

## **'WP ought to be more transparent'**

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Workers' Party (WP) MP Yaw Shin Leong should address once and for all whether there is any truth to the allegations that he had an extramarital affair with a married woman in his party, said many Singaporeans interviewed yesterday.

But almost as many Singaporeans have also argued that the alleged affair is a private matter and the only people who should be judging Mr Yaw are the voters in his Hougang constituency.

The mixed reaction to Mr Yaw's alleged affair from the 36 interviewed reflects people's ambivalence about where to draw the line between an MP's private life and his public work.

The alleged affair first surfaced in an online report three weeks ago and on Tuesday, without explanation, Mr Yaw resigned as treasurer from the party's top decision-making executive council.

As a result, most of the those interviewed were adamant on one point: WP should be transparent about the whole saga instead of maintaining its current 'no comment' position.

Said retiree Paul Loo, 66: 'If he is not guilty, come out and say it. They talked about the Government's lack of accountability and transparency during the general election, but they are doing the same thing they accused others of.'

Bank executive Patrick Neo said that by keeping mum, both the WP and Mr Yaw had given people the impression that he could be guilty.

'If his conscience is clear, give an outright denial,' added the 30-year-old.

Mr Neo also feels Mr Yaw's resignation from the executive council would affirm to most people that there is truth to the allegations.

Political analyst Rueben Wong of the National University of Singapore, said the resignation is 'obviously a statement (from the WP) that there is a price to pay for personal impropriety'.

But in not being forthcoming by giving the reason for the move, Dr Wong said the WP had missed an opportunity. 'They have not been able to show that they are whiter than white.'

Although it can continue to talk about political accountability, he said it will be harder for it to address personal accountability issues - like 'throw stones at the CPIB probe'.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau recently arrested Central Narcotics Bureau chief Ng Boon Gay and Singapore Civil Defence Force chief Peter Lim.

They are being investigated for 'serious personal misconduct' and have since been stripped of their posts. Both allegedly had sex with a 36-year-old IT executive.

Like 16 of the 36 interviewed, financial analyst Denise Quek argues that what matters is that Mr Yaw is a good MP.

'I view extramarital affairs as a personal issue magnified because he is a public figure, like how celebrities' personal lives are under scrutiny,' said the 25-year-old.

'I don't think it affects his capability and ability to serve as an MP. So transparency need not apply to his personal life, just his work and position on public policies,' she added.

Like her, seven Hougang residents said their main concern is how Mr Yaw performed as an MP.

Said Mr Ong Kuee Fen, 58, a landscape designer, in Mandarin: 'We in Hougang struggled so hard to get to where we are... I will support whoever the WP fields in Hougang.

'I trust in (WP chief) Low Thia Khiang. If he fields Mr Yaw, it must be because he thinks it's right.'

However, Singaporeans generally share retiree George Ho's sentiments.

Said the 66-year-old: 'An MP should be very clean, no vices, and set the standard. If the person has a fault, how can you field him? I can't trust him.'

Retired cabby Choo Siu Hoon, 80, agrees, saying Mr Yaw should resign as an MP.

'Singaporeans are traditional, have Confucian morality, and won't accept adultery.

'We have different values from Western countries like Italy, where many women were involved with Silvio Berlusconi but he could still be the prime minister.' he said in Mandarin, referring to the former Italian PM.

Added Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh: 'In our culture, people expect a higher level of moral probity from our public sector leaders or MPs.'