REBELS WITH A CAUSE – JOSIAH AND THE DON DALE 6

Between February 2014 and April 2017, Josiah Binsaris escaped from the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre four times, in an increasingly violent manner. He and his mates were condemned as “scumbags” in the media. What the public did not know, was that kids {up to 100 per cent were of Aboriginal descent) in Don Dale were being butalised and held in solitary confinement in cells unfit for animals in a system described as “breeding troubled kids and repeat offenders”. The nation was shocked when video evidence from inside the detention centre was shown on the ABC television program “4 Corners” in July 2016. But the same evidence was documented a year earlier in a report to the NT government. Even the federal government was so out of touch they at first appointed a retired NT Chief Justice, Brian Martin, as the Royal Commissioner to investigate the treatment of juveniles in custody in the NT. Josiah Binsaris wasn't waiting around. To make a point, he and a mate escaped again in April 2017 but was recaptured after four days.

We condemn car stealing. Car chases can lead to the deaths of innocent people. Car-jacking is traumatic for the victim. But the Don Dale escapees focused attention in the only way they knew, to a soul-destroying incarceration system in the Northern Territory.

In 2020, the Don Dale 6 received some recognition in the High Court of Australia when four of the Don Dale detainees, including Josiah Binsaris, were judged to be entitled to damages as a result of their treatment by prison authorities in Don Dale on 21 August, 2014.

The articles in this Facebook album tell the story, thanks to the “Territory Stories” internet site created by the Library and Archives of the NT, The NT News, the book “Crocs in the Cabinet: Northern Territory politics: an instruction manual on how NOT to run a government” by Ben Smee and Christopher Walsh (2016) and the newspaper collections of the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA).

TIMELINE of the “DON DALE 6” protest actions.

Monday, 17 February 2014 - 14-year-old Josiah Binsaris escorted from the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre to the Darwin Magistrates Court to face charges of property offences. At 11.50am, barefooted Josiah leaps from the dock over a 1.5-metre glass barrier, runs past security at the door and disappears into scrub around the Railway Dam Aboriginal community. Police with dogs searching into the night fail to find the escapee. Re-arrested next day.

Saturday, 2 August, 2014 - Josiah with four other youths escape Don Dale. Josiah the last captured on Wednesday 6 August.

21 August, 2014 – Josiah among six youths tear-gassed in Don Dale (see still from body cam)..

Sunday night, 30 May, 2015 – 16-year-old Josiah and five other youths trash B-Block in Don Dale and climb onto the roof. Josiah and friend mange to climb over two fences, getting serious cuts on the razor wire. Escape in stolen car, sighted in a third stolen car, a Yaris, on Tuesday 2 June, 2015. Their third day on the run. Josiah in the stolen Yaris then heads back to Don Dale. After smashing through the gates, the vehicle is driven around the prison for 45 minutes before Josiah and friend are apprehended.

August 2015 - Report by Colleen Gwyne on treatment of juveniles in Don Dale is received by NT Government. Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Nigel Scullion later says the report of tear-gassing and use of spit hoods “hadn't piqued my interest”. Apparently no action taken.

25 July, 2016 – ABC Four Corners program shows brutal treatment of prisoners in Don Dale, reported in NT News under page one headlines like, “Jailhouse Shame”, “Sack the lot of them” and “Crying Shame”.

2 August, 2016 – The Royal Commissioner appointed by PM Malcolm Turnbull, retired NT Chief Justice Brian Martin, resigns after protests over the Chief Justice's past record of sentencing Aboriginal offenders and objections that the Chief Justice's daughter Joanna had been an adviser to previous NT Attorney General Delia Lawrie (also see “Graham X and the Chief Justice” on my Facebook pages).

6pm, Wednesday 5 April, 2017 – Two 17-year-old prisoners, Josiah Binsaris and Trey Mason smash a window during a storm and climb a fence to escape Don Dale detention centre. In stolen car they drive south along the Stuart Highway. After a car-jacking and ramming of a police car, tyre spikes are used by police and Josiah is tasered and captured at Adelaide River on Saturday, 8 April, 2017,.

25 May, 2017 - Josiah Binsaris turns 18 and is sent to the new Holtz adult prison outside Darwin. To serve the remainder of his 5 years and 6 months for the April 2017 escape and various offences committed while on the run.

February 2019 – Josiah sentenced to an additional four months, to a total 5 years 10 months imprisonment from April 2017.

June 2020 – The High Court of Australia rules that the use of tear gas in Don Dale was illegal and four Don Dale detainees, including Josiah Binsaris are entitled to sue the NT Government for damages.

POSTSCRIPT: The Northern Territory loves a manhunt. The Northern Territory News reported on 3 October 1961 on the police hunt for two Malayan pearl divers named Daru Binsaris and Zainal Hashim. Road blocks were set up at the 11-mile and houses were searched. Waterside workers held stop-work meetings, petitions were signed and the NT News editorialised as Darwin people protested at official moves to deport Binsaris and Hashim who had been working in northern Australia for more than 12 years. As a last resort, the deportees went underground with the support of the Darwin community. The eventual federal government back-down, allowing the “stayput Malayans” to reside in Australia, was seen as a victory for popular resistance against the racist White Australia policy of the era. The NT News reported on 17 May 1962: “They won the right to stay after a long, often bitter campaign waged by Darwin people and every major newspaper in Australia.”