

KMT's rally at NTU a sign of its callousness

Written by Michael Lin 林錫山

Wednesday, 09 May 2018 04:51

In the past few days, National Taiwan University (NTU) has been rocked by a series of demonstrations purportedly in support of upholding the school's autonomy. Those who support NTU president-elect Kuan Chung-ming (關錫山) have been holding gatherings on campus for some time.

On Saturday, former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) and other KMT heavyweights participated in one such demonstration.

Despite holding signs in support of university autonomy, they shouted slogans of support for their party and Ma. Even slogans opposing Taiwanese independence were heard on campus and several groups long opposed to pension reform have also turned up.

Were these activities really in support of academic autonomy, or was the school's campus being used as a parade ground by the KMT?

A walk through the campus would reveal that the environment feels normal. Aside from a group of older-looking people, self-described parents of students or alumni who have installed themselves beside the campus bell, hardly any students are paying attention to these events.

That is not to say that students do not appreciate the importance of the university's independence, nor do they underestimate the importance of the school's president.

However, the main issue that needs to be clarified is which group forms the backbone of the university: Is it alumni and parents, or is it the lecturers and the students? If the politicians and protesters do not respect the true backbone of the university — its students — then what right do they have to speak about its autonomy?

Most unbearable was Ma's presence on campus. The former KMT president went on campus supposedly to support the university's ban on political interference, only to make vocal appeals

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for President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) not to interfere with the school's autonomy.

Hung's presence at the rally was even more absurd. During her tenure as KMT chairwoman, Hung established the Sun Yat-sen School, which has an office at NTU. Anyone who has heard Hung's speeches and brand of politics would understand that the school is politicized and does not respect the university's rules against political interference.

The only people seen at the demonstration were retired officials from the KMT era making eloquent speeches for politics to be driven out of the university. "We are clean, anyone who questions our motives must have a political axe to grind" — this seems to be the logic of the KMT.

KMT Chairman Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) has repeatedly called for a return of the KMT's youth wing to university campuses. How can the party keep a straight face while calling for politics to be removed from NTU? The party's Yi Hsien Student Association still operates on campus and holds book readings, but Ma and Hung did not call for it to be expelled from campus.

For the KMT, now out of office for nearly two years, the adjustment to the new reality must have been painful. Long used to being at the center of history, the party is now thrashing around for a role and a sense of purpose, which is why it came to campus to support "suppressed" students.

However, if the party wants to parade around on campus, it needs to choose the right issue. If it cares about university autonomy, it must start by caring about students. If all its politics are focused on the party, then it is not protecting the university's independence, but instead is defending the interests of the party and the old party-state era.

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Translated by Edward Jones

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/05/09](#)