

## CONVERSATIONS WITH COOP AUTHORS

July 23, 2024



By Juliet Kleber

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It should come as no surprise to readers of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* that the Coop is home to a great number of writers of all kinds—from celebrated newspaper journalists to children's book authors and writers of literary fiction. The *Gazette* interviewed three of these member-authors recently: Eileen Kelly, author of the novel *Small Wonder*, an introspective and suspenseful story of a young single mother living and teaching in Park Slope; Lauren Mechling, *Gazette* editor and co-author of the "comedic time travel novel" *The Memo*; and Stephen Savage, *Gazette* illustrator and author of *Rescue Cat*, an illustrated story for young readers in which the titular character takes her turn as rescuer.

The *Gazette* spoke to each author about their recently published or soon-to-be-released books, their experiences at the Coop and the creative community that exists here.

*The following interviews have been edited for clarity and brevity.*

**Eileen Kelly, author of *Small Wonder*—out August 6 from Flexible Press**

**How long have you been a Coop member?**

My husband, Anthony Richter, and I joined the Coop in 2003, when our children were five and three years old. Now both of them are Coop members.

**Tell us a little about your novel.**

It's about a single parent with a poorly-paying teaching job who is facing some economic crises, including losing her housing, and encounters a widower whose child is in her class and whose other child is a friend of her son's. They have a flirtation and she is tempted by the idea of saving herself by attaching herself to this man. He is very charming, but his children are behaving badly, becoming more and more aggressive. At the same time she's trying to figure out what happened to his wife, who died kind of mysteriously. It's a bit thriller-ish. But it's also about a very civilized place where people have very high standards for how they treat other people, and the challenge of dealing with children who do not follow those rules.

**Your novel is set in Park Slope; do you think there are any features of life in the neighborhood that Coop members would recognize?**

In my 20s, I was moving around to lots of different places. In my 30s, I settled in Park Slope, and it was a different experience of life—covering the same ground, the same blocks back and forth. That can be monotonous, but it can also be building a deeper connection to where you live. I wanted to give a sense of this woman walking from

her house to work, from her house to school, from school to her house. And even in a big city, in a community like this you can have a very small-town experience of life.

I draw from my decade working as a classroom teacher at Beansprouts preschool. It's been around since 1984. It occupies from 10th Street to 7th Street on 6th Avenue in Brooklyn, so right up the road from the Coop. [In the novel] I make up the school and invent the characters, but I try to re-create from my experience the relationships and experience of teachers, parents and younger children growing up in this area.

**What aspects of that experience feel especially particular to this neighborhood?**

Everything happens on foot. Private moments happen in public spaces. And I think people who've lived here a long time have a sense of privacy that they sort of carry with them as they move through a place crowded with people.

Also, this particular family likes to go walking down by the Gowanus Canal. It's set a little earlier in the past, so it isn't developed, and they like looking at the excavators and the machines and the big cement-processing plant down by the Gowanus and under the BQE. I hope to capture the experience of children growing up in a city, too. They're playing in parks, they don't have a yard, so all their play takes place in public.

**Do you think the Coop is kind of a microcosm of that familiar-but-public type space?**

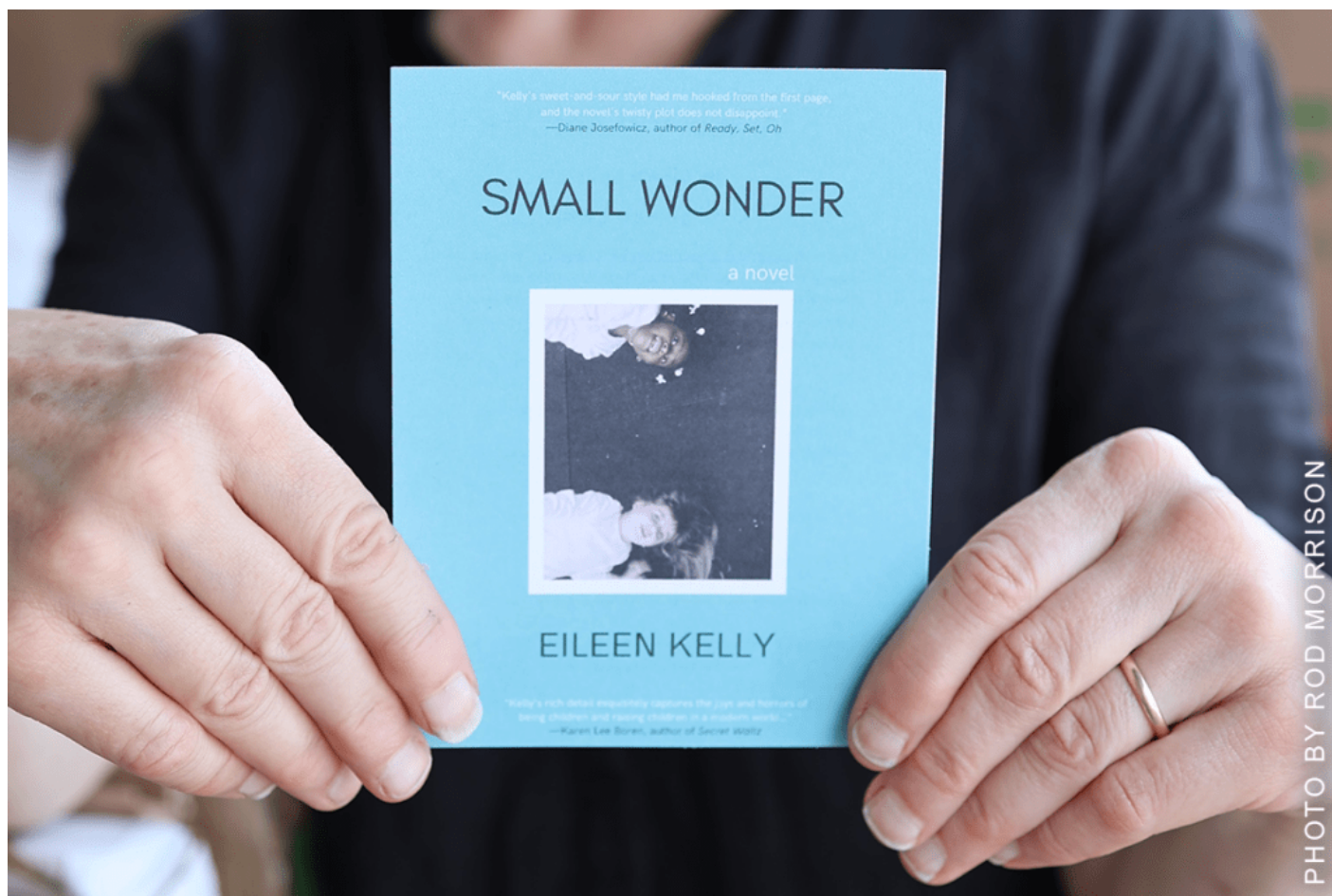


Going into the milk cooler is a metaphor for Eileen's life as she tends to work in private. But with her book coming out, she's determined to step outside the milk cooler. That's very true. When they had child care pre-COVID, I would work up there, and it was sort of that same thing. But like many writers, I'm an introvert, and I found the best place for introverts to work their Coop shift is the dairy cooler. I would just go in, put on my big heavy coat and my gloves, and space out entirely unbothered. Whereas my husband, who is a super social guy, would be in places where you're all wrapping the cheese together and you can talk. Every time he goes, he comes back with another person he found who he knows from work connections or school. So there is a place for everybody, and people form their little communities and alliances and probably there are feuds I don't know of.

We're definitely overdue for a novel or a TV series like *Parks and Recreation* set in a food coop.

I LEFT COLLEGE THINKING, “HERE COMES MY LIFE. I’M GOING TO BE A NOVELIST.”

**A portion of the proceeds from *Small Wonder* go to the Center for Popular Democracy—can you tell us about their work and how you came to that decision?**



Flexible Press will publish *Small Wonder*. Eileen plans to donate some of the proceeds to the Center for Popular Democracy.

Flexible Press asks all of their authors to choose a nonprofit to share proceeds with. This was my choice.

I got connected to them from Trump-era activism. Their model is to build local power to work toward national change. They work with independent groups across the US

like Make the Road Nevada or Lucha in Arizona. And they really listen to and support the goals of the local group, meeting the needs of that community. In national elections, they work with those groups to elect candidates that they think will meet progressive goals. But the idea mainly is helping people who tend to be without economic or political power build local power so that they can shape their communities.

**This is your first published novel and you've described yourself as a "second-act author." Could you talk a little bit about that and how you got where you are now?**

I first had a novel represented by a well-connected and pretty powerful literary agent in 1984, when I was a senior in college. I left college thinking, "Here comes my life. I'm going to be a novelist." But she didn't sell it, and then she didn't want the next thing I wrote. And I got another agent who could not sell that book, and then another. I've written five adult novels and come so close so many times to being published, but it never happened. Then 40 years go by, and I stopped telling people I was a writer. It was almost like an embarrassing secret.

There was a period of time where I felt very frustrated, and very much as though I'd failed, and then at some point, I just decided: "This is your only life. You've just got to live this, whatever it is." So I got married, I had a family, and I kept writing, but I let it be less important to me in some ways and got more out of other things. I've also been very politically active and that's very rewarding to me.

Then I finished this novel. I had an agent, she couldn't sell it, and she said, "Well that's it, we're done." And I thought, "No, no, no—not this time." I started sending it out to small presses. Coming at this point in my life it doesn't mean as much as it would have when I was 21, but in some ways I have less at stake, so I can enjoy it more.

I think a lot of people—I'm sure so many Coop members—set out into adulthood saying, "I'm an actor, I'm a playwright, I'm a singer, I'm a painter," and the world is so

economically not built for that and punishing and exclusionary. If I were to do it again, I think I would not be so quick to say, “I’m not a writer because I’m not a published writer.” That was a mistake I made in my thinking. People have rich lives that are not dependent on their employment, and definitely the Coop is an example of that. So few people there are working there for their job. But they write for the Coop, they make art, they do music, they do performances. This is an example of how people’s lives are defined by far more than their paycheck.

### **Have you found any kind of creative community at the Coop?**



Eileen found the best place for introverts to work their Coop shift is the dairy cooler. People say, “You’re a debut author,” and this is kind of a debut in that I’ve been almost a secret author. Going into the milk cooler is such a metaphor for my life. I’m very connected to people, family and close friends, but I really worked in private. I’m now making new connections to people because the book is coming out. So if there is a group of writers at the Coop I don’t know of, I am now determined to step outside the milk cooler and make some friends.

**Lauren Mechling, author of *The Memo* (with Rachel Dode)—released by Harper Perennial on June 18.**

**How long have you been a member of the Coop?**

Maybe 20 years. I joined when I was single and very young. Then I got engaged to my then-boyfriend and one of the conditions of marriage was that he join the Coop, so I moved in with him and we now live in Gowanus.

**Tell us a little about *The Memo*.**



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

*The Memo* is a novel and a comedy about a woman who gets to go back over the past 10 years and do things over.

In very short... I think of it as a magic carpet ride—it's a time-travel story, but not in the way that most people think of time-travel stories, because it doesn't go back to the Victorian times or when-have-you. It's kind of a sliding-doors tale of a woman who gets to go back over the last 10 years of her life and do things over.

**Is there a moment in your life that you would “blitz track” (to use the terminology of the novel) if you could?**

There are a million. One thing that keeps coming to mind is that I've started doing more and more humor writing lately and I wish that in college I had not doubted myself on that front. I wish I could blitz track to college and join the humor magazine and give that my all. I'm 46, so the idea of having had the last 25 years to really hone those skills... it's something I'll never get back.

**You wrote this book in collaboration with another author, Rachel Dodes. Can you tell me about how that came to be and what the process was like on a granular level?**

Rachel and I were reporters together at the *Wall Street Journal* when we were in our 20s. We sat near each other, but it was the kind of office where you put your head down and worked hard. Then five years ago, I wrote a novel called *How Could She*, and Rachel received an early copy and loved it and invited me on her podcast. We discovered in this conversation that there was so much more to the two of us than we had ever realized when we were both in Midtown in this corporate setting. We made each other laugh a lot. I think she's incredibly kooky and ingenious. We kept making each other laugh on Twitter, and she wrote me a message one day and said, “Is there any chance you would want to work on something together? I think we'd be really good collaborators.”

I was very excited about that idea because I had been writing things by myself, which

can be lonely. So we started hanging out. We were both unemployed, and we were coming up with different ideas and mapping them out on white boards.

We initially thought we were going to do a scripted podcast, but we kept having meetings with different executives and nothing was happening. And then there was a pandemic, and it became incredibly clear that we don't need to wait for some guy who runs Spotify to give us the green light. We can take one of these stories and we can write it as a novel.

We had a shared Google Doc and took turns every day reading over what the other person had written, rewriting or trying to tweak it to make it funnier, and then adding more. So by the end, we'd kind of established a third voice that's not hers or mine.

**I think that's pretty unusual to do with the novel form. I was wondering what drew you to that and—I'm very sorry for what I'm about to say—if it is a kind of cooperative impulse?**

It's definitely cooperative in the sense that Rachel and I share all the money half and half. If you're more of a capitalist, I think you would probably say, "No way—I'm going to do this all by myself and keep everything for myself." And like the Coop, I think you just have to kind of love the charms of the place even when it's a little herky-jerky or crowded. You have to be more accepting. There were times that Rachel or I would take out things we didn't love, but others when you have to go, "Alright if you really feel strongly about that—I love you and I trust you."

**Food has a pretty important role in the novel—I was wondering if you could speak to the symbolic and personal function that it plays in the story.**



Lauren and her co-author, Rachel Dodes, are foodies. Their book features a character that loves baking.

Jenny, the main character, graduated from a prestigious college and majored in economics, but she really just loved baking. That's a huge part of the story—because of the sliding door, there's her life as a “loser” and then her life as a “winner” and in both stories food is how she expresses herself.

In the first draft of the book, food was not a big part of it. But one of the notes we got from a reader was that it was lacking. Rachel and I both love food, and it just seemed like the most obvious, easy and exciting way to rework the story. Initially she was a sound artist, and then we said, “What if she loves baking?”

**Even between the two versions of the character’s life, the relationships to food are very different and very representative.**

Yeah, she is indulgent in her regular life. She loves eating and going to the farmer’s market and getting pierogies and baking. Then in her alternate life, where she’s supposed to be her “optimized self,” food is a big part of how she is supposed to live but it’s a rather joyless version of how to eat and how to nourish yourself, with lots of disgusting smoothies that taste like dirt. But she has a bikini bod.

**You’re an editor on the *Gazette*—how long have you been doing that?**

Maybe three years. I had been trying for 20 years and then during COVID when suddenly a bunch of journalists left the city, I got on. I started out on the cheese squad, which used to be in the basement and was really fun. It was the same group of people on Friday afternoons and I just loved having these regular catch-ups with the same cast of characters. Then I moved over to an amazing squad at the soup kitchen, but I got kicked off because they needed fewer people and I was the last one who joined. Then I was an exit worker.

I TEND TO GET A WALKER TO GO HOME, AND I ALWAYS TALK TO MY WALKERS AND ASK THEM A MILLION QUESTIONS. THEY’RE ALMOST ALWAYS ARTICLE-WORTHY.

**Has working on the *Gazette* changed your Coop experience?**

I keep my eyes open more. Now that I oversee a team of writers, I'm always noticing tiny things, like "We suddenly have all these non-alcoholic cocktails—is that a story?" "What about the new blinking sign where you come in?"



Lauren, oversees a team of writers on the *Gazette*. She always talks to her “walkers” asking them a million questions which are often article-worthy.

I tend to get a walker to go home, and I always talk to my walkers and ask them a million questions. They're almost always article-worthy. I'll ask them how their day was and by the end, I learn that they're the wardrobe designer for *The Bear* or run the exhibition wing at the Brooklyn Museum. Then I'll tell my team maybe someone should write about them, because I'm excited about the community that we have here.

### **Have you found any kind of creative community at the Coop?**

It seems like half of the time when I talk to my walkers, they're also writers. It's exciting that there's this little gem in the neighborhood where I'm surrounded by so many

fellow writers of all different genres. There are some famous writers at the Coop, but even more extraordinary to me, a lot of people who are not famous but still at it and living in Brooklyn. That's so hard to do. We are very writer-rich.

**Stephen Savage, author of *Rescue Cat* — out July 23 from Roaring Brook Press**

**How long have you been a Coop member?**

I think about a year and a half. It's very new and exciting. In your 50s, what can you radically do to renovate your life? Well, joining the Coop has been one of those things.

**And what's your shopping routine like?**



Shopping has always been Steve Savage's job. He gets an electric CitiBike and heads to the Coop with one bag on each of the handlebars.

Shopping has always been a job in my life; when I was a kid I used to go grocery shopping to help my parents. Now I do it for our family. Being in that space is a very comfortable home-like space for me. It doesn't change—I feel like I'm 7 years old again.

But we have a teenage daughter so one challenge is always just getting [nutritious] food that she'll eat. I go probably twice a week with small bags. I feel like if I get more than two bags, then we end up not eating some of it. I get an electric Citi Bike and put one bag on each of the handlebars.

### **Tell me a little about your work.**

My books are on the younger side of the already young picture book demographic—pre-K to six-year-olds. I like that audience a lot: I relate to it, I like going into kindergarten classes and I feel like I have lots of ideas for that group of readers.

### **Could you tell us a bit about this book in your own words?**

It's a story about a cat that sees a little lion cub on a nature show and wants to go and rescue the cub. It's kind of a story about a portal or an alternate universe or your imagination.

### **How did you land on this idea?**

I've done a lot of vehicle books. So I was trying to think of something new, and I thought it might be fun to do an animal book.

Having worked as an editorial illustrator, I think it's nice when there's a little concept or hook, so I came up with this idea of a cat that goes into the TV and has an adventure. And then the trick was making it a story that feels emotional and has a satisfying arc for the reader. It becomes like a two-year process to create these things—you start with a little kernel of an idea and then you just keep revising it, and in the end it becomes something a little bit different. I'll come up with another idea for a book that

I'll think is just as cool as *Rescue Cat* and then it won't go anywhere—it'll just die after a couple of weeks or months. Good ideas tend to keep you interested and stay alive over time.

**I saw in your author bio that you have dogs—why make the main character for this book a cat?**



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Steve mostly writes and illustrates books for pre-K through six-year-olds. His current book is about a cat with magical powers.

The story actually started with a dog—the kernel for the idea came from my in-laws telling us that they couldn't put on certain movies because one of their dogs would freak out and get really aggressive when he saw an animal [on the TV]. That got me thinking—does the dog really believe that's like a window they're looking through?

So the original story was a dog seeing a Lassie-type character on a show and going to rescue Lassie. We shifted to a cat, but it wasn't because of my preference for animals—I was just thinking of what character would work better. And for the story, I think the idea of taking in a stray cat is a little bit easier as a starting point because you don't see dogs on the street.

BUT THE FUNNY THING IS, I ACTUALLY REALLY ENJOY GOING IN AND WRAPPING CHEESE JUST AS MUCH AS DOING THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

**How did you end up as an illustrator for the *Gazette*? And what has that experience been like?**

We have a neighbor who said that there might be an opening on the *Gazette*, and it was an easy way [to work a shift] where I wouldn't have to get my hands dirty. But the funny thing is, I actually really enjoy going in and wrapping cheese just as much as doing the illustrations.

But for many years, I primarily did newspaper illustrations. And I like doing the *Gazette* illustrations because I don't do much of that work anymore, I do this longer-form illustration with the picture books that takes a long time. With something like the *Gazette*, you spend three hours or four hours and it's over and you get to see the results very quickly.

**Have you found any creative community at the Coop?**



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Steve, seen here at the J.J. Byrne Playground on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, commented that Park Slope is a mecca for children's book illustrators.

Park Slope is kind of an artist enclave. I did an article years ago for *The Horn Book* about all the illustrators that are in the neighborhood. It's like a mecca for children's book illustrators. I've bumped into a few people [at the Coop]. I'm sure there are others who I haven't asked if they're a member, but secretly you know they have their Coop card in their wallet.

*Juliet Kleber is a writer, editor, and musician based in Bed-Stuy. She joined the Coop in 2021 and always comes home with too much cheese.*

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## CATCHING UP WITH FISH SALES AT THE COOP: WHAT'S NEW AND WHY

July 23, 2024



*By Jess Powers*

July 23, 2024

If you've noticed more fish and seafood options at the Coop lately, you're not alone. Interestingly, seafood consumption rose across the U.S. during the pandemic, as people sought out healthy protein options to prepare at home; sales dipped in 2023 due to inflation but remained higher than before the pandemic. Fresh-fish, frozen-fish and canned-fish buyers at the Coop have responded to the consumer demand by expanding our vendor list and accommodating member requests for new products.

### **New Fresh Fish at the Coop**

Masha Bezlepkina, who was born in Ukraine and grew up in Moscow, joined the meat, fresh and frozen-fish buying team at the Coop in September 2022; she became the sole buyer in the spring of 2024. As a vegetarian, she doesn't consume what she

sources for us, but her appreciation of the purchasing standards and of vendors who are passionate about their products is apparent.

THERE ARE PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS TO THE INVENTORY THE COOP CAN CARRY...  
“IT’S NOT POSSIBLE TO CARRY LIVE CRAB,” BEZLEPKINA NOTES.

Hudson Valley Fisheries is one of two main suppliers of fresh fish to the Coop. They raise steelhead trout in a Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS) and the sashimi grade trout are delivered shortly after harvesting. This closed, controlled land-based system reuses 95% of its water and upcycles waste into fertilizer, according to Hudson Valley Fisheries’ website. Notably, they are committed to environmental stewardship, humane harvesting, and research and education.

Bezlepkinina recalls visiting the facility and being struck by how innovative its practices are. On her visit, the growers mentioned “sometimes [having] tiny fish and wondering what to do with them.” They decided to make dog chews and introduced the new product line within a year—they are now also available at the Coop.

The other main supplier of fresh fish to the Coop is Pierless Fish Corporation, a long-time wholesaler to NYC restaurants that was acquired by Baldor Specialty Foods in 2020. Newer items at the Coop, such as sashimi and poke, feature three rotating types of fish that change based on season and freshness. Pierless delivers daily: fish arrives at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, is processed that night and delivered in the morning.

There are practical limitations to the inventory the Coop can carry due to the size of the refrigerated case and how much space we have in general. “It’s not possible to carry live crab,” Bezlepkinina notes.

That said, Bezlepkinina closely follows developments within the industry, recently intro-

ducing King Scottish salmon with good farming practices. She also listens to member input and requests. Recently, a member asked for tuna and swordfish steaks to be cut thicker so they work better on the grill. The request was accommodated and has received positive feedback (and sales) from other members.

## Canned Fish and Supply-Chain Issues



There are many tinned-fish varieties from suppliers available at the Coop.

Canned (or tinned) fish is a staple in many households, offering quick protein options that are shelf stable. Depending on the harvest method and location, small fish like anchovies, sardines and other forage fish can be sustainable choices. (Check Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch for specific recommendations.)

Britt Henriksson and Gillian Chi are responsible for canned-fish buying at the Coop. Chi explains that the Coop sells an impressive 3,000 units of canned fish per week. This figure doesn't include the gourmet items located at the end cap. The everyday brands in Aisle 6 are mostly sourced from United Natural Foods (UNFI), and include Field Day, Henry & Lisa, Safe Catch, Scout, Ortiz, Season's, Tonnino, Matiz, Patagonia, Wild Planet, Natural Sea and Fishwife. Not surprisingly, tuna is the biggest seller; sardines, anchovies and mackerel are the next-most-popular canned-fish proteins of choice.



Whether you enjoy sardines with preserved lemon on toast or use wild cockles in sea salt brine to make a quick spaghetti and clams, there is certainly something for everyone. The gourmet brands such as Fishwife, Minnow, Porto Muinos, La Brujula, Jose Gourmet, Siesta, Rizzoli and Iasa are sourced from Faire or A Priori. Minnow products are connected to the local restaurants Hart's, Cervo's and The Fly.

HENRIKSSON SAYS PRODUCTS FROM NEW BRANDS LIKE MINNOW AND FISHWIFE "FLY OFF THE SHELF."

In all, Henriksson and co-buyer Yuri Weber manage vendor relationships for about 45 different companies, with multiple deliveries a week from some of them, and all of the paperwork involved. Here, too, space and popularity are considerations that affect what to stock.

Henriksson recounts that during the pandemic, there were crop shortages and supply-chain issues that impacted the ability to source rolled oats. This led the team to pursue new distributor relationships, as we now do with fish suppliers. She says products from new brands like Minnow and Fishwife “fly off the shelf.” Minnow’s stark, retro-reminiscent, jewel-tone-and-black labels are striking, as are Fishwife’s psychedelic, colorful graphics. Fishwife, founded in 2020 by two women who aim to produce ethically sourced and delicious tinned seafood, sells smoked salmon with Fly by Jing chili crisp, slow-smoked mackerel with chili flakes, and smoked rainbow trout.



Henriksson doesn’t eat canned fish herself. “I OD’d on tuna in college,” she jokes. “I’m not into the smell.” But she is dedicated to satisfying members’ demand for it. Recently the Coop received samples from a French sardine company. “People thought they were yummy,” she shares. “Now we have to see if it’s at a good price point.”

New products, meanwhile, often emerge from member requests. A member recently requested that the Coop carry cod liver. Henriksson found it available from an online

ordering platform, Faire, that the Coop uses. (Another Coop member works at the company.) Minnow describes this product, sustainably sourced from wild cod originating in Iceland's Westfjord region, as "butter of the sea," much like uni.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

*Jess Powers enjoys good food and works in emergency management.*

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## JUNE ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

July 23, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

*By Rahima Nasa*

July 23, 2024

Coop members trickled into the Prospect Park Picnic House in the early evening on June 25 for the Coop's Annual Meeting. Unlike General Meetings, Annual Meetings include board elections and a presentation of the Coop's finances during the past fiscal year.

Tensions from recent discussions about potentially boycotting Israeli goods loomed over the meeting. Outside the entrance to the Picnic House, volunteers from the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine offered refreshments and Middle Eastern snacks as members made their way to the meeting. The group sought signatures in support of the Coop joining the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Discussions of whether the Coop should participate in the BDS movement, which seeks to pressure Israel to alter its policies toward Palestinians, have come up in Letters to the Editor and in recent meetings, and members in support of and in opposition to BDS made their voices heard during the Annual Meeting.

## **Committee Updates and Officer Elections**

Prior to the financial presentation, members heard an update from General Coordinator for Purchasing and Operations, Joseph Szladek, about new produce at the Coop. “Aside from developing foreign policy, we got lots of great produce,” quipped Szladek as he reached the podium. “Look out for Sycamore honeydew in a few weeks—they are amazing.” A full list of the produce currently in stock can be found [here](#).

Jill Dovale, a member of the Animal Welfare Committee, then gave a brief presentation about the committee and its work. Though the committee was formed a decade ago, most members present at the meeting were unfamiliar with it. The Animal Welfare Committee creates guides and reports about animal welfare conditions related to products like milk, eggs, meat, and pet food. The reports include extensive research on vendors, whom committee members reach out to for specific details about what conditions are like for animals in their facilities.

Though these reports do not influence buying decisions in any official way, buyers do take them into consideration: “We use these guides on the buying team because of the excellent information they supply for us,” Szladek noted.

Though the information compiled by the committee should ideally be found near the products, Dovale acknowledged that it can be hard to locate, and the committee is therefore working on getting more visibility for its reports. QR codes linking to the welfare reports near certain products might be one possibility.

## **Board of Directors Elections**

The meeting opened with a final opportunity for Board of Directors candidates to make their case for why they should win election to the board.

The Board of Directors plays a pivotal role in how the Coop operates by acting as the decision-making body for the Coop. There are five seats on the board and each car-

ries a three-year term. The board is required to meet at least ten times a year and must give Coop membership enough advance notice before its meetings so that all members can voice their concerns before the board officially meets.

This year, there were two board seats up for election and nine candidates vying for the positions. More information about the candidates can be found [here](#). Four of the nine nominees—Tess Brown-Lavoie, Ramon Maislen, Sondra Shaievitz and Keyian Vafai—were present at the meeting. All had the opportunity to make one last appeal for votes before voting officially ended. Members at the meeting also had the chance to ask questions before they cast their vote.

All candidates were asked about their position on BDS and whether they personally supported the movement. Brown-Lavoie and Vafai stated that they personally support BDS but would uphold whatever the majority of members decided on the issue. - Maislen and Shaievitz stated that they did not support BDS but would also support the will of the membership. Maislen pointed to his Letter to the Editor in the *Gazette*, which was also signed by Shaievitz and over 60 other members. Maislen reiterated that he wanted the Coop to remain a place of unity.

“The Food Coop is not a political forum,” Shaievitz, a corporate lawyer turned energy healer, stated. “We’re not going to solve this Middle East issue at a little food coop in New York.” Shaievitz claimed that the recent push for BDS came from a contingent of new members joining in the last year. Members in the crowd booed the statement. One member who identified herself as Jewish shouted that she supported BDS and had been a member for over 30 years.

Several news outlets, including the *Gazette*, have documented discussions about the Coop’s potential involvement in the BDS movement for more than a decade. In 2012, the Coop voted against the motion to hold a referendum to join the international boycott of Israeli goods. There were 1,005 members who voted against the referendum and 653 voted in favor.

Once the candidates were done speaking, members cast their final ballots. Members could vote by paper proxy before the meeting, online or by ballot at the meeting. If the member had already voted by the other methods, the ballot at the meeting would void the prior votes. The ballots had members' ID numbers to ensure that members didn't vote more than once.

The winning candidate had to garner more YES votes than NO votes. This means that if a candidate received more NO votes than YES votes, they were ineligible to win. Member workers diligently counted ballots throughout the meeting so the winners could be announced before the meeting ended.

Brown-Lavoie and Vafai, who had both been endorsed by PSFC Members for Palestine, won election to the Board.

## **Audited Financial Statement Report**

The June meeting also offered an opportunity to review the financial health of the Coop with financial experts. Representatives from Cornick, Garber & Sandler, LLP (CGS), the Coop's auditing firm, presented the Coop's audited financial statement for the last fiscal year, ending on January 28, 2024.

The Coop's finances are in good health. Overall, total investments increased for the Coop, which allowed for increased investments in debt securities comprising U.S. Government Treasuries, U.S. Government Agency Bonds, and Bank CDs of less than \$250,000 each. All these securities are purchased through our account at Vanguard. The Coop's net sales increased from \$48,172,077 to \$54,969,951 this past year. After calculating losses and operating expenses, total net income was \$289,499.

Members received a full copy of the audited financial report, which can also be found [here](#).

Members were able to ask the auditors questions about the Coop's fiscal health,

which several were keen to do. When asked about where Coop investments were made, the accountants explained that the investments were spread through a diverse portfolio and the particular industries could be found in the financial statement distributed to members. Another member wondered which banks the Coop used and one of the accountants responded that all were highly rated banks like Morgan Stanley.

Once the presentation ended, members voted to accept the audited financial statement as well as to continue to use the Coop's current auditing firm for the next fiscal year.

## **Officer Elections**

The meeting concluded with officer elections for President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary. The Coop's President and Vice-President also sit on the Board of Directors. You can learn more about the difference between a Board Member and an officer [here](#).

The only contested position was treasurer, as board member Tim Hospodar attempted to unseat Joe Holtz. When he came to the podium to make his case, Hospodar highlighted his background working for a financial accounting firm and his commitment to the Coop's values over the years. At one point, he raised his fist and shouted "Down with the occupation!" Ultimately, Hospodar did not prevail.

Brandon West was elected president, Imani Q'ryn vice-president, Elizabeth Tobier secretary, and Holtz remained treasurer.

*Rahima Nasa enjoys writing for the Gazette because of all the members she's gotten to meet and because it allows her to learn about how the Coop works. When she's not writing for the Gazette, Rahima likes to experiment with new ingredients and is on a never-ending quest to make the perfect pie crust.*

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# FOOD DRIVE SUCCESS STORY

July 23, 2024



PHOTO BY KAREN MANCUSO

A special THANK YOU to all the members who donated to our Food Drive in June. With your help, we collected:

- 38+ banana boxes full of food
- \$1,480+ in cash donations for CHiPS

(Plus a total of 10+ banana boxes full of food for St. Vincent de Paul Ministry's food pantry!)

Thanks to us and others, CHiPS has served 92,313 meals and given out 9,624 pantry bags so far this year.

Way to go, Cooperators!

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## ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE REPORT

July 23, 2024



## **Banking on Change: Make a Difference at the Cash Register**

*By Alice Roche-Naude*

At the Park Slope Food Coop, we're all about making mindful choices. We prefer to buy from local Earth-friendly producers. We recycle. We try to lead by example, educating ourselves and others about health and nutrition, cooperation and the environment. But our commitment to a healthy planet doesn't stop at the checkout aisle. Have you considered the environmental impact of your bank?

## **Your Money's Environmental Footprint: Kicking the Fossil Fuel Habit**

Banks don't just store your money; they use it to fund various projects and industries. By choosing a sustainable bank, you can ensure your hard-earned cash isn't indirectly supporting practices that harm the environment. Traditional banks often invest heavi-

ly in fossil fuel companies. This fuels climate change, leading to extreme weather events, sea-level rise and disruptions to agriculture—all impacting our food system and communities.

“Since the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the world’s 60 largest banks have poured US\$ 5.5 trillion into the fossil fuel industry,” according to Banking on Climate Chaos, a report published by a coalition of civil society groups.

## **Banking with a Green Conscience: Divest from Fossil Fuel**

The good news? There’s a growing movement of sustainable banks that align with our Park Slope Food Coop spirit. These banks choose to divest, meaning they sell their investments in fossil fuel companies. Instead, they invest in projects that are more aligned with our values at the Coop. These banks might:

- Support Renewable Energy by investing in solar, wind and other renewable energy sources, promoting clean energy transition.
- Fund Sustainable Businesses through loans and investments directed towards sustainable agriculture, green building projects and eco-friendly businesses.

## **Making a Difference, One Dollar at a Time**

By choosing a sustainable bank, you become part of a growing movement towards a greener economy. Here’s how your decision can create a ripple effect:

- Put pressure on banks and big polluters with increased demand for sustainable banking. The realities of climate change put pressure on traditional banks to shift their practices, making fossil fuel expansion eventually too high a risk. Last month, Barclays announced they would stop directly financing new oil and gas projects.

- Invest in a healthy planet. Your money supports projects that combat climate change and promote environmental health.
- Align with Coop values. Choosing a sustainable bank reflects the same environmental consciousness we practice at the Coop.

## **Small Steps, Big Impact**

Switching banks may seem like a small action, but collectively these choices have significant power. By aligning your banking choices with your values you can make a real difference for the environment and support a more sustainable future. Remember, every dollar counts and with conscious banking we can invest in a healthier planet, one transaction at a time.

## **Finding the Right Fit**

Not all sustainable banks are created equal. Research their practices, investment strategies and commitment to environmental responsibility. Don't be afraid to ask questions and compare options.

See these resources to find a fossil fuel free bank:

Mighty Deposits

Green America

1 Million Women

Green Portfolio

*Alice Roche-Naude is a member of the Environmental Committee.*

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JULY 23, 2024

July 23, 2024



Letters to the Editor, July 23, 2024

**Support for Parents of Young Children**

Dear Coop Members,

I have been a Coop member for 23 years, and I am struggling more than ever to keep up my membership because I am now a single parent of two children, ages four and eight. I totally understand that the Coop tried its hardest to reinstate childcare, and it wasn't possible. So, what is the plan now to support parents? Could we contract with a local daycare center (and offer them free labor)? Could parents be allowed to bring their child with them while they work a shift (perhaps within a certain age range for certain types of shifts)? The Coop has been very thoughtful about making accommodations for many different types of members with special needs to remain in the community. We must now use that same creativity and inclusive spirit to figure out how to better accommodate the large number of members who have young children.

*Daniel Vitali*

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## **ISO the Vitamin Aisle Guide Sheet**

Dear Friends,

I have not seen the sheet that was at the end of the vitamin aisle where I could look something up and reference what I was looking for. Am I missing something?

*Regards,*

*Bruce Zeines*

## **Response from a receiving coordinator:**

Dear Member,

Thanks for your question. When people ask me this I first briefly explain the organiza-

tion of the aisle, which is divided into columns of shelves A through H, and each shelf has a number starting with the hanging items as number 1. The A to H are an organizational system, not the names of products. I then point the shopping member to the look up computer, which is on the side of the ice cream case. You may know some of this, but for those who don't: enter a keyword into the search and items with that word will appear in a list. The list has a "Location" column. For the supplements aisle, the location column will say something like "Aisle 4b Location B6," where B6 indicates what column and shelf the product should be on. Sometimes, it's true, as products come in and out of stock they might get pushed to the next or previous shelf. But at least now you know the approximate area to look in!

Thanks again for the opportunity to explain the system for those not familiar.

*Martha, Receiving Coordinator in supplements*

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## **Feeling Kind of Cranky**

Dear Cooperators,

I know I'm getting older, parts of my body seem to ache more than they used to, and I do get upset at more things than I did in the past, but it may be due to the fact that I'm recently retired and have more time to contemplate. If you ask my wife I have way too much time to think about minutiae, but I've always thought about it, just starting to dig into it a little deeper.

As I was working a checkout shift, which I don't do that often, I was scanning for customers to check out and noticed two workers, maybe a little less motivated than I. One was reading a book and it was a big book, the other was looking at their phone. During that time there were customers looking to check out their goods and I called a customer over to my counter. I looked up after I checked out that customer

and saw that the worker/members were still not doing what they needed to do and people were waiting on line. I didn't have time to bring it up with the squad leader but did feel like I would feel less cranky if the worker/members did what they were supposed to be doing.

*Thank you,  
Mark Paperno*

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## **Hybrid Meetings Would Improve Coop Democracy**

Hello!

In 2021 New York City voted in the most consequential local election in a generation where, due to term limits, we elected essentially a new city government. Despite its importance, only 21% of NYers voted. At the time, I worked at an organization whose mission was to improve local democracy. After that election, I was tasked with researching and publishing policy recommendations to improve turnout.

I give this background to say I have spent plenty of time considering ways to improve voter participation. A key principle in improving turnout is removing barriers. In the case of PSFC, the requirement that voting must be in-person is the most obvious barrier. Politically, Coop members likely support policies like "no-excuse absentee," which opens up absentee ballots to all, so they don't need to go to the polls. Such policies improve voter turnout and expand the electorate. Hybrid GMs are the Coop's version of this policy.

In-person meeting requirements are a barrier for many. I live 45 minutes from the Picnic House. Adding an hour and a half total commute often becomes the deciding factor as to whether I attend. It isn't just me. PSFC includes members from all five boroughs and even across state lines. Where someone lives shouldn't determine their

participation.

Due to the in-person voting requirements, members with disabilities or mobility impairments are often excluded from Coop democracy. Working parents and caretakers are also excluded from participation when they lack adequate childcare.

The Picnic House's maximum capacity is 240 or 1.5% of our membership. This means even when members want to vote on consequential decisions like the markup rate, mask mandates or a second Coop location, 98.5% of members can't participate! Hybrid meetings would improve participation by opening up GMs to all members, regardless of ability, location, or circumstance.

*Dan Kaminsky*

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## **Her Body, Her Choice**

To the Editors,

I'm writing in as a new member of the Coop. After two years of living in Park Slope, my family and I were finally able to navigate out of the unaffordable and disappointing local grocery options and—lo and behold—secure a membership. We felt like we won the lottery, but the reward was more cheese and kale options.

My first Coop shift entailed filling small bags with bulk spices in the basement. It was fun to scoop cumin and curry while chatting away about random topics. Phones were away, and we were just there being human. It was really special. I was hooked!

Three days later, I was shocked to learn that a group is pushing to incorporate a blanket ban on products from Israel. Is this the same Coop I joined? I want us to protect the Coop. It's truly a unique, special place for community and inclusivity, a place to

celebrate things we have in common. A proposed blanket ban on Israel-associated products is misguided and shortsighted.

Proponents of the ban claim they want to increase democratic participation at the Coop. Is making choices for me democratic? How? I am not Jewish, but believe that standing up as an ally right now for Israel and my Jewish neighbors is important, especially as we witness incidents of hate increase in Brooklyn.

I've always been a part of the "progressive left," even when I disagree with some of the more extreme tactics of my cohorts. But I'm also a student of history. We must not stay quiet when others try to take away our freedom of choice.

*Meg Robertson*

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## **On Our Coop's Roots**

Fellow Coopers,

I've been disturbed by the assertion, both in recent General Meetings and in the pages of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, that political issues do not belong in the Coop. I strive to live by the critical contribution of second-wave feminists that "the personal is political." Indeed, this principle is at the foundation of the Coop, which strives to eschew transactional and exploitative food practices in favor of sustainability, community investment and fair labor. Without these very politically-minded ideas our beloved Coop would be just another organic grocery store.

Based on these recent claims that politics do not belong in the Coop, why should we take care to buy produce or coffee grown following certain fair labor practices? After all, the lives of farm workers have no bearing on my life in Brooklyn. The answer, of course, is that it is not acceptable for us to shut our eyes to the world around us. This

principle is one we must try to follow generally, but especially since we are all members-owners of a cooperative involved in food purchasing, making us complicit in exploitation or accomplices in justice.

Conscious choices, whether to collectively contribute labor, stock food in accordance with certain principles or to act on political convictions via member democracy, are a vital part of our Coop. True large-scale issues such as food-related exploitation or climate change must be solved through many small actions equaling a greater whole. But the idea that this is an excuse to nihilistically bury our heads in the sand is antithetical to our community's most basic principles (one of which is **solidarity**). Any idea that divisive issues or politics do not belong in the Coop is absurd on its face, and should be left down the street at Union Market.

*Aaron Posner*

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## **A Call for Mediation**

Dear Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine,

I am writing on behalf of concerned Coop members. We fear your proposal to impose an anti-Israeli boycott aligned with the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) campaign may lead to increased physical and emotional harm to Jewish members. Some of us have already experienced verbal assaults and physical intimidation.

We acknowledge the passion and dedication your group brings to the cause of Palestinian rights. At the same time, we ask you to recognize that antisemitic hate crimes remain disproportionately high in many places, including here in New York City, which is why security measures are necessary at our synagogues, schools, and community centers.

The heightened tension since October 7 has validated and exacerbated our fears. We support the vision of two nation-states—Israel and Palestine—living side-by-side in peace. However, the rhetoric used by the BDS campaign and some members of your group, which often demonizes Israel and its supporters, undermines this vision and conflicts with the inclusive values of our Coop. The mission statement says:

**“We are committed to diversity and equality. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member.”**

To this end, we propose a mediation session to address the following issues:

1. Clarification of how you intend to align the agenda of BDS with the principles of the Coop.
2. Discussion of the rise in confrontations among Coop members and strategies to ensure the safety and respect of all members.

Mediation could demonstrate that dialogue and mutual respect can lead to positive outcomes. We hope to work cooperatively with your group to find a solution that upholds the values of our Coop.

*Sincerely,*

*Ramon Maislen, Coop 4 Unity*

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## **Another Jewish Coop Member for BDS**

Dear Coop Members,

I write as a long-time Coop member and the daughter of Holocaust survivors. My grandfather was involved in the Zionist movement in Austria in the 1930s. As a teenager, I was involved in the leftist Zionist movement. However, over the last 40+ years, I have painfully come to realize that the establishment of Israel, as it is **currently** configured is increasingly problematic. I support groups in Israel such as “Refusers” and “Voices Against War” who are working within Israel to support an end to the war AND the development of a more just and equitable society

Since last October, I’ve experienced horror and grief at unfolding events in Israel and Palestine. I mourned the deaths of Israelis and the taking of hostages. I’ve demonstrated with groups like Jewish Voice for Peace, demanding an immediate ceasefire and mourning the mounting toll, including the gruesome deaths of *many thousands* of Palestinian children in Gaza. I’m outraged that, even as famine spreads and Gaza’s hospitals lie in ruins, our own government keeps using our tax dollars to fuel these atrocities.

I’ve always valued the Coop as not only a grocery store but a place to implement our visions of justice in the world. Through decades of experience with progressive activism, I’ve seen that unjust power is never defeated through persuasion alone. It has to be directly confronted. This was true in apartheid South Africa and is true for Israel. Boycotting Israeli products is a nonviolent method of creating constructive pressure that supports Palestine, and as such seems like a perfect fit for the Coop. Regardless of whether you agree with me, we all deserve the chance to weigh in on this crucial topic. Let’s bring this matter to a vote and let the members decide!

*Sincerely,*

*Judith Loeb*

Hello,

At June's Annual Meeting, a member gave a terrific presentation on the efforts of the PSFC Animal Welfare Committee to research our producers' animal welfare practices and to encourage our membership to make better ethical choices when purchasing animal products. Particularly heartening was when General Coordinator and Coop buyer Joe Szladek offered his gratitude during the discussion period, noting that PSFC buyers regularly consult the AWC info guides when making their decisions. I was proud to see that our community, from membership to administration, was taking great care to consider the ethical dimensions of our food consumption.

I was then disappointed when, while introducing himself during his own presentation on the Coop's buying, Szladek made light of the current debate over how to respond to the ongoing violence in Gaza with a joke to the effect of: *"In addition to helping write the Coop's foreign policy, I work as one of our buyers..."*

Szladek's crack obscures our community's ongoing investment in food justice, which has often expressed itself in policies critical of foreign governments. As founding member Joe Holtz proudly reminds us, the PSFC protested Apartheid by boycotting South African apples, and protested the Pinochet regime by boycotting Chilean grapes. At a moment when mass starvation is being wielded by Israel as a weapon of collective punishment, when 95% of Gazans are projected to face acute food insecurity through September, when many are going days without a meal and dozens of children have already starved to death, now is not a time to reduce our Coop to a mere grocery store where our ethical consideration is irrelevant. Rather, it's a time to stay true to our historic commitment to collaboratively developing food practices that align with our community's values.

*In cooperation,*

*Morgan Võ*

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## Coop Priorities

To the Editor,

Congratulations to Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai, whose election to the Coop's Board of Directors was met with jubilation. Both candidates boast impressive backgrounds in, respectively, agriculture and politics. However, the number of "Yes" and "No" votes each candidate received is a clear indication that one issue dominated this year's election, with the two most vocal anti-BDS candidates receiving the most "No" votes, and the winners staunchly advocating a Coop-wide boycott of Israeli goods. (In the interest of transparency, I checked "Abstain" next to all four of these candidates. Certainly, everyone has the right to their own beliefs and priorities, but I voted for local leadership over geopolitical advocacy.)

Leaders form coalitions from dissenting factions, while advocates often ascribe the opposition with moral inferiority, thereby making them easier to dismiss, something I thought all four of these candidates did in their own ways. Beyond political expedience, I question the wisdom of elevating a geopolitical issue, even one as heartbreaking as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, above local issues with more immediate impact on our grocery-based cooperative. Efforts to ameliorate the suffering of innocent Palestinians and Israelis are laudable. But is imposing a singular Middle Eastern position on a pluralistic Brooklyn community the most effective way to help innocent civilians? To be sure, the Coop has plenty of members with family in the region, and I sympathize with the agony that they are feeling. Even so, just as I wouldn't use an emotional justification to conduct political activism at my place of work, I continue to hope that within the Coop, we can temper our own strong feelings about a fractious issue with respect and compassion for people who disagree with each other, many of whom are dealing with unfathomable loss. To many, it feels like the Coop is finally on the verge of adopting policies that align with their beliefs, and letters like this are unwelcome disruptions to an exhilarating moment of triumph. My hope is that, amid this

fervor, you make space for those who disagree and that going forward, all members retain the right to make our own shopping decisions.

*In Cooperation,*

*Brian Shuman*

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## **New Board Composition Is Cause for Concern**

Dear Coop Members,

The composition of the Board of Directors following the recent election should be a major concern for all Coop members, whether pro-BDS or pro-Unity. The board makes the final call following member votes and has other crucial responsibilities. Almost all board of directors support a boycott of Israeli products, inspired by the BDS movement.

To illustrate, if the Supreme Court were in complete control by one set of political views, it would undermine trust between citizens and the government system. This is very similar to what is happening at the Coop these days.

Jewish members of the Coop feel under attack, coinciding with a sharp rise in anti-semitic hate crimes in New York and a shocking rise in hate remarks towards Jewish members since BDS promotion began. These alarming signals, combined with the current Board's bias, make the Coop very hostile for many members.

I used to enjoy coming to the Coop for shifts and shopping, feeling part of an inclusive community. Now, it feels very unpleasant. Regardless, I will still come because inclusion means accepting everyone, regardless of political opinion or ethnicity. I'm optimistic that the Coop will see better days, as I truly believe that the vast majority of

Coop members support the principle of inclusion and don't want politics to be a part of every visit to the Coop.

*Thanks,*

*Yuval Inselberg*

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## **How to Love Our Coop**

Dear Members,

Judging from the letters section of the recent *Gazette*, the pearl-clutching hysteria over members who support a targeted boycott of Israeli goods and increased member participation in the Coop's democracy gives a false perception that our beloved Coop is being torn asunder by rabid and disruptive antisemitic ne'er-do-wells. As a member for close to 30 years and a Jew, I have never felt better about the Coop than I do now. The people advocating for a targeted boycott and for General Meetings that would afford an opportunity for greater participatory democracy are dedicated, hard-working and sincere. The huge participation in our recent Board of Directors election and the overwhelming victory of two of our most dedicated members is an indication of just how eager the membership as a whole is to the prospect of a healthier democracy. The actions of Members 4 Palestine, were it not for the self-named "Unity" group, will doubtless make the Coop a MORE inclusive, vibrant and healthier place than it has ever been and one that I'm proud to be a member of. General Meetings, now limited to only a tiny percentage of members who aren't immunocompromised or hampered by child care and other issues, will soon be a mix of those able to attend physically plus those attending remotely. As someone who's been to dozens of General Meetings over the years, I can't wait! And to those fellow members who claim to be feeling "unsafe" or "uncomfortable" because of the efforts of Members 4 Palestine, I extend a warm-hearted invitation to my house for supper this autumn. Just reach out.

I love to cook, and you are welcome.

*Carol Wald*

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## **Appreciation for Courageous Conversations**

Editors and fellow members,

As a newer member of PSFC, it was great to attend the May 28 GM. I valued hearing more of the workings behind the groceries along with the opportunity to hear the voices of other members. Notably, the call to action toward the creation of a committee to address plastic usage made me feel more at home as a member knowing that others care about the scourge of plastic and are willing to call the rest of us into initially hard, self-sacrificing action.

I felt similarly weeks before when I was first approached by a two soft-spoken fellow members asking if I'd sign a petition in favor of the Coop dropping certain targeted Israeli products from Coop shelves in solidarity with an international BDS movement.

As I have been deeply disturbed by the bombardment, starvation and horrific conditions to which the people in Gaza have been subjected, meeting these Coop members was a breath of fresh air. In an instant, the Coop felt like a safer space to speak my beliefs, and it was heartening to meet members interested in the Coop joining its economic leverage to a worldwide effort to pressure our sibling nation of Israel to do better.

I've been part of food coops since 1989, and have come to rely on them as a place where members organize together for community building and social growth: where hard questions are asked, and asked again if need be. Since meeting and getting involved with the sincere, thoughtful, and diverse cohort of PSFC Members for Pales-

tine, my feeling of belonging at the Coop has deepened, along with my interest in working to help the Coop be the best it can be.

*Alan Lewandowski*

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## **BDS IS ANTISEMITIC: THE EVIDENCE**

Editors,

Violent antisemitism is resurgent as the BDS agenda—the delegitimization of Israel—is promoted around the world.

As of January 2023 The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism has been adopted by 1,000 global entities, at least 37 nations including the United States, many cities, other government entities and numerous colleges. One element of this definition is “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination.” By this definition, both BDS and Hamas are antisemitic, as explained below.

### **The Antisemitic Goals of BDS and Hamas**

According to Palestinian BDS founder Omar Barghouti, “No Palestinian will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine.” While BDS claims to be nonviolent, its goal is similar to that expressed in the Hamas Covenant: “Israel will exist ... until Islam will obliterate it.” These words confirm genocidal intent on the part of BDS and Hamas, an effort brutally begun on October 7, 2023, with promises of more to come.

### **Germany’s Requirement for Naturalization**

Hopefully we can agree that Germany knows something about antisemitism. Accord-

ing to CNN, all applicants for German naturalization must affirm that Israel has a right to exist.

## **The Board of Directors' Responsibilities**

The directors must not only reject proposals that create legal or financial jeopardy. They must also decide whether a proposal is in the best interests of the purposes for which the corporation was formed and whether it complies with the Coop's Mission Statement, which doesn't include a political purpose. Clearly this never-ending crusade, painfully divisive and deeply offensive to many, isn't in the best interests of this cooperative project. Therefore, the new pro-BDS majority of directors should give serious thought as to their personal and political motives for possibly inflicting an anti-semitic movement on this food coop.

*Sylvia Lowenthal*

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## **Brief Responses to the 5 Most Common Coop Anti-BDS Arguments**

To Coop members,

*Our coop should be apolitical*

1. PSFC is a political project founded on cooperative principles that are contrary to the norms of our economic system.
2. PSFC has a long history of activism, including many boycotts dating back to our inception.
3. Continuing to purchase products from companies that support or profit from what is happening *is* a political choice.

*Why single out Israel when other countries have poor human rights records?*

The fact that other countries have poor human rights records isn't a reason not to boycott a country that has recently killed 40,000 people. A targeted boycott of select Israeli products does not prevent us from boycotting goods from other countries. If people are concerned about certain countries, they should be encouraged to submit an agenda item and make their case.

*A boycott would harm facets of Israeli society that aren't responsible for the oppression of Palestinians*

PSFC Members for Palestine is advocating for a targeted boycott of products that directly profit from or support the ongoing genocide and occupation.

*PSFC Members for Palestine supports violence*

Boycotts have a rich history as a nonviolent tactic to promote social change. As a Jew, I am deeply disturbed by the violence being enacted in my name and grateful to be organizing with a diverse group of members to hold the Coop accountable to its mission. PSFC Members for Palestine does not and has never advocated violence. It is untrue when people claim this, and the *Gazette* should not print such falsehoods.

*Boycotting Israeli products is antisemitic*

As a Jew, I understand an action to be antisemitic if it discriminates against Jews due to their Jewish identity. A targeted boycott has nothing to do with the ethnic or religious identity of Jewish Israelis. Instead, it is a response to the bombardment of Gaza and the history of occupation.

*Rachel James*

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## Where have all the Jews gone?

Fellow members,

“Hey, where did those peanut-butter puff snacks go? My kids loved those.”

“Ah, *Bamba*, you mean? Those are snacks produced by the Israeli oppression. We can’t have those in our Coop.”

“Yes, of course... And my favorite hummus, I don’t see that here anymore...”

“Ah, Sabra hummus, you mean? Yes, it’s made by Israeli apartheid lovers. We can’t have that in our Coop.”

“But what about the *challah* bread? My Jewish neighbors buy that for *Shabbat*. It’s made in Brooklyn! Surely that can’t also be linked to—”

“Ah, Green’s Kosher Bakery *challah*. The *challah* had to go too, I’m afraid. We asked if they were good Jews or if they were genocide-supporting, Zionist Jews. They seemed afraid to answer. We can’t have that in our Coop.”

“I see. Can I ask you one last question? Where did all the Jewish shoppers go? I don’t see my Jewish neighbors here anymore.”

“Hm, I’m not sure about that one. We were just boycotting the world’s only Jewish state; you know, the Zionists. We weren’t boycotting the Jews.”

“Shouldn’t we also boycott countries like China, Iran, Russia, Yemen, Syria, Sudan...”

“Nah, just the Jewish one for now. Just Israel.”

Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews say caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them, and nearly half of the world's Jews live in Israel (Pew Research Center). I hope you can understand that Israel is an important part of your Jewish neighbors' identities.

Legitimate criticism of the Israeli government is not antisemitic. The BDS movement, which singles out the Jewish state and denies its right to exist, is antisemitic. Please do not allow antisemitism to be normalized at the Coop. Your Jewish neighbors need your support.

*Jonathan Aranov*

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**Re: "ACROSS THE AISLE: MY WALK AND TALK WITH A BDS ADVOCATE"**

To the Editors,

It's depressing to see the *Gazette* giving a platform to the twisted gaslighting violent fantasy of one member's take on BDS.

What's being done by Israel to Gaza with the financial backing of the USA is one of the greatest moral atrocities of our lifetime, and it did not begin as a reaction to Hamas on October 7. To be silent, to equivocate, to deny, is to tacitly endorse an act of generational evil. It's no wonder our members for BDS don't want to buy peppers or soda machines under these conditions. For me, it is impossible to read the facts and watch the videos and come to any other conclusion.

*Lisa Guido*