

Taiwanese should be in control: referendum

Written by Allen Hough 侯安

Sunday, 10 March 2013 10:43

President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration recently decided that the issue of halting or continuing construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in Gongliao District (公寮), New Taipei City (新北市), should be put to a referendum. Although no votes yet have been cast, it is almost certain that the public will lose unless a miracle occurs and voter turnout exceeds 9 million voters, half of all eligible voters, which is the requirement for a referendum to be legally binding.

The way a referendum question is phrased essentially decides its outcome, and that is a ridiculous state of affairs. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ma is pulling yet another trick.

The way Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜華) has based the referendum on whether construction of the plant should be halted or not is equally ridiculous.

A referendum is a tool for the public express their views on whether to reject inappropriate laws, stop inappropriate government policies or create laws that the legislature is not willing to make.

The government has the legal power to set policy, so why does it need to hold a referendum? If it wants to stop construction of the plant it can do so, just as it can let construction continue if that is what it wishes to do.

Referendums are a weapon for the public to resist or subdue a government. The government should never use them for its own purposes.

If a referendum on the plant is held, then the public should propose it, not the government. It is shocking for the premier to try to stipulate the content. It is also absurd for lawmakers to initiate a referendum. Who has heard of lawmakers having the right to carry out the powers of initiative and referendum?

The referendum question should also be decided by the public. Nobody from the government

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should be allowed to have a say in the matter.

Those who support the continued construction of the plant have no reason to propose a referendum, because the continued construction of the plant is a policy that the government is already carrying out.

It is members of the public who oppose continued construction who need to propose one, so they can bring public opinion into play and force the government to stop its current policies.

Ma and Jiang are not only bad, they are only concerned with Machiavellian trickery. The Referendum Act (公投法) is a freakish, unconstitutional law being used by these political cheats to rob the public of their powers of initiative and referendum.

If the referendum is lost against these political cheats, it must not be forgotten that the Referendum Act is unconstitutional and that the results of any referendum held according to it should be invalid.

The public must prepare itself for a long, tough period of resistance against the government. This right is enshrined in the Constitution.

Citizens must resist as long as it takes for the government to give them back their powers of initiative and referendum, as long as it takes for the construction of the plant to be stopped and until Taiwan is made into a nuclear-free country.

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Translated by Drew Cameron

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