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# For WP, the challenge of great expectations

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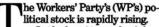
ROAD AHEAD FOR THE WORKERS PARTY

# For WP, the challenge of great expectations



The WP has the largest Opposition presence in the House since 1968. TODAY FILE PHOTO

#### EUGENE K B TAN



In the last 21 months, it has notched resounding electoral successes in the May 2011 General Election (GE), winning six elected seats (including five in Aljunied GRC, a first for any Opposition party); in the Hougang by-election in May last year; and most recently in Punggol East. With nine Members of Parliament (MPs), including two non-constituency MPs, the WP has the largest Opposition presence in the House since 1968.

The WP has established itself as the leading Opposition party, and a dominant one at that. It is seen as the vanguard of political change as we tread across the "new normal" to a "more normal" state of political affairs.

Naturally, growing expectations of the WP run the risk of ballooning to runaway expectations. Its supporters and critics alike expect the WP to punch above its weight in Parliament, even as the party was criticised during the Punggol East hustings for not doing enough.

However, voters felt otherwise, satisfied with the WP's tactical position as a check-and-balance against the People's Action Party (PAP) Government.

#### TACTICALLY UNDER-PROMISING

In many ways, the WP has been able to capitalise on the fading lustre of oneparty dominance, as well as on a growing demand for a healthy Opposition parliamentary presence as an enabler of good governance and to make the Government more responsive.

But now, flush with success, the WP has wasted no time in deftly managing growing expectations. Always tactically shrewd, the WP has indicated more than once that it is not ready to form an alternative government.

Secretary-General Low Thia Khiang said last Sunday that Singaporeans needed to give the incumbent Government time to work out the issues, and that the WP is prepared to cooperate where policies do benefit Singaporeans.

He also said that the results of the Punggol East by-election should not

> The WP will have to develop an operating system that will enable it to seriously challenge the PAP on the substance of policy ideas. In short, the WP has to win votes in its own right -rather than gain votes that are cast against the PAP.

Notwithstanding the limitations Opposition parties face, the WP must be policy innovators – and not confine itself to being policy technicians tinkering at the edges.

be seen as a trend for the future. V Chairman Sylvia Lim chimed in Monday that the party has to gua against being too embroiled in "par san politics" and one-upmanship.

What can we make of these sta ments? They are pre-emptive a under-promising in nature. They we help the WP to temper expectation buy time to sustainably grow the parand to shift the focus back to the P/

They also certainly seek to empl size WP's moderate brand of politi that it is not out to throw the baby of with the bathwater. The WP is asse ing that it engages in a "change an continuity" politics, that it does not of pose for opposition's sake.

This message will help assu those who are concerned with whe er Singapore is ready for a non-Pr government. It also reaches out non-WP supporters, especially the who prefer evolutionary, rather th revolutionary, political change.

#### PRESENT REAL ALTERNATIVES

The WP is astute to recognise the Singapore is deeply imprinted we the PAP institutional template, a that the WP would not help its or S gapore's cause if it were to take or the reins of government when it is no ready. It also is acutely aware that, the leading Opposition party, it nees to ramp up its policymaking expertia

However, the WP needs to go by yond merely criticising policy flat and raising parliamentary question The PAP MPs and Nominated MPs ready do that.

Not only must the WP go beyo manifesto-type policy prescriptions must also provide alternative polic that are not only viable but also r alternatives that are visionary, exing and inspiring.

For example, it needs to craft p cies that can not only deal with dividual hot-button issues such housing prices, transport woes, i migration, cost of — but also mana

### END OF THE HONEYMOON?

The WP is in an enviable position ing into the next GE. It is enjoying extended political honeymoon but electorate will, sooner or later, exp the party to challenge the PAP serious way.

Expectations are high, and if th a false political dawn for the WP, can expect voters to turn agains with a vengeance. Such was the of for the Singapore Democratic Pa when it won three seats in the 1991 but lost two of them in 1997.

Looking at the next GE, the would likely contest in no more to 40 per cent of the seats, primarily cusing on the eastern and north-eastern ern parts of the island in a geograp cally contiguous strategy. Not of will this strategy assure the grou somewhat, it can also help the continue to gain political ground we out prematurely removing the F

# For WP, the challenge of great expectations

• CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14 them in a holistic manner such that

policy success in one area does not have the unintended consequence of creating problems in another.

Notwithstanding the policymaking limitations that Opposition parties typically face, the WP must be policy innovators — and not confine itself to being policy technicians tinkering at the edges.

It is easy to resist policy work, given that the WP is primarily assessed on its constituency work which it has been very diligent about — even to the extent of channelling the bulk of party resources to the Aljunied GRC at the expense of constituencies where it



porters and critics expect the WP to punch above its weight in Parliament, BHOTO BELITER