

Forum told Taiwanese Castro will emerge

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A political strongman in the mold of former Cuban president Fidel Castro is likely to emerge in Taiwan to resist China's economic interference should the proposed economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with Beijing ravage the middle-classes and benefit only large corporations, an expert attending a forum on the ECFA said yesterday.

Hsu Chung-hsin, a law professor at National Cheng Kung University, said once China took over Taiwan's economy, even if Taiwan was still politically independent, a candidate with a radical platform was likely to be elected because the public would likely no longer be able to stand the yawning chasm between rich and poor and the stagnation of salaries.

"Cuba is living proof," he said. "If Taiwan and China become a free-trade area, Taiwan's economy will be controlled by China. It is not a good idea to have free-trade with a country that harbors political and military ambitions against us."

Hsu made the remarks during a forum in Taipei yesterday morning. The event, entitled "ECFA: Eventual Colonization Framework Arrangement," was organized by Taiwan Advocates, a group founded by former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝).

Hsu said since the trade pact would cover service industries, such as banking, it would only serve the best interest of the country if the administration amends the Banking Act (銀行法) to ensure head offices in Taiwan do not have to take responsibility should the capital of branches in China be frozen or nationalized for political reasons.

"I'm not against doing business with China, but a responsible government must have a well-thought-out plan to minimize the risks," he said. "I'm all for investing in China if the interests of Taiwanese businesspeople are well protected and that is the responsibility of the government."

Max Huang (黃國光), an assistant research fellow of law at Academia Sinica, criticized the Referendum Review Committee for its decision to block a Taiwan Solidarity Union proposal to hold a referendum on whether the government should sign an ECFA with China.

Huang said he was not at all surprised at the committee's decision, but that he found its reasons "unimaginably queer."

While the committee said the question did not comply with the Referendum Act (referendum law), Huang said the committee did not have the right to review the proposed question.

"Next time, it will probably throw out a case for some other strange excuse, such as a typo or using an ugly font," he said. "It is so ridiculous."

Since taking committee members to court would be time consuming and appealing the case

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at the Executive Yuan's Grievances Committee did not seem promising, Huang proposed Taiwan Advocates organize a debate and invite committee members to fully expound their position.

Wu Rong-i (吳榮義), former vice premier and now president of Taiwan Braintrust, urged the administration to exercise prudence when signing an ECFA.

"It is like a frog in slowly warming water, by the time the frog feels the heat, it is too late," he said.

Wang To-far (王德發), a professor of economics at National Taipei University, called on the public to come out and oppose the proposed accord.

He said an ECFA is a refurbished version of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) — a trade deal signed between Hong Kong and China.

"It is a special economic framework arrangement conspired by the Chinese Nationalist Party [KMT] and the Chinese Communist Party," he said. "It will pave the way for a 'one China' market and ultimate unification with China."

Citing the CEPA as an example, Wang said Hong Kong suffered an exodus of industries to China, especially manufacturing and services. After the manufacturing sector was hollowed out, unemployment soared and salaries deteriorated, widening the gap between rich and poor.

Taiwan is likely to end up like Hong Kong if an ECFA is signed, Wang said.

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