

Lingnan University

Digital Commons @ Lingnan University

Staff Publications

Lingnan Staff Publication

11-10-2015

Politicization preys on social ills

Lok Sang HO

Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.ln.edu.hk/sw_master



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ho, L.-S. (2015, November 10). Politicization preys on social ills. *China Daily (Hong Kong Edition)*, P9.

This Newspaper article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lingnan Staff Publication at Digital Commons @ Lingnan University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Lingnan University.

Politicization preys on social ills

HO Lok-sang

Ho Lok-sang writes that politicians should not distort the truth and manipulate facts to score political points, but always keep the best interests of society at heart.

Legislator Alan Leong Kah-kit wrote an article recently on politicization, taking a very positive view of it. Either he misunderstands the nature of politicization, or he misunderstood the proper relationship between politics and public policy.

Leong wrote, "The council (he meant the Legislative Council or district councils) is part of politics. Entering a race to be elected as a member of a council is opting for a political career. The platform that a candidate proposes to his constituents in Chinese is called political agenda (zheng gang). The work of council members is political. But the pro-establishment camp likes to distort things. It bills all opposition voices as 'politicization'."

Actually, politicization means using an issue for the purpose of achieving political gains. When an issue is politicized, instead of being analyzed objectively it is blown out of proportion for the selfish purpose of political gain. The objective for those who politicize is not to get things right but to take advantage of public emotions - even to manipulate them - for political ends.

It is true that public policies are intrinsically political. That is because public policies will almost always produce gainers and losers. The potential gainers will naturally amass their political clout to get the proposed policy passed; the potential losers will amass what they can to stop it. Sometimes those who think they benefit (or lose) from a policy could even be mistaken, because their perception could be all wrong. But no matter, those who perceive they will gain will fight against those who perceive they will lose.

Despite this, politicians who have the interests of society at heart will do what they can. They will try to understand the full implications of policy alternatives, and to help the public understand the pros and cons of the various policies. They will seek to work out what the best policy option from the perspective of society as a whole is - the policy option that disinterested people would opt for. They will do what they can to inform the public about the implications of policy alternatives. Ultimately, they will endeavor to promote the policy that is best for society.

Those politicians who prefer to politicize an issue leverage people's fears and emotions in order to

garner more support for themselves or for their parties. They do not care what the best policy option for society is. Neither do they care if people have false perceptions or a poor understanding of the issues. They only care what is politically most advantageous for themselves.

In saying this, I am not claiming that everything the opposition camp does is politicization. But I am all too well aware of how some issues are politicized so that the best outcome fails to materialize.

One that stands out is Moral and National Education (MNE). Legislator Tik Chi-yuen explained on an RTHK program on Sunday that he had supported MNE entirely as a matter of conscience. He said his position on MNE was entirely rational: A teacher is a professional with judgment, and Tik could not believe teachers would "brainwash" students or that the government could force teachers to brainwash students. Practically every country has national education in its curriculum, so there was nothing wrong with introducing MNE in Hong Kong. MNE would have allowed Hong Kong students to better understand the complicated issues confronting the Chinese nation and inspired an interest in the country's developments.

But Tik was severely criticized by the Democratic Party, and was even persuaded to give up his party membership. However, he said he did not blame those party leaders and colleagues who attacked him because political interest was at stake.

The other highly politicized issue that stands out of course is political reform. Some would still argue that prior vetting by the Nominating Committee is a worse outcome than the status quo arrangement of electing the Chief Executive through the Election Committee. But just seeing how "middle-ground" legislators like Ronny Tong Ka-wah were marginalized - notwithstanding the evidence now available through a recent survey that the majority of Hong Kong people actually prefer a middle-ground stance - is enough to convince us that politicization is alive and well, but operating to the detriment of Hong Kong.

Leong went on to accuse CE Leung Chun-ying of transplanting political struggle from the mainland to Hong Kong. "Having ruled over Hong Kong for three years, he has torn Hong Kong apart into polarized camps - either friend or foe. There is little room for dialogues and rational discourse," he complained. But is this true? Leung was asked to step down even before he took office. One of the first demands made by the illegal occupation movement was that he resign. The protesters screened out all the middle-ground options before allowing the public to cast a vote, and booed anyone whose position differed from theirs at public forums.

I do not want to lay the blame on anyone specifically. But enough is enough.