

Tsai must fulfill her historic duty

Written by Chin Heng-wei 陳恆偉
Saturday, 09 June 2018 00:01

For the past two years, following its victories in the 2016 elections, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been in control of both the executive and legislative branches of government. This puts the government in a much stronger position than those of former presidents Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁).

If the DPP government cannot even resolve the relatively minor matter of National Taiwan University's (NTU) selection of a president, it will be held in disdain not only by China, but also by the pan-blue camp and even by many in the pan-green camp.

Opinion polls show that public approval rates for President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Premier William Lai (賴清德) are far below their previous highs.

The alarm bell is ringing, but will Tsai's government heed it?

On Wednesday last week, Chen commented about the government's poor poll ratings on Facebook, asking whether there is any hope of saving it.

"If they stop kidding themselves, there is still some hope for them, but if they keep on kidding themselves, even the gods cannot save them," Chen wrote.

Indeed, if Tsai and her team remain complacent, it will be hard for her to win a second term in 2020. Even before that, the Nov. 24 local elections would show what fate awaits Tsai and her colleagues.

The Sunflower movement of 2014 wiped out whatever credibility the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) might have had after ruling Taiwan for seven decades and in subsequent elections voters ousted the KMT, creating an opportunity to remold the nation's power structures.

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While the DPP's election victories gave it control of the legislature as well as the executive branch, they also gave it the mission of curing Taiwan's chronic sickness — the remnants of the KMT's party-state.

Does the DPP see political reform as its calling? Is it determined to do all in its power to complete the mission that voters have given it? Or could it be that the DPP has merely satisfied its lust for power and has no idea about any historic mission?

The DPP is putting all its energy into dealing with the “visible” KMT. Despite all the fanfare surrounding the Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee and the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促轉法), the truth is that it can only cause some pain to the KMT, but not eradicate its structures.

The roots of “deep-blue forces” penetrate the military, police, educational and judicial establishments, and they even reach into the Cabinet.

Minister of National Defense Yen De-fa (嚴德發) said in the legislature on May 7 that the armed forces would not fight for Taiwanese independence.

His words were a slap in the face for Lai, who describes himself as “a worker for Taiwanese independence.”

While the military is dominated by people like Yen, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is staffed by clones of former minister of foreign affairs Francisco Ou (歐陽) and the Ministry of Education is full of people who support NTU president-elect Kuan Chung-ming (管中閔).

With the pan-blues having so much influence, what use is it that the DPP is in government? What can the DPP do to get out of this bind?

It must use its executive power to root out the pan-blue forces within the establishment and it

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must use its legislative power to crack down on the reactionary forces that oppose democracy and Taiwan.

For Taiwan to be thoroughly transformed, these sturdy and tenacious party-state structures must first be demolished.

The drama over the selection of the NTU president drags on.

It looks as though it cannot be resolved by replacing the minister of education and the only way to fix it would be to hand the matter over to the legislature.

The way to fix the problem at its root would be to amend the University Act (大學法) to abolish the “presidential selection committees” that are in the pockets of certain interest groups and operate through backroom deals. Instead, we should give universities back to their students by letting them vote for university presidents in direct elections.

University students aged 18 or older can vote for the nation’s president, so why should they not be able to directly elect the presidents of their universities?

The idea of students directly electing university presidents is not new.

Back in the days when the KMT was in power, education reform advocates such as former national policy adviser Ku Chung-hwa (顧仲華) proposed exactly that, although the Ministry of Education promptly dismissed the idea.

The main point is that the pan-blue clique at NTU treats the university as its private property and simply will not budge, so the education ministry has got nowhere with the case despite losing two ministers in the process.

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At this point, the legislature, which is supposed to be the guardian of public opinion, must step up and break the stalemate, and do its duty by amending the University Act.

Even though it would take time to amend the act, it would be better than letting the dispute drag on forever.

Tsai and the DPP should not misjudge the situation. They have a sacred historic duty to perform and they should not give up on it.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/06/09](#)