4 Consumer Politics Under Early One-Party Dominance: 1955 to the Late 1960s

In 1956, after GDP growth rates had finally matched prewar highs, the Japanese government officially announced the end of the period of postwar reconstruction and the beginning of an era of economic expansion (Bronfenbrenner and Yasuba 1987:95). For consumers, the ensuing years were ones of increasing consumption and unprecedented economic affluence, dual phenomena that were both sources and side effects of Japan's economic catch-up with the West. As often happens in countries that grow rapidly, this veritable revolution in consumption patterns both transformed Japanese living standards and led to a profusion of consumer problems that lent a new sense of urgency to the organized movement.

If any one feature of consumer politics stands out between the mid-1950s and the end of the following decade, it is the reluctance of the pro-business conservative regime to respond in more than a haphazard fashion to the movement's demands for a comprehensive policymaking and administrative system geared toward consumers. Since 1955, when the Liberal Democratic Party first took control of government, through the late 1960s, when its grip on power began to loosen, national policymaking in the political-economy realm was oriented to promoting producer interests. In a manner reminiscent of the United States before World War II, the particular problems of consumers were addressed only as a secondary concern.

In this chapter, I analyze consumer activism during the first fifteen years or so of the era of one-party dominance, paying particular attention to the limits of the movement's protest- and market-oriented strategies vis-à-vis the

policy process. I also explore the opening of new opportunities for consumer activism at the prefectural level, opportunities that enabled advocates to begin exploring alternative avenues of interest articulation. Those avenues, as we shall see in later chapters, facilitated the movement's subsequent expansion and policy-related successes at the national level.

The Crisis of Consumer Affluence

Japan's "consumer revolution" (*shōhisha kakumei*) was officially acknowledged in the government's 1959 *White Paper on Citizen Affluence* (Maki 1979:45). At its most mundane, the phenomenon marked the advent of rampant materialism as consumers scrambled to acquire the latest in consumer technology, with the so-called three sacred treasures (*sanshu no jingi*)—television sets, refrigerators, and washing machines—topping the list of coveted items. Pejorative terms like "electrification madame" (*denka madamu*) and "automated lady" (*ōtome fujin*) (NHSK 1980:60) crept into the popular discourse as housewives struggled to outpurchase one another, reflecting not only the mounting affluence of a population long held captive by state-enforced frugality but also the erosion of simpler and more traditional lifestyles.[1]

At a more systemic level, the consumer revolution entailed deep-seated changes in the relationship between producers and consumers. As industrial innovation contributed to the twin phenomena of mass production and mass consumption, consumers became increasingly separated from producers by layers and layers of middlemen. Gone were the days when shoppers could purchase most of their goods and services from small producers on the basis of direct, personal relationships. Although such vendors have remained fixtures in the market for basic foodstuffs, for larger and more technologically sophisticated items, consumers found themselves at the tail end of increasingly complicated networks of manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and retailers.

As consumption grew more complex, the problems confronting consumers mushroomed in both number and scope. Among the more conspicuous were the high prices caused by cartels and the expanding distribution system, and the indiscriminate use of synthetic additives in processed foods. Consumers also grappled with consumer fraud, the inevitable by-product of

fierce and often unregulated competition among producers and retailers. In many cases, the race by manufacturers and retailers for ever bigger market shares was accompanied by outrageous marketing strategies to promote consumer acceptance of artificially inflated prices, the development of a "throwaway culture" (*tsukaisute bunka*), and an end to that old wartime mind-set that "extravagance is the enemy" (*zeitaku wa teki da*) (NHSK 1980:60–61).[2]

To the surprise of many who associate contemporary Japanese products with superior quality, the most pressing consumer issue of the late 1950s and 1960s was the flood of defective products into the marketplace. In some instances, the consumption of those products resulted in catastrophic consequences for their users. Some of the better-known examples of this are the 1955 incident involving arsenic poisoning in a powdered milk formula produced by the Morinaga Corporation that sickened more than 12,000 infants; the thalidomide incident of 1962 that affected about 700 babies; the 1968 Kanemi cooking oil disaster (*Kanemi yushō jiken*) involving PCB poisoning in cooking oil and approximately 1,600 casualties; and the SMON incident of 1970 in which more than 11,000 consumers were disfigured by a tainted antidiarrhea medicine.[3]

As students of the Japanese environmental movement have shown (see, e.g., Broadbent 1998; McKean 1981), the negative side effects of rapid economic growth were symptomatic of a corporate culture that clung blindly to the objective of "growth at all costs" as the nation strove to catch up economically with the West. Buttressed by such practices as lifetime employment and corporate loyalty and by a deepening relationship between producers and conservative politicians, that culture often proved impermeable to the complaints of ordinary citizens who bore the brunt of manufacturing excesses (Kimoto 1986:55).

As the sheer number and severity of those excesses grew, however, governmental authorities began to respond to consumer movement pressures for the establishment of a consumer *kakekomidera* at the governmental level—of a bureaucratic entity (or entities), in other words, that would listen to the concerns of consumers, assume responsibility for the formulation and implementation of consumer protection policy, and, in the process, function as a consumer-oriented, institutional counterbalance to the numerous inroads into the policy process enjoyed by business interests. The degree to which these demands were fulfilled, however, varied markedly according to the level of government.

Early Consumer *kakekomidera* at the National and Local Levels

Prefectural and local governments took the lead in establishing consumer-oriented bureaucratic facilities. The localities had several incentives to embrace the consumer cause: (1) a presidential-style electoral system for many heads of government which encouraged governors and mayors to embrace consumer, environmental, and other public-interest issues; (2) a unitary system of government which prompted many localities to look for innovative ways to distinguish themselves administratively from the powerful central government; (3) the 1947 Local Autonomy Law which, at SCAP's behest, singled out the localities as the country's primary laboratory for democratization; (4) a centuries-old popular tradition of looking to the localities to solve problems confronting local residents; and (5) as the 1960s wore on, the proliferation of progressive local governments eager to establish more responsive lines of communication with local citizens.

It all began in Tōkyō, where the national consumer organizations were based and consumer consciousness was relatively strong (Suzuki 1979:260). In 1961, the Tōkyō metropolitan government responded to a campaign organized by a local assemblywoman from Chifuren and to the recommendations of the Tōkyō Consumer Price Policy Advisory Council (Tōkyōto shōhiseikatsu bukka taisaku shingikai) by setting up the nation's first Consumer Economics Section (Shōhikeizaika) in its Economics Department (Keizaikyoku). Elevated to the status of a division (*bu*) in 1964, the organ was in charge of developing product safety, pricing, and consumer education policies in the Tōkyō area. From the start, the division was plagued by low morale and inertia among officials, many of whom viewed their new consumer-related assignments as demotions (Sahara 1979:216). Such problems aside, similar sections and divisions were set up by other prefectures and large cities around the country in a process of intergovernmental communication and policy diffusion.[4] By 1966, a total of twenty-one prefectural and twenty-five city organs had been established (NHSK 1980:73).

Tōkyō was also the first locality to incorporate consumer participation into local decision-making processes in what was clearly a reflection of progressive governmental efforts to establish "pipelines to the people" (Steiner et al. 1980a:19). In 1961, the Tōkyō government established the predecessor of what is now known as the Consumer Lifestyle Policy Advisory Council (Shōhi seikatsu taisaku shingikai), a commission that makes consumer-

related policy recommendations to the governor and includes representatives from consumer organizations. The following year, it set up the Consumer Lifestyles Monitor, a government-run network that solicits opinions about consumer issues from 1,000 residents from all walks of life. This was followed up two years later with the establishment of a governmental consumer consultation facility that became the nucleus of a consumer center later in the decade. Finally, in 1967, the government began publishing *The Wise Consumer* (Kashikoi shōhisha), a monthly periodical on local consumer-related problems, as well as *Documents on the Consumer Movement* (Shōhisha undō shiryō), a long-running series that chronicles the activities of consumer organizations in the metropolitan area (Suzuki 1979:260).

Tōkyō was certainly not the only locality to institute novel consumer-related facilities. Similar developments were also occurring in the Kansai area. In 1965, the Hyōgo prefectural government set up a semigovernmental facility known as the Citizens' Lifestyle Science Center (Kokumin seikatsu kagaku sentaa) that developed consumer education programs and carried out consultation services for aggrieved consumers in the prefecture. By decade's end, the center had become a model for consumer centers throughout the country (Sahara 1979:216).

When all is said and done, consumer-related institutional developments at the local level were ad hoc, sporadic, and insufficient responses to the myriad problems that plagued consumers during the 1960s. But they were far more progressive than comparable developments at the national level, where an unspoken policy of "growth at all costs" held sway as a result of a strong relationship among the ruling LDP, economic bureaucrats, and leading members of the business community. In 1963—two years after the Tōkyō metropolitan government established its Consumer Economics Section—the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries became the first national ministry to establish an in-house consumer division, followed by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) the next year. Although welcomed by consumer advocates as administrative steps in the right direction, these sections proved to be far less interested in "consumer protection" than in promoting higher levels of "consumption" in the consuming population. Unlike their local counterparts, moreover, they did very little to incorporate consumer participation into ministerial decision-making processes (NHSK 1980:92).

The Economic Planning Agency, which lacked ministerial status and was looking for ways to expand its jurisdiction, did the most at the national level to address the concerns of consumers. In 1965, it established the Citizen's

Lifestyle Bureau (Kokumin seikatsu kyoku), a bureaucratic space that became the coordinating bureau for consumer policy throughout the national bureaucracy. Limited participation by consumer representatives in consumer-related agency decision making was introduced with the establishment of the Social Policy Council (Kokumin seikatsu shingikai) in 1965, an advisory organ falling under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office that is administered by the agency and deliberates on a wide variety of social issues. These administrative and advisory organs eventually made a number of recommendations to the government in favor of stronger consumer protection laws and a larger national consumer administrative system (Miyasaka et al. 1990b:56). Unfortunately for consumers, however, many of those recommendations were all but ignored until the end of the decade.

Although a comprehensive and more uniform system of consumer protection policymaking and administration spanning both levels of government did not materialize until after the 1968 enactment of the Consumer Protection Basic Law, several features that characterized consumer bureaucratic affairs throughout the latter part of the twentieth century became apparent during this time. The first was the bureaucratic subordination of consumer issues to the goal of economic growth, a phenomenon common to the United States and other advanced industrial democracies that spread consumer-related functions throughout their bureaucracies rather than concentrating them in one central ministry/department or agency.

Weak representation of consumer interests in the national bureaucracy was (and still is) further aggravated by *tatewari gyōsei* (vertical administration): the vertical organization of ministries along functional lines. *Tatewari gyōsei* reinforces the subordination of consumer functions to the particular economic or social focus of each ministry and is characterized by a lack of horizontal coordination of those functions *across* ministerial lines (Kimoto 1986:14). This is in marked contrast to Britain, where consumer-related administrative functions tend to be concentrated in a small handful of ministries.[5] The Japanese system complicates the task of articulating the consumer interest by dispersing opportunities for consumer participation in bureaucratic policymaking over a very wide range of administrative access points. Combined with the ministries' already strong disposition toward the interests of producers during the high-growth era, vertical administration weakened the efficiency of consumer lobbying efforts and strained the resource base of movement advocates as they struggled to establish long-term informal relations with a diverse array of government officials.

Tatewari gyōsei was not the only institutional feature of the national bureaucracy that weakened the effectiveness of consumer lobbying efforts. Advocates were also hindered by the fact that bureaucrats were regularly rotated from position to position in their particular ministries and agencies and, in some cases, between ministries and agencies. This made it very difficult for advocates to establish lasting allies in the bureaucracy. Last but not least, the fact that most regulatory functions are carried out by the economic ministries, as opposed to independent regulatory agencies and commissions, made it all the more difficult for advocates to find sympathetic ears in the bureaucracy. Japan differs in this respect from the United States, where independent regulatory commissions have produced some of the organized movement's most influential and enduring allies.

In sum, while the national bureaucracy appeared to be perforated with multiple access points for consumer advocates, the effectiveness of those potential inroads into the policy process was weakened by the structure of bureaucratic institutions and by many of the rules and customs governing those institutions. This is not to suggest that consumer advocates lacked any connection whatsoever with officialdom. The housewives' organizations, for example, were occasionally commissioned by the ministries to carry out consumer surveys and product testing. Leaders from both Chifuren and Shufuren also served as members of governmental *shingikai* (governmental advisory councils) that deliberated on social and economic policy issues, positions that accorded them access to classified information that was often quietly distributed to other activists. But advocates did not have the kind of close relationships with government officials that business representatives enjoyed. To the contrary, their requests for private meetings with individual bureaucrats were often denied and their opinions in *shingikai* proceedings all but ignored. For all intents and purposes, consumer advocates played second fiddle to their business adversaries in a policymaking process that accorded them little more than symbolic representation. It was a relationship, as we shall see in later chapters, that persisted even after the post-1968 institutionalization of a more comprehensive consumer bureaucratic system.

As consumer organizations were "turned away at the gate" (*monzenbarai*) of the national policy process during much of the 1960s, relations between consumer organizations and prefectural and local governments took something of a different turn. As noted earlier, institutional innovations at the local level—particularly in localities of a progressive political persuasion—represented governmental efforts to address consumer problems in local ju-

risdictions and to incorporate consumer participation into policymaking processes. Relations between local governments and consumer organs were not always consistently productive or "democratic" across localities. In Saitama Prefecture, for instance, many consumer groups were co-opted by the prefectural government as they clamored for government subsidies (Kimoto 1986:245). Other prefectures and cities, meanwhile, ignored the concerns of consumers altogether, while those that did the most for consumers were often criticized by advocates for not doing enough. When all is said and done, however, the institutional innovations at the local level proved to be much more progressive and beneficial for consumer advocates than those at the national level, a trend that continued after 1968.

The Diversification of the Organized Consumer Movement

The period of early one-party dominance also witnessed an expansion of the organized consumer movement at an average rate of sixty-nine new organs per year (Tsujinaka 1988:73). This rate marks a drop from the democratization phase of the Occupation period, when 648 new groups or organizations were formed in 1945 alone (Keizaikikakuchō 1997:9),[6] and the mid-1970s, when the rate of movement expansion reached its post-Occupation zenith. The vast majority of organs that were established during the late 1950s and 1960s were local or prefectural,[7] a trend that can be at least partly explained by the localities' forward-looking bureaucratic innovations. That said, several new organizations were also established at the national level, many of which went on to play important roles in the movement. The following is a brief survey of some of those groups and organizations.

The Lifestyle Schools

Most of the groups that appeared during the late 1950s and 1960s were either *fujinkai*, the local women's groups often affiliated with Chifuren, or small groups consisting primarily of housewives that arose in response to specific grassroots problems. Although little is known about the structure, goals, and longevity of many of these small groups, it appears that some organized spontaneously and in response to pressing consumer concerns and worked hard to maintain their political independence, whereas others were

either organized under the guidance of local bureaucrats or went on to form clientelistic relationships (Tsujinaka 1988:57) with local authorities. As might be expected, the presence of captured local organs has tarnished the organized movement's overall reputation as an independent political entity.

Perhaps the most conspicuous examples of captured local consumer groups are those that participated in the post-1964 Lifestyle Schools movement (Seikatsu gakkō undō). Like the national housewives' organizations, the small lifestyle schools[8] promote the education of local consumers on such basic issues as household accounting and comparison-shopping techniques (NHSK 1980:83). Unlike the national associations, however, the lifestyle schools tend to avoid overt political protest and other forms of political advocacy, although occasional confrontation with local industry and officials is certainly not out of the question when warranted by concerns for the health and safety of local consumers.

The apolitical tendencies of the lifestyle schools stem in part from their links with government organizations. During the first few years of their existence, many championed the cause of the New Life movement and relied on both the national and prefectural New Life movement associations for start-up grants and other forms of funding. Then, as the movement began to lose steam, the schools turned to the localities as their main source of financial aid. Their close financial links to local government eventually contributed to their undoing as the media and other consumer organizations branded them as mere appendages of the localities. Politicians, meanwhile, criticized the more politicized schools for using taxpayers' money to oppose state policies (NHSK 1980:85). The fact that the schools often duplicated many of the educational functions performed by the larger housewives' associations and the *fujinkai* merely added to their struggle to survive. Despite efforts to establish an independent financial base and diversify its activities, the Lifestyle Schools movement declined rapidly from the 1970s and today occupies only a small proportion of the organized consumer movement.[9]

The Japan Consumers Association

Another important product of the rapid-growth period that focused on the dissemination of consumer-related information rather than political advocacy was the Japan Consumers Association (Nihon shōhisha kyōkai), a controversial semigovernmental organ whose history is representative of na-

tional governmental efforts to defang private consumer organizations by coopting some of their functions and encouraging movement cooperation with industry.

The Japan Consumers Association began as a small committee in the Japan Productivity Center (Nihon seisansei honbu), a MITI-affiliated organization established in 1955 with the support of business, labor, and the U.S. government (KSS 1997:43–44) to foster rapid economic growth and the introduction of foreign (i.e., modern) technology and management techniques to Japan. In 1958, on the premise that productivity could not be enhanced without advancing the interests of the consumers of Japanese products, the center set up an internal Consumer Education Committee (Shōhisha kyōiku iinkai) consisting, among others, of government officials and representatives from private consumer organizations.[10] Both the committee and its immediate successor, the Consumer Education Room (Shōhisha kyōiku shitsu), promoted cooperative linkages between individual consumers and private firms and sponsored public lectures on various product lines (K. Kobayashi, December 1996:37). The center also established comparable programs at the regional level,[11] published an educational magazine called *Smart Shopping* (Kaimono jōzu), and sponsored inspection trips (*shisatsudan ryokō*) abroad (KSS 1997:45) for cash-strapped consumer advocates like Oku Mumeo to investigate foreign consumer programs.

The center's consumer activities were instrumental not only in raising consumer awareness of the nature of consumption but also in introducing several consumer-related expressions to Japan, including "the consumer is king" (*shōhisha wa ōsama da*) and "virtuous consumption" (*shōhi wa bitoku*), as well as the more basic term "consumer education" (*shōhisha kyōiku*) (NHSK 1980:66–69). These and other slogans highlighted the center's determination to promote the development of a home market for Japanese products. The center's activities were also an example of effective cooperation between government officials and private consumer activists toward a common goal: the education of Japanese citizens about consumption in the context of rapid economic growth. Relations between the two sides, however, were not always harmonious. Consumer advocates, for example, criticized the Japan Productivity Center for paying far more attention to encouraging consumer demand than to promoting consumer protection, a tendency symbolized by the center's promotion of "virtuous consumption" as its consumer-related catchphrase of the day. The center eventually took heed of these criticisms in 1961, when the organ responsible for consumer edu-

cation broke off from its parent organization to form the Japan Consumers Association (Zaidan hōjin shōhisha kyōkai).

The Japan Consumers Association is a MITI-affiliated organization with regional chapters that provides educational materials to consumer organs, schools, and businesses; carries out consumer research and product testing; provides consultation services to aggrieved consumers; and publishes *The Monthly Consumer* (*Gekkan shōhisha*), a well-respected journal consisting of product assessments and other consumer-related articles. The association is also responsible for training and certifying consumer lifestyle consultants (*shōhiseikatsu konsarutanto*) who are employed by local governments and private businesses as both advisers on consumer-related issues and liaisons between their employers and the consuming public.

Although individual members of the Japan Consumers Association have been known to participate in consumer protest and legislative campaigns over the years, the association itself tends to avoid involvement in consumer movement campaigns.[12] As a result of its dependence on subsidies from both MITI and industry (Maki 1979:45), the association's role as an independent spokesperson for the consumer interest warrants suspicion (Sahara 1979: 215). The well-funded association has also weakened the raison d'être of some of the less well-off private consumer organizations. For example, its sophisticated research and testing facilities were partly responsible for the eventual termination of Shufuren's own product-testing program. These criticisms notwithstanding, the association was an important part of Japan's network of consumer organizations during the rapid-growth period and is highly regarded for its contributions to the development of consumer informational services and of a consumer identity in the public at large.

The Consumption Science Center and the Consumption Science Federation (Shōkaren)

Another organization that appeared during this period was the Consumption Science Center, a privately funded consumer entity led, until her death in the early 1990s, by Mitsumaki Akiko. Mitsumaki was at one time a vice-president of Shufuren who caused something of a media stir in 1964 by breaking away from that organization following a leadership dispute (KSS 1997:102). At the heart of Mitsumaki's decision to leave Shufuren was her desire to establish comprehensive programs to teach Japanese citizens

about consumer rights and practical consumer-related issues, an objective that Mitsumaki believed could not be fully met by the politically active Shufuren.

Shortly after leaving Shufuren, Mitsumaki founded the Consumption Science Center (Shōhikagaku sentaa), one of the few juridical organizations (*zaidan hōjin*) in the organized movement.[13] The center's principal function has been to run the Consumer University (Shōhisha daigaku), a Tōkyō-based lecture and seminar program covering a wide range of consumer issues (Shōhi kagaku sentaa 1989:6–7). Women's groups affiliated with the federation carry out similar programs in areas around the country. A month after establishing the center, which can be viewed as an educational consumer organ, Mitsumaki set up Shōkaren (Shōhi kagaku rengōkai), the center's "movement organization" that participates frequently in political advocacy campaigns.

Mitsumaki's organizations also administered a small consumer cooperative that grew out of a movement to provide consumers with low-priced milk during the mid-1950s. Launched while the leaders of Shōkaren were still Shufuren members, the project involved the "spot selling" (*sokubai*) of milk for ten yen a bottle in the busy Shibuya ward of Tōkyō. The leaders of the project obtained the milk directly from dairy farmers and eventually arranged to have it delivered to the homes of interested consumers. In conjunction with the eventual proliferation of refrigerators, a formal cooperative was established to cover a much wider range of products.

Shōkaren's spot-selling efforts were part of publicity activities (*gaitō senden katsudō*) designed to alert consumers to the effects and pervasiveness of price increases. As such, they were also a vehicle for mobilizing consumers into protest and legislative campaigns, some of which distinguished Shōkaren as a maverick organization in the consumer movement. For example, in stark contrast to Shufuren and despite the organization's links with local farmers, Shōkaren supported at least a partial liberalization of the domestic rice market and the reform of the government's food staple control system in order to both lower the price of rice and provide consumers with a wider range of product choice (KSS 1997:9–10).[14] This unusual stance, which debunks the stereotypical view advanced by the media that consumer organizations are uniformly opposed to the liberalization of rice, was the product of Mitsumaki's personal philosophy and her many years of experience as the only consumer representative on the central government's Rice Price Advisory Council (Beika shingikai). It may also result from the fact that Shō-

karen is not nearly as well organized locally as, say, Shufuren and Chifuren, both of which adopted far more conservative positions on the issue of rice liberalization in response to the preferences of their rural and semirural members (interview, Shōda, December 1993).

Japan Consumers Union

The personal preferences of movement leaders also help explain the distinctive objectives and strategies of Japan Consumers Union (Nihon shōhisha renmei), a consumer organization that combines both educational and advocacy functions. The organization was established in 1969 by Takeuchi Naokazu, a former bureaucrat from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry (MAFF) who left his post to protest what he argued was bureaucratic support for a cartel to raise milk prices (KSS 197:115). Takeuchi, like many other consumer advocates, has been a vocal supporter of agricultural protectionism but is not, as van Wolferen and other critics assert, a handmaiden of the MAFF (see, e.g., van Wolferen 1990:53). To the contrary, Takeuchi is a radical and outspoken critic of governmental policy (see, e.g., Takeuchi 1990).

Financed almost exclusively by proceeds from its publication, *Shōhisha report* (Consumer report) (interview, Tomiyama, March 1994), Consumers Union is one of only a handful of national organizations that has a significant male membership.[15] In order to protect its politically nonpartisan stance, the organization forbids other consumer organs to become members, allowing only individuals to join (KSS 1997:115). It is also one of the smallest national consumer organizations, with only 4,000 or so members (Keizaikikakuchō 1993a:78). In marked contrast to Shufuren, which relies heavily on proceeds from corporate advertising in *Shufuren dayori*, its in-house newspaper, Consumers Union stays clear of such links with the business community. It is, in short, the most independent of all the major consumer organizations.

It is also the most radical and controversial. Taking its cue from Ralph Nader's style of political activism (K. Kobayashi, November 1996:42), Consumers Union has become well known for confronting firms in an unusually aggressive and "accusatory" manner (*kokuhatsugata*) that some might argue is tantamount to harassment. Its methods consist of bombarding the alleged perpetrators of consumer abuses with pointed questionnaires known as *ya-*

bumi (lit. "a letter tied to an arrow") (KSS 1997:117). If the business in question refuses to answer the questionnaires or, over time, to change its behavior, Consumers Union will publicize the names of the company and its products in *Shōhisha report* and, if possible, the mainstream media. The organization has also taken—or threatened to take—its opponents to court. Since its chances of winning lawsuits have been very slim, however, the tactic can be viewed as a device for attracting broad attention to a particular issue and alerting citizens to their rights as consumers.

The union's confrontational style, die-hard support for agricultural protectionism, and fight for additive-free food products have invited the disdain of the bureaucracy and precluded any possibility of individual members serving on ministerial advisory councils. Its radical overtones have also led to conflicts with other, more politically moderate consumer organizations, particularly over questions of strategy. Whereas the housewives' organizations and the cooperatives have been willing to cooperate with business and government and to pursue assimilative political strategies, Consumers Union has generally avoided any association with its ideological adversaries, preferring instead to rely on market-oriented tactics and political protest. With its go-it-alone approach to political activism, Consumers Union is the most unusual and least representative organization in the movement.

Shōdanren

An inevitable side effect of the proliferation of consumer organs was the organizational fragmentation of the consumer movement as a whole. To help overcome this problem, which threatened to weaken the movement's political and economic effectiveness, the consumer cooperatives and Shufuren spearheaded the establishment of a horizontal umbrella group known as the National Liaison Committee of Consumer Organizations, or Shōdanren (Nihon shōhisha dantai renrakukai), in December 1956 (interview, Ono, March 1994). In later years, comparable liaison committees were established at the prefectural level as well. Although Shōdanren occasionally performs educational functions for the consuming public, its raison d'être is consumer advocacy.

The immediate impetus behind Shōdanren's establishment was the enactment of the Special Measures Law for the Adjustment of Retail Trade (Kouri shōgyō chōsei tokubetsu sotchi hō) (Ono 1996:41), a law that per-

mitted cartel-like agreements among specified groups of small retailers. Arguing that it gave small businessmen an unfair competitive advantage over consumer cooperatives, Shōdanren strongly protested the legislation.

Shōdanren originally consisted of representatives from eleven organizations, including Shufuren, Seikyōren, several smaller women's groups, Sōhyō, and one other labor federation. Over time, the organization quadrupled in size, and membership by labor unions all but disappeared as the labor movement declined.

In addition to its role as a leading proponent of consumer rights in Japan, Shōdanren made its mark as a vocal critic of all forms of collusive business practices during the rapid-growth era and was a key supporter of a stronger Antimonopoly Law—issues that, not coincidentally, affected the economic well-being of the co-ops. Shōdanren has been instrumental in orchestrating interorganizational cooperation on specific issues and continues to organize and sponsor an annual consumer rally (*shōhisha taikai*) of consumer representatives from around the country. Comparable functions are performed at the local level by regional Shōdanren chapters.

The history of Shōdanren has been a rocky one. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the organization was very dependent on financial contributions from Sōhyō (interview, Ono, March 1994), Japan's foremost labor organization at the time and one of Shōdanren's most politically powerful and financially secure members. To appease Sōhyō, Shōdanren occasionally softened its otherwise aggressive stance toward consumer problems that had a bearing on labor-management relations, such as the reform of the Antimonopoly Law (interview, Ono, March 1994). Since the decline of organized labor, however, Shōdanren has distanced itself politically from the unions (interview, Hiwasa, February 1994) and diversified its funding sources. Shōdanren's efforts to orchestrate joint activism during these early years, however, were impeded by the fact that many of its constituent organizations had little in common and had not yet mastered the technique of working together. Even today, Shōdanren is handicapped by the absence of Chifuren, although the housewives' federation does cooperate with the umbrella organization on an issue-by-issue basis.

Financial problems, an overdependence on labor support, and poor management techniques prevented Shōdanren from effectively fulfilling its self-declared mandate during the 1960s (interviews, Ono, March 1994, and Hiwasa, February 1994). It did little, for example, to confront problems involving false labeling and advertising and industrial pollution—problems

that were occupying the attention of other social movement organizations at the time (interview, Hiwasa, February 1994). In subsequent years, however, the organization honed its skills as an interorganizational coordinator and political lobbyist and, from the 1970s, played a leading role in most consumer protection legislative campaigns (Shōdanren 1987b:17). As such, it can be credited for bringing some semblance of organizational unity to an otherwise highly fragmented movement.

The Emergence of a "Dual Structure" in the Japanese Consumer Movement

By the eve of the enactment of the 1968 Consumer Protection Basic Law, the organized consumer movement showed signs of becoming two movements in one: one local and the other national in scope. The local movement, as we have seen, encompassed a wide assortment of groups. Some of those groups were *fujinkai* affiliated with Chifuren or groups established under the auspices of Shufuren, while others were founded as part of the New Life movement. Still others were independent grassroots groups that arose in response to purely local issues. Although there are no nationwide statistics to prove this point, it appears that many in the latter group were eventually captured by the local bureaucracies with which they cooperated (interview, Andō, February 1993), a trend that continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Others, by contrast, worked hard to preserve their political independence and exhibited many of the traits that scholars normally associate with environmental citizens' movements and other new social movements, such as the spontaneous organization of middle-class citizens at the grassroots level, democratic participation in group-decision making, and attention to quality-of-life issues. Based on my own personal observations and interviews with national consumer activists, it appears that most of these small, grassroots groups were preoccupied with local environmental and food safety issues and only rarely got involved in large-scale political advocacy campaigns.

Private organizations at the national level, by contrast, looked in many ways like the advocacy organs of the United States during the 1960s. Many of them, for example, pursued quality-of-life, public-interest goals on behalf of very broad constituencies and, with the notable exceptions of Chifuren and, to a lesser extant, Shufuren, had no more than minimal contact with

grassroots consumers or consumer groups as they went about their day-to-day business. As might be expected, this organizational feature of the movement made it difficult for national advocates to mobilize public opinion behind movement goals (interview, Shōda, December 1993).

Whereas local groups focused on solving consumer-related problems by directly confronting industry on a case-by-case basis, many of the national and prefectural organizations addressed consumer problems more systemically by pursuing three broad objectives. The first—pressuring government into institutionalizing a more comprehensive consumer protection policy-making and administrative system—we have already examined. The other two were reflections of the government's reluctance to do more to protect consumers from the hazards of rapid growth: the development of consumer education programs designed to increase citizens' awareness of consumption and their rights as consumers, and the introduction of stricter consumer protection laws and regulations by the national and prefectural governments.

Consumer Education and the Notion of Consumer Rights

Whether public or private, financially secure or dependent on government largesse, many consumer organizations during the 1960s launched programs to educate the public about consumption and consumer rights. To some scholars, education was the most important responsibility shouldered by consumer activists, for one important reason: the absence in the general public of a strong civic consciousness and awareness of individual rights (Kimoto 1986:35; Shōda 1989; interview, Shōda, December 1993). In the U.S., British, and German cases, consumer movements were grafted onto individuals' preexisting awareness of their civic rights and responsibilities. In Japan, by contrast, the birth of the postwar consumer movement *preceded* the entrenchment of such an awareness (Shōda 1989:118).[16] In order to overcome this barrier to consumer consciousness-raising, many consumer advocates became much more than mere representatives of the "consumer interest," however defined; they also functioned as vehicles for the dissemination and articulation of "citizenship"—of that element of the early *seikatsusha* identity that had been introduced from above during the Occupation and that was slow to take root in Japanese soil. Although many consumer organs in the United States and Britain combine educational and advocacy functions in their day-to-day affairs, the overlap between the two

was taken to unprecedented heights in Japan in response to these political and historical considerations.

Generally, consumer education programs were designed to cultivate either "wise consumers" (*kashikoi shōhisha*) or "active consumers" (*kōdōsuru shōhisha*). The first objective, pursued by virtually all consumer organs and local governmental consumer offices, included the dissemination of information about such basic consumer skills as recognizing bargains, comparing prices, and avoiding defective products. As such, consumer education was a politically innocuous affair that served to rationalize consumption without upsetting the political and economic institutions and practices that shaped the processes of production.

As the 1960s wore on and the problems confronting consumers proliferated, some consumer organs became more and more interested in cultivating active consumers (Kimoto 1986:45), that is, consumers who were willing to stand up for their interests and to exercise their rights as both consumers and citizens. This was, of course, a politically loaded undertaking, since it meant confronting industry and, in some cases, tacitly rejecting many of the government's pro-business policies.[17] It also involved a great deal of "learning by doing"—of raising consumer and civic consciousness by means of product boycotts, street demonstrations, petition drives, and the like. As might be expected, the Japan Consumers Association and local groups that had formed clientelistic relations with the localities steered clear of such overtly political activities, while Shōdanren, Shufuren, Consumers Union, and other private consumer advocacy organizations took the lead.

The promotion of consumer rights in a country that had not yet digested the more general notion of civil rights proved challenging for consumer advocates. As in many other advanced industrial democracies, consumer rights are not entrenched in civil law (Kimoto 1986:63). For guidance on how to legitimize those rights in the eyes of the public, therefore, advocates could only refer to articles 13 and 25 of the constitution dealing with the right to health and happiness and the right to life, respectively. They also took their cue from President John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech to Congress that outlined the consumer's rights to safety, choice, information, and representation. These rights, together with the right to redress, have since become indelible principles of the Japanese movement.

Even with this arsenal of ideas at their disposal, activists by the mid-1960s found the task of instilling a consumer consciousness and an appreciation of consumer rights in the general public to be particularly onerous. The

challenge stemmed in part from the nature of consumer problems in advanced industrial countries. As noted in chapter 1, a consumer consciousness tends to develop slowly in a society because the burden of consumer "injustices" like defective products and high prices is often shared, to varying degrees, by all socioeconomic groups. Consumers have few incentives, in other words, to distinguish themselves from other groups in society on the basis of those injustices. Without that kind of "us versus them" mentality, however, few citizens are motivated to think carefully about their rights as consumers.[18]

During the late 1950s and 1960s, Japanese citizens had even fewer incentives to dwell on their consumer identities; this was, after all, an era of "growth at all costs"—of pro-producer policies generated by a conservative political system that was firmly behind the national goal of economic "catch-up" with the West. To go against the grain of this national creed by championing the interests of consumers was to appear unpatriotic. Against this backdrop, many consumers were disinclined to speak up for their interests, preferring instead to delegate the resolution of consumer problems to those in governmental authority (*okami ni makaseru*) or to passively "cry themselves to sleep" (*nakineiri suru*) as mere victims of producer-instigated abuse. These habits proved hard to break for those who had been educated under the crushing yoke of authoritarianism.

The flip side of this victim mentality and dependence on authority was the government's distinctive conceptualization of its role vis-à-vis the consumer. In the United States and Britain, the government has assumed the role of *guarantor* or *caretaker* of consumer rights that are vested in the individual and that entitle individual consumers to legal redress upon demand. In Japan, by contrast, the task of protecting consumers from the negative externalities of production during the rapid-growth era was approached—if at all—as an *obligation* of a paternalistic government.[19] Although the government was certainly beholden to fulfill its obligations in those few consumer-related areas that were defined by law, the absence of legally entrenched consumer rights gave it the upper hand when dealing with consumer issues that had yet to be formally defined. Not surprisingly, when faced with unforeseen problems, the government, in its preoccupation with economic growth, tended to uphold the interests of producers over those of consumers.

For these reasons, many consumer activists in Japan view consumer "protection" as a mixed blessing. Consumer protection normally entails the introduction of laws and regulations by governments to shield consumers who

cannot protect themselves from the harmful side effects of business activities. In the United States, consumer protection also implies the guarantee of basic consumer rights. But in a country like Japan where the notions of individual and consumer rights are not so deeply entrenched in the political culture, consumer protection runs the risk of preserving the status quo by reinforcing consumer passivity, governmental paternalism, and the power of business interests.

Clamoring for Government Protection: Consumer Movement Campaigns

Despite the disadvantages of relying too heavily on government for consumer protection, consumer advocates realized they had little choice but to do precisely that, given the weakness of the courts as guarantors of individual rights—a point that will be explored in later chapters—and the sheer power of the business community. Advocates, in other words, needed the government on their side in their bid to narrow the yawning political and economic gap between producers and consumers. The late 1950s and 1960s, therefore, were peppered with campaigns to pressure government into assuming an expanded consumer protection role. As in the United States before World War II, however, consumer protection policies were normally the product of scandal or converging interests between consumers and producers, rather than consumer participation in established channels of interest articulation. The following is an overview of three representative consumer campaigns, two of which ended in success, the other in failure.

The Nise Canned Beef Incident and the Product-Labeling Movement

As businesses scrambled for market share during the rapid-growth era, consumers were increasingly exposed to incidents of consumer fraud (NHSK 1980:61). One of the most glaring examples of this was the so-called Nise Canned Beef incident (Nise gyūkan jiken), a scandal that revealed the paucity of national regulatory measures to protect the consumer.

It all started in September 1960 when a lone consumer contacted the Public Health Department (Eiseikyoku) of the Tōkyō metropolitan government to complain about a fly she had discovered in a can of beef produced by the Nise Corporation. The department immediately launched an investigation into what seemed to be a straightforward violation of public-health

regulations. It quickly became apparent, however, that false labeling was also at issue, for the cans of "beef" had been packed with whale meat.

The incident caused a minor media sensation and drew attention to the inadequacy of Japan's weak labeling regulations. Since whale meat in no way posed a threat to the health of consumers, both the Public Health Department and the Ministry of Health and Welfare were powerless to change the labeling practices of the Nise Corporation. For Shufuren, whose product-testing department had long been aware of fraudulent labeling by manufacturers, the Nise case presented a long-awaited opportunity to mobilize for stricter labeling regulations (KSS 1997:90–91).

In 1962, the national government responded to the findings of the Tōkyō government and the burgeoning consumer backlash by enacting the Law to Prevent Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations (Futōkeihinryū oyobi futōhyōji bōshi hō), the first piece of legislation since the Antimonopoly Law to cite consumer protection as one of its primary objectives (Sahara 1979:214–15). The process surrounding the enactment of the law was unusual, however, in that the bill met with virtually no resistance from firms. In fact, many manufacturers welcomed the measures because they promised to stem the proliferation of unfair trade practices—if the provision of premiums to consumers can be regarded as such—which advantage some firms over others.[20] The law was, in short, widely viewed in the business community as a regulatory safeguard against that age-old bugaboo of "competitive chaos" (*katō kyōsō*).

The Nise case was significant not only because it was one of the only legislative campaigns in which the interests of business and consumers coincided but also because it marked the beginning of a long-term and very successful consumer movement to improve product-labeling practices. It also highlighted both the sympathy of local officials for the interests of consumers and the impact of local government initiatives on the introduction of national regulatory measures. Indeed, the case was one of the earliest examples of a loose partnership between consumer activists and local authorities to enact stronger consumer protection measures. It was a partnership that was to expand considerably as the years passed.

The Newspaper Boycott

Throughout the 1960s, consumer advocates pressured bureaucrats and politicians to quell the swelling "price typhoon" (*bukka taifū*) that was hitting

consumers squarely in the pocketbook (Shōdanren 1987b:24). Realizing that inflation was bad for business as well as consumers, the Ikeda government responded by introducing an ambitious assortment of anti-inflationary policies.[21] Unfortunately, however, those policies were not completely successful, in part because of the government's reluctance to simultaneously tackle collusive business practices and other structural causes of inflation. This was at no time more apparent than during Shōdanren's newspaper boycott.

In 1959, Japan's major national and regional newspapers announced within several days of one another a whopping 18 percent increase in their subscription rates. Convinced of intraindustry collusion, Shōdanren filed a formal request for an investigation (*shinsa seikyūsho*) with the Japan Fair Trade Commission (JFTC) under article 45 of the Antimonopoly Law. The commission proceeded to collect evidence of collusion from the national Newspaper Association (Shimbun kyōkai) and from comparable organizations at the regional level. Shōdanren, meanwhile, persuaded more than 1 million newspaper subscribers (Shōdanren 1987b:20) to refuse to pay the difference between the old and new subscription rates. Swayed by arguments that the increases had been warranted by rising paper costs and in effect ignoring the evidence of collusion, the JFTC finally ruled in August that it would not press charges against the newspaper companies (Misono 1987). Incensed by the decision, consumer organizations filed appeals with the Tōkyō District Court and, later, the Tōkyō High Court, both of which upheld the commission's decision.

The boycott, which was closely covered by the nation's smaller newspapers, proved to be the biggest show of consumer protest since the Occupation. Although the major dailies promised to consult with consumer representatives before implementing future price hikes (interview, K. Nakamura, April 1994), Shōdanren nonetheless viewed the campaign as a major failure for the consumer movement (interview, Ono, March 1994). Activists were particularly disappointed by the JFTC's unwillingness to carry out the spirit of the Antimonopoly Law by responding to the demands of ordinary citizens and combating the problem of collusive business practices (Ono 1996). Unfortunately, the inability of consumer organizations to counter collusive business practices was revealed again and again during the 1960s as Shōdanren and unaffiliated consumer organizations fought against collusive price hikes by the utilities sector, public bath owners, and barber and beauty shop proprietors (Shōdanren 1987b:24). Together, these were classic examples of *monzenbarai*—of being turned away at the gate of ostensibly pro-consumer national bureaucratic organs that had been captured by producer interests.

The Color TV Boycott

The high point of consumer activism during the rapid-growth period was reached in 1970/71, when five consumer organizations working together with the leaders of Shōdanren organized a nationwide boycott of television sets that had been grossly overpriced as a result of intraindustry price fixing.

In 1970, Chifuren was commissioned by the JFTC to investigate the prices of color television sets. Both Chifuren and, in subsequent inquiries, the JFTC, discovered that manufacturers were displaying artificially high list prices (*genkin seika*) on their products (Kirkpatrick 1975:243), thereby enabling designated sellers to charge inflated "discount" prices. The ploy proved misleading—not to mention costly—to consumers who were not savvy enough to negotiate discounts. This was, consumer advocates concluded, a glaring example of unfair trade practices (*futō torihiki hōhō*), a violation of the 1961 Law to Prevent Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations, and an infringement of the consumer rights to information and product choice at fair prices. To rectify the problem, they insisted, among other things, on the public disclosure of the actual list prices, a demand that the industry categorically ignored.

The United States, meanwhile, was pressuring the Japanese government to do something about the enormous price discrepancy between sets sold in Japan and the United States. According to a study conducted jointly by JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) and MITI, nineteen-inch models produced by Japanese color television manufacturers were selling in America for roughly one-third less than the price of comparable models in Japan (NHSK 1980:137). These dumping charges, together with Chifuren's findings on the industry's pricing practices at home, attracted widespread media coverage and outraged the Japanese public.

In early 1971, when it became clear that the industry was not about to comply with the JFTC's recommendations to liberalize prices (Zenchifuren 1973:158) and that MITI did not intend to rectify the problem, Chifuren launched a consumer boycott against color TV sets with the support of four other consumer organizations, including Shufuren. Seikyōren, the national consumer cooperative umbrella organization, helped raise public awareness of the color TV problem by producing its own model and selling it in affiliated co-op stores for almost half the price of mainstream brands.

The timing of the boycott could not have been more fortuitous. First, it was carried out when millions of Japanese consumers were on the threshold of replacing their old black-and-white sets with the color models that had

just hit the market. Consumer organizations took advantage of this buying trend by skillfully convincing consumers to "refrain from buying" (*kaibikae*) their new TVs until the sets were priced more fairly. Second, since it was launched at the height of the New Year's buying season when shoppers were armed with their year-end bonuses, the campaign contributed to a sharp decrease in sales at a time when they should have been at their highest. Finally, consumer leaders were able to activate the boycott quickly and effectively when circumstances were at their most favorable because of extensive media coverage, much of which had been fueled by the controversy's international dimensions (interview, K. Nakamura, April 1994).[22] Consumer activists, in other words, had at their disposal a recipe for a successful boycott: good timing, media coverage, public support, and a powerful and indignant (foreign) ally.

As the boycott progressed and American anger intensified, advocates welcomed two more allies into their fold: MITI and the JFTC, both of which caved in to domestic and international pressures by urging the industry to lower their prices and cut back on exports. In February 1971, as profits dropped precipitously and inventories swelled, manufacturers finally agreed to meet these demands. The boycott drew to a close.

The color television boycott was a milestone in the history of the postwar consumer movement in that it marked the first time that a disparate group of consumer organs had joined to successfully combat the collusive business practices of a powerful industry. Over the next two decades, Shōdanren and the "five organizations" (*go dantai*: Shufuren, Chifuren, Japan League of Women Voters, Seikyōren, and Consumers Association of the (Tōkyō) Bunkyō Ward) that formed the campaign's organizational nucleus cooperated frequently on several consumer-related issues. Intracoalition relations were not always smooth, however, and disagreements over tactics resulted in a number of hard-won compromises. In the color TV boycott, for example, the organizations battled over what kind of terminology to use in their attempts to attract the participation of consumers. Chifuren opposed the actual use of the word *boycott* (*fubai* or *boikotto*), insisting instead on more modest expressions like *kaibikae* ("refrain from buying") in the hopes of winning over consumers who hesitated to participate in a highly publicized social movement. Some of the other organizations disagreed with Chifuren but ultimately conceded in order to keep the federation—with its huge membership—involved in the campaign (interview, K. Nakamura, April 1994).

The success of the color television boycott prompted both Japanese and foreign observers to sit up and take notice of what appeared to be a new

consumer phenomenon. Maki Shōhei, a frequent commentator on Japanese consumer issues, viewed the affair as much more than a transient occurrence and marveled at the ability of activists to mobilize literally millions of citizens (Maki 1979:46–47). In a similar vein, Maurine Kirkpatrick observed that the boycott and other successful consumer campaigns represented

> an attempt to broaden the bases of interest articulation and representation, and . . . had the effect of serving as a vehicle for popular dissatisfaction as well as providing feelings of individual efficacy. . . . In the context of this new political environment, . . . the consumer movement . . . acquired a meaning extending beyond mere interest in fair treatment for consumers. The consumer movement [became], like citizens' movement activism, another channel of expression for citizens' demands and dissatisfactions.
>
> (Kirkpatrick 1975:235)

Although analysts were certainly correct to point out the broad significance of consumer movement activism for Japanese politics, they erred on two points. First, many were approaching their subject matter as if consumer activism were a recent phenomenon, when in fact the boycotts and other market-oriented campaigns that had captured so much media attention toward the end of the rapid-growth era had been fixtures of consumer politics for almost a quarter century.

Second, many analysts overestimated the power of the boycott as a movement strategy. As we noted in chapter 1, boycotts are extremely difficult to organize given the diffuseness of the consumer constituency and are doomed to failure if the media neglect to cover them or the government decides to support the targeted manufacturers. Their success, moreover, depends heavily on good timing and luck—two ingredients that were present in the TV boycott case but have been hard to duplicate in other instances. It should come as no surprise, then, that the color TV boycott was not only the first large-scale boycott to truly succeed in postwar Japanese history; it was also the last.

Conclusion

The period stretching from the advent of the 1955 system to the late 1960s or so was one of both institutional constraints and opportunities for

Japanese consumer activists. First and foremost under the category of constraints was the government's failure to effectively incorporate the consumer interest into national decision-making processes by establishing a more comprehensive system of consumer protection policymaking and administration. For all intents and purposes, consumers were still excluded from the corridors of power by a political establishment consisting of conservative politicians, bureaucrats in the economic ministries, and representatives from the business community. The predominance of pro-business interests was particularly apparent in the JFTC's unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of consumer movement appeals for stricter antitrust enforcement, a topic explored in greater detail in chapter 6.

Against the backdrop of pro-business political alignments and bureaucratic institutions that excluded consumer activists from meaningful participation in national policymaking, consumer advocates found sympathetic allies at the local level. As illustrated by the Nise Canned Beef incident, local administrations were much more open to the demands of consumers than was their national counterpart; in some instances, moreover, local initiatives on the consumer front helped spark policy innovation at the national level. This emerging relationship between the localities and the national government in the sphere of national consumer protection policymaking was only to intensify in subsequent years.

The first decade and a half of the 1955 system also underscored the limits of market-oriented strategies to wrest concessions from business interests. As the short case studies explored in this chapter show, activists were able to achieve their goals only in those rare instances when business had been hit squarely in the pocketbook or when their interests in a particular piece of "consumer" regulation or legislation coincided with those of consumer advocates. In cases of pure confrontation between consumers and business, without effective inroads into the national policy process, consumers were doomed to failure. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, consumer access to national decision-making processes promised to expand with the 1968 enactment of the Consumer Protection Basic Law and the subsequent introduction of a comprehensive system of consumer protection policymaking and administration.