

Unpopular Hung assails populism

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 16 September 2015 08:11

If a word is to be identified as Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu's (洪秀柱) campaign keyword, it would probably be "populism."

Bizarrely for a running candidate, in Hung's campaign it is not a self-referential keyword, but one she has been constantly using to describe Taiwan's current political atmosphere, or more precisely, to accuse those who have political beliefs different from hers of being irrational.

The first question to be asked is why Hung's team does not seem to have established an overarching campaign theme. With four months left until the election, Hung might have raised a few banners calling for pay raises for the younger generation, a technical separation of the security transaction tax and capital gains tax, and an ambitious plan to solve the problems of the overworked medical staff, the police and firefighters, and the issue of the surplus of trained schoolteachers. However, there is no unifying thread running through all these policies.

Unlike the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) campaign slogan calling for stability and sound reforms, Hung's campaign has been unorganized in the sense that the policies are sprawling and not unified under a campaign theme.

The loss of direction might partly be attributed to the conflicts within the KMT in the past months, with persistent rumors that Hung might be replaced by another candidate.

However, that cannot completely explain the quandary she faces.

Hung has defended her "no beef" approach by saying that a presidential candidate, as a potential head of state, is expected to embody the nation and be a leader of "principles" (and leave it to her team to work on the specific policies).

Those words match what she has been highlighting since the announcement of her presidential bid, that she wishes to uphold the "right way" for the Republic of China (that could be distinguished from the DPP's "Taiwanese independence").

Unpopular Hung assails populism

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 16 September 2015 08:11

Hung gave the “status quo” argument away to the DPP with her underlying motivation to truthfully abide by the ROC Constitution, which would risk altering the “status quo” — physically and mentally — of a de facto independent Taiwan.

It is then not surprising that Hung would be frustrated to the point of denouncing Taiwanese society for being trapped in populism. What she is really doing is complaining about the overwhelming unpopularity of her political doctrine in Taiwan.

Hung has brought up “populism” in numerous discussions ranging from the dengue fever outbreak in the south and lack of development in Kaohsiung to the controversy over three professional baseball league cheerleaders shooting advertisements for her campaign. Hung’s regret over people not giving her and the KMT enough support could be inferred from her Facebook posts. And only one thing is responsible for this: populism.

Hung has never provided a definition for the term and interestingly claimed that populism has been rife under former president Chen Shui-bian’s (陳水扁) and President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) administrations.

It can be concluded that what Hung means by populism is actually “winning with popular support” and not “appealing to popular opinion” (where the latter reminds us of Hung’s tapping into popular emotional reactions to brutal murders and support for capital punishment).

Hung is probably quite comfortable with her small support base, who she believes are the only ones capable of “rational thinking.” She probably does not have the chance to become a “populist” — in her definition of populism — and so will not have to worry about how to modify her rhetoric of populism at a time when she may enjoy popularity from the populace.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2015/09/16](#)