

# A Queens Toy Plant Looks to Christmas—1973

By PRANAY GUPTA

Christmas decorations garland the single-family homes in the Queens neighborhood and the glow of anticipation of tomorrow's surprises shines on children's faces, forming a counterpoint to their parents' relief that the last day of shopping has passed.

Just a few blocks away is the workshop that fashioned many of the presents scattered under the trees. But the building housing the nation's third largest toy factory is drab, and very nearly deserted this festive time of the year.

Only four months ago, the Ideal Toy Corporation factory at 184-10 Jamaica Avenue in Hollis bustled 24 hours a day and employed 3,000 workers. But for most of them, the Christmas season ended more than a month ago.

The permanent staff in the elaborately guarded factory is now working on toy and game designs for next spring.

No one knows what next year's new toys are going to be like, except, of course, the company's top officials, who will not talk, because, they say, "industrial espionage is something of a problem."

"You have to guard your new novelties," Lionel A. Weintraub, president of the Ideal Toy Corporation, said

last week.

The factory has a network of closed-circuit television cameras, multi-locked doors, electronic warning devices and guards who patrol the 650,000-square-foot building day and night. There are even rooms that are restricted to the engineers and designers who mull over plans and anticipate new demands.

Even though the company, which was started 70 years ago in a Brooklyn candy store, had a record sales volume of \$75-million for 1972, its earnings went down.

"We have expanded for the first time from toys, gaffes and dolls into the field of sporting goods," said Mr. Weintraub, who has been president for the last 10 years.

## Inflation Takes Toll

At the same time, however, inflation has put "severe pressure" on internal costs and profits, resulting in a situation, Mr. Weintraub said, where Ideal's sales went up but actual earnings were lowered.

"The consumer rightly feels that toys should be cheap," Mr. Weintraub said. "We are thus caught in a squeeze." He added that the company also had increased promotional expenses this year, because of "intensified competition."

The toy industry in the



The New York Times

Dolls being assembled at the Ideal Toy Corporation plant in Queens. For most of the workers at the factory the rush of the holiday season ended a month ago.

country generates annual sales of about \$2.7-billion.

But now, the Ideal Toy Corporation is preparing for a show that will be held here next February, an annual event where toy designers display their latest models for buyers from the big stores.

"Spring is the second largest toy selling season of the year, with more than \$500-million worth of sales in the

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# Toy Factory Looking to 1973

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industry," said Herbert R. Sand, executive vice president for marketing.

For the stores, the biggest sales time is Christmas, but the industry does most of its selling in late summer and early fall.

Which is why, at the present time, the factory in Hollis looks deserted.

Mr. Weintraub explained that production has not ceased, "It's just the volume of production that has decreased." During the spring months and prior to Christmas, seasonal unskilled labor is hired to meet with the additional demand for toys, he said.

It is a little like an auto-

mobile factory, where models are planned years in advance—the average period of gestation for most Ideal games and toys is two years from planning to production, according to company officials.

"Our products must be in stores by November to meet with the Christmas rush," Mr. Weintraub said.

In addition to planning next year's show and models for the future, Mr. Weintraub said, his company is preparers in Newark.

"Our Hollis plant will still be retained," Mr. Weintraub said. "We are expanding to Newark because business is growing."

Asked to give his assessment of this year, Mr. Weintraub said it was a "very good year for games."

But toys and dolls continue as fast-selling items, he added. In this, however, there "is a marked trend towards the past, toward less mechanical toys," Mr. Weintraub said.

"Our soft cuddly dolls were very successful this year," he said. "I feel there's a general consumer trend toward disaffection with gadgets. Space toys, for instance, are not selling too well.

Another group of items that has not been popular, another company official said, is the war games. Ideal does not manufacture such games—or even toy soldiers and guns.

Still, there have been a couple of occasions when the company was the target of criticism.

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