Obituary Francis Khoo

Francis Khoo Kah Siang died on 20th November 2011 at the age of 64. He was a steadfast comrade of The Haldane Society. To lose him is a serious blow, but his legacy continues. His widow, Dr Ang Swee Chai of Medical Aid for Palestinians, is very much with us still.

Francis was the fourth generation of a Singapore Peranakan family. As a law student he opposed the introduction of the Suitability Certificate, the abolition of the jury system, and the heavy bombing of Hanoi on Christmas day in 1972. He was called to the Singapore Bar. Shortly after joining a legal practice, he helped to found a Citizens' Co-op to save the *Singapore Herald*, the liberal English daily closed by the Government of Lee Kuan Yew.

He met Dr Ang Swee in 1974, and two weeks after their meeting she read in *The Straits Times* that her new acquaintance was to defend in a controversial trial in which factory workers and a student leader were charged with rioting. She was worried for his personal safety, but he patiently explained that everyone is entitled to legal defence – and that no one should be deemed guilty until guilt is proven beyond reasonable doubt. If he had to pay the price of doing so, he would accept it.

Indeed, shortly after they were married, in 1977, the authorities sought to arrest Francis, but he managed to escape. Dr Ang Swee was detained shortly afterwards, and was questioned about Francis. When she was released, she joined

him in exile in England.

Francis started his life in exile as a cleaner in a Central London Hotel. However he soon found work as an administrator in Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam. Two years later he worked as a journalist for an international third world magazine, *South*. From there he went on to direct the charity War on Want.

He was co-founder with Dr Ang Swee and Vice Chair of Medical Aid for Palestinians from 1984 to 2007. He had to step down when new British Charity

legislation advised against office holders serving more than nine years. He had served 23 years! From War on Want he returned to legal practice in London until his failing health forced him to stop. Despite this, his work for many charities continued.

He wrote many poems, songs and articles. He sang for the wives of striking miners. One of his songs, *Father Christmas in the Slog Heap*, brought the whole of Hemsworth, a town faced with pit closure, to tears in 1984.

He had suffered from renal failure since 1998. He went on

dialysis but had a successful renal transplant in July 2011 – the generous gift of an anonymous British woman donor.

The day before his death he was at the Annual General Meeting of Living Stones, a charity of which he was trustee. His diary was full of future engagements including The Haldane Society, charities for the homeless, Medical Aid for Palestinians, the Scottish Parliament, and the House of Commons. He was in exile from his beloved Singapore for 34 years.

Bill Bowring with thanks to Dr Ang Swee

'Clear potential for wrongful convictions'

On the 6th December 2011, The Haldane Society hosted a lecture on 'Guilt by Association: Criminalisation through Joint Enterprise Law'. The speakers were Gloria Morrison, Campaign Co-ordinator for Jengba, and Simon Natas, Solicitor-Advocate and Partner at Irvine Thanvi Natas Solicitors.

Joint enterprise is a legal principle being applied to murder cases. Under joint enterprise defendants may be found guilty of murder if they foresaw that another person might kill or intend serious harm and they encouraged or assisted that person. Simon explained that the main problem is that encouragement or assistance can

be inferred from presence at the scene. Although legal principle states mere presence is not enough for criminal liability, it is unclear where mere presence ends and encouragement or assistance begins. If the prosecution had to prove the defendant shared intention to kill this would be fair, but under joint enterprise the defendant does not need to intend murder. Simon told us that this results in two problems, first, innocent people can be convicted; secondly it is not right that a person who did not intend to kill can be convicted.

Gloria spoke about the case of Ken Alexander. He and his friends were attacked by a group

of men, one of whom died. Ken was convicted of murder under joint enterprise and received a 16-year prison sentence. Gloria told us that Ken did not have a weapon or participate in the attack and at the time of the murder was semi-conscious. Over 260 families have contacted Jengba reporting concerns about convictions where those convicted did not foresee, intend or participate in the murder they were convicted of.

Simon explained that 'joint enterprise is increasingly being used as a powerful, coercive and punitive tool where there is clear potential for wrongful convictions'.

For more information on what is a lively debate go to www.jointenterprise.co

Rebecca Harvey

judgment in a claim brought by former Guantánamo Bay detainee Binyam Mohammed. He is a big fan of the unelected chamber: 'The House of Lords has been at a very high quality for a very long time,' he said, 'You get a good hearing and impressively reasoned decisions there.'

17: The first of three private prosecutions concerning Judge Baltasar Garzón opens in Madrid. One of the trials involves Garzón's attempts to open investigations into victims of the Franco regime. Garzón led the attempts in 1998 to extradite General Pinochet from the UK to face

£315k

The amount of tax paid by Tony Blair's "companies" on earnings of £12million last year.

trial for human rights abuses during the military dictatorship in Chile. Garzón has also pursued former members of Argentina's military junta. Human rights organisations and his many supporters in Spain claim that the prosecutions are politically motivated.