

Report of Martial Law joke by Soong draws ire

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A man takes a picture of a portrait of People First Party Chairman James Soong at press conference in Taipei on Thursday at which Soong announced his presidential candidacy.

Photo: Liao Chen-huei, Taipei Times

Student activist Chen Wei-ting (陳偉霆) and New Power Party legislative candidate Freddy Lim (林煥堃) joined netizens yesterday in panning comments by People First Party (PFP) Chairman and presidential candidate James Soong (宋楚瑜) on the Martial Law period as inappropriate.

Soong declared his presidential bid on Thursday and his campaign photograph showed Soong covered in mud.

A report by online news outlet Storm Media Group quoted a Soong aide as saying that Soong was unaware on the day of the photo shoot that he would have mud plastered on him and had jokingly told two of the staff members: "If this was during the Martial Law era, I would have had both of you shot, but do not worry, I would have granted you a pardon."

The comments, while they caused laughter at the photo shoot, were met with indignation from netizens, the report said.

Martial law was imposed from 1949 to 1987 after the second Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party led to the KMT's defeat and its retreat to Taiwan. The White Terror era was also carried out under martial law.

Lim said he could not believe a presidential candidate would find the Martial Law era to be a laughing matter.

"The protests against high-school curriculum guideline changes, like the calls for transitional

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justice, embody the hope that we can face the truth of the painful history that has occurred in this land, and it is ridiculous to see this history as fodder for jokes,” Lim said.

It goes to show that Taiwan has still not adequately reflected on its past, Lim said, adding that if anyone felt that such jokes were inconsequential, they should imagine going to Germany and telling a Jew: “If this was during World War II, I would have sent you to the concentration camps to be gassed.”

Chen had also shared a post by netizen Brandin Ko Yang, who left a simple message reading: “Not funny” to show his disapproval.

Many other netizens also shared the opinion and criticized the “joke.”

In response to the criticism, PFP spokesman Clarence Wu (吳昌雄) said that Soong had never used the words “Martial Law era” that day and that the report was erroneous, although Soong had joked about having someone shot, but then pardoning their supposed crimes.

Wu said the party hopes that the upcoming election utilizes creativity instead of the usual mudslinging to change the electoral atmosphere, adding that the party hoped that the nation would keep its sense of humor.

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