are now trying to do. Can it be that they have jointly sold out the vital interests of both the Sinhalese and Tamil masses in a shoddy and opportunist horse-deal designed to protect the privileges and the selfish class interests of the upper strata of both communities?"

He then waded into the smaller parties of the **Hath Howla**, showing their contradictions with the UNP and with each other. Of Mr. C. P. de Silva's party Keuneman said cuttingly: "The gentlemen of the SLFSP are past-masters of the delayed conscience."

Recent exchanges between Mr. Philip Gunawardena and Messrs. Dudley Senanayake and J. R. Jayewardene were called to mind, where Philip Gunawardena called the UNP "Enemy No. 1 of this country" and its leaders "hirelings of imperialism", "people who were behind the coup, reactionaries," and "conspirators." The UNP leaders had retorted by calling Mr. Gunawardena a "murderer" and saying that he was "off his head".

Keuneman went on to show that the pro-imperialist character of the Government and its heavy dependence on imperialist assistance for its existence constituted a grave and present danger to Ceylon's independence and sovereignty and to the democratic rights and standards of living and culture of its people.

Looking back on this and other speeches of Keuneman at the time, it is remarkable how many of his prognostications about the new Government and the development of events have come true.

For instance, in the Throne Speech debate of 19th April 1965, Keuneman specifically warned against "the steadily increasing powers and authority that are being taken over by the Hon. Minister of State (Mr. J. R. Jayewardene)". He called this a "disquieting trend" and said "democracy will also be struck down in the process." It was not much later that the Prime Minister had publicly to admit the development within his party of persons with "dictatorial" tendencies.

In September 1965, just after the **Hath Howla** Government's first Budget, Keuneman published a booklet entitled "*Hath Howla's March Backwards*". Based on his Budget Speech of that year, this booklet analysed the real meaning and intentions of the Government in the field of economy.

In this booklet Keuneman characterised the **Hath Howla** as "a Government of the foreign vested interests and the big Ceylonese capitalists, a Government that is ready to sell the interests of Ceylon to foreign imperialism, a Government that seeks to foster neo-colonialism in Ceylon."

Characterising the Government's main line in economic policy, Keuneman said:

"Real economic development with the assistance of the USSR and other socialist countries is to be replaced by *pin paddi* (charitable allowances) from the imperialist powers in return for political and economic subordination to imperialist dictates and a free field for neo-colonialism in Ceylon."



With Mrs Bandaranaike at the 1966 May Day Rally



Addressing the 22nd CPSU Congress

It is remarkable how many predictions in this booklet as to the result of the Government's economic policy have proved true. Dependence on World Bank loans has led, as Keuneman predicted, to an attack on the food subsidies and the social services. The Government's great expectations of massive economic aid from its American and other imperialist friends have not materialised and Ceylon's economy and people have suffered greatly from the sweeping concessions the Government has made to the foreign capitalists in the hope of getting such aid. Public sector industrial development has been frozen, aid negotiated with the socialist countries by the former Government has been largely unused, the state's share in the import trade has been progressively dismantled, the production of subsidiary foodstuffs has been entrusted to foreign and local big capitalists and the capitalist companies at the expense of the peasants. Failure to curb the foreign monopolies has enabled them artificially to depress the prices of Ceylon's exports, resulting in a sharp drop in export earnings and a consequential sharp reduction in essential imports.

Keuneman posed the main issue thus:

“Do we want Ceylon to be a truly independent and prosperous country progressively developing towards socialism along a non-capitalist path? Or do we want Ceylon to be a neo-colony like South Vietnam?”

Urging the need for advance along the first path, Keuneman set out in this booklet several proposals of the Communist Party in regard to the economic policy that the SLFP-LSSP - CP alliance should fight for, and called for the political strengthening of this alliance as well.

The policies that the Communist Party and Pieter Keuneman advanced in these documents have won wider accept-

ance among the progressive forces of Ceylon in the past two and a half years. Keuneman himself has repeatedly expounded and developed these policies in speeches in Parliament, at public and by-election rallies, in lectures and writings. Both the Communists and Keuneman were in the forefront of struggles for these policies - the best known of which was the general strike and Day of Mourning on 8th January 1966, which resulted in the Government imposing a state of emergency which has continued ever after (with the exception of 10 days), restricting trade union and democratic rights, banning Opposition newspapers and public meetings, and victimising tens of thousands of workers in various ways.

Like those of all the other Communists, a great deal of Keuneman's time and energies have been devoted in these two and a half years to the problems of building working class and progressive unity. The Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, of which he is President, has played a notable part in the formation of the Joint Committee of Trade Unions, the highest degree of trade union unity realised so far in Ceylon's history. This Committee combines eleven of the major trade union centres and federations of workers in the public and private sectors, organising over one and a quarter million workers.

As a spokesman of the Communist Party, Keuneman has campaigned indefatigably for the development of the SLFP - LSSP - CP alliance into a stable united front based on a common programme, around which all anti-imperialist and progressive forces can be united for a SLFP - LSSP - CP Coalition Government. In meetings, writings and discussions, he has helped to elucidate and overcome many knotty problems that impeded the further development of unity.

During this period, the Communist Party has performed a signal service to the cause of unity and the further advance of the progressive and anti-imperialist movement by their work to help *Aththa*, the daily newspaper of the progressive movement, which has become a scourge of the imperialist and all reactionaries and an inspirer, educator and organiser of the progressive forces in Ceylon. In this work, Keuneman too has played his part, frequently contributing articles to *Aththa* on important current topics, and helping this newspaper in numerous ways.

On the occasion of his 50th birthday, the fight for unity of the anti-imperialist and progressive forces, for which Keuneman has devoted so great a part of his public life, has grown immensely and is at the point of culmination. The advance of this unity to a new and yet higher stage will be one of the best birthday presents that Keuneman could receive.

VII

INTERNATIONALISM

No other political party has done as much as the Communist Party to acquaint the people of Ceylon with progressive developments abroad and the experiences to be learnt from them; to organise solidarity actions with struggles for national liberation, democracy and socialism in other lands; to unite the working class and democratic movements of Ceylon with the international working class and democratic movements; and to foster Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism among the working class and Left movement.

Pieter Keuneman has been in the forefront of all such activities.

He was one of the first persons in Ceylon to draw attention to the increasingly menacing role of gendarme for world reaction that American imperialism had begun to play after the Second World War. In Parliament and outside it, he kept up

a continuous exposure of the aims, intentions and actions of US imperialism in Asia and especially in relation to Ceylon. Keuneman was the first to unmask in Parliament the reactionary and subversive roles played by the US-dominated World Bank, P. L. 480 and other forms of US "aid"; the "Peace" Corps, Asia Foundation and other C.I.A.-sponsored organisations, thus alerting the entire progressive movement to various forms and methods that US imperialism seeks to extend its domination over other countries.

Another contribution made by Keuneman to heightening national awareness has been his unremitting, concrete and detailed exposure of the methods and extent of British imperialist exploitation of Ceylon, especially after independence. It was Keuneman who brought out in Parliament the enormous profits that British sterling plantation companies make out of Ceylon year by year, the reactionary and exploitative role of the foreign banks and the unbridled plunder and devious sharp practices of British and other foreign firms who dominate the import-export trade. Quoting from the undisputed but secret records of these firms themselves, Keuneman showed that, with a total investment of a little over Rs. 600 million left in Ceylon, the British companies make the equivalent of this amount in profits every few years.

Together with his Party, Keuneman has figured prominently in all the solidarity actions in Ceylon with struggles abroad against imperialist aggression. At the end of World War II, he was prominent in the struggle to close Ceylon's harbours to Dutch imperialism in its attempt to re-take Indonesia, speaking at innumerable meetings and leading the strikes in the ports of Colombo and Trincomalee which finally compelled the Government of the day to close these ports to Dutch shipping.

Keuneman was just as much to the forefront in the mass solidarity campaigns over the Congo following the murder of Patrice Lumumba, in the solidarity actions with Cuba when it was subjected to American aggression, and in the mass campaigns to condemn the aggressive attacks by imperialism and the Israeli government on the UAR and other Arab lands in 1956 and 1967. Many other similar campaigns of solidarity with the victims of imperialist aggression or those fighting for their national independence from imperialism and neo-colonialism have received Keuneman's active support.

One such campaign with which Keuneman is prominently associated at present is the solidarity campaign with the heroic peoples of Vietnam against US imperialist aggression. Apart from his many public speeches and writings and Parliamentary initiatives in support of Vietnam, Keuneman was the author of an amendment adopted by the last Parliament *nem con* calling for the withdrawal of US armed forces from Vietnam and a settlement based on the Geneva Agreement of 1954.

Keuneman has also taken a leading part in the current campaign to condemn Israeli aggression against the UAR and other Arab countries and to support the world-wide demand that Israel should vacate its aggression and withdraw its troops. He has spoken at many lectures and rallies explaining the true facts about Israeli aggression and was co-sponsor of the joint Opposition letter to the Prime Minister asking him to suspend diplomatic and other relations with Israel until such time as Israel withdraws her armed forces to the positions they occupied prior to the aggression.

The many initiatives that Keuneman, on behalf of the Communist Party, has taken to improve relations between

Ceylon and the socialist countries are well-known. His persistent campaign in Parliament for the normalisation of relations with the GDR and the recognition of both German states on a basis of equality, resulted in the GDR representation in Ceylon being raised to the status of a Consulate-General, a step that made the West German neo-colonialists cut off their so-called "aid" to Ceylon. The recognition of the Mongolian People's Republic, for which Keuneman had repeatedly agitated in Parliament, was another achievement.

It has been a source of great satisfaction to the Communists and to Keuneman personally to see the increasing association of progressive trade union and democratic mass organisations in Ceylon with international organisations such as the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the World Federation of Democratic Youth.

When these international organisations were first started it was only those organisations in Ceylon led or influenced by the Communists that maintained relations with them. On behalf of these organisations, Keuneman attended early international conferences such as the 1950 meeting of the World Peace Council in Warsaw, the International Conference on Social Security called by the W.F.T.U. in Vienna in 1953, the Executive Committee meeting of the World Peace Council in Berlin and the I.L.O. Conference on Plantations in Havana, also in 1953.

But as the Communists explained the real nature and aims of these international democratic organisations, many other organisations in Ceylon, some led by the SLFP and LSSP, and some Independent, began to become members of or associate themselves with the work of these international bodies.

10241

Pieter Keuneman himself is today not only an acknowledged leader of the Communist and Left movement of Ceylon, but also a well-known and respected figure in the international Communist and workers' movement. He has led delegations of the Ceylon Communist Party to the historic Moscow meeting of Communist and Workers' parties in Moscow in November 1957 and to other international conferences and meetings of the fraternal Marxist-Leninist parties. His speeches at these meetings, many of which have been published abroad, have been received with respect.

Keuneman has also led fraternal delegations from the Ceylon Communist Party to the Congresses of other fraternal parties. He headed the Communist Party's delegations to the 21st, 22nd and 23rd Congresses of the CPSU in 1959, 1961 and 1966 respectively and to the Congresses of the Communist Parties of Czechoslovakia and India and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. Among the other Congresses of Communist Parties that he attended was the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1956.

At these meetings and Congresses and in many bilateral visits abroad, Keuneman got to know most of the leaders of the international Communist movement and was able to have many rewarding discussions with them.

Keuneman has also taken a leading part in many discussions and conferences of the international Communist movement devoted to the theoretical elucidation of current problems of the world revolutionary movement. In 1964 on the occasion of the centenary of the foundation of the First International he read a special paper on "Current Problems of the New Stage of the National Liberation Movement" to a seminar organised in Berlin by **Problems of**

Peace and Socialism, the theoretical journal of the international Communist movement published in many languages including Sinhala. Keuneman was also one of the speakers, together with Leonid Brezhnev and Walter Ulbricht, at a public meeting in Berlin to celebrate this historic centenary.

In the same year Keuneman also represented his Party at an international seminar in Moscow which reviewed the experiences and developments in the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism since the foundation of the First International. Keuneman was selected to make the opening address to this seminar. He later read a paper to it in which he developed certain ideas in the 1960 Statement of the fraternal Marxist-Leninist parties on the possibility of "National Democracy and a non-capitalist path of development to socialism for newly - liberated, former colonial countries." This subject had not been elaborated much in Marxist-Leninist writings earlier and Keuneman's contribution was one of the first of its kind. It was later republished in **Problems of Peace and Socialism**.

Pieter Keuneman's articles on various problems of the international Communist movement have often been published abroad in **Problems of Peace and Socialism**, *Pravda* and in the periodicals and newspapers of many fraternal Communist Parties in both the socialist and capitalist countries. He has often lectured to various institutes of the Academies of Sciences in the USSR and other socialist countries on Ceylon and on general and specific problems of the international revolutionary movements.

In Ceylon itself Keuneman has been one of the most indefatigable teachers of Marxism-Leninism through lectures, booklets and other writings. His frequent lectures on

problems of world politics and the international revolutionary movement are well-known to and well attended by Party cadres and political activists, both Party and non-Party.

Keuneman has often spoken warmly about the close fraternal relations between the Communists of Ceylon and those of other countries and, in particular, about the high regard in which the Ceylon Communist Party holds the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

“The CPSU,” he told the 23rd Congress of Lenin’s Party, “has always occupied a place of special affection in the hearts of Ceylonese Communists and our Party will stand side by side with you to implement the general line of our Communist movement worked out at the 1957 and 1960 meetings.”

“All we have seen and heard,” he went on, “has convinced us that this 23rd Congress will be yet another memorable landmark in your victorious advance to communist society. This Congress will enhance the high prestige of your Party and your country and will strengthen still further the Soviet Union’s outstanding contribution to the fight for peace and national liberation, to the success of the world revolutionary process.... This Congress has demonstrated once again your Party’s unswerving devotion to Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, its deep and abiding consciousness of its revolutionary duty, and its determination to spare nothing in order to fulfil this duty.”

Relations between the Ceylon Communist Party and the Communist Party of China were warm and cordial for many years, and had been enhanced by frequent exchanges

of delegations at various levels. Keuneman himself twice visited China — in 1956 and 1960 — when he had long discussions with the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. These good relations, unfortunately, began to be strained at the end of 1962 when differences became apparent between them, first on the events of the Caribbean crisis and then regarding the Sino-Indian border war. They deteriorated further after 1963, when the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party came out with a “general line” of their own for the international Communist movement, in repudiation of the general line that they, together with all other Communist Parties, had accepted and signed at the 1957 and 1960 meetings in Moscow.

When the Chinese leaders realised that they could get no support from the Ceylon Communist Party for their erroneous policies and tactics, they embarked on the unpardonable task of encouraging personally ambitious and disruptive elements like N. Sanmugathan to split the Party.

Repudiating this political line and tactics at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in 1964, Keuneman said, on behalf of the Party:

“The special ideological and theoretical views of the CPC leaders are intimately connected with their practical actions in supporting and promoting splits in other fraternal parties and in the international Communist movement.”

He referred to the type of people whom the Chinese leaders had picked upon to support them and asked:

“Since when has Marxism-Leninism had to be defended by extolling all types of opportunists, petty-bourgeois

adventurers, splitters, corrupt persons and sometimes downright scoundrels as 'genuine Marxist-Leninists'?"

He characterised the interference on the part of the CPC leaders in the internal affairs of other fraternal parties as "dangerous and impermissible" and called upon the entire movement to rebuff these tactics and to defend and strengthen the unity and cohesion of the international Communist movement.

He went on: "If the relations between the CPC and our Party are not normal, it is because the CPC leaders have interfered in our internal affairs and encouraged splits and factionalism. We should like to normalise relations, but this requires that the CPC should not interfere in our internal affairs."

In an article "On Recent Events in China" published in September 1966, Keuneman expressed the grief, horror and indignation of Ceylonese Communists at what masquerades as a 'great proletarian cultural revolution' in China.

"Communists who base themselves on the enlightened teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin," he wrote, "cannot but be aghast and repelled at some of the events that are taking place in China in the name of a 'great proletarian cultural revolution.'

"These events and the ideological and theoretical arguments advanced to justify them are a gross caricature of the principles of scientific communism. They only help to discredit the true ideas of communism in the eyes of the world."

Keuneman went on to show how, by pursuing a wrong and dangerous line in opposition to the general line that all

the Communist and Workers' parties, including the CPC, had worked out collectively, the Chinese leaders had done great damage to the world-wide fight against imperialism, and for peace, national liberation, socialism and communism. Their policies and actions had led to tragic and costly defeats as in Indonesia, to the virtual isolation of China and to the aggravation almost to breaking-point of its relations with most of the socialist countries and many of the new national states. Its only effect on American imperialism was to encourage it to become more bold and aggressive."

"It is tragic," he said, "that such events should be taking place in China, a great country that has one of the oldest unified and continuous cultural histories in the world..... Everyone who recognises what a great contribution the Chinese Revolution made to the development of the world revolutionary process can only be aghast and full of sorrow at such events, for they signify a degeneration and not a development of the Chinese revolution."

In his speech to the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, Keuneⁿ man emphasised the urgent need for unity in the socialist^t camp and the international Communist movement. He said:

"One of the reasons why imperialism has become more bold and aggressive is the differences that have arisen in the socialist camp and the international Communist movement. Our Party fully supports the inspiring call made in Comrade Brezhnev's Report for the unity of the socialist camp and the international Communist movement in the struggle against our common enemy, imperialism. We agree with the steps he proposes to restore such unity and value highly the patient and principled way in which the CPSU has worked to re-establish unity. It is not difficult now for anyone to see who is for unity and who is not...."

“It is now the duty of all fraternal parties to seek out all the possible concrete forms and matters around which we can unite and act together. That is why we strongly support the proposal for united action by the socialist camp and the fraternal parties in support of and in solidarity with our valiant comrades in Vietnam.”

Elaborating on this theme at a speech to Party functionaries in Colombo on “Problems of the World Revolutionary Movement” in 1967, Keuneman added:

“We welcome the fact that some of the Communist Parties which were misled by the wrong and dangerous line of the Mao Tse-tung group in the Chinese Communist Party have now realised their mistakes, returned to the mainstream of the international Communist movement and come out strongly in favour of unity. The number of such parties was never very large, but the fact that such dissensions should exist at all weakened our movement and encouraged our enemy, imperialism....

“It has now become clear that, within China and the Chinese Communist Party itself, opposition to the disastrous policies of the Mao Tse-tung group is strong and growing..

“Extremely favourable conditions for the restoration of overall unity of our movement once again have begun to mature. We should appreciate and encourage all such tendencies. We should explore all means to strengthen unity.

“Bilateral discussions and joint statements between fraternal Parties have had good results. We ourselves have had such discussions and issued such statements with other Parties. Where regional conferences of fraternal Parties

have been held, they have been a success. The Karlovy Vary conference of fraternal Parties in Europe is a recent example of this. We hope most sincerely that it will be possible before long to be able to hold such a conference in Asia, where the blows of American imperialism are being concentrated at the moment.

“At its Seventh Congress, our Party declared its support for another international meeting of the fraternal Parties. We are still of this view. So much has happened since our last meeting in 1960 and the fraternal Parties need to evaluate these developments and collectively elaborate our common tasks in the period ahead. Such a new international meeting will be a great help to the smaller and younger fraternal Parties in particular.”

VIII

COMRADE PIETER

Pieter Keuneman has been so long in the forefront of the anti-imperialist and working class struggles of Ceylon that it is sometimes forgotten that, at 50 years, he is among the youngest of the front-rank leaders of the Left movement in Ceylon and the Opposition in Parliament.

It is not only his many outstanding personal abilities that made Keuneman's rapid rise to a leading position in the Communist Party and the working class and progressive movement possible. His unremitting and devoted work for these movements over quarter of a century, his integrity and single-mindedness of purpose, and his affability and accessibility to everyone have also helped to win him respect and affection from all sections of the progressive movement.

From the point of view of birth, education and family connections, Pieter Keuneman had all the qualifications and opportunities to shine in the orbit of capitalism. But

he chose to renounce all this and to throw in his lot with the working class. This involved a series of personal adjustments and transformations that Keuneman carried through conscientiously and with unflinching good humour. The student of Latin, Greek and modern European languages had to learn to make public speeches in Sinhala; the ex-President of the Cambridge Union had to learn how to organise and lead strikes.

"When I began my political work," Keuneman once said, "I used to be introduced to a working class audience as the son of a Supreme Court Judge who had 'crossed over'. You can imagine my humiliation and embarrassment at what was, I presume, meant to be a compliment. It was only when I got to the stage when I was introduced with 'Comrade Pieter will now speak' or 'There's no need to introduce the next speaker' that I knew that I had really succeeded in crossing the line."

Even those who do not see eye to eye with Keuneman politically acknowledge this fact. Howard Wriggins, a Professor of Princeton University who made an exhaustive on-the-spot study of Ceylon politics and then wrote the voluminous tome, *The Dilemmas of a New Nation*, said about Keuneman that "despite his social skills and his ability to meet the 'best society' as a social equal, of all Marxists he has perhaps best identified himself as a 'friend of the people'."

Another foreign commentator, Harry Hopkins, in his book *New Worlds Arising* about post-war South East Asia, also thinks the same. "Keuneman," he says, "is probably the most widely respected of all the Opposition leaders. His knowledge of Ceylon and all its problems is immense and often first-hand."

All who know Keuneman are impressed by his high idealism, intellectual brilliance and Communist humanism, as well as his simplicity, affability, personal generosity and accessibility to everyone. His patent sincerity is acknowledged even by his opponents. Even the late Mr. D. S. Senanayake, Keuneman's political foe and his father's friend, once said in Parliament of Keuneman that he was "an honest Pieter, if a mistaken one."

People often speak about the sacrifices that Keuneman has made. Such tributes annoy Keuneman who is rarely irritated except by mechanical objects that don't work, telephones that ring incessantly and personal possessions like his fountain-pen and spectacles which tend to get misplaced. "I don't see that there is any sacrifice involved in doing what I consider right and what I want to do," he says.

Keuneman's mind is sharp and lively. He can get to the guts of complex questions very quickly. But he is cautious of this gift which, he considers, tends to encourage facile conclusions and discourage a profound and concrete study of important matters. Unlike his wife, Maud, who is a model of planning and precision in work, Keuneman is sometimes inclined to put matters off until the last minute. ("It's my journalistic background; I like to work against deadlines," he quips). But his capacity for hard and concentrated work is prodigious. When preparing a report for a Party meeting or a Budget speech for Parliament, he has been known to work for 12 to 18 hours at a stretch, oblivious to outside distractions and hardly even pausing for food.

Keuneman's powers of endurance are due to his good health and his ability to relax instantly and go to sleep at will. A former chain-smoker, he has now stopped smoking

altogether - a fact that the cartoonists to whom an ever-drooping cigarette is Keuneman's identity symbol have not yet caught up with. In recent years, Keuneman has begun to look after his health with greater care, and early every morning is out for a swim or a brisk walk. It took him many years and the death of several comrades and friends to make him realise that he had a political duty to look after his health.

Keuneman's working day generally follows a set pattern. He is up early and, after his regular exercise and a quick look at the morning's newspapers, he spends his time until nearly 10 a.m. (when he has his first meal) attending to the many people who call daily to see him - constituents, Party members and others with problems big and small about which they want Keuneman's advice and help. These problems cover a wide field - housing, rent, employment, exploitation by slum landlords, harassment by the police or other Government authorities, schools, sanitation, shortages of essential articles at co-operative stores and experiences of delays and other vexations at the hands of Governmental and local government bureaucrats. Many people call to discuss personal problems and to seek Keuneman's advice.

Keuneman attaches great political importance to such discussions, for from them he is able to gauge what particular problems are agitating the minds of ordinary people at any particular place or moment.

The rest of the morning usually finds Keuneman at his Party headquarters, sitting in at meetings of various bureaux and committees or dealing with problems of the Communist Party and its members.

His afternoons are usually devoted to reading and preparing various reports and materials, except when Parliament is in session.

On evenings, Keuneman usually addresses public meetings in Colombo or outside it, delivers lectures or visits branches of the Communist Party or its youth leagues.

For about ten days in each month, usually at week-ends, he is away from Colombo, speaking at meetings or engaged in other Party work in the outstations.

When work is over, Keuneman and his wife relax at home, reading or listening to music or talking with visitors. From time to time they see a film, play or ballet or visit friends themselves. Keuneman's personal library contains over 3,000 books, and to read the titles on his bookshelves is not merely to discover how wide is his range of interests but also an education in itself. As both Keuneman and his wife are fast and avid readers, the library keeps being added to.

Listening to gramophone records and recording music on his tape-recorder are two other interests which occupy Keuneman's spare time. Keuneman's collection of records and tapes, which range from classical music to classical jazz and a vast number of folk, revolutionary and protest songs in many languages, could keep a lover of music happy for several weeks. Like his library of books, it has been lovingly built up over the years. "It's my main concession to the acquisitive instinct," Keuneman says.

Both Keuneman and his wife are balletomanes, and invariably try to see every new ballet performed in Ceylon. Many well-known dancers and musicians are their personal



With his wife, Maud, after his 1952 election.



Talking to women in his constituency

friends and the Keunemans often discuss with them the ballets they produce. Whenever in Moscow, Keuneman is a regular patron of the Bolshoi ballet (he has seen *Swan Lake* 15 times) and can discuss for hours the merits of different dancers and ballets.

Keuneman's fondness for swimming, especially snorkelling and skin-diving, is a private joke among his comrades. Whenever a speaker is needed for a meeting near Hikkaduwa, Weligama or Polhena in Matara, the cry is: "Ask Pieter, he's sure to agree." And when he does, Keuneman usually finds time to don his mask and flippers and inspect the coral reef, the turtles and the many-coloured fish.

Keuneman has little time or opportunity to take part in all the activities that interest him. A keen photographer at one time, he rarely uses his cameras now. But he retains his interest in painting and attends almost every new exhibition. Ceylon wood and stone carvings and *kolam* masks are also among his interests.

Keuneman's ability as an orator, debater and public speaker are too well known to need much comment. Over the years and especially with the switch-over to Sinhala, Keuneman's speaking style has changed considerably and become more direct, simple and forceful.

Apart from lucidity and eloquence, Keuneman is a past-master of the sarcastic quip and the devastating retort which flattens anyone bold enough to heckle him. Examples of these are legion.

When the Tamil Congress split in 1948 after Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam joined the D. S. Senanayake Cabinet

while a section led by Mr. Chelvanayakam broke away, Keuneman weighed in with the acid comment: "For the first time the Tamil Congress has begun to practice the fifty-fifty it preaches. Fifty per cent are voting with the Government, and fifty per cent with the Opposition."

So, too, when Mr. Jim Munasinghe betrayed the SLFP to vote for the short-lived minority Government formed by Dudley Senanayake after the March 1960 General Election. Said Keuneman: "I have heard of rats deserting sinking ships. But this is the first time I have seen a rat trying to jump on one."

When the ebullient Sir John Kotelawela tried to heckle Keuneman in Parliament, he was crushed with the retort: "I think the Honourable Prime Minister is the supreme embodiment of the triumph of matter over mind."

Nor did Dr. E. M. V. Naganathan fare any better. When once, interrupting Keuneman, he muttered something about one step backward, two steps forward being the Communist creed, Keuneman came down heavily on him with the reply: "When my hon. friend the Member for Nallur was carrying on satyagraha in Galle Face he took so many steps backward so fast that he landed up without any clothes in the Galle Face Hotel and ruined our tourist trade."

A UNP back-bencher who tried to heckle Keuneman during his famous Hartal speech was silenced when Keuneman told him: "If the hon. Member for Hambantota had twice the amount of brains he has now, he would still be a half-wit."

Keuneman described Premier Dahanayake's nonsensical "Political Notebook" over Radio Ceylon as written by "an imbecile striving unsuccessfully to qualify as a half-wit."

Pieter Keuneman can wield not only the rapier but also the pole-axe when it comes to dealing with renegades from the progressive movement.

To the late Mahanama Samaraweera, who left the Communist Party to become a Minister, Keuneman snapped: "I don't want to cast any pearls before - the Hon. member for Matara. The gentlemen opposite may have made him a Minister. But let him never forget that it was the Communist Party that made him a man."

Keuneman's verbal slaughter of Philip Gunawardena soon after the latter had joined the Dudley Senanayake Government and attacked the LSSP and CP for joining with "a heavy-footed Kandyan dancer" (Mrs. Bandaranaike) is even more devastating.

"He told us," said Keuneman to Parliament, "that he had decided to break a five-month silence. It was a great mistake. If he had kept his mouth shut, people might have thought he still had something to say.

"He confessed to us that he is fond of children. So am I. But I like them in their first childhood, not their second - a stage which the Hon. Minister seems to have entered.

"What has happened to this old lion? Even if he cannot bite, we thought that he could still roar. But his speech . . . was nothing more than the hollow hisses and last gasps of a once powerful volcano now sinking into extinction.

"The Hon. Minister of Industries rebuked the LSSP and the CP for accepting as a leader what he called 'an old

feudal lady, politically illiterate'. No doubt he is disappointed that we did not prefer an old Boralugoda lion who has been now transformed into a canary in a gilded UNP cage.

"I remember that in 1964 the Hon. Minister was not slow in falling at the 'heavy feet' of this feudal lady. He tried twice to enter her Cabinet, once on his own and another occasion together with the ULF. It is amazing how a portfolio or the absence of a portfolio can change the political assessments of the Hon. Minister of Industries.

"I remember he once said in the House that he would join hands with the devil or even the devil's grandmother to oppose the UNP. But he now sits snugly in the same UNP-led Cabinet. I do hope he finds his seat comfortable."

And then the final smashing blow - "He wants to know what we of the Left movement have achieved in the past thirty years. I will give him only one example. It is due to the impact made by the Left movement during the last thirty years that the UNP thinks it worthwhile to pay him a sum of Rs. 1500 a month and to keep him as Minister in their Government even though he is the only representative of his party in the House."

In answer to a question by this writer as to what he considered he had achieved in his 50-year life and what person or persons had helped him most, Keuneman replied: "I think that the main achievement of my life so far is that I have helped to build and develop a Communist Party in Ceylon and, in the process, to transform myself into a reasonably good, but by no means perfect, Communist.

"When I started my political work there was no Communist Party in Ceylon. There is one now, and we shall celebrate

its twenty fifth anniversary next year. I am very proud that I have been able to contribute something to this historic fact.

"So many people have helped and encouraged me that it would be invidious to name names. But I would like to mention the Central Committee and members of the Communist Party; the workers of Colombo, especially those organised in the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions; and the voters of Colombo Central. Their help and encouragement has been immense and I thank them for it.

"No, I'll change my mind and mention one name - my wife, Maud. No one could have asked for a better wife and comrade. This was my special good fortune.

"Thanks to all of them, I am what I am today. I have been a Communist for 30 years and I intend to remain a Communist until the end of my days. If I had to live these 50 years all over again, there is no other road I would choose.

"The past 50 years have been the most exciting in human history and have witnessed the most wonderful scientific discoveries and the most profound social and political changes. And the greatest of all these has been the transformation on a world scale from imperialism and capitalism to socialism and communism that was started 50 years ago by the Great October Socialist Revolution.

"Do you want to know what I value more than anything else? It is my membership of the Communist Party. My Party card gives me the privilege and confers on me the honour to take a direct part in the fight to change the world and my own country, to abolish war, exploitation and oppres-

from the life of human society and to replace them with socialism and communism which represent the highest development of equality, social justice and humanism. There is no greater honour than to take part in this fight."

— THE END —

In his fiftieth year, Pieter Keuneman is General Secretary of the Ceylon Communist Party and President of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions. An outstanding and acknowledged leader of the anti-imperialist and working class movement and a Member of Parliament for 20 consecutive years, Pieter Keuneman has been so intimately associated with all political developments in Ceylon over the past three decades that this short biography is also the political history of this turbulent period in Ceylon's affairs told through the life of one of its front-rank participants.

The author, Basil Perera, is an Advocate, a double Honours graduate and a journalist who, after being Chief Assistant Editor of the *Ceylon Daily News* for a short period, has been a well-known and distinguished contributor to a number of progressive newspapers and magazines published in Ceylon and abroad. He took Part in the International Journalists' Conference and tour organised by the Committee of Youth Organisations of the USSR earlier this year. He has been a Political colleague and friend of Pieter Keuneman for the last 24 years.

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