

Sunflowers bloom; dictators dig in

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 09:00

The Nine-percent President (Ma Ying-jeou, 馬英九) has attempted to discredit the Sunflower movement and to weaken the opposition's voice, but there is no denying that in Taiwan's history of democratic movements a record was created when 500,000 people, labeled the "black-clad army," took to the streets of Taipei on March 30 in protest against the cross-strait service trade agreement.

In addition to setting a new record for the number of protesters in a rally, the demonstration was backed by 80 percent of the public. This shows Ma has lost the legitimacy required for a president and if he does not start listening to the public, he will have to step down.

Ma — who did not fare too well in an article in the Economist titled "On the antlers of a dilemma" — should pay attention to the popular US television drama series House of Cards.

In the series, a president who faced impeachment stepped down, giving the reason that his approval rating had dropped to 8 percent, which meant he had no mandate to rule the country and should therefore resign.

Of course, since Ma suffers from an inflated opinion of himself, there is little chance he will step down even if the only Taiwanese who support him are his wife, National Security Council Secretary-General King Pu-tsung (金溥聰), Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜樺) and a few other senior officials. Expecting him to show any sense of shame or admit that he is wrong would be beyond him.

There are always a variety of reasons behind any historic event, and when things erupt on a mass scale, they are normally linked to a single, sudden event. It is not enough to look at the rise of the Sunflower movement from the viewpoint of the service trade agreement alone.

The movement has come into "full bloom" because Ma's six-year administration has nourished public discontent to the extent that people now completely reject Ma and his actions, which can be characterized as tyrannical and against the public will.

Sunflowers bloom; dictators dig in

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 09:00

First, those in power are incompetent and insincere. Ma not only failed to deliver on his “6-3-3” campaign pledge — 6 percent annual economic growth, US\$30,000 per capita income and an unemployment rate of less than 3 percent by 2012 — propaganda which he used to get elected in 2008, he also failed to keep his promise of giving away half of his salary if he failed to deliver on the promise.

During his time in office, the economy has performed badly, salaries have dropped to the same level as 16 years ago and the unemployment rate has never fallen below 4 percent.

Still, Ma has been so shameless that he has claimed that his results are the best that the nation has ever seen and that the economy now ranks second among the four Asian Tigers.

Second, the constitutional crisis created by the Sunflower movement is a result of the contradictions between democracy and authoritarianism. On the surface, Ma and Jiang might seem to be friendly, well-mannered and liberal-minded, but they have no sense of democracy. This is especially true for Ma. From his time as a student until now, Ma has never supported democratic reform.

During the Martial Law era, Ma served as a poster boy for authoritarian rule. He opposed re-election of the full legislature, direct election of the president and ending martial law, and he also viewed the dangwai (黨外) movement — those outside the party — as attempting a revolt.

Since Ma has no concept whatsoever of democracy and human rights, all his talk about “doing things in accordance with the law” ultimately means playing with the law to meet his own needs. The law has become a tool for the nation’s leaders and everything is done in accordance with unjust laws. When the leaders think like this, it does not take much before they become dictators.

The rule of law in democratic societies emphasizes that legislation must be in line with universal values and since they are applicable to the general public, they should also be used to limit the power of those in charge.

Sunflowers bloom; dictators dig in

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 09:00

An even more important feature of the Sunflower movement is that it represents a battle between generations. In essence, the movement highlights the will of young people to decide their own future.

However, those in power have decided to resist their demands. The battle between generations is a result of globalization and, more specifically, the baggage left behind from the old regime. Ma has the biggest vested interest in authoritarianism.

In the days when Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and former president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) were in power, they used the lame excuse that they had come to Taiwan to consolidate their power because China fell to the communists. They put a freeze on the re-election of the legislature that was chosen in China and revised temporary provisions so that Chiang Kai-shek could remain in office forever.

It was also at this time that military officials, civil servants and educators became groups that Chiang Kai-shek must enlist for his side.

All of the past civil service examinations allowed the children of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) leaders an easy way into politics and the 18 percent preferential interest rates on parts of personal savings enjoyed by military officials, civil servants and public school teachers is an example of the blatant way that the KMT bought people.

These manifestly unfair measures turned the beneficiaries into life-long pan-blue camp supporters, but their pensions also accumulate hidden debt in excess of more than NT\$10 trillion (US\$331 billion).

The young generation must now pick up the bill for these mind-boggling sums, despite the fact that they earn an average starting salary of NT\$22,000 and struggle to make ends meet.

Finally, it would be wrong to say that the economy has not experienced any growth over the past two decades. However, Taiwanese businesses have constantly been moving their operations overseas such that more than half of the products that Taiwanese businesses

Sunflowers bloom; dictators dig in

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 09:00

receive are produced overseas, mostly in China.

This being the case, the fruits of economic growth have been gathered by a small minority, while the incomes of the majority continue to decrease and the general cost of housing and life skyrocket.

This has resulted in opposition between those with vested interests in the authoritarian regime, who represent a minority of the population, and the majority, whose rights and interests are sacrificed. This is yet another social dichotomy that the Sunflower movement has brought to light.

The Ma administration has said a great deal about how the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) would bolster economic growth, but three years after its signing, just how much has it contributed? Given that the “Made in China” remedy has not improved the situation, how can people believe that the service trade agreement and the coming cross-strait agreement for trade in goods — both follow ups to the ECFA — will be a panacea to their economic woes?

It is foreseeable that as soon as the service trade agreement and the agreement on trade in goods are passed, Beijing’s influence over Taiwan will rise massively.

This will not only see the majority of local industries swallowed up by China’s huge capital, it will also result in a tragic state of affairs in which economic breakdown follows the loss of democracy and freedom.

The same thing that happened in Hong Kong — where pro-China people have gained so much money and power while the rest have suffered — will repeat itself here.

Freedom of speech will be clamped down on, while those working in the media could very well be subjected to the same sort of violent attacks that we recently saw perpetrated against an editor in Hong Kong.

Sunflowers bloom; dictators dig in

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 09:00

The nightmare about Taiwan becoming the next Hong Kong is really about to become reality.

Translated by Drew Cameron

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/04/09](#)