

MEMBER SUBMISSION: A NEW COOP DEMOCRACY

October 15, 2024



By Jason Weiner

October 15, 2024

When the Coop was a small community, the town hall format worked. These days, it doesn't serve our membership.

We currently have a selective, not a representative democracy: the members who always attend General Meetings, people directly connected to an item and those just there for credit (the unfortunate way to bulk up participation). Members involved in the initial discussion are a completely different group from those who only have about 45 minutes to decide how to vote at a following meeting.

Our main decision-making body is an incomplete composition of approximately 2% of membership. A common complaint we hear is that members weren't aware a vote or discussion was happening, even with all the ways we promote and disseminate. We should allow everyone to have a voice, be part of our democracy, and stop limiting to a time and format that doesn't allow full participation at the GM.

It's time to have all members vote.

I understand the desire to modify the system by going hybrid, which attempts to address some of these issues. However, it doesn't fix our systems:

- It's not representative and maintains the selectiveness that is inherently inequitable.
- It's attempt to be more inclusive actually disenfranchises those without the technology resources to participate and maintains the time constraint that prevents many members' involvement.
- It creates more work for staff (who will be the ones to bear the burden of managing costly systems that still don't allow for maximum participation).

We need a change that honors the fundamental right for all members to be heard, if we want to continue this type of governance.

It's time to make the GM a discussion-only format.

GM credit should be like jury duty (where it becomes your work responsibility for the entire year so members build a greater understanding of these items and it's not just about increasing participation).

After each discussion, the full membership could access:

- The full recording of the discussion
- A detailed summary
- A pro and con list on any item
- Additional discourse through an online forum
- And most importantly, an opportunity to hear how the hourly paid staff feel on any topic. This Coop belongs to ALL OF US, but it's the staff's livelihood and future that is affected by every decision that comes out of the meeting. True community-based governance centers those most impacted within the community.

All this could be online, in the office and even in paper format if needed, so that all members can access. This could be achieved with minimal work (and cost), unlike attempting to manage in-person and online simultaneously with the myriad complications and oversight that a hybrid system would require.

Members need time to actually understand items coming up for vote.

We shouldn't have to incentivize voting, but I get it. Maybe if members participate in every vote in a calendar year we could give them a bonus credit?

It's time to bring voting to all. It's time to change to full accessibility.

Jason Weiner is Membership Coordinator at the Coop.

AUGUST GENERAL MEETING REPORT

October 15, 2024



By Sanoja Bhaumik

September 24, 2024

The August 2024 General Meeting (GM) focused on the Coop's two-day-per-week mask policy on the shopping floor. The discussion led to renewed calls for hybrid meetings so that immune-compromised members could easily attend GMs. At the meeting, there were also procedural questions around the agenda and Coop referendums.

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ PRESENTED THE COOP'S 24-WEEK FINANCIAL REPORT. NOTABLY, THE COOP SAW A NET INCOME LOSS OF \$33,298, WHICH

HOLTZ ATTRIBUTED TO SLOWER SUMMER SALES.

OPEN FORUM

In the Open Forum, Coop member Tim Hospodor inquired if merchandise credits, which can expire, could be used as credits towards member investment. Coop secretary Elizabeth Tobier brought up the question of hybrid GMs over Zoom, especially in cases where venues will not rent to the Coop (Brooklyn College Tow Center agreed and then later reversed on their decision to rent a larger meeting space to the Coop earlier this year). Another member noted that an agenda item on the issue of amending the Coop's bylaws to allow for hybrid GMs has been pending for eight months, and there has been no update on when it will be included in the agenda. Dominique Bravo, a member of the Agenda Committee, responded that the issue will be heard: "It's happening," she said.

COOP FINANCES

General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented the Coop's 24-week financial report. Notably, the Coop saw a net income loss of \$33,298, which Holtz attributed to slower summer sales and increased spoilage in the warm weather. During the same period last year, the Coop had a net income gain of \$283,586. When questioned on the difference between the two years, Holtz attributed it to a change in the Coop markup, from 25% in 2023 to 24% this year, as well as to a rise in staff healthcare costs. He concluded, "Nothing I've said concerns me about the Coop's financial health." The Coop has done almost \$27 million in sales in this fiscal year.

As Holtz explained in the August GM, the Coop raised its markup from 21% to 25% during the pandemic, then lowered it just before the beginning of the current fiscal year; the power to make this change had been given to General Coordinators by a prior GM. Holtz had also explained in August that the Coop's income should bounce back by the end of the fiscal year and that its mission is to make food affordable and break even.

Members also asked about increases in *Gazette* costs and repairs: the *Linewaiters' Gazette* needed a software purchase, and the Coop made repairs to the floors in aisles 2 and 3. The Coop also recently converted the childcare room to storage, since the Coop no longer provides childcare as a result of rising insurance costs.

HOLTZ EMPHASIZED THAT FUTURE PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS NECESSITATED A HOME DELIVERY SYSTEM, AND A PILOT DELIVERY PROGRAM WOULD BEGIN SOMETIME NEXT YEAR.

One member asked how the Coop invests its balances to take advantage of high interest rates. Holtz gave an overview of the Coop's investments—the bulk of which is held in Vanguard treasuries, money markets, and CDs—and added that the Coop earned approximately \$136,000 in interest this fiscal year so far. One member asked about a line item for a pilot home delivery program, which had been delayed from January 2020. Holtz emphasized that future pandemic preparedness necessitated a home delivery system, and a pilot delivery program would begin sometime next year.

SUMMER PRODUCE

General Coordinator Joe Szladek gave a produce report, highlighting all the fresh, local summer produce available at the Coop, including local cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, melon, peaches, nectarines and apples. Szladek also noted that the first week after Labor Day tends to be one of the busiest at the Coop, as members return from holiday and children go back to school.

One member asked about excess packaging waste. Szladek stated that the Coop considers plastic and wasteful packaging when ordering items, but he acknowledged that excess waste is an industry-wide problem. He also reminded members that the Personnel Committee, which works with the General Coordinators to provide guidance

and support human resources and operational issues, is looking for new members. To learn more, read about it [here](#).

MEXICAN MAIZE

A member of the International Trade Education Committee gave a report previewing a piece in this issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* on Mexico's ban on genetically modified corn, in an effort to protect Mexico's vast array of indigenous corn. Mexicans are the largest maize consumers in the world, and maize is the country's staple crop. The US is the second-largest importer of Mexican maize, and Mexico is the largest importer of US corn. This ban would have major effects on US corn exports to Mexico, and the move has since led to a dispute with US trade representatives, who are challenging the ban under the US Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA).

THE MAJORITY OF THE GM MEETING WAS SPENT DISCUSSING A PROPOSED REFERENDUM ON THE COOP'S TWO-DAY-PER-WEEK MASKING POLICY.

MASK UP?

The majority of the GM meeting was spent discussing a proposed referendum on the Coop's two-day-per-week masking policy. The agenda item sponsor, David Bartner, briefly introduced the proposal. Bartner's main point was that the vote on the mask policy took place at the October 2023 GM, on Halloween night, when many parents could not attend. He described the decision to hold a vote on this night as "joyless." Instead, Bartner pointed to an earlier 2023 Coop survey on the question of masking sent through email. That survey had over 4,700 respondents, with 68 percent voting against a mask mandate, and Bartner argued that this survey was more representative of members' opinions than a 100-person GM. This comment sparked discussion around the effectiveness of GMs versus referendums in deciding Coop policy. Several members noted that they had advocated for hybrid GMs for several months in order to expand access to the forum.

A member later added a point of information that the cited survey asked for opinions on a 7-day-per-week mask mandate, not a two-day-per-week mandate as is currently in place on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Thus, the survey was not representative of members' opinions on the standing Coop mask policy.

The agenda item stated that masking at the Coop should be voluntary and not required two days a week; in addition, any future decision on masking should be decided by referendum. Several members cited concerns around the text of the referendum, which was limited by presenting two choices:

__Yes, I agree masking should be voluntary, and any future decision on masking should be decided by referendum.

__No, I do not agree that masking should be voluntary. The Coop should maintain its current masking policy.

Members noted that there were many possibilities between the two options, such as a decision to vote on a masking decision by referendum, while maintaining a two-day mask mandate on the shopping floor, altering a mask mandate to one-day-per-week, or adjusting the mask mandate to certain hours of the day. Members asked Bartner if the Coop would retain its ability to implement an emergency mask mandate, as during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bartner replied that the referendum would not impede emergency decision making.

MEMBERS ALSO NOTED THAT THIS DISCUSSION WOULD BE MORE APT IN A HYBRID SETTING WITH A VIDEO OPTION, WHERE THOSE WHO FELT UNCOMFORTABLE ATTENDING AN UNMASKED, INDOOR MEETING COULD PARTICIPATE IN A DISCUSSION THAT WAS PERTINENT TO THEM AND THEIR SAFETY.

The agenda item also spurred debate around the Agenda Committee's process. As

the Open Forum discussion revealed, the agenda item on hybrid meetings had been stalled for eight months. A member asked why the masking agenda item was back on the GM agenda when the issue had been discussed less than a year prior. Agenda Committee member Dominique Bravo responded that the new item considers a referendum, a new subject in the discussion, and the committee was concerned about the perception that the October 31 GM vote was unfair.

Members also noted that this discussion would be more apt in a hybrid setting with a video option, where those who felt uncomfortable attending an unmasked, indoor meeting could participate in a discussion that was pertinent to them and their safety. The Chair Committee then urged members to discuss the content of the proposal and not the process.

Several members commented that they would vote “no” on the agenda item and the referendum. They argued that the two-day-per-week mask mandate seemed like a “reasonable” accommodation for vulnerable members and those with health conditions that required masking, and it was in line with the cooperative spirit. Member Elise Barr spoke about fellow Coop members who only feel safe shopping with two-way masking. She also questioned the posts on the Coop’s Instagram account, which promoted the GM discussion around mask mandates with an image of a large trash bag filled with disposable surgical masks. Members suggested that concerns about the excess waste produced by free disposable masks could be addressed by encouraging members to bring reusable masks (as members bring their own shopping bags) or even charging a small fee for a disposable mask at the Coop.

Others disagreed. One member suggested that the mask mandate was “offensive, oppressive” and “hateful,” as it reduced individual choice. Member Amir Bar-lev argued that through the mask mandate, the Coop had chosen “ideology over science,” because no government or scientific body has currently urged a mask mandate. Another member responded that government bodies often make recommendations based on expectations of compliance, and the current policy seemed like a good compromise. One member involved in the 2023 survey noted that the two-day-a-week mask policy

was based on staff input, and survey results in which 32% of respondents wanted a seven-day mask mandate.

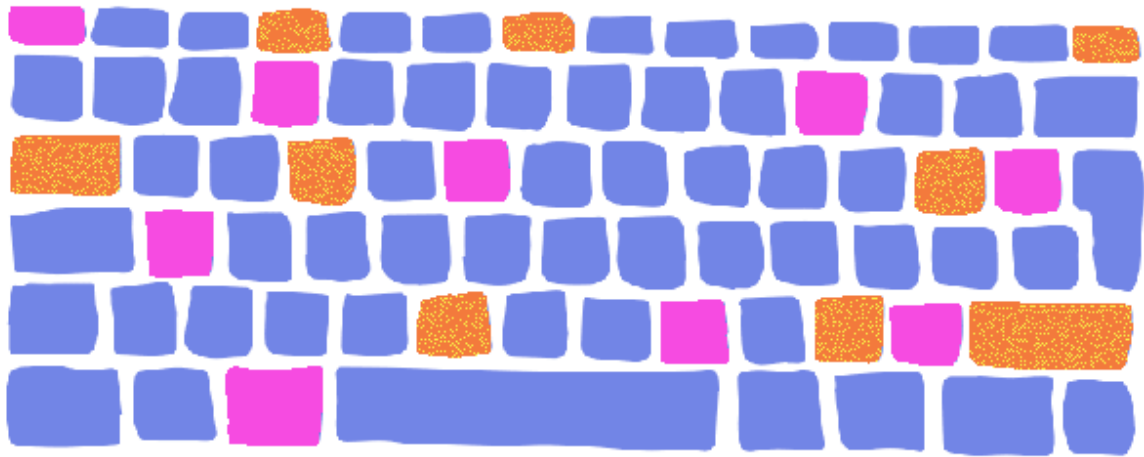
Although a small number of present members opposed the mask policy and signaled their approval of the proposed referendum, the majority of present members appeared hesitant to move forward with the agenda item, both due to procedural questions around the use of a referendum and COVID-19 transmission concerns.

Following this lively discussion, the Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of membership in reference to the minutes of the July meeting. After the vote, the meeting was adjourned.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

October 15, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



JEEZ THE CHEESE IS TOO BIG

Hi Members,

I'm not necessarily a cheese enthusiast, but my partner and son are. They love cheese and love trying new cheeses. Years ago, this was easy to do, as the cheeses

cut were of various shapes and sizes.

For the past many years, however, cheeses tend to be about the same size, which discourages trying different types. I'd love to buy a piece of parmesan, but not a \$10 block of it. I'm hoping we can add a diversity of sizes to the cheeses being displayed which would reflect our members' various needs.

Here's to bringing back small and medium sizes of cheese—let's make cheese great again.

Thanks and hope to see the new sizes soon.

Respectfully in cooperation,
Jesse Farrell

RE: CRITIQUE OF JULY 2024 PROPOSAL ITEM

To the Members:

Three Coop area coordinators brought a proposal item to the July 2024 General Meeting (GM) on behalf of a group of 52 area coordinators. It was posted in the GM agenda notice as "Urgent Resubmission of Personnel Committee Proposal," and was a reworking of a similar proposal that was brought by the General Coordinators to the April 2024 GM and voted down. Both proposals sought to set policies concerning the powers of the Coop committee known as the Personnel Committee, as well as detailing the supervisory hierarchy of Coop staff. The version of the proposal brought to the July 2024 GM was approved by the members.

Both versions of the proposal included language that disenfranchises membership, which I find unnecessary and baffling.

One is the statement:

“The personnel policies of the Park Slope Food Coop shall be the responsibility of the General Manager, GC Team, and/or the Personnel Committee. Those entities have the sole authority to bring agenda items related to personnel policies to the General Meeting.”

Why can't a non-General Coordinator or non-Personnel Committee member bring an agenda item concerning personnel policies if that member thinks it's needed? Very perplexing.

Two is the statement:

“Once approved, the above motions shall replace all other GM-approved motions on matters in the areas specified above regarding employment policies and procedures for the General Coordinators and the General Manager.”

What is objectionable to me about this is that the GM was not provided with the specific policies and procedures being replaced. These documents could and should have been made available to members so they could be fully informed on the matter. Links to these documents could have been posted online or emailed to members before the meeting.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Tobier

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

Dear fellow members:

In reading this article I was struck by the mention of the Second Location Study Committee (SLSC), its rigorous investigation into the feasibility and the community benefits of a second location, and its simple rejection by a close margin of 74 votes to 64 votes. That's 138 of approximately 16,000 Coop members who participated in the vote. The article goes on to survey several other potential avenues for increasing capacity and improving efficiency within the walls of the current PSFC building, none of which sound promising or would benefit the greater Brooklyn community and sustainable vendors at large.

After reading this article, I went back to look at the PSFC's Mission Statement. There are two lines included that I believe support the ideas held within the SLSC's report. Support for that initiative had the potential to satisfy our Mission and would also ameliorate the problem of overcrowding at the PSFC.

Here are the two lines:

"We are a part of and support the cooperative movement."

"We strive to reduce the impact of our lifestyles on the world we share with other species and future generations."

I am familiar with SLSC's report and was one of the 138 voters. I am writing this letter with the hope of stimulating interest in the ideas and information gathered by the SLSC. My concern is that the participation of voting members was woefully small and a good idea was laid to rest prematurely.

A third line from our Mission statement speaks to this hope:

"We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store."

Cheers!

REGARDING REFERENDA AND HYBRID MEETINGS

To the Editors,

With all the controversy about holding referenda and hybrid meetings, a few statistics I obtained from the office may shed some light on these subjects.

It turns out that the total number of members who participated in this year's Board of Directors election out of more than 15,000 members was around 3,800, and this was apparently atypically high, likely due to efforts to get BDS partisans onto the Board; the number of members who vote is usually around 1,000—a tiny fraction of the total.

As for virtual meetings, during the height of the pandemic, after an initial surge in attendance in the spring of 2020, the numbers dwindled and ultimately fell to under 100 by August 2023.

Even the unprecedented and very costly 2012 General Meeting, which required security presence to consider a referendum on joining BDS, attracted fewer than 2,000 members.

It's likely that referenda and hybrid meetings would produce similarly minimal participation since the vast majority of members simply want to do their work shifts and shop at the Coop in a congenial and welcoming atmosphere and aren't interested in subjects outside the Coop's fundamental mission of providing good food at low prices for working members.

Sylvia Lowenthal

BOYCOTT NEXT STEPS: A MODEST PROPOSAL

Dear fellow members,

I'd like to propose a simple, hopefully modest proposal as we look to individually express our views on a boycott of Israeli goods—in short, let us all vote with our wallets as we see fit.

To those that support a boycott: create a list of all products that you believe should not be purchased, publicize that list in a central location (perhaps on a social media page dedicated to the effort), and encourage those that agree with you to not buy those products.

Others who do not support the boycott can continue to purchase products as they see fit.

There is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution to complex issues, especially those as nuanced and emotionally charged as this, and pushing for an entire community to adopt a set of principles is divisive and unnecessary. Let us all be informed and take individual action that aligns with our own personal outlook.

In cooperation, even when we disagree,

Paul Blachar

GENERAL COORDINATORS (GCS) ANN HERPEL AND MATT HOAGLAND RESPOND TO STEPHEN KLEIN'S LETTER, "OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

OF FINDING WORK SHIFTS”:

Dear Stephen,

We offer these answers to help all Coop members understand how complex Coop operations are and the factors that must be considered before changing the labor system.

1. **Availability of Shifts**

As of Sept. 3, there were 12,037 members in the work pool. The six-week shift calendar had 2,184 shifts per week, projecting 13,104 shifts per cycle. The difference between these two figures (work pool and projected shifts over six weeks) is 1,067, leaving a weekly surplus of 177 shifts. In other words, there is at least one shift for every member to work in the six-week cycle, plus 1,067.

Members might feel that there is a dearth of shifts. But from an operational perspective, even with the surplus, the Coop often runs without optimal member-workers where work goes uncompleted or staff step in because the task has to be done.

2. **Expanded store hours are coming soon.** While the start date is TBD, the GCs have decided to expand the shopping hours to 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Sunday hours will remain 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Closing the Coop one hour later, six days per week, will add approximately 30 shifts, meeting at the end of the Coop day, per week.

3. **Reducing the shift length to two hours or increasing the shift cycle length:** Neither would affect shift size, nor reduce demand for popular shifts and start times.

The benefit of reducing the shift length would be to add one more shift-time daily at the END the day, something the expanded store hours will accomplish. However, unlike expanding hours, it would also be burdensome for the operations for many other reasons we can't explain in this brief response.

Increasing the cycle length beyond six weeks would require the Coop to grow around 2,000 members per additional week, far beyond our building's capacity to buy, receive, shelf, and sell groceries to the membership. The impact on the check-out line or queue to enter would be detrimental, to say the least.

4. **Limiting Shift Credits:** Only 3% of the members in the working-pool have 10 or more shifts in their shift bank. Many work on committees like the Gazette or Chair Committee or restricted shifts that need additional training unavailable to most members. Those that do use the shift calendar are more than balanced out by the shift surplus. In fact, the vast majority of members— over 95%—have shift credit banks ranging from -3 to +2 shifts. They are not accumulating enough shifts to crowd out other members from the shift calendar. Note there is currently a two-shift limit on scheduled shifts that helps to prevent shift hoarding.

A SODASTREAM MYSTERY, HR REFORMS, AND MELONS GALORE! NOTES FROM THE JULY GENERAL MEETING

October 15, 2024



PHOTO BY LIZ WELCH

By Liz Welch

September 4, 2024

The evening of Tuesday, July 30, was hot and sticky and my first time attending an in-person Park Slope Food Coop General meeting in years. (The last time had been pre-pandemic, back when the meetings were held at Congregation Beth Elohim.) This one was at the Picnic House in Prospect Park which meant walking through a cluster of trees, via the 5th street entrance, and crossing the busy bike and runners path to the stately brick building where the assembly started promptly at 7 p.m.

General Meeting Committee chair David Moss welcomed everyone with a land acknowledgement (Lenni Lenape) and the Open Forum began, where members were given the opportunity to ask questions. Queries ranged from: "Why are we still using clam shell containers and plastic bags?" to "Why aren't these meetings hybrid?"

The former inquiry echoed many members' concerns about how to lower the Coop's dependence on single use plastic, from packaging to produce and bulk bags. The latter is another perennial issue in our post-Covid era. Several speakers chimed in to state that Zoom is a dependable technology and would foster higher participation in GMs. Making at-home participation would also be a thoughtful offering to members who cannot travel (into the park and across a bike lane no less) to in-person meetings. Most members who commented were in favor of a hybrid option, prompting Moss to explain that the Coop's bylaws require in-person meetings. He assured the group that this concern and the one about plastic use were ongoing issues that the Coop will continue to address and explore.

"OUR INCOME DIPS THROUGHOUT THE SLOWER SUMMER MONTHS, BUT IS EXPECTED TO BOUNCE BACK BY THE END OF THE FISCAL YEAR."

The Treasurer's Report was the next item on the agenda. General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz explained why the Coop shows less income this year than it did last year. "Markup was raised from 21% to 25% during Covid," Holtz explained. "Then, just before the beginning of the current fiscal year, we lowered it 24%." In a follow-up, he explained that the power to lower it was given to the General Coordinators by the General Meeting. Holtz also noted that the Coop's income will bounce back by the end of the fiscal year and explained, "Our goal is to make food affordable, and break even."

Other highlights from Holtz included news that the Coop has engaged a company to study and draw a design for a new heat pump system to replace the air conditioner originally installed in 1991. The cost for this will be approximately \$700,000. And overall, the Coop's cash and cash equivalents equal \$8 million. "To be prepared for the next pandemic," Holtz added, "we need between 7.5 and 10 million."

During the General Coordinators' reports we learned that summer is a great opportu-

nity for teens to get work experience at the Coop. The minimum age is 14 and working papers are necessary. Attendees also heard about a fleet of new shopping carts and salad bins (to prevent wilting), as well as a “findability” search for the health and beauty aisle, which you can access on the price look up computer on the side of the ice cream case. Basically, you can type the name of the product you are looking for and it will tell you the precise location.

Then there was a pop quiz: how many kinds of melons were sold in late July? Correct answer: 14! Melon types included Snow Leopard, Cavaillon, Picasso and four different kinds of watermelon. A member asked: “What happened to the vegan gluten-free pound cake?” Alas, Margaret Palca, who made those and other beloved baked goods, has retired and closed her beloved Columbia Street waterfront bakery after 40 years!

Another fascinating factoid: the Coop hands out 3,000 masks weekly. Attendees learned this when Holtz explained the snafu the last week of July when a delayed mask delivery resulted in mask-only Wednesday and Thursday shopping days not being honored.

The last item to bubble up for discussion was why the Coop no longer sells SodaStream products. The answer has nothing to do with boycotting Israeli products, Holtz explained. “[The company has] been denying credit to us—and barely communicate nor respond to the issues we raise.” Hence, the Coop has parted ways with the manufacturer.

AUGUST 15TH
DEADLINE FOR
SODASTREAM DEPOSITS



LOOK OUT FOR NEW LOCAL BRAND:
STAY CARBONATED

Calline.com
Style #43915 1-888-800-0120

AMY'S BREAD

Micha, S

NY State North Co. Farm
unbleached wheat flour
sourdough starter

PHOTO BY JENNIFERMACFARLANE

There was a shoutout to Matt Hoagland who, after 19 years as a membership coordinator, has been hired as a general coordinator. This announcement was followed by a supercool presentation of an interactive map called Seeding Solidarity, which shows every co-op, community refrigerator, garden, credit union and other “cooperative and democratic entity” in New York City. This presentation was made by a representative from Cooperative Economic Alliance of New York City (CEANYC). Those interested in participating in the project can learn more by emailing mapcoopnyc@gmail.com. Their next meeting is on October 8, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

All of the above were the equivalent of warm-up bands to the evening’s rousing headliner: “Urgent Resubmission of Personnel Committee Proposal.”

Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso took the stage with Membership Coordinators Jana Cunningham and Mae Frankeberger, who together had collected 50 staff signatures in favor of a proposal that outlines a new approach to Personnel Committee responsibilities. To recap: “Area Coordinators” is the umbrella term for staff who are not General Coordinators. Receiving Coordinators, Membership Coordinators, Bookkeeping Coordinators, and the IT Department are all considered Area Coordinators. The General Coordinators are the supervisors of the staff of approximately 75 Area Coordinators. The Personnel Committee (PC) is composed of PSFC members who are responsible for hiring, firing and disciplining the General Coordinators. This group operates with out-of-date policies that are deficient in addressing the current workforce. When the committee was formed in 1981, there were only 1,000 members at the Coop. Now that the Coop has vastly grown—in membership and staff—the authors of the proposal laid out a need for functional HR practices and policies. As Mancuso explained, “without an empowered PC, the Coop is unable to fairly mediate any grievances.”

“THE COOP IS THIS AMAZING PLACE WHERE WE ALL LOVE TO SHOP AND WORK AND COME TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY. WE NEED TO PROTECT IT.”

During the subsequent Q and A session, most of the members who commented agreed that we must protect our staff at all costs. During the vote an overwhelming majority shot up their hands in favor of this new proposal.

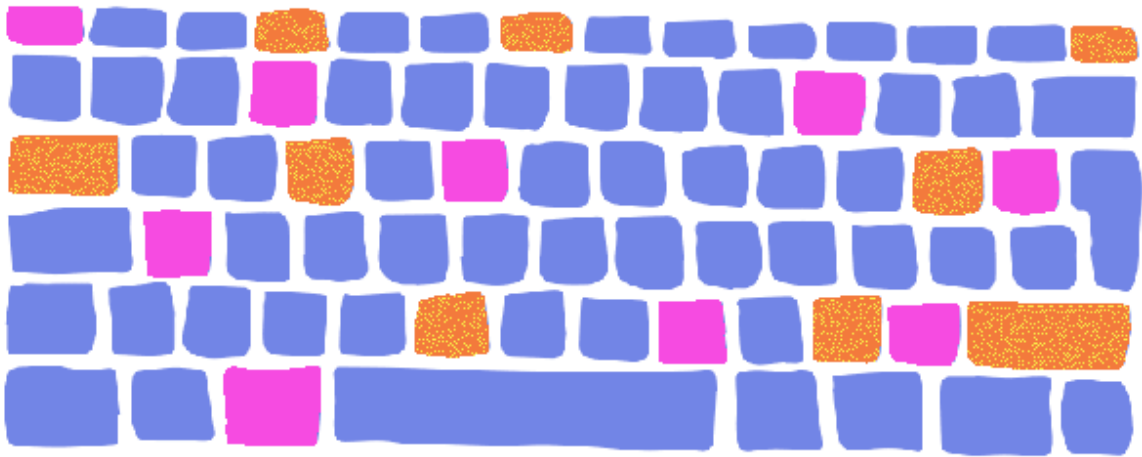
As Mancuso stated, “the Coop is this amazing place where we all love to shop and work and come together as a community. But to this group, it is our employer and our livelihood. We need to protect it.” The motion was passed unanimously.

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

SEPTEMBER 4, 2024

October 15, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



GIVE FUNGI THE RESPECT THEY'RE DUE

Dear Coop,

A very minor bone to pick: I tend to work checkout shifts, and am always dismayed that mushrooms are categorized under vegetable in the checkout system. Not only

are mushrooms not vegetables, they aren't even plants. Fungi are their own biological kingdom (along with plants, animals, protists and monera). So, in a biological sense, a mushroom is as much a vegetable as a chicken is—that is to say, not at all.

In cooperation,

Abaye Steinmetz-Silber

RE: JUNE ANNUAL MEETING REPORT (7/23/24)

To the Editor:

The June Annual Meeting Report (7/23/24) contains a misleading statement, “The Board of Directors plays a pivotal role in how the Coop operates by acting as the decision-making body for the Coop.”

Actually, unlike most organizations, the members on the Board of Directors at the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) are expected by other Coop members to receive and follow the advice provided to it in the form of General Meeting (GM) votes on all matters brought there. In other words, even if a PSFC board member disagrees with a particular GM voting result on a proposal or election item, the board member will accept the advice provided by the membership vote. That is why the GM chair usually states at the beginning of every GM that the GM is the decision-making body of the Coop. That is why members discuss and vote on all matters before the board votes on whether or not to accept their advice. That is why board candidates are generally questioned by members to make sure that, if elected, he or she will honor this PSFC cooperative tradition.

Please correct the online report error so that readers are not led astray on the role of the board.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Tobier

LET'S RETHINK MEMBERSHIP CAPS AND IMPOSE OCCUPANCY ONES

Dear Editor,

The solution to Coop crowding surely involves more market force and less central planning than the current approach. Rather than capping total membership, total member occupancy should be capped, either at fire code maximum or some lower number at which shopping becomes truly painful (which, in my experience, is extremely rare).

This controls crowding through natural consequences. If the Coop fills on Sundays, for example, there will be lines, encouraging those who can shop on less crowded days to do so, while making shopping possible for those who need to do so on that day—including people are currently denied this opportunity by the membership caps.

The central planning that has occurred thus far is certainly appreciated, and ideas like later shopping hours are great. Making the cap about how full the building is rather than how full the membership rolls are makes the Coop more inclusive while relieving some planning burden from our General Coordinators.

Ryan Tate

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF FINDING WORK SHIFTS

Dear Coop,

I as well as many other community members that I know have increasingly struggled with finding shifts. I am wondering if the Coop would consider some of the following suggestions: increased hours, reducing to two-hour shifts and/or shifts every eight weeks and limiting the number of shift credits one is able to accumulate in a year. These are all preliminary notional ideas, so obviously, they would need to be researched in regards to the effect any or all of these would have on operations, membership and solidarity.

Stephen Klein

TWO COOP LOVERS FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Coop-ers,

The PSFC was a major plug in our respective moves to Brooklyn. As folks who love fresh local produce and supporting community-run grocery stores, we were both beyond excited to see if the Coop would live up to its hype. And, in so many aspects, the Coop *has* delivered as we hoped it would: delicious produce, excellent bulk items, sweet treats discovered while stocking the dairy aisle and fun and quirky co-owners that we can chat with while working a shift. Despite these obvious perks, there is at least one key way in which the Coop has fallen short: providing inclusive General Meetings.

Part of what makes the Coop special is that it is *defined* by its community, and together, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We work collectively to restock, check out and request new and exciting products. We even work together to put to-

gether this newsletter. It's disappointing, then, that this does not extend to being open and welcoming for our GMs. Hybrid GMs offer the chance for folks with different schedules, needs, abilities and time constraints to more easily participate in making the Coop a more inclusive community. Since the pandemic, meetings utilizing Zoom and other virtual participation platforms have become par for the course. They are common-place for doctor visits, university classes, work huddles, fundraising events, NYC community board meetings—you can even do a virtual interview for TSA PreCheck and Global Entry! Today's widespread use of virtual meeting spaces demonstrates a common understanding of the benefits of the inclusivity that they offer. If we are truly a Coop where all members can contribute to our definition as a collective, prioritizing hybrid meetings should be at the top of the list.

Jessie Wesley

Estee Ward

ON HYBRID VOTING, AKA MAKING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY WORK AT THE COOP

Hello!

A few months ago, I got an email from the Coop announcing the vote for Board of Directors. I was excited to take part in the board election! Unfortunately, I was out of the country and on-leave; how was that going to work? Well, it worked swimmingly. The vote would be taking place in-person at the next General Meeting *and* online in the lead-up to the meeting. I could vote online—and early!

I clicked on the link, signed in, read the candidate statements one final time and voted. The whole process took five minutes. Democracy in action, 2024! Amazing!

This experience, however, stood in powerful contrast to the fact that we are still unable to vote online regarding measures raised at the GM. Every month, the GM notice goes out with the exhortation that “Participating in the meeting is your way of having a voice in important issues that affect you and your Coop. Meaningful member participation strengthens our governance system, ensures that the board of directors hears from the Coop membership, and upholds the democratic principle at the heart of cooperatives.” This is inspiring stuff, so it’s too bad that, given the resistance to hybrid meetings, a Coop with over 16,000 members has its major issues decided in-person by about 200.

It’s not as though this is a new issue. For decades now, members have been raising the need to make the coop governance process more accessible. As we approach the November 2024 election, in a political atmosphere where US democracy is on the line in a historically unprecedented way, maybe we can do our part by working together to make the little village that is PSFC a place where the ideal of participatory democracy is reflected in our practices.

Jim McKay

DIRECT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COOP

To the editor:

I write on behalf of Coop 4 Unity, a group of Coop members who understand and oppose the goals and tactics of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Instead of continuing to fill the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* with letters for and against the renewed push to declare the Coop in solidarity with a boycott of the State of Israel, Coop 4 Unity proposes direct communications with Park Slope Food Coop Members 4 Palestine, the BDS faction within the Coop.

In the July 23, 2024, edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, a member of the unity group put out a call for mediation. There has been no response to that call. Ironically, a BDS supporter's letter in the same edition concluded with a dinner invitation to members who oppose the efforts of "Members 4 Palestine." We construe that dinner invitation as an expression of willingness on the part of the BDS faction to engage in direct dialogue.

The letter with the dinner invitation did not include the member's contact information. The email address for the Coop group is coop4unity@gmail.com. If anyone from the BDS faction (or any Coop member) wants to communicate directly about the future of the Coop—and move the conversation out of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*—please contact us at that address.

Noah Potter

A SECOND REQUEST FOR WELL-INTENTIONED DIALOGUE WITH PRO-BDS COOP MEMBERS

Dear PSFC Members for Palestine,

I have received no response from the BDS-inspired PSFC Members for Palestine regarding multiple good-faith requests for mediation to negotiate a resolution to the intensifying conflict that has arisen as PSFC Members for Palestine attempt to resurrect a boycott of Israeli products, characterizing it as a moral imperative for the Coop.

Instead members of this faction have taken to mocking opponents of the boycott (see, for instance, Carol Wald's July 23 letter in which she writes of "the pearl-clutching hysteria over members who support a targeted boycott of Israeli goods) and those who worry about BDS's infiltration of the Coop, in the form of letters to the *Linewaiters' Gazette* that assert the moral superiority of their position (see, for example, Lisa

Guido's July 23 letter in which she states "what's being done by Israel to Gaza with the financial backing of the USA is one of the greatest moral atrocities of our lifetime, and it did not begin as a reaction to Hamas on October 7. To be silent, to equivocate, to deny, is to tacitly endorse an act of generational evil.")

We reject the tactic of Jews weaponizing their identity in support of BDS. Their anti-Zionism is no more morally superior than the beliefs and concerns of other Jews. That is true in the Coop context, as anywhere.

I repeat my invitation to participate in a mediated constructive dialogue on these issues. We are giving your faction the benefit of the doubt that you do not understand the harm you are causing to many fellow members in a community grocery store based on cooperation.

If you do not respond to our request, we will understand your silence as an expression of your unwillingness to communicate and, by extension, your callousness towards this harm, and, ultimately, your disregard for the fiscal health of the Coop's business.

With hopes of cooperation,

Ramon Maislen, Coop 4 Unity

JUST SAY NO...TO MEDIATION REGARDING THE BDS AGENDA

Dear Members,

I have read Ramon Maislen's letter (published in the July 23, 2023 issue of the *Gazette*) and the follow-up letter that was handed out at the July 30, 2023 GM. In these, he proposed a private mediation session between Coop 4 Unity and PSFC Members for Palestine to clarify how the group intends to "align the agenda of BDS with

the principles of the Coop” and to discuss the “rise in confrontations between Coop members and strategies to ensure the safety and respect of all members.”

I don’t think it makes sense to hold a mediation between Coop 4 Unity and PSFC for Palestine or between Ramon and a representative of PSFC Members for Palestine. A proposed boycott would affect all members of the Coop. Just like all other Coop-wide issues, the specifics of what this boycott would entail should be brought to the full membership, for discussion at a General Meeting and (ultimately) a vote. Nothing needs to be said behind closed doors; this must be a discussion open to all members.

There is a place for mediation at the Coop—the Dispute Resolution Committee is available to any members who find themselves in personal disputes or unresolved negative interactions.

I am a Jewish woman who also worries about antisemitism, but BDS and PSFC Members for Palestine are not antisemitic. I believe Israel is committing crimes against humanity and that the least we can do as a Coop is to discuss whether to boycott certain Israeli products.

Cooperatively,

Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones

LET’S VOTE ON BDS

To Coop Members,

Controversy in any group is natural. I am convinced that in our Coop with a clear process for shared decision-making and sufficient individual emotional maturity, constant arguments can be avoided. Neither of these criteria is easy to achieve. Both depend

upon the commitment of members to each other and to common goals that are at least as strong as the commitment to one's own opinion and interest—a caring community.

Trust in a democratic process is delicate. We have suffered early childhood trauma as well as violent historical assaults on our identity that resulted in loss, grief and anguish. The process for collective decision-making in a caring community needs to include consequences for cheating and violence. We need vision, courage and trust.

You win some; you lose some. Feeling safe requires winning with grace and humility and/or losing with dignity, acceptance and adaptation.

With contemporary digital capacity, secure processes to vote can be adapted. We use infinite ways of sharing information, thinking and experiences. With so much technology, we don't need to be all in the same place to cast a ballot.

A fair voting process for collective decision-making will be inclusive, respectful and equitable if it is managed by an impartial team and overseen by members of different factions. Hope for peace includes enough vision, trust and courage to try democracy.

Susan Metz

THE COOP'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

Dear Coop Members,

I've been a member since February 2020, and what I love most about the Coop is its commitment to democracy. We are all workers, members and owners, with hierarchy limited to administrative necessity. Our voices are equal and we act in the best interest of the majority.

In the summer of 2020, I saw the Coop's commitment to democracy tested. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd, many members called for an official statement in support of the movement. Although it was clear that the majority of members would likely support such a statement, our leaders decided to wait until a vote could be held. While this felt counterintuitive at the time, it demonstrated the Coop's integrity and dedication to democratic processes.

Today, we are faced with another tragic moment. The war in Gaza has entered its ninth month with no clear end in sight. Israel continues its bombardment and civilian deaths rise daily. We now have an opportunity to act by stopping the sale of products that help fund this violence. As the Coop has done in the past, it must show integrity and put this question to a membership vote. The delay in voting feels excessive and unlike the BLM voting delay, the rationale here is unclear.

If the membership votes to keep BDS-sanctioned products on the shelves, so be it. But what is most important is maintaining our commitment to democracy. Without it, the Coop ceases to be what it is.

Atticus Hoffman

MAY GM: MEMBERS DIVIDED ON ISRAEL, ALIGNED IN DISDAIN FOR PLASTIC WASTE

October 15, 2024



By Leila Darabi

The May General Meeting kicked off on May 28 at the Prospect Park Picnic House with a charged open forum focused not only on members' differing views on the Israel-Hamas War, but on how those views are communicated. The chair committee reminded members throughout the evening that singling out other members in their statements would not be tolerated and repeatedly asked members to refrain from shouting out comments from the audience.

Members also discussed a proposal to bring back the print edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* and a proposal to create a new committee to reduce the Coop's plastic use.

OPEN FORUM

During the open forum, several speakers called on fellow members to embrace civility. (Note: Coop members are not required to share their full names during the open fo-

rum.)

Seth Pollack shared that he felt some materials being circulated ahead of the Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors elections reflected the division among members and stated “the very, very least that I feel we can do is answer the call of civil society groups and join the BDS movement” referring to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

ONE MEMBER REPORTED THAT LABELS OF ISRAELI PEARLED COUSCOUS HAVE BEEN DEFACED ON THE COOP SHELVES AND CALLED THE BEHAVIOR “PETTY AND UNCOOPERATIVE.”

Jonathan T. claimed that another Coop member had been called a Nazi by another member and that “hate has no place here and neither does BDS.”

Amos reported that labels of Israeli pearled couscous have been defaced on the Coop shelves and called the behavior “petty and uncooperative.”

Several members addressed the ongoing debate around whether the Coop would need to change its bylaws to permit virtual or hybrid meetings and voting by proxy.

Dena Beard stated that she works for the Tow Center for Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, a potential venue to host a GM that included a BDS discussion or vote, and that she felt threatened after receiving a voicemail from a member warning her that hosting such a meeting would incite violence. Tensions peaked when Beard said that one voicemail had come from a member whom she mentioned by name.

MJ reported that Professor Michael Haber had, pro bono, drafted a legal memo after reviewing the Coop’s bylaws and that in his opinion the Coop would not need to change bylaws to legally host hybrid or virtual meetings.

Alex also commented on the benefits of virtual meetings, noting that virtual meetings and votes worked well throughout the pandemic.

In response to the open forum, General Coordinators offered some clarifications:

Joe Holtz shared that the Coop's lawyer had reached the opposite conclusion and thought the bylaws would indeed first need to change before a virtual or hybrid meeting could be considered. He noted that the Board had received both decisions.

GENERAL COORDINATOR ELINOR ASTRINSKY REPORTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN UPTICK IN NON-MEMBERS ENTERING THE STORE AND CAUTIONED SHOPPERS AND WORKERS TO KEEP THEIR VALUABLES CLOSE AT ALL TIMES.

Ann Herpel also clarified that Brooklyn College had offered to host a GM where a BDS vote could take place but that, before signing a contract, the General Coordinators asked the agenda committee to contact the four members who had previously submitted items related to a vote on the boycott of products from Israel to confirm that these items could be brought to the May GM. Herpel shared that:

"All four members declined the May 28th date and instead requested to postpone their items until after another pending agenda item about changing the 75% supermajority currently needed to approve a boycott was discussed and voted on," and closed stating: "Though it took more years than many would have liked, the [General Coordinators] did fulfill our commitment to secure a location."

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz also reviewed the 12-week financial statement shared ahead of the meeting covering the period from April 21 through May 28, 2024. He shared that there has been a 7.65% increase in average weekly sales compared to the previous year, but that he

expected this average to fall to around 5% by the end of the year.

Holtz also took questions, clarifying that the Coop currently marks products up 24% over wholesale, a 1% decrease from the previous year, which impacts profits.

COORDINATOR'S REPORTS

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky shared what she called a “nuts and bolts” report with updates across a range of topics. Among these, she reported that there has been an uptick in non-members entering the store and cautioned shoppers and workers to keep their valuables close at all times. She also stressed that anyone working a shift should wear close-toed shoes.

ALEX GODIN SHARED THAT “THE COOP FEELS MORE AND MORE LIKE A WHOLE FOODS AND LESS LIKE A COMMUNITY,” LAMENTING THE LOSS OF FREE CHILD-CARE AND THE STORE BULLETIN BOARD.

Herpel read a statement from the General Coordinators taking issue with how their views were characterized during the April GM during a vote on the Coop’s HR policies.

COMMITTEE REPORT

Bart DeCoursy of the International Trade Education Squad gave the lone committee report sharing awareness that hearings are ongoing to settle Mexico’s ongoing dispute with the U.S. over corn. Mexico refuses to import genetically modified corn, which accounts for most corn grown in the U.S.

NOSTALGIA FOR A PRINT EDITION OF THE *LINEWAITERS’ GAZETTE*

For the first of two agenda items for discussion, Alex Godin shared that “the Coop feels more and more like a Whole Foods and less like a community,” lamenting that

the loss of free childcare and the store bulletin board during the pandemic also contributed to this feeling. The proposal: reinstate a print version of the Coop's newsletter, the *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

Eric Lewis, a former co-coordinating editor of the *Gazette* voiced enthusiastic support and suggested investigating ad sales as a way to cover costs and testing out a new print version for a year to see what worked. The *Gazette*, he said, "is a place for budding journalists... and deepens and strengthens the sense of community [at the Coop]"

Coop member Morgan also shared, in support of the proposal, "print ephemera is an amazing way to create an embodied sense of community."

Coop member Kian asked what the cost would be to reinstate a print edition. In response, Herpel shared that in the last 30 days, the online *Gazette* has received 31,000 views of articles and 10,000 visitors. She also said that to revive the print edition, the Coop would need to replace several computers, resubscribe to Adobe software and cover the cost of printing.

Staff member Jana Cunningham shared that the Coop is working on adding classified ads to the digital *Gazette*.

Coop member Yasmine also voiced support, noting that digital news can be changed but that "in print, the work of journalists is set in stone."

TRACY FITZ PROPOSED THE CREATION OF A COOP CLIMATE CRISIS COMMITTEE
AND COLLECTED EMAILS FROM MEMBERS WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED TO JOIN.

In response to a question about the kind of paper used to print the *Gazette*, Herpel clarified that the prior *Gazette* was printed on post-consumer newsprint by a union print shop.

The second and final agenda item, introduced by Tracy Fitz, proposed the creation of a Coop Climate Crisis Committee (4Cs) and collected emails from members who would be interested to join.

“In 2019, the Coop went through 49,000 plastic produce bags a week. We now use 57% of that, 28,200 produce bags a week because we have clamshells instead!” In a lively presentation, Fitz pulled sample bags and plastic clamshells out of a bag and waved them around, inspiring laughter across a room that an hour earlier had felt quite tense. “We’re all addicted, [to plastic]!” she cried. A suggestion to wrap General Coordinators in plastic as an artistic action drew applause.

During the discussion that followed, no one disagreed, but members shared additional thoughts on ways to reduce plastic.

Zoe added that compostable bags also include fossil fuel and aren’t necessarily a safe alternative.

Sunny shared that she had a similar idea to create a committee and asked interested members to email plasticfreefoodcoop@gmail.com to join, noting that she was open to joining forces and creating a single Coop Climate Crisis Committee.

Lois Wilken urged people to read her recent *Gazette* submission “Love Letter from a Mermaid: On Plastics and Your Health.”

For historical context, Holtz shared that the Coop had in the past banned plastic produce bags, then brought them back. “There’s a lot of education to do,” Holtz said. “We also sell something in aisle four to wash and reuse plastic bags.”

CLOSING

Board member Brandon West called a vote to close the meeting during which the board voted to accept the minutes from the April GM.

PERSONNEL POLICIES LEAD TO COOP DIVIDE

October 15, 2024



By Sanoja Bhaumik

At the April 30 General Meeting, General Coordinators Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore introduced an agenda item to update personnel policies, which they described as outdated compared to current human resources (HR) practices. In a surprising turn, the item was rejected, in part because of organized opposition from PSFC Members for Palestine.

Prior to the meeting, PSFC Members for Palestine published a memo arguing that the

proposal “concentrates even more executive power in the hands of the General Coordinators,” with “alarming” implications for labor practices and union busting.

Those opposed to the group have since responded. Ramon Maislen, candidate for Board of Directors, wrote in a recent *Linewaiters’ Gazette* letter to the editor, “[The PSFC Members for Palestine] are encouraging members to vote against Coop interests even when they are unrelated to a boycott.”

THE QUESTION REMAINS: HOW DID AN AGENDA ITEM RELATED TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS BECOME SO DIVISIVE?

In addition to the debate around the proposal’s content, the vote itself was controversial. There were not enough written ballots, and the Chair Committee was forced to initiate two hand counts, both of which resulted in the rejection of the proposal. Park Slope Food Coop staff and PSFC Members for Palestine both criticized the lack of organization. But the question remains: How did an agenda item related to employee handbooks become so divisive?

THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Holtz and Moore first proposed changes to the personnel policies at the March GM. They designed the proposal to address “deficiencies” in current policies and centralize all policies in a single place.

PSFC Members for Palestine voiced several concerns, writing that the proposal did not “address the problems that led to the Personnel Committee’s current dysfunction.” In a statement to the *Gazette*, the group added, “The proposal’s language was unclear. The first and second paragraphs contradicted each other.”

The first clause states that the “GCs shall be solely responsible for all personnel-relat-

ed matters,” while the second states that the “Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Coordinator team, shall be solely responsible for all personnel-related matters.”

The proposal consolidates Coop HR practices already in place, and therefore may not alter the GCs’ authority over HR. Jana Cunningham, Membership Coordinator, wrote to the *Gazette*, “The identical HR practices are listed in several different GM mandates. General Coordinators have the responsibility for HR and the authority to take disciplinary actions, in accordance with the Employee Handbook in regards to the Area Coordinators, this remains the same.”

PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE STATED, “PEOPLE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW WHY THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HAS REMAINED SEVERELY UNDERSTAFFED FOR ABOUT 15 MONTHS. THE PROPOSERS DIDN’T ANSWER.”

The Personnel Committee was created in 1981 to be a five-member elected council. Its mandate, as reiterated by the Committee in 2022, has been the following: “The Committee is an elected group of members that serves in an advisory capacity to the General Coordinators, supporting them with personnel matters such as performance evaluations, succession planning and developing human resources policies.”

At present, the Personnel Committee only has two members. Speaking about the March GM, PSFC Members for Palestine stated, “People also wanted to know why the Personnel Committee has remained severely understaffed for about 15 months. The proposers didn’t answer.”

In July of 2022, the Committee faced intense criticism after suspending Holtz without pay for 30 days after he breached COVID-19 protocols. In August of 2022, in a letter published in the *Gazette*, Safe Food Committee staff member Margaret Maugenest wrote, “One has to wonder about the agenda of the Personnel Committee. Who are th-

ese people? Why is there no appeal process to challenge the Personnel Committee's decision?"

In another letter published in November of 2022, Coop member Claudia Joseph added, "It is time to rethink the structure of the Personnel Committee: Five members who were elected by uncontested vote are clearly not qualified to wield this much power."

DEBATING THE PROPOSAL

The Personnel Committee proposal introduced by Holtz and Moore was ostensibly designed to address structural issues that became apparent in the aftermath of Holtz's suspension. But it remains unclear how the proposal updates policies to meet "widely accepted HR practices."

Holtz and Moore noted that the proposal had been designed with consultation from the two-member Personnel Committee and with input from an employment lawyer recommended by the National Co+Op Grocers. On its website, the latter describes itself as "a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States."

Cunningham noted that the GC proposal would correct the Coop's current practices, some of which she called "outdated and potentially libelous."

At the March GM, the GCs agreed to take members' feedback into account when reintroducing the proposal at the following meeting. The policy introduced in April returned with one addition: "The complaint policy includes the provision to employ a neutral third-party employment lawyer to thoroughly investigate these complaints and provide recommended courses of action for any offenses committed."

THE LETTER ALSO CRITICIZED THE "POLITICIZED EFFORTS": "THE PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE GROUP ENCOURAGED THEIR MEMBERS TO VOTE AGAINST THE

BEST INTEREST OF THE COOP AND THE STAFF.”

No alternative proposals—such as contracting an outside HR service to bear responsibility for all personnel issues—were considered. PSFC Members for Palestine commented to the *Gazette*, “No proposal, including one presented by a general coordinator, is automatically entitled to a yes vote. A new proposal must address the ambiguities and contradictions that a majority of members voted down in April.”

Following the April GM vote, a group of 43 Area Coordinators—non-GC paid staff at the Coop—signed a letter to the Agenda Committee criticizing the “no” vote and the handling of the agenda item.

The letter also criticized the “politicized efforts” of the PSFC Members for Palestine: “The PSFC Members for Palestine group encouraged their members to vote against the best interest of the Coop and the staff and we believe this leaves the Coop vulnerable to any potential wrongdoing by senior staff.”

The letter supports the GC’s GM proposal, stating that it puts “the Personnel Committee and the General Coordinators in a better position to make much needed decisions on personnel issues that are currently not possible.” Despite this expressed backing, the letter also proposes significant amendments to the GC proposal—amendments yet to be introduced in the April GM.

The Area Coordinators’ amended proposal excludes the first item of the original GC--supported proposal, which places responsibility for personnel-related matters in the hands of the GC. Instead, the amended proposal suggests: “The Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Manager and General Coordinator team, shall be responsible for the hiring, compensation and employment policies for the General Coordinator team.”

The amended proposal also sets forth a plan for selecting the Personnel Commit-

tee—a feature absent from the original proposal—that would include the participation of two GCs, the General Manager and four Area Coordinators.

While the amended proposal diverges from the GC proposal with these two changes, the Area Coordinator staff who signed “resent this [GC] proposal having been hijacked by a member group whose purpose is unrelated to the matter at hand.” The letter continues, “Nothing in the GC proposal mentions Palestine.”

This concern was echoed by individual staff. Cunningham, who signed the letter, commented to the *Gazette*:

What concerns me is that an organized group of members can make a statement like “the GC proposal had alarming implications for labor practices and union-busting,” which was inflammatory and completely inaccurate, influence others to vote against the best interest of the Coop staff and put the Coop at financial risk.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Personnel policies will undoubtedly reemerge as a central issue in future GMs, but the discussion risks veering into debate around PSFC Members for Palestine’s tactics and right to organize.

Responding to criticism around their involvement, the PSFC Members for Palestine stated:

We believe meaningful member participation strengthens our democratic governance system and upholds our cooperative principles[...] Rather than acknowledging the weaknesses in their proposal, the GCs chose to undermine our Coop’s democratic tenets by vilifying member engagement.

For Cunningham, the most important step is to move forward with changes to the personnel policies. “My colleagues and I (more than half of the ACs) firmly support the

GC proposal and want to see its implementation as soon as possible,” she added.

Amid the debate, all seem to agree that the most important goal is for the Coop to be a safe, welcoming work environment, in which issues of fairness, discrimination and labor standards can be handled in a confidential and professional manner.