

# *Taiwan Counts Down to a New Government After Three Years Mess by the Ma Administration*

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## I. Introduction

It is no doubt that the Ma Ying-jeou Government has failed to convince the people of Taiwan with its performance during the past three years. Aside from persistently low approval rate, this is also reflected in citizens' worries over the current political, economic and social environment. The Ma Government has not only failed to solve the problems that plague our people, but has even aggravated some of the existing severe problems with its unprofessional and shortsighted pattern of governing the country. Putting it simply, since the Ma Government lacks farsighted leadership and does nothing but blame the previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Government and frequently talk big, it does not only lack a track record to shine with, but even keeps pushing up Taiwan's misery index.

## II. Broken Campaign Pledges

A Taiwan Brain Trust opinion poll marking Ma's third year in office found that 41 percent of the respondents feel that the president has severely betrayed his campaign pledges, a higher ratio than those voicing the opposite. Given such public perception, Ma will see his credibility severely discounted if he continues to make new campaign promises as he prepares for his reelection bid during his last year in office. Actually as many as 48 percent of the respondents were "not very satisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with Ma's performance during the past three years, whereas even more than half of the respondents (50.9 percent) voiced dissatisfaction with the

performance of Premier Wu Duen-yih and his cabinet. Clearly the Ma-Wu Government has failed to stand the test of public scrutiny.

Shortly after taking his post, Wu declared that he would push for an economy that allows ordinary people to enjoy the fruits of economic growth. But he has clearly failed to meet the goal. While half of the respondents believe that their personal economic situation remains unchanged, 30 percent feel their situation has worsened and only 17 percent saw an improvement. In a nutshell this means that only a minority of people in Taiwan feel that they get to share the fruits of economic growth that the Government claims to have brought about. As many as 70 percent of the respondents feel that there is a severe gap between the rich and the poor in Taiwan. At the same time, 58 percent of the respondents consider unemployment a very serious problem. However, the Ma Government seems unable to find any remedy to address these problems of public concern, letting the situation grow worse instead. Nearly 52 percent of the respondents oppose a salary hike for military officers, civil servants and teachers, a likely reflection of their sense of relative deprivation.

Moreover, while the majority of respondents think that not much has changed with regard to Taiwan's international status, democratic freedom, and human rights guarantees, more people feel that the situation has deteriorated than improved. What's even worse is the fact that as many as 43 percent of the respondents think that the situation of Taiwan's judiciary is worsening. This shows not only that the judicial reforms that the Ma Government trumpets from dawn till dusk are not felt by the public, but also that public trust in the

judicial system has crumbled.

### III. Final Countdown

As Ma's term in office enters the final countdown, the Ma Government does not only fail to reflect on its mistakes, but even continues to blame the previous Government, using A-bian (former President Chen Shui-bian) to gain political capital, pretending to be innocent and twisting the truth in a bid to find an excuse for its own inept performance. Selfish politicians will try to find excuses for their own failures, but the people are not obliged to buy the reasons that these politicians use to exculpate themselves.

The 6-3-3 campaign pledge (6 percent annual GDP growth, annual per capita income of US\$30,000 and less than 3 percent unemployment) became a joke a long time ago, and other promises such as free school lunches, free high school and vocational school education, free kindergarten education for five-year-olds, tax deduction for childcare costs, and a higher budget for education all came to nothing. The unemployment rate continually edged up from 3.8 percent in May 2008 when the DPP Government stepped down to a historic high of 6.13 percent in August 2009, and has since remained high at around 5 percent. The price of natural gas alone, a staple item in people's everyday life, has increased from NT\$500 for a 20 liter cylinder in 2008 when the DPP ceded power to the Kuomintang (KMT) to NT\$800 today.

While their own pockets get emptier citizens see that the Ma Government can spend money whenever it wants, which only fuels their indignation and sense of deprivation. In today's Taiwan the rich gets richer and the poor becomes

poorer, while social mobility has almost come to a standstill. Such social problems cannot be ignored. And as the sense of relative deprivation in the middle and lower classes continues to intensify and making it by one's own efforts becomes an illusive dream, Taiwanese society has probably already sown the seeds of class contradiction and confrontation.

As a matter of course a ruling party needs achievements to solicit voter support. But although the KMT claims to "take full control of the Government and full responsibility for it," it has been utterly unable to solve the host of problems that plague our society and economy. "To lead or to follow" that should be the question. If the Ma Government is not able or willing to lead the people in tackling our numerous social problems, then the people must lead the Government in facing and solving them. Voters must use the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections to instigate another power transition, taking their destiny into their own hands for a promising future! **BT**