Cooperativism and its Role in the Disintegration of the Peasantry

Ursula Oswald

The present paper discusses cooperativism in the agricultural sector, taking into account the integration-disintegration dynamic. This leads us to pose the following question: integration-disintegration, for whom and for what reason? From the outset this question leads to a fundamental dichotomy, specifically expressed in this work as the opposition between the popular and the elitist sectors.

In the particular case dealt with in this paper we include within the term “popular” those peasant workers who lack specialization apart from the traditional cultivation of maize. These for both the basis of the cooperative and the base of the village itself as they include independent agriculturalists (individual “ejidatarios”1) who continue to produce individually in order to satisfy their own subsistence needs, marketing only the surplus. In other words, we are concerned with worker peasants (and their families) whose output is directed towards their very survival, that is to say, to satisfy basic needs and vital demands.2

1 “Ejido” refers to a collective system of land distribution by the state to a group of peasants. This allotment does not grant ownership but only the right of cultivation. Normally, the assigned land is divided and each peasant receives an individual portion and title. The ejidal land can not be sold or rented but ordinarily it is inherited to the descendants. This pulverizes it with a certain frequency. The person (the ejidatario) loses his right of cultivation and therefore his title when he does not work the land.

term *elite* as used in this paper includes those ejidatarios and private livestock owners who have either partially or completely abandoned traditional cultivation practices in order to undertake commercial export production. In numerical terms these groups account for approximately 140/0 of the total peasant population, while the remaining 860/0 are included within the popular sector. In addition to the rural livestock bourgeoisie, the leaders of the cooperativist organization are included within this same elitist group. These are locally referred to as the "board of directors". In reality, however, because of its composition this group transcends the local limit as, in addition to local leaders, it also includes regional representatives of the national bank which, in their turn, administer World Bank funds for the cooperatives. We note this point because it signifies that our approach has had forcibly to transcend the local framework and take into account a double perspective: that of the popular base, on the one hand, and that of the local, regional, national and international elite on the other. 3

However, prior to examining this elitist-popular dynamic more closely, we must clarify the sense in which we use the concept of integration, a concept which is understood in a multitude of ways in the social sciences (not to mention the legal, architectural and philosophical approaches, etc. towards the same concept). For purposes of this paper a definition of the concept is employed which allows a conceptualization and operationalization appropriate for dealing with and explaining the empirical data and, thus, for corroborating the utility of such a defini-


3 In this work the local leadership is considered to belong to the elite, although one has to be conscious of the fact that we are dealing with an elite which is, in reality, manipulated by the extralocal (regional, national and international) elites. This means that one is dealing with people in a transitional phase, i.e. that no longer totally reflects what can be called the non capitalist worker peasant given that he has modernized his system of production, taken on the role of a leader, has often worked outside of the village, etc.; and, because of this particular behaviour, which differs from that of the rest of the peasants, was designated to the directorate of the cooperative. However, although he is no longer a traditional peasant it is still not possible to consider him to be totally different, given that the external promoters took advantage of his non capitalistic components (the particular sense of commitment) in order to use him for the achievement of their own goals. Although a study of the elite would thus have to differentiate clearly between different levels (local, regional, etc.), for our purpose it is sufficient to mention all these levels in order to include them.
Prior to discussing the concept itself, it is also opportune to clarify that when using this term no allusion at all is made to a "normal" state of a social system which opposes any social change or conflict and which, therefore, can be considered to be static. On the contrary, the process dealt with here is both dynamic and contradictory. Thus, it seems appropriate, given such goals, to adopt the approach of Jorge R. Serrano who postulates that "political integration is the identity between Political Demands and Public Goals".

In order to apply this definition to our case-study we will modify it or, more correctly, adapt it in the following way: in place of "political integration" we will here refer to integration as socioeconomic and political integration and, in place of "political demand" in general, we will refer directly to the popular demand, given that this work deals with the base, i.e. the popular sector as defined previously. Thus, the definition used in our approach is that: integration is the identity between Popular Demands and Public Goals.

It should be made clear that first, popular demand includes all those wishes —economic, social or political, etc.— which tend to be transformed into public goals and which are, therefore, "political", i.e. they tend to integrate, and not to marginalize the people politically (as is sought, for example, with the consumer society in a developed world country); and, secondly, that a consideration of the popular sector implies a dialectical consideration distinguishing between the popular and the nonpopular; this consideration, in its turn relativizes our approach which previously has only been considered in absolute terms. That is to say, in our case-study popular and elite sectors are found at opposite poles: the latter is totally opposed to the achievement of popular public goals and attempts to impose its own public goals. These are the result of elitist

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4 These data are based on field work conducted in southern Mexico (State of Guerrero).


6 This differentiation of concepts is of a terminological type and should serve to clarify their use in this paper. Both of the modifications not only perfectly adjust to the concepts used by J. Serrano but are already suggested and legitimized in his study.

7 The term "public goal" signifies the aim or objective sought by an entity, society, group, etc., in order to obtain a common benefit.
demands which are, in their turn, the product of class interests that are in conflict with popular interests. Therefore, in this dynamic we postulate that the greater the satisfaction of popular demands, the lesser the satisfaction of elitist demands, and vice versa.

However, the antagonistic relationship is not as simplistic as this postulate would seem to suggest; on the contrary, transformation mechanisms or, more accurately, mechanisms for the manipulation of popular demand intervene in such a way that elitist demand apparently coincides with popular demand, given that the latter is manipulated and/or transformed in accordance with elitist requirements. Here, both the relativization of our approach and the complexity of the problem can now clearly be appreciated.

The considerations mentioned above provide us with the conceptual elements necessary for formulating the central hypothesis of this work and for focusing subsequently on field data directly related to the cooperativism problematic.

The central hypothesis is the following: the cooperativist movement acts as a disintegrator of the peasantry, given that it transforms and/or manipulates the socioeconomic and political demands of the popular base, in the service of the elite (which, in the specific case studied, must also include the State itself). In this way the elite uses cooperativism as a means of popular legitimization; the analysis shows, however, that cooperativism is but a manipulation of the popular base and of its demands.

Thus, cooperativism would only promote the integration of the elite, which, at the same time, provokes the disintegration of the peasantry. In the extreme case we would have a total integration of the elites and a complete popular disintegration, i.e. a total negation of popular needs in terms of their conversion into public goals. The present study, however, will show that this process is more complex and multifaceted. Therefore, it is not possible to talk of direct negation but, rather, of a manipulation or transformation of popular demand as a function of

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8 In Mexico, cooperativism under the name of the "collective ejido" has a political function in attempting to resolve the problems of low productivity and land tenancy. It obtained initial support during the presidency of L. Cárdenas (1934-40) being abandoned partially by later presidents of the country and receiving a new impetus with the present government. Thus, it can be noted that interested governments, when they have so wished, have promoted cooperativism (usually with the support of the World Bank or similar agencies) and, therefore, they also are directly responsible for the immediate effects of cooperativism i.e. the separation of popular demands from public goals.
elitist demand in such a way that, as mentioned previously, the elite does not lose its popular legitimization (on the contrary, it always obtains or increases it).

Let us now test this hypothesis with the data available. First, we will analyze the proposed aims of cooperativism, as formally and officially established by the supra-local national elite.  

Proposed aims:

- An increase in existing agricultural and livestock exploitation, through the use of new techniques;
- Promotion of livestock exploitation in the ejidal sector in order to supply urban, national and international markets;
- The creation of new sources of work;
- The increased participation of the peasantry in official credit programs;
- The standardization of community life through the use of legal codes aimed at reducing local and regional violence;
- Regularization of land ownership problems among ejidatarios;
- The better use of technical assistance.

To sum up, one is concerned with the socioeconomic development of the village, aimed at diminishing political tensions and violence at the same time as increasing export livestock production.

Discovered realities

The analysis of our data shows that the socioeconomic aspects and political repercussions of the process are not as lineal and clear as anticipated. On the contrary, the process is far more contradictory. This is manifested socio-economically in the following observed realities: the insufficient wage received by the members or worker cooperativists, which is clearly inferior to the earnings obtained from the simple culti-

9 Direct information from the Bank of Mexico, the organization responsible for granting credits to collective agricultural companies, and because of this, representative of governmental policy. Moreover, it is the official organization that redistributes credits granted by the World Bank and is, therefore, the executive arm of this organization.
vation of maize; dependency in terms of the credit and new technology introduced by the promoting bank; the separation of the cultivator from his means of production; the destruction of subsistence cultivation in favor of purely export or commercial crops; the scarcity of basic food-stuffs with the result that the majority of the daily expenses now have to be provided for by the women and children; a change in consumption patterns is witnessed in general; migration of the younger work-force takes place, which itself leads to the destruction of family and ritual organization; and, finally, an accentuation of social stratification occurs. These socioeconomic contradictions are also repeated in the political area where the peasants, as well as being marginalized, also find themselves represented by leaders who, although in popular disguise, in reality defend the interests of the regional, national and international elite.

The strong antagonisms that arise within the peasant base, as a result of these socioeconomic and political contradictions have resulted in the necessary formation of opposition groups; this has led to the formation of factions and subfactions which, in their turn, divide the ejidal base (cooperativists and poor independent peasants). In this way the elite has the facility to implement the system of "divide and rule".

As can be seen, the contradictions found show at their core the manipulation and, almost invariably the nullification of the popular demands. But the divergence between proposed aims and discovered realities also focuses our attention on the legitimization of elitist interests at the cost of popular interests.

Let us now analyze the field data in detail, at the same time confronting popular demands with public goals and their transformation. We will begin with the economic data. The annual wage of the cooperativists, $7,500 Mexican pesos ($300 U.S.), is only 59.6% of the annual

10 Nicholas, Ralph W., 1963, "Village faction and political parties in rural West Bengal", Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, 2, 17-32.

11 This percentage is still reduced by 17% if we take into account (as we must in order to have a common basis for comparison) the production of maize by individual ejidatarios for subsistence use owing to the fact that the cooperativists are obliged to spend 5,350 pesos annually in the purchase of such basic foodstuff, (i.e., they have to spend 71.3% of their salary of the cooperative, equivalent to 13.5% of the total annual income of the cooperativist and of his family).
DISINTEGRATION OF THE PEASANTRY

agricultural income earned by individual *ejidatarios*\(^{12}\) who chose not to enter the cooperative, (not taking into account what they obtain from peonage labors of from cattle earning). This disproportion is not only relative, i.e. in comparison with the individual *ejidatarios*, but also absolute: the total income coming from the cooperative is sufficient to satisfy something less than half of the necessary annual expenditures of each cooperativist. Thus, wives are obliged to complement the insufficient wage (by washing clothes, making bread or cultivating flowers for the market, as maids, working in small food shops, etc.). In the cooperative studied, wives contribute 50.6\(^{\circ}/o\) of the necessary income, as compared to 17.6\(^{\circ}/o\) among the individual ejidatarios. In the majority of cases, even where one includes this contribution, income does not cover the basic needs of the family with the result that children, from school age onwards, have to contribute their labor as well to the support of the family. Moreover, in that the establishment of a livestock cooperative only requires an abundant labor force in its initial phase, young people are now obliged to emigrate towards tourist and industrial centers throughout the republic.

A further problem is faced as regards the income of the cooperative; this demonstrates elitist goals even more clearly. The income that a member receives for his labors is, in reality, nothing more than a loan. This means to say that the members are obliged to return this money after the first three years of the functioning of the state company (used as a synonym for the cooperative or collective ejido). This leads us to the second point of interest, *credit*.

The type, amount and conditions under which credit is granted (see table 1), along with the analysis of the source of credit (directly from the World Bank to the Bank of Mexico and then successively to the general headquarters of the state Ejidal Bank, the regional office of this bank and finally the local board of directors of the cooperative) clearly demonstrate the inequality of the policy for granting credits to individual and collective ejidatarios by strongly favoring the latter. Moreover, it also demonstrates the vertical interaction and the dependency implied in this granting of credit. Not only is the cooperative "obliged" to produce an export product and to forgo subsistence cul-

\(^{12}\) The term 'individual ejidatarios' only includes the group forming the ejidal base, i.e. we exclude the rich individual livestock raisers (ejidal and small ownership) in order to thus obtain a common basis for comparison.
tivation\textsuperscript{13}, but the implementation of modern technology, which is economically and technically beyond the reach of the ejidatario, also serves the objectives of the national bureaucracy (which provides technicians and administrators) as well as the objectives of the central countries who provide the credit.\textsuperscript{14} This vertical interaction disguises the true objectives of the central countries behind a mask of humanitarian aid\textsuperscript{15} and, in its turn, also prevents this structure of exploitation and dependency from being perceived by the peasants. The member of the cooperative will only be conscious of the deficient administration and the corruption and the failures in the granting of credit by the regional branch of the bank.\textsuperscript{16} This is a typical obstacle to the person involved being able to delve further into the structure exploitation, an awareness of which would permit him to detect the underlying national and international goals which provoke these failings at a local level as a result of the manipulation of peasant needs and demands (more credit, increase in incomes, diversification of production, stable base for the survival of the family, covering of basic necessities, etc.) in function of elitist demands (to sell advanced technology, to assure the supply of a world tourist center with cheap meat and to monopolize export production in such a way that at the same time a need is created to import basic foodstuffs\textsuperscript{17}). All this, in its turn, pressures the peasant and

\textsuperscript{13} Previously, between 30\% and 50\% of the basic production was destined to self consumption by the popular sector, whilst now with regard to meat – which is the only thing the cooperative produces – the comparative figures are only 9\% for the total population and 2.5\% for the ejidal base, the remainder being all exported.


\textsuperscript{16} See the complete study: Oswald, Ursula, Serrano Jorge R., Luna Laurentino, 1976, \textit{Cooperativos ejidales y capitalismo estatal dependiente} (in press).

\textsuperscript{17} The land surface dedicated to the cultivation of maize was reduced by 57.5\% with the introduction of the cooperative. This resulted in the increased scarcity of this basic crop.
obliges him to work in livestock exploitation\textsuperscript{18} in order to be able to repay the credit and the respective interest payments. Thus, the granting of credit, the implementation of new technology and the destruction of self dependency in favor of a commercial product has resulted in what can be summarized as “economic and social dependency” (because of being a member of a cooperative organization), at a time when popular demand was the exact opposite, i.e. for greater liberty in both the economic and social areas.

A further economic aspect remains to be considered (which, as already noted, has repercussions of a social nature). One must indicate that the necessary condition for the granting of credit was the supply of cultivable land by the members. This permitted the concentration of 2,700 hectares, a necessary condition for profitable capitalist exploitation. All of this land is now used for grazing, in place of maize. This has not only had repercussions in terms of production and mechanization (using new technology), on alimentation itself and on the work but it has also created a political problem of prime importance. Supported by the strength of the cooperativist organization (52.6\textsuperscript{o/o} of local ejidatarios are organized in the ejidal company) these ejidatarios took over communal lands that theoretically had previously served as community pasture areas and which, in concrete terms, were specially useful for a few rich ejidal and private livestock raisers. Thus, these livestock raisers, in order to acquire greater political force, united with opposition individual ejidatarios against the idea of the cooperative and together presented their complaint before the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and before the federal Ministry of the President itself. Moreover, only with the direct intervention of the armed forces and of a powerful senator (now governor of a state) in favor of the cooperative was it possible to avoid a greater bloodbath.\textsuperscript{19} The military forces still contin-

\textsuperscript{18} This obligation is not as absolute in the contract as in reality, owing to the fact that in order to be able to return the land parcel to the member he is obliged to pay the cost of all the investments made on it. The results of the investments are of no use to him as, for example, those made to change cleared into grazing land. This sum, in itself greatly increased owing to the application of modern technology, (15.2\textsuperscript{o/o} of the annual salary for a single hectare) is impossible for the member to accumulate given that his income is not even sufficient, as we have already seen, to cover his basic necessities.

\textsuperscript{19} Even thus, amongst other things, the local deputy was murdered, several members of the board of directors were injured, five horses were stolen in a period of six months and the fences of cooperative lands were destroyed more than 80 times.
ue to protect the production areas, whilst tensions continue at the local level.

These tensions are now so accentuated that they transcend both blood ties and, to an even greater extent, traditional compadrazgo relationships. Thus, the first negative effects are now also felt within the traditional family organization, at a time when the cooperative has still not terminated its initial take off phase and still requires a fairly large work force for the construction of infrastructural works such as warehouses, corrals and irrigation canals, and for the preparation of grazing pastures, etc. In any case an excess supply of labor has already begun to be experienced. Although migration has been concentrated, up until present, amongst the younger sector of the population, who previously helped on the family parcel and who now only partially find work within the ejidal company, within a few years the very members of the cooperative will be obliged to search for new sources of work given that livestock exploitation will only require limited amounts of labor (a few semi-specialized workers). This means that within a short time the traditional peasant of the area, who learned cultivation practices from his father, will not even possess his own land (this now belongs to the company), neither a place of work, nor a trade which will permit him to change employer.

Finally, as regards the social aspect, we will mention the phenomenon of social stratification. In order to develop the cooperative, the promoting bank took advantage of the influence of a group of local leaders. This was achieved principally by offers of economic rewards (double salary for the directors, complete indemnization for the land given by them, purchase of their livestock, etc.) but also with the increase in status and prestige accorded them (frequent journeys to the capital of the state and of the country, the right to sign all letters and documents, representation of the co-ejidatarios before the authorities, etc.). This, in its turn, strengthened their position within the local bourgeoisie, while the co-members (the workers or "fools" as they refer to themselves) found themselves indebted and even deprived of their land, their basic means of production. This not only led to their rapid impoverishment and to an increase in their dependency, but also to the perpetuation of

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20 One part of the family joins the cooperative whilst the other defends its interests as individual ejidatarios. Even more extreme is the situation of ritual kinship where, for instance a case occurs in which the leader of the cooperative and that of the opposing group are compadres (ritual kinship between the child's father and godfather).
that same dependency given that at present it acts not only at the individual, but also at the social level: the traditional small free peasants who produced for their own consumption and marketed their excess production now find themselves swelling the ranks of the agricultural proletariat. They have no basis on which to support themselves, other than an insufficient salary, they lack subsistence foodstuffs and the means to produce them (the land) and, as if this wasn't enough, have a debt to the bank which is impossible to pay. In other words, differences between opposing strata developed and accentuated, with the result that the ejidatarios that form the 'base' of the ejido presently form part of a proletariat in their own company, while only a small group of leaders are installing themselves at the opposite pole, i.e. that of the rural bourgeoisie.

However, there can be no doubt that the deviated demands, both economic and social, have their political repercussions: the conflict over communal land is only one although the most sanguinary expression of them.

In searching for the supports and factors involved in the conflict over land, and in the transformation of the demand for land, we have to distinguish clearly between two antagonistic groups. On the one hand the cooperativists, who are supported at the local level by the richest livestock raiser of the region and his family, at the state level by the present governor, at the national level by the official party - the PRI - and the present presidential policy and, finally, at the international level by the directors, i.e. the directorate of the World Bank. On the other hand, the group which is opposed to the cooperative is supported at the local level by the leader of the opposing group which is united with the private livestock raisers (excluding the richest) and with the members of the opposition party — the PPS —, at the state level by the governor at that time, at the national level by the agencies and elected deputies of the opposition party, and at the international level by private capital, in as much as it is opposed to the nation's Third World policy with the restrictions it poses in terms of investment, payments of taxes, syndicate control, etc.

But of course, the really concrete violent conflict is localized in the village itself. Here the struggle between the base of the cooperative and that of the individual ejidatarios demonstrates, with its bleeding violence, the manipulation to which both groups have been subjected, in having been divided into two antagonistic factions. Thus, the majority of the previously mentioned negative effects of cooperativism are subsumed in
a pseudo conflict\textsuperscript{21} with the opposing faction, principally made up of the ejidal base itself. This permits, in addition to the efficient protection of production by the armed forces (under the pretext of maintaining order between contending factions), the total control of the population by state capitalism, which takes advantage of the Roman principle "divide and rule"\textsuperscript{22}. The second important aspect of this manipulatory policy has still to be mentioned; this we refer to in this paper as the "escape valve" role of the factions. This means that in order that the peasant base should not confront the real problem, in this case the cooperative or, more generally, the exploitation of the popular groups by those above, the public goal is diverted and the elite creates a pseudo factional enemy in the manner mentioned. This takes place in such a way that the revolutionary and discontented forces spend their time on insignificant and easily controlled clashes (given the presence of the military) in place of developing a true class struggle. Thus, the division into two factions fulfills the function of a valve through which discontented and revolutionary energies escape.

In addition, however, the formal policy, with its adequate credit promotion, technical assistance, mobilization of mass media and armed intervention, all of which favor cooperativism, becomes a witness to, and an explicit promoter of, the manipulation of popular demands; all of these mechanisms and the way in which they are manipulated favor the transformation of popular demands into demands which completely restructure the goals of the local peasants in favor of the few powerful ones. These, in a third world country such as Mexico, are to a fairly large extent those functionaries that lead the country. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{21} We use the term 'pseudo' because one is dealing with an artificial conflict within the same social stratum (without benefit for it); i.e. cunning alliances now exist between socioeconomic strata which are in themselves opposed (large scale livestock owners and poor ejidatarios) which create renting conflicts between the latter and others of the same stratum (poor coejidatarios both within and without the cooperative).

\textsuperscript{22} This control, by means of the fostering of two antagonistic factions and their subfactions, has special significance in this case given that we are concerned with the most violent area of the republic and one of the most conflictive in the world. A very high crime level exists there: between a quarter and one fifth of crimes are homicides and 63.20\% personal attacks (these data are averages for the last five years) which signifies that there are between two and three murders monthly in a population of 5,102 inhabitants.
the deviation of the popular demands also leads to political authoritarianism, a typical sign of dependent state capitalism.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, when relating our empirical data with the hypothesis and the theoretical framework mentioned at the beginning of this paper, we can conclude by asking ourselves: at the cost of what and in favor of whom did the increase in livestock production and export production take place.\textsuperscript{24} Given, that 79.2\% of all the members of the cooperative did not receive a wage which even allowed them to live poorly, it clearly shows that even the basic popular demand of "being able to at least subsist" is not satisfied. The same occurs with the social demands where both the family and the ritual organization disintegrates (through migration, specific interests of a few leaders, etc.). Delving further into the political field we can see that contrary to what was previously postulated, local conflicts increase and surpass supportable limits in such a way that the armed forces have to intervene.

Thus, as a whole, one clearly notes that none of the demands or expectations of the village, with respect to cooperativism, were fulfilled.

Why does this collective ejido continue to function? In analyzing the supports for the collective ejido and the means used to promote it we discover the tremendous socio-political manipulation to which the members are subjected, and in such a way that although they now realize that it is not to their advantage (56\% explicitly prefer now individual exploitation) they can not but continue struggling for it. This can be explained only by the transformation of the basic popular demand into an elitist demand.

Thus, analysis of a cooperativist movement sheds light on the gradual process of disintegration of the peasant base by the separation, through manipulation, of the popular demands from the public goals being in fact implemented which are those of the elite. To the same extent it sheds light on the integration of the elite and the satisfaction of its demands. The elite, in order to achieve goals, has manipulated the traditional peasant conscience at the same time as promoting individual competition between local leaders. The result is a total transformation

\textsuperscript{23} See note 15 for more detail.

\textsuperscript{24} It is a fact that even though there has been an increase in livestock production this has not even been sufficient to cover the repayment quota corresponding to the credit, not to mention of course any profit for the members. Moreover, as we have already seen, this increase was based on an enormous decrease in the production of the basic foodstuff, maize.
of the original demands, which not only questions the method with which it is achieved (manipulation, corruption, conflict murder) but also the goal itself of the human being.

Table I: Credits

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<th>Credit receivers</th>
<th>Cooperative members</th>
<th>Individual ejidatarios</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Implemented $</td>
<td>Projected $</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>long term</td>
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<td>26,909,350</td>
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<td>short term: % interest</td>
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<td>number of members</td>
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$: Mexican Pesos