

## Sunflowers planted democratic seeds

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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In countries under the rule of law, being sentenced to prison is a legal punishment for having broken the law. In times of turmoil, it can be the price paid for tearing down an unjust system and disturbing the current order. In the first case, going to prison is as it should be, but in the second case, going to prison is a badge of honor and the person should be respected for fighting for human rights.

On Tuesday, the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office charged Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆), Chen Wei-ting (陳偉霆), Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) and dozens of others for breaking into and occupying the Legislative Yuan and/or the Executive Yuan in March last year during the Sunflower movement protests. Even filmmaker Kevin Lee (李凱), who was making a documentary of the events, was included.

These people did break the law by occupying the Legislative Yuan and Executive Yuan, but their actions were supported by a majority of the public. It was only because protesters were not afraid to break the law that more than 100,000 people demonstrated on the streets against the government's lack of transparency in trying to quickly force the cross-strait service trade agreement through the legislature in the face of public opposition. We should thank them for standing up and stopping the wealth gap from widening and the hopes of the young generation from ending in disappointment.

If it had not been for the Sunflower movement, young people, who seemed previously uninterested in politics, would never have stood up and taken an active part in public life and written a new page in the history of civil society. Now, even the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is afraid of the force of young people — and of the public in general — and of the power of the Internet.

If it had not been for the Sunflower movement, the KMT would probably never have met with such decisive defeat in last year's nine-in-one elections, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) would never have stepped down as KMT chairman and New Taipei City Mayor Eric Chu (朱立倫) would never have become leader of the KMT, and there would never have been the possibility of a future reform of the political framework.

Without the Sunflower movement, Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) would not have been elected mayor of Taipei, where he is reshaping the political landscape.

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The Sunflower movement has received considerable attention and support from the international community. Without its example, the Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong might not have successfully mobilized the territory's residents to protest against the Hong Kong and Chinese governments. Although these governments gave the protesters the cold shoulder, the Sunflower and the Occupy Central movements planted the seeds of democracy in China. It is only a matter of time before those seeds will take root, grow strong and bloom.

The participants in the Sunflower movement knew what they were in for, and the possible price they might have to pay even before they started, but they took resolute action and are prepared to face the legal consequences. One student breathed a sigh of relief when he saw his name appear on the list of those indicted, because it meant that he was part of Taiwan's democratic history.

The charges are the authorities' one-sided view of the Sunflower movement, but the importance of the movement will reach beyond any superficial government action. It is hoped that the courts will give careful consideration — with regard to punishment — to the reasonable nature of the protesters' actions and the Sunflower movement's legitimacy and general social acceptance. Not guilty verdicts, or suspended sentences, would help prevent a new wave of social turmoil.

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