

# An opposition party takes shape

## in Taiwan

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Members of Taiwan's provincial assembly who are not also members of the Kuomintang, the single party of the Taipei government, have quietly become an opposition party in all but name—the first since the Nationalists established themselves as a government of mainlanders in 1949. With other signs, this offers hope that liberalization will go ahead under the new president-elect, Chiang Ching-kuo.

The non-KMT politicians, who are predominantly islanders, believe that several factors are working for them: The island's rapid economic growth is changing the whole political atmosphere; Taiwan's foreign trade should exceed \$20 billion in 1978 (against the Chinese People's Republic's \$15 billion in 1977); and more than a million tourists annually, plus the enormous student flow to and from the U. S., have long since ended the island's isolation. With the Carter Administration's emphasis on liberalism, Taipei's reputation in this area could be a factor in forestalling "normalization" between Washington and Peking. Taiwan worries that would mean the end not only of its mutual defense treaty with the U. S. but also of the economic benefits of being an independent power—membership in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for example.

**Election riots.** The watershed in Taiwan politics was reached last November. In local and islandwide elections, non-KMT candidates picked up 21 of 77 seats in the provincial assembly, up from eight. Successful independents were mostly around 40—young for Chinese politics—and nearly all were college graduates. And in Chungli, where rumors of ballot-tampering brought on a riot, authorities responded with restraint.

That doesn't mean the end of restrictions. Police last month confiscated copies of a book with pictures taken during the Chungli riot. The KMT leadership has tried—so far unsuccessfully—to force the largely Taiwanese Presbyterian Church to back off from its declaration for Taiwan's independence. (The KMT believes the island is a part of China, something both they and the Peking government agree on.)

The next major test will come at yearend, when national legislative bodies are elected. So far, the independents have not set up a party to contest them, but newspaper and magazine articles have hinted at it. ■