

Idiom by Lon Yan

知難而退

zhi1 nan2 er2 tui4

The court has granted leave for the government's judicial review seeking to remove four more non-establishment lawmakers for allegedly failing to take office oaths properly. "Long Hair" Leung Kwok-hung, one of the four, was "not surprised," saying since he has no money, he would "take things as they come."

He did call the government move a political coup, but all in all, his initial reaction was calm, seemingly resigned to the reality that there is little chance of him winning the case. He wasn't even going to engage a lawyer, it was reported.

People who give up at the first sign of trouble usually wouldn't go very far, but so wouldn't those who don't know when to "知難而退" (*zhi1 nan2 er2 tui4*).

"知" (*zhi1*) is "to know," "to understand," "難" (*nan2*) "difficulty," "problem," "而" (*er2*) "and," "to" and "退" (*tui4*) "to retreat," "to withdraw."

Literally, "知難而退" (*zhi1 nan2 er2 tui4*) is "realize difficulty and retreat," "to sound out the difficulties and retreat to avoid defeat."

Figuratively, it means "to back out of an awkward situation," "to get out on finding out what it's really like". Survivors all know which fight to pick and when to fold and walk.

Looking at the NPC interpretation and the predicament of Sixtus Leung Chung-hang and Yau Wai-ching, there seems to be only two possible outcomes for the four respondents in the latest case – throw in everything, fight to the bitter end, lose the seat and accept financial ruins, or walk away and lose the seat.

Not much of a choice, apparently, so "知難而退" (*zhi1 nan2 er2 tui4*) doesn't appear to be a bad option.

Terms containing the character "退" (*tui4*) include:

退休 (*tui4 xiu1*) – to retire

退步 (*tui4 bu4*) – to do less well than before

退出 (*tui4 chu1*) – to withdraw from

退款 (*tui4 kuan3*) – a refund