

Political Mondays

By Hans van der Lugt

A new series of conferences creating a venue for debate on current politics started this fall. "Political Mondays" is the title of the series and if we believe the first speaker, LDP Diet Member Taro Kono, who appeared on Oct. 22, Monday evenings are the perfect time to hold it because politicians return from their constituencies that day of the week and don't have a full schedule yet.

The political scheming and bickering over glasses of sake in the ryotei of Akasaka, if I may say so, only starts on Tuesdays. So Kono himself was in no hurry to leave after the scheduled speech and Q&A that evening and stayed a long time in the bar to continue discussions with

about 10 correspondents and other interested Club members.

The Political Mondays themselves are slightly different from our regular "Professional Luncheons" and "Professional Dinners." The room is set up without a raised head table to separate speaker from guests, so people have the opportunity to start discussions with the guest of honor while still enjoying their meal. The self-service buffet set-up instead of a table-served dinner makes for a more informal atmosphere. Questions to the speaker at these events are not limited to professional correspondents only, since these evenings are meant more as study-meetings than as regular press appearances.

The second speaker on Nov. was the young and outspoken

Kiyomi Tsujimoto, policy head of the Social Democratic Party, who told us about her recent trip to Pakistan and her views on the Japanese response to "September 11." According to Tsujimoto, proponents of sending the Self-Defense Force to take part in the U.S. effort simply want to use recent developments to break resistance against changing the constitution. She is not opposed to changing the constitution per se, but does object movements from the right of the political spectrum to focus only on abolishing Article 9.

The purpose of the program became apparent that evening when one of Tsujimoto's political foes, but personal friends, showed up among the guests: Katsuei Hirasawa, Lower House member for the LDP and state-



Kiyomi Tsujimoto

(Photo Per Bodner)

secretary at the Self-Defense Agency. This time around it was Hirasawa who remained at the Club to share his interesting views on present political developments with Club members.

It is unfortunate if you weren't there, as I'm sure what he said in private was more controversial than what he did say in public during an appearance at a Professional Luncheon on Nov. 26.