



Defending the Legitimacy of Elections

MARUAH believes in a free and fair election as the right of all citizens. To that end we have done research, conducted forums and continue with our Education process. In this paper we explore the role of Parliamentarians.

Asking the Right Questions: The Quest for Parliament's Holy Grail

There is a wonderful story about the power of the question. It comes from the ancient European legend of the Holy Grail. The quest for wisdom is unwittingly undertaken by Parsifal, a young knight who is green and has no idea about life. He stumbles upon the Grail Castle, entirely by chance quite early on in his quest. In the middle of the banquet, a parade takes place during which the Holy Grail and the Spear which pierced Christ's side on the cross displayed. Parsifal being a complete idiot does not ask the wounded King who guards these treasures what they are. Instead, he stares at it open mouthed. The parade passes on in silence and Parsifal goes back to eating. When he awakes the castle has disappeared and he is in the middle of a wet field. He later discovers that he should have asked the King what these treasures were and the question, "What ails thee?", for if he had, he would have found wisdom and his quest would have ended.

The point of the story is that the solution to a problem is given when the right question is asked, but you have to ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION.

In a representative democracy, the elected parliamentarian is to represent the interests of the PEOPLE who voted for him. This is why the idea of democracy is so powerful. That a person, of a certain age, whatever their race, language or religion, whatever their income, wealth, class or standing, whatever their sexuality or morals, has the SAME or EQUAL say in who we believe will do the best job in representing our interests.

The elected parliamentarian does this by making laws, holding the government of the day to account, and working through the parliament on a system of checks and balances.

They do this through a series of instruments (no not hammers and screwdrivers), but rather bodies like Select Committees, procedures and protocols, and amongst other things, asking the right questions – sometimes over and over again. They are the voice of conscience of the government, making sure that no stone is left unturned.

When MPs are at their best, the citizens believe that the government has nothing to hide.

Members of Parliament (MPs) have many resources at their disposal in order to do this. Mostly they have their ears, which are supposed to be open and to the ground, to understand the issues which people face. They then are the person through whom the welfare of the individual and society is conveyed and this is in turn reflected in the way the country is run.

So good governance is a collaboration between the people, the MPs and the government (which is a combination of political parties and the civil service.)

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The main duty of an MP therefore is, through their informed opinions, raise issues in Parliament or to contribute to any debates. This is done through speeches, debate and asking questions.

If you want to know how hard your Parliamentarian has been working on your behalf you could take a look at their attendance, the numbers of interventions they have made and the number of questions they tabled.

There are two kinds of questions: one, are questions raised by the MP. For instance, they could ask, "Could be please put Lee Kuan Yew's face on our money?" or they could ask, "What are you doing about the long-term effects of the haze?" (These are real questions.)

These questions can be answered in Parliament, they may have supplementary questions asked of them, or they can be answered in a written format. If it was written, it may be that time had run out for the allocated amount of time, OR it could be that the MP had just required a written reply.

It is not rocket science.

So what kind of MP do you think you should have?

Namely:-

1. One that **attends** as many sessions of Parliament as they can.
2. One that does their **research**, talks to their constituents, is on the side of the people, and asks questions when issues arise.
3. One that is **independent** and is not going to hold back when it comes to difficult questions, whether it is debating a bill or raising an issue.
4. One that **pursues an issue** by following up on the promises made by the government and keeps bringing up the issue until it is resolved.

This is because ONLY when an MP works conscientiously in this manner does good governance occur.

With this in mind, let us look at how the MPs from the present Parliament fared in asking questions. Other characteristics have recently been written up by The Middle Ground (<http://themiddleground.sg>).

(Please note that at the present moment, there is no way of finding quickly how many questions were tabled by individual MPs and the researcher has had to count each search that has come up, while separating the supplementary questions from the tabled ones.)

The 12th Parliament of Singapore – Year 2011 to Year 2015(July)

Name	Oral Questions	Total (tabled and supplementary)	Written Questions
Mr Ang Hin Kee	7 - tabled, 10 - supp	17	52

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Mr Ang Wei Neng	40 - tabled, 9 - supp	49	33
Mr Baey Yam Keng	44 -tabled, 18 - supp	62	24
Mr Chen Show Mao	7 – tabled, 1 - supp	8	45
Mr Chia Shi-Lu	12 – tabled, 4 - supp	16	7
Ms Chia Yong Yong	4 – tabled, 2 - supp	8	5
Ms Lina Chiam	48 – tabled, 5 - supp	53	71
Mr Chua Kee Seng, Thomas	6 tabled, 1 - supp	7	2
Mr Christopher de Souza	57 - tabled, 9 - supp	68	59
Ms Fatimah Latif	20 - tabled, 10 - supp	30	75
Mr Fong, Arthur	11 - tabled	11	5
Mr Foo, Cedric	2 - tabled, 10 - supp	12	2
Ms Foo Mee Har	37 - tabled, 1 - supp	38	35
Mr Gan Thiam Poh	41 - tabled, 1 - supp	42	99
Mr Giam, Gerald Yean Song	38 - tabled, 8 - supp	46	117
Mr Hri Kumar Nair	19 - tabled, 4 - supp	23	12
Mr Inderjit Singh	2 - tabled	2	6

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Ms Intan Azura Mokhtar	24 - tabled, 12 - supp	36	28
Mr Janil Puthucheary	11 - tabled, 3 - supp	14	20
Mr K Karthikeyan	2	2	19
Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin	3	3	12
Ms Lee Bee Wah	66 - tabled , 32 - supp	98	107
Ms Lee, Ellen	6	6	30
Ms Lee Li Lian	15 - tabled	15	43
Mr Liang Eng Hwa	12 - tabled, 12 - supp	24	19
Mr Lim Biow Chuan	32 - tabled, 11 - supp	43	67
Ms Sylvia Lim	23 - tabled	23	57
Mr Lim Wee Kiak	30 - tabled, 10 - supp	40	23
Ms Penny Low	4 - tabled, 9 - supp	13	6
Mr Low Thia Kiang	4 - tabled, 20 - supp	24	3
Ms Low Yen Ling	5 - tabled	5	8
Mr Mohd Ismail Hussein	2 - tabled	2	1
Mr Muhamad Faisal bin Abdul Manap	11 - tabled, 6 - supp	17	65
Mr Muhamamd Faishal Ibrahim	-		12

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Ms Lily Neo	14 - tabled, 3 - supp	17	1
Ms Irene Ng Peck Hoong	30 - tabled, 7 - supp	37	19
Mr Daniel Ong	59 - tabled and supp	59	53
Mr Ong Teng Koon	6 - tabled and supporting	6	14
Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng	28 - tabled, 15 – sup	33	10
Mr Png Eng Huat	23 - tabled	23	44
Mr Pritam Singh	29 - tabled	29	55
Mr Seah Kian Peng	11 - tabled, 8 - supp	19	36
Mr Seng Han Thong	7 - tabled	7	7
Mr Sitoh Yin Pin	3 - tabled, 2 - supp	5	37
Ms Rita Soh Siow Lan	2 - tabled	2	-
Mr Benedict Tan	7 - tabled	7	7
Mr Randolph Tan	2 - tabled, 5 - supp	7	6
Ms Jessica Tan	3 - supp	3	2
Mr Tan Tai Yong	5 - tabled, 1 - supp	6	No results for the search
Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan	3 - tabled, 13 - supp	16	45
Mr Teo Ho Pin	1 - tabled, 1 supp	2	3
Ms Tin Pei Ling	22 - tabled, 6 -	28	43

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	supp		
Mr Edwin Tong	2 - tabled	2	1
Mr Vikram Nair	2 - tabled, 3 - supp	5	3
Mr Alex Yam	34 - tabled, 10 - supp	44	34
Mr Yee Jenn Jong	55 - tabled, 17 - supp	72	89
Mr Alvin Yeo	3 - tabled	3	2
Mr Yeo Guat Kwang	2 - tabled, 9 - supp	11	6
Mr Zainal Sapari	28 - tabled, 4 - supp	32	84
Mr Zainudin Nordin	11 - tabled, 9 - supp	20	4
Mr Zaqqy Mohamad	38 - tabled, 37 - supp	75	52

Each MP has special interests, and some MPs – the very few, such as Lee Bee Hwa – will ask questions about almost anything. Suffice it to say, if the MP is asking more questions and attending more sessions, then their constituent and us as citizens will hopefully be getting more bang for our buck so to speak.

Some of the MPs have asked pitifully few questions. For instance, 22 MPs tabled fewer than 10 oral questions. Is this the kind of accountability which you think is acceptable for a democratic government? Imagine if every MP only asked two questions. What would then happen to laws which were made? Would you feel your interests were being represented? Do you think that this would be an acceptable enforcement of this system of checks and balances?

So, to questions VOTERS could ask MPs when we see them, if we do a little bit of homework.

Incumbents:

Go to the Singapore Parliament records, search for your MP under Advanced Search and see what questions they asked during their time in office. Scrutinise the questions and see if YOU think they were good questions. Did they hold the government's actions to account? Did they do their own background research? What did they do with the information? Did they follow it up? If it isn't clear

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ask them if they did. Ask them how they think they made a difference to the Bill which was passed? Did they raise the issues in an effective manner? Ask them what issues they are planning to pursue in their new term if they are re-elected.

New candidates:

Ask them what issues interest them. Ask them in what way do they think the laws can be improved to reflect this. Find out how they think they can enforce this law. Make them promise to attend as many parliamentary sittings as possible.

Happy questing!