

Towards an Ecologically Oriented Basic Income

- Based on an income distribution plan at the level of national economy

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1. From the perspective of a social and ecological economic democracy, ecological conservation and basic income must go hand in hand. So far, these two issues have been discussed separately, and attempts to integrate them have not yet been made in earnest. I would like to present a proposal for an ecologically oriented basic income that integrates ecological conservation and basic income. The proposal starts from the inseparability of ecological justice and social justice.

2. The relationship between economic system and ecosystem is best understood in terms of energy-matter cycle. This insight began with Marx, who perceived labor as a metabolism with nature, and has been elaborated by the theory of open system that is the very foundation of ecosystem theory. From this perspective, the amount of energy-matter input into economic system from ecosystem is equal to the amount of waste energy and waste matter released from economic system into ecosystem. This means that the depletion of ecosystem resources and the ecological crisis are two sides of the same coin.

3. The depletion of ecosystem resources and the ecological crisis have been accelerated through mass production and mass consumption in economic system. Mass production and mass consumption are the result of rapid capital accumulation. Capital accumulation is accompanied by the spread of social poverty. The market economy system, which is centered on the accumulation of capital, can only pursue the expansion of national debt or household debt to resolve the contradictory situation of expanding production and shrinking consumption.

Therefore, the market economy system binds people in debt and deprives them of their freedom; and the system of mass production and mass consumption that relies on the expansion of debt sucks out the ecological wealth that future generations should enjoy, and inevitably destroys the ecological basis for survival.

4. In such a situation, we must ask how to control the mechanism of capital accumulation and expansion that causes social poverty and ecological crisis at the same time. To that question, I would like to propose two solutions.

First, to block the excessive accumulation of capital and the spread of social poverty, labor and capital must achieve an institutional balance of power. The balance of power between labor and capital is a prerequisite for dismantling the subsumption of labor to capital, which lies at the heart of market economy system. It is an institutional relationship between labor and capital based on the recognition of the

mutual inviolability and mutual limitation of laborer's rights and owner's rights. Such relationship is a right relationship between labor and capital, and that is an institutional expression of social justice.

Second, to operate market economy system under the condition of ecological integrity, it is necessary to achieve a balance of power between ecosystem and economic system. It is a way to manage the relationship between ecosystem and economic system in a just manner that recognizes the rights of nature and respects those rights as much as possible. The rights of nature refer to the rights of each living and non-living entity to occupy its own proper place and maintain its existence within multi-layered networks of ecological relationships. If the power of the corporation representing the rights of nature is not able to counter the power of the corporation representing the interests of economic system, the usurpation of the rights of ecosystem for the interests of economic system will never end. When the balance of power between ecosystem and economic system is realized, a right relationship between ecosystem and economic system can be established. That is an institutional expression of ecological justice.

Recognizing that social justice and ecological justice are inseparably fused together, I define social and ecological economic democracy as a plan to pursue the balance of power between labor and capital, and, at the same time, the balance of power between ecosystem and economic system.

5. Social and ecological economic democracy is a political and

social plan to solve social poverty and ecological crisis at the same time. The core of the plan is to design income distribution at the level of national economy to combine basic income and ecological conservation. The essence of such income distribution is to extract accumulated capital on a large scale and spend it in securing the stability and healthiness of ecosystem on the one hand, and in securing the material basis for all people to live with human dignity and freedom on the other. It is a method of income distribution that drastically reduces the share of capital that goes into mass production and consumption and drastically increases the share of capital that goes into ecosystem conservation and human dignified life and freedom. With such an income distribution, part of the capital accumulated in market economy system can be allocated to ecosystem conservation, another part to people's welfare, and the last part to investment for the future, which is the original interest of capital.

6. Here I would like to add some words about redirecting some of the accumulated capital to ecosystem conservation. Such a redirection can be seen as repaying the principal and interest of "ecological debt". The inherent value of the energy and matter imputed from ecosystem to economic system has not been captured by price or value theories, and the work of ecosystem in breaking down waste energy and waste materials released from economic system into ecosystem has not been paid for. The "ecological debt" has resulted from economic system's failure to return ecosystem's share to it. The "ecological debt" cannot

but be estimated as astronomical. So even if we were to return some of the capital share to the realm of ecosystem conservation, that would be nothing more than an installment payment of interest on the "ecological debt".

7. Let us now refine the basic principles of income distribution, taking into account the socio-economic characteristics of the gross national product. In presenting these basic principles, I start from Marx's scheme of the reproduction of capital, which helps us to find the conditions for the macro equilibrium of production and consumption in an economic system of commodity exchange. According to the scheme refined and applied to modern market economy, there are no obstacle to achieving a macro balance of production and consumption, provided that part of capital accumulated in various forms is used for ecosystem preservation, and the rest is appropriately distributed between labor and capital.

8. From the perspective of social and ecological economic democracy, I suggest that the national income be distributed in three steps. The first step is to extract a significant part of the accumulated capital and establish a fund for ecological conservation. The second is to appropriately divide the remainder into labor's share and capital's share so as to meet the conditions of macro balance of production and consumption. The third is to appropriately divide the share of labor into wage labor income and basic income. It would be appropriate to divide wage labor income and basic income in a ratio of 1:1. It is because the

marginal propensity to consume is greater for those with lower incomes. However, it would also be reasonable not to set the ratio in advance, but to leave it to social and political consensus.

9. In such an income distribution, those who have jobs in the market would receive a combination of basic income and market income, while those without jobs would receive only basic income. People who get only the basic income would have more opportunities to enjoy goods and services that the market does not provide, since they would be able to take better care of themselves and be more involved in community life.

10. In envisioning an ecologically-oriented basic income, I start from the premise that basic income and ecosystem conservation are two pillars for restructuring our society and economy. An economy without ecological conservation cannot be sustainable, and a society without basic income cannot maintain solidarity and social peace. In that sense, ecological conservation and basic income must go hand in hand. Only by combining ecological and social justice as two sides of the same coin can people and ecosystem form a healthy and stable living community.