

Walkers demand ECFA referendum

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The People's Sovereignty Movement — a 49-day protest walk to promote changes to the Referendum Act (公投法) and push for referendums on all cross-strait agreements — departed yesterday from Longshan Temple (龍山寺) in Taipei.

People from all walks of life — teachers, college students, shop owners, workers, social activists, Christian ministers and Buddhist monks — gathered at the square in front of the temple to sign up for the protest. Politicians such as former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) also took part.

Several civic groups, including the Nuke-4 Referendum Initiative Association, the Union of Taiwanese Teachers, the Green Formosa Front Association and the Taiwan Labor Front, organized the walkathon.

As people prepared to begin the walk, a Buddhist monk held a placard written in English that read “ECFA — No.”

ECFA stands for “economic cooperation framework agreement,” a deal that the government plans to sign with China to establish closer economic ties, but some groups have raised doubts about the proposal.

Many people brought banners and signs voicing their concern that signing an ECFA might result in higher unemployment because more factories may move to China and less expensive Chinese products may be dumped on the Taiwanese market.

“The People's Sovereignty Movement believes that cross-strait agreements concern the country's sovereignty and the people's welfare, and thus should be ratified by the people via referendums,” said Chen Li-chun (陳麗君), a spokeswoman for the movement.

“We urge the public to demand that President Ma Ying-jeou [馬英九] initiate a referendum to ask the people if they agree that Taiwan should sign agreements with China under the ‘one China’ principle as stated in Article 17 of the Referendum Act,” she said. “The Executive Yuan should also propose amendments to the law so that it becomes a better tool of direct democracy.”

Article 17 of the law stipulates that the president may initiate a referendum if the country is under threat from an outside force or if its sovereignty may be compromised.

Chen Li-kuei (陳麗貴), a movement leader, urged more people to “say with our feet what we, the masters of the country, want.”

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