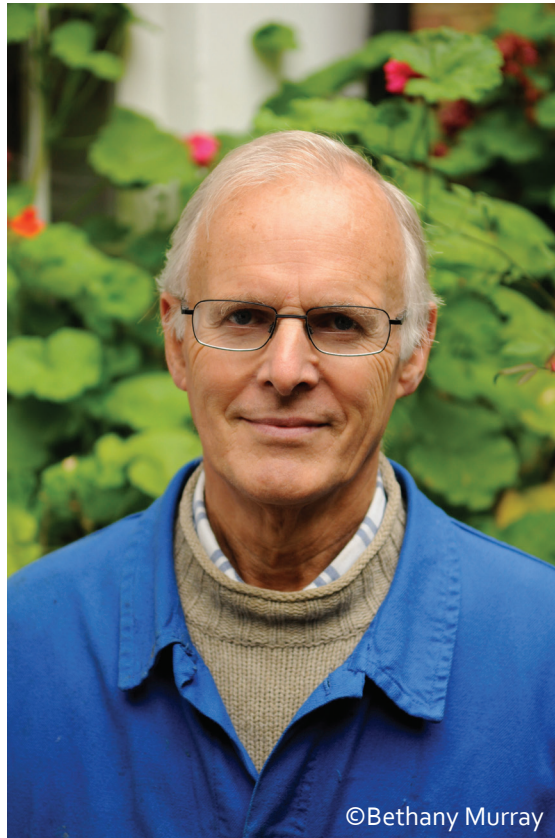


Celebrating the life and work of Fair Trade pioneer, Robin Murray, 1940–2017



The Dialectics of Change Personified

Elaine Jones, Board Director at Twin, 2001–2008 and 2010–2016

The publication of this first issue of the *Journal of Fair Trade* would have been greatly relished by Robin Murray, much-loved and dearly missed giant and founder of Alternative and Fair Trade in the United Kingdom. I met Robin while serving on the Board of Directors of Twin, where we served together for a total of thirteen years. The 'Twins' of Twin and Twin Trading are a 'twin structure': a non-profit organisation that owns a trading company. This structure combines trade, marketing, programmes and advocacy to build market systems that create better livelihoods for farming groups growing coffee, cocoa and nuts. Twin is all about connecting actors along the value chain and facilitating meaningful, global partnerships between buyers, donors and farmer co-operatives; with a shared vision of using trade to enable sustainable and vibrant farming communities to develop and prosper. The Twins were born in 1985 out of the ashes of the Greater London Council, where Robin worked as Chief Economic Adviser from 1981 until its abolition in 1985 under Margaret Thatcher.

I was introduced to Twin by my friend and colleague Jacqui MacDonald, when she was Head of what was then known as the Trade Not Aid Programme at The Body Shop International, founded by Anita and Gordon Roddick. I was hired as the Trader for the Americas in 1994 – a grand title! We were working to establish direct trading relationships with community-based enterprises to supply The Body Shop with raw materials and accessories. Twin Trading was one of the first groups to bridge the gap between a giant multinational organisation and a tiny group of indigenous women producing body scrubs from cactus fibre in Mexico, and so I entered into the university of Fair Trade under the tutelage of Robin and other big names such as Michael Barratt Brown.

This also marked the beginning of a long friendship with the Editor-in-Chief of this Journal, Pauline Tiffen, who was then Managing Director of Twin and an inspirational leader of the Fair Trade movement. Those who were close to the Fair Trade movement and who were involved in the boom years of the 1990s will remember the thought leadership exercised by Robin and by Michael Barratt Brown. For me, attending the Twin board meetings was like visiting an intellectual gymnasium. The workout started as soon as you walked through the door. I would leave feeling invigorated and would take the learning back to my day job, hungry to return for the next workout session.

Robin had an enormously generous spirit. He had a way of making you feel that you were making a special contribution, which always made me feel both valued and inadequate at the same time. When Robin asked me if I would take over from him as Chair when he wanted to take up a position providing maternity cover for our mutual friend Hilary Cottam at the Design Council, I felt overwhelmed. How could I succeed Robin Murray? But he was never far away and continued his mentorship even as he was breaking new ground at the Design Council.

I knew that Robin was involved in a plethora of spheres that sought to influence change in thinking about more democratic and egalitarian economic systems and politics. This only really came home to me in its full force when I attended his memorial service in November 2017. When I was asked to write this tribute, I knew that to do Robin justice, it must acknowledge the multi-dimensional, prolific Robin as well as his massive contribution to the sphere of Fair Trade. Just as Robin lived and breathed dialectics, as I have studied all the tributes from the multiple spheres he inhabited, I have come to realise that his life and his work are all completely interconnected by the thread of Robin's values and his systems thinking.

Indeed, the dialectics of change is reflected in the strapline of the *Journal of Fair Trade* – Action ≈ Learning ≈ Theory ≈ Justice – and the transformational change that both contributors and readers want to see and be through the movement we are a part of.

What follows is a compilation of tributes from contributors who appreciate Robin's legacy to Fair Trade and the multiple spheres in which Robin moved and applied his influence in his untiring quest to make the world a better place.

Robin Murray – Memories and Legacy

Pauline Tiffen, Managing Director/Worker at Twin, 1986–2000

In the manic days of an expiring, soon-to-be abolished Greater London Council, Robin Murray used his considerable clout and knack for outstanding visionary thought – he made wildly exciting ideas sound so obvious and easy – to channel funds into a new venture to be dedicated to exploring ways to trade for mutual benefit, called the Third World Information Network (Twin) and Twin Trading.

Twin and Twin Trading were founded in 1985, initiated with a series of workshops attended by like-minded men (it has to be said) and activists from around the world – Mozambique, Senegal and South Africa to name a few – all hard at work challenging and attempting to find dignified liberation and economic survival in the face of an emerging neo-liberal onslaught. Once mocked as 'Ken Livingstone's foreign policy department', the four-year forward funding for the Twins was a licence to go out and make a difference. From day one, Twin was a network in a 'pre-network' era. Later, the acronym alone would stand as the organisation's name, as the world and our concepts of first, second and third worlds changed around us and the ideas of networking, matrix methodologies and the greater efficiencies of non-hierarchical forms versus trust-based forms of organisation took hold. My first job at Twin was 'Information and Network Officer' – there cannot have been many of those around.

Commonplace today, the then highly unusual interlinked structure of non-profit and for-profit companies, with a 'self-perpetuating oligarchy' to run them and keep them 'true' marks Robin's strategic awareness of the importance and meaning of organisation formation, of form following content and of the permanent risk of values dilution. This would play out again and again in the multiple, innovative and catalytic initiatives dreamed up and rolled out by Twin and Twin Trading – Cafédirect, Divine Chocolate and, later, Liberation Nuts.

Robin contributed in ways that cannot be measured to the unique governance of the embryonic Twins and their offshoots. He was the first to back the decision of the workers, led by then Director Richard Day, to capitalise

our grant and earn money: a highly atypical position for 'lefties'. While we struggled a little over the use of the word 'profit' versus 'surplus' (with Michael Barratt Brown never quite able to use the former), it was a statement of our intention to live on beyond the grant and to be not just successful on our own terms politically but also viable.

As Managing Director and worker for fourteen years at the Twins (and having been active on many Boards and governance structures since), from Robin I acquired many tools to support and defend social enterprises and the brave people in them, which I have used the world over. From Robin, I learned the incredible and simple importance of taking good minutes. Robin's attention to detail and his indivisible incorporation of everything from the micro to the macro and the relationship of our decisions to our values and principles were a critical factor in Twin's evolution and my own, particularly in moments of strife. He was meticulous and sometimes ruthless in holding people to account, socialising the ideas and decision-making process, providing succour to those fighting within organisations – our own and those within our network – to sustain the vital commitments made in the face of opposition or retrenchment.

Robin was an adventurer. Twin was his ship. As Twin grew and its trading and ventures spun off, he delighted in the successes and the failures. He saw opposition and crisis as opportunity. 'When you are sunk in a deep hole', he would say in the many such moments along the way, 'you have to do the hard work to decide which way you want to be facing when you climb out.' I cannot tell you how many times I have quoted this guidance! Robin's day-to-day take on alternative business never strayed from the realities (and horrible dilemmas and challenges presented) but wove into these realities a search for and appreciation of a different feel and purpose. However, while an economist with a fascination for numbers, I doubt many of his profession would ever look into not just the credibility of the quantified outcomes but the 'aesthetic' of a business plan. This was Robin's way of testing the 'rightness' and 'justice' of a proposal and its implementation: its beauty. Failure to support and show solidarity to allies and comrades was ugly, for Robin.

Robin was supported and also challenged – something he relished – by a host of incredible minds and hearts around the Twin board table, including Michael Barratt Brown, Teodor Shanin, Vela Pillay, Peter Robbins and Sandy Balfour. He was particularly prescient about the dangers of mainstreaming Fair Trade, during the rollout of the modest and values-driven Stichting Max Havelaar in the Netherlands, into a series of national certification schemes for Fairtrade (one word) with a supranational oversight body. He foresaw the structural limitations, the co-optation and the future defeats and warned against the surrendering of the alternative economic nature of our project; in the words of Richard Day, being 'in but against the market'.

Twin's early entry into the domain of branding and intellectual property with the launch of Cafédirect and Divine Chocolate superceded the certification model, Robin argued, adding and sharing equity value that had previously accrued only to brand owners. He saw this as the source in a post-modern economy of far greater leveraging power (with the increasing dominance of retailers) than other traditional capitalist mechanisms for control of pricing. Through trial and practice, we realised that transformation/processing and working up the value chain – an early premise of economic development and even industrial strategy – could seldom deliver power or income to the weakest players in a global market dominated by intangibles. Yet, Robin was one of the first, with Michael Barratt Brown, to see from the Twin experiment that alternative trade praxis did generate economic change: dialectically, by opposition, by example and, even more simply, competitively. Would or could Cadbury have switched to Fairtrade if we had not created the sourcing conditions (the largest Fair Trade-certified cocoa co-op in the world) and challenged them head-on on the supermarket shelves? Did Robin predict the 'ditching' of the label and co-optation of the messages we have seen (by Sainsbury, Cadbury, Marks & Spencer) – yes, he did. This was exciting for Robin, but imperfect solutions to this challenge persist.

As Managing Director of Twin for more than a decade, I experienced the care and presence of Robin as a more or less permanent tutorial or post-doctoral viva! Challenging, supporting and sometimes admiring, no business books or professional self-improvement courses for me came from Robin. 'I think you will like this', Robin would say, dropping a copy of Le Roy Ladurie's *Montailou* (a portrait of life in a medieval village and an exposition of the universal and permanent role of beliefs and resistance in daily life, sometimes subtitled 'the promised land of error') on my desk. To Robin's patient and generous tutelage, I must add here, of course, that

of Michael Barratt Brown (*Fair Trade: Reform and Realities in the International Trading System*, Zed Books; *Short Changed: Africa and World Trade*, Pluto Press) and Teodor Shanin (*Peasants and Peasant Societies*, Blackwell; *The Awkward Class*, Oxford Clarendon Press; *The Idea of Progress*, Zed Books).

Together Robin and I conceived of and produced a series of papers (circa 1997, unpublished) funded by the Department of International Development, and we organised debates on the key concerns and insights gleaned from our practical work: on branding, intellectual property, Fairtrade Certification structures, uneven bargaining power of producers, asymmetrical access to information and on what alternative multinationals should look like. These ideas were all ahead of the curve, typifying that amazing place Robin occupied in his life – active, passionate and determined in the here and now, constantly squeezing lessons from life to prepare for and mould the future.

We have come far since then, and we are surrounded with multinationals that are ethical and committed to sustainability. This needs to be challenged and re-shaped. The launch of this new *Journal of Fair Trade* aims to reclaim the best practices and values that contribute to mutuality and equity in trade. Its companion, the Fair Trade Society, is a membership-based organisation with a network and website providing a forum and funnel for new work, ideas and outspoken debate. Robin's Fair Trade papers are a model for where and how the Fair Trade Society and the *Journal of Fair Trade* aim to engage. In his honour, we dedicate this volume to him. We hope to publish Robin's papers in the future.

Robin Murray was an inspired and an inspiring man. We are less supported and affirmed now he is not with us. I wish he were here, but I am sure our works and continued resistance would please him greatly.

Crisis and Opportunity? Robin and the Launch of Divine Chocolate

Sandy Balfour, Chair of Divine Chocolate, 1998–2010

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Divine Chocolate has brought hope, joy, inspiration and delicious life-affirming chocolate to many people across the world – and it exists because one person showed the courage, imagination, chutzpah and sheer bloody-mindedness to stand tall when it would have been easier to duck. That person was Robin Murray.

There is, of course, a long backstory. Suffice to say there was a moment when the fledgling organisation was in crisis. The idea was good, but the money was not in place. Debts were mounting, and there was a question over whether we could continue. Most of us had doubts; Robin had none. This was not about money, he insisted. This was an idea whose time had come. This was about people and people, in Robin's eyes, were infinitely more important than money. And so, after a round of fretful meetings, we went ahead. Divine grew and prospered and became the global inspiration we see today.

We tend to forget the bad times, but I never have – because a bad time with Robin was never really a bad time. He had that extraordinary ability to make light of a crisis and to smile in the face of danger. He was a visionary who loved detail, a patrician who loved people.

It was a delight to know him and a privilege to work with him. Nothing gives me greater joy than to know that all that Divine has come to be might never have happened had not Robin, at the key moment, been – well, been Robin.

I will miss him more than words can say.

A Co-operative Visionary

Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK

Adapted from an article originally published in *Co-op News*: Mayo, E. (2017, January 3). Robin Murray: A tribute. *Co-op News*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenews.coop/119111/topic/development/robin-murray-tribute/>

Co-operation has always attracted visionary thinkers and Robin Murray, who passed away in 2017, was one.

Pointing to a private sector out of sync with the major issues of the day and an eroded state, Robin once said that the economic system has 'all the hallmarks of a Shakespearian economic tragedy, the principal characters unable to escape from their tragic flaw' (Murray, 2015). And in Shakespeare's tragedies, it could be

other characters in the cast that come to the fore at the end. Often, after misfortune and misrule, their brief speeches of closure at the end would close on the theme of good governance. In line with that, Robin's work focused on those sources of economic action and innovation often sidelined in mainstream analysis, notably around fair trade, the co-operative sector and wider civil or social economy.

Robin was an Associate of Co-operatives UK from 2010, alongside a host of distinguished affiliations, such as the London School of Economics (LSE) and the Young Foundation. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and at the LSE. He then joined the London Business School, where he lectured in Economics, moving to the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex where he was a Fellow for twenty years.

In the 1980s, he was appointed by Ken Livingstone, London Mayor, as Director of Industry for the Greater London Council, helping to promote a new industrial strategy, which, at a time of rapid economic change, with a hollowing-out of industry in the capital, had extraordinary success. Robin worked with a team of talented colleagues, including Michael Ward, who went on to found the Centre for Local Economics Strategies, and Hilary Wainwright, founder of Red Pepper.

In 1985, he helped to found Twin and Twin Trading – fair trade pioneers with a focus on the practical development of co-operatives in supply chains overseas. Twin's sister was Traidcraft, founded out of the Christian churches, whereas Twin's roots were in the trade union and co-operative sectors. In the 1990s, he served as Director of Development in the Government of Ontario, returning with a passion for green enterprise. He also co-wrote the first pamphlet for the think-tank Demos on reforming taxation, which made him front-page news for a short while. That was not what he craved.

Robin was someone who enjoyed collaboration, with a breadth of interests and a passion for learning. As Stephen Yeo, the distinguished historian of co-operation, comments, Robin's own achievements were 'always drowned by his enthusiasms for what his friends and comrades had done' (personal correspondence). In 2011, true to that, he delivered on a commission that I had approached him to lead, which was to look at the future of the co-operative sector. The report *Co-operation in the Age of Google* was hugely influential in the UK and overseas (Murray, 2011).

He made it clear that the sector had lost some of the cutting edge that it had arguably held before, identifying the extent to which co-operative methodologies had been adapted for use outside of the formal co-operative sector. At the same time, he argued that co-operation tended to come in waves. A surge of co-operation in the 1880s and 1890s in Europe and the United States followed in the wake of the long depression, as did rural electricity co-operatives in the United States in the response to the depression of the 1930s: 'Standing back, we can see that just as there have been long waves of economic prosperity and crisis, so there have been long waves of co-operation' (Murray, 2015).

His recommendations, based on the potential conditions for a new wave, were ambitious. The sector needed to be more open to innovation, more effective in its integration and more internationalist in its reach. A passionate supporter of the case for co-operative education, he argued for the establishment of a Co-operative University in the United Kingdom (a concept which is moving closer thanks to work by the Co-operative College). He helped to start an Innovation Programme at Co-operatives UK, with the world's first Co-operative Innovation Prize, run in partnership with the UK Department for Business.

Where systems of co-operation had successfully realised economies that served to create a genuine advantage, it was typically the success not of a single enterprise but a network of co-operatives, operating together with the relationships and systems of production that could outcompete investor-owned models. Co-operatives, he suggested, rarely fly solo, flourishing instead where the principle of co-operation between co-operatives takes root. It was this, he argued, that explained the viral growth of health co-operatives in Japan, of renewable energy co-operatives in Denmark and Germany, of co-operative schools in England and of social co-operatives in Italy. And, as the numbers grow, so the system grows in complexity. As he later commented, such 'co-operative networks have found a way of achieving sufficient economies of scale and

specialization through such networks of collaboration without undermining the quality of relationships that lie at the heart of the co-operative advantage' (Murray, 2015).

The relevance of the co-operative model reflected underlying changes in patterns of economic production. The twentieth-century model was one of the corporate pyramid, based on the principle of compartmentalisation, that management, like work, could be broken down into self-contained parts. Each part would operate according to rules established from above and coordinated by those at the top. It was a model suitable for mass production and was developed first for corporations and then for the state. Yet it is a model, Robin argued, that is quite unsuited to the complexity of modern production, where the demands now are to increase the autonomy of the frontline and break down the silos that have traditionally divided them. Post-Fordism, in short, was about decentralisation and integration, offering the scope for new systems of 'distributed co-operation'.

At Co-operative Congress in 2011, Robin presented his findings and stayed talking with co-operative development practitioners in the bar with characteristic charm and politeness until 3 a.m. in the morning. He also served on the Wales Commission on Co-operatives and Mutuals, together with Dame Pauline Green, former President of the International Co-operative Alliance. As good as that report was, the flow of creative and substantive e-mails from Robin as a Commissioner encouraging a look at wider options, such as a co-operative investment bank for Wales modelled on Caja Laboral in Spain, pointed to what could have been.

When the idea of 'social innovation' started to gain recognition, Robin travelled widely to spread the word, always open to the new. Through fair trade, for example, he learned of the wider work of co-operatives in Japan, creating farmer-to-consumer-to-farmer links domestically and overseas. In 2017, posthumously, he was awarded the Albert Medal by the Royal Society of Arts in London for his work on social innovation.

He e-mailed me after visiting Crumlin Gaol in Belfast. He was there to talk about social innovation in the context of peace and reconciliation. Later, he was shown round the gaol – 'so shocking', he reported

... that I find it hard to write about. I was with one of the people who had been interned there in the 70s and who had (bravely, I thought) decided to return. Talk about co-operation! The extraordinary and terrible world of the prisoners. The prisoner's dilemma which is all about individualism is in some ways the opposite of what seems to characterise life there. The ex prisoner was the one who has been the driver of the Irish language movement in the Falls Road, which now has 41 schools that teach Irish across the communities. One of his favourite words is meitheal, that is pronounced mehal, which he translated as together, or what one says when there is a break in the weather and adjoining farms work together to save the hay. But we might translate as mutual or co-operative. (Personal correspondence)

In later years, as an Associate of Co-operatives UK, he was active in working with Pat Conaty and Laurie Gregory among others on the challenges of social care and the kind of innovations that could develop a person-centred approach. He was drawing in part on his time at the Design Council, in part on his acute sense of how to make mutuality work in business terms, for commercial advantage. He was an active supporter of his local co-operatives, in Hackney, where he lived, and Cumbria, where he rested.

John Restakis has called Robin 'a beacon of hope, insight, and optimism for so many of us'. Hilary Wainwright, Editor of Red Pepper, said that 'Robin exuded vigour and hope. And he infected those around him with his mood'. Michel Bauwens, of the P2P Foundation, has written that 'my conversations with him had been electrifying, and we stayed in touch, meeting a few times in between. He was an amazing man and his life story left me speechless. He was a true hero!' (personal correspondence). His widow, Frances, is co-ordinating the collection of Robin's writings with the intention to publish these.

My last time with Robin was spent by his bed, talking about values and how co-operatives work well when their values inspire them to be courageous, to do new things. To the end, he was hopeful and I sign off this tribute to a co-operative visionary with his own words of hope:

The informal information economy is open and global. It is driven by interest and enthusiasm rather than money. The bulk of its traffic is free. It is taking time to digest the implications of these changes, and for those involved to work out what rules are necessary to govern behaviour. Some have seen it as a new form of the commons, and looked at codes of behaviour that have been developed by those using common land or fishing grounds. But this informal economy is more than sharing a common resource, for with the web the resource is unlimited. It is a site for relationships, and where joint projects are involved, it requires the kind of qualities found in those pioneer communities where everyone worked together to raise the roof of a home.

It is growing with the speed and diversity of a tropical forest. It is informal and astonishingly inventive. It shares many of the same values and practices of formal co-operatives and opens up numerous possibilities for a meshing between them. William Morris's *News from Nowhere* depicted a world based on mutualism that for more than a century was seen as utopian. But in the last decade, it has emerged as a reality not on the banks of the Thames but in the world of the web.

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