

The truth must be uncovered now

Written by Chou Ni-an 周尼安
Friday, 10 May 2019 04:14

The legislature convened a question-and-answer session on April 8 to hear about progress on Transitional Justice Commission's request for documents from the National Security Bureau (NSB) concerning the 228 Incident, the 1981 death of Carnegie Mellon University assistant professor Chen Wen-chen (陳文成), the murders of Lin I-hsiung's (林義雄) mother and twin daughters, and the Kaohsiung Incident.

To this end, the National Development Council's National Archives Administration has embarked on a sixth collection of files and requested that the bureau provide 176 political files from the Martial Law period.

The NSB only forwarded 34 and listed the remaining 142 as "permanently classified." The public cannot help but wonder if the Presidential Office endorses the bureau's decision.

The implementation of transitional justice has been President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) most important commitment since assuming office. If she is determined to pursue the truth, demanding that the NSB declassify the files would surely not be difficult.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) regime imposed martial law in Taiwan for 38 years, the second-longest the world has ever seen. The truth of the White Terror era and wrongful political murders committed during the period remains unknown.

If the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and younger generations confine their historical perspective to a linear political evolution from the Formosa Incident to the dangwai (黨外, "outside the party") era and on to the DPP's establishment and its growing power, they will find it difficult to give a full picture of the development of the nation's democracy movement. Much of this history is tainted with blood and tears.

Chen Chih-hsiung (陳昌黎), the first independence activist executed by the KMT, for instance, shouted: "Long live Taiwan Independence" at the top of his lungs several times before he was killed.

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Instead of removing his shackles, the prison guards cut off Chen's feet with an axe so that he would not be able to walk to the execution ground with his head held high.

Hsinchu native Shih Ju-chen (謝居陳), a communist, joined the guerrilla resistance against the KMT after the 228 Incident. Refusing to turn himself in, Shih hid for 18 years behind a fake wall built inside his younger brother's house.

Through a peephole in the wall, Shih witnessed his wife being raped by police. She was taken to Taipei and forced into prostitution. He also saw his family being persecuted and torn apart by secret agents.

In 1970, Shih died from jaundice, because he did not dare go to see a doctor, and was hastily buried in the backyard.

In February 1970, Cheng Chin-ho (鄭欽和), Chen Liang (陳良), Chan Tien-tseng (陳天送), Chiang Ping-hsing (蔣平興), Hsieh Tung-jung (謝東榮) and Cheng Cheng-cheng (鄭成成), six political prisoners at Taiyuan Prison (臺源監獄) in Taitung County, planned to stage an uprising by snatching firearms and occupying a radio station to broadcast a declaration of Taiwanese independence to the world and call for Taiwanese to overthrow the Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) regime.

Caught in the act, they fled into the mountains before being captured several months later. They were executed as martyrs for a noble cause.

After their execution, secret agents demanded a high ransom from their families to hand over the bodies for burial.

In July 1959, Yao Chia-chien (姚家謙), a Philippine-born businessman of Chinese descent and manager of the Wuhan Hotel in Taipei, hanged himself in the hotel. To persuade other Chinese to continue investing in Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek demanded that the Investigation Bureau look into the case, originally ruled a suicide, as a murder.

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Seven people, including the hotel's owner, Huang Hsueh-wen (黃雪文); Huang's wife, Yang Hsun-chun (楊孫春); hotel employees; a guest at the hotel; and National Taiwan University professor Chen Hua-chou (陳華周) were arrested and imprisoned by the bureau and forced to confess to being either communist spies or murderers.

Huang was granted medical parole due to mental illnesses and later fled to the US after six retrials and receiving eight death sentences in 15 years. It was not until 2006 when the statute of limitations was passed that the Supreme Court closed the case.

Huang died in 2013 after having been embroiled in lawsuits for 47 years. In December 2017, his widow, then in her 90s, petitioned the Presidential Office to have the conviction overturned.

Deng Nan-jung (鄧南仲), who in 1984 founded *Freedom Era Weekly*, constantly challenged newspaper and political party bans by digging into the dark secrets of the party-state during the Martial Law era.

In 1986, Deng was imprisoned for eight months after then-Taipei city councilor Chang Te-ming (張德明) accused him of contravening the Civil Servants Election And Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法).

In 1988, Chen Yao-neng (陳耀能), a prosecutor at the Taiwan High Prosecutors' Office, subpoenaed Deng and charged him with sedition for having printed a draft "Republic of Taiwan constitution" written by then-World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI) chairman Koh Se-kai (高塞凱).

A few days later, Deng declared that "The KMT will only take my body; they will never take me alive" and barricaded himself in the magazine's offices.

When police surrounded the office and broke down the door after 71 days, Deng set himself on fire and died in the blaze, sending shockwaves through the nation.

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On Sept. 13, 1989, democracy pioneer and former Kaohsiung County commissioner Yu Deng-fa (鄧登發) was found dead in his house in Bagualiao (八角寮) in what was then Jenwu Township (麟蹄), with blood over the floor.

Yu's death was first determined to be of natural causes, but an autopsy by forensics expert Yang Ri-song (楊麗松) found evidence of a blunt instrument hitting the back of Yu's head.

The Yu family, which was powerful in the *dangwai* movement and has fought the KMT for many years, found the death suspicious and regards it as a murder of complex motivations. The case remains unsolved and no suspect has been identified.

On Oct. 12, 1993, independence activist Wang Kang-lu (王康路), a blacklisted overseas Taiwanese who served as secretary-general of WUFI, died in a traffic accident on Yangde Boulevard, a major route to and from Yangmingshan National Park (陽明山國家公園), near the NSB headquarters. Wang was sharing a taxi with Hsu Ao (許奧), a university student. They were returning late at night to downtown Taipei after Wang had delivered a speech at Chinese Culture University.

The taxi driver said that they were tailed by a suspicious vehicle. They then had to abruptly turn left to evade a person standing next to a vehicle parked on the roadside. When the taxi returned to the right lane, a parked vehicle suddenly turned its engine on and sped up, crashing into the taxi and causing the accident.

The case was closed and the driver of the other vehicle, Lin Ching-chung (林清忠), was convicted of drunk driving and negligence causing death.

The Ankang Guesthouse (安康賓館), at No. 20, Shuangcheng Rd in what is now New Taipei City's Sindian District (新店), was established in 1973 by the Investigation Bureau as a detention center of about 800 ping (2,645m²). Before it was decommissioned after the lifting of martial law in 1987, the facility served as the first detention stop for suspects in major cases and political investigations.

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In 2009, then-legislators Wong Chin-chu (王仁川) and Chen Ting-fei (陳丁飛) took a few reporters to inspect the defunct detention center. They found files from the White Terror era scattered inside the abandoned facility, as well as 60 glass containers of human organs in formalin.

The unmanaged facility was open to the homeless, and juvenile delinquents threw drug parties inside it.

The documents found scattered on the floor included information on human rights activist and writer Bo Yang (柏楊); former legislator Hsieh Tsung-min (許宗民); former DPP chairman Huang Hsin-chieh (黃信介); Huang Tien-fu (黃天福) who is now national policy adviser to the president; former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮); Taiwanese National Party founding chairman Huang Hua (黃華); former vice premier Chiou I-jen (邱毅); and others.

The DPP worried that many confidential files were destroyed before the transition of power on May 20, 2016, as the files have not been handed over to the National Archives Administration. During a question-and-answer session on March 22, 2016, DPP Legislator Lee Chun-yi (李俊洋) asked then-minister of justice Lo Ying-shay (羅英時) if she knew the purpose of the guesthouse, and Lo answered that she did not.

The Transitional Justice Commission has now cataloged the facility in a list of historical sites of injustice. Yet there are eyewitness accounts from nearby residents, saying that they have seen people burning items inside the facility, perhaps to destroy confidential documents and files.

There are eight months to go before the next presidential election, which will determine whether the DPP remains in power. There is also at least one month left until the party's presidential primary. In contrast, full implementation of transitional justice has been delayed for dozens of years.

Time and tide wait for no man — one sincerely hopes that Tsai makes the best use of an opportunity that could only last a few more months to unveil truths that have been covered in dust for more than 60 years.

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