

Stop sowing the seeds of hatred

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Control Yuan was smart enough to realize that a report by Control Yuan members Chou Yang-shan (周陽山) and Lee Ping-nan (李平南) on the 228 Incident was likely to prove unpopular, so it pulled the report from its Web site one day after it was made public.

However, it was dumb enough to not realize beforehand that what Shih Hsin University adjunct assistant professor Chi Chia-lin (齊嘉林) was quoted as saying in the report — that former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) may be the illegitimate son of a Japanese man — would enrage the public.

Worse yet, Control Yuan President Wang Chien-shien was quick to defend the comments — which were unrelated to the 228 Massacre — saying that Lee deserved the treatment because the former president was a “bad person.”

It is not the first time that Wang has made such derogatory comments — he once said that Han people are smarter than Aborigines. Nor was it unusual to see such comments or attitudes directed at specific politicians in Taiwan simply because of the hatred some people have for others' bloodline or ethnicity.

Former government official Kuo Kuan-ying (郭寬盈) stirred up controversy when he called himself a “high-class Mainlander” and made several racist comments in his articles. Then-presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said in 2007 that he would treat Aborigines as human beings, “and I will educate you well,” if they moved to the city.

Instances of spiteful behavior have included Lee Teng-hui being accused of having communist sympathies and attacks on Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) when both served as president, and some people even threw a shoe at Ma just months ago.

While the public has long been aware of the red line of hate politics, such as calling someone a “Mainlander pig” or making the Nazi salute, incidents and comments like these keep cropping up.

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Hatred against specific groups based on their bloodline and ethnicity is a global phenomenon, influenced by history, culture, society, religion and other factors. Efforts to eliminate hatred and hate speech, which by now have been recognized by the majority of people as toxic, have been ongoing for thousands of years, but remain an unfulfilled goal.

Racist or hateful speech uttered by elected or appointed government officials is more dangerous than similar statements by members of the public. Empowered with administrative authority, government officials are able to persecute and discredit groups of people and set a bad example to the public.

Government officials should not only refrain from making any comment or move that could divide the nation, but should also discourage and condemn such actions. The same applies to political parties, politicians and celebrities.

Failure to do so would likely contribute to the deterioration of the already serious social and political divisions in Taiwan.

Opposition politicians have begun their efforts to ease potential tensions ignited by recent controversial statements and actions. Former premier Frank Hsieh (郝伯村) and former president Chen Shui-bian both said the shoe-throwing protest against Ma could not be condoned, even though the right to protest is a civil right, and Lee Teng-hui laughed off the Control Yuan report without seeking to retaliate.

It is time for the Ma administration, which has been sitting on the sidelines during recent instances of hateful speech, and has itself even been involved in controversial comments and activities, to take action.

Silence and tolerance of incidents such as the ridiculous Control Yuan report is no prescription for healing the wounds caused by social division.

On the contrary, to do nothing would sow the seeds of hatred.

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