

Taiwan: WHAT NEXT FOR THE BLUEBIRD MOVEMENT?

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THE PROTESTS AGAINST the KMT and TPP's efforts at expanding legislative powers did not result in preventing the bill's third reading yesterday. This occurs despite the fact that over the course of two weeks, the demonstrations went from around 300 individuals to over 100,000 in the short course of a week.

As such, it is a question what comes next for the demonstrations. Demonstrators remained in high spirits even after the third reading took place, with the protest continuing until the scheduled programming was to end after 11 PM.

Organizers vowed that more actions would take place, even if it remains somewhat ambiguous as to what that would be. By contrast, participants in the demonstration were called on *not* to take direct action over the new powers, even as speakers such as Wu Rwei-ren described the actions of the KMT and TPP as a parliamentary coup. Ironically, the contested bill passed its third reading just as the movement had acquired an identity in the form of the name, "Bluebird Movement," as riffing off the similarity of the "Qingdao" (青島) in "Qingdao East Road" (青島東路) and "bluebird" (藍鳥).

As the coalition of civil society groups involved in organizing the demonstration were also the main coordinators of the Sunflower Movement in 2014, it is not that they have an inherent opposition to direct action, but it may be that they view such an action as unlikely to succeed. The public may be perceived as not wishing for another chaotic protest movement on the scale of the Sunflower Movement.

Likewise, the unique set of conditions that allowed for the Sunflower Movement do not exist at present—student occupiers were not cleared from the legislature because of the intervention of then-KMT majority speaker Wang Jinpyng. Because of [his political tensions](#) with then-president Ma Ying-jeou, Wang also later proved to be the figure in the KMT who was able to back down from the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement that the movement opposed, providing the necessary pretext for the withdrawal from the Sunflower Movement. By contrast, one could little expect KMT Legislative Yuan president Han Kuo-yu taking a light hand to students, or KMT caucus convener Fu Kun-chi. Nor were there visible splits in the KMT or TPP that could have been leveraged to provide an endgame for the movement.

As such, civil society groups are waiting to see what occurs next in terms of other branches of government potentially taking action to restrain the bill. The DPP stated that it would seek a constitutional interpretation if the bill reached a third reading. It is very possible that the bill will, in fact, encounter issues in [the Constitutional Court](#), particularly with the view that the bill grants to the legislature powers normally reserved for the executive or even judiciary branches of government. Moreover, the Executive Yuan [has been called](#) on to exercise powers of oversight over the bill by civil society groups.

Still, if this is the outcome, the pan-Blue camp is likely to claim that this is a product of the undue influence of the DPP over other branches of government. These solutions are not likely to put an end to partisan conflict in Taiwan.

Still, the way forward that civil society groups proposed at the end of the demonstration yesterday proves interesting. Members of the public were called on to go back to their localities, to build new networks, and make their desires heard by local politicians. Likewise, participants were called on to form new organizations or to join existing organizations, to develop ties for future actions. In particular, students were called to organize clubs and to revive student movements.

The [2008 Wild Strawberry Movement](#), which played a pivotal role in building the networks that led up to the 2014 Sunflower Movement, led to students returning to campuses and building student activist groups. The networks that formed between these activist groups then later were mobilized in the course of the Sunflower Movement.

The Sunflower Movement, similarly, ended on the note of [“sowing seeds in the local.”](#) Activists were called on to return to their hometowns, to try and change local politics in which the KMT often had deep roots. Sometimes this involved organizing recall campaigns against KMT legislators, as in [the Appendectomy Project](#).

Direct ideas from the Sunflower Movement were brought up in the conclusion of the protests yesterday, with Economic Democracy Union convener Lai Chung-chiang calling members of the public to take shifts to provide oversight over legislative actions based on the last digit of their national ID. This reminds of when Lin Fei-fan called on the public to form cells with the people next to them in the protest to organize in the future during [his speech](#) on March 30th, 2014, during the rally often thought of as the high point of the Sunflower Movement, perhaps with some ideas drawn from how national ID numbers were used to divide who was allowed to visit supermarkets during [the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Yet perhaps the echoes of past ideas from the Sunflower Movement point to how many of the [same political issues](#) have remained unresolved in the past decade, including the KMT’s deep roots in local politics.

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