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'Live by minimum wages,' supporters of tax reform program challenged

By MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT

A youth group challenged government officials who have been supporting the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) to "live by minimum wages" to see for themselves the "real impact" of the new tax reform program.

Members of the Samahan ng Progressibong Kabataan (SPARK) lambasted officials for "continued deception" of TRAIN impacts and dared them to experience living with minimum wages. The activist group also criticized government officials for insisting that the new tax imposition will have "minimal and temporary" effects on the prices of commodities and shall benefit the rich and poor alike.

SPARK, in a statement, condemned the statements made by Secretary Ramon Lopez of the Trade department and presidential spokesperson Harry Roque. Both claimed that the impacts of the TRAIN law are "minimal and temporary" and accused anti-TRAIN groups for "spreading disinformation" to the public.

The group said the officials are the ones spreading the misinformation by downplaying the adverse effects of TRAIN and by making it seem "justified and impartial."

"They must admit that TRAIN like all indirect taxes are pass-on impositions," the group said. "Manufacturers of goods and service providers shall simply make their clients bear their tax obligations," the group added.

SPARK said that it is "absurd" for government officials "to claim minimal and temporary effects when undeniably, taxing petroleum products and electricity shall push the prices of commodities upwards, generating a tsunami of price hikes on all goods and services, gravely affecting those already living on a hand-to-mouth existence."

The youth activists also challenged both Lopez and Roque "to live even for a day on minimum wage so they may know first-hand what more than 12 million Filipinos will suffer once TRAIN is fully in motion."

Meanwhile, the group also belied claims made by Lopez that 90 percent of the country's more than 40 million workforce shall benefit from TRAIN. "The greater bulk of our minimum wage earners are already exempted from paying income taxes since 2008," the group said.

SPARK also criticized the supposed "mitigating measures" for marginalized sectors enacted also in the TRAIN law. They said that "the additional monthly ₱200 allowance for the 4Ps program will be not be enough even if one lives on cup noodles thrice a day for a month."

The group also alleged that the other benefits such as the fuel vouchers for jeepney drivers, fare discounts and NFA rice discounts are still in the planning stages.

SPARK announced plans to link up with laborers and other disadvantaged sectors in launching a nationally coordinated protest action on January 23.

*TAX REFORM FOR ACCELERATION AND INCLUSION (TRAIN)
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