

4. Tranby, co-operatives and empowerment

The first time Kevin heard about Tranby College was when he was still a builders labourer and met the Reverend Alf Clint. Alf had enjoyed strong union support over many years. When Kevin met him, Alf was continuing to get on a lot better with unionists and communists than he did with the church hierarchy!

As *Kevin* tells the story: Yeah, old Alf Clint wrote a letter to the union about getting some finances for Tranby College,¹ and I think it was Pringle said 'Ring Kevin, he'll deal with it!' So he come in to see me and we had a strike on so I said look, 'I'll have to make it tomorrow', you know, I apologised to him. And he said, 'What milk bar will I meet you at?' and I said 'To be quite truthful, I don't know a milk bar'. And he said, 'What about the Sussex Hotel?' and I said 'I know that'. So I went up there and I was shouting him, I shouted him all afternoon! I thought it was a couple of beers and off he'd go after our meeting. But no he stayed there all night! And he knew more of the Builders Labourers than I did! And so we got to talking, he needed money for the college, and so I went to the executive and we got some money for him. So then I went over and seen the place at Tranby to see what he'd done. And after a while I got onto the Board of Directors.

There were other things too. Dexter Daniels come down from Darwin and they were fighting that land rights fight up there. And so the union got behind that. There was a lot of behind the scenes things, you know, like raising money for the food and to take people down to the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972. That was all raised through some of the unions.

We used to go to meetings together after that, Alf and me, and I said 'Why aren't you wearing your collar? We'll get more money if you wear the collar'. I learned a lot about him then when I was going to those meetings with him. He was a funny guy. He'd started off working in a co-op store in Balmain in the 1920s or so. He heard Bishop Bergmann² preach, and he started talking to him and he ended up being a Bush Brother. But he said to the church, 'Before I join up, there's one thing I have to ask of you. I want to hold my ALP ticket and my AWU union ticket'. And they allowed that. So he went up and he used to preach at the mines around Lithgow and Portland.

1 Alf had been supported by the church to set up co-operatives for community development and economic advancement in Papua New Guinea and later in northern Australia. He worked predominantly in Australia with Aboriginal communities, establishing cooperatives not only in Queensland but in the northern rivers area of New South Wales. In 1957 he established a co-operative training centre for Aboriginal co-operative members in Tranby, a Glebe house donated to the Anglican Church for this purpose by the family of Justice Robert Hope, who remained an active member of the Tranby Board of Directors, and whom Kevin was to consult frequently, see Chapter 5.

2 Bishop Ernest Bergmann (1885-1967) was the High Anglican Bishop of Goulburn, and was known as the Red Bishop because of his strong social justice sympathies. He was the grandfather of Kevin's close friend and political ally, Meredith Burgmann.



Figure 4.1: Aboriginal Australian Fellowship May Day float.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

Joe Owens knew Alf well in the union: Yeah, I remember those stories about Alf too. Let me put it this way, the Moscow wing of the Communist party thought the sun shone out of Alf's arse, cause Alf was very keen on the Soviet Union. That was one thing we had to keep away from when we were talking with Alf, us blokes like me and Munday, cause you'd cop a mouthful off him!³ ... I never forget a yarn with the ex-leader of the Miners, who was telling me that the Miners' Federation supported Alf no end. Alf was shifted to some parish up in the coal fields where they were gonna give him the arse cause he hadn't enough customers! The old bishops down here were lookin' to get rid of him. So all these left-wing miners went to church every fucking day and night, singing fucking hymns! Half of the bastards were communists! singing hymns! And the place was packed!! And they were all coming up ... fuck me dead! They're getting more here than they're gettin' in the Anglican Cathedral! But it was humourous! And when it was all over they'd go out with Alf and they'd all get on the piss! ...

Kevin: That's what he told me too, he used to have church on Sundays and then Lenin meetings on Sunday night!

Joe: When that big strike was on, when that miner got killed at Rothbury ... that was way back in the mists of time, Alf was there! That old Miners' Union bloke said 'Clint was there you know, he was very young, when the coppers shot the miner'.

3 Alf remained in sympathy with the Moscow-affiliated Socialist Party of Australia, which broke away from the Communist Party of Australia, to which Joe and Jack Munday belonged.

Kevin: Yeah, he never backed down, Alf!

Joe: Alf was a hard bloke to knock back for support... Alf could drink with the best of them! Fuck me, didn't he'd get on the piss! But he was a hard bloke to knock back!!

Kevin: Bill Knott was around that mining area too, he was in the Electricians' union, the only communist and this was when they *hated* communists! Bill was a union rep, he even ran for parliament as a communist, out there. He's another funny bloke. But Alf could walk that thin line between all the unions, whether it was the AWU, the BLF or the BWIU. He had a good rapport with the Seamen's Union too, especially with Eliot V Elliott.

In 1975, after the union battles, Kevin took some time away from the city. But Alf Clint hadn't forgotten him.

Kevin: After Gallagher come in and destroyed the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation, I went home and went fishing at Lake Illawarra with my uncle. We were professional fishing and I was down there for about four months, on the prawns. We didn't make any money, but we had a good time. I know you might say we drank all the profits, but you couldn't drink when you'd go out on the boat. Too dangerous! I learnt all about the prawns, about fishing and Stan taught me how to row.

So I was working down in Wollongong fishing and Bill Knot, Margaret's uncle, who was a mate of Alf's, came around to my place at Berkeley and said, 'Alf wants to see you up in Sydney'. So I come back up.

Alf said he wanted me to be a student and to work! I said that was alright. But then Alf said he couldn't pay me anything. I said, 'Look, I'm just fishing for fucking nothing, I'd might as well come up!'

So I was going to spend about three days a week in class. Now the third day I was there, Alf came up to me and said, 'Would you unlock tomorrow morning? I have to go away', I said 'Yeah'. So he give me this big bunch of keys and I unlocked the next day.

Then I came to class the morning *after* and everyone's standing outside. I said, 'What's the matter?' 'Keys!', they said. Now, I still had the keys, I'd taken them home. I thought Alf would have another set. But Alf wasn't there!

Alf rang up the next day and said, 'I'm in Cairns – I want you to look after the place until I get back'. And that was it! He was gone two weeks!

Kevin's move to Tranby surprised many of his friends. City-based students and activists like me knew that co-operatives had originated in radical workers organisations in the 19th century, but we thought that today, co-operatives

were mainly associated with church charities, or very individualised credit unions, or big commercial bodies for rural producers like the Dairy Farmers' Co-operative. We didn't know much about the community co-operatives Alf had helped set up in Papua New Guinea, the Torres Strait Islands or Queensland, all run by local people to fight racism and discrimination in employment. And we didn't know anything about the international network that Alf had connected Tranby to, which had started up as a fishworkers co-operative in Antigonish on the west coast of Canada. This had blossomed into Coady International Institute which had supported co-operatives in India, Africa and Latin America. The co-operatives in India were often run by indigenous people, known as *Adivasi*, or by economically-marginalised low caste or untouchable groups. In South Africa, co-operatives had been one of the only political organisations that were legal for Africans living under Apartheid. And in Latin America, this co-operative movement had pioneered 'liberation theology' and 'action research' where local people made all the decisions. But we didn't know any of that, so we didn't understand at all why Kevin would have wanted to get involved, except that he had known Alf for a while through the union and this was a steady job for a while.

But Alf had seen something in Cookie that he really wanted for Tranby.

Joe Owens talked with Cookie about this: Now I'm not pissin' in your pocket, Kevin, but you knew how to organise! That was the thing – Cookie knew how to organise! And Alf wanted that! He realised for that place to grow that he needed to get people in to organise so he went looking! And Cookie did it for 'im! You knew how to do it, Kevin, you brought in all your experience from the union!

And that was the way it worked! Kevin did use the union contacts that he already had to shape what he could do at Tranby. He drew on the people he knew from the BLF who were good communicators to teach the students about organising and industrial law. And he expanded his own union training, enrolling in a class at TUTA, the Trade Union Training Authority, when it opened its doors at Albury in 1977. There he met Serge Serino, a union organiser in the FEDFA⁴ and found they shared a lot of interests, as well as sparking Kevin's warm memories of the Italian kids he had known at Wollongong and the Italians he had worked with in the BLF. Serge was another one who came to teach at Tranby, and introduced Cookie to his friend and fellow political activist, Frank Panucci, a trade union researcher working at the same time in Italian-Australian cultural and political organisations. In this way, Kevin built up wide ranging networks which all brought an extraordinary set of innovative and enthusiastic teachers into Tranby's classrooms.

But he found that although he could build on his trade union background, he had to change the way he approached people now that he was an advocate for

Tranby to the whole union movement. Unionists treated him differently because now he was no longer representing just the BLF but was representing Tranby. So Cookie had to build relationships with right-wing as well as left-wing unionists, in a way that had never been needed before.

But whatever political position his allies took, Kevin was always interested in them as people. He called on the doctor, Paul Torzillo, for example to come with him when he went on Tranby business to see Pat Clancy, the Federal Secretary of the BWIU⁵ and aligned with the Moscow-affiliated Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). Paul was on the Board at Tranby by then, but he still wasn't quite sure what Cookie wanted him to do in this meeting with Pat Clancy. It turned out Kevin wanted Paul there in case Clancy talked about his heart problems and his eyesight – he was worried that Pat Clancy would not go to see a doctor otherwise.

As *Kevin* recalls it: Yeah, I took Paul along because I knew Clancy was sick, and I wanted to give him the chance to ask Paul any extra advice that he might have needed. Pat Clancy was another one who was always good with Tranby. He supported us because he'd been close friends with Alf. And I had no troubles either, you know, with other people like with Tom McDonald or Stan Sharkey in the BWIU, even though we might have taken very different positions in the unions. Stan Sharkey was the main instigator in setting up the National Aboriginal Trade Union body, TUCAR.

Bobby Baker, from the BLF, thought it was Tranby that brought very disparate unionists together: You shouldn't have had any trouble anyway with any of that mob Cookie. They all had differences of opinion about which line of the Communist party you happened to be following, but on issues like Tranby or issues like the land rights, there were no real differences of opinion really.

Kevin agreed: Even when we set up the Black Defence Group, there were a couple of trade unionists that helped out, like Meredith Burgmann from the Academics Union and Rod Pickette from the ATEA [Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association]. Also, it helped no end when we sat down and talked with a couple of key people about setting up what was the best way of doing it, who to get involved. As soon as we started it up it just clicked. We got a lot of gains through that and that was through the association with the Builders Labourers. But once you left the union, it was a fine line you had to walk between the unions that you were directly involved in, who'd been supportive when you were a builders labourer, and the other unions. You couldn't be seen as part of one camp and that was very hard, but we managed that pretty well I think. Which is really good.

A lot of the BLs found a welcome at Tranby, and they contributed to the teaching there about politics and organisation – as well as stirring up some debates!

5 Building Workers' Industrial Union.

Joe Owens recalled: I ended up over at Tranby a lot after the union folded. Remember when old Alf give me the dump when the kids went on strike, do you remember that one? The kids were whinging about something ... Alf got me in as a teacher and I was teaching public speaking. That was before we all got any money (for teaching). And we had Russ Herman coming over with a camera and taking pictures of the kids and showing them how to speak... and how to present themselves on the camera... And Alf thought it was great! But anyway the kids had a blue about something, might have been about the tucker or something...



Figure 4.2: Rod Pickette, with his son, 2011. Rod was an organiser with the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association in the 1970s and active in the NSW ALP. He is now National Policy Officer in the Maritime Union of Australia.

Courtesy Rod Pickette family collection.

Kevin: No, it was about the showers! And you know that strike got it fixed! So the students won!

Joe: But Alf was held in great respect... Take Charlie Oliver from the AWU. ... I actually got on well with Charlie Oliver. There were some things I didn't like about Charlie but I liked *him*. Now he never got on with the Builders Labourers.⁶ But I'll never forget if you mentioned Alf Clint's name, mate! The decks were cleared! If Charlie Oliver was there, you'd get all the support you cared for!

⁶ Because as a member of the right-wing faction of the ALP, Oliver did not like dealing with communists in the BLF.

This broad commitment to Tranby from unions of all persuasions was the result of years of Alf's hard work in building strong working relationships – partly in the pubs but just as much through building interactions with unions, so Aboriginal students could take their place beside unionists to learn not just the trade but the politics of organising! Paddy Crumlin, the General Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia and a member of the Tranby Board in the 1980s, talked with Kevin about Tranby's links with the Seamen's Union.



Figure 4.3: Paddy Crumlin, a member of the Seamen's Union in the 1970s and now General Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia.

Courtesy Maritime Union of Australia.

Paddy Crumlin: Tranby's been a thing in the Seamen's Union for about 50 years. When you're on a ship, you often sponsor young guys, you know scholarships, that sort of thing, going right back. It was a real connection.

Tranby went a long way back with the Seamen and the Wharfies and the Miners in the early days. Alf must have had fantastic respect, you know, even I heard about him even though I was a lot younger and never bumped into him. Even just his ability to communicate issues! And to knock around and be involved with communists. He had a big connection through the party, before all the splits in the '70s.

Seamen had their political rolling funds and political issues and political and industrial issues. Ships like the *Iron Monarch* would agree to keep a sponsorship

going for an individual and would pay money out on a regular basis. We were involved in Abschol, too. The Wharfies and the Seamen were involved in a program that helped young Aboriginal boys get jobs in the industry, like up at Weipa there was a program that got six young guys on up there as seamen and a deck boy. Alf was a good friend of Eliot V Elliott⁷ the general secretary of the Seamen's Union. Eliot used to go and tell the Seamen, he'd say 'Well we need more money for more scholarships, butchers, bakers and candle stick makers!' There was a lot of butchers and bakers in those days, hands on trades. That was late '50s, early '60s.

For the rank and file it wasn't just about money. For example Jack Hassam, he was a seaman on a 60 miler that ran between Sydney and Newcastle. Jack was living down at Millers Point, and sort of home every night. The union said, 'Do we want to send someone down to be a director, at Tranby?' Well Jack was a rank and file member, a knock around sort of a bloke, and that's how Jack ended up down there on the Tranby Board. He's a terrific bloke. Hands on and that was the sort of connection between the workers themselves. And after that there was Pat Sweetenson.

I was talking to Patrick Geraghty about it. He said Elliott was a great mate of Alf. They all knew Alf as that sort of knock-around bloke who loved a beer and could get a message across and was part of that progressive broad front. It was a real big thing the co-operative thing, getting things going, and doing it in a knock-around sort of a way. That was the connection I think with the Seamen, a *political* connection with a bit of knowledge about Tranby because of Alf and then you Cookie!

To have exposure pretty early in anyone's political development to something like Tranby was tremendously important. It's had a political impact – on a whole generation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership in terms of Indigenous issues. I mean it's absolutely unique, almost irreplaceable. You know, everyone speaks from your own perspective, but, in my political development, in *my* understanding of issues, that's what Tranby's been.

Yeah, so a lot of it comes back to you mate, no doubt about it, like Geraghty said, 'He was a genius that Alf, he found the little bloke, he found Cookie!' 'Well, Cookie found him probably more like it', that's what I said to Geraghty!

As well as supporting rural co-operatives and organising work placements, Tranby had a series of courses running to train co-operative members about how to manage their local businesses and manage the co-operative process.

7 Eliot V Elliott, the General Secretary of the Australian Seamen's Union from 1941 to 1978.

Kevin was interviewed about this early teaching program in 1996 by Russ Herman, an old BLF friend as well as a filmmaker. As Joe had mentioned, Russ was another union person who Cookie had pulled in to teach at Tranby. In the interview, Kevin explained what Tranby was like for him at first:⁸

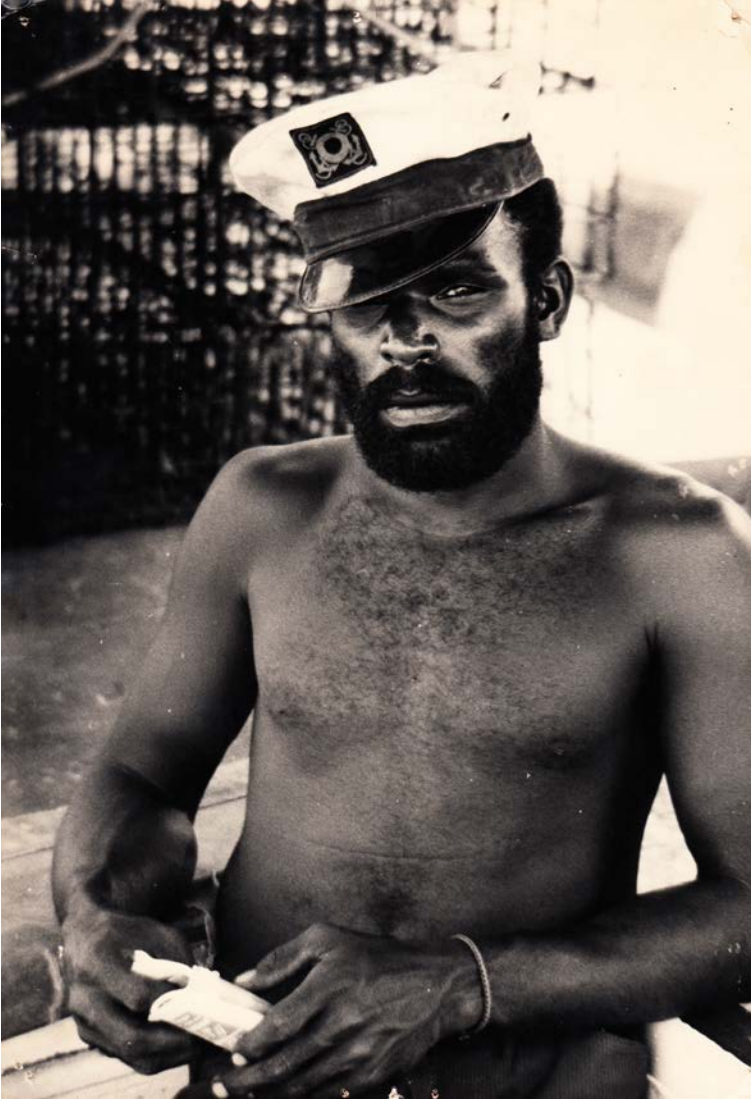


Figure 4.4: Tranby apprentice seaman. As Paddy Crumlin describes, the role of the Seamen's and later Maritime unions, in sustaining contact with Tranby, was crucial in setting up such apprenticeships.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

⁸ Russ Herman, 1996, in one of a series of documentary interviews to compile a history of Tranby Co-operative College.



Figure 4.5: Pat Geraghty, long time leader of the Seamen's Union of Australia and a strong supporter of Alf Clint and the Tranby apprenticeships for Aboriginal seamen.

Courtesy Maritime Union of Australia.

Kevin: When I first came up to work at Tranby, we only had one course then. It was called the Co-operative Course and it was about running small businesses, using the co-operative principles. There were about 15 students when I was here. We had one paid teacher, the rest of our teachers were from St Scholasticas down the road, the Catholic College – they'd send up teachers. But it wasn't a very good arrangement because if one of their other colleges was short of people, then those teachers would go there and then they'd send somebody else up to us. So we had no continuity. But if they didn't do it, then we'd have no teachers to teach. So the arrangement wasn't the best but we got through with it.

The problem with having the one course, we had people who'd had very little or no schooling to people who had gone right through the schooling system. So that the range of education background was very wide. When the teacher would come in, he'd have to teach literacy and numeracy to some students, and try to carry on the full-time course as well. So it was very hard on teachers, but we didn't have the money to employ teachers to come in and teach literacy and numeracy.

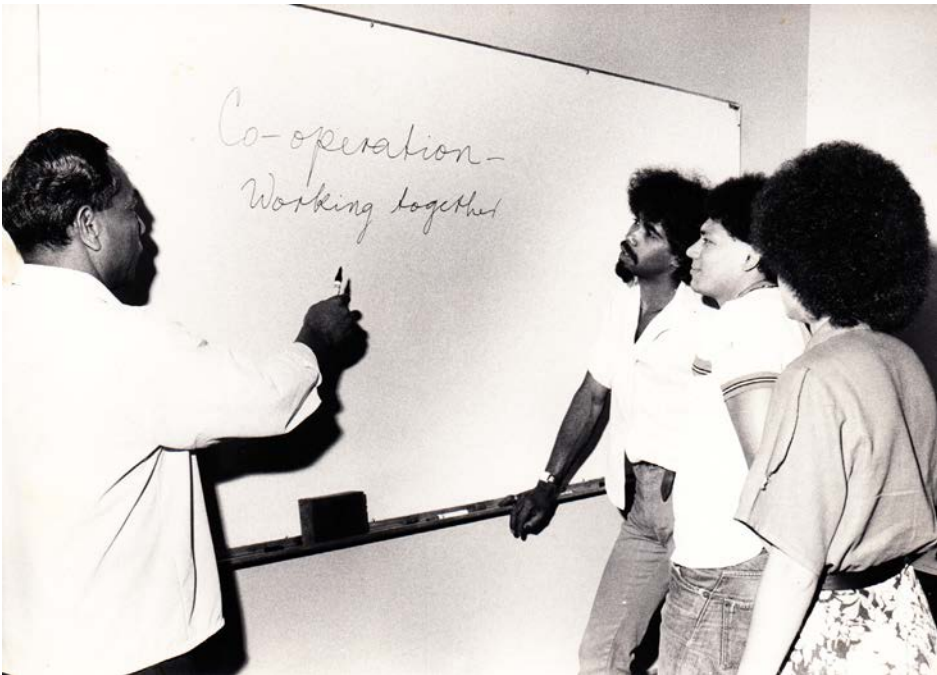


Figure 4.6: Courses at Tranby: teaching 'co-operation'.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 4.7: Courses at Tranby: class including Lester Bostock (then a student).

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

Working with Alf was exciting: he knew an amazing lot of people from the clergy to prime ministers, to trade union leaders, to miners on the coal face. He had a very good rapport with workers. That's where his ministry lay: before he came to Tranby he was with the working class. So that all of the contacts he'd built up through the union movement, plus then all of the contacts I'd built up through the union movement, kept Tranby in good stead when we had to call on support from those unions.

And we did call on them on a lot of occasions in the early days because we weren't funded. In the few years before I came on board, the place had closed down three times because of lack of funding. So that the trade union movement played a very big role, along with church groups, in funding Tranby in the early days.

By 1977, I was doing trips all over the place for Alf and for Tranby. One of the funniest ones was my first trip to Brisbane, Ayr, Cairns and then back home. I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know too many people because it was Alf who knew everybody. He gave me a note saying you have to go and see these people. First I went to Ayr and I stayed with a family who were Pentecostals. I'd never heard of Pentecostalism before, I've only been to the mainstream churches.

So I went to church there with them and I sat down between two large women. I didn't know what to expect, I looked up and they had a kind of a stage there with drums and guitars. The minister was yelling in a loud voice and they started singing and then everybody started to sway backwards and forwards. Of course, I wasn't in rhythm, I was just sitting there in between these two large women, so I was getting knocked around. I had to start swinging too. I've never been in a situation in church where people are singing, with drums and electric guitars. And then another woman started to run down the aisle and said, 'I've been saved, I've been saved!' And I was taken aback, you know!

And when we went out I talked to the people who I was staying with and they said, 'Oh, that's a very quiet service, Kevin', they said, 'you should come tonight'. Well I had to decline because I didn't know what to expect!

Next day I was off again up to Tully by train. Before I left Sydney, Alf had been telling me about the rainfall at Tully and especially about the large snakes. When I got to Tully it was about four o'clock in the morning and when I tried to get a cab into town, the station master said, 'If you get a cab into town, nothing's open. You might as well sleep on the station'. So I just slept on one of the seats. And when I woke up, before I opened up my eyes I could feel this nice warm thing on the middle of my chest. And it took me 15 to 20 minutes before I opened my eyes. And as I opened my eyes I swiped, cause I thought it was a snake! And it turned out it was only a little kitten. I tried to call the cat back but it wouldn't come, it ran away!

But in all of those places, the people were trying to work out how to run their organisations and co-ops and some of them were sending students down to Tranby.

The meaning of co-operatives was debated in Australia just as it was in many other places. Kevin was grappling with this, not only in his first years in Tranby but later on. He talked this over with Russ Herman, explaining in this 1996 interview that co-operatives continued to offer important principles.

Russ: The co-operative was considered – certainly by Alf Clint – to be the answer for an Aboriginal community. Today, co-ops aren't so popular anymore. What do you think about the concept?

Kevin: Well I believe co-operatives are the closest thing to the way we live as Aboriginal people – we are communal owners. The co-operative is set up on those principles that are the principles that Aboriginal people live by. That's why we thought that the co-operative way, the co-operative principles in small business, is the way that Aboriginal people should go.



Figure 4.8: Co-operative enterprises in communities: Robert Bolt, member Numbahging sugar cane co-operative with cane, Cabbage Tree Island, North Coast NSW.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 4.9: Co-operative stores in communities: Numbahging store co-operative, Cabbage Tree Island, North Coast NSW.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

Russ: But isn't there a lot of pressure from the general community these days, against co-operatives?

Kevin: No. I think the ideas are still there and important. Even if the organisation is forced to be registered as a company, under the federal government's laws, it can still operate *as* a co-operative because it's still one member, one vote. It's not how much money you put into it, it's one-member-one-vote.

So even if it's a company or they're registered under any other criteria, it seems to me that the majority of Aboriginal organisations still use their own principles, which is the co-operative principle which is one person one vote, its communal ownership.

So co-operatives aren't a new thing in Aboriginal communities. I think that communal living is the way forward. I think that we have to share our resources. If we don't, because of unemployment, there'll be an even larger division between the haves and the have-nots. But if we own things communally then we can trade communally, then there's not a big issue about unemployment.

I think one of the big stigmas attached to unemployment and the dole is that it's so individual – especially for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have to be

doing something that is the betterment for their own community. If they don't do it they feel that they're not important, they're not worthwhile, and that's where you get drinking and other social problems.

Cookie at Coady: In touch with the world

Alf had begun to talk with Kevin about the Antigonish movement in Canada and its international network soon after he arrived in 1976. By that time, Tranby Co-operative was concentrating not on setting up new cooperatives but, from the mid 1960s, on bringing Aboriginal people from remote areas. As funds allowed, people had come from the co-operatives in the Torres Strait Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu and other Pacific Islands to the college for courses and for the summer school. Alf had organised for a Tranby student, Charles French, to go to Coady in 1964 and French had returned to take up further tertiary studies. There had been attention to communicating with far-flung cooperatives since then, with the newsletter *Milli Milli*, but there had been no-one travelling to study at Coady since Charles French had been there.

Alf wanted Kevin to see how international co-operatives had been developing in those years since 1964. Finally, in 1979, Kevin agreed to enroll at Coady for a semester – it was to be his first trip overseas since he had been working in New Zealand.

Kevin's time at Coady has been a mystery to his friends in Australia until recently. He would have been happy to tell us, but none of us thought to ask. As I have learned from talking to others⁹ who had worked closely with Cookie before and after he went to Canada, we had all assumed that he had been having an interesting time but mainly as a break away from the hectic politics and networking he had faced in Australia. Personally, I had thought he had done some abstract courses on bookkeeping or communication strategies. It was only as we worked on this book together that I learnt how wrong I had been. As we talked more about his time at Coady, it became clear that it had been a tremendously important experience for him.

9 Like Meredith Burgmann, Barbara Flick and Brian Doolan.



Figure 4.10: Charles French, 1964, Tranby student who was awarded a UN scholarship with support from Tranby and Sydney University to enroll for a semester at Coady International College, St Francis Xavier University.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 4.11: Cookie just before he left for Coady – mid-1979.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

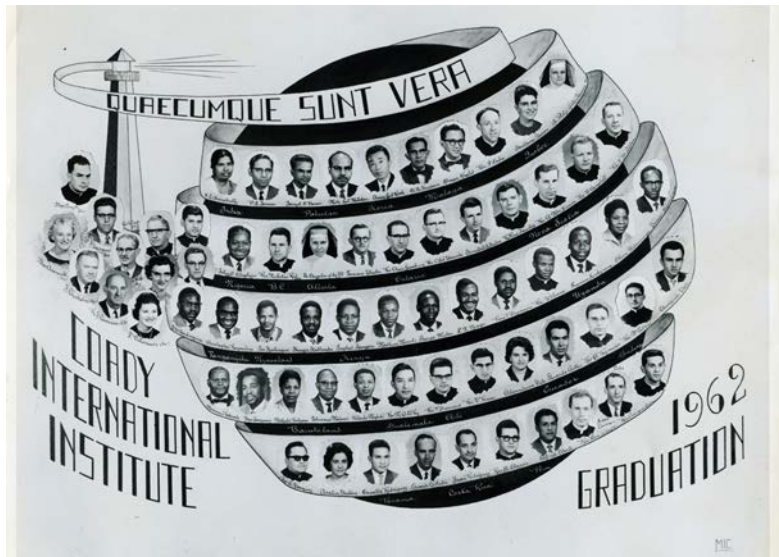


Figure 4.12: Coady International Institute had flourished by building links between working and minority peoples co-operatives in the developing world. This 1962 graduation photograph shows the wide range of people who were by then participating in the co-operative training at Coady.

Courtesy St Francis Xavier University Archives.



Figure 4.13: In India, in 1986, a priest speaks at a development symposium organised jointly by Coady and the Cochin diocese.

Courtesy St Francis Xavier University Archives.

By the time Cookie headed for Canada in 1979, there had been a growing numbers of co-operatives in developing countries since the 1950s. More recently, in the 1970s, there had been a revival of co-operatives in the west. So Coady International College at Antigonish was now offering courses in Community Development as well as in Co-operative Studies. These changes had echoed the new experiences which Coady staff had been having as they travelled to the many co-operatives in their network, from India and Africa to Latin America. This shift had fuelled further developments in the Coady philosophy to make it much more cross-cultural and ecumenical. During 1979, the same year that Cookie studied there, the Institute commemorated Moses Coady by arguing that he was 'light years' ahead of his time:

Almost fifty years ago, he warned of poisoning our earth and our waters ... He urged scientific thinking in a generation when men and women were often inclined or directed to parochial notions, hearsay and superficial catchwords ... He was breaking windows in musty institutions many years before Pope John was opening windows to allow fresh breezes to blow through. ... He said that one could not speak of Catholic co-operation or Protestant co-operation, of Buddhist, Mohammedan, Shinto or Hebrew economics any more than one could speaker of Quaker chemistry or Mormon mathematics. ... He fought for the concept of one world of humans.

Kevin chose the Community Development course, in line with his main interest, but he mixed freely with the students in the Co-operative course too, as well as the staff in the Institute, particularly those who had worked in Latin America. Students were accommodated on the campus at St Francis Xavier University where Coady was based. Here they lived in dormitories with individual bedrooms but shared living and cooking spaces, so there was lots of everyday socialising and networking. It was late summer as the semester got started, and Kevin found the classes useful, learning more about the history of the early United Kingdom workers' co-operatives like Rochdale, which had supported workers' employment and opposed slavery in the United States, despite suffering economic disadvantage. It was their commitment to principle over economic security which Kevin told me he had really valued.

Most important to his experience, however, were the participants who had come to the International Institute. They were all activists in community-oriented co-operatives, rather than in any of the large corporate or State-controlled ones. These were people working in and for communities, who found what they wanted in the co-operative structure, which enabled economic self-reliance based on democratic decision-making. Each of the participants had come from co-operatives which emphasised self-reliance above dependence and principle over profits.



Figure 4.14: Kevin's graduation photo, 1979, showing his whole Coady class. Kevin is sitting third from the right in the front row. The people with whom he became close friends included: Front Row: G. Asirvadam (India – 3rd from left); Second Row: Maria Cwata (Zimbabwe – 1st on left); Third Row: Dr Angelina Roche (India – 8th from left), Ruth Mpisaunga (Zimbabwe – 7th from right), Alice Thiongo (Kenya – 6th from right), Sophie Mazibuko (South Africa – 5th from right); Back Row: Joe Mullor (India – 3rd from right), Griffiths Zahala (South Africa – 2nd from right), James Ross (Liberia – on extreme right).

Courtesy St Francis Xavier University Archives.

Cookie found there were three major areas – India, Latin America and Africa – which had sent students, although there were also individuals from Ireland, from Canada and of course Kevin from Australia. All of them worked in community-focused co-operatives, however small or large. And Cookie became close friends with people from each area.

The students from India were largely from the southern states of Karnataka, Andra Pradesh and Kerala. But one, Father Joe Mulloor, was from Bihar State in the north of India, and in close contact with the nearby forest-dependent indigenous communities, known in India as *Adivasi*. Kevin spent a lot of time with Joe Mulloor, discussing his work with local people. Today, he pays him the ultimate tribute when he says: 'Joe was my mate'.

A southern Indian student Kevin spent time with was Dr Angelina Roche, a medical doctor also from Karnataka but living near the western coastal city of Mangalore. Another close friend was G Asirvadam, who lived just a bit further east in central forested areas but these were over the border in the State of Andra Pradesh. Here Asirvadam led the Kadapa District Agricultural Labourers co-operative. He was a committed activist which showed when all the students were asked to record their 'Interests' in the Coady Year Book. Most wrote down hobbies like music and gardening. But Asirvadam recorded his 'Interests' as 'Socio-economic upliftment of low caste people'. He was campaigning against debt bondage among agricultural workers, many of whom were living in virtual slavery trying to pay off enormous debts they had accrued just trying to feed their families. Kevin saw Asirvadam's role in union and class terms.

Kevin: Asirvadam was like a union organiser – working with people who were share-farmers and owed money to farmers and other landowners – they never got out of debt. It starts off with a low amount of money they have to pay back, and then it builds up. ... He bought some people out of debt himself to get them free!

It shows the closeness in which the students all shared their daily lives, that Asirvadam was also remembered because he shaved himself – and others if they wanted to try it out – with a razor. Not with a blade in a handle but with just the bare safety razor blade held nimbly between thumb and forefinger, as the student newsletter showed in a sketch. He shaved Cookie – 'And he did a great job of it too!' Cookie laughed as he remembered, 'He kept on sharpening it!'

The second group were those from Latin America, and Kevin spent a lot of time with some students from Guyana and Belize. 'St Xavier's was always sending people out all the time to South America and they'd come back and talk to us about it.' He remembers their approach in communities, which was to organise study circles among co-operative members to analyse the problems they faced and develop strategies to solve these problems, step by step, then put them into practice. Their attempts would then be evaluated, again in the co-operative group discussions, reassessed and refined so they could be tried again. This strategy for development and research is now familiar as 'action research', but in the 1970s, this was pioneering work. Hearing about it left a deep impression on Kevin – he remembers realising this was an approach to community development which would carry people with it.

The third and very important group for Kevin were the students from Africa. He was good friends with James Ross from Liberia in western Africa, but the people he was particularly close to were those from Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) and South Africa.

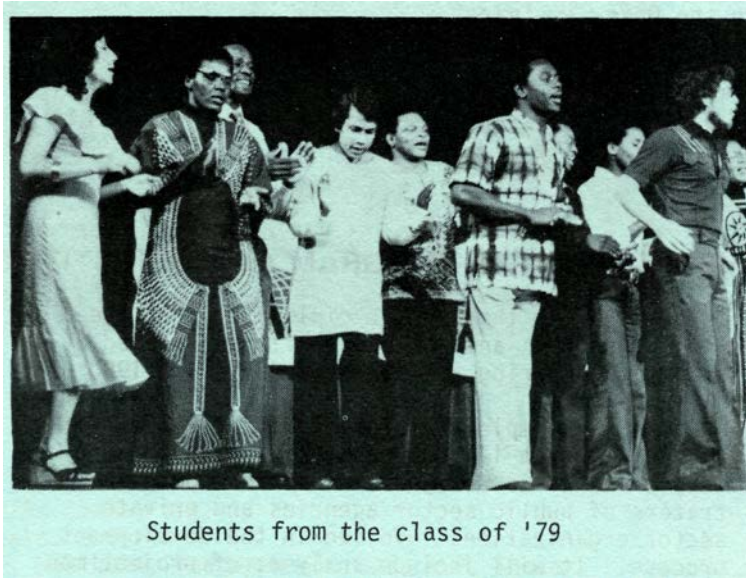


Figure 4.15: James Ross from Liberia is the tall man in the check shirt in this photograph of the Class of '79, taken from the Coady International Institute Newsletter, February 1980.

Courtesy St Francis Xavier University Archives.

Cookie shared not only classes with these African students but also the day-to-day living and cooking routines of the dormitory.

Cookie remembers: There was a good mix of people there, especially the South Africans. And especially the women from South Africa. The women used to have a time to cook every day, at about 6pm or 7pm. There was me and an Irishman, Bill Walsh, and these women from South Africa, Monica Mosala and Sophie Mazibuko, and Maria Cwata from Zimbabwe. Everyone used to throw in some money and the women would go once a week to the market and when they came back – eight or nine women – they'd all be walking back up the hill with the food balanced on their heads!! They'd cross the road and the cars would stop 10 or 20 metres back from them out of respect and not wanting to hit them or frighten them. The University was the lifeblood of the town!

Because of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa at that time, with co-operatives being one of the few black organisations which were allowed to exist at all, each of these southern Africans was intensely politicised.

As *Cookie* remembers: I had already been involved in the anti-Apartheid stuff in Australia. And I took with me – and I wore it! – an ANC T-shirt. One of the

South African blokes I spent a lot of time with wanted that shirt badly. I didn't want to give it up – because I liked it and it meant a lot to me too – but mainly because I was worried about what would happen to this bloke if he wore it over there (or maybe even when he had it through Customs). But this bloke was persistent and in the end I gave it to him – I dunno what he did with it! He couldn't have worn it! He'd have got shot!

They all told him about their lives in South Africa under Apartheid and in Rhodesia under white-minority rule. Cookie met up with Sophie some years later, when she came over to Australia, representing the ANC – the African National Congress – Nelson Mandela's party which was waging the struggle against the South African regime. When they were at Coady together in 1979, Sophie would tell Kevin about how she used to sneak out at night in South Africa to go to ANC meetings – when the organisation was illegal and she would have been jailed or worse if she had been caught. Just from talking with these activists over cooking and dinner, Kevin says he came away with 'a bigger picture'. It is significant that he interpreted all the work of the students he was close to – including the priests and nuns – in class terms as he did with Asirvadam, whom he said was 'just like a union organiser' as he went about organising and freeing debt-bonded labourers. Overall, Kevin summed up his fellow students by saying: 'All of these people had a good understanding of politics. All of them worked on the left.'

The course itself aimed to maximise the communication between participants. The main project over the whole semester was for students to apply some of the course's resources and approaches to a community development problem they were working on in their home countries and to which they would return. Kevin chose the gaining of land rights as a strategy for empowerment of Aboriginal people in NSW. These projects were shared and discussed among students at various points through the semester and Kevin was able to talk over his ideas for strategies and key goals. The assignment has long gone, but Kevin remembers those conversations vividly. The key goal he came to settle on during these discussions was that the land rights movement in NSW should concentrate on the inalienability of title – land should not be able to be sold so that land rights gains would be protected. He remembers the next important goals to have been the democratic membership of the land holding bodies, which might come to be called Land Councils, and the regional nature of representation, so the problems of alienation of leaders from their communities, which he had seen to happen in State-level centralised bodies like the Aboriginal Lands Trust, would not occur. Apart from the advice and critiques he received from other students, Kevin remembers ruefully that the South Africans expected that Aboriginal people in Australia would achieve their goals of empowerment long before the people of South Africa had achieved freedom.

From these many discussions, Kevin brought back to Tranby a strengthened interest in co-operative organisation to achieve social change through economic empowerment and particularly through education, drawing on the Frierian community-driven approaches from South America. Despite their many differences, Kevin was struck by how all of his fellow students were focused on empowerment – and their support and enthusiasm for each other convinced him of the importance of sharing ideas and networking with activists around the developing world.

Kevin: They were about empowerment! That was the critical thing for all of them, about empowering communities!

Kevin feels that the lessons he took most seriously to heart were in the debriefing session at the end of the course. The Coady staff stressed that all of the students were going back to difficult conditions where their ideas and visions would not necessarily be welcomed.

As *Cookie* remembers: They gave us a three day briefing about all the pitfalls about coming back with new ideas and trying to get them put into practice. They said, ‘Don’t try to do it all at once or in a hurry’. This was really important for the people like the Kenyans, who were going back to a church situation.

Cookie says the biggest lesson for him was that: ‘You have to bring people along with you – you can’t lead by being out in front.’

Over the next decades, he brought this approach both to his work in education with Tranby and as a land rights activist. He tried to work by carrying people along with him. In the development of the land rights movement and then the advice he was able to give on the structure of the Act¹⁰ and the Interim Land Council, he felt he had fulfilled many of the goals he had set during that time in Canada in 1979.

10 *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW).