

## More work is needed on housing

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On Dec. 13, the Legislative Yuan passed amendments to the acts on housing justice. Government leaders proudly claimed that this was a giant leap toward the realization of land and housing justice in Taiwan, but the dark shadow of housing injustice continued to loom over the legislative process and the final negotiations between the political parties.

Why has the housing problem become the No. 1 public complaint? Perhaps short-term speculation is causing public discontent, but what is really infuriating is the systemic collusion between government officials and businesses, which erodes the foundation of the nation's overall economic interests and of social justice. The legislative process surrounding the latest amendments and its results are a typical example. Society at large has repeatedly pushed for this legislation, striving hard to make government leaders realize the seriousness of the problem. However, at the last crucial stage, it seemed an easy decision for officials and lawmakers to protect the opinions and benefits of those who are creating the housing injustice.

The amendments to the five acts on housing justice were passed as a result of electoral pressure. On the surface, it would seem that the opinions of the majority were met, but in fact, certain key amendments clearly favor those who are the source of the housing injustice. This legislation will instead create obstacles that will be hard to surmount when trying to bring about a healthy housing market and housing justice.

First, there are the amendments to the three property-related acts — the Real-Estate Broking Management Act (不動產經紀業管理條例), the Equalization of Land Rights Act (平均地權條例) and the Land Administration Agent Act (地政士法) — which aim to enforce the registration of real transaction prices and information transparency to build a foundation for future taxation, also on real transaction prices. However, the legislation restricts the degree to which information is transparent and prohibits taxation on real transaction prices. This result is diametrically opposed to the purpose of the legislation. One can only wonder what ulterior motives are behind this outcome.

Next, the Housing Act (住宅法) requires that 10 percent of social housing units be reserved for disadvantaged groups, but it does not specify how many units the government should provide. In other words, since the supply of social housing is still unspecified, social housing for the disadvantaged is just a dream. And under the build-operation-transfer (BOT) model, who benefits, the builders or the disadvantaged?

Finally, the Land Expropriation Act (土地徵收條例) requires that the government pay market prices for expropriated land. At first sight, this seems to be favorable to landowners, but the key

issue is how to avoid rampant and improper expropriation to protect people's property rights. Some people are unwilling to sell their property even for prices above the market value, let alone market prices. Besides, the "market price" as defined in the act is to be determined by the government itself, instead of by fair and professional land appraisers. The key issue is the protection of people's property and survival rights.

We have fought for years for legislation requiring the registration of actual property sales prices and the Housing Act. There have already been too many articles and reports written and conferences discussing what constitutes good legislation that truly fulfills the normal development needs of the social economy, and the consensus that has been created on this issue is both clear and complete. The Cabinet already has draft proposals for achieving this and plans for their execution, and many complimentary measures that the public are unaware of have in fact reached a high level of maturity and expert planning.

The public has given the government a good chance to garner popular support, but government leaders are so stubborn that they chose to create housing injustice and obstruct housing justice. We hope that the executive branch will come up with follow-up measures to reverse this mistake. The nation belongs to all of its people, and a few individuals should not do be allowed to do whatever they want. Housing justice is a necessary condition for a healthy nation and society, and the public should not easily compromise on this issue.

The housing justice revolution has not yet succeeded and much more work remains to be done. We should all work together to create a beautiful living environment for all Taiwanese.

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