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How can we eliminate CO2 emissions by 2050?

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1. Decarbonization domino is coming to Japan!

Last October, Prime Minister Suga pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This is a substantive breakaway from the energy/environmental policy of the previous Abe administration. The Green Development Strategies announced in December plans to support technology development in 14 key areas including offshore wind power generation, hydrogen, and fuel ammonia. Mr. Suga reiterated the new energy policy in his policy speech in January, saying that the environmental policy is no longer a restriction but a key to development. It will invite innovation and investment, increase productivity, change the industrial structure and eventually lead to dynamic growth.

This clear policy shift pushed the business community to start up their actions toward decarbonization. At the end of last year, the Keidanren announced a statement to change the inactive attitude they have been taking so far and expressed their serious intent to promote climate change policies.

Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, who strongly led the shift, uses the term “decarbonization domino” to represent the extensive movements taking place in Japanese society. I have been claiming that climate issues to be discussed as a major policy issue, and therefore I cannot but impressed by this sudden change of policy. The time has come. We should now discuss climate change as a national policy issue.

What made me surprised was that the steel industry officially announced the elimination of CO2 emissions by 2050. This industry has been active in applying a brake to the introduction of a carbon tax and emissions trading, saying that they will balance the emissions by the end of this century. It seems that political and business pressures as well as the possible introduction of the border tax adjustment currently discussed in the West forced them to move up the schedule by 50 years.

2. A total of 1.2 billion tons of CO2 be reduced in the next 30 years

In 1990, the government of Japan started anti-global warming measures, and the GHGs emissions at that time were 1.276 billion tons in Japan. As the social and economic situations changed and due to the economy-first policy of the Second Abe administration for eight years, the emission reduction was not successful despite the promotion of such technological innovation as LED lighting, energy-saving devices, and hybrid vehicles. As the result, the emissions in 2019 were 1.213 billion tons, which means we could reduce only 60 million tons in the past 30 years.

To balance the emissions by 2050, we have to reduce almost 1.2 billion tons in 30 years to come. The government is highly reliant on technological innovation, but seeing that the innovation so far has not successfully reduced emissions, we cannot expect much on technologies.

Then, what is required of us? I must say that Japanese people, while maintaining a decent level of living, need to change their ways of life and take a step further to save more energy. At the same time, the increase of renewable energy supply would be of critical importance. In addition to solar photovoltaics, solar thermal power generation, the use of ocean energy, and woody biomass utilization combined with afforestation, urban afforestation, wall and roof greening, etc. To reduce 1.2 billion tons of CO₂, Japan has to implement all possible measures seriously.

3. Two important actions to be taken

Firstly, the Japanese government should fairly analyze the reason for a little reduction in the past years, and reflect the result on the future policy measures. Japan was able to reduce only a few percentages since 1990, while such advanced nations as Germany, France, and the UK reduced 20 to 40 percent. We need to elaborate on what caused this difference.

Secondly, Japan should get out of the old system of expert commissions in designing policies. Instead, the government should promote participation from every sector of the society, inviting women, youth, and NPOs to the policy-making process. If they stick to the closed circle of industry-academia-government, this

country will be fatally ruined.