

In a speech to mark the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) 115th anniversary on Nov. 21, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), in his capacity as party chairman, said the party should be thankful to the people of Taiwan.

"We are extremely grateful to the people of Taiwan who let the KMT, which was out of power for eight years, return as the governing party," Ma said. "We need to be humble and cherish this precious opportunity. We need to strive to hear the people's voice and let the people be the real master of the country."

Ma appeared genuine, his words sounded sincere and it was encouraging to learn that the KMT credited the public for allowing it back into the Presidential Office.

Words that are not followed by concrete action, however, are just words.

There has been nothing to show that Ma meant what he said, and it is becoming clear that his administration is not letting Taiwanese be the real masters of the country.

One group, which calls itself the People's Sovereignty Movement, has called Ma's bluff. Departing from Taipei on Nov. 8, the group began a 49-day protest walk around the country to promote amendments to the Referendum Act (公投法) and push for referendums on all cross-strait agreements.

In the past weeks, people from all walks of life — individuals in their 80s, mothers and their children, young people — have joined the movement. Despite the lack of media coverage of the event, the group has quietly promoted its ideals by walking, rain or shine.

Another group, this one counting 132,402 members, has voiced its support — with signatures — for a referendum on reopening talks with Washington on the import of US beef products.

There were signs of progress on this front on Tuesday, when Ma praised Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as a model of democracy in the Caribbean after it held a constitutional referendum on Nov. 25.

Maybe Ma has it within himself to recognize the significance of referendums in democratic societies (though it might be easier to praise the mechanism when it is used abroad rather than at home, where the outcome can obstruct government policy).

In his Nov. 21 speech, Ma waxed philosophical: "If a political party can take the initiative to push reforms, then I believe it could propel reform in Taiwan's politics and let Taiwan be a quality democracy with substance."

Rousing words indeed, but again entirely meaningless if they are not accompanied by concrete actions.

## Enough talking — let's see results

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In the face of great challenges and rising public opposition to many of his administration's policies, Ma's slogans not only sound increasingly hollow, they risk degenerating into farce. If he doesn't want to go down in history as a leader who talked big but accomplished nothing, Ma should tone down the rhetoric and start walking the walk. If he needs help taking his first steps, he should be reminded that he has 23 million masters in this country who would be more than happy to assist him.

Spare our ears and walk with us, Mr Ma.

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