

THE BANANA TRADE HAS A SORDID HISTORY. WHY THE COOP'S BANANAS ARE DIFFERENT

June 16, 2026

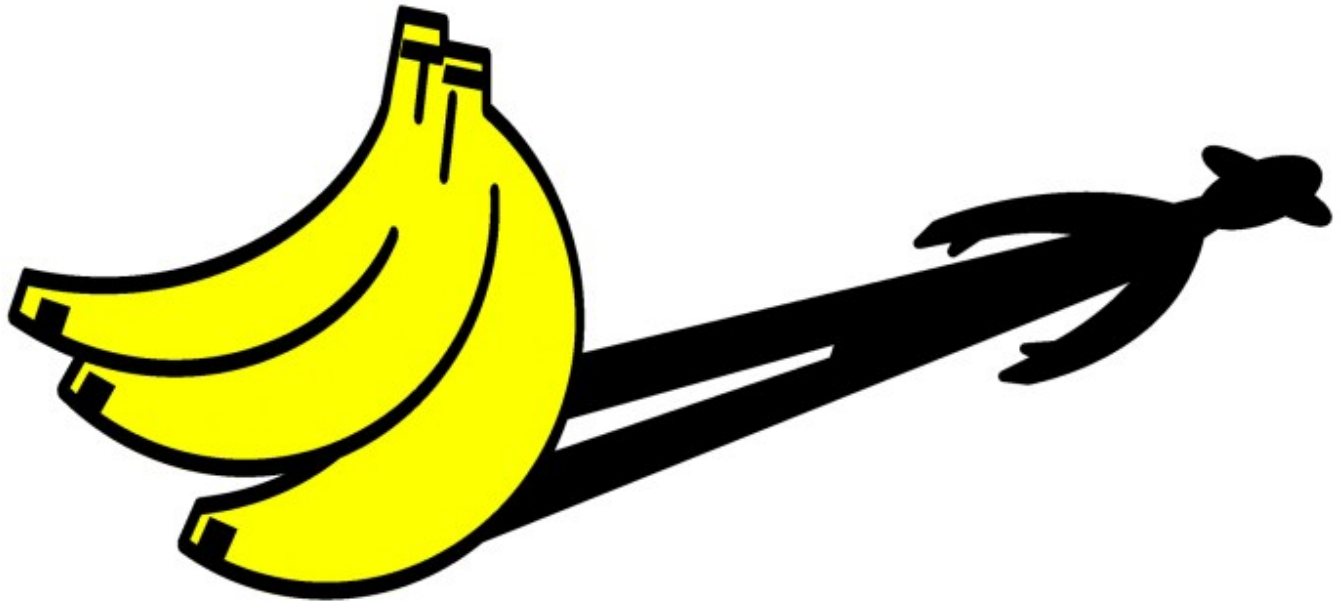


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

June 16, 2026

By Dan Bergsagel

In the United States, we eat a lot of bananas. Each year, over 5 million tons of bananas are imported, about 27 billion bananas in total.

That's 25 to 30 pounds per person each year, the equivalent of each of us eating one banana every four or five days. Nearly all the bananas eaten in the United States are grown in a handful of Central and South American countries, with 40 percent imported from Guatemala, and 50 percent imported from Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico.

The weird and wonderful story of how bananas get from boats to the grocery stores of New York City has been covered by *The New York Times*, but what is the story of the

Coop's bananas?

Not all bananas are grown and harvested under the same circumstances.

The banana-growing industry "is rooted in power imbalance" according to Equal Exchange, the Coop's banana distributor. Historical practices that abuse laborers in banana-growing regions have included granting tax-free land to foreign multinational corporations, forced labor under paramilitaries and the promotion of farming chemicals dangerous to humans.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

The term “Banana Republic” described the consequences of a small state, usually authoritarian, becoming economically dependent on the export of bananas, to the detriment of its population.

Where the Coop buys our bananas is crucial if we wish to avoid this tarnished supply chain. For 20 years, Equal Exchange has been sourcing organic fair-trade bananas, importing 37 million in 2025 (approximately 1 in every 730 bananas imported to the

US).

According to Jessie Myszka, Equal Exchange's National Sales Manager for Fresh Produce, 782,880 of its bananas were sold to the Coop in 2025, a 7 percent increase on our banana purchases in 2024. At just over 2 percent of the total bananas Equal Exchange distributes, the Coop is its largest single-unit customer.

If, like me, you struggle to visualize what 780,000 bananas look like, it's nearly 10,000 cases, filling 204 pallets. That is four packing pallets of bananas per week. "That's a lot of bananas for one store," Myszka said.

Of the bananas consumed by the Coop, around 250,000 are grown by Cooperativa Rio y Valle (RyV) in the northwestern Piura region of Peru.

Bananas are weird. They are not the fruit of a tree, like an apple, but technically the berries of an herb. Commercial bananas are sterile—they do not reproduce from seeds, but are instead propagated from offshoot stems, much as you might grow a house plant from cuttings.

"The little sprouts at the base of the banana plant are referred to as babies and the big one is the mother," said Myszka. "When they prune the plant they take away all but two of the babies."

When bananas are prepared for export, layers of foam or newspaper are placed between the layers of hands in a bunch, and this bunch is covered with a plastic bag for weeks to protect it from spores.



Carrying bananas in a cradle. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

The bunches are then cut down when they are still green and put carefully on a large cushion (referred to as a cradle). The bunch is then hung, sprayed and trimmed to the group of 5 or 6 bananas that we see in the store. They are washed in a big tank and then packed in cases for export.



Packing bananas. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

Because banana plants are sterile, “once the mother’s fruit is harvested, the mother has to be cut down,” explained Myszka. One of the babies will grow in her place. Banana plants require moist soil to grow, with the soil staying within a goldilocks moisture range that is neither dry nor waterlogged, but evenly and consistently damp. And in death, the mother can still provide for her babies.

“The plant stem holds a ton of water in honeycomb-like cells, so after they cut down the mother they slice open the trunk and put that on the ground face down so it can drain. In an area where there is not much water, that’s really important,” Myszka said.

With this unusual growing and harvesting cycle, it can be hard to manage the quality of banana produce. This is one of the key traits of Rio y Valle, and why it is one of only three primary banana-supplying cooperatives trusted by Equal Exchange.

RyV has been commended by Equal Exchange’s third-party quality oversight for its superior banana quality. At RyV, after harvest the bananas are carefully transported from the fields to a local packing facility, “either through limited cableway systems or manually by workers carrying bunches on their shoulders,” described Edgar Talledo, a banana grower and Certifications Manager at RyV, “before being moved in cooperative-owned trucks to a central palletizing site. There, the bananas are packed into containers, sealed and transported by road to the port.”

The quality was attributed to a “work ethic that ... is difficult to replicate,” he said.

“The cooperative faced serious quality issues during its early years, even receiving ultimatums from buyers that threatened to halt exports,” Talledo said. “In response, the entire organization—from leadership to field workers—committed to raising standards through continuous training, close supervision and a shared sense of responsibility among producers and staff.”



A meeting of Rio y Valle co-op members. (Photo courtesy of Equal Exchange.)

RyV is a cooperative formed by 343 small producers. Unlike large commercial banana plantations of hundreds of hectares, or even regional fair trade cooperatives formed of producers with an average of 7 hectares each, the farmers within RyV each manage less than 2 hectares. This collaboration of many small farmers is particularly important for managing the water resources in the region.

“Río y Valle’s name reflects the landscape where it was born: the Chira River and the Chira Valley in northern Peru. This region offers particularly favorable conditions for banana production, with a warm, stable climate that supports consistent growth and good yields,” Talledo said.

Yet the land was not always like this. The President of RyV, Juan Ovieda, described the land when they established the farms in the mid-1980s as “dusty, dry and not productive.”

Water management is crucial, but it’s hard with a collection of small farmers. “At that scale, it’s not practical to address the water needs of a plot. Together, this modest group of growers successfully requested permission to install an irrigation system,” explains a blog on the Equal Exchange website.

Exporting bananas requires a lot of plastic—both between the layers of hands of bananas and to enclose the bunches. RyV now operates a plastic recycling factory.

“The co-op coordinates picking up the plastic from the individual farmers, and it goes to a little factory where it gets pelletized and extruded into pallet corner boards,” Myszka said. This is a win-win outcome, where the cooperative is reducing waste in its environment and producing an item that its members need for shipping bananas, allowing them to buy from their own facilities at a much lower price.

Cooperativa Rio y Valle’s work is inspiring, but there are broader problems with the banana trade.

“All the bananas that get exported are the same variety, called Cavendish. The local market has many types of bananas, but only the Cavendish can travel,” said Myszka.

Cavendish bananas are grown as a monoculture, and because they are sterile and propagated from other plants, they are essentially clones. Without genetic diversity, they are susceptible to pests and disease.

This is not a hypothetical concern. Up until the 1950s, the export banana trade dealt with a different cultivar, Gros Michel, until swathes of plantations were destroyed by a fungus causing a wilt called Panama Disease. Gros Michel was replaced with Cavendish, a variety that was resistant to the fungus.

Today the Cavendish is under threat from two fungi. In Ecuador, banana plantations are being affected by Black Sigatoka. In Peru, the threat is a fungus called TR4, which is a strain (Tropical Race 4) of the same Panama Disease that finished Gros Michel.

“The scary thing about TR4 is that it gets into the soil and stays there for a very long time, decades. It kills the banana plant and stops you growing new banana plants on the same land,” said Myszka. Climate change is not helping. Plants that are under water stress are weaker and less able to resist the fungus.

As a consequence of TR4, “a different group near to Rio y Valle has decreased from shipping well over a dozen container loads of bananas per week to just one. They used to be the strongest banana coop in the region and that is no longer where they are.”

There is a small silver lining for organic fair trade co-ops.

“Even the general banana industry is saying there is no conventional spray pesticide solution for TR4,” Myszka said.

Organic techniques that maintain good microorganisms in the soil are the best re-

sponse to TR4, which lends itself to organic co-ops, particularly those who receive a fair trade premium for their produce. “We are applying large amounts of liquid biofertilizer and beneficial fungus Trichoderma; this is helping us significantly, as are applications of guano and compost. These measures are helping to extend the lifespan of our plants just a little bit longer” explained a banana grower named Santos Gutiérrez.

“We aren’t going to eradicate it—no, the plants will still eventually die—but with the right management, we can at least delay that outcome for a little while longer.”

“I don’t know what the future holds—I can only hope, and pray to God, that the plants eventually develop some form of resistance—but as of now, there isn’t a single plant variety that is either resistant or tolerant to it. Unless a resistant plant variety emerges, this whole operation will come to an end within a couple of years.”

Dan Bergsagel is often mistaken for someone else.

THE NEW MEMBER WHO JUST OPENED A STANDOUT NEIGHBORHOOD PIZZERIA

June 16, 2026



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE

June 16, 2026

By Zach Schiffman

Ben Wexler didn't grow up in Park Slope, but he might as well have. A born-and-raised New Yorker, he spent the pandemic years running a seasonal pizza business on Peaks Island, off the coast of Maine—all while his girlfriend held down an apartment here and a Coop membership going on 10 years.

But the city kept pulling him back. So this past November, after a long hunt for the right space, he opened Il Leone just around the corner from the Coop on Seventh Avenue: a sit-down wine bar built around long-fermented sourdough Neapolitan pizza, with the produce treated as the main event.

That obsession traces back to a stint on a small organic vegetable farm, where picking what he'd cook each morning rewired how Wexler thinks about food. It's a philosophy that lines up neatly with the Coop's, which makes his timing perfect: after years of circling, he's finally an official member. We caught up with him just as his first New York tomato season comes into view, to talk Maine, Naples, the heirloom seeds in his backyard and how to shop the Coop like a chef.

How did Il Leone come to be on Seventh Avenue?



PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE

Ben standing in front of Il Leone.

I started the business on Peaks Island, off Portland, Maine, during the pandemic. I'm a born-and-raised New Yorker but went to college in Maine, then moved back and was mostly working on political campaigns. In between campaigns, I did various things in the food business, including working on a small organic vegetable farm.

Right before the pandemic, in about 2019, I was burnt out from living in the city and wanted to move to Maine and start this business. At first I was looking to start it on a farm up there, partnering with a farm, and then when the pandemic hit, that fell through. So I started it on the island instead and lived up there for a few years, running it as a seasonal business, and I just really started to miss the city. The native New Yorker in me was pulling me back.

My girlfriend was living here in Park Slope, so I'd spend some of my off-season time down here in the winter, exploring what the business might look like in the city. After a few years of looking at spaces, I found the one we're in now. Having spent that off-season time in Park Slope, it just felt like a really great fit. There was a dearth of restaurants in the neighborhood, and not a lot of people doing conceptually what I was trying to do. So that's how this all came about.

How much of your business is local repeat neighbors versus people from all over the city?

I'd say we're about 75 percent Park Slope right now. I started this to first and foremost be a place for the neighborhood, and the reception's been really positive. People are just looking for another restaurant to go to, whether it's with their kids or without. They love that we emphasize sourcing as locally and organically as possible, and that we offer a sit-down wine bar experience alongside the pizza and the food. They love that we're doing the sourdough with a really long fermentation, putting a lot of love, care, and intention into the food. It's been a really positive first six months.

Have you been aware of customers who are Coop members?

I haven't asked, so that's hard to say. But a lot of the Park Slope community are members. My girlfriend has been a Coop member for 10 years, so I'm very familiar with it, and there have definitely been customers who've mentioned they work there. I'm sure many members have come through our doors.

Living in Maine, with your girlfriend being a member—what was your awareness of the Coop as you were going back and forth?

I've known about the Coop for years, just from being a New Yorker. Right out of college I had a sublet in Park Slope and I was on the verge of joining about 10 years ago, but didn't, because I ended up moving out of the neighborhood. Growing up here, I've always respected what it does—both as a community model for increasing access to affordable, quality fresh produce, and just as a great grocery store. The foodie in me loves a grocery store that has a lot to offer, and the Coop clearly stands out as one of the better ones in the city.

How does your experience working on farms change you as a restaurant owner?

The most fulfilling part of working on that small organic vegetable farm was getting to pick what I'm cooking with that day. It really drew me back to the roots of not just Italian cuisine, but Neapolitan-style pizza making—because in Naples, where pizza was invented, there's such a profound emphasis on simplicity, the quality of ingredients, and sourcing everything as locally as possible.



PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE



PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE



Ben in his restaurant backyard planting basil, which he uses for his dishes.

I came to realize more and more that what makes the best food, particularly the best Italian food, is not overdoing it—using just a few really great ingredients. That’s how you make the best tomato sauce: just tomatoes, olive oil, and sea salt. You don’t need oregano, you don’t need garlic, you don’t need all these add-ons. The best pasta in the world, arguably, is just a simple spaghetti pomodoro with in-season tomatoes and some fresh basil. That’s what Neapolitan pizza has always been about.

So as a pizza maker, I was really excited to bring that philosophy to my pizza. There are some people doing Neapolitan-style pizza, and some doing sourdough Neapolitan specifically, like Anthony Mangieri of Una Pizza Napoletana, who I’ve always looked up to. But I feel like there aren’t that many people in the city really offering a “farm--to-pizza” experience, focused on the quality of the produce. That’s an area I’ve focused on since working on that farm.

How are you feeling about your first tomato season in the city?

We opened in November, so we haven't had a tomato season yet. This'll be my first one open in New York. I'm so excited. For the last five years in Maine, I've done a pizza I call the "l'estate," which means summer in Italian. It's literally just peak in-season heirloom cherry tomatoes from a small organic farm, ripened right on the vine. When you harvest cherry tomatoes at peak ripeness, there's just nothing like it—they carry so much flavor, unlike any tomato you'd find in a grocery store. I'm so excited to get that pizza back on the menu.

There's another we do in summer called the "Fiore," with squash blossoms and local organic zucchini—also really special. And there's one we'll be doing shortly with in-season garlic scapes from the farmers market.

In Maine I got all my produce from one or two small organic farms, and those partnerships let me develop a lot of these pizzas. They rest on traditional Italian ingredient combinations, but they also work because we're able to get such great produce. We're just getting into farmers market season here, and I'm so excited to start putting some of these seasonal pizzas on the menu—that's part of the challenge of launching in late fall and early winter, not being able to do quite as much with in-season produce as we traditionally have.

Is there anything you're considering trying here that you never did in Maine?

Of course. We love to try new things. We've got a few things in the works with some really special heirloom tomato seeds that I'm actually growing in my backyard at the restaurant right now. I won't announce it just yet, until the tomatoes are ready, but there's some fun stuff coming.

I'm a big believer in walking through the farmers market, talking to farmers, and seeing what looks exciting and what's going to work on a pizza. One we're doing right

now that's been a big hit is organic asparagus with fresh lemon spritzed on top, fresh mozzarella, pecorino, and black pepper. As we transition out of asparagus season, we'll start doing the garlic scape pie I mentioned, and some others as the summer heats up.

As we head into summer-produce season, do you have any advice for people shopping at the Coop?

I always like to shop as much as possible day-of when I'm cooking. You generally get the freshest stuff that way. I keep an eye out for what looks really perky and fresh, what was truly just harvested that day or the day before. That always makes for the best meals in my experience. So use your eyes and follow your heart, and see what's truly poppin' on those shelves. That's going to lead to a lovely dining experience.

Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian, and Park Slope local.

THE SHELF WHERE EVERYTHING IS HALF OFF

June 16, 2026



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

June 16, 2026

By Kayla Levy

There are many places to begin a shopping trip at the Coop. Some people beeline for the produce section or go straight to the bulk aisle. Others begin filling up a cart at the meat freezer. Others still walk directly back to the end of aisle four, where there's a shelf—called an endcap in the shopping business—full of discounted goods.

“I’ve had a lot of shoppers tell me this is the first thing they look at when they come into the Coop,” said Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi. “When I stock the sale endcap, people come and grab items before I even put the price label up.” Chi would know, as she is the one who started—and is responsible for maintaining—the sale endcap, where all items are half off.

It all began with an email. In 2021, Chi received a message from KeHE, one of the Coop’s main distributors, with a spreadsheet highlighting hundreds of half-off items. The cost of groceries was skyrocketing, and Chi thought the discounts would benefit shoppers, so she placed an order for an endcap’s worth of items (the end of aisle four had just been cleared of extra supplements). Everything sold quickly.





PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



“I called my sales rep to understand why she sent the discounted list in the first place, and she said, ‘Oh, we have one every week,’” said Chi, recalling her surprise. “I asked her to start sending it to me weekly.” From there, the sale endcap was born.

Every week, Chi receives the half-off list via email and sorts through to find about 20 items to purchase. She starts by removing frozen or refrigerated goods, as well as anything with artificial ingredients or an expiration date less than three months away. From there, she’s left with about 100 products.

“It’s a gamble, but I’ve gotten pretty experienced at having a gut feeling about what people will buy,” said Chi.

She typically buys 200 units of each product (the most that can fit in the basement), hoping the supply will last a week—but that rarely happens. Turnover on the endcap is quicker than in other parts of the store, and there are fewer items in backstock, Chi

explained. Chips and chocolate are usually the first to go, she said.

Coop member Robert Berkman shops the sale endcap all the time but is disappointed when items sell out. “The only problem is buying something really good and then going back and they’re all gone. Forever,” he said.

Other members said they have a hard time finding predictable products or flavors they like on the endcap. “I’ve mostly found unusual snacks there,” said Sophie Pugh-Sellers.

In some cases, sale items are products that exist elsewhere in the store or are staple goods. Once, Coop member Mo Christ discovered a shelf-stable curry from the endcap that they now purchase at full price. “It’s a perfect office lunch,” they said.

For her part, Chi tries to stock the shelf with pantry staples when possible. “The other items are impulse purchases, but buying a pantry staple makes me feel good because it’s a chance for shoppers to save money on an item they’d be buying anyway,” she said.



One member noted that the best item they'd ever bought on the endcap was a Graza olive oil refill for just \$9.

The endcap at aisle four isn't the only place where shoppers can find sales in the Coop. When the Coop gets an extreme deal from KeHE or another distributor, the team tends to put it elsewhere on the floor—like in shopping carts with a special sign.

Distributors regularly put products on sale from 10% to 25% off for the month, and the Coop passes those savings along, but unless you're someone who buys the same item regularly or closely tracks your receipt, you might miss them. "We have no way of indicating that on the shelf, so it's kind of like a hidden sale," said Chi.

In recent months, bolstered by continuing demand, the discount initiative has expanded into the side of aisle four. Chi tries to divide products, putting non-edible goods next to the supplements, and edible treats on the endcap itself. "It's a very random selection, but it's fun," she said.

“This week we have noni juice. I’d never heard of it before, but we’ve almost run out.”

Kayla Levy is a freelance contributor covering housing and culture for New York Magazine. She’s been a Coop member since 2019.

JUNE 16, 2026

June 16, 2026

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

PRINTED GAZETTE?

Hello Linewaiters!

It would be wonderful if the *Linewaiters' Gazette* were available to read while waiting in line at the Coop. Perhaps we could print a handful of copies, laminate them, and circulate them in store—similar to how the carrots are used—so members can read

while they wait to check out. I think this would increase engagement, and I would personally love to read it during that time. It might also be nice to offer an option to receive or pick up a printed copy. My household observes phone-free mornings on the weekends, and this is something I'd really enjoy incorporating into that time.

Thanks for listening!

*All good things,
Rebecca Gladstone*

PLASTIC REDUCTION AT THE COOP: SOME INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

To the Editor:

As a PSFC member involved in the Coop's plastics recycling (before it was mandated by NYC) as well as involved in further plastics reduction over more than two decades, I'm very encouraged to see the renewal of these efforts.

Previously, subcommittees of the PSFC Environmental Committee took up these challenges. Some of this history was shared last fall with the new stand-alone committee:

Original Plastic Roll Bag Reduction FAQ (2011-2012)

"From an environmental perspective, recycling should always be a last resort. Reducing our use of disposable plastic is critical. Plastics recycling, like plastics manufacturing, releases toxins into the air, water, and soil, and consumes excessive nonrenewable energy. Our plastics are often sorted through by low-income workers and reprocessed in low-income neighborhoods—whether in the U.S., in Asia, or elsewhere—with greatly increased health risks as a result."

Not a 'Ban'—Just Our Triple Bottom Line: More Q&A About Phasing Out Plastic Bag Rolls at the Coop (*Linewaiters' Gazette*, June 2012)

The May 28 Plastic Bag Vote: What It Is, What It Isn't (*Linewaiters' Gazette*, April 2013)

I am heartened that Coop awareness has evolved over the past 15 years—and hope we can all learn from our history in order to move forward more effectively.

Yours in cooperation,
Regina Sandler-Phillips
PSFC member since 1995

POINT OF ORDER

Dear Editors,

At Tuesday's meeting, the supporters of a boycott argued against a referendum on a specific premise: that the General Meeting is the better venue because it enables live Q&A and debate from all sides. That premise was not honored. A motion to end discussion carried before any such exchange took place, followed immediately by a vote passing the boycott.

I have been a member since 2004 and attended the General Meeting in 2012 held at Brooklyn Tech where the discussion was whether to have a referendum. The discussion was informative and engaging. I learned then that the Park Slope Food Coop needed to be a part of a broader coalition to participate in a boycott and I came to Tuesday's meeting still wanting to know which one and on what terms including their relationship to B.D.S.

The supporters of the boycott did themselves a disservice by not answering a single question or entering into a discussion with the membership in attendance.

*Sincerely,
Peter Karp*

ONLINE-ONLY FAILS DEMOCRATIC GOALS

Dear Coop members:

I attended the online General Meeting late last month expecting to learn about and vote on a controversial boycott proposal. Instead, I encountered an issue that extends beyond this turbulent moment.

If we aspire to greater fairness and inclusivity, on Tuesday night, May 26th, 2026, we went backwards. Outside of the Coop, current attempts to expand early voting, mail-in voting options and polling location numbers all move our society toward inclusivity. The Coop's hybrid voting addition moves us in that direction as well. Making this week's vote online-only did not.

At the GM I saw a sincere attempt by well-meaning volunteers to run a large meeting addressing a controversial proposal. Thanks to the committee for trying, but that effort was derailed by flawed solutions to efficiency and security concerns that lost sight of democracy. On a weeknight/work-night, this meeting started late, suspended debate, ran long and suffered tech gremlins and connectivity issues. It also decided divisive and emotionally charged Coop policy questions through an online-only vote.

How does online-only anything promote democratic expansion? Please consider that all issues of real significance and/or fueled by great passion should leave an option

for real (actual, not virtual) human participation. Open meetings, hybrid meetings and referendums all meet these criteria. Our participation at the May 26th General Meeting required members to be available in that one time slot, supported by a computer or smartphone and connectivity. This digital-only event format further assumes that members possess a degree of technical proficiency not previously required for Coop membership. Such digital exclusion affects seniors in particular at a higher rate than others.

The digital divide is real and disenfranchises Coop members. Opportunities to vote, especially on such hot-button issues, should not be narrowed to a tech-mediated five-minute window.

Sincerely,
Bert Beiderman

PRE-EMPTIVE SILENCING OF DISSENT IS ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND UNCOOPERATIVE

Dear Coop members:

I have been a Park Slope Food Coop member since 1988 and have long valued the Coop's commitment to democratic process. Although I voted in favor of the boycott, last night's decision to move directly to a vote silenced those who opposed it. I believe in a democratic process that allows for multiple points of view to be heard. This mirrors the current state of politics in the United States, where dissenting voices are increasingly shut down. I am deeply disappointed.

Sincerely,
Anthony Viti

TOUCHING THE THIRD RAIL

To the Editors:

Although I have marched for Palestinian rights and believe Israel is guilty of war crimes, I intended to vote “No” on both proposals at the GM. I was disenfranchised because the Zoom poll never worked for me, and I was prevented from speaking when discussion before the final vote was barred.

A friend never received the link to join the meeting. Of some 8,400 members who registered, only 6,634 actually voted on the boycott proposal. We’ll never know how many of those 1,700 other members were unable to join or to vote. And what of the majority of Coop members who didn’t register at all? In the end, fewer than a quarter of our membership approved two of the most consequential decisions in our Coop’s history.

The Coop works because we are all rowing in the same direction. For more than half a century, we have largely avoided the divisive third-rail of politics. When we did venture into the political realm through boycotts, the proposal was broadly supported. Opponents should be harder to find than a Court Street Grocers sandwich at 7 p.m.

This all went out the window on May 26 and we are reaping the consequences. We hired security guards for a time to keep the peace, and members must now scan in to go to the second floor. We don’t yet know the financial impacts.

I know those who championed the boycott did so from a place of deep conviction. But I’m not sure they thought through the implications to the Coop of making this political point. I fervently hope we can learn from this and resume pulling in the same direction, all of us.

*Sincerely,
Ken Coughlin*

WHY DID YOU VOTE TO BOYCOTT ISRAELI PRODUCTS? DO YOU CARE ABOUT PALESTINIANS? DO YOU WANT TO HURT ISRAEL'S ECONOMY? THESE ARE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.

Dear Coop Members,

The Members for Palestine boycott list included 9 items (some say 11). Among them was Seed + Mill tahini. It's well worth a trip to Chelsea Market to try their halva. But why was Seed + Mill targeted when it is a New York company? Because Seed + Mill partners with a tahini factory in Israel that is owned by Palestinians. Equal Exchange Organic Olive Oil, a business collaboration between Arab and Jewish women in Israel, and Arab Israeli owned Al Arz Tahini were also included in the boycott. Removing these products directly impacts Palestinian jobs and income. Yet, these businesses were targeted because the Palestinians involved are Israelis.

Twenty percent of Israel's population is Arab. Arabs Israelis can be Muslim or Christian, Bedouin or Druze (a unique and fascinating religion). There are Arabs in the Israeli Parliament. Arabs make up a fifth of undergraduate students in Israel, and there is a significant representation of Arabs in the medical workforce. At the same time, Arab Israelis do face discrimination and inequity within the state of Israel. Many Jewish and Arab activists within Israeli society are working together to address these inequalities through the vision of a shared society.

I have been a member of the Coop for 17 years because it is a community founded on the values of service and cooperation. These products represent a shared commitment to supporting Israel as a healthy democracy. It is difficult for me to understand how the Coop community could turn its back on companies that are dedicated to

working together in a spirit of cooperation.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Sussman

ON UNITY

Dear Coop members,

Anti-BDS organizers at our Coop often spoke of “unity.” Without a hint of irony, a few even took their case for “unity” to the *New York Post*. In practice, what their idea of “unity” always required was for members to just stop talking about the Middle East. The implicit offer of their “unity” was this: if our Coop kept buying Israeli products uncritically, everyone could stop thinking about the Middle East, and we could all shop happily ever after.

But there are Coop members for whom the Middle East is not just an abstraction getting in the way of an idyllic shopping experience. I am one of those members. In February, Trump and Israel launched a war of aggression against my home country of Iran. Please imagine the alienation I felt shopping while my parents became internal refugees, blast waves shattered my aunt’s windows and the neighborhood my grandfather taught me how to bike in was bombed using AI targeting software.

Members with experiences like mine have silently lived under the weight of what our Coop has spent years debating whether to inconvenience itself over. The vote in May was the first time this institution acknowledged what we have been carrying for so long. I am thankful to all those members who made that night possible; I am thankful that their principled efforts overwhelmed the arrogant paternalism displayed by some of our leadership; and I am thankful that our membership voted for BDS in a landslide.

I joined the Coop for cheaper groceries, yes, but also because I believed it was a place united by the conviction that what we buy is not separate from our place in the world. The victory of BDS tells me that conviction still unites us here.

Sincerely,
Ali Safarkhani

WE DID THE RIGHT THING THE RIGHT WAY

Dear Editor:

As a member of the PSFC since 1979, I have seen our organization go through many difficult and contentious phases. There was a time when I chose to actively engage. Although I no longer attend in person meetings, I do always vote (when there are online or mail-in options to do so). Currently, I depend on the *Linewaiters' Gazette* to stay informed. The *Letters* section is my window into member concerns and issues.

Like 6K+ others, I attended the May 26th General Meeting—the two boycott issues being so important to me. I am pleased to say I felt only genuine pride and gratitude for all involved. To see the first ever PSFC fully online Zoom meeting format so brilliantly, deftly facilitated was a real joy. What we, as a community, have achieved to make the PSFC more truly democratic is something I have long hoped for. I applaud the stamina and determination of each member leader who worked so diligently to make this happen.

For me, this Zoom format was near flawless. I did not step away from my screen at any point. I was totally captivated, impressed to see everyone speaking with so much care, conviction and dignity. Every slight glitch in the process was handled with calm and grace.

No doubt there will be fatigue, pain and bruising. Those feelings are par for the course in any noble effort to effect change and inclusion. There will be push back. I believe the PSFC will survive it. Brava and deep gratitude for all concerned.

I feel strongly WE DID THE RIGHT THING.

Dolores Brandon Thompson

THE MISGUIDED MOVEMENT OF SOLIDARITY THAT DESTROYED OUR COMMUNITY

Dear Coop members:

I have been a member of the Coop for 27 years. I have loved it for the same reasons as many of us—the cooperative spirit, collegiality, commitment to diversity, quality of food. I am absolutely appalled by the cynical, manipulative, aggressive, devious and hate-filled process by which the two measures at the last General Meeting were rammed through leading up to the boycott of products made in Israel. As we all know, this boycott has nothing whatsoever to do with Bamba or tahini. It has everything to do with a multiyear campaign that an anti-peace, anti-co-existence, historically illiterate and functionally anti-Semitic BDS movement has waged to hijack the Coop's visibility and significance to promote their cause. They worked strategically to get positioned on committees and did indeed get their boycott passed by around 4,000 of 16,000 members—hardly an overwhelming majority of the total membership. They worked to shut down the possibility of a Coop-wide referendum, which the paid staff seemed to prefer. Some pro-boycott members say they feel they're putting external pressure on the Israeli government, or "stopping genocide." How absurd. What the Coop boycott has actually and ONLY accomplished is to drive a massive wedge and sow discord in our once-great Brooklyn institution, causing alienation and dysfunction. It is the antithesis of cooperation on all levels. Those who voted for it may feel very

virtuous about themselves and what they have signaled to the world, but it is meaningless to geopolitics and the lived experience of actual Palestinians. If only the members who rammed this through devoted their significant passion and energy into something that spurred real progress in the world, the kind that doesn't have to do with slogans, simplistic thinking and social media. Instead, they've decimated the spirit and unity of our Coop.

*Sincerely,
Jennifer Bleyer*

FINALLY, THE COOP IS ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY

Dear Coop members:

The May 26 General Meeting went more smoothly than I expected. After 2.5 years of acrimonious disputes, the proposals to repeal the undemocratic supermajority boycott threshold passed by 61% of the vote against 38% opposed. And despite a concerted campaign of bad-faith fearmongering by pro-Israel Coop members, who augured the “destruction” of the Coop, the much-demonized boycott passed by a resounding 67% of the vote against 31% opposed. This proves that when it comes to Israel's actions, fearmongering no longer has power in New York. Indeed, there is growing evidence of ordinary Americans' weariness of Israel's special status in domestic politics as shown by the deference that Democrat and Republican give to it and the carte blanche that Israel receives in the form of billions of dollars in US military aid annually.

When states and politicians fail to heed the will of the majority, civil society organizations like consumer and worker coops play a crucial role in building international solidarity. Though I do not believe that taking Israeli products off the shelves will make

so much as a dent in the Israeli war machine, I am thrilled to see that the Park Slope Food Coop has finally honored its long-standing tradition of boycotts and taking a principled stand against injustice. As a historic New York City institution, the Park Slope Food Coop sent a powerful message to other civil society organizations about non-cooperation with regimes—in this case, Israel—that perpetrate genocide.

Hopefully, this vote will propel other coops across the country to boycott Israel's goods. Last Tuesday night, the PSFC took a clear stand against the normalization of genocide.

*Sincerely,
David Diaz*

WHAT DO YOU FEAR MOST? PUBLIC SPEAKING? A LAWSUIT? FIGHTING WITH YOUR PARENTS? OR...

Dear Coop members:

Right now, one of my strongest fears is being an “innocent bystander.”

I fear taking on the belief that I am special: that I have impunity from the consequences of the evils done around me or on my behalf. That I am somehow above accountability. That I do not have a responsibility to make amends for living on stolen land, for benefiting from institutions founded on enslavement or for stopping violence around the world done in my name, “U.S. consumer.” That somehow, I am just a bystander to all the violence but am innocent myself.

I am afraid of feeling so hopeless or helpless that I cope by losing myself in reading

fiction, playing video games or overconsuming food and drink. I am afraid of falling prey to the lie that there are some people who are powerful and I simply am not one of them. That those people will unabashedly commit depraved evils in order to pursue their desires. That I cannot be part of changing the environment that supports and allows human evil.

And I know there is more. I see that the flip side of this fear is the fear that I actually do have power to change things. Because if I do have the ability to make things better, then does that mean I am behaving in some immensely immoral way by not being active right now?

I hope you and I both cultivate hope even when the genocide continues, Coop members do and say things that are wrong, and we see the Trump/Epstein/Musk class continue to live with impunity. I hope we cultivate a compassion and kindness filled with such determination that we find ways to improve the situation. That we get involved.

Sincerely,
Idris Merchant

BDS PROPONENTS FAILED TO RESPECT AND HONOR OTHERS IN OUR VERY COMMUNITY

Dear Coop members:

Like many of you, I attended the May 26 General Meeting. It was my first. At times, it seemed to drag, burdened by the compunctions of procedure, but as a lawyer, I am familiar with these niceties and I understand their place. And the process seemingly worked: almost everyone voted, the majorities carried the day, and the people got what they wanted.

Even so, after all was said and done, I felt a deep sadness. That sadness is still with me today.

To put it all out front, I voted against the boycott. I have my reasons. But that is not why I'm sad. I understand that democratic processes don't always yield the results we want, but that doesn't mean the processes have failed.

I am sad because the majority of my fellow members voted to end discussion about the boycott before it began. They voted to move forward with a vote, knowing how painful and deeply-felt these issues are, without even offering the minority an opportunity to be heard. Sure, it may not have changed the outcome. But that's not the point of hearing each other out: we listen to each other because it honors our fundamental human dignity and it provides us with an opportunity for catharsis—even if we cannot truly find dialogue at the end of the day.

I know how strongly we feel about these issues. They are deeply serious, important issues. But please, I implore us all, our discussions don't need to carry the same division and closed-heartedness that characterizes that of the larger political world. Our community can do better than that.

If you're reading this, I want to say that I love you. And I want to listen to you.

And I hope you want you to listen to me, too.

Thank you,
Alex Kronman

NOT ONE DIME

Dear Coop members:

It is with great regret and guilt that my family will spend not one dime at the Coop.

My heart is with the Coop workers who depend on this Coop for their livelihood, health insurance and whom I've worked and bonded with for the past 24 years. But, I can no longer shop at a coop that decided that: Israel has no right to exist; that Israeli lives (murdered, raped, kidnapped) don't matter; that international law such as the 1947 UN Resolution 181 declaring a two state solution for Jews and Arabs doesn't matter, that UN Resolution 194 that only allows right of return for non-violent refugees does not matter. That my wife's family that fled Yemen circa 1950 and escaped to Israel due to anti-Jewish violence is labeled as a colonizer when refugee would be the appropriate term.

Around 70% of those present (less than 1/4 of the total membership) voted to cut off debate and not hear a different narrative, or refused to take this issue to a coop-wide referendum despite an appeal by the workers and an extremely flawed online voting system. That only one side making a specious genocide claim can speak while silencing a different perspective.

The government in Gaza (Hamas) very easily could have stopped the war and brought in food simply by returning the hostages and disarming, but instead they chose to have the civilians of Gaza pay the price for their genocidal activities on October 7, consistent with Article 7 of the Hamas Charter, which explicitly calls for the killing of Jews.

The Coop has embraced the BDS movement, which, based on my reading of Omar Barghouti's book on BDS, explicitly condemns cooperation and eschews dialogue with those who believe differently (e.g., Zionists). A movement that, based on the two BDS presentations at Coop meetings and the BDS web site, does not condemn the genocidal actions and aspirations of Hamas. Instead of allowing each of us, individually, to decide what we buy, we have thus allowed BDS to coopt our coop.

And I say Not One Dime.

Murray Lantner

BRAVO TO THE MEETING CHAIRS

To the chairs of the May General Meeting,

Thank you for so diligently carrying out your duties under immense and unprecedented pressure. The hours of preparation you put in before the meeting, the patience with which you navigated the many unexpected moments and your stone-cold poker faces throughout indicated deep respect for your fellow Coop members and the institution of the Coop.

I hope you all took Wednesday off to recuperate. If there is a fund for Josef to have a spa day soon, please let me know where I and the other members of my Coop group chat can contribute, as we were all concerned about his stress levels in particular.

In gratitude,
Zoë Leverant

NEVERMIND TAHINI, WHAT'S BEEN VOTED OUT IS TRUE COMMUNITY

Dear Coop members:

I am so disappointed and hurt by the result of the boycott. We joined the Coop to support farmers and the sustainability goal of shopping locally. The additional benefit of providing fresh food for my family at reasonable prices was more icing on the cake. However, once I joined, I obtained an addition benefit that turned out to be the most

valuable one.

Watching the shelves empty and fill made me realize I was part of something bigger: I became part of an organic group of people sharing that objective and taking action to ensure its survival and growth.

We claim all the time that we, as citizens of the world, are part of that seamless web that connects us all.

The Coop provided proof that I was.

That is why the vote was a one-two punch.

I was born in Brooklyn, and my wife and kids were born at Methodist. Our home has been in the family since 1947.

The Coop, that breathing organism that was such an integral part of my neighborhood, was under attack (from both inside and outside).

Also, an attack on a dozen Israeli farmers and manufacturers felt less like a condemnation of the Israeli government and more like an attack on Zionism.

The statement by some who supported the boycott, "I'm Jewish, so trust me I know a Holocaust" made me wince.

I doubt whether there were many South Africans or Chileans who were affected by the previous boycotts, but there are thousands of Jews affected by this one.

I can get tahini elsewhere, but identity and community are a lot more precious and harder to come by.

Thank you to all who were part of this messy experiment. I will miss you.

LAMENT FOR A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Dear Coop members:

My name is Greg Selig and I've been a Coop member for 17+ years, and now, likely, no longer. This is not a protest withdrawal, this is not a loser's departure, this is not revenge. This is dismay. The Coop is no longer the community I believed in, an institution based on the shared ethos of working together in order to sustain an alternate economic model. An example to the chaotic world outside: people from all backgrounds and affinities can overcome the headwinds of conformity and discover new pathways for a better way forward. The Coop has lost its way and chosen the banality of divisiveness for the sake of a myth that we are obligated to engage in social activism to bolster our credentials. The Coop is radical unto itself.

Although not overly publicized because of the self-interest of activist individuals on Coop committees, I mentioned in my previous *Linewaiters' Gazette* submission how NY Peace Institute had a program prepared for mediation at the Coop. Can you imagine? Folks from within our community, who have profound disagreements, choosing to work out their differences for the common good of the membership? What could be more cooperative than that? Even if the people did not know about this plan, the broader membership should have been clamoring for a solution like this rather than submitting to the fracturing of our village. It was only too obvious that, regardless of vote outcome, a large number of people were going to feel hard done by and leave. So damn avoidable. The Coop lost concern for each other for the sake of the Golden Calf of "statement politics." Who knows what's to come, but the Coop is poorer for it.

With Regret,
Greg Selig

THE OBJECTIONABLE CURTAILMENT OF FREE SPEECH

To the Editor:

One of the leaders officiating at the May 26 PSFC meeting made a telling point at the meeting's conclusion. She said that the cutting off discussion before any discussion of the proposal to boycott Israeli products could even begin was the first meeting in memory at which discussion about a specific proposal was prevented. In other words, no discussion of the boycott proposal was allowed. Only the individuals who introduced the proposal spoke. Nobody who opposed the proposal got to speak. Given the divisive nature of the proposal discussed, it would have behooved us to enable the large audience attending the meeting to have an opportunity to hear both sides.

I don't deny the pro-boycott people the right to speak in favor of a boycott. That is what freedom of speech is about. But the pro-boycott supporters denied me and others the right to speak against the boycott. The best I could do was write my thoughts and quickly put them into the chat—not much of a message to the attendees with the chat scrolling by. What the pro-boycott adherents did to eliminate any discussion about the proposal was objectionable and bad for the Coop.

Sincerely,
Irvin Schonfeld

SOMETHING I NEED TO SAY

To my Jewish friends at the Coop,

I see you.

Sincerely,

Karen Mancuso

I WON'T BE SILENCED

Dear Coop members:

I am a proud Jewish Orthodox woman and a member since 2019. I attended the recent General Meeting and remain shocked and stunned by the offensiveness of its agenda. It wasn't conducted democratically and was more reminiscent of Putin/Castro style of governance. Members against the BDS movement were NOT permitted to respond to counter statements at the meeting.

Personally, I felt hijacked and stunned facing a bullying squad that spewed dangerous bigotry, seething hatred and discriminatory hostility. Bigotry and antisemitism masked by self-righteous indignation is not only alarmingly misguided, it's outrageously appalling and exceedingly dangerous.

The Coop is supposed to be a **safe** store where shoppers can buy organic groceries at a discounted price. It should NOT offer a springboard for the promotion of hate speech. To me, the meeting represented a personal attack for being Jewish and pro-Israel. Should a member or employee clock a shift or shop wearing a Ku Klux Klan cape or Aryan brotherhood attire, they would appropriately be addressed. Yet the same principles do not equally apply to members wearing keffiyehs with anti-Israel buttons

promoting BDS while *that* constitutes printed hate speech. The glaring hypocrisy. The unabashed bias. The conspicuous silence.

The notion expressed by a pro-BDS member who felt unsupported after ICE raids on immigrants shocked me. The deafening silence after October 7th where **innocent** peace-loving civilians; men, women and children were brutally raped, assaulted, murdered, tortured, maimed, mutilated, butchered and then held hostage and NOTHING was said about it. There were no words of condemnation at the Coop. No speech uttered to detest violence. No call for unity against violence nor a cry for peace and the release of hostages. No meeting to campaign for a BOYCOTT against Palestine and to decry Hamas.

My father is a Holocaust survivor. Yesterday wasn't Kristallnacht. We won't be silenced, though the meeting made clear "if you support Israel, you're not wanted here." As a shareholder, my voice won't be silent.

Sincerely,
HL

GEOPOLITICS FOR SALE ON THE ENDCAP

Dear Coop members:

Until the last avocado is sold, the Coop will be primarily associated with the BDS movement. Imagine going to a dinner party, cheese plate in hand, six-dollar six-pack of Orange Cat beer, and everyone is solely interested in what you think about a bi-national state in the Middle East. Instead of talking about seasonal stone fruit, you're going to have to get into heated debates about Qatari funding for American universities. Good luck with your organic journey, or should I say "Free Palestine Frisee."

Sincerely,
Anonymous

LOVE AND APPRECIATION ALL AROUND!

Dear Coop members:

This past General Meeting meeting, composed of close to 8,000 participants, all on-line from the comfort of home or library or workspace, is a testament to the thousands of hours dedicated to our achieving at last a hybrid meeting format which ensures the largest true participation of all member owners in how our Coop runs.

Thank you to PSFC Members4Palestine for your grit, determination and hard work which enables the largest possible number of members to have a voice going forward! Thanks for the hard and I'm sure stressful work of those chairing the committee, the meeting went well and was managed professionally. PSFC Members 4 Palestine is a lovely, democratic, smart, accomplished, multi-racial multi ethnic, friendly, fun loving, Coop-loving group, and if you too want to ensure the growth of democratic norms, food justice and an open, cooperative Coop that's fun to shop at—and is open to all—please join us!

Those of you who are considering leaving the Coop because two-thirds of the members at the meeting voted yes to the boycott of Israeli goods, please reconsider. You are welcome even though you disagree with the decision. Should you decide to leave, there are many, many eager people lining up to take your place.

Thanks to all who help make this Coop great: members, staff, chair committee, board members, committee members. It's a real labor of love. I'm deeply grateful to you all.

Sincerely,

WHY HYPOCRISY AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVITY SULLY OUR RECENT COOP VOTES

To the members who submitted agenda items 887 and 881:

Congrats and Mazel Tov—you did it! PSFCMembers4Palestine pushed through the removal of the Supermajority and BDS.

Over the last 18 months, your campaign ran on the platform that you're bringing the PSFC back to its roots and improving democratic order. However, your platform did all but that.

You've run on the platform that BDS supports democratic activity, however when someone peels back the veil and intricacies of BDS, they can see the reality: BDS leaves no room for debate or finding resolution through differences.

Many members—including me—have asked for mediation with BDS supporters in order to try resolving our different viewpoints, which are not just about the Middle East. Quite a few of us are concerned about the state of financial affairs at the Coop and how BDS conversations have pulled focus away from actual business matters.

BDS does not support the reality that communities—such as the Coop—have “diversity of thought.” We will not agree on all items as such is human nature. However, value exists in embracing different opinions.

Many BDS advocates have posited “Jewish Values,” such as the idea of repairing the world, as a rationale for the boycott. However, when one expands the scope of Jewish values, one sees that the embrace of difference is another core tenant of Judaism. Di-

versity of thought and opinion is critical to find harmony in large groups.

This can be summed up best in this statement from the late Jonathan Sacks, the United Kingdom's former chief rabbi:

"We have to learn to speak to those we do not hope to convert, but with whom we wish to live."

*Sincerely,
Zack Zaban*

GRATITUDE AND LET'S KEEP DEMOCRACY GOING!

Dear General Coordinators and staff, fellow member owners, the General Meeting chairing committee, and Park Slope Food Coop Members For Palestine,

Gratitude for the contributions you each made to the historic May General Meeting.

To the GCs and staff: grateful that you moved the meeting to a fully virtual space which minimized disruptions and made vote counting quick and trustworthy.

To the thousands of us who participated in the meeting: appreciation for showing up and engaging in a democratic process.

To the chairing committee: thanks for your commitment to giving people time to vote, even if it meant logging off and on again, and following the will of the meeting as it unfolded.

To Park Slope Food Coop Members For Palestine: massive props for steadily working to expand access and democracy (proposing hybrid meetings, restoring the simple

majority for a boycott vote), for bringing the Israeli products boycott proposal to us with principle and clarity, and for all your generous and creative organizing, educating and communicating over the years.

Thank you all.

I hope we continue to strengthen the democratic processes we use. Let's find more ways to give General Meeting participants tools and information about how to engage, and let's adopt the practice of electing instead of appointing Chair Committee members while providing them with optimal support and training.

Proud to have been part of this landmark vote,

Kathy McCullagh

A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

Dear Linewaiters' Gazette,

I am heartened by the votes in the 26 May 2026 General Meeting. Boycotting Israeli goods is the least we, as a cooperative, can do for Palestinians living under a brutal occupation of 78 years. A better world is possible and this past Tuesday ought to serve as a catalyst for one.

Sincerely,

Damien Neva

BEEN THERE; GROUPTHINKED THAT

Dear Coop members:

We've been here before. And now our longstanding goal is achieved. We've banned Israeli goods from the Coop. I write "we" because I write as part of the collective. However, I voted against the boycott and against reducing the threshold for votes like this.

The threshold was instituted so that we, as a cooperative, could speak with one voice. But the lower threshold ensured that when only a minority of the coop's 17,000 members voted, an even smaller group was able to successfully ban Israeli products.

The presentation preceding the vote was built on claims about genocide, Israel and the Palestinians that I found misleading and unsupported. Many of the presenters seemed to use religion as a moral badge but it was unconvincing to me. This boycott, we were told, is similar to other boycotts in the coop's past. It's not. Irrespective of our fellow coop members' devotion to a democratic meeting, as the night wore on the process became more deeply flawed. Few speakers managed to present a coherent statement without being cut off.

After dragging on, the end came swiftly but without a proper rebuttal or related discussion, apparently for the first time in the coop's history. And the boycott will end when "Israel complies with international law including by ceasing unlawful discriminatory practices" against the Palestinians. In other words, never, because that standard cannot be met by any country on earth, including the United States.

Supposedly, Israel was on trial. But so are each of us. Our collective thrill at taking a moral stand is impoverished and stained by hypocrisy, groupthink, untruths and by an accomplice, BDS, that suffers from the same failings. What's next on the coop's moral agenda? Will we really still be comfortable shopping alongside Zionists? As I wrote above, we've been here before.

*Sincerely,
Daniel Alter*

YOUR COOP VOTE IS NOW MEANINGLESS

Members,

Due to:

- Throwing all our resources at online voting
- Ignoring overwhelming evidence from the start about how it could fail
- Massive and documented technical problems with the online vote on May 26, 2026
- Massive confusion over how to proceed under the voting problems
- And a desert of technical know-how to address any problems...

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement is now firmly in control of the Coop. The Board of Directors, the committees that support and run the General Meetings, and the BDS floor members forced through an uncooperative model for governance while turning their backs on PSFC's stance as non-violent.

They do not accept disagreement with their goals.

As yet, they do not have the power to banish you on a whim. So if you feel the slightest pressure to conform with an uncomfortable stance whether a floor member, paid staff, a General Coordinator, or member of any committee: report it! Email justice4-parkslopefoodcoop@gmail.com immediately with your situation and as much detail as you can provide. Then file a complaint with the Coop's DRC by doing the same.

This turn towards neutering democracy and supporting violence concerns everyone because BDS is a movement whose leadership has argued that there is no moral right to condemn Palestinian violence, including the attacks of October 7, 2023. In that pogrom's wake, Omar Barghouti, spokesperson for Global BDS, stated that people "...have no moral right to condemn illegal or immoral acts of violence that the oppressed may commit...". According to the ADL, BDS campaigns frequently employ anti-Semitic rhetoric and imagery, and some of BDS's founding goals are anti-Semitic.

Your vote at PSFC is now meaningless and ignored. Democracy is dead. Don't look away.

*Sincerely,
Jesse Rosenfeld*

HAVE WE CONSIDERED THE PRICE WE'LL PAY WITH THIS BOYCOTT VOTE?

Dear PSFC members,

Before the heavily publicized general meeting on boycotting Israeli products, I had been thinking deeply about the issue. About a year ago, while locking my bicycle outside the Coop, another shopper approached, asking me to sign a petition supporting the boycott. I declined, wanting to better understand the issue before taking a position. As a Jewish liberal Democrat and longtime Park Slope resident, I have spent years navigating the difficult emotions and political realities surrounding Israel and Palestine.

The large turnout at the meeting showed how deeply members care about this issue. Unfortunately, the discussion itself felt divisive rather than constructive. Instead of meaningful dialogue encouraging empathy and understanding, the conversation seemed focused on pushing a predetermined agenda. Members supporting the boy-

cott appeared organized and prepared, while opportunities for open discussion felt limited. The Coop should be a welcoming place where differing opinions can be heard respectfully.

I left the meeting with important questions unanswered. I wanted to better understand how this boycott would affect Palestinians and Jewish communities, whether it could unintentionally contribute to anti-Semitism, and why alternative perspectives were not given more space. No members were invited to share concerns or discuss the complexity of the issue. For me, this boycott is not simply about products or sales; it is tied to a broader political movement whose goals and rhetoric I do not fully support.

Our Coop's mission emphasizes education, inclusion and community. I worry that this process damaged those values and created unnecessary division. While the boycott itself may have limited practical impact, the strain it placed on our community feels significant and lasting.

I hope future conversations encourage genuine dialogue, curiosity and compassion so members with different perspectives feel respected, heard and included together going forward.

*In cooperation,
Jodi Radwell*

BOYCOTT = RACISM

To The Editor:

Shopping at the Coop over the last several years has been extremely uncomfortable for me (a member of 18 years). There, I've been surrounded by keffiyehs—what some

consider a statement of social justice and what I perceive as a symbol of hatred and self-proclaimed genocide of the Jews. The vote at the most recent GM made me feel like I am actually living in 1930's Germany. The "as a Jew" BDS proponents touting a "genocide" by the Israeli government is a bald-faced lie. The government is far from perfect, but the false narratives that vilify Israel—not to mention that consider the slaughter and rape of Jews on October 7th a justified act of resistance—are beyond belief.

Moreover, despite the fact that people were certainly ready to vote the way they were going to vote regardless of the voices heard, the fact that the propaganda was able to be presented without any opportunity for others to speak is another example of the "Free Palestine" movement never wanting to engage. Rather, it spews lies and silences those of us who want freedom for Palestinians but also want our families in Israel not to be murdered by Islamic jihadists.

No matter your opinion of the Israeli government, you need to understand that we—the Jews whose identity, history, culture and traditions are inextricably woven into our connection to our Homeland (i.e., most Jews I know)—feel like we are being kicked out of a place to shop because of our identity. That is called racism, folks. I know you think you're just punishing a government that's intentionally hurting people, but you need to understand that for those of us who know that Israel is defending itself, the result of the passing of this boycott is that you are committing injustice.

Sincerely,
Chana Balk

ON THE INTENTIONAL, WOEFUL LACK OF COOPERATION AT THE COOP'S GENERAL MEETING

Dear Coop members,

Despite the efforts of those running the monthly meeting on Tuesday evening, May 26th, the process was far from democratic. There was no opportunity for discussion after the pro-BDS members were allotted their ten minutes to present their proposal (again). No member who opposed the motion to boycott Israeli goods was even allowed to speak.

How was this a cooperative process?

Regardless, for anyone paying attention, the outcome was inevitable, given that the pro-Palestinian faction has hijacked the Coop.

So, congratulations! We are now officially a nexus for Palestinian rights. This will do nothing to help the Palestinians, and may lead to the demise of the Coop. We had a good run.

*Sincerely,
Mindy Werner*

NO GMS-TURNED-KINGS AT THE COOP

Dear Coop Family:

“No Kings” resonates with us all. So, I was quite shocked last June 4th when I opened an email from the then General Manager (GM) that was a completely one-sided partisan push, complete with inaccuracies such as the suggestion that the Coop has a long history of boycotting with a supermajority, when in fact we operated with a simple majority for 43 years, and disallowing an opportunity for response by utilizing an email which indicated “no reply” was possible. “The King hath spoken!” What? This was obviously so wrong and a flagrant violation of our principles and governance policies. Yet, to my knowledge, there’s been no formal corrective action taken. Is the Coop GM

beyond accountability? Have we bestowed monarch status on this position? But worse yet, Joe Holtz is now running for our board. This should not be allowed; but I have faith that our good Coop family will send that message through our votes. (Here's the video he proudly posted).

Sincerely,

Mitty Owens, 20 year member

Now active in General Mtgs thanks to hybrid

THE COOP BETRAYED ITS OWN MEMBERS

Dear Coop members:

The largest meeting in the Coop's history was also its least democratic. More members voted than ever before, and yet the meeting made a mockery of the General Meeting's most basic purpose: letting members be heard.

At April's GM, both sides presented the pros and cons of lowering the boycott threshold from 75% to 50%. Fewer than 400 members attended, but the process was fair. I presented Agenda Item 888 in favor of keeping the 75% threshold. Both sides had a voice.

At May's GM, over 7,000 members heard only one side, a 10-minute presentation with no rebuttal, no counterargument and no discussion.

I asked why I was not permitted to present my Agenda Item during the meeting itself. I was told that I "had failed to request the agenda item to be voted on," a supposed procedural requirement that I could not easily locate on the Coop's website. No one from the Agenda Committee informed me of this rule.

This raises serious questions: Why didn't the Agenda Committee notify me? Why would it schedule a vote of this magnitude and permit only one side to present?

The same failure of democratic process extended to the second Agenda Item: a vote on whether to boycott Israeli goods. For one of the most contentious proposals in the Coop's history, no discussion was held at all.

The Park Slope Members for Palestine championed hybrid meetings as a tool to expand democracy. They then used that same platform to silence thousands of members and foreclose debate. That is not progress, it is hypocrisy.

Sincerely,
Ramon Maislen

A RETURN TO MEMBER-OWNER DEMOCRACY

Dear Coop members:

We witnessed a stunning return to the Coop's tradition of popular democracy at the May General Meeting, and an encouraging sign of renewed interest in member-owner governance that will be critical to the future health of the Coop. Over 7,000 member-owners attended the May GM—far more than any other meeting in the 53-year history of this institution. Over 7,000 member-owners got to hear about Coop finances, the state of seasonal produce and, ultimately, decide whether we would boycott goods imported from a particular country. It is a reminder that when the Coop engages member-owners on issues that matter to them—regardless of their stance—we are all better off; votes on important issues should be embraced, not suppressed. Over the last several years, and especially the last several months, member-owners actually talked to one another in aisles and at checkouts and on the sidewalk about what kind of community we want to be, in ways that I had never seen since I joined

the Coop in 2018. Hundreds of member-owners learned each other's names for the first time, developed friendships and worked together to advance their visions of the Coop. This is exactly the kind of truly socially meaningful cooperation on which the Coop will depend so it does not just survive but thrives in the months and years to come.

Sincerely,
Gabriel Young

OUTRAGED AT A LACK OF REFERENDUM

To the Editor,

It is outrageous and just plain wrong that two highly controversial questions—May 26 General Meeting agenda item 3 (concerning changing a longstanding Coop rule on boycott votes) and agenda item 4 (concerning a proposed boycott on products from Israel)—were not put to member-wide referendums as has been done with other controversial matters in the past, such as whether to sell meat or beer.

Not everyone who cares about these issues could attend this meeting either. For example, my husband and I, both members for more than 25 and 35 years respectively, were originally scheduled to be on a plane at the time the meeting was held.

The way this was handled was terrible for members' trust in Coop leadership and thus a threat to our long-term well-being as a cooperative organization. The vast majority of Coop staff signed a statement in support of a referendum. Apparently, they were being ignored, which leaves us wondering what is really going on here.

Sincerely,
Regina Rae Weiss

VOTER SUPPRESSION ON DISPLAY AT THE FOOD COOP

To the Editor,

The May 26 meeting was one of the most unfair and undemocratic meetings in our Coop's history. For the first time, members were denied meaningful discussion before votes were cast. A cooperative should be built on transparency, participation and open debate, yet members were silenced and rushed through a process that affects everyone.

Equally troubling was the lack of fair representation. Many members did not have a real opportunity to vote or participate fully in the decision-making process. When large portions of the membership are excluded, the legitimacy of the outcome is seriously undermined. Procedures should protect democratic participation, not restrict it.

What occurred was voter suppression in practice. Preventing discussion and limiting participation created distrust and division instead of cooperation. It sent the message that some voices matter more than others, which goes against the principles a coop is supposed to uphold.

Unfortunately, this meeting was also another example of how divisive and uncooperative the culture within the Coop has become. Healthy disagreement is part of any democratic organization, but suppressing participation is not. Leadership should be encouraging transparency and member involvement, not limiting it.

Members deserve equal representation, open discussion and a fair opportunity to have their voices heard. Until those principles are restored, confidence in the integrity of these meetings will continue to decline.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Levy

POLITICS AT THE COOP

Dear Coop members:

I believe the overwhelming purpose of the Coop is to supply the best food, vitamins, etc. at the cheapest price, thus benefiting its members as they wished upon joining.

If Iranian pistachios, Russian lentils, Somalian vegetable oils, Chinese tree nuts or Israeli medjool dates are of equal quality or better and are cheaper than elsewhere, they should be available.

The members of the Coop joined for health, nutritional and cost saving purposes. No one joined for the purpose of promoting political issues. Should a member wish to personally boycott items, for whatever reason, fine. But they need not eliminate choices for other members, by vote or otherwise.

Let's create a proposal to serve our members in a way that serves their original intentions upon joining, and not torture our organization with outside, confrontational and divisive issues.

I tell people about the Coop, "Best produce for best prices." Let that be our calling card. Let political activists organize and protest elsewhere, and not poison our food purchasing with zealous political divisiveness.

Appealing for the inclusion of my idea, above, in our bylaws or mission statement and/or

Sincerely,

*Melvin Hess,
With wife Esther Podemski*

SUSTAINING AND NURTURING OUR COMMUNITY

Fellow members,

Many of you will recognize my name as one of the presenters of the proposal to boycott Israeli goods. I'm truly grateful to see our Coop standing in solidarity with Palestinians. On May 26th, more members than have ever attended a General Meeting voted to advocate for the right of Palestinians to food and shelter, safety and equality—all fundamental aspects of life we want for ourselves and our families.

For nearly five decades, I have given my labor, time and money to be a Coop member. Over these years, I have vehemently disagreed with the Coop on a variety of issues, including the sale of Israeli goods. Still, like many of my collaborators working toward a boycott, I have never once considered leaving the Coop, or trying to harm it.

Whether or not you voted for the boycott, it is time to come together as a community to sustain and nurture our cooperative. Let's all work together because we're member-owners of the Coop—stewards of its health and future.

*In cooperation,
Alyce Barr*

REFLECTIONS ON THE MAY 26 “BOYCOTT ISRAEL” GENERAL MEETING

Dear Coop members:

a) I received the preliminary e-mail about the meeting. I did not receive the final “invitation” link. (I know the drill, having successfully attended the previous hybrid meetings.) I got onto the Zoom using the meeting ID that was sent to another member of my household. They, unlike me, got all the necessary e-mails. The Zoom app on my laptop recognized me. As the meeting was about to start, using the Q&A function, I wrote about not getting the link. Someone answered saying if I was using the Q&A function I was “in” the meeting. I participated in the votes. I **assume** they counted.

COULD ANYONE WHO GOT A HOLD OF THE MEETING ID LIKE I DID HAVE GOTTEN IN???

IS THERE A WAY THE COOP CONFIRMED THAT ALL ATTENDEES AND VOTERS WERE ACTUAL MEMBERS???

Coop sentiment **appeared** to be clear. A solid majority of **voters** felt Israel deserved to be boycotted. (I suspect members have felt this way at least since the point when the 75% threshold was put into place.) If all “uninvited” members like me would have gotten in, I don’t think it would have substantially changed the outcome. **But...???**

b) The chair skipped over/did not honor the Open Forum portion of the meeting. It was on all versions of the Agenda. I had plenty to say but was not given the chance.

c) Hybrid meeting management **NEEDS A LOT OF WORK**: – Members not receiving the entry link – Confusion about how to count votes on the Referendum Amendment question. **Were we ready for such a large meeting?**

d) An individual who supported the boycott said they were “excited” about the outcome. This entire situation is very sad and not something to be giddy about.

*Sincerely,
Andy Feldman*

PROUD OF THE PSFC AND ESPECIALLY PROUD OF OUR STAFF

Dear Coop,

I'm so proud of the PSFC for turning out in overwhelming numbers at the May General Meeting to vote on the boycott of Israeli goods. In my understanding, this is by far the largest attendance we've had at a GM. Amazingly, the total number of votes cast (6,753) exceeded the total vote in the June, 2025 referendum on hybrid meetings (6,504). We can have great confidence that we now understand "the will of the membership," given this massive turnout plus the fact that the boycott won by a greater than two-thirds majority.

The huge media response to our decision underscores what most of us already knew: the PSFC is an extremely influential institution both in our local community and in the national/international cooperative movement. This is cause for celebration, and for optimism about the positive impact of our ethical leadership, but brings some immediate challenges.

News organizations are publishing distorted coverage. We're already hearing about frivolous lawsuits and other "lawfare" approaches targeting us simply because we voted to honor our proud tradition of social justice boycotts. As we know from Joe Szladek's email of May 23, Coop staff have had to deal with a series of menacing incidents.

This is the time to come together as a community. Whatever our view on the boycott issue, we need to firmly reject these efforts to punish our Coop for making a democratic decision. Let's be especially mindful of the staff, who are doing a brilliant job of

keeping the Coop humming along in extraordinary times. Let's support them however we can.

In cooperation,

Mischa Berlin

IN WITH THE NEW AND OUT WITH THE SPITEFUL

Dear Members:

It's a new era for the Coop, whose shelves now better reflect our values. We enthusiastically voted for a principled, necessary boycott of Israeli products, in solidarity with Palestinians and in protest of Israel's violent and dehumanizing apartheid system. News of the boycott reached friends in Paris, in Gaza and in every corner of New York City.

For some years now, there's been an upsurge in prospective Coop members. Since the May 26 vote, I believe the Coop will experience even higher new member demand. As I write this, however, it is unreasonably challenging to join. Scheduled orientations are full, and prospective members need to act quickly to reserve a spot. Reddit users share tips on snagging orientation seats. It's the hottest, hardest ticket to score in NYC.

At this pivotal moment, when member participation is at an all-time high, how can the Coop involve more members to grow our membership, starting with easing the orientation process? Let's be creative!

Let's also consider the minority of members who, in response to the boycott vote, have said publicly that they are planning to leave the Coop. Others have said they plan to go on leave—a course that, while it may not violate Coop policy, I can't help

noticing would deny the Coop revenue while not allowing new active (and shopping) members to take their place.

Still others, including in the pages of the *New York Post*, have indicated that they are considering taking steps such as scheduling shifts but not showing up, in an active attempt to harm the Coop. Such acts would be starkly uncooperative. Membership at the PSFC is a privilege. It is not a right. A member who publicly states they desire to harm the Coop should lose their membership, especially now when so many New Yorkers are clamoring to join.

Anonymous

Editors' note: Per our policy the Gazette permits anonymous letters only in certain cases.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND EDUCATION SQUAD REPORT: WHY PRICES KEEP CLIMBING

June 16, 2026



June 16, 2026

By Sarah Z. Canner & Stephen I. Klein

If grocery prices at the Coop feel like they keep edging up, they are. A lot of what we buy starts as a commodity—basic items like wheat, corn, soybeans, coffee and oil—and those prices are set in global markets, not at the neighborhood level.

Wars, droughts, tariffs, labor shortages and shipping problems all ripple through the food system quickly. Fuel plays an enormous role, too, because diesel powers nearly every step of getting food from farm to shelf: planting, harvesting, processing, trucking, shipping and stocking.

Right now, the biggest pressure point is the U.S.-Iran conflict and the Strait of Hormuz

crisis, which has closed the strait and prevented transport of petroleum and fertilizer. That waterway carries 20 percent of the world's oil, so when shipping there gets disrupted, energy prices jump. Gasoline in the United States is up sharply, even with some recent easing.

A lot of the world's urea and ammonia, essential ingredients for fertilizers, move through the same region, so those prices have surged as well. That matters because fertilizer is one of the biggest costs for farmers, especially in the spring planting season. If farmers use less fertilizer, that can mean lower yields later on—and higher food prices down the road.

These are new pressures on an already strained system. Prices never really came back down after Covid, and recent tariffs and poor crops have added to the strains. So the Coop isn't dealing with one big shock—it's facing several at once.

Even so, the Coop has been able to maintain fairly stable prices in this volatile environment. Britt Henriksson, Receiving Coordinator and Buyer of Bulk and Gourmet Foods, said: "We have been seeing higher price hikes since Covid—there were not enough drivers and port workers and the cost of containers for shipping increased. After Covid eased, there were not enough workers across the board (prices never did come back down to pre-Covid prices). The most recent hikes were from tariffs and bad crops. I believe one or two small companies have said they will start charging a small fee per invoice or increase their fuel pricing for transportation due to rising fuel prices."

So yes, prices are still climbing—but a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to keep the Coop as steady as possible.

MEMBER SUBMISSION: GIVE PEAS A CHANCE

June 16, 2026



June 16, 2026

By Cynthia Blayer

"With every true friendship, we build more firmly the foundations on which the peace of the whole world rests."

—Mahatma Gandhi

In March, I participated in the *Commission on the State of Women (CSW70)* at the United Nations. This global gathering is focused on advancing gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women. Related topics, such as education, cultural bias, domestic violence, environmental sustainability and war, were discussed. It was

exhilarating to see thousands of people from all over the world coming together to share information and work towards a common goal. The annual March event is the largest one for the group, but throughout the year there are many other meetings, conversations, plans and initiatives among international organizations continuing to work together.

I was attending as a member of *Servas International*, a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to building peace through cross-cultural understanding and friendship, via a network of hosts and travelers who welcome others for day visits and home stays. *Servas* was founded after World War II by Bob Luitweiler, with the aim of creating a more peaceful society and preventing wars. Bob had been inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who said, “With every true friendship, we build more firmly the foundations on which the peace of the whole world rests.” At CSW70, people spoke about peace not being just the absence of war, but a society where racial, cultural and gender bias have been alleviated and people can live together harmoniously.

During the conference, I hosted a *Servas* visitor from Bolivia. It was an opportunity to learn about life in another part of the world. My visitor showed me photos and videos of her family and neighborhood in Cochabamba and how her son and daughter participated in local cultural events, dancing the traditional Bolivian dances they had learned in childhood. We compared notes on our lives, cultures and traditions, and I was invited to visit Bolivia in the future.

The Food Coop, like *Servas*, includes people from many cultures and countries. The Coop can and should be a place that is free of racial, cultural and gender bias, building an underpinning for a peaceable society. How can we better promote cross cultural understanding and friendship? How can we remember that “cooperation” is key to being a cooperative? Without cooperation and teamwork, how are we any different than countries at war?

Coop members had more opportunities to get to know each other before the pandemic. The meeting room served as a focal point for in-person films, cooking classes,

game nights, guest speakers discussing environmental issues and much more. While it is good to have virtual options, in-person events are an important part of building a peaceable community.

Many food cooperatives have a member engagement committee. These committees evaluate member engagement within their coops and help to foster more involvement. They determine what might be blocking engagement and find ways to build community. Just as peace is not just the absence of war but a consciously created peaceful society, a food coop can benefit by actively fostering cooperation and community, rather than assuming it is already there.

Cynthia Blayer, a longtime Coop member, has served on the Environmental Committee and as a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Food Cooperative Alliance (MAFCA).