

JULY 15, 2025

July 15, 2025

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

DON'T DISENFRANCHISE ME

Greetings:

Now that we know nearly two-thirds of member voters want remote access to the gen-

eral meetings, and that we are free to have hybrid meetings without a change to the bylaws (legal advice received by senior staff after the referendum was happening), can we please reopen meeting access? Since it's not a boycott or a bylaw change, all we need is a simple majority to approve, if we even need a vote.

For reasons of work/childcare/medical/mobility and room capacity, we can't all participate otherwise.

Sincerely,
Lisa Guido

DEMOCRACY, GENERALLY COORDINATED

Greetings:

As recently noted by outgoing General Manager Joe Holtz, Coop members have the right under New York State law to participate in our democratic processes virtually. But our bid to enshrine that right into our bylaws has failed, winning 66.45% of a vote that required 66.67%. That slim margin is a testament to how critical the General Coordinators' fearmongering was in defeating a commonsense proposal rooted in a desire to expand access and maximize participation at the Coop.

The GCs will tout the PSFC's commitment to democracy and member input. They'll invite you to General Meetings where you can "have your voice heard." But after a year and a half of obstruction, obfuscation and the blatant misuse of their bully pulpit, I speak from experience when I say they'll only let you participate if they think they'll still be in control at the end of the day.

Sincerely,
Morgan Võ

LOOKING FORWARD WITH OPTIMISM

Fellow Members,

This summer I will turn 70 and will have been a member of this Coop for more than two-thirds of my life.

As I move into the next decade, our Coop moves into a new phase of its life, with Joe Szladek in the role of General Manager. Welcome and congratulations, Joe.

As a clear-eyed optimist, I imagine the possibilities and work as hard as I can to achieve it. At this moment, I have great hope for what our Coop can achieve under the leadership of a forward-looking General Manager.

Like all Coop leaders, a GM needs to be even-handed and open, fair in their treatment of every Coop member and constituency. They can help us become a truly democratic organization that uses all available tools, so that 17,000 members have the best possible chance to engage in policy- and decision-making. At a moment when a literal majority of Coop members want the opportunity to attend General Meetings online (while the still undecided Hybrid Referendum leaves that up in the air), they can help us transition to hybrid, fully virtual or asynchronous decision-making.

This means leaving behind an overly nostalgic and often unhelpful “we’ve always done it this way” perspective, choosing instead a more analytical stance. It’s time to review how well things actually worked before and consider what needs to change to meet the current moment.

During my 30-plus years working in NYC public education, I learned from and with every child I taught, every teacher and principal I coached and every parent who trusted their child with me. As Joe Szladek assumes his important new role, I look forward to

his willingness to learn from and with all members and his commitment to our mission: food, social and environmental justice.

In solidarity,
Alyce Barr

THE COOP HAS CHANGED—EXCEPT FOR THE LEADERSHIP

Dear Coop members:

“The city has changed,” said NY-7 Rep Nydia Velázquez on Democratic Primary night. “Zohran knew it. The other candidates didn’t see it. And that is why we are here celebrating this beautiful moment.”

The Coop has changed. Everyone knows it, especially younger people, disabled people, members targeted by racism and Islamophobia, shift workers, supporters of Park Slope Food Coop for Palestine and so on. The Coop leadership doesn’t see it. And that is why it’s not hard to imagine the Coop’s eventual fade.

Kerry Carnahan

MORE DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP: ONWARD!

How disheartening to read that the referendum for hybrid meetings failed to pass. The odds were stacked against it though and I believe that the majority of members do care about greater access to the decision-making process. So...let’s forge ahead!

My co-worker Jason Weiner drafted a robust proposal last year. Member Yejia Chen al-

so came up with a solid plan this Spring. The original hybrid meeting proposal, from CJ Glackin & Morgan Võ, has good recommendations too.

I hope that the General Manager, the Agenda Committee, the General Coordinators and the Membership at large will agree to quickly usher these forward. There is always a lot to do, we are all pulled left and right, but this is urgent. With proper planning we can come up with proposals to vote on in the not so distant future. We have to be agile and steadfast about this. We also have to be transparent, accountable and stop the on-going back-stabbing, slandering and other shenanigans.

The above proposals and ideas could be fully discussed at the next GM; small committees of members and/or staff can be organized to generate ideas and research feasibility with regular reporting, clear timelines and deadlines. The Coop can perhaps postpone other projects to focus on this issue. This is not rocket science. It's a business decision related to priorities and allocation of resources.

I encourage all members to push for this in the coming months, and not let it be buried under other priorities or by institutional inertia, nay-sayers and pushback. If we don't stand behind reforming the system to allow greater participation, the Coop will only pay lip service to a core principle: "Democratic Member Control." And skeptical members will have a point: The Coop is just another "glorified buyers club" with performative democratic values.

In solidarity,

Delphine Selles-Alvarez

Membership Coordinator at the Coop

NEW DEMOCRACY 2.0

Dear Coop members:

We best serve the democratic process when we allow everyone to come to the table. Regardless of technology enhancements, our biggest accessibility limitation will always be time. If we continue to only allow members to participate in discussion and voting on Tuesdays at 7 p.m., we disenfranchise anyone unavailable then. Whether it's the inability to travel, log on or simply focus due to other constraints like family, location or just life, those members can't participate.

We need a system that won't require someone who lost the affordable connectivity program to be pressured by personal cost to participate. We need to give parents and people who work nights time to digest information and not be forced to divide their attention. We need ways that give members with different learning styles and accessibility needs the same info as those at the GM.

I believe it's important to recognize that nowhere in the principles of cooperation does it say that members must agree with each other. Cooperation is finding common ground. The Coop is not meant to be a cookie cutter of anyone's beliefs. That's what makes it beautiful, messy and home to us all. Conflict is inherent in this space. Dis-course is a necessity to allow these different opinions a voice. Our current system does not give time or ability to receive, process and respond. It limits participation, it limits engagement, it limits understanding and most importantly it limits factual information and transparent communication.

It keeps us from properly hearing each other. It makes us react and not engage in the best ways. It keeps us from making as much progress as we could.

It's time for **a new Coop democracy**. Please attend the July General Meeting to discuss my agenda item.

Sincerely,

Jason Weiner

Membership Coordinator at the Coop

SPECIAL PRIVILEGES FOR HOLTZ?

Dear Coop members:

In his June 6 email, Joe Holz says that “I’m speaking today only for myself and not on behalf of the staff or General Coordinator team.”

If Holtz is speaking only for himself, as one member equal among many thousands of other PFSC members, how is it that he was authorized to send his email to all members on the PFSC email database? Are all members, speaking only for themselves, able to send emails to the entire PFSC email list when they wish?

*Sincerely,
Erich Hahn*

JOE HOLTZ’S ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

Dear member owners,

Joe Holtz’s abuse of authority in using the Coop’s mailing list to send a message to each of us about how to vote in the upcoming election is outrageous. I’ve been an active member of our beloved Coop for more than two decades, so I have heard Joe’s opinion on many things over all these years. But this is next level, to use our member directory to send a personal message about how to vote.

Joe Holtz’s intervention is straight up election interference and an egregious abuse of his power and privilege. Not only is it outrageous that Joe did this himself, I would like to understand which General Coordinators allowed him this access and which General

Coordinators knew about this email before it went out and didn't have the judgment to see this as an inflammatory smear campaign against our own members? Please explain.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Sullivan

IS THE COOP LOSING ITS PROGRESSIVE SPIRIT?

Folks,

I'd firstly like to congratulate and welcome Joe Szladek to his new role. It's tough taking on a leadership role from a set of founders, as I know from my experience advising many startups and nonprofits around the world.

I joined the Coop because good food is good politics—if not, why buy organic or biodynamic? But the recent developments at the Coop have left me feeling insulted, condescended to, and frankly, unwelcome. The spate of missives from the GCs was bad enough, but Joe Holtz's email decrying board candidates was the height of paternalistic hypocrisy. If the candidates aren't allowed a similar platform to rebut any smears against them, is this really a democracy?

The contrast with Brooklyn, and the rest of the city—in light of the mayoral primary—couldn't be more stark. The recent elections have proven that the electorate has uplifted candidates such as Mamdani, Hanif, Lander and others who have espoused justice for Palestinians and a variety of progressive causes. This begs the question: Has the Coop become a conservative institution with a set of ossified principles and bound by inertia? What happened to the kind of spirit that led to Chilean products being boycotted (under Pinochet)? Are we going to be so out of step with the community around us?

Maybe I should give up expecting better and go somewhere else.

I was honestly expecting Joe Holtz to email us all urging us to vote for Cuomo. Perhaps he still will?

*Regards,
Jayanth Eranki*

SEEKING ANSWERS ABOUT ALL-MEMBER EMAIL

Dear Editors:

I'm confused—how and why was an overly political and biased email on the Board elections from Joe Holtz sent to all members using the Coop's official 'no-reply' mailing list? I do not consent to my email being used by the Coop in this manner for any political and/or campaign message, and have never received one until now.

Additionally, was Holtz's letter meant to coerce, convince and/or rationalize in some way that Coop members need to agree to carry even one single product, let alone several, from a country openly and defiantly committing genocide in front of the entire globe with full U.S. support of funding, intelligence and weapons? Again, confused and would like an explanation.

*Sincerely,
A.L. Steiner*

MOURNING FRIEND'S FAMILY, CALLING FOR BOYCOTT

To my fellow members,

I have a good friend who is Palestinian and grew up as a farmer in a village called Khuza'a, southern Gaza. I mentioned him in a letter early last year (a letter that was originally refused for publication by the Gazette).

In the last month, I learned from him that his entire village was completely erased by Israel (there is no other word for it). Over 50 of his relatives were killed. The fate of the rest of the over 15,000 residents is by and large unknown, a tragedy in itself.

Khuza'a's population was not that far off from the size of the Coop's membership.

Among false narratives from the General Coordinators that a mere boycott of Israeli goods would destroy the Coop—narratives then used to prevent discussion and demonize members—I make the same appeal as in my previous letter: Let's keep our focus on the real destruction happening in Palestine.

*In cooperation and solidarity,
Abdi-Hakin Dirie*

FROM TAIPEI TO PARK SLOPE: IN SUPPORT OF THE COOP'S VALUES

To the Editor:

I've been a proud member of the Park Slope Food Coop for 15 years and have always valued its spirit of cooperation and commitment to providing high-quality, sustainable food to our community.

However, since the attacks in October 2023, I've been troubled by what feels like a shift in the Coop's atmosphere. A vocal minority has pushed rhetoric that feels out of step with the inclusive and cooperative spirit that has long defined this community.

As someone who grew up in Taiwan—a place where democracy and civil liberties were hard-won—I'm deeply unsettled by the selective moral outrage directed at Israel. Though imperfect like any democracy, Israel stands alone in the region in offering meaningful protections for women, minorities and LGBTQ individuals. Yet it is often the sole target of intense condemnation, while regimes like China, Russia and Egypt—whose human rights abuses are well-documented—escape similar scrutiny. Criticizing a government's policies is one thing; singling out an entire nation and its people as uniquely immoral is something else entirely.

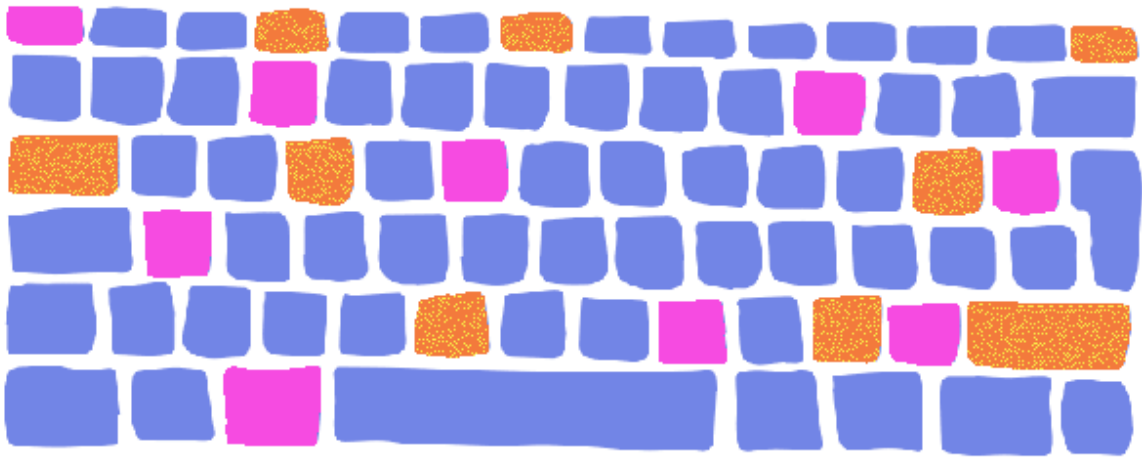
Regardless of where one stands on this complex and emotional issue, it is crucial to preserve the Coop's core values: cooperation, inclusivity and a focus on good food and community. I greatly appreciate the dedication of our General Coordinators, whose hard work reassures me that the Coop's spirit can continue to thrive. I want to thank Joe Holtz for his decades of service to the Coop and for his recent letter—a voice of reason and moral clarity from someone who has long embodied the values of the Coop. As Joe steps back from his role, I believe his words serve as a timely reminder of what this community stands for: cooperation, respect and a shared commitment to the Coop's founding principles.

Sincerely,
Linda Wong

AUGUST 14, 2024

July 15, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



PSFC CARD PHONE INTEGRATION IS ALREADY HERE

Dear all,

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

able via the website.

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

Happy to give some instructions if needed.

Max Miller

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

Dear fellow members:

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

This is the strongest opinion ever issued by the ICJ.

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

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

Ann Schneider

PROTECTING THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THROUGH IN-PERSON VOTING

Dear fellow Cooperators,

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

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

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

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

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

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

In cooperation,
Tali Rasis

WHILST DEBATING A BOYCOTT, CONSIDER A DOCUMENTARY'S MESSAGE

Dear Fellow Members:

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

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

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

In cooperation,

Jan Clausen

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

Dear Fellow Members,

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

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

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

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

With love,
Nancy Mercado

FROM AN ANTI-ZIONIST JEW

Dear Coop,

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

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

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

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

Alyce Barr

"DEMOCRACY" AT THE COOP

Dear fellow members:

Part of the definition of democracy includes the following:

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

it's quite insulting that the pro BDS members of the Coop insist on simply "having the conversation" to adopt a boycott of Israeli goods while presenting the vote as upholding "democracy." Someone wrote "Regardless of whether you agree with me, we all deserve the chance to weigh in on this crucial topic. Let's bring this matter to a vote and let the members decide!"

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Tobias

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