

There has been considerable debate recently about President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) eligibility to stand for a third term as Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman.

Many of his supporters within the party say this is an "in-house affair." Former KMT chairman Wu Poh-hsiung (吳伯雄), for example, has said that a party's right to decide its own personnel matters should be acknowledged and that the matter was an internal one so people should respect the KMT's autonomy. All the party needs is consensus within its own ranks, Wu said.

Domestic violence used to be regarded as a private matter concerning the head of the household, but nowadays it is legally regarded as a matter of public concern, open to the scrutiny of the state.

One wonders why the internal affairs of a national political party, which directly impact the operation of democracy within the country, should be any different. Ma's eligibility to stand for a third term as party chairman is not simply a matter of internal housekeeping for the KMT.

The experience of most democratic countries has shown that, in a sense, democratic politics is party politics.

Within the democratic process political parties are accorded certain special rights, such as being able to nominate candidates for positions at each level of government, to receive party votes in the split vote system and receiving state fund subsidies.

However, with these special rights come responsibilities: the consolidation of the nation's democratic order through the mechanisms of competing policy manifestos and the transfer of power between parties, all of which are aimed at achieving the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. If a party is happy to accept these special rights, but refuses to carry out its responsibilities, then the country's democratic order is placed in jeopardy.

If political parties are to carry out their duties to the fullest, it is of paramount importance that they also undertake to run their internal affairs in a way that complies with democratic principles.

In the 1930s Germany came under the control of the Third Reich, the totalitarian Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler, bringing an unprecedented disaster for not just Germany but much of the rest of the world.

After the end of World War II, the new West German government approved the Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, the constitution of Germany, first of the Federal Republic, then all of West Germany and ultimately all of post-reunification Germany.

The constitution specified that all political parties' internal organization must conform to democratic principles, and that all political parties must publicly account for their assets and the sources and uses of their funds.

It also states that "Parties that, by reason of their aims or the behavior of their adherents, seek to undermine or abolish the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany shall be unconstitutional. The Federal Constitutional Court shall rule on the question of unconstitutionality."

Germany's example is something that we can learn from in our as yet unfinished democratic transition project.

It is generally known that the KMT is based on the Leninist model, as is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China. The party's internal organization has never complied with democratic principles, as an inevitable result of its very nature.

On Wednesday last week, the KMT Central Standing Committee decided, through a show of hands, that Ma could go ahead and stand for re-election as party chairman, as is the

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convention in Leninist-style parties.

However, the reason the KMT feels it is imperative that the president also hold the party chairmanship is that in this role he also has control over the party's ill-gotten assets, the largest assets of any political party in the world.

Not only does he control the organization, he controls the party members, so regardless of how far his policies divert from the wishes of the mainstream public he can still push them through the legislature — in which the KMT enjoys a majority — and have party members in government at all levels.

Consequently, democracy in Taiwan is gradually being eaten up by the malignant tumor of dictatorial leadership.

Nowhere in the Republic of China Constitution in its current form does it say that the internal organization of political parties must comply with democratic principles. This is why the KMT can speak of democracy while being non-democratic itself.

Any future amendments or redrafting of the Constitution ought to stipulate the inclusion of the democratic principles laid out in the German constitution.

In the past, this Leninist model was legitimized by the Civil Organization Act (黨團組織法), legislation that the KMT itself devised and implemented.

At present, there is a draft political party act stalled in the legislature. This should clearly stipulate that parties' internal organization should comply with democratic principles and should also provide a comprehensive solution to the issue of the KMT's assets.

If this is not addressed, the development of democracy in Taiwan will forever be on shaky ground, and our democracy will be in a state of crisis as long as the KMT is in power.

At the end of last year, the Cabinet did come up with a blueprint for a draft political parties act which stipulated that all political parties were to transfer ownership or sell shares in profit-making enterprises within a certain period of time. Failing this, they were to place them in a trust.

This clause was basically tailor-made for the KMT, because it gave it a way out on a previous pledge to divest itself of all party assets.

However, it also goes to show how much of an issue the problem with the democratization of the party's internal organization is. The KMT would not have made this amendment to the law by its own volition, if it had not had pressure from outside the party.

Ma's recent attempt to secure a third term as chairman, and his supporters' attempt to characterize this as an internal matter, highlight the Leninist nature of the party and that these people still have no idea what democracy is.

This Leninist party has the audacity to openly oppose the will of the public, to ruin the democratic order of the country and conspire with another Leninist party to have Taiwan swallowed up by China.

Mindful of the unease surrounding this issue, Ma met with his closest aides over the past few days to discuss tactics, and came out fighting, reportedly citing US constitutional amendments and the DPP's own charter to back up his eligibility to stand, saying that his bid for a third term was completely legitimate.

Ma, with his popularity rating having fallen to 13 percent, does not want to play by the rules of democracy and would prefer to wrangle another term as KMT chairman. Who knows what he thinks the public's impression of him is? However, what is more important is what Ma has demonstrated here.

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Taiwanese must take note that the KMT is not conducting itself internally in any way consistent with democratic principles, and that if the KMT fails to complete a democratic transformation Taiwan will continue in the same way it has over the past four years, going backwards from consolidating its democracy to seeing it go into reverse and descending into a hotbed for dictatorial rule under the KMT hand-in-hand with the CCP.

Translated by Paul Cooper

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