

Government too reliant on disloyal civil service

Written by Chen Mao-hsiung 陳毛雄
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The violent protests against pension reform that took place on April 19 focused attention on the passive resistance against the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government that the police displayed.

The protests are open and transparent, and everyone is well aware of the fact that the protesters have used violence, yet the police did not address the situation. In practice, this problem is not limited to the police; it also extends to military personnel, civil servants and public school teachers.

According to the nation's political system, policies should be finalized by the legislative branch and executed by political appointees, while civil servants simply follow orders to implement them. However, traditionally, the bureaucracy has directed both policymaking and implementation.

In nations with a Cabinet system, the government is formed by the majority in the legislature and members of parliament serve as politically appointed Cabinet ministers. Policymaking and implementation are thus controlled by the majority in the country's legislative institution.

Elected lawmakers are not specialists and they do not necessarily have a specialist's understanding of the legislative process and policy implementation. These tasks frequently fall to the bureaucracy, which means that it is normal to have the bureaucracy direct policy implementation. For example, politically appointed ministers in Japan often follow the suggestions of civil servants.

In Taiwan and the US, the executive and the legislative branches are separate from each other and voters elect lawmakers as well as the executive leader — the president. Policy is finalized in the legislature and implementation is directed by political appointees. The head of the executive appoints specialists to serve as ministers and civil servants act on the instructions of ministers. While this system works in the US, things are more problematic in Taiwan.

In the past, the "10,000-year legislature," which consisted of the legislators, National Assembly representatives and Control Yuan members that were elected in China in 1947, controlled all

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legislation, but the members were unable to make laws, which means that policy was made and implemented by the executive.

In other words, the legislature simply provided a rubber stamp for the Executive Yuan. Ministers were not specialists, as Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) picked them based on connections and loyalty. Since political appointees lacked expertise, policymaking and implementation fell to the civil servants in the bureaucracy, which is very similar to how it works in a Cabinet system.

When the DPP took office, it had the chance to restore the separation between the executive branch and lawmaking, so that policy would be finalized by the legislature while the head of the executive branch appoints specialists as ministers, distancing itself from the tradition that civil servants direct policy implementation.

However, the DPP has changed and, just like the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), it now relies on connections for elections and appointments. Political appointees who are selected based on connections normally are not specialists. They often cling to their positions and their perspective on the world is informed by their own interests. This is the KMT's model of political appointment.

Because the DPP government has adopted the KMT's approach, it has to rely on the bureaucracy for policy implementation. However, most civil servants are working against the DPP — a worrying prospect for the government.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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