

NPP sets referendum drive in motion

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New Power Party members demonstrate in Taipei yesterday, calling for people to support its proposals for holding referendums on constitutional reform and changes to the minimum wage and labor laws.

Photo: CNA

The New Power Party (NPP) yesterday began a referendum drive to scrap newly approved amendments to the Labor Standards Act (勞動基準法), legislate for a minimum wage bill and require the president to call a national affairs conference to draft a new constitution.

The party is waging a campaign on the streets for three separate referendum topics: requiring the legislature to scrap the labor amendments approved on Wednesday last week and restart the legislation process; establishing a minimum wage law stipulating a salary that can sustain basic living needs; and requiring the president to convene a national affairs conference to formulate a new constitution, which would subsequently require referendum approval.

Following the passage of the labor amendment, the NPP on Friday last week announced that it was adding the labor referendum petition to its referendum drive on a living wage and a new constitution.

In a week, the party plans to collect 1,879 signatures — about 0.001 percent of the voter turnout in the last presidential election — for each referendum topic and submit them to the Central Election Commission, before collecting 280,000 signatures — about 1.5 percent of the eligible voters in the most recent presidential election — for each topic in the coming months to initiate the referendum.

“The amendments approved by the Legislative Yuan are worse than the Cabinet proposals.

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[The Cabinet] said its proposals were to allow workers to work overtime to improve low wage conditions,” NPP Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) said. “The claim is unacceptable, but even more unacceptable is the final version approved by the Legislative Yuan, which will allow [employers] to give compensatory leave in lieu of overtime pay.”

The public should join the referendum drive to abolish the labor amendments and improve working conditions, Huang said.

Asked if the party would stick to the set of “expedient” labor amendments that it proposed on Monday last week, which has a striking resemblance to the Cabinet amendments should the labor law referendum be approved, NPP Legislator Hsu Yung-ming (許毓仁) said the party was still undecided.

The party plans to assess public opinion during the course of the referendum and propose bills accordingly, Hsu said.

The NPP in April 2016 proposed a draft minimum wage bill, which stipulated a minimum monthly salary of NT\$26,867, but the bill has been shelved without undergoing any review, Huang added, calling for a minimum wage act to protect labor rights.

Meanwhile, Huang and Hsu denied a media report alleging that a division had sprung up among NPP lawmakers over the referendum drive, as “dovish” NPP lawmakers Hung Tzu-yung (洪錫政), Freddy Lim (林錫山) and Kawlo Iyun Pacidal were reportedly against the labor law referendum proposal.

They were absent from yesterday’s campaigning.

Hsu said the lawmakers’ absence was due to scheduling conflicts and added that the labor law referendum proposal was approved by the NPP’s decisionmaking body.

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Meanwhile, the party plans to put forward a list of 20 councilor candidates as the first series of its nominations for the year-end mayoral and councilor elections.

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