

COORDINATORS' CORNER: GETTING THE PROCESS RIGHT—ISRAELI GOODS BOYCOTT DISCUSSIONS AND VOTES

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Illustration by Erik Schurink

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By Joe Szladek, General Manager

With hybrid General Meetings (GMs) beginning in February, the Coop is taking up pending agenda items, including the question of a potential boycott of Israeli goods.

How we approach this moment matters. For decisions of this magnitude—particularly one as consequential as a boycott of Israeli goods—legitimacy doesn't come from the outcome; it comes from the process used to reach it. A process that is deliberate and trusted will lead to a result the broader Coop membership can support, whatever the outcome.

At the March GM, a discussion of a boycott of Israeli goods was initially only allocated

20 minutes—later extended to 30 minutes. For an issue not fully deliberated at a GM in more than ten years, that is insufficient. Past practice for comparably significant items has allowed an hour or more. The last time the Coop discussed a boycott of Israeli goods, the Agenda Committee devoted the entire meeting (90 minutes) to the topic. Complex and contested issues require time: time to understand, to question, and to deliberate.

There is an urgency among some members to move boycott discussions forward. Elected governance committees, however, have a fiduciary responsibility to the Coop as a whole and not to any particular agenda item or outcome. That responsibility requires resisting compressed timelines and ensuring decisions are made carefully and consistent with our governance practices. Urgency cannot dictate process.

Advocates of any position on this issue have a stake in this process. A fair process increases the likelihood that members across the Coop, including those who disagree, will accept the outcome.

The GM exists for shared deliberation. The hybrid format expands access to GMs and should be used to deepen participation, not accelerate decisions. Rushing to a vote now that hybrid GMs are a reality risks undermining the very framework they are meant to strengthen—and turning a tool for inclusion into a shortcut that weakens the integrity of Coop governance.

WHAT THIS MOMENT REQUIRES

1. ALLOWING TIME FOR FULL DELIBERATION

GM agenda items related to a boycott of Israeli goods are significant for the Coop membership, and items of this scale should be spaced and structured to allow for meaningful engagement. Sufficient time must be allotted for discussion. This approach is consistent with how the Agenda Committee has historically scheduled more complex items for GMs. Concentrating multiple significant items in a single meeting—

particularly for votes—limits participation and weakens deliberation.

2. A REFERENDUM FOR FULL MEMBER PARTICIPATION

The strongest approach is one that ensures broad participation. All members must have an opportunity to take part in a decision of this magnitude. A referendum allows the full membership—not only those able to attend a particular GM—to weigh in. In 2012, the last time a boycott of Israeli goods was considered, the presenters recognized the importance of involving the entire membership and pursued a referendum. If we value participatory governance, that same standard should apply here.

3. MAINTAINING THE SUPERMAJORITY FOR BOYCOTT APPROVAL

A pending GM agenda item would lower the voting threshold for member approval of boycotts from 75% to a simple majority. The existing 75% supermajority requirement helps ensure that major decisions reflect broad consensus and should remain in place. Unions, political parties and other member-governed organizations all use higher thresholds for consequential decisions to ensure confidence and trust in an outcome. Lowering that threshold to accommodate a difficult boycott vote risks appearing as an effort to adjust the rules to achieve a desired outcome.

REFLECTING THE WILL OF THE MEMBERSHIP

Decisions of this scale—particularly a boycott—should reflect the will of the broader membership. A referendum offers the widest opportunity for participation and the clearest way to measure how members feel. The strength of any decision—whether for or against a boycott—will rest on whether members see it as the product of a fair, inclusive and credible process that reflects the Coop's governance standards.

If we approach this right, we give ourselves the best chance of reaching an outcome the membership can stand behind—and of moving forward together.

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