

The ghosts in James Soong's closet

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 13 August 2015 06:46

The campaign video that the People First Party (PFP) released on the day Chairman James Soong (宋楚瑜) announced his presidential bid was focused on changing “mudslinging” into fodder for growth.

What the PFP and Soong should be aware of is that — in a departure from the 2012 election in which he was nothing close to a game changer and the Internet generation did not really care about what politicians did — this time around the party is facing a highly suspicious and historically conscious group of younger voters.

At a time when Soong aims to — and is likely to — defeat the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in a national-level election, what might be flung at Soong is not “mud,” but evidence of his own past actions.

The video is — literally, in terms of the images used — about mudslinging. Soong, dressed in white, stands against a dark background with his face and shirt caked in mud that has been smeared on by hand. It is said that the mud, meant to symbolize humiliation, pressure and frustration, can also be a source of nutrition for growth.

The video, together with another campaign ad picture that shows Soong covered with mud and holding a sapling, caused a sensation among young people. Memes of the latter image went viral. In a way, parodies notwithstanding, the campaign tactic seemed to have served its end.

However, a news article about the making of the video, following the hype caused by the ad, has accidentally turned the tables on Soong. Meant to show that the idea for the ads came from the younger people on the team, the article reported that the PFP chairman joked with the young staff throwing mud at him, saying: “If it were the Martial Law era, I would have you guys executed, but don’t worry, I would grant you amnesty.”

The joke was allegedly received with laughs at the time.

The ghosts in James Soong's closet

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 13 August 2015 06:46

However, many people — not party to the team's playful atmosphere — did not find the joke funny at all, especially coming from a politician who did indeed play a role in the authoritarian regime.

In 2003, an article was published detailing his acts of repression against the freedoms of the press, speech and language in his capacity as Government Information Office director-general between 1979 and 1984. At that time, languages other than Mandarin — what the regime called “dialects” such as Hokklo and Hakka — were discouraged and were planned eventually to be downsized to nil in the media.

For example, concerning the freedom to publish, it is said that scores of magazines were banned during his time as the head of the government information office including Formosa Magazine, the members of which had organized a march on Dec. 10, 1979, that lit the fuse of the democratic movement.

The article, along with other related historical material regarding Soong has returned to haunt him. In addition to post-Sunflower movement (and possibly post-anti-curriculum movement) younger people more willing and eager than ever to learn about the nation's intentionally buried history, along with the fact that the PFP and its leader are more likely than ever to crowd out the KMT's support in the coming elections, it is not surprising that the questioning is more vociferous.

“The PFP is the KMT without its party assets” is what is now being trumpeted online.

Without winning the support of younger voters, it is questionable how many seats the party would actually win in the legislature as a result of Soong's bid, as a recent poll indicates that pan-blue supporters might vote for the KMT to compensate for their support for Soong in the presidential vote.

However, whether making gains — if it does — what is sure is that Soong's bid has forced party members to confront their pasts.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2015/08/12](#)