

MA: TWO YEARS IN OFFICE: Three-day ECFA sit-in protest starts

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 21 May 2010 07:52 -

Hundreds of protesters wearing green shirts gathered in Taipei yesterday to begin a three-day sit-in calling for a referendum on the government's proposal to sign a trade agreement with China.

Staged at the Jinan Road entrance to the legislature and surrounded by a light police presence, the crowd chanted slogans including "Give the people a voice" and "We want a referendum."

President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration says that signing an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with Beijing would prevent Taiwan from being marginalized following the implementation of ASEAN Plus One (China).

Critics, however, say that opposition to an ECFA has been growing in recent months, fueled by the government's unwillingness to disclose key parts of the agreement, including a list of industries likely to be affected by an influx of cheaper competing goods from China.

Addressing the sit-in, which included a large number of farmers from Yunlin County who were concerned that the pact would have an adverse effect on the local agricultural industry, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said: "The people only have one wish: that an ECFA, which concerns Taiwan's future and our next generation, should first be put to a referendum."

Tsai said Ma had failed to take into account China's political objectives and that the Taiwanese public should reject an agreement that would entrust Taiwan's future to its cross-strait neighbor.

"China is not a democratic country; China is also not a market-economy. Moreover, China harbors dangerous political ambitions toward Taiwan. The question I want to ask is: Should we really be handing our political future to China?" Tsai said to a roaring chorus of "No!"

Police put the number present during the afternoon at 800 to 1,000, while organizers said it was more than 1,000. Nearly a dozen prospective DPP city councilor candidates also arrived earlier in the afternoon, armed with election cars, flags and promotional flyers, giving the sit-in a visible political atmosphere. Concerns that an opening ceremony at 2pm would be disrupted by four Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei City councilors later proved to be unfounded.

The crowd began winding down in the evening as it started drizzling intermittently. However, hundreds remained, despite a torrential downpour early in the night.

Organizers said they expected numbers to swell again during daytime today as news of the sit-in, which was not advertised, spreads by word-of-mouth.

The three day sit-in is split into 20 periods of two hours each, with groups adopting daylight

MA: TWO YEARS IN OFFICE: Three-day ECFA sit-in protest starts

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 21 May 2010 07:52 -

time slots, while the protest organizers continue the sit-in overnight between 10pm and 6am.

Lin Fang-wen (林芳文), a middle-aged farmer from Yunlin County, said: "Our products are already in stiff competition against loads of smuggled agricultural goods from China. What an ECFA will do is make all these illegal goods, legal, killing our industry."

The DPP also expressed worries that middle-class workers would be heavily impacted by an ECFA as Chinese companies, with their lower-cost labor, would have free access to the Taiwanese market.

Ma has said the government would establish a 10-year, NT\$95 billion (US\$2.95 billion) fund to aid industries potentially hard-hit by the agreement.

However, a number of DPP lawmakers, taking turns making speeches to the crowd, said the Ma administration failed to take into account WTO regulations that say if an ECFA — or free-trade agreement — were signed, Taiwan and China would have to open up to 90 percent of cross-strait trade to duty-free access within the next decade.

Chou Pi-yu (周品瑜), a protester in her 60s who joined the sit-in with her two-year-old grandson, said: "It's the next generation that will really feel the impact of this mistake."

The sit-in, which included a mock awards ceremony and an evening concert along with speeches and lectures, is expected to continue until 10pm on Saturday.

Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) urged former premier Frank Hsieh (謝長廷), one of the organizers, in a press conference last week to shorten the three-day protest in the interests of 2,000 students who will be taking competence tests tomorrow and on Sunday at Taipei Municipal Chengggong Senior High School on Jinan Road.

Hau denied any political motivations behind the city government's move, adding that the city respected the public's right to protest. Although sounds tests taken yesterday morning at the sit-in showed noise levels to be within acceptable limits set by the city government, it still called on protesters to ensure that the noise would not affect test-takers.

Chen Ming-cheng (陳明成), director of the Police Department's Zhongzheng First Precinct, said police had banned protesters from using megaphones or horns from 8:40am to 5:10pm tomorrow and from gathering around the area after 4pm tomorrow.

Fang Yang-ning (方陽寧), director of the Police Department's Traffic Police Division, called on students and their parents to avoid Zhongshan S Road, Qingdao E Road and the adjacent area around the Legislative Yuan and Ketagalan Boulevard.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/05/21](#)