

It is no longer a secret that Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei mayoral candidate Sean Lien (連戰) and the ruling party, which is struggling to shore up sagging poll numbers, have started to “colorize” the election campaign by attempting to emphasize the affiliation of Lien and his main opponent, Ko Wen-je (柯文哲), with the blue and green camps respectively, despite Ko being an independent candidate with no party affiliation.

Appealing to party adherence is an understandable approach in a well-functioning democracy, where political parties attract votes by persuading supporters that their policies and principles are superior to the opposition’s.

However, it is also no secret that the nation’s incomplete democratization and its tense and unusual relationship with China have long borne down on the political environment and polarized society by making parties — or party colors — the object of people’s obsession.

The Taipei mayoral election represents an opportunity to break away from the fetter of the ingrained color-coded mindset and revive the ideal of running a campaign based on values and policies.

However, as the only major political party involved in the election, the KMT has not acted in a way that demonstrates confidence in its political standing and philosophies, if it has any.

The KMT has not only been insistently relating Ko to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), it has also started to wage an imaginary war against former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁). In a recent round of campaign activities, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) attributed the food safety scandal to Chen, Lien’s campaign director Alex Tsai (蔡啟芳) called Ko’s recruiting of advisers from various walks of life “a Chen-imitating trick,” and Lien himself cited Chen as an example of a candidate who played dirty tricks to get elected.

Instead of suggesting how it would have acted differently if it were the ruling party in 2005 when, as it alleges, the fodder oil was first imported from Vietnam by Ting Hsin International Group (鼎新國際), the government simply said the former administration, and Chen in particular, were accountable.

Netizens have been sarcastically calling on Chen to “step down” to make a mockery of KMT politicians’ penchant of alluding to the former president, six years after he was removed from power, to pass the buck, or manipulate some people’s (partially misdirected) entrenched animosity toward and distrust in Chen to their own benefit.

The question is whether the KMT knows how to run a successful campaign against the DPP without mentioning Chen, or events from several years ago.

With the main opponent in the mayoral election lacking affiliation with any political party, the KMT seems at a loss as to how to appear superior. With the veil of party politics lifted, what remains is an archaic party which is unable to segue into the democratic era.

For example, Ma slighted Ko’s goal of “open government, public participation,” saying: “The right of decisionmaking cannot be returned to the people who chose you precisely to decide things for them.”

Also, a KMT legislator panned officials of a government agency in the legislature and said they would be “held accountable” for Lien’s loss if a bill to lower the threshold for retired public officials to receive year-end bonuses failed to pass and “made public officials unhappy.”

The questions raised in a mayoral debate last week by “civic groups” — one which is controversially known to be biased toward the KMT, and the other two which are relatively unheard of — amounted to a mudslinging attempt by Lien, whose spokesman later shrugged off public queries about impartiality. This was just one more example of the dated and transparent acts played out by the KMT in recent weeks.

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