

Lim Hock Siew

SINGAPORE INFOPEDIA

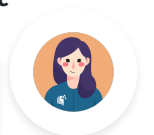
by Chua, Alvin

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Background

Lim Hock Siew (Dr) (*b. 21 February 1931, Singapore–d. 4 June 2012, Singapore*) was a medical doctor, ex-politician and former political detainee. A founding member of the [People's Action Party](#) (PAP), he later joined the [Barisan Sosialis](#) (Malay for “Socialist Front”) and was arrested during Operation Coldstore in 1963. Accused by the government of involvement in communist activities, Lim was detained without trial under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance and later the [Internal Security Act](#) (ISA). He was released in 1982, after serving almost 20 years in detention. Lim subsequently returned to his medical practice and in his later years campaigned for the abolishment of the ISA.¹

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attended Chinese-medium schools, Lim received an English education, first at Anglo-Tamil School and then at Rangoon Road School before his studies was interrupted in 1942 by the Japanese Occupation.²

During the occupation years, Lim worked at a rationing centre for tapioca and red palm oil and later with his father at Kandang Kerbau market (now known as Tekka Centre) selling fish. The harsh realities of the occupation, and the chaos that ensued in the period immediately following the [Japanese surrender](#) and before the British returned, made Lim question the pro-British sentiments that were disseminated in the English schools before the war.³

After the end of the occupation in 1945, Lim went back to Rangoon Road School briefly to finish his primary education. He then continued his studies at [Raffles Institution](#) from 1946 to 1949.⁴ He was an active student there, serving as school prefect, editor of the school magazine, *The Rafflesian*, as well as representing the school at oratory and debating competitions.⁵ While many of his schoolmates were said to be politically apathetic, Lim was exposed to anti-colonial ideals through reading the biographies of Indian nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru.⁶

Lim entered the University of Malaya in 1950 and studied medicine. During his time in university, he helped to found the Non-Hostelite Organisation, served as chairman of the students' council and was actively involved in the activities of the Pan-Malayan Students' Federation. In 1953, he became a founding member of the University Socialist Club (USC) together with the likes of [James Puthucheary](#),



Political and professional career

PAP

During the sedition trial, Lim met former [prime minister Lee Kuan Yew](#), who was then a lawyer assisting in the legal defence of the USC members. After their acquittal, Lim and other USC members helped gather support from Chinese-school students and working-class organisations for the formation of the People's Action Party (PAP), which was officially inaugurated on 21 November 1954.⁸

While still a medical student, Lim helped to campaign for PAP candidate [Devan Nair](#) during the [1955 Legislative Assembly general election](#). During his time as a PAP member, Lim came into contact with prominent left-wing PAP members such as [Fong Swee Suan](#) and [Lim Chin Siong](#).⁹

In 1957, Lim graduated from university and joined the government medical service as a doctor at the [Singapore General Hospital](#) and later [Tan Tock Seng Hospital](#).¹⁰ In 1959, Lim offered to stand as a PAP candidate in the upcoming general election but was rejected by Lee. Lim attributed the rejection to political differences, his criticism of some of the party's policies as well as Lee's distrust of him.¹¹ After the PAP was elected to government following the 1959 general election, Lim's party membership was cancelled.¹²

Barisan Sosialis

In 1961, Lim resigned from the government service to join the Barisan Sosialis party shortly after its official establishment on 13 August



Barisan Sosialis.¹⁴ In his medical practice, Lim lowered consultation charges for the poor and offered free treatment to those who could not afford it.¹⁵

As a member of the Barisan leadership, Lim campaigned against the PAP government's proposed terms of merger with the Federation of Malaya. Lim and his Barisan colleagues argued that it was not a genuine merger, as Singapore citizens would neither be granted equal political rights nor given proportionate representation in the federal government.¹⁶ At a June 1962 public debate on the issue of merger, then Prime Minister Lee accused Lim of being a [Marxist](#) and communist sympathiser, and also added that Lim's brother Hock Koon was an important member of the Malayan Communist Party who had been a fugitive from the law for a number of years.¹⁷ Lim was also one of the delegates (including Workers' Party leader [David Marshall](#)) who went before the United Nations Committee on Colonialism in July 1962 to make a case against the [merger referendum](#).¹⁸

Detention

On 2 February 1963, Lim was arrested together with Woodhull in his home off [MacPherson Road](#) during Operation Coldstore, a government security operation launched under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (now known as the ISA). More than a hundred left-wing politicians, unionists and journalists were arrested and detained during the operation.¹⁹ A statement issued by the Internal Security Council (present-day Internal Security Department) at the time of the arrests accused Lim and other detainees of involvement in communist activities, plotting to sabotage the



Road Detention Centre.⁴¹ While at Changi Prison, he was a spokesman for the detainees held in “E” Hall.²² Throughout his detention, Lim participated in a number of hunger strikes to protest issues related to treatment of the detainees such as the imposition of manual labour on detainees.²³

Lim and four other detainees were momentarily freed on 18 November 1967 after then [Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin](#) ruled that their detention was illegal because the orders had not been signed by the president as required by law. However, the detainees were rearrested outside the gates of Queenstown Remand Prison almost immediately after their release and served with new detention orders signed by the president.²⁴

On 17 November 1978, Lim and fellow detainee [Said Zahari](#), poet and former editor of Malay newspaper [Utusan Melayu](#), were released from full detention and confined to the islands of [Pulau Tekong](#) and [Pulau Ubin](#) respectively. A government statement explained that both men could not be released unconditionally, as they had refused to sign written undertakings renouncing involvement with communist organisations and the use of force to overthrow the government.²⁵ While on Pulau Tekong, Lim provided medical services to the residents of the island on a voluntary basis.²⁶

Release, subsequent life and death

On 6 September 1982, Lim was allowed to return to mainland Singapore. However, he had to abide by a number of conditions stipulated under the Restriction Order still held against him. For instance, Lim was not allowed to travel overseas, or engage in



Upon returning to mainland Singapore, Lim went back to his medical practice at Rakyat Clinic.²⁹ In his later years, he brought public attention to the conditions faced by political detainees through recounting his own experiences under detention. In 2009, one of his speeches on the subject of detention under the ISA was filmed and uploaded online by filmmaker Martyn See. The video recording was subsequently banned by the government on the grounds that it was against public interests, as it was said to give a “distorted and misleading portrayal” of Lim’s detention.³⁰ In 2011, Lim and 15 other former detainees signed a statement calling for the abolition of the ISA, arguing that the safeguards in place to prevent its abuse were spurious.³¹

In May 2012, Lim, who had been diagnosed with kidney failure three years earlier, had a fall at home and was hospitalised. He remained in a stable condition until 4 June, when he suffered a fatal heart attack. Lim’s funeral was attended by friends, former patients, medical colleagues and politicians. They paid tribute to the strength of his socialist convictions and his commitment to helping the underprivileged.³² Some of Lim’s friends subsequently published a book, titled *向坚定的自由战士林福寿医生敬礼* (*Remembering Dr Lim Hock Siew: Our freedom fighter*), in honour of him.³³

Family³⁴

Wife: Beatrice Chen, a kidney specialist.

Son: Lim Yue Wen, a senior medical administrator.