

## STAFF AT THE COOP

June 28, 2020

TO THE EDITORS,

Like so many, I appreciate the Coop's staff, who, along with essential workers across the city, keep coming to work. Unfortunately, members are not working now, but this does not mean we are any less a coop based on member labor. I think we should return to the model of member labor (adjusted as needed for safety) that has served us so well for 47 years. Two pages I heard over the intercom as I was shopping this week led me to think that some of the staff at the Coop have forgotten about that model, as it has been solely staff running the Coop for almost three months.

I heard several pages referring to members as "shoppers." This may seem like an innocuous phrase, but it indicates a shift that I hope is unintentional and short-lived; namely, the shift to a bifurcated staff/customers model. The Coop has never referred to members as shoppers or customers, because those phrases suggest competing interests between store owners (or staff ) and those who shop. Our Coop is practically unique in rejecting that division, which is why members can trust the Coop to provide the groceries we want without advertising or deceptive practices, and why the staff can trust the Coop to provide employment conditions that adhere to their values. I hope both temporary and permanent staff will remember to address members as "members" and not further erode the culture of cooperation that thrived pre-Covid.

Similarly, I heard a lengthy page asking members to contribute to a collection by staff for the Bail Project. As it happens, I used to work in criminal justice reform—for the same organization that the Bail Project's founder got her start in—indeed, worked with her. I agree that bail reform is important work. But I am not sure why the staff is collecting for that particular project (there are several other projects, and many more established organizations, doing vital justice reform work). I wonder whether the collection effort represents some broad consensus among the entire staff, or if some of the staff can now raise money for whomever they want. It all seems opaque to me, in

terms of who decided which organizations to support, and who decided who could decide. Again, I am left feeling like staff are not working as part of a cooperative, certainly not a member-labor cooperative.

Perhaps some staff would prefer that the Coop be a workers' cooperative, like the Rainbow Grocery Coop in San Francisco. Rainbow is great, but we are not that kind of a coop. Even in the age of Covid-19 anxiety, I hope our Coop will maintain its uniquely wonderful reliance on the cooperation of all 17,000 of us working together. We have done a great job of this so far.

*In Cooperation,  
Rachel Porter*