JOE HOLTZ REFLECTS ON A HALF-CENTURY WITH THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP

December 18, 2024



Part 1 of 2

By Hayley Gorenberg

December 17, 2024

On the cusp of retiring after a half-century, Park Slope Food Coop General Manager and first-ever staff member Joe Holtz reflected on pivotal moments for the Coop, including the guiding light for starting the Coop in 1973 in the face of war and prejudice. Holtz recollected:

“We led with cooperation, even though we were into good food. We realized the same

people who brought us the Vietnam War brought us discrimination against Black people, gay people, women. The most important thing about the Coop was building an institution where we could have a community success—not access to the best short--grain rice from California and oils produced without poison. Our line in the sand was, 'Can we build this community institution?' Whereas a lot of people in other places say, 'At least we still have the food. We'll go forward anyway, and charge people different prices.' That sets up a class system and comes with a bundle of problems—-could be legal problems, as well. So we were willing to risk the whole thing. We bet the whole Coop."

He acknowledged that Brooklynites were well-situated overall to access good food. "If we went out of business, we could still go to a place in lower Manhattan and get short--grain brown rice, go to Sahadi's on Atlantic and get good stuff. That said, we wanted to eat better, and couldn't afford it. We needed the Coop because we needed the low prices. We read *Diet for a Small Planet.* We knew it's a good thing to avoid pesticides, eat lower on the food chain."

> "WE KNEW COOPS WERE ALREADY FAILING BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T FIGURE OUT HOW TO DIVIDE WORK. 'EVERYBODY DOING THEIR SHARE' WAS BREAKING DOWN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY."

The commitment to an egalitarian approach meant trying different labor systems, even if they could have driven the Coop to the financial brink. "We were willing to risk the Coop by figuring out how to make the work system work," Holtz said. But the first two efforts at cooperative work systems failed. Holtz described the idealistic initial concept: "Everybody in the world is a member. We don't need to write people's names down, because this is such a wonderful thing, people will be happy to do their share and all [will be] excited about the Coop, and sign up to work next week." But the work chart soon developed problems and holes.

“That concept of it being everybody’s was a beautiful thing,” Holtz said. But when someone didn’t show up to receive deliveries, a founding member would typically step into the breach. Then, members of a small, core group started to do so every week. “Not sustainable!” Holtz added. Tuned into a ’60s movement of groups pooling resources to buy in bulk from farmers and alternative sources, with coops often dubbed “food conspiracies,” Holtz and co-founders were aware of structural vulnerabilities.

> “‘SUPERHERO MEMBERS’ WOULD COME FORWARD AND DO A LOT OF EXTRA WORK. BUT YOU CAN’T HAVE A MEMBER-LABOR COOP THAT IS BASED ON SUPERHEROES.”

”We knew coops were already failing because they couldn’t figure out how to divide work. ‘Everybody doing their share’ was breaking down all over the country,” Holtz recalled. “It was hard to measure, hard to say you can’t shop anymore. ‘Superhero members’ would come forward and do a lot of extra work. But you can’t have a member-labor coop that is based on superheroes.”



Joe Holtz at the Coop. Photograph by Michael Berman

“The Coop hobbled through until the fall of 1973, then closed for a ‘planning interlude’ to hatch the second system,” Holtz said. Components of the revised system included, “Maybe everybody in the world isn’t a member. We write it down, and [members] have to pay a fee and have a requirement of working monthly. Everybody has to work.’”

That system held up for a little while. “But it became clear we were naive to think everybody would show up,” Holtz added. “Telling people they have to and actually doing something about it when they don’t is really different.” He continued, “A significant number of people realized they could keep putting off work and that no one was really keeping track of who’s behind, ahead, even. No recordkeeping system, no enforcement, no consequences, no one thought about it.”

> “A COMMITTEE MEMBER GREETED THE FIRST PERSON WHO SHOWED UP TO SHOP WITHOUT HAVING WORKED, LOOKED HIM UP IN THE NEW SYSTEM, AND SAID, ‘OH, YOU CAN’T SHOP.'”

Another planning session devised the third and longest-running member labor system—with consequences. Holtz reflected:

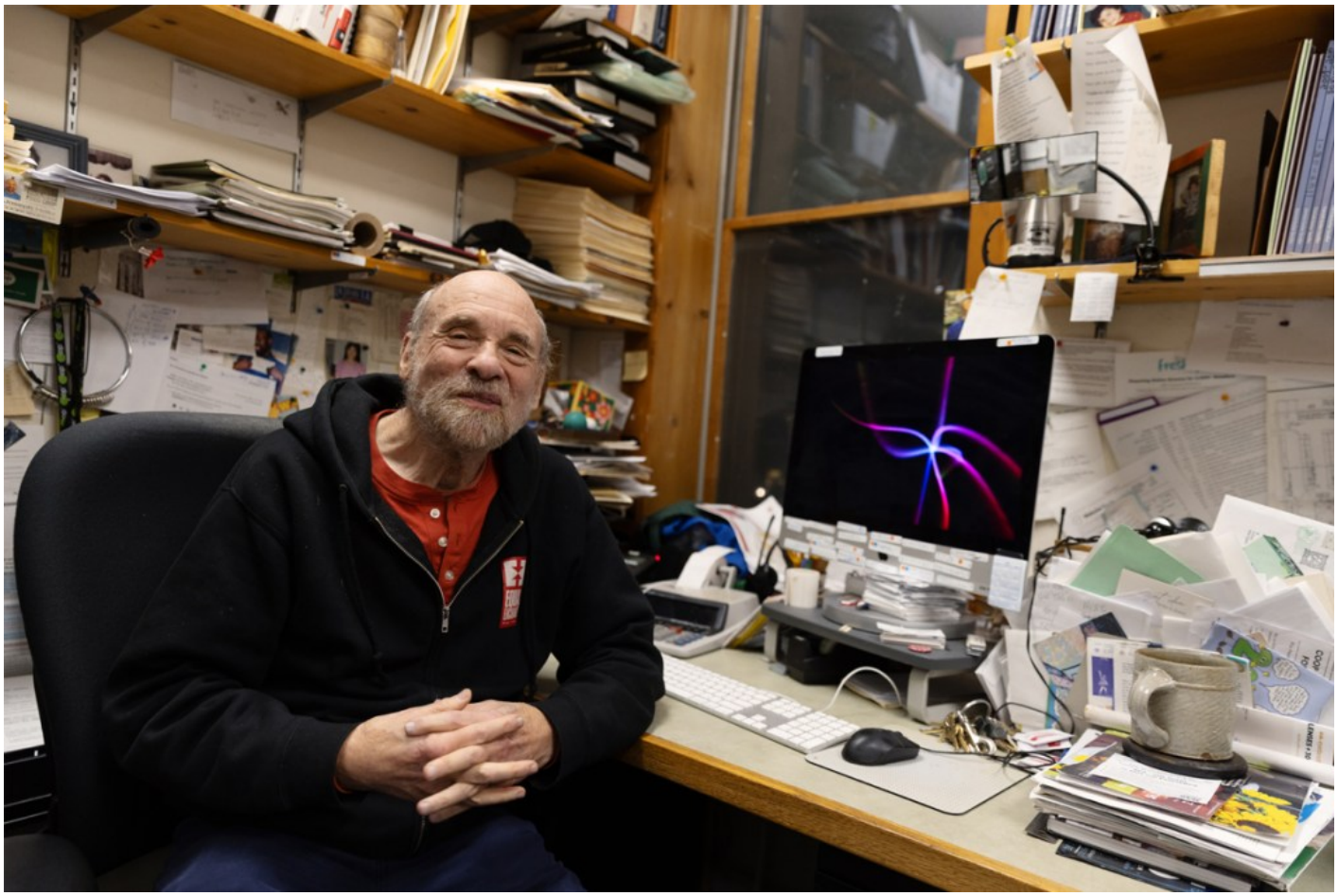
“The most important day in the history of the Coop was that day in late 1974, when we had our third system, and someone came to the door, and there was a new committee there called the Records Committee. A committee member greeted the first person who showed up to shop without having worked, looked him up in the new system, and said, ‘Oh, you can’t shop.’ It’s the most important day in the history of the Coop—we weren’t going to look the other way because this person came with their money, and they need the food, and we’re going to let them get away without keeping up on their work. We protected the people that were actually doing their share. Because eventually those people would get wind, and say, ‘My life is busy, too.’”

By early 1975, the Coop had established a functioning, accountable system that required working a shift every four weeks, guided by member “squad leaders.” But, despite an excellent, functioning member labor system, “some things were falling between functioning groups that were not passing the baton efficiently.” Holtz recalled that the early member Janet Schumacher raised the need to hire a paid staff member. “We needed someone hired to make the system work,” he said. Schumacher let him know she would bring the hiring issue to the General Meeting, and told Holtz that she wanted him to apply for the job. (Schumacher later joined the staff in the 1980s.) Holtz was hired part-time, but says he “worked full-time from the beginning, because there was always full-time work to be done!”

(After COVID-19 in 2020, the Coop moved to its fourth member labor system, with work requirements every six weeks, and a system Holtz describes as more like a mar-

ketplace, with worker–friendly cancellation options and a more centralized leadership system.)

Part 2 will be published in the next issue of the Gazette*.*

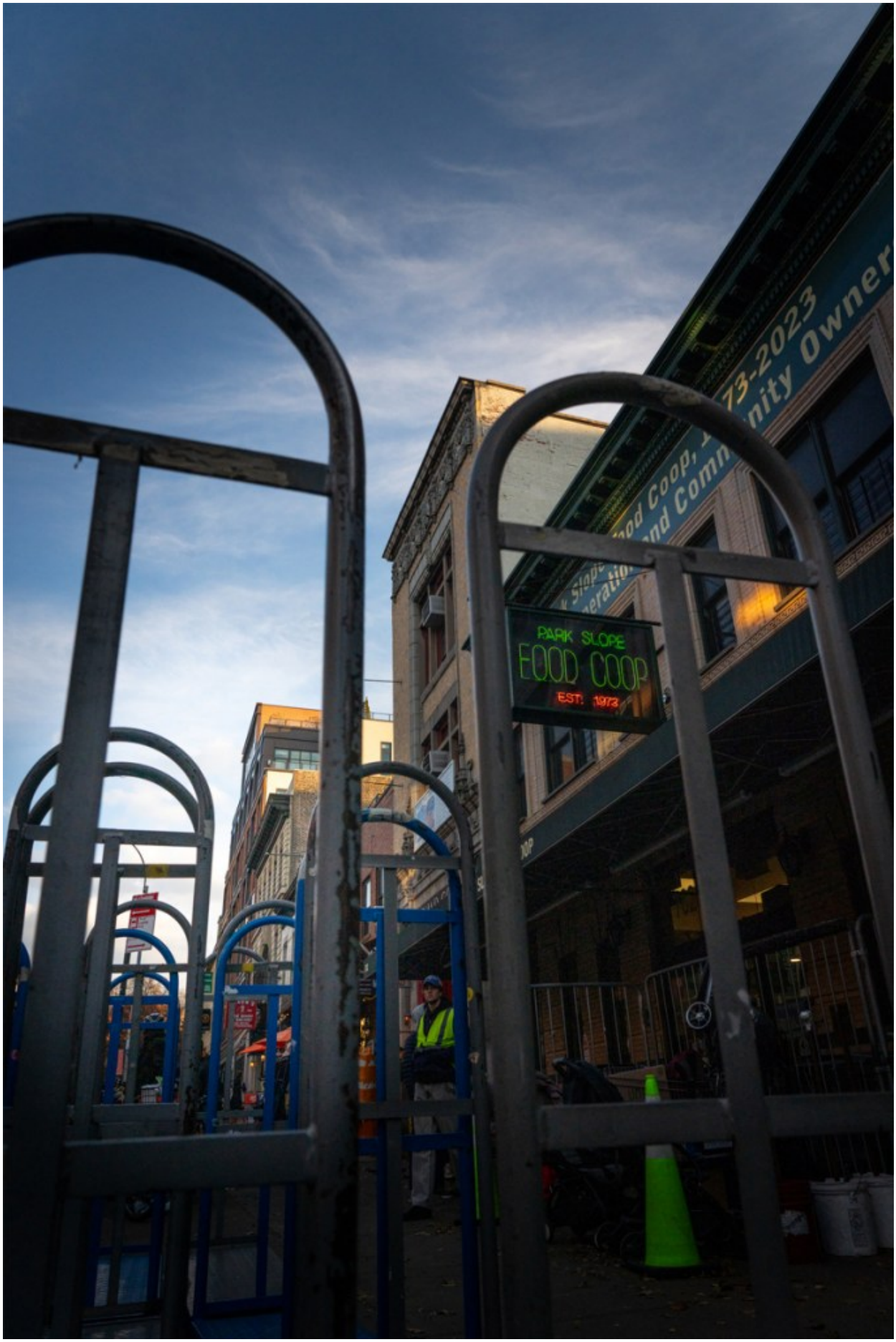


Holtz reflects on his long career. Photograph by Michael Berman

---

BUILDING A COOPERATIVE MODEL

December 18, 2024


PARK SLOPE
FOOD COOP
EST. 1973

By Sanoja Bhaumik

December 17, 2024

All Park Slope Food Coop members are familiar with the Coop's member-labor model: To shop at the Coop, one must be a member. And in order to maintain member status, with a few exceptions, one must complete a 2 hour, 45 minute shift once every six weeks. The member-labor model is an effort to strike a balance between multiple goals: cooperation, community, affordability, accessibility and local food production. How do the models of other food cooperatives across the country compare?

BY SAVING ON LABOR COSTS, THE COOP CAN RELIABLY OFFER LOW PRICES TO ALL MEMBERS.

The Coop's mission statement testifies to the centrality of member labor, reading in part: "As members, we contribute our labor: working together builds trust through cooperation and teamwork and enables us to keep prices as low as possible within the context of our values and principles." As a result of being able to rely upon a large volunteer workforce, PSFC is one of only a few food cooperatives to standardize and publicize its wholesale price markup in its financial statements. This markup now stands at 24%. In traditional retail grocery stores, markups above wholesale can range from 30% to 80%. By saving on labor costs, the Coop can reliably offer low prices to all members.

According to the National Co+op Grocers—a group that includes 165 independently operated food cooperatives in the U.S., including PSFC—food cooperatives across the board prioritize affordability, democratic control and local food production. The association reports that, on average, food coops provide a 25% discount on over 2,400 products each week and work with at least 169 local farms. But while 1.3 million people are members of food cooperatives in the U.S., coop members only account for 63% of

all coop sales—many nonmembers thus shop at food cooperatives, highlighting a strikingly different model from the PSFC.

Below, we examine how different food cooperatives operate, looking at how their financial and labor models address questions of affordability, accessibility and food supply. These distinct models each have their benefits and drawbacks, and they ultimately speak to a wide range of visions for food justice.



Scenes of stocking: Members place goods on the Coop's shelves. Photographs by Caroline Mardok.

MEMBER LABOR VERSUS MEMBER DISCOUNTS

In a 1992 issue of the *Cooperative Grocer,* Nancy Moore raises legal issues with the member-labor model in food cooperatives, which, at the time, began to face threats from the Department of Labor (DOL) for labor violations. These issues included how volunteer labor would square against requirements for workers' compensation, minimum wage laws and Social Security taxes—i.e., were members considered workers? "It is time for the food coops to consider whether the discounts are an integral part of their member labor program and also to consider whether volunteers are the best solution for performing the daily operating tasks of grocery stores," wrote Moore in response to these complaints.

Twenty years later, in 2012, Thane Joyal, a coop board consultant, revisited the issue of member labor in another issue of the *Cooperative Grocer:*

"In recent years, some retail food co-ops have modified or abandoned their owner work programs due to a lack of owner participation and concerns about violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act … Some cooperatives have changed their programs in light of concerns about how to equitably allocate limited work opportunities among interested owners."

> TODAY, FEW FOOD COOPS IN THE U.S. RELY ON MEMBER LABOR OR RESTRICT SHOPPING TO MEMBERS ONLY, OFTEN FOR FINANCIAL REASONS.

The shift away from a member-labor model is exemplified by the case of La Montañita Coop in New Mexico, which both Joyal and Moore cite. By the early 1990s, the cooperative offered a program in which members who worked three hours per week re-

ceived an 18% discount. The DOL filed a case against the store, demanding that the discount be increased to the minimum wage. Today, La Montañita Coop no longer has a member-labor program. Members instead receive deals on certain goods each week, in addition to a general discount on groceries. But nonmembers are also able to shop at the store, a common feature of food cooperatives across the country.

The DOL ultimately pursued very few cases against food cooperatives, and yet today few food coops in the U.S. rely on member labor or restrict shopping to members only, often for financial reasons. While allowing nonmembers to shop certainly makes a food cooperative more open to newcomers (though not necessarily more affordable), many such stores are located outside of major metropolitan areas, where they likely face far greater financial pressure to attract customers and may find it difficult to convince members to complete work shifts.

It's telling that two other food coops in Brooklyn—the Windsor Terrace Food Coop and the Greene Hill Food Co-op on the border of Bed-Stuy and Clinton Hill—operate similarly to the PSFC, as both require member labor and, on most days, are only open to members for shopping. New York City consistently ranks as one of the most expensive cities in the world, and as a result there are likely to be more potential members willing to contribute labor in order to access affordable, high-quality food.

Elsewhere, cooperatives frequently follow a model similar to that of La Montañita, based on member incentives and discounts. At the 16,000-member River Valley Co-op in Northhampton, Massachusetts, members receive additional discounts for shopping, such as a 15% discount on full cases of items, and a 10% discount on coop-owner appreciation days. At the Honest Weight Food Co-op in Albany, New York, members similarly receive a discount compared to nonmembers. There is also an optional labor component here: Members can increase their discount by contributing labor similar to the types of work shifts available at PSFC, what Honest Weight calls an "incentivized opportunity."

MEMBER LABOR REDUCES THE NUMBER OF JOBS CREATED BY A FOOD COOP, AS THEY ARE IN PART MEANT TO CUT BACK ON LABOR COSTS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SAVINGS.

Other food coops have prioritized efforts to serve the community through job creation and by tackling forms of food injustice. In addition to being open to members and non-members, Gem City Market in Dayton, Ohio runs a teaching kitchen, a mini health clinic and a coffeehouse. Back in 2016, the Seward Community Co-op in Minneapolis built a new store with a stated goal of hiring people of color from the community. Member labor reduces the number of jobs created by a food coop, as they are in part meant to cut back on labor costs in order to provide savings.

The yet-to-open Kingston Food Co-op is a peculiar case, exemplifying the contradictions in some cooperative models as they pursue food justice and accessibility: The Kingston Co-op has received at least $200,000 from the Warren Buffet-funded Novo Foundation, an organization that has been accused of aiding rapid gentrification in the city. The Kingston Food Co-op asks founding members to join based on a system of “solidarity shares,” which offers lower membership joining fees for low-income people and those who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or a person of color.


X2

Food processing, stocking, receiving and other member labor at the PSFC. Photographs by Caroline Mardok.

FOOD JUSTICE

Many food cooperatives, including PSFC, draw their lineage from the political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which promoted food sovereignty and justice. The Black Panther Party notably designed a series of free breakfast and food survival programs, inspiring cooperative food models in Black communities across the country. Darnell Adams shows that these programs highlight an even longer legacy of Black coops and alternative economics, noting: “For over a century, Black people have organized and run food cooperatives, farm cooperatives, cooperative schools, insurance mutual groups, and credit unions.” In the 1970s, many of the debates around food cooperatives revolved around how they would balance the availability of high--quality, organic and often costly foods from local farms with the goal of providing affordable groceries to communities of color.

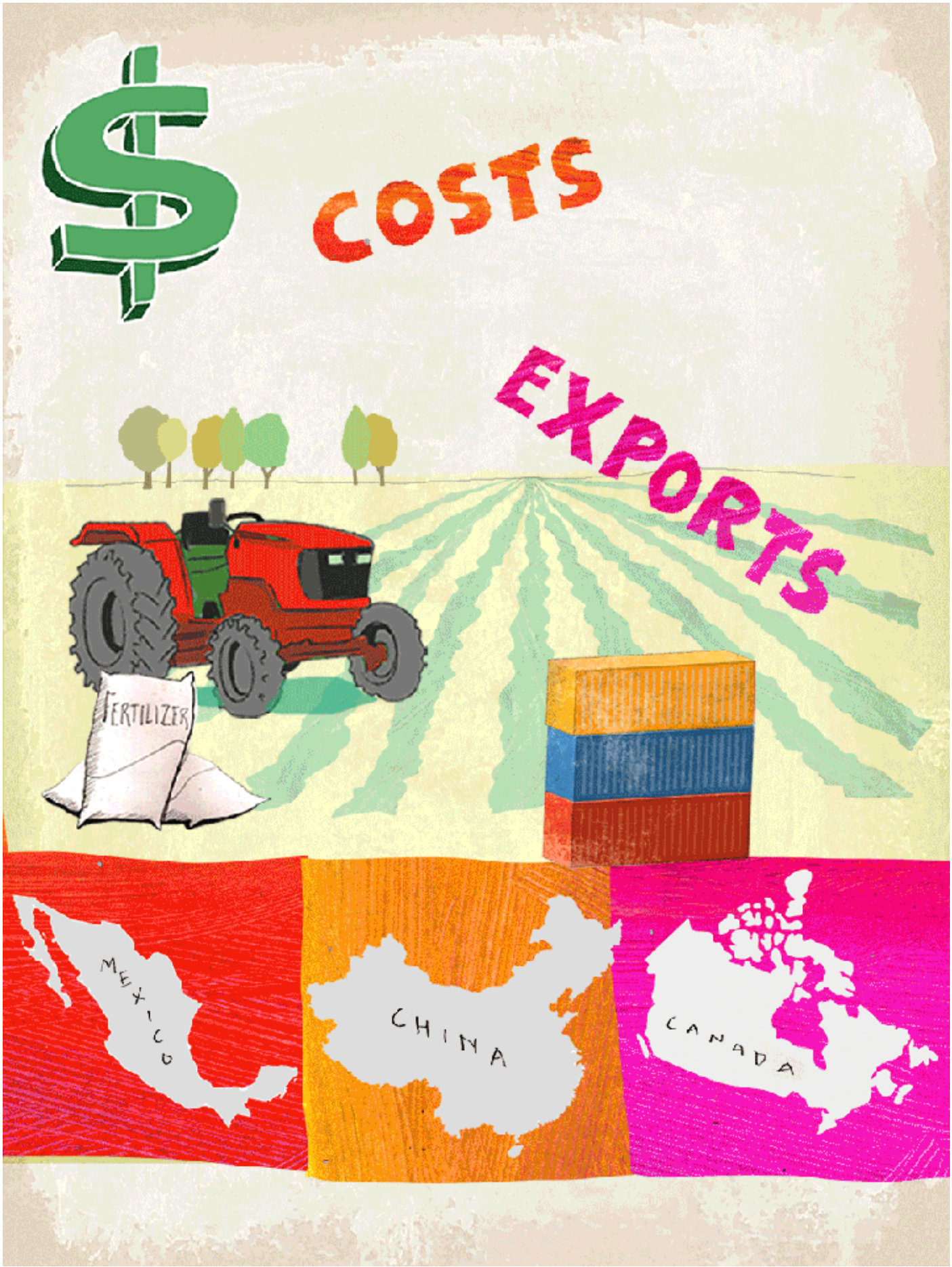
MEMBER LABOR IS SIMILARLY IMPLICATED IN THE CONVERSATION AROUND EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY, AS MANY WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES MAY NOT HAVE THE ABILITY TO WORK SHIFTS.

Similar questions have arisen today around the identity of the food cooperative. “The models and business development frameworks for co-ops have largely focused on predominantly white, middle-to- upper-middle-class college-educated communities,” writes Adams. To address issues of affordability, many cooperatives have begun to bring in conventional foods alongside natural and organic foods, which are usually more expensive. Member labor is similarly implicated in the conversation around equity and accessibility, as many working-class families may not have the ability to work shifts.

Fifty-plus years after its founding, PSFC has settled on a model that upholds the value of labor in order to guarantee affordability for its members only population. Increasing rents, higher wages and benefits costs and rising food prices have meant that food co-operatives must pursue liberatory political visions amidst daunting financial constraints. At the end of the day, it’s important that whatever model food cooperatives pursue, they keep their doors open. But despite the differences in financial and labor models, all food cooperatives in the U.S. share key values in their cooperative identities: democratic member control, autonomy and economic participation.

WHAT NEW TRUMP TARIFFS WOULD MEAN FOR THE COOP

December 18, 2024


COSTS
EXPORTS
FERTILIZER
MEXICO
CHINA
CANADA

By Leila Darabi

December 17, 2024

“Tariffs are the greatest thing ever invented,’’ Donald Trump said on the campaign trail as a presidential candidate.

In various speeches over the past year, he claimed that once back in office, he would introduce up to a 60% tariff on all goods imported from China and a 10–20% tariff on goods imported from all other countries. He also threatened a 200% tariff specifically on John Deere products, an attempt to bully the farm equipment company into reversing plans to move a share of its production from the Midwest to Mexico.

On November 27, 2024, now President-elect Trump announced that the rollout of these tariffs would begin on the first day of his presidency, starting with a 25% tariff on goods from Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10% tariff on goods from China. He cited a crackdown on illegal immigration and drug trafficking as the justification for targeting the United States’ three largest trade allies, which account for 40% of all international imports.

While the desire to institute these tariffs comprised one of the most specific policy messages of the Trump campaign, his plan to implement them remains unclear. As Trump himself recently stated: “The vision is there, but the game plan is not.”

> “THE PROBLEM WITH BROAD TARIFFS IN TODAY’S CONCENTRATED MARKET IS THAT ALL GOODS WIND UP COSTING MORE, NOT JUST THOSE THAT ARE IMPORTED.”
>
> JOE MAXWELL, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AND COFOUNDER OF FARM ACTION

HOW TARIFFS WORK

The nonprofit advocacy group Farm Action and their lobbying arm, Farm Action Fund, have produced a number of helpful explainers on tariffs. Their fact sheet, “What Would More Trump Tariffs Mean for Food and Farmers,” summarizes:

Tariffs are a tax on imported goods that can be used to strategically discourage imports or defend against unfair imports and open more market opportunity for domestic producers. The US buyer (a retailer or manufacturer) pays these taxes and may pass that cost on to US consumers. This can often be the case with broad, across-the-board tariffs—especially when they are not paired with strategies to help boost domestic production.

“The problem with broad tariffs in today’s concentrated market is that all goods wind up costing more, not just those that are imported,” Joe Maxwell, the chief strategy officer and cofounder of Farm Action, told the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. “The U.S. company or buyer tends to pass that tax onto the consumer as part of the cost of goods.”

Once in place, experts agree, tariffs are difficult to remove.

Broad tariffs have two effects, according to Brian Kuehl, the executive director of the advocacy group Farmers for Free Trade. As Kuehl explained to the *Gazette*, tariffs “increase the cost of imported goods … and then countries retaliate against us and they’ll put increased cost on our exports.” This means farmers are unable to “export food products or export as competitively. So American farmers get squeezed both with increased import costs and decreased costs at which they can sell their products.”

Joe Maxwell, from Farm Action, shared a similar assessment. In addition to his advocacy work, Maxwell runs a farm in Missouri where he raises sheep and hogs, as well as row crops like corn and soybeans.

IN 2018 AND 2019, CHINA PUT TARIFFS ON U.S. EXPORTS INCLUDING WINE, SOY BEANS, CORN AND PORK, WHILE INDIA PUT TARIFFS ON APPLES, PULSE CROPS, ALMONDS AND WALNUTS.

"In U.S. agriculture, a large segment of us depend on export markets. So that puts extra pressure on the farmer because now they're having to pay higher for the goods they need, whether that's consumer goods or business goods. And now they can't sell their stuff, so they get squeezed on both ends," Maxwell explained.

WHY FARMERS ARE WORRIED ABOUT TRADE WARS

U.S. farmers have real cause for concern based on their experiences during the first Trump Administration, according to Kuehl. "Pretty much every country that we put tariffs on in 2018 and 2019 retaliated against food and agriculture," he said. "It really turns on what the country is importing." For example, in 2018 and 2019, China put tariffs on U.S. exports including wine, soy beans, corn and pork, while India put tariffs on apples, pulse crops, almonds and walnuts.

Maxwell worries that the economic shock of renewed tariffs would have an outsized impact on U.S. farmers. "Because we don't have a lot of domestic production, much of our food, much of our farm equipment, is controlled by very few domestic corporations," he said. When tariffs increase the cost of international goods, "it's easy for [these corporations] to also raise their prices, because there's not any competitor or nobody emerging in the market that would do it for less."

Potash fertilizers are a prime example, he said. "Two companies control all the potash in the United States. If we import potash at 20%, those two companies aren't going to say, 'Oh, we'll keep ours at the domestic price'. They're gonna say, 'No competition? We'll tack [higher prices] on, too.'"

IN RESPONSE TO TRUMP'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HIS NEW TARIFFS WOULD START WITH MEXICO, MEXICAN PRESIDENT CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM RESPONDED THAT MEXICO WOULD RETALIATE WITH TARIFFS, A MOVE SHE ESTIMATED COULD COST 400,000 U.S. JOBS.

According to research conducted and published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, retaliatory tariffs from Canada, China, the European Union, India, Mexico and Turkey totaled more than $27 billion from 2018 through the end of 2019, or more than $13 billion per year during the years when the first generation of Trump tariffs went into effect. China accounted for more than 90% of these costs, further indication of the U.S.' dependence on imports from China.

In response to Trump's November 27 announcement that his new tariffs would start with Mexico, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum responded that Mexico would retaliate with tariffs, a move she estimated could cost 400,000 U.S. jobs.

HOW COOP SHOPPERS WOULD FEEL TARIFFS

As the Kamala Harris campaign stated repeatedly on the campaign trail—and which Vice President Harris reiterated during the Harris–Trump Presidential debate—tariffs at the rates Trump has proposed (including a 60% tariff on China) would be the equivalent of a nearly $4,000 tax increase for the average American family.

COOP PRODUCE ITEMS CURRENTLY SOURCED FROM MEXICO COULD SPIKE IN PRICE OR FORCE COOP BUYERS TO SEEK OUT ALTERNATIVE SUPPLIERS.

During the first Trump Administration, the Coop saw increased food prices—notably on imports like European cheeses—that rose in 2018 and 2019 and have never fallen.

While other factors have contributed to rising food costs in the U.S., additional tariffs would transfer additional costs to shoppers.

If the newly-threatened trade war with Mexico were to go into effect, Coop produce items currently sourced from Mexico could spike in price or force Coop buyers to seek out alternative suppliers. Current produce offerings imported from Mexico include avocados, blueberries, blackberries, broccolini, Persian cucumbers, garlic, lemons, limes, mangoes, peppers, scallions and certain tomatoes.

WAITING FOR THE ROLLOUT

How and when new tariffs will take effect remains unclear, especially as we don't yet know if the President-elect will be able to pass broad tariffs at the rates he boasted of during his campaign.

"We don't know how Trump's going to roll out new tariffs, but the worst case scenario is it happens fast and it happens broad[ly]," Kuehl said. "There's certainly one scenario where in January he announces he's doing tariffs around everybody. That's sort of how he did his tariffs in 2018." Kuehl added, "He didn't start his Administration that way, but when he did them, he did steel and aluminum tariffs on all countries globally. And it was a pretty big shock to the system."

The trade war sparked by the 2018 and 2019 Trump tariffs led to a spike in farm bankruptcies, which increased by 20% in 2019, even after a massive bailout from the Trump administration to prevent such an outcome.

"The farmer bailout did not have a noticeable difference in food prices. It was received by the farmers after the fact," Maxwell explained. "Farmers are price takers and not price makers."

US FARMERS HAVE TWO OTHER MAJOR WORRIES UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRA-

TION: IMMIGRATION POLICY AND THE APPOINTMENT OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR. TO LEAD THE U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION.

BEYOND TARIFFS

Beyond tariffs, U.S. farmers have two other major worries under the Trump Administration, said Kuehl: immigration policy and the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to lead the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

“Parts of the agricultural economy are very immigrant dependent,” he said. “Those would include produce, meat packing and dairy. You could see disruptions in U.S. food production if we see mass deportations and disrupt labor in those pieces of the farm economy.”

Such a disruption could lead not only to increased prices if farmers aren’t able to produce enough food to meet demand, but also food waste and culling of herds. During COVID-19 disruptions in food production, dairy farmers had to dump milk and farmers raising animals for meat had to cull herds, both possible scenarios if mass deportation lead to a farm labor shortage.

CALLS TO ACTION

Both Farmers for Free Trade, Kuehl’s organization, and Farm Action, Maxwell’s organization, are focused on raising awareness around the dangers of broad-based tariffs and the specific impact on food production in the U.S.

New Yorkers, Maxwell noted, can potentially call on Senator Chuck Schumer, the current majority leader and soon-to-be minority leader in the Senate, to encourage policymakers on both sides of the aisle to oppose broad-based tariffs.

Members interested in tracking these policy issues can look out for updates at the General Meeting—and reported in the *Gazette*—from the International Trade Educa-

tion Squad.

PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP CONCERT SERIES AT SHAPESHIFTER LAB

December 18, 2024



December 17, 2024

The September return of the Coop’s monthly concert series at ShapeShifter Lab brought out Coop talent, music lovers, and friends and family. ShapeShifter Lab is just across from the Coop at 837 Union Street. Don’t miss the next event on January 10.

Photo story by Caroline Mardok



Maya Solovey performing with Ilusha Tsinadze while a young fan and her children, Dora and Antonio, support her on stage.







Left: The Coop series is family-friendly. Right: Bev Grant, the original founder of the Coop concert series, performing her folk songs.



Jay Rodriguez and Alexis Cuadrado curated the September 13 concert. They are both professional musicians, composers and producers.



Maya Solovey performing as her son Antonio looks on.







Right: Anita-Mae Kahan performing her cello pieces.



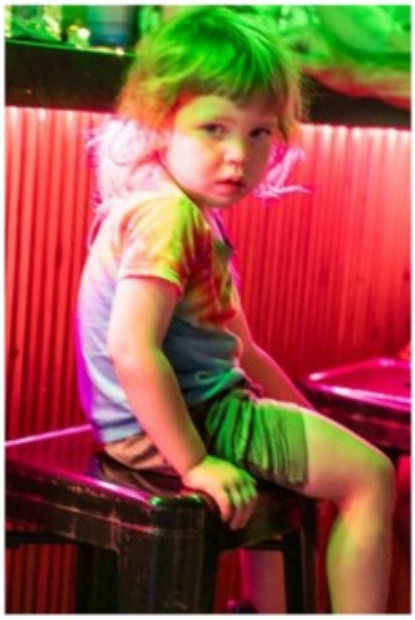






Top: Anita-Mae Kahan singing a Georges Brassens song in French. Bottom right: Anita-Mae Kahan (cello) performs with Adam Kahan (bass).








Top left and bottom right: Caroline Davis performing solo. Top right and bottom left: Fortuna Sung, cofounder with Matt Garrison of ShapeShifter Lab, which generously provided its performance space.
If you're interested in performing at the PSFC Concert Series, fill out this form.

We are also looking for PR professionals to help with social media promotion for works-lot credit. If you have relevant experience, send your résumé and letter of interest to membership-office@psfc.coop.

EQUITY, ACCESS AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE REPORT

December 18, 2024



By Azi Khalili for the EACC

December 17, 2024

Founded in 2004, the Equity, Access and Community Committee (EACC) was established to uphold the Park Slope Food Coop's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. The EACC is a team of academics, researchers, attorneys, educators, artists and activists united by a shared passion for equity and social justice within the Coop.

Dedicated to creating an accessible and welcoming space, the EACC advocates for diversity, challenges discrimination and promotes equal participation. Working alongside Coop staff, managers and members, the committee investigates cases of discrimination and offers support to members who have experienced or observed discrimination based on racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, religious bias, etc.

We review reports, mediate conflicts and propose structural changes to address and prevent discriminatory practices. Though the EACC does not impose penalties, our mission is to foster a fair and inclusive environment for all members.

In an effort to better understand and serve the Coop's community, the EACC is launching an anonymous demographic survey. Approved by the General Meeting, this survey will gather insights on the Coop's membership to inform outreach, recruitment and programming and to ensure the Coop reflects the diverse Brooklyn and Greater NYC communities it serves.

Key goals of the survey include understanding member demographics, identifying underrepresented groups and shaping policies that enhance inclusivity. By addressing potential barriers to participation, the EACC hopes to improve Coop accessibility and make data-informed decisions to meet members' needs. The EACC hopes to launch the survey in late December or early January. We will notify Coop members as soon as it's available.

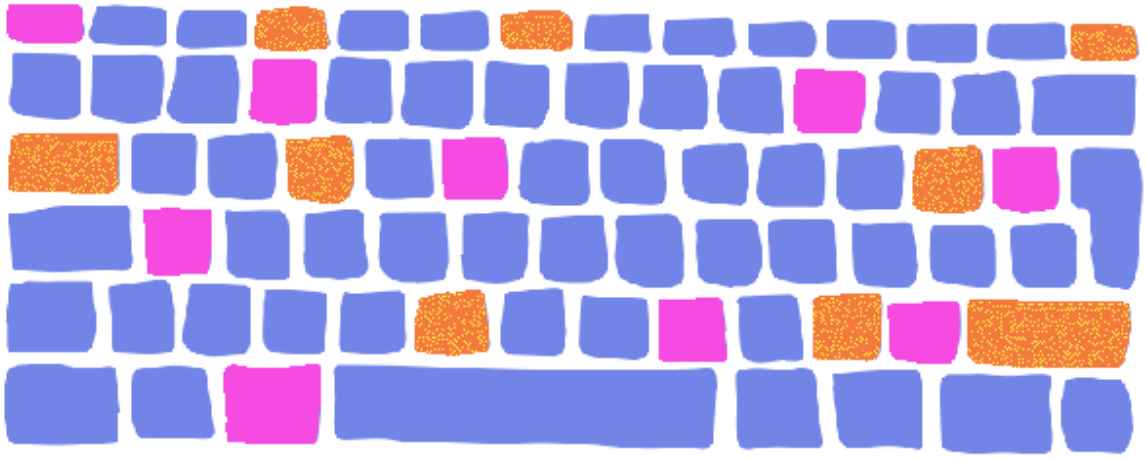
To further support its mission, the EACC is also building a new website. This resource will provide members with information on the committee's role, how to report inci-

dents and ways to engage in the Coop’s efforts to build a more equitable community. Stay tuned for updates as the site develops!

DECEMBER 17, 2024

December 18, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



ALARMING COST RISE AT THE COOP

Dear Fellow Members:

It was deeply distressing to learn that the Coop plans to return to what was supposed to be a temporary, pandemic gross margin of 25% after failing a very modest retreat

to 24% (“Notes from the October General Meeting“). It seems clear that something permanent has shifted in the cost structure of this organization to the point of institutionalized bloat. If the Coop is to serve its core mission of affordable food then costs must come down permanently and a more serious examination of expenses must be undertaken.

The ability and willingness to do so should be prominent in the criteria for selecting Joe Holtz’s replacement. Unfortunately the selection process has thus far proceeded with a minimal role for members, whose focused interests in low margins differ from the interests of coordinators paid from the margin. Member approval was not sought to extend the “temporary” higher margin another year (essentially making it permanent) nor was any information or analysis of how we got to this point brought to the meeting where the decision was announced, judging from the *Gazette* report. Instead members received an update about another cost center in the works, home delivery.

A reckoning on expenses is inevitable. We should collectively summon the grit to face it now rather than later, when it will be much more difficult to do so. We as members must also be vocal when coordinators fail to consult us on important matters.

In cooperation,
Ryan Tate

Dear Ryan,

The Gazette Letters Editor asked the General Coordinators to respond to your letter.

At the March 2023 GM, members voted to give authority to the General Coordinators to annually set the markup in a range of 21–25%, based on the Coop’s financial situation. You can read the minutes from that meeting.

Second, at the October 2024 GM, Joe Holtz gave a detailed report of why the markup was going back up to 25%. This document, shown at the GM, provides the financial

reasons the markup will be increasing to 25% on Feb 3, 2025 (the first day of the fiscal year 2026). Every member received this document, either by email or text, before the meeting.

The delivery service's cost to the Coop is pure speculation. In fact, we predict the opposite. However, since it hasn't started yet, no one knows what its effect on our finances will be. It's also important to note that the service will have a trial period, after which it will come to a GM for final approval or rejection by members.

Sincerely,
The General Coordinators

IT STARTED WITH WORDS

Dear Editor:

In 2021, Holocaust survivors began a campaign to show how that genocide "started with words."

The current epidemic of antisemitic and anti-Zionist speech, and subsequent global escalation of antisemitic violence, echo that phrase. We are witnessing the latest provocation for the historically recurring, multi-millennial expulsions and genocidal attacks on Jews, in this instance for defending themselves against their terrorist enemies who have declared their genocidal "intent," intent being required to prove genocide.

According to *Gazette* policy, letters cannot be "hateful, needlessly inflammatory, discriminatory libelous, personal attacks…." Apparently, this principle applies only to attacks on individuals, not religious, national or ethnic groups, though I'm certain such sustained attacks on any groups other than Jews and Israel would never appear in the

Gazette. (A letter of mine was rejected as “inflammatory” for using the word “Arab” as a descriptive, non-pejorative term, and Palestinians identify as Arabs).

For years the editors have intentionally or thoughtlessly ignored their policy that letters must be written with “accurate, attributed, easily verifiable statements of facts separated from opinions.” If this is true, why publish a letter alleging “haunting parallels” between the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Israel’s actions in Gaza? Israel is widely recognized for making unprecedented wartime efforts to avoid civilian casualties, undermined by Hamas operating within civilian infrastructure.

Another allegation is “purposeful starvation” of Palestinians. Note that Hamas is known to frequently hijack food provided by Israel and intended for civilians.

As to calls for a ceasefire, it was during a ceasefire that Hamas committed its brutality on Oct 7, 2023.

Sadly, I don’t expect this letter to have any impact on the editors, Board of Directors, Diversity Committee or BDS activists. This Coop is what it is, a community lacking ethical agency and commitment to its principle of inclusiveness for *all* members.

Sylvia Lowenthal

HYBRID MEETINGS: MAKING A BAD SYSTEM WORSE

Dear Editor:

The Coop’s town hall type GM was appropriate for a simpler time. We were small, intimate, and running the store was relatively simple. Now it is more complex. The Coop manages dozens of employees, pension and health plans, reserve funds, property, etc. It is a $60M/year business.

Our current system allows any member to introduce any agenda item, and it must be scheduled for a GM. There is no obligation to provide an impact or cost/benefit analysis. The presentations are brief and there is no opportunity for prepared counter responses. Instead, we have ad hoc responses often based more on feelings than on facts. All present members vote, and the Board of Directors, by tradition, mirrors the meeting proceedings thereby making the meeting decision official and legal.

The system allows for abuse and irresponsible decision making, such as when an update to the personnel policy was rejected. The hybrid meeting would amplify these deficiencies.

Aside from the recklessness of voting to change the bylaws without a plan on how to carry out hybrid meetings and taking on additional expenses when the Coop sales are not meeting costs, there does not appear to be a demand to attend GM's that would warrant holding hybrid meetings, except for the push to have the Coop endorse the BDS movement, and with it endorse the Hamas war against Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state. Anyone who believes the former does not include the latter has not done due diligence. The BDS faction has been very public about promoting hybrid meetings as a means to hold a BDS vote. A vote for hybrid is a vote for BDS. BDS will destroy our Coop. Please vote against hybrid meetings.

Barbara Mazor

BDS IS ALREADY HURTING OUR FINANCES

Dear Membership,

BDS has already damaged PSFC's balance sheet and threatens staff pensions. Just imagine the ruin if we ever vote them a place at our table.

At the October General Meeting, the financial report stated awareness that people aren't shopping due to political "disputes." I am one of those people. It's my coop and I'm disgusted every time I see BDS openly attempt to dictate what I buy, what I believe and how to behave politically.

Frequent stops and socializing once translated into me spending over $1,000 a month. Since March, I don't crack $350. I just get essentials, and I'm out. Coming up is our ultimate protest: not shopping altogether yet refusing to relinquish membership.

I join Jews, Christians and Muslims in resisting this attack on our Coop, a growing groundswell ever since Hamas broke the truce on October 7, 2023, raping, kidnapping and murdering 1,200 Jews and Muslims of every age.

But what about, "I'm Jewish so it's OK," or, "I'm anti-Zionist, not anti-Jew"? My reply is, "Nope, not buying that either." History looks brutal for the minuscule, misinformed Jewish groups who initially supported the Germans politically and at concentration camps, or spied for Stalin. And public anti-Zionist figures worldwide are open about their violent intentions towards (yeah, right) Zionists.

BDS goes beyond purging certain kinds of Jews from PSFC and ignoring how Palestinians were always more terrified of Hamas than the IDF. This is 1930's level bigotry and whatever term passes for Fascism on the Left.

It literally nauseates me now to visit. I imagine that titillates some keffiyeh-clad members, but look at them and ask yourself, "What's funny about ruining this place?"

BDS needs the Coop, not the other way around.

Jesse Rosenfeld

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR FREELANCERS

Dear PSCF Community,

As a freelancer for more than 10 years, health insurance has been a real struggle both in terms of cost, coverage and network. I found Opolis in 2023 and enrolled in 2024 and am happy to say I will renew for 2025. I felt other freelancers would want to know about this option for health insurance. The fact that Opolis is also an insured coop is a double bonus for the PSFC community. I can attest you won’t find cheaper and better health insurance on the open market.

Thanks,
Johanna Kolodny