

Protest highlights labor rights, land expropriation

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Labor rights campaigners demonstrate outside the Presidential Office Building on Taipei's Ketagalan Boulevard yesterday, as part of the annual Autumn Struggle protest.

Photo: Liao Chen-huei, Taipei Times

The Autumn Struggle (四季), an annual protest organized by labor rights advocates, yesterday rallied 61 groups as they marched down Taipei's Ketagalan Boulevard and shouted their disappointment with the politics of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration.

The protest focused on the rights of local workers, migrant workers and people in education, as well as land expropriation.

Group representatives first voiced their demands at a news conference at the National Taiwan University Alumni Club before starting on a march toward the boulevard at 11am.

Nearly 200 protesters threw plastic piggy banks that were used for President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) fundraising during her presidential campaign toward the Presidential Office Building at the end of the boulevard.

The piggy banks, covered in "Taiwan Next" stickers, were collected from DPP supporters who have grown disillusioned with the party, land protection groups convener Chen Chih-hsiao (陳智豪) said.

When it comes to land use, the DPP has even strengthened the martial law-era authoritarian system it inherited from the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), Chen said.

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Many protesters had been affected by land expropriation and urban renewal projects.

Urban renewal projects are “nightmares that never end,” said New Taipei City Urban Renewal Self-help Association director Liu Chen-hua (劉陳華), who is to be forcibly removed from his house in Jhonghe District (中和) if the city government approves a renewal project for the area.

Labor rights groups said the new amendment to the Labor Standards Act (勞基法) approved by the Cabinet on Thursday would deal a heavy blow to workers’ rights.

With the relaxation of the “one fixed day off” rule, the amendment would allow employees in certain industries to work up to 12 consecutive days, while the seven national holidays canceled in the amendment that introduced the rule would not be reinstated, they said.

Migrant workers called on the government to revoke the system of broker agencies and to legally protect the rights of household caregivers.

While the Autumn Struggle is one of the nation’s best-known labor protests, this year it attracted only 200 participants, a slide from about 500 last year and 2,000 to 3,000 protesters during former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) term.

Organizers did not call for a large-scale mobilization this year because many groups have been occupied by different “battles” since the DPP government took office in May last year, fighting the Labor Standards Act and land expropriation, said Ku Yu-ling (柯裕玲), one of the founders of the event that has been held annually since 1988.

While civic groups used to harbor some hope that the DPP would do better, they now realized that the party has embraced far-right and capitalist policies even more tightly than the KMT, she said.

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For example, Veterans Affairs Council Deputy Minister Lee Wen-chung (李文忠) has shown no leniency in oppressing residents of New Taipei City's Daguan (大觀) community, and Premier William Lai (賴清德) has shown himself tough on labor rights and land development, she said.

When Lai speaks of inviting more foreign workers to work in Taiwan's agriculture and long-term care services, he only thinks about the highly educated and has no attention for the large number of migrant workers from Southeast Asian nations, she said.

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