

China demonstrates its ruthlessness

Written by Chen Fang-ming 陳芳明
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Taiwanese activist Lee Ming-che (李明哲) was on Tuesday sentenced to five years in prison by a court in Yueyang in China's Hunan Province.

At about the same time, Beijing began a campaign to evict what it calls the city's "low-end population" — people with low income or low levels of education, most of them workers from other provinces.

These two things, although seemingly unrelated, are equally revealing of how the regime of Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) approaches government.

Beijing has long emphasized that maintaining the nation's stability is one of its major policies, but that alone will not earn it respect. When a ruler has no regard for basic human rights, no matter how strong the nation is, it will never be respected.

The regime in Beijing uses Marxist doctrine to justify its rule, but the way it is treating people at the bottom of society is nothing if not cruel and barbaric.

Amid a campaign to evict the capital's "low-end population," many people are being forced to leave their homes in the cold of winter as their apartments are torn down.

What does that say about Xi's understanding of Marxist principles? By showing a complete lack of sympathy for its people and no interest in humanitarian values, China has proven what it really means when it claims to be the largest democracy in the world.

In order to maintain political stability in the nation, the Chinese government went so far as to arrest Lee, a powerless human rights activist from Taiwan.

They first confined him for more than 250 days and then, after the briefest of trials, sentenced

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him to five years in prison for “subversion of state power.”

There is no way of knowing what kind of “political education” or “thought correction” Lee was subjected to during this detention.

As Lee was forced to admit to committing the offense on television, Beijing got exactly what it wanted. The trial was pure show, but although it could not convince Taiwanese that Lee is guilty, it was enough to show the good people in China what Beijing means by “maintaining stability” and “subversion of state power.”

The most important part of the performance was Lee being sentenced to deprivation of his political rights for two years, which shows that China is looking on Taiwanese as Chinese citizens: How else could Taiwanese have political rights in China?

The primary purpose of the trial was to show that Taiwan is under the jurisdiction of China. Since Lee, merely a non-governmental organization (NGO) worker, is no longer a member of the Democratic Progressive Party or a leader of any great movement, there is no other political symbolism involved in this case.

However, Beijing has decided to make a big affair of the case by portraying Lee as plotting secretly against the Chinese government.

To more accurately define the purpose of the show that Beijing put on, it would be better to describe it as an attempt to send a warning to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) than to maintain stability in China.

Since Tsai took office, her administration has never acknowledged the so-called “1992 consensus.” In addition, she has expressed strong displeasure over reports in the Taiwanese media that she would meet with Xi. In reality, Tsai’s government has little say on cross-strait issues, as Beijing has the ultimate control over any cross-strait policies or plans.

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The Chinese Communist Party's 19th National Congress ended less than two months ago and Xi is still busy reorganizing the party to increase his power.

Lee's severe punishment was meant to serve as a warning to all Chinese, showing them the consequences of speaking freely on Facebook and other non-Chinese Web sites.

It confirms that Beijing is monitoring everything that people say. Any Chinese-speaking user of Facebook could be arrested on charges of "subversion of state power" for criticizing the Chinese government or Chinese society: Even if the criticism was made outside of China, the moment you enter the country, you could be indicted.

All of Lee's comments about China that led to his heavy penalty were made in Taiwan, discussing politics with his Chinese friends online.

Even though it is such a big country and it claims to be the world's largest democracy, China cannot endure any political discussions on Facebook. Lee's comments and discussions fell within the scope of an NGO and that Beijing should consider such comments a threat to its regime just shows how fragile it is.

The way Beijing is evicting the "low-end population" from the country's capital reveals how inhumane Xi's rule is. This "low-end population," including blue-collar and white-collar workers, have all contributed to China's economy and tax revenue. If the Chinese government can be so ruthless with them, it can certainly be ruthless with Taiwan's democracy advocates.

In China, which claims to be the world's biggest democracy, even the pettiest remarks can be exaggerated and treated as the worst of crimes — China, the most powerful country and the greatest democracy in the world.

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