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The Right to Safety: The Movement to Oppose the Deregulation of Food Additives

Hiwasa Nobuko is in many ways a typical Japanese consumer leader. Like thousands of other housewives, she joined a consumer cooperative during the mid-1970s out of concern for the nutritional well-being of her children. Troubled by what she termed the “distortions” (*yugami*) of rapid economic growth and the dearth of information about the food she and her family consumed, Mrs. Hiwasa was attracted to the co-ops by their commitment to foods that were free of agricultural chemicals and synthetic additives (interview, Hiwasa, February 1994). Drawn to political activism by interest in these and other consumer issues, she was soon playing a major role in movement campaigns to ban the use of synthetic food additives. Today, Mrs. Hiwasa is secretary-general of Shōdanren, the national umbrella organization that coordinates many of the country’s consumer campaigns.

Mrs. Hiwasa’s ascension to the pinnacle of consumer movement power symbolizes the leading role of food safety in Japanese definitions of the consumer interest. Throughout the postwar period, consumer organizations campaigned tirelessly for comprehensive food-labeling standards, strict regulatory controls over the use of synthetic additives in foods, limits on the usage of agricultural pesticides, and a ban on imported foods treated with postharvest chemicals. Some advocates have even tolerated high food prices for the sake of maximum safety,¹ a stance that many Americans, with their penchant for convenience and low prices, find difficult to understand. The importance of food purity to the organized movement was further highlighted by the profound crisis of confidence that it suffered during the early

1980s following its failure to reverse the deregulation of eleven controversial synthetic additives and to strengthen the nation's bureaucratic system for guaranteeing food safety. Occurring against a backdrop of LDP resurgence in Japanese politics, this setback marked the advent of a long "winter period" (*fuyu no jidai*)² in the movement's history that lasted until the early 1990s.

The movement to oppose the deregulation of food additives is the focus of this chapter. As one of the largest single-issue campaigns in Japanese consumer history³ and an example of movement failure, it serves as a prime case study for several of the issues and questions introduced at the beginning of this volume: the relationship between a movement's level of organization and its impact on policymaking, the political determinants of movement influence, and the role of institutions in determining the extent to which the voices of diffuse societal interests are incorporated into central governmental decision making. The case also touches on a number of additional themes that underscore the distinctive features of the Japanese consumer movement, namely, the relationship between consumers and governmental authorities in the regulatory sphere, the impact of culture on consumer movement priorities, and the role of foreign pressure, or *gaiatsu*, in Japanese consumer protection policymaking.

The Regulatory, Cultural, and Historical Backdrop

Consumer Protection and Governmental Regulation

Organized consumer movements have traditionally adhered to the "public-interest" theory of regulation.⁴ Based on the twin convictions that free-market mechanisms have the potential to harm consumers and that public policymaking is dominated by narrow economic interests, this theory looks to government as the only entity strong enough to act in the best interests of the general public. The primary mechanism for protecting the public interest is regulation: the governmental "imposition of controls and restraints and the application of rules" over firms' economic decisions (Swann 1989:3).

Regulation can be roughly divided into three broad categories, each of which has a bearing on consumer protection. Economic regulation, which gives governments the authority to control major decisions pertaining to price, output, rates of return, and entry and exit in specific industries (Ger-

ston, Fraleigh, and Schwab 1988:27), can benefit consumers by stabilizing the prices and supplies of goods and services in the marketplace. Antitrust regulation, which enables governments to interfere in business activities in order to prevent collusive business behavior, protects consumers from both high prices and unfair business practices.

Consumer protection is achieved as a by-product of economic and anti-trust regulation, whereas social regulation targets the consumer directly. Based on the recognition that consumers are frequently incapable of evaluating complicated information that will allow them to make sound judgments about the goods and services they purchase, social regulation sets standards for the kinds of qualitative results that industries must achieve in the productive process (Gerston et al. 1988:30). Examples include automobile emission standards, approval procedures for drugs and cosmetics, and, more important to our purposes, product-labeling requirements and controls over the use of food additives and agricultural pesticides. As might be expected, social regulation has been a major focus of consumer movement activism throughout the industrialized world.

As I explain in more detail later on, American consumer advocates over the years have been selectively supportive of public proposals to disengage from the affairs of private firms, particularly when governmental regulatory mandates have been abused or unfulfilled. This, I believe, is partly a function of their capacity to curb the excesses of business behavior through an activist court system. British organizations have also supported a number of deregulatory programs in part because of their ability to perform officially sanctioned watchdog functions over deregulated industries. Both movements, moreover, tend to embrace liberal economic principles, preferring free-market mechanisms to governmental controls as means to advance consumer interests.

Japanese consumer representatives, by contrast, have clung with almost religious tenacity to a public-interest approach to consumer protection, even when that approach was losing political legitimacy. There are several reasons for this. First, the country's legacy of state-led economic development legitimized an activist governmental role not only in the affairs of business but also in the consumer realm. This has been borne out, as we have seen in previous chapters, by the establishment of semigovernmental consumer organizations that compete with private organizations for control over various consumer-related functions and that play a leading role in consumer education. Second, with the weakening of private consumer organizations rela-

tive to governmental organs, consumers were given strong incentives to lean heavily on government for consumer protection services. This tendency was further reinforced by weak conceptualizations of individual and consumer rights and the absence of an activist court to champion those rights.

Consumer advocates in Japan did not like having to submit to the often arbitrary protections of a paternalistic state, but as long as the courts remained weak and civil law (as opposed to regulatory) protections of consumers few in number, they were loath to support deregulatory measures that would expose consumers to the negative side effects of business activities. They were not necessarily opposing deregulation *per se*, as some critics of the movement would have us believe; they were simply opposed to deregulation *without* accompanying legal protections.

Culture Matters

Another reason that Japanese consumer organizations have projected an "anti-deregulation" image is that in 1983, in one of its first forays into the deregulatory realm, the government targeted social regulations governing the use of synthetic food additives, a move that elicited a torrent of protest from consumer advocates. In the United States and Britain, social regulation was largely untouched by the reform movements of the 1980s. Had the reverse been true, one can be certain that American and British consumer advocates would have been equally vociferous in their reactions.

Consumer concerns about food safety are common to virtually all advanced industrial societies and for a variety of reasons that are by no means specific to any one country. Scholars have found, for example, that like other quality-of-life issues, heightened food safety concerns tend to reflect higher income levels (see, e.g., Swinbank 1993). On the basis of a survey of consumer attitudes in Seattle and Kobe, Japan, moreover, Jussaume and Judson contend that declining confidence in the safety of the food supply generally increases with age and in households with children under eighteen (Jussaume and Judson 1992:243). They also observe that the level of concern is much higher in Japan than in the United States, and for reasons that appear to pertain to culture (Jussaume and Judson 1992:247). They do not, however, pursue this observation in detail.

According to Douglas and Wildavsky, popular attitudes toward risk are conditioned by a society's shared values (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982:8). If

this is indeed the case, what are the cultural sources of the Japanese unwillingness to take food-related risks? The Shintō and Buddhist premium placed on cleanliness and purity is certainly one source. The etiological view of disease, explored by Ohnuki-Tierney, may be another.

According to Ohnuki-Tierney, traditional beliefs about the origins of disease involve demarcations between the safe and controlled surroundings of one's home or personal space and the possible dangers emanating from "without." The common cold, for instance, is widely believed to be the product of germs contracted from the "outside"; hence the importance of removing one's shoes before entering a home, washing one's hands after being outdoors, and soaping up and rinsing off before entering the communal bath. Ohnuki-Tierney argues that the linkage between impurities contracted from outside and one's physical health is so strong in the minds of many Japanese that to neglect these ritual acts and ablutions is tantamount to a transgression of common morality (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984:21–50).

A concern for purity permeates basic consumption patterns as well. Consider, for example, the unwillingness of many Japanese consumers to eat while strolling down the street. If Ohnuki-Tierney's theory is correct, this is attributable not to a dislike for foods that lend themselves to ambulatory consumption but, rather, to a fear of eating in uncontrolled environments that have been subjected to a host of contaminants.⁵ And what first-time visitor to Japan has not marveled at the Japanese penchant for peeling the skin off fruits—even grapes—before consuming them? Again using Ohnuki-Tierney's theory, those skins are the locus of germs and chemicals that may pose a risk to the health of consumers, even after washing. The skin of a fruit, in other words, is the bearer of impurities that were contracted from "outside" and that separate the consumer from the purity of the fruit "inside." As a foreigner living in Japan, I could certainly understand the hygienic rationale of this custom but failed to comprehend its moral value, as I demonstrated all too often by popping unpeeled grapes into my mouth in front of my disapproving Japanese friends.

If the mere thought of eating a piece of fruit with the skin still intact is anathema to most Japanese, imagine their reaction to foods containing chemical additives. In many advanced industrial countries, the use of such additives escalated after World War II, when mass production, the establishment of sophisticated distribution systems, and the proliferation of supermarkets made it possible to produce processed foods for national markets. In this context, the use of synthetic additives enabled food processors to

produce foods with a shelf life of weeks and even months. In response to these trends, the number of synthetic additives permitted for use in Japan increased from a mere sixty in 1957 to 356 by 1969 (*Kobe shimbun*, April 23, 1983).⁶ For Japanese consumers long used to purchasing unprocessed foods from small neighborhood shops, the proliferation of additives was an affront to their notions of purity, what with their unnatural origins and possible side effects and the unknown consequences of consuming large mixtures of additives over a lifetime. It also contributed, I would argue, to an already deep-seated distrust of free-market principles and to the determination of many consumers to look to a paternalistic government for regulatory protection.

The History of Food Safety Issues in Postwar Japan

That culture may be a more important determinant of food safety awareness in Japan than economic affluence is apparent in the fact that consumer awareness of the potentially harmful effects of chemical additives first arose during the latter years of the Occupation, when consumers were still struggling economically. In 1951, in one of its first forays into product testing, Shufuren uncovered the use of an allegedly carcinogenic food dye in *takuan* (pickled radishes), a discovery that eventually prompted the Ministry of Health and Welfare to ban the substance. Consumer activism regarding food safety issues was also flourishing at the local level, where housewives were becoming increasingly conscious of the effects of postwar food shortages on the nutritional health of their children. Tani Mitsuei's experiences serve as a good example. A prominent consumer advocate in Niigata Prefecture, Mrs. Tani got her start in consumer politics during the early 1950s by organizing a study group on food-related issues. In a few years, the prefectural government responded to pressure from the group by establishing one of the country's first food-testing facilities at the prefectural level. By decade's end, Mrs. Tani had helped establish a regional *renrakukai* (liaison committee) of consumers to promote the use of natural food additives. One of the distinguishing features of the *renrakukai* was its close working relationship with the prefectural government. The committee not only relied heavily on the findings of the prefecture's testing facilities, but it also cooperated with the government on a number of fronts to promote food safety and nutritional awareness in the prefecture (Tani 1996:117–20). It was an early but never-

theless representative case of local governmental initiative and cooperation with consumer advocates.

The consumer cooperative movement also benefited from consumer concerns about food safety. By the end of the 1950s, the co-ops were struggling to attract members and to stay afloat financially. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, membership was booming in what organizers called “the golden age” of the cooperative movement (interview, Kurimoto, November 1992). The movement continued to flourish through the 1980s and into the 1990s and, by 1992, boasted a membership of roughly 15 million households, one-quarter of all households in Japan (interview, Kurimoto, November 1992). According to a 1988 survey of co-op members conducted by the Japan Consumer Cooperative Unions (Seikyōren), 76.5 percent of co-op households joined the movement in order to gain access to safe, higher-quality foods (Iwadare 1991:433). Paralleling and complementing this trend was the establishment of local joint-buying clubs based on direct purchasing relationships between groups of local consumers and organic farmers. The clubs gave consumers access to guaranteed sources of healthy produce and enabled farmers and consumers alike to circumvent the often byzantine—and costly—distribution system.

According to co-op officials, the consumer cooperatives were the first to provide consumers with organically grown produce and food products free of synthetic additives. These products were popular among consumers who had seen their food supply quickly transformed by rapid economic growth and were increasingly distressed by news of mass injuries caused by tainted milk products,⁷ cooking oil laced with PCBs,⁸ and other food-related disasters. The growing popularity of the co-ops eventually prompted mainstream food retailers to follow suit. Today, organic and additive-free products are readily available to consumers in a wide range of stores, a development that by the early 1990s resulted in a leveling off of cooperative membership (interview, Hiwasa, February 1994). It is a trend that simply underscores the long-term success of the consumer cooperative movement as a whole.

Throughout the postwar period, consumer advocates have taken a number of steps to ensure the safety of the nation’s food supply and to heighten consumer awareness of this issue. One way of achieving these goals has been to campaign for stricter product-labeling (*hyōji*) standards. Many organizations, for example, pressured the Ministry of Health and Welfare to require detailed descriptions of synthetic additives used in processed foods, an objective they failed to achieve until *after* the anti-deregulatory move-

ment of 1983/84. The delay, it appears, was caused by pressure from food manufacturers who balked at the inconvenience of conforming to new labeling standards (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 30, 1983). Many also feared that the inclusion of more information pertaining to potentially controversial additives would hurt business by scaring consumers away.⁹

Consumer advocates have also grouped together on a number of occasions to ban the presence of potentially dangerous food products in the marketplace and to pressure the Ministry of Health and Welfare into introducing stricter regulations governing the food supply. As the following two examples show, their efforts met with mixed results.

In late October 1969, the Ministry of Health and Welfare announced a recall of all food products containing cyclamates in response to evidence uncovered by American scientists that the substances were carcinogenic.¹⁰ Although Japanese food processors had a vested interest in the continued authorization of cyclamates, which comprised more than 80 percent of the artificial sweeteners in use at the time, a few companies responded to public concerns by voluntarily pulling their products from store shelves well before the recall was to go into effect. Then, in a last-minute about-face, the ministry postponed the recall in early January 1970, following a similar move by the American government and mounting opposition from the majority of Japanese food processors.

Shortly after the recall was postponed, five consumer organizations, led by Chifuren, launched a nationwide movement to boycott products containing cyclamates. The boycott, which attracted the participation of several million consumers, was testament to the organizational skills of consumer advocates,¹¹ but it failed to convince the Ministry of Health and Welfare to revoke the postponement. The use of cyclamates is still permitted in Japan today, although many companies have stopped using them in anticipation of further consumer boycotts.

Consumer activism was much more effective in the movement to ban the use of AF2, a germicide used in tofu, ham, sausages, and Japanese fish paste. AF2 had been officially authorized by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1965, but independent research conducted during the early 1970s on laboratory animals revealed carcinogenic properties in the substance. Although AF2 was not a focus of international pressure, the Ministry of Health and Welfare sided with food processors and refused to ban the substance in response to organized consumer demands.

Consumer organizations responded by taking their cause to the grassroots level. The campaign began in 1972 in the Tōkyō area, where local consumer

groups organized boycotts of neighborhood shops that sold products containing AF2 (Inaba et al. 1979:11; see also Suginamiku shōhisha no kai 1982:63–64), and soon spread to other cities around the country. After several weeks of this, the Ministry of Health and Welfare caved in to the movement's demands by authorizing its Food Sanitation Deliberation Council (Shokuhin eisei chōsakai) to look into the problem. Before the council publicized its opinion that AF2 may indeed be carcinogenic, however, countless large food-processing companies and retail outlets voluntarily stopped using or selling the substance, turning instead to alternative—usually natural—additives that performed similar functions. In August 1974, the ministry formally removed AF2 from its list of approved additives.

In his study of Japanese food safety regulations and their impact on trade, David Vogel suggests that consumer representatives and Japanese business have seen more or less eye to eye on the question of strict standards governing synthetic food additives (D. Vogel 1992:146). The cyclamate and AF2 campaigns, however, indicate that consumer-business relations on this issue are much more conflicted than Vogel suggests: consumer representatives *will* take businesses to task for violating consumer safety expectations.

The cases are also typical examples of the politics governing the regulation of potentially harmful additives. The Ministry of Health and Welfare usually will respond to consumer activism and ban the use of an additive *if* it can be easily replaced by other additives and there is no foreign pressure for its continued use. But even when consumer organizations fail to evoke a ministerial response, they still can curb the usage of controversial additives by boycotting them. As we have observed in other chapters, the effectiveness of this time-consuming tactic should not be overestimated—particularly when two or more product lines have been targeted.

The Regulatory Process and the Consumer Movement's Response

All advanced industrial democracies regulate the use of food additives to some degree. In some countries, food processors are free to use any additive so long as it has not been specifically banned by the government; in others, including Japan, the United States, and Britain, manufacturers can use only those additives that have been expressly approved by government authorities (D. Vogel 1992:120). In some ways, the Japanese regime is more lax than those of its Anglo-Saxon counterparts; it does not, for example, regulate natural food additives. But in regard to synthetic additives, Japanese

regulations are stricter than those of the United States¹² and Britain, although this has not always been the case. Before the European Union moved to harmonize the regulation of additives among its member states during the early 1990s, Britain had authorized the use of roughly 300 additives (D. Vogel 1995:51–52), many fewer than the 336 approved by the Japanese government on the eve of deregulation in 1983.¹³

In the past, the Japanese government went to great lengths to assure the population of its commitment to food safety. In 1972, as consumer activism on this issue was reaching its postwar peak and the AF2 movement at the grassroots level was gathering steam, the Diet passed a resolution alongside an amendment to strengthen the 1948 Food Sanitation Law (*Shokuhin eiseihō*)¹⁴ which pledged to restrict the number of additives approved in the future. In keeping with that resolution, the Ministry of Health and Welfare authorized only seven additives between 1972 and 1983 (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, May 18, 1983). In 1975, in response to mounting domestic fears concerning the possible presence of dangerous additives and pesticides in imported foods, the Miki cabinet resolved that additives should be authorized only on the basis of studies conducted by Japanese governmental organs, universities, or other domestic research organizations in a position of authority (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 14, 1983),¹⁵ the implication being that foreign data would not be accepted as an alternative. These moves met with a mixture of resounding approval from consumer representatives and criticism from abroad that the Japanese government was erecting nontariff barriers to trade in food products.

Even though the Japanese regulatory regime governing synthetic food additives acquired a reputation abroad for being one of the strictest in the world, consumer organizations complained that it was not strict enough. In accordance with the cultural premium placed on cleanliness and purity, consumer organizations have in principle opposed the use of synthetic additives on the grounds that safer, natural substances¹⁶ can be used to perform the same functions.¹⁷ Some organizations like the Consumers Union (*Shōhisha renmei*), moreover, have even gone so far as to insist on a blanket ban on all synthetic additives. Most consumer advocates refuse to accept the scientific argument that some controversial additives are harmless to human beings when consumed in minute quantities, pointing out that science has yet to disprove the possibility of toxic side effects resulting from the prolonged consumption of many different kinds of additives. Consumer organizations have, in other words, equated “safety” with “zero risk.” The Min-

istry of Health and Welfare, meanwhile, like many of its foreign counterparts, equates safety with the “absence of significant risk” (D. Vogel 1992:120).

Consumer organizations have also contested the manner in which synthetic additives have been approved for use in Japan. The Food Sanitation Law stipulates that before it can be approved by the Minister of Health and Welfare, an additive must first be assessed by the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council (Shokuhin eisei chōsakai), an advisory council that answers to the minister. The 1972 Diet resolution on food safety requires that council membership mainly reflect the opinions of consumers. In practice, however, scientists and business interests are much more heavily represented than consumer interests, with only one representative from consumer organizations permitted on the council at any given time. Much to the chagrin of the organized movement, moreover, consumer representatives are not designated as such. For example, Takada Yuri, a prominent vice-president of Shufuren and the first consumer representative to sit on the commission, was required to serve in her capacity as a pharmacist, a title that she felt undermined the significance of her proclamations made on behalf of consumers. Her successors—both of them well-known consumer representatives—served on the council as “individuals of learning and experience” (*gakushiki keikensha*). In keeping with consumer misgivings about governmental *shingikai* in general, all three consumer advocates have complained vehemently about the paucity of consumer representation on the council and its tendency either to override or ignore their opinions (interviews: Y. Itō, April 1994; Kanamori, April 1993; Takada, April 1994; kss 1983:126).

According to the rules and regulations governing council procedures, additives can be approved only when (1) there is actual proof (*jisshō*) or confirmation (*kakunin*) of the safety of those additives and (2) the additives are deemed both indispensable to a food product and beneficial to consumers (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 12, 1983).¹⁸ Again, the consumer representatives who have served on the council tell a different story. Council members have often been known to devote only a few hours of discussion to safety issues, and the documentation on which such deliberations are based has often been provided by food-processing companies rather than independent research organizations or the Ministry of Health and Welfare. In addition, members are often given only a few days to read hundreds of pages of documents, many of which are written in complicated academic styles that are often incomprehensible to laypersons. To complicate matters further, many of the documents are written in English and other foreign languages, with no translations pro-

vided (interview, Y. Itō, April 1994). Finally, until recently members were forbidden to discuss the contents of the documents with noncouncil members, a requirement that obstructed attempts by consumer representatives to obtain outside assistance or, for that matter, to disseminate information about the policy process to other advocates. Together, these informal norms and customs governing the regulatory policy process effectively excluded the systematic incorporation of consumer voices in that process.

By the early 1980s, consumer advocates were complaining that the policy process surrounding the regulation of synthetic additives was a slipshod, undemocratic affair sorely in need of reform. The government disagreed. To consumer representatives, Ministry of Health and Welfare officials justified the closed-door sessions as necessary to ensure free and open discussions by council members, the majority of whom have been scientists (*Shōhisha Report*, July 27, 1983). They also argued that decisions reached in the council were based on international standards of safety and that consumer advocates had underestimated the ability of modern technology to determine the exact levels at which various kinds of additives could be safely consumed by humans.

Toward the Comprehensive Deregulation of Synthetic Additives

Neoliberalism and the Movement Toward Deregulation

By 1980, regulation as a mechanism for protecting consumers was falling into disfavor in the United States, Britain, and, to a lesser extent, Japan. At the root of this trend was a widespread rejection of the premise expounded by many scholars and policymakers that economic regulation was serving the “public interest.” During the 1960s and 1970s, academics of the Chicago school developed the so-called capture theory of regulation, which stated that regulatory agencies were serving the interests of the regulated rather than those of the public at large. George Stigler, for example, viewed the regulatory process not as a forum for the advancement of the consumer interest but, rather, as a kind of political marketplace in which politicians offered industry protective regulation in return for votes and financial backing (Stigler 1971). Milton Friedman, whose writings became a major cornerstone of the neoliberal economic “rethink” in Britain as well as the United States, argued that

government efforts to protect the consumer through regulation had failed because they excluded many products from the marketplace and reduced the overall range of consumer choice (Jordan 1993:23).¹⁹

Although the capture theory of regulation has since been partially refuted by a number of American scholars (see, e.g., Wilson 1980b), it nevertheless found a receptive audience among business representatives and conservative policymakers during the late 1970s and 1980s in all three countries following the economic slowdowns and mounting budget deficits of the post-oil shock period. Academic proposals for governmental disengagement from the economy, meanwhile, had become viable solutions to contemporary problems relating to economic performance. This did not mean that consumer protection was no longer a consideration for policymakers; rather, it meant that there was a growing belief that consumer protection was best achieved through freer market mechanisms. Consequently, terms like *self-regulation* and *self-responsibility* assumed the dimensions of deregulatory slogans in the United States, Britain, and Japan, underscoring a basic trust the market's ability to provide industries with the incentives to establish their own rules governing entry and exit and product safety standards, and for consumers to take care of themselves.

In many ways, the notions of self-regulation and self-responsibility conflict with the traditional beliefs of organized consumer movements. Consumer advocates do not view consumption as a strictly economic act but, rather, as a multifaceted activity that affects such quality-of-life concerns as one's life, health, and standard of living. In the past, consumer advocates in Japan and elsewhere put very little trust in the ability of unfettered markets to guarantee the rights and interests of consumers. Instead, they pressed for governmental economic regulation to control prices and supply and for social regulation to guarantee product quality and safety.

One therefore might have expected consumer advocates during the 1980s to oppose the neoliberal movement toward deregulation. In both the United States and Britain, however, this was not always the case. Although consumer organizations expressed misgivings about certain aspects of deregulation, many eventually supported proposals for airline and other forms of deregulation in the expectation that consumers would be better off in the long run. In Japan, consumer organizations were vociferous in their opposition to deregulation, a development partly attributable, as we noted earlier, to the *kind* of deregulation being proposed. In the United States and Britain, reform focused on *economic* regulation which, when loosened, stood to benefit

consumers by lowering prices and expanding product choice. *Social* regulation, meanwhile, emerged from the reform process more or less unscathed. In Japan during the early 1980s, the neoliberal spotlight focused not only on economic regulation but also on product safety standards, governmental controls over the use of synthetic additives, and other forms of social regulation. Consumer organizations responded by opposing deregulation across the board.

Enter gaiatsu

The Japanese government's interest in social deregulation reflected both international developments in food processing and, more important, outright pressure from the United States for the liberalization of Japanese agricultural markets. Foreign trends and *gaiatsu* (foreign pressure) had had an impact on rules governing the use of food additives well before the neoliberal reform movement of the early 1980s. During the mid-1970s, for example, Japanese government authorities were monitoring worldwide reassessments of food safety standards that were contributing to the expanded use of synthetic additives in countries around the world.²⁰ Second, and in response to the mounting trade imbalance between Japan and the United States, Washington had begun to criticize Japan's strict controls over the use of additives as nontariff barriers to trade (see D. Vogel 1992). The Japanese government responded to these pressures during the mid- to late 1970s by authorizing the use of a handful of additives, including, in 1977, a highly controversial fungicide known as OPP found on imported citrus fruits.²¹

Whereas governmental efforts during the 1970s to appease the Americans were largely ad hoc, the response of the Nakasone government (1982–1987) to American trade pressure was far more systematic. Shortly after taking office, Nakasone authorized a comprehensive reassessment of economic and social regulatory controls that were allegedly functioning as barriers to imports. In 1982, the oto (Overseas Trade Ombudsman, Shijō kaihō mondai kujō shōri suishin honbu) was established under the jurisdiction of the Economic Planning Agency to monitor feedback from Japan's trade partners about Japanese trade practices. As might be expected, complaints concerning Japan's stringent food and product safety standards—most of them lodged by American businesses—topped the list. With regard to food additives, Americans were particularly concerned that Japan had failed to authorize

the use of 128 synthetic additives that were on the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization / World Health Organization (FAO/WHO)'s A1 list and that were widely used by American food-processing companies. It is in this context that the Nakasone government decided in 1983 to increase the number of synthetic additives permitted for use in Japan.

The Consumer Backlash

Among the eleven additives targeted for authorization in 1983 were the controversial artificial sweetener aspartame, fungicides used in breads and other baked foods, colorants found in chocolates and candies, and an additive used in beer to speed up the fermentation process. Along with those additives, the government also deliberated on BHA, an antioxidant widely used both in Japan²² and abroad that had long been opposed by consumer advocates. Research conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and a team of scientists at Nagoya University had shown that BHA caused cancer in rats. The ministry responded to these findings in the summer of 1982 by informing the GATT of a decision to ban the substance (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, February 1, 1983). Following an outpouring of complaints from the American, British, and Canadian governments that the ban constituted a nontariff barrier to trade, Prime Minister Nakasone and Mori Yoshirō, the minister of health and welfare, conferred in January 1983 and agreed to suspend the ban until international scientists had ruled conclusively that BHA was unsafe for human consumption (*Mainichi shimbun*, February 1, 1983; *Yomiuri shimbun* February 1, 1983). Consumer organizations were outraged by the move and argued that the ban should have stayed in place, given the substance's potentially carcinogenic properties. Although BHA was not one of the eleven additives formally authorized by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in August 1983, the ministry did decide at that time to extend the suspension of the ban. Despite the continued opposition of consumer representatives, BHA is still used today.

From the government's point of view, loosening governmental restrictions on the use of synthetic additives was, comparatively speaking, a politically painless but fruitful affair. For one thing, the deregulatory process could be carried out relatively simply and effectively in the Ministry of Health and Welfare and without any formal input from the Diet. Deregulation also had the support of domestic food processors that opposed governmental controls

and all the tedious paperwork and other forms of governmental interference that accompanied them. Finally, authorizing several additives all at once could be seen as a signal to Japan's trading partners that the country was "serious" about deregulation and committed to opening its agricultural markets.

The authorization of the eleven additives resulted in a major consumer backlash. Several issues were at stake for consumer advocates, not the least of which was the culturally based concern for the safety of the nation's food supply. Although all the targeted additives were listed on the FAO / WHO's A1 list, advocates opposed authorization on the same grounds that they had opposed the use of synthetic additives in the past: the lack of evidence that the prolonged consumption of such substances would not result in damaging side effects.

Ongoing problems in the nation's product-labeling standards were also of concern to consumer advocates. Before 1983, only one-fifth of the 336 authorized synthetic additives had to be listed on the labels of food products. Manufacturers were not required to state those additives by name so long as their functions were clearly indicated (*Sankei shimbun*, August 10, 1983). Much more lenient than those of the United States and most Western European countries, Japanese food-labeling standards gave manufacturers the freedom to withhold information from consumers regarding controversial additives. These standards undermined the validity of the pro-deregulatory slogan of "self-responsibility," since consumers could not be expected to make informed choices about the foods they purchased if they were not given information on which to base those choices.

The role played by *gaiatsu* in the unraveling of governmental controls over synthetic additives was grist for the consumer movement's mill. Although advocates have been known to welcome foreign interference in domestic political affairs as a boost to the consumer cause,²³ such has not been the case for food safety. Condemning American demands for the liberalization of food additives during the late 1970s and 1980s as a threat to the health of Japanese consumers, advocates, like their counterparts in many European countries, argued that the international harmonization of regulations affecting trade flows should not impinge on national safety standards reflecting the culinary habits and cultural traditions of a particular society (*Shōhisha undō nenpan* 1987:17). Advocates also worried that foreign pressure on the additives issue would jeopardize the future of Japanese agriculture by destroying barriers to food imports. Heavily influenced by the fam-

ines of the early postwar period, by their long-standing political partnership with the farming community, and by Japanese conceptualizations of what it means to be a consumer in society, the majority of older advocates have consistently supported agricultural protectionism as a prerequisite for self-sufficiency in the nation's food supply, even if it leads to higher prices for consumers. According to Takeuchi Naokazu of Consumers Union, these cultural, safety, and nationalist considerations warrant the placement of food products *outside* the mainstream commodity economy (Miyachi 1984). The failure to do so, he argued, would allow Americans to "occupy the stomachs" of the Japanese (Takeuchi 1990:104).

Finally, consumer advocates viewed the whole affair as evidence that the Japanese government could not be trusted to respect the wishes of consumers. More specifically, they condemned the Nakasone government's decision to authorize the eleven additives as a violation of past policies to protect the health of consumers, particularly the 1972 Diet resolution and the Miki cabinet's 1975 proclamation (*Asahi shimbun*, June 11, 1983).

The Deregulatory Process

Consumer advocates also criticized the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council for issuing its recommendation after only a few short weeks of deliberations, for ignoring evidence generated by Japanese scientists that several of the additives caused cancer in rats,²⁴ and, as the council chairman himself later admitted during a press conference, for failing to build a viable consensus among the membership in favor of deregulation (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 13, 1983).

The harried pace of deliberations meant that many of the members had little chance to absorb the reams of documents provided by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. This matter was later the target of a heated exchange in the Diet's Social Labor Committee (*Shakai rōdō iinkai*) between a Shaminren Diet member and the head of the Ministry of Health and Welfare bureau that serves as the secretariat to the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council:

SHAMINREN: When were the documents delivered to the members of the [council]? Also, how many were delivered?

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELFARE: I think about a week beforehand.

SHAMINREN: I heard that documents [for the April 11 meeting] were delivered once on April 3 and once on April 6. Is that correct?

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELFARE: That's correct.

SHAMINREN: I heard that the documents were enough to fill two cardboard boxes and that they amounted to 6,000 pages—many of which were written in English. Minister [of Health and Welfare] Mori says it is enough to feed a horse. Is this true?

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELFARE: I think that's about right.

SHAMINREN: So the members had one full week to read the first set and only three to five days to read the second set. And with that, they're to carry out careful deliberations?

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELFARE: I think they were able to deliberate sufficiently, since each member was to read only those documents pertaining to his field of specialty.

(Mainichi shimbun, July 13, 1983)

Although accounts differ as to the precise timing of the distribution of documents (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 13, 1983), the fact remains that the members were unable to make informed decisions based on a thorough evaluation of the data at their disposal.

The haphazard deliberations of a council whose membership was skewed toward business interests suggests that the decision to deregulate had been made *before* the issue reached the council and that the council itself was little more than a *kakuremino* (lit., an “invisibility-granting fairy cloak”; Schwartz 1993:230), a forum for legitimizing behind-the-scenes political maneuvering by key policymakers. This was in turn facilitated by the fact that the main actors behind the decision to authorize the additives were few in number: Prime Minister Nakasone, the minister of health and welfare, several high-level bureaucrats in the Ministry of Health and Welfare,²⁵ and business representatives.²⁶ This pro-deregulation coalition was able to control the decision-making agenda for two reasons, both of which pertain to the institutional configurations of the decision-making process. First, since only the Ministry of Health and Welfare had bureaucratic jurisdiction over additives in Japan, it did not have to coordinate its position with that of other ministries, a process that can lead to long-winded turf battles and policy-making stalemates. Second, the centralization of decision making in the bureaucracy enabled Nakasone and his supporters to sidestep the protests of

the opposition parties during the early stages of the policy process and to prevent the further politicization of this highly controversial issue. The discrete nature of the policy process in turn allowed key decision makers to act quickly and decisively before their bureaucratic or political opponents had a chance to mobilize—a feature that distinguishes the additives case from the antitrust and product liability cases, both of which were mired from the start in jurisdictional battles and political conflict.

Superimposed on this decision-making process was a sense of urgency precipitated by American trade pressure. This should not suggest, however, that the additives case was one of simple Japanese capitulation to American demands. As Schoppa argues in his analysis of the Structural Impediments Initiative (SII) talks, *gaiatsu* is successful when it resonates with the demands of a domestic political constituency (Schoppa 1997). Without such a commonality of interests, Schoppa contends, *gaiatsu* works only when it is accompanied by a serious diplomatic threat (Schoppa 1997:7). In the additives case, it is clear that the demands of American trade negotiators had found a receptive audience among the likes of Prime Minister Nakasone, one of the leading proponents of deregulation; the Ministry of Health and Welfare, which was much more liberal in its approach to regulating additives than Japanese consumers were; and Japanese food manufacturers and retailers, many of whom looked to the expanded use of synthetic additives as a ticket to higher sales. It is also clear that threat was *not* a major component of American trade pressure in this instance. Although Americans were certainly complaining about the role of Japanese product safety standards as nontariff barriers to trade, the threats of retaliation that accompanied those complaints did not carry nearly as much punch as they did after 1988, when the Super 301 provision of the Omnibus Trade and Competition Act enhanced the capacity of Congress and the U.S. trade representative to change the behavior of America's "recalcitrant" trade partners. Indeed, when all is said and done, American pressure in the additives case did not preempt the role of pro-business actors in consumer politics; rather, it complemented and legitimized that role.

The Anti-Deregulation Campaign

After the government presented the public with a *fait accompli*—sanctioned by a council that purported to speak for the public interest—the media zoomed in on the issue. A flood of critical newspaper articles spoke

of a government that had caved in to foreign pressure and resorted to underhanded tactics in forcing what amounted to a highly unpopular decision. Consumer organizations, for their own part, cashed in on the mounting sense of public outrage to build a nationwide anti-deregulation movement.

The movement grew rapidly during the summer and autumn of 1983 as both local groups and national organizations campaigned aggressively at the local level to bring about a reversal of the government's decision (*Asahi shimbun*, June 11, 1983). As part of the *mondai teigi* (issue definition) stage of their campaign, advocates educated consumers on the alleged dangers of chemical additives by sponsoring public lectures and symposia using the facilities and public relations assistance of local consumer centers and by distributing tens of thousands of leaflets and booklets to concerned citizens. In addition, rallies and demonstrations were held around the country. One such rally of more than 10,000 people was staged in Tōkyō on the heels of an official state visit by President Ronald Reagan (Nihon seikyōren 1984:20). The largest consumer rally to date, it was surpassed only by those of the anticonsumption tax movement later in the decade. Advocates also pressured thirty-three prefectural and 392 city, town, and village assemblies into passing resolutions calling for a reversal in the government's policy (Nihon seikyōren 1984:20) and persuaded a number of localities to enact ordinances banning several of the controversial additives (*Kobe shimbun*, July 5, 1983). Finally, appeals signed by hundreds of prominent personalities from a range of professions were published in the newspapers, and more than 8 million signatures were collected for petitions that were sent to both the Diet and local assemblies (Zenchifuren 1986:136), a number that far exceeded those of the antitrust and product liability movements. Most of these tactics were carried out under the guidance of the Central Executive Committee for Opposing the Deregulation of Food Additives (Shokuhin tenkabutsu no kisei kanwa hantai chuō jikkō iinkai), a liaison committee established in October 1983 by ninety-six national, regional, and local consumer organs and with the selective support of labor activists, lawyers, and the agricultural cooperatives (Zenchifuren 1986:136).

Judging from the sheer number of the petitions and the attendance levels at rallies and demonstrations, efforts to elicit a response from the public at large had been very successful. The response was not all that surprising, however, given the population's cultural predisposition to take an interest in food safety issues. The results of public opinion surveys underscore this point. In a survey of about 500 housewives conducted in December 1983

by a Tōkyō consumer-related study group, 68.2 percent of the respondents said that they were very worried about the deregulation of additives. Only 2.2 percent stated that they were unaware of the issue (*Mainichi shimbun*, December 20, 1983).

Consumer organizations also tried to lobby LDP politicians, but their requests for meetings were often refused. One tactic that was carried out quite successfully vis-à-vis the political parties, however, was the submission of questionnaires to various party headquarters. Although the questions asked were often rhetorical and yielded information that was largely irrelevant to the policy process, they did uncover some interesting insights into the politics of deregulation and provided consumer advocates with verbal ammunition against the government. In the spring of 1983, for example, a coalition of consumer organizations distributed a questionnaire to the parties that consisted of the following politically loaded questions:²⁷ (1) Do you approve of deregulating additives in response to trade friction and without proof that the substances are safe? (2) Do you support the 1972 Diet resolution proclaiming that the use of additives should be restricted “to the utmost” (*kyokuryoku seigen suru*)? and (3) Do you feel that the deregulation of additives without conclusive proof of their long-term safety will alarm the general public?

The LDP responded to the first question by stating that the deregulation of additives was necessitated by (1) Japan’s international obligation to open its markets by harmonizing product standards and licensing procedures according to international norms and (2) the diversification of domestic culinary habits and the diffusion of processed foods. This position was seconded by the New Liberal Club. The JSP, Kōmeitō, and the JCP, by contrast, all responded that they opposed deregulation on the grounds that the safety of the targeted additives had not been conclusively determined. The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) took the middle ground by supporting the need to liberalize domestic markets while criticizing the government’s refusal to respect the public’s wishes.

As for whether or not Japan should still abide by the 1972 Diet resolution, the LDP evaded the question by arguing that the safety of the additives was “internationally recognized” (*kokusaiteki ni kakunin sarete*) and that the additives were necessary given the nation’s changing culinary habits. The New Liberal Club toed a similar line. The other opposition parties (with the exception of the DSP, which did not respond to the second and third questions) replied that the resolution should indeed be respected through strict control of the total number of additives authorized for use in Japan.

The LDP avoided the third question by asserting once again that the additives were safe and posed no dangers to public health. The New Liberal Club was much less evasive in its response, arguing that given the lack of conclusive information on the effects of prolonged consumption of many different kinds of additives, steps should be taken to allay the fears of the populace. The other opposition parties were more stringent in their demands that the long-term effects of additives be more thoroughly investigated. The Socialist and Communist Parties also called on the government to respond to public pressure by assigning more consumer representatives to the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council and opening deliberations to the public.

These responses clearly indicate that the LDP, which used *gaiatsu* as an excuse for implementing unpopular political measures, was unwilling to publicly acknowledge consumer concerns regarding the safety of synthetic additives. Most of the opposition parties took a "safety first" stance, acknowledged the need to keep the public informed and to address their demands, and generally portrayed themselves as allies of consumers. The LDP cited the existence of scientific information to justify its claims, whereas the opposition parties pointed to the lack thereof to support theirs. It was classic party politics.

Consumer organizations responded to the LDP's position as elucidated in these and other statements by taking the moral high ground. In both movement publications and through the national media, advocates tried to depict the ruling party as completely oblivious to the welfare of its citizens. In July 1983, for example, the *Mainichi shimbun* reported on a heated exchange over the safety of the prolonged use of synthetic additives between consumer representatives and Mori Yoshirō, the minister of health and welfare. Once it became painfully clear that his answers had failed to satisfy his opponents, an irritated Mori demanded: "Has anyone ever fallen ill because of additives?" (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 12, 1983).

The press, for its own part, had a field day with the issue. Food safety is one of the few contemporary consumer issues that is relatively easy for the average consumer to understand.²⁸ Moreover, given the penchant for Japanese citizens to judge a food product "unsafe until proven absolutely safe," the issue can be conveyed with few ambiguities. Articles reporting the estimates of a Dōshisha University professor that the average Japanese adult was consuming as much as 4 kilograms of synthetic additives a year (*Hokkaidō shimbun*, May 19, 1983), therefore, were bound to provoke the consternation of consumers. In short, the controversy surrounding the eleven additives

made good copy as headline news in the home economics sections of the national and local newspapers.

In addition to the safety issue, the deregulatory process itself was a topic of media attention, even for the pro-business *Nihon keizai shimbun*. On the day the council delivered its final decision, the newspaper criticized the fact that the council had stated not that it would endorse the authorization of the additives but, rather, that it “would not stand in the way” (*sashitsukaenai*) of such a move (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, May 18, 1983). Other newspapers also raised some thought-provoking questions about the way in which the council deliberations had been carried out. In a highly informative and well-researched series of articles published in July, for example, the *Mainichi shimbun*²⁹ quoted inside sources who revealed that the actual issue of safety had been the focus of only three to four hours of deliberations and that many of the documents used for those deliberations were biased. One council member alleged that the documentation used to prove the safety of the artificial sweetener aspartame, for example, had been provided exclusively by the American firm that manufactured the substance (*Mainichi shimbun*, July 14, 1983). These and other articles were written in a style that would easily outrage readers who were concerned about their rights to be heard and to product safety. They were, in short, a boon to the anti-deregulation movement.

The opposition parties also took up the consumer banner by pitting themselves against a seemingly indifferent government as champions of the consumer interest. Although opposition politicians did not work closely with consumer advocates and were criticized by the movement for not acting quickly enough on the issue,³⁰ they did articulate the consumer position in the policymaking sphere on several occasions. As illustrated earlier, questions concerning the content of deliberations in the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council were frequently raised in both chambers of the Diet, and a number of politicians—including the future socialist prime minister Murayama Tomiichi—took the LDP and the Ministry of Health and Welfare to task for handling the deregulatory process in an undemocratic and haphazard fashion (*Shufuren dayori*, May 15, 1983). On one occasion, JSP politicians organized a debate with Ministry of Health and Welfare officials and invited consumer representatives to observe. When asked why the council deliberations had been closed to the public, the officials responded that it was to preserve the academic freedom of the members, most of whom were scientists. They also stated that even though the meetings were closed, the

public could later view the minutes upon request. This came as a surprise to many of the consumer representatives in the group, who had found it next to impossible to gain access to that documentation (*Shōhisha Report*, July 27, 1983).

More than any other consumer campaign either before or after, consumer organizations, their allies, and the general public spoke with a single voice in their opposition to the deregulation of the eleven additives. This upsurge of public protest from the grass roots of society did not, however, lead to success in the policy realm. The Ministry of Health and Welfare's decision to deregulate the eleven additives went ahead as planned, largely because of the strength of Nakasone's coalition, which operated in a discrete and highly controlled institutional environment. It was a crushing disappointment for the organized movement.

Postscript

In addition to loosening the regulations governing food additives, Nakasone and his allies simplified the government's food inspection system. In mid-1983, sixteen laws governing safety checks on imported foods were amended as part of the governmental policy of administrative reform and in response to pressure from the United States (Nihon seikyōren 1984:4). Also in 1983, the Food Sanitation Supervisory Office (*Shokuhin eisei kanshi jimusho*), the governmental body in charge of supervising the nation's inspection procedures of food imports, was abolished and its duties transferred to the Quarantine Office. As a result of these administrative changes, the number of inspections of imported foods declined sharply. Consumer organizations, their allies in the legal community, and opposition party politicians opposed these cutbacks in the country's food inspection administrative apparatus and continued to demand tighter regulatory controls over inspection procedures well into the 1980s.

From the point of view of consumers, the deregulatory movement of the early 1980s did have one positive side effect: following the authorization of the eleven additives and the postponement of the ban on BHA, the Ministry of Health and Welfare announced that it would strengthen the nation's food-labeling standards in order to provide consumers with the information to make more informed choices about the foods they purchased. Seventy-eight additives, including the eleven slated for authorization in 1983, now had to be identified by name on product labels. All but five of that total, moreover,

had to be identified according to function as well (D. Vogel 1992:128). Although the changes were in keeping with the deregulatory slogan of consumer self-responsibility, they were received rather grudgingly by food-processing companies, many of which criticized the new standards as just another form of regulation that would require investment in new labeling designs. To accommodate businesses and much to the annoyance of consumer organizations, the Ministry of Health and Welfare ruled that the new standards would not go into effect for another two years. While welcoming the changes as a protection of the rights to know and to choose, consumer advocates criticized the government's decision as an attempt to defuse conflict over what was, in the final analysis, an unresolved public safety issue (*Shufuren dayori*, July 15, 1983). True to their long-standing faith in the merits of the public-interest theory of regulation, moreover, many advocates paternalistically questioned the ability of consumers to properly evaluate the information at their disposal concerning the foods they consumed.

Finally, it should be noted that a few consumer organizations softened their opposition to deregulation by the late 1980s as the government abandoned its efforts to carry out social regulatory reform. Today, organizations like Shufuren, Chifuren, and the consumer cooperatives support reforms that enhance consumer access to a wider range of products at lower prices. At the same time, however, advocates maintain their vigilance over both the processes and long-term ramifications of regulatory reform. With regard to the deregulation of medicinal products, for example, concerned advocates remain wary of proposals to introduce sweeping changes that would make more over-the-counter medicines available to consumers. Advocates like Itō Yasue, a Shōkaren executive and former member of the Food Sanitation Deliberation Council, contend that such products should be deregulated on a case-by-case basis and only after extensive investigations into their safety have been completed (interview, Y. Itō, December 1998). Japanese consumer organizations, in short, accept deregulation as a political inevitability, but they are determined to prevent the kinds of deregulatory excesses that might prove harmful to consumers.

Conclusion

The movement to oppose the deregulation of synthetic additives was, without doubt, one of the largest and best-organized single-issue consumer campaigns of the postwar period. To the leaders of the movement, the au-

thorization of the eleven additives symbolized a capitulation to foreign pressure that did not correspond to the nation's cultural values, domestic demand, or economic necessity. Critics contend that the movement's opposition to deregulation on the grounds that the additives might be unsafe was built on scientific quicksand; indeed, there is no conclusive evidence even today that the fears of the movement and the general public were scientifically sound. What is important in this case, however, is not so much the scientific validity of the movement's position as the perceptions of both consumer organizations and an attentive public that many of those additives were unfit for human consumption. And as the size and cohesiveness of the anti-deregulation campaign show, perceptions can be as potent a force as truth when it comes to galvanizing the public behind a political cause.³¹

The anti-deregulation movement was overpowered by a tightly knit governmental coalition backed by business interests and legitimized by foreign pressure. This coalition had complete control over the decision-making process and managed to reach a decision before the issue became mired in political controversy and party politics. Faced with the monolithic power of this coalition, the cohesiveness of the consumer coalition and the strong support of both local governments and public opinion proved inconsequential. In this respect, the anti-deregulation case is proof that the relative impact of an organized social movement on policy is ultimately determined not by the wealth and size of that movement but by the structure of the policy-making system and by the nature of the political alliances within that system.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, the failure of the anti-deregulation campaign marked the advent of a "winter period" (*fuyu no jidai*) in the postwar history of the organized consumer movement. Overwhelmed by the conservative, pro-business political atmosphere of the 1980s, consumer organizations suffered a crisis of confidence and a leveling off or decline in their membership levels. Many individual consumer organizations continued to fight for such food safety objectives as a ban on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on agricultural products. Aside from these campaigns and a highly unsuccessful bid to block the introduction of the consumption tax in 1988, consumer activism became primarily a local affair as participation in national policy-related campaigns fell to a twenty-year low. Then in 1991, the deregulatory movement catapulted consumer organizations into the national political arena once again, this time to enact a product liability law.