JULY 23, 2024

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Letters to the Editor, July 23, 2024

Support for Parents of Young Children

Dear Coop Members,

I have been a Coop member for 23 years, and I am struggling more than ever to keep up my membership because I am now a single parent of two children, ages four and eight. I totally understand that the Coop tried its hardest to reinstate childcare, and it wasn't possible. So, what is the plan now to support parents? Could we contract with a local daycare center (and offer them free labor)? Could parents be allowed to bring their child with them while they work a shift (perhaps within a certain age range for certain types of shifts)? The Coop has been very thoughtful about making accommodations for many different types of members with special needs to remain in the community. We must now use that same creativity and inclusive spirit to figure out how to better accommodate the large number of members who have young children.

Daniel Vitali

ISO the Vitamin Aisle Guide Sheet

Dear Friends,

I have not seen the sheet that was at the end of the vitamin aisle where I could look something up and reference what I was looking for. Am I missing something?

Regards,
Bruce Zeines

Response from a receiving coordinator:

Dear Member,

Thanks for your question. When people ask me this I first briefly explain the organization of the aisle, which is divided into columns of shelves A through H, and each shelf has a number starting with the hanging items as number 1. The A to H are an organi-

zational system, not the names of products. I then point the shopping member to the look up computer, which is on the side of the ice cream case. You may know some of this, but for those who don't: enter a keyword into the search and items with that word will appear in a list. The list has a "Location" column. For the supplements aisle, the location column will say something like "Aisle 4b Location B6," where B6 indicates what column and shelf the product should be on. Sometimes, it's true, as products come in and out of stock they might get pushed to the next or previous shelf. But at least now you know the approximate area to look in!

Thanks again for the opportunity to explain the system for those not familiar.

Martha, Receiving Coordinator in supplements

Feeling Kind of Cranky

Dear Cooperators,

I know I'm getting older, parts of my body seem to ache more than they used to, and I do get upset at more things than I did in the past, but it may be due to the fact that I'm recently retired and have more time to contemplate. If you ask my wife I have way too much time to think about minutiae, but I've always thought about it, just starting to dig into it a little deeper.

As I was working a checkout shift, which I don't do that often, I was scanning for customers to check out and noticed two workers, maybe a little less motivated than I. One was reading a book and it was a big book, the other was looking at their phone. During that time there were customers looking to check out their goods and I called a customer over to my counter. I looked up after I checked out that customer and saw that the worker/members were still not doing what they needed to do and people were waiting on line. I didn't have time to bring it up with the squad leader but

did feel like I would feel less cranky if the worker/members did what they were supposed to be doing.

Thank you,
Mark Paperno

Hybrid Meetings Would Improve Coop Democracy

Hello!

In 2021 New York City voted in the most consequential local election in a generation where, due to term limits, we elected essentially a new city government. Despite its importance, only 21% of NYers voted. At the time, I worked at an organization whose mission was to improve local democracy. After that election, I was tasked with researching and publishing policy recommendations to improve turnout.

I give this background to say I have spent plenty of time considering ways to improve voter participation. A key principle in improving turnout is removing barriers. In the case of PSFC, the requirement that voting must be in-person is the most obvious barrier. Politically, Coop members likely support policies like “no-excuse absentee,” which opens up absentee ballots to all, so they don’t need to go to the polls. Such policies improve voter turnout and expand the electorate. Hybrid GMs are the Coop’s version of this policy.

In-person meeting requirements are a barrier for many. I live 45 minutes from the Picnic House. Adding an hour and a half total commute often becomes the deciding factor as to whether I attend. It isn’t just me. PSFC includes members from all five boroughs and even across state lines. Where someone lives shouldn’t determine their participation.

Due to the in-person voting requirements, members with disabilities or mobility impairments are often excluded from Coop democracy. Working parents and caretakers are also excluded from participation when they lack adequate childcare.

The Picnic House's maximum capacity is 240 or 1.5% of our membership. This means even when members want to vote on consequential decisions like the markup rate, mask mandates or a second Coop location, 98.5% of members can't participate! Hybrid meetings would improve participation by opening up GMs to all members, regardless of ability, location, or circumstance.

Dan Kaminsky

Her Body, Her Choice

To the Editors,

I'm writing in as a new member of the Coop. After two years of living in Park Slope, my family and I were finally able to navigate out of the unaffordable and disappointing local grocery options and—lo and behold—secure a membership. We felt like we won the lottery, but the reward was more cheese and kale options.

My first Coop shift entailed filling small bags with bulk spices in the basement. It was fun to scoop cumin and curry while chatting away about random topics. Phones were away, and we were just there being human. It was really special. I was hooked!

Three days later, I was shocked to learn that a group is pushing to incorporate a blanket ban on products from Israel. Is this the same Coop I joined? I want us to protect the Coop. It's truly a unique, special place for community and inclusivity, a place to celebrate things we have in common. A proposed blanket ban on Israel-associated products is misguided and shortsighted.

Proponents of the ban claim they want to increase democratic participation at the Coop. Is making choices for me democratic? How? I am not Jewish, but believe that standing up as an ally right now for Israel and my Jewish neighbors is important, especially as we witness incidents of hate increase in Brooklyn.

I've always been a part of the "progressive left," even when I disagree with some of the more extreme tactics of my cohorts. But I'm also a student of history. We must not stay quiet when others try to take away our freedom of choice.

Meg Robertson

On Our Coop's Roots

Fellow Coopers,

I've been disturbed by the assertion, both in recent General Meetings and in the pages of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, that political issues do not belong in the Coop. I strive to live by the critical contribution of second-wave feminists that "the personal is political." Indeed, this principle is at the foundation of the Coop, which strives to eschew transactional and exploitative food practices in favor of sustainability, community investment and fair labor. Without these very politically-minded ideas our beloved Coop would be just another organic grocery store.

Based on these recent claims that politics do not belong in the Coop, why should we take care to buy produce or coffee grown following certain fair labor practices? After all, the lives of farm workers have no bearing on my life in Brooklyn. The answer, of course, is that it is not acceptable for us to shut our eyes to the world around us. This principle is one we must try to follow generally, but especially since we are all members-owners of a cooperative involved in food purchasing, making us complicit in exploitation or accomplices in justice.

Conscious choices, whether to collectively contribute labor, stock food in accordance with certain principles or to act on political convictions via member democracy, are a vital part of our Coop. True large-scale issues such as food-related exploitation or climate change must be solved through many small actions equaling a greater whole. But the idea that this is an excuse to nihilistically bury our heads in the sand is antithetical to our community's most basic principles (one of which is **solidarity**). Any idea that divisive issues or politics do not belong in the Coop is absurd on its face, and should be left down the street at Union Market.

Aaron Posner

A Call for Mediation

Dear Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine,

I am writing on behalf of concerned Coop members. We fear your proposal to impose an anti-Israeli boycott aligned with the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) campaign may lead to increased physical and emotional harm to Jewish members. Some of us have already experienced verbal assaults and physical intimidation.

We acknowledge the passion and dedication your group brings to the cause of Palestinian rights. At the same time, we ask you to recognize that antisemitic hate crimes remain disproportionately high in many places, including here in New York City, which is why security measures are necessary at our synagogues, schools, and community centers.

The heightened tension since October 7 has validated and exacerbated our fears. We support the vision of two nation-states—Israel and Palestine—living side-by-side in peace. However, the rhetoric used by the BDS campaign and some members of your group, which often demonizes Israel and its supporters, undermines this vision and

conflicts with the inclusive values of our Coop. The mission statement says:

“We are committed to diversity and equality. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member.”

To this end, we propose a mediation session to address the following issues:

1. Clarification of how you intend to align the agenda of BDS with the principles of the Coop.
2. Discussion of the rise in confrontations among Coop members and strategies to ensure the safety and respect of all members.

Mediation could demonstrate that dialogue and mutual respect can lead to positive outcomes. We hope to work cooperatively with your group to find a solution that upholds the values of our Coop.

Sincerely,
Ramon Maislen, Coop 4 Unity

Another Jewish Coop Member for BDS

Dear Coop Members,

I write as a long-time Coop member and the daughter of Holocaust survivors. My grandfather was involved in the Zionist movement in Austria in the 1930s. As a teenager, I was involved in the leftist Zionist movement. However, over the last 40+ years, I have painfully come to realize that the establishment of Israel, as it is ***cur-***

rently configured is increasingly problematic. I support groups in Israel such as "Refusers" and "Voices Against War" who are working within Israel to support an end to the war AND the development of a more just and equitable society

Since last October, I've experienced horror and grief at unfolding events in Israel and Palestine. I mourned the deaths of Israelis and the taking of hostages. I've demonstrated with groups like Jewish Voice for Peace, demanding an immediate ceasefire and mourning the mounting toll, including the gruesome deaths of *many thousands* of Palestinian children in Gaza. I'm outraged that, even as famine spreads and Gaza's hospitals lie in ruins, our own government keeps using our tax dollars to fuel these atrocities.

I've always valued the Coop as not only a grocery store but a place to implement our visions of justice in the world. Through decades of experience with progressive activism, I've seen that unjust power is never defeated through persuasion alone. It has to be directly confronted. This was true in apartheid South Africa and is true for Israel. Boycotting Israeli products is a nonviolent method of creating constructive pressure that supports Palestine, and as such seems like a perfect fit for the Coop. Regardless of whether you agree with me, we all deserve the chance to weigh in on this crucial topic. Let's bring this matter to a vote and let the members decide!

Sincerely,

Judith Loebl

Food Justice at the PSFC

Hello,

At June's Annual Meeting, a member gave a terrific presentation on the efforts of the

PSFC Animal Welfare Committee to research our producers' animal welfare practices and to encourage our membership to make better ethical choices when purchasing animal products. Particularly heartening was when General Coordinator and Coop buyer Joe Szladek offered his gratitude during the discussion period, noting that PSFC buyers regularly consult the AWC info guides when making their decisions. I was proud to see that our community, from membership to administration, was taking great care to consider the ethical dimensions of our food consumption.

I was then disappointed when, while introducing himself during his own presentation on the Coop's buying, Szladek made light of the current debate over how to respond to the ongoing violence in Gaza with a joke to the effect of: "*In addition to helping write the Coop's foreign policy*, I work as one of our buyers…"

Szladek's crack obscures our community's ongoing investment in food justice, which has often expressed itself in policies critical of foreign governments. As founding member Joe Holtz proudly reminds us, the PSFC protested Apartheid by boycotting South African apples, and protested the Pinochet regime by boycotting Chilean grapes. At a moment when mass starvation is being wielded by Israel as a weapon of collective punishment, when 95% of Gazans are projected to face acute food insecurity through September, when many are going days without a meal and dozens of children have already starved to death, now is not a time to reduce our Coop to a mere grocery store where our ethical consideration is irrelevant. Rather, it's a time to stay true to our historic commitment to collaboratively developing food practices that align with our community's values.

In cooperation,
Morgan Võ

Coop Priorities

To the Editor,

Congratulations to Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai, whose election to the Coop's Board of Directors was met with jubilation. Both candidates boast impressive backgrounds in, respectively, agriculture and politics. However, the number of "Yes" and "No" votes each candidate received is a clear indication that one issue dominated this year's election, with the two most vocal anti-BDS candidates receiving the most "No" votes, and the winners staunchly advocating a Coop-wide boycott of Israeli goods. (In the interest of transparency, I checked "Abstain" next to all four of these candidates. Certainly, everyone has the right to their own beliefs and priorities, but I voted for local leadership over geopolitical advocacy.)

Leaders form coalitions from dissenting factions, while advocates often ascribe the opposition with moral inferiority, thereby making them easier to dismiss, something I thought all four of these candidates did in their own ways. Beyond political expedience, I question the wisdom of elevating a geopolitical issue, even one as heartbreaking as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, above local issues with more immediate impact on our grocery-based cooperative. Efforts to ameliorate the suffering of innocent Palestinians and Israelis are laudable. But is imposing a singular Middle Eastern position on a pluralistic Brooklyn community the most effective way to help innocent civilians? To be sure, the Coop has plenty of members with family in the region, and I sympathize with the agony that they are feeling. Even so, just as I wouldn't use an emotional justification to conduct political activism at my place of work, I continue to hope that within the Coop, we can temper our own strong feelings about a fractious issue with respect and compassion for people who disagree with each other, many of whom are dealing with unfathomable loss. To many, it feels like the Coop is finally on the verge of adopting policies that align with their beliefs, and letters like this are unwelcome disruptions to an exhilarating moment of triumph. My hope is that, amid this fervor, you make space for those who disagree and that going forward, all members retain the right to make our own shopping decisions.

In Cooperation,

Brian Shuman

New Board Composition Is Cause for Concern

Dear Coop Members,

The composition of the Board of Directors following the recent election should be a major concern for all Coop members, whether pro-BDS or pro-Unity. The board makes the final call following member votes and has other crucial responsibilities. Almost all board of directors support a boycott of Israeli products, inspired by the BDS movement.

To illustrate, if the Supreme Court were in complete control by one set of political views, it would undermine trust between citizens and the government system. This is very similar to what is happening at the Coop these days.

Jewish members of the Coop feel under attack, coinciding with a sharp rise in anti-semitic hate crimes in New York and a shocking rise in hate remarks towards Jewish members since BDS promotion began. These alarming signals, combined with the current Board's bias, make the Coop very hostile for many members.

I used to enjoy coming to the Coop for shifts and shopping, feeling part of an inclusive community. Now, it feels very unpleasant. Regardless, I will still come because inclusion means accepting everyone, regardless of political opinion or ethnicity. I'm optimistic that the Coop will see better days, as I truly believe that the vast majority of Coop members support the principle of inclusion and don't want politics to be a part of every visit to the Coop.

Thanks,

Yuval Inselberg

How to Love Our Coop

Dear Members,

Judging from the letters section of the recent *Gazette*, the pearl-clutching hysteria over members who support a targeted boycott of Israeli goods and increased member participation in the Coop's democracy gives a false perception that our beloved Coop is being torn asunder by rabid and disruptive antisemitic ne'er-do-wells. As a member for close to 30 years and a Jew, I have never felt better about the Coop than I do now. The people advocating for a targeted boycott and for General Meetings that would afford an opportunity for greater participatory democracy are dedicated, hard--working and sincere. The huge participation in our recent Board of Directors election and the overwhelming victory of two of our most dedicated members is an indication of just how eager the membership as a whole is to the prospect of a healthier democracy. The actions of Members 4 Palestine, were it not for the self-named "Unity" group, will doubtless make the Coop a MORE inclusive, vibrant and healthier place than it has ever been and one that I'm proud to be a member of. General Meetings, now limited to only a tiny percentage of members who aren't immunocompromised or hampered by child care and other issues, will soon be a mix of those able to attend physically plus those attending remotely. As someone who's been to dozens of General Meetings over the years, I can't wait! And to those fellow members who claim to be feeling "unsafe" or "uncomfortable" because of the efforts of Members 4 Palestine, I extend a warm-hearted invitation to my house for supper this autumn. Just reach out. I love to cook, and you are welcome.

Carol Wald

Appreciation for Courageous Conversations

Editors and fellow members,

As a newer member of PSFC, it was great to attend the May 28 GM. I valued hearing more of the workings behind the groceries along with the opportunity to hear the voices of other members. Notably, the call to action toward the creation of a committee to address plastic usage made me feel more at home as a member knowing that others care about the scourge of plastic and are willing to call the rest of us into initially hard, self-sacrificing action.

I felt similarly weeks before when I was first approached by a two soft-spoken fellow members asking if I'd sign a petition in favor of the Coop dropping certain targeted Israeli products from Coop shelves in solidarity with an international BDS movement.

As I have been deeply disturbed by the bombardment, starvation and horrific conditions to which the people in Gaza have been subjected, meeting these Coop members was a breath of fresh air. In an instant, the Coop felt like a safer space to speak my beliefs, and it was heartening to meet members interested in the Coop joining its economic leverage to a worldwide effort to pressure our sibling nation of Israel to do better.

I've been part of food coops since 1989, and have come to rely on them as a place where members organize together for community building and social growth: where hard questions are asked, and asked again if need be. Since meeting and getting involved with the sincere, thoughtful, and diverse cohort of PSFC Members for Palestine, my feeling of belonging at the Coop has deepened, along with my interest in working to help the Coop be the best it can be.

Alan Lewandowski

BDS IS ANTISEMITIC: THE EVIDENCE

Editors,

Violent antisemitism is resurgent as the BDS agenda—the delegitimization of Israel—is promoted around the world.

As of January 2023 The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism has been adopted by 1,000 global entities, at least 37 - nations including the United States, many cities, other government entities and numerous colleges. One element of this definition is “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination.” By this definition, both BDS and Hamas are antisemitic, as explained below.

The Antisemitic Goals of BDS and Hamas

According to Palestinian BDS founder Omar Barghouti, “No Palestinian will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine.” While BDS claims to be nonviolent, its goal is similar to that expressed in the Hamas Covenant: “Israel will exist … until Islam will obliterate it.” These words confirm genocidal intent on the part of BDS and Hamas, an effort brutally begun on October 7, 2023, with promises of more to come.

Germany’s Requirement for Naturalization

Hopefully we can agree that Germany knows something about antisemitism. According to CNN, all applicants for German naturalization must affirm that Israel has a right to exist.

The Board of Directors’ Responsibilities

The directors must not only reject proposals that create legal or financial jeopardy. They must also decide whether a proposal is in the best interests of the purposes for which the corporation was formed and whether it complies with the Coop's Mission Statement, which doesn't include a political purpose. Clearly this never-ending crusade, painfully divisive and deeply offensive to many, isn't in the best interests of this cooperative project. Therefore, the new pro-BDS majority of directors should give serious thought as to their personal and political motives for possibly inflicting an anti-semitic movement on this food coop.

Sylvia Lowenthal

Brief Responses to the 5 Most Common Coop Anti-BDS Arguments

To Coop members,

Our coop should be apolitical

1. PSFC is a political project founded on cooperative principles that are contrary to the norms of our economic system.
2. PSFC has a long history of activism, including many boycotts dating back to our inception.
3. Continuing to purchase products from companies that support or profit from what is happening *is* a political choice.

Why single out Israel when other countries have poor human rights records?

The fact that other countries have poor human rights records isn't a reason not to boycott a country that has recently killed 40,000 people. A targeted boycott of select Is-

raeli products does not prevent us from boycotting goods from other countries. If people are concerned about certain countries, they should be encouraged to submit an agenda item and make their case.

A boycott would harm facets of Israeli society that aren't responsible for the oppression of Palestinians

PSFC Members for Palestine is advocating for a targeted boycott of products that directly profit from or support the ongoing genocide and occupation.

PSFC Members for Palestine supports violence

Boycotts have a rich history as a nonviolent tactic to promote social change. As a Jew, I am deeply disturbed by the violence being enacted in my name and grateful to be organizing with a diverse group of members to hold the Coop accountable to its mission. PSFC Members for Palestine does not and has never advocated violence. It is untrue when people claim this, and the *Gazette* should not print such falsehoods.

Boycotting Israeli products is antisemitic

As a Jew, I understand an action to be antisemitic if it discriminates against Jews due to their Jewish identity. A targeted boycott has nothing to do with the ethnic or religious identity of Jewish Israelis. Instead, it is a response to the bombardment of Gaza and the history of occupation.

Rachel James

Where have all the Jews gone?

Fellow members,

“Hey, where did those peanut-butter puff snacks go? My kids loved those.”

“Ah, *Bamba,* you mean? Those are snacks produced by the Israeli oppression. We can’t have those in our Coop.”

“Yes, of course… And my favorite hummus, I don’t see that here anymore…”

“Ah, Sabra hummus, you mean? Yes, it’s made by Israeli apartheid lovers. We can’t have that in our Coop.”

“But what about the *challah* bread? My Jewish neighbors buy that for *Shabbat*. It’s made in Brooklyn! Surely that can’t also be linked to—”

“Ah, Green’s Kosher Bakery *challah*. The *challah* had to go too, I’m afraid. We asked if they were good Jews or if they were genocide-supporting, Zionist Jews. They seemed afraid to answer. We can’t have that in our Coop.”

“I see. Can I ask you one last question? Where did all the Jewish shoppers go? I don’t see my Jewish neighbors here anymore.”

“Hm, I’m not sure about that one. We were just boycotting the world’s only Jewish state; you know, the Zionists. We weren’t boycotting the Jews.”

“Shouldn’t we also boycott countries like China, Iran, Russia, Yemen, Syria, Sudan…”

“Nah, just the Jewish one for now. Just Israel.”

Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews say caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them, and nearly half of the world’s Jews live in Israel (Pew Research Center). I hope you can understand that Israel is an important part of your Jewish neighbors’ identities.

Legitimate criticism of the Israeli government is not antisemitic. The BDS movement, which singles out the Jewish state and denies its right to exist, is antisemitic. Please do not allow antisemitism to be normalized at the Coop. Your Jewish neighbors need your support.

Jonathan Aranov

Re: “ACROSS THE AISLE: MY WALK AND TALK WITH A BDS ADVOCATE”

To the Editors,

It’s depressing to see the *Gazette* giving a platform to the twisted gaslighting violent fantasy of one member’s take on BDS.

What’s being done by Israel to Gaza with the financial backing of the USA is one of the greatest moral atrocities of our lifetime, and it did not begin as a reaction to Hamas on October 7. To be silent, to equivocate, to deny, is to tacitly endorse an act of generational evil. It’s no wonder our members for BDS don’t want to buy peppers or soda machines under these conditions. For me, it is impossible to read the facts and watch the videos and come to any other conclusion.

Lisa Guido