

The misinterpretation of stability

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Friday, 23 August 2013 08:05

The presence of up to 250,000 people at a protest on Aug. 3 made the government succumb to public pressure with the removal of the military judiciary in peacetime. The protest was billed as a watershed moment for Taiwan as well as the beginning of a new civil movement. Things have begun to change.

There was criticism of the hundreds of people who “ambushed” the Joint Central Government Building and occupied the plaza on Sunday in protest at the Ministry of the Interior’s (MOI) ignorance of numerous land expropriation cases across the country, in particular the one in Dapu Borough (大埔), Miaoli County.

Participants in the “Tear down the government” sit-in decorated the MOI building’s windows and walls with stickers, and sprayed slogans on the walls and the sidewalk. The protesters said they expected to be removed at midnight, but the police decided to leave them alone and the demonstration ended peacefully 20 hours later on Monday evening.

While politicians and political pundits were largely silent on the anti-military protest, they had something to say about the MOI protest.

New Party Chairman Yok Mu-ming (楊慕明) said the protest was “organized crime” which tried to overthrow the government and the protesters should have all been arrested.

Political commentator Tang Hsiang-lung (唐湘龍) described the protesters as “political bandits.”

Minister of the Interior Lee Hong-yuan (李鴻元) insisted that the Land Expropriation Act (土地徵收法), which the protesters demanded be abolished, was “not a bad law” and did not rule out seeking compensation from and filing a lawsuit against the protesters.

Members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) criticized the police as “soft” in their dealings with the protesters.

The misinterpretation of stability

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Friday, 23 August 2013 08:05

Some netizens chastised the demonstrators for endangering social stability and social order.

These comments share a basic mentality: Regardless of what people ask for, they should do so within the system. Taiwanese were told during the fierce democratic movement of the 1970s and 1980s that stability should always be the No. 1 priority. Blood-stained police uniforms were displayed in public after the Kaohsiung Incident in 1979 and a photo of a “Legislative Yuan” signboard was shown after the 520 Farmers Movement in 1988, hinting that violence should not be tolerated.

Stability and social order have been among the ideas most used by the government to divide social opinion while resisting change. However, stability should not be interpreted as merely the “status quo,” and change of the “status quo” should not be interpreted as instability. Otherwise, there would not be such a thing as civil disobedience.

It is difficult to understand why stability is an unchallengeable idea in people’s minds. Surely they know that activists before them made unbearable sacrifices for Taiwan’s democratic transformation.

“An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law,” US civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr said.

Civil disobedience and demonstrations happen because people have exhausted all means within the system, not because they enjoy clashing with the police and breaking into government buildings.

The democracy that Taiwan has is the hard-won result of numerous people willing to, as King said, accept the penalty to arouse public awareness on injustice and to strive for the public good.

The misinterpretation of stability

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Friday, 23 August 2013 08:05

The misinterpretation of stability is a concern because, without change, hope for a better government and a better society hinges on one thing — the government itself. And that situation, judging from past experience, is dangerous.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2013/08/23](#)