

NEW COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE SEEKS TO DEMYSTIFY COMMITTEES FOR MEMBERS

October 25, 2022



By John B. Thomas

For most of the Coop's 14,000 members, fulfilling our workslot credit requirement is as simple as regularly signing up for a receiving, checkout or food preparation shift.

But for a subset of members, there is a different path to fulfilling the workslot credit requirement: service on a committee. But what is a committee? What do they do? Who runs them? How do they benefit the Coop? What oversight do they have? And how do members join them (or leave them)?

These are the questions that motivated Rachel Porter, longtime Coop member (and member of the Revolving Loan Fund Committee), to look into the status of committees at the Coop. In Porter's estimation the Coop has somewhere around 35 committees that vary widely in size, structure, transparency, function, as well as power and influence.

THE MYRIAD OF COMMITTEES IS CLEARLY AS VARIED AND DIVERSE AS THE COOP ITSELF.

Some, like the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, have nearly 60 members. Others like the Firehouse Committee (established to liaise with the firehouse next door to the Coop, and now seemingly defunct) were just one person. Some have an inordinate amount of power, such as the Chair and Agenda Committees that run the General Meeting or the Personnel Committee who can hire or fire General Coordinators. For the average Coop member, some are highly transparent in their communication to members, such as the International Trade Education Committee which runs its own WordPress site. And some appear to be defunct, such as the Tree Bed Committee. And some clearly contribute to the Coop's mission such as the Environmental Committee, one of the longest-running committees responsible for many of the Coop's environmental stances. And some are more a project of passion, such as the Hudson Valley Farm Committee tasked with expanding smallholder agriculture in the Hudson Valley. The myriad of committees is clearly as varied and diverse as the Coop itself.

Porter estimates that several hundred Coop members work across the Coop's approximately 35 committees, which represents a not-insignificant number of the Coop's

member-workers.



According to Porter, “All the members of the Coop should know what the committees are, what they do, and who works for them.” This was the subject of her proposal for the Committee Oversight Committee (COC), a recently-approved committee by the July 2022 GM whose mandate is to regularly report to the GM and LWG on Coop member committees’ work. The COC is comprised of 6 members who were elected at the July 2022 General Meeting. The proposal for the Committee contained three main elements that were approved by the Coop membership:

1. Committees should report to the GM one to three times per year, report in the *Line-waiters’ Gazette* two times per year, and should have a current entry on the Coop’s website that includes the committee members and is updated annually.
2. Committee membership requirements should be transparent and public.
3. It should be clear that you can only do as much work through a committee as the

membership generally works.

These elements should provide transparency to the membership about the number, scope and activities of the committees. Porter feels that this is a critical step in providing both transparency to the membership but also accountability for committee members, where the contribution to the Coop is not as obvious as stocking shelves or working checkout. This ambiguity about workslot credit goes both ways however, with some committee jobs likely requiring significantly more work than a normal workslot, and some committee jobs likely requiring significantly less work.

A key issue the COC will need to resolve is what exactly constitutes a committee, and what kind of oversight is required depending on the type of committee. According to Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham, there seems to be some confusion on even the basic definition of what is in scope for the COC: “We have used the words ‘committee’ and ‘squad’ somewhat interchangeably.” In Cunningham’s view, the more operational committees or squads should not be subject to the COC’s mandate as the visible nature of the work and the coop staff engagement ensure accountability. These include squads where there is visibility into the work that is being done for the Coop (e.g., receiving, checkout, food prep) and where there is direct and close contact with a member of coop staff. Cunningham says, “I think the intention of the [COC] proposal was that there are Committees that are more ambiguous in terms of what they do for the Coop. [For these committees] having a report written in the *Gazette* or a presentation to the GM makes sense.”

THESE ELEMENTS SHOULD PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY TO THE MEMBERSHIP ABOUT THE NUMBER, SCOPE, AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEES.

Another key challenge for the COC will be defining where to prioritize oversight and the limits of its mandate. According to Cunningham, “In some of the communications

with staff and committees the COC members have been using language like ‘investigate’ which I don’t think the proposal approved by the GM mentioned.” Additionally, Cunningham is surprised by some of the committees being targeted by initial outreach from the COC. “It seems like [the COC is] focusing more on committees where there is already a lot of visibility and accountability, like the Agenda Committee, instead of committees where the work might be less apparent, there’s not a website presence, and they’re not connected to a PSFC staff member.” She continues, “[The COC proposal] was a great idea. Let’s clearly define roles of committees and have more oversight for committees that we don’t know what they are. But we need more clarification on what the COC should actually be doing.”

One element of Porter’s initial proposal did not pass—which was a proposal to have term limits on committee membership. Porter felt that this was an especially critical piece for some of the more powerful committees such as Personnel, Agenda, Chair, *Linewaiters’ Gazette*, and Dispute Resolution Committee that have tremendous power in shaping the staffing, membership, and direction of the Coop. Upon joining these committees, members can effectively stay on for as long as they wish with no ability to remove them unless they choose to step aside. *[Editors’ note: Gazette staff are subject to editorial oversight; members can be and are removed from their jobs for a variety of reasons. Also, It is not a given that the Gazette has the level of influence described by Porter.]* The implications of this unchecked power became clear with the furor surrounding the disciplinary action taken by the Personnel Committee against General Coordinator Joe Holtz for coming back to work after taking a COVID test that later turned out to be positive (covered in the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* here and the subject of numerous Letters to the Editor).

PORTER’S HOPE IS THAT THE COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CAN BEGIN TO BRIDGE THAT DIVIDE THROUGH A FOUNDATION OF INCREASED TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION.

Issues with these more powerful and influential committees—such as the Personnel Committee—may not be able to be solved through the COC. As a long-time staff member for 25 years, Cunningham makes the point that “the Coop has tried to use volunteer labor for as much work as possible to be able to keep our prices competitive. When we were a mom and pop shop we could get away with that. But now we have 80 employees and we’re a multi-million dollar organization so maybe it’s time now for us to look at different organizational tools, like an actual Human Resources department.”

The Coop’s mission statement articulates the spirit of cooperation with which the organization is supposed to function: “working together builds trust through cooperation and teamwork.” However, Porter notes that the current lack of transparency around Committees “demonstrates a preference for secrecy that creates this divide between staff and committees on the one side and membership on the other.” She continued, “I don’t think our cooperative model is about that. [Our model] is so special and unique.”

Porter’s hope is that the Committee Oversight Committee can begin to bridge that divide through a foundation of increased transparency and communication, noting: “We put a lot of time and money into these committees. We should really start to take them seriously.” Cunningham agrees: “The people who proposed the COC have the best of intentions. I think we just need to clarify its application.”

John B. Thomas works on the sustainability and social impact team for a purpose-driven apparel company.

BRING BACK CHILDCARE: A RESPONSE TO THE COOP’S MAY LETTER
ABOUT CHILDCARE

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Karen,

I am responding to your May letter in the *Gazette* regarding bringing back childcare.

The Coop states that the two main reasons that the Coop cannot currently bring back childcare is that the food processing machine currently occupies the old childcare room, and the public health risks. I wish to address these one at a time.

One: The “machine.” I have seen and witnessed this machine, and can appreciate all the value and expediency it has brought to the Coop. However, it does not seem big enough that another space could not be found for it elsewhere in the Coop. I am not one to say where exactly it should go, but if the basement is not an option, the meeting room certainly could be. This room is currently used for one or two (or zero) office members eating their lunch. Orientation meetings no longer happen there. It is a viable option. Space at the Coop has always been tight, and yet the Coop has always found a way.

Two: Public health risks. All children six months and older are now eligible to be vaccinated. On November 1, the mayor will strike the vaccine mandate for workers. Though I am personally all for the vaccine, whether people are vaccinated or not has been negligible on their ability to transmit COVID since the arrival of Omicron and its sub-variants. It should also be noted that childcare is an optional service that the Coop offers, and that people who may not be comfortable interacting with this particular population, one prone to runny noses and not using masks correctly (if at all), do not have to engage. Likewise for parents who do not want to bring their children in to childcare.

But most parents or people who regularly interact with their own and other children accept these inherent risks in exchange for living a regular life after the trauma of the pandemic. If anything, bringing back childcare would most likely make the Coop safer for our more vulnerable members, by not forcing them to be around mask-less children on the Coop floor. (Any parent who has brought their child with them to the Coop will tell you how impossible it is to keep a mask correctly on their child while here, especially given that they are being paraded in front of an endless array of snacks.) I would also argue that social distancing at the Coop in general is a non-starter. It is rarely a part of how any of us interact at this point, and one only has to spend five minutes on the Coop floor to witness this fact.

With all due respect, the Coop’s arguments in this matter are outdated and its inflexible stance towards childcare a bit stubborn. The Coop is not a normal grocery store,

in that it requires its members to work. Providing childcare enables parents to reliably work their shifts. The Coop has so far been unwilling to accept and accommodate this reality, and the time has come for this to change.

In cooperation,

Maya Solovéy

PERSONNEL GRIEVANCES ARE PRIVATE BY NATURE

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Coop community,

I don't like to feel used.

Yet, this is how I felt during the September 27 General Meeting as members discussed the agenda item re: overturning General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz's suspension. The Coop membership is unable to evaluate this situation thoroughly or fairly. Due to the right to privacy, we have limited access to the full story behind the

decision. Frustrated members expressed the lack of transparency pointed to the Personnel Committee's wrongdoing. Some suggested the Coop should have human resources on site. Anyone who thinks the role of HR is transparency has no experience with a human resources department.

Personnel matters are not for public consumption. Employers won't reveal suspensions, firings, or other personnel details due to liability concerns. These limitations became a main argument for retroactively overturning Mr. Holtz's suspension.

As I looked at the screen share of a letter from the Personnel Committee to Mr. Holtz that he provided to Item Sponsors Dorothy Siegel and Gillian Chi, I wondered: can other PSFC staff members have their personnel grievances made into a General Meeting agenda item? Mr. Holtz has the support, resources and privilege while I'm sure other staff members couldn't even fathom this course of action.

Calls to reevaluate the structures around personnel decisions are understandable. For the health of the Coop, structures should be revisited regularly. However, an attempt to bypass the structure and use members to overturn one decision is bad faith. How can we thrive when we're being aimed at one another? Mr. Holtz can pursue the appropriate legal action if he so chooses.

Sincerely,

Deneen Reynolds-Knott

STREAMLINE THE SHOPPING PROCESS FOR EBT HOLDERS

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Hi,

I would like to see checkout accept EBT payments for those who use a debit card for any balance not covered by the EBT. Should a person prefer to use cash or have a coupon, then the sale could be suspended and the shopper could proceed to the cashier. To avoid confusion, signs may be placed at each checkout position indicating EBT is accepted ONLY IF any balance is to be paid by a debit card.

The current situation is discriminatory against the poor, requiring an extra step that should easily be covered by the current checkouts. Swiping two cards is a simple task.

How might this improvement be undertaken? Does it require a vote of the membership?

In an email exchange with Joe Holtz, he expressed some concerns which I believe I have responded to here and I would like wider input on my proposal.

Thanks!

George Carter

OPENNESS ABOUT CONTROVERSIES IS A CORE COOP VALUE

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

Having just attended the September GM, I'm impressed with the collected wisdom of our membership in the discussion about the suspension of General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz. There was also a deep feeling we have something of a crisis in dealing with conflict at the Coop. I want to call up a detail from a previous report on our governance:

“The Coop culture is shifted towards participation, and openness about controversies,” says General Coordinator Ann Herpel. “Decisions are not made behind closed doors in private meetings.”

We need to respect that core value of our governance.

Regarding the reinstatement of Joe Holtz’s salary, I support it based on *Linewaiters’ Gazette* reporting and the presentation at the GM. I support policy transparency and fairness toward all Coop employees. Locking out an employee and docking a full month of pay is obviously extreme, and outside the guidelines for repercussions detailed in the Coop’s COVID policy at the time of the offense. If there is more to it than this, someone better clarify it for the rest of us, and trust in our process.

In cooperation,

Lisa Guido

MEMBERS DESERVE A WARM—AND RESPECTFUL—WELCOME

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

To The Editor,

I am writing to express my concern about the treatment of personal information in the Coop database. Specifically, at the check-in desk. This has bothered me for a while, but the low point was an occasion a few years ago where my wife was ridiculed about her disability work exemption. I am sharing this with her permission.

Though she has battled chronic illness for years, she's relatively young and appears

to be able-bodied to those who don't know her. On this visit to the Coop, the person working check-in saw her, looked at her membership status (disability), scoffed in disgust and questioned why she would need the exemption at all.

Of course, addressing this in the moment would be one way to try to solve the problem. But my wife's response was shock and embarrassment, so she moved along, speechless. There are other examples of her being questioned about her disability status. Her visits to the Coop have slowly become more rare in recent years for this very reason.

The current Coop policy allows anyone to sign up for shifts in the office and at check-in, with no training or guidelines about how to treat people's personal information. This should change. In my experience, the Coop is full of kind, socially intelligent coordinators who discreetly address personal issues on a regular basis. Members working their regular shift on the other hand, can sometimes be careless and even rude.

Although these incidents seem to be rare, it should be the Coop's goal for this to never happen at all. We love the Coop and simply want it to be an inviting place for all.

Sincerely,

Christian John

KEEP THE VACCINE AND MASKING MANDATE — FOR SHOPPERS AND WORKERS

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

My partner is immunocompromised and their health has declined significantly due to long COVID. The Coop's recent decision to remove the vaccine mandate for workers risks pushing out families like mine. Although the city is no longer mandating that private employers impose a vaccine mandate, employers are still free to impose such mandates. They are not required to lift their mandates, as the Coop has chosen to

do—with no opportunity for members to weigh in. Worse still, the Coop is also considering removing its mask mandate. Such a move would devastate members who are disabled, elderly, pregnant or immunocompromised, and everyone in their households—folks like me who can't afford to carry risks home.

Both the CDC and the city are downplaying the risks of COVID and long COVID in the interest of returning to “business as usual.” The Coop must do better. Even if the current community levels of COVID are low—a situation that is very likely to change as the weather gets colder and the holiday season begins—the risk to the most vulnerable remains high, and the long-term effects of even “mild” cases can be devastating. In such a situation, a community like the Coop should be guided not by the will of the majority or what is easiest for most, but instead by practices that allow everyone to be together in as safe a way as possible. That is what disability justice and basic decency demand. The Coop should retain the general vaccine and masking mandates for workers and shoppers and permit exemptions based on medical necessity, just as it does with the work requirement.

Households like mine have already been pushed out of most spheres of public life as basic safety measures have been abandoned. Don't let the Coop leave us behind.

Adrien Lorenzo Weibgen

VOTE FOR THE NYS CLEAN WATER, CLEAN AIR, CLEAN JOBS BOND ACT
ON NOV. 8

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Cooperators,

There's a lot at stake in the 2022 midterm elections—including a great opportunity to protect our state's environment by voting for the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Bond Act. This would be the state's first environmental bond act since 1996.

The Bond act would safeguard clean drinking water, replace lead pipes, fund electric

school buses, and cover the cost of retrofitting schools and other public buildings to improve energy efficiency and air filtration. It would update roads and sewer systems to withstand more intense storms, and it would provide funds for flood risk reduction and to restore shorelines damaged by heavy rains and tides. There's also money for farmland protection, wildlife conservation, and park improvements.

The Bond act has the support of more than 200 groups across the state, from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Audubon Society to the New York State AFL--CIO and the Construction Trades Council. The act would support nearly 100,000 green, family-sustaining jobs that can't be offshored.

Passing the Bond act by a wide margin would send a clear message that New Yorkers are serious about environmental protection. That's urgent, because we need legislators to take even stronger measures on climate in the upcoming session. Please spread the word that we need everyone to vote yes on this referendum item in November.

In cooperation,

Mimi Bluestone

JOE HOLTZ DESERVES BETTER

October 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editor,

I've been a Coop member for over 15 years and was shocked and dismayed to read about Founder, General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz's suspension in the October *Linewaiters' Gazette*. I've always felt tremendous gratitude to Joe and the other Coop founders for their incredible contribution to the community and dedication to making and keeping the Coop such an amazing place. But I would be shocked by the severity

of this punishment for any Coop member. Banned from even shopping at the Coop and docked a month's pay? That is cruel and gratuitous. This was not May 2020—we have vaccines, we have effective treatments, and Joe was wearing an N95 mask. I urge the decision makers here to reinstate Joe, award him back pay, and perhaps most important, give him a heartfelt apology.

In cooperation,

Jackie Cheney

TENSIONS RISE AT THE SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING

October 25, 2022



By Sara Ivry

Like autumn leaves in a howling gale, insinuations flew at the September 27 General Meeting of the Food Coop when attendees turned attention to a proposal concerning Joe Holtz, the Coop's general manager and treasurer, and the penalty he faced last summer in response to violating staff COVID protocols. Imposed by the Personnel Committee, the disciplinary action consisted of a 30-day suspension without pay and

barred entry for Holtz to the Coop for that same time period.

“We believe an injustice has been done and should be remedied,” said Gillian Chi, a Coop receiving coordinator and buyer, who presented and wrote the proposal with member Dorothy Siegel. They drafted it, they said, with Holtz’s knowledge but not at his behest. The proposal seeks twin outcomes: the payment of Holtz’s garnished wages and the issuance by the Coop of a public retraction of the punitive action.

“This treatment was unprecedented,” Chi said, adding that “at least 25% of paid staff have violated COVID protocols at one time or another,” or so she has observed. She said she has seen staff remove masks, eat in areas where they should not, and more. “Perhaps warnings were given. But nothing more. None of us were suspended without pay.”

LIKE AUTUMN LEAVES IN A HOWLING GALE, INSINUATIONS FLEW AT THE SEPTEMBER 27 GENERAL MEETING OF THE FOOD COOP

“The ultimate motivation to our proposal is not just to reverse one decision about one person,” Chi said. “The real issue is, can the Coop be a good employer? Can we be confident our employer will have high ethical standards?”

Having offered an overview of the evolution of, and limits to, the power of the Personnel Committee, Chi maintained that the committee lacks the right to hire or fire people without general membership consent.

“Membership has authority to redress this harm,” Chi said, and she and Siegel want their proposal to go before the membership for a vote at the next general meeting.

Jean Callahan, a member of the Personnel Committee, defended the actions of her committee, clarifying that it is a body elected to advise on hiring and firing matters. It

did not act on a whim and consulted with a labor lawyer, she said. “We considered a full range of responses. We decided [the punishment] was a fair and proportionate response.”

Moreover, the rifts over whether Holtz was singled out for punishment or deserving of it belies a bigger issue “undermining the morale of the paid staff.” In the course of the Personnel Committee’s investigation into Holtz’s action, some Coop staff expressed fear of reprisals for being whistle blowers and requested anonymity in their conversations.

“Some were fearful of Joe’s power,” Callahan said. “At the moment there are some deep and painful divides. Individual staff members feel silenced and unsafe.”

Among them was General Coordinator Ann Herpel, who said the very fact that this proposal was on the agenda at the General Meeting represented a form of retaliation against those who complained about or investigated Holtz, and that there is much more to the story of Holtz’s infraction than what has been reported previously or presented by Chi and Siegel.

MEMBERS WILL NO LONGER BE REQUIRED TO SHOW PROOF OF VACCINATION TO WORK A SHIFT AND UNVACCINATED WORKERS MAY RETURN TO WORKING THEIR SHIFTS.

“I’m really dismayed that people are saying that the members have the final say on personnel issues,” Herpel said. “That could have a chilling effect... Why would people complain or participate in investigations if they thought that this body would make a final decision that could overrule a decision by another body that investigated? Why would anyone participate?”

According to Herpel, the Personnel Committee has taken action against general coord-

inators in the past “without controversy,” she said, “which leads to the conclusion that Joe Holtz is not accountable” given that the penalty imposed against him is being challenged and may lead to him being given a pass for his transgression.

“I’m angry. I’m dismayed. I’m appalled. I feel unsafe,” she said before departing the meeting.

Terry Meyers, a staff member in the accounting office, similarly defended the Personnel Committee’s action. What the proposal is saying “is that the leadership does not have to follow the rules. That innuendo and excuses mean more than an investigation involving statements from, I am sure, more than one person. People in power should be held to higher standards, not lesser standards,” she said. “Joe being away for 30 days did not hurt the Coop, though it created more work for staff. Reversing the decision of the committee would.”

Others sided with Chi and Siegel, questioning the mandate of the Personnel Committee and the lack of transparency in policies and proceedings.

“It’s our Coop. We own it. We are responsible for making sure it’s a safe and fair employer,” said Cheyenna Weber. “I also encourage the Personnel Committee to bring a proposal for a Human Resources Committee.”

And Siegel, like Herpel before her, said she was dismayed by the turn of events but did not blame the Personnel Committee, whose disbandment she originally planned to propose. She moreover took umbrage at the slurry of innuendos this entire episode has begat.



A file photo of Joe Holtz, the Coop's General Manager and Treasurer

"A lot of this rancor, 'if only you knew what really went on you wouldn't feel this way,' but then you can't expect members to accept insinuations or the red meat of Joe McCarthy," Siegel said. "The last thing I want is for Ginia Bellafante to write an article about the precious Coop where people are wounded and people are fired and people throw out accusations about each other." She added, "I'm sorry it has come to this."

[Editor's Note: On October 1, Chi emailed the office to drop this proposal and it will not be going up for a vote at the October meeting.]

Controversial though it was, the conversation about the proposal was not the only issue raised at the meeting.

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky announced that as of November 1, the Coop would comply with Mayor Eric Adams' new rules regarding COVID protocols at work. Members will no longer be required to show proof of vaccination to work a shift and

unvaccinated workers may return to working their shifts. Whether shoppers will be required to wear masks in the Coop will depend on the will of the membership, who are invited to respond to an online survey on the matter that was live until October 12.

In response to a question about determining what is suitable for composting and what could go to a soup kitchen, Astrinsky said members on produce shifts might benefit from more information on how to determine what should be composted. She invited anyone to make some kind of illustrated poster detailing, she said, “This is compost. It has things growing on it. It’s too mushy. It’s not going to make it two days. We want sample images, maybe a little blurb.”

Astrinsky shared the news that a property adjacent to the Coop has been leased by the Board of Education and will be undergoing some kind of construction, which will limit or potentially eliminate bicycle parking as well as have other potential and unforeseen impacts on the Coop. She also announced the hiring of part-time Receiving Coordinator Tanya Steinberg and full-time staffer Masha Bezlekina in a role supporting perishables like meat and bread. Astrinsky said Food Processor Gabriel Feliciano has left his position.

“It’s been a very long time since our staff have had any celebration or party to acknowledge their hard work throughout this time,” Astrinsky said. “We have decided to hold a staff party, which hasn’t happened in two, three years now.” To that end, the Coop closed at 5 p.m. on October 6 so that all staff might attend.

LEADERSHIP NOW NEEDS TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS LIKE WHETHER TO ADD BACK SHOPPING HOURS, WHETHER TO ALLOW MORE SHOPPERS ON THE FLOOR AT ANY GIVEN TIME, WHETHER TO INVESTIGATE AND IMPLEMENT A HOME DELIVERY OPTION, AND WHETHER TO RESTORE CHILD CARE AS AN INCENTIVE FOR PEOPLE TO SHOP AT THE COOP.

Donning his metaphorical treasurer's hat, Holtz reported that the Coop is operating currently at a loss, but is optimistic that a typical fall surge in shopping, along with a rise in membership, could help ease the Coop out of that hole "if we control expenses adequately," he said, "but it's a big 'if' during this inflationary time."

He noted that in October 2020 the General Coordinators marked up prices to 25% from 21%, with the intention of returning to the 21% mark up when membership returned to full work conditions or the Coop was breaking even. The General Coordinators plan now to discuss whether these conditions are being met to their satisfaction. Holtz also said that the Coop is owed tax credits of \$1.5 million that represents the part of the \$6.2 million from government support that we are still waiting to receive, and that leadership now needs to consider questions like whether to add back shopping hours, whether to allow more shoppers on the floor at any given time, whether to investigate and implement a home delivery option, and whether to restore child care as an incentive for people to shop at the Coop.

Labor Committee member Eric Frumin shared both good and bad news. He reported on the Coop's collaboration with the Fair Food Program, which supports agricultural workers in Florida and Georgia, noting that the Coop pays a six percent premium for tomatoes from these growers. That translated most recently to \$4,100 that the Coop paid to make sure the workers in Florida earned good wages and worked in environments free from sexual violence.

Frumin's bad news related to Amy's Kitchen Company, which has been dogged by reports of abusive and unsafe working conditions in its factories and by its hostility to unionizing efforts. Frumin said the Coop had sent a letter to Amy's CEO last spring, which was ignored. They resent it to no avail before turning to help from the National Coop Grocers, a membership organization of 149 coops nationwide.

"One of the disturbing thing we learned is that Amy's has failed to disclose important information on rates of injuries," Frumin said. "Its largest factory in Idaho has a 20 percent rate of disabling injury. This is triple the industry average in frozen foods. And

it goes against the Coop's mandate.”

A long-time Food Coop member, Sara Ivry worked as a shopping squad leader before joining the Gazette earlier this year.