

Chen recall shows flawed process

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The recall vote for Taiwan Statebuilding Party Legislator Chen Po-wei (陳柏偉) on Saturday next week has little to do with his performance as a legislator representing Taichung's second electoral district. It is a local issue, but not in the way that recalls are intended to be. More significantly, it concerns national, and even international, political power play.

Chen has had a target on his back ever since he won the seat in last year's legislative elections as a dark-horse candidate against then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislator Yen Kuan-hen (顏寬恒).

Yen is the son of former Non-Partisan Solidarity Union legislator Yen Ching-piao (顏清標), a former convict affiliated with the KMT who has been a powerful figure in Taichung for decades as a result of, not in spite of, his shadowy background. The Yen family's long-term grip on the electoral district was broken by Chen's victory and they, together with the KMT, are hoping for his recall so that the younger Yen can reclaim his "birthright."

Chen's recall motion — launched by the pro-

unification New Party, an offshoot of the KMT — just days after former Kaohsiung mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) was recalled in June last year, was just the first in a wave of "retributive" recalls that has included independent Kaohsiung City Councilor Huang Jie (黃捷) and former Taoyuan city councilor Wang Hao-yu (王浩宇) — Huang survived the vote, Wang did not — and still threatens independent Legislator Freddy Lim (林錫山).

While Huang was vilified by Han and KMT supporters for her questioning of the former mayor in the city council, Chen's part in Han's recall was far more direct: He was the spokesman of the Taiwan Radical Wings Party, the precursor to the Taiwan Statebuilding Party, and actively campaigned for Han's ouster.

More than a year since that "original sin," Chen's recall has morphed from being a retributive action on the local level to part of the KMT's national strategy to reclaim the presidency. The KMT does not care about avenging Han's recall, but it is happy to exploit the lingering anger of his supporters among its core voter base.

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Recalls are intended as a mechanism for voters to remove an official in-between elections if that person is deemed to be negligent or unfit for office. However, as KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) said during his campaign for the party chairpersonship, the four referendums scheduled for Dec. 18 and Chen's recall were two major weapons in the party's attempt to regain the presidency. Other major KMT figures have also linked the recall to a vote on Premier Su Tseng-chang's (蘇貞昌) leadership.

If that seems a stretch, KMT Legislator Lee De-wei (李德偉) helpfully pointed out that Chen had consistently voted in line with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — from lifting a ban on pork imports containing the feed additive ractopamine to the government's policy on COVID-19 vaccines. The Taiwan Statebuilding Party is a small political party, and Chen is its only legislator. It presents no challenge to the KMT in terms of clout.

The party is mostly aligned with the DPP, but has been vociferously critical of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) reluctance to move further toward independence. Its strong pro-independence stance is an affront to the KMT's mission of protecting the Republic of China against a "Republic of Taiwan." However, it is the Chinese Communist Party that appears to be even more determined to stamp out the influence of Chen's party in the legislature.

Chu's focus on Chen's recall, and his mobilization of KMT forces to get it passed, could be interpreted as his kowtowing to his masters in Beijing.

Whatever the outcome, it is becoming increasingly clear that the local mechanism is being manipulated and exploited for national political ends, and is even open to foreign influence. The government needs to rethink the recall process.

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