

Tsai should stand behind primary

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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There used to be a warning disguised as a jest that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was becoming “KMT-ized,” or backsliding to become like the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), which has been known for its palace politics and undemocratic practices.

However, recent developments seem to suggest that there is an irony unfolding: While the KMT has made progress toward enforcing the democratic system by holding a presidential primary, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the DPP is looking to drive her party in the opposite direction.

Tsai, facing a challenge from former premier William Lai (賴清德) in the party’s primary for next year’s presidential election, on Friday was quoted by reporters as saying that using public opinion polls for the primary would hurt party unity.

Accusing the reports of taking her words out of context and stressing that she did not say that she “rejects conducting a poll” for the primary, nor that the party “cannot conduct polls,” Tsai later that evening posted a transcript of her full statement on her Line account.

“The DPP has only one option, which is unity; one plus one is absolutely greater than two,” the transcript read. “Many people have said that public opinion polls would be a more democratic mechanism. I am confident about winning in polls, but if [the party] is to continue polling [for the primary], the party would split. When there is a poll, there is competition, and when there is competition, it will certainly bring attack, and how is the party to unite then? So I would like to tell everyone that the best thing to do is unite.”

Bewilderment would be an understatement to describe the extent to which Tsai chewed her words. Indeed, she never said “I reject polling” or that the party cannot conduct a primary poll, but after reading her full remarks, any reasonable person would arrive at the conclusion that she believes there should not be polling because doing so would split the party. What words were the media putting in her mouth?

The ridiculous logic of Tsai’s statement is dumbfounding and prompts questions over the meanings of democracy and progress that Tsai purportedly holds in her heart.

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By that same logic, if polling would bring competition, and competition would bring attack and therefore division, is she saying that Taiwan should not hold any more elections, as they would bring about competition, and therefore attack and division?

It cannot be helped but to wonder whether Tsai is taking the public for fools by suggesting that competition would bring about disunity.

Competition is not negative; on the contrary, it drives innovation and is essential to improvement. It is through constructive competitions such as primaries and elections that those in power are humbled to public opinion in return for votes.

Tsai's remarks only further prove the need to hold a primary so that DPP members and supporters can scrutinize the candidates and decide who would best represent the party in January next year.

Lai has been stressing that he is committed to fair play and would support Tsai if she wins the primary. So why is Tsai worrying about party unity?

Besides, the party has conducted polls in past primaries, and regardless of how feisty they have proven to be, the party eventually pulled together and stood united in the face of other parties.

Tsai truly does not need to worry about party unity. As a matter of fact, a fair primary with displays of integrity from all parties would help unify the DPP.

Even the KMT is embracing the democratic practice without concern that it would divide the party. Tsai should place more faith in the DPP's adherence to the democratic spirit and complete the primary process, of which she and her party ought to be proud.

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