

COOP MEMBER EXPELLED AFTER REPEATED MASK-WEARING VIOLATIONS

July 4, 2022

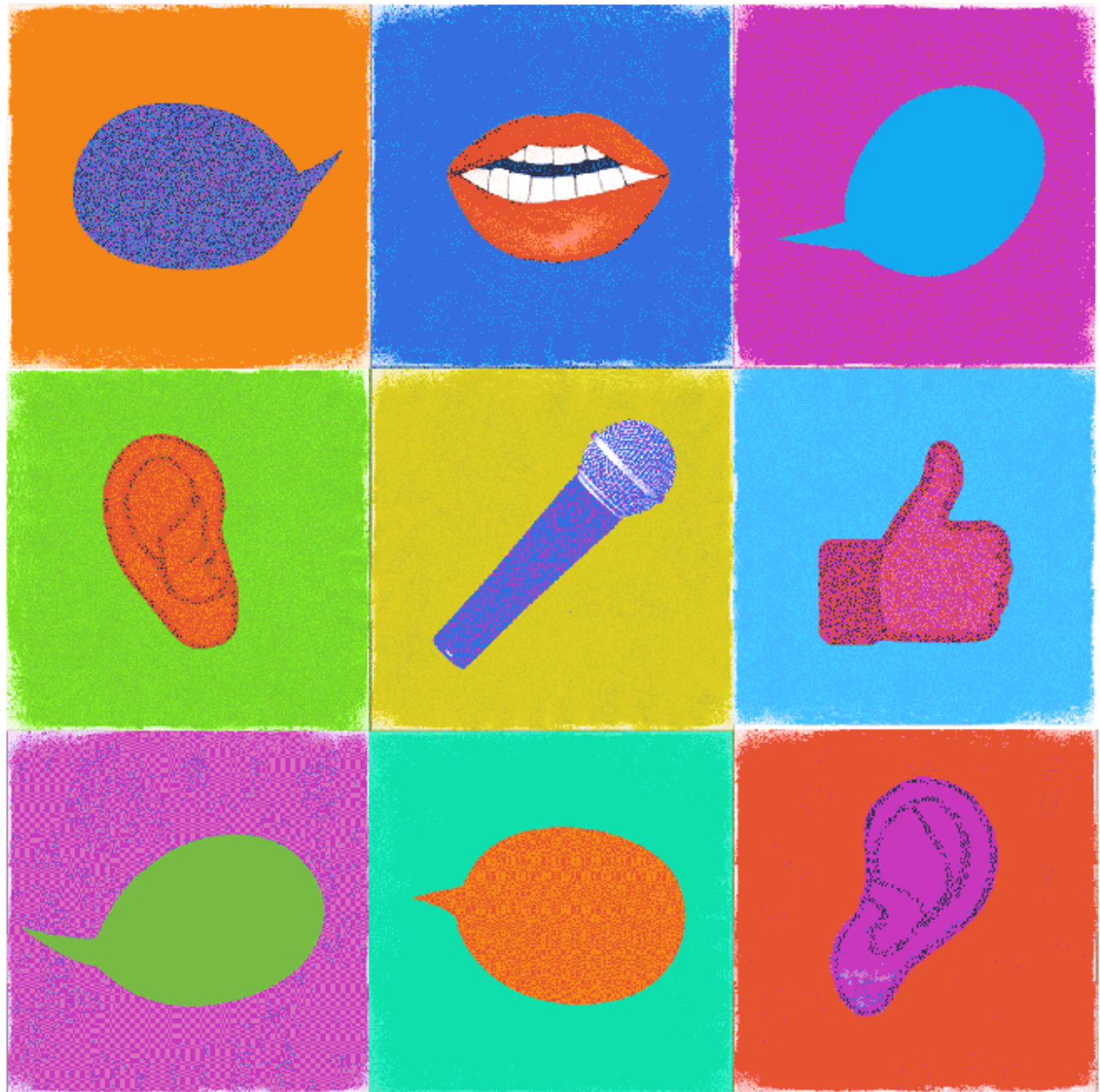


ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

By Jess Powers

On May 12, 2022, a Coop Hearing was held to determine whether a member violated rules on Dec. 10 and 20, 2020, and exhibited extremely uncooperative behavior. As described in previous pieces regarding the dispute resolution process, participants in-

cluded the accused individual, various witnesses on both sides, members of the Hearing Administration Committee, the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC), the Hearing Officers Committee, and 15 Coop members who served as the Hearing Group, each with responsibilities to ensure a fair outcome.

For transparency, the *Linewaiters' Gazette* reports on hearings but the name of the accused is withheld to protect confidentiality. At the request of the committees involved, all names are withheld.

After a year and a half of delays due to the pandemic, members gathered in a spare assembly room at the Picnic House in Prospect Park. The Hearing Administration Committee organized the logistics, arranged the date and venue, and contacted a list of randomly selected Coop members to serve as a Hearing Group. There were a few bumps: not enough copies of documents were made and participants were not miked, occasionally making it difficult to hear. Members of the Hearing Officers Committee kept the proceedings on track and would ultimately decide on a penalty based on the decision of the Hearing Group. After serving for a few hours, only nine of the 15 Hearing Group participants voted on whether the member violated the rules, per the PSFC Disciplinary Procedures.

The accused and committee members introduced themselves. Two members of the DRC shared the results of the investigation. The accused, who will remain anonymous, is a lean white woman in her 60s who wore green clogs and introduced herself as a dancer and a healer.

The investigator began by explaining that the accused member had exhibited a “flagrant disregard for Coop rules” by repeatedly refusing to wear a mask, had altercations with staff and cashiers, and rejected COVID-19 as a “conspiracy theory.” She had a history of refusing to adhere to Coop rules and had been put on probation in the past.

After an incident is reported, an investigation is conducted and, depending on what is

learned, one of nine pre-hearing actions takes place, ranging from a verbal warning to work-slot adjustments. For a dispute to rise to the level of a hearing, the rule-defying behavior must be generally egregious and continue despite attempts to remedy it. The accused is given the option to resign or to have a hearing or arbitration to determine whether they will remain a Coop member.

The accused interjected that she was “not informed about the ability to bring witnesses” until the last minute. A Hearing Officer stated that the disciplinary hearing letter the woman had received included specific details about the process and that other rules and procedures are available online. He also reiterated that the matter at hand was to discuss what was alleged to have happened on Dec. 10 and 20, 2021 and that what occurred years before was only relevant if it pertained to this discussion.

The first witness, A.M., joined the Coop 25 years ago, worked as a paid checkout worker during the pandemic when member labor was suspended, and subsequently was hired full-time to the Coop staff. She recalled the accused wearing a mask under her chin as she approached checkout and A.M. asked her to put it on properly. The accused responded that “masks don’t protect us.” A.M. explained that it was the policy of the Coop. The accused pulled the mask up and replied, “Are you happy now?” A.M. countered, “You don’t need to be so rude,” to which the accused responded loudly, “You’re the rude one.”

FOR A DISPUTE TO RISE TO THE LEVEL OF A HEARING, THE RULE-DEFYING BEHAVIOR MUST BE GENERALLY EGREGIOUS, AND CONTINUE DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY IT.

A.M. said that it was “not an easy time for folks,” between the stress of the pandemic, long lines, and few people allowed into the Coop at a time. She said that some members didn’t realize that the paid cashiers were Coop members, and that a few people were aggressive or disrespectful every week. Cashiers were instructed not to engage

these folks further and to call on permanent staff if support was needed. In this case, A.M. was unnerved by the incident and was encouraged to file a report.

When given a chance to ask questions, the accused immediately apologized to A.M. She explained that since joining the Coop 26 years ago, she observed increasing amounts of “micromanagement” and that she was frustrated with the adoption of rules on mask-wearing.

After receiving a letter from the DRC, it would likely have been possible to resolve the case by apologizing to the parties involved and following the mask-wearing rule. The accused explained, however, that she wanted “to be heard.”

A witness who was unable to attend the hearing in person submitted a letter confirming that she witnessed the incident at the adjacent checkout. She stated that the accused “explained why masks do not work” and became “combative.”

The investigators learned that, following the incident at the checkout, the accused went to the Service Desk outside the office to inquire about the mask policy. Another witness who was unable to attend recounted in written testimony that the accused began to yell after hearing her options. She shared that the accused said that people were “trying to control her” and that she was “yelling her theories.”

After the incidents on the first date, a warning letter was sent by mail on Dec. 18. A popup screen alerted the entrance desk worker when the accused arrived to shop. The letter was also presented by hand to the accused by a Membership Coordinator. The accused was given a mask and allowed to shop on Dec. 20, the date of the second incident.

A Membership Coordinator (MC) at the Coop for over a decade was the next witness. She alluded to previous challenges with the accused and the Hearing Officer restated that prior bad acts are not relevant to this discussion. When the accused questioned the MC on her testimony, a representative exchange ensued:

Accused: “As a squad leader, I did things very differently. There was dancing, good music during our shift.”

MC: “Nothing wrong with that.”

Accused: “I have creative energy, I’m being nice, a person who thinks differently and acts differently. It could be frustrating, nobody hearing what you’re saying.”

MC: “I tried to help you with this, I said to go to a General Meeting [Coop decision making process]. Screaming in the aisle is not the way. I came into the frozen aisle, there you were.”

Accused: “I was frustrated. I was not the only member frustrated. It was the wrong time, wrong place. The woman who was on me... I started singing, trying to channel my energy. I was singing too [loudly], told I shouldn’t dance. I’m an artist. My memory is the word ‘fascist,’ not acting as a cooperative, as a ‘fascist organization.’”

MC: “You’re absolutely right, you said ‘fascist.’ I don’t remember ‘organization.’ By the time I got to you, two more people were present. It was a little wild, that’s why they got staff. People felt uncomfortable... I understand frustration totally, but there has to be some common ground. You seem to be very often outside of that common ground.”

Accused: “Every society has somebody who is a little different.”

A former member of the DRC, P.V., testified about an investigation in 2018. It was relevant only in order to demonstrate that there was a pattern of behavior. A letter shared in the welcome packet and later questions asked by the accused revealed that the prior issues involved arriving late or leaving work shifts early, bringing a child to shifts, and not providing adequate direction as a squad leader. A previous investigation led to a six-month probationary period, which was successfully fulfilled. P.V. shared the impression that the accused followed the rules that made sense to her,

not the Coop rules in general.

IN HER TESTIMONY, THE ACCUSED ACKNOWLEDGED THE PAST INCIDENTS AND DESCRIBED BEING EXAMINED “UNDER A MICROSCOPE.” SHE DESCRIBED HERSELF AS HAVING A “PERSONALITY OF PASSION” THAT PEOPLE MISINTERPRET.

J.B., a witness for the accused, has worked in food processing and been a Coop member since 2008. She met the accused over a decade ago at a New England dance camp and described her as being community-minded, conscientious, high-spirited, and an amazing teacher.

In her testimony, the accused acknowledged the past incidents and described being examined “under a microscope.” She described herself as having a “personality of passion” that people misinterpret. She shared a family tragedy and said that she received a lot of love and support from the Coop at that time. She expressed feeling attacked in the years since and admitted to acting defensively toward administrative staff in response. She described herself as being “big into conflict resolution.”

The accused also described anxiety and having difficulty breathing while wearing a mask, adding that she had an “ADA card.” The DRC investigators responded that this “never came up” in conversations with her and added that the process to apply for a medical exemption was described in the attachment to the letter dated Dec. 18.

The 15 members of the Hearing Group were allowed to ask questions. They approached the situation with care. One member asked why the accused couldn’t put aside her personal beliefs about masks, having “presented [herself] as a person who likes to spread love.” The accused responded: “I am spreading love, by telling the truth. You’re not getting enough oxygen [wearing a mask], I have a different way of seeing it.”

When asked if she was aware that a mask mandate was in place in the state of New York on the dates in question, the accused countered: “It’s not a law, it’s a mandate. The Governor cannot make laws, they can only administer them. They attempted to trick everyone. We don’t have to follow it.”

A DRC member clarified that many mask-wearing cases came before the committee during the pandemic. With the exception of this one, they were de-escalated and resolved by claiming a medical exemption, through workarounds or designated shoppers. She explained that the accused was uncooperative on the phone and the investigator “couldn’t have a constructive conversation with her.” The accused “would not back down from the idea that a mask is wrong, and she is right.” She explained further that this was not the outcome the DRC wanted. The accused responded that she didn’t have a conversation over the phone or that it was so brief that she didn’t recall it.

The remaining nine members of the Hearing Group were reminded that the “intention is irrelevant.” They were to decide whether the accused violated a rule on Dec. 10 and 20 and whether she exhibited “extremely uncooperative behavior.”

We left the Picnic House while the Hearing Group deliberated.

The Hearing Group decided that the rules were broken on those dates and the accused exhibited extremely uncooperative behavior. The Hearing Officers then decided that expulsion is the appropriate penalty. The reasoning was two-fold: first, that was the penalty in other cases where members exhibited uncooperative behavior, and second, the context of a global pandemic before a vaccine was widely available made this behavior particularly uncooperative.

Members of the various committees involved in the dispute resolution process are working to refine and continually improve the process. Any proposed changes will be presented during a General Meeting for Coop members to vote on. In this case, Coop peers decided that expulsion was the most appropriate outcome.

Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and eating. IG: @foodandfury

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR JANA CUNNINGHAM'S QUARTER CENTURY OF SERVICE

July 4, 2022



By Leila Darabi

If you've ever been shopping at the Coop when a shopper uses the intercom to ask "Are we out of almond milk?" you may have heard the voice of Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham. She keeps her ears open for food-related intercom pages, and if the Coop is in fact out of the product, she sometimes shares a recipe instead.

“Call me if you want to learn how to make the best almond milk ever in five minutes!” she recently invited.

AN ISLAND GIRL

Cunningham was born in New York City. “I’m an island girl,” she said, explaining that she was born “on the island of Manhattan, in the village of Harlem,” before moving as a young child to “the mainland” and growing up in the South Bronx.

She describes her mother as an excellent cook. “My goodness! We could go to any restaurant, and she could walk out of there and recreate whatever the dish was from taste.”

When Cunningham was 13, she discovered Islam through her older sister and converted. Rather than explain to her mother that she now wanted to follow a religious diet and avoid non-Halal meat, she announced that she was vegetarian. Nearly five decades later, diet and nutrition remain extremely important parts of her life.

While her mother continued to cook meat, she also served vegetables and “beautiful salads” with every meal, and Cunningham said the “unintended consequence” of her shift in diet was feeling healthier.

“At 13, you don’t think you’re not feeling optimally well. You think this is how you feel,” she explained.

LEAVING CORPORATE LIFE

In her early years, Cunningham studied theater and dance and practiced yoga at home, and she has continued throughout her life. As an adult, however, she worked a corporate job at AT&T. One day, while listening to the radio on her lunch break, she heard a promotion for a yoga event. As a child, she had loved the PBS program “Lilias, Yoga and You” and she described watching the show, following along, and then teaching her younger sister the poses she had learned.

The lunch break radio promotion reminded Cunningham of this early passion, and she decided to attend the event to meet the teacher. While there, she caught the teacher’s eye. “What are you doing in my class?” the teacher asked. “You should be teaching yoga.”

Cunningham eventually became a yoga instructor.

DISCOVERING THE COOP

Cunningham joined the Coop in 1993, not long after moving to Brooklyn. “In those days there was a street squad,” she explained—members whose work shift involved setting up a table in front of the store, talking to people who walked by, and canvassing for new members. Cunningham agreed to a tour and signed up.



Cunningham has seen the Coop evolve from the over 3,000-member community she joined to a peak of over 17,000 members just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I had made a commitment to all-organic food, and I had three young children, and I practically emptied my savings account sticking to that commitment,” she said. The access to organic produce without breaking the bank and the cooperative philosophy

of the Coop appealed to her.

In the beginning she worked different shifts, trying out different roles as a member. “Then I went to the office and I was like, ‘Oh, I like this best.’” One day in 1997, while working that shift, a staff member informed her of an open role for a paid position. Cunningham applied and got the job.

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Twenty-five years later, Cunningham remains on staff and has seen the Coop evolve from the over 3,000-member community she joined to a peak of over 17,000 members just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Running the Coop’s membership office has always been a very challenging job and requires a balanced, compassionate approach with great attention to fairness,” said Coop founder and General Manager Joe Holtz. “Jana has mastered this and more and has been a positive example for her colleagues. The Coop is lucky to have hired her more than 25 years ago.”

Cunningham said working in the office appealed to her “mommy gene.” She has always enjoyed both helping people and teaching, as she did when she taught yoga. (She continues to teach tai chi.) As a Membership Coordinator she counsels members on “cooperative behavior” and encourages them to be considerate and mindful of their roles in the Coop community.

When asked what advice she has for shoppers, Cunningham said, “When people come to shop here, they should not be in a rush.”

PANDEMIC SHIFT

Like all Coop staff, Cunningham’s role changed when the store adopted strict COVID-19 protocols.

“The pandemic happened, and I went from an office job to managing a grocery store and being on the floor eight hours a day,” she said.

Only staff could work, and members of any status could shop, eliminating the need for a team upstairs tracking member work shifts. “It didn’t matter if you were suspended with five makeups, you could still shop,” said Cunningham. “So all the membership coordinators went downstairs to run the store.”



Like all Coop staff, Cunningham’s role shifted when the store adopted strict COVID-19 protocols.

Rather than working from an office and managing member labor, she and her colleagues found themselves managing the store and temporary workers. “It was very different. It was a physically very demanding and exhausting couple of years,” she said.

PERMANENT CHANGES

Now that the Membership Office is back open, Cunningham and her colleagues have shifted jobs again, though they have not fully reverted to the roles they played prior to March 2020. “A lot of what we did [pre-pandemic] has moved online, so the job is changing,” she said.

While several membership coordinators have left their jobs in the past few years, the Coop has not filled every opening, in part because the labor needs have shifted. “The jobs here continuously evolve,” Cunningham explained.

“When I first started, there were only five or six Membership Coordinators.” Two years ago, she said, the membership staff was around 18 people and is now about 12, including a few on parental leave.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Cunningham typically works Tuesday through Friday, four 10-hour shifts per week. She arrives at 7 a.m. to open the store and set up the membership office. She makes sure the cashiers have what they need, that there are tags at the entrance to help count the number of members shopping at any given time, and she sets up the office for her colleague who arrives at 8 a.m. to greet members working that shift.

Then it’s time to “open the gates.” Over the course of the day, Cunningham might help someone on suspension get a day pass to shop, respond to pages from members working on the floor who need assistance, and attend a staff meeting. A big part of her job is the behind-the-scenes office work that helps manage membership.

Cunningham shops at the Coop every day, purchasing greens and avocados to make a salad for lunch, or picking up blueberries and yogurt for the next day’s breakfast. On Fridays she does a larger shop for her days off and likes to walk the produce aisle to see what’s new.

One of the many perks that has kept her happy in her job for over 25 years is the constant possibility of new discoveries.

“I like to try new things,” she said.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She is the cohost of the Cringe-watchers podcast and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients @persian_ish on Instagram.

JUST HOW “SLAVE FREE” IS TONY’S CHOCOLONELY?

July 4, 2022

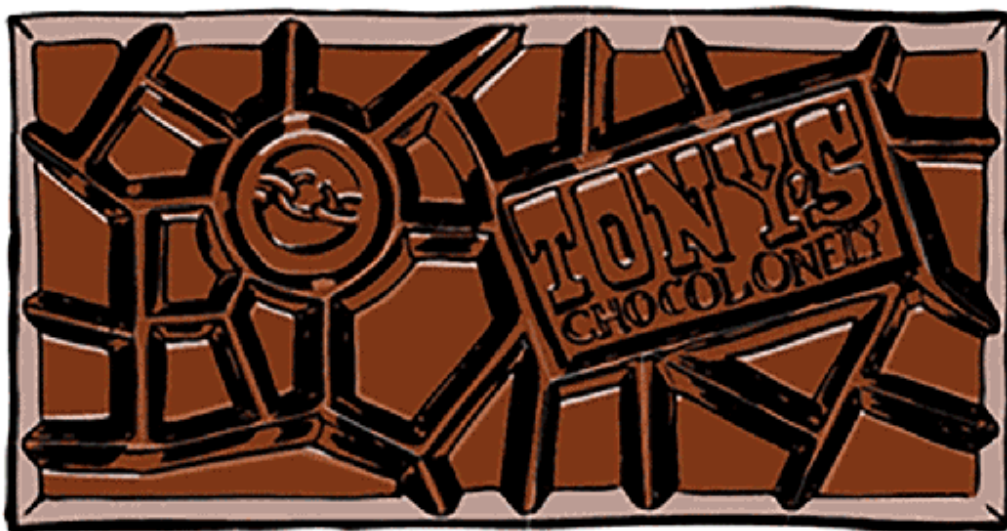


ILLUSTRATION BY VALERIE TRUCCHIA

By Miranda Purves

Grocery shopping at the age of 51 with a family of four to feed is mostly a grind now, but I still get one frisson of rebellious adult joy from the aisles when I chuck not one, not two, but five or six Tony's Chocolonely bars into my cart at a time. With the Coop price of \$3.75 per 6.35 ounce bar, it's an affordable splurge. (At my nearest bodega that stocks them, Food Train on 7th Avenue and 11th street, they're \$5.95 each.)

I grew up in the '70s with a mother who, when it came to candy, subscribed to a scarcity angle of parental modeling. Although my brother and I are sugar fiends, as are our parents, dessert was often yogurt and homemade jam. When there was chocolate, there was one bar. My mother controlled it, divvying it up agonizingly, with more for her and my dad.

Now, I have a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old who have their father's fast metabolism, and I'm in charge of chocolate procurement. I stock sufficient quantities each week to, I hope, allow my offspring to grow up free from a survivalist urge to fork their dining companion's hand to the table whenever a chocolate bar appears.

Tony's Chocolonely is particularly well-suited for fostering a sense of abundance, because it comes in 3-by-6-by-½-inch slabs that are wrapped in childlike primary colors, emanating an unrefined, bulk-buy quality.

RESEARCHING THIS STORY HAS FORCED ME TO CONFRONT THE VERACITY OF TONY'S APPEALING MARKETING MESSAGE. WERE THEY REALLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MULTINATIONAL CHOCOLATE COMPANIES?

Flavors such as honey nougat, caramel or hazelnut taste like very, very good low-end chocolate. Good enough to lure in even bean-to-bar 75 percent plus cocoa aesthetes, such as my friend and fellow Coop member Jon Bines, who recently started buying Chocolonely milk chocolate bars for his teenagers.

“My enthusiasm is for the most delicious version of whatever the thing is. I have no problem with a slider or a corn dog. I just want it to be a good slider or a good corn dog,” said Bines. “So if you want a fantastic, big thick chocolate bar, you want that one and not some crummy thing from Hershey’s like a Chunky bar.”

His wife, Alexandra Jacobs, mused that “expensive dark chocolate can taste like you’re eating dirt.”

Our families aren’t alone in our yearning for a certain base indulgence. According to one of our chocolate buyers, Gillian Chi, Tony’s Choclonely is a Coop favorite, selling about 300 bars a week. Tony’s Milk Caramel Sea Salt is our store’s fourth most popular bar, just behind Justin’s chocolate peanut butter cups and two Chocolove flavors (whose popularity might be aided by their mid-shelf placement; Tony’s is down at the bottom).

The emblem stamped on every Choclonely bar, “Together we’ll make chocolate 100% slave free,” adds to the appeal for conscientious Coop members. I chose to view it as a final seal of approval for my weekly stockpiling, even though my 16-year-old cautioned that there is no such thing as slave-free chocolate. There were some truths, particularly during the pandemic, I didn’t want to hear.

But researching this story has forced me to confront the veracity of Tony’s appealing marketing message. Were they really different from other multinational chocolate companies?

Yes, Tony’s proclaims—vigorously—in their social media campaigns, branding efforts, and their fair-trade stamp and B-Corp certification. (A B Corp, or benefit corporation, is a nonprofit that encourages what is known as “impact businesses,” which balances profits with social and environmental stewardship.)

Not really, according to Ayn Riggs, a one-woman chocolate social justice powerhouse who turned her tiny NGO, Slave Free Chocolate, into an industry influencer. Since

2007, Riggs has issued an annual list of ethical chocolate companies as a way for consumers in the United States to be activists with their dollars. (Riggs said she works on Slave Free Chocolate pro bono; her day job is running a decorative arts company that specializes in Italian plaster finishes.)

In 2021, Riggs took Tony's off her list because their beans are processed into cocoa liquor by Barry Callebaut, a member of what she terms "the chocolate cartel," which also includes a handful of mega-players such as Mondelez International, Cargill, Nestlé, Mars, Olam Group, and Hershey's. These multinationals dominate the market with exports from farms in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which grow about 70 percent of the world's cocoa. The use of unpaid child labor on their farms is well-documented by, among other groups, the U.S. Department of Labor.

THE USE OF UNPAID CHILD LABOR ON COCOA FARMS IS WELL-DOCUMENTED BY,
AMONG OTHER GROUPS, THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

Commodities trading and multinational corporations have kept the price of cocoa low for decades, despite increasing demand as Asian countries have begun consuming more chocolate and as dark bars have gained a reputation as a superfood in the West.

Because farmers, who tend to own only a few hectares and earn about \$0.75 a day in Côte d'Ivoire and \$2 a day in Ghana, can't afford to pay for harvesters, they turn to their children. Instead of going to school, these underage, unpaid laborers spend their days cutting pods off trees with machetes and hauling 100-pound sacks. The plantations are often soaked in Roundup, accidents are common and emergency medical care is rare or nonexistent. This is what the United Nations has defined as modern slavery.

In some instances, the children aren't relatives: They're boys from the even poorer

neighboring countries Mali and Burkina Faso, lured with the promise that they'll be able to send money home but are instead enslaved and kept locked in sheds at night.

Initially, Tony's entire raison d'être was to change this system. In the early 2000s, a Dutch investigative journalist named Teun van de Keuken produced a television show on the chocolate industry. He was so appalled by the exploitation inherent in the supply chain that he and two colleagues eventually decided to start their own company. Their mission was to raise awareness, put pressure on the major players to change their practices, and procure slave-free beans from the poorest regions for their own chocolate.

They called the bars Tony's, after the anglicization of Teun's first name, and Choc-colonely because the entrepreneurs stood alone against the companies who upheld the slavery status quo.

The bars are divided unequally. This is to signify the inequality at the heart of the supply chain, but it has the side effect of making you eat more chocolate.

"There's this round piece you have to work around and you can only get too small or too big a chunk," said Luca Bines, Jon and Alexandra's 16-year-old, "so you always go too big."

Van de Keuken's bars, which successfully conveyed both a social justice mission and a sense of zany Dutch fun, were an instant success. Since its inception in 2005, the company has grown vastly. They grabbed an 8.9 percent market share in the Netherlands in 2021 and have expanded, with influxes of venture capital and private equity, across the globe. They have opened offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and Austria. In 2021 they took in 100 million euros in revenue, although they reported operating at a slight net loss due to aggressive international growth strategies.

But as Tony's has expanded, so has the problem they set out to stop. "When I first

started my list,” said Riggs, “1.8 million children were considered at risk according to the [U.S.] Department of Labor. Now it’s gone up to 2.5 million.”

Both Chocolonely and Riggs agree that the multibillion-dollar multinationals are the ones causing the problem, and are also the only ones who can fix it, by collectively assuming the responsibility to pay living wage rates for cocoa and taking a hit in their profits and/or increasing the prices consumers pay.

Not only does the low price of cocoa force farmers to use child labor, it has also, in as little as a decade, led to an 80 percent destruction of rainforest canopy in Côte d’Ivoire’s once biodiverse national forests as farmers extend plantations to increase their low-dollar yields.

NOT ONLY DOES THE LOW PRICE OF COCOA FORCE FARMERS TO USE CHILD LABOR, IT HAS ALSO, IN AS LITTLE AS A DECADE, LED TO AN 80 PERCENT DESTRUCTION OF RAINFOREST CANOPY IN CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S ONCE BIODIVERSE NATIONAL FORESTS.

Riggs acknowledged that many of the high-end bean-to-bar chocolatiers on her list are slave-free and sustainable by default. “They buy from more regulated countries such as Costa Rica or Indonesia, where the farmers are poor, but their children can go to school in the day and get medical attention,” Riggs said.

She cites Divine Chocolate, also carried by the Coop, as an example of a Fairtrade company that is creating alternative economic systems, such as women-owned plantations, within West Africa.

“Tony’s is great marketing, and has raised awareness, but results are results. After 16 years, I think it’s BS that this is changing the industry from within,” said Riggs. “And they’re complicit in slavery by buying from Callebaut.”

Tony's responded via email, admitting the failure to achieve industry-wide change but also asserting: "Have we made lots of impact on the ground at coops we work with, raised a ton of awareness and gotten other companies to join in on the cause? Heck yeah!" (Their email maintains the brand's high-energy tone.)

They say they pay both a fair-trade increase, which still doesn't bring the price per ton up to a living wage, and their own self-imposed premium, which they state does provide the 8,000 farmers in their network "a living income," enough to send their children to school.

Riggs questions whether tracking this is possible within the mélange of small, ramshackle farms dispersed in the forest. Indeed, in February, Tony's tweeted that they'd identified 1,701 cases of illegal child labor in their supply chain in 2021, which they plan to remediate. They write that this "generally come[s] from onboarding new coops." Riggs casts doubt on how they can monitor that remediation when the farmers, even with increased fees for their crops, are still entrenched in poverty. "Transparency shouldn't provide much comfort to consumers," said Riggs. "It's a tool, but it doesn't fix a broken price structure."

If Coop members decided to view Tony's claims as social-good washing and wanted to stop carrying the brand, Chi, our buyer, explains that we'd have to bring it up as an item at the General Meeting.

For now, I'll continue to buy Tony's. I think it's preferable to keep some pressure on in the cocoa-growing regions of West Africa, to use marketing films to introduce consumers to the farmers behind-the-scenes, and to expand the number of farmers benefiting from somewhat higher wages.

I've come to see though, even as I munch down another smooth, thick wedge of caramel sea salt, that my mother's adherence to a model of scarcity was the more honorable parenting move.

Miranda Purves is a South Slope writer and tree hugger.