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**Successful Mexican Tuna Cooperatives:  
A Model for U.S. Fishermen?**

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## INTRODUCTION

The small scale U.S. fisherman is increasingly subject to degenerating economic conditions--the cost of boats, supplies, maintenance, etc., are continually increasing, while financial returns relative to capital investment and relative to the national average are on the decline. As a result of the superior technology, organization and capital investment of large fishing corporations, the competitive position of the small fisherman is steadily weakening. U.S. fishermen have been unable to form a unified opposition to unfavorable government policy or to organized corporate interests and, thus, remain relatively powerless in the national polity. The social conditions of the fisherman have also deteriorated as a product of modern economic trends--as evidenced by such things as fragmentation of the kinship system, decay of familial influences, and diminished community cohesiveness.

Although the fishermen of Mexico have been subject to many of the same forces of modernization, some of them have fared much better than their U.S. counterparts. This paper will describe one such group--the tuna cooperatives of Ensenada, Mexico. The fishermen of these cooperatives consider themselves economically successful. They earn from 4-5 times the average Mexican wage and have high status in the local community. In the interaction among cooperatives, private enterprise, and government they have sufficient power to effect changes which significantly benefit their position. In addition, these cooperatives have acted as important integrative agencies. Unlike most U.S. fishing cooperatives, they have successfully assumed some of the functions which were traditionally served by kinship and family.

A purpose of this paper is to identify some of the means by which Mexican tuna cooperatives have been able to successfully adapt to physical and social conditions. The difference between the successful adaptation of the Mexican cooperatives and the less than successful adaptation of many U.S. fishing cooperatives has been a product of the complex interaction of numerous historical and cultural variables. Although conditions in Mexico and the United States are not directly parallel, some of the mechanisms employed by the Mexican fisherman in adapting to changing conditions could prove useful to U.S. fishermen in solving their own problems.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

The small scale Mexican fisherman of Ensenada who had traditionally fished for shrimp, lobster, anchovie, sardine, abalone, etc., had been obliged to form cooperative organizations because various regulations between 1936 and 1950 had been established to reserve exclusive fishing rights to such luxury fish for cooperatives. These cooperatives were, in turn, required register with the federation of fishing cooperatives of Ensenada. The function of this federation was almost entirely supervisory. The controlling figure of this federation--the Secretary--was government-appointed and responsible only to his bureaucratic superiors. His function was more to *minimize* aggregated demand on government than to *promote* cooperative interests.

The stability of this structure was enhanced by the fact that the need for, and the price of, fish increased at a pace which offset the more deleterious effects of lack of representation. That is, since Mexican fishermen, especially during the war<sup>1</sup> years, were in great demand and earned good wages, some of the economic effects of government control were minimized.

In the early 1960's, however, with the tremendous growth of the neighboring U.S. private fleet, the fishermen of Ensenada began to sense their relative deprivation. Some groups of fishermen began to form cooperatives designed to purchase and operate modern high-seas tuna seiners. They were refused official registration on various technicalities until 1966. In that year, on the day after the death of Ex-President of the Republic General Abelardo Rodriguez, who had personally controlled the entire Mexican high-seas tuna fleet, they were granted

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1. The draft, the internment of the Japanese-American fishermen who controlled a major portion of the fisheries of Baja California, as well as a shift in Mexican policy concerning foreign access to national waters, created a vacuum which only Mexican fishermen could fill.

recognition.

Since initial operation of the first tuna cooperative in 1971, five others have obtained funds and are operating out of Ensenada. Of the six, all but one have been very successful economically. The one exception has been moderately successful but has suffered set backs due to mismanagement and, some say, embezzlement.

### **Higher Organization:**

The Mexican Cooperative Laws of 1936 stipulate that all cooperatives shall belong to higher order regional organizations called federations. All the cooperatives based in the Port of Ensenada belong to the Federación de Cooperativas Pesqueras de Ensenada. The federation is specifically designed to serve as an intermediary between the individual cooperative and outside organizations, especially the government. Government directives concerning changes in regulations are invariably channeled through the federation. Often legislation involving cooperatives relies heavily on the federation to enforce compliance. Government regulations specify that many operations performed by individual cooperatives must first be approved by federation officers. Various quotas, fees, and duties are collected by the federation and transmitted directly to the federal government. The money for these items comes directly from the federation in its other role as a marketing agent for the cooperatives.

The general assembly of the federation is specifically designed to function as a forum for all the cooperatives and serves to consolidate opinion and present a unified position in dealings with other organizations (e.g., the canneries, the port authorities, distributors, and purchasers). In these forums each cooperative is represented by a delegate who has an equal voice in the disposition of any item on the agenda, i.e., they vote on matters which could affect their particular cooperative. Without unanimity on any particular case or issue resolutions cannot be adopted, thus, each individual cooperative must be willing to relinquish some of its own independence in order to achieve the unanimity necessary for effective action.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Economic Context:**

In both the United States and Mexico fishing has become more capital intensive, more competitive and more restricted by government legislation and economic policy. The tuna cooperatives of Ensenada, however, are in a more favorable market situation than most U.S. fishermen. They have access to two markets, the United States and their own. They can sell between 70 and 80% of their product in the U.S. at the accepted international rate while the rest must be sold domestically at about two-thirds this rate. Thus, the Mexican tuna fisherman is not subject to weekly demand variations by locality or region. Nor, on the other hand, is he subject to the fluctuating shortages of transport and storage facilities endured by many of his U.S. counterparts.

The Mexican and U.S. perception of the short and long range resource availability of their coastal water differs radically. U.S. fishermen view a rapidly diminishing resource stock which must be regulated in order to preserve a 'maximum sustainable yield' while Mexican fishermen perceive the resource as relatively inexhaustible and are encouraged<sup>1</sup> to increase production. The economic climate in the U.S. is clearly not as conducive to expansion and capital investment as it is in Mexico.

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1. During the late 1960's there was a tremendous push by Mexico to attain self-sufficiency, especially in the area of nutrition: an accessible, relatively untapped, source of protein was Mexico's marine resources. This atmosphere fostered eventual registration and financing of the tuna cooperatives. The U.S., of course, has not had the same need to develop fishing as a major nutritional source, although the potential for increasing per capita consumption of fish is great.

### Political Context:

Efforts in the U.S. and in Mexico to organize fishing cooperatives have been subject to different historical and ideological factors. The strength of the agrarian cooperative movement during the formative stage of the Mexican political system has given cooperatives a certain legitimacy in the revolutionary idiom. President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), in a sense, institutionalized the government's preferential treatment of the whole class of collective and cooperative enterprises with his organization of the ejidos and his promotion of the Cooperative Laws of 1936. The policies initiated by Cárdenas were to set the style for political regimes to follow. After his term in office "it proved politically impossible for any President to alter the general direction of the country's reform policies (Greenburg 1970:15)." In the U.S., on the other hand, the perceived political association of cooperatives with left-leaning ideology has, if anything, retarded their growth and popular acceptance.

In Mexico the political structure within which a cooperative must operate differs significantly from that of the U.S. The Mexican political system is much more centralized than the U.S. system. The legislative and judicial branches have been relatively ineffective counterforces to the almost total assumption of power by the Mexican President. Congress passes presidentially sponsored bills with little opposition while the Mexican Supreme Court has proved unable to rule against what it considers unconstitutional legislation presented by the President. All administrative decisions, even those at lower levels, are subject to executive sanction. At the change of each presidential administration<sup>1</sup> nearly 25,000 appointive posts become available to the incoming executive while about 18,000 elective posts are ultimately subject to his sanction through his control of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), essentially Mexico's only political party. Executive authority in Mexico extends into areas of national welfare, over which, in the United States, a President would have no control. The President is the central figure in policy decisions on economic and social matters as well as political issues. He determines not only the monetary policy (by manipulating reserve requirements, rates of exchange, prime lending rates, etc.,) of the Bank of Mexico, which functions in much the same way as the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, but can personally control private enterprise by means of various licensing agencies, by regulating the issuance of tax exemptions, and by setting tariff and duty levels. In addition, he is the final authority in policy decisions made by such government-owned or -operated major enterprises as steel, petroleum, natural gas, electric power, telephone, railroads and much of the large scale fishing industry. The government is also directly involved in the management or ownership of nearly 300 other large and small scale industries in Mexico.

The success of this system depends on the maintenance of low political mobility (Linz fn. 1, p. 311 and Purcell 1973:34). Less than 57% of the eligible voters go to the polls during national election years (McDonnald 1971:252, fn. 15), and nearly 35% of the eligible population take part in no political<sup>2</sup> activity (Almond and Verba 1963:62). Low subject mobilization describes a situation in which the absence of unified political action or interest groups permits the relatively unrestricted exercise of authority by a political leader. In other words, fewer political demands on the system allow the administrator greater decision-making latitude--and with this autonomy he is more likely to address efforts to pre-existing demands or to policies which will further his personal career. The political sophistication of the public is seen as a potential threat to political stability because it endangers the hegemony of the bureaucratic elite, thus efforts are made to prevent the formation of interest groups or to undermine the cohesion or political power of existing ones.

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1. The *sexenio*, or wholesale change of leadership every six years, is itself an important aspect of the Mexican political system. Since in Mexico incumbent officials are constitutionally prohibited from succeeding themselves, as their terms in office expire every six years there is a dramatic turnover of politically appointed and elected positions. The period of transition, when earlier policies are either accepted or rejected and new policy objectives are formulated, is a particularly rewarding time at which to assert political demands.

2. By controlling the means of disseminating information (television, radio and the press) the President and his political party are usually able to manipulate political participation in accordance with their own priorities.

Another feature of the Mexican political system, closely related to executive centralism, is limited political pluralism. Independent, integrated, well organized interest groups such as those present in the U.S. or Western Europe are not present in the Mexican system. Business groups such as the National Confederation of Chambers of Commerce (CONCANACO), the Confederation of Mexican Chambers of Industry (CONCAMIN) or the Employers Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COMPARAMEX), which, ostensibly, are organized to influence government economic policy, are, in reality, not interest aggregating agencies but implements of government control. Membership in these organizations is essentially compulsory (Shafer 1973:69) and the leadership--nominated by the chief executive--is closely tied to government directory boards (Purcell and Purcell 1976:224, fn. 10).

In this system dominated by political patronage, where positions are, in essence, appointive rather than elective, job security and upward mobility are dependent upon one's relationship to his superiors and not to an extra-governmental constituency. Any demands from outside the hierarchy threaten to diminish resources used to support one's own position, and are thus discouraged.

It seems likely that the political system of the U.S. is one which would be more susceptible to unified political pressure than that of Mexico. Similar administrative agencies in the U.S. have much more decision-making and operational latitude. The U.S. President has relatively little direct control over elected positions and a narrowly limited appointive authority below higher level administrative posts. The extent of his control over the political patronage system is therefore subject to greater limits than the control exerted by the Mexican President. As a consequence, the actions of U.S. bureaucrats are not solely dependent on the maintenance of hierarchical political connections as is the case in Mexico. Where in Mexico it is often in the interest of the administrator to restrict demand and allocate resources on the basis of their instrumental use in his personal quest for upward job mobility, in the U.S. it is in the interest of the administrator to respond impersonally to the demands of his constituency in order to be re-elected or re-appointed. In a politically pluralist society this constituency is composed of numerous special interest groups which vie for influence at every level of government. Government agencies in the United States are accustomed to dealing with this diversity of demand and are equipped to handle it. That is, they have the authority to allocate specific resources, based on precedent and on the specific charter under which the agency is organized.

### **Social Change:**

In traditional society kinship served many of the functions necessary for the persistence of the social system. As a result of the economic changes that have taken place in the fishing community, there has been a great disruption of these kinship functions. These economic changes have generated many occupational alternatives. Increased mobility in response to these alternatives has resulted in new community and regional residence patterns which conform to market-registered demands for labor. New residence patterns have led to geographically and socially dispersed kinship networks and as distance has increased the kinship system has lost power as a social integrating agent. The greater distance over which kin interaction must take place has led to (a) a narrower range of kin recognition, (b) a reduction of the importance of kinship in economic affairs and, (c) the increased individuation of the nuclear family. It has also resulted in "the absence of corporate groups of kin recruited according to residence or some other non-kinship principle" (Bott 1971:118).

Many of the fisherman's social values and patterns have suffered as a result of the decay of the traditional kinship system. Occupational recruitment, once seen as the product of kinship affiliation, has come to be viewed as a *supportive mechanism* for the maintenance of kin relations. In a sense, this is an aspect of the transition from a system in which 'economic' transactions took place within a kinship framework to one in which kinship relations have, to a great extent, become a function of economic considerations. Traditional marital systems, for example, have been affected by these changes. Spouses are still selected on the basis of personal association, but such association is increasingly a function of educational status and

residence patterns, founded less on kinship factors than on economic criteria. Social solidarity and welfare functions once served by kinship have deteriorated in a similar fashion, e.g. retirement, life, property and disability insurance, assured employment, and priority occupational recruitment are no longer adequately provided for within the kinship system.

Social and economic trends have affected the functions served by the family itself. The traditional family was "strong and cohesive, held together by traditional bonds of loyalty, common economic strivings, mutual dependence, the prospect of inheritance, and finally, the absence of any other social group to which the individual (could) turn (Lewis 1960:54)." As individual family members are drawn into the labor pool, the sanctions exerted from within the nuclear family lose their effectiveness. Market pressures create independent wage-earners who are no longer dependent on family ties for their security. In addition, broader regional and national economic priorities have, in many ways, come to subordinate family socialization, career indoctrination and training functions. Mandatory extended education, for example, tends to promote greater occupational mobility by allowing greater time to observe the outside world and different occupational alternatives. It also prevents early occupational entry, forcing, in a sense, part-time work experiences which are often crucial in the selection of a career. Economic trends have also affected material inheritance patterns. Father to son transmission of capital equipment decreases as the cost of maintaining or purchasing technologically sophisticated equipment or vessels increases and as the number of progeny willing to pursue the occupation declines.

### ADAPTIVE RESPONSE

For the tuna fishermen of Mexico, the cooperative has proven to be economically, politically and socially adaptive. At least for the Mexican environment this type of cooperative seems to be particularly well-suited.

#### **Economic Adaptation:**

The economic adaptation of cooperatives may not be the most significant aspect of their success but there is definitely a minimally acceptable level of returns which must be reached before the importance of other factors<sup>1</sup> can be considered. The level considered adequate, however, may be relatively low when compared with similar private enterprises if the "mix" of social, political and economic components fall within a range defined as acceptable by the membership. In short, fishermen will be willing to participate in a cooperative and forego part of their potential earnings if the other-than-economic advantages of belonging are perceived to outweigh the financial disadvantages. The Mexican cooperative tuna fishermen were required to make this judgement only during the early phase of development, "the first year and a half was the difficult time, after that everyone wanted to join...three years later there were five others...all of them working well". Today, even Fishermen's Union members say the only thing preventing them from joining or forming a cooperative is the lack<sup>2</sup> of boats.

The effort required to obtain financing for the first tuna cooperatives should not, however, be minimized. After waiting six years to obtain official registration, the process of actually obtaining funds extended another five years. Even then only one of the cooperatives--the first--received funds directly from the agency created to finance this kind of enterprise--the

1. It is assumed here that while variables such as ideological zeal, common hostility to outside agents, personal loyalties, or other sociological factors, may serve to unite the membership on a temporary basis, they cannot provide the basis for long term commitment to an economic enterprise in the extended absence of financial success.

2. It has been difficult to obtain boats because the Mexican government is reluctant (a) to finance an industry which competes directly with the government-owned fishing enterprise or (b) to support a growing rival political force which has already come to undermine the political power of government agencies concerned with the fisheries. Within the Mexican fleet roughly half the high-seas tuna vessels are owned and managed by cooperative organizations, while one quarter are owned and operated by the Mexican government, and the remaining quarter are controlled by small corporations and individual owners.

Banco Fomento Cooperativo. Of the rest, some were financed within the framework of an exchange program with Poland while the others were financed directly by U.S. canneries. In all the latter cases the Mexican government was only required to provide loan guarantees<sup>1</sup> to the lenders.

There are a number of reasons why these tuna cooperatives have been economically successful. First, the economic superiority of large-scale, technologically sophisticated vessels has been clearly demonstrated in fisheries in Mexico as well as in many other nations. They are capable of capturing greater quantities of fish in less time and at less expense per ton than is the independent fisherman with his smaller vessel. The increased storage capacity and improved preservation techniques of these vessels has, over time, also enhanced the fisherman's ability to control for periodic price fluctuations of their product.

Second, the Mexican tuna fishermen have access<sup>2</sup> to a relatively unlimited market for their product in the United States. U.S. canneries can handle entire catches ranging to over one thousand tons and normally issue a check within 48 hours for the total proceeds. It is also a very stable market. Prices are set at yearly intervals and remain unchanged until the following year. The prices established are, to Mexican standards, quite high. The Mexican domestic market has been able to support a price of about \$535 per ton of product while the U.S. canneries pay close to \$850 per ton. The impression that these cooperatives derive surplus profits because they earn in dollars while their expenses are in pesos must, however, be dispelled. Virtually all of their costs are in dollars. This includes parts, since most of the vessels were constructed in the U.S., and maintenance, which, except for onboard or labor intensive repairs, is performed in U.S. Their principle expense--fuel--is presently selling at rates nearly identical with the United States. It should be recognized, however, that most of the individual fisherman's expense is in the domestic market and thus significantly lower than that of his U.S. counterpart.

A third reason for the economic success of these cooperatives is they have the advantage of professional organization and management. By separating the functions of management from production, thus providing permanent occupational categories to those in responsible positions, they have generated expertise in marketing, accounting and in organization and have been able to utilize this in their interaction with both government and private enterprise.

Another significant economic advantage is their control over an important source of credit, which is the keystone of successful economic enterprise. These vessels represent a sizeable investment--as much as \$6,000,000 each. In addition, with the rising cost of new construction, the value of the vessel is actually appreciating. This provides the leverage on which the cooperatives finance large capital investments, such as new nets or major repairs. It should also be added that as the actual value of the vessel increases the value of each members' share in the cooperative increases--and this is an important source of long term commitment to the enterprise.

#### Political Adaptation:

Fishermen in Mexico are organized either into one of three unions or within cooperatives. One of the unions operates exclusively with the government fishery while the other two represent fishermen who work for privately-owned domestic and foreign vessels. These unions are principally concerned with protecting the individual fisherman's rights and safety on these vessels and have had relatively little impact on government policy. The cooperatives are

1. In view of the financial success of these cooperatives it is apparent that the motivations for refusing the petitions for loan guarantees of recently registered cooperatives rest in the political domain.

2. This is due, in part, to the fact that some of the cooperatives were financed by U.S. canneries with the express provision that mortgage payments be made not in cash but in product and to the fact that Mexican authorities allow these sales because they understand that the cooperatives could not fulfill their foreign financial obligations if they were limited to rates paid in the domestic market. For the canneries, this has also served as a hedge against the potential power of the American Tuna Boat Association. That is, the canneries were assured of some supply in the case of a U.S. fisherman strike.

organized into a federation which, until the middle 1970's had been able to exert little pressure on the Mexican government for policy decisions more favorable to cooperative fishermen.

In October, 1976, the cooperative fishermen of Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico physically ousted the government-appointed director of the Federation of Fishing Cooperatives of Guaymas. This action set in motion a series of events which have culminated in the achievement of significant political power for Mexican fishing cooperatives. In the months to follow the cooperative fishermen of Cabo San Lucas and Ensenada were also to replace their government-controlled directors with democratically elected<sup>1</sup> representatives.

The federation represents the interests of all the fishing cooperatives of the region and aggregates these interests into a politically powerful force. The organization of the federation promotes the exercise of this power in several ways. First, the leaders of the federation represent the interests of hundreds of fishermen. The solidarity of this group carries an inherent degree of political clout. The capacity of fishing groups to unite and cause considerable commotion in regional political systems was demonstrated in the events of Guaymas described above. The government's awareness of the disruptive potential of the cooperatives tends to temper their inclinations to block cooperative activity, since any sign of political instability reflects poorly on concerned government officials and threatens their job mobility and security.

The leaders of the federation are democratically elected by the membership and thus outside the elite bureaucracy of national politics. With the strength of the membership behind them, they are able to make demands on government officials, unrestricted by the prevailing political patronage system. It is in their own best interest to remain responsible only to the wishes of the fishermen, in that their chances of upward occupational mobility as well as their own personal prestige depend on how well they represent the needs of this constituency. Also, because the cooperative officials are not as susceptible to the social and political sanctions normally employed within the elite bureaucracy of the broader political system, government representatives are unable to control their demands and find it difficult to avoid direct response.

The structure of the Mexican cooperative federation provides for full time officials<sup>2</sup> to represent the interests of the fisherman; individual fishermen can afford neither the time nor the economic costs of such participation. In Mexico, trip characteristics allow general assemblies of the cooperatives at regular intervals. The elected representatives of these cooperatives then meet at regularly scheduled regional assemblies of the federation where a unified cooperative platform is formulated.

### **Social Adaptation:**

The successes of the cooperative also have a bearing on the development of group solidarity. Individuals and groups tend to adjust their expectations and their aspirations according to their perception of what is attainable. By this measure the Mexican tuna cooperatives are in a very favorable situation. Mexican fishing cooperatives in Ensenada have had generally successful operations for two or three decades, while the tuna cooperatives in particular have been inordinately successful for nearly a decade.

As the members of these cooperatives achieve some of their objectives, especially those involving an economic impact, their belief in the efficacy of cooperative organization is enhanced. The successes of the federation of cooperatives in defending the fisherman's

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1. One of the first united actions taken by these three federations was the creation of a Confederation of Fishing Cooperatives of Mexico which is now recognized as the representative of the interests of all fishing cooperatives in Mexico. The President of this organization has been able to negotiate directly with national agencies charged with the formulation and implementation of fishery policy and in some cases has successfully modified proposed legislation to be more favorable to fisherman and cooperative interests.

2. There are also lobbying positions built into the structure of the Confederation which are designed specifically for influencing government policy at the national level.



position against government obstacles have had a substantial impact on the unity of all the cooperative fishermen of the region. It would seem that as the intermediate goals of the cooperatives and the federation are achieved the fishermen become increasingly conscious of their potential for even greater actions and are motivated to greater commitment and participation. In this way, increased participation<sup>1</sup> results in increased success and, conversely, increased success leads to increased participation in a mutually reinforcing cycle.

Fishing cooperatives in Mexico have also functioned as an integrative mechanism. They have helped to reduce the effects of the disintegration of traditional Mexican social structure by providing new means of satisfying the material and social needs of its members. The by-laws of the cooperatives contain clauses which are designed to satisfy some of the security needs of the fisherman. These provide life, health and disability insurance to the membership and, in some cases, even insure the members' personal property. They also contain provisions for retirement and for scholarships for outstanding sons or daughters of members. These by-laws also allow short- and medium-term loans to members and, when the member is out to sea, to their families. Membership also provides a source of assured employment<sup>2</sup> even for those who chose, for some reason, not to fish a particular season or even the entire year. The structure of recruitment into Mexican cooperatives also provides an important means of integrating traditional mechanisms with modern ones. The cooperative by-laws stipulate that priority should be given to sons of cooperative members who wish to join the organization. This provides a means by which the remnants of traditional recruitment patterns based on kinship can be maintained. Cooperative members spend a great deal of their time in port in each other's company. These informal gatherings as well as the more formal assemblies of the entire cooperative provide an important context in which the traditional bonds of community/kinship solidarity can be maintained.

## IMPLICATIONS

The comparison of salient conditions in the U.S. and in Mexico, in conjunction with the analysis of the successful adaptation of Mexican tuna cooperatives to their environment, suggests the potential utility of similar cooperative organization in the United States. Discussed in the following section are implications of the utilization of these organizations by U.S. fishermen.

### Economic Implications:

The adaptability of fishing cooperatives to changing conditions depends, in great part, upon their continued economic viability. One implication to be drawn from the Mexican data, is that, in some cases, by organizing small-scale fishermen into cooperatives designed to purchase and operate the larger high-seas vessels, the likelihood of satisfactory economic returns may be enhanced. The production capacities and economies of scale likely to result from such operations will provide improved income to its members, while the increased storage capacity and advanced preservation techniques of these vessels will, over time, enhance the fisherman's ability to control for periodic price fluctuations of their product. In addition, fishermen using these technological advantages will be better able to resist manipulation by the canneries or by buyers monopolies. The separation of management functions from ownership functions and from actual fishing operations will also promote improved overall performance. Furthermore, these vessels will represent an essentially capital intensive means of production. Credit facilities otherwise unavailable to smaller fishermen can be utilized by the cooperative to improve production, marketing, storage or in other ways to improve earnings. Governmental

1. Greater participation in the groups' decisions has been shown to be closely related to the members' commitment to the goals of the group, to the relative adaptability of the group to structural and environmental changes and to the greater acceptance of change by group members. Increased participation has also been related to the greater complexity and innovativeness of organizational decisions and to an increased decentralization of decision-making (see Patchen 1965:149-174).

2. Only a vote of the entire membership at a general assembly can expel a member.

tax incentives<sup>1</sup> available to cooperatives in particular as well as the different means available to larger enterprises to manipulate their tax category (e.g., depreciation allowances, fuel taxes, improved salaries) would help promote successful economic adaptation.

Utilization of these suggestions must clearly be predicated on a number of assumptions about the nature of the economic context of fishing in the U.S. That is, what is the actual availability of the specific resource. For example, do tuna exist in sufficient quantity and within an acceptable range to be commercially viable? Will the domestic market provide an adequate demand for the product? Will the actual returns to the individual cooperative member be considered adequate? But most of all, which group or type of fishermen is most likely to benefit from this type of organization?

The level of commercial viability or degree of accessibility to be expected from any specific fishery resource varies. Nevertheless, it seems likely that some resource will fall within the parameters of the above specifications. The question of "adequate" returns, on the other hand, depends on the type of fisherman selected as the target population. The independent, owner-producer fisherman, with vested interest in maintaining his present level of technology is clearly not a viable option for this type of cooperative organization. The capital intensive nature of the technology, moreover, clearly places it beyond the ability of most individual fishermen or the capacity of small groups to acquire. In economic terms, the group most likely to be able to profitably utilize this type of technology and organization are those fishermen without substantial economic commitment to a particular technological subsystem. Crewmen, especially those accustomed to high-seas fishing and extended trips, as well as independent fishermen who have little capital investment in a particular technology or who pursue a marginal species and must therefore supplement their fishing earnings with second occupations, are the most attractive target population. (Some of the social constraints will be discussed below.)

### **Political Implications:**

In the United States there are no established mechanisms for aggregating fisherman interest for large scale political input. The crewman is represented by fishermen's unions while owners are represented by associations of boat owners. Fisherman input into government policy-making is usually channeled through one of these two conduits, usually after the policy has been formalized and usually ineffectively. As long as political representation remains unorganized and involves relatively small numbers of fishermen, government will not be responsive to their demands.

Fishermen in the United States are rarely united around a single issue or against a particular governmental agency. Their interests often temporarily coincide in reaction to a congressional bill, especially if it involves their own regional interests, technological subsystem or the particular species they fish. The 200 mile limit is an example of a sweeping initiative which was applauded by some fishermen and bitterly protested by others. These regional, technological and species differentiations have prevented the effective representation of "fisherman" interests at higher governmental levels.

It is argued that input into governmental policy-formation will increase as the various organizational characteristics of cooperative production have their effect felt at the level of the federation. That is, as these cooperatives begin to achieve some of their economic goals and are able to coalesce with other types of fishing cooperatives into federations, cooperative input into government fishery policy formation will be enhanced. These federations will be able to represent the interests of different technologies, as well as different regional and species adaptations with the aggregate political and economic weight of all these fishing industries. Eventually, they will be able to interact at higher governmental levels, thus minimizing the negative effects of mid-level bureaucratic inertia. As this process becomes even more formalized it will be in

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1. The legislative measures enabling fishing cooperatives to obtain government secured credit are provided in the United States Cooperative Credit Act of 1971. Various governmental agencies are also charged with providing technical and managerial assistance to cooperative organizations.

the government's interest to consult these federations in the actual process of fishery policy formation.

### **Social Implications:**

Attempts to ameliorate some of the adverse social and economic conditions of the U.S. fisherman have been made through the formation and operation of small-scale cooperatives. These efforts have been mainly in the areas of supply purchasing and product distribution (i.e., packaging, transport, and marketing of the product). In most cases these attempts have met with very limited success or with failure.

Successful cooperative activity in the United States has been retarded<sup>1</sup> by a number of social and cultural factors. In addition to the vested economic interests discussed above, cooperative fishermen in the U.S. must contend with much greater racial and ethnic diversity, as well as greater social class distinctions, than is present in the Mexican context. The actual social cost of participation in cooperative activities or meetings may be too great. Members may find it uncomfortable to interact with fishermen of widely disparate ethnic groups or with those of competing technologies within the egalitarian atmosphere of such meetings. In an industry noted for strong individualism some also find it unpleasant to relegate part of their independence to cooperative organizations. It is posited here that the common economic and political objectives inherent in cooperative production will have a muting effect on these differences.

The expectations of success for fishing cooperatives in the United States have also suffered as a result of unfavorable historical precedents. Fishermen in the U.S. can cite numerous instances in which cooperatives have failed--frequently at great cost to their members--and for this reason tend to be wary of new attempts. These negative expectations, of course, adversely affect modern attempts to initiate cooperative activities. The less fishermen expect an organization to be effective the less they are willing to participate in it. It is, however, my view that this reluctance to join cooperatives could be overcome by demonstrating the economic superiority of cooperatively-owned and -operated high-seas vessels.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper I have discussed the successful adaptation of a group of cooperatives in Ensenada, B.C., Mexico. They have achieved economic success within a relatively short span of time, have unified the fishermen into a politically powerful force, and have enhanced the social integration of their members. There are, essentially, three implications for U.S. fishermen to be drawn from the Mexican data: first, an almost totally neglected form of organization in the United States--cooperatives based on the ownership of a capital intensive means of production (e.g., a high-seas tuna seiner)--may be an important means by which the U.S. fisherman's situation could be improved. The production superiority of these larger vessels, resulting from improved technology, increased carrying and preservation capacities, increased range, etc., should produce substantial economic benefits. These benefits should accrue directly to the cooperative members and be a source of increased commitment and participation. Second, the absence of a shared recognition of economic class and the presence of greater ethnic and linguistic diversity, as well as various regional, technological and species differentiations in the U.S. fleet need not prevent the effective articulation of a unified, cohesive political position. The formation of federations of cooperatives should, moreover, provide a means whereby such differences can be subordinated to the interests of a whole class of fisherman. These

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1. Mexican tuna cooperatives, to be sure, have an inherent advantage over U.S. fishing cooperatives in the social and cultural similarities which promote the achievement of political unity and a sense of community. Their members share a much broader range of cultural similarities than do U.S. fishermen, i.e., a common ethnic background, language, religion, and race as well as a generally similar commitment to cooperative ideology.

federations will provide member cooperatives with direct access to higher-level governmental agencies. Eventually, as the process of consultation becomes more formalized, the federation will be able to interact with government representatives in the early stages of fishery policy formation. Third, social conditions should improve as a result of the improved sense of community and increased social solidarity involved in the cooperative ownership and management of these larger vessels. Further, interaction among fishermen of varying ecological adaptations within the context of cooperative federation should lead to enhanced overall fisherman morale and commitment.

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