

Letter from Japan

The Year in Retrospect

THE new draft budget for 1962 has been published and is now open for criticism before it is submitted to the Diet. The total expenditure is Y2,426,801 million, an increase of 24 per cent over the previous year. In spite of this increased expenditure, a number of taxes are likely to be cut as a result of the increased yield from the present boom. The main increases in expenditure are on public works (mainly roads), social security (mainly as a result of a doctors and dentists' strike demanding increased payments) and education (as a result of a war-time increase in the number of children at present in middle schools). Also defence has slightly increased to Y204,858, about a 10 per cent increase over last year. Thus most of the increase in expenditure is not a result of new policy but is a consequence of the events of the last year. Behind the budget however is the thought on everyone's mind that this state of expansion cannot last and that the low foreign exchange reserves of the Japanese Government must be increased in some way. The natural way to do this is by limiting the amount of foreign exchange spent on imports and yet the Japanese Government has committed itself to a policy of gradually removing import restrictions so that Japan is in the position of a blindfolded man balancing on the edge of a precipice.

Some of the internal events of the last year which have exercised the interest of the Japanese man-in-the-street are as follows:

Assassinations

As a result of a short story in the national weekly magazine *Chuo Koron* cynically attacking the Emperor in a "dream", the wife of the editor was badly injured and his maid killed by an ultra-rightist youth. Very recently a plot by ex-members of the old war-time Imperial Defence Academy (unrelated to the present day Self Defence Forces) to kill the Prime Minister and leading members of the Liberal Democrat, Socialist and Communist Parties was uncovered. One interest-

ing feature of this plot was that one of the senior members involved was the same person who had killed the pre-war Premier, Inukai. He had been condemned to life imprisonment at the time, but had been released after one year for "good conduct" and had then become managing director of an intermediate sized firm.

However, these "plots" should be seen in proper perspective. Although the tradition of right-wing assassinations has clearly been preserved in modern Japan, the attitude of the public towards them is very different from that before the war and Japanese society is not at all likely to come under a right wing Government overnight as happened in the case of South Korea.

Government's Responsibility

During the last year there was a continuous stream of traffic accidents between gravel lorries and other cars and pedestrians. Something like 50 per cent of all accidents involve these trucks which are frequently overloaded and driven by youths without any sense of responsibility. The amount of compensation for dependents of those killed is extremely small and frequently the victims are not covered by insurance. The young drivers plead inexperience and their employers deny responsibility. In a court case recently in which one woman was dragged 50 feet behind a truck with the husband jumping on the cab begging the driver to stop the driver was convicted of murder, and not dangerous driving, with a more severe penalty. Yet public opinion is still not sufficiently roused to take firm steps against such drivers and the companies employing them.

The same malady may be seen in two coal mine disasters which took place in Fukuoka-ken on March 9 and 16 killing 107 miners. The disasters were clearly a result of rules recommended by the Safety Inspectors not being carried out in spite of an official warning to the companies. The managers of these companies are still alive and no term of imprisonment has been imposed on anyone.

Basically these events of 1961 are not a result of cruelty but of a lack of awareness that the Government has any responsibility in private affairs of coal mine employers and employees or of gravel truck drivers and the truck owners. The situation is very similar to that in England at the time of Wilberforce and the early clays of English capitalism except, of course, that Japan is infinitely more sophisticated. But Japan must be one of the really few capitalist countries left in the world. In some respects by contrast the Americans seem almost socialist. Perhaps this explains the strength of left wing thinking in Japan.

Sport

One event which stands out in international sport is the defeat of the Japanese champion, Sone (Height 5' 11", weight 198 lbs) by the Dutch champion, Geesink (6'6" and 262 lbs) in the international judo championships. The Japanese experts as well as the people were very much surprised at this defeat, especially as Geesink pinned Sone to the mat after only seven minutes, a feat which is almost unheard of among the top-ranking champions who never allow themselves to get into this position. The bout was scheduled to last for twenty minutes.

Being wise after the event however, the following explanation has been offered for the defeat. Originally, judo grew out of jujitsu. Unlike judo, in jujitsu a number of dangerous holds which are likely to kill someone if properly applied (something like *karate*) are allowed. Thus in jujitsu it makes no difference whether the opponents are big or small. As long as one can get in one's blow one is safe. However with the rise of judo as a sport weight started to count for more because these fatal blows could not be used. The reforms of Jigoro Hano, the founder of the judo, were principals based on excluding these special holds. When judo was introduced into the Olympics, three divisions were made for different weights, a reform which had to come even though it conflicted with the original spirit of the founder.

In 1946 judo was divided into two main schools, the Kodokan in Tokyo and the Butokukai in Kyoto. The former, roughly speaking, put emphasis on getting the opponent on to the mat and the latter on grappling with him standing. General MacArthur closed the Butokukai, leaving Kodokan, the main school of judo inside Japan. The teachers of the Butokukai went overseas to teach judo in those countries where it was most popular like France, Holland and England. The low salaries of the professionals at the Kodokan combined with the smaller stature of Japanese have combined in weakening the previous advantage of Japanese judoists. And when it is realised that Geesink is also a first class athlete in other fields, his victory cannot be regarded as surprising although it was certainly unexpected. The victory of the Japanese in the 1964 Olympics cannot be regarded as certain even though the division into various

classes on the basis of weight makes it likely that the Japanese will win at least one.

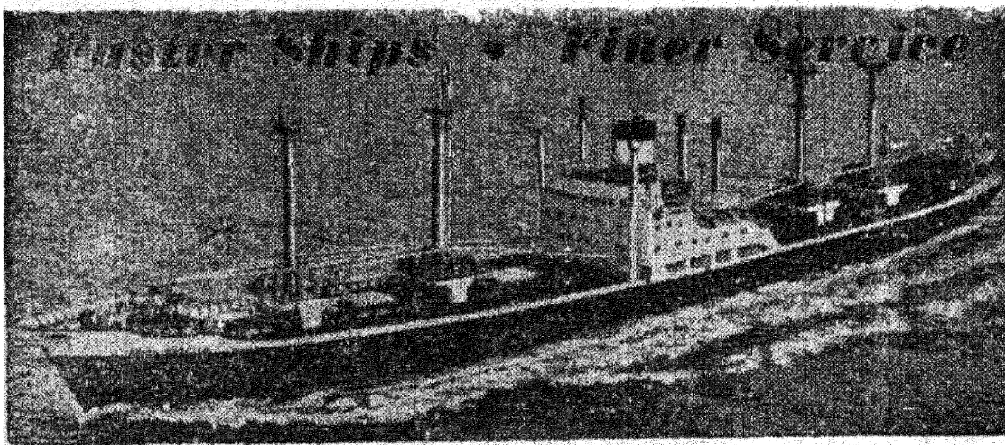
International Affairs

Last year was a dull one for Japan internationally. On every really important international issue it sided with the United States, as on the question of seating of Communist China. There was little contact with the other side of the sea of Japan and even the Japan Socialist Party failed to send any important representatives to China or the Soviet Union. In the annual meeting of the WFTU, Sohyo (the largest trade union organisation) found it necessary to refuse nomination for the vice-chairmanship because they could not endorse the Russian explosion of the 50 megaton bomb on the grounds of political necessity.

The Prime Minister made a very polite trip around the other countries in S E Asia. When he return-

ed he made a statement that he considered Japan a truly "Asian country" but when asked by a reporter whether this meant that Japan should endorse the Asian policy of "neutralism and non-involvement in power 'blocs'" he denied that any change in the policy of close alliance with the United States was contemplated.

it seems unlikely that 1962 will prove as calm for Japan as 1961 was. By and large the Japanese people are more interested in internal problems — the standard of living and the size of the wage packet — than in international affairs, although any presumptuous criticism by other countries of their national pride will always unite them. This year will deal with the difficult problem of trade liberalisation, the size of the foreign exchange holdings and direct voting on the Red China question. Any one of these issues could cause difficulties.



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