

## Needed: Leader who doesn't pander

By Lin Terng-yaw 林騰鶴 /

Tue, Nov 09, 2010 - Page 8

A notable feature of the way those in power govern Taiwan these days, on both the national and local levels, is a high--spending style of administration that produces a short-term feel-good factor, as they hand out money to selected social groups to win their support. Money obtained by taxing hard-working Taiwanese is often not cherished, but rather spent willy-nilly.

If it's not used to build "mosquito halls" — public buildings that hardly ever get used — or high-tech industrial parks that lie idle for years, then it goes to impressive-looking, but poorly constructed engineering projects. Haven't we seen flood control projects that cost NT\$100 billion (US\$3.3 billion) or more laid waste by a few rainstorms?

Governments never hold back when it comes to handing out money to selected social groups. Armed forces veterans, elderly farmers, Aborigines, military personnel, civil servants, teachers, pregnant women and so on, all get their share and a jolly good time is had by all.

To make matters worse, rival political parties vie with each other to hand out ever-increasing piles of cash. They have no concern for whether the national treasury can take the strain, nor do they worry about how our children and grandchildren will feel when they are loaded down with debt.

If the entire system of public administration has degraded into a style of spend, spend, spend and unending handouts, then however incorruptible President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) may be, not even 10,000 Mas can right the ship. In the end, the public will wind up destitute.

What can be done to change the way Taiwan is being administered, while preserving the public's standard of living? The only way to accomplish this is to get back to basics; meaning returning to the basic mission and responsibilities that society expects from its government.

The basic mission of administrative work is to put security first and then give priority to food, clothing, living conditions, travel, social order and environmental hygiene. As to lanterns, fireworks, concerts and other feel-good items, they should come after all the essentials. The cart should not come before the horse.

The Constitution clearly defines the powers and responsibilities of the legislative, judicial, examination and control branches of government. When it comes to the executive branch, however, its powers and responsibilities are not well defined. Academics have said that administration is the core function of the state. To put it in plain language, the powers and responsibilities of the executive are vast and all-encompassing. The executive branch administers not just heaven and earth, but people too. It administers life, death and everything in between.

That is why it is said of a poor administration that “tyranny is more fierce than a tiger.”

It is also the reason why Article 41 of the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights says that every person has the “right to good administration.”

Good administration requires good management, but national and local governments are not very keen on good management these days, and they aren’t very good at it, either. The trend in recent times is for heads of administrative departments to become paid servants of political forces.

One result of this is that they remain in their appointed posts for shorter periods and get much less administrative experience. These factors are whittling away at national and local governments’ administrative abilities, rendering them incapable of managing their ever greater and more changeable administrative duties. So, no matter what kind of administration we are talking about — forecasting, planning, control, investigation, order, risk, conservation or management — all are often hit by shortages of personnel, lack of diligence and poverty of expertise, leading to calamities or cases of malpractice. When will we be free of such a disastrous style of administration?

Elections will soon be held for executive leaders of Taiwan’s five biggest municipalities. Let us hope that those elected will be virtuous and capable people who can match those business managers who put corporate social responsibility into practice by carrying out their executive social responsibility. Let’s hope the ones elected into office won’t be those who shout passionate, but empty slogans, or villains who look after the interests of mobsters and political factions, but don’t care whether ordinary people live or die.

The leaders Taiwan needs are clean and capable ones who are willing and able to fulfill their executive social responsibilities to the public, to the land and the environment, who will implement fair taxation and provide for the interests of our children and grandchildren in years to come.

*Lin Terng-yaw is a law professor at Tunghai University.*

TRANSLATED BY JULIAN CLEGG

**Published on Taipei Times :**

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2010/11/09/2003488057>

Copyright © 1999-2010 [The Taipei Times](#). All rights reserved.