

Taiwan citizens should march for our future

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
Friday, 25 June 2010 09:32

All Taiwan citizens who believe that they should have a voice on the future economic and political direction of our society should participate in tomorrow's "Let the People Decide" and "Oppose the One-China Market" rally in Taipei City tomorrow afternoon.

The march, organized by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party, will take place only three days before representatives of the Chinese Communist Party-ruled People's Republic of China and Taiwan's Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government will sign a bitterly controversial "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement."

Preliminary talks held in Taipei yesterday between Taipei's Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) and Beijing's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait reached agreement on lists for "early harvest" tariff reductions and on the content of the draft pact, in which the PRC agreed to cuts in 539 items and Taiwan agreed to reduce tariffs for 267 product categories of PRC imports.

President Ma Ying-jeou and other KMT government officials said the results would pave the way for the elimination of all tariff barriers to Taiwan exports and defended Taiwan's "disadvantaged industries" and "Taiwan subjectivity."

Not surprisingly, numerous Taiwan business leaders yesterday responded with a chorus of accolades and predictions that the ECFA will lead to greater competitiveness and will be "stronger than vitamins."

Such positive reports prompted one KMT spokesman to declare that Friday's announcement eliminated the "legitimacy" of tomorrow's protest.

KMT surrenders, again

We believe that both such claims and the trumped up euphoria over the boost to the Taiwan economy from the "early harvest" list are grossly premature.

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First, the preoccupation with the "early harvest" list for Taiwan, and the relative neglect to the "early damage" list of concessions to the PRC, has excessively narrowed the focus of concern to the details of the ECFA in order to avoid discussing the fundamental issues of whether the pursuit of this pact was wise.

The ECFA will become a panacea in reverse as it will undermine Taiwan's long-term competitiveness and political autonomy by further locking Taiwan into an asymmetrical and subordinate position in the PRC-dominated "one China economy" instead of promoting Taiwan's economic upgrading and abandoning the protective umbrella of the World Trade Organization.

A feasible and wiser course would have been to refrain from a rashly jumping into a comprehensive pact and instead engage in a multifaceted drive to accelerate Taiwan's industrial upgrading, deepen economic links with advanced industrial countries and carry out talks with the PRC to deal one by one with major sectoral tariff issues as well as the unfair or non-tariff barriers in the PRC's far from "normal" economy.

Moreover, the establishment of a "cross-strait economic cooperation commission" embodied with powers to engage in future negotiations, resolve disputes and interpret the accord demonstrates the KMT's surrender of Taiwan's economic and even political autonomy.

Unlike bilateral committees commonly formed to monitor implementation of free trade agreements, this arrangement grants executive, judicial and legislative powers to a bilateral commission with a hostile power and imitates the June 2003 "closer economic partnership agreement" (CEPA) signed in between the PRC central government and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Instead of "upholding" Taiwan's subjectivity, this clause will surrender Taiwan's sovereignty as well as an abandonment of the WTO anti-dumping and anti-subsidy protections and place the future cross-strait negotiation even deeper in a KMT-CCP "black box" and beyond monitoring by Taiwan's legislature, media or citizens. Instead, by refusing to face the political and strategic economic goals of the PRC, the KMT has demonstrated fully how it lost the Chinese mainland to the CCP through its congenital political color blindness, as reflected by its naive insistence that the ECFA was "purely economic."

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In sum, the narrow results of the "early harvest" and "early damage" lists themselves will not affect the overarching reality that entering into this bilateral framework and setting aside the protections for our economy provided by our WTO membership will fundamentally compromise Taiwan's long-term economic prosperity, social equity and security and political autonomy.

It is therefore important to note that the theme of tomorrow's march does not simply "oppose ECFA" but combines opposition to the KMT's signing of this misguided and unequal treaty that will lock Taiwan into a "one China market" with the positive demand that "the people must decide through referendum" our future economic and political course.

The fundamental issue at stake is whether the Taiwan people agree or disagree with the overall strategy of signing a pact that will lock our economy into a bilateral "one China market" with an authoritarian power which dominates a state-led and far from "normal" economic system and clearly aims to use the new pact as a lever to push Taiwan to accept annexation.

All citizens who believe that Taiwan should reconsider, delay or simply not sign this pact and that whether to accept this economic and political gamble should be decided by Taiwan's 23 million citizens should participate in tomorrow's protest and also make their voices heard in the Nov. 27 municipal elections.

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