

SELBY COOP TASK FORCE ON DECISIONMAKING
SUMMARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The idea of serving the needs of poor and working class people has always held some strength in the operation of Selby Food Coop and Sunrise Book Coop. The changes attempted in the past have only partially accomplished this task. Attempts to expand the class base of the Coop are incomplete unless we undertake the task of including members of the working class in the leadership. We need a change from the present leadership to a leadership who better represents members of the community who will benefit most materially from a neighborhood food cooperative.

Selby's organization and control structures from the beginning were based upon rejection of the superstructure and competition created by the capitalist food stores. In order to establish an alternative to the capitalist way of food distribution, work routines at the store were shared and coop meetings were set up to decentralize the control of the coop. Workgroups allowed volunteers to work for the store on an easy come, easy go basis. Decisions of general nature, or ones that no one wanted to make are made by the coop meeting and specific decisions by the workgroup workers. The biggest control in the store is one of money and necessity. The ones who know the most about the store situation exercise the most control.

If we look at the real structure of decisionmaking we find that decisions are being made by a few. These few could control the coop because they had: 1) an interest in keeping the store going; 2) experience and knowledge in how Selby runs; 3) time to put into running the store; 4) contact with others in the coop who had previous control. Even though we have a democratic process for our meetings few felt like participating. A small number had control based on their overall knowledge, influence, and interest in operating the store. In the past, lack of success in increasing participation in the democratic meetings has reinforced this control by a few.

Decisionmaking by a few people is not necessarily bad, provided that the leaders and decisions are accountable to the coop and are recallable. In the past the informal structures of leadership were responsive only informally to a circle of people who had interests, experience, and ideals similar to the leadership's. Without formal accountable leaders, working and poor people outside the circles were unheeded and responded to very slowly if at all. The only control over the leadership by working class shoppers is the small amount of personal contact these shoppers have with some of the leaders.

Leadership is correct if it is based upon common goals shared by those taking part, and if it serves all those who share that common goal. The coop needs to move concretely towards the common goal of transforming the store to broaden the class base. Policy should be based upon fulfilling poor and working people's food needs and upon education about monopoly capitalism's control over Selby and over all our lives.

We see the need for transformation at Selby Coop, a transformation that will include not only a change in the coop's stock of food and a change in workers and customers -- but most importantly a change in leadership. The look at past experiences in decisions shows the control covert leadership has had over the "democratic" store. If we want to broaden the class base of the coop, we need leadership who reflect the thinking and background of the shoppers and community allies. They know best what they need.

JN DECISION MAKING

Based on analysis of the current decision-making process, the task force concludes: there is a need to make leadership open and accountable to the support base of the coop; there is a need to make a clear and open statement of our common goals in the transformation at Selby Coop.

Goals

1. Transform the store to serve the material needs of poor and working class people in the neighborhood.
2. Unify and integrate the struggles of the Selby Coop with the struggles of poor and working class people in the community.
3. Develop and follow leadership of poor and working class people in the neighborhood.

New Leadership Structure

Coop Council

A. Composition

1. 4 paid people - 3 new term cashiers & CETA employee
 - a. New Cashier Selection Committee
 - (1) chaired by Joan Johnson
 - (2) selection goal - to include one or two people new to the coop
 - (3) selection committee composed of volunteers committed to transformation goal
 - b. For immediate implementation, current cashiers will serve
2. 4 elected members
 - a. elected by a majority of coop meeting
 - b. must be committed to goals of transformation

B. Tasks

1. Evaluate the volunteer system and develop structures to connect with workgroups
2. Analysis and explanation of financial situation
3. Develop community outreach and support
4. Support and implement work of food committees
5. Evaluate buying of the building and act accordingly
6. Hold monthly criticism and assessment meetings (public coop community sessions)
7. Gather information from all segments of the store and from the neighborhood
8. Communicate issues and decisions; gather feedback

C. Framework and context

1. Three month transitional period
2. Monthly formal criticism/self criticism sessions
3. After 2 months, individuals may be recalled based on previous criticism and practice, by simple majority vote at community assessment meeting
4. After 3 months - evaluation of overall structure
 - a. vote on structure (based on assessment of current conditions)
 - b. vote on leaders

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