

Service pact needs redo, not review

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The cross-strait service trade agreement is finally being reviewed by the legislature, article by article, in a process that neither the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) nor the opposition parties dare take lightly.

On Tuesday night, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators prepared for the review in the legislature's Internal Administration Committee conference room, while the KMT caucus met earlier in the day to strengthen party morale. KMT lawmakers were warned that anyone who did not show up for the review meetings would be disciplined by the party, because the agreement must be passed.

Saying that it will be difficult to avoid a battle over the pact, KMT Legislator Chang Ching-chung (張景淳) has proposed handling the review the way previous cross-strait agreements have been dealt with: letting them be implemented by default. Based on the Act Governing the Legislative Yuan's Power (立法院長權限法), if the review takes longer than three months, the service pact would be declared to be in effect. However, the KMT last year promised not to invoke that option and also struck a consensus with the opposition caucuses that a series of public hearings on the pact would precede the legislative review, and that the deal would not be allowed to take effect by default.

The DPP is strongly opposed to the default outcome, while Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜華) has said that the legislature should be given a reasonable amount of time to review the document. Jiang is apparently unwilling to shoulder the blame should the pact be implemented without thorough review. Yet it is the legislature's review agenda that has created a political standoff and social division over the pact. This is because President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration consistently presents cross-strait policy as a fait accompli, neither offering information to nor communicating with the public on such policies and not allowing either the legislature or the opposition any degree of oversight.

Since the government's arbitrary signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), Taiwan's sovereignty has weakened and its economy became more locked into the Chinese market. The result has been a massive outflow of Taiwanese industry, technology, manpower and capital. The economy has stopped developing and is becoming fully dependent on China, a reliance that is undermining domestic industry and the job market. Despite this, the government went ahead and signed the service trade agreement, and also plans to ink a trade in goods agreement that will only drag the nation down further.

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The government's handling of cross-strait affairs has caused a confidence crisis and widespread public discontent. A poll of industry representatives attending the legislature's public hearings on the service trade pact found that 53 percent of respondents are unhappy with the deal, 51 percent are not happy that their industry will be deregulated and 55 percent think the agreement will speed up the outflow of Taiwanese management and workers to China.

Although the general public and the business sector are unhappy with the pact, the government insists that it must be passed in the current legislative session, with a defiant attitude that is forging common ground between the public and opposition parties.

Cross-strait affairs are neither the sole province of Ma, the Mainland Affairs Council, the Straits Exchange Foundation nor the KMT government. The legislature's decision to review each article of the agreement should be applauded. Those that are not in the best interests of local industry and the public should be scrapped and a new round of talks based on what the public and industry want should be held so a reasonable deal can be negotiated under the oversight of the legislature and non-governmental organizations.

Legislators equipping themselves with sleeping bags in expectation of a marathon battle are not good for Taiwan's democracy, but passing the service trade pact would have an even worse impact on the nation, since it affects the future well-being of all Taiwanese.

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