

The DPP gives lesson in democracy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus' decision to resolve the dispute on nominating a candidate for legislative speaker triggered criticism from some, who said that the decision was made in an "opaque" way. However, the decisionmaking process was more like a lesson in democracy than a target for condemnation.

Following the DPP's victory in both the presidential and legislative elections, its caucus whip Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘), Legislator Chen Ming-wen (陳明文) and legislator-at-large-elect Su Jia-chyuan (蘇嘉全) have shown interest in the speakership.

Many might have believed that the competition within the party would drag on and perhaps turn into a harsh battle among different factions, since the dispute could not be solved when president-elect and DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) intervened by asking Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊) to help negotiate a solution at party headquarters on Thursday.

While a vote was planned for the caucus meeting on Friday, Ker, Chen and Su met prior to the meeting, and agreed that Ker and Chen would drop out of the race and throw their support behind Su.

The outcome immediately drew criticism from some political commentators and media outlets, accusing the DPP of making a "black box" decision, while others accused Tsai of breaking her promise to respect the autonomy of the caucus by meddling in the race.

Such criticisms do not make sense — after all, is it not one of the core functions of the democratic system to resolve disputes through negotiation and peaceful means?

Societies have been resolving disputes — including allocation of resources, power and territories — through armed conflicts, resulting in unnecessary loss of human lives.

Similar situations occurred in the history of the DPP as well, with different factions fighting each other more harshly than they would fight the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). As a result,

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some DPP politicians consider their comrades as sworn enemies, making solidarity within the party merely a slogan.

There is nothing opaque about DPP politicians resolving their differences through negotiation.

It is not known if Su has promised anything to Ker and Chen for dropping out of the race, but there have been such rumors.

However, the essence of the art of negotiation is giving and receiving: No one should be expected to give up something without receiving something else in return.

As for Tsai's role in the issue, she promised that she would respect the autonomy of the caucus to decide who would be nominated as a candidate for speakership, but did she?

Other than being the president-elect, Tsai is also the DPP chairperson and if the three DPP lawmakers and lawmaker-to-be could not settle their disputes, there is nothing wrong with the party leader getting involved, and, after all, it was Ker, Chen and Su who talked and reached an agreement.

Tsai did not tell them “no, you cannot run” or “yes, you can run.”

It is natural that Tsai would play a role as party chairperson — how could the leader of a political party sit and watch as senior party members fight among each other, especially when the dispute might lead to the party breaking into more factions, especially when unity is needed at a time when Tsai is set to launch her reform projects with assistance from the legislature?

Prior to becoming the DPP chairperson, Tsai was an experienced negotiator, and she — as well as Ker, Chen and Su — has set a very good example on showing how politicians can resolve their differences through peaceful negotiations.

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