Workers' Party announces new office bearers

By *Deborah Choo*

The Workers' Party (WP) has unveiled four new office bearers for the term of 2012 to 2014 following its Central Executive Council (CEC) meeting on 4 September.

Frieda Chan Sio Phing (deputy treasurer), Jane Leong (Vice-Chair to the WP media team), Lee Li Lian (deputy webmaster), and Muhamad Faisal bin Abdul Manap (president of the WP Youth wing) were appointed after the Council met on Tuesday evening.

The senior leadership of the WP remains unchanged – Sylvia Lim remains Chairman, while Low Thia Kiang is still Secretary-General of the WP and Yee Jenn Jong, Treasurer.

Chan, 36, is an National University of Singapore (NUS) graduate with double majors in social work and sociology. She previously represented Singapore in 1998 to 1999 at the Korea-ASEAN Future-Oriented Cooperation Youth Exchange Programme.

Leong, 53, is now assisting the chair of the media team, Gerald Giam. A managing director of a small-medium enterprise, she also doubles up as the editorial co-ordinator of WP's newsletter "The Hammer".

Lee, 34, is no new face to party members. She first volunteered with WP during the 2006 General Elections.

Muhamad Faisal, 36, has been with the party for almost six years now and is an advisor to the Aljunied Constituency Committee. He works as a counsellor with a voluntary welfare organisation.

Commenting on the changes, political analyst Bridget Welsh said, "There are three trends noticeable – first there is a process of broadening taking place with greater inclusion of women and more multiethnic representation, especially Malays."

"Second, the key leaders Low and Lim remain in place and remain in core leadership positions, so they will continue to set the direction for the party as they have in recent years. This illustrates a steady hand in leadership without significant detours from recent trajectories."

"Third, many of the new members of parliament are given less party leadership roles so that they can focus on their roles as parliamentarians. The pattern of the Worker's Party has been to focus on social issues affecting ordinary Singaporeans while simultaneously calling for greater alternative voices in governance."

The associate professor in political science at the Singapore Management University added, "This current line-up suggests that this will continue to be their direction, while giving more space for younger leaders to rise. The people to watch are the newcomers, especially the party's new youth leader, and, of course, members of parliament who will continue to be

the most prominent public faces for the party."

Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan agreed.

"I see the new line-up as a conscious refinement of the strategic division of labour within the party," he said. "The accent is on youth, with 8 out of 15 CEC members being under the age of 40 years. I see it as a team primed for the consolidation of the WP following a successful 2011 GE. The line-up seeks to expose the young non-MPs within the CEC to new challenges, which would also enable them to play a more prominent role within the party."

Tan, who is also an associate professor at SMU, said the changes would allow WP MPs like Chen Show Mao and Pritam Singh, as well as Png Eng Huat, to focus on constituency work, town council matters, as well as parliamentary work."

Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy said the new committee changes were a conscious effort to "save the bandwidth" of the WP MPs.

"It is no mean feat for an opposition party to have to take charge of these (administering the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council). WP would want to prove that it can do the job well... There continues to be a high level of expectation placed on these WP MPs with regard to their work in Parliament. That is another duty they will have to reserve some bandwidth for."