

Formosa Alliance rally draws 130,000

Written by Taipei Times

Sunday, 21 October 2018 05:34 -



Taiwanese independence supporters wave flags and shout slogans at the Formosa Alliance's rally in Taipei yesterday to demand the right to hold a referendum on Taiwanese independence.

Photo: EPA / Ritchie B. Tongo

Under the Formosa Alliance's rallying call, tens of thousands of people yesterday gathered in front of the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) headquarters in Taipei, demanding an amendment to the Referendum Act (公投法) to allow for a poll promoting Taiwanese independence and rejecting Chinese annexation.

Amendments to the act promulgated in January have lowered the thresholds for proposing and passing referendums, but proposals about changing the national territory, flag and name are still not allowed.

Shouting slogans such as "Taiwan yes, China no" and "[we] want a referendum," nearly 130,000 people rallied outside the DPP's headquarters, according to the alliance's estimate at 3:30pm.

"We should tell the world that we want to establish an independent country," alliance convener and Formosa TV (公視) chairman Kuo Bei-hung (郭倍宏) said, encouraging people to press the ruling party to amend the law again.

Former Presidential Office adviser Peng Ming-min (彭明敏) said that many of his friends had asked him not to attend the rally, but he still went, even though he might lose friends.

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To strive for a better future, Taiwanese should fight Beijing's attempts to swallow the nation, otherwise China might eliminate Taiwanese, as it is doing to Uighurs in Xinjiang, Peng said.

There should be no limit to referendum proposals, given that initiating referendums is a basic democratic right, he said, adding that Taiwanese independence should be achieved through a referendum.

"Long live the Republic of Taiwan," Peng shouted at the end of his speech.

The act has evolved from a "bird cage" to an "iron cage," because it does not even allow people to decide on the name of their own country, former Presidential Office adviser Wu Li-pei (吳立偉) said, urging people not to let Taiwan become "another Hong Kong."

"We are at a critical juncture of history," Wu said. "There might be a long way to go to achieve Taiwanese independence, but everyone should play his or her own part to realize the goal."

It has been more than 50 years since Peng initiated the Declaration of Formosan Self-Salvation in 1964, but Taiwan has not yet become a "normal" country, because Taiwanese did not fight for their rights bravely enough, Social Democratic Party convener Fan Yun (范雲) said.

The nation should be named "Taiwan" instead of the "Republic of China," otherwise other countries would continue confusing the nation with China and rejecting Taiwan's international presence, Taoyuan resident Teng Pang-yuan (滕 pang-yuan), 32, said.

Teng said that seeing Beijing's bullying and the insistence of using the name "Chinese Taipei" at sports events makes him more inclined toward independence.

Taiwanese should make the nation independent, even if other countries refuse to admit this status, Teng added.

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Yesterday's event might be the biggest rally trumpeting independence in recent decades, event host Dennis Peng (彭文志) said, adding that the DPP's march in Kaohsiung yesterday was not serious, because it averted the independence issue and only copied the alliance's call to oppose Chinese annexation.

While the DPP has forbidden party members from joining the alliance's activities, many still showed up at the rally, including Wu and former minister of foreign affairs Mark Chen (陳其南).

Asked if the party would punish those who attended, DPP Deputy Secretary-General Hsu Chia-ching (許嘉智) said the order was to protect candidates running in the Nov. 24 elections, and that Wu and Chen would not be affected, because they are not candidates.

Additional reporting by Su Fun-her

Source: [Taipei Times - 2018/10/21](#)