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TOKYO, Dec. 24—The "Komeito whirlwind," as newspapers here say, is cutting a wide, devastating swath across many hitherto placid electoral districts as the voting day, Saturday, approaches in Japan's year-end elections for the 486-seat House of Representatives.

The Komeito, or Clean Government party, is the political arm of the Soka Gakkai, an energetic and fast-growing organization that says it has approximately 16,000,000 adherents belonging to the Nichiren Shoshu sect of Buddhism, a branch of the Nichiren denomination founded in the 13th century.

The party, formally organized only five years ago, is running 76 candidates for house seats, seems certain to win 40 to 45, and says it has good chance of winning 10 or 12 more. In the last house, it held 25 seats.

The unusual husband-and-wife team of Ichiro and Michiko Watanabe is a symbol both of the party's appeal to women and young people, and of its threat to Japan's two established major parties, the ruling Liberal-Democrats and the Socialists. The Liberal-Democrats held 272 seats in the last house and the Socialists 135.

Husband Seeks Second Term

Mr. Watanabe, who is 38 years old, is running for his second term from a district in the port city of Kobe. His wife, 37 years old, is the Komeito's standard-bearer in the bitterly contested First District of Tokyo, which includes three major downtown wards.

"Taxes and high prices are the major issues of this campaign," Mr. Watanabe said in an interview in Arima, in the high mountains just behind Kobe. "When we began campaigning two weeks ago, we thought that Okinawa and the security treaty with the United States would be the main questions, so we planned to spend about half our speech time on these questions and half on domestic issues.

"But since the campaign began, every party has had to change its plans. The voters' overwhelming interest is in high prices and taxes. We can't disregard Okinawa or the security treaty entirely, but we just mention a bit at the end."

"Premier Eisaku Sato is strong on Okinawa, but weak on prices. After all, he got the United States to agree to return Okinawa in 1972, and while we may be suspicious about the terms of the agreement, everyone is happy about the return of Okinawa itself.

"But look at the way prices keep going up. Mr. Sato boasted he would keep the annual rise at five per cent or less.



Yoshikatsu Takeiri, the chairman of Komeito, addressing a political assemblage in Tokyo



Junya Yano, secretary general of party, making a speech

But this year, consumer prices have gone up nearly seven per cent. Everyone is complaining. "What should we do about

it? First, we should keep public charges fixed—railway fares, gas and electricity charges, and the like. Second, we should in-

crease imports, for instance, of meat. A good cut of beef costs 230 yen [about 64 cents] for 100 grams [about a quarter of a pound] whereas the same cut imported from the United States would come to only 60 or 70 yen, and from Communist China 41 yen.

Mr. Watanabe, a genial, wide-faced former chemical engineer, cited figure after figure in an effort to show where the Liberal-Democrats had failed and how Komeito policies would set them right. The Komeito has won a reputation for devising down-to-earth programs with wide voter appeal, in contrast to the Socialists, who seem immersed in their ideological disputes with each other as well as with their enemies.

Support From Left Sought

The Komeito, an organization marked by the relative youth and energy of its leaders, headed by Yoshikatsu Takeiri, the chairman, and Junya Yano, the secretary general, has thus far proved difficult to categorize in the political spectrum. Some analysts believe that it has not yet formulated any clear political philosophy, noting that it has voted with the conservative Liberal-Democrats on some national and local issues and joined with the other opposition parties on others.

Recently it appears to have moved somewhat left of cen-

ter, possibly because, solidly assured of Soka Gakkai votes, it hopes to lure supporters from the Socialists and Democratic Socialists.

In Tokyo, Mr. Watanabe's slender wife, a law school graduate and a journalist, also cites figures and statistics, particularly in regard to taxes.

"Why should office workers, who can't hide their salaries, have to pay such heavy income and residential taxes, when large enterprises can take advantage of loophole after loophole?" she cried to a street-corner crowd near busy Shimobashi Station.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Watanabe have a basic and solid Soka Gakkai vote on which they can depend. In Kobe, where an electorate of a million voters will choose four representatives, the Soka Gakkai has about 50,000 votes. Mr. Watanabe will probably need another 50,000 independent votes to retain his seat.

One question attracting much attention in the election is the extent to which the Komeito can attract support from outside the Soka Gakkai adherents. The self-confident, militant tactics of the Buddhist group have aroused widespread antagonism and distrust, which has led some analysts to believe that the growth of both Soka Gakkai and its party will soon reach a natural limit and then halt.

But there is evidence that Komeito, with its broad general appeal to the voter and its concern for the man in the street, has been able to win substantial voting support from many who oppose the fundamental tenets of Soka Gakkai.

In Tokyo's First District, with 550,000 voters, Mrs. Watanabe needs 50,000 to 60,000 votes to win a seat. She can count on 30,000 Soka Gakkai adherents; for the rest, she must have the support of independent voters.

Both Kobe and the Tokyo First District show what havoc the Komeito has wrought to the decades-old status quo between the Liberal-Democrats and the Socialists. In Kobe, before Mr. Watanabe ran, the Liberal-Democrats held two seats and the Socialists two. When the Komeito entered the race in 1967, the Liberal-Democrats lost one of their seats, while the Socialists also lost one to the moderate Democratic Socialists.

In Tokyo's First District, which has three seats, the incumbents are a Liberal-Democrat, a Socialist and a Democratic Socialist. Now that the Komeito is putting up a candidate, one of these three is likely to fall—probably, political analysts here say, the Socialist.