

Democracy put on altar for Taiwan-China ECFA

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
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The ruling rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) yesterday confirmed its intention to put Taiwan's democracy on the sacrificial altar for the "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" with the authoritarian People's Republic of China.

During the raucous initial meeting of a special session of the Legislative Yuan, KMT Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng directly announced the "unanimous" passage of a just - proposed KMT motion to send the ECFA ratification bill to a second reading without taking any heed of shouts of opposition by DPP lawmakers and without a required vote.

The announcement provoked a rush by DPP lawmakers on the speaker's podium and ended in an unseemly brawl with one KMT lawmaker and one DPP legislative injured.

However, the publicity over the legislative conflict should not be allowed to mask the far more serious implications of Wang's arbitrary declaration that the ECFA will be directly referred to a second reading as a package.

Following the expressed will of President and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, this procedure will block the possibility that the ECFA agreement and four related sets of revisions to tariff and tax laws would be subject to normal article-by-article review in related legislative committees.

Moreover, neither Ma or Premier Wu Den-yih will be required to deliver a formal report on ECFA to lawmakers, opening the possibility that the package will be directly voted on and rammed through the Legislative Yuan with little or no discussion in similarly choreographed second and third readings.

Despite the effort by KMT legislators to paint the DPP's reaction as "crazy" or "irrational," it remains open to question as to whether such actions of resistance will help or hurt the opposition at the polls.

After all, the DPP can gain a rhetorical advantage by showing its resistance to the KMT's

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adoption of a grossly undemocratic procedure that threatens to sacrifice the democratic rights and social and economic interests of the majority of Taiwan people on the ECFA altar.

Indeed, a DPP spokesman declared yesterday that its rejection of this action since the ECFA was a major national policy issue and that the pact and its related tax bills involve a "redistribution of wealth" that will affect everyone in Taiwan and should be handled based on normal legislative procedures.

Moreover, the DPP condemned the KMT's use of "martial law era" methods had "gravely harmed Taiwan's democratic values and constitutional system" and warned that Ma was "murdering Taiwan democracy.'

It was less clear what values KMT lawmakers were defending, besides a desire to demonstrate their eagerness to relinquish their constitutional duties and return the Legislative Yuan to being the rubber stamp of an autocratic (even if elected) KMT regime or to learn the habits of the PRC's National People's Congress.

In any event, the image of the KMT legislative caucus could hardly get worse, as barely 20 percent of Taiwan citizens approve of its performance.

The Hong Kong precedent

Nevertheless, many citizens wonder why Ma and the KMT leadership feel that it is necessary to adopt legislative "majority violence" to secure the passage of the ECFA and its related legal revisions.

With 74 of 113 seats compared to the DPP's 33 slots, the KMT holds an overwhelming majority and need have no fear that passage of the ECFA would not be endangered from article by article review or discussion.

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Surely one objective is to short-circuit the real possibility that an extended article by article review of the vaguely worded ECFA would reveal to our citizens just how much the pact has compromised "the people's interests" and denigrated "Taiwan's dignity."

Second, Ma may intend to block the setting of a precedent for detailed legislative review and pave the way for "efficient" ratification of future agreements between the KMT and the PRC's ruling Chinese Communist Party, perhaps including a "peace agreement" that will be functionally an unification pact, without interference from opposition legislators or civil society.

The acquiescence of the KMT-controlled Legislative Yuan in being excluded from pre-negotiation authorization or post-signing review essentially gives Ma and the KMT government a blank check to carry out any and all negotiations with the PRC without any legislative check and balance.

The intention is to entirely exclude Taiwan's parliament and Taiwan's citizens from any role in future KMT-CCP talks, in a similar manner to how the fates of Hong Kong and Macau were "resolved" in the 1980s and 1990s.

Besides the grave harm that this action threatens to inflict on Taiwan's democracy, Ma's intent to concentrate all negotiating power in the hands of the KMT and block any meaningful legislative or citizen monitoring will severely undermine Taipei's bargaining power in future negotiations with the CCP.

In a sad irony, the Ma government's autocratic arrogance combined with the self-emasculatation of the Legislature also confirm the democratic necessity for the ECFA and future major cross-strait agreements to be submitted for ratification through national referendum by Taiwan's 23 million citizens, who are now the only people who can decide whether Taiwan democracy will live or die.

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