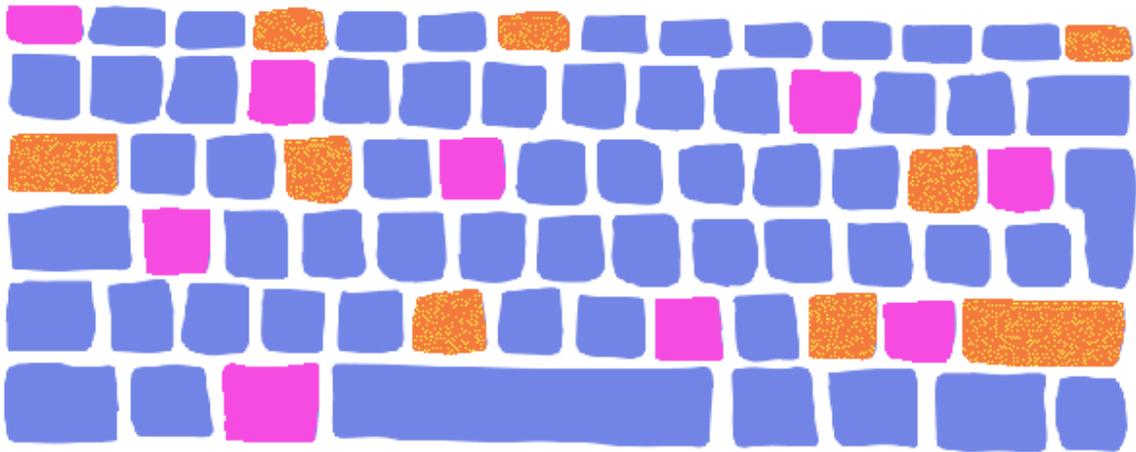


APRIL 30, 2024

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## **Please Expand List of Vegan Foods**

Dear Park Slope Food Coop,

As a vegan who has been a member of the Coop for over 20 years with a vegetarian daughter, I am of course very happy with the wonderful selection of fresh produce you carry year-round. But I am constantly disappointed by some of the packaged products which are either lacking in options, or which have been discontinued.

For instance, for years the only real vegan jerky we have carried is the same extremely dry Primal Spirit sticks. There are many vegan jerky brands now—for instance Louisville Vegan Jerky, which can be found at Whole Foods and is excellent—and even Beyond has their own brand now. Please let's have more vegan jerky options!

Also, in the yogurt department we could really use more Silk soy yogurts or some other brand of soy yogurt, for instance a vanilla flavor and a plain soy yogurt. Forager is tasty, but cashew (and oat and coconut) yogurts have NO nutritional value—no protein or calcium. Soy is the most nutritious type of yogurt and milk for vegans.

Lastly, please bring back Sweet Earth Benevolent Bacon, Quorn Chiqin Fillets, and Meatless Grounds (vegetarian), Earth Balance Vegan Cheddar Flavor Squares, Wholly Veggie Buffalo Cauliflower Wings, Van Leeuwen vegan chocolate ice cream, and Mings Bings Plant-based Egg and Cheese flavor if possible. It would also be great if we could sell Impossible Burgers in addition to our other Impossible products.

*Thank you so much for considering,  
Eva Airdjis*

### **Needed: More Transparency In Regards to General Coordinators Team**

Dear Coop Members,

In the aftermath of General Manager Joe Holtz's suspension in the summer of 2022, Personnel Committee Member Jean Callahan was quoted in the *Gazette* as saying there were "deep and painful divides" within the Coop Coordinators group.

I wrote a letter to the *Gazette* that fall asking how the Coop could allow such discord to be hiding in our organization as we shopped and worked.

In the time since I heard nothing about the issue, so at the recent March General Meeting (GM) I asked about the situation. We were informed that the General Coordinators team has been working with the NY Peace Institute (an organization that promotes peace in our community). I said this was great, but it was too bad that it took my question at the GM almost two years later to learn about it.

We are now in the process of establishing new “Personnel Policies, Personnel Committee, and General Coordinator Roles.”

I think these procedures ought to include mechanisms for more transparency and communication between the coordinators, the Personnel Committee and the members, such that we are informed about things like the above, and more!

The membership deserves to be kept up to date about coordinator and Personnel Committee activity ongoingly. Not just when a major issue is percolating, a big decision is pending or a crisis is taking place. What about a report in every *Gazette* issue about what these people are thinking about, the projects they are working on and what they are discussing in their meetings?

*Andy Feldman*

## **Value of Walkers**

To the editor:

As a Coop member for 22 years, I think the system of walkers has been one of the most useful and practical improvements that I’ve observed. I remember some letters that derided it, but it has truly stood the test of time.

I notice instances where shoppers are left waiting longer than necessary or practical. Wouldn't it make sense to expand the number of people doing walking shifts at higher volume shopping times to eliminate long waits?

Nice opportunity for a pleasant walk while serving a useful purpose. All while giving your dog some exercise if you wish!

*Cordially,  
Saul D. Raw*

## **Expanding Access to General Meetings**

Dear Fellow Coop Members:

I'm writing to advocate for a proposal I submitted in December 2023 to make General Meetings hybrid (in-person and online).

I submitted this proposal to support member participation. Our current GM venue is the Prospect Park Picnic House, with a capacity of 240. Our membership is 15.5k, which means a maximum of 0.015% of us can participate in the Coop's policymaking on any given issue. The PSFC mission states that we "seek to maximize participation at every level." Given the precedent-setting pandemic-era online GMs, it's regrettable that we aren't utilizing everyday technologies to fulfill that mission.

Since submitting this proposal, I've talked with folks for whom expanded avenues of attendance are critical to their ability to help shape our Coop. These are people with accessibility needs, for whom travel can be burdensome and large gatherings potentially dangerous; caregivers, whether new parents or people with ailing family, who need to stay close to loved ones; members who live in different boroughs, or even different parts of the state or country. If these members contribute their labor, they deserve the opportunity to have a say in the Coop's governance.

Since submitting my proposal, I've been notified multiple times that I should prepare to present, only to be told that for one reason or another it has been taken off the agenda. The latest reason was that the Picnic House can't hold all the people who would want to talk about this proposal, and larger venues aren't available; I don't take pleasure in this irony.

If you support this proposal, please reach out to our administration and let them know you'd like to see it come to the floor. We all deserve to participate, and to me, this proposal is straightforward common sense.

*In cooperation,  
Morgan Võ*

## **Endorsing Ramon Maislen and Sondra Shaievitz for the Board of Directors**

Dear Fellow Coop Members,

I would like to endorse Ramon Maislen and Sondra Shaievitz for the Board of Directors. Ramon and Sondra both spoke at the March GM. Their responses were clear, agreeable, and focused exclusively on the role.

I would gladly call them both "Pro-Coop."

Ramon and Sondra have many decades of membership experience between them. This sweat equity is important: I feel uneasy about so many other candidates since they have only a few years at the Coop and want to jump into such an important role. Some of them have admitted to only attending a few General Meetings, if at all. This role requires a deep-rooted understanding of our community and organization. That understanding can only be acquired through long-term experience, both in working shifts and in participating in our organizational processes.

Ramon and Sondra come with a great deal of experience in business and law. Their

experience focusing on the legal and financial bottom line for our Coop is vital to our stability.

Ramon and Sondra appear fully capable of setting aside personal opinions for the greater good of the PSFC. They accept what the Board role has always been, to simply approve the wishes of the general meeting and not to use it for activism inside or outside the Coop.

I encourage fellow members to support Ramon Maislen and Sondra Shaievitz by voting YES for them during the election. It's worth noting that according to PSFC's voting guidelines, you can vote YES for more than one candidate (two yeses, for example, is fine), and you can vote NO for as many as you'd like. Also important—candidates require more YES votes than NO votes to be elected.

*Sincerely,  
Elian Jeifez*

## **What Happened to Jason Toothpaste?**

Fellow Cooperators:

Did you notice the “new and improved” Jason toothpaste? We've tried three different flavors and they're all disgusting.

I reached out to Hain Celestial, the parent company, and they provided the old and new ingredient lists. They're almost completely different products: two thirds of the ingredients changed and the only ones to remain the same are water, glycerin, silica and stevia extract—and stevia jumped up from almost the bottom of the list to close to the top. (I think stevia is the ingredient that I find so disgusting.)

This is just a simple example of American capitalism. Someone makes a great product and builds up a small base of loyal customers, a large corporation buys them out,

tries to expand market share by releasing a “new and improved” version that’ll appeal to the masses, and destroys the product in the process. This is why we can’t have nice things.

*Petty rant over,  
Christopher Diamond*

## **Coop Members Engage in Intimidation Campaign**

Dear Members,

I am a new member of the PSFC and the Director of the Tow Center at Brooklyn College.

The General Coordinators inquired about renting the Tow Center’s theater on February 13, 2024, for a Coop-wide discussion about a boycott of Israeli products. They requested extra security, so I assured them that our events were overseen by a private security firm.

I attended the March GM for work credit, where Joe Holtz announced the Tow Center’s theater as a potential meeting space, but also that the Coop would no longer need the venue. On March 27, Joe withdrew the inquiry. On April 1 though, Joe emailed me to see if the theater was still available.

Before that, from Friday, March 29, through Sunday, March 31, I received 11 voice-mails and was forwarded an email sent to senior Brooklyn College leadership that urged them to deny rental requests by the PSFC. This was clearly a coordinated campaign by Coop members opposed to any discussion of a boycott. All these communications followed a script; each message suggested that violence would occur if the college rented to the PSFC. Of course, based on these threats, Brooklyn College can no longer rent the theater to the Coop. Additionally, I’ve been adversely affected professionally and, since most of these messages were left by Coop members, I now feel

much less comfortable at the PSFC. I offered space to help the Coop carry out its member-driven operations, and I do not appreciate being bullied and harassed.

How can the Coop have difficult conversations if intimidation tactics like these continue to obstruct discussions? It is essential that we find ways to renew the Coop's democracy.

*Dena Beard*

### **Voicing Dissent: Standing Against BDS Petition at Park Slope Coop**

To the Editor,

In recent weeks, supporters of the BDS movement have been stationed prominently outside the Coop, actively soliciting signatures for a petition urging a boycott of Israeli products. One of them wrote to the *Gazette*, painting a rosy picture of the reception she received.

However, there's growing sentiment among some of us that this campaign is deeply offensive, fostering divisiveness within our Coop community and exhibiting shades of antisemitism. Attempts by at least one Coop member to engage with the BDS supporters and express his concerns were met with disregard. Members who have approached the front desk with their objections have been informed that while the Coop has received numerous complaints, it cannot prohibit petitioners from gathering signatures on the sidewalk.

While acknowledging the right of individuals and organizations to advocate for their causes outside the Coop, many of us are eager to voice our opposition within our community. The apparent silence of passersby should not be misconstrued as silent consent; rather, it reflects discomfort and disagreement with the BDS petition. Numerous Coop members, including friends and acquaintances, share this discomfort and wish to ensure that our dissenting voices are also heard.

*In cooperation,  
Maya Bodinger*

## **Refusing Our Complicity**

Dear Members,

During February's GM, it was suggested that we should donate to the aid group Anera instead of pushing for a boycott at the Coop. As of April 2nd, Anera announced that it would be pausing operations in Gaza following the IDF's targeted strikes of three World Central Kitchen vehicles on April 1st, which killed seven aid workers, as well as the killing of Anera aid worker, Mousa Shawwa, by an IDF strike on March 8th. These killings follow the indiscriminate slaughter of more than 33,000 Palestinians by IDF violence since October of last year.

Supporting relief efforts is necessary, as is stopping the ongoing genocide. When relief is being cut off and aid workers themselves are murdered, our focus must be to refuse our complicity in the violence that exacerbates the need for relief in the first place. We can and must do many things at once, including enacting a principled boycott of Israeli goods at the Coop.

*In cooperation,  
Laura Henriksen*

## **A Ban on Israeli Products Threatens the Coop's Spirit of Inclusivity**

Dear Editor:

My favorite thing about PSFC is the warmth and diversity of our community. As a cooperative of Brooklyn residents with a myriad of unique identities and perspectives, every one of us is joyfully accountable for the labor required to keep PSFC's doors open and our shelves stocked. For me, the privilege of having access to produce that's

affordable, local and organic is a huge plus. However, what I appreciate most is the spirit of our collective that has transformed grocery shopping from a tedious chore into an expression of belonging. I rarely leave a shift without learning about a new vegetable or getting inspired by a fellow PSFC member to try a new recipe. Our modern world is a hectic, complicated and scary place, and PSFC feels like a haven from that. We care about each other. Over the past six months, well-meaning members of “PSFC Members for Palestine” have threatened the inclusive culture of our Coop with a call to ban products from Israel. They align themselves with the BDS movement whose messaging is widely known to incorporate antisemitic tropes about the perceived powers and evils of Jewish people. Antisemitic discrimination has triggered atrocious violence throughout history and is currently fueling attacks on Jewish people and spaces in New York City and throughout the United States. The conflict between Israel and Hamas is deeply polarizing; by adopting a ban against Israel, we would be inviting antisemitism into the PSFC. Such an act would alienate Jewish and pro-Israel members and attract negative PR. Most importantly, this boycott would undermine and erode our culture and values. We owe it to our community and to PSFC to be a beacon of inclusivity and belonging. It is for this reason that I oppose a ban on products from Israel.

*Sylvia Tobias*

### **Don't Like It? Don't Buy It!**

Dear Linewaiters' Gazette:

Recently I was approached on the sidewalk in front of the Coop asking to sign a petition supporting a boycott of Coop products imported from Israel. This came a week after my neighbor's home was vandalized with “FREE GAZA” spray paint (their door has a visible mezuzah), and days before I was told in a CEC 15 meeting if I had a problem with antisemitism in my son's school, I should just send him to private Jewish day school.

We moved to Park Slope 10 years ago, in part because of its beauty, friendly vibe and proximity to the park. Within the month I dragged my husband to the Food Coop's orientation. I'm a registered dietitian and value good quality food. I naively never locked my brownstone door during the day, that is until October 8th (we also have a visible mezuzah).

The hate that's invaded our community these last six months has been painful. You don't have to like or support a government or country overseas, but we're neighbors. We deserve a right to feel safe and welcome in Park Slope and at the Food Coop. Lately I have felt neither. This boycott is divisive. If buying tahini to make sabich sandwiches—the kind I like to get in Tel Aviv—bothers you so much, don't buy it.

So much of what we eat is rooted in who we are. Why are we ostracizing members? We should be welcoming differences in our community, not fueling hostility between each other. This demonization of Israel is outright antisemitism and there is no place for it at the Food Coop.

*Thank you,  
Shira Sussi*

## **Boycotting Israel is Hurtful to Many of Us, and Hurts the Coop**

Dear fellow members:

My message about the recent push to boycott Israeli products is simple and heartfelt: The proposal is deeply hurtful.

The last six months have been nightmarish for those of us with a direct connection to Israel and Palestine. This is a traumatic and scary time. Divisive efforts like BDS make it worse, not better. A boycott is hurtful because it assigns all the blame to one side, delegitimizing the experience of Israelis wrapped up in a complex conflict, along with the vast majority of Jews who have deep ties to Israel. And, it must be said, boycott-

ing Jews has a dark and sinister echo of centuries of systematic and murderous anti-semitism in both Europe and the Middle East. Critics of Israel have an affirmative obligation to distance themselves from antisemitism, and an indiscriminate tool like a countrywide boycott fails that test.

Some say that the fact that the boycott hurts is the point. But we should be better than that, and also mindful of our obligations as a community. Hurting Coop members is also hurtful to the Coop itself.

I understand the desire to take a stand, support suffering people and oppose war. But this boycott is not simply a convenient way to express solidarity with Palestinians under bombardment. We as a community owe it to our members with ties to both Israel and Palestine not to oversimplify the situation, and not to demonize people on either side.

Instead, let's devote our energy to positive and healing acts. Some of the products we carry at the Coop come from peace and co-existence initiatives in Israel and Palestine. Instead of boycotting them, let's feature and celebrate them.

*Josh Suskewicz*

## **Re: PSFC for Palestine**

To the Editor and Fellow Coop Members:

If you don't want to buy peppers grown in Israel, don't buy peppers grown in Israel. To insist, however, that everyone else must follow suit is domineering, wrong and, in this case, antisemitic.

For over 2,000 years, Jews have been singled out, isolated, scrutinized and subject to abuse. Explicit antisemitism is no longer socially acceptable. Today, however, Israel offers a convenient proxy for those who cannot tolerate a Jewish expression of inde-

pendence and sovereignty. Antipathy to Israel is not only fashionable, but the price of admission in many progressive spaces.

Israel is not above reproach. Absolutist and single-minded calls to eliminate it, however, are another thing entirely. No one's calling to eradicate other Coop sources with troubling human rights records such as Honduras, Ecuador or, for that matter, Texas. Yet "PSFC for Palestine" is openly committed to a movement that opposes Israel's mere existence. According to its own proponents, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement aims to eliminate the world's only Jewish state.

At the end of the day, a Coop boycott would not even register on the Israeli economy. It would, however, invariably lead many Jewish Coop members to feel unwelcome and send the message that it's acceptable to single out Jews for mistreatment. In that light, the zeal with which some have taken towards vilifying Israel understandably leaves many, including this Coop member, feeling rattled.

*Michael Snow*

## **Regarding a Potential Boycott of Israeli Products**

Dear Editor:

We've been here before. Some years ago there was a proposal to boycott Israeli products at the Coop. A rundown of products found that there were only a few products of Israeli origin that the Coop carried. Additionally, of course there were very divergent opinions within the Coop on Israel. We must look to the effective meaning of any boycott and the divisiveness of any movement within our membership. We have agreed, for instance, to no longer carry Cheerios, because of concerns about glyphosate. Most Coop members were in agreement on this. An Israeli boycott does not have the same level of support. Curiously, concerted action by people who claim to support Palestinians led SodaStream some years ago to close its West Bank facility, thus removing jobs from Palestinians. Was that a win for Palestinians overall? We must look at the

long-term effects of any action we take on the issue at hand but also on our ability to operate as a food store with a diverse population.

*In Cooperation,*  
*Adam Segal-Isaacson*

## **The Divisiveness BDS Seeds Is Antithetical to the Coop Mission**

Dear Fellow Members:

I was born in Israel and spent my formative years there. My grandfather, who emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust, was a small farmer who grew clementines and was a member of an agricultural cooperative. Perhaps, through random chance, I have crossed paths with a fellow PSFC member-owner who directly enjoyed the literal fruits of his labor.

The events of the October 7th massacre in Israel and the ongoing hostage crisis in Gaza weigh heavily on me on a daily basis. I also, deeply and unequivocally, empathize with the suffering of Palestinians and innocent civilians affected by the ongoing war on Hamas. I hope the silent majority of member owners also simultaneously hold both of these truths with heavy hearts.

My hope for the region is to achieve a just and lasting peace. The BDS approach undermines efforts for peace and coexistence by seeding resentment instead of encouraging cooperation. The BDS movement is in direct contradiction with peace-building, and makes reconciliation impossible. With this in mind, I cannot support the Coop joining the BDS movement.

The BDS movement makes it clear that peaceful coexistence is not its goal when they condone violence and criticize organizations and businesses that advocate for dialogue and mutual coexistence.

If the Coop votes to join the BDS movement, it will be in direct conflict with my values of supporting a peaceful resolution between Israel and Palestine and my household will, with broken hearts, leave the Coop.

*Sincerely,*

*Tali Rasis*

## **BDS: Historically Rejected By Responsible Parties**

To the Editors, Members, and Board of Directors,

BDS is a movement that primarily plays out on college campuses, where students vote to have their institutions divest from Israeli companies, refuse cooperation with Israeli universities and where students disrupt Israeli speakers. Support of this movement on campuses has also, not surprisingly, resulted in harassment, exclusion and even attacks on Jewish students, as well as damage to property. Several lawsuits are pending against these institutions for permitting an antisemitic climate, and government agencies are amping up policies against antisemitism. Nor is there evidence of university administrations acting on these student decisions.

As to food coops, more than a decade ago only one American food coop, Olympia, voted to boycott Israeli products, to the best of my knowledge. All others voted no: Port Townsend, Davis, Sacramento, Seattle, Ann Arbor, and finally, Park Slope, whose super-majority vote against a referendum in 2012 was essentially a vote against joining BDS.

The primary reasons for their decisions given by leaders at these coops were the lack of qualifications to take actions on international conflicts and to resolve the conflict in the Middle East; that such actions countered the purposes of a food coop; and that such actions would damage coops. In the case of Seattle Central, a committee member there called consideration of the boycott “a malignancy to our business.”

There is no evidence I can find that apart from our Coop, any other is revisiting campaigns to join BDS.

I add here that in 2016, the NYC Council voted, by a super-majority, in favor of a resolution “condemning all efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the global movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction the people of Israel.” Similar proposals have been passed by New York State and other states.

*Sylvia Lowenthal*

### **Why Is the PSFC a Success Story?**

Dear Coop Members:

Before joining the Coop, I was skeptical about the concept. Despite my reservations, the allure of affordable prices and quality produce convinced me to give it a try. I vividly recall my first shift, thinking, “Let’s just get this over with and return to my usual business.”

However, to my surprise, I discovered a peculiar joy in arranging fruits and vegetables. Initially, I couldn’t pinpoint the source of my contentment. Over time, it became clear: The satisfaction didn’t stem from the task of organizing produce itself, but from feeling connected to a diverse community of individuals, all united in the simple act of sorting carrots and apples. It was beautifully straightforward and profoundly unifying. At the end of the day, we’re all fundamentally alike, no matter your profession, where you were born, or your political views. There was a place for everyone to feel welcome.

I’ve enjoyed every shift at the Coop, growing to value its true inclusiveness and, of course, the exceptional food.

Recently, however, the atmosphere has shifted. Politics and polarization have crept

in, threatening the delicate fabric of our cooperative. The Coop is at a critical juncture. I earnestly hope we can all recall the core principles that have sustained our community since 1973 and strive to preserve this wonderful community as healthy and truly inclusive for all.

*Thanks,  
Yuval Inselberg*

## **Taking Issue With Coordinators' Corner Column**

Coop Members,

I am 68 years old and I joined the Coop when I was 23. For many years I was proud to be part of a cooperative that was tied to issues of food and labor justice. I learned from the Coop that organic growing practices were more important for farm workers than for me as a consumer, and that supporting their right to work without exposure to harmful chemicals was paramount.

Fast forward to now: Joe Holtz's recent piece (March 19 Coordinators' Corner) has upset me to my core. I'm frustrated and ashamed that the Coop has not taken a stand against the Israeli genocide, against Israel's deliberate starvation of Gazans, its aid blockades and its destruction and theft of Palestinian farmland. BDS seems like the least we could do.

I have known Joe Holtz since I joined the Coop. I have valued and respected the work he did to establish and sustain the Coop. In his writing, he worries about the Coop's future 50 years. Fifty years from now, it is very unlikely that Joe or I will be alive, but people can judge us then by what we did and said now, in the face of this genocide.

*Alyce Barr*

## **Response to 2/26/24 Coordinators' Corner**

To the LWG Editors:

I was dismayed and disappointed by the opinions expressed by Joe Holtz in his February 26 Coordinators' Corner column. His byline states that he speaks on behalf of all the General Coordinators. I would like to know by what process the rest of the coordinators agreed with what he said and why their names did not appear.

He states that some members feel unwelcome at the Coop because of the language of a petition. Who are these members and what is making them feel unwelcome? We as members and humans have the right to question and criticize our own government and any other foreign government, especially the conduct of a foreign state that is taking our tax dollars. I have read the petition from PSFC Members for Palestine and find nothing that could be interpreted as harassing about it.

I think it is an abuse of position and privilege for Mr. Holtz to favor one group of members over another and claim to represent the persons who direct the Coop. This is his personal opinion and has a chilling effect on open discussions and in a sense "poisons the jury pool" that will later be allowed to participate in some kind of far-off vote or consensus process (which I sincerely doubt will ever occur — it's all rhetoric to me). I think as a Coop it is an overdue time for us to have discussions about power and privilege and how they are used unfairly.

*Yours truly*

*Amina Ali*