

DPP must remember Sunflowers

Written by Michael Lin 林錫山

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On Dec. 18, former premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜桦) returned to his alma mater and former employer, National Taiwan University (NTU), to give a talk at the Department of Political Science. However, students who took part in the 2014 Sunflower movement protested his presence and the event was abandoned. Meanwhile, a former NTU professor who opposed Jiang's talk was attacked by a knife-wielding assailant and narrowly avoided being killed. These incidents show that there is still a serious rift in society, despite it being four years since the Sunflower movement. Students and the wider public are clearly unable to put the events of 2014 behind them.

With the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in government, it should be paying attention to the underlying debate that is driving such incidents. However, after four years, many people have probably forgotten why Jiang is still unable to resume his former role at NTU. How many people still remember that it was on Jiang's orders that the bloody events of March 23, 2014, unfolded, when students and supporters were forcibly cleared from the Executive Yuan by police? Time is the biggest enemy of transitional justice, as it robs the memory of details.

Jiang's biggest problem has always been that he is the one who ordered police to use force, whether it was tacit or explicit encouragement to do so. To this day, he has refused to apologize.

The day after the eviction, Jiang convened an international news conference and told a brazen lie in front of the assembled media by claiming that police had only hit protesters on the shoulders using batons.

Not a drop of blood had been spilled, he said.

The cold-heartedness that he displayed now dogs him wherever he goes. From start to finish he has shown no compassion for those caught up in the violence.

As for the current administration, when it sees incidents such as what happened at NTU, it should be filled with fear. The greatest slogan chanted during the Sunflower movement was: "This is our own country, we must save it ourselves." The sentiment of the protesters in 2014

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was that the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration was unsympathetic to the will of the people, while those tasked with keeping the executive branch in check were unable or unwilling to perform their role. Protesters felt that they had to solve the problems themselves, which is why they took the unprecedented step of occupying the Legislative Yuan's main chamber.

The students had pinned their hopes on the DPP and Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) to resolve their frustrations, but although the first act of Lin Chuan (林錫山) as premier was to rescind the charges against Sunflower movement participants, this clearly fell short of adequately redressing grievances, so emotions still run high.

Many of my friends participated in the Sunflower movement, all of whom felt deep grief and indignation at the results of last month's nine-in-one elections, let alone the crushing failure of the referendums. Inspired and enlightened by the Sunflower movement, these young people have consistently adopted a position that puts their country first. For them, national sovereignty is non-negotiable. As for energy policy, marriage, labor laws and other policy issues, they have taken up positions at the vanguard of the reform movement.

Two-and-a-half years into this DPP administration, are they satisfied with its performance? Has it been willing to put Taiwan first and stand up for national sovereignty more forcefully than the previous administration? Why did it not have the courage to lend its voice to the campaign to change the name of the nation's sports team to compete at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics from "Chinese Taipei" to "Taiwan"? Why has it rushed out a series of policies without engaging in a period of mature reflection? Why did it fail to communicate these policies properly to the public?

Following the administration's drubbing at the polls — in which the party hemorrhaged several million votes — it must strain every sinew to win them back. In particular, it must jettison its lazy assumption that the younger generation will always be among those voting for the DPP. The administration has failed to show sufficient humility over its policy implementation, while its communication has been abysmal. The party's younger generation of politicians must keep this lesson at the forefront of their minds.

Those in power would do well to heed the underlying message from the NTU incidents.

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