

Members of the Taiwan Association of University Professors on Wednesday urged the government to step up its efforts to restore property and assets seized from victims during the White Terror era and commit to a timetable for returning assets.

The professors voiced concern that time is running out to restore past wrongs, with many victims now frail and in poor health.

Given that it is now more than three decades since martial law was abolished, it is understandable that some feel frustrated that it is taking so long for transitional justice to be implemented.

While there may be some truth in the accusation that the government is dragging its feet on the issue to preserve political capital, the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) repeated refusal to open up its archives is the real reason for the lack of progress.

The 228 Massacre and the subsequent imposition of martial law and White Terror period is an indelible stain on the KMT's past, and is perhaps the darkest chapter in the recent history of this nation.

In the initial action to quell a riot sparked by the hated Taiwan Monopoly Bureau, foreign eyewitnesses described scenes of wholesale slaughter by Nationalist Army troops, dispatched from China by Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) government in Nanjing.

During several days of wanton violence, civilians were indiscriminately raked with machine gun fire in the streets, homes were broken into, their occupants raped or killed and possessions looted.

In the ensuing White Terror era, it is estimated that thousands — perhaps tens of thousands — of Taiwanese intellectuals were prosecuted and incarcerated by the party-state security apparatus, the majority labeled as communist spies or sympathizers, their properties and

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Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Friday, 11 October 2019 04:52

assets confiscated by the state.

After the Democratic Progressive Party, led by Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), won a historic first legislative majority in the 2016 elections, the party established the Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee and later the Transitional Justice Commission to obtain justice for victims.

The committee cannot be accused of idly twiddling its thumbs. To date, it has frozen the assets of KMT-affiliated organizations, including the China Youth Corps and the National Women's League, and, in June it launched a public database of properties linked to the KMT.

However, the job of identifying and returning less high-profile properties and assets seized from private citizens has been less successful. This is primarily because of the KMT's refusal to open up its archives and, at every step of the way, doing whatever it can do to impede the progress of investigators. When they are granted access, investigators are intimidated by a team of KMT lawyers filming them as they go about their work.

The party has also refused to comply with disciplinary measures recommended by the commission and launched various appeals, including attempts to block the commission's reclassification of archived documents as national property. Sometimes, important files are "missing" or the committee is forced to wade through reams of irrelevant information.

To get around the lack of access, the commission has been forced to come up with creative solutions, in August launching a campaign for information from the public, with a monetary reward for any evidence that is corroborated.

Perhaps worst of all, some in the KMT have screamed blue murder, crassly accusing the government of unleashing a "green terror" on it. While the KMT has offered apologies in the past, actions speak louder than words.

If the KMT is serious about regaining power, its more moderate, nativist voices must push for unfettered access to the archives and show genuine contrition. Otherwise, voters will likely

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continue to spurn the party at the ballot box.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/10/11](#)