



Friday, July 6, 2007

Less social security, more self-reliance

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Hiromitsu Ishi, head of the governmental tax commission, stated on June 1 that it would be appropriate to raise Japan's consumption tax rate to about 10% over 10 years in order to meet the expected increase in social security burdens. The Fiscal System Council (FSC), on the other hand, insisted on containing the cost of social security in order to limit next year's general expenditure to the current year's budget of 4.75 trillion yen.

While Ishi's proposal is out of the question, I am somewhat dismayed by the FSC's recommendation. This is not because it tries to contain social security costs, but because its recommendation is not drastic enough.

Next year's social security costs are expected to be over 1.8 trillion yen, approximately 38% of general expenditure. At the onset of the aging society in Japan, this figure will certainly increase substantially and Ishi's prediction may come true if we do nothing drastic soon.

Social security expenses are to the nation what cancer is to the body. If they grow bigger and bigger, they will certainly destroy the nation. Social security expenses increase as people demand more and more rights.

For example, Japan's health insurance is supposed to be a form of social insurance; consequently, in theory, insurance premiums should cover all necessary expenses without government subsidies. In reality, however, national health insurance requires so much government subsidy that it may no longer be called a social insurance but charity.

Left-wing critics insist loudly that the government should be primarily responsible for maintaining people's health conditions, citing Article 25 of the Japanese Constitution which stipulates: "All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living."

The critics insist on people's rights to receive the most advanced healthcare services available, but they totally neglect people's individual responsibility for paying appropriate premiums or for keeping their bodies in good condition for themselves.

Considering the social security issues, we should also critically examine the relationship between people and their government. As people depend on the government for paying more and more for social security, they tend to accept a big government. As a tradeoff, the government will surely ask for more tax and more control over people's behavior.

People demand that the government should play a bigger role in social security while at the same time they denounce the existence of a powerful bureaucracy. This is an obvious contradiction: You cannot have your cake and eat it, too.

We may need to have a minimum social safety net, but we should not consider it our inherent right to demand that the government provide us with a comfortable standard of living. Individual responsibility, not rights, is what we really need now.

We, not the government, have to assume responsibility for leading healthy lives to minimize healthcare expenses and to prepare for retirement. Only by cutting our current heavy dependence on government and by standing on our own two feet, may we possess certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Ask not what the government can do for you, but what you can do for yourself.

June 7, 2002

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