

Economic Issues Become the Determining Factor in the Presidential Election

By Chen Jin-ji

The Executive Yuan's Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) announced Nov. 16 that 48 companies had asked employees to take unpaid leave; 5,513 workers, the companies reported, were on unpaid leave, but the number of workers actually taking the leave was 5,021. In that report, the number of companies resorting to unpaid leave had risen three times higher than the statistics published two weeks earlier. The earlier statistics stated that 12 companies had asked 2,801 employees to take unpaid leave. The CLA, however, considered that because the number of workers on unpaid leave had not doubled during the period between the two statistical reports, the trend of unpaid leave "had gradually eased." Meanwhile, according to statistics compiled by the reporting system of the Taiwan Electronics and Information Industry Trade Union and updated Nov. 16, about 75 companies had asked 36,400 workers to take unpaid leave. The union's statistics showed that the increase in the number of employees on unpaid leave had slightly slowed down compared with the data on Nov. 6, which reported that 63 companies had offered 33,000 employees unpaid leave. In spite of the slowing down of the increase in the number of workers on unpaid leave, the union's statistics of workers affected by the practice were nearly six times higher than those published by the CLA. The government should not be too optimistic when speculating about whether the unpaid leave storm will continue to spread.

On Nov. 18, Yes 123 Job Bank published an online survey of office workers' views of unpaid leave,¹ which revealed that nearly 90% of nine-to-fivers believed that the actual situation of this wave of unpaid leave is more serious than reported by the media and is not, as the government said, "under control." Moreover, while most office workers did not believe that the government can stop this wave of unpaid leave, 50% of them even thought that massive layoffs will take place following next January's presidential election. Survey results also showed that if the practice of unpaid leave gets worse, two-thirds of nine-to-fivers will not vote for Ma Ying-jeou. Nearly 70% of office workers believed that if the government fails to effectively check the unpaid leave maelstrom before the presidential election, Ma may lose the race.

Such information indicates that economic and livelihood issues will influence the way the electorate vote. Livelihood issues such as employment and commodity prices that

are closely related to people's daily life will become a major determining factor in the presidential election. The "Public Opinion Poll on the Economic Situation and the Presidential Election"² published by the Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) Nov. 2 showed that over 70% of respondents considered the current unemployment problems as very serious. Nearly 50% held a negative view of the economic prospects in the coming six months and 57% felt dissatisfied with the Ma administration's economic measures. As high as 77.7% thought that the gap between rich and poor in Taiwan has severely widened during Ma's more-than-three-year administration, while 57% believed that the Ma government's policies benefit corporations and widen the gap between rich and poor. Up to 80% reckoned that Ma's government has not efficiently solved the problem of rising commodity prices.

And the people's worries about unpaid leave, layoff woes, increasing unemployment rates, rising commodity prices, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the overall situation of Taiwan's economy in the future are naturally reflected in their preferences for presidential candidates. The TBT opinion poll suggested the public considered that among the three presidential candidates, Tsai Ing-wen, Ma Ying-jeou, and James Soong, Tsai is more concerned about unemployment problems and the gap between rich and poor than the other two candidates. According to this presidential election poll, in this race contended by three rivals, support rates of the Tsai-Su (Su Jia-chyuan) ticket, the Ma-Wu (Wu Den-yih) ticket, and the Soong-Lin (Lin Ruey-shiung) ticket were 35.9%, 32.2%, and 13.7% respectively.

In this age of globalization, international links between economies have deepened and domestic economic prospects are closely connected with international factors. Although many international factors are beyond our country's control, our government cannot shirk its responsibility to make sound preparations and propose related responsive policies that give the people confidence in the administration's capacity to provide stabilization measures. President Ma, the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) presidential candidate, is still responsible for handling the nation's economic problems when he is on the campaign trail. But opinion polls indicate that Ma's election-oriented approaches to the economy have failed to meet the electorate's expectations.

Election experiences in the United States also suggest that economic issues are often the crucial factor influencing the electorate's voting tendencies in presidential elections. In Taiwan's 2008 presidential election, polls similarly revealed that many

voters changed their support for the green camp to the blue camp because of their economic appeals. What this demonstrated was the electorate's "economic voting behavior," which signified that voting tendencies are influenced more by voters' preferences for candidates' handling of economic issues than by voters' past party affiliations. As Taiwan's economic problems deteriorate, it is worth observing whether "economic voting behavior," which may turn many voters' support of the blue camp to the green camp or vice versa, will take place in 2012.

¹ An online survey of office workers' views of unpaid leave published by Yes 123 Job Bank

Date: Nov. 3-7, 2011

Survey method: Online questionnaire and survey sampling

Sample size: 1,094 valid questionnaires answered by job bank members

Margin of error: +/- 2.96% with a 95% confidence level

² The TBT public opinion poll

Survey area: 22 cities and counties of Taiwan

Sampling method: Proportional stratified random sampling

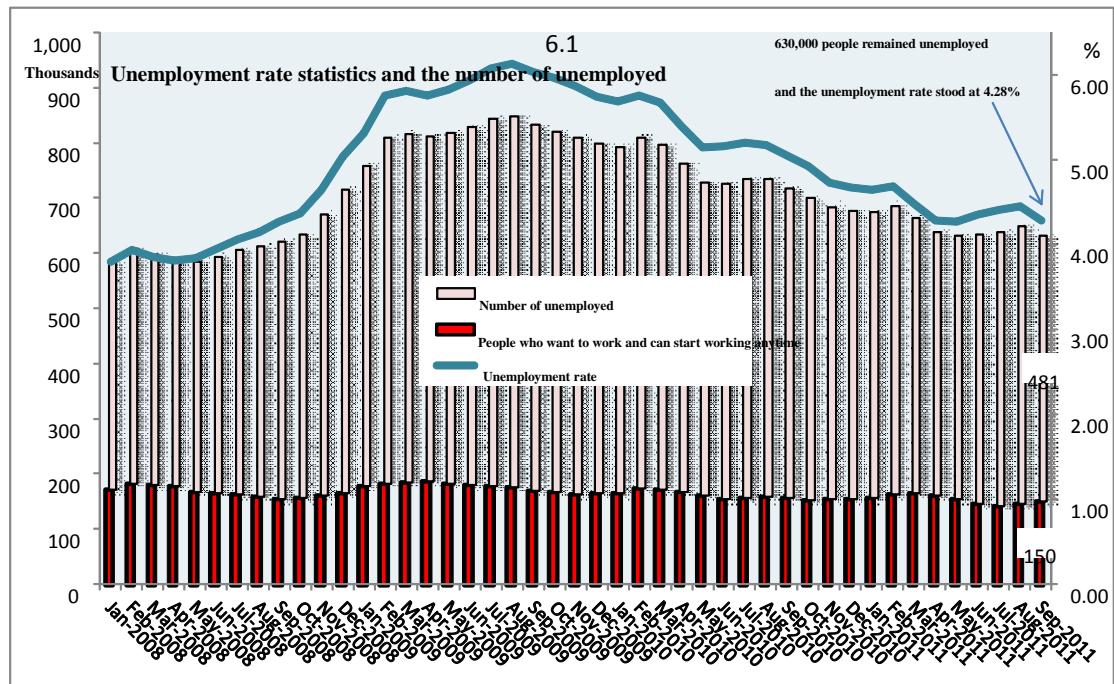
Interviewees: People who are aged 20 or above

Date: Oct. 28-29, 2011

Sample size: 1,071 valid respondents. Based on the Taiwan area's population statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior, sample related to household registration area, age, and gender is examined and raking ratio estimation is used for weighting.

Margin of error: +/- 3% with a 95% confidence level

Graph: Unemployment rate and number of unemployed



Source: Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics, Executive Yuan

千人：Thousands

失業率與失業人口統計：Unemployment rate statistics and the number of unemployed

仍有失業者63.1萬人，失業率4.28：630,000 people remained unemployed and the unemployment rate stood at 4.28%

失業人口：Number of unemployed

想工作且隨時可以開始工作者：People who want to work and can start working anytime

失業率：Unemployment rate

Graph: Major presidential election polls

