

Kaohsiung residents want end to tensions

Written by Li Kuan-long 李貫龍

Thursday, 14 May 2020 05:25

We are now less than a month away from the vote to recall Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜), scheduled for June 6. There has been a perceptible change on the ground in Kaohsiung in the dynamics of the campaign surrounding the vote.

This change has been in the shift from the mobilization of political forces to considerations and discourse surrounding the rational choice of individual residents. Unfortunately for Han, this shift is part of a tide that is going to be difficult to turn back.

Nobody is saying, of course, that the recall motion is not a political move, and the mayor's reputation has far from sustained a precipitous plunge.

The rather lukewarm response to the recall motion thus far is perhaps because the majority of Kaohsiung residents have hitherto not really been all that interested in political fighting and opposition.

However, Han has done himself very few favors, with a string of unforced errors that have left residents with a mounting sense of alarm.

The recall vote has now become a choice connected to the development of the city; it has become so much more than a simple election for who is to be mayor.

Some people have begun taking a rational look at this attempt to recall Han.

It seems to this author that, in the past few days and weeks, the residents of Kaohsiung have arrived at the determination that, above and beyond personal and political enmities on the part of some, the most important aspect of this recall vote is that this individual — whom so many paid attention to at the outset and of whom many had so much expectation — has utterly failed to deliver on his campaign promises over the past 18 months of being in city hall, and has fallen well short of the expectations those who voted for him had.

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Not only was he in a rush to have a stab at the presidency, he has also sought to grab at any excuse available to avoid answering questions at the Kaohsiung City Council.

In short, his performance as mayor has been totally unacceptable to the people of Kaohsiung.

At the same time, Han has been acting as if there were nothing to be concerned about, and that he had not done anything close to being worthy of reproach.

How is this fair to the city's residents?

Since its inception, the move to recall Han has encountered much criticism and yet Han has declined to address it directly himself, preferring to avoid the topic altogether, much to the frustration of the residents of the city he is supposed to serve.

It remains to be seen whether the city's residents will use the recall vote to vent their frustration.

Internal polling for the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) says it all.

In the run-up to June 6, this author gets the distinct impression that there is an increasingly objective, rational atmosphere descending upon the city, the manifestation of a reaction to a mayor who has relied on soundbites more than he has on laying the foundations for the future of Kaohsiung.

The objective of this vote has now become finding a way to reduce tensions and to allow Kaohsiung, in the shortest time possible, to return to its former vitality.

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It is precisely this kind of rational calculus that led to the aforementioned result in the KMT's internal polling.

Those results must have made for very uncomfortable reading for Han.

Li Kuan-long is a lecturer at Shih Chien University's Kaohsiung campus.

Translated by Paul Cooper

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