

A KMT show for the people

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Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislators appear to have rallied after their decisive election defeat last year. Every day now they are fighting — often physically — in the legislature over pension reform and the government's Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program proposals. Despite the physical tussles and the animated expressions on their faces as they protest, these legislators know all too well that this is but a show put on for the benefit of their supporters.

A closer look reveals differences in their approaches toward the two issues. In regards to pension reform, legislators might well be strutting around the chamber with placards, chanting slogans, pushing and shoving and throwing things around, but it is all for the benefit of the groups on the streets outside who oppose pension reform, showing the military personnel, school teachers and civil servants who support the KMT that the party is fighting their corner.

The KMT attempted pension reform when it was in power and is perfectly cognizant of the importance of the issue. Former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration folded under party pressure and relented, tail tucked between its legs.

The problem is that the older generation of public servants wants to see the KMT fight pension reform, but the younger generation would actually stand to gain much from it, so the KMT is damned if it does, damned if it does not. If the KMT manages to return to power, it would likely have to deal with the mess it leaves on the legislative floor.

The forward-looking program is something else altogether. The government wants to allocate NT\$882.49 billion (US\$29.3 billion) all at once to be spent over the next eight years, which, if all goes well, would make it very difficult for the KMT to win any elections, from local city and county councilors to mayors, all the way up to the presidency, for the foreseeable future. It is no wonder that the KMT is so vehemently opposed to these proposals, from both an economic and political standpoint.

Pan-blue legislators are fully aware that whether the proposals are forward-looking or not is beside the point, and neither is it important to debate the details or determine if the budget stretches state finances: this is all about politics. The government wants to leave a big legacy and so it is bundling everything it needs and wants to achieve together, so it can be done in one fell swoop; one big scheme with a grand name. This would save time in the legislature,

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with its endless debates on the finer details and budgeting.

However, is this really what the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government is up to? In that regard, it is little different from Ma's KMT administration: in 2009, then-premier Liu Chao-hsuan (劉兆玄) proposed economic stimulus and a major construction investment plan of about NT\$600 billion over the course of five years. When Ma was seeking re-election, he proposed the "Love Taiwan 12 Major Construction Plans," which would see NT\$3.99 trillion spent over the next decade. Thankfully, Ma's government proved unequal to the task of introducing those ambitious plans and was required to tone them down. Indeed, some of those proposals have been incorporated into the forward-looking infrastructure program.

If scenes of daily chaos in the legislature worry you, you need not be overly concerned. It is mostly a play put on for the electorate, and legislators on both sides have read the script.

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