

Ma accused of being out of touch

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President Ma Ying-jeou addresses foreign academics at the Fulbright Association's 37th Annual Conference in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

After responding to questions posed by foreign academics at the Fulbright Association's 37th Annual Conference, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) yesterday was criticized by members of the public for being "out of touch with the people."

At the event in Taipei, a foreign academic asked Ma's opinion on what was causing the men (男) which many Taiwanese said they were feeling, which the academic said was "a feeling of stagnation, or having no way forward."

Ma said that he did not know of such a "widespread phenomenon," saying that there were bound to be a variety of feelings felt by different people as Taiwan is a "very pluralistic society," adding that the government is striving to take care of those with particular concerns and has raised social welfare spending in a bid to narrow the wealth gap.

Ma said the gap between the richest 20 percent and poorest 20 percent of families had been 6.39 times, but the government's efforts had reduced the gap to 6.09 times. The wealth gap between individuals stands at 4.08 times, he said.

Ma concluded his talk with some comments in English.

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“If you know anyone who specifically feels hen men (雞男), let me know. I’ll talk to them, alright?” he said.

Ma’s remarks provoked criticism.

Taiwan Adequate Housing Association president Huang Yi-chung (黃宜中) said he would be very glad to talk with Ma on how men those without housing felt.

While Ma says that 85 percent of Taiwanese have their own homes, it is a figure based on family units, Huang said.

Under such a method, Huang said that although he works in Taipei and rents an apartment, the data show that he possesses a house as his registered residence is in Hsinchu, where his family owns a home.

Such a calculation method only highlights Ma’s stupidity, Huang said.

Huang also dismissed Ma’s remarks that the central government and local governments are seeking to solve the problem by building more social housing, saying that the 7,000 units of social housing comprise only 0.08 percent of total residential buildings in the nation.

Huang said the government’s policies allowing younger people to take out loans at a lower interest rate results in the young being burdened with debt for the next two to three decades to pay for a home that is over-priced as a result of property speculation.

Such policies expose young people to a potential housing market bubble, further displaying Ma’s stupidity, Huang said.

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National Alliance of Parents Organizations director-general Wu Fu-pin (吳福賓) and National Federation of Teachers Unions deputy secretary-general Lo Te-shui (羅德水) said that the government's education policies are making both parents and teachers "feel stagnated."

Taiwan Labor Front secretary-general Son Yu-liam (孫宇良) said the nation's economy has become sluggish and is not doing so well. Not only has Ma failed to deliver on his "6-3-3" election campaign promise, workers are also subjected to long hours and are constantly being overworked, while receiving very low wages.

Government policies continue to favor large corporations, while workers' wages have regressed to the same level as 1999, Son said, adding that people have evidently had enough, which led to last year's mass protests and the storming of the Legislative Yuan in Taipei.

"A president who says he does not know that the public is suffering from a feeling of stagnation, or having no way forward, is evidently too far removed from the public he is supposed to be serving," Son said.

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