**Japanese Politician Charged in Payoffs Gets Light Fine**

By By T. R. Field

Prosecutors formally accepted a controversial plea bargain Monday that allowed Japan's most powerful politician to avoid a misde- meanor plea and a minor fine for taking $4 million in illegal contribu- tions from the Yakuza in Japan's long history of politi- cal corruption. The prosecutors showed so much deference to Shintaro Kanemaru, 73, the chieftain of Japan's domi- nant Liberal-Democratic Party, that he could not even make him to court for questioning. Instead, Kanemaru deported a written con- fession from his Tokyo home, where a number of junior politicians have come in more days to express their continued loyalty.

The outbreak of public and the public have been less respectful, however. The prosecutors' decision to close the case with the payment of a $1.60 million fine has prompted angry its- der and street protests. Critics have said that the amount Kanemaru must pay is far more than the fine of $200,000 for overpiling garbage in some crowded Tokyo neighborhoods.

One politician splashed yellow paint on the wall outside the public prosecutor's building. The paint-thrower was immediately jailed without bail on a settled defecting property — a crime that carries fines from 30 percent higher than what he will eventually pay.

In light of the controversy, pros- ecutors took the unusual step of giving an interview to The Washington Post to explain their action. "We used all the legal authority we've got," said Deputy Prosecu- tor Takayoshi Nishimura. "We gave him the maximum fine authorized by law for failing to pay his debts.

The prosecutors, who appeared to have considered a much sterner penalty for taking any criminal action at all against a man with Kanemaru's power, clearly were moved by the sharp criticism of the plea bargain. Kanemaru, a 73-year-old member of the national Diet, or parlia- ment, is the biggest fish caught so far in the sprawling net of Japan's largest political scandal, the Sago-Kyoto case.

Officials of Saga, an express delivery firm that has been linked to the mob, reportedly sold out large helpings of cash, far in excess of legal contribution limits, to top poli- ticians in the dominant party and sev- eral opposition parties as well.

News leaks, evidently from pros- ecutors, suggest that the Saga case could become the biggest pay- off scandal ever in a political system that seems to have a major new financial crisis every year. The Saga case involved such huge sums that some analysts said the cash became problematic. Kanemaru's $4 million repayment was believed to be like a $200,000 fine in some of the most prominent political corruption cases.

Moreover, Saga officials origi- nally helped bring Kanemaru and other top politicians together with leaders of Japan's yakuza, the orga- nized crime syndicates. Untouched so far by the Saga case is Liberal-Democratic Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, although Kanemaru has served in his political patron and chief sup- porter with the party, Miyazawa has been on the man case and has conspicuously declined to join the politicians publicly to come to Kanemaru's defense. Several other top Liberal-Democratic offi- cials reportedly suspected of taking money from Saga Kyushu, the current case could actually help Miyazawa by tarnishing some of his competitors with the party regime.

But the new scandal could undermine Miyazawa's power in the Diet. Opposition parties have proven skilful at focusing on scandal revelations to start action against the Liberal-Democratic Party's tight- est regime.

There is no evidence that Kanemaru used the secret $4 mil- lion contribution for his own gain. Instead, he parceled the money out to other members of his party's faction for the re-elect- ion campaign.

Eight members of the Liberal- Democratic Party took part in a long discussion of the case with this correspond- ent over the weekend. All but one portrayed Kanemaru as a decent man who just trying to get by in a political system that requires huge amounts of money.

"We provides campaign funds for him," said faction member Shigeno Inahara. "And with- out that money, you can't get re- elected."

Because prosecutors let him get by in a political system that requires huge amounts of money, Kanemaru will not have to face offcial questions about his alleged dealings with the mob.