

KMT will pay price for Taiwan-PRC ECFA

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
Monday, 28 June 2010 09:25

The massive protest march and rally in Taipei Saturday organized by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and Taiwan Solidarity Union highlighted the continued anxiety in Taiwan over the unilateral drive by President Ma Ying-jeou and his Chinese Nationalist Party government to ink a bitterly controversial "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" (ECFA) with the People's Republic of China.

Ma and other KMT officials and pro-KMT news media commentators have called on the opposition to accept the accomplished fact of the ECFA, which will be signed in Chongqing, China tomorrow by Taipei's Strait Exchange Foundation Chairman Chiang Ping-kun and Beijing's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin, and to monitor its implementation "rationally."

Nevertheless, the Ma government itself would be well advised to take seriously the main themes manifested by Saturday's protest as well as the repeated criticisms raised of its blatant lack of transparency, democratic accountability or checks and balance and frank and equal dialogue with the public during its promotion of the pact.

Unfortunately, to this date, the Ma government does not seem to have taken seriously the long-term strategic economic and political risks associated with the ECFA and instead have painted fanciful vistas of a cornucopia of benefits. Taiwan's deeper dependence on the PRC market is supposed to bring the Taiwan people.

The turnout of tens of thousands of protesters, who numbered between the 150,000 estimated by the DPP and the 32,000 estimated by the Taipei City police, sent a warning to the Ma government not to entrap Taiwan into a "one China market" and avoid eroding Taiwan's economic autonomy and political sovereignty.

DPP Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen pointedly warned that the opening of Taiwan's markets to PRC goods and services will jeopardize employment opportunities and wages, erode living standards and quality, pose threats to health and consumer safety and, by disproportionately benefiting conglomerates, foster a society in which "the poor get poorer and the rich get richer."

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The people's voices

But the most important theme in Saturday's rally was its demand that "the people must decide through referendum" and its protest over the KMT government's arbitrary interference in the democratic and legally guaranteed right of Taiwan's 23 million people to petition for a national citizen referendum on the ECFA or other major public policies.

The KMT government has already begun to renege on its promise for substantive and transparent legislative review of the ECFA by relegating the review to a brief special session in July and setting a precondition that there can be no "clause by clause" examination but only a "up or down" package vote.

The Ma government has thereby ensured that legislative oversight will be formalistic and that the reality will be another exercise of "majority violence" by the KMT's overwhelming legislative majority.

Thanks to the KMT government's arbitrary veto of petitions for an ECFA ratifying referendum, this risky pact with an authoritarian and hostile power will be negotiated, signed and implemented by the KMT and the PRC's ruling Chinese Communist Party without any real chance for the majority of Taiwan's 23 million people to have their say.

In the run-up to critical municipal mayoral polls Nov. 29, the Ma government obviously aims to use this dubious "achievement" to distract public attention from its incompetence and portray the DPP for having had a "closed door" policy toward the PRC in the past and for now "irrationally" opposing all moves by the Ma government to improve cross-strait relations and improve the Taiwan economy.

But the energy manifested by the tens of thousands of protestors despite torrential rain and the high-profile participation by 87-year old former president and ex-KMT chairman Lee Teng-hui may puncture this fantasy.

Besides his statute as Taiwan's "Mr Democracy" during his 12 years in office, Lee was long

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Taiwan's most prominent economist and the mentor of both Vice President Vincent Siew and Ma, whom he hoisted to victory in the December 1998 Taipei City mayoral elections over DPP's Chen Shui-bian by praising him as a "new Taiwanese."

Lee's thumping of Ma as carrying out "wrong policies" that are "helping China unify Taiwan" and as "unqualified to be president" and his open call on Taiwan voters to "dump Ma to protect Taiwan" cannot be easily discredited as the ideological ravings of an "irrational" opposition but instead will add considerable weight to the DPP's warnings.

Besides neglecting the dictum that "there is no such thing as free lunch" in its negotiations with the CCP, Ma and his party may pay a heavy price for neglecting the wisdom in the famous quip popularized by the late Bob Marley that "you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

The consistent findings in opinion polls that over 60 percent of Taiwan citizens want the ECFA to be submitted to a national referendum hint that most Taiwan people "see the light" and may indeed decide in November to "stand up for our rights!"

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