

OBITUARIES



David Ernst

Joseph Ernst

Medical practitioner Portugal (b 1942; q Birmingham 1974; FRCS), d 23 May 2015.

David Ernst was born in 1942 into a traditional Jewish family in South Africa. He was a bright student and, by the age of 16, had completed high school and went to the University of Cape Town and the University of Natal to study medicine.

David was initially very active with the Zionist socialist student body but gradually turned his attention to left wing politics and fighting injustice in South Africa.

He became very active in the anti-Apartheid struggle, taking huge risks to help banned communist activists keep in communication with each other and taking part in activities to keep the struggle in South Africa alive.

In early 1966 he was arrested and tortured by special branch in Pretoria, and was held without charge under the draconian 90 day laws of South Africa. In protest, he began a hunger strike, demanding to be released or charged. He was on strike for 32 days and was eventually charged—alongside fellow activists Vic Finkelstein and Rowley Arenstein—on trivial and absurd grounds in the government's attempt to stifle the struggle. He was subsequently imprisoned for three years at Pretoria Central Prison.

He remained loyal to his comrades, despite betrayals by some of his friends, and used these experiences to focus on what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. After his release from prison in 1969 he left South Africa on a permanent exit visa with a United Nations scholarship to King's College at Cambridge University, where he read medicine. David qualified from Cambridge in 1971, graduated as a doctor from Birmingham University in 1974, and became a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons on 31 May 1978.

He remained politically active in the UK, with Morris Ludmer and others, in the antiracist and antifascist movement throughout the 1970s, and as a doctor with the BMA. David was part of the Junior Hospital Doctors Association team that successfully negotiated with the government in 1975 for better working hours and pay for NHS Doctors.

In Cambridge, he met his wife, Teresa, and began a new chapter in his life, starting his own family. They relocated to Lisbon in 1983, where he spent the rest of his life running a successful Anglo-Portuguese medical practice.

David leaves his wife, Teresa; sons Joseph, Daniel, and Simon; and seven grandchildren.

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