

Hard to be patient in face of Hitler card

April 26, 2015 by Daniel J. Bauer

In the beginning, the news story requires a bit of patience just to keep the details straight. By the time you get to the end of it, however, you may find you've plumb run out of patience and are feeling not merely unhappy, but angry.

That is where I am here. I am more than simply upset or frustrated. I am angry.

At the same time, I suspect that whenever we run up against what seems to be this unnatural and bizarre fascination in Taiwan with Adolph Hitler, we're up against what my college course in anthropology termed a cultural conflict. Conflicts such as these may be realities we cannot rid ourselves of, said my professor. The best we can do, he shrugged his shoulders, is try to understand.

I am trying to understand. Yet I also wonder if we can do more than that. I am not sure what. Speak out, perhaps. Refuse to take this nonsense silently. Say how wrong it is, how silly, how ugly.

I mentioned Adolph Hitler. That was no typing error. A poster with his photograph and name – looks to be mighty big, nearly life-sized – appeared in our local news this week. The poster was planted like the cover of a pornographic magazine in the middle of Tainan.

Imagine, Adolph Hitler alive and well in Tainan. Hitler on a very large placard, custom cut in cardboard to fit into the front row seat assigned to the mayor of the city, Hitler in City Council Chambers.

Woe is me, but I hinted above that I might ask for your patience as I relate the details behind this situation in Tainan. Patience, I am told, is a virtue.

In a nutshell, Mayor William Lai (Lai Ching-te) continues to boycott city council meetings in Tainan as an act of protest to the presence at them of Lee Chuan-chiao of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), who government prosecutors have charged with vote-buying. Back on November 29 when the KMT lost its bloomers in elections all over the country, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won 28 of 57 seats in the Tainan City Council. The KMT picked up 16. Low and behold, when the dust settled after councilors later chose

their new speaker, the KMT's Lee emerged with 29 votes, and the DPP's Lai Hui-mei 26.

So, the beat goes on. Mr. Mayor and a number of his administrators refuse to show up at council meetings, and the business of the city, allocations, budgets and such, has largely ground to a halt. The mayor says council speaker Lee's claim to leadership is illegitimate, and he won't abide by it. The KMT label him a you-know-what.

Now Lee's KMT cronies have wheeled in the mammoth Hitler sign and parked it in the mayor's seat for meetings that are not happening. In politics, this is called a photo opportunity.

This use of images of Adolph Hitler is nauseating. Nothing I can imagine is more personally repulsive than anything that smacks of humor at the suffering Adolph Hitler brought to millions in our world, especially to people of Jewish ancestry. The KMT is not wrong every minute of the time, but it is wrong whenever it uses Hitler in any way to score points in politics. I used "whenever."

The KMT leader who ran unsuccessfully in two Taiwan presidential elections (and in one mayoral contest in Taipei) some years back, whose admirers keep right on praising him for "peace" overtures between his party and the Communists in Beijing a decade ago, labeled his DPP rival "a Hitler" not just once, but repeatedly. This baiting, bullying, brainless behavior, which was widely reported in our media at the time, continues without a lick of moral awareness or apology there in Tainan. The top brass of the KMT ought to be ashamed of itself. Playing the Hitler card again only exacerbates Taiwan's pitiful image of insensitivity to Jewish people as reflected in recent years with our Nazi concentration camp theme restaurants and caricatures of Hitler in advertisements to sell home appliances. Those were mind-blowing events for people with even a smidgen of grey matter between the ears and, again, were broadcasted in embarrassing reports all over the world.

My former student Elie told me to be patient, and I vowed to try. But in this case, it "sure ain't easy."

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Talking points –

1. This column expresses anger at a political party's use of Adolph Hitler to try to score political points in a City Council problem in Tainan. What do you think of when you see a picture of Hitler, or hear his name? Can you understand a little bit of how Jewish people and other so called "minority groups" (Gypsies, Catholics in some parts of Europe during World War II, and so on) feel when "Hitler" appears in public today?
2. Hitler's name and photograph appears in odd ways in Taiwan life every year or two. Why does this happen? Do Taiwan people realize what this does to Taiwan's image in the world?
3. You may sense the emotion of anger in this column. Is it wise to write on a topic such as this when a person feels upset?

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