

Why WP isn't more 'rebel-rousing and vociferous': Sylvia Lim

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Workers' Party chairman Sylvia Lim on Monday addressed criticism the opposition group has been too moderate and too ideologically similar to the People's Action Party.

Responding to a question raised in a large governance forum organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, Lim said the opposition party differed very much from the ruling party in the areas of transparency and accountability, civil liberties, social justice and healthcare.

"I disagree that ideologically we are close," the Member of Parliament for Aljunied group representation constituency said, adding that the differences can be seen from the party's manifesto available online.

Acknowledging that some people perhaps wanted them to be "more rebel-rousing and vociferous" in objections to government policies, she said party members feel they have to take the positions they feel are correct and sustainable.

"If we find that we have no support for the things we are doing then it is fine for us to review and do things differently, but so far as we can see we do have some public support, and I believe that Singaporeans as a whole group appreciate the opposition politics of the sort that we offer them," she said.

Speaking to an audience of about 1,000 people from government, schools and civil society, Lim also tackled criticism over statements that the WP is not yet ready to form the next government following the decisive win of its candidate Lee Li Lian in the Punggol East by-election on Saturday.

"That is just the honest position," she said. "At the same time, of course, within our capacities as MPs in charge of the area, we will have to make sure that our residents' interests are taken care of, fought for, and we manage the towns well so as not to let them down, and I think we are quite incremental in our approach."

Her comments follow those made by WP secretary-general Low Thia Kiang a day after WP candidate Lee Li Lian swept to victory in Punggol East by garnering 54.5 per cent of the votes against the PAP candidate Dr Koh Poh Koon's about 43 per cent share in a four-way contest, who cautioned against making too much out of the victory.

"We can't take the by-election result as one that is going to be a trend in the future," he said.

As to the role of the WP, Lim said Monday that their belief is that political competition is a safeguard to improving Singaporeans' lives.

"We (the WP) provide competition at elections by requiring the government to convince the voters that it is performing. It is also our responsibility outside of election time is to promote good governance," she explained.

However, she said as political parties they have to constantly check against getting too embroiled in partisan politics, as opposed to remaining focused on the well-being of the people.

"We should guard against excessive one-upmanship and ask ourselves where lies the greater good," she noted, sharing her positive experience of contributing ideas that were accepted and taken into consideration by ministries toward the revision of proposed legislation ahead of public policy debates.

Lim also said that her party "will continue to assist the government when we can and when it is appropriate".

"While as political parties we fight electoral battles, I think it is possible to operate in a culture of mutual respect and give and take," she said. "It is possible for different political parties to coexist in this ecosystem for the benefit and survival of Singapore."