

APRIL 1, 2025

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Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

How to Determine Product Markups

Dear Members,

In reviewing the recent 53-week financials, I was struck by section three: *Markup*. I

am curious about the rhyme and reason of what seems like a very complex markup system based on the type of product. Why not a simple percentage across the board?
NOTE: I am not commenting on the actual percent of the markup.

If any of the Staff would respond that would be of interest. Thank you.

In Cooperation,

Stewart Pravda

Speaking for the Trees

Dear Fellow Members,

I never expected to write in to raise a concern with a fellow member's interpretation of a verse from the Tanakh, but here we are! Sarede Rachel Switzer references Deuteronomy 20:19 in a submission from March 11, 2025. To quote: "For man is a tree in the field."

While I appreciate the author's sentiment that people are like trees because "throughout our lives, we also grow—developing and refining our character traits—through ridding ourselves of ego (not unlike the seed disintegrating into the ground)," I think it's important to read the entire verse (from the 1999 JPS translation):

"When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?"

This is not a passage about how people are like trees; it is about how people can flee

dangerous situations, but trees cannot because they are rooted to the ground. For this reason, we are instructed never to destroy fruit-bearing trees.

That said, a March 6 article published by Equal Exchange (a Coop supplier) about the recent experience of Palestinian farmers in the West Bank asserts:

“In January 2025, Israeli [sic] carried out 2,161 assaults against West Bank Palestinians; some of these attacks resulted in the uprooting of 960 olive trees.... While PARC has been able to export the new harvest oil to the United States, there is concern that the obstacles, such as increased checkpoints and settler violence, will only continue into the rest of the year.”

This is a tragedy.

Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones

What Do You Think About a Plastic Reduction Committee?

Dear Fellow Members,

We are a group of members working to form a Plastic Reduction Committee at the Coop. You may have heard our presentation at the January membership meeting. The committee aims to decrease the Coop’s reliance on plastics because of their documented negative impacts on human and environmental health from pollution, toxics, material waste and greenhouse gas emissions, which bring environmental injustice to front- and fence-line communities, most often home to low-income and other marginalized groups.

Our committee would collaborate with Coop staff to assess plastic use; gather information on what’s working and what could be improved; and develop proposals, educa-

tional events and tabling based on our insights. Projects that would potentially support staff in reducing plastic at the Coop include but are not limited to:

- Increasing availability of plastic-free options.
- Improving self-service options for bulk items.
- Reducing plastics for repackaging items.
- Finding alternatives to prepackaged items.

All while considering equity and addressing disparate impacts on Coop members of different means.

We were encouraged by the interest and questions at our January presentation. The next step is for members to vote on our proposal; we hope to be on a meeting agenda imminently.

Meanwhile, we are writing to keep the conversation going. If you have anything to ask or share, please email us at reduceplasticpsfc@gmail.com, ideally by April 15 so that we can answer you at the April General Meeting, if we are on the agenda. If we are not, we will answer your questions by email and as a follow-up letter or article in the *Gazette*.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

The aspiring Plastic Reduction Committee:

Lesley Broder

Ricki Jaeckel

Zoë Kaplan-Lewis

Jessica Roff

Anne Schoeneborn

Abby Shelton

Matthew Spencer

Lois Wilcken

Can I Buy Six Grapes and Leave the Rest?

Dear Staff,

I was shocked and overjoyed to learn this year that it's acceptable to snap off and purchase a small piece of celery from a larger bunch. This was an eye-opening moment that only escalated in the subsequent weeks, as I learned with joy that you could snap a single banana off a bunch or break open a box of Spindrift and purchase just one can. Now I wonder where the limits are.

Can I rip off just a handful of grapes, put them in a bag, and leave the rest behind? I sure hope so—I'm always buying more grapes than I need. The sign near the eggs forbidding the act of cutting a carton in half suggests that until recently I could've enjoyed the unique joy of purchasing just six eggs—or maybe even two? One? Of course, you can break apart a six pack of beer, but what about a six pack of granola bars? A single sprig of parsley from a bunch? How should I think about this? What are

the rules? Are there any?

Nate (Nathaniel) Parrott

Chair Committee, Govern Thyself

Dear Editor,

The Committee is breaking its own rule when speeches are permitted during Open Forums. Your rule states: "Members will have up to one minute to ask a brief question regarding Coop operations." The report of the January GM includes remarks about boycotts from several members which were not, in fact, questions.

Please be more vigilant in enforcing this rule.

Sylvia Lowenthal

Complying in Advance With Trump?

Dear Coop community,

I oppose boycotting Israeli goods at the Coop and support the 75% approval requirement for boycotts. However, I was troubled to read the Coordinators' Corner article published February 18, where they recommend against a boycott for fear of hypothetical future harm from the Trump-aligned Heritage Foundation (authors of Projects 2025 and Esther).

In the past five weeks, many entities have chosen to comply with the Trump adminis-

tration's hostile executive orders. The orders I've tracked closely are anti-transgender: They set out to prohibit things like mentioning trans people or gender identity, -trans healthcare for people under 19 and students wearing their own clothes or using the restroom at school. These orders threaten to withhold federal funds (for example, SNAP authorization) from entities that do not comply.

I'm disappointed by the hospitals, government agencies and nonprofits which chose to, for example, expunge all mention of trans people from their websites. I'm disappointed and *surprised* that the General Coordinator Team recommends against a boycott *in case* a boycott causes the Heritage Foundation to target the Coop.

My wife received her first gender-affirming photo ID from the Coop. She has since legally changed her name and sex. But under this administration and its executive orders, she will not be permitted documents like a passport. All federal entities have been directed to list her as "male." This is not hypothetical: It has been stated and uniformly enacted policy in the past five weeks under Trump.

Transgender Americans are afraid. Now we are afraid at the Coop too. If the Trump administration demands you misgender trans worker-members and this seems to threaten the Coop's ability to accept SNAP, will you comply in advance with that, too?

In cooperation,

Elijah Morningstar

Cheating on the Coop at ShopRite

Greetings,

In the article "Confessions of Coop Cheaters" by Liz Welch there was no mention of

the largest supermarkets in the area. That is the ShopRite on McDonald Ave at Avenue I. Prices are the best in the area. The store highlight is the grass-finished beef and lamb from Australia. Many cuts for a fraction of the Coop prices.

Even bigger is the Brooklyn ShopRite out in Gateway. Too far to bike.

In solidarity,

Don Wiss

We Want Hybrid Meetings, Now!

Dear Fellow Members,

It was disheartening to hear a General Coordinator at our last General Meeting say that some of the concerns surrounding hybrid voting—such as privacy and security—remain unexamined and require subcommittee investigation before any vote can take place. Those important issues were addressed directly and convincingly by knowledgeable IT folks during the discussion session of the hybrid proposal. Because the always-changing participation in General Meetings necessitated by in-person-only attendance allows for decontextualized and ahistorical statements, and few members are able to attend every General Meeting as I have, such statements can be made without correction. This contributes to an erosion of trust in the democratic processes of the Coop.

Schedule the much-delayed vote on expanding member participation already! This is the 21st century and the Coop has already proven that online meetings are feasible. C'mon, people!

Carol Wald

Using the MAGA Handbook to Suppress Democracy at the Coop

Greetings,

I am another Jewish Coop member supporting the BDS campaign against apartheid Israeli products. The absolutely undemocratic, one-sided presentation by the “Coop leadership” in the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*—calling for keeping the status quo and saying even a vote on the issue would be divisive—takes a page out of the MAGA handbook of voter suppression.

Hybrid meetings would help allow a broader participation of parents, the elderly, those with mobility issues and other members who do not want to be in a large room of people during flu season. This is a separate issue from BDS. It is a proposal that has long been necessary since the Coop membership is larger than a local physical space to hold meetings. To deny a more democratic, participatory scheme that would allow more involvement in the guidance and policies of the Coop is exactly akin to Trump’s plan to suppress votes that he doesn’t agree with.

With kids being killed, starved and bombed in Gaza, we can’t wait to just vote this current board out. We must act now. Economic boycotts are effective, or they wouldn’t be trying so hard to stop them. BDS is a nonviolent way to vote with our wallets to stop Israeli aggression and let the U.S. legislators know their constituents are watching as they vote to fund Israel’s weapon industry. Ceasefire now!

In solidarity,

Spike Kahn

Opposing the Ideology Guiding the General Coordinators

Dear Coop Members,

The PSFC General Coordinators (GCs) have guided the Coop beautifully. The place just works, for 50+ years, thanks in large part to their leadership.

A notorious exception is the GCs' now-public catastrophizing campaign against popular member proposals: holding hybrid general meetings; restoring the Coop's traditional boycott voting threshold; and boycotting goods that fund ethnic cleansing and genocide. In pursuing this anti-member campaign, the GCs have shed their folksy competent personas. All along have they (or some of them) been ideologues, eager to twist facts, abuse their power and disable member participation? Is this outsize power gone astray, gone haywire?

What else explains why an otherwise resourceful Coop has been unable to find a larger venue for an in-person Coop vote on hybrid meetings or a boycott? The excuses don't add up: This is about squashing member proposals, and it's shameful malfeasance.

What else but ideology explains the GCs seeking guidance from the Heritage Foundation, the favored think tank for MAGA Republicans? In a recent *Gazette*, the GCs suggest the Coop comply in advance with the Heritage Foundation's blueprints for fascism: "Project 2025" and "Project Esther." Doing so, the GCs cravenly direct the Coop to fall in line with fascistic repression pursued by the current MAGA administration.

Coop staff and members are rightfully alarmed about the reactionary politics, and unseemly tactics, that animate the GCs' bizarre campaign against popular member proposals. Now is not the time for blind allegiance to the GCs, as called for in a recent *Gazette* letter. Instead, it's time for members, staff and the Coop Board to act on and

insist on healthy skepticism and scrutiny at the Coop, fair and open dialogue, checks on power, transparency, democratic processes, all engaged in by as many Coop members and staff as possible.

M.J. Williams

Anticipatory Obedience Is an Existential Threat to Our Coop

To The Editor,

I was deeply perturbed by last month's Coordinators' Corner "Safeguarding the Coop's Future." Beyond the purported subject matter of BDS and hybrid meetings, the article signaled a terrifying direction for the General Coordinators to be taking in this political moment.

In their article, the GCs argued against BDS and hybrid meetings on the grounds that it "could result in costly legal battles, government investigations and major disruptions to the Coop's operations and stability." This is textbook "anticipatory obedience" as popularized by historian Timothy Snyder in his book *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From the Twentieth Century*. The concept of anticipatory obedience and its effects are clear: By preemptively submitting to repression before being forced, institutions signal to power the extent of what it can accomplish.

Regardless of one's feelings about hybrid meetings or BDS, the Coop should be practicing democracy and bringing these issues to a vote. By fear mongering about potential future repression the Coordinators not only overstep their mandate, they signal their moral cowardice.

We are living in historic, unprecedented and terrifying times. The only way to make it through is to root ourselves in democracy and collective power. For the Coop, this

means the issue is not BDS or hybrid, it is a question of whether we are a democratic cooperative body willing to stand up for that ideal or if we will preemptively bend to the will of this country's fascist leadership. In their letter, the GCs made it clear which side of that dichotomy they fall on. That is not the leadership we need in this moment. And in this Coop member's opinion, if we can't practice democracy within our cooperative body, then we don't deserve to have a Coop at all.

Sincerely,

Eva Lewis

Coop for Unity. Who We Are.

Dear Members,

We are Coop 4 Unity (C4U), a group formed out of concern that determined cohorts within the Coop are leveraging PSFC to advance damaging partisan positions, threatening our community's cohesion and exposing the Coop to financial and legal risk.

Members stand by four values:

1. Diverse Viewpoints: Hold a belief that people with diverse political views can come together to build and sustain a successful collective enterprise.
2. Safety: Assert that absolutely no group should feel unwelcome or unsafe in the Coop.
3. Prevent Exploitation: Oppose the exploitation of the Coop and its reputation for promoting highly charged partisan politics. The Coop is a business first and foremost with at least \$60M annually in business and dozens of employees.

4. Promote Active Engagement: We advocate for greater member engagement and participation in Coop decision-making. Any governance changes should be undertaken only after full investigation by a PSFC committee.

With these beliefs, we act in four key ways:

1. Seek productive understanding through honest dialogue and minimize activity that exploits the Coop for highly charged partisan issues without first analyzing long-term impact.
2. Abide by the Cooperative Values and Principles from the International Cooperative Alliance.
3. Promote actions that maximize the Coop's financial success and stability.
4. Act to ensure that Coop governance changes should be undertaken only after full investigation.

If you wish to join us, please contact us at Coop4Unity.org.

Jesse Rosenfeld

Coop for Unity

Those in Favor of Turning a Page, Say Aye

Greetings,

Politics and the Coop are not a good mix. BDS followers are less interested in the Coop and more in their agenda, which has nothing to do with the Coop. It will, in fact,

cause differences to be amplified and distort the organization. The present situation makes this clear.

The business of the Coop is the store itself, not what can be politically appended to the store. Compelling any means to pull off their coup, the expansion of anything but a voting member meeting of the Coop is but another way around a bend that can break the Coop.

The Middle East is stuck in a sad spiral of conflict. We do not need to emulate this kind of thing. It might even be helpful if we created an example of a way out of having to choose sides.

If a small area on one of the shelves in the store featured both Israeli and Palestinian products, we could demonstrate both good wishes for peace and an example of living side by side. But mostly we could end the BDS diversion of energy to the notion of taking sides in a sad scene.

It's time to turn the page.

Rodger Parsons

Khalil and the Coop

Dear Coop members,

It's hard to read the news these days without experiencing grief, fear and disbelief at the flagrant disregard for democracy, honesty and empathy. News of recent Columbia University graduate Mahmoud Khalil's detention paints a particularly dire picture. Khalil has a green card. He has committed no crime. Yet he has been imprisoned over a thousand miles from his pregnant wife simply for being Palestinian and for trying to

reach an agreement between student protesters and Columbia's administration.

Anyone who cares about the rights of noncitizens or First Amendment rights should be outraged. We should also consider what this attack on freedom and justice means. It not only highlights Donald Trump's gleeful authoritarianism, but also demonstrates that Project Esther and related Zionist projects have been dangerously empowered. I shouldn't have to say, but will mention here, that I wholeheartedly condemn anti-semitism. But I also condemn those who purposely strip that term of real meaning and use it as a weapon to dox, and now detain or even deport, those who envision freedom for Palestinians.

How does this relate to the Coop? Here we are seeing legitimate, thoughtful and caring organizing efforts labeled as "dangerous." Here an overly empowered Coop administration is trying to tip the scales away from pro-Palestinian organizers and open democratic process. In this political environment, Coop members should be unified behind the Coop's mission. This does not mean that we will all agree on a boycott of Israeli products. But it does mean that we should affirm democratic process, honesty and fairness. Moving expeditiously to vote on a boycott is one simple way the Coop can model integrity and cooperation in these frightening times.

In Cooperation,

Sophie Glickman

Witch Hunt or Simple Expectations of Duty

Dear Editor,

At the January General Meeting (GM), a General Coordinator (GC) concluded the meeting by correcting themselves about the Agenda Committee election in October—the

election was not preceded by a call for candidates in the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Not for a few years, apparently. This correction not only served to reverse the assertions made that night during the GC Reports portion of the GM but to correct for the GC claims dating back to the Nov/Dec GM when GC Ann Herpel introduced the idea. To be clear, the Board never requested staff time be spent digging through years of *Gazettes* to find support for their claims.

What the Board expects, on behalf of the membership, is accurate information presented by the Coordinators at GMs, as stated in the GM Procedures and Guidelines published on the PSFC website. Painting this Board behavior as a witch hunt (as MC Karen Mancuso did in a letter to the Feb 18 *Gazette*) is unfair. Contrary to Karen's claim in the letter, I'm a member of the Board who does not want you perceiving GCs as the enemy. I love our staff for their impressive stewardship of our Coop. But Karen's mention of GC's human error needs revisiting.

It's OK to say, "I don't know, I'll find out." In fact, Robert's Rules of Orders essentially requires abstentions for lack of sufficient information. In this way, the human error could have been avoided. No one asked Ann to make her point of order; Ann took the stage without a prompt. In fact, she took a risk by introducing her claim. Simple human errors arise from uncalculated risks. But recent Coordinators' Corner articles, however, require the reader to understand GCs are astute risk assessors. What's scarier: GCs taking uncalculated risks or taking calculated risks later shown to be inappropriate?

Tim Hospodar

Timing?

Fellow members,

A proposal for hybrid General Meetings was first submitted to the Agenda Committee in November 2023. It was then delayed for the better part of a year before coming up for discussion at the September 2024 GM.

Before that date, Joe Holtz, presenting no supporting data, insisted that the discussion would need a venue larger than the Picnic House. Eventually, his objection was withdrawn, finally allowing the item to be considered by the membership. There was space in the Picnic House for all who showed up and reactions were overwhelmingly positive.

As for any proposal, a vote follows discussion, typically quickly when a proposal has been favorably received. In this case, Joe renewed his claims of needing a larger venue and no vote was scheduled, even as the *Gazette* was flooded with letters clamoring for hybrid. It was not until the January 2025 GM (14 months post-submission) that GC Lisa Moore announced the identification of a voting venue. Despite this, as of mid-March, the vote still hasn't been scheduled.

Recently, the GCs have stepped up their obstruction. They say they might support hybrid in theory, but not in this form. They insist that a comprehensive study needs to take place. Why didn't they voice this concern when the proposal was first submitted? Where were these concerns when the Coop successfully conducted fully remote meetings during Covid? Waiting until the eve of this vote is a blatant delaying tactic. Is it being deployed because hybrid meetings offer more members a voice and a vote, potentially diminishing the GCs' power?

Hybrid meeting technology is available and reliable for organizations larger than ours. The time to adopt hybrid GMs is now.

Alyce Barr

Some Israeli Boycott Issues to Consider

Dear Fellow Members,

One of several arguments brought up against a boycott of Israeli products is that Israel is being “singled out” unfairly, given that there are many bad actors in the world. But there’s a very good reason for Americans to “single out” Israel. A hefty chunk of our tax dollars, several billion dollars worth—more aid than for any other single country—go to Israel every year, no strings attached. This in addition to arming Israel to the teeth with advanced weaponry, which Israel uses freely on its occupied Arab civilian population, both those in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is a prosperous country, and not in need of handouts, while our own country could use those dollars for worthwhile projects here at home. So U.S. citizens have a direct stake in that country, and thus should have every right to a say in its affairs.

Israel’s partisans have defended Israel’s violent acts in its occupied territories with the claim that “Israel has the legal right to defend itself.” But Israel, as an occupying power, has no such right—rather, the people under occupation (and in this case for almost 50 years now) have every right to resist their occupation. Hamas and Hezbollah are resistance groups. While one can pin almost any fighting group with a legitimate accusation of “terrorist acts,” there was no proof or justification for the accusation of the October 7 “beheaded babies.”

Finally, Israel partisans have often claimed that this campaign to boycott Israel is anti-semitic. But many of those pro-boycott people are themselves Jews, some of whom may have themselves lost relations in a particular past holocaust we’re all familiar with. Loose phrases like “antisemitism” and “hate” should not be equated with anti-Zionism, the colonial project that has violently displaced and oppressed Palestine’s indigenous Arab population.

