

Tokyo's Business Slow to React

(Hans Binnendijk, a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, will be writing a series of articles for The News during a study-tour he is making of the Orient, India, the Middle East and Europe this summer, for the Edward R. Murrow Center for Communications at Fletcher.)

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TOKYO — Japan's environment is in trouble and her political community is taking up the banner. Smog fills the air, cadmium poisons the rivers and noise exhausts the population.

"Urban problems such as pollution, traffic congestion, the housing shortage and increased population are the same in Japan and the United States," concluded Princeton sociologist Gerald Breese after a research trip to these islands.

Perhaps Tokyo's greatest problem is air pollution.

Last Friday evening, the smog was worse in Tokyo than this reporter has ever seen it in Boston or New York.

A total of 1,596 people have so far been recognized as "patients of environmental pollution and hazard diseases". Most of the high toll resulted from air pollution. The afflictions sound familiar: asthma, respiratory disease, chronic bronchitis, and mercury poisoning.

One of Tokyo's night life areas, Shinjuku, now reports finding several cases of lead poisoning caused by the high content of exhaust fumes. The sale of air conditioners boomed the day after that report was released.

The sources of air pollution are also familiar; sulphurous acid gas from heating systems, smoke from industrial plants, coal dust and

soot from coking coal plants, and exhaust fumes from automobiles.

Tokyo is the largest city in the world, with over 11 million inhabitants and seemingly an equal number of automobiles. Toyota reports that sales in June were up 19.3 per cent. Toyo Ethyl Company is planning to start producing lead additives for the gasoline.

To add to their ability to choke the population, the automobiles also make a deafening noise which dulls the ears. Special noise meters, which look like small basketball scoreboards, are placed in strategic centers in the city. While the Japanese Health and Welfare Ministry reports that 65 phons is the maximum safety level, the scoreboard constantly registers between 75 and 80 phons.

Some of Japan's rivers make the Charles look like a constantly filtered swimming pool. The trash that has piled up in the river next to Tokyo's airport almost serves as a dam. Foam from industrial waste floats along with the trash.

Reports have recently circulated that cadmium, an industrial salt, is contaminating the drinking water.

The Japanese are reacting to environmental problems in ways similar to the Americans. The government, the opposition, students, the press, community groups; everyone is getting into the act.

Last week's anti-Security Treaty demonstrations had a preponderance of protest signs relating to the environment.

The Sokyō, the Socialist General Council of Trade Unions, announced on Monday a new political movement aimed at housing and environmental problems.

The Liberal Democratic government under Premier

Eisaku Sato, like President Nixon, is trying to align itself with the pollution fighters.

A government White Paper entitled "Creation of a Bountiful Environment" was released last week. The basis of the report is an indictment of a policy which puts a higher priority on economic development rather than on the welfare of the people.

Emphasis was also placed on information pollution. "Information via radio, television and the press now exceeds the amount people are actually able to absorb by six times", the White paper reports.

In addition to the White paper, government committees are beginning to act. Moves are being made to ban lead additives in gasoline and to cut the level of noise pollution.

Newspapers are also applying pressure. Every day the big three, The Asahi, The Mainichi, and The Yomiuri, carry several articles exposing the various dangers in Japan's environment.

However, big business is slow to react. Although oil refineries and the steel industry have been working on anti-pollution campaigns for several years, 57 per cent of Japan's large industries have no pollution controls at all. Few have plans for future use of such controls.

In contrast to the choking air and filthy rivers, the streets and subways are clean. Teams of sanitation employees work all night with straw brooms to clean the city's streets of debris. Subway walls are washed periodically. Shopkeepers wash the streets in front of their stores.

The Japanese want a clean environment and generally seem to be willing to work for it. However, certain segments of Japanese society (and American society) can gain from pollution. It is up to the people to decide that

profits should not be made at the expense of public health.