

## DARCE CASSIDY

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This is from my 2015 *Organiser's Report*: "In 2014, I was contacted out of the blue by an Australian expatriate filmmaker in the US regarding a never finished film of the 1974 Long March (by bus, I might add) across Australia to a former US military base (North West Cape, Western Australia). A number of New Zealanders, including me, took part in this and it provided the inspiration for the 1975 South Island Resistance Ride, the event which led to the creation of what was first called CAFGINZ (now CAFCA)".

"We put a small sum of \$US into the film and screened it at CAFCA's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, in 2015. Dealing with the Aussie expat also led me to getting back in touch with an old Australian friend (a veteran of both the Long March and the Resistance Ride), with whom I'd lost all contact since the 80s". That old Australian friend was Darce Cassidy, who died in May 2019, aged 77.

### Long March & Resistance Ride

The Long March was a truly epic event. When I went on it, I was Editor of *Canta*, the University of Canterbury student paper, and I wrote several lengthy articles about it. But none of those are online. The best place to learn about it is on the Website that Jan Smith, Darce's widow, has set up in his memory <http://darcecassidy.com/long-march/>. You can watch the film there at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTP145MPolq>. Darce was the narrator.

That film, a fascinating time capsule of the 1970s' Australian radical Left, really was a rediscovered treasure. Jan Smith e-mailed me: "I thought you would be interested to know we played a shortened version of the Long March film at Darce's celebration of life. People clapped; many had never seen this footage before". I was touched to discover on Darce's Website that Jan has thanked me for my help and included links to the sites of CAFCA, *Watchdog* and the Anti-Bases Campaign (which wasn't founded until more than a decade after the Long March). Darce was one of the Aussies who came on the Resistance Ride.

Here's an extract from my article "SIS Spied On CAFCA For Quarter Of A Century" (*Watchdog* 120, May 2009, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/20/06.htm>): "So, we had at least one spy in our membership from the 1970s to the late 90s, inclusive. Indeed, the very earliest batch of reports in the file, relating to the period leading up to and including our foundation activity, the 1975 South Island Resistance Ride, indicates that there may have been more than one, as those earliest reports include features such as complete reproduction of minutes of our meetings (held at the former Resistance Bookshop and Action Centre) and the full two page list of names, addresses and phone numbers of all Resistance Ride participants (**including Australians**". *Emphasis added*).

"At the bottom it reads: 'Please note: This list has been compiled from the original addresses given to CAFGINZ for the Resistance Ride....'. The Resistance Ride was the subject of extensive State surveillance. The most recent material we have received from the SIS (NZ Security Intelligence Service) is a collection of Police surveillance photos taken during it and supplied to the SIS for identification purposes".

When in Christchurch for the Resistance Ride, Darce stayed with me and my then partner, fellow CAFGINZ founder Christine Bird. Before going home, he became quite unwell and we were concerned that he had contracted something in our rather downmarket flat. It turned out to be hepatitis (I don't know of what particular strain) and we were relieved when he told us that it would have already been in his system before he came to NZ.

We stayed with Darce in Melbourne on at least two occasions in the 70s and 80s that I can remember, plus I made solo visits. In those days I was a Railways worker and one of the international perks of the job was free interstate rail travel around Aussie (not only free but it was also first class, meaning a sleeper), and I travelled the length and breadth of that huge country several times by train, with bus travel filling the gaps, quite often on political business.

Darce was a great host. He had a lovely Melbourne home (he had a well-paid job with the State radio network), he loved entertaining, he was a great cook, he dressed well, and he was fond of a cigar (which I've also been known to enjoy in years gone past). It was on one of those trips that he told me how Jon Cassidy came to be called Darce Cassidy. "I was a bit of a larrikin, so people started calling me Darce after Darcy Dugan" (Dugan was "an Australian bank robber and New South Wales' most notorious prison escape artist". *Wikipedia*).

It's that Aussie fascination with the outlaw and the bushranger, arising from its convict history. Speaking as a quarter Australian, with a convict in my family tree, I get it. But New Zealand has a different white settler history and respectable middle-class people tend not to rename themselves after notorious criminals as a badge of honour. It's definitely an Aussie thing.

## Freedom Ride

My last memory of him was when he dropped Bird and I off at Melbourne's interstate railway station in his white Mercedes. That was in the 80s and we had no further contact until 2014, when the film of the 1974 Long March put us back in touch again. We made up for lost time and had a flurry of correspondence. Most fascinatingly, he sent me his audio documentary of the 1965 Freedom Ride through western New South Wales, on which he was both a participant and radio journalist.

This is an extract from an obituary co-written by his widow Jan Smith: "He was a participant in the Freedom Ride, a bus tour which exposed endemic racism towards indigenous people in rural Australia. During the journey through western NSW there were several heated confrontations, including a life-threatening incident when the bus was run off the road. Cassidy took along a recorder, documenting the discrimination of local whites towards their indigenous neighbours".

"The ultra-conservative ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission, now Corporation) management censored these tapes, but he kept them until they were broadcast on Radio National many years later. He often revisited the towns along the Freedom Ride's itinerary to support indigenous peoples' fight for equal rights" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12/7/19, "Jon Cassidy: Journalist And Leader Of Radical Organisations", <https://www.smh.com.au/national/jon-cassidy-journalist-and-leader-of-radical-organisations-20190710-p525wr.html>). A very detailed account, written by Darce himself, is on his Website at <http://darcecassidy.com/freedomride/>.

I've listened to the audio documentary and it's a bloodcurdling confirmation of the vicious racism towards Aborigines that I've seen for myself in my travels through rural Australia. It ends abruptly, because one of the white racists got Darce in a headlock and cut the cord between his tape recorder and microphone. ABC broadcast it in 2015, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ([https://abcmedia.akamaized.net/rn/podcast/2015/02/aye\\_20150207\\_1807.mp3](https://abcmedia.akamaized.net/rn/podcast/2015/02/aye_20150207_1807.mp3)).

I went to Melbourne in 2017, for the first time since 1988, to speak at an Australian peace movement national conference. But I was saddened not to be able to see or contact Darce whilst there. It was only after he died that I learnt why – he'd been suffering from Alzheimer's since 2011. As I've said, it was the contact with the expat Aussie filmmaker in the US about the long-lost Long March film that put me back in touch with Darce.

Equally, it was Darce's death that put me back in touch with Ken Mansell, a former leading Australian anti-bases activist, who wrote the below obituary of Darce. Ken came on the Anti-Bases Campaign's very first Waihopai spy base protest, in 1988, and stayed with me in Christchurch. Later that same year, I stayed with Ken and Dora in Melbourne, on my way back from my second protest trip to North West Cape, and we had some political adventures in Melbourne. 2019 marked my first contact with Ken since then. Every cloud has a silver lining.