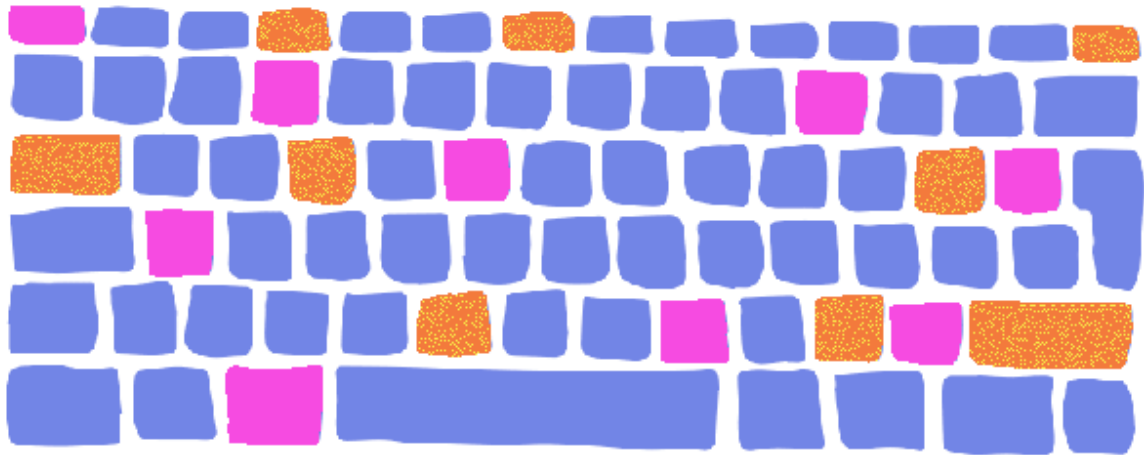


SEPTEMBER 4, 2024

September 4, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



GIVE FUNGI THE RESPECT THEY'RE DUE

Dear Coop,

A very minor bone to pick: I tend to work checkout shifts, and am always dismayed that mushrooms are categorized under vegetable in the checkout system. Not only are mushrooms not vegetables, they aren't even plants. Fungi are their own biological kingdom (along with plants, animals, protists and monera). So, in a biological sense, a mushroom is as much a vegetable as a chicken is—that is to say, not at all.

In cooperation,

Abaye Steinmetz-Silber

RE: JUNE ANNUAL MEETING REPORT (7/23/24)

To the Editor:

The June Annual Meeting Report (7/23/24) contains a misleading statement, “The Board of Directors plays a pivotal role in how the Coop operates by acting as the decision-making body for the Coop.”

Actually, unlike most organizations, the members on the Board of Directors at the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) are expected by other Coop members to receive and follow the advice provided to it in the form of General Meeting (GM) votes on all matters brought there. In other words, even if a PSFC board member disagrees with a particular GM voting result on a proposal or election item, the board member will accept the advice provided by the membership vote. That is why the GM chair usually states at the beginning of every GM that the GM is the decision-making body of the Coop. That is why members discuss and vote on all matters before the board votes on whether or not to accept their advice. That is why board candidates are generally questioned by members to make sure that, if elected, he or she will honor this PSFC cooperative tradition.

Please correct the online report error so that readers are not led astray on the role of the board.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Tobier

LET'S RETHINK MEMBERSHIP CAPS AND IMPOSE OCCUPANCY ONES

Dear Editor,

The solution to Coop crowding surely involves more market force and less central planning than the current approach. Rather than capping total membership, total member occupancy should be capped, either at fire code maximum or some lower number at which shopping becomes truly painful (which, in my experience, is extremely rare).

This controls crowding through natural consequences. If the Coop fills on Sundays, for example, there will be lines, encouraging those who can shop on less crowded days to do so, while making shopping possible for those who need to do so on that day—including people are currently denied this opportunity by the membership caps.

The central planning that has occurred thus far is certainly appreciated, and ideas like later shopping hours are great. Making the cap about how full the building is rather than how full the membership rolls are makes the Coop more inclusive while relieving some planning burden from our General Coordinators.

Ryan Tate

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF FINDING WORK SHIFTS

Dear Coop,

I as well as many other community members that I know have increasingly struggled with finding shifts. I am wondering if the Coop would consider some of the following suggestions: increased hours, reducing to two-hour shifts and/or shifts every eight weeks and limiting the number of shift credits one is able to accumulate in a year. These are all preliminary notional ideas, so obviously, they would need to be researched in regards to the effect any or all of these would have on operations, membership and solidarity.

Stephen Klein

TWO COOP LOVERS FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Coop-ers,

The PSFC was a major plug in our respective moves to Brooklyn. As folks who love fresh local produce and supporting community-run grocery stores, we were both beyond excited to see if the Coop would live up to its hype. And, in so many aspects, the Coop *has* delivered as we hoped it would: delicious produce, excellent bulk items, sweet treats discovered while stocking the dairy aisle and fun and quirky co-owners that we can chat with while working a shift. Despite these obvious perks, there is at least one key way in which the Coop has fallen short: providing inclusive General Meetings.

Part of what makes the Coop special is that it is *defined* by its community, and together, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We work collectively to restock, check out and request new and exciting products. We even work together to put together this newsletter. It's disappointing, then, that this does not extend to being open and welcoming for our GMs. Hybrid GMs offer the chance for folks with different schedules, needs, abilities and time constraints to more easily participate in making the Coop a more inclusive community. Since the pandemic, meetings utilizing Zoom and other virtual participation platforms have become par for the course. They are common-place for doctor visits, university classes, work huddles, fundraising events, NYC community board meetings—you can even do a virtual interview for TSA PreCheck and Global Entry! Today's widespread use of virtual meeting spaces demonstrates a common understanding of the benefits of the inclusivity that they offer. If we are truly a Coop where all members can contribute to our definition as a collective, prioritizing hybrid meetings should be at the top of the list.

Jessie Wesley

Estee Ward

ON HYBRID VOTING, AKA MAKING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY WORK AT THE COOP

Hello!

A few months ago, I got an email from the Coop announcing the vote for Board of Directors. I was excited to take part in the board election! Unfortunately, I was out of the country and on-leave; how was that going to work? Well, it worked swimmingly. The vote would be taking place in-person at the next General Meeting *and* online in the lead-up to the meeting. I could vote online—and early!

I clicked on the link, signed in, read the candidate statements one final time and voted. The whole process took five minutes. Democracy in action, 2024! Amazing!

This experience, however, stood in powerful contrast to the fact that we are still unable to vote online regarding measures raised at the GM. Every month, the GM notice goes out with the exhortation that “Participating in the meeting is your way of having a voice in important issues that affect you and your Coop. Meaningful member participation strengthens our governance system, ensures that the board of directors hears from the Coop membership, and upholds the democratic principle at the heart of cooperatives.” This is inspiring stuff, so it’s too bad that, given the resistance to hybrid meetings, a Coop with over 16,000 members has its major issues decided in-person by about 200.

It’s not as though this is a new issue. For decades now, members have been raising the need to make the coop governance process more accessible. As we approach the November 2024 election, in a political atmosphere where US democracy is on the line in a historically unprecedented way, maybe we can do our part by working together to make the little village that is PSFC a place where the ideal of participatory democracy is reflected in our practices.

Jim McKay

DIRECT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COOP

To the editor:

I write on behalf of Coop 4 Unity, a group of Coop members who understand and oppose the goals and tactics of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Instead of continuing to fill the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* with letters for and against the re-

newed push to declare the Coop in solidarity with a boycott of the State of Israel, Coop 4 Unity proposes direct communications with Park Slope Food Coop Members 4 Palestine, the BDS faction within the Coop.

In the July 23, 2024, edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, a member of the unity group put out a call for mediation. There has been no response to that call. Ironically, a BDS supporter's letter in the same edition concluded with a dinner invitation to members who oppose the efforts of "Members 4 Palestine." We construe that dinner invitation as an expression of willingness on the part of the BDS faction to engage in direct dialogue.

The letter with the dinner invitation did not include the member's contact information. The email address for the Coop group is coop4unity@gmail.com. If anyone from the BDS faction (or any Coop member) wants to communicate directly about the future of the Coop—and move the conversation out of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*—please contact us at that address.

Noah Potter

A SECOND REQUEST FOR WELL-INTENTIONED DIALOGUE WITH PRO-BDS COOP MEMBERS

Dear PSFC Members for Palestine,

I have received no response from the BDS-inspired PSFC Members for Palestine regarding multiple good-faith requests for mediation to negotiate a resolution to the intensifying conflict that has arisen as PSFC Members for Palestine attempt to resurrect a boycott of Israeli products, characterizing it as a moral imperative for the Coop.

Instead members of this faction have taken to mocking opponents of the boycott

(see, for instance, Carol Wald's July 23 letter in which she writes of "the pearl-clutching hysteria over members who support a targeted boycott of Israeli goods) and those who worry about BDS's infiltration of the Coop, in the form of letters to the *Linewaiters' Gazette* that assert the moral superiority of their position (see, for example, Lisa Guido's July 23 letter in which she states "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.")

We reject the tactic of Jews weaponizing their identity in support of BDS. Their anti-Zionism is no more morally superior than the beliefs and concerns of other Jews. That is true in the Coop context, as anywhere.

I repeat my invitation to participate in a mediated constructive dialogue on these issues. We are giving your faction the benefit of the doubt that you do not understand the harm you are causing to many fellow members in a community grocery store based on cooperation.

If you do not respond to our request, we will understand your silence as an expression of your unwillingness to communicate and, by extension, your callousness towards this harm, and, ultimately, your disregard for the fiscal health of the Coop's business.

With hopes of cooperation,

Ramon Maislen, Coop 4 Unity

JUST SAY NO...TO MEDIATION REGARDING THE BDS AGENDA

Dear Members,

I have read Ramon Maislen's letter (published in the July 23, 2023 issue of the *Gazette*) and the follow-up letter that was handed out at the July 30, 2023 GM. In these, he proposed a private mediation session between Coop 4 Unity and PSFC Members for Palestine to clarify how the group intends to "align the agenda of BDS with the principles of the Coop" and to discuss the "rise in confrontations between Coop members and strategies to ensure the safety and respect of all members."

I don't think it makes sense to hold a mediation between Coop 4 Unity and PSFC for Palestine or between Ramon and a representative of PSFC Members for Palestine. A proposed boycott would affect all members of the Coop. Just like all other Coop-wide issues, the specifics of what this boycott would entail should be brought to the full membership, for discussion at a General Meeting and (ultimately) a vote. Nothing needs to be said behind closed doors; this must be a discussion open to all members.

There is a place for mediation at the Coop—the Dispute Resolution Committee is available to any members who find themselves in personal disputes or unresolved negative interactions.

I am a Jewish woman who also worries about antisemitism, but BDS and PSFC Members for Palestine are not antisemitic. I believe Israel is committing crimes against humanity and that the least we can do as a Coop is to discuss whether to boycott certain Israeli products.

Cooperatively,

Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones

LET'S VOTE ON BDS

To Coop Members,

Controversy in any group is natural. I am convinced that in our Coop with a clear process for shared decision-making and sufficient individual emotional maturity, constant arguments can be avoided. Neither of these criteria is easy to achieve. Both depend upon the commitment of members to each other and to common goals that are at least as strong as the commitment to one's own opinion and interest—a caring community.

Trust in a democratic process is delicate. We have suffered early childhood trauma as well as violent historical assaults on our identity that resulted in loss, grief and anguish. The process for collective decision-making in a caring community needs to include consequences for cheating and violence. We need vision, courage and trust.

You win some; you lose some. Feeling safe requires winning with grace and humility and/or losing with dignity, acceptance and adaptation.

With contemporary digital capacity, secure processes to vote can be adapted. We use infinite ways of sharing information, thinking and experiences. With so much technology, we don't need to be all in the same place to cast a ballot.

A fair voting process for collective decision-making will be inclusive, respectful and equitable if it is managed by an impartial team and overseen by members of different factions. Hope for peace includes enough vision, trust and courage to try democracy.

Susan Metz

THE COOP'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

Dear Coop Members,

I've been a member since February 2020, and what I love most about the Coop is its

commitment to democracy. We are all workers, members and owners, with hierarchy limited to administrative necessity. Our voices are equal and we act in the best interest of the majority.

In the summer of 2020, I saw the Coop's commitment to democracy tested. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd, many members called for an official statement in support of the movement. Although it was clear that the majority of members would likely support such a statement, our leaders decided to wait until a vote could be held. While this felt counterintuitive at the time, it demonstrated the Coop's integrity and dedication to democratic processes.

Today, we are faced with another tragic moment. The war in Gaza has entered its ninth month with no clear end in sight. Israel continues its bombardment and civilian deaths rise daily. We now have an opportunity to act by stopping the sale of products that help fund this violence. As the Coop has done in the past, it must show integrity and put this question to a membership vote. The delay in voting feels excessive and unlike the BLM voting delay, the rationale here is unclear.

If the membership votes to keep BDS-sanctioned products on the shelves, so be it. But what is most important is maintaining our commitment to democracy. Without it, the Coop ceases to be what it is.

Atticus Hoffman