

Silent marchers urge referendum reform

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Members of the People Rule Foundation yesterday march in Taipei in a silent appeal to President Tsai Ing-wen to honor her promise to amend the Referendum Act.

Photo: CNA

About 40 members of the People Rule Foundation yesterday marched in Taipei in a silent appeal to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to honor her promise to amend the Referendum Act (公投法) by the end of the year, which they said is an important step toward “normalizing” the nation.

Setting out in the morning from MRT Yuanshan Station, the marchers passed the Dadaocheng (大稻埕) area before reaching the Legislative Yuan, their final destination, concluding a walk of about 15km that lasted almost seven hours.

Wearing white T-shirts and bamboo hats, the marchers followed an approach the foundation described as “nonviolent protest,” walking in silence until they arrived in front of the legislature, where they rallied and shouted slogans.

Foundation chief executive officer Liu Ming-hsin (劉明賢) called on lawmakers to swiftly pass a proposed amendment to the act, which passed its first reading in December last year.

The proposed amendment would lower the number of signatures required to decide the topic of a referendum — the first stage — from 0.5 percent to 0.0001 percent of the total number of eligible voters in presidential elections.

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That would bring down the number of signatures needed in the first stage from about 94,000 to about 1,800.

For a signature drive that is held during the second stage of a referendum drive, the threshold for the second stage of a referendum drive to succeed would be brought down to 1.5 percent of the total number of eligible voters in a presidential election, from 5 percent, bringing the requirement down to about 280,000 signatures.

The proposal would abolish the stipulation that a referendum outcome is valid only if more than 50 percent of all eligible voters vote and the “yes” votes account for at least 50 percent of the total number of votes cast.

According to the draft amendment, the outcome of a referendum would be valid if one-fourth of all eligible voters cast a ballot and a majority of votes is in favor of the proposal.

The amendment also seeks to lower the voting age for referendums from 20 to 18.

If the proposed amendment is passed, it would give the nation an “amulet” that would allow the people to decide whether to amend the Constitution to grant Taiwan the status of a “normalized nation,” thereby defending it from the “bullying of foreign forces,” Liu said.

“By amending the act, we would be able to enlighten the public and return the power to decide on national affairs from lawmakers to the people, realizing true democracy,” Liu said.

He called on Tsai to honor her pledge and urged lawmakers to help the bill clear the legislative floor during the third extraordinary session starting on Aug 21 or the next legislative session starting in September.

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