

Tsai faces tough task to achieve true reform

Written by Peng Ming-min 彭明敏
Monday, 18 January 2016 07:30

When Westerners see someone taking on a position of responsibility which results in themselves being left to deal with a pile of insoluble problems, they often say: “I do not envy him/her.”

When Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) first contested a presidential election in 2012, a senior economist issued a warning, saying that if Taiwan really wanted reform, it must be prepared to sacrifice itself. Tsai responded by saying that Taiwan’s democracy was mature, and that there was no need to exaggerate. The economist said she was too naive and did not have a sufficient understanding of Chinese. I agree completely.

Tsai should be congratulated on winning this year’s presidential election, but she does not find herself in an envious position. The nation’s status is not determined and Taiwan’s national identity is in turmoil. Tsai is surrounded by enemies: in front of her, she faces the Chinese tiger and behind her lies the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) snake.

She is faced with unprecedented debt — every newborn Taiwanese child is NT\$1 million in debt — and military personnel, civil servants and public school teachers continue to enjoy their exorbitant pensions. The economy is in a slump, exports and tax revenues have dropped sharply, unemployment is high and salaries are low, education institutions are struggling and the economy is dependent on China to the point that Taiwan’s survival is at risk.

Military preparedness is in decline, arms are out of date, high-ranking military leaders are friendly with China, the mid-level leadership is full of communist spies and the lower levels are encumbered by frequent failures, while the whole nation has been infiltrated by the Chinese Communist Party.

Then there are the issues of deteriorating food safety and a dispute over power generation, among others.

During World War II, Winston Churchill was appointed British prime minister as the nation’s existence was in peril.

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He told parliament that he had “nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat” and that it would be necessary “to wage war, by sea, land and air” and that the goal was “victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror ... for without victory, there is no survival.”

It was a speech that aroused British morale. France lost World War I, but then Germany was defeated in World War II.

When Iceland was on the brink of a national default, Icelandic people worked hard and before long the nation was back on its feet. Taiwan has suffered under long-standing misrule, which is unlikely to change overnight; before things begin to improve, they are likely to worsen for quite some time.

No one knows if Taiwanese possess the same strength as other nation's mentioned above, but they are honest and hardworking, and if the government tells it as it is, perhaps the public would unite to get through a difficult transition period.

The government should not try to hide major ills and possible obstacles, but announce them and offer regular reports on reform progress — or the reasons for lack of progress — so that the public can appreciate the government's determination to move forward and better the nation.

Someone recently demanded that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) take the KMT back to China. I have also heard that someone offered to provide big passenger ships to send the party and its members back to China. We can only hope that the new president would make Taiwanese happy by taking up this offer.

Peng Ming-min is a former adviser to former president Chen Shui-bian.

Translated by Perry Svensson

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