

Clueless Ma adrift in delusion

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Describing President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) apparent detachment from the public and how oblivious he seems toward the difficulties of the nation's workers as dumbfounding would be an understatement.

Ma's seeming indifference to the economic plight of Taiwanese was made evident by his remarks on Wednesday at the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) Central Standing Committee's weekly meeting.

After a report by Council of Labor Affairs Minister Pan Shih-wei (潘世偉) and in reference to a series of protests lodged by laid-off workers over retirement payments, Ma said that the protests "sometimes lead to [the public's] delusion that our workers are all leading a very poor life, or have no protection."

In light of the nation's economic woes, this remark only demonstrates how out of touch he is.

Does he think workers are happy and content under his governance?

This logic may explain why the president seems to be unresponsive to criticism of his administration's economic performance.

"It's just a delusion that the nation is suffering from high unemployment," he is probably thinking. "It's just a delusion that there's an increase in low-income households, or that the nation's economy is weak."

However, the bleak truth confronting the nation's working population is real and brutal.

The lack of employment prospects has driven some young people to commit suicide.

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The unemployment rate of 4.24 percent remains stubbornly high, workers' salaries are back to where they were 16 years ago, and the starting salary for many college graduates is as low as NT\$22,000 (US\$725) a month — a figure lower than it was 15 years ago.

The latest information from the Ministry of Finance shows the average national debt shouldered by Taiwanese rose to NT\$234,000 per person last month, with the central government's long-term and short-term debt totaling NT\$5.4618 trillion, an increase of NT\$124.94 billion from December last year. The increase added NT\$6,000 to each individual's load, the ministry said.

According to Taiwan Labor Front secretary-general Sun Yu-lien (孫玉蓮), workers in recent years have been faced with a situation where “they toil in vain, labor in vain and burn out in vain.”

In view of all this somber news, Ma, of all people in the nation, ought to be humble and be reminded that it is his administration that created the situation in the first place.

Ma is fond of lecturing his officials to keep the public's suffering close to heart and to empathize with their plight and struggles. So it is ironic that the president, of all KMT officials, appears to be one who cannot relate to people's lives and has been heedless of people's suffering.

No wonder Ma's remarks on Wednesday outraged National Alliance for Workers of Closed Factories spokeswoman Chen Hsiu-lien (陳秀蓮), who slammed the president for what she called “being shameless” in uttering such ignorant remarks.

“Perhaps it is a Taiwanese hope that it is a mere delusion that Ma Ying-jeou is the nation's president,” Chen said.

It is a bad sign when national debate revolves around the question of who is more delusional.

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