

Taipei rally urges electoral reform

Written by Taipei Times

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Despite drizzling weather, more than 1,000 demonstrators rallied on Jinan Road outside the Legislative Yuan in Taipei last night to support calls for reforms to the nation's electoral policies, while also expressing their dissatisfaction toward what they say is the government's failure to respond to demands made during the Sunflower movement.

Entitled "Blasting Jinan Road with Roars of Anger" (開路怒吼) to signify participants' outrage, the rally was launched by a coalition of civic groups, including many youth political movements that bloomed after the Sunflower movement.

Primary organizers — Taiwan March, Taiwan Inversion and the Appendectomy Project — called on the public to support three campaigns: A petition to reform the Referendum Act (公投法) to ensure channels for direct democracy; increased public scrutiny of candidates from political families running in the Nov. 29 nine-in-one elections; and support for a recall effort directed at three Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislators on election day.

Public appearances by prominent Sunflower movement activists galvanized the crowd, including student leaders Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆) and Chen Wei-ting (陳偉霆), Academia Sinica researcher Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) and human rights lawyer Lai Chung-chiang (賴忠強).

Huang lambasted President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) recent remarks in an interview with the New York Times, in which the president voiced his support for Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, but condemned Taiwanese students for delaying progress in the cross-strait trade services agreement and what he said was violence.

"Only through direct democracy can the people give politicians such as Ma a lesson," Huang said, urging supporters to support Taiwan March's petition to reform the Referendum Act.

"When representative democracy loses its effectiveness, we need to reclaim our constitutional rights for direct democracy," Huang said, adding that the group plans to set up stands around the nation to collect signatures on the day of the elections.

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The activists demanded that the voter turnout threshold in the act be lowered. Currently, a 50 percent voter turnout is required in order for a referendum to take effect.

At one point during the rally, DJ Andy Lau (鄧紫棋) stirred up the sign-waving crowd by playing electronic music mixed with soundbites and slogans from past protests.

Several other activist musicians and bands also performed throughout the night, including punk band Fire-EX.

Urda Yen (顏宇達), a member of Taiwan Inversion — a movement with the aim of raising the quality of Taiwanese politics — said local politics were often controlled by hereditary political families, and called on the public to initiate change.

“When candidates from political families who are in their 20s run for office, it’s not because they have political ideals, but merely because their families give them more political resources” Yen said, urging the public to participate in an online vote to determine the “top 10 dominant political families” in the nation.

The Appendectomy Project called on supporters to back their recall campaign against three KMT lawmakers — Lin Hung-chih (林鴻基), Wu Yu-sheng (吳育生) and Alex Tsai (蔡啟芳), who also serves as KMT Taipei mayoral candidate Sean Lien’s (連戰) campaign director.

Covered in his signature surgeon’s cap and surgical mask, the project’s representative, known as Mr Lin From Taipei (林從台北), said the campaign hopes to initiate the first recall vote in Taiwan in 20 years, with a signature collection to be launched on Nov. 29 to coincide with nine-in-one elections.

The name “Appendectomy Project” was chosen for both the group and the recall campaign because in Mandarin Chinese, the term for blue-camp legislators, lan wei (藍委) is pronounced the same as “appendix” (盲腸).

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