

THE COOP IS AT CAPACITY AND CROWDED: CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?

August 14, 2024



By Dan Bergsagel

August 14, 2024

It's 2 p.m. on a Saturday and you are waiting to shop at the Coop. It's sweltering outside, and you joined the line on Union Street, closer to 7th Avenue than the Coop.

Finally, the "NEXT MEMBER" sign flashes for you.



A welcome sight after a long line.

But inside, the aisles are thronged. You regret taking a full-size shopping cart as you struggle to navigate the pinch point between the lemons and the bananas. The end of the checkout line is by the frozen peas cabinet.

This scene tells a story of the Coop's success, but it also speaks to the main complaint that many members have about the Coop: overcrowding. It's a longstanding challenge that the Coop's board and professional staff have periodically tried to grapple with, but there are no easy answers.

"The lines at the Coop are where all the good intentions of the community disappear and die," said member Lucy Willis. "It is a real decision to choose between a chaotic shopping experience with people barging into you, instead of a less busy, less rushed but slightly more expensive shop."

Even so, demand to join the Coop remains fierce. Currently, 15 to 25 members leave

each week, and they are quickly replaced when new membership orientation appointments are opened, which “are booked up almost immediately,” said General Coordinator Ann Herpel.

For many members, the tensions over overcrowding can lead to complicated emotions. Members are proud of the Coop, but do not necessarily want it to be an exclusive club.

This friction is not new, said Herpel, who noted that, “We have been controlling the growth of the Coop since late 2009.”



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Traffic jams in produce are not uncommon at peak times.

The impact of these controls has become more pronounced in the last few years as the Coop has shrunk from over 17,000 members pre-pandemic to about 16,000 members today. The goal of this contraction is to try and find a membership equilibrium that minimizes “the negative impacts the staff experienced prior to the pandemic and the long lines and crowded shopping floor the members endured,” Herpel said.

General Coordinator Matt Hoagland described the Coop as a “little ecosystem,” with three key parts: the size of the membership, the efficiency of the Coop in selling food to those members and the physical capacity of the building.

Crowding at the Coop can be addressed by rebalancing the first two, reducing the number of members and improving efficiency. But when it comes to the Coop’s physical capacity, “there is only so much our store can hold,” Hoagland said.

Longtime member Jonathan Farber said, “The Coop is fantastically successful and has been for decades, but capacity is a problem.”

Farber was the architect of the Second Location Study Committee, which was conceived in 2012 with the purpose of investigating how to expand the Coop.



Stocking at busy times can add to the congestion.

He came to the question of expansion from a background in farming and politics. “If I wanted to make a positive change in our food and farming systems, there could be no better vehicle than the Coop. The Coop model solves a lot of problems, so why not do it again and spread the love?”

The Second Location Committee was formally convened at the November 2016 General Meeting. It had a number of goals, including allowing for an increase in membership to better align with the International Cooperative Movement’s goal to be “open to all persons.”

The committee prepared a detailed report in March 2020 that summarized its analysis of a potential second location, including a survey of over 3,600 Coop members, staff and non-members that assessed priorities and location preferences.

The committee also conducted a series of real estate case studies around adaptive

reuse or new construction, and analyzed the financial feasibility of a second location and potential methods to generate funds for it.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Expanding to other spaces on Union Street is unlikely.

Because of the pandemic, the report was not presented to the membership until the November 2022 General Meeting.

After working in detail on the topic for over a decade, the committee proposed finding another building in Brooklyn of around 20,000 square feet that the Coop could purchase for approximately \$20 million, which would roughly double the capacity of the Coop.

A vote was held at the May 2023 General meeting on a resolution to authorize a referendum on a second location. But concerns were raised about whether the committee's report was still up-to-date because it had been prepared before the pandemic. Some opponents also said they were worried about the cost of the proposal. The resolution was rejected, 74 votes to 64 votes.

If the Coop does not expand at a second location, can it expand at its current location instead? Historically, the Coop has grown incrementally, first expanding from its rented second story space at 782 Union Street downwards into the whole building, and then into adjacent buildings both east and west.

Could this approach be continued to increase the size of the Coop by further expanding next door?

This is not likely. "Union Street is zoned residential," explained General Coordinator Joe Holtz. "The Coop is grandfathered in as a 'non-conforming use'," which means it can continue to operate for commercial use.

"We were disappointed," Farber recalled. "We recognized that the vote left few avenues for us to continue our work on the expansion, and that was heartbreaking."

However, the zoning makes it all but impossible to build new commercial buildings. This means that the enticing empty lot to the west and south of the Coop—the former

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

The station house for FDNY Squad 1, which is to the east of the Coop, would be an extreme long shot as a site for expansion. Even if the squad were ever to move and the building presented for sale, converting it to commercial use would be very challenging.

Could the Coop add floors? This is also complicated because of zoning regulations.

Even if the regulations could be overcome, digging an additional basement level below the existing one would be very expensive, and would require temporary closure

of the Coop.

The structural work required to add additional levels above is less arduous and wouldn't necessarily require closure of the Coop to complete it. However, it would still increase the floor area of the Coop as a ratio of the lot size, which is against zoning regulations.

Zoning issues would also prevent the Coop from using its existing office space for shopping while leasing other offices nearby.

Considering the logistical challenges to these proposals, GC Hoagland quips that, "Expanding the Coop's physical size is more of a dream."

If the physical space cannot be expanded, could efficiency be improved instead?

One way to do so would be to address a main bottleneck, checkout.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Checkout is a main bottleneck.

The front area of the store was rearranged to add four or five new checkouts a few decades ago, increasing shopping capacity and throughflow. Another two registers were recently added to ease lines during busy periods.

Another approach would be to extend shopping hours.

“Before the pandemic, the Coop was open 100 hours a week,” recalled Holtz, with shopping ending at 10 p.m. six days a week. This compares to the current 84 hours that the Coop is open, which is closer to the shopping hours that were available back in 2002.

However, returning to longer hours is not as easy as it seems. Later closing will require members to work later shifts, and shrink the available time to clean, repair and restock.

The Coop already has “trouble getting enough members to work early morning slots starting at 5 a.m. and late evening weekend shifts for hard-to-fill jobs like lifting, cleaning and bathrooms.”

These issues may not deter the General Coordinators, and Holtz hinted at potential movement on this topic, with the possibility of extending shopping hours from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday.



Extended hours are being considered to add capacity.

It is not clear what impact extending shopping hours would have on crowds. Shopping demand can be lumpy. The Coop could try to smooth out differences in peak and off-peak shopping numbers by encouraging people to shop more uniformly across the hours that the Coop is open, perhaps with carrot credits for early morning and late evening shopping.

Short of taking another look at the Second Location Committee's work, any of these possible changes may be relatively incremental.

Still, the Coop's professional staff continues to try to figure out innovative ways to address overcrowding. "The GCs, with the staff, will keep working to make the experience for the current members the best it can be," Herpel said.

Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.

ALL THE COOP'S A STAGE: HOW THE CHEESE SHIFT TURNED INTO A SLASHER SATIRE

August 14, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

By Zach Schiffman

August 14, 2024

Working a shift at the Coop can often feel inherently theatrical: the conversations of strangers that you overhear, the clattering and chaos in the aisles as shoppers jostle with stockers, the mysterious corners of the basement.

Madison Fiedler, a playwright and Coop member, picked up on that. Her experiences as a cheese shift regular inspired *Homofermenters, or The Park Slope Co-op Play*, which debuted in June at Ars Nova's Ant Fest in Manhattan.

The annual festival is dedicated to new work from emerging, adventurous artists. Alumnae of the festival include theatrical luminaries like Jeremy O. Harris, Michael Breslin and Patrick Foley, as well Bowen Yang of *Saturday Night Live*.

Fiedler's show follows six Coop members working the Friday 6 a.m. cheese shift. As each shift passes, conflict increasingly curdles. When a team leader suddenly dies, all hell breaks loose in the cold Coop basement.

Fiedler collaborated with director Francesca Sabel on the "satire-turned-slasher." Sex, murder and the merits of collaboration are all on the table, as well as cheese (which Sabel points out comes from rotting milk, "controlled death.")

After the show's debut at Ant Fest, I spoke with the pair about what inspired *Homofermenters*, what they discovered researching the Coop, and if there are future plans for the show. (Warning: Some of the discussion contains spoilers!)

Was there a defining moment during a shift at which you decided to write about the Coop?

Madison Fiedler: My very first shift I worked in stocking. I accidentally slashed open nine bags of flour. I was like, "I can never do this again. This is the most humiliating experience of my life, of course."

I was asking friends who were members what shifts they'd enjoyed the most. A friend of ours, Joan, told me about the cheese shift and was like, "It is so cold down there. My body sort of rejected it, but it is the most fun." It's a hard shift to get. You're just handling cheeses and learning about them and you're down in this kind of underbelly of the place.

It feels like a shift that is exemplary of a lot of the things that are funny and also silly about the Coop. Everyone's talking about how incredibly priced the cheeses are the whole time. Everyone's talking about how good it feels to work with their hands, which is mentioned in the show. You're cutting a small piece of cheese and you're doing it for 2 hours and 45 minutes.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

Francesca, you directed this show without being a member. What is and was your impression of the Coop from the outside?

Francesca Sabel: I grew up in New York, so I feel like the Coop was always around. I

went to Hunter College High School and there were a lot of Coop families there. I remember whenever I would go to a Brooklyn friend's house, it would be like, "Just so you know, this meal was made with groceries from the Coop."

So it's kind of sanctified in that way. Madison described it in this way that was so exciting, because it was like you were so aware of all the things that were a little bit ridiculous about it and also so aware of all the things that are amazing about it.

And it felt like part of the tonal and thematic thing that this piece was always doing was offering those both at the same time and being like, "It is insane that there are people who take the size of the wedges so seriously." But also, "Isn't it cool that there are people who take the size of the wedges so seriously?" And that's how this thing against all odds has survived for all these years.

Without spoiling details from the show, what do you think is parallel about the Upper West Side community and that of the Coop?

Sabel: My Upper West Side parents came to the show and they were very sort of hurt by the ending. I think that in both cases, you have people who have figured out a sort of approach to the city that feels different. You're near parks, it's New York with all the benefits of greenery. There are delicious restaurants and there's a tremendous amount of privilege infused in every step you take in both the Upper West Side and Park Slope.

I think that is because those communities are pretty insular even though they're in these big cities. I remember growing up and then getting to high school and college with people who had grown up in different parts of New York, thinking "This actually isn't really New York. This is a bubble within it."

The show is both a horror and a comedy, but it's also very erotic. What about the cheese shift brought in those three different directions?

Fiedler: For one reason, I want more horny art for lesbians. We started working on this show with one of our actors, who ended up getting Covid and not being able to do the show, but is this extraordinary actor Moe Angelos who is in the Five Lesbian Brothers, this iconic downtown lesbian theater group that did a lot of work in the '90s.

We've collaborated with her before and I knew I wanted to write a part for her. She played all of these really ridiculous horny parts and did them so well back in the '80s and '90s. And I wanted to write a semi-retired lesbian lothario kind of part for her. I am so interested in the history of Park Slope as this historically lesbian neighborhood, and the role of lesbians in its gentrification.

When I am at the Coop, I feel like I see older queer people more than I do other places. It's an amazing thing, to see all these old lesbians stocking soy crackers.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

What inspired the murder mystery elements?

Fiedler: I thought the environment lent itself well to that. The nature of the Coop is this Sisyphean repeating effort. The stakes are built in, because people care so much and that's what also keeps it alive and keeps it going. There are all these rules that can feel ridiculous, but are also the thing that keep it intact. It is constantly straining against itself, full of these internal collisions and contradictions. Doing some research for the show, I went to a general meeting, and conflict bubbles up in a very theatrical way.

Sabel: We wanted to feel that in the show, too. Our sound designer, Michael Roger-son, took a trip to the Coop with Madison and recorded ambiance which became our transition sounds. You could hear real Coop boxes being lifted, with strings underneath to sound ominous.

I was obsessed with Emmaline's (the uptight shift leader who dies) monologue. It pulls from the history of the Coop, but also feels like a political stump speech. What went into writing that?

Fiedler: All of the characters have interludes that provide some kind of access to their interiority, in an otherwise ensemble, plot-heavy show. Emmaline's speech is about the history of the Coop and kind of where she sees herself in its lineage.

I read a lot of old *Linewaiters' Gazette* articles, and did my own research. There was this amazing book, *Stirrings: How Activist New Yorkers Ignited a Movement for Food Justice*, about food activist movements in New York. There's a whole chapter in the Coop. It's an amazing read. This book quotes this Coop member in the *Gazette*.

The member, Rich Richardson, wrote in the *Gazette*: "I believe that in this decaying society there will be formed enclaves like monasteries, which nourish progressive ideas in dark ages. Park Slope can be such an enclave. Formal political organization has waned, but a living political organism (our Coop) has become bigger in size and in meaning. Voting with our feet (or with a moving van) we cast a ballot for a people's cooperative and against an individual fortress."

Sabel: I remember being really struck by the amazing things that were happening when the Coop was formed. Roe v. Wade was being decided. The Twin Towers were going up. There was this sort of progressive movement, and now Roe v. Wade and the Twin Towers aren't things that exist anymore. The Coop was founded in a lot of hope and optimism; if we trace how all of these things come into our present moment, that hope and optimism gets complicated. I think Madison's script is really thoughtful about how the Coop aligns with the history of gentrification in Park Slope.

It's bittersweet. The show is satirizing what the Coop is now, while honoring what it once was.

Fiedler: One hundred percent. The Coop is this attempt at utopia in a grocery store, that's building a microcosm of the world you want to inhabit. I feel a strong resurgence of a want for that. Young people feel like they are living in the end times. It struck me that the Coop was founded by six friends who were anti-war organizers and had all of this motivation toward making change and creating a better world.

But when the Vietnam War ended, they were like, "What do we do with this?" I think the Coop is a miraculous thing or it wouldn't be worth poking fun at. I'll be honest. I mean also I am aware of the ways that I am a textbook young, white, gay leftist Coop member. I am not so different from these kinds of ridiculous characters.

Was there anything in your research that didn't make it into the show, but stuck with you?

Sabel: This isn't exactly research, but I do think one of the things that we kept feeling like we were running out of time for was there are just so many fun potential murder weapons in the cheese section. Sure, cheese knives. This actually got cut off in the production, because of limited tech time, but we wanted our final gesture to be someone stretching a cheese wire. You see someone get clobbered with a 40 pound wheel of Parmesan.

Fiedler: I worked my first shift since the show the other day, and I kept texting cast members. I was operating the back lift to bring a U-boat down to the bulk section in the basement. And I was like, "Fuck. This could have been a way for them to get the body upstairs." There was also a lot of research on the history of cheese that could not make its way in there. Even the title *Homofermenters*, I didn't get to explain what that means, and what the role of homofermenters in cheese-making is, but that's a fun little secret for us to get to keep.

While thinking about what didn't make it in, are there plans for the show again? What can *Gazette* readers look forward to?

Sabel: In a really beautiful way, Madison and I work together a lot. I'm very sort of obsessed with Madison. We have been working on a different show that is very precise and quiet. We were sort of like, "What is the opposite of that?" So we did *Homofermenters* for Ant Fest, which is one night only, 70 minutes or less. I think it was designed to be in an ephemeral, batshit context too.

But if somebody was like, "You know what, if the Park Slope Coop wants to host a *Homofermentors*, we will definitely do a site specific *Homofermentors*."

PLANNING A PICNIC? MEMBERS OFFER TOP PICKS FROM THE COOP'S BOUNTY

August 14, 2024



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

By Liora Fishman



Watermelon salad with lime and mint is a vegan picnic go-to.

August 14, 2024

What better way to celebrate summer than with a picnic! Of course, the bountiful choices at the Coop can sometimes feel like a curse; where to begin?

I spoke to Coop members and staff to find out what they're bringing to their picnics this summer, and what products Coop members should look for.

Brett Krasner, who lives in Prospect Lefferts Garden and has been a Coop member for three years, suggests eliminating choice paralysis by planning a menu in advance. Krasner prefers shelf-stable options and easily portable perishables alike: "Tinned fish is an easy, portable protein for any sandwich. Layered between sliced cucumbers, micro greens and spicy mayo—you can never go wrong."



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDDLEY

Tinned fish is a protein that travels well.

Coop cheeses travel especially well. Krasner recommends pairing cheese with Firehook crackers and Amaro cherries. “I use Amaro cherries the same way anyone would use jam—it’s just a bit of a twist on a classic pairing,” he said. “My favorite is Le Secret de Lys Soft Ripened Cow’s Milk cheese.”

Yuri Weber, the Coop’s buyer for cheese, shared that sales for burrata, fresh mozzarella and feta “almost double in the warmer months.”



Cheese paired with fruit or jam is another popular picnic choice.

Weber also recommended cheeses from Moser, in Switzerland, of which the Coop typically stocks about three or four varieties, including Aux Noix (with hazelnuts), Riesling x Sylvaner (washed with wine), and Charmant (triple cream). The Coop also stocks miniature-size versions of those cheeses.

Receiving Coordinator Lisa Hidem suggested picking up “any of [the Coop’s] delicious breads to go with that cheese. And for vegans there’s hummus or baba ghanoush.”



No pairing more classic than bread and cheese.

For vegan Coop members like Tamar Lindenbaum, another simple but no less refreshing option is a staple at picnics: “Limes, mint and watermelon, baby! No better snack to stay cool and share with friends at the park,” Lindenbaum said. “Cutting the watermelon is the toughest part—beyond that, it’s a simple snack that requires all of five minutes to prepare and is a crowd pleaser.”

Sabina Tilevitz, a Crown Heights resident and Coop member for two years, echoed Lindenbaum’s sentiments and added: “I love the Mi Niña ‘Pico de Gallo’ flavored chips. I’ll often bring those to the park with a jar of salsa and an avocado or two.”

Weber suggests a simple, grain-based salad: “I always bring orzo salad to picnics. Kalamata olives, ricotta salata, cherry tomatoes and fresh herbs—basil and mint.”



The Coop's fresh herbs can punch up a grain salad.

Beverages are also a crucial consideration in your picnic planning, and Coop members have no shortage to choose from. "I love to bring some Basque cider to the park—it's light and the bubbles are refreshing," Krasner recommended. "Although, if you prefer a more involved option, you could consider bringing a thermos of a favorite summer cocktail to share with folks."

And if you'd like to end your meal on a sweeter note, Hidem recommends checking out the personal-size Noble pies, in flavors like apple, blueberry, cherry and other rotating seasonal flavors.

When preparing for a picnic, Coop members ought to also consider essentials that will make them more comfortable at their picnic, like a large picnic blanket and foldable chairs.

The Coop carries Baggu products that often can be used for picnicking, including wa-

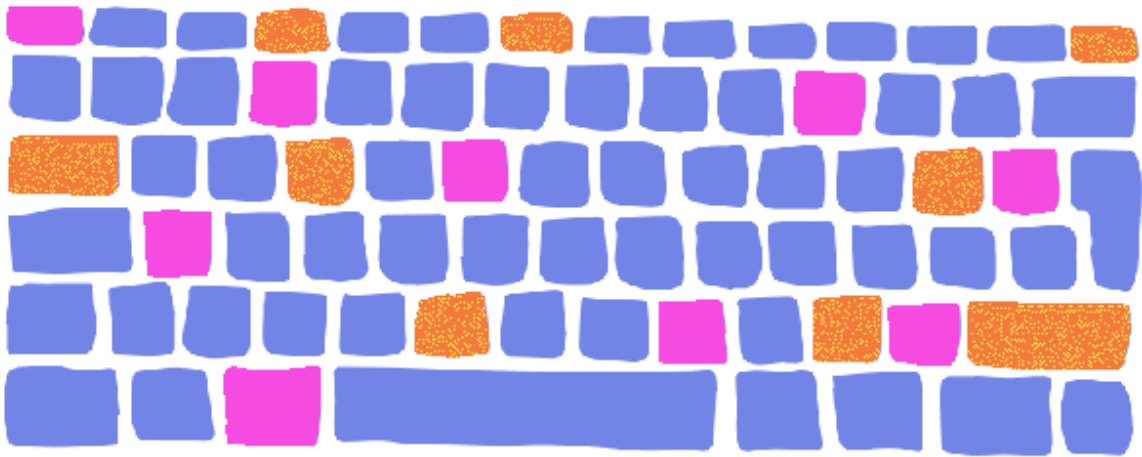
terproof picnic blankets, insulated lunch boxes and reusable bags. I most recently bought a green gingham Baggu picnic blanket from the Coop that I've been sporting all summer when I head to the park after work.

Liora Fishman joined the Coop in December 2021. She lives in Prospect Heights and has a wonderful dog, Ollie, whom she loves very much.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



PSFC CARD PHONE INTEGRATION IS ALREADY HERE

Dear all,

Hey, I noticed in this July 2 article that the Coop is working on making a phone-based option for displaying a member's barcode, and that right now the barcode is just avail-

able via the website.

I wanted to make sure you are aware that as far as Android phones go, it's already possible to add your PSFC membership card to your phone's digital wallet. I have mine added to my Google Wallet, and from there I can bring a barcode up on my screen that readily scans me in to the Coop.

Happy to give some instructions if needed.

Max Miller

THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE RULING AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE COOP

Dear fellow members:

Millions of justice seekers of every ethnicity have had their aspirations heard by the International Court of Justice in the Hague. On July 19th, the ICJ ruled that the illegal settlements in the occupied territories must be evacuated and reparations made to those who lost their land.

This is the strongest opinion ever issued by the ICJ.

The Court found that "the regime of comprehensive restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory constitutes systemic discrimination based on, inter alia, race, religion or ethnic origin."

We are all enjoined not to be complicit in this apartheid scheme. PSFC has a role to play by adopting the nonviolent boycott, divestment and sanctions principles urged by Palestinian civil society since 2005.

Ann Schneider

PROTECTING THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THROUGH IN-PERSON VOTING

Dear fellow Cooperators,

After attending a few recent General Meetings, I am concerned about the impact that the group PSFC Members 4 Palestine is having on the democratic process of the Coop and how this would look in a world of hybrid voting. While this group preaches democracy and inclusivity, their actions are in direct contradiction of these values.

While I value a diversity of opinions in the Coop community, even when they diverge from my perspective, the tactics this group employs are chipping away at the integrity of the democratic process.

If you haven't attended a recent General Meeting, allow me to fill you in. It is evident that the conversations and decisions of the group are predetermined. The decisions that result from this feel orchestrated rather than organically derived from member input and healthy debate. Debate on agenda items and resolutions is limited because "their" decision has already been made before anyone has even scanned in their membership card to walk into the Picnic House.

It seems that this atmosphere has also led to a loss of decorum. I have observed Coop members wearing PSFC Members 4 Palestine pins uncooperatively sneer, giggle and generally bully anyone who dares to express an opposing viewpoint.

These actions undermine the values of the Coop, where every member should be free to express their opinions and participate. If we let this behavior continue to fester, our debates will continue to lack the breadth and depth required for a healthy democratic process.

I'm concerned that if we move to online voting, this group would silo into their own side conversations and chat rooms instead of engaging in actual conversation. For this reason, I strongly support preserving the current in-person meeting format. The free and open exchange of ideas is essential for the health of the Coop community.

In cooperation,
Tali Rasis

WHILST DEBATING A BOYCOTT, CONSIDER A DOCUMENTARY'S MESSAGE

Dear Fellow Members:

For all those following world events with profound implications for our Coop, I highly recommend *The Night Won't End*, a searing film about life and death in Gaza under Israeli assault. The film, produced by Laila Al-Arian for the Al Jazeera documentary series *Fault Lines*, is free on YouTube. It eloquently conveys the grief, horror and courage of ordinary Palestinians who have watched their world reduced to rubble. Far worse than any fear for personal safety is the dread of knowing that loved ones, especially young children, are likely to suffer and die. I am haunted by moments such as the sequence during which an ambulance dispatcher remembers the two paramedics who were sent to rescue 6-year-old Hind Rajab: "I won't see heroes like them again. They knew they would be killed, and yet they went."

As the Coop engages in a necessary (and healthy) debate about whether to adopt a boycott of products implicated in Israel's crimes, the discussion can wind up feeling abstract. That's especially the case as U.S. election coverage takes over the headlines, crowding out the unbearable reality of unfolding genocide. As we continue to discuss how our Coop might take a small but meaningful step in alignment with the powerful international movement to free Palestine, it's important not to lose sight of

what's at stake in human terms. Among other things, Al-Arian's film memorably contextualizes the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of July 19. That opinion clarifies once and for all that Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territory (including the ever-expanding West Bank settlements) is "unlawful" and that "all States are under an obligation" to reject this illegal presence. The online news sites Mondoweiss and Electronic Intifada have good articles about the ICJ opinion.

In cooperation,

Jan Clausen

A RESPONSE TO "FEAR-BASED ACCUSATIONS" REGARDING PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE

Dear Fellow Members,

A Coop member for over 20 years, I'm writing to share my experience of petitioning in front of the Coop with Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine. I'd never canvassed at the Coop, and I was a little nervous at first. So, I was delighted by how many folks were in support of and/or wanted to hear more about our proposal for a targeted boycott of Israeli goods. I had thoughtful conversations with many members. The few who weren't interested simply said "no thank you" or "definitely not" and headed inside.

Given this experience, I was dismayed by the tenor of some of the letters in the July 23 Gazette. Those letters used words like "impose," "blanket ban" and "Coop-wide boycott" as though we are proposing to autocratically deprive fellow members of their right to make their own shopping decisions. These fear-based accusations need to be corrected. PSFC Members for Palestine proposes a targeted boycott (of Sabra, SodaStream and Israeli produce), and we would like all members to have an opportunity to vote on that idea in a way that is accessible and open to all. It is that simple.

To suggest that this is divisive or harmful to Coop unity underestimates our community and the messy but vital democratic experiment that Coop membership entails.

Other letters suggested that we avoid politics or focus more on local issues instead of “geopolitical advocacy.” In my view, being a member of the PSFC is an inherently political act. A core Coop principle is to be a “responsible and ethical employer and neighbor,” and I’m pretty sure that doesn’t simply apply to Union Street and environs. Our neighbors in Palestine deserve our attention and care. Voting on a targeted boycott proposal seems like the bare minimum.

With love,
Nancy Mercado

FROM AN ANTI-ZIONIST JEW

Dear Coop,

Authors of several recent letters published in the *Gazette* have expressed claims to represent the opinions of Jewish Coop members. Editors of the *Gazette* have let these statements stand without note that these are the thoughts of Jewish Coop members in support of the Israeli state, people who are not and never will be authorized to speak on behalf of all Jewish Coop members.

Jews are not monolithic. We are diverse in national/regional origin, religious belief, culture, language, race and political ideology. One need not be Jewish to be a Zionist supporter of the currently configured Israeli state, whereas I, like many Jews in the United States and around the world, oppose Israel for its apartheid government and its ongoing commission of genocide.

I would never attempt to speak for all Jews or all Jewish Coop members and I am deep-

ly disturbed by those who purport to represent my interests or needs as a Jew. I reject the Zionist claim that people who oppose the Israeli state are anti-Semitic or self-hating. I request that if the *Gazette* continues to publish letters that explicitly or implicitly speak for all Jews or Jewish Coop members, the editors include a disclaimer that these are the opinions of only one person or one segment of Coop Jews.

Alyce Barr

"DEMOCRACY" AT THE COOP

Dear fellow members:

Part of the definition of democracy includes the following:

"...protected rights that ensure the majority does not abuse its power to violate the rights of the minority." I would love to know which aspects of the proposed BDS vote adhere to these democratic values?

it's quite insulting that the pro BDS members of the Coop insist on simply "having the conversation" to adopt a boycott of Israeli goods while presenting the vote as upholding "democracy." Someone wrote "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!"

No thank you. You can't scream "democracy" about a topic that a lot of members see as discriminatory. If the Coop is forced to have this conversation AGAIN as it did TWICE in the past, that will bring legitimacy that my country where I was born and consider my second home is temporary and disposable.

We also seem to be "having the conversation" quite often at the Coop. Every *Gazette*

issue, General Meeting, nearly every day someone is handing out propaganda and lies about “having the conversation.” However, it’s interesting. They seem to only be conversing with each other and no one else. DRC complaints regarding the war have gone up in addition to carts being vandalized. Also, people seem to really love crossing out “Israel” on the couscous box.

It’s getting harder for me to go to the Coop as often as I used to in the past. I now stretch out my visits as far apart as possible. No more lunches or random pop-ins for a quick snack. I want to avoid the place as much as I can as long as the BDS vote hangs over it. So much for democracy.

Jonathan Tobias

Editor’s note: The August 14, 2024 issue of the Linewaiters’ Gazette ran the above letter titled “‘Democracy’ at the Coop” signed by Jon T, who requested anonymity. The editor granted this request without inquiring about the reason for it, possibly in violation of the LWG letters’ policy. The writer of the letter is Jonathan Tobias.

CROSSWORD: TURN KEY

August 14, 2024