

When president-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Tuesday reiterated her resolution to carry out “transitional justice” through legislation and the establishment of an independent committee, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) had just announced a plan to rename a Presidential Office Building hall after Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), the nation’s last authoritarian ruler.

That might seem ironic, but it demonstrates — along with the outgoing ruling party’s united front against the incoming administration’s idea of transitional justice, calling it a “political vendetta” — that the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) tactics are less about absurdity and more about ignorance, or feigning it.

First, it is not surprising that the Presidential Office is to “honor Chiang Ching-kuo” for what the office called his contribution to young people. The name Chiang Ching-kuo has not lost its glamor among many, particularly when compared with that of his father, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石).

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) is one of those who is enchanted; People First Party Chairperson James Soong (宋楚瑜) and former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) — both former KMT members — stressed that they graduated from the “Ching-kuo school;” while former deputy legislative speaker Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱), who is running in the KMT chairperson election, called on the party to revive the “Ching-kuo spirit.”

Many Taiwanese, especially those older than 50, have a memory of the nation’s economic growth overlapping with the rule of Chiang Ching-kuo after Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975. While it is debatable whether the junior Chiang and his administration should be attributed with all the merits that entailed rapid growth, for those who lived through the time, the positive image was seared, not only through experience, but also through propaganda.

Hung has repeatedly called for the party to “Ching-kuo-lize,” which is to “stand with the people.” The party also upheld the “Ching-kuo spirit” before the Jan. 16 elections, which was probably more than apt given that the KMT targeted voters born before about 1960.

However, Hung, or the party as a whole, has overlooked the fact that while “the people” they

## Feigning ignorance over justice

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have in mind might relate to Chiang Ching-kuo in a favorable light, that generation is gradually phasing out in terms of political activity. Their memory of a time in which “Taiwan’s money flooded around people’s feet” has failed to strike a chord with younger voters, who are mired in stagnant wage growth and dim prospects.

Increasingly, Taiwanese born at about the time martial law ended in 1987 categorize the rule of Chiang Ching-kuo not in economic terms, but as the latter half of the authoritarian period, including the White Terror era, the Kaohsiung Incident, the murder of family members of long-time political activist Lin I-hsiung’s (林義雄), democracy activist Chen Wen-chen’s (陳文成) mysterious death and the assassination of writer Henry Liu (劉以鬯).

Legislator Apollo Chen (陳昭南), another KMT chairperson candidate, was honest enough to acknowledge that both Chiangs were authoritarians, but added that John Chiang (蔣經國) and Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安) — Chiang Ching-kuo’s son and grandson respectively — have achieved “KMT transitional justice” by participating in democratic elections and by being elected as lawmakers.

This is a misinterpretation of transitional justice, which Chen equates with democratization. What the notion really signifies is to redress systematic abuses of human rights perpetrated before political transition.

The Democratic Progressive Party, while working on the project now, has apparently not invested sufficient effort in propagating, or comprehending, the system of thought behind the idea, a failure that could easily serve to bolster the KMT’s conflation tactics.

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