

The appeals of Lien the lachrymose

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 27 November 2014 07:30

“If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen” — a saying widely attributed to former US president Harry Truman — describes a situation in which a leader, once having reached the coveted position, finds it difficult to cope with the stress, pressure, responsibility and criticism that comes with the job. It means that if one decides to stick around the kitchen, the person should know that the heat is to be expected and should therefore quit complaining about it.

This is why many were baffled by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei mayoral candidate Sean Lien’s (連戰) display of self pity at a campaign rally on Saturday last week.

An obviously emotional Lien, his eyes glistening with tears, said that he had been bullied by netizens over the past year, and that he has encountered a lot of setbacks in his life.

“I tell my family and relatives ‘do not cry for me’ because how could I be afraid of blatant verbal attacks, burning satire and freezing irony when I have already had a bullet pass through my head,” Lien said, referring to the 2010 shooting at a campaign rally.

As Lien seemed to choke back tears, his wife, Patty Tsai (蔡淑玲), appeared to captivate the crowd as she stood next to him.

Upon encountering such scenes, some are moved to wonder: Why bother running for office in the first place if the process is so painful and miserable and the scrutiny and criticism unbearable?

Lien’s main rival, independent Taipei candidate Ko Wen-je (柯文哲), might have more reason to complain, considering the extent to which the KMT administration has allegedly exploited state apparatus to attack him.

Ko has been accused by KMT lawmakers of laundering money — through a National Taiwan University Hospital account — and illegal organ harvesting, with various judicial, executive and legislative agencies stepping in to investigate, including the National Audit Office of the Control

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Ko did not try to hide from the allegations; he faced them squarely, an attitude that increased his popularity with healthcare professionals.

One is fair game for scrutiny and criticism when one aspires to become a public official.

It is too early to say whether Ko will win Saturday's vote, but at least he has clearly demonstrated over the past few months the core values that motivated him to run.

"Due to differences in ideology, an invisible and cold wall was erected in the city between you and me. The wall divided us into pan-green and pan-blue, pro-unification and pro-independence," Ko said. "The two sides of the wall hated each other and opposed each other. We do not know when this wall appeared, or how long it has existed, but it makes our family relationships, friendships and loved ones suffer. I am here to stand with everyone in the city, to tear down the wall with love and hugs."

What about Lien? What are the core values driving him? Through his campaign speeches, one cannot help but get the impression that Lien seems to only care about himself and his family, about his being shot and how his wife's safety is under threat because of the election.

Lien's campaign team yesterday rolled out a TV spot featuring Tsai recalling the shooting four years ago. The logic behind this commercial is flawed, if not bizarre. What does Lien being shot have to do with his ability to be the mayor of the nation's capital?

With less than two days to go before voters head to the polls, it is hoped that Lien seizes the remaining hours to woo voters with visionary and positive messages, instead of relying on emotional appeals, sadness, fear, hatred and his wife's tears.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/11/26](#)