

## Tolerance and forgetfulness are not virtues

Written by Huang Kuo-chang 黃國昌  
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The legislative recall campaign launched by the Constitution 133 Alliance was preceded by waves of popular protest that took place over the summer, including the send-off for army corporal Hung Chung-chiu (洪仲丘) after he died from heat exhaustion, and a mass demonstration against forced demolitions with the theme: “Demolish the government.”

These protests signify a public awakening. They have been moderate in form, but formidable in substance.

The Constitution 133 Alliance is raising the banner of constitutional civil rights and it is determined to hold accountable legislators who only care about what President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) wants while neglecting the public. The significance of this movement is by no means limited to deterring Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislators from further degenerating into a voting machine for Ma, or to disbanding Ma’s “praetorian guard” in the legislature and weakening its ability to turn back the political clock.

The movement launched by the Constitution 133 Alliance is also about inspiring the public to stand up and put right a representative democracy that has been distorted. It aims to use civil politics to impose checks and balances on the games that political parties are playing. Its ultimate purpose is to win back the country for its citizens, who are the rightful owners.

It is easy to see how the policymakers have been operating so that the nation’s democratic crisis was created — though the crisis is hidden behind the Ma administration’s incompetence, collapsing credibility and rapidly waning legitimacy.

This crisis has two aspects: The dilution of citizens’ sovereignty and the hollowing out of political accountability.

Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of China states: “The sovereignty of the Republic of China shall reside in the whole body of citizens.”

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However, so many restrictions have been imposed on this principle that it has been narrowed down to little more than the right to cast a vote every four years. The most serious restriction is one that has a deep impact on the public's livelihood — the limited access to information on interactions across the Taiwan Strait.

A small clique of rich and powerful people has been sitting in a dark corner and dividing the benefits of cross-strait travel and trade among themselves. The legislature hardly plays any role in cross-strait relations, while the public has even less chance to take part in any substantial way.

What is even harder to accept is that KMT legislators, faced with a situation in which their role has been marginalized so much that they can no longer faithfully carry out their duties, are anxious not to offend Ma. They are still only concerned about nominations and funding for the next election, they have completely forgotten that the true basis for their power comes from their constituencies.

As a result, even though an overwhelming majority of opinion is against continued construction of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant in Gongliao District (公寮), New Taipei City (新北市), these legislators go on voting as directed by their party whip, playing along with the party's political tactics and killing off any legislative initiative that offers a chance of halting construction.

Even if some people can accept our legislators spending public money at girly bars, surely they cannot tolerate the betrayal of democracy as lawmakers enact disgraceful amendments to the Accounting Act (會計法) late at night and behind closed doors. Even though there are resounding calls to enact laws that prevent media monopolies, lawmakers' promises to complete the legislative process can be dropped after they receive a telephone call from a media tycoon.

Considering the shambles in the legislature, every citizen is entitled to ask who among our lawmakers has truly borne his or her responsibilities. However, voters should at the same time ask themselves whether tolerance and forgetfulness of improper behavior has been the hotbed that has fostered this gang of out-of-control lawmakers. Is the public more concerned about whether legislators have given away presents, organized raffles and proposed Mid-Autumn Festival toasts, or whether their work in the legislature has served to safeguard the nation?

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Tolerance and forgetfulness is the catalyst for the rampant delinquency of political hacks. It is what has prevented Taiwan's democracy from becoming properly established. Only when citizens stop being so tolerant will they be able to force politicians to change their behavior. Only when the public stops being so forgetful will these public servants be held accountable to society's collective memory.

The Constitution 133 Alliance's recall campaign offers a chance to cure this chronic political malady. It offers a ray of hope for democracy, which needs deepening. For politicians to place the public above their party, Taiwanese must first identify themselves as citizens, not as pawns of the pan-blue or pan-green political camps.

They must invest time in the future for the generations to come. They should unite to do battle in a political war. They must take action to be able to one day write a history of real democracy and constitutional government in Taiwan.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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