Minimum wage, gender equality top issues in online forum

PAP, WP and PSP also tackle questions on post-GE plans in dialogue organised by IPS

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Minimum wage, gender equality and party leadership succession were the main burning issues that came up during an online dialogue yesterday involving representatives from three political parties.

The online forum, on the parties’ assessment of the 2020 General Election and their agenda for the next few years, was organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

At the event on IPS Facebook page, moderated by the institute’s senior research fellow, Dr Gillian Koh, the panellists responded to questions raised by the audience.

MINIMUM WAGE

When asked if there is a consensus in the Workers’ Party (WP) on how soon Singapore should implement a minimum wage, Singapour GRC MP Louis Chia said the party is leaning in that direction.

The WP does not use minimum wage and Singapore’s progressive wage model (PWM) as diametrically opposed, he added.

“PWM is a framework where workers can earn higher salaries as they upgrade their skills — has been the subject of robust debate in Parliament. The WP is moving for full-time Singapore workers to be paid a minimum wage of $1,200 each month. Responding to the WP’s proposal, Minister for Manpower and Social Development Mr Heng Swee Keat said we should consider a minimum wage that is not too high. We will do a lot of consultation and research on this issue before we come to a conclusion,” he said.

Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam reiterated Dr Koh’s point, noting at the forum that the PWM is a minimum wage. She said: “We have to come to a point where we do not just keep pushing the ideology, but look at it in the context of other factors, too,” she said.

The Singapore Progress Party (PPP) is also against the WP proposal.

Its assistant secretary-general Francis Yuen said wages are just one part of overall business costs, and the key is to raise productivity and reduce over-reliance on foreign workers. “We should not be a system where foreign workers are brought in because they are cheap,” he said.

GENDER EQUALITY

On the gender pay gap, Ms Rahayu said reaching it does not just end with just introducing legislation. It also requires insight into the dynamics of the workplace.

“We’re talking about changing mindsets and looking at how work can be made more flexible; it’s about productivity and what one can deliver,” she added, acknowledging that “we continue to work in a ‘macho’ mentality” for taking women out of the workplace.

A Singapore Management University study found that women earn less than men by a factor of 20 per cent less than their male peers in 2018, after taking into account factors such as the worker’s industry, occupation, age and education.

Ms Chua noted that some multinational companies give mothers and fathers the same number of days of maternity and paternity leave.

Fathers in Singapore are entitled to 10 weeks of paid paternity leave. “Perhaps this is something we can do more of,” he said. “It’s not just about wages, but ensuring that there is equality across some of these other dimensions as well.”

LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION AND CANDIDATE SELECTION

On whether the People’s Action Party would prefer to nominating senior party leaders for the next general election, Dr Koh said that it is not necessarily a one-off that candidates will be chosen from the party’s leadership.

The WP, on the other hand, is planning to select its candidates for the next general election.

Mr Chia said, “I think a lot of younger people want to be involved in politics and I don’t think there is anything wrong with that.”

On whether the WP’s standing committee has yet to decide on the new leadership, Mr Chia said it needs to be more inclusive.

“Mr Ong said that it is more important to have a team that is representative of the country. I believe we should take a similar path,” he said.

On whether the WP has a new leader in mind, Mr Chia said, “We believe in a broad-based leadership that is truly representative and inclusive.”

Mr Chia added that he believed that the WP is in a period of rejuvenation and now is the time to look ahead to the future of WP. The WP will continue to be broad-based, inclusive and representative.

Source: The Straits Times