

Dr Lim

(21 February 1931



Dr Lim Hock Siew (right) with A/Prof Paul Ananth Tambyah at the Singapore Democratic Party National Day Dinner in August 2011. Dr Lim was honoured with an art piece, *Malayan Exchange*, which featured his image on a \$5 bill by local artist Green Zeng

Photo: Dr Siok Kuan Tambyah

My friendship with Hock Siew spanned 60 years. We became good friends in 1950 while in medical school at the University of Malaya (now the National University of Singapore).

In university, he formed and was active in the Non-Hostelites Organisation, whose membership comprised about 30% of the university population. He was also in the Students' Council, and in the *Undergrad*, the organ of the University of Malaya Students' Union. Hock Siew helped found the University Socialist Club (USC), but did not immediately take an active part, as he was busy with other activities. Hock Siew also joined the editorial board of the *Fajar*, which was published by the USC. During the *Fajar* sedition trial in 1954, he ran the *Fajar* Defence Fund together with Tan Seng Huat and did a marvellous job.

Hock Siew became a member of the People's Action Party and supported its aims, but owing to political disagreements, he later threw his lot with the Barisan Sosialis when it was formed in August 1961. A member of its Central Working Committee, Hock Siew was also editor of its English paper, the *Plebeian*. He also helped write speeches for the Barisan assemblymen, particularly challenging the plans for merger with Malaysia. He was in the party's team which presented its case to the United Nations.

Hock Siew was arrested and detained on 2 February 1963, and remained in prison for nearly 20 years. I want to stress that Hock Siew was first an anti-colonialist, who grew with the *Fajar* trial to become more ideological. A socialist, he was for democracy, the welfare of the people, and human rights. He opposed detention without trial, and stuck to these principles despite the privations of prison life, rejecting outright any conditions for his release which involved compromising his principles. When he was arrested, his son was only five months old. In Changi Prison, Hock Siew was in E Hall with over

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By Prof Arthur Lim

100 other political detainees. He provided leadership, comfort and understanding, particularly when they were newly arrived, and a bit lost. Up to today, many of them still feel very much for him.

Up to recent years, Hock Siew remained interested in issues related to human rights, democracy, and transparency. On 2 June this year, Hock Siew was in hospital and could not attend the gathering at the Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim Park to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1987 arrests of the "Marxist conspirators". But he must have seen footage of the more than 400 people who attended the event on television. It must have heartened him to see the turnout, and the evaporation of fear. Noticing all this he must have been happy that he had fulfilled his social responsibility and his sacrifices were not in vain. He could see all this happening, things he wanted to do himself.

He was active in the Medical Alumni and supported SMA from its founding days. He was against privatisation, and commercialisation of the medical service. He wanted a comprehensive state run health service that people could afford. He was well known for his compassionate care of patients at his Rakyat Clinic, not charging the poor patients many times. When the salaries of government doctors were slashed by the government, he boldly stood up to condemn the cuts and the arbitrary way in which it was done.

Hock Siew was a gifted artist, and also an art collector of paintings and stone carvings which he bought during trips to China. He was extremely lucky to have Dr Beatrice Chen as his wife. She is a really amazing person as she supported him all through the very difficult years while he was in prison, and like a single mother, brought up their only son who was already a man when Hock Siew was released. Beatrice was a member of the detainees' family committee, and helped to look after

many detainee friends when they were sick. Hock Siew and Beatrice did everything together, and in the last few years, having already gone round the world, made regular holiday trips to China.

Hock Siew lived the life he chose. A fearless anti-colonialist, and staunch in his struggle for the welfare of his people, for human rights, for freedom and against injustice. **SMA**

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