

My fault, but I had good intentions: Poh Lee Guan



Poh Lee Guan, a veteran member from the Workers' Party, is expelled with immediate effect. (YouTube screengrab)

Sacked Workers' party (WP) member Poh Lee Guan said he had good intentions when he sought to be a candidate in the Hougang by-election in May.

In a Facebook post responding to media queries over his recent expulsion from the opposition party, Poh admitted he had lapsed in the implementation of his attempt to be a spare candidate for the party but that it was “definitely NOT [a] lack of professionalism” as mentioned by WP party chief Low Thia Khiang on Nomination Day.

Poh said he told the WP's central executive council in a meeting on 10 July that his decision to apply for a political donation certificate in May – a prerequisite for standing in the by-election – was a move made with the view to avoid a “worst-case scenario” such as a walkover in the single-member constituency.

“[I] decided to do it quietly (behind the scene) because [the] Elections Department [had] confirmed that the applicants' name are CONFIDENTIAL when I applied for the political donation certificate,” he explained.

In May, the Elections Department reportedly said that the names of those issued the political donation certificates were released after media queries were made. A spokesperson was quoted in a Today report as saying “there were no similar queries in previous elections”.

On his plans now, the 50-year-old Poh said he would focus on some of the social projects

“close to [his] heart” such as enhancing the management and processes of some faith-based organisations and reaching out to the less well-off of the community.

Poh’s expulsion was confirmed late Wednesday night by Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) Gerald Giam, who is also chair of WP’s media team. He said that the expulsion was carried out on the grounds set out under Article 22 of the WP Constitution.

Section (a) states: “The Executive Council, if satisfied that the conduct of any member is contrary to the principles or aims or objects of the Party or prejudicial to the welfare of the Party, may suspend or expel such member from any post in the Party, and demote him to the status of ordinary member if an Organising Member, and expel him from membership of the Party.”

Based on what appears to be a copy of a WP letter to Poh dated 12 July, the WP executive council heard Poh’s explanation of his actions during the Hougang by-election on 10 July and did not find it acceptable.

Giam refused to confirm whether the letter, which Poh posted on his personal Facebook page on Wednesday night, was authentic or not.

Commenting on WP’s decision, Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Eugene Tan said that the opposition party’s move “will not come as a surprise... as Poh’s actions, just prior to Nomination Day, had been detrimental to the WP in that it did not put the party in good light... it was [also] something the party could do without at that time”.

Tan, an assistant professor in law at Singapore Management University, also dismissed talks that the party’s move will reflect negatively on them. “Public opinion is with the WP... Whether the party had expelled Poh or not, the WP would come out favourably,” he said.

“If it had opted to impose a lesser sanction, the public would view it as a magnanimous move on the part of WP [but] expelling Poh will also be seen as a measure necessary to reinforce party discipline,” he added.

In the end, the battle for Hougang came down to a straight showdown between the WP’s official nominee, businessman Png Eng Huat, and the People’s Action Party’s Desmond Choo. Png won the by-election on 26 May.

12 July 2012

Dear Dr Poh Lee Guan,

EXPULSION FROM THE WORKERS' PARTY

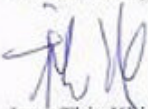
I refer to the Party Chairman's email of 6 June 2012, notifying you that the Executive Council of the Workers' Party would be meeting to discuss your actions in the Hougang By-Election 2012 and inviting you to attend to offer your explanation before any decision is made.

At your request, the meeting was postponed to 10 July 2012. You attended the meeting accordingly and gave your explanation of the events.

I write to notify you that after due consideration, the Council does not find your explanation acceptable. The Council has decided to expel you from the Party under Article 22 of the Workers' Party Constitution, with immediate effect.

The Party thanks you for your past service and wishes you the best in your future endeavours.

Yours faithfully,



Low Thia Kheng
Secretary-General

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-- Additional reporting by Melissa Aw