

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)-controlled legislature on Tuesday passed the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促轉法) aimed at redressing the legacy of injustices left by the nation's authoritarian era.

The law requires the Executive Yuan to set up a nine-member independent committee to implement transitional justice measures set forth under the act. These include investigating human rights abuses under martial law during the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) authoritarian regime, the rectification of unjust verdicts from that era, the removal of publicly displayed authoritarian symbols commemorating dictators, and the retrieval of political archives held by political parties and affiliated organizations determined by the ad hoc committee to be national archives, among other things.

The long-overdue legislation is undoubtedly a big step toward consolidating the nation's democracy, with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who is also DPP chairperson, touting it as an important milestone for Taiwanese democracy. All eyes are now on how her administration will execute the law.

However, remarks made by several DPP and government officials shortly after the law was enacted raise the question whether the Tsai administration has the willpower to truly enforce the law.

One day after the passage of the act, Cabinet spokesman Hsu Kuo-yung (許國揚), in response to reports that roads and schools named after Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) will be renamed, criticized those spreading the rumors as "trying to create divisions in society."

DPP caucus whip Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) added that names of roads and schools bearing Chiang's name have existed for decades and have created an emotional bond with locals and school alumni. If Ker's logic stands, what is the point of stipulating that public displays of authoritarian symbols commemorating dictators must be eliminated?

Names and statues of the main instigator of the White Terror era have permeated virtually all corners of the nation for more than 60 years. How can the DPP government talk about the

Enforcing transitional justice

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nation turning over a new leaf and leaving its authoritarian past behind when it shies from eliminating authoritarian symbols?

Granted, the nine-member independent committee will make the final decisions on how to implement transitional justice measures set forth under the act, including sites that are to be designated as “negative heritages.” However, it is indisputable that Chiang statues and the like are not historical sites, but authoritarian totems.

The tragedy of the 228 Massacre marks the darkest days in Taiwan’s post-World War II history. To this day, many survivors and family members continue to live in the shadow of grief and agony. Hsu is correct in stating that the act is meant to reconcile and not create divisions in society; however, he should also bear in mind that without truth and justice, there cannot be true reconciliation.

The DPP cannot boast of creating a new milestone in democracy for the nation if it fails to take concrete steps to implement the act. Otherwise, it would be just as culpable as the former KMT regime, which allowed the authoritarian worship of Chiang to continue.

Failure to do so also opens the DPP to criticism that the legislature’s passage of the transitional justice act was a bid by the party to gain points it had lost from the controversy over amendments to the Labor Standards Act (勞基法) ahead of next year’s nine-in-one elections.

Will Tsai live up to her promise? Or will the DPP administration compromise and let the public down — with transitional justice ending up as no more than a slogan?

The public wait and see.

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